

**Consortium for Policy Research in Education (CPRE)
Assessment and Accountability in the Fifty States: 1999-2000**

ARKANSAS

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All information was current as of that date.*

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State Assessment System (1999-2000 school year)

1. Provide a brief overview and history of the assessment system as the context.

The **Arkansas Comprehensive Testing, Assessment, and Accountability program (ACTAAP)** is a comprehensive system encompassing high academic standards, professional development, student assessment and accountability for schools and students, and fulfills the requirements of various Arkansas statutes, including Act 999 of 1999.

2. What are the characteristics of the state assessment system, including:

- *Name of Assessment Instrument(s) or Program(s)* ACTAAP has two components: one is a **Criterion Referenced Testing** program consisting of Benchmark Exams and End-of-Course exams, the other is a Norm Referenced Testing Program currently consisting of **Stanford Achievement Test**, 9th edition.
- *Grade Levels and Subjects Tested*
 - Criterion-referenced Benchmark Examinations: grades 4, 6, and 8, in reading, writing, and mathematics.
 - End-of-Course Algebra when completed.
 - End-of-Course Geometry when completed.

- End-of-Course Literacy when completed.
- Norm-referenced assessment: grades 5, 7, and 10.
- *Norm or Criterion Referenced Both*
- *Matrix or Census Testing Census*
- *Item Types (including proportions if available via Internet or interview) such as: traditional or enhanced multiple choice, performance tasks, open-ended questions, portfolios, essays, etc.* The tests consist of enhanced multiple choice questions, open ended questions and essays.
- *Time of Testing (specific month(s) or testing window)* See table on the following page.
- *High School Exit Exam (date of implementation and/or phase-in timeline)* No high school exit exam in currently in place in Arkansas.
- *Other Assessments* NAEP, ACT, SAT, AP, PLAN, EXPLORE, and others.
- *Transitional or Final Assessment System Final* (but in the implementation phase)

Assessments	Grade Level	Month Administered
Criterion-Referenced		
Primary Benchmark	Grade 4	April
Intermediate Benchmark	Grade 6	April
Middle Level Benchmark	Grade 8	April
End-of-Course – Algebra I	When Completed	January/May
End-of-Course – Geometry	When Completed	January/May
End-of-Course – Literacy	When Completed	April
Norm-Referenced	Grades 5, 7, and 10	September

3. *Who designed and produced the assessment(s) used by the state?*

- *State Department of Education*
- *Commercial Testing Organization*
- *State teachers and administrators*
- *Assessment Committee*
- *Other*

In the criterion-referenced testing program, the Arkansas Department of Education works in partnership with the testing company and content advisory committee of Arkansas teachers to develop test items. Criterion-referenced tests are customized around the academic standards in the Arkansas Curriculum Frameworks. Items are additionally reviewed by a bias review committee and by a citizens advisory committee. A standards setting committee also recommends performance levels to the state board of education on each of the examinations.

4. *What are the state requirements for local assessment, including the types of assessments and their use in areas such as reporting and accountability, as well as Title I adequate yearly progress? What grade levels and subjects are tested?*

Arkansas law requires schools and districts to do the following:

Schools must assess children in K-3 according to a local assessment plan to determine whether or not they are functioning at grade level. Children who are not performing at grade level in K-3 must have an academic improvement plan and must have intervention/remediation strategies delivered to them.

Students who do not perform at the proficient level on any part of the primary intermediate or middle level benchmarks or on any End-of-Course examination must have an academic improvement plan and must be remediated.

5. *Is the state assessment system aligned with the state standards? Are there plans for alignment, and if so, how will the assessment and standards become aligned?*

- *Refining standards*
- *Revamping assessments*
- *Adding components to assessments*
What is the timeline for completion of the alignment?

All of the items on the criterion referenced test are based on the content standards in the Arkansas curriculum frameworks. The frameworks are revised according to a state board approved schedule. Since the criterion referenced items are given to the schools after each test has been scored, the criterion referenced assessments are new with each testing.

6. *What is the state's approach for ensuring alignment and what evidence of that alignment is provided?*

Arkansas officials affirm that all CRT items are aligned with the state curriculum. Committees of teachers write, revise, and/or review each item. No item moves into the test without the approval of the content committees, the bias review committee, and the citizens committee.

7. *How is the data included in the state assessment system used?*

- *Student Grade Promotion/Retention, Graduation, Diploma Certification*
- *Teacher, School and/or District accountability*
- *Program Evaluation (Identify federal, state programs)*
- *Identification of students for programs like Title I, state CompEd, Bilingual, etc.*
- *Instructional guidance to local administrators and/or teachers*
- *School improvement (e.g., preparing a school improvement plan)*

Arkansas has identified the following as uses/functions of the assessment system: improve student learning and classroom instruction, provide public accountability by establishing

expected achievement levels and reporting on student achievement, provide program evaluation data, assist policymakers in decision-making.

