

The Condition of Assessment of Student Learning in Arizona: 2005

Executive Summary

Reports on student achievement should assist policy makers in Arizona in making effective decisions about educational programs. The major source of achievement data available for 2005 is from Dual-Purpose Assessment (DPA). The idea behind DPA is that two tests are used to meet two different purposes. The first purpose is met by Arizona's Instrument to Measure Standards (AIMS); AIMS is intended to assess the degree to which students have met the standards of the Arizona curriculum. The TerraNova (TN), a standardized achievement test from CTB/McGraw-Hill, is intended to serve the second purpose: providing a comparison to other states in the nation. Another source of achievement data, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), is used to compare the performance of a sample of Arizona students to other states in the nation. A key difference between TN and the AIMS/NAEP assessments is that TN is mandated by the state rather than the federal government. TN has questionable validity for its intended purpose and contributes little to the assessment of student learning in Arizona.

Recommendations

It is recommended that:

- The Arizona Department of Education (ADE) create state user norms for AIMS and the TN each year for grades 2 through 10.
- ADE clearly specify which measures are used for what purposes.
- ADE compare schools using norms for schools, not with norms for individual scores, when reporting the results of annual testing.
- ADE conduct a study to recommend the number of curricula that teachers are expected to use as guides to instruction.