

# The Condition of Special Education in Arizona: 2005

## Executive Summary

Students in the state of Arizona receiving special education services have a legal right to equal access to an appropriate education, effective education programming in the least restrictive environment, and evaluation in an unbiased manner. Ensuring these rights has proven difficult because of the differing goals and methods of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). NCLB's achievement goals are focused on implementing academic programs for all special education students, but IDEA demands differentiated instruction based on an individual's needs. This conflict (group vs. individualization) has created widespread frustration for educators and policy makers. For Arizona's special education programs to overcome the problems created by this conflict, the authors of this brief assert that teachers must be able to collaborate on the education plans of special-education students, all educators should receive professional development in addressing behavior problems and methods for identifying students with disabilities, and the Arizona Department of Education (ADE) should compile more data on the teacher hiring practices employed by schools.

## Recommendations

### It is recommended that:

- ADE in collaboration with Institutions of Higher Education create a comprehensive database to track patterns of hiring practices of schools.
- ADE; public, private, and charter schools; and teacher and school psychologist training programs implement response to intervention (RTI) methods to improve achievement and prevent misidentification of students with disabilities.
- ADE work with individual districts and schools to provide students with disabilities access and opportunities to participate and progress in the general education curriculum through collaboration by special and general education teachers in the student's educational planning.
- Arizona schools improve the academic and social behavioral outcomes of challenging students who are at serious academic or behavioral risk.
- Arizona guarantee effective instructional options, and specialized programming, mental health services, and vocational rehabilitation for students with special needs.
- ADE open a statewide dialogue concerning suspension and expulsion, and their alternatives for promoting a productive learning climate in Arizona schools.