



Bureau Brief

Memorandum

TO : Members of the House and Senate Committees on Education
FROM : Rebeca Whorton, Research Analyst
DATE : December 17, 2013
SUBJECT : Student Achievement Statistics
PROJECT # : 14-001-34

In the Arkansas Supreme Court's 2002 order declaring the state's school funding system unconstitutional, the justices agreed with the lower court's assessment that the "State has a remarkably serious problem with student performance." At the time, according to the 2001 opinion of the Pulaski County Chancery Court, just 16% of 8th graders statewide tested proficient or advanced in math, and 58% of high school graduates entering college required remediation in English or math.

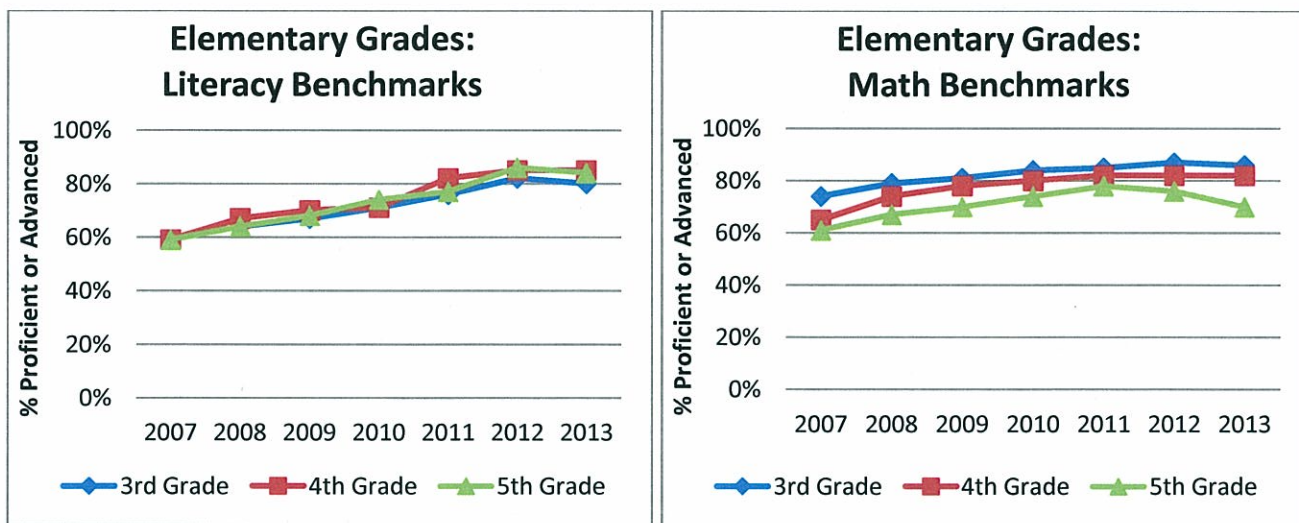
Statistics from 2001 and earlier are difficult to compare with current statistics due to different calculation methods and changes in tests, but this report provides information about the progress made by Arkansas's public schools over the last several years, as measured by student test scores, graduation rates and other education statistics. The statewide student test scores show that Arkansas is making significant improvements, but students continue to score below the national average in some national assessments.

Arkansas Benchmark Exams

Elementary Grades

Student scores from the Benchmark exams are used to measure how well students are learning the Arkansas curriculum. The 2013 test scores mark the first year in which the impact of the Common Core State Standards can be measured. The Common Core State Standards have been introduced in K-12 classrooms across the state, although the tests that are aligned to those standards will not be rolled out until 2014-15. The Common Core was introduced in kindergarten through 2nd grade in 2011-12, but those grades do not take state Benchmark tests.

Grades 3 through 8 were introduced to Common Core in 2012-13, and a dip in their proficiency may reflect a gap between the new standards that students are being taught and the former standards on which the tests are still based. Proficiency in literacy dropped for the first time in the last eight years for 3rd graders (from 82% proficient to 80%) and for 5th graders (from 86% proficient to 84%). Literacy proficiency among 4th graders remained unchanged (85%). Proficiency in math also dipped for 3rd graders (87% proficient to 86%) and for 5th graders (76% proficient to 70%). Again, 4th grade proficiency in math remained unchanged (82%).

