

Adequacy Study 2024

Learning Expectations

Prepared for the
House and Senate
Committees
on Education



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Introduction

The State of Arkansas has expressed the intent of what public school students should learn in law, rule, and in the definition of adequacy as adopted by the Senate and House Education Committees in the biennial adequacy study process.

Act 930 of 2017, codified in Arkansas Code §6-15-2901 *et seq.*, created the Arkansas Educational Support and Accountability Act and directs the Department of Education (ADE) to establish “academic standards that define what students shall know and be able to demonstrate in each content area.” Furthermore, instruction in all public schools is to be based on the academic standards “to prepare students to demonstrate the skills and competencies necessary for successful academic growth and high school graduation.” The standards, the law further states, shall be reviewed periodically “to ensure that the Arkansas academic standards are rigorous and prepare students for college, career, and community engagement.”

The Arkansas Rules Governing Standards for Accreditation of Arkansas Public Schools and School Districts, effective July 2020, address curriculum and instruction in Standard 1-A. In addition to specifying that each public school district’s board of directors annually adopt and implement a curriculum aligned to the Arkansas Academic Standards, the courses to be taught at each grade level are listed. These include an overview of the “required 38 units” that are to be offered at the high school (grades 9-12) level.

Finally, the adequacy definition approved by the Senate and House Education Committees in its 2020 Educational Adequacy Study includes this language in its first paragraph:

The standards included in the state’s curriculum and career and technical frameworks, which define what Arkansas students are to be taught, including specific grade level curriculum and a mandatory thirty-eight (38) Carnegie units defined by the Arkansas Standards of Accreditation to be taught at the high school level.

The “adequacy study statute” – Arkansas Code §10-3-2102 – requires the General Assembly “to assess, evaluate and monitor the entire spectrum of education across the State of Arkansas to determine whether equal educational opportunity for an adequate education is being substantially afforded to the school children of the State of Arkansas... .” In addition, the statute requires an evaluation of what constitutes an adequate education as well as an evaluation of the method of providing equality of educational opportunity. As part of that process, the legislature shall biennially review the academic standards (referred to in the statute as the “curriculum frameworks” before Act 936 of 2017) developed by ADE’s Division of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE).¹ This report represents the current review of those standards as well as specific educational programs in place for Arkansas students.

Academic Standards

The standards used by public school teachers throughout the state for the 2023 school year were called the Arkansas Academic Standards and were posted on the Division of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) website. These provided, by grade level and/or by subject area, the specific content to be covered in each course. Standards had been created and were available online for the following areas:

¹ Ark. Code Ann. § 10-3-2102(f)(2).

- **Computer Science**
- **English Language Arts**
- **Fine Arts**
- **Health and Physical Education**
- **Library Media**
- **Mathematics**
- **Science**
- **Social Studies**
- **World Languages**

Standards are to be reviewed and revised periodically, generally every six years or so. The process involves a committee of educators and stakeholders with professional experience related to the academic content area being discussed meeting over a course of weeks to review and update the academic standards, which then must be approved by the State Board of Education.²

The schedule for upcoming standards revision is noted in the following table:

Academic Standard to Be Revised	Committee Work	State Board Approval	Full Implementation
Mathematics	Summer 2022	Spring 2023	2023-2024
English Language Arts	Summer 2022	Spring 2023	2023-2024
Science	Summer 2024	Spring 2025	2026-2027
Physical Education Health Driver’s Education	Summer 2026	Spring 2027	2028-2029
Foreign Language Library Media	Summer 2027	Spring 2028	2029-2030
Fine Arts	Summer 2028	Spring 2029	2030-2031
Science	Summer 2029	Spring 2030	2031-2032
Social Studies Arkansas History	Summer 2030	December 2031	2032-2033
Mathematics	Summer 2031	April 2032	2033-2034
English Language Arts	Summer 2032	April 2033	2034-2035

Required Courses

The courses required to be taught at each grade level can be found in the Standards for Accreditation, Appendix A, Standard 1.

In grades K-4, all students must receive instruction annually in:

- **English Language Arts**
- **Mathematics**

² A.C.A. § 6-15-2906(b) and (c) “Arkansas Academics Standards Revision Cycle” found at https://dese.ade.arkansas.gov/Files/20201209101511_Standards-Revision-Cycle.pdf, and [https://dese.ade.arkansas.gov/admin/Files/ARKANSAS_ACADEMIC_STANDARDS_REVISION_CYCLE_\(1\)_LS.pdf](https://dese.ade.arkansas.gov/admin/Files/ARKANSAS_ACADEMIC_STANDARDS_REVISION_CYCLE_(1)_LS.pdf)

- **Science**
- **Social Studies**
- **Fine Arts**
- **Health and Safety Education and Physical Education**
- 1 unit of **Arkansas history** to be taught at each elementary grade level with an emphasis in 4th grade
- 40 minutes of the instructional day are to be used for **recess**

In grades 5-8, all students must receive instruction annually in:

- **English Language Arts**
- **Mathematics**
- **Science**
- **Social Studies**
- **Fine Arts**
- **Health and Safety Education and Physical Education**
- **Career and Technical Education**
- 1 unit of **Arkansas history** to be taught with an emphasis in 5th grade; 1 full semester of Arkansas history to be taught to all students in the 7th, 8th, 9th, 10th, 11th or 12th grades

In grades 9-12, the following content areas were to be offered during the 2023 school year for a total of 38 unique units, or year-long courses (a minimum 120 clock hours over a minimum 178 school days)³, unless otherwise allowed by law or rule. Until 2015, schools were considered in violation of accreditation standards if they did not teach all 38 of the required units without a corresponding waiver from teaching one or more of the required units. Act 853 of 2015 changed that, specifying in its subtitle that, “a school district is not in violation of the standards of accreditation for Arkansas public schools and school districts if a school district offers a course but no students enroll in the course.”⁴

Within some of these content areas, specific courses were required, while others were for courses that schools may offer. The required courses for the 2023 school year in each content area are noted in parentheses in the listing below:

- **English Language Arts** – Six units (English 9, English 10, English 11, English 12 [English 11 and 12 can be replaced with four approved, semester-long courses] and two units from an approved selection of courses)⁵
- **Oral Communications** – One-half unit

³ Arkansas Division of Elementary and Secondary Education Rules Governing Standards for Accreditation of Arkansas Public Schools and School Districts, Effective May 2, 2022, Appendix A, Standard 1-A.1.3

⁴ A.C.A. § 6-15-213(1)(B)

⁵ According to the Division of Elementary and Secondary Education document entitled “Thirty-Eight Required High School Courses” for the 2023 school year, one of the following English Language Arts courses must be offered: Critical Reading, Creative Writing, Debate I, Dramatic Literature, ELA Drama, Forensics I, Journalism, Transitional Literacy Ready, AP English course. Retrieved at https://dese.ade.arkansas.gov/admin/Files/AR_Thirty-Eight_Required_High_School_Courses_LS.pdf.

- **Science** – Five units (Physical Science Integrated, Biology Integrated, Chemistry Integrated, and two units from an approved selection of courses⁶)
- **Mathematics** – Six units (Algebra I, Geometry I, Algebra II, Pre-Calculus, and two units from an approved selection of courses⁷)
- **Computer Science** – One unit
- **World Languages** – Two units of the same language
- **Fine Arts** – Three and one-half units (Visual Art Foundations I, Vocal Music I, one full unit from an approved list of courses and one-half unit from an approved list of courses⁸)
- **Social Studies** – Four units (U.S. History Since 1890, World History Since 1450, Civics (one-half unit), Economics and Personal Finance (one-half unit), and one unit from an approved list of courses⁹)
- **Health and Safety Education and Physical Education** – One and one-half units (one full unit from an approved list of courses¹⁰ and one-half unit Health and Wellness)
- **Career and Technical Education** – Nine units of sequenced courses representing three of the following occupational areas: Agriculture, Science and Technology; Business and Marketing Technology, Family and Consumer Sciences; Trade and Industry; Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics.

In addition to the above, for the 2023 school year, schools were to offer one Advanced Placement (AP) course each in English Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies as well as transitional courses in math and literacy. The later refer to rigorous courses designed to prepare students for college coursework. The AP and transitional courses could account for one of the additional courses from the approved lists within the respective subject areas.

