



College and Career Readiness Definitions

This brief addresses the following areas:

- Context for college and career readiness
- College and career readiness definitions
- Measuring college and career readiness in Arkansas
- Additional methods for incentivizing college and career readiness
- Initial considerations for college and career readiness definition in Arkansas

Context for College and Career Readiness

College and career readiness (CCR) is an important area of focus nationally, in SREB states and in Arkansas. By 2025, two out of every three jobs in the U.S. will require some postsecondary education and training. National research identifies a wide variety of college and career readiness indicators and predictors of postsecondary success, including related assessment outcomes, behaviors, grades, coursework, and skills. Arkansas has a robust set of data available to measure and monitor college and career readiness in most of the same areas identified by the research.

In the SREB region, less than 40 percent of students meet their states' college- and career readiness benchmarks. On average, between 40 percent and 60 percent of first-year college students are required to take one or more remedial courses in English or math, and less than a quarter of students who required remediation earned a credential within eight years.¹

Arkansas performance compared to other states differs in many areas. The average ACT composite score in Arkansas is 19.68 compared to 20.9 nationally, with 17 percent of Arkansas graduates meeting readiness benchmarks in all four ACT subjects, compared to 27 percent nationally; there are significant differences in achievement by race/ethnicity. Arkansas students also require remediation at a higher rate than their peers nationally, at both four- and two-year institutions and in both English and math. However, Arkansas' outcomes for CTE completers are better for both graduation and placement compared to SREB states, with about 96 percent of CTE completers graduating and being employed, enrolled in a postsecondary institution, or in the military six months following graduation (placement outcomes).

College and Career Readiness Definitions

In Arkansas, college and career readiness is defined within the state's Comprehensive Testing, Assessment, and Accountability Program statute as the acquisition of skills a student needs to be successful in future endeavors, including successfully completing credit-bearing, first-year

¹ 2017 Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) report on college and career readiness

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courses at a postsecondary institution; and embarking on a chosen career. Arkansas also has separate CCR standards within career and technical education (CTE) programs.

The majority of states have defined what it means to be college and/or career ready, though definitions vary widely in terms of how they value college vs. career readiness, and in terms of how detailed and actionable they are. More actionable definitions identify specific academic knowledge, skills and traits that students are expected to have in order to be college and career ready, including:

- Core academic knowledge in Math, ELA, and Science (32 states)
- Capabilities: critical thinking, problem solving, collaboration, and/or communication; often referred to as 21st Century Skills (16 states)
- Behavioral/readiness skills: resilience, perseverance, and dependability (15 states)
- College and career preparation knowledge and skills: college/career exploration, planning and decision making (14 states)

Measuring College and Career Readiness in Arkansas

Arkansas' ESSA School Index and School Quality and School Success (SQSS) Indicators for high schools includes many components of college and career readiness. The ESSA School Index is calculated based upon: Weighted Achievement (35%), Student Growth (50% of ESSA School Index through eighth grade, 35% in grades 9-12), Graduation Rates (15% of ESSA School Index in grades 9-12) and SQSS Indicators (15%). High School SQSS Indicators include on-time credits, high school GPA, ACT composite scores and readiness benchmarks, AP/IB/Concurrent Enrollment credits, computer science credits and community service/ service-Learning credits.

Additional Approaches for Incentivizing College and Career Readiness

Additional approaches for incentivizing college and career readiness beyond the state's accountability system include graduation requirements, diploma paths, and scholarship opportunities. The state's graduation requirements include career focus credit requirements and are aligned with state college admission requirements. Arkansas provides additional recognition for career readiness through Arkansas Career Readiness Certificates and also provides scholarship opportunities, primarily for academic success.

Initial Considerations for CCR Definition for Arkansas

APA puts forth the following initial considerations for a CCR definition in Arkansas (a definition will be proposed following stakeholder feedback on this topic later in the study):

- Equally value college and career readiness in CCR definition
- Develop a definition based upon key components of actionable definitions from other states and best practice research, including academic knowledge, capabilities/21st Century Skills, behavioral/readiness skills, and college and career preparation knowledge and skills, and encourage state agencies to collaboratively identify the specific standards, skills and indicators to measure using the robust data available within the state data system
- Include career readiness items in High School SQSS Indicators, such as number of CTE completers or earning an Arkansas Career Readiness Certificate