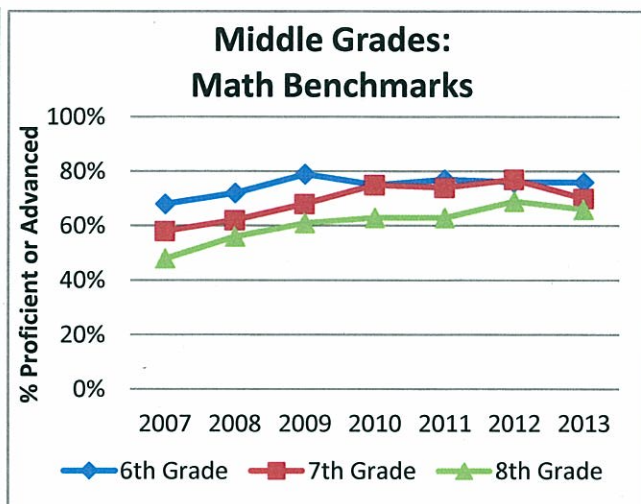
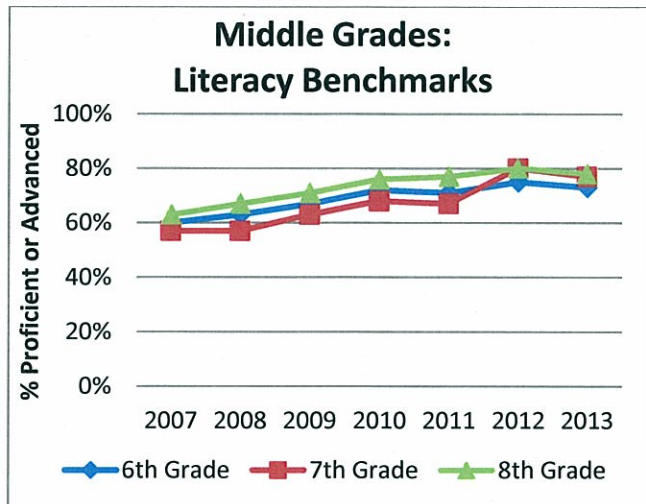


Note: 2013 proficiency data are preliminary.

Source: <http://www.arkansased.org/divisions/learning-services/student-assessment/test-scores/year?y=2013>

Middle Grades

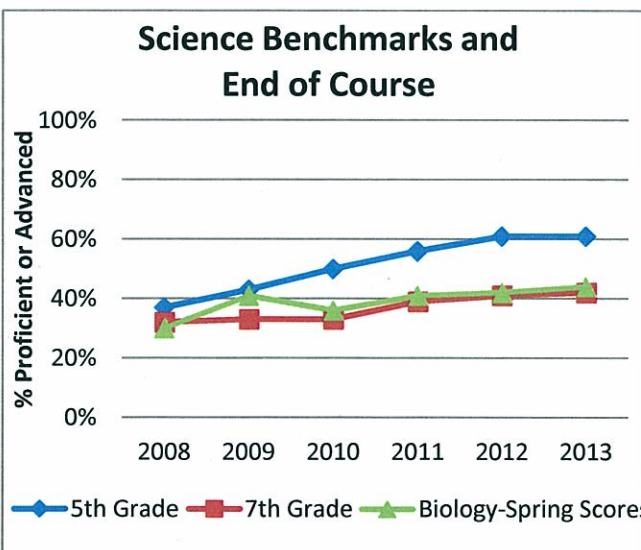
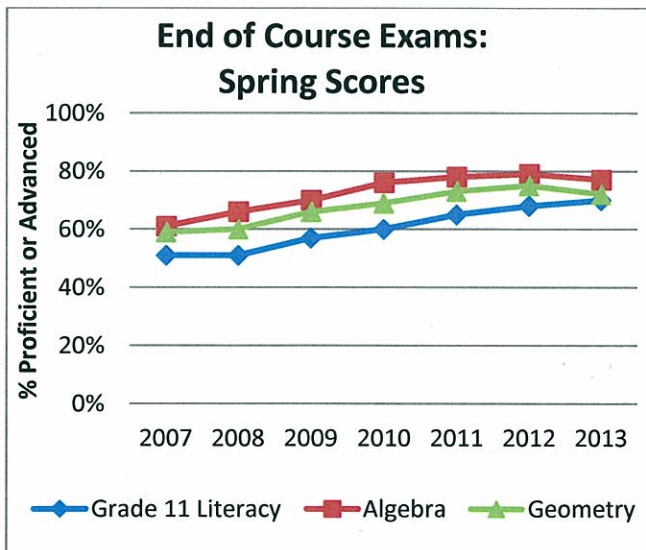
Similarly, proficiency among middle schoolers declined by 2 to 3 percentage points in 2013. The only exception in the declines in 6th, 7th and 8th graders' proficiency was among 6th graders in math, which held steady at 76%.



