

AZ Views

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Arizona Indicators Panel

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Arizonans Like Their Jobs But Question Their Schools

Good jobs and good schools—few would disagree that these are essential elements of a secure and rewarding life. Both are also vital components of a healthy society: Good jobs create revenue to support quality schools, which in turn produce a superior workforce to fill those jobs. Based on survey panelists' responses, most Arizonans seem to feel that they're doing well on the employment front, but not quite so well concerning education.

How much do Arizonans like their jobs? Most panelists say they are somewhat (49%) or very (39%) satisfied with their employment, and most said they feel somewhat (42%) or very (47%) secure about keeping their job. These numbers are even higher than the 2004 Morrison Institute quality of life survey (*What Matters in Greater Phoenix*). The current survey has produced remarkably high numbers, especially in the midst of a serious national economic downturn. On the one hand, they might reflect Arizonans' confidence in the state's continued growth and opportunity; in this regard, it is notable that 65% of panelists also said they had a "good quality" job and were able to describe the qualities that made it so. On the other hand, this strong expression of job satisfaction could also arise from a more guarded feeling that simply *having* a job in these uncertain times makes it a good job.

Arizona Indicators Panel

Data reported here come from the Arizona Indicators Panel. This is a *statewide* representative sample of Arizonans. Panel members have agreed to be surveyed online several times a year across many topic areas. This enables great depth and exploration of topics with the same sample group and solves some of the problems experienced in random sample telephone surveys. The results reported here come from two rounds of panel questions and were collected in May and July 2008. The results summarized here contain the statistically significant differences on selected demographic characteristics of panel participants that can be found at the end of this report.

Arizona Indicators is a partnership of Arizona State University, *The Arizona Republic*, Arizona Community Foundation, Valley of the Sun United Way, and Arizona Department of Commerce.

In any case, this sense of contentment has its limits. Only 16% of panelists say they're very confident that they could find a comparable job if they lost theirs and yet very few panelists say they are participating in classes or other means to acquire new skills for other jobs—a finding seemingly at odds with the importance often placed on upgrading Arizona's workforce skills to compete in the "knowledge economy."

As for schools, most panelists say they trust local schools to act in the best interests of their community, although not as much as they trust police officers or hospitals. But respondents also expressed skepticism about schools' ability to prepare students for college and local jobs. This view was most pronounced among minority panelists, who are critical of schools' academic performance. Similar sentiments were expressed in the 2004 *What Matters* survey of Valley residents, in which only 34% rated the quality of K-12 education as excellent or good. In that survey, 45% of respondents said K-12 education was staying the same and 28% thought it was getting worse.

Arizonans Are Satisfied with Their Jobs

Panelists were asked to rate their level of job satisfaction on a scale from very satisfied to not at all satisfied. Almost 90% were very or somewhat satisfied with their job.

There was an association between job satisfaction and higher household incomes. Satisfaction also increased steadily with age, ranging from 74% for those ages 18-29 to 97% for those 60+. In addition, workers with higher educational attainment generally reported higher levels of job satisfaction. Yet the *most* satisfied panelists were those with only "some college."

- Phoenix residents reported extremely high job satisfaction (97%) and considerably more than Tucson residents (69%).
- More than 90% of women are somewhat or very satisfied with their jobs versus 84% of men.
- Minority-group panelists were 10% more satisfied than majority-group panelists.

How satisfied would you say you are with your current job?	
Level of Satisfaction	Percent of those working
Very satisfied	39%
Somewhat satisfied	49%
Not very satisfied	12%
Not at all satisfied	1%
Total	100%

n=370

Few Panelists in Training

Few panelists say they've participated in training, classes or foreign language study during the past six months. This may reflect a lack of opportunities, a lack of awareness, a scarcity of time, or few local resources for study.

