

Renewing Arizona Families

Numbers You Can Use to Preach, Teach, and Write

Fifty-eight findings from the Renewing Arizona Families research, organized by subject — not by the order of the report. Each one gives you the number, a sentence or two of context, and the page in the RAF report where you can check it yourself.

Where to check the source. All page numbers refer to *Renewing Arizona Families: Why Strong Families Are Central to Arizona's Future*, by Brad Wilcox, Grant Bailey, and Sophie Anderson of the Institute for Family Studies, with Peter Gentala, Bob Trent, and Leisa Brug of the Center for Arizona Policy, May 2026. The full report and its underlying data are public at www.renewingazfamilies.org

A statistic makes a person curious. Only the Gospel makes a person willing.

One: Hope and Trajectory

The number	What it means, and how to say it	Report page
35th	Arizona's rank among the 50 states on the Family Structure Index, which measures marriage among adults 25 to 54, the number of children women have, and the share of teens growing up with married parents. It's not a shameful number; it is a starting line.	p. 33
Up four places	Arizona has moved from 39th to 35th since 2020. Arizona has ranked as high as 33rd in earlier years, so "climbing" describes the last five years, not all time.	p. 34
58 to 62 percent	The share of Arizona children living with married parents hit its low point in 2011 at 58 percent and rose to 62 percent by 2024. A steady climb over more than a decade. The national figure is 63 percent, so we are nearly even.	p. 40
Divorce is falling	Arizona's divorce rate has declined steadily since the mid-1980s, and marriages here are more durable than they were at the turn of the century. Part of the reason is that fewer people marry, so those who do are more intentional.	p. 36
Unmarried birthrate is steady	Arizona's share of births to unmarried mothers has leveled off since the late 2000s and stayed generally steady rather than continuing to rise. Steady is not victory, but it is not slippage either.	p. 39
Not a policy	Nothing in the report credits a law for the improvement. The share of children with married parents began rising in 2011, driven by households and communities. The trend line moved before any legislature acted.	pp. 36, 40

Two: Children and School

The number	What it means, and how to say it	Report page
85 vs. 64 percent	Arizona children ages 6 to 17 earning A's and B's: 85 percent of those living with their married parents, compared with 64 percent from single-mother homes and 65 percent from other family situations.	p. 7
91 percent	After accounting for age, sex, race, income, parental education, and immigration status, children from non-intact families are about 91 percent more likely to earn poor grades. The controls are the point — this is not just a measure of income.	p. 8
43 points	Arizona school districts with the most married-parent families outperform districts with the fewest by 43 percentage points on reading proficiency.	p. 10
27 points	The gap in reading proficiency between the highest-income and lowest-income districts is 27 points.	p. 10
Marriage matters more than income	Marriage matters more than money in the classroom. Arizona school districts with the most married-parent families outperform those with the fewest by 43 percentage points in reading proficiency, far more than the 27-point gap between the highest- and lowest-income districts.	P. 10
Higley and Flowing Wells	A story rather than a statistic. In Higley Unified in Gilbert, 77 percent of households with children are led by married parents, and 60 percent of students read proficiently. In Flowing Wells, 54 percent are married, and 35 percent are proficient — despite spending about 60 percent more per student on classroom support (\$1,138 vs. \$734).	pp. 8–9
33 percent	Arizona students from non-intact families are about a third more likely to have their parents contacted by the school for behavior or learning problems, after controls.	p. 11
True across every group	The relationship between married-parent households and reading proficiency holds for Hispanic, White, Native American, and Black students across Arizona districts. It's not a matter of race.	pp. 9–10

Three: Children, Suffering, and Adverse Experiences

The number	What it means, and how to say it	Report page
274 percent	Arizona school-age children outside intact families are 274 percent more likely to experience at least one adverse childhood experience than peers in intact families. Consider saying "nearly four times as likely," which is easier to hear and just as accurate.	pp. 14–15
What an ACE is	Define it before you cite it. Adverse childhood experiences or ACEs are potentially traumatic events between ages 0 and 17: domestic violence, neglect, parental separation or divorce, homelessness, a serious accident, or losing a family member to suicide, among others.	p. 14
43 percent	Per the Arizona Department of Health Services, 43 percent of Arizona children have experienced at least one adverse childhood experience (ACE), slightly above the national rate of about 40 percent.	p. 14
60 and 57 percent	Arizona girls are 60 percent more likely, and boys 57 percent more likely to be diagnosed with depression when raised in a home without both parents, after controls.	p. 13
Up more than half	National context the report supplies: depression rates among people under 30 have risen more than 50 percent since 1990, with even higher prevalence among those born after 2000. This is the world your student ministry is working in.	p. 12

