



## Bureau Brief



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### Arkansas Comprehensive Testing, Assessment and Accountability Program

The Arkansas Comprehensive Testing, Assessment, and Accountability Program (ACTAAP) A.C.A. § 6-15-401 et seq., is the statutory framework for the state's program of student academic assessment and district and school accountability. The courts have called ACTAAP the "blueprint for education in Arkansas." The three stated purposes of ACTAAP are:

- To improve student learning and classroom instruction.
- To provide public accountability.
- To provide evaluation data to assist policymakers.

The statutory goal for ACTAAP is to ensure all Arkansas students graduate from high school ready for success in college and career. ACTAAP provides the statutory framework necessary for all students in Arkansas public schools to demonstrate grade-level academic proficiency in accordance with state curriculum frameworks, performance standards, and assessments.

Act 54 of 1983 created an initial system of student testing and assessment, but was later amended by a number of measures to reach beyond student testing and include a school accountability element. As a result, ACTAAP now establishes the manner in which the state holds schools and districts accountable for the performance of their students on state tests. The accountability program under the ACTAAP state statute works in conjunction with the federal **No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)**, also known as the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). ACTAAP requires the State Board of Education to identify and address schools in need of improvement in compliance with the No Child Left Behind Act.

#### **Assessment**

The centerpiece of ACTAAP is a testing system in which every student and public school is required to participate.

The tests are used to gauge students' understanding of the state curriculum. The Arkansas Department of Education (ADE) then uses the collective test scores to measure the quality of the education that schools provide. These tests are given to assess school readiness in kindergarten and to assess math and literacy at the 1<sup>st</sup> through 8<sup>th</sup> grade levels. ACTAAP also calls for End-of-Course testing and college readiness testing (pre-ACT assessments for 8<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> graders) for high school students. The state may also give tests in science, civics and government as mandated by ADE. For students who are not proficient in reading, writing and math, ACTAAP calls for an individual evaluation and the development of an academic improvement plan. Currently, the state's assessment program is transitioning to a new set of tests aligned with the Common Core curriculum. These tests, known as the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC), will be used to determine whether students are college or career ready.

#### **Accountability**

Each school and school district is required to demonstrate students' ability to perform at proficient levels in reading and writing literacy and mathematics. Schools are then held accountable for student achievement through a ratings program based on their students' annual performance, academic growth, graduation rate (for secondary schools), and any other criteria required by law or rule of the ADE. These dimensions are determined based on students' performance on state assessments and other criteria set by ADE rules. Each school's designation must be published annually and be generally accessible to parents and to the public.

The current configuration of the school rating system was established by Act 1429 of 2013. Under previous law, the

rating system was based on a 1 to 5 rating in two categories: annual improvement (also known as the gains rating) and annual performance (also known as the status rating). These rating categories were different from the school improvement labels schools received under the federal No Child Left Behind Act and are different from the school designations under the ESEA Flexibility Plan. Act 1429 eliminated the annual improvement rating and dropped the 1 to 5 rating scale from the **school performance rating**. ADE is currently working on developing criteria to be used to rate schools on their performance. Act 1429 also amended the Arkansas School Recognition Program to provide financial rewards to public schools with high student performance, academic growth, and graduation rates.

To ensure that all schools plan strategies to improve instruction and learning, ACTAAP requires public schools and public school districts to develop and file with ADE a comprehensive school improvement plan (ACSIP). This plan is designed to ensure that all students demonstrate proficiency on all portions of the state mandated assessments. These school improvement plans must include strategies to address the achievement gap existing for any identifiable group or subgroup from the academic standard.

ACTAAP also establishes the **academic distress** program under which schools or school districts can be sanctioned for low student achievement. The law requires the State Board of Education to determine the criteria for academic distress, and the State Board has incorporated provisions of the state's ESEA Flexibility Plan for that purpose.