Source: <http://www.arkansased.org/divisions/learning-services/student-assessment/test-scores/year?y=2013>

High School Grades

The Common Core standards are being introduced in the high school grades in the 2013-14 school year, so students' 2013 test scores do not yet reflect this change. While Literacy scores have continued to rise, Arkansas has seen a decrease in Algebra I and Geometry scores. The decrease in Algebra I may be the result of Common Core implementation since Algebra I is taught in some schools in the 8th grade. Assessments for 5th and 7th grade science and biology started in the spring of 2008.

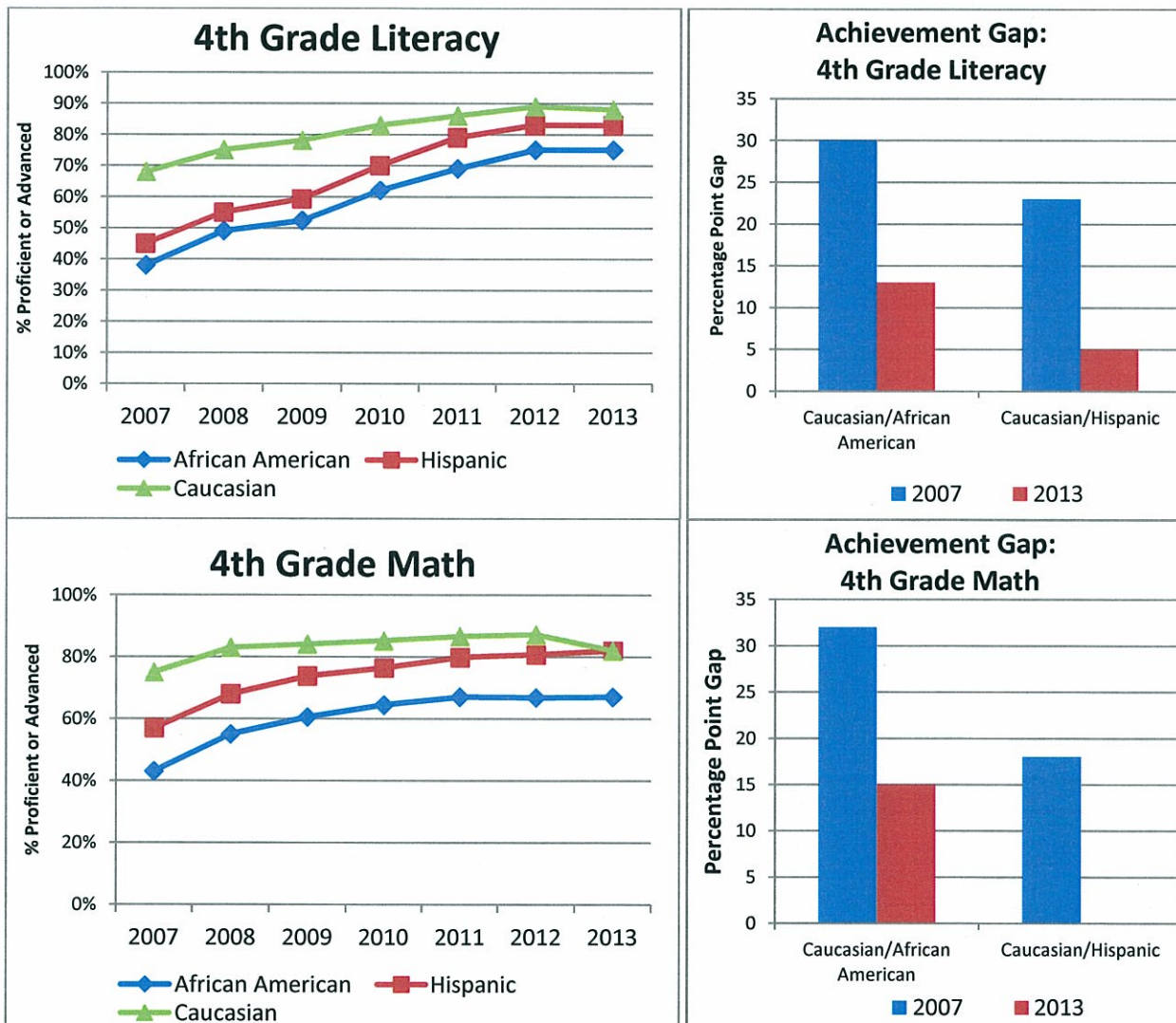


Source: <http://www.arkansased.org/divisions/learning-services/student-assessment/test-scores/year?y=2013>

Achievement Gap

The achievement gap between all students has decreased between 2007 and 2013. Over this period of time, African American and Hispanic students have improved performance in literacy and mathematics in both the 4th and 8th grade. For example, the gap in 4th grade math proficiency between Caucasian and Hispanic students was eliminated in 2013. In addition, the gap between African American and Caucasian students in the same subject has been cut almost in half. Although the achievement gap is declining, a gap still separates African American, Hispanic and Caucasian students.

