



Research Report

English Language Learners (ELL) State Categorical Funding Review

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Prepared for
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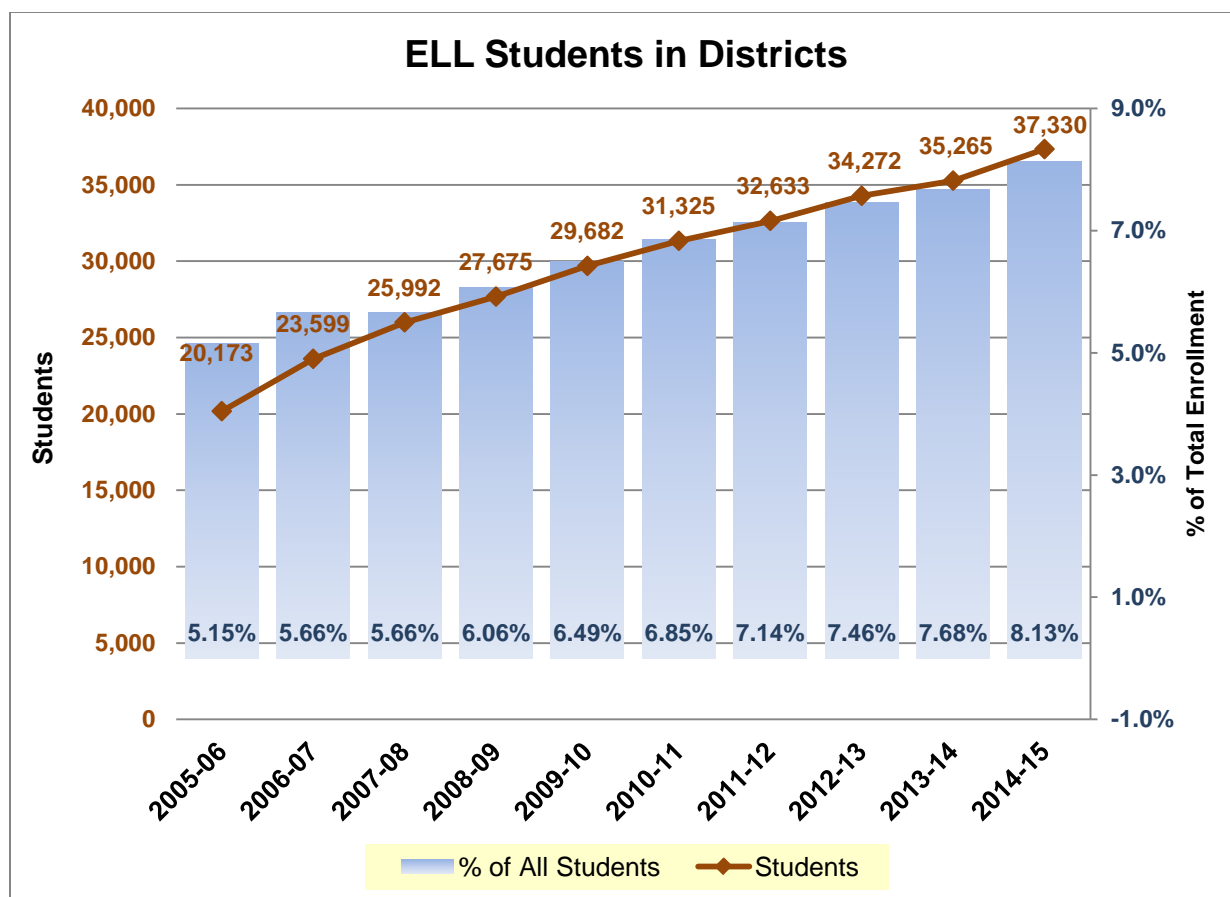
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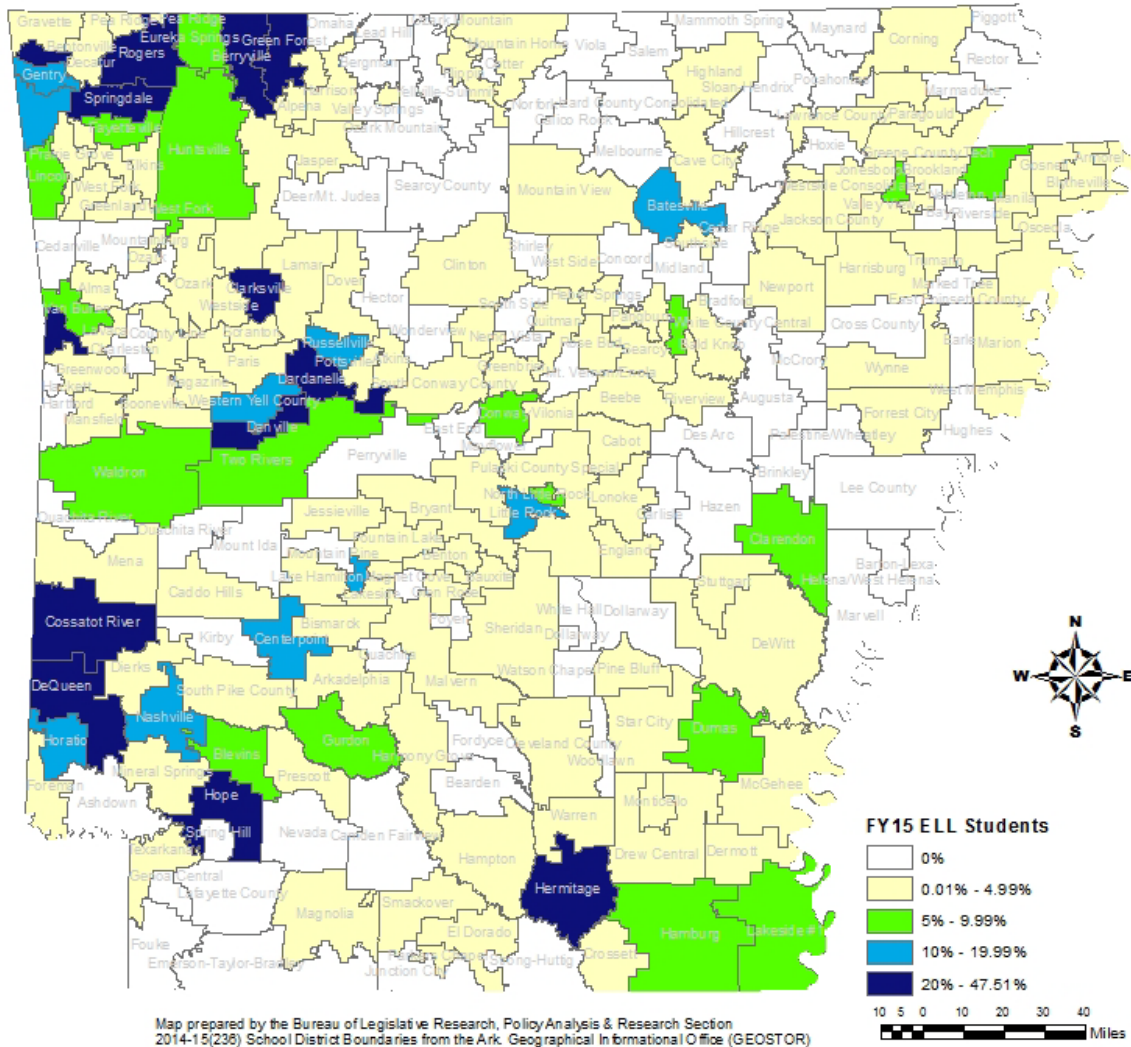
ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

