

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS
PERFORMANCE AUDIT

Subject

The 21st century brought a new focus on school accountability. In 2001, Arizona voters established “Arizona Learns” to identify and assist underperforming or failing public schools. In 2002, Congress passed the No Child Left Behind Act, which sets a goal of academic proficiency for all children by the 2013-2014 academic year.

Our Conclusion

The Arizona Department of Education (ADE) generally follows best practices recognized in literature to assist in improving student achievement. However, ADE can make some improvements in these practices. In addition, ADE should continue its efforts to improve participation in state-funded tutoring and to improve accountability in tutoring programs.



2006

School Accountability Programs

The Arizona Department of Education administers two school improvement programs: the federal “No Child Left Behind” (NCLB) program and the “Arizona Learns” program. Although some of the requirements and corrective actions differ between the two programs, both sets of requirements are in full force.

NCLB—Under NCLB, schools must make adequate yearly progress (AYP) toward making students proficient in reading, writing, and math.

To determine whether a school meets or does not meet AYP, Arizona uses student scores from the Arizona Instrument to Measure Standards (AIMS) test, along with the percentage of students who took AIMS, attendance rates at elementary schools, and graduation rates for high schools.

In FY 2005, 1,544 Arizona schools were meeting AYP and 237 failed to meet AYP.

Under NCLB, if a school does not meet AYP in the first year there is no consequence. If a school continues to not meet AYP corrective actions escalate, ending in a restructuring of the school in year six.

As shown in Table 1, in the 2004-2005 academic year, four schools were in Year 6 restructuring.

Arizona Learns—Arizona’s accountability system is known as Arizona Learns. Arizona Learns also measures student achievement based on AIMS, graduation

Table 1: Status of Arizona Schools in NCLB Improvement or Intervention Programs Academic Year 2004-2005

School Improvement	
Warning year	85
Year 1 improvement	56
Year 2 improvement	42
State Intervention	
Corrective action	27
Planning to restructure	20
Restructuring	4

Source: Auditor General staff analysis of information provided by ADE staff.

or attendance rates, and AYP. However, ADE begins to address underperformance after the first year and intervenes in the third year. Table 3 (see page 2) compares the key features of NCLB and Arizona Learns.

Under Arizona Learns, there are six classifications for school performance, ranging from Excelling to Failing. As shown in Table 2, in the 2004-2005 academic year there were four failing schools.

Table 2: Arizona Learns Achievement Profiles Academic Year 2004-2005

Achievement Profiles	Number of Schools
Excelling	228
Highly Performing	254
Performing Plus	494
Performing	773
Underperforming	123
Failing	4

Source: Auditor General staff analysis of information provided by ADE’s Web site and ADE staff.

Table 3: Comparison of Selected Aspects of NCLB and Arizona Learns
As of October 2005

	NCLB	Arizona Learns
Measurement components	AIMS scores Percentage of students assessed Attendance/graduation rates	AIMS scores Measure of Academic Progress (MAP) Graduation/dropout rates Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)
Classification for schools	School made AYP School did not make AYP	Excelling Highly performing Performing plus Performing Underperforming Failing to meet academic standards
Progression of corrective action	<p>Did not make AYP 1 year:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> No consequence—warning year <p>Did not make AYP 2 years:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> School improvement year 1 <p>Did not make AYP 3 years:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> School improvement year 2 <p>Did not make AYP 4 years:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Corrective action <p>Did not make AYP 5 years:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Planning to restructure <p>Did not make AYP 6 years:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Restructuring <p>School is "free and clear" of these consequences as soon as it makes AYP for 2 consecutive years.</p>	<p>Underperforming year 1</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> School improvement <p>Underperforming year 2</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> School improvement <p>Underperforming year 3 and Failing to meet academic standards (pending site visit)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> State intervention <p>School is "free and clear" of these consequences as soon as it is designated Performing, Performing Plus, Highly Performing, or Excelling.</p>

Source: Auditor General staff analysis of ADE School Effectiveness Division's *Intervention Handbook* and of academic year 2004-2005 achievement profiles from ADE's Web site as of October 17, 2005.

ADE's School Improvement Program Generally Follows Best Practices but Can Make Some Improvements

Under Arizona Learns, ADE provides assistance to underperforming schools through its School Improvement program. According to the literature, strong improvement programs contain key elements and several are present in Arizona's program. These include:

- Requiring underperforming schools to develop Arizona School Improvement Plans (ASIPs);
- Having external Solutions Teams review the ASIPs, and
- Providing technical assistance by assigning "ASSIST" Coaches to meet monthly with principals and staff.

