

# The Condition of Special Education Services for Students With Disabilities in Arizona: 2004

## Executive Summary

For nearly three decades, services for children and youths with disabilities in the U.S. have been shaped by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). A more recent federal mandate that is beginning to have a significant impact on special education is the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB). In Arizona, more than 104,000 children and youths ages 3 to 22 are currently in special education programs intended to give them a free and appropriate public education, with curricula and services designed to address their individual learning needs. Although the regular education classroom is a prevalent setting for students with mild to moderate disabilities, research does not support the superiority of this, or any other, placement over another. There currently are no statewide data on the quality of certified and non-certified special education teachers, nor are there data on the factors that lead to the retention of quality teachers.

## Recommendations

### It is recommended that:

- The Arizona Department of Education (ADE) improve the collection of child count and placement data to enhance the understanding of who children with disabilities are and where they are being served. Reporting data by grade as well as by age would help to distinguish the eligible kindergarten students from the pre-school placements covered by the count of three- to five-year-olds.
- The ADE create a special education database that can be merged with other ADE databases to establish how schools ascertain the use of research- and evidence-based practices; how schools confirm they are hiring quality educators who have knowledge of both content and pedagogy; how teachers apply evidence-based instructional practices and inform researchers and policy makers of advantages and limitations in practice; how schools assess the efficiency and effectiveness of special education programming; and how schools measure and implement the factors that foster retention of quality teachers.
- The ADE implement a tracking system for personnel that reflects an actual count of personnel providing special education services (not just full-time employees) to identify who is serving students with special needs and what their qualifications are. Such a tracking system would facilitate understanding of the predictors and contextual factors that create conducive environments for student learning and for the long-term retention of quality teachers.
- The ADE implement a tracking system capable of tracking students with disabilities who move from one placement or level to another.