Act 611 of 2021 required Holocaust education to be included as grade-appropriate instruction in grades 5-12, so that students would gain an understanding of the causes, course, and effects of the Holocaust. DESE, working with partner organizations, developed curriculum units as well as other resources and professional development to assist with the implementation of this instruction.

The specific courses within these content areas are updated in a separate document annually, which is approved by the State Board of Education generally during the second semester of the school year preceding the fall of the school year in which they will be required. (Please see Appendix A for the 2023 documents.)

⁶ Ibid, two of the following science courses must be offered: Astronomy, Chemistry II, Earth Science, Environmental Science, Anatomy/Physiology, AP science course.

⁷ Ibid, two of the following mathematics courses must be offered: Advanced Topics and Modeling in Mathematics, Algebra III (transitional), Calculus, Statistics, Quantitative Literacy (transitional), Transitional Math Ready, Technical Math for College and Career, AP mathematics course).

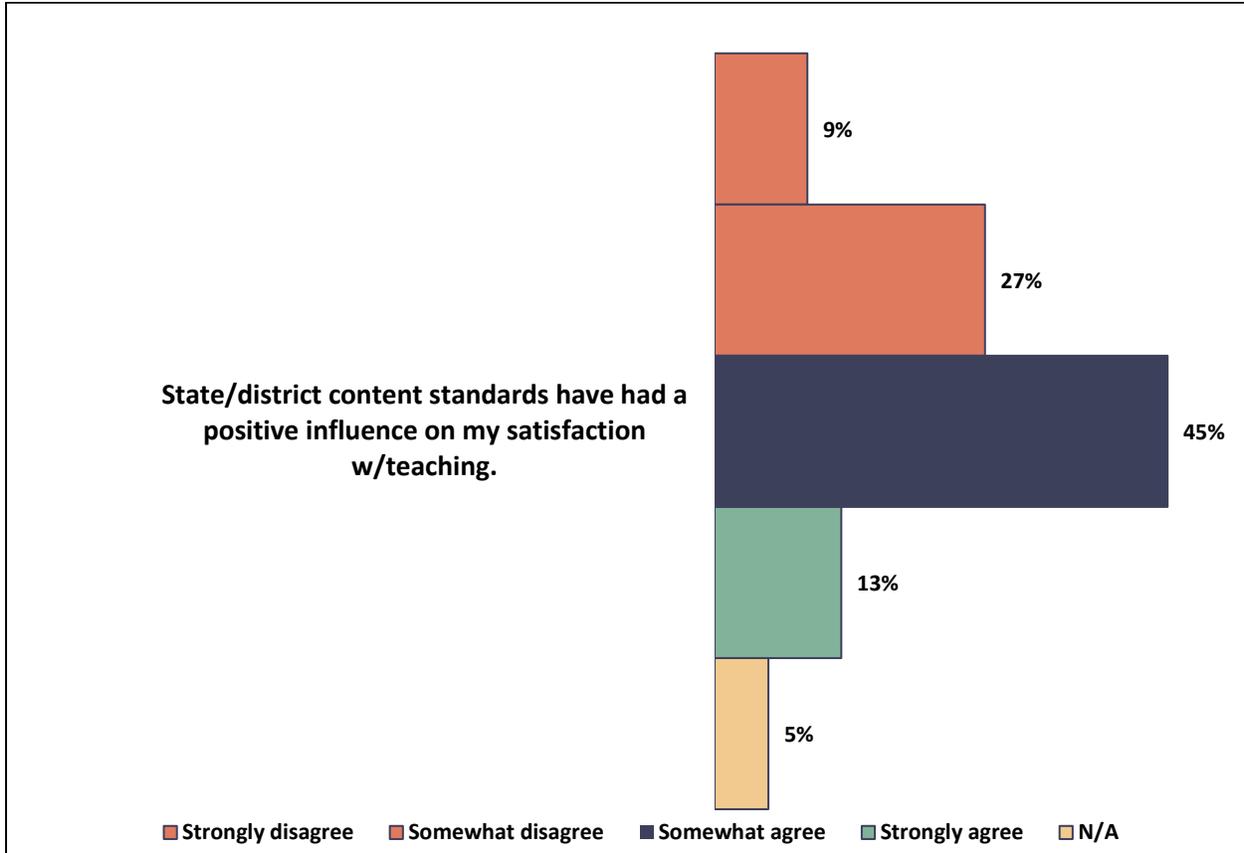
⁸ Ibid, one full credit from the following fine arts courses must be offered: Band I, Jazz Band I, Orchestra I; one-half credit from the following discipline areas must be offered: music, visual art, theater, dance, AP/IB offerings).

⁹ Ibid, one full credit from the following social studies courses must be offered: Arkansas History, African American History, Psychology, Sociology, United States Government, World Geography (all ½ credit courses); AP Social Studies (1 credit).

¹⁰ Ibid, one full credit from the following physical education courses (all ½ credit): Personal Fitness for Life, Recreational Sports, Outdoor Pursuits, Athletics.

Input from Arkansas Educators

The BLR included two questions dealing with the academic standards and content instruction in the 2024 Educatory Surveys, both of which were addressed to teachers and reflected their opinions in the 2023 school year.¹¹ Teachers were asked to what extent they agreed with the following statements:



Nearly two-thirds of responding teachers agreed or strongly agreed that state and districts content standards had a positive influence on their satisfaction with teaching, while 90% of teachers said they made an effort to coordinate the content of their courses with what other teachers were covering in their classes.

¹¹ Please see Teachers 2024 Adequacy Survey, question 19.

Graduation Requirements and Smart Core

Arkansas Code Annotated §6-15-2901 *et seq.* directs the Department of Education to establish and regularly review the academic standards “to ensure that the Arkansas academic standards are rigorous and prepare students for college, career, and community engagement.” The graduation requirements are courses identified within the required 38 units that are to be offered. Although there is flexibility of courses that can be taken within the content areas, the requirements set by the State Board of Education called for all students to successfully complete 22 units before graduation in 2023.

Smart Core was the default high school curriculum required for graduation during the 2023 school year. The Smart Core courses included four English Language Arts, four mathematics, three sciences, three social sciences, one computer science (which can satisfy the fourth math or third science requirement), one-half health and safety, one-half physical education, one-half fine arts, one-half oral communications and six career focus credits. The list of courses that could satisfy Smart Core requirements in 2023 are included in Appendix B.

Students, parents, or guardians could request a waiver from the Smart Core curriculum beginning in the students’ middle school or junior high years. Of the students in grades 7- 12, 5,380 statewide, or 2.4% were coded as having waivers from Smart Core during the 2023 school year. Over half of those students who opted out were in their junior and senior years, and only 100 of the students opting out were in the seventh grade. The difference for those students who opted out was that they were not required to take Algebra II or a higher-level math beyond Algebra II.

In addition to successfully completing the 22 required courses for graduation, students had to earn a credit in a course that included Personal and Family Finance,¹² pass the Arkansas Civics Exam,¹³ and complete cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) training¹⁴. Students graduating in 2026 must earn a unit of computer science, and students graduating in 2027 must complete a minimum of 75-clock hours of documented community service during grades 9-12.¹⁵

¹² Ark. Code Ann. § 6-16-135.

¹³ Ark. Code Ann. § 6-16-149.

