



## Research Report

# State Categorical Funding Review English Language Learners (ELL)

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Prepared for the

**THE HOUSE INTERIM COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION  
AND THE SENATE INTERIM COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION**



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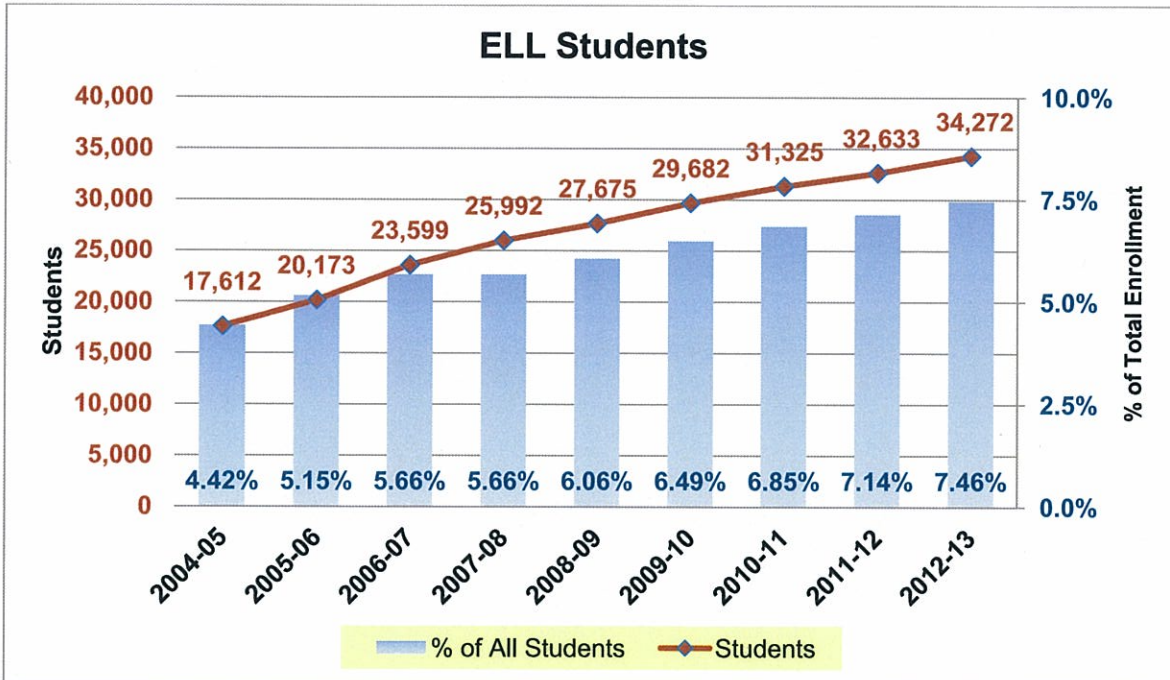
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## ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

English Language Learners (ELL) funding is the Arkansas categorical funding program that supports students who are not proficient in English. These students face the challenge of learning a new language in addition to the challenge of mastering academic subject matter being taught in that language. In FY2012-13 there were 34,272 ELL students in the state's school districts. Data retrieved from ADE's State Aid Notice reports indicate the growth in ELL enrollment has increased by 95 percent since 2005. The chart below reflects the growth of ELL students as well as the growth in the proportion of all students who are ELL.



## BACKGROUND

When discussing English Language Learners, it is important to note that there are several different terms used to refer to ELL students in Arkansas. EL (English Learners), ESL (English as a Second Language), LEP (limited English proficient), and ELL (English-Language Learners) are all interchangeable terms that are used for both federal and state funding and student placement purposes.

In 2003, the state of Arkansas hired the consultants Picus and Associates to help revise the state's education finance system. Subsequently, they recommended to the Joint Committee on Educational Adequacy that each 100 children that qualified for free or reduced price lunch *and* identified as English Language learners generate an additional .40 FTE tutor/teacher. Thus, every 100 students that are both LEP and from a poverty family would trigger an additional 1.4 teacher positions, rather than 1.0 if just from a poverty family. As a result, the categorical funding mechanism for English Language Learners originated under the Public School Funding Act of 2003 to provide categorical funding in addition to NSL funding<sup>1</sup>. In 2005-2006 the General

<sup>1</sup>Please see Arkansas Annotated Code A.C.A. § 6-20-2305(b)(3).