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 FY2014-15 there were 37,330 ELL students in the state’s public school districts and an additional 248 ELL students in open enrollment charter schools. Data retrieved from ADE’s State Aid Notice indicate the growth in ELL enrollment has increased by roughly 85 percent since 2006. This mirrors similar growth in the overall Spanish-speaking population in Arkansas. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the Spanish-speaking population in Arkansas has grown from 3.2% of the general population in 2000 to an estimate of 7% of the total population in 2015. The chart below reflects the growth of ELL students and the growth in the proportion of all students who are ELL.



These numbers do not include students enrolled in charter schools.

According to the Department of Education, fifty-six percent (21,032) of the 37,578 ELL students in the state during SY2014/15 were served by four school districts—Springdale (9,629), Rogers (4,988), Fort Smith (3,713), and Little Rock (2,702). The following map shows the percent of each district’s student population that is ELL.



The ELL student population density data are provided in the following tables:

Number of ELL Students FY 15	
# of ELL Students	# of Districts (Charter Schools)
1,000 or more	5 (0)
500 - 1,000	8 (0)
100 - 500	28 (0)
1 - 100	111 (9)
0	84 (9)
Percentage of ELL Students FY 15	
ELL Percentage of All Students	# of Districts (Charter Schools)
20% - 47.5%	13 (2)
10% - 19.9%	10 (0)
5% - 9.9%	18 (1)
1% - 4.9%	70 (5)
0.1% - 0.9%	41 (1)
0%	84 (9)

The most widely spoken languages for ELL students in school year 2014-2015 are:

Top 5 Languages Spoken 2014-2015			
	Language	Student Count	Percentage of Total ELL
1	Spanish	32,293	86.03%
2	Marshallese	2,344	6.24%
3	Vietnamese	499	1.33%
4	Laotian	378	1.01%
5	Hmong	291	0.76%

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 education consultants Picus and Associates to help revise the state's education finance system. They recommended that the state provide additional funding to school districts to support 40% of a full-time teacher (.4 FTE) for every 100 students who are both English language learners and eligible for free or reduced price lunch, or about \$195 per qualifying student. This funding was designed to supplement the funding provided to school districts based on the number of low income students (National School Lunch state categorical funding).

In 2006, when the state rehired Picus and Associates, the consultants recommended increasing ELL funding to support 1.0 FTE, rather than the .4 FTE funded by the state at the time. The Adequacy Study Oversight Subcommittee opted to instead adopt a 50% increase for the ELL per-student funding rate to .6 FTE. That decision was based on the fact that districts were spending more money on ELL programs than they were provided in ELL funding. However the increase was limited to 50% because financial data showed districts had significant balances of NSL funding, money that was meant to supplement ELL funding.

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 language proficiency assessments, commonly referred to as ELPAs. In order to identify students that may potentially be ELLs, Arkansas follows the recommendation of the U.S. Department of Education (USDOE) and administers a home language survey (HLS) at the time a student is registered with a school district at any grade level (K-12). This survey is filled out by the parent or guardian enrolling the student and determines whether the student's native language is something other than English or if the student comes from an environment in which a non-English language may have affected his or her English language proficiency. Once the home language survey is submitted, a district's English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) coordinator will review the responses and determine any potential English learners (EL)¹. These students are then

¹ For further specifications on the ESOL position, please see the ADE Commissioner's Memo LS-16-021 dated October 1, 2015.

given a screener or placement test to determine if they are not fully fluent in English². If it is determined that the student is not fully English proficient, he or she is then placed into the ELL program.

Each ELL student is assigned a group of teachers and/or school staff who monitor the student's progress towards English language proficiency. This group of educators is referred to as the student's LPAC (language placement and assessment committee). The LPAC works closely with students to evaluate classroom performance, language-specific assessment results, and state benchmark testing results. Each student's progress must be reviewed and documented on a yearly basis, or more frequently as needed, by his or her LPAC. The language-specific assessment currently used by Arkansas districts is called the ELDA (English Language Development Assessment). This assessment is given each spring and is used to determine a student's level of English language proficiency. It does not assess prior academic knowledge. It tests students in kindergarten through twelfth grade in four domains: reading, writing, listening, and speaking. The results of the assessment helps schools determine what type of English language instruction is most 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. 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 (FEP).

Following a review of the spring ELDA test results, the LPAC will make a recommendation as to whether or not a student remains stationary in the program, advances a level, or exits the program entirely. In order to exit the program, a student must score proficient or above in all sections of the ELDA and earn a "C" grade or above in all core subject areas (English/language arts, mathematics, social studies, and science). ELL students in grades 3-12 must also score proficient or advanced on the literacy and math benchmark tests, and students in grades 1-2 must score at or above the 40th percentile on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS). Because the scores from the PARCC assessment administered in the spring of 2015 will not be available until November 2015, the Arkansas Commissioner of Education is allowing school districts to use the spring 2014 state assessment results, in concert with the other necessary exit criteria, to assess the position of a student in the ELL program³. According to ADE, districts self-reported that 1405 students (4%) exited the ELL program in the 2013/14 school year⁴.

Districts receiving federal funding are required to monitor and assist students who exit the program for two years, according to 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 years⁵. 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 testing as well.

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

³ For more information, please see Commissioner's Memo LS-16-007 dated August 31, 2015.

