



School Improvement Planning Under Act 930 of 2017

Act 930 of 2017 spells out a process for school improvement planning that provides schools and school districts more autonomy and flexibility than they have experienced in the last 15 years.

This mirrors the federal effort to provide those same qualities to schools, districts and states under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) as opposed to former requirements under No Child Left Behind and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act Flexibility systems. ADE’s newly written draft of rules for the new accountability and school planning systems are currently in the public comment phase of approval.

The major changes realized under the new law include:

- Schools no longer have to use the electronic planning tool Indistar to build their improvement plans
- Districts no longer develop improvement plans. Rather, all except the highest performing districts must develop school district support plans
- ADE no longer works directly at the school level without district input

School-Level Planning

Act 930 requires schools to develop school improvement plans by May 1 of each year.

The planning process is to incorporate a “Cycle of Inquiry” or “plan-do-check” approach, which entails the following steps:

- Performing a needs assessment informed by analysis of student performance data (state test scores, interim assessments and other indicators identified by the school)
- Identifying resources needed to address the determined needs by

using a framework of six systems (the first five of which are listed in Act 930; the Arkansas Department of Education (ADE) added the sixth later):

- Academics (curriculum)
 - Facilities
 - Fiscal operations
 - Human capital management
 - Student support services
 - Communications & family outreach
- Setting interim and long-term goals by which to monitor progress and make necessary adjustments along the way
 - Evaluating the effectiveness of the strategy or strategies annually
 - Starting the cycle again by assessing progress and identifying current needs



District Support

Under the Act 930 framework, district personnel are considered the first line of assistance for their schools. Schools may also work with ADE or other “partners” to help develop their plans as well. (ADE leaders note that when the department is contacted directly by a school for assistance, they will always engage district personnel in the process.)

After the May 1 deadline, schools and school districts will negotiate on the plans’ specifics. How much of this is needed depends on how much school

and district personnel have communicated about the identified needs in the plans throughout the year, according to ADE. The plans are to be posted on the school district’s website by Aug. 1.

According to the draft rules, districts that are determined to be receiving Level 2 – Collaborative support, Level 3 – Coordinated support, Level 4 – Directed support or Level 5 – Intensive support have until Sept. 1 of each year to finalize a school district *support* plan. According to the new rules, districts receiving support at Levels 4 or 5 *will work* with ADE in the development of their support plans.

Districts that are receiving Level 2 – Collaborative support only have to submit their plans to ADE upon request by the Commissioner. All districts receiving higher levels of support must do so. The school district is to post its plan soon after submission to ADE. It is also the school district’s responsibility to monitor the implementation of each school’s plan and then to evaluate each for its effectiveness in achieving the school’s goals.

ADE’s Role

Under Act 930, ADE’s role throughout this process is more supportive than regulative, though the agency will continue to monitor school- and district-level data to see if there are instances in which they should engage with a district to assist in the district’s support of its schools. This differs from past practices in several ways. One is that much of the monitoring will be in the form of “desk-monitoring” since most of the data is maintained in the Arkansas Public School Computer Network.

The other is that while ADE involvement will focus at the district level, it will seldom be mandatory for districts to accept the department’s involvement. Before, certain academic benchmarks could trigger action by ADE either at the school or district level.