Assembly looked at the large 2004-2005 fund balances in school district NSL accounts. That money, they claimed, was meant to be used for ELL and supplemented by the ELL categorical funds. The schools were spending virtually all of the money in the ELL account and saying they were providing beyond the amount provided for ELL.

However, when Picus and Associates were again hired in 2006 they asserted that it had been incorrectly asserted during the Lake View hearings (2005) and in the Special Masters Report (2005) that NSL funds supplement ELL funds, when the reverse is true. The Special Masters were appointed by the Arkansas Supreme Court to evaluate the progress made by the state toward meeting the constitutional requirements set forth in the 2003 Lake View lawsuit. The report states that, "insufficiency of funding for ELL children requires the expenditure of NSLA funding for ELL, thereby limiting a school district's ability to provide necessary help to non-ELL poverty children (2005:28). However, Picus and Associates argued that the purpose of the ELL funding formula was to supplement NSL funding for these students from a separate categorical source. The subsequent recommendation was to enact legislation to adjust the student teacher ratio requirement in order to effectively increase funding by fifty percent (50%) per 100 students, beginning with the 2007-08 school year and in addition to NSL categorical funding. Finally, in August of 2006 the Arkansas Recalibration report was released by Picus and Associates, recommending that resources for ELL students be increased from .4 to 1.0 support positions per 100 ELL students, independent of the services they receive given NSL status. Thus in Act 272 of 2007, the legislature increased the amount of funding in the ELL categorical fund, originally set at \$195 per student to \$293.

## PROGRAM OVERVIEW

As defined in A.C.A. §6-20-2303 "English-language learners" means students identified by the state board as not proficient in the English language based upon approved English proficiency assessments. The language tests are administered annually in the fall of the current school year and measure oral, reading, and writing proficiency. To be designated as an ELL, a student must meet the following two criteria:

- Student is identified as an ELL at the time of enrollment by a Home Language Survey, which is filled out by parents or guardians;
- Student is placed in an English as a second language, or ESL, program using a screener or placement test<sup>2</sup> that has indicated that the student is not fully fluent in English.

Once a student is identified as ELL, he or she is assigned a group of teachers who monitor each student's progress. This committee meets to discuss ELDA test results, benchmark results, and in-classroom progress for each ELL student. Documentation is required on all LEP students during enrollment in an ELL program and for two years after a student is exited from an ESL program. Each student's progress shall be reviewed and documented on a yearly basis, or more frequently as needed, by the school's LPAC (language placement committee). The ELDA (English Language Development Assessment) tests ELL students to determine their level of proficiency in the English language. It does not assess prior academic knowledge and tests students in kindergarten through twelfth grade in four domains: reading, writing, listening, and speaking. The results of the assessment help schools determine what type of English language instruction is appropriate for each ELL student. Based on his or her composite score (the average of the scores of the four domain tests), each student is assigned a proficiency level.

<sup>2</sup> The placement test or screener used is chosen by each LEA. There are several tests available including the LAS/LAS Links, the Mac II (Maculitis, II edition), and the TELPA.

Students at level 5 are considered to have English language skills comparable to those of a native speaker. The five proficiency levels are:

1. pre-functional,
2. beginning,
3. intermediate,
4. advanced, and
5. fully English proficient.

Depending upon the student's achievements, the committee will make a recommendation after the ELDA scores come in each spring as to whether or not a student stays where he or she is in the program, advances a level, or exits the program entirely. This recommendation is based on a combination of ELDA scores and subjective performance review. If a student is able to exit the ELL program, districts are required to monitor and to assist ELLs for two years after exiting the ELL program, according to the federal law under Title III of No Child Left Behind. Exited students' ELDA test scores may be banked and included in a school's spring test score report for a maximum of two years<sup>3</sup>. The requirements for testing to determine a student's progress and release from ELL programming have an impact on federal education compliance, federal civil rights compliance, state funding, and state benchmark testing as well.