⁴ ADE was unable to provide the number of students exited from the ELL program for the 2014/15 school year.

⁵ For more information, please see Commissioner's Memo LS-07-035 dated September 6, 2006.

During the 2015/16 school year, the ELL student assessment will be changing from the ELDA to the ELPA21 (English Language Proficiency Assessment for the 21st Century) test. The ELPA21 is a consortium of 14 states⁶, including Arkansas, using new English language proficiency standards developed by the Council of Chief State School Officers. These standards are aligned with the Common Core standards for English language arts, mathematics, and science. According to ADE, the reasons for this transition center on the standards update as well as on the way(s) ELDA is administered. The ELDA is strictly a paper-pencil test administered in grades 1-12. In contrast, the ELPA21 is given to grades K-12 and will be administered online, allowing for a decrease in the time spent administering the test and providing real-time student scores. The ELPA21 includes six grade bands. These are K, 1, 2/3, 4/5, 6/8, and 9/12. The assessment standards are grade-specific with the test covering the same four domains used in the ELDA (listening, speaking, reading, and writing). While the ELDA weights the reading and writing domains more heavily, the ELPA21 equally weights all four domains in the composite score (1-5). However, the ELPA21 scoring criteria for the individual domains has not yet been released.

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 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 ELL 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 (2,702 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 ELL population.

In order to teach ELL classes in Arkansas, a fully certified teacher must have an ESL endorsement added to his or her license. During the 2014/15 school year, 3,533 teachers held an ESL endorsement, according to ADE⁷. The endorsement requires 12 hours of coursework completed at an approved college or university. Upon completion of this coursework, the teacher must then take, and pass, the ESL Praxis. Transcripts and Praxis scores may then be sent to ADE for verification and the endorsement may be issued. Arkansas Tech and the University of Arkansas have partnered to offer an intensive, 6-day summer workshop, with additional online modules and two weekend follow-up sessions, to help interested educators obtain ESL endorsement with minimal disruption during the school year.

Districts are not required by Arkansas statute or ADE rules to employ an ESL teacher or coordinator. However, if an English learner is identified in a school district, that district must provide instruction that is in compliance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964⁸. According to this act, programs that educate children with limited English proficiency must be:

- Based on sound educational theory;
- Adequately supported, with adequate and effective staff and resources, so that the program has a realistic chance of success; and
- Periodically evaluated and if necessary revised.

There is no further regulatory guidance provided for school district ELL programs.

⁶ The other member states are: Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Mississippi, Missouri, New Jersey, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Utah, Virginia, Washington, West Virginia, and Wisconsin.

⁷ This number includes teachers that may have retired or otherwise left the profession and teachers who are not currently teaching an ELL class.

⁸ In *Lau v. Nichols*, the U.S. Supreme Court affirmed a memorandum issued by the Department of Education on May 25, 1970. This memo directed schools to take steps to help limited-English proficient students overcome language barriers to ensure that they can participate meaningfully in the district’s educational programs.

ELL PROGRAM FUNDING

STATE FUNDING

While categorical funding for NSL and Alternative Learning Environment (ALE) is provided based on previous year student enrollment numbers, 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.

In 2015, 152 districts and 9 open enrollment charter schools received \$317 per ELL student, or about \$11.9 million. This per-student funding amount is established in A.C.A. §16-20-2305. Additionally, districts can transfer funding into ELL funds from other state categorical programs (Professional Development, Alternative Learning Environments, and National School Lunch) if they need more funding for ELL programs than they received. In 2014/15, districts transferred about \$3.9 million from other categorical funds to be used as ELL. The majority of that funding, about \$3.7 million, was transferred from NSL funds.

FY 2014-15	Per-Student ELL Funding	Total ELL Categorical Funding	Funding Transferred to ELL From Other Categorical Funds
2012-2013	\$305	\$10,560,320	\$3,966,345.00
2013-2014	\$311	\$11,031,481	\$3,994,300.23
2014-2015	\$317	\$11,912,226	\$3,885,312.25

ELL funding, like other categorical funding programs, is considered restricted, meaning districts can only spend the money for specific purposes. The following activities are listed as eligible uses of ELL funding:

- Salaries for ELL instruction;
- Professional development activities;
- 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.

