

Adequacy Study 2024

Progress on
Lake View Measures

Prepared for the
House and Senate
Committees
on Education



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Introduction

Arkansas’s biennial adequacy study stems from the Arkansas Supreme Court’s 2002 decision that declared the state’s school funding system unconstitutional, known today simply as the *Lake View* decision. In it, the Supreme Court justices agreed with the lower court’s assessment that the “State has a remarkably serious problem with student performance.”

Pulaski County Circuit Court Judge Collins Kilgore wrote the lower court’s assessment, and he based the conclusions on a range of educational and economic statistics. So how is Arkansas faring more than two decades after that assessment was made? The Bureau of Legislative Research (BLR) has attempted to identify the likeliest sources of data that were cited in the 2001 Kilgore decision, then illustrate the state’s progress based on the most recent comparable data.

The first decade or so after the “Lake View reforms” were instituted, many of the indicators Kilgore cited trended upward. Most of those indicators’ trendlines have leveled off or, in some cases, reversed direction since around 2013. For instance, the disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic beginning in the 2020 school year led to significant drops in student achievement levels in Arkansas and across the United States, with lingering effects still evident in the 2023 test scores.

In the following sections, current data representing the original *Lake View* measures is compared with that in other states, and the trend in performance over time is displayed as well. The analyses show that Arkansas currently often ranks among the lower states on most indicators.

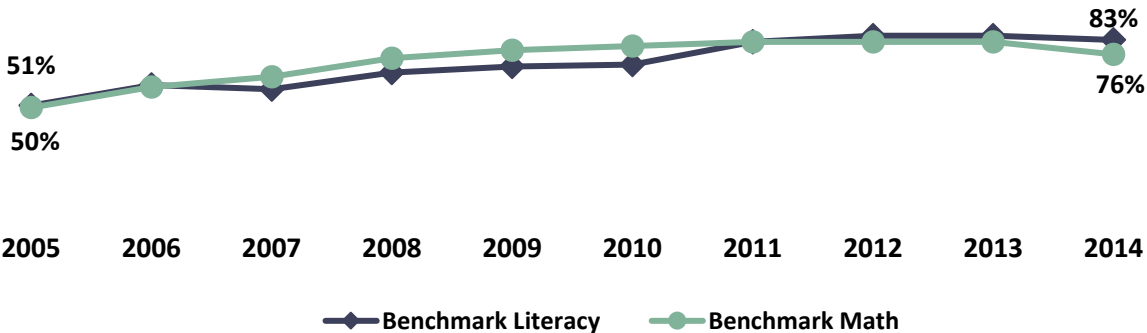
State Assessment Scores

2001 KILGORE DECISION: “The first set of scores on the ACTAAP test showed that only 44% of the fourth graders were proficient in reading and only 34% of the students were proficient in math.”

NOW: The statewide assessment has changed multiple times in the last 20 years, so direct comparisons are difficult. However, the decade from 2005 to 2013 shows progress being made on the 4th grade Benchmark assessments in literacy and math.

The ACTAAP test Kilgore referred to were what was known as the state’s Benchmark exams, which were criterion-referenced exams specific to Arkansas’s learning standards with the purpose of measuring students’ mastery of Arkansas’s curriculum. Beginning in spring 2007, Benchmarks were augmented with questions that could be norm-referenced for comparisons with students in other states.

Percent 4th Graders Scoring Proficient or Advance on State Benchmark Exams

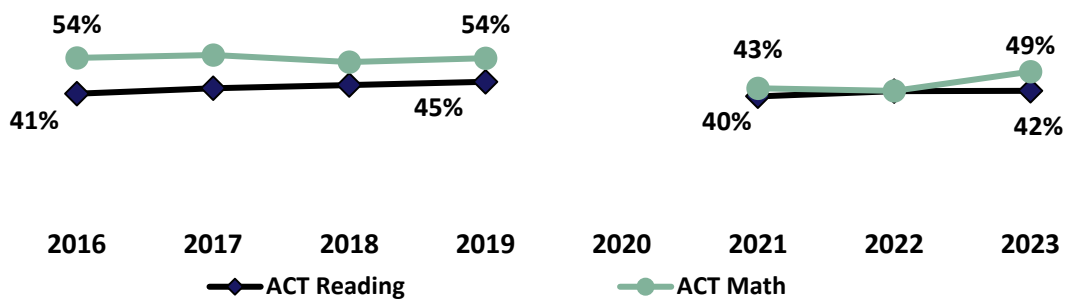


In 2015, the state switched to a common exam taken by students in a consortium of states, the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC). The results showed most 4th-graders were not meeting proficiency levels on the exams:

- **34%** proficient or advanced in 4th grade English Language Arts
- **24%** proficient or advanced in 4th grade math

In 2016, the state changed its state assessment again, this time to the ACT Aspire, which uses the terminology “Ready” and “Exceeding.” Though 4th grade math scores have remained relatively flat, some progress has occurred in reading scores. Because of COVID-19, no tests were administered in 2020. Fourth graders scored higher in reading in 2023 than they did in 2022, but 2023 math and reading scores both fell short of pre-pandemic levels.

