

The Condition of English Language Learners in Arizona: 2004

Executive Summary

Two noteworthy policy changes in Arizona – the federal court case *Flores v. Arizona* in 2000 and the voter-initiated Proposition 203 in 2002 – have brought significant changes to the ways English Language Learners (ELLs) are educated. Both changes affected laws governing numerous aspects of education, including program options, teacher qualifications, and assessment. Key unanswered questions include how policy changes are being interpreted and implemented in the classroom, whether these policies have been effective, whether ELLs are progressing academically amid these major policy and programmatic changes, and what the best methods are of assessing ELLs' academic progress. Currently available data are inadequate to address these important questions.

Recommendations

It is recommended that:

- The Arizona Department of Education (ADE) improve reliability of state demographic data by collecting and coding each ELL's socioeconomic status, language proficiency measures, program placement, ELL's socioeconomic status, length of time classified as an ELL student, and other relevant information. One way to achieve greater accuracy is to provide pre-coded, computer-generated labels for each student in the state at each administration of a test.
- The ADE create an evaluation system to follow students that includes multiple measures of success over time to support longitudinal studies that can address unanswered policy questions. ADE's new unique identification code for each student will permit more reliable tracking of students across multiple years of schooling.
- The ADE make both its qualitative and quantitative data more accessible so that researchers can design rigorous studies that produce valid and reliable results, and continuously collect and maintain data notwithstanding administration changes.
- The Arizona legislature and ADE foster collaborative ventures between the policy community and research community situated in Arizona public universities.
- The Arizona legislature commission an evaluation study of the impact of Proposition 203.