



# ThinkAZ Policy Brief

ARIZONA CENTER *for* PUBLIC POLICY

Volume 1 • Number 2 • May 2003

## Arizona K-12 Public Education

### *Who does what?*

Public education is one of the most important and extensive functions of state government. Given the enormity of providing education services to all eligible students in Arizona, it is no surprise that the K-12 public education system is so complex. The purpose of this paper is to outline the roles and responsibilities of major public education officials and identify the lines of authority between them. This is a valuable resource for parents or anyone else trying to understand the complex Arizona K-12 public education system. It is not a comprehensive analysis of all the responsibilities held by each education official and the reader is encouraged to refer to Title 15 of the Arizona Revised Statutes for specific details. In addition, this paper does not address private schools because the state public school system has no jurisdiction over these schools. It does, however, apply to charter schools because they are part of the state public education system.

Public education is divided into four levels: state, district, county and school with education officials at each level. Three lines of authority connect the education officials and determine supervisory and subordinate roles and responsibilities between them. The three lines of authority are: academic, financial and personnel.

#### EDUCATION LEVELS AND OFFICIALS

**State** – State Board of Education, Superintendent of Public Instruction and Arizona Department of Education

**District** – school board, district office including district superintendent and administrators

**County** – board of supervisors and county school superintendent

**School** – principals and teachers

#### LINES OF AUTHORITY

**Academic** – includes the authority to prescribe policies and procedures in the areas of academics, safety/discipline and educational programs