- Minority-group panelists (10%) were twice as likely as majority-group panelists (5%) to have participated in training to get a better job in the past six months.
- Minority-group members (10%) were more likely than majority-group members (3%) to have taken classes to get skills for a different job.
- Phoenicians (1%) were far less likely to have participated in training to get a better job than residents in the rest of Maricopa County (12%).
- Panelists with a college degree (13%) were more likely to participate in job training than those with some college (4%) or those with a high school diploma or less (5%).

Which of These Applies to You?		
Suggestions	Total percent	Percent of those working
I have studied a foreign language in the last six months	9%	13%
I participated in training to get a better job	7%	11%
I was forced to retire when I wanted to keep working	6%	2%
I am retired from one position and now working (full or part-time) at another	6%	7%
I took classes to get skills for a different job in the last 6 months	5%	5%

n=651 n=370

- For panelists ages 18-29, 16% took classes to acquire skills for a different job versus 7% of those 30-44 years of age, 2% of those 45-59 years of age, and less than 1% of those 60+ years of age.
- Among those most likely to have studied a foreign language in the past six months were Tucson residents (17%), those with a college degree (15%), and those age 18-29 (13%).

Most Switch Jobs to Get a Better One

Most panelists (90%) had not changed jobs in the past six months. Half (51%) of those who did change did so in pursuit of a better job, be it full-time or part-time, in the same or different field. One in four of those changing jobs (26%) did so in order to work for a charitable organization.

Of those that had changed jobs:

- Women (79%) were far more likely than men (25%) to have changed for a better job.
- Majority-group panelists (32%) were far more likely than minority-group panelists (5%) to have changed for a different type of career.
- Of those who changed jobs in the past six months, the trend towards working for a charitable organization was more common among men or minority-group panelists.

Panelists were also asked about career changes that they anticipated occurring over the next six months. Of those who anticipated changes, most (66%) aspired to a better job, and 19% said they planned to begin working for a charitable organization. Fifteen percent expected to start a business and 10% planned to retire by choice. Phoenix residents were the most likely to anticipate changing jobs for a different type of career.

	Percent
Changed jobs in past six months*	10%
Changed for:**	
A better job	51%
Began working for a charitable organization	26%
A different type of career	18%
A full-time job	16%
Began working for a family business	12%
Got laid off or forced to leave because employer closed	11%
Began taking care of children, an older family member, or other family	3%
Finished a degree from a private or public post-secondary institution	3%
A part-time job	2%
Started a business	2%
Retired by choice	1%
A second job	1%

*n=370, **n=38

Though Secure in Their Jobs, Many Doubt They Could Replace It

In general, Arizonans have a very strong sense of job security, despite the national economic slump and the state's budget crisis. Nearly half of the panelists (47%) reported that they were very secure, and 42% more said they felt somewhat secure. Nor were these sentiments limited to a privileged economic sector of respondents; in fact, there were no statistically significant differences by demographic characteristics.

Most Arizonans also expressed confidence about finding another job at comparable pay—but notably less confident than they are about keeping their current job. Only 16% say they felt very confident.

How secure do you feel about keeping your job or keeping your business open?	
Level of Security	Percent
Very secure	47%
Somewhat secure	42%
Not very secure	10%
Not at all secure	1%

n=368

If you currently work for pay and lost your job tomorrow, how confident are you that you could other employment at a comparable rate of pay within a reasonable time?	
Level of Confidence	Percent
Very confident	16%
Somewhat confident	41%
Not very confident	32%
Not at all confident	11%

n=368

- Among those who felt very confident were majority-group panelists, men, young people (ages 18-29), those with a college degree, and those with household incomes of \$60K and above.
- Eight percent of Phoenix residents felt very confident compared to 25% of Tucson residents.

What Makes a “High Quality” Job?

Arizona has income lower than the national average and its leaders and residents frequently express concern that its jobs are of insufficient quality to enable the state to compete successfully in the knowledge, high-tech economy. But two out of three panelists (65%) who were employed said that by their own definition they have high quality jobs. Only 6% strongly disagreed.