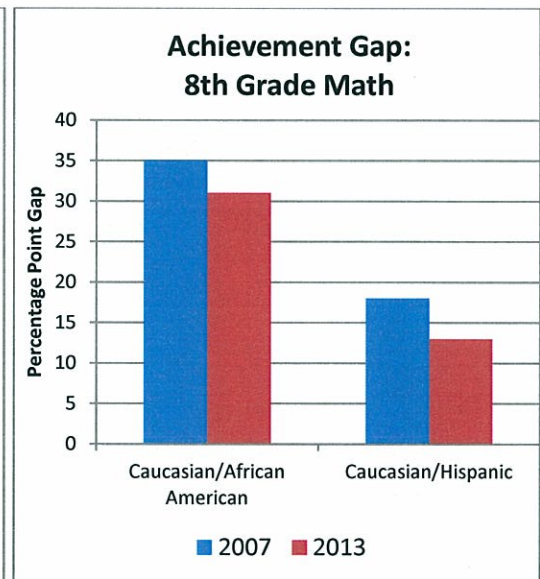
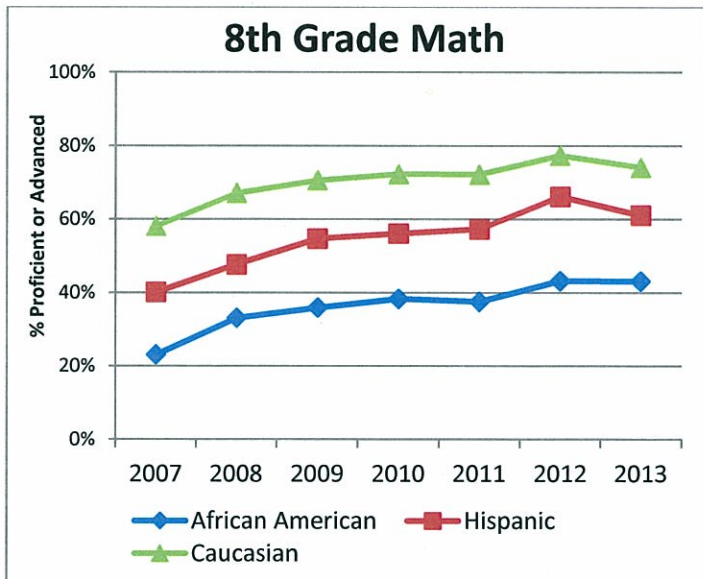
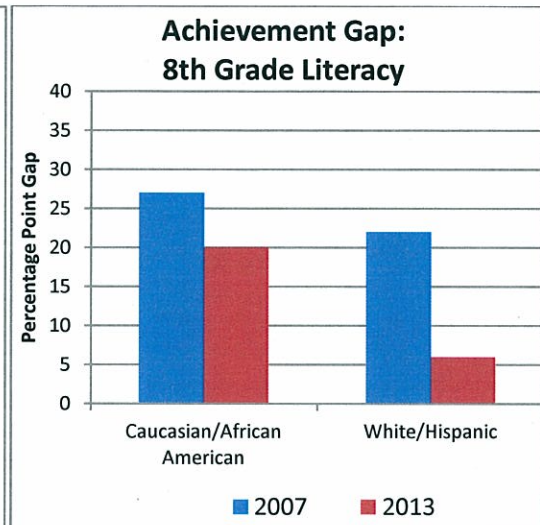
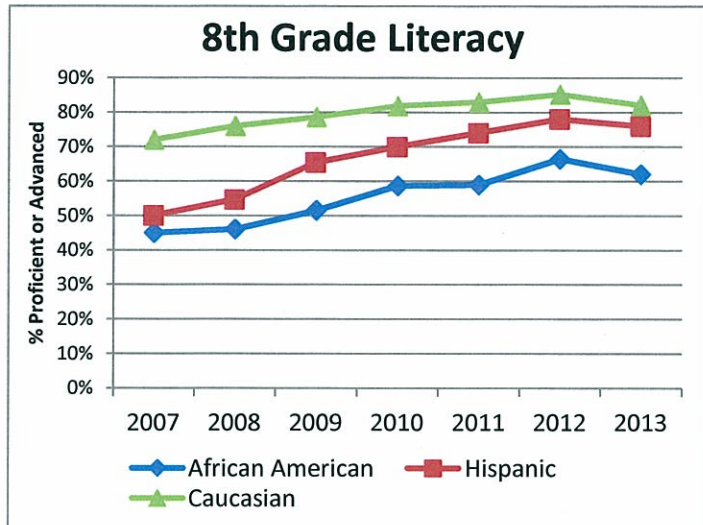
4th Grade Benchmark



