



Accreditation Standards and Curriculum Frameworks

Arkansas statute requires the State Board of Education to determine what subjects should be taught in public schools and develop a plan to review and revise those curriculum standards (§6-16-103, §6-15-1502 et seq.). The state public school **accreditation standards** require districts to provide instruction to elementary and middle school students annually in each of the following areas:

Grades K-4	Grades 5-8
Language Arts	
Math	
Social Studies	
Science	
Tools for Learning (e.g., research skills)	
Fine Arts	
Health & Safety Education	
Physical Education	
Practical Living Skills/Career Exploration	Career & Technical Education

For high school students, districts are required to teach the following courses annually. The provision of these **38 units** is one element the General Assembly's definition of an adequate education.

Grades 9-12	
Language Arts	6 units
Science	5 units
Math	6 units
Foreign Language	2 units
Fine Arts	3.5 units
Computer Applications	1 unit
Social Studies	4 units
Economics	.5 units
Health & Safety	.5 units
Physical Education	1 unit
Career & Tech	9 units

The Economics unit can be counted toward the required social studies or career & technical units with the appropriate teacher licensure.

In the 2012-13 school year, seven schools were cited for not providing all of the required courses. All seven schools were high schools in different school districts.

The 38 units districts must offer are different from the 22 required units high school students need to graduate.

Graduation Requirements	
English	4 units
Math	4 units
Natural Science	3 units
Social Studies	3 units
Oral Communications	.5 units
Physical Education	.5 units
Health & Safety	.5 units
Economics	.5 units
Fine Arts	.5 units
Career Focus	6 units

Seniors in 2013-14 will be the first students required to take Economics to graduate. The Economics course can be counted toward the three required social studies credits.

Students have the option of completing their high school education with the Core curriculum or the **Smart Core** curriculum. Both Core and Smart Core require 22 units, but Smart Core requires more rigorous coursework. For example, both Core and Smart Core require four units of math. However, Smart Core requires students to complete Algebra II and a higher math unit, while students taking the Core curriculum could graduate having completed only Algebra I and Geometry. Districts are required to enroll students in Smart Core, but parents can obtain a waiver to allow their student to opt out. In 2012-13, 89.6% of high school students were enrolled in Smart Core.

Grade	% in Smart Core
9 th	92.7%
10 th	90.5%
11 th	89.0%
12 th	85.5%

Curriculum Frameworks

The State Board of Education also specifies what information will be taught within each subject. The Arkansas **curriculum frameworks** are the learning standards that describe what students must know and be able to do in each academic subject area at each grade level. For example, one standard in the science curriculum frameworks specifies that by the end of the 4th grade, students should be able to classify invertebrates as mollusks, segmented worms or

arthropods. The curriculum frameworks, also known as “academic content standards” in statute, do not specify how the subject matter is to be taught or what textbooks teachers should use. Local school districts, principals and teachers are responsible for conveying the information in the way that best meets the needs of their students.

The curriculum frameworks form the basis for the state’s school accountability system. Student assessments are designed to test on the knowledge and skills identified in the frameworks, and schools are responsible for ensuring their students demonstrate mastery by testing “proficient” on the exams.

Revising the Frameworks

Arkansas statute requires the State Board to set a schedule to periodically review and revise the academic standards (§6-15-404). The State Board must seek input from content standards experts, higher education and workforce education officials, and committees of Arkansas teachers, among others. Each year ADE receives funding to facilitate these revision efforts. Act 1309 of 2013 appropriated \$50,000 for the development of a comprehensive plan for revising the curriculum frameworks and \$161,000 for the cost of the revisions. These annual appropriation levels have not changed since they were first approved in the 2003-05 biennium.

Arkansas’s English language and math curriculum frameworks are currently being replaced with the Common Core State Standards. The state’s science standards are also being revised in coordination with 25 other states through the development of the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS). Arkansas educators are reviewing the NGSS, but the State Board has not yet adopted them.