



**Sahuarita Unified School District and  
Freeport-McMoRan Foundation Partnership**

## Background

Sahuarita Unified School District (SUSD), located just south of Tucson, Arizona, serves 5,800 students residing within 606 square miles in Pima County. The district has an early childhood center, four elementary schools, one K-8 school, one middle school, two high schools, and an alternative school.

The district has been the recipient of funding via the Freeport-McMoRan Foundation (FCX Foundation), which seeks to build resiliency in mining communities where Freeport-McMoRan has a presence, and enable these communities to thrive long after mining has stopped.

The initiatives in SUSD support a larger effort by Achieve60AZ, a community-based alliance of 150+ member organizations and 40+ municipalities working to advance postsecondary attainment across the state. The alliance set a goal that by 2030, 60% of Arizona adults ages 25-64 will hold a postsecondary credential or degree.

The FCX Foundation's work addresses several pillars to achieve this goal, among them:

- Emphasize high school graduation
- Support students through pathways to college, career and certificates

## Results

Within the SUSD community, macro-measures of community resiliency are heading in a positive direction. Inflation-adjusted median individual earnings within the SUSD school district rose 11% over the past nine years and educational outcomes have steadily increased. The Sahuarita community is making progress toward meeting Arizona Progress Meters, as follows:



of 3rd students scored Proficient or Highly Proficient on the AzMERIT 3rd Grade English language arts (ELA) assessment.

of 8th grade students are proficient in 8th grade math and on track for high school math.

of students graduated high school in 4 years.

of graduates enrolled in postsecondary education or certificate programs after graduating from high school.

of residents age 25-64 have completed two- or four-year degree or received a postsecondary certificate.

72%

69%

90%

70%

60%

Goal

Goal

Goal

Goal

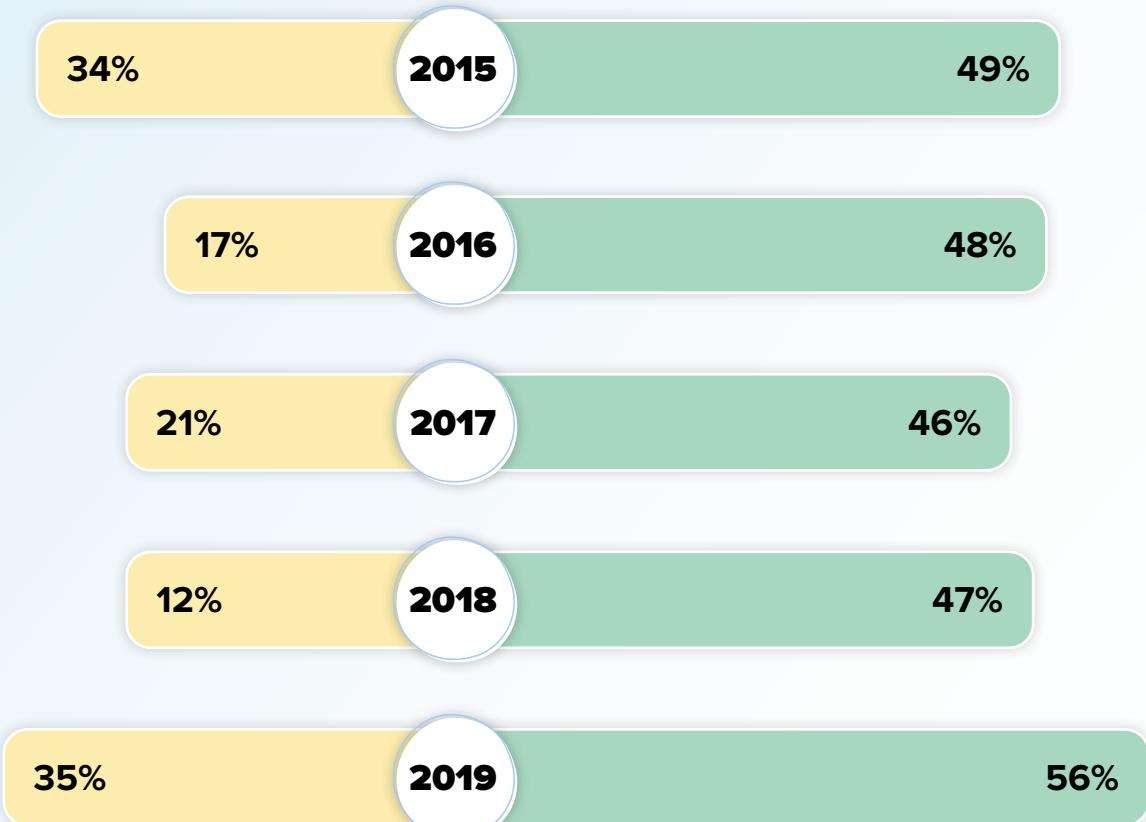
Goal



On K-8 measures, ELA proficiency rates remained relatively constant from 2015-2018 then saw a slight uptick in 2019 at 56%. Math proficiency has been very low at 34% in 2015, 17% in 2016; 21% in 2017, 12% in 2018, and 35% in 2019.

## Proficiency Rates

### Math | ELA



The FCX Foundation / SUSD Partnership included a large National Math and Science Initiative (NMSI) project, focused on increasing the enrollment in and quality of AP course offerings, as well as a Discovery Education initiative focused on increasing the quality of K-8 science, math, and reading instruction.

The Discovery Education implementation started small with just 246 students in Year 1 (2016-17 school year) and grew to impact roughly 900 students across five grades during the 2018-19 school year. Approximately 50% of applicable district students used Discovery Education.

## **About the Study:**

This evaluation is the first study that seeks to understand the impact of various SUSD initiatives funded by the FCX Foundation. The evaluation initiative was led by researcher Dr. Brett Kramer of Decisive Data Insights.

### **Study Design:**

The study, conducted from January 2020 through October 2020, began with stakeholder engagement to garner buy-in. The research team then collected performance data across the funded projects, analyzed the data using advanced statistical methods to determine partnership effects, and tied those effects back to larger macro-level measures to help inform and guide the direction of future philanthropic investments.

In regards to the Discovery Education analysis, the independent variable was the Discovery Education usage data across three years. Each year was examined separately, and aggregate effects were examined across the three years. The analysis looked for a differential effect with different levels of Discovery Education use. The dependent variables included science and reading (informational text) scores. Same-subject scores were used as covariates to control for prior achievement (e.g. prior year's math score used to control for current year performance). Attendance data was also used as a covariate to parcel effects.

The study results were made public in January 2021 at a meeting of the SUSD governing board.

### **Findings/Conclusions:**

- The investment in Discovery Education resulted in increased science, math and reading proficiency in grades 3-8. Cross-curricular effects are evident, but claims related to subjects other than science should be tempered only because Discovery Education does not make explicit claims that their curriculum leads to those effects.
- With 18 positive effects across the grade levels, subject, and relatively sparse years of implementation, it can be justifiably concluded that the Discovery Education implementation led to better academic outcomes in every subject and grade level, to some degree, than what would have been attained without its use.
- Discovery Education was used by fewer than 50% of students and sometimes as few as 25% of students in a given grade level. With more widespread use, it can be posited that better results likely would have been attained.
- In terms of efficacy and return on investment, more consistent, albeit smaller effects were observed at the younger grade levels, suggesting more widespread use be focused there, and perhaps supplementary use be focused at the older grade levels, if cost is an issue.

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