Source: <http://www.arkansased.org/divisions/learning-services/student-assessment/test-scores/year?y=2013>

8th Grade Benchmark

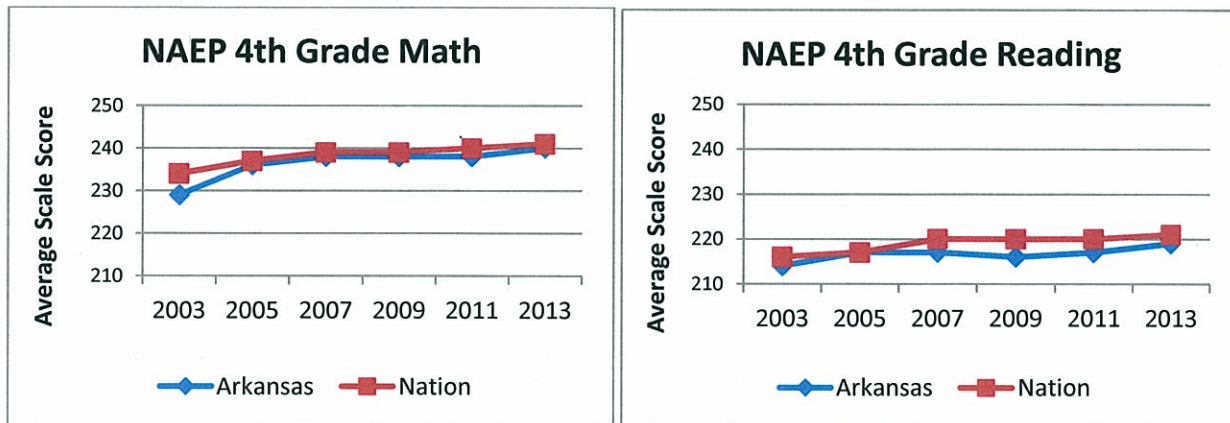
The achievement gaps among 8th grade students have decreased more slowly than the achievement gaps seen at the 4th grade level. For example, the achievement gap between African American students and white students dropped by just four percentage points between 2007 and 2013.



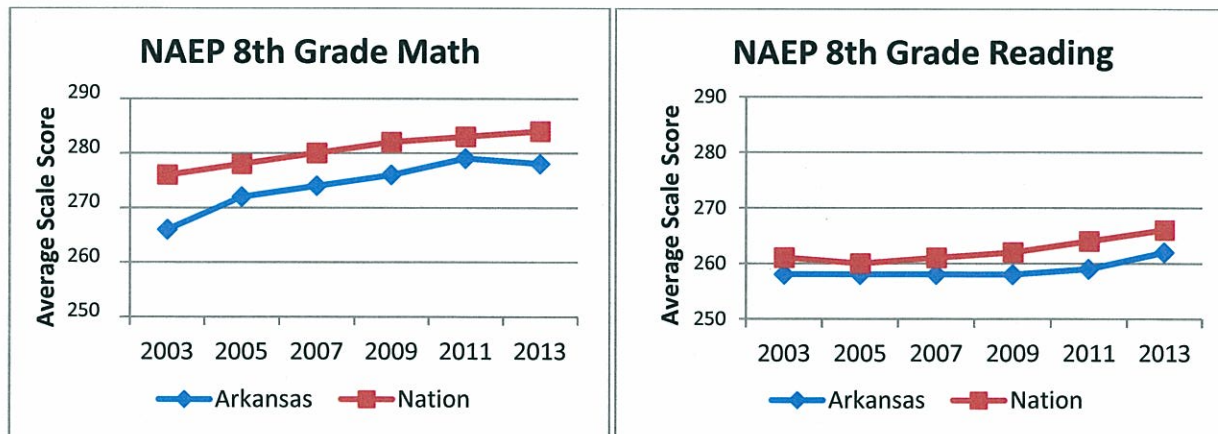
Source: <http://www.arkansased.org/divisions/learning-services/student-assessment/test-scores/year?y=2013>

National Assessment of Educational Progress Scores

Currently, there is no common assessment used nationwide. State assessments are different in every state, so to compare Arkansas's progress with other states, a test that is the same across states must be used. Students in the 4th and 8th grades take the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) assessment, a national exam used to compare the progress made by Arkansas students with the progress made by students in other states. Arkansas students, on average, continue to score below students nationally. Arkansas students at the 4th grade level perform comparably to the national average in both math and reading assessments. However, at the 8th grade level Arkansas students still lag behind the national performance averages.



