

Introduction

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The Condition of Education in Arizona: 2004 is a collection of ten policy briefs examining various key elements of the state's public education system. The authors, contributors, and reviewers of the briefs are, for the most part, on the faculty of Arizona's three public universities: Arizona State University, Northern Arizona University, and the University of Arizona. *The Condition of Education in Arizona: 2004* is the first of a planned series of annual reports sponsored by the Arizona Education Policy Initiative (AEPI). Launched in 2003, the AEPI was created to focus the expertise of faculty from Arizona's public universities on significant education policy issues in the state.

Although the topics taken up in *The Condition of Education in Arizona: 2004* are varied, there is one common theme: Arizona often lacks adequate data to make important education policy decisions. Again and again, in one area after another, the authors note the lack of data, conflicting data, or data that can not be cross referenced.

Michael Kelley, of ASU West Campus, and Joseph Tobin, of ASU Tempe Campus, examine Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) in the state. They note that there is a large number of children on the state's childcare subsidy waiting list, and that there is a significant disparity in wages paid to ECEC practitioners. Beyond that, they note that data necessary to plan efforts to strengthen and expand ECEC are not available. They recommend a variety of strategies to collect the necessary information in key areas.

Kate Mahoney, of ASU East Campus, and Marilyn Thompson and Jeff MacSwan, both of ASU Tempe Campus, assess how policies affecting English Language Learners (ELLs) are interpreted and implemented in the classroom, and to what extent ELLs are progressing academically. They find that the available data are not adequate to answer such questions.

Sarup R. Mathur and Robert B. Rutherford, both of ASU Tempe Campus, examine education for children with disabilities. They find gaps in the data needed to understand the quality of education that children with disabilities receive. There is, for example, little, if any, data available on the quality of the state's pool of special education teachers or on factors that lead to the retention of high-quality special education teachers in Arizona.

Josué M. González and Elsie M. Szecsy, both of the Southwest Center for Education Equity and Language Diversity at ASU Tempe Campus, find the data on minority student performance of limited value because they can not be disaggregated in ways that would make it possible to identify meaningful trends relating to achievement. They note that by not correcting these data deficiencies, the Arizona Department of Education (ADE) is making it difficult, if not impossible, to compare the adequacy of Arizona school programs to those of other states, or to evaluate the quality of the ADE's leadership in helping local schools improve education for all children.

Sherry Markel of NAU examines the twin issues of teacher shortages and teacher quality. She observes that although the federal No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) equates teacher quality almost exclusively with subject matter knowledge, many experts emphasize pedagogical skills that NCLB ignores. This is a significant issue in Arizona because, in the face of anticipated teacher shortages in specific subjects and in certain geographic areas, there is increased pressure for "fast track" teacher education programs that greatly reduce training in pedagogical skills. Markel notes that a growing body of research raises important questions about the value of such "fast-track" models.

Arnold Danzig, of ASU Tempe Campus, and Walter Delecki, of NAU, report on the supply, demand, and preparation of school administrators. They suggest that schools across the state would benefit from a more rigorous and better organized system for selecting the best candidates for administrator preparation. Danzig and Delecki find that data on administrator supply and demand is not particularly reliable or easily available. Additionally, no data are available to compare the performance of graduates from approved administrator certification programs with that of candidates who apply directly to the state for certification.

Examining attempts to assess public education by measuring student achievement, David R. Garcia, of the Arizona Center for Public Policy, and Joseph M. Ryan, of ASU West Campus, find that recent changes in the state measurement formulas have made it virtually impossible to draw valid conclusions about school improvement and, therefore, impossible to determine the impact of the Arizona LEARNS accountability system.

Thomas M. Haladyna of ASU West Campus describes the incompatibility of the data from two leading measures of achievement: the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) and the Stanford Achievement Test (Stanford 9). This incompatibility calls into question the validity of conclusions about the performance of Arizona students relative to that of students in the rest of the U.S.

Gene V Glass of ASU Tempe Campus considers the two principal policies for expanding parental choice in Arizona: charter schools and private-school-tuition tax credits. He finds that data necessary to determine whether students in charter schools are performing better academically than they would have performed had they remained in traditional public schools do not exist. Further, he notes that data to determine whether Arizona's private-school-tuition tax credit program has enabled public school students to attend private schools who otherwise could not have done so are not collected.

Finally, Richard Wiggall of Northern Arizona University reviews the recent history of school-finance policy in Arizona, and finds that the state legislature's policies have led to comparatively low per-pupil expenditure. Although the state has developed a funding approach that largely achieves equity, Wiggall concludes that it may have done so at the expense of funding adequacy.