8. *Are there changes planned for the state assessment system (proposed or enacted and to be implemented)? If so, what do these plans include? Why are these changes being made and what is the timeline? Are there implications for the state reporting or accountability systems (Title I or in general)?*

Arkansas officials are working to get the entire assessment system phased in, and they are on schedule to date. The assessments should be implemented according to the following schedule:

1998 – 99	Primary Benchmark
1999 – 00	Middle Level Benchmark
2000 – 01	None
2001 – 02	Intermediate Benchmark End-of-Course Algebra I End-of-Course Geometry End-of-Course Literacy

9. *What have been the major issues and challenges in the area of state assessment? Explain.*

Arkansas officials identified full implementation of the accountability program as a current challenge; encouraging educators and administrators to focus on standards, fostering adequate communication not only with educators but with the community at large and parents. Resources – both financial and in terms of time – pose continual challenges for the state and for districts.

Inclusion Policies for Assessment

1. *What exclusions are made in the current state assessment for students with disabilities? LEP? Who makes the decision about exclusion of a particular child? Does the state collect data or in other ways monitor the number and types of students excluded? Does that vary by test?*

Policies with regard to students with disabilities: Each student in the specified grades shall participate in the criterion-referenced testing program and the norm-referenced testing program. (This will be fully implemented during the 2000-2001 academic year.) A student shall participate in the Arkansas Alternate Assessment Program only upon the formal determination of the student's IEP committee, as documented in the student's individualized educational program.

The IEP committee shall determine whether or not participation in the standard state assessment program is appropriate for students with IEPs. Students with disabilities for whom it is deemed inappropriate to take the standard state assessments with accommodations shall participate in the Arkansas Alternate Assessment Program.

Policies with regard to students with Limited English Proficiency: A Language Proficiency Committee shall recommend participation in the Arkansas Limited English Proficiency

Assessment Program based on limited English proficiency only. The committee shall assess English proficiency growth annually to determine appropriate participation in the standard state assessment program or the Arkansas Alternate Assessment Program. LEP students may take the Arkansas Limited English Proficiency Alternate Assessment Program for a period which shall not exceed three years before entering the standard state assessment.

2. What accommodations and/or modifications are made on the current state assessment for students with disabilities? LEP?

Accommodations are allowed to students participating in the administration of standard state assessment instruments. For an accommodation to be authorized, it must be specified within a student's IEP for large-scale testing and it must be used in classroom assessments.

Acceptable accommodations include:

- Additional time
- Large print
- Braille
- Use of a scribe
- Small group testing
- Individualized testing
- Testing in a study carrel or other location that reduces distractions
- Reading the test to student (only for math and writing portions, may not be used on sections measuring reading).
- Large print

This list is not exhaustive, other accommodations may be considered based on individual needs.

3. Does the state provide assessments in languages other than English? If so, describe. In what grades and subjects?

No, the state does not provide standard assessments in languages other than English. Beginning in 2000-2001, an alternate portfolio assessment will accommodate Limited English Proficient students.

4. Does the state provide alternative assessments for students with disabilities? If so, describe. For which students and in which subjects and at what ages?

Yes, the state provides the Arkansas Alternate Assessment Program.

5. Does the state have a goal for the inclusion of students with disabilities and/or LEP students on the statewide tests? Does the state use any strategies to encourage the inclusion of students with disabilities? LEP students?

The state does have the goal of full inclusion of students with disabilities or LEP students on statewide tests. Participation levels in the authorized alternate assessment should not exceed a maximum proportion of the total population that shall be established by the State Board of

Education in the year 2000. Excessive participation in the Alternate Assessment shall result in district and school sanctions.

6. Are changes planned in the for the inclusion of SWD and LEP students in the state assessment system (proposed or enacted and to be implemented)? If so, what do these plans include? Why are these changes being made and what is the timeline? Are there implications for the state reporting or accountability systems (Title I or in general)?

Beginning next year, Arkansas will fully enforce policies to include all students in testing, whether in the regular assessments or through the alternate assessment program. Performance of special populations will be reported.

Performance Standards

1. How many and what performance levels has the state established for its assessments?

Four performance levels have been established for the state-mandated criterion-referenced examinations. The general definitions for these standards are as follows:

Advanced: Advanced students demonstrate superior performance well beyond proficient grade-level performance. They can apply Arkansas established reading, writing and mathematics skills to solve complex problems and complete demanding tasks on their own. They can make insightful connections between abstract and concrete ideas and provide well-supported explanations and arguments.