Percent 4th Graders Scoring Ready or Exceeding on ACT Aspire Math & Reading



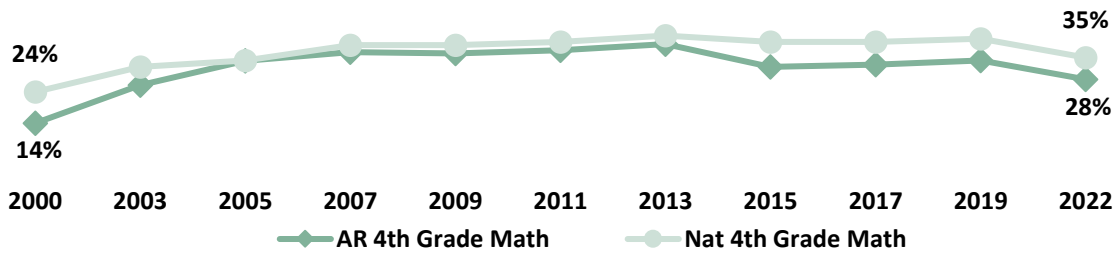
The 2023 school year was the final administration of the ACT Aspire in Arkansas and a new testing system called ATLAS will take its place beginning with the testing period in spring of 2024.

National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) Scores

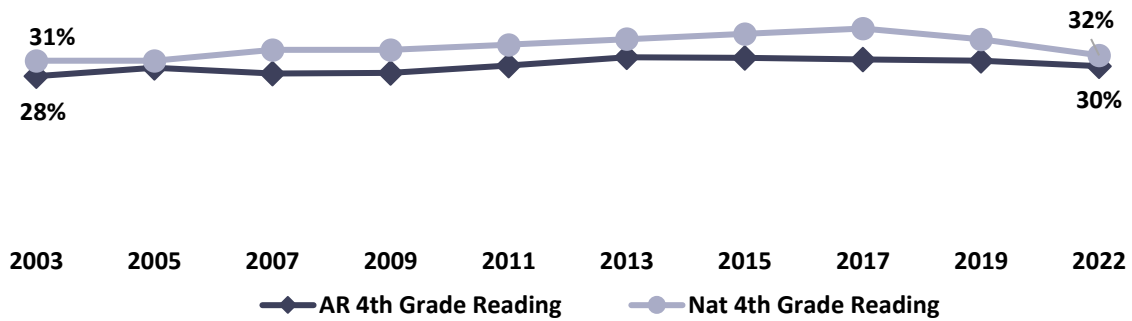
2001 KILGORE DECISION: “Arkansas’ [sic] fourth and eighth grade students do not rank at or above the national average for proficiency in math, reading, science or writing as measured by the Southern Regional Education Board’s State Analysis of the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) test scores.”

NOW: Arkansas’s 4th and 8th grade students have made some progress on the NAEP assessments since the 2001 Kilgore decision, especially in science. (The science exam was last administered in 2019, when scores at the national level saw a decrease in both grades. State scores have not yet been released for the 2019 science exam.) The most recent scores in both math and reading fall below the peak that was set in previous years for each test. The impact of COVID-19 both in Arkansas and nationwide also is evident in the following graphs. Arkansas students still trail behind the national average in those subjects.

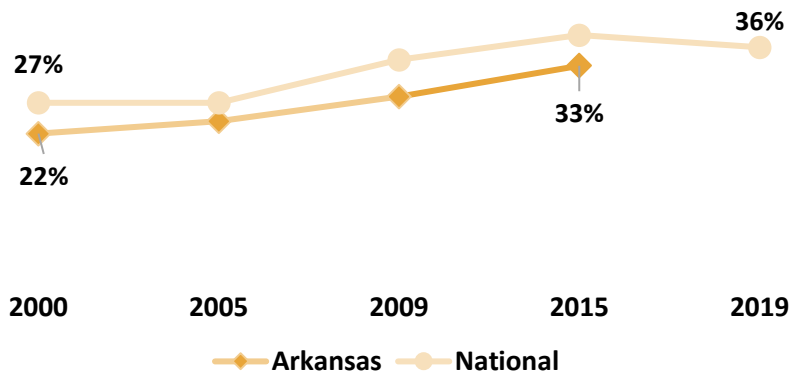
Percent AR and U.S. 4th Graders Scoring Proficient or Above on NAEP Math



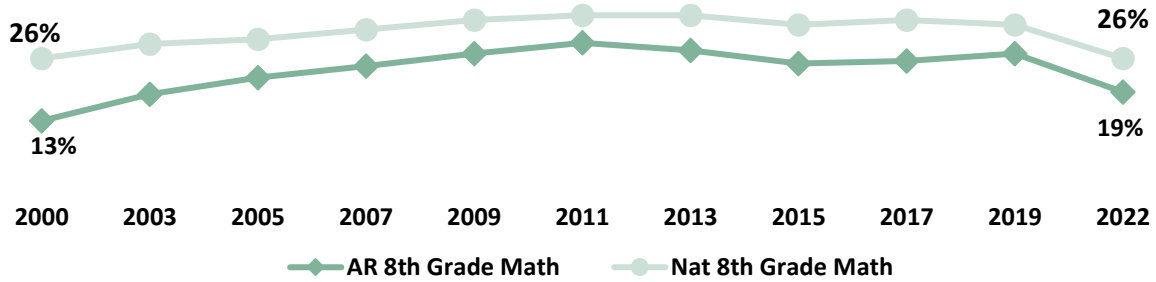
Percent AR and U.S. 4th Graders Scoring Proficient or Above on NAEP Reading



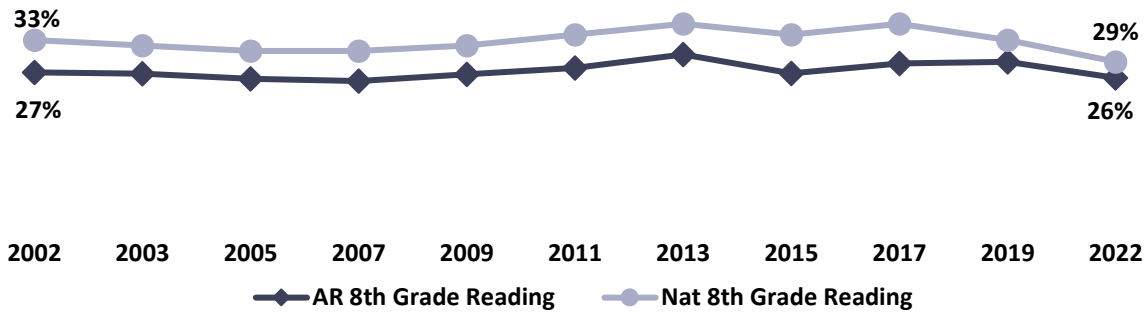
Percent AR and U.S. 4th Graders Scoring Proficient or Above on NAEP Science



