

ARKANSAS DEPARTMENT OF  
**Education**

**Focus: Eliminating the Need for College Remedial Courses**

The Arkansas Department of Education and the State must continue to better prepare K-12 students educationally so that remediation at the college level is not necessary. While remediation rates have fallen in recent years (from more than 50 percent three years ago to 44 percent for last year's graduates), the rates are still much too high. The Department believes that a high school diploma from a public school in Arkansas should be a guarantee for any student that he or she is adequately prepared to enroll in freshman level courses.

Below are described efforts currently underway to eliminate the need for remedial courses for students graduating from Arkansas high schools. While we believe these efforts are responsible for the recent drop in remediation rates and that they will have further impact as they remain intact, we also have suggestions for future strategies listed below.

**Current Efforts**

The following strategies and resources are currently in place to better enable students to enter higher education without the need for remediation.

***Smart Core***

- The concept of a Smart Core curriculum emerged after a review of student performance data in 2003 by directors of the state's Department of Education, Department of Higher Education and Department of Workforce Education.
- Smart Core classes are contained within the 38 courses required by law to be taught each year at all Arkansas high schools. It includes four years of grade level English; four years of mathematics with the sequence of Algebra I, Geometry, Algebra II and a fourth higher-level math; three social studies; and three sciences with laboratory experience. Smart Core also involves six units of career focus coursework.
- Smart Core became the default curriculum with the graduating class of 2009-2010 (10<sup>th</sup> graders in the 2007-2008 school year).
- So far, the statewide opt-out rate for Smart Core has averaged between 10-13 percent for each class each year according to self-reported data by the schools. These rates vary greatly, however, ranging from a reported 0 percent in about one third of school districts to 100 percent for one grade at one district.

***Alignment to College- and Work-Ready Standards***

- The math and literacy course standards (including all courses within these disciplines) have been approved by the State Board of Education. Achieve, Inc., and representatives from higher education and business have determined these standards to be aligned with the skills necessary for success in college or work.

***ACT Assessment Program***

- Act 881 of 2007 created within the Department of Education the Voluntary Universal ACT Assessment Program to improve college remediation. This legislation allows the school districts to use NSLA funds to pay for the ACT test.

### ***Advanced Placement***

- Arkansas has been recognized nationally for implementing legislation and policies that have expanded access to Advanced Placement courses in every high school in the state. Participation grew by 108 percent in the first year of operation.

### ***Academic Improvement Plans***

- Under Act 35, students in grades 3 through 8 who score below proficient on the benchmark exam must complete remediation in the deficient subject area as indicated in an academic improvement plan (AIP). If the AIP is not followed, the student is retained.

### ***End-of-Course Exams***

- Beginning with the 2009-2010 school year, students must pass end-of-course exams in geometry, algebra I, and biology to receive credit for the course.

### ***Commission on the Coordination of Educational Efforts (CCEF)***

- The CCEF was created by Act 109 of the Second Extraordinary Session of 2003. The Act requires the Commission to recommend policies related to the improvement of coordination among and between the levels of education from pre-kindergarten to the graduate level. They must also:
  - make recommendations related to aligning the curriculum from kindergarten through the bachelor's level in colleges and universities, and
  - make recommendations related to the future need for remediation of beginning college students.

### ***Next steps...***

In addition to continuing to focus on the above strategies, next steps should include:

- Encouraging schools to administer PLAN, EXPLORE and PSAT.
- Providing professional development to educators so they can use the data from the exams to plan appropriate interventions to improve student achievement levels.
- Developing policies that will promote best practices in the area of extra learning opportunities, especially with after-school and summer interventions programs for those students who need extra time to succeed.
- Support the Arkansas Scholars program, which is aligned with Smart Core requirements, recognizes students for maintaining a C average a 95 percent attendance rate and works with higher education institutions to provide financial assistance/rewards to Arkansas Scholars.
- Create a systematic means of communicating to parents of middle school students the importance of their children pursuing Smart Core during high school.