Proficient: Proficient students demonstrate solid academic performance for the grade tested and are well-prepared for the next level of school. They can use Arkansas established reading, writing, and mathematics skills and knowledge to solve problems and complete tasks on their own. Students can tie ideas together and explain the ways their ideas are connected.

Basic: Basic students show substantial skills in reading, writing, and mathematics; however they only partially demonstrate the abilities to apply these skills. They demonstrate a need for some additional assistance, commitment or study to reach the proficient level.

Below Basic: Below basic students fail to show sufficient mastering of skills in reading, writing, and mathematics to attain the basic level.

The only tests for which scaled scores defining these levels have been set are the Primary Benchmark Exam and the Middle Level Benchmark Exam. Similar scales will be established by the State Board of Education as additional tests are complete and data become available.

Performance Level	Scaled Score Ranges for Performance Levels for Mathematics		Scales Score Ranges for Performance Levels for Literacy	
	Primary	Middle Level	Primary	Middle Level
Advanced	250 and above	250 and above	250 and above	250 and above
Proficient	200-249	200-249	200-249	200-249
Basic	155-199	149-199	179-199	164-199
Below Basic	154 and below	148 and below	178 and below	163 and below

2. Has the state set acceptable levels or targets for schools, districts or the state on tests, drop-out rates or other measures?

- *Target level proficient*
- *Percentage of students expected to attain target level* 100%
- *Time period in which to attain level Tier I goals:* For the Tier I goals, Arkansas has set the time period in which to attain the target at ten years. For Tier II goals, the time period has not yet been set.
- *Annual increase required* This varies for each school, but is defined as the number of students not at the proficient level divided by 10 years.

Arkansas has set the following goals, as part of the Tier I accountability indicators:

Indicator	Goal (Definition)	Grade Level(s)
Performance on State-Mandated Criterion-Referenced Tests	100% of a school's students shall perform at or above the "proficient" level in reading and writing. 100% of a school's students shall perform at or above the "proficient" level in mathematics.	4, 6, and 8
Performance on State-Mandated Criterion-Referenced Tests	100% of a school's secondary students shall perform at or above the "proficient" level in Algebra I. 100% of a school's secondary students shall perform at or above the "proficient" level in Geometry. 100% of a school's secondary students shall perform at or above the "proficient" level in Literacy	Secondary
School Drop Out	At least 99% of secondary students will remain in school to complete the 12th grade.	7 – 12

Average Daily Attendance	Average daily attendance rate will be at least 95%.	Kindergarten – 12
Classes Taught by an Appropriately Licensed Teacher	100% of a school's classes will be taught by an appropriately licensed teacher.	Kindergarten – 12
Professional Development	100% of a school's certified staff will complete at least 30 hours of approved professional development annually.	Kindergarten – 12
School Safety	Schools will be free of drugs, weapons, and violent acts.	Kindergarten – 12

3. How are these performance standards calculated? What data are included in the calculations, and at what proportions (e.g. assessment results 60%, dropout and attendance rates 40%). How are the calculations made? What is the final unit of analysis for reporting school and district achievement levels (e.g. performance index, grade, category)?

The performance levels described in question #1 are based solely on assessment data.

When fully developed, the final unit of analysis for reporting school achievement levels will be a point system, which will incorporate both cognitive and non-cognitive indicators. Since the determination of rewards and sanctions will be based on points assigned to the various indicators, it is extremely important that such a system be fair and statistically and legally defensible. It is necessary to allow appropriate time for sufficient data to be gathered that will permit an accurate measurement of trends and improvement in a sufficient number of indicators.

4. Are all students, schools and districts included in these performance calculations? If not, who is excluded?

All students should be included, the only exception being students taking the alternate assessments. For the purposes of assigned points for state-mandated criterion-referenced tests under the Tier II accountability component, the performance of each of the student categories – general population, special education students, Limited English Proficient students and high mobility students – shall be measured.

5. Are changes planned for the state performance standards (proposed or enacted and to be implemented)? If so, what do these plans include? Why are these changes being made and what is the timeline? Are there implications for the state reporting or accountability systems (Title I or in general)?

No changes are currently anticipated.

6. What proportion of schools and/or districts fail to meet acceptable levels on performance targets?

Arkansas is in the process of implementing a new accountability system, so this has not yet determined.

Reporting Performance Data

1. Describe the characteristics of the state performance data reporting system (by whom, what data, who is the audience) for each of the following levels:

- *Student reports*

Individual student reports of assessment results should be sent to parents – the Department of Education sends two copies of student reports to the school, one for the school and one for the parents. It is the responsibility of the school to ensure that parents receive a copy.