- Majority-group panelists (93%) were more likely than minority-group panelists (76%) to believe that they have a good quality job.
- Phoenix and Tucson residents were less likely to consider their job “good quality” than residents in the rest of the state.

Respondents who said they had a good quality job (“strongly agree” and “agree”) were asked to specify what made it a quality job. Their answers were grouped into categories shown in the following table. The results clearly indicate that pay level is

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
I have a good quality job.	32%	33%	10%	6%	24%

n=399

What makes it a good quality job?	
Reason	Valid Percent
Work is enjoyable and interesting	21%
Benefits	13%
Quality of people and level of interaction with people	11%
Salary	9%
Giving back to community	9%
Good hours, flexible schedule	8%
Job stability and security	8%
Other	7%
Status or type of profession	6%
Work environment, positive atmosphere	4%
Self employed or family owned business	4%
Location or work from home	1%
Independence - not micro-managed	1%

n=256

not most panelists' first—or even second—criterion. But they did place high importance on benefits, which might reflect today's widespread concern about health insurance. Benefits came in at number two (13%), with the top element of a good quality job being enjoyable/interesting work (21%). Salary came in at number four (9%), tied with “giving back to the community.” This lack of emphasis on salary is consistent with national survey data that show workers are increasingly interested in meaningful work as a criterion for choosing a job.

Many Arizonans, Especially Minorities, Worry about Public Schools

Panelists expressed more reservations about the state's public schools, the institutions tasked with preparing young Arizonans for the workforce. Most respondents said they trust the schools to act in the community's best interests, but only a quarter expressed a great deal of trust. While this placed schools above religious organizations and businesses, they came in below local police officers and hospitals.

- Women (29%) were slightly more likely than men (22%) to trust local schools “a great deal.”
- Majority and minority-group panelists expressed similar degrees of trust. Twenty-six percent of majority-group panelists trusted local schools “a great deal” compared to 24% of minorities.
- Phoenix residents were more trusting than Tucson residents.
- Those with household incomes between \$30 and \$60K were the least trusting of local schools. Thirty-two percent of these respondents said that they trust local schools “not much” or “not at all.”

Though they might trust their local schools, most panelists expressed doubt that they are performing as well as they should. A majority (62%) agreed that academic performance is too low, while most respondents either didn't agree that—or didn't know whether—schools are preparing their children well. Perhaps the most striking finding was the level of dissatisfaction with the schools expressed by minority-group panelists.

How much do you trust each of the following to act in the best interests of your community?					
Options	A great deal	Somewhat	Not much	Not at all	Don't know
Local police officers	44%	41%	12%	2%	1%
Local hospitals	29%	52%	8%	2%	10%
Local schools	25%	47%	13%	5%	9%
Local religious organizations	24%	42%	16%	3%	16%
Local nonprofit community organizations	19%	53%	16%	1%	11%
Local businesses	14%	53%	22%	4%	8%
Local elected officials	7%	47%	31%	7%	7%

n=555

- Eighty-nine percent of minority-group panelists believed (strongly agreed or agreed) that “the academic performance of our schools is not as high as it should be.”
- Among those who strongly agreed and agreed that “there are particular problems with our local schools that need urgent attention” are those with higher educational attainment, older residents, or retirees.

Thinking of K-12 schools in your local school district, how much do you agree with the following statements?						
Statements	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know	Total
The academic performance of our schools is not as high as it should be.	17%	45%	19%	3%	15%	n=541
There are particular problems with our local schools that need urgent attention.	16%	19%	20%	2%	44%	n=531
Our schools do a good job in preparing their students for college.	6%	37%	28%	10%	20%	n=540
Our local schools prepare students to get good local jobs after graduation.	2%	33%	32%	10%	23%	n=540

- Women (60%) are more likely than men (45%) to strongly agree or agree that “our schools do a good job in preparing their students for college.” Nearly 60% of minority-group panelists disagree or strongly disagree with this statement.
- Sixty-one percent of men and 49% of women disagree or strongly disagree that “our local schools prepare students to get good local jobs after graduation.”