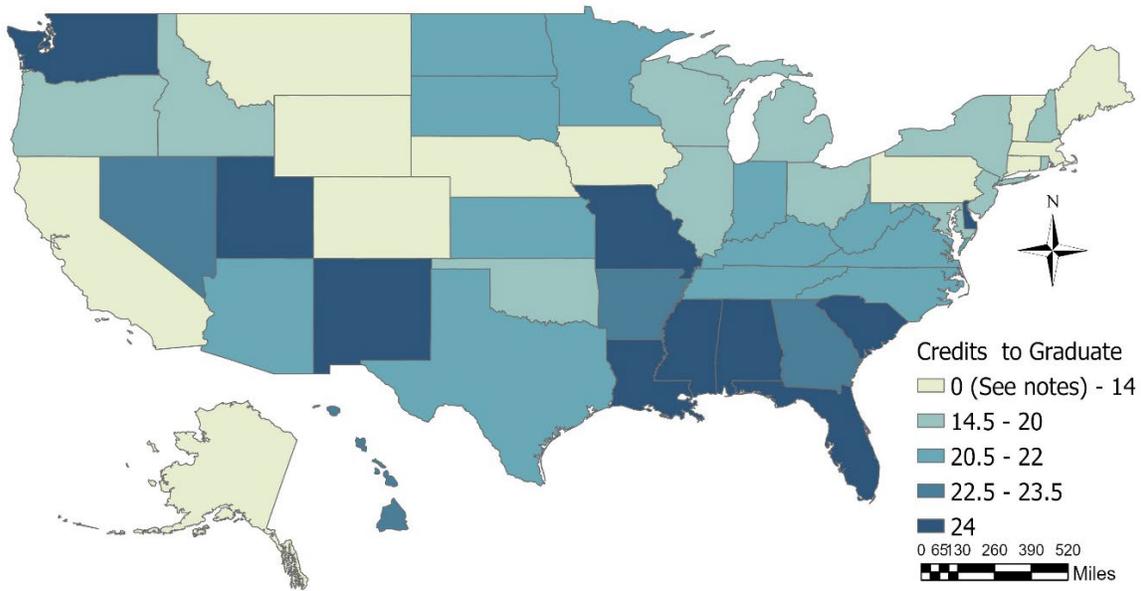
¹⁴ Ark. Code Ann. § 6-16-143.

¹⁵ Ark. Code Ann. § 6-16-1901(a).

Graduation Requirements in Comparison States

Information about the graduation requirements for all states are illustrated in the following map and charts.¹⁶

States' Total Credit Requirements for Graduation



Notes: Colorado, Massachusetts and Pennsylvania allow local districts to set graduation credit requirements. Vermont allows students to demonstrate proficiency in required subjects to graduate.

States' Required Credits for Graduation by Subject Areas

STATE	ELA	Social Studies	Science	Mathematics	Other credits
Alabama	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.0	8.0
Alaska	4.0	3.0	2.0	3.0	1.0
Arizona	4.0	3.0	3.0	4.0	8.0
Arkansas	4.0	3.0	3.0	4.0	8.5
California	3.0	3.0	2.0	2.0	3.0
Colorado*	---	0.5	---	---	---
Connecticut	4.0	3.0	2.0	3.0	2.0
Delaware	4.0	3.0	3.0	4.0	10.0
District of Columbia	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.0	8.0
Florida	4.0	3.0	3.0	4.0	10.0

¹⁶ Information for map and chart retrieved from the 2022 Digest of Education Statistics, Table 234.3” Course credit requirements and exit exam requirements for a standard high school diploma and the use of other high school completion credentials, by state: 2019,” retrieved at https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d22/tables/dt22_234.30.asp?current=yes.

STATE	ELA	Social Studies	Science	Mathematics	Other credits
Georgia	4.0	3.0	4.0	4.0	8.0
Hawaii	4.0	4.0	3.0	3.0	9.5
Idaho	4.5	2.5	3.0	3.0	1.5
Illinois	4.0	2.0	2.0	3.0	3.8
Indiana	4.0	3.0	3.0	3.0	7.5
Iowa	4.0	3.0	3.0	3.0	1.0
Kansas	4.0	3.0	3.0	3.0	8.0
Kentucky	4.0	3.0	3.0	3.0	9.0
Louisiana	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.0	8.0
Maine	4.0	2.0	2.0	2.0	1.0
Maryland	4.0	3.0	3.0	3.0	5.0
Massachusetts*	---	---	---	---	---
Michigan	4.0	3.0	3.0	4.0	4.0
Minnesota	4.0	3.5	3.0	3.0	8.0
Mississippi	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.0	8.0
Missouri	4.0	3.0	3.0	3.0	11.0
Montana	4.0	2.0	2.0	2.0	3.0
Nebraska	4.0	3.0	3.0	3.0	---
Nevada	4.0	2.0	2.0	3.0	11.5
New Hampshire	4.0	2.5	2.0	3.0	8.5
New Jersey	4.0	3.0	3.0	3.0	6.5
New Mexico	4.0	3.5	3.0	4.0	9.5
New York	4.0	4.0	3.0	3.0	4.5
North Carolina	4.0	4.0	3.0	4.0	7.0
North Dakota	4.0	3.0	3.0	3.0	9.0
Ohio	4.0	3.0	3.0	4.0	6.0
Oklahoma	4.0	3.0	3.0	3.0	3.0
Oregon	4.0	3.0	3.0	3.0	5.0
Pennsylvania*	---	---	---	---	---
Rhode Island	4.0	3.0	3.0	4.0	6.0
South Carolina	4.0	3.0	3.0	4.0	10.0
South Dakota	4.0	3.0	3.0	3.0	8.5
Tennessee	4.0	3.0	3.0	4.0	8.0
Texas	4.0	3.0	3.0	3.0	9.0
Utah	4.0	3.0	3.0	3.0	11.0
Vermont**	---	---	---	---	---
Virginia	4.0	3.0	3.0	3.0	8.0
Washington	4.0	3.0	3.0	3.0	11.0
West Virginia	4.0	4.0	3.0	4.0	7.0
Wisconsin	4.0	3.0	3.0	3.0	2.0
Wyoming	4.0	3.0	3.0	3.0	---

*Graduation requirements set at local level.

**Students meet requirements for graduation when they demonstrate proficiency in the curriculum subjects.

In addition, 13 states -- Florida, Indiana, Louisiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, Mississippi, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Ohio, Texas, Virginia and Washington – require students to pass exit exams to earn their standard diplomas.¹⁷

College and Career Readiness

Readiness for college and career has been a focus for public education in recent decades, though definitions vary from state to state and from organization to organization. Arkansas’s current definition of college and career readiness is located in A.C.A. § 6-15-2903(2) as part of the definition for the mandated college and career readiness assessment. The assessment is “a set of criterion-referenced measurements of a student’s acquisition of the knowledge and skills that the student needs to [b]e successful in future endeavors, including credit-bearing, first-year courses at an institution of higher education such as a two-year or four-year college, trade school, or technical school; or [e]mbark on a career.”

When Augenblick, Palaich and Associates (APA), hired by the Senate and House Education Committees in 2020, presented its Arkansas School Finance Study, one of the consultant’s recommendations was for Arkansas “to adopt a career readiness definition that includes: (1) core academic knowledge and skills, (2) capabilities, (3) behavior skills and dispositions, and (4) postsecondary preparation and planning.” APA recommended the following definition:

Upon high school graduation, Arkansas students should be prepared to take the next steps toward a career regardless of whether that is college (two- or four-year), a technical program, military service, or an entry-level career position.

More specifically, an Arkansas student who is career ready will have:

- *Gained core academic knowledge in mathematics, science, and English language arts to enable them to successfully complete credit-bearing, first-year courses at a postsecondary institution.*
- *Demonstrated capabilities such as communication, critical thinking, collaborative problem-solving, time management, and information and technology skills.*
- *Developed behavioral skills and dispositions such as dependability, perseverance, working effectively with others, adapting, and managing stress.*
- *Developed financial literacy.*

All Arkansas students should be guided in career exploration, planning, and decision-making throughout their K–12 education to enable them to successfully navigate their chosen career path. This includes knowledge of careers, industries, and postsecondary education and training opportunities, identification of individual interests and abilities, and development of a personalized postsecondary plan with the concrete steps that need to be taken to enter a specific career field after graduation. Further, students should have had opportunities to participate in advanced, concurrent enrollment, career and technical education (CTE) or other career-focused courses, internships, and apprenticeships to demonstrate that they are career ready.¹⁸

The Senate Education Committee included the APA definition for college- and career-readiness in its 2022 adequacy recommendations.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Augenblick, Palaich and Associates, WestED and Partners, “Arkansas School Finance Study,” prepared for the Arkansas Senate and House Education Committee, December 2020.

Advanced Courses

Most Arkansas high school students have access to advanced coursework either through Advanced Placement or International Baccalaureate course offerings or through college-level concurrent courses.

Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate

The Rules Governing the Standards for Accreditation call for advanced education courses to be offered in accordance with Arkansas laws and with ADE rules. Arkansas Code Annotated §6-16-1204 stipulates that, beginning with the 2008-09 school year, each Arkansas high school shall offer a minimum of four Advanced Placement (AP) courses, with one each in English, math, science and social studies. That directive is reflected on the course list for the 2023 school year. State law allows for International Baccalaureate (IB) courses to be offered instead of AP courses.¹⁹ Both AP and IB classes are weighted on a five-point scale rather than a four-point scale (A = 5 points toward grade point average).²⁰

During the 2023 school year, AP or IB courses were taught in 219²¹ – or 94% – of the state’s school districts and in nine²² of 21 – or 43% – of the state’s open-enrollment public charter school systems. Within those 228 districts and charter school systems, 257 high schools and seven junior highs feeding into high schools offered at least one AP course. Little Rock’s Central High School offered the most AP courses (36), while 10 schools offered one AP course during the 2023 school year. The most popular AP course – or the course with the highest enrollment across the state – was AP English Language and Composition.

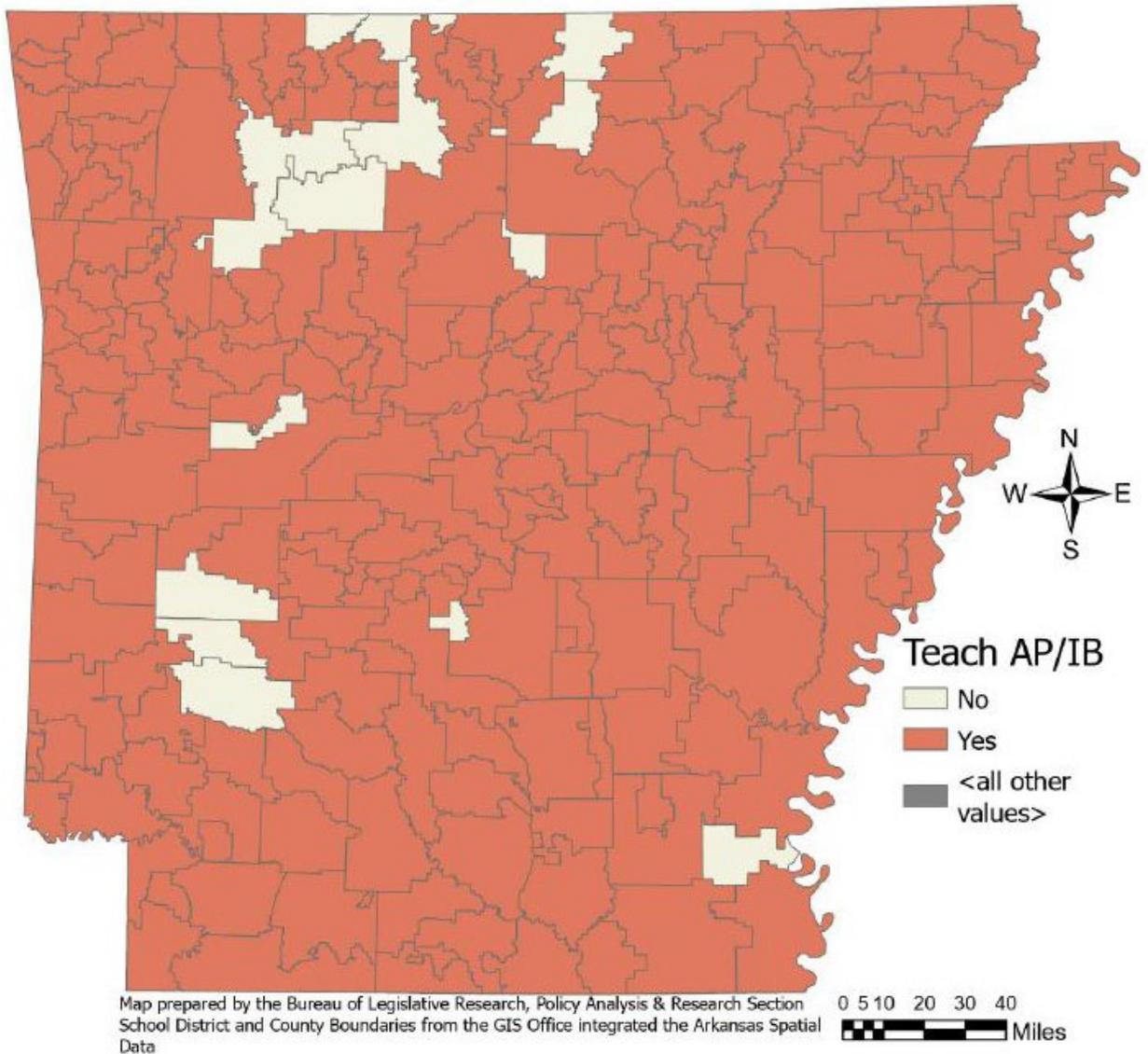
¹⁹ A.C.A. § 6-16-806

²⁰ DESE “Rules Governing Grading and Course Credit.”

²¹ School districts not teaching AP or IB classes during the 2023 school year included Caddo Hills, Calico Rock, Danville, Deer/Mt. Judea, Dermott, Jasper, Kirby, Lead Hill, Omaha, Ozark Mountain, Poyen, Shirley, South Pike County, and Viola.

²² Charter systems teaching AP or IB classes during the 2023 school year included Arkansas Arts Academy, Founders Classical Academies of Arkansas, Arkansas Connections Academy, Academics Plus Public Charter Schools, LISA Academy, Arkansas Virtual Academy, eStem Public Charter School, Arkansas Lighthouse Academies, and Haas Hall Academy.

AP/IB Courses Taught in Arkansas School Districts, 2023

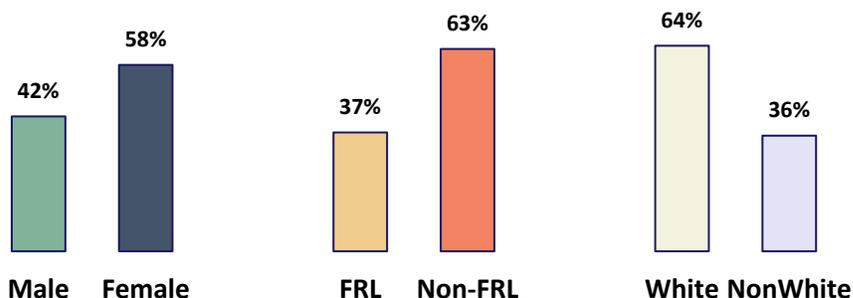


Statewide enrollment in AP and IB courses during the 2023 school year was almost 45,000, which was made up of more than 27,000 unique students, meaning some students were enrolled in more than one AP class during the school year. As reported in the previous Student Achievement section of the adequacy study, of the 43,142 AP tests taken, 43% received scores of 3, 4 or 5 (the scores many colleges require to grant course credit), compared with 62% nationally. According to DESE, Arkansas is one of a handful of states that pays for students' AP tests, which could result in a lower passing rate.²³

²³ Email from Kiffany Pride, Ed.D, Assistant Commissioner of Learning Services, ADE, DESE, dated May 29, 2024.

Three charter school systems had waivers from AP/IB class requirements for their high schools: Graduate Arkansas Charter, KIPP Delta Public Schools, and Responsive Ed Solutions Premier High School of Springdale. In addition, the North Little Rock School District had a waiver from AP/IB class requirements for North Little Rock Center of Excellence.

