

A SNAPSHOT OF CHILDREN ON THE ARIZONA BORDER



Almost one in four (23%) Arizonans lives in a county that borders Mexico (Cochise, Pima, Santa Cruz and Yuma). While border Arizonans enjoy significant similarities with other Arizonans, there are also notable differences. First and foremost, despite a high percentage of working families, and the fact that border Arizonans are more likely to be in school, families along the border are by and large poorer than other Arizonans.

One could argue that in many ways Arizona is largely a border state, where the issues faced by families in border counties are very similar to issues faced by families living elsewhere in the state. Families on the border, like far too many families in Arizona, are likely to be poor, despite significant work effort on the part of parents. Latino Parents are equally likely to be fluent in English. The percentage of residents who are foreign born is somewhat higher in border counties than in the rest of the state, as are births to teens.

There are also important differences between border counties and the remainder of Arizona. Along the border:

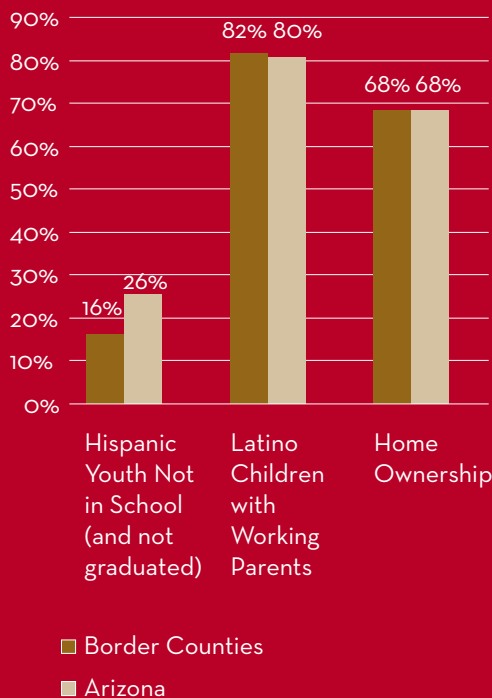
- Median income is 13% lower.
- Children are 52% more likely to be Hispanic.
- Foreign-born residents are 42% more likely to become citizens.
- And non-Hispanic White children are 37% more likely to live in poverty.

Unfortunately, families living in Arizona's border counties often lack access to needed and affordable services. There are not enough doctors or other professionals to provide the services needed by the population. And even when providers exist, it can be a long drive to get there, especially in rural counties. Demand for community-based services similarly outstrips supply. For example, there are only five Healthy Families child abuse prevention contractors to serve the rural border counties.

The Arizona Border Region: Indicators of Child Well-Being

	Border Counties	Non-Border Counties	Arizona Average
Percent of Population Who Is Hispanic	34	23	25
Percent of Child Population Who is Hispanic	49	32	36
Percent of Hispanic Children with Working Parents	82	80	80
Percent of Births to Teens	15	14	14
Percent of Residents Who are Foreign Born	14	12	13
Percent Foreign-Born Who are Citizens	38	27	30
Percent of Hispanic Children in Poverty	31	28	29
Percent of non-Hispanic White Children in Poverty	11	8	9
Percent of Hispanic Adults Who Are Fluent in English	64	57	59
Percent of Hispanics aged 16-19 Who Are Not in School (and Have Not Graduated)	16	30	26
Median Income	\$35,421		\$40,558

Border Families Work, Own Homes, and Avoid Dropping Out of School



Arizonans - especially Hispanic Children - Living on the Border Have Many Strengths. Families on the border often have a sound commitment to education for their children, significant history of work, rich cultural and linguistic backgrounds, and strong ties to the community.

Border teens stay in school. Arizona's drop-out rate is a widely acknowledged problem, and Hispanic youth are three times as likely to drop out of school as their non-Hispanic white peers for Arizona. However, Hispanic teens on the border are about half as likely to be out of school than Hispanic youth in the remainder of Arizona (16% versus 30%), suggesting a strong commitment to education. (This is consistent with data from the Arizona Department of Education which shows that while Hispanic drop-out rates tend to be well above the state average, border counties with a high percentage of Hispanic children have average or below average drop-out rates.)

Most families on the border are headed by a parent who works for a living. This is consistent with other Arizona data that shows most families - including low-income families - rely on wages to support their families. Overall, there was an 88% decline in receipt of public assistance in Arizona border counties between 1989 and 1999 (compared to 61% for the U.S./Mexico border generally).