District and open-enrollment charter school expenditures of ELL funds for FY2014/15, including expenditures of funds transferred to ELL, totaled about \$15.9 million or \$425 per student. Thus, on average, districts spent roughly 134 percent of the ELL categorical funding they originally received for that purpose. The transfers into ELL from other types of categorical funds (ALE, NSL, and Professional Development) allow districts to spend more than the ELL funding they receive in a given year. The table below shows ELL state funding levels as well as ELL district and open enrollment charter school expenditures for three fiscal years.

FY 2014-15	Total ELL Categorical Fund Expenditures	Per Student ELL Funding	Per-Student ELL Expenditures
2012-2013	\$14,847,412.90	\$305	\$431
2013-2014	\$14,895,273.57	\$311	\$420
2014-2015	\$15,997,816.46	\$317	\$425

Unspent ELL funding may be carried forward from one year to the next as a fund balance. The total ELL fund balance, across all districts and open enrollment charter schools, in 2015 was

\$1,620,182.62. This brings the district average fund balance to \$43 per ELL student, or about 15 percent of the \$317 per student funding.

FY 2014-15	Total ELL Categorical Fund Balance	Per Student ELL Fund Balance
2012-2013	\$1,652,828.69	\$48
2013-2014	\$1,818,932.87	\$51
2014-2015	\$1,620,182.62	\$43

FEDERAL FUNDING

An important funding source for ELL programs is federal Title III funding. Part A of Title III is a federal education grant program known as the English Language Acquisition, Language Enhancement, and Academic Achievement Act. It provides funds to ELL programs in qualifying districts. Each year, the government dedicates a varying amount to Title III, Part A programs. A per-student amount is calculated based on this total available grant amount, divided by the total number of prior year ELL students. A school district will qualify for funding if its prior year ELL student count multiplied by the current year per-student grant amount equals \$10,000 or more. This differs from state funding which is based on current year ELL student counts. In 2014/15 \$3,218,120.00 in Title III money was provided to Arkansas. Of this allotted money, ADE retained \$100,000 for administration fees and \$75,000 for professional development. In 2014/15, the remaining \$3,043,120 was distributed to 38 districts.

Additionally, Congress provided an additional \$14,000,000 nationally under Title III, Part A to help LEAs meet the needs of immigrant children and youth. These funds are specifically earmarked for immigrant children who have been placed with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) or with another appropriate adult, while their immigration cases are resolved. Five Arkansas school districts received money through this program during the 2014/15 school year. These districts and the amounts they received are in the chart below.

LEA	District	Supplemental Grant Amount
2606000	Lakeside	4,039.79
4401000	Huntsville	8,271.95
0406000	Siloam Springs	5,578.75
5805000	Russellville	5,386.38
7001000	El Dorado	5,771.13

ACHIEVEMENT

ENGLISH LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT ASSESSMENT (ELDA)

Under Title III, 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 programs⁹. 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 FY2014/15, according to the Arkansas Department of Education, are shown below with the percentage of districts that met the target¹⁰:

AMAO 1 Percent of English Language Learners Making Progress by Moving from One Composite Level to a Higher Level on the English Language Development Assessment (ELDA)	AMAO 2 Percent of English Language Learners Fully Proficient in English with a Composite Score of 5 on the English Language Development Assessment (ELDA)	AMAO 3 AYP for the LEP Subgroup in Literacy and Mathematics at Each Grade Span Required for Federal Reporting
<p align="center">Target 32% 30 of 38 districts (79%) met the target</p>	<p align="center">Target 5.5% 32 of 38 districts (84%) met the target</p>	<p align="center">Multiple targets 19% met individual literacy targets 00% met individual math targets 77% met individual graduation targets</p>

For the 2014-2015 school year, most districts met the goals for AMAO 1 and AMAO 2. AMAO 3 gauges whether or not each district meets its 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. According to ADE, 19% of districts met their goal for literacy, 0% met their goal for math, and 77% met their graduation rate goal in SY2014/15. Prior to the 2015/16 school year, there have been no substantive penalties levied on schools not meeting their targets. During the current school year, a four-year plan will be put in place with increasingly stiff penalties levied on schools not meeting AMAO targets. This will be written into a district's Arkansas Comprehensive School Improvement Plan (ACSIP) and may ultimately result in the loss of all Title III funding. 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, although all ELL students are required to take the ELDA exam.