**Financial** – includes the authority to budget/account for monies, purchase/sell assets and maintain property

**Personnel** – includes the authority to hire/fire, discipline/evaluate and set employee salaries

## STATE LEVEL

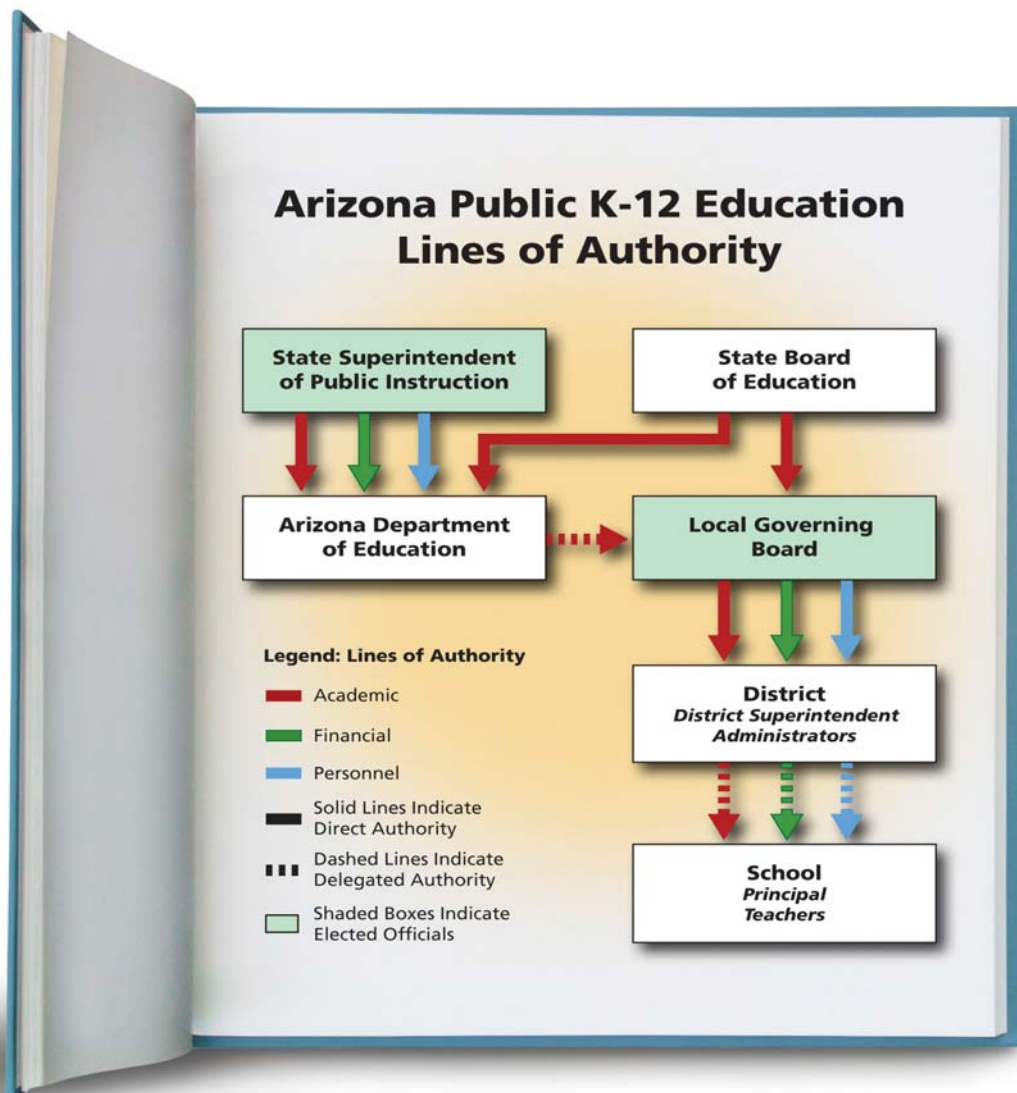


### *State Board of Education*

The State Board of Education (State Board) consists of nine members appointed by the governor to staggered four-year terms. The State Superintendent of Public Instruction, a statewide elected official, is also a member of the State Board. The purpose of the State Board is to “exercise general supervision over and regulate the conduct of the public education system.”

Its primary academic authority is establishing policies that govern district level and charter school curricula. The State Board:

- prescribes a minimum course of study for elementary grades (K-8) including minimum competency requirements for the promotion of students from third and eighth grade.
- prescribes a minimum course of study and requirements for high school graduation. The course of study and graduation requirements detail the type and quantity of classes necessary to receive an Arizona high school diploma.



- adopts competency tests for high school graduation. The competency tests are better known as Arizona’s Instrument to Measure Standards (AIMS).

The State Board also serves important roles in school accountability, such as adopting the criteria to classify each school, and determining if a consistently “failing” school should be managed by an entity other than the local school board.

The State Board does not have financial authority over school districts. It is, however, charged with ensuring that school districts comply with financial administrative laws and it can impose penalties as a corrective measure.

With regard to personnel authority, the State Board:

- controls the certification requirements and qualifications of professional persons employed in the public education system, including the adoption of proficiency examinations.
- oversees investigations into allegations of immoral or unprofessional conduct on behalf of certified employees and may impose disciplinary action, including the revocation of a certificate, upon a finding of immoral or unprofessional conduct.

The State Board does not have authority to hire or fire employees at the district or school level.

The **State Legislature** creates laws that govern the public education system. The Legislature delegates authority and responsibilities to every level of the system, determines the amount of revenue appropriated to public education and establishes how local governing boards spend public funds.



### ***State Superintendent of Public Instruction***

The State Superintendent of Public Instruction is an elected official, a member of the State Board and executes the policies of the State Board and applicable state laws. As with the State Board, the State Superintendent of Public Instruction does not have financial or personnel authority over school districts or schools.

The **Arizona Department of Education (ADE)** is charged with implementing State Board policies. The State Superintendent of Public Instruction is responsible for all executive and administrative functions of the ADE.

The superintendent is charged with correcting school district or charter school budgets that do not conform to state law, evaluating route miles that determine the amount of money districts receive for student transportation costs and maintaining official school finance records.

### **DISTRICT LEVEL**



### ***Local School Board***

Local school boards (school boards), commonly referred to as local governing boards, are organized for the government and management of schools within the school district and are responsible for the education of students under their jurisdiction. School board members are locally elected officials and possess the most extensive authority over schools.