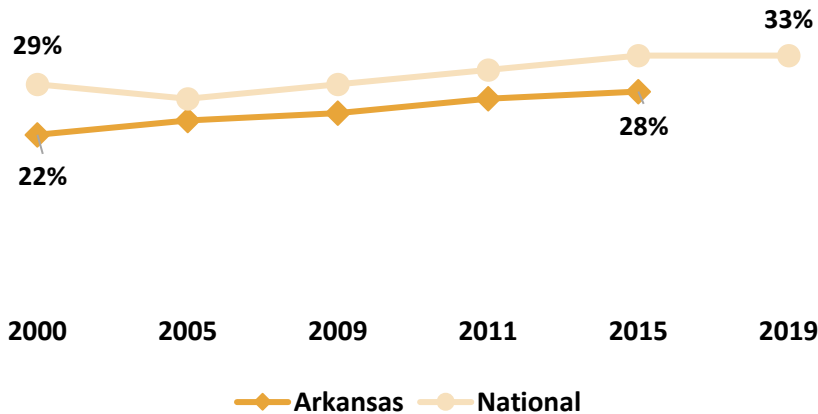
Percent AR and U.S. 8th Graders Scoring Proficient or Above on NAEP Math



Percent AR and U.S. 8th Graders Scoring Proficient or Above on NAEP Reading



Percent AR and U.S. 8th Graders Scoring Proficient or Above on NAEP Science



Data Source: Scores retrieved from the NAEP Data Explorer at www.nationsreportcard.gov.

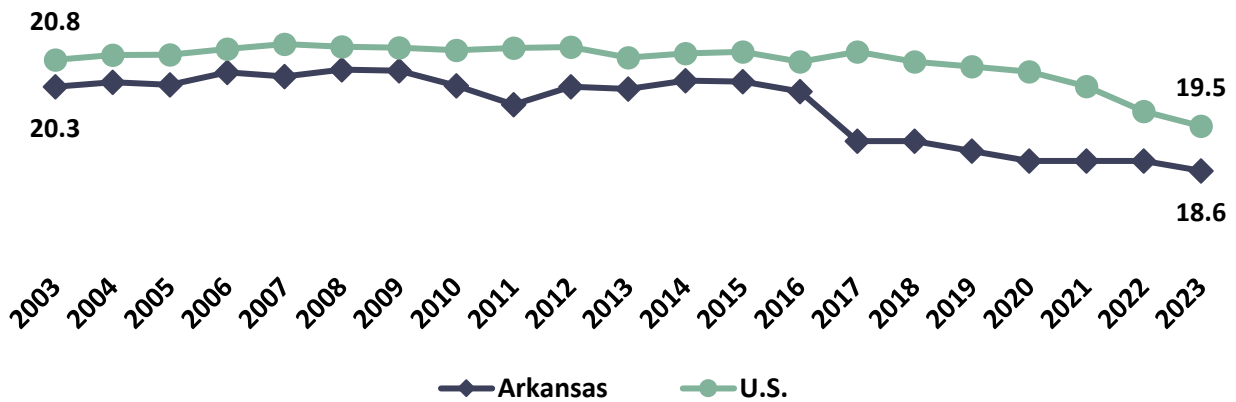
Average ACT Composite Scores

2001 KILGORE DECISION: “Arkansas students scored several tenths below the national average on the ACT from 1990 to 1999.”

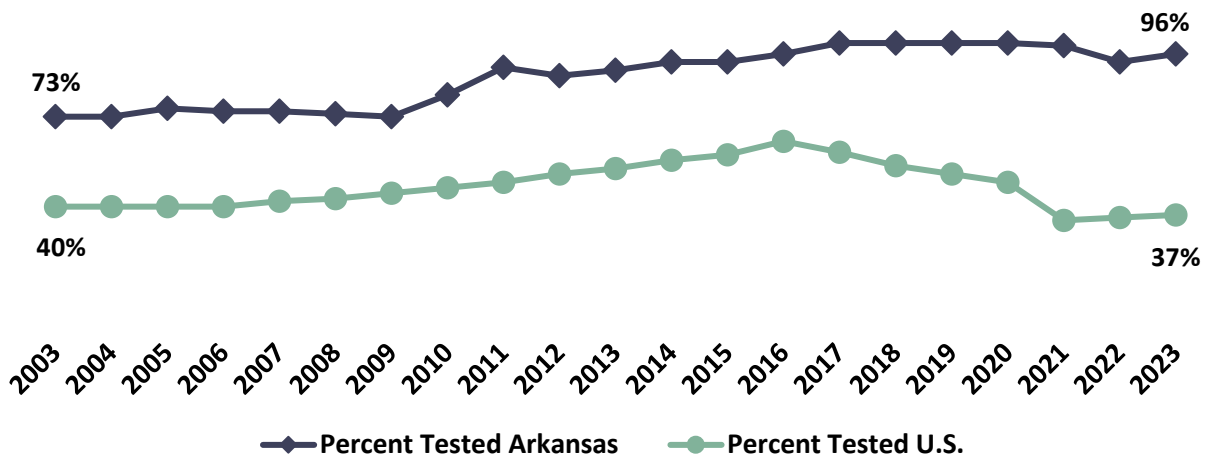
NOW: Arkansas students are further behind the national average, scoring 0.9 points below the national average in 2023.. The narrower gap is due to the national average score declining.

