



ARKANSAS'S EDUCATIONAL ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEM

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With the passage of Act 930 in 2017, Arkansas instituted a new system of educational accountability called the Arkansas Educational Support and Accountability System. It replaces the 15-year old ACTAAP, or Arkansas Comprehensive Testing, Assessment and Accountability Program. Act 930 is designed to align state accountability with the federal Every Student Succeeds Act.

ACTAAP had been recognized by the Arkansas Supreme Court in 2002 as being a process integral to meeting the state's constitutional mandate of providing an adequate and equitable education to all public school students. The Court considered the elements of ACTAAP to be "the paramount initiatives by the State to correct the course of education deficiencies in Arkansas."

Major Changes

While both ACTAAP and the new Support and Accountability Act represent comprehensive approaches to holding schools and school districts accountable for using resources to efficiently provide a quality education, some major differences exist between the two pieces of legislation:

- Instead of the Department of Education intervening directly with the schools, the department will now work to support school districts so they can support their schools.
- The label of "academic distress" for schools and schools districts is no more, though school districts determined to be most in need of support will be considered to be in Level 5 - Intensive support.
- Education delivery will adhere to a student-focused education model.

Components of the System

Below is a brief summary of each of the specific elements of the new support and accountability system.

Academic Standards

This section of Act 930 deals with curricular requirements. Specifically, it requires all schools to use the Arkansas state standards, which define what students should know and be able to do in each content area at each grade level.

Educators

This area of Act 930 coordinates with the Arkansas Equitable Access to Excellent Educators plan submitted to the U.S. government in 2015. It says that all students should have access to teachers who are licensed, teaching in area and experienced.

Student-focused Learning

Act 930 calls for all schools to transition to a student-focused learning model by the 2018-19 school year. This means that education will be tailored to each individual student's needs, including areas for which interventions or remediation are called for and those where acceleration is recommended. The idea is that content mastery becomes the constant and time becomes the variable. All students, by the end of their 8th-grade year, will work with educators and their parents to develop a Student Success Plan that will map out their course to college-, career- and community-readiness upon graduation.

Statewide Student Assessment System

Assessments are the traditional backbone of accountability systems. Arkansas will continue to use the ACT Aspire, the Alternative Assessment for Cognitively Disabled Students and the English Language Proficiency Assessment 21st Century (ELPA 21). What's new is that, in compliance with the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), English language proficiency for English learners will be a component in school accountability.

Student Performance Levels

Student test scores, which are reported aggregately at the school and school district levels, are to be reported by performance bands. Arkansas will use the student scores as reported by the ACT Aspire: In Need of Support, Close, Ready, and Exceeding (or Levels 1-4 respectively).

ESSA School Index

Act 930 and the federal Every Student Succeeds Act both call for multiple measures to be used in assessing academic performance on the student, school and school district levels. Arkansas will do so using a state-developed ESSA School Index composed of the following measures and weights:

MEASURE	K-8 WEIGHT	9-12 WEIGHT
Weighted Achievement	35%	35%
Student Growth	50%	35%
Graduation Rate	NA	15% (4-year: 10% 5-year -5%)
School Quality & Student Success	15%	15%

School Accountability Under ESSA

Arkansas is responsible for determining school-level accountability under the Every Student Succeeds Act. The federal law focuses on the lowest-performing 5% of schools using these categories:

Comprehensive Support and Improvement will be those schools with the lowest 5% of ESSA Index Scores for all students.

Targeted Improvement and Support will be those schools with consistently underperforming subgroups.

Additional Targeted Improvement and Support will be those schools whose subgroups' ESSA School Index scores fall into the lowest 5% of index scores statewide (equivalent to Comprehensive Support and Improvement schools').

District Level Support

While the federal system focuses accountability at the school level, the new state system focuses at the school district level. Arkansas school districts will be considered in one of five levels of support: General, Collaborative, Coordinated, Directed and Intensive with the level of support and/or interventions increasing from General to Intensive. State support is provided in collaboration with the districts based on discussions between district teams and ADE staff. Districts considered in Level 5 may come under state control.

School Rating/Reward System

Act 744 of 2017 updates the school rating system to use multiple measures as in the ESSA School Index, though the department is still working on the exact criteria. In the past, schools in the top 10% of achievement or growth in student performance received rewards.