Four: Poverty, Provision, and the Poor Among You

The number	What it means, and how to say it	Report page
10, 38, and 41 percent	Arizona children living below the poverty line: 10 percent in married intact families, 38 percent with single mothers, and 41 percent in cohabiting-parent homes.	p. 17
Not just two adults	Because poverty is highest in cohabiting homes — higher even than single-mother homes — the report concludes it is the relationship between the adults and the children that protects, not merely how many adults are present. A useful correction to the assumption that this is about headcount or income.	p. 17
104 percent	Controlling for race, age, parental education, and immigration, Arizona children in unmarried or non-intact homes are about twice as likely to live in poverty.	p. 19
Nearly 300 percent	Children without a college-educated parent in the home are nearly 300% more likely to be living in poverty than those with a college-educated parent.	p. 19
163 percent	Native American children in Arizona are 163 percent more likely to live in poverty than White children. The report says plainly that family structure is one significant predictor, not the only one	p. 19
54 to 136 percent	In the late 2000s, Arizona children in unmarried or non-intact homes were 54 percent more likely to be poor than peers with married parents. For 2020 through 2025 that figure is 136 percent. Family structure protects more now than it did fifteen years ago.	p. 20
3 vs. 15 percent	Among White Arizonans, 3 percent of children in married intact families are in poverty compared with 15 percent in other family situations. The same protective pattern appears for Hispanic, Native American, and Black families at different levels.	p. 18

Five: Marriage and the Flourishing of Adults

The number	What it means, and how to say it	Report page
Happier than anything else	National research the report draws on finds that marriage surpasses health, money, education, and work as a predictor of adult happiness in America. Among married people, the happiest of all are married couples with children, by notable margins.	p. 21
Ten times	Married Americans heading into their fifties hold roughly ten times the assets of their divorced or never-married peers, all else being equal. National, not Arizona-specific.	p. 22
The strongest predictor	In Arizona, among adults 35 and older, being married is by far the strongest predictor of owning a home — stronger than income, stronger than education, stronger than race.	p. 27
51 vs. 36 percent	51 percent of married Arizonans age 35 to 55 in the bottom income quartile own their home, compared with 36 percent of unmarried Arizonans in the top income quartile. Marriage outperforms money on the single largest asset most families will ever hold.	p. 26
84 and 68 percent	Homeownership among married Arizonans 35 to 55: 84 percent of the college-educated and 68 percent of those without a degree. Their unmarried peers: 43 and 25 percent.	p. 25
15, 24, and 34 percent	Public assistance among Arizonans 25 to 55: 15 percent of married adults, 24 percent of unmarried men, 34 percent of unmarried women. The report notes the gap is likely understated, since surveys tend to underreport benefits.	p. 28
Health follows too	Thousands of social science studies demonstrate that married men and women live longer, have healthier lives, recover more quickly and successfully from illness, and are more emotionally healthy.	p. 22
83 to 53 to 62 percent	Homeownership among Arizonans 35 to 55 was 83 percent in 1980, bottomed out at 53 percent in 2017, and stands at 62 percent today — and the decline fell almost entirely on unmarried Arizonans.	pp. 23–24

Six: Neighbor, Community, and the Common Good

The number	What it means, and how to say it	Report page
Maricopa and Apache	In Maricopa County, 53 percent of adults 25 to 54 are married, and the poverty rate is 9 percent. In Apache County, 35 percent are married, and the poverty rate is 29 percent. Two Arizona counties, the same state, a twenty-point difference in poverty.	p. 32
Crime follows the pattern	With the exception of Apache County, Arizona counties with more married adults generally show lower violent crime. Always name the exception; it makes the rest credible.	pp. 31–32
61, 59, 55 percent	Greenlee, Yuma, and Yavapai counties have the highest share of married prime-age adults in the state. Useful if you serve in one of them, or if you are preaching to a rural congregation that assumes decline is universal.	pp. 30–31
Instability costs everyone	Economists Raj Chetty and Joseph Price found that American communities with greater family instability have more incarceration and less economic mobility.	p. 31
Homeownership stabilizes communities	The report notes that homeownership stabilizes communities, improves neighborhood safety and quality, and appears to support the educational attainment of children. Where marriage is stronger, so is the fabric of the neighborhood.	p. 27
39 percent	Only 39 percent of Arizona residents were born here. Most of your congregation arrived from somewhere else, which means most of them have no extended family within driving distance. The church is not supplementing their village. In many cases, the church is the village.	p. 46

