

The Condition of School Funding in Arizona: 2004

Executive Summary

For the past ten years, Arizona has been in the bottom five of the 50 states in terms of per pupil expenditure. It is Arizona's policy of restricting school district access to the property tax and a generally minimalist approach to school funding that have made Arizona's per pupil spending comparatively low. In a climate of low funding for public schools during the 1990s, the Arizona legislature enacted a variety of laws and provisions expanding charter schools, assumed responsibility for school construction costs, created a tax credit for citizens who contribute money to be used for private school scholarships, increased sales taxes through a citizen's initiative to increase school funding, and sought to use Indian gaming revenues to add to support for schools.

Recommendations

It is recommended that:

- The Arizona legislature review and reconsider its decision to fund school capital expenses, such as construction of new buildings and additions, upgrades, or repairs to existing buildings, from annual appropriations through Students FIRST (Fair and Immediate Resources for Students Today) legislation.
- The Arizona legislature and the Arizona Department of Education (ADE) either conduct a study of whether Arizona's school funding is adequate to support the state's education standards, or establish a means to formally review recommendations for adequacy in school funding developed by the Rodel Foundation.
- The ADE develop, using the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) model, a common process to be used by all agencies for calculating school finance trends and details.