

The Condition of Assessment of Student Learning in Arizona: 2004

Executive Summary

Reports of student achievement help policy makers in Arizona make effective decisions about resources and programs. Two commonly cited data sources for measuring achievement – the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) and the Stanford Achievement Test (Stanford 9) – contradict each other. The NAEP shows that Arizona students overall, and at-risk students especially, lag behind most other states, whereas the Stanford 9 shows that Arizona students perform slightly above the national average. A third source of achievement data, Arizona’s Instrument to Measure Standards (AIMS), offers the potential of having the greatest validity, but it is not completely developed, has not been in place long enough to provide valid longitudinal data, and does not allow for comparison to other states.

Recommendations

It is recommended that:

- The Arizona Department of Education (ADE) develop a comprehensive database that includes valid indicators of student learning as well as in-school and out-of-school indicators reasonably believed to influence student achievement.
- The ADE concentrate state assessment resources on the AIMS, using it to provide the achievement information sought by a wide range of constituencies and agencies.
- The ADE resolve the contradiction between the NAEP and Stanford 9 results if Arizona continues to use both these tests.
- The ADE validate the large gains over time reported by the Stanford 9, and if the gains are shown to be valid, investigate the factors associated with them: whether teaching and student learning are improving, and whether schools or districts have successful programs that are producing unusually high gains in student learning.