

The Condition of School Funding in Arizona: 2005

Executive Summary

With the release of *Lead with Five: Five Investments to Improve Arizona Education*, the Rodel Foundation has brought attention to the funding with which Arizona supports its preK-12 schools and provides recommendations where future increases would result in increased student achievement. The *Lead with Five* report, based on an adequacy-of-funding study conducted by the nationally known firm of Picus and Associates, is the product of a process to determine the basic education necessary for Arizona students to meet the expectations established by the Arizona State Legislature when learning standards and assessment were passed into law. The recommendations are a roadmap to direct future funding and a recommendation to the legislature to consider increasing funding for education. This brief explores adequacy as a test to be applied to Arizona school funding, compares the Arizona study to adequacy studies focused on other states, and examines the question of education research supporting the policy recommendations contained in the *Lead with Five* publication. This report finds that policies promoted by the Arizona State Legislature appear to be focused on restricting funds for core instructional purposes to the greatest degree possible and financially promoting a competitive system that offers alternatives (charter schools, vouchers, tax credits) to traditional public schools.

Recommendations

It is recommended that:

- Policy makers develop a model for comprehensive school funding reform for public schools, incorporating into the model needed educational services that will enable all students to perform at the level required by Arizona's standards.
- Policy makers incorporate into a school funding reform model the concepts of adequacy in funding in lieu of the current policy of promoting equity among school districts.
- Arizona adopt a system of reporting and comparing school funding that focuses on core instructional support in order to minimize public confusion regarding the level of support for teaching and learning.