ELL instructional programs are designed by, and provided at, the district level. The state does not mandate one way in which to provide these services. Instead, there is often a combination of instructional methods used to serve the ELL population. Some LEAs may use pull-out instruction while others provide students with "sheltered instruction." This is a method by which students are aided during content area classes by an ESL trained instructor within a particular classroom. In schools with a critical-mass enrollment a stand alone, self-contained ELL class may be provided, if resources justify. For instance, Little Rock School District's (2,283 ELLs) Hall High School contains a "newcomer's center" designed specifically to meet the needs of their high school level ELLs. In contrast the Cabot School District (157 ELLs) uses a combination of instructional methods to serve its ESL population.

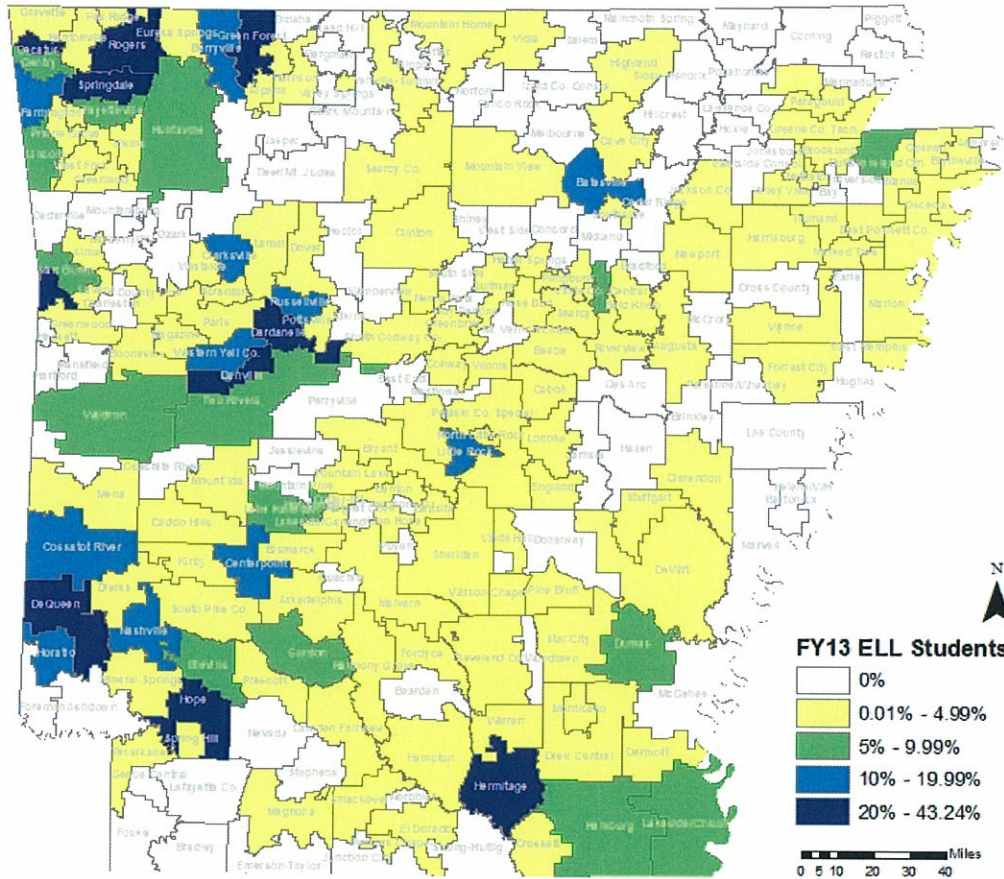
Currently, Arkansas has no full ESL Certification for teacher licensure. Instead, Arkansas has an ESL endorsement for certified teachers. According to ADE, there were approximately 2,662 ESL endorsed teachers during school year 2012-13. At present the state does not require ESL endorsement of ESL teachers. However, it is required that ESL teachers receive ESL workshop training. All school districts with ELLs are required to have trained ESL staff for those students.

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<sup>3</sup> For more information, please see Commissioner's Memo LS-07-035 dated September 6, 2006.

**ELL STUDENT POPULATION DENSITY FOR EACH DISTRICT**

Fifty-six percent (19,211) of the 34,272 ELL students in the state during SY2012-13 were served by four school districts—Springdale (8,636), Rogers (4,837), Fort Smith (3,455), and Little Rock (2,283).