AP Enrollment Statistics



Research Review

The College Board created the Advanced Placement program in 1952 as a program for high achieving students to potentially earn college credit by passing a test in the corresponding class.²⁴ The authors of a 2015 research paper examining the impacts AP participation has for students point to earlier research that found that students who took AP exams were more likely to enroll in four-year colleges and to earn higher grade point averages while in college, bachelor’s degrees, and subsequent higher incomes than students who did not take an AP course. Additional research cited found that students who successfully completed AP courses were more likely to earn advanced degrees.²⁵ The same paper also pointed to research that finds that earning high grades in AP courses did not reduce students’ time to graduate college, with further research explaining that the rapid expansion of the AP program in the last 15 years resulted in students enrolling in AP courses though they were not academically ready for advanced classes. However, the authors performed their own study of data to determine if taking AP courses helped students score higher on the ACT college admissions exam and found that, “We believe our study can be added to the rich body of literature that indicates that the AP program is beneficial for students.”²⁶

A 2018 study found several predictors for success in AP or IB courses, including good mental health, strong educational histories (particularly strong academic skills exhibited in the 8th grade), good family socio-economic status, and student motivation and engagement levels. Risk factors for success in advanced coursework, on the other hand, were found to include higher levels of parent-child stressors and greater tendencies to respond to school-level stress through avoidance.²⁷

In 2021, the Center for American Progress, which, according to its website, is a “public policy research and advocacy organization which presents a liberal viewpoint on economic and social issues,” looked at

²⁴ “The Impact of Participation in the Advanced Placement Program on Students’ College Admissions Test Scores” by Warne, Russel T.; Larsen, Ross; Anderson, Braydon; Odasso, Alyce J. in *The Journal of Educational Research*, 108L 400-416l 2015.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ “Predictors of Success Among High School Students in Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate Programs” by Suldo, Shannon M.; Shaunessy-Dedrick, Elizabeth; Ferron, Joh; Dedrick, Robert F. in *Gifted Child Quarterly*, Volume 62(4) 350-373, 2018.

gaps among AP participants and found that “Black and Indigenous students are more likely to enroll in schools offering fewer AP courses... .” In addition, regardless of the level of AP offerings in school, the study found that Black, Latino/Latina, and Indigenous students were less likely to enroll in an AP course, take an AP test, or receive a passing score on an AP exam.²⁸

Concurrent Courses

Arkansas Code Annotated §6-16-1204 provides that schools may offer concurrent enrollment courses (in which students earn both high school credit and college-level credit) if they do so through an Arkansas institution of higher education that, upon completion, would qualify for academic credit in both the institution and a public high school that "is in one (1) of the four (4) core areas of math, English, science, and social studies; meets the requirements of 6-16-1204(b); and is listed in the Arkansas Course Transfer System of the Division of Higher Education." Districts may decide to offer these courses with a weighted grading scale (A=5 points).²⁹ To enroll in a concurrent course, students must be admitted by the higher education institution offering the course and must have met all prerequisites for the course.

Concurrent credit courses may be offered at reduced rates of tuition. In 2017, Act 1118 added that students qualifying for free or reduced-price lunches do not have to pay the costs of qualifying concurrent credit courses for up to six credit hours,³⁰ and, in 2019, Act 456 created the Arkansas Concurrent Challenge Scholarship Program,³¹ which allows any remaining funds after the distribution of Arkansas Academic Challenge Scholarships under A.C.A. § 6-85-201 *et seq.* and Arkansas Workforce Challenge Scholarships under A.C.A. § 6-85-301 *et seq.* to be used for \$125 scholarships per concurrent course for college credit up to a maximum \$500 per student. According to the Arkansas Division of Higher Education, 13,059 awards totaling \$1,472,062 were provided to 8,467 students in Fall 2022, and another 12,069 awards totaling \$1,374,315 were provided to 8,297 students in Spring 2023. All who applied received the scholarship.³²

Total enrollment in concurrent courses during the 2023 school year was almost 22,000, which was made up by 10,540 individual students, meaning that some students were enrolled in more than one concurrent course in during the school year.

According to the Arkansas Division of Higher Education Annual Report on Concurrent Education published in December 2021, 55% of students taking general education concurrent courses in the 2018-2021 fall semesters made A's in the class; 29% made B's, 11% made C's, 1% made D's, and 4% made F's.

During the 2023 school year, concurrent courses were taught in 222³³ – or 95% – of the state's school districts and in seven³⁴ of 21 – or 33% -- of the state's open enrollment charter school systems. Within

²⁸ “Closing Advance Coursework Equity Gaps for All Students” by Chatterji, Roby; Campell, Neil; and Quirk, Abby for the Center for American Progress, July 2021.

²⁹ See Ark. Code Ann. § 6-15-902(b). See also DESE “Rules Governing Grading and Course Credit.”

³⁰ DESE’s “Rules Governing Grading and Course Credit.”

³¹ A.C.A. § 6-85-401 *et seq.*

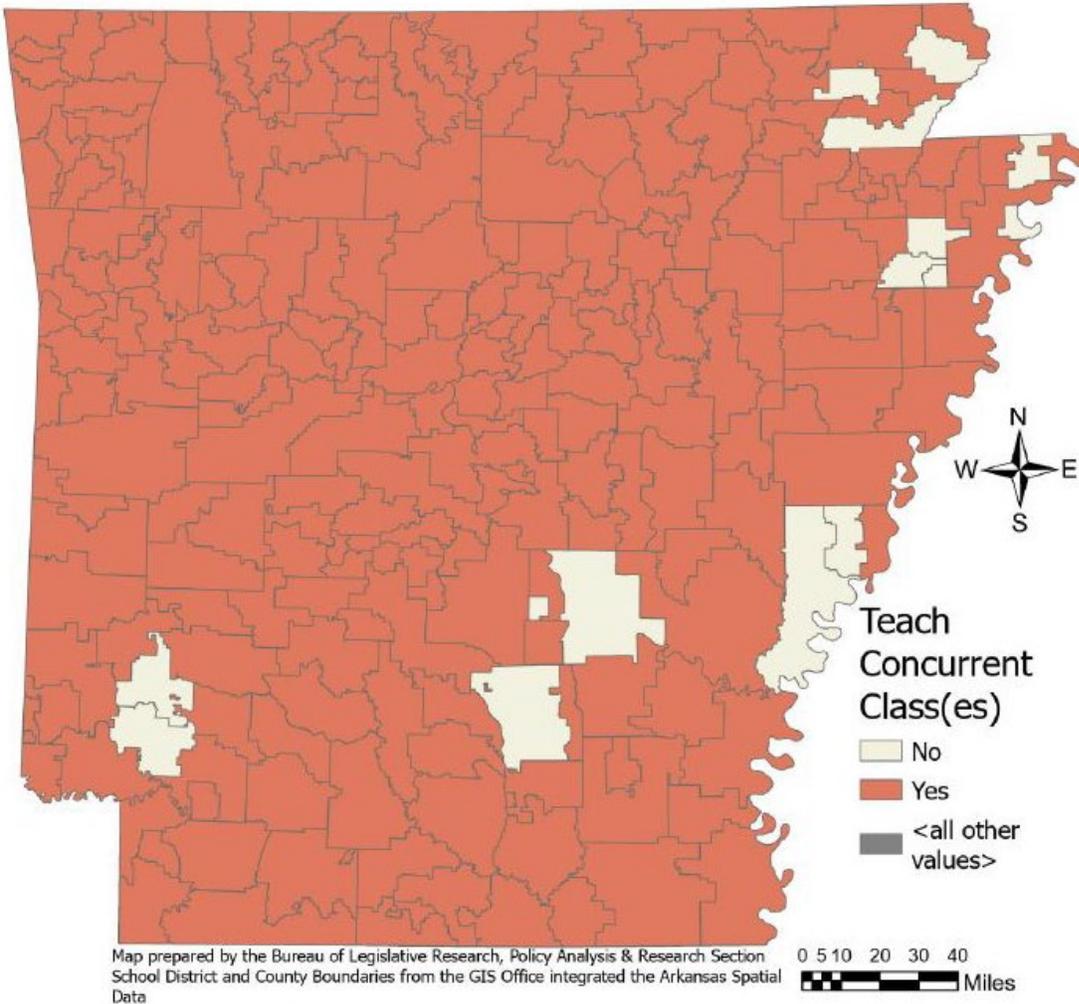
³² Email from Sonia Hazelwood, Chief Data Officer, Assistant Commissioner, Information Systems and Technology and Innovation, Arkansas Division of Higher Education, Arkansas Department of Education, dated February 6, 2024.

³³ School districts not teaching concurrent courses during the 2023 school year included Rector, Cleveland County, Greene County, Mineral Springs, Nashville, Pine Bluff, Blytheville, Osceola, Barton, Marvell-Elaine, Marked Tree, and East Poinsett County.