Arkansas’s scores peaked almost 20 years ago (20.6 in 2006, 2008 and 2009). Since then, Arkansas’s average composite scores have declined overall, although some of that is due to the rate of participation increasing until it reached 100% in 2017. COVID-19 impacted participation rates both in the nation and Arkansas, where it has fallen below 100%. While scores have declined nationally in recent years, they have declined at a lower level in Arkansas.

Average ACT Composite Scores for AR and U.S.



ACT Participation Rates for AR and U.S.



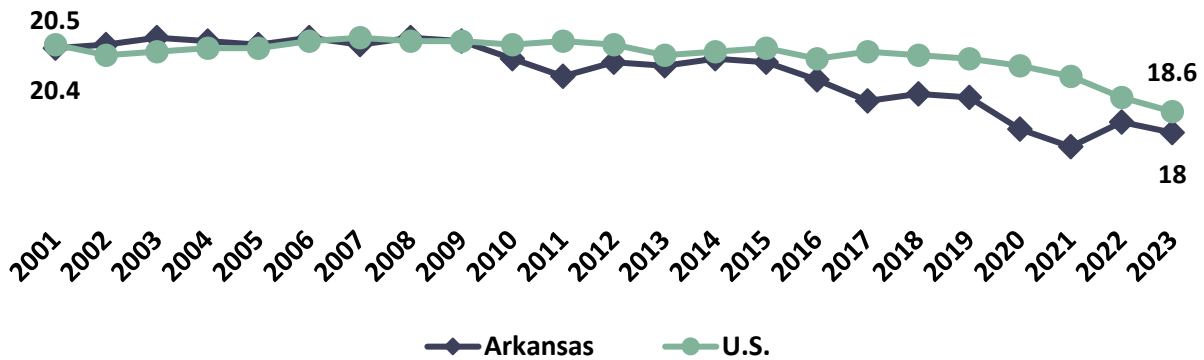
Data Source: “Average Act Scores by State Graduating Class of 2023” and former years, ACT.

Average ACT Scores in English

2001 KILGORE DECISION: “On the ACT test in English, Arkansas students exceed the national average.”

NOW: The average ACT English score for Arkansas dropped from 20.7 in 2001 to 18 in 2023. Arkansas’s score has been below the national average for the last 14 administrations of the exam, though the gap is less than one point this year. Again, the lower scores beginning in 2017 may be all or partially due to Arkansas’s higher participation rate.

Average ACT English Scores for AR and U.S.



Data Source: “Average Act Scores by State Graduating Class of 2023” and former years, ACT.

College Going Rates

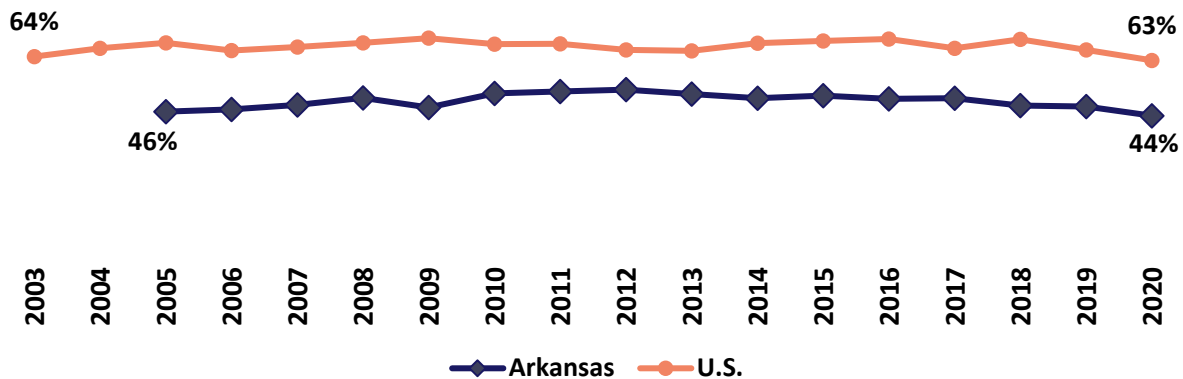
2001 KILGORE DECISION: “For the period 1996 through 1998, the percentage of Arkansas high school graduates attending college is approximately 53%.”

NOW: The most recent data show that less than half of Arkansas’s graduating students go on to two- and four-year colleges, while about two-thirds of the nation’s graduates enter post-secondary education.

The college-going rate cited in the Kilgore decision resulted from a different methodology than the one currently used. Beginning in the 2010 school year, the new methodology is a calculation for Arkansas public high school graduates only and does not include private school graduates.¹ According to the Arkansas Department of Higher Education’s 2020 Comprehensive Higher Education Annual Report, Arkansas’s college-going rate reached a high of 52.9% in 2012 but was **44.2%** in 2020. The national college-going rate peaked at 69.8% in 2016 and fell to 62.7% in 2020.

¹ Arkansas Department of Higher Education. *Comprehensive Arkansas Higher Education Annual Report*. 2020. Retrieved from: https://static.ark.org/eeuploads/adhe/6-CollegeGoingRate-ANNUAL_2.pdf

College-Going Rates for AR and U.S.



