

# The Condition of Choice in Arizona Public Schools: 2004

## Executive Summary

School choice in Arizona takes the form of either charter schools (since 1995) or education tax credits (since 1998). About 8 percent of public school students in Arizona are enrolled in charter schools, compared with slightly over 1 percent nationally. The ethnic composition of Arizona charter schools roughly mirrors that of the traditional Arizona public schools. No credible data exist to answer the question whether students in charter schools are performing better academically than they would have performed had they remained in traditional public schools. No data on special education students' participation in charter schools exist. Since the inception of the Arizona Education Tax Credit program in 1998, approximately \$170 million has been diverted from state revenues and allocated to this program. No comprehensive data exist to verify whether this program enabled any public school students to move to private schools. Policy analysts, journalists, politicians, educators, and citizens need data on school choice in Arizona that clearly show trends over many years in the growth and operations of these programs. Only slight modifications in how certain data are collected and reported would be needed to facilitate their use by other parties.

## Recommendations

### It is recommended that:

- The State Board for Charter Schools include legislative staff and non-governmental policy analysts in data collection discussions so that the needs of multiple audiences can be served by the data collected.
- The State Board for Charter Schools expand its data collection efforts to include information on the participation in charter schools of children with special needs. Such data do not now appear to exist.
- The State Board for Charter Schools' website clearly spell out corporate relationships among charter holders.
- The Arizona Department of Education collect data on transfers from public schools to private schools as a result of award of a tuition scholarship from a School Tuition Organization.