The academic authority of the school board includes:

- prescribing the academic curriculum that determines the content of classroom instruction.
- determining the criteria for the promotion of elementary grade students.
- setting competency requirements for graduation that are in addition to or higher than the requirements established by the State Board.
- reviewing the decision of a teacher to promote/retain an elementary student or to pass/fail a student in a high school course.
- approving textbooks and supplementary materials for use in the classroom.
- establishing special programs.

The school board also is responsible for carrying out school accountability requirements as defined in state law including the development and supervision of a school improvement plan for all “underperforming” and “failing” schools.

The school board has jurisdiction over safety/discipline policies that include holding students accountable for disorderly conduct, prescribing rules for discipline, suspension and expulsion of students and developing a school emergency response plan. They may also require students to wear uniforms. Policies adopted by the school board are commonly found in a central location, such as a policy manual, that is accessible to the public through the district office.

The school board maintains financial authority over schools including the adoption of a budget and the management of school district funds in accordance with state laws. The school board also maintains and controls school property within the district. The school

board, however, is not responsible for funding, constructing or maintaining school buildings or capital equipment. Since 1997, the State School Facilities Board is charged with these responsibilities and carries out these duties in conjunction with the school board.

School boards are the official employer at the district and school levels. As such, the school board fixes salaries, establishes a system for performance evaluation, prescribes and enforces policies and procedures for disciplinary action and can dismiss, suspend or decide not to re-employ personnel.

One of the most important employment decisions of the local governing board is the hiring of the **district superintendent**. The local school board delegates the authority to implement policies to the district superintendent and other district administrators. The type and extent of authority provided to the district office varies by school district.

## COUNTY LEVEL



### *County School Superintendent*

The county school superintendent is an elected official with authority over the education of students in circumstances that are outside the normal operation of school districts. The county school superintendent:

- authorizes students who are precluded by distance or lack of adequate transportation facilities or who reside in an unorganized territory to attend an adjoining school district.

- operates accommodation schools. Accommodation schools are located on military reservations, unorganized territory, detention facilities and provide educational services to homeless students.
- may provide other educational services to school districts.

As a fiscal agent, the county school superintendent handles accounting responsibilities for some school districts. Under this arrangement, the county treasurer holds school district monies in specific funds. In order to spend money, school boards issue a voucher to the county school superintendent who, in turn, issues a warrant allowing the county treasurer to release the money.

The **county board of supervisors** is an elected body with the authority to levy county taxes, some of which are for K-12 public education. In addition, the county board of supervisors shares many duties with the county school superintendent.

In addition to the previous responsibilities, the county school superintendent has election duties in conjunction with the county board of supervisors, when required. The duties include filling school board vacancies and conducting regular and special school district elections.

The county school superintendent also serves a role in the education of home school and private school students. The parents of these students are required to file an affidavit of intent with the county school superintendent.

## SCHOOL LEVEL

All employees, including teachers, are required to comply with the rules and policies of the local school board. At the school level,

principals are responsible for providing leadership and serving as the school administrator. Some schools have school councils. According to state statute, a local school board may, but is not required, to delegate powers to the council. Therefore, the responsibilities of school councils may vary by school district.



### *Charter Schools*

Charter schools are public schools. As such, charter schools are required to adhere to the same course of study, graduation requirements and testing policies as other public schools. In addition, charter schools are required to follow the same financial reporting and health/safety requirements as other public schools. The charter sponsor has the responsibility for providing oversight and supervision over the charter schools under their jurisdiction. According to state statute, only the State Board for Charter Schools, the State Board of Education and/or local school boards may sponsor charter schools. Under the sponsorship arrangement, charter schools establish a contract, or charter, with the sponsor that sets forth the methods of operation and conditions that the charter school must meet to remain in operation. A charter school sponsor may revoke the charter of a school that does not fulfill the terms of its charter. Charter schools also are required to have a governing body that is responsible for policy decisions. The authority of the governing body varies by charter school.

\* All quotes and references from Arizona Revised Statutes, Title 15.



*The Arizona Center for Public Policy is an independent, non-partisan research institute dedicated to providing thorough, accurate and impartial information on public policy issues that impact the economic and social well-being of the state.*