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Arizona Education Policy Initiative

*****NEWS RELEASE*****

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Researchers Find Flaws, Inconsistencies in Arizona's Education Policies, Offer Recommendations

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TEMPE, Ariz. (Monday, September 12, 2005) — The sweeping mandates of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) and Arizona's school accountability policies are creating a one-size-fits-all state public education system that struggles to meet the needs of Arizona's diverse student population, according to "The Condition of Pre-K-12 Education in Arizona: 2005," a report released by the Arizona Education Policy Initiative (AEPI).

For the second consecutive year, researchers from Arizona's public universities studied several facets of the state's education policies. This year's report, a collection of 10 policy briefs, is the first study to present the comprehensive impact of federal and state accountability policies in Arizona.

The report highlights contradictions between Arizona's accountability policies and local and federal legislation, the difficulties with implementing these policies, and the impact on teachers, students, and parents. Each policy brief offers recommendations for understanding and alleviating these problems. Nearly all of the briefs echoed the 2004 report's key finding: Adequate data needed to make important policy decisions were severely lacking. This year's findings are:

- **English Language Learners** (Kate Mahoney, Jeff MacSwan, and Marilyn Thompson, ASU): The structured English immersion method of educating English language learners (ELLs) is indefensible in terms of the research and data reviewed for this report. Given the lack of a research base, the authors recommend that the Arizona State Legislature commission a scientifically rigorous evaluation study of Proposition 203, a voter-initiated action that

mandated children in Arizona public schools be taught English by being taught *in* English.

- **Minority Access** (Frances Julia Riemer, NAU): Test data show that African American, Hispanic, and Native American students continue to trail far behind their White and Asian counterparts. Dropout data reveal that a significantly higher percentage of African American, Hispanic, and Native American students drop out of school than do White or Asian students. The dropout data collected reveal neither the motive nor rationale for the students' actions, making it impossible for the lack of minority participation to be explained or resolved.
- **School Funding** (Ric Wiggall, NAU): The education policies promoted by the Arizona State Legislature appear to be focused on (1) restricting funds for core instructional purposes to the greatest possible degree and (2) financially promoting a competitive system that offers alternatives (i.e., charter schools, vouchers, tax credits) to traditional public schools. The current method of education funding in Arizona is likely to perpetuate existing achievement gaps.
- **Standards & Assessment** (Darrell Sabers and Sonya Powers, UA): Instead of the Stanford 9, AZ LEARNS will now administer the TerraNova standardized exams to grades 2 through 9 to compare Arizona test scores with those of other states. The TerraNova has questionable validity for its intended purpose and contributes little to the assessment of student learning in Arizona.
- **School Accountability** (David R. Garcia, ASU): There is a weak relationship between AZ LEARNS accountability labels (e.g., "Performing," "Underperforming," "Failing") and school test scores on AIMS (Arizona's Instrument to Measure Standards). This inconsistency calls into question how well the system accurately aids parents in school-choice decisions.
- **Special Education** (Sarup R. Mathur and Robert B. Rutherford, ASU): NCLB's achievement goals are focused on implementing blanket academic goals for special education students which conflicts with the demands of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). IDEA calls for differentiated instruction based on an individual student's needs.
- **School Administration** (Arnold Danzig, ASU; Walter Delecki, NAU; and David Quinn, UA): Administrative costs have declined since 2001 and are below national and state averages. The trend of hiring leased employees—retired administrators who return for a fraction of their salary while still collecting their pension—has implications for the cost of lost innovation and for the cost to the state's retirement system.
- **Arizona Education by the Numbers** (Alex Molnar, Jamie Joanou, ASU): Due to missing or contradictory data, there are a number of key facts Arizonans do not know: (1) Arizona's dropout rate, (2) the exact number of charter holders, (3) the number of charter schools, (4) the average size of charter schools, (5) the number of Arizona's public school students attending charter schools, (6) the ethnic

composition of Arizona's charter school population, (7) the number of ELLs in Arizona's charter schools, (8) the number of charter school teachers, (9) the ethnic and gender composition, and years of experience of charter school teachers, and (10) the number of charter school administrators.

- **Technology** (Laura Sujo de Montes, NAU): While the Arizona Department of Education (ADE) has begun to close the technology gap by wiring schools for the Internet and providing computers, the technological professional development offered by the state for teachers is inadequate.
- **Teacher Quality** (Sherry Markel, NAU): With the implementation of structured English immersion and the changes to Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC), teachers and caregivers are required to obtain additional certification and receive more professional development. ECEC could experience a shortage of qualified personnel should current caregivers be unable to dedicate the time or money to become certified.
- **Early Childhood Education and Care** (Michael F. Kelley, Joseph Tobin, and Karen Ortiz, ASU): Policy makers are focused on strengthening and expanding ECEC services to include fully-funded, full-day kindergarten and to improve the quality and capacity of ECEC. The data needed to guide ECEC policy decisions, however, are nonexistent.

The Arizona State Board of Education recently agreed to allow researchers greater access to state education data. This initiative will enable AEPI researchers to conduct studies that will better inform Arizona policy makers. Arizona is only the second state to have such an agreement with its state board of education (North Carolina is the other).

“This agreement is an avenue for conducting scientific, rigorous, and informative research to improve public education in Arizona,” said AEPI Coordinator and ASU Assistant Professor David Garcia. “The State Board needs answers. Its members should be commended for taking this great step toward getting those answers.”

Find this document on the web at:

http://www.asu.edu/educ/eps/ae/ae_2005_annual_report.htm

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The Arizona Education Policy Initiative (AEPI) is a collaborative project of Arizona State University, Northern Arizona University, and the University of Arizona, launched in September 2003. AEPI's projects utilize the expertise of Arizona's public universities' faculty to contribute to Arizona education policy and practice.

Visit the AEPI website at <http://arizonaeducationpolicy.org>

The Education Policy Studies Laboratory (EPSL) at Arizona State University offers high quality analyses of national education policy issues and provides an analytical resource for educators, journalists, and citizens. It includes the Arizona Education Policy Initiative (AEPI), the Commercialism in Education Research Unit (CERU), the Education Policy Research Unit (EPRU), and the Language Policy Research Unit (LPRU). The EPSL is directed by Professor Alex Molnar.

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