- *School reports*

Each public school in Arkansas will have a **School Performance Report** that will be created through the combined efforts of the local school, district, and ADE (to be implemented). The **School Performance Report** will provide parents and the public data upon which to evaluate their schools and provide benchmarks for measuring school improvement.

Also, each school will provide a report for parents and community. This report will include a narrative description (such as prepared under Tier III indicators) that will highlight the school's improvement plan and indicate progress made in implementing the performance indicators within that plan.

- *District reports*

District data that is available on the Arkansas Department of Education website includes the following:

- ✓ District results on state Literacy and Math tests, by grade level and proficiency level
- ✓ ACT test results
- ✓ Attendance rate
- ✓ Retention rate
- ✓ Stanford Achievement test results, by grade and percentile.

- *State reports*

Arkansas publishes the following data for the state and district levels on the public reporting section of the Department of Education website, the **Arkansas School Information Site (AS-IS)**:

- ✓ Dropout rate
- ✓ Attendance rate
- ✓ Completion rate (9-12)
- ✓ Retention rate (K-9)
- ✓ Average teacher's salary

- ✓ Stanford-9 at or below 25th percentile, Stanford-9 above 50th percentile, Stanford-9 above 75th percentile
- ✓ CRT-Literacy Test Meeting/exceeding proficiency
- ✓ CRT-Math Test Meeting/exceeding proficiency
- ✓ Percent taking ACT, average ACT score on last test taken, percent scoring 19 or above
- ✓ AP tests per 1K students
- ✓ Percent needing college remediation
- ✓ Expense per ADM
- ✓ Athletic expense per ADM

Also available: state results, by grade level and proficiency level for state Literacy and Math tests.

- *Title I reports*

Arkansas publishes a Title I report with descriptive information on Title I, information on Targeted Assistance and Schoolwide programs, schools in need of improvement, poverty level of schools, disaggregated student participation, distinguished schools, instructional areas, and staff information.

2. How are the data distributed? When during the year (month or time period after assessment)? To whom (students, teachers, parents, the media, the community)?

The School Performance Report will be mailed directly to parents from the State Department of Education. Other data is available on the state website. The Department of Education is able to provide criterion-referenced data to schools by September (testing in spring).

3. At what level(s) are data disaggregated (state, district and school levels)? For what groups are disaggregated data reported (see Internet sites for state, district and school level report cards)?

- *Gender*
- *Race*
- *LEP status*
- *Migrant Status*
- *SWD*
- *SES*

The state disaggregates by race, gender, LEP, disabilities, student mobility, and socio-economic status. Disaggregated data is available for districts, other individual reports are available upon request.

4. Does trend data exist from the state assessments (example: Texas State Assessment data is available from “1996-97 on”)?

Because Arkansas is implementing a new assessment system, trend data is not yet available.

5. How are the results of students with disabilities and limited English proficiency reported? Are they included in the aggregate scores reported to the public, or disaggregated by group?

Although the same standards of student performance will be expected of all students, assessment data will be analyzed and reported both separately and combined. The purpose of tracking performance of these student groups is to focus on narrowing the achievement gap between them and their peers and to ensure that all student populations are annually and systematically monitored. Beginning with the 1999-2000 mandatory assessments, results will be reported separately for the following categories of students:

- ✓ General population (excludes special groups)
- ✓ Special education
- ✓ Limited English proficient
- ✓ Highly mobile
- ✓ Combined population (includes all special groups).

Beginning with the 2000-2001 mandatory assessments, the number of students not tested through either mandatory criterion-referenced and norm-referenced assessments or Alternate Assessment program will be reported by school.

6. What are the state's requirements for the use of data in school and district improvement planning?

Each school is required to engage in the development and implementation of a school improvement plan. The initial step in the planning model is a structured process that leads to disaggregation of student achievement and other student data. The study of this data helps school identify areas within the curriculum where student performance does not meet expectations.

7. Are changes planned for performance reporting (proposed or enacted and to be implemented)? If so, what do these plans include? Why are these changes being made and what is the timeline? Are there implications for the accountability system (Title I or in general)?

Full development of the School Performance Report is a major change on the horizon. Moving to one comprehensive school improvement plan and set of performance standards is another change.