However, ADE could take steps to better meet best practices in three areas.

More monitoring and guidance needed for improvement plans—ASIPs are one of the primary tools that underperforming and failing schools use to improve. While ADE provides some training on completing an ASIP, the ASIPs we reviewed often lacked specific goals and timelines.

ADE also does not have a process for revising and correcting unsound ASIPs.

Although ADE has Solutions Teams review the ASIP and notify the school if a plan is deficient, it should follow up to ensure that the school revises the plan. ADE should also create a deadline of 45 days after ASIPs are found deficient for schools to submit a revised ASIP.

ADE could provide assistance that better meets best practices—ADE's ASSIST Coaches provide general technical assistance to help schools improve, such as general information about integrating technology with classroom management and identifying available resources.

However, ADE could better meet best practices by providing more intensive assistance to the lowest-performing schools. To do this, ADE should consider instituting a pilot program to identify a few of the lowest-performing schools and provide them on-site, full-time technical

experts. Other states, such as Kentucky and South Carolina, already provide full-time, on-site experts who work with particularly weak schools.

Additionally, ADE should consider providing more specialized assistance by matching the strengths of the coaches with the needs of the particular schools. Currently, coaches are often assigned based on location.

Monitoring and evaluation could be improved—ASSIST Coaches perform some monitoring and evaluation of schools. However, ASSIST Coaches do not gather information in a standardized way, and this information is not systematically reviewed. ADE should review information obtained by coaches to determine if any adjustments in its School Improvement program should be made.

One school's ASIP for the 2004-2005 academic year included prior AIMS test results but did not state its goal for improving the scores on the next test.

Recommendations

ADE should:

- Improve its ASIPs training program;
- Follow up to ensure that schools revise unsound ASIPs;
- Set a deadline of 45 days to receive revised ASIPs from schools;
- Consider instituting a pilot program to provide on-site, full-time technical experts to some particularly weak schools;
- Consider providing more specialized assistance through ASSIST Coaches; and
- Review information obtained by coaches to see if any adjustments in its School Improvement program should be made.

Additional Monitoring Needed to Assess Efforts to Improve Participation in Tutoring Programs

In Arizona, students who have failed one or more parts of the AIMS test or attend an underperforming school may receive state-funded free tutoring. However, in the fall 2005 semester, fewer than 2 percent of more than 55,000 eligible students received tutoring. As of April 30, 2006, the tutoring fund had a balance in excess of \$6.7 million.

In December 2005, the State Board of Education made changes to the tutoring program to increase participation. Changes included:

- Increasing from 9 to as many as 90 the number of hours of tutoring students may receive.
- Allowing high school credit for some AIMS tutoring.

- Increasing tutor pay from \$30 to \$40 per hour.
- Eliminating the use of a pre-test and post-test to show a student's academic improvement.

The tutor and parent determine the skills the student must study and the performance criteria the student must achieve. However, there is little assurance that tutored students are achieving an appropriate level of improvement or that

tutors are spending the reported amount of time tutoring.

ADE also promotes and reviews the federal tutoring program for Title 1 schools prescribed by NCLB. All K-12 students attending a Title 1 school that is in its second year of School Improvement are eligible for free tutoring using Title 1 funds. However, the tutoring is largely provided by private providers after school hours at off-campus sites. As a result, transportation is a major barrier to participation.

Recommendations

ADE should:

- Continue to monitor participation in the state tutoring program.
- Randomly audit tutor records to ensure the reasonableness of criteria to assess student achievement.

TO OBTAIN MORE INFORMATION

A copy of the full report can be obtained by calling
(602) 553-0333



or by visiting our Web site at:
www.azauditor.gov

Contact person for this report:
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Other Pertinent Information

Arizona students' performance on state proficiency tests cannot be reliably compared to students' performance in all other states. However, one test that allows interstate comparability of student performance is the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) test. Since 1969, NAEP tests have been conducted periodically in such subjects as reading, mathematics, science, and

writing. NAEP is a sample survey of American students, testing knowledge and skills in the nation as a whole, in each participating state, and in different demographic groupings. For the 2004-2005 academic year, NAEP results show Arizona students scoring below the national average in reading and mathematics.