



HOLDING ARKANSAS SCHOOLS ACCOUNTABLE

EDUCATION ACCOUNTABILITY

School accountability systems have been designed at both the national and the state levels for the past several decades. Accountability systems are means of measuring, reporting and spurring school progress.

Accountability systems are generally expected to:¹

- Set clear expectations for schools to raise the achievement of ALL students.
- Communicate whether schools are meeting those expectations.
- Celebrate schools that are meeting or exceeding those expectations for all groups of students while prompting action in those that are not.
- Direct additional resources and support to struggling schools to help them improve.

ARKANSAS EDUCATIONAL SUPPORT AND ACCOUNTABILITY ACT

Act 930 of 2017 created Arkansas’s current accountability system, which is called the Arkansas Educational Support and Accountability Program (AESAP). In many ways, AESAP reflects the goals of the new federal accountability system under the Every Student Succeeds Act by providing schools and school districts more autonomy and flexibility, emphasizing support from the state as opposed to labels and sanctions, and using multiple measures to assess schools’ success with students.

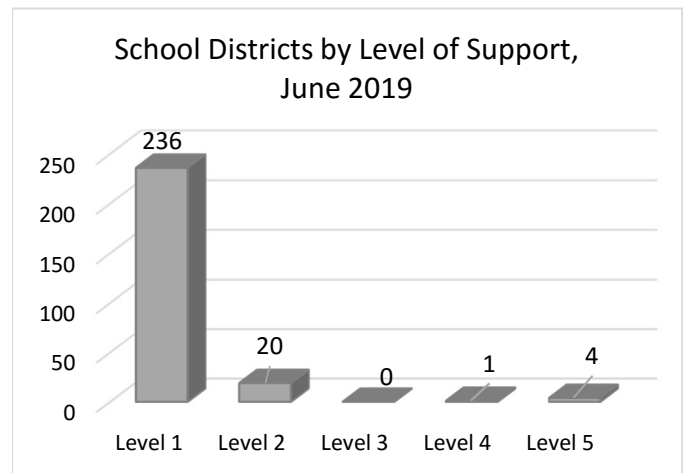
Arkansas measures school performance through a combined indicator called the ESSA School Index, which is based on these components:

- **Weighted achievement** (an equation for a school that includes both current performance and how many students moved to a different performance category from the previous year)
- **Growth** (compares each student’s performance on the current year standardized test with his/her expected score based on his/her past test score trend; also includes language acquisition performance of English language learners)
- **Graduation rates** (both 4-year and 5-year graduation rates)

- **School Quality and Student Success** indicators (includes a number of indicators considered important to student success, such as percent of students reading on grade level, percent of students with chronic absences and percent enrolled in Advanced Placement classes)

LEVELS OF SUPPORT

Each school district is considered to be in need of one of five levels of “support,” either because the district has requested a certain amount of assistance from ADE or ADE has determined through some other means that the district needs it. The five levels range from Level 1 – General, which is the basic support provided to all districts, to Level 5-Intensive.



As of the end of the 2018-2019 school year, all but 25 of the 260 school districts and charter school systems were considered by ADE to be in need of **Level 1 – General** Support. According to ADE, districts in Level 1 support have the capacity to help their schools improve and are able to take advantage of any needed assistance through the tools ADE provides all schools and school districts: information on the ADE website, web-based data tools or phone calls to their designated ADE specialists, for instance.

The only districts and charter school systems receiving **Level 2 – Collaborative** support were 20 that had schools with federal 1003 school improvement grants. Providing this level of support is required to comply with federal guidance. (Three additional districts that had schools with 1003 grants were classified in Level 5.) At Level 2, ADE works with districts to provide schools with minor or temporary technical assistance.

No districts at the end of the 2018-2019 school year were considered to be in need of **Level 3 - Coordinated** support. At

this level, ADE’s technical assistance is coupled with closer monitoring of a district’s major systems. Act 1082 of 2019 requires ADE to provide Level 3 support to any school district in which 40 percent or more of its students score “in need of support” for reading on the state’s standardized exam. Therefore, beginning during the 2019-2010 school year, approximately 50 school districts and charter school systems will be considered in Level 3 support.

One district was receiving **Level 4 – Directive** support at the end of the 2018-2019 school year. This level of support involves direct guidance from ADE for the development and implementation of school improvement plans. Again, the passage of Act 1082 of 2019 means that about 20 more districts and charter school systems will join the ranks of Level 4 support districts, as the law calls for any district with 50 percent or more its students scoring “in need of support” on the state’s reading test to receive that Level 4 support from the state.

Four districts were in **Level 5 – Intensive** support as of June 2019. Level 5 designation can mean removal of the superintendent and/or local school board.¹ The district then has up to five years to address the problems and meet the exit criteria set by the state before facing one of three outcomes outlined in the law: consolidation with another district, annexation into another district or reconstitution of the district.

SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT AND DISTRICT SUPPORT PLANS

Each school in the state is required under Act 930 to develop a school-level improvement plan by May 1 of each year. The school-level plan is to be submitted to the district and posted on the district website by Aug. 1 of each year.

School districts are to incorporate school improvement plans into their strategic planning for the school year, but not all have to develop an actual support plan. For instance, school districts considered in need of Level 1 support – currently the vast majority of districts – do not have to create a district support plan. Districts receiving support categorized as Level 2 and higher, however, must develop district plans of support by Sept. 1 and post them on their websites within 10 days.

Most districts that have to create support plans also have to turn them into ADE. The only districts receiving Level 2 support that must submit their plans to ADE are the ones that the Commissioner specifies. All school districts receiving Levels 3, 4 or 5 support must submit their plans to ADE. ADE personnel are integrally involved in the creation of support plans for districts in Level 5.

ADE also creates exit plans for districts receiving Level 5 support with criteria they must meet to avoid the legislated repercussions of consolidation, annexation or reconstitution. The criteria include qualitative as well as quantitative measures.

¹ “New School Accountability Systems in the States: Both Opportunities and Perils,” The Education Trust, retrieved at <https://edtrust.org/new-school-accountability-systems-in-the-statesboth-opportunities-and-peril/>