Furthermore, beginning with the kindergarten class of 2000-2001, the scores of all students classified as special education students participating in the mandatory criterion-referenced and norm-referenced assessments with or without accommodations shall be aggregated with those of the general population students according the following calendar:

- ✓ 2004-2005: Primary Benchmark
- ✓ 2005-2006: Fifth Grade Norm-Referenced
- ✓ 2006-2007: Intermediate Benchmark
- ✓ 2007-2008: Seventh Grade Norm-Referenced

- ✓ 2008-2009: Middle Level Benchmark
- ✓ 2009-2010: End-of-Course (where applicable)
- ✓ 2010-2011: Tenth Grade Norm-referenced
- ✓ 2011-2012: End of Course Literacy

8. *What have been the major issues and challenges in the area of performance standards and reporting? Explain.*

One of the challenges is ensuring uniformity in reporting – particularly in when collecting non-cognitive indicators, for which districts may have slightly differing definitions of what should be reported.

State Accountability System (1999-2000 school year)

1. *Provide a brief overview and history of the accountability system as the context.*

Arkansas is expanding from an accountability system which is primarily district-based to one that focuses on the school site as the unit of change and uses multiple measures. Currently, identification of schools and districts - the Academic Distress Designation System - is based on the results of norm-referenced tests, which are not always perfectly aligned with curriculum. When the Arkansas criterion-referenced tests are in place, the system will be based on these exams instead.

The new ACTAAP accountability model focuses on each individual school and is constructed around a three-tiered system that includes statewide indicators, individual school improvement indicators, and a locally-generated school accountability narrative. Once appropriate time has elapsed to evaluate trends and improvement expectations in a sufficient number of indicators and a statistically defensible point assignment system can be developed, points for each of the statewide and individual school improvement indicators will be given. The point system will form the basis for rewards and sanctions.

Act 999 of 1999 mandates “that all students in the public schools of this state demonstrate grade-level academic proficiency through the application of knowledge and skills in the core academic subjects consistent with state-curriculum frameworks, performance standards, and assessments.”

2. *What are the characteristics of the state accountability system?*

- *Who is held accountable (students, schools, districts)?*
- *For what are they held accountable (adequate yearly progress, student achievement, processes, multiple non-cognitive indicators, etc)?*
- *Using what criteria (state assessments, local assessments, both state and local criteria)?*
- *To what targets or performance levels?*
- *With what consequences (promotion or graduation, program improvement, additional planning, state takeover, rewards, assistance, etc.)?*

Organize the response into the following subsections:

- *Student Accountability/Rewards and Sanctions*

The results of End-of-Course exams shall become a part of each student's transcript or permanent record. Act 855 of 1999 mandates that students in Grades K-3 not performing at grade level during the regular school year shall participate in an ADE approved remediation program or a summer school remediation program to be eligible for promotion to the next grade.

- *School Accountability/Rewards and Sanctions*

The school accountability system is three-tiered and holds schools accountable for outcomes (test scores/academic performance), as well as processes/non-academic indicators such as: drop out rate, daily attendance, classes taught by a licensed teacher, professional development, and school safety.

Tier I Indicators, all state-mandated, are based on performance goals and apply to every school in the state. These concern: performance on state-mandated criterion-referenced tests, drop-out rates, average daily attendance, classes taught by an appropriately licensed teacher, professional development, and school safety. All goals aim for 100% compliance, with the exception of drop-out (99%) and attendance (95%). (See section on performance standards.)

Tier II Indicators are based on trend and improvement goals on state-mandated criterion-referenced tests and on school-selected indicators. Schools can select five indicators on which they will improve; these can focus on the improvement of the academic performance of sub-groups.

Tier III is a narrative developed by the staff of each school. This annual narrative of approximately 500 words generally describes data sources (e.g. criterion-referenced tests, norm-referenced tests) used to address state and local performance indicators. The narrative also describes progress that the school has made in formulating the plan and in successfully implementing the trend and performance indicators within the school improvement process.

Schools that demonstrate high performance and/or growth on both the state-mandated and school-selected indicators may be eligible for rewards. The two categories of rewards are **Performance Awards** and **Growth Trend and Improvement Awards**. Rewards could include cash payments, but reward system is being phased in over time and will be implemented as the indicator performance levels are established through the standard setting process.

To avoid sanctions, each school is expected to achieve annually a minimum percentage of its total possible points given for the accountability indicators described within the three-tiered system. Failure to do so will result in the following designations:

- high priority status – first year
- alert status – second year
- low performing status – third year
- academic distress phase I status – fourth year.
- Additional designations are Academic Distress Phase II and Phase III (different from the district Academic Distress system).

The ADE reserves the right, for any school in any of the designations above, to mandate a specified intensive intervention plan which could include, but not be limited to, specific one-year goals in curriculum, instruction, assessment, and professional development. This plan could also include a mandated summer school program for students performing below grade level.