Map Prepared by the Bureau of Legislative Research, Policy Analysis & Research Section  
School District Boundaries from the Arkansas Geographical Informational Office

District-level data for ELL students are provided in the following tables:

| Number of ELL Students FY 13 |                |
|------------------------------|----------------|
| # of ELL Students            | # of Districts |
| 1,000 or more                | 5              |
| 500 - 1,000                  | 5              |
| 100 - 500                    | 30             |
| 1 - 100                      | 111            |
| 0                            | 88             |

| Percentage of ELL Students FY 13 |                |
|----------------------------------|----------------|
| ELL Percentage of All Students   | # of Districts |
| 20% - 42.5%                      | 10             |
| 10% - 19.9%                      | 11             |
| 5% - 9.9%                        | 16             |
| 1% - 4.9%                        | 72             |
| 0.1% - 0.9%                      | 42             |
| 0%                               | 88             |

The most widely spoken languages for ELL students in school year 2012-2013 are:

| Top 5 Languages Spoken 2012-2013 |               |                         |
|----------------------------------|---------------|-------------------------|
| Language                         | Student Count | Percentage of Total ELL |
| 1 Spanish                        | 27,823        | 81.18%                  |
| 2 Marshallese                    | 1,865         | 5.44%                   |
| 3 Vietnamese                     | 425           | 1.24%                   |
| 4 Laotian                        | 363           | 1.06%                   |
| 5 Hmong                          | 261           | 0.76%                   |

## ELL PROGRAM FUNDING

### STATE FUNDING

Unlike categorical funding for NSLA and ALE, ELL funding is based on the number of ELL students in the current school year. Districts must submit to ADE documentation they will use to calculate the number of identified ELL students no later than November 1 of each school year. The identification must be based on tests approved by ADE.

The following activities are listed as eligible uses of ELL funding:

- Salaries for ELL instruction;
- Professional development activities;
- Released-time for ELL program development;
- Instructional and supplemental materials including computer-assisted technology and library materials;
- Counseling services, community liaison staff with language and cultural skills appropriate to the ELL population; and
- Assessment activities.

In FY2012-13, ELL expenditures totaled \$14,661,304.12, or \$428 per ELL student. The categorical funding level was \$305 per ELL student for FY2012-13. Thus, on average, districts were spending about 140 percent of the ELL categorical funding per ELL student. There were also \$3,243,047.94 in ELL expenditures from other, non-categorical funding sources. The table below shows ELL state funding levels as well as ELL district expenditures for three fiscal years<sup>4</sup>.

|           | Total ELL Categorical Funding | Total ELL Categorical Fund Expenditures | Per-Student ELL Funding | Per-Student ELL Expenditures |
|-----------|-------------------------------|---|-------------------------|------------------------------|
| 2010-2011 | \$9,178,225                   | \$12,984,494.92                         | \$293                   | \$414                        |
| 2011-2012 | \$9,757,267                   | \$14,549,528.80                         | \$299                   | \$446                        |
| 2012-2013 | \$10,452,960                  | \$14,661,304.12                         | \$305                   | \$428                        |

<sup>4</sup> These numbers do not include charter school expenditures. The total ELL categorical fund expenditures also excludes any dollar amounts transferred from the ELL categorical fund to any other categorical fund for each given year.

The use of ELL funding is restricted to categorical programs only. Transfers from NSL categorical funds into ELL totaled \$3,787,560.80 in SY12-13. This reflects a small change in transfers made to ELL than in the years prior (FY2011-12 \$4,333,278 and FY2010-11 \$3,966,345), rising at a rate of 9.5% between 2011 and 2012 and falling by 12.6% between 2012 and 2013. The total ELL fund balance, across all districts, in 2013 was \$1,618,178.82. This brings the district average to \$55.76 per ELL student, or about 18.3 percent of the \$305 per student funding. Like other categorical programs, ELL funding may be carried forward from one year to the next and can be transferred to other categorical programs. For the 89 percent of ELL students who also are eligible for free and reduced priced lunch (30,604), schools will receive \$517 \$1,033, or \$1,549 depending on the concentration of students in poverty.

## FEDERAL FUNDING

An important funding source for ELL is federal Title III funding. Title III is a federal education grant program and \$3,112,455.00 in Title III money was allotted to 38 qualifying Arkansas school districts for FY2012-2013. Of this allotted money ADE is able to retain \$150,000 for administration fees and \$2.7 million was reported as distributed to the districts in 2013.