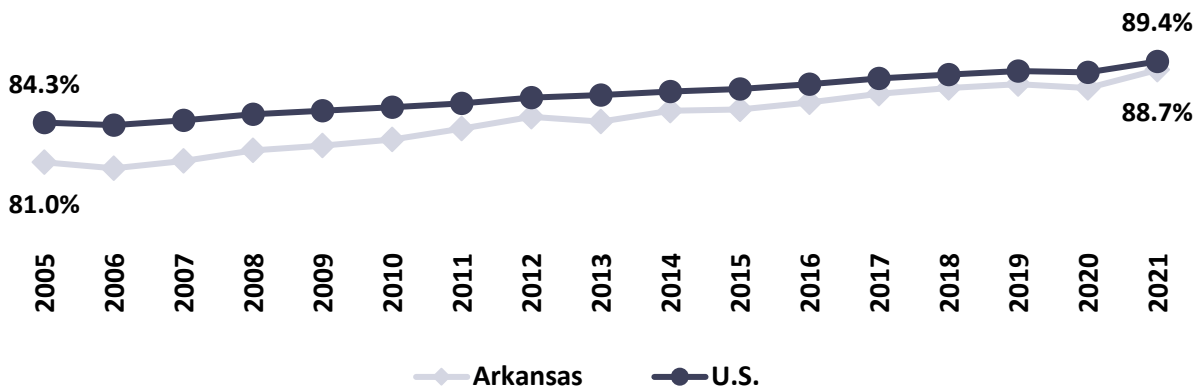
Data Source: NCES Recent high school completers and their enrollment in 2-year and 4-year colleges retrieved at https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d16/tables/dt16_302.10.asp and ADHE’s Annual College-Going Rate Report, Dec. 2022.

Adults Who Graduated from High School

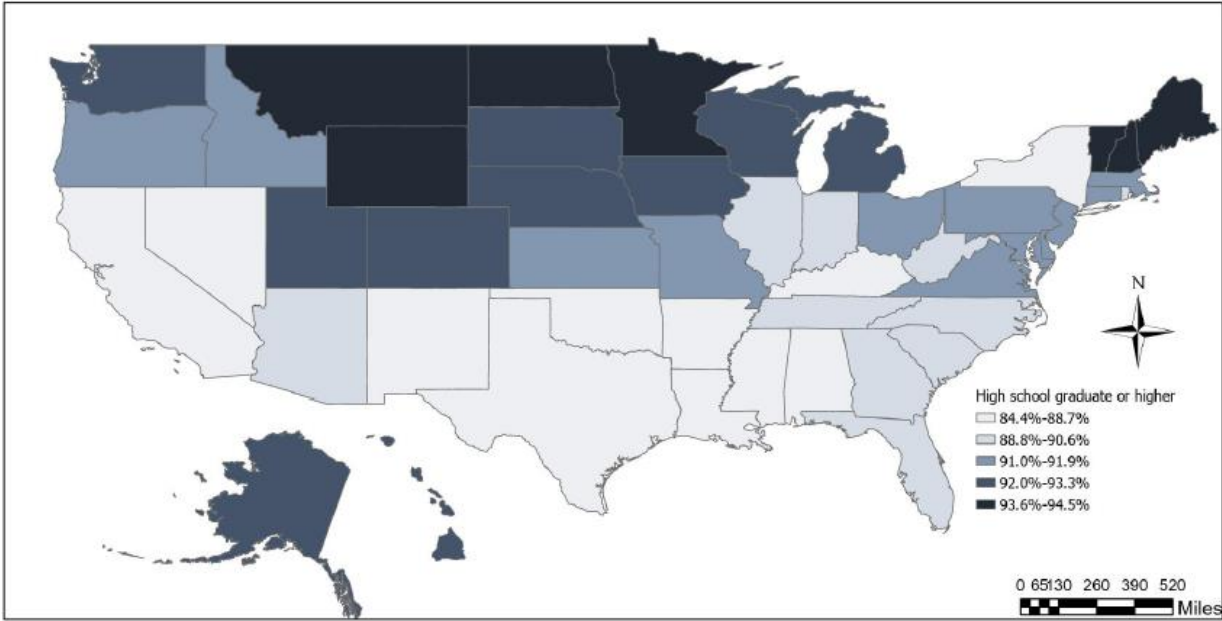
2001 KILGORE DECISION: “Arkansas ranks lower than the national average for percentage of adults ages 25 years and older who have graduated from high school.”

NOW: While Arkansas still ranks below the national average, it has increased the percentage of adults ages 25 years and older who have graduated from high school and narrowed the gap to only 0.7 percentage points below the national rate. According to the latest data from the U.S. Census Bureau’s American Community Survey, in 2021, Arkansas tied with Oklahoma to rank 47th among the states and the District of Columbia.

Average Percent High School Graduates, 25 and Older, in AR and U.S.



2021 Percent Adult (25 and Older) High School Graduates by State



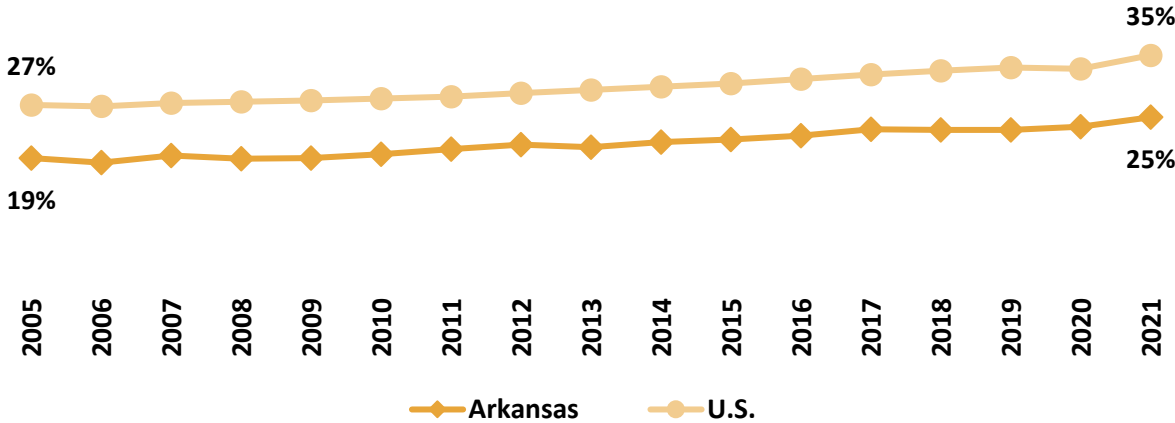
Data Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey: 1 –Year Estimate, Various Years.