Source: http://nationsreportcard.gov/math_2011/gr4_state.asp and http://nationsreportcard.gov/reading_2011/state_g4.asp



Source: http://nationsreportcard.gov/math_2011/gr8_state.asp and http://nationsreportcard.gov/reading_2011/state_g8.asp

College Entrance Exam Scores

ACT

Arkansas students who took the ACT, on average, score below the national average. However, a far greater percentage of Arkansas students take the ACT each year than graduates nationally.

In 2013, 90% of Arkansas graduates took the ACT compared with 54% of graduates nationwide. The percentage of Arkansas students taking the ACT is elevated because college admissions, remediation requirements and scholarship eligibility for Arkansas colleges are based on the results of the ACT test.

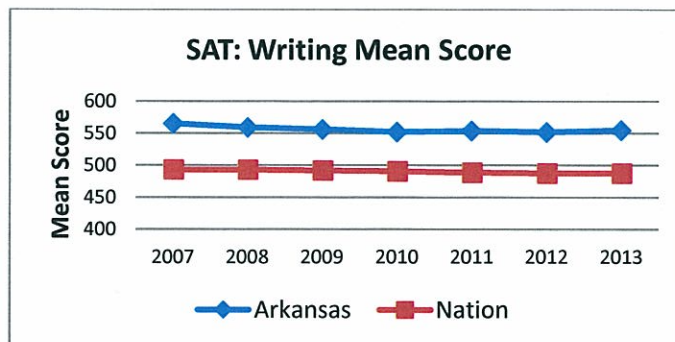
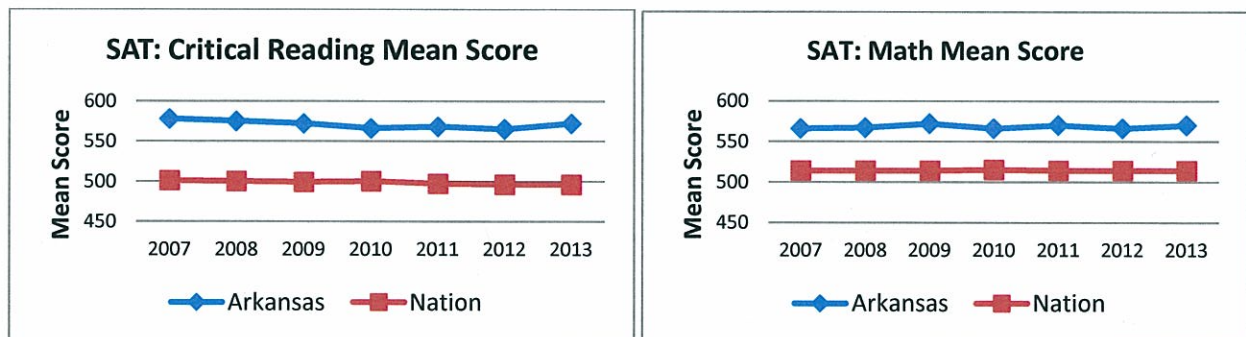


Source: <http://www.act.org/newsroom/data/2011/states.html>

SAT

Arkansas students who take the SAT typically score, on average, higher than students nationally. However, only a fraction of Arkansas high school students take the SAT, and those students are typically interested in attending an out-of-state college. In 2012, 827 public high school students took the SAT test, which is roughly 3% of the 28,896 public school graduates in Arkansas.

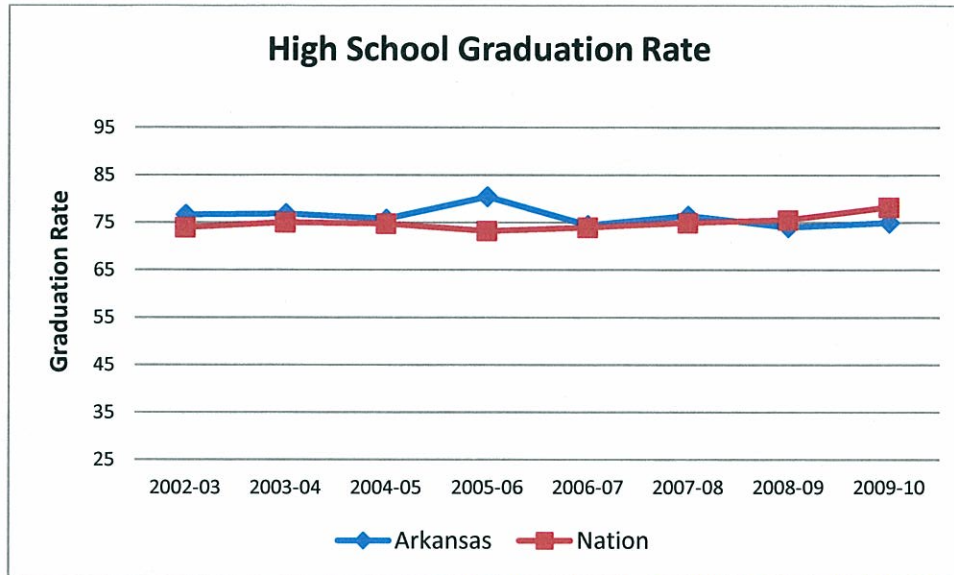
(<https://adedata.arkansas.gov/statewide/State/Graduates.aspx?year=22&search=&pagesize=10> and <https://adedata.arkansas.gov/arc/docs/StateReportCard.pdf>)