There are several federal requirements related to the state's participation in Title III funding. Part A of that program, which provides funds to ESL programs, is known as the English Language Acquisition, Language Enhancement, and Academic Achievement Act. Thirty-eight Arkansas districts had enough ELL students to meet a \$10,000 funding threshold required by the Act to participate in this federal program in FY2013. Depending upon the Title III funding grant amount awarded each year, the number of ELLs required to meet this threshold varies. However, on average, it takes between 100-120 students to meet the threshold in any given year (ADE).

## ACHIEVEMENT

### ELDA

The state is required to establish Annual Measurable Achievement Objectives (AMAOs), which are achievement targets used by the state to evaluate the effectiveness of the 38 Title III English language programs<sup>5</sup>. Objectives or targets are based on English language proficiency standards and relate to ELL students' development and attainment of English language proficiency. Arkansas's AMAO Targets for FY2012-13, according to the Arkansas Department of Education, are shown below with the percentage of districts that met the target:

| School Year | AMAO 1<br>Percent of ELL Making Progress by Moving from One Composite Level to a Higher Level on the English Language Development Assessment (ELDA) | AMAO 2<br>Percent of ELL Fully Proficient in English with a Composite Score of 5 on the English Language Development Assessment (ELDA) | AMAO 3<br>AYP for the LEP Subgroup in Literacy and Mathematics at Each Grade Span Required for Federal Reporting |
|-------------|---|--|--|
| 2012-2013   | Target 30%<br>32 of 38 districts (84%) met the target   | Target 4.5%<br>33 of 38 districts (87%) met the target   | 4 of 38 districts (10.5%) met the target   |

<sup>5</sup> All ELL students are required to take the ELDA exam, not just those in districts receiving Title III money.



For the 2012-2013 school year, most districts met the goals for AMAO 1 and AMAO 2. AMAO 3 gauges whether or not each district meets their individually set target for proficiency among ELL students in literacy and math on state assessments, as well as their target graduation rate. Thus, there is no state-wide target but instead each district has its own target standards. It is important to note that only the 38 districts participating in the Title III program are required to provide ELDA scores for federal evaluation.

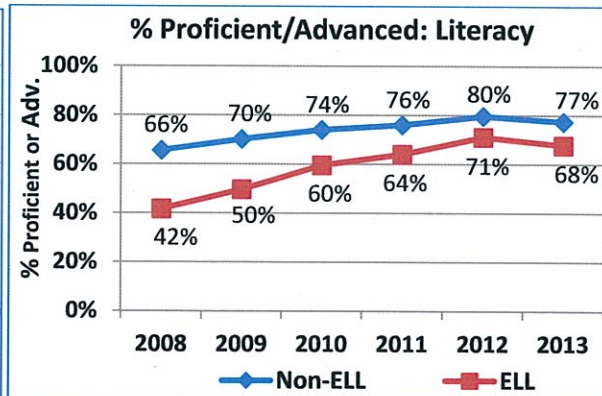
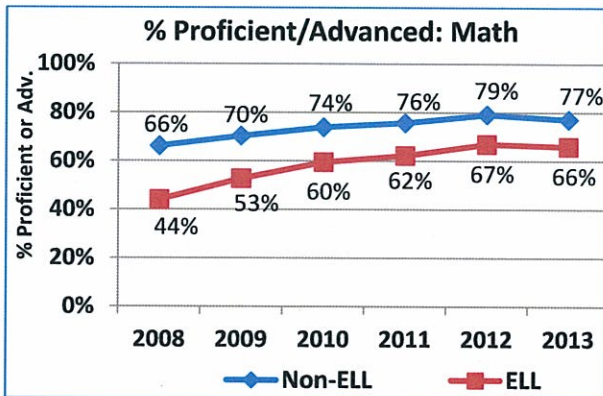
**BENCHMARKS**

With fifty-six percent (19,211) of the 34,272 ELL students in the state served by four school districts—Springdale, Rogers, Fort Smith, and Little Rock, it is important to consider how the LEP subpopulation performed on state benchmark exams in those districts.

| District      | Literacy Percent Proficient or Advanced 2013 LEP | Math Percent Proficient or Advanced 2013 LEP |
|---------------|--|--|
| Fort Smith    | 67.02%   | 60.56%                                       |
| Little Rock   | 68.70%   | 67.25%                                       |
| Rogers        | 85.87%   | 72.00%                                       |
| Springdale    | 71.20%   | 63.12%                                       |
| State Average | 73.53%   | 66.18%                                       |