Respondents who agreed there are “particular problems with our local schools” were asked to name those problems. The results show that panelists had a lot of different complaints about the schools (20% of the comments fell in the “other” category), while academics/fundamentals (21%) were mentioned most frequently. Funding and teacher salaries (12%) came in third.

Mixed Results Raise Challenging Questions About Arizona’s Future

The findings on employment are both heartening and worrisome. On one hand, it’s surely encouraging that most respondents like their jobs, expect to keep them, and believe they could find a comparable one within a reasonable time. It’s also fortunate that most Arizonans seem to judge the quality of their jobs more by metrics other than pay. On the other hand, however, these survey responses do not necessarily reflect the views of an energetic, ambitious

There are particular problems with our local schools that need urgent attention—specify?	
	Valid Percent
Academics and Fundamentals	21%
Other	20%
Funding and Teacher Salary	12%
Testing	9%
Needs of Special Populations: Tribal, Homeless, Special Ed	8%
Drop Out Rate	6%
Quality of Teachers and Administrators	6%
ESL and Immigration	5%
Broad Structural Issues	5%
Safety Concerns: Violence, Drugs, Gangs, Bullying	5%
Over-Crowding	2%
Discipline	1%
Vocational Education and Practical Life Skills	1%

n=109

workforce guided by a desire to improve itself, learn new skills, and flourish in our increasingly competitive global world. It could be instructive to question panelists further in this area to determine their attitudes toward the demands of the “knowledge economy.” A particular challenge may be incentivizing older workers to participate in retraining and skill development.

Survey results concerning education are less ambiguous but more troubling. Most panelists don’t think local schools are succeeding. As noted above, criticism of academic quality is particularly strong in the minority community, which is Arizona’s fastest-growing population and the one that will contribute an increasing share of the state’s future workers, businesspeople, and leaders.

Panel Data Participant Demographic Variables ¹					
Demographic Characteristics		First round – May 2008		Second round – June 2008	
Gender	Male	309	48%	268	48%
	Female	342	52%	288	52%
Age	18-29	98	15%	75	14%
	30-44	210	32%	188	34%
	45-59	184	28%	156	28%
	60+	158	24%	136	24%
Education	High school diploma or less	267	41%	241	43%
	Some college	208	32%	162	29%
	College degree+	176	27%	152	27%
Household Income	Up to \$30K	156	24%	11	20%
	\$30-60K	224	34%	198	36%
	\$60K+	271	42%	248	45%
Race/ethnicity ²	Majority	401	62%	365	66%
	Minority	250	38%	191	34%
Employment ³	Working	371	57%	306	55%
	Not-working	152	23%	145	26%
	Retired	128	20%	105	19%
Region ⁴	Phoenix	149	23%	158	29%
	Rest of Maricopa	195	30%	167	30%
	Tucson	134	21%	88	16%
	Rest of state	170	26%	140	25%
Total		n=651		n=556	

¹ These data are weighted to be representative of Arizona as a whole.

² Majority comprises “White, non-Hispanic” (61.6%); Minority comprises, “Black non-Hispanic” (4.1%), “Other, non-Hispanic” (7/0%), “Hispanic” (26.0%), “two-races, non-Hispanic” (0.9%). Percentages are for first round.

³ Working comprises “Working as a paid employee” (49.7%) and “Self-employed” (7.3%); Not Working comprises “Not working, looking for work”(8.4%), “Not working, disabled” (7.8%), and “Not working, other” (7.1%); Retired is 19.6%. Percentages are for first round.

⁴ Regions were defined from a combination of zip code and county information. Phoenix was defined as all of the panelists living in Phoenix zip codes (23%) and Rest of Maricopa as all of the Maricopa County residents not in Phoenix (30%). Tucson was defined as all of the panelists in Tucson's zip codes (21%) and Rest of State as any panelists not living in the other three categories (26%). Percentages are for first round.



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