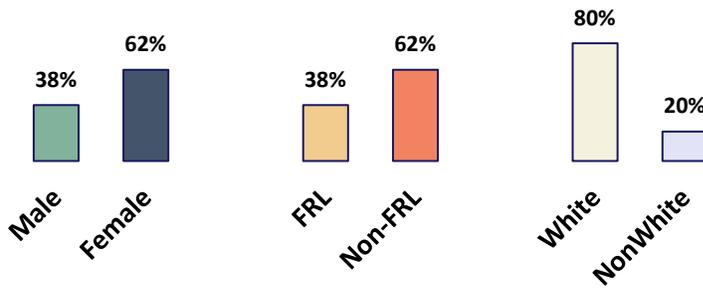
³⁴ Charter systems teaching concurrent courses during the 2023 school year included Arkansas Arts Academy, Arkansas Connections Academy, Friendship Aspire Academy, KIPP Delta Public Schools, Academic Plus School District, Arkansas Virtual Academy, and Arkansas Lighthouse Charter Schools.

those 230 districts and charter school systems, 253 high schools and three junior highs feeding into high schools offered at least one concurrent credit course. Arkansas Virtual Academy High School offered the most concurrent courses (29), while 12 high schools offered one concurrent course during the 2023 school year. The most popular concurrent course – or the course with the highest enrollment across the state – was English Composition.

Concurrent Courses Taught in Arkansas School Districts, 2023



Concurrent Enrollment Statistics



River Valley Virtual Academy in the Van Buren School District was the only school with a waiver concerning concurrent credit courses in the 2023 school year.

Review of Research

In 2017, the What Works Clearinghouse, identified five studies of dual enrollment programs that together support the findings that these programs have “positive effects on students’ degree attainment (college), college access and enrollment, credit accumulation, completing high school, and general academic achievement (high school)...”³⁵

The *Arkansas Concurrent Enrollment Report*, published in January 2024, cites research findings that concurrent students nationally are more likely than their peers who did not participate in concurrent courses “to graduate high school, matriculate, and persist to credential completion, while experiencing lower rates of developmental/remedial placement upon matriculation.”³⁶ The study found the Arkansas data show similar results in that “the college-going rates of Arkansas high school graduates who completed concurrent coursework are consistently more than 20 percent higher than the general population of Arkansas high school graduates. The report also says the data indicates that access to concurrent enrollment opportunities is not equal across regions of the state.

³⁵ *WWC Intervention Report: Dual Enrollment Programs*, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education, February 2017.

³⁶ *Arkansas Concurrent Enrollment Report: Landscape Analysis and Recommendations* by Zinth Jennifer with Zinth Consulting, LLC, January 2024.

Arkansas Computer Science Initiative

Act 187 of 2015 required each public high school and public charter high school to offer a course “of high quality” and that meets or exceeds the state board's curriculum standards in computer science. ADE developed and adopted curriculum standards and courses. ADE also provided course codes for Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate computer science courses. Act 414 of 2021, known as the Computer Science Education Advancement Act, required students, beginning with the entering ninth-grade class of the 2023 school year, to complete one credit of a DESE-approved computer science course to graduate and for school districts and charter school systems to employ a computer science teacher starting with the 2024 school year.

Computer Science Enrollment Statistics



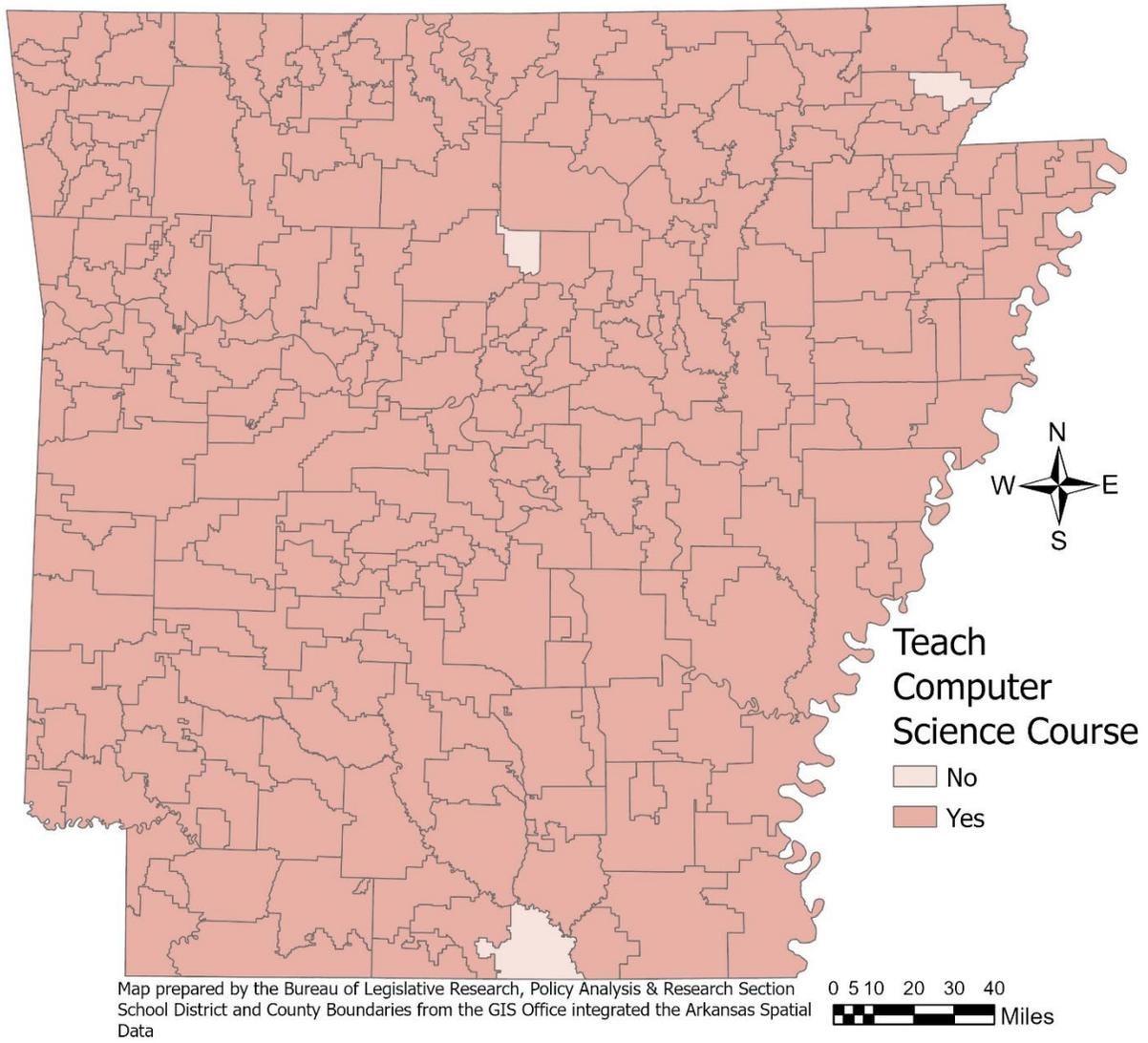
Act 654 of 2023 amended the 2021 law by adding that graduation requirements could be met by successful completion of a DESE-approved computer science course “or computer science-related career and technical education course before the student graduates.” The law also stipulates that the course could be taken as early as eighth grade to count toward a student’s graduation. Act 635 of 2023 further amended the Computer Science Education Advancement Act of 2021 by changing the language concerning employment of a computer science teacher from mandatory to permissive wording, by replacing the word “shall” hire with “may” hire.

During 2023 year, computer science courses were taught in 14³⁷ charter systems and 231 school districts (all but Marmaduke, Strong-Huttig, and Shirley school districts) as classroom-based courses or remotely as digital-learning courses, according to the APSCN data, with about 25,000 enrolled students.

No waivers from computer science course offerings were listed for the 2023 school year.

³⁷ Charter systems reported in APSCN as teaching computer science courses during the 2023 school year included: Arkansas Arts Academy, Founders Classical Academies of Arkansas, Arkansas Connections Academy, Friendship Aspire Academy, KIPP Delta Public Schools, Academics Plus Charter Schools, LISA Academy, Arkansas Virtual Academy, eSTEM Public Schools, Arkansas Lighthouse Academies, Graduate Arkansas Charter, Premier High Schools of Arkansas, Future School of Fort Smith, HAAS Hall Academy.

Computer Science Taught in Arkansas School Districts, 2023



2023 LEGISLATION

Incorporating the LEARNS Act

COMMUNITY SERVICE DIPLOMA REQUIREMENTS

The act requires each public high school student, beginning with the graduating class of 2026-2027, to complete at least seventy-five (75) hours of documented community service in grades nine through twelve (9-12) with specific requirements established for each grade.