Source: <http://professionals.collegeboard.com/data-reports-research/sat/cb-seniors-2011>

Graduation Rate

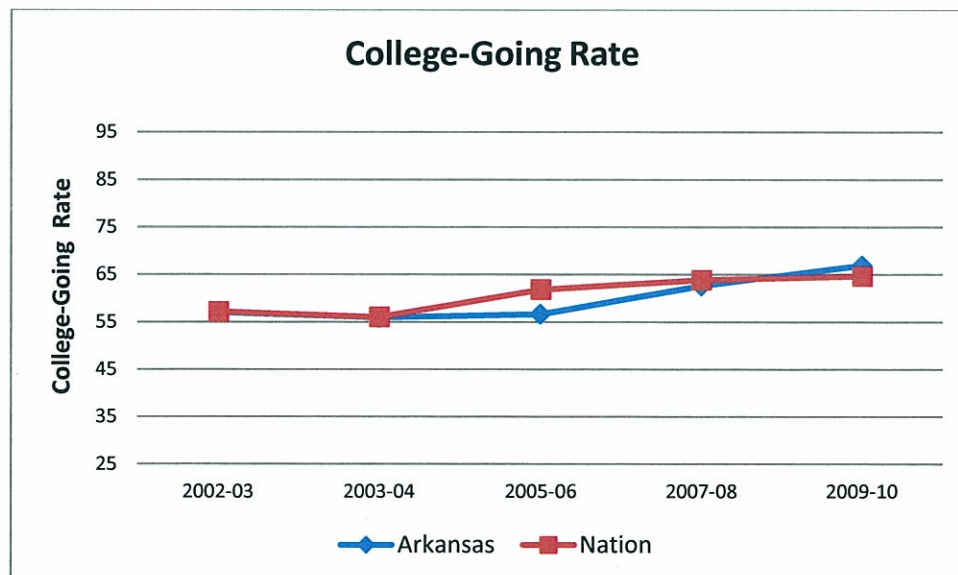
Arkansas's high school graduation rate typically outpaces the national rate. However, in 2008-09 and 2009-10, the latest years for which there is nationwide data, the U.S. rate outpaced Arkansas's. In the 2009-10 academic school year, Arkansas's high school graduation rate ranked 41st among other states.



Source: National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), <http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2013309rev>

College-Going Rate

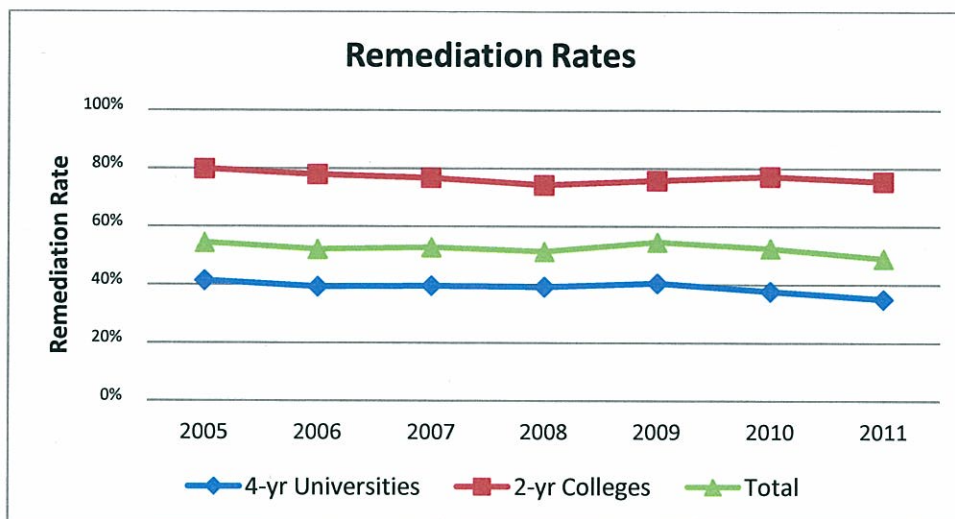
College-going rates among recent high school graduates continue to rise as more students are pursuing post-secondary education. (The lottery scholarship was first available in the 2010-2011 academic school year, so its effect is not reflected in the chart below.)



