

**REPORT  
 HIGHLIGHTS**  
 PERFORMANCE AUDIT

**Our Conclusion**

The Arizona State Schools for the Deaf and the Blind (ASDB) serves children and students from birth through 21 years of age who have sensory impairments such as deafness and blindness. As of April 2012, ASDB had 2,240 students who either attended one of its three on-campus schools, participated in its birth to age three or preschool programs, or received ASDB services at their local schools. ASDB can do more to promote student success by ensuring that children with sensory impairments receive services early in their lives, increasing students' access to highly qualified teachers, and researching and addressing differences in students' test scores. ASDB should also ensure its regional cooperative program, which serves students at their local schools, more fully recovers its costs. It should also strengthen oversight and management of the program. Finally, ASDB needs to address critical information technology weaknesses.



2012

**ASDB can do more to promote student success**

**ASDB uses standardized tests to assess student progress—**

These tests include the state-wide Arizona's Instrument to Measure Standards (AIMS) test as well as another test similar to the AIMS called Measures of Academic Progress (MAP).

**Most ASDB students did not meet standards on AIMS—**

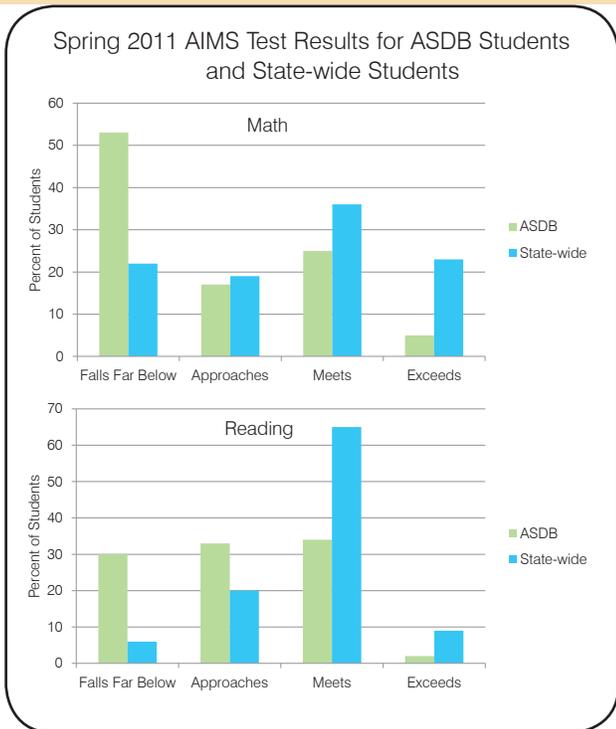
ASDB students generally scored lower on AIMS than did Arizona students as a whole. Although some ASDB students passed and even exceeded standards on the spring 2011 AIMS, most did not.

**MAP results showed students made some progress but still testing well below grade level—**

ASDB students' MAP test scores showed that they start at a much lower level than national norms. Although limited growth occurred after 5th and 6th grades and continued into high school, it was not sufficient to bring students' scores within reach of national norms. For example, by the 11th grade, ASDB students scored the same as the average 3rd-grade student would in reading and scored slightly below the average 4th-grade student in math.

**Standardized test scores are limited indicators of program success—**Sensory-impaired students may have difficulty taking standardized tests because of natural disadvantages these students may face in taking these tests. In addition, there is little comparative information about scores attained by similar students in other Arizona schools or other states' schools.

**ASDB uses common practices, but can strengthen its practices—**To help ensure success in educating its students, ASDB



follows commonly used practices, including using technology to help students learn. In addition, ASDB groups students according to their academic ability rather than age. However, ASDB can strengthen the following practices:

- **Early Intervention—**Early intervention services are a critical element in a student's success. ASDB provides early intervention services through a program called Arizona Early Intervention Program. ASDB has identified areas where it can do more to improve this program such as coordinating with the other agencies involved in the program, better organizing and training staff, and reaching out to families with sensory-impaired infants and children.
- **Highly qualified teachers—**Federal law requires that disabled students be taught by teachers who are highly qualified in special education and in core academic subjects. According

to an Arizona Department of Education report, about 90 percent of ASDB teachers were highly qualified during the 2011-2012 school year. According to ASDB officials, it is difficult to hire and retain highly qualified teachers for many reasons, including lack of competitive pay and the challenges of obtaining the required certifications. ASDB is working with the University of Arizona and the Arizona Department of Education to increase the pool of qualified teachers.

- **Studying differences in test scores**—Federal law requires that all public schools work to narrow achievements gaps in their states. Study-

ing differences in AIMS passing rates across the various ASDB locations may help improve ASDB's student achievement.

**Recommendations**—ASDB should:

- Improve its early intervention program to ensure that children receive needed services.
- Increase students' access to highly qualified teachers.
- Study differences in test scores and implement potential solutions to improve student achievement.

## ASDB should review regional cooperative service fees and strengthen its operations

**ASDB provides services at local school districts through its regional cooperative program**—ASDB established a regional cooperative program in 1988 to help local school districts serve sensory impaired students. There are five regional cooperatives, and each has a staff of teachers, interpreters, and other specialists. About one-half of state school districts participate in the program.

**Funding comes from various sources**—Funding for the regional cooperatives comes from special education vouchers through the Arizona Department of Education for assessments, counseling, and direct teaching services; from the State General Fund for program administrative costs; and from school district membership fees to

screen children and train school staff.

**ASDB should examine fees**—Each regional cooperative has established its own membership fees it charges to school districts. Districts also pay ASDB for direct educational services provided to their sensory impaired students. ASDB does not have policies for determining appropriate membership and other fees. Further, ASDB has not evaluated whether such fees cover the costs of the services provided.

**Recommendation**—ASDB should ensure that fees cover the cost of all services provided by regional cooperatives by assessing operations, tracking costs, and developing appropriate fees.

## ASDB needs to improve its information technology practices

In 2009, the Arizona Department of Administration's Information Security group assessed ASDB's information technology (IT) environment. This assessment identified deficiencies and made several recommendations. Although ASDB tried to address the deficiencies, this audit identified the following IT security control weaknesses:

- No risk assessment or security reviews of the IT environment have been done.
- The IT network does not have adequate controls to secure it from hackers.
- There is no effective process for updating com-

puters and servers, which are running critical systems on outdated software.

ASDB also does not have a comprehensive disaster recovery plan and does not properly test or backup data. As a result, ASDB may not be able to meet federal and state requirements to protect the privacy of its students and staff.

**Recommendations**—ASDB should:

- Strengthen IT security controls.
- Address disaster recovery deficiencies.
- Improve data backup.