

Alternative Learning Environment

An Alternative Learning Environment (ALE) is a student intervention program that seeks to eliminate traditional barriers to student learning for students at risk (A.C.A. § 6-18-508 and 6-18-509). These at-risk students need smaller classes, more individualized and specialized instruction, and additional services that are integrated into their academic expectations. The following table shows the per-student (full-time equivalent, or FTE) amount established for ALE funding and the amount the state disbursed or will disburse to the districts each year since 2009-10. (For more information about ALE funding and programs, see page 64.)

State Expenditures: ALE Funding				
	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13
Per ALE Student/FTE	\$4,063	\$4,063	\$4,145	\$4,228
Total	\$20,529,609	\$21,019,743	\$22,341,560	\$21,775,797 Budgeted

Alternative Learning Environments

An Alternative Learning Environment (ALE) is a student intervention program that seeks to eliminate traditional barriers to student learning for students at risk (A.C.A. § 6-18-508 and 6-18-509). Alternative education in Arkansas is based on the premise that all students can learn if they are provided with an environment conducive to their particular learning needs. These at-risk students need smaller classes, more individualized and specialized instruction, and additional services that are integrated into their academic expectations. Students qualify for ALE services if they exhibit two or more of the following characteristics (ADE's Rules Governing the Distribution of Student Special Needs Funding and the Determination of Allowable Expenditures of those funds, 4.02.1.1 and 4.02.1.2)

- Ongoing, persistent lack of attaining proficiency levels in literacy and mathematics (Students cannot be placed in ALE based on academic problems alone.)
- Abuse: physical, mental, or sexual
- Frequent relocation of residency
- Homelessness
- Inadequate emotional support
- Mental/physical health problems
- Pregnancy
- Single parenting
- Personal or family problems or situations
- Recurring absenteeism
- Dropping out of school
- Disruptive behavior

According to data collected by the state's ALE staff, the ALE population is 47.9% minority students and 67.7% male students. This can be compared with the overall student population that is 35% minority students and 51.2% male students, according to SY2011 data in the ADE Data Center.

Students' placement in ALE programs is not intended to be permanent. The BLR report described the length of time students typically stay in ALE programs. About 34% of students participating in ALE stay for 135 days or more. Another 22% stay between 90 and 134 days and 44% stay between 20 and 89 days.

A.C.A. § 6-18-508 requires every school district to establish an ALE program, which may be a cooperative program with one or more other districts. According to ADE, the majority of ALE programs are an extension of the traditional school opportunities, but some districts have established schools that are dedicated to ALE students. Most districts, however, do not have the financial stability or number of students to allow for full school alternative education.

ALE programs are funded based on the number of full-time equivalent students in the program in the previous year. In FY2010-11, a student in an ALE program must have been in the program for at least 20 days for the district to be eligible for funding. (Legislation passed in 2011 changed that requirement to 20 consecutive days.)

For most districts (184), ALE students make up less than 2% of the total student population. For one district, ALE students made up more than 5% of the total student population. Twenty-eight districts were not funded in 2010-11 because they had no ALE students in 2009-10. Districts may avoid providing ALE services by not designating students as meeting the minimum criteria established through ADE rules. There is no investigation by ADE to determine whether districts not providing these services are adequately meeting the needs of all their students.

Act 272 of 2007 set the categorical funding provided to districts for each ALE student at \$4,063. There was no increase in funding until FY2011-12.

ALE Per-Student Funding					
	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13
Per ALE Student/FTE	\$4,063	\$4,063	\$4,063	\$4,145	\$4,228

In FY2010-11, every ALE full-time equivalent (FTE) student generated \$6,023 in foundation funding in addition to \$4,063 in ALE funding, for a total of \$10,086 per student. District expenditures for ALE in FY2010-11 totaled \$33,541,601 for 5,390 FTE ALE students, or \$6,223 per FTE student.

The report also found that the majority of districts had ending ALE fund balances of 20% or less of that year's ALE funding allocation. However, nine districts had ALE fund balances of more than 100% of that year's ALE allocation.

ALE Fund Balance	Districts
0%	88
>0%-20%	79
>20%-50%	25
>50%-100%	10
100%+	9
TOTAL	211 Districts

Legislation passed in 2011 (Act 1118), repeals A.C.A. §6-18-508 and §6-18-509 concerning alternative learning environments and creates a new subchapter of the Arkansas Code, §6-48-101 et seq. The new law redefines ADE's responsibilities, including: (1) the method of calculating the funding for alternative learning environment students; (2) developing criteria for professional development and training for alternative learning environment teachers; and (3) developing rules for measuring the effectiveness of alternative learning environments. The new provisions went into effect July 1, 2011.

Act 1118 also requires ADE to evaluate each ALE program. During this adequacy study, ADE said its ALE unit evaluates the effectiveness of programs through visits with individual districts on-site. ADE provides technical assistance, rather than a more structured and documented monitoring process. The new law also requires ADE to submit an annual report to the House and Senate Education Committees that describes the information ALE programs are required to report as well as the effectiveness of ALE programs. The first report produced by ADE under the 2011 legislation in May 2012 did not include information on the effectiveness of ALE programs. ADE said subsequent reports will include the required information from school districts and their evaluations. ADE is collecting the information using a new electronic format for the program approval and an improved program assessment instrument. The program assessment instrument is designed to be a self assessment, but one page of the document will be used for ALE staff evaluations.

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