Many Hispanic children on the border are bilingual. 76% are fluent in English and 68% are fluent in Spanish.

Border families have strong ties to their communities. Two-thirds (68%) of all households on the border own their own homes (although home values tend to be less than the Arizona average). Even for foreign-born residents, community ties are strong. Indeed, almost two-thirds (64%) have lived in Arizona for over a decade.

The Arizona Border Region: Recommendations

Improve Outreach for the Federal Earned Income Tax Credit

The Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) is a refundable tax credit available to working families earning up to \$34,000 per year. A team of researchers from Syracuse University and the Center for Law and Human Services found that families used money from the EITC to pay education expenses, repair their cars, move to a new neighborhood or put money in a savings account. In August of 2003, Governor Napolitano formed an EITC Task Force to increase the number of working families filing for the federal credit. This helped \$633 million be pumped back into the Arizona economy – a 6% increase over the previous year.

However, many outreach efforts did not reach families in January – when lower-income families file their tax return in anticipation of a refund. This means that lower-income families may have relied on professional tax preparers who require payment (instead of volunteers) or filled out the return themselves, perhaps without claiming the EITC. Therefore, outreach efforts should be conducted earlier in the year, and through trusted community resources, such as community home visitors, friends, family, neighbors, or through community-based programs such as Healthy Families.

Expand Role of Schools in Linking Families to Services

Border counties are less likely to have health service providers and other supports. At the same time, border teens (especially Hispanic teens) are far more likely to be in school than other Arizona youth. An efficient use of state resources would include enhanced linkages between the schools and other services. For example, schools in border counties could be encouraged to use an application for free and reduced priced school lunch that also links families to KidsCare health insurance.

Increase the Number and Capacity of Health Care Providers

Arizonans in border counties (except Pima County) have far less access to services than other Arizonans. Arizona could explore creative strategies to expand the supply of service providers, such as loan forgiveness programs for state-trained doctors.

Support Working Families

Families throughout Arizona, including in border counties, are often poor despite significant work effort on the part of parents. Studies repeatedly confirm that childhood poverty can have significant and long-lasting negative results. Family supports have a demonstrated impact on family well-being. These supports can include:

- Health care, through KidsCare, Arizona Health Care Cost Containment System (AHCCCS), health departments or community providers can link children to the health insurance they need.
- Child care subsidies help working parents afford the safe, reliable child care they need to be reliable employees.
- The Earned Income Tax Credit can help families put more cash in their wallets.
- Financial literacy programs can help families best manage their money.
- Social services such as food banks, rent and utility assistance and subsidized repairs can help families by providing time-limited assistance in an especially tight month.

In addition, Arizona has other supports that serve to strengthen families. Health Start is a health education and outreach program targeted to pregnant women and girls in low-income neighborhoods in Arizona that is proven effective in reducing the incidence of low birthweight babies, improving prenatal care, and increasing immunization rates. The Healthy Families child abuse prevention program helps struggling families with newborns, including teen parents, address immediate needs such as housing, food and jobs. Evaluations have found it increases parental income, improves children home environments and health care, reduces reliance on public assistance, and reduces the rate of child abuse and neglect. Parenting classes can hone the skills of parents of children of all ages.

All of these supports are especially important in border counties where families are very likely to have low-incomes despite work. Also, the strong community ties held by many border families suggests that such program are likely to have long-lasting results. By building on strengths such as school attendance and community links, these supports can make a difference for border children.



What does the border mean to you?

“It all depends on how you look at it. Some of us see it as a place rich in culture and experience, an influx of new ideas, constantly renewed yet mixed with the old. You can make a life here. It’s full of opportunities.”

“People don’t often see the rich exchange of culture, ideas, skills, and money on the border, but it’s there. Nogales, Arizona could not exist if not for the Mexican shopper and the sales tax they leave behind.” -Maria

How does the border differ from other areas of the U.S.?

“When you live on the border, you are not a Mexican or an American. Americans view you as a Mexican. Mexicans view you as an American, but border towns look like Mexico.”

“People outside a border town just assume you are not American. They don’t think you speak English and assume you live in poverty.”
-Diana



Children’s Action Alliance (CAA), is a non-profit, non-partisan organization dedicated to promoting the well-being of all of Arizona’s children and their families through research, policy development, media campaigns and advocacy.

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Unless otherwise noted all data comes from the Border Kids Count report.

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For more information on AECF please visit: www.aecf.org



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