INDOCTRINATION SECTION

Section 16 defines “prohibited indoctrination” and requires DESE to review curricular materials for indoctrination purposes, and allows ASBE to promulgate rules to implement the section.

CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE AND HUMAN TRAFFICKING PREVENTION PROGRAM

The act requires public schools to implement a child sexual abuse and human trafficking prevention program, provide training for teachers on child sexual abuse and human trafficking prevention, notify parents and legal guardians when instruction on child sexual abuse and human trafficking prevention occurs, and allow parents and legal guardians to exempt their child from instruction on child sexual abuse and human trafficking prevention. The act requires the Division of Elementary and Secondary Education to enhance or adapt curriculum materials to assist public schools in providing the required instruction on child sexual abuse and human trafficking prevention.

DIGITAL LEARNING SECTION

The act repeals the digital course requirement for graduation.

COURSE CHOICE PROGRAM

The act requires ASBE to establish a program in which students can take courses from outside providers if the course is not offered at their school or they are in a C-, D- or F-graded school.

Other 2023 Legislation

ACT 48 establishes Holocaust Education Week during the last full week of classes in January in all public schools in order to educate students about the significance and history of the Holocaust.

ACT 100 requires that the receipt of a high school diploma through the passage of a nationally recognized high school equivalency exam, such as the GED test, be treated the same as the receipt of a high school diploma from an accredited secondary school for purposes of employment.

ACT 243 authorizes the Division of Elementary and Secondary Education to consult with industry stakeholders to establish a pilot program to provide agricultural education in elementary schools beginning with the 2025-2026 school year. The act also authorizes the division to provide and report on a program evaluation regarding the success and impact of the pilot program.

ACT 662 allows a public school district or an open-enrollment public charter school to award a terminally ill student a high school diploma before the established graduation date *if* criteria are met. The act declares an emergency and is effective on and after April 11, 2023.

ACT 290 establishes Mental Health Awareness Week during the first full week of classes in May in Arkansas schools in order to raise awareness of mental illness, remove stigma and misunderstanding associated with mental illness, and provide support for those who experience mental illness.

ACT 637 requires that, beginning with the 2023-2024 school year, each public school provide instruction on adoption awareness at the beginning of each school year to students enrolled in grades six through twelve (6-12) for a period of time not to exceed one (1) hour during each school year. The adoption education required by the act may be provided during a regular class period or at a special event organized for purposes of providing the required adoption awareness instruction. The act requires the State Board of Education to develop curricula, standards, materials, and units relating to required adoption awareness instruction.

ACT 654 permits a career readiness assessment administered to a student in grades ten through twelve (10-12) to include without limitation the ACT WorkKeys National Career Readiness Certificate and requires that a Platinum, Gold, Silver, or Bronze credential through the ACT WorkKeys be used by an institution of higher education as transcribable credit towards the attainment of a postsecondary technical degree. The act allows a public high school student to meet the requirement to earn one (1) unit of credit in an approved high school computer science course by completing an approved high school computer science course or a computer science-related career and technical education course. The act also requires the Division of Career and Technical Education to review new and existing career and technical pathways to determine which courses within the career and technical pathways meet criteria for weighted credit and to publish a list of all approved career and technical pathways annually by January 1. The act permits weighted credit to be awarded for a career and technical pathway to a student upon the completion of the relevant career and technical pathway and the student's earning of the high-value industry credential aligned with the career and technical pathway.

ACT 720 repeals the requirement that the State Board of Education approve programs and activities in which students participate in order to obtain community service hours and requires that programs and activities approved for purposes of community service satisfy certain criteria.

ACT 723 requires that each health and safety course offered by a public school district or open-enrollment public charter school include information regarding breastfeeding, including without limitation the benefits of breastfeeding as health nutrition for all infants and for lactating mothers.

APPENDIX A: 38 REQUIRED COURSES



DIVISION OF ELEMENTARY & SECONDARY EDUCATION

Thirty-Eight Required High School Courses

The thirty-eight required high school courses reflect the minimum courses a school must offer. Schools must offer the following:

*38 unique courses, even if a course falls into two categories

*One math and one literacy transitional course (T)

*At least one Advanced Placement (AP) course in each of the core areas of English Language Arts, Mathematics, Science and Social Studies

*Arkansas History if not taught in the 7th or 8th grade

English Language Arts	Computer Science	Social Studies
Must offer 2 full credits from below 410000 English 9 1 full credit 411000 English 10 1 full credit Must offer 2 full credits from below 412000 English 11 1 full credit 413000 English 12 1 full credit 418010 English 11/12 U.S. History Seminal Documents 1/2 credit 418020 English 11/12 Cross-Cultural Literature 1/2 credit 418030 English 11/12 Comparative Literature 1/2 credit 418040 English 11/12 Film as Literature 1/2 credit 418100 English 11/12 Public Relations 1/2 credit 418110 English 11/12 Reading and Writing for Business 1/2 credit 418120 English 11/12 Mass Communications 1/2 credit 418200 English 11/12 Reading and Writing for STEM 1/2 credit 418210 English 11/12 Entrepreneurship and Innovation 1/2 credit 418220 English 11/12 Technical Reading and Writing for Trade and Industry 1/2 credit Must offer 1/2 credit from below 414200 Oral Communications: Personal Communication 1/2 credit 414210 Oral Communications: Professional Communication 1/2 credit Must offer 2 credits from below 419110 Critical Reading 1 full credit 417010 Creative Writing 1/2 credit 414050 Debate I 1 full credit 416010 Dramatic Literature 1 full credit 416000 ELA Drama 1/2 credit 414020 Forensics I 1 full credit 415000 Journalism 1 full credit 496030 Transitional Literacy Ready (T) 1 full credit Additional English 11/12 courses AP English course 1 full credit * <i>At least one AP course from this content area must be offered. Official IB offerings</i> Total required English Language Arts: 6 credits	Must offer 1 full credit from below Any ADE Approved Year 1 Computer Science and Computing One-Credit Course 1 full credit Total required Computer Science: 1 full credit Mathematics Must offer 4 full credits from below 430000 Algebra I 1 full credit 431000 Geometry 1 full credit 432000 Algebra II 1 full credit 433000 Pre Calculus 1 full credit Must offer 2 full credits from below 439050 Advanced Topics and Modeling in Mathematics 1 full credit 439070 Algebra III (T) 1 full credit 434010 Calculus 1 full credit 439090 Statistics 1 full credit 439120 Quantitative Literacy (T) 1 full credit 439110 Transitional Math Ready (T) 1 full credit 439130 Technical Math for College and Career AP Mathematics Course 1 full credit * <i>At least one AP course from this content area must be offered. Official IB offerings</i> Total required Mathematics: 8 full credits Science Must offer 3 full credits from below 423000 Physical Science Integrated 1 full credit 420000 Biology Integrated 1 full credit 421000 Chemistry Integrated 1 full credit Must offer 2 full credits from below 425050 Astronomy 1 full credit 421010 Chemistry II 1 full credit 425020 Earth Science 1 full credit 424020 Environmental Science 1 full credit 424030 Anatomy/Physiology 1 full credit 422010 Physics 1 full credit * <i>At least one AP course from this content area must be offered. Official IB offerings</i> Total required Science: 6 full credits Career Education Must offer programs of study representing three (3) of the following occupational areas: - Agriculture Science and Technology - Business and Marketing Technology - Family and Consumer Sciences - Trade and Industry - Science, Technology, Engineering & Mathematics Total required Career Education: 3 full credits	Must offer 3 full credits from below 470000 United States History Since 1690 1 full credit 471000 World History Since 1450 1 full credit 472000 Civics 1/2 credit 474300 Economics and Personal Finance 1/2 credit Must offer 1 full credit from below 473000 Arkansas History 1/2 credit 474700 African American History 1/2 credit 474400 Psychology 1/2 credit 474500 Sociology 1/2 credit 474100 United States Government 1/2 credit 474600 World Geography 1/2 credit AP Social Studies course 1 full credit * <i>At least one AP course from this content area must be offered. Official IB offerings</i> Total required Social Studies: 4 full credits Fine Arts Must offer 2 full credits from below 450000 Visual Art Foundations I 1 full credit 452000 Vocal Ensemble I 1 full credit Must offer 1 full credit from below 451000 Band I 1 full credit 451200 Jazz Band I 1 full credit 451100 Orchestra I 1 full credit Must offer 1/2 credit from below Any Fine Arts course within the approved discipline areas: - Music - Visual Art - Theater - Dance - Official AP and IB offerings Total required Fine Arts: 3 1/2 credits Physical Education Must offer 1 full credit from below 485010 Personal Fitness for Life 1/2 credit 485020 Recreational Sports 1/2 credit 485030 Outdoor Pursuits 1/2 credit 485040 Athletics 1/2 credit Total required Physical Education: 1 full credit Health and Wellness 480000 Health and Wellness 1/2 credit Total required Health and Wellness: 1/2 credit

1 full credit= 1 full-year course 1/2 credit= 1 semester course (T)= Transitional Course
 Approved Pre AP courses may be implemented in lieu of the corresponding courses in the thirty-eight required list. The Pre AP crosswalk is located on the DESE course approval webpage.