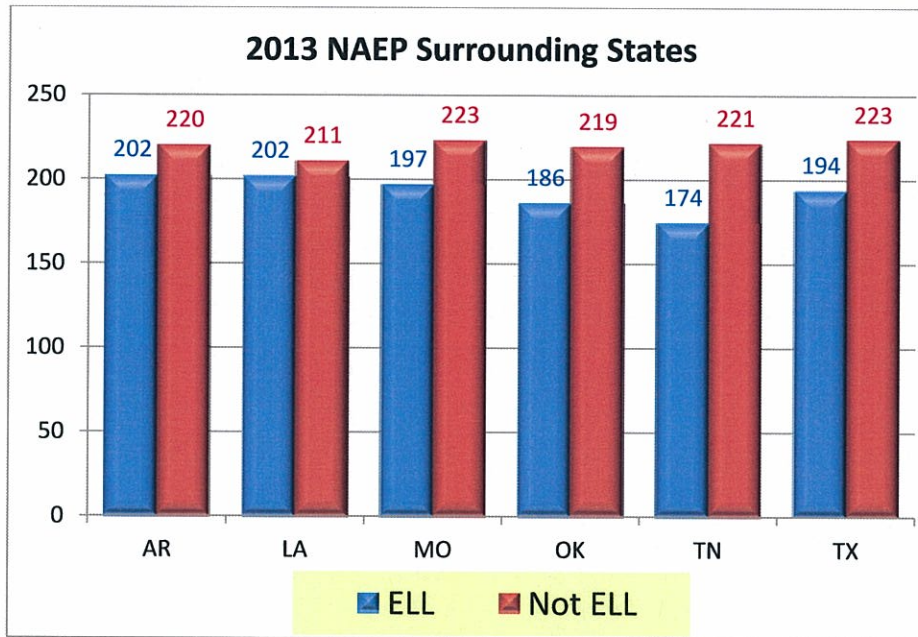
Source: ADE, Grades 4 & 8

The four districts with the largest numbers of ELLs approximate the state averages for the ELL subgroup in literacy in math in 2013. Statewide, the performance of the ELL subgroup has improved in both literacy and math over the past six years, closing the gap between ELL and non-ELL students. However, ELL students still lag behind non-ELL students in both subjects by 11 and 9 percentage points, respectively. The percent proficient or advanced for each group is shown in the following tables for each 2013 benchmark and end of course exam.