Seven: The State of Marriage in Arizona

The number	What it means, and how to say it	Report page
45 down to 30	Newlyweds per 1,000 single adults in Arizona fell from 45 in 2000 to about 30 by 2013, then flattened. Fewer Arizonans are receiving the benefits marriage provides than at the turn of the century.	p. 35
47 percent	The share of Arizona adults ages 18 to 65 who are married bottomed out at 46 percent in the mid-2010s and has stabilized at 47 percent as of 2024. Roughly one in two.	p. 37
28.8 to 30.2	The average age at first marriage in Arizona rose from 28.8 in 2008 to 30.2 in 2024. The report argues directly that young adults are not benefiting from later marriage, and that encouraging marriage in the twenties would strengthen Arizona.	p. 38
About 45 percent	Roughly 45 percent of Arizona births are to unmarried mothers, above the national figure of about 40 percent.	p. 39
85 vs. 42 percent	Eighty-five percent of children born to college-educated parents in Arizona are born within marriage, compared with 42 percent of children born to less-educated parents.	p. 43
58 percent	Most Arizona children — 58 percent — live with their married biological parents, below the national average of 65 percent. Note this is a narrower measure than the 62 percent figure in Section One, which also counts stepfamilies. Do not mix the two in one sentence.	p. 44
Fertility at 1.60	Arizona's birth rate has fallen from well above the national average in 2003 (2.40) to about even with it today (1.60).	pp. 48–49
Age 27	Arizona women typically become mothers around age 27, about two and a half years later than in 2007.	p. 49

Eight: The Success Sequence

The number	What it means, and how to say it	Report page
Success Sequence	Finish high school. Get and keep a full-time job in your twenties. Marry before having children. That's the <i>Success Sequence</i> . Popularized by scholars Ron Haskins and Isabel Sawhill at the Brookings Institution — credit them; it defuses the assumption that this is a religious invention.	p. 52
97 percent	The share of young adults who follow the <i>Success Sequence</i> and avoid poverty in their late twenties and thirties.	p. 52
More than 90 percent	The same holds for Black, Hispanic, and young adults from poor families. This is the figure that answers the objection that the <i>Success Sequence</i> only works for people who already had advantages. Never cite the 97 without this one.	p. 52
86 percent	The share of Millennials who followed the <i>Success Sequence</i> and reached at least the middle class as young adults.	p. 52
Half the distress	Young adults who followed the <i>Success Sequence</i> have 50 percent lower odds of emotional distress than peers who did not, even after accounting for race, ethnicity, education, and income. The sequence is not only about money.	p. 53
Twice as likely	Those who followed the <i>Success Sequence</i> were twice as likely to still be married in their thirties as peers who had a child before or outside marriage.	p. 53
Communities of faith	The report names who should teach this: parents, schools, pediatricians, communities of faith, coaches, and extended family. The Church is the only institution that gathers teenagers and their parents every week, voluntarily.	p. 53
Not widely known	The report states flatly that the power of education, work, and marriage to lift people out of poverty is not widely known. The information is free, proven, and needs to be shared.	p. 53
Wisdom	The essential framing. This is a path, not a promise, and not a verdict on anyone's past. Presented as wisdom, it is among the most hopeful things a young Arizonan can hear.	pp. 52–53

Nine: What the Research Says About the Church

The number	What it means, and how to say it	Report page
25 to 50 percent lower	Divorce rates among weekly attenders compared with those who rarely or never attend. Use the full range, not the top of it.	p. 63
30 to 40 percent lower	Rates of depression and anxiety reported by adolescents who attend regularly compared with non-attending peers. Speak this one as "research suggests" — it rests on a narrower evidence base than the school and poverty findings.	p. 64
Higher grades	Children whose families attend regularly are more likely to excel academically, with higher grade point averages and test scores.	p. 64
About 40 percent fewer	Arizona adults who attended weekly as children reported nearly one full adverse childhood experience fewer on the ten-point scale than those who never attended. Drawn from an analysis of Arizona health survey data; say "one analysis of Arizona data found."	p. 64
6 to 9 points	Arizona counties with higher congregational membership show 6 to 9 percentage points lower child poverty, even after accounting for education, race, and family structure. Present it as an association the researchers observed, not as an effect the church produces.	p. 64
Five mechanisms	Why researchers think it works: clear teaching about marriage; dense networks providing childcare, meals, and financial help; premarital and enrichment programming; teaching on forgiveness and reconciliation; and material relief through benevolence, job networks, and housing help.	p. 64
22 vs. 35 percent	About 22 percent of Arizona adults under 30 attend weekly, compared with 35 percent of those over 50. The protective effect above cannot reach people who are not here. Cite the gap as the reason for young adult ministry and phrase it as "surveys indicate."	p. 65
The summary sentence	Quotable verbatim, and one of the best sentences in the report: religious participation is one of the most powerful predictors and protectors of family stability in Arizona.	p. 66