Source: http://info.sreb.org/DataLibrary/tables/FB13_19.xlsx

Remediation Rate

All entering first-year students seeking an associate degree or higher from an Arkansas public college or university must earn a score of 19 or higher on the ACT (or the equivalent on the ASSET, SAT, or COMPASS tests) in English, mathematics, and reading. Those who do not are required to take a corresponding remedial course.



Source: <http://www.arkleg.state.ar.us/Education/HigherEd/ADHE%20Backup/2011ComprehensiveReport-ADHE-Compressed.pdf>

Quality Counts Ranking

Each year Education Week publishes "Quality Counts," a ranking of state education systems. While Arkansas usually ranks relatively high in the overall scores, the state typically earns a D grade in the area of student achievement. The Student Achievement grade is awarded based on improvements in NAEP test scores, the state's graduation rate and AP test scores.

There are six categories of measures that comprise the overall rankings. Three are qualitative, and three are policy-related:

1. Chance for Success (family income, kindergarten enrollment, adult educational attainment, etc.),
2. K-12 Achievement (NAEP proficiency and change in average scale scores, graduation rate, etc.),
3. Standards, Assessments, & Accountability (state's academic standards are course- or grade-specific, assessments include extended response items and are aligned to the standards, etc.),
4. Teaching Profession (Teacher pay is competitive with other comparable occupations, the state requires formal teacher evaluations, teachers' evaluations are tied to their students' performance, etc.)
5. School Finance (per-pupil expenditures, etc.), and
6. Transitions and Alignment (state has a definition of college readiness, state offers programs for students who are not considered ready for school, etc.).

	Student Achievement Grade	Overall Grade	Overall Rank
2008	D	B-	8 th
2009	D	B-	10 th
2010	D	B-	10 th
2011	D	B-	6 th
2012	D	B-	5 th
2013	D	B-	5 th

Source: http://www.edweek.org/ew/qc/2013/state_report_cards.html?intc=EW-QC13-LFTNAV

ESEA Flexibility

Arkansas's Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) Flexibility Plan replaces the federal school improvement accountability structure. Under the previous school improvement structure, schools were required to increase the percentage of students each year who tested proficient or advanced on state assessments. Each year percentage targets were set for elementary, middle and high schools to ensure that, by 2013-14, 100% of students were proficient. The targets were the same for all schools regardless of whether a school started at 25% proficiency or 95% proficiency.

Under ESEA Flexibility, individual schools are no longer required to hit the same student performance targets. Instead, each school has its own target that calls for it to cut in half the percentage of students who are not proficient within the next six years and, for high schools, to reduce by half the percentage of students who do not graduate.

Under the plan all schools are designated as achieving or needs improvement, depending on whether they meet their established performance targets and graduation rates. The Flexibility Plan also calls for more oversight and intensive support for the schools with the lowest level of student achievement and for those with the largest achievement gaps. The plan required ADE to identify the schools that ranked in the bottom 5% of schools in the state in 2012. These schools were designated as "needs improvement priority schools." These schools will remain priority schools through the end of 2015-16 school year unless they meet their annual targets for two consecutive years. Four schools were removed from the priority schools list in November based on their 2013 test results. Focus schools are those with the largest achievement gaps between students in the Targeted Achievement Gap Group (TAGG) and other students. TAGG students are those who are either economically disadvantaged, have a disability or are English language learners.

Overall Status	2012	2012 %	2013	2013 %
Number of Exemplary Schools	15	1%	9	1%
Number of Achieving Schools	336	32%	137	13%
Number of Needs Improvement Schools	581	53%	793	74%
Number of Needs Improvement Focus Schools	109	10%	90	8%
Number of Needs Improvement Priority Schools	48	4%	42	4%
Total	1,089	100%	1,071	100%

Achieving Targets 2012	Yes	% Yes	No	% No	NA
Schools that met percent tested target	1,035	97%	35	3%	4
Schools designated "achieving literacy"	852	80%	217	20%	5
Schools designated "achieving math"	518	48%	554	52%	2
Schools designated "achieving graduation rate"	122	47%	139	53%	813

Achieving Targets 2013	Yes	% Yes	No	% No	NA
Schools that met percent tested target	1,004	92%	82	8%	-
Schools designated "achieving literacy"	562	52%	523	48%	1
Schools designated "achieving math"	247	23%	839	77%	-
Schools designated "achieving graduation rate"	154	56%	123	44%	809