

The Condition of School Accountability in Arizona: 2004

Executive Summary

In November, 2000, Arizona voters passed Proposition 301, thereby instituting both school accountability provisions and a six-tenths of a cent sales tax increase dedicated to public education. These accountability policies are intended to improve public schools through calculation of achievement profiles, public dissemination of the achievement profiles, implementation of school improvement plans, and state intervention in low-performing schools. The achievement profile data have been released in the fall of 2002 and 2003, and to date 82 Arizona public schools have been designated as “Underperforming” for two consecutive years. The state board has modified the achievement formula dramatically, making it virtually impossible to draw valid conclusions about school improvement over time. As a result, the impact of the Arizona LEARNS accountability system cannot be determined. Potential threats to developing sound data in the future include the impact of policy decisions, the accuracy of the underlying academic indicators, and school/district responses to school accountability policies. The need to examine the impact of the Arizona LEARNS, including both the intended and unintended outcomes, remains a high priority.

Recommendations

It is recommended that:

- The Arizona legislature expand the scope of school accountability policies to include evaluating the role and impact of local school boards, teacher organizations, colleges of education, and district, county, and state agencies that affect student learning and therefore should be held accountable for improving public education.
- The Arizona legislature authorize and fund the Arizona Department of Education (ADE) to create an independent evaluation team, composed of personnel who are not responsible for directing and managing the accountability program, to review the accountability system.
- The Arizona legislature authorize and fund the ADE to develop a comprehensive, systemic, and external evaluation of school accountability policies that includes, but is not limited to, the academic indicators already included in the school accountability system.