Finally, as part of the state's accreditation process, each school is required to engage in the development and implementation of a school improvement plan based on priorities indicated by student assessment and other pertinent data. This plan is designed to ensure that all students demonstrate proficiency on all portions of the state-mandated criterion-referenced exams. The initial step in the planning model is a structured process that leads to disaggregation of student achievement and other student data. The study of this data helps schools identify areas within the curriculum where student performance does not meet expectations.

- *District Accountability/Rewards and Sanctions*

Arkansas is expanding from an accountability system which is primarily district-based to one that focuses on the school site as the unit of change. Current rules and regulations governing district-based Academic Distress will remain in effect until ACTAAP is fully implemented.

At the moment (but soon to be phased out) districts may be identified for sanctions through the designation of Academic Distress, which came about as a result of Act 915 of the 1995 legislative session. There are three phases of Academic Distress: I, II, and III. A district is initially placed in Phase I Academic Distress if 40% of students score below 25th percentile on state tests. Phase III Academic Distress is takeover of the district by the state.

3. *What methods of measuring progress are used in the state accountability system?*

- *Relative growth*
- *Absolute target*
- *Narrowing the Gap between high and low achievers*

The new accountability system in Arkansas will measure relative growth and set an absolute target: While the Tier II indicators consist of trend and improvement goals, the Tier I goals set absolute targets for cognitive and non-cognitive indicators. Finally, through the selection of Tier II indicators, schools may elect to focus on narrowing the gap between high and low achievers. The old system – district based Academic Distress – was focused on an absolute target.

4. *Are all students included in calculating the measures of progress? If not, who is excluded (probe on inclusion of SWD and LEP students)?*

All students, schools, and districts are included in performance calculations, but assessment data will be analyzed and reported separately for three student classifications: special education students, LEP students, and high mobility students.

State regulations affirm that all students at state-tested grade levels must be accounted for in the standard or alternate assessment. Failure to account for all students in the manner prescribed shall lead to an inquiry which may result in a recommendation to the State Board for loss of accreditation or other sanctions.

5. *How do the general state accountability system and the system of accountability for Title I schools compare? Are they the same, or different? How?*

Arkansas is progressing towards one comprehensive system for Title I and for state accountability. At the moment, however, the Title I system is in a state of flux, pending implementation of the new accountability system, and adequate yearly progress has not been calculated.

6. *Are subgroup performance results used as an indicator in the calculation of state accountability measures? If so, how? To identify schools or districts in need of improvement? For recognition and rewards?*

For purposes of assigned points under Tier II, the performance of special populations (special ed, LEP and highly mobile) will be measured. Improvement on other subgroup performances may be chosen by schools as an additional Tier II indicator. Schools may be eligible for a growth trend and improvement award. The state provides the following as an example of a school-selected Tier II goal:

- The gap between the scale score in mathematics on the Primary Benchmark Exam for African-American students and white students will decrease by 10% each year.

7. *Are charter and/or non-public schools included in the accountability system? If so, how?*

Charter schools are only recently approved; they will be part of the accountability system.

8. *Are changes planned for the state accountability system (proposed or enacted and to be implemented)? If so, what do these plans include? Why are these changes being made and what is the timeline?*

Many changes to the system are under discussion; proposals are currently out for public comment.

In addition, the state is working towards full implementation of the accountability system, including the development of the accountability point system. The following timeline outlines the baseline year, or the first year in which official data for each Tier I indicator will be collected:

1998 – 99	Primary Benchmark
1999 – 00	Middle Level Benchmark School Dropout Average Daily Attendance Classes Taught by an Appropriately Licensed Teacher Professional Development School Safety
2000 – 01	None
2001 – 02	Intermediate Benchmark

End-of-Course Algebra I
End-of-Course Geometry
End-of-Course Literacy

Even though baseline data accumulation was begun with the 1998-99 school year, actual points for rewards and sanctions will not be assigned until 2001-2002. The complete accountability point system will become fully operational, with all indicators, in 2003-04.

9. *What have been the major issues and challenges in the area of accountability? Explain.*

Arkansas officials identified two major challenges:

- To make sure the accountability system is statistically and legally defensible.
- To articulate clearly the accountability system to schools and to the general public.

Identifying and Assisting Low Performing Schools and Districts

1. *How are schools and districts identified as low performing? Using what criteria? Do the identification processes and/or criteria differ for Title I and non-Title I schools?*

Through implementation of the new accountability system, Arkansas is moving to one method of defining low performance and one comprehensive school improvement plan.

Currently (although this system will be modified in the near future) districts may be identified as low-performing based on norm-referenced tests (distress is defined as 40% of students in bottom quartile) plus secondary indicators such as attendance rate, dropout rate, number of certified teachers, achievement disparities, number of students participating in core subjects.