Adults with a Bachelor’s Degree or Higher

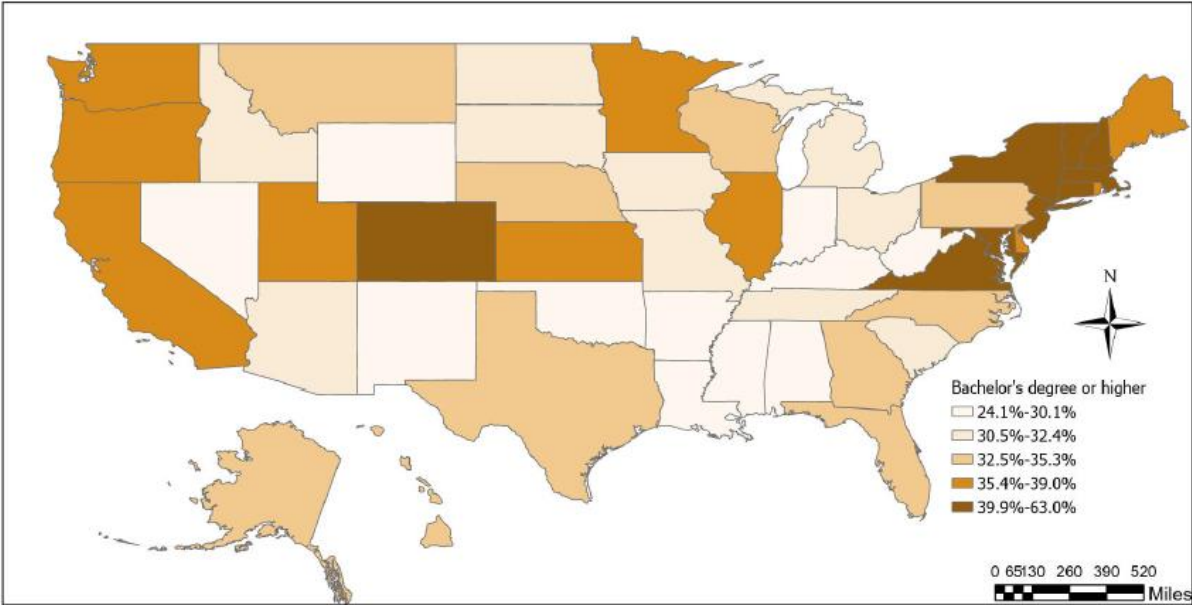
2001 KILGORE DECISION: “Arkansas ranks 49th in the nation in percentage of the population age 25 years or older with a bachelor’s degree or higher.”

NOW: According to the latest data from the U.S. Census Bureau’s American Community Survey, Arkansas ranked 49th out of the 50 states and the District of Columbia in 2021, with 25.3% of adults 25 and older holding bachelor’s degrees, compared to the national rate of 35%. Arkansas’s rate of residents holding bachelor’s degrees increased by 3.3 percentage points in 2021 from the previous year, narrowing the gap with the national rate to the smallest gap since 2005 – 7.9 percentage points.

Average Percent with Bachelor’s Degrees, 25 and Older, in AR and U.S.



2021 Percent Adults (25 and Older) with Bachelor's Degrees by State



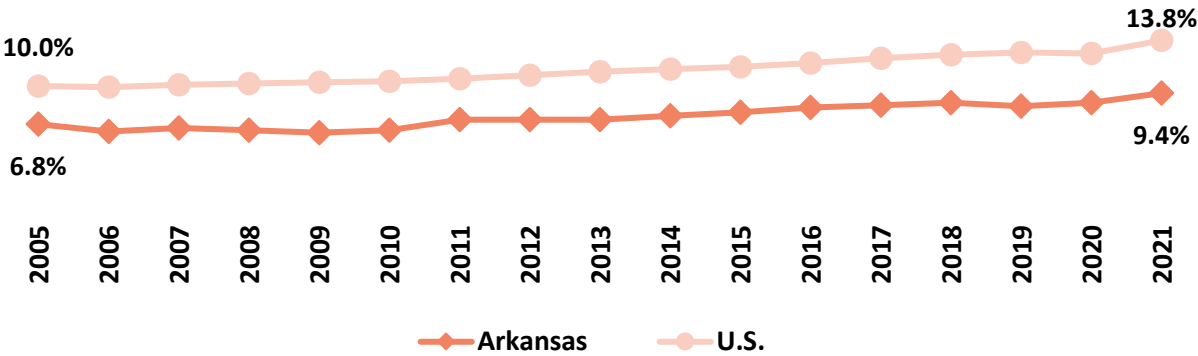
Data Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey: 1 –Year Estimate, Various Years.