BENCHMARKS

During the 2013/14 school year, all students, including the ELL targeted group, participated in the state benchmark examinations. Because the 2014/15 spring PARCC scores have not been released, the ADE Commissioner has prescribed the use of the 2013/14 benchmark scores for 2014/15 student assessment. Statewide, the performance of the ELL subgroup has improved in literacy over the past six years, reducing the gap between ELL and non-ELL students in the fourth and eighth grades. 2014 saw decrease of 4 percentage points in ELL literacy scores.

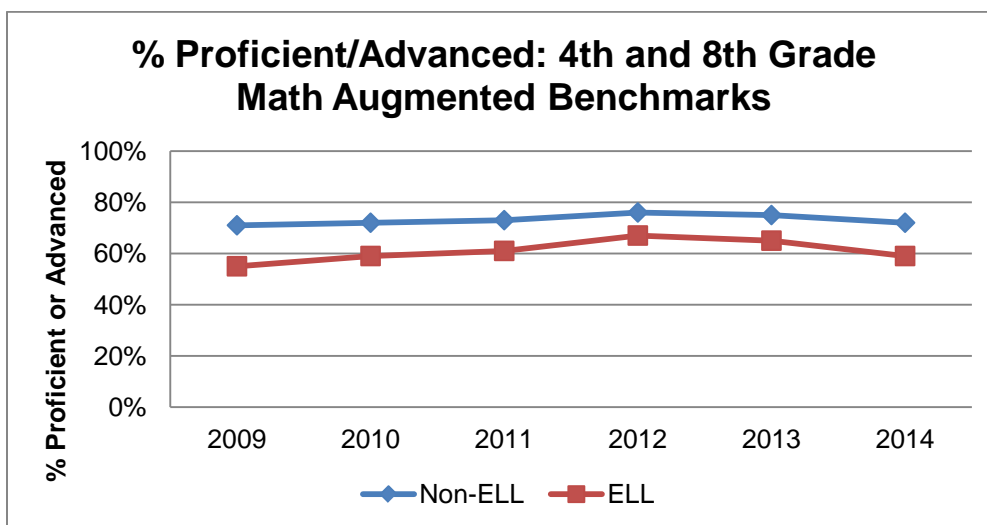
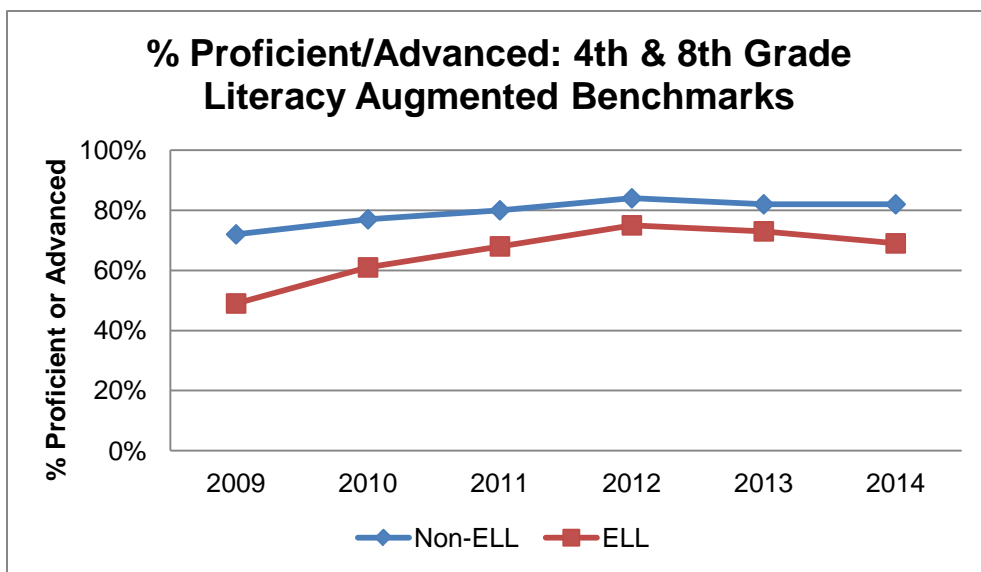
⁹ As noted on page ____ Arkansas will be transitioning to the ELPA21 in the 2015/16 school year.

¹⁰ AMAOs 1 and 2 will change in 2015/2016. ADE is currently working with the ELPA21 consortium to create the new requirements.

