

ARKANSAS *ESEA Flexibility Request*



July 27, 2015

U.S. Department of Education
Washington, DC 20202

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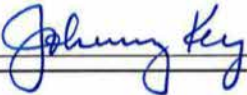
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COVER SHEET FOR ESEA FLEXIBILITY REQUEST

Legal Name of Requester: Arkansas Department of Education	Requester's Mailing Address: Four Capitol Mall Little Rock, AR 72201
State Contact for the ESEA Flexibility Request Name: M. Annette Barnes Position and Office: Assistant Commissioner, Division of Public School Accountability Contact's Mailing Address: Four Capitol Mall, Room 205-B Little Rock, AR 72201 Telephone: 501 682-5891 Fax: 501 682-7966 Email address: annette.m.barnes@arkansas.gov	
Chief State School Officer (Printed Name): Mr. Johnny Key	Telephone: 501 682-4203
Signature of the Chief State School Officer: X 	Date: 7/27/2015
The State, through its authorized representative, agrees to meet all principles of the ESEA Flexibility.	

WAIVERS

By submitting this updated ESEA flexibility request, the SEA renews its request for flexibility through waivers of the nine ESEA requirements listed below and their associated regulatory, administrative, and reporting requirements, as well as any optional waivers the SEA has chosen to request under ESEA flexibility, by checking each of the boxes below. The provisions below represent the general areas of flexibility requested.

1. The requirements in ESEA section 1111(b)(2)(E)-(H) that prescribe how an SEA must establish annual measurable objectives (AMOs) for determining adequate yearly progress (AYP) to ensure that all students meet or exceed the State’s proficient level of academic achievement on the State’s assessments in reading/language arts and mathematics no later than the end of the 2013–2014 school year. The SEA requests this waiver to develop new ambitious but achievable AMOs in reading/language arts and mathematics in order to provide meaningful goals that are used to guide support and improvement efforts for the State, LEAs, schools, and student subgroups.
2. The requirements in ESEA section 1116(b) for an LEA to identify for improvement, corrective action, or restructuring, as appropriate, a Title I school that fails, for two consecutive years or more, to make AYP, and for a school so identified and its LEA to take certain improvement actions. The SEA requests this waiver so that an LEA and its Title I schools need not comply with these requirements.
3. The requirements in ESEA section 1116(c) for an SEA to identify for improvement or corrective action, as appropriate, an LEA that, for two consecutive years or more, fails to make AYP, and for an LEA so identified and its SEA to take certain improvement actions. The SEA requests this waiver so that it need not comply with these requirements with respect to its LEAs.
4. The requirements in ESEA sections 6213(b) and 6224(e) that limit participation in, and use of funds under the Small, Rural School Achievement (SRSA) and Rural and Low-Income School (RLIS) programs based on whether an LEA has made AYP and is complying with the requirements in ESEA section 1116. The SEA requests this waiver so that an LEA that receives SRSA or RLIS funds may use those funds for any authorized purpose regardless of whether the LEA makes AYP.
5. The requirement in ESEA section 1114(a)(1) that a school have a poverty percentage of 40 percent or more in order to operate a school-wide program. The SEA requests this waiver so that an LEA may implement interventions consistent with the turnaround principles or interventions that are based on the needs of the students in the school and designed to enhance the entire educational program in a school in any of its priority and focus schools that meet the definitions of “priority schools” and “focus schools,” respectively, set forth in the document titled *ESEA Flexibility*, as appropriate, even if those schools do not have a poverty percentage of 40 percent or more.
6. The requirement in ESEA section 1003(a) for an SEA to distribute funds reserved under that section only to LEAs with schools identified for improvement, corrective action, or restructuring. The SEA requests this waiver so that it may allocate section 1003(a) funds to its

LEAs in order to serve any of the State’s priority and focus school that meet the definitions of “priority schools” and “focus schools,” respectively, set forth in the document titled *ESEA Flexibility*.

7. The provision in ESEA section 1117(c)(2)(A) that authorizes an SEA to reserve Title I, Part A funds to reward a Title I school that (1) significantly closed the achievement gap between subgroups in the school; or (2) has exceeded AYP for two or more consecutive years. The SEA requests this waiver so that it may use funds reserved under ESEA section 1117(c)(2)(A) for any of the State’s reward schools that meet the definition of “reward schools” set forth in the document titled *ESEA Flexibility*.