Adults with Graduate and Professional Degrees

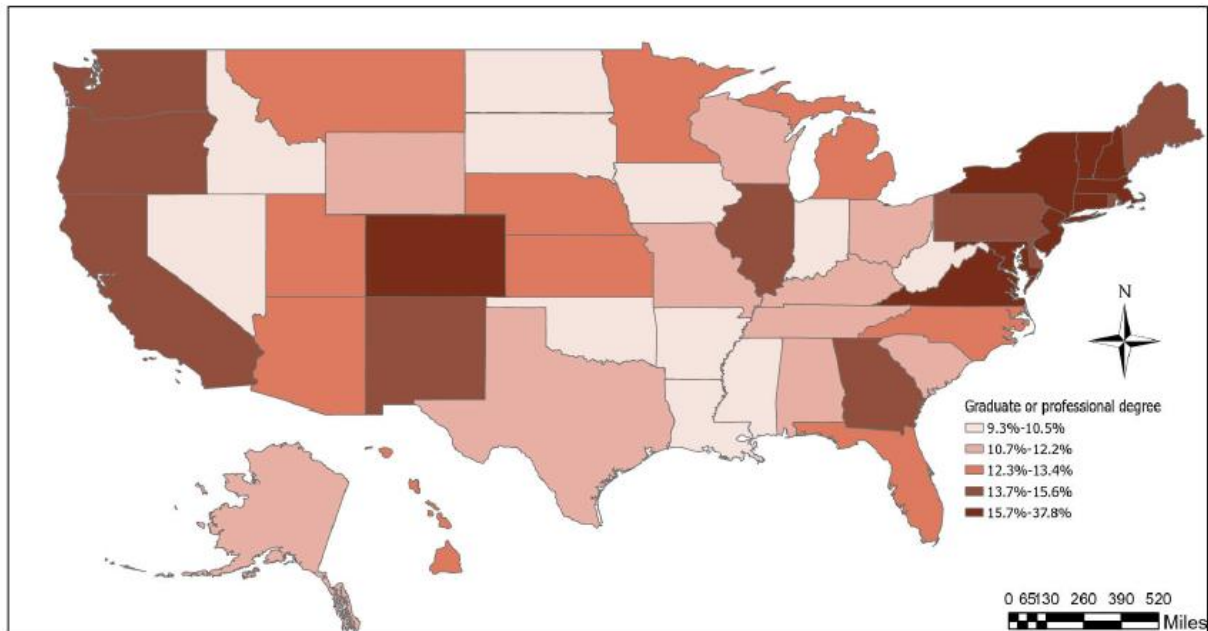
2001 KILGORE DECISION: “Arkansas ties for last place in the nation in percentage of adults with graduate degrees.”

NOW: In 2021, Arkansas tied for 50th with North Dakota, with 9.4% of adults 25 and older with graduate degrees. Mississippi was last with 9.3% of residents 25 years and older with graduate degrees.

Average Percent with Graduate Degrees, 25 and Older, in AR and U.S.



2021 Percent Adults (25 and Older) with Graduate Degrees



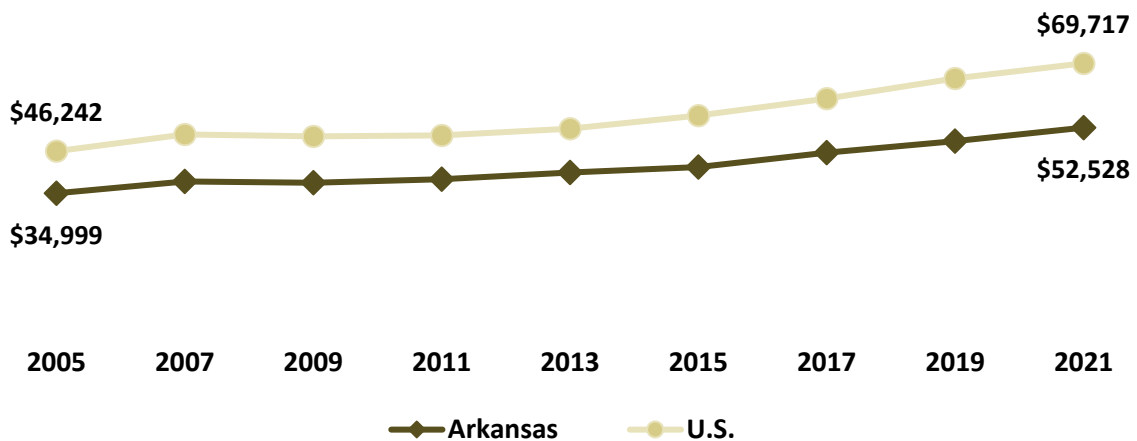
Data Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey: 1 –Year Estimate, Various Years.

Median Household Income

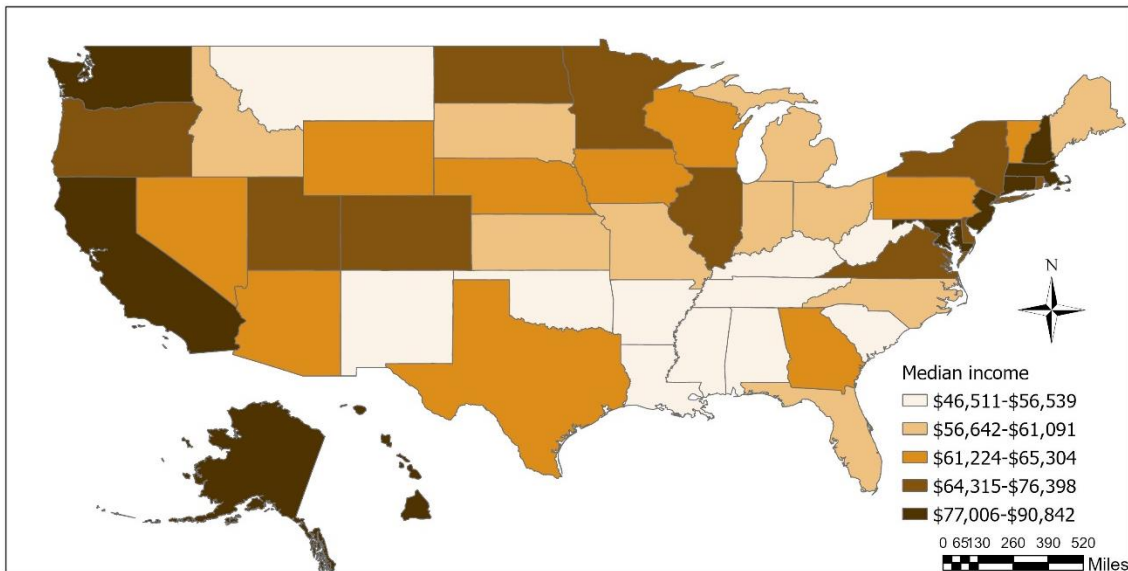
2001 KILGORE DECISION: “Arkansas ranks 49th among the states for median household income.”