Despite overall gains, there was also 6 percentage point decrease in the math score for 2014. The percent proficient or advanced for each group is shown in the following table and charts for the 4th and 8th grade augmented benchmark exams.

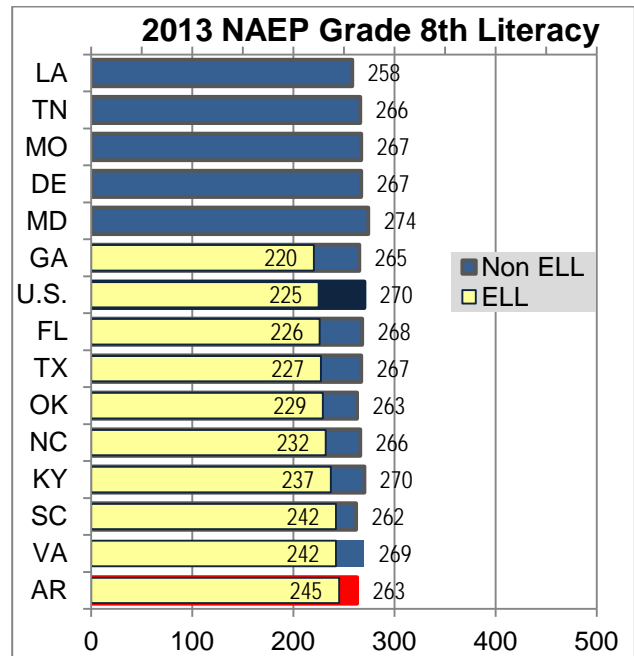
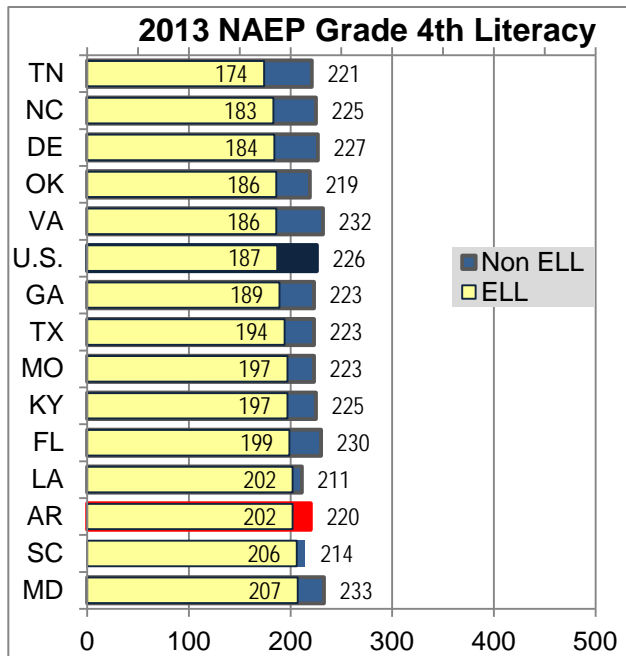
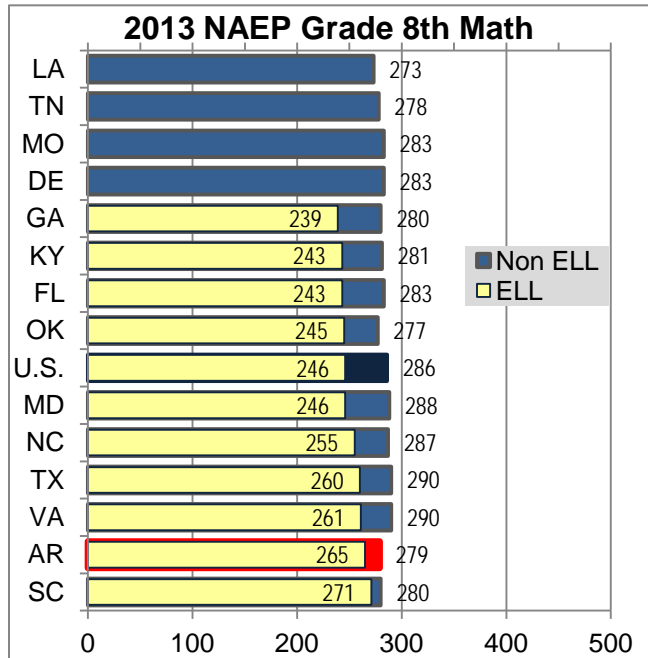
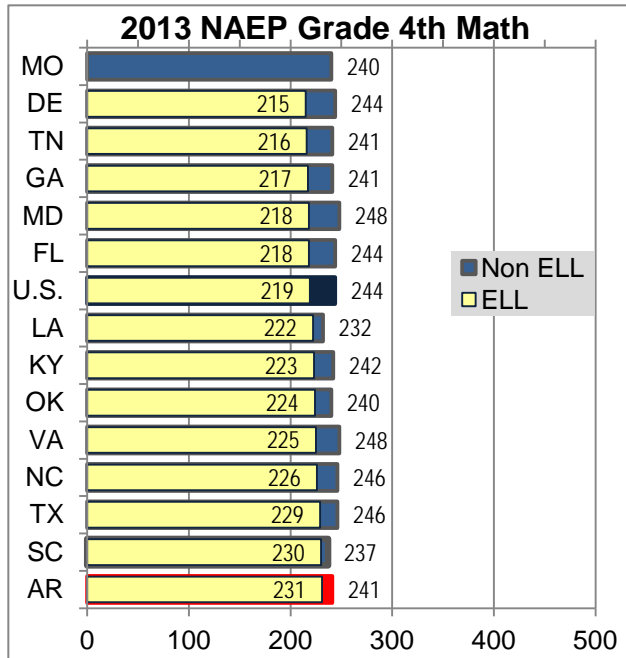
% Proficient/Advanced: 4th & 8th Grade Literacy Augmented Benchmarks						
	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Non-ELL	72%	77%	80%	84%	82%	81%
ELL	49%	61%	68%	75%	73%	69%