APPENDIX B: SMART CORE COURSES

The courses below are tied to specific course code numbers and are identified by the Arkansas Department of Education as courses that meet the Smart Core graduation requirements.

English Language/Arts -4 Credits
9th Grade English – 1 Credit
English 9
English 9 (requires ADE approval)
ESL English 9
Concurrent Credit English 9
Pre-AP English 1
10th Grade English – 1 Credit
English 10
Pre-AP English 2
English 10 (requires ADE approval)
ESL English 10
Concurrent Credit English 10
11th Grade English – 1 Credit
English 11
English 11 (Weighted – requires ADE approval)
English 11 (requires ADE approval)
ESL English 11
AP English Language and Composition
AP English Literature and Composition
IB English 11
Concurrent Credit English 11
<i>Or 1 full credit from the 11/12 English Section below</i>
12th Grade English – 1 Credit
English 12
Transitional English 12
English 12 (Weighted – requires ADE approval)
English 12 (requires ADE approval)
ESL English 12
AP English Language and Composition
AP English Literature and Composition
IB English 12
Other Concurrent Credit Language Arts
Concurrent Credit English 12
<i>Or 1 full credit from the 11/12 English section below:</i>
<i>English 11/12 The half-credit courses from the list below may be combined to fulfill 11th and/or 12th Grade English.</i>
U.S. History Seminal Documents
Cross-Cultural Literature

Comparative Literature
Film as Literature
Public Relations
Reading and Writing for Business Professions
Reading and Writing for STEM Professions
Mass Communications
Entrepreneurship and Innovation
Technical Reading/Writing for Trade & Industry
<u>Mathematics -4 Credits</u>
<u>Algebra I - 1 Credit</u>
Algebra I
Pre-AP Algebra I
Algebra I (requires ADE approval)
Concurrent Credit Algebra I
Algebra I-Part A & Algebra I-Part B
<u>Geometry - 1 Credit</u>
Geometry
Geometry (requires ADE approval)
Concurrent Credit Geometry
Geometry-Part A & Geometry-Part B
Pre-AP Geometry w/Statistics
<u>Algebra II - 1 Credit</u>
Algebra II
Pre-AP Algebra 2
Algebra II (requires ADE approval)
Concurrent Credit Algebra II
IB Math: Applications and Interpretation SL Year 1
<u>Fourth Math or Computer Science Flex* - 1 Credit – A CS Flex credit or one of the following:</u>
Pre Calculus
Calculus
Advanced Topics and Modeling in Mathematics
Algebra III
Mathematical Applications and Algorithms
Statistics
Transitional Math Ready (SREB)
Quantitative Literacy
Technical Math for College and Career
CASE: Ag Power and Technical System Weighted Credit
Accounting
Civil Engineering & Architecture (PLTW) Weighted Credit
Digital Electronics (PLTW) Weighted Credit
Engineering Design and Development (PLTW)

Pre Calculus (requires ADE approval)
Calculus (Weighted - requires ADE approval)
AP Calculus AB
AP Calculus BC
Elective Mathematics I (requires ADE approval)
Elective Mathematics II (requires ADE approval)
AP Statistics
Discrete Mathematics (Weighted - Requires ADE Approval)
IB Math: Applications and Interpretation SL Year 2
Concurrent Credit Pre Calculus/Trigonometry
Concurrent Credit Statistics
Concurrent Credit Math Beyond Algebra II
Science – 3 Credits
Biology– 1 Credit
Biology - Integrated
Pre-AP Biology
Biology - Integrated (Weighted - requires ADE approval)
Biology - Integrated (requires ADE approval)
AP Biology
IB Biology
Concurrent Credit Biology
Physical Science Credit - 1 Credit
Chemistry - Integrated
Chemistry II
Pre-AP Chemistry
Physics
Physical Science - Integrated
Aerospace Engineering Weighted Credit
Principles of Engineering (PLTW)
Chemistry - Integrated (Weighted - requires ADE approval)
Chemistry - Integrated (requires ADE approval)
AP Chemistry
IB Chemistry
Physics (Weighted - requires ADE approval)
Physics (requires ADE approval)
AP Physics C: Electricity and Magnetism
AP Physics C: Mechanics
IB Physics
AP Physics 1
AP Physics 2
Physical Science (Weighted - requires ADE approval)
Physical Science - Integrated (requires ADE approval)
Concurrent Credit Physical Science
Concurrent Credit Chemistry

Concurrent Credit Physics
Third Science or Computer Science Flex* - 1 Credit – an additional Biology, Physical Science, CS Flex, or 1 of the following:
Environmental Science
Anatomy/Physiology
Earth Science
Astronomy
Concurrent Credit College Algebra
Principles of Agriculture Science-Animal (CASE) Weighted Credit
Natural Resources & Ecology (CASE) Weighted Credit
Principles of Agriculture Science-Plant (CASE) Weighted Credit
Chemistry of Foods
Human Body Systems
AP Environmental Science
Concurrent Credit Anatomy and Physiology
Concurrent Credit Environmental Science
Concurrent Credit Earth Science
Concurrent Credit Astronomy
IB Environmental Systems and Societies
<u>Social Studies -3 Credits</u>
<u>Civics - 0.5 Credit</u>
Civics (0.5 credit)
Civics (0.5 credit) (requires ADE approval)
IB American Government
AP United States Government & Politics (for Civics credit)
Concurrent Credit Civics
<u>World History - 1 Credit</u>
World History Since 1450
Pre-AP World History
World History (requires ADE approval)
World History (Weighted - requires ADE approval)
AP World History
Concurrent Credit World History
<u>United States History - 1 Credit</u>
United States History Since 1890
United States History (Weighted - requires ADE approval)
AP United States History
United States History (requires ADE approval)
IB History of the Americas
Concurrent Credit United States History
<u>Economics - 0.5 Credit</u>
Economics with Personal Finance (0.5 credit)
Financial Planning (0.5 Econ/PF credit, 1.0 Career Focus credit)
Concurrent Credit Economics with Personal Finance (1 credit)
ADE Approved AP Macroeconomics & Personal Finance (0.5 credit)

ADE Approved AP Microeconomics & Personal Finance (0.5 credit)
Personal Finance
See https://bit.ly/3830LjE
*Computer Science - Optional Flex Credit
<i>Optional credits for 4th math or 3rd science requirements</i>
Any course starting with 465 or 565
See https://goo.gl/y95ZTc
Health and Safety - 0.5 Credit
Health and Wellness
JROTC Health
Health and Safety (requires ADE approval)
Other Concurrent Credit Health Ed.
Physical Education - 0.5 Credit
Personal Fitness for Life
Recreational Sports
Outdoor Pursuits
Athletics
JROTC Physical Education
Physical Education (requires ADE approval)
Concurrent Credit Physical Ed.
Fine Arts - 0.5 Credit
Credit chosen from courses coded 450000-459999 or 550010-559999
Oral Communication - 0.5 Credit
Forensics I
Debate I
Integrated Oral Communication NT
Oral Communication: Personal Communication
Oral Communication: Professional Communication
Oral Comm. (Weighted - requires ADE approval)
Concurrent Credit Oral Communication
Oral Communication (requires ADE approval)
Career Focus - 6 Credits
Unused credits chosen from courses beginning with a 4 or 5