NOW: According to the latest data from the U.S. Census Bureau (the American Community Survey, a different survey source from the 2000 Census data), in 2021, Arkansas ranked **48th**, at \$52,528, ahead of Louisiana, West Virginia, and Mississippi.

Median Income in AR and U.S



Median Income in U.S., 2021



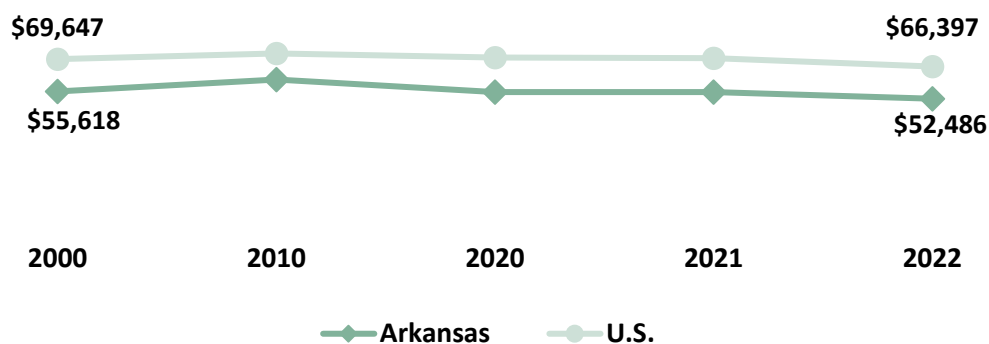
Data Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey: 1 –Year Estimate, Various Years.

Teacher Pay

2001 KILGORE DECISION: “Arkansas generally ranks between 48th and 50th in teacher pay.”

NOW: Arkansas’s average annual teacher salary increased by more than \$17,000 since 2000, but its ranking in average annual teacher salaries in 2022 was 45th, ahead of Missouri, Louisiana, Florida, West Virginia, South Dakota, and Mississippi.²

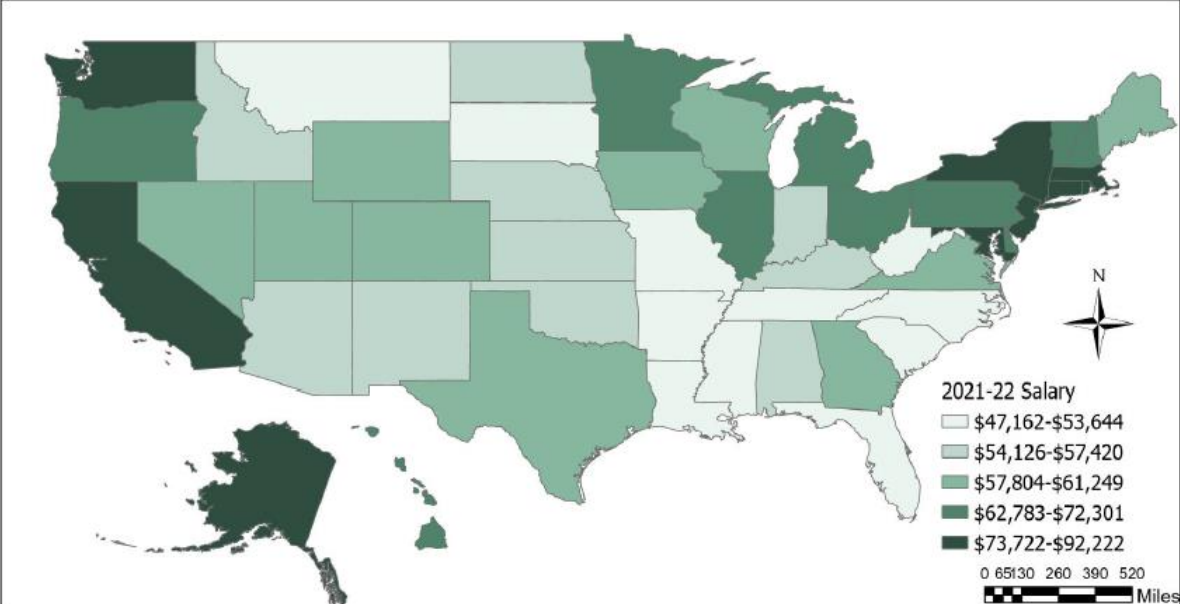
Average Teacher Salaries, Selected Years.



Data Source: 2022 Educational Digest, Table 211.60, National Center for Education Statistics. (2022 constant dollars.)

² The minimum salary for teachers increases to \$50,000 in 2023-2024 due to passage of Act 237 of 2023

Average Teachers Salaries in U.S., 2022



Data Source: 2022 Educational Digest, Table 211.60, National Center for Education Statistics