2. *Does the district or the state decide whether a school is low performing? If the district is involved in the process, how much discretion do they have?*

The state is responsible for making decisions regarding low performance.

3. *What types of assistance are provided to these schools and districts by the state?*

- *Evaluation and Planning* yes, see below
- *Financial* yes, see below
- *Expert Assistance* yes, see below

The following types of assistance are provided for schools and districts in academic distress:

- On-going staff development and training is available to all districts regardless of performance, as Arkansas believes in assistance before sanctions.
- Research-based practices are recommended by the state.
- A state staff person from Standards Assurance Unit is assigned to any district that is placed in academic distress, these specialists go to the districts on a weekly basis.
- Low performing schools must write school improvement plans that are data driven, based on their own assessment results. If a district/school is in academic distress, they must write a plan as well.

- Schools are visited by an external team.
- Schools and districts in distress are eligible for additional resources, be they fiscal or human resources.
- School staff are trained in how to use data to improve instruction.
- Math and literacy specialists are assigned to educational cooperatives (15 total cooperatives in Arkansas) to help schools use item analysis to focus on specific needs.
- Technical assistance with on-site visits.
- Regional Achievement Institutes provide additional assistance: any time a district or school enters academic distress they attend workshops to better understand the process of what is required of them and how they can get out of academic distress.

4. *Who provides the state assistance?*

- *School/district support teams* yes
- *Regional centers* yes
- *Distinguished educators*
- *SDE staff* yes
- *Other:* Smart Start (supports professional development, among other areas) and Smart Step

For further details please refer to the previous question.

5. *Does support to Title I and all low performing schools and districts differ? Is support generally provided for all schools and districts, or are services specifically designed to help those that are low performing?*

Both systems have the same general support system. Additionally, state Poverty Index funds are provided for schools with high levels of free and reduced lunch populations in grades K-2. These funds are to be used for activities designed to increase student achievement in pre-Kindergarten through Grade 1. Specific activities may include:

- Literacy and/or mathematics specialists
- Literacy coaches
- Professional Development
- Technology (purchase of computers and/or software)
- Before and after school instructional activities
- Extended school year instructional activities
- Establishment, maintenance or expansion of pre-Kindergarten through Grade 1 programs.

Funding for the 1999-2000 school year consisted of \$8.5 million distributed to schools with 75% or more of students in Kindergarten through Grade 1 participating in the free and reduced meal program. Funding for subsequent years will be based on minimum free and reduced price meal participation as well as school-by-school evaluation of how the funds have impacted student achievement.

6. *Has the state established a set of criteria and/or a process for getting schools and districts out of low performing status? If so, what do they include?*

The following is a set of seven steps required of schools and districts in academic distress:

- 1) Acknowledge publicly where they are and how they got there.
- 2) Analyze the data: during this step the schools will be provided with data and assistance in interpreting them.
- 3) Alignment: review of curriculum in order to ensure that what is being taught is what is being assessed.
- 4) Assessment step: ensure that the staff and administrators fully understand the assessments
- 5) Adjustment in attitude: change the attitude of low expectations
- 6) Accentuate: could include test taking tips, or other elements designed to encourage improved performance on assessments.
- 7) Activate a plan that is data driven: schools should not only focus on low-performing students, but all students.

The school improvement team reviews the strengths and weaknesses of each school by class and by content area so that the school is familiar with the data when it is time to write their data-driven plan.

Although the Academic Distress designation is being phased out, districts may lose their Academic Distress status when they no longer have 40% of their students in the lowest quartile.

7. Once a school or district is identified as low performing, what types of plans must it prepare? Who are they submitted to once completed? How do they differ from other planning documents?

As noted above, each school or district in academic distress must prepare data-driven improvement plans.

8. Are changes planned for the state system of identifying and assisting low performing schools or districts (proposed or enacted and to be implemented)? If so, what do these plans include? Why are these changes being made and what is the timeline?

Arkansas is expanding from an accountability system which is primarily district-based to one that focuses on the school site as the unit of change and uses multiple measures. Currently, identification of schools and districts is based on the results of norm-referenced tests, which are not always perfectly aligned with curriculum. When the Arkansas criterion-referenced tests are in place, the system will be based on these exams instead. As this system is implemented, the identification of low performing schools will be based on the Tier I and II indicators, not on Academic Distress definitions. The timeline for phasing in the new assessments and accountability system is provided on page 15.

Title I and Adequate Yearly Progress

1. What criteria are included in the definition of adequate yearly progress for schools and districts under Title I?

- *What measures are used (relationship between cognitive/non-cognitive data)?*
- *What targets have been established?*

- *Are local assessment systems included as criteria? If so, does the state provide guidance? Monitor their use?*
- *Is subgroup performance included in the criteria?*

Adequate yearly progress is in a state of flux in Arkansas. When the new accountability system is phased in, Arkansas will have a unitary system of accountability, with the same measures and targets being applied to all schools, whether Title I or non-Title I.