8. The requirements in ESEA section 2141(a), (b), and (c) for an LEA and SEA to comply with certain requirements for improvement plans regarding highly qualified teachers. The SEA requests this waiver to allow the SEA and its LEAs to focus on developing and implementing more meaningful evaluation and support systems.

9. The limitations in ESEA section 6123 that limit the amount of funds an SEA or LEA may transfer from certain ESEA programs to other ESEA programs. The SEA requests this waiver so that it and its LEAs may transfer up to 100 percent of the funds it receives under the authorized programs among those programs and into Title I, Part A.

Optional Flexibilities:

If an SEA chooses to request waivers of any of the following requirements, it should check the corresponding box(es) below:

10. The requirements in ESEA sections 4201(b)(1)(A) and 4204(b)(2)(A) that restrict the activities provided by a community learning center under the Twenty-First Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) program to activities provided only during non-school hours or periods when school is not in session (*i.e.*, before and after school or during summer recess). The SEA requests this waiver so that 21st CCLC funds may be used to support expanded learning time during the school day in addition to activities during non-school hours or periods when school is not in session.

11. The requirements in ESEA sections 1116(a)(1)(A)-(B) and 1116(c)(1)(A) that require LEAs and SEAs to make determinations of adequate yearly progress (AYP) for schools and LEAs, respectively. The SEA requests this waiver because continuing to determine whether an LEA and its schools make AYP is inconsistent with the SEA’s State-developed differentiated recognition, accountability, and support system included in its ESEA flexibility request. The SEA and its LEAs must report on their report cards performance against the AMOs for all subgroups identified in ESEA section 1111(b)(2)(C)(v), and use performance against the AMOs to support continuous improvement in Title I schools.

12. The requirements in ESEA section 1113(a)(3)-(4) and (c)(1) that require an LEA to serve eligible schools under Title I in rank order of poverty and to allocate Title I, Part A funds based on that rank ordering. The SEA requests this waiver in order to permit its LEAs to serve a Title I-eligible high school with a graduation rate below 60 percent that the SEA has identified as a priority

school even if that school does not otherwise rank sufficiently high to be served under ESEA section 1113.

13. The requirement in ESEA section 1003(a) for an SEA to distribute funds reserved under that section only to LEAs with schools identified for improvement, corrective action, or restructuring. The SEA requests this waiver in addition to waiver #6 so that, when it has remaining section 1003(a) funds after ensuring that all priority and focus schools have sufficient funds to carry out interventions, it may allocate section 1003(a) funds to its LEAs to provide interventions and supports for low-achieving students in other Title I schools when one or more subgroups miss either AMOs or graduation rate targets or both over a number of years.

If the SEA is requesting waiver #13, the SEA must demonstrate in its renewal request that it has a process to ensure, on an annual basis, that all of its priority and focus schools will have sufficient funding to implement their required interventions prior to distributing ESEA section 1003(a) funds to other Title I schools.

Click here to enter page numbers where edits have been made and where new attachments have been added. Do not insert new text here – insert new text in redline into the revised request.

14. The requirements in ESEA sections 1111(b)(1)(B) and 1111(b)(3)(C)(i) that, respectively, require the SEA to apply the same academic content and academic achievement standards to all public schools and public school children in the State and to administer the same academic assessments to measure the achievement of all students. The SEA requests this waiver so that it is not required to double test a student who is not yet enrolled in high school but who takes advanced, high school level, mathematics coursework. The SEA would assess such a student with the corresponding advanced, high school level assessment in place of the mathematics assessment the SEA would otherwise administer to the student for the grade in which the student is enrolled. For Federal accountability purposes, the SEA will use the results of the advanced, high school level, mathematics assessment in the year in which the assessment is administered and will administer one or more additional advanced, high school level, mathematics assessments to such students in high school, consistent with the State's mathematics content standards, and use the results in high school accountability determinations.

If the SEA is requesting waiver #14, the SEA must demonstrate in its renewal request how it will ensure that every student in the State has the opportunity to be prepared for and take courses at an advanced level prior to high school.