Ten: Children, Screens, and Formation

The number	What it means, and how to say it	Report page
Electronic opiates	The report's own phrase for social media, short-form video, gaming, and now artificial-intelligence companions — which it says degrade children's capacity to concentrate, read, and learn, inhibit social development, and harm the quantity and quality of parent-child relationships, dating, and marriage.	p. 60
Arizona already acted	The state has required age verification on pornography sites and restricted smartphones during school hours. Lead with what Arizona has done rather than what it has not; it changes the emotional register of the whole conversation.	p. 60
Three next steps	The report recommends age verification for human-like artificial intelligence systems, an App Store Accountability Act requiring verified parental consent for downloads, and a Utah-style limit on classroom technology.	pp. 60–62
AI companions	The report describes chatbots marketed as companions feeding the delusions of the mentally unstable and preying on the depressed, including a settled lawsuit involving the death of a fourteen-year-old.	p. 60
The formation ratio	Every hour of formation a church offers a child competes with many more hours delivered by a device. That is not a reason for despair. It is a reason to equip the parent who controls the device.	Section 3

Eleven: Lines You Can Use

The line	What it rests on
In Arizona schools, marriage now matters more than money.	The 43-point married-household proficiency gap exceeds the 27-point income gap (p. 10).
A married couple in the bottom income quartile is more likely to own a home than an unmarried Arizonan in the top.	51 percent vs. 36 percent (p. 26).
Arizona is climbing. The question is whether we climb faster.	Up four places on the Family Structure Index since 2020 (p. 34).
Almost half the children in this room are carrying something.	43 percent of Arizona children have experienced at least one adverse childhood experience (p. 14).
Most of us came here from somewhere else. That means this church is not supplementing anyone's village. In a lot of cases, it is the village.	Only 39 percent of Arizona residents were born in the state (p. 46).
Three decisions, in order, and ninety-seven out of a hundred young adults stay out of poverty. Yet, almost nobody has told them about the Success Sequence.	The Success Sequence, and the report's statement that its power is not widely known (pp. 52–53).
The trend line turned before any law changed it.	The share of children with married parents began rising in 2011 without a policy driver (p. 40).

Twelve: Find It by Sermon Theme

If you are preaching on...	Go to	Texts that pair well
Covenant and marriage	Sections Five and Seven	Genesis 2:18–25; Malachi 2:13–16; Matthew 19:3–6; Ephesians 5:21–33
Forgiveness and repair	Section Nine, the five mechanisms	Colossians 3:12–14; Ephesians 4:26–32; Matthew 18:21–22
Wisdom and decisions	Section Eight, the Success Sequence	Proverbs 24:27; Luke 14:28–30; Proverbs 13:22
Fathers, mothers, and formation	Sections Two and Three	Deuteronomy 6:4–9; Psalm 127; Ephesians 6:4; Malachi 4:6
The poor and the vulnerable	Section Four	James 1:27; Psalm 68:5–6; Isaiah 1:17; 1 Timothy 5:3–16
The church as household	Sections Six and Nine	Ephesians 2:19; Galatians 6:10; Acts 2:44–47
Loving your city	Section Six, the county story	Jeremiah 29:7; Matthew 5:14–16
Children as blessing	Section Seven, fertility	Psalm 127:3–5; Mark 10:13–16
Attention, formation, and screens	Section Ten	Deuteronomy 6:7; Philippians 4:8; Romans 12:2
Hope and renewal	Section One	Isaiah 58:12; Joel 2:25; Revelation 21:5

Where to Get More

What	Where
The full report, the pastor's edition, and county-level data for your area	renewingazfamilies.org
Church Ambassador Network — connecting Arizona church leaders to their legislators and to one another.	azcan.org

What	Where
Proyecto por la Familia — recursos en español	azporlafamilia.org

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