However, Arkansas is currently in a transition phase from reliance on norm-referenced assessments to the new criterion-referenced assessments, which are not fully implemented. In the interim, a new definition of adequate yearly progress has not been applied and adequate yearly progress has not been calculated.

Under the most recent system, local districts have the option of adding local assessment data, such as portfolios, demonstrations, exhibitions, locally developed criterion-referenced testing, off-grade NRT testing, etc. These state-approved optional data should not replace the required assessment data, but may be used to augment those required data.

2. *What are the definitions of adequate yearly progress for the following:*

- *Title I schools and non-Title I schools*
- *Targeted vs. schoolwide programs, charter, non-public and small schools*
- *Districts*

Are these transitional or final definitions? If transitional, when will the final definitions be in place and what criteria and processes will they include?

When the new accountability system is fully implemented, Title I and non-Title I schools will have the same definition of adequate yearly progress, which is based on the goal of having 100% of students at the proficiency level in 10 years. Hence, schools must take the percentage of students not at the proficient level, divide that by 10, and determine an adequate rate of progress. Arkansas will have the same definition of adequate yearly progress for schools (targeted or schoolwide) and districts.

Previously, if a school or district had more than 40% of students scoring in the lowest quartile on norm-referenced assessments, it was determined to have not made adequate yearly progress. At the moment, however, adequate yearly progress is not being calculated.

3. *What is the process for identifying those schools and districts that are not making adequate yearly progress under Title I? Does the district or the state make this determination for schools? If the districts plays a role, does the state provide guidance on local criteria?*

The state will notify the LEA and the school if a school is not making adequate yearly progress, based on state assessment data. The LEA will also continually review data to determine which schools are not making adequate progress and to provide assistance to them.

4. *What are the criteria and processes for identifying schools and districts in need of improvement under Title I? What plans must be prepared? How can a school or district get out of Program Improvement? Does the district or the state make this determination for schools?*

It takes two consecutive years of not showing adequate yearly progress to trigger school improvement and it takes two consecutive years of meeting adequate yearly progress to be removed from school improvement.

5. *What types of assistance are provided to those in need of improvement under Title I?*

- *Evaluation and Planning*
- *Financial*
- *Expert Assistance*

The state provides all of the above forms of assistance. For further details, please see below.

6. *Who provides the assistance?*

- *School/district support teams* yes
- *Regional centers* yes
- *Distinguished educators* yes
- *SDE staff* yes

Title I has the same system of support that is generally provided to schools and districts in academic distress:

- A state staff person from Standards Assurance Unit is assigned to any district that is placed in academic distress, these specialists go to the districts on a weekly basis.
- Low performing schools must write school improvement plans that are data driven, based on their own assessment results. If a district/school is in academic distress, they must write a plan as well.
- Schools are visited by an external team.
- Schools and districts in distress are eligible for additional resources: fiscal resources or human resources.
- School staff are trained in how to use data to improve instruction.
- Math and literacy specialists are assigned to educational cooperatives (15 total cooperatives in Arkansas) to help schools use item analysis to focus on specific needs.
- Technical assistance with on-site visits are available for schools and districts in need of improvement.
- Regional Achievement Institutes provide additional assistance: administrators of schools and districts in need of improvement attend these workshops to better understand why they were identified as in need of improvement and what steps that can take to be removed from this status.
- Poverty Index funds are available for schools that are in socio-economically disadvantaged areas.

7. *Have waivers played a role in this process?*

Waivers have not played a significant role in Arkansas.

8. *Are there future plans for the state system for schools or districts receiving Title I funding (proposed or enacted and to be implemented) or for the definition of adequate yearly progress? If so, what do these plans include? Why are these changes being made and what is the timeline?*

When the criterion-referenced exams are in the place, and the accountability system implemented, Title I will have a new definition of adequate yearly progress that is entirely aligned with the general state accountability system. The rewards and sanctions component of the accountability system will go into effect in 2001-2002, and the entire point system will be fully operational in 2003-2004.

9. *Is there alignment between Title I and non-Title I systems for adequate yearly progress?*

When the new accountability system is implemented, the Title I and non-Title I systems will be fully aligned. At the moment, however, adequate yearly progress is not being calculated.

10. *What have been the major issues and challenges in the area of Title I? Explain.*

The major challenges facing Title I in Arkansas concern the full implementation of the accountability and assessment systems and aligning Title I with these systems.

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