% Proficient/Advanced: 4th & 8th Grade Math Augmented Benchmarks						
	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Non-ELL	71%	72%	73%	76%	75%	70%
ELL	55%	59%	61%	67%	65%	59%



NATIONAL ASSESSMENT OF EDUCATIONAL PROGRESS (NAEP)

NAEP scores are also important to consider when looking at the progress of Arkansas's ELL students. These tests are given at grades 4 and 8 and score 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 those surrounding and SREB states for which ELL data is available.



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

CONCLUSION

English Language Learners are students identified by the state board as not proficient in the English language. During the 2014/15 school year, there were 37,578 students categorized as ELLs across 152 Arkansas school districts and 9 Arkansas charter schools. 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 ELL 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 ELL program. ELL instruction and support is primarily funded through the state and is based on the number of ELL students in the current school year. In FY2014-15, ELL categorical funding totaled \$11.9 million or \$317 per ELL. This includes roughly \$3.8 million in transfers from other categorical funds into ELL. Expenditures for ELL in 2015 totaled \$15.9 million, or \$425 per ELL student. The total ELL fund balance, across all districts and open enrollment charter schools was \$1.6 million, or \$43 per ELL.

Federal funding is available to districts that meet a \$10,000 funding threshold (typically districts with between 100-120 ELL students) through the Title III program. In 2015, 38 Arkansas school districts met this requirement and were subsequently allotted a total of \$3,043,120 in Title III funding.

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 2015, 79% of districts met the target for AMAO 1, 84% of districts met the target for AMAO 2, and districts had varied success with meeting their targets on AMAO 3 (please see page 6 of this report for more information on AMAO definitions and targets). In the spring of 2016, ELL students will transition to the ELPA21 test and AMAOs 1 and 2 will change.

Arkansas ELL students also participate in state Benchmark and End of Course (EOC) exams, including the PARCC exam in 2015. Because PARCC scores will not be available until November 2015, ADE has advised the use of 2014 Benchmark scores to evaluate ELL performance in the 2014/15 school year. In 2014, 59% of ELL students scored proficient or above in math, and 69% scored proficient or above in literacy, in both the 4th and 8th grades. Across the non-ELL population, 72% scored proficient or above in math and 82% scored proficient or above in literacy. Only 13 of the 16 SREB (Southern Regional Board) states have data available on NAEP ELL student performance. Of these states, Arkansas's ELL students rank 1st in fourth grade math and 2nd in eighth grade math. In reading, Arkansas ranks 3rd at the fourth grade level and 1st at the eighth grade level. Arkansas ranks 1st in all of these categories, when looking at surrounding states, although some states do not have a large enough ELL population to report NAEP testing numbers (please see pg. 10).