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Mayors Work To Improve Arizona Dropout Rates, Negative Economic Impacts

By [Lauren Gilger](#)

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One in five young people in Arizona has not completed high school.

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In 2012, more than 18,000 students failed to finish high school. That will cost Arizona \$7.6 billion over their lifetimes, according to a [report](#) by the Arizona Mayor's Education Roundtable.

But if Arizonans could cut that dropout rate in half, it would generate more than \$3.8 billion in economic benefits to the state, the report said.

The Arizona Mayors Education Roundtable commissioned the research from the University of California-Santa Barbara in 2014 to assess the economic losses to the community when high school students drop out and young people aren't working or in school.

Now, the Roundtable has released a new report profiling 10 cities across the state to show the social and economic losses for high school dropouts and disconnected youth, 16-24 year-olds who aren't in school or working.

"No. 1, these are our kids, and we love them, and we want them to have bright futures," said Mesa Mayor John Giles, whose city is profiled in the report.

But from an economic standpoint, he said "This is costing us a whole lot of money, and we need to address it and try to make a meaningful impact to turn these trends around."

The Roundtable's goal is to address the dropout rate in the state and the rate of disconnected youth.

"It's a huge dollar figure," said Avondale Mayor Ken Weise. "It ranges in the hundreds of millions of dollars, if not billions of dollars, when it comes to the social services that those kids are going to need going into the future for the rest of their lives and the loss of the economic impact that they have on society, they're buying power."

Weise said with high dropout rates cities are not only looking at a lower tax base and a higher reliance on government programs, but it also makes it harder for them to attract companies to relocate there.

"When you have a population where a lot of the kids who are going to be applying for those jobs may not have finished high school, those employers aren't going to come to the city as readily," Weise said. "Because they look at it say, 'OK, they don't have the education or the talent base to fill those jobs.'"

Weise said Avondale is working with the City of Goodyear and their school districts to bolster after-school programs, as well as their local community college and employers to offer support.

In Mesa, Giles said they're focusing on programs that will help low-income families get their kids into pre-K programs, as well as working

with Mesa Community College to help get more high school students enrolled in their classes.

“This is not a small task,” Giles said. “To get kids involved in pre-K. Frankly, you’re going to have to go out and knock on doors and talk to the families.”

Giles said even though this is usually the school district’s territory, he thinks there’s an important role for cities to play in improving dropout rates.

“Some of it is in the mindset of the city, frankly, and of local governments thinking that this isn’t our job,” he said. “If we continue in that mindset, we’ll continue to see the trends go in the wrong direction.”

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