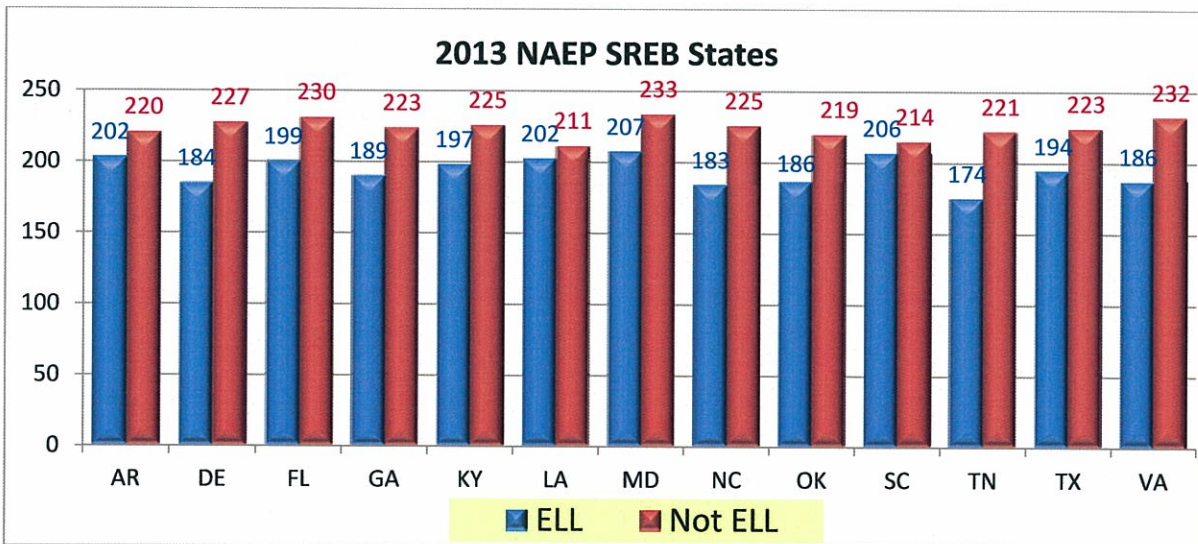


**NAEP**

NAEP (National Assessment of Educational Progress) scores are also important to consider when looking at the progress of Arkansas’s ESL students. These tests are given at grades 4 and 8 and scores students on proficiency in both math and literacy on a scale of 0 (the lowest score) to 500 (the highest score). The NAEP test is given to students in the United States and allows for comparison between states on a common rubric. The following tables provide information on the achievement of ELL versus non-ELL students on NAEP as well as information on the achievement of Arkansas’s ELL students versus ELL students in surrounding and SREB states.



\*There is no data available for ELL students in MS  
 Source: nces.ed.gov/datatools/



\*There is no data available for ELL students in AL, MS, or WV.  
 Source: nces.ed.gov/datatools/

When compared to the surrounding states, Arkansas and Louisiana have the highest NAEP scores for ELL students (202 average scale score), followed closely by MO (197) and TX (194). In 2013, ELL students in Arkansas and the surrounding states lagged behind non-ELL students on NAEP by an average of 27 points.

There are only 13 SREB (Southern Regional Education Board) states with data available on NAEP ELL student performance. Of these states, Arkansas's ELL student scores rank third behind MD and SC. On average, ELL students in the SREB states lag behind non-ELL students on the 2013 NAEP tests by 30 points.

## CONCLUSION

English Language Learners are students identified by the state board as not proficient in the English language. During the 2012-13 school year, there were 34,272 students categorized as ELLs across 150 Arkansas school districts. Using the Home Language Survey at the time of school enrollment, students are identified as potential ELLs and given one of several screener tests to assess the child's level of English proficiency. If identified as an ELL, the student is then placed in an ESL program and is monitored by an LPAC (Language Placement Committee) which meets to ensure the student's progress. If the student shows that he or she is English proficient through ELDA (English Language Development Assessment) test scores and performance in core content classes, he or she may be released from the ESL program.

ELL is primarily funded through the state and is based on the number of ELL students in the current school year rather than the prior year student count. In FY2012-13, ELL expenditures totaled \$14,661,304.12 million, or \$428 per ELL student. The categorical funding level was \$305 per ELL student. There were \$3,787,560.80 in transfers from NSL categorical funds into ELL and \$3,243,047.94 in ELL expenditures from other, non-federal sources beyond ELL categorical funds. The total ELL fund balance, across all districts, in 2013 was \$1,618,178.82. This brings the district average to \$55.76 per ELL student, or about 18.3 percent of the \$305 per student funding.

Federal funding is available to districts who meet a \$10,000 funding threshold (typically districts with between 100-120 ELL students) through the Title III program. In 2013, there were 38 Arkansas school districts that met this requirement and were subsequently allotted \$3,112,455.00 in Title III funding. Legislative Audit reported \$2.7 million of the \$3.1 million dollar allotment as distributed to the 38 qualifying districts in 2013.

All ELL students in Arkansas take the ELDA test not only to gauge language acquisition but also in fulfillment of Title III regulations that use the ELDA scores to gauge the performance of qualifying Title III schools. Three AMAOs (Annual Measurable Achievement Objectives) are set that districts must meet in order to continue to qualify for federal funding. In 2013, 84% of districts met the target for AMAO 1, 87% of districts met the target for AMAO 2, and 10.5% of districts met the target for AMAO 3 (please see page 6 of this report for more information on AMAO definitions and targets).

Arkansas ELL students also participate in state Benchmark and End of Course (EOC) exams. In 2013, 66% of ELL students scored proficient or above in math and 68% of ELL students scored proficient or advanced in literacy (across all grades for Benchmark and EOC testing). This is compared to the non-ELL population in which 77% were proficient or advanced in math and 77% were proficient or advanced in literacy. NAEP (National Assessment of Educational Progress) is a test given at grades 4 and 8 across all U.S. states. Arkansas ELL students performed well on NAEP tests, with the highest average NAEP score for ELLs among surrounding states (202) and the third highest average NAEP score among SREB states.