ASSURANCES

By submitting this application, the SEA assures that:

- 1. It requests waivers of the above-referenced requirements based on its agreement to meet Principles 1 through 4 of ESEA flexibility, as described throughout the remainder of this request.
- 2. It has adopted English language proficiency (ELP) standards that correspond to the State's college- and career-ready standards, consistent with the requirement in ESEA section 3113(b)(2), and that reflect the academic language skills necessary to access and meet the State's college- and career-ready standards. (Principle 1)
- 3. It will administer no later than the 2014–2015 school year alternate assessments based on grade-level academic achievement standards or alternate assessments based on alternate academic achievement standards for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities that are consistent with 34 C.F.R. § 200.6(a)(2) and are aligned with the State's college- and career-ready standards. (Principle 1)
- 4. It will develop and administer ELP assessments aligned with the State's ELP standards, consistent with the requirements in ESEA sections 1111(b)(7), 3113(b)(2), and 3122(a)(3)(A)(ii) no later than the 2015–2016 school year. (Principle 1)
- 5. It will report annually to the public on college-going and college credit-accumulation rates for all students and subgroups of students in each LEA and each public high school in the State. (Principle 1)
- 6. If the SEA includes student achievement on assessments in addition to reading/language arts and mathematics in its differentiated recognition, accountability, and support system and uses achievement on those assessments to identify priority and focus schools, it has technical documentation, which can be made available to the Department upon request, demonstrating that the assessments are administered statewide; include all students, including by providing appropriate accommodations for English Learners and students with disabilities, as well as alternate assessments based on grade-level academic achievement standards or alternate assessments based on alternate academic achievement standards for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities, consistent with 34 C.F.R. § 200.6(a)(2); and are valid and reliable for use in the SEA's differentiated recognition, accountability, and support system. (Principle 2)
- 7. It will annually make public its lists of reward schools, priority schools, and focus schools prior to the start of the school year as well as publicly recognize its reward schools, and will update its lists of priority and focus schools at least every three years. (Principle 2)

If the SEA is not submitting with its renewal request its updated list of priority and focus schools, based on the most recent available data, for implementation beginning in the 2015–2016 school year, it must also assure that:

- 8. It will provide to the Department, no later than January 31, 2016, an updated list of priority

and focus schools, identified based on school year 2014–2015 data, for implementation beginning in the 2016–2017 school year.

- 9. It will evaluate and, based on that evaluation, revise its own administrative requirements to reduce duplication and unnecessary burden on LEAs and schools. (Principle 4)
- 10. It has consulted with its Committee of Practitioners regarding the information set forth in its ESEA flexibility request.
- 11. Prior to submitting this request, it provided all LEAs with notice and a reasonable opportunity to comment on the request and has attached a copy of that notice (Attachment 1) as well as copies of any comments it received from LEAs. (Attachment 2)
- 12. Prior to submitting this request, it provided notice and information regarding the request to the public in the manner in which the SEA customarily provides such notice and information to the public (*e.g.*, by publishing a notice in the newspaper; by posting information on its website) and has attached a copy of, or link to, that notice. (Attachment 2)
- 13. It will provide to the Department, in a timely manner, all required reports, data, and evidence regarding its progress in implementing the plans contained throughout its ESEA flexibility request, and will ensure that all such reports, data, and evidence are accurate, reliable, and complete or, if it is aware of issues related to the accuracy, reliability, or completeness of its reports, data, or evidence, it will disclose those issues.
- 14. It will report annually on its State report card and will ensure that its LEAs annually report on their local report cards, for the “all students” group, each subgroup described in ESEA section 1111(b)(2)(C)(v)(II), and for any combined subgroup (as applicable): information on student achievement at each proficiency level; data comparing actual achievement levels to the State’s annual measurable objectives; the percentage of students not tested; performance on the other academic indicator for elementary and middle schools; and graduation rates for high schools. In addition, it will annually report, and will ensure that its LEAs annually report, all other information and data required by ESEA section 1111(h)(1)(C) and 1111(h)(2)(B), respectively. It will ensure that all reporting is consistent with *State and Local Report Cards Title I, Part A of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, as Amended Non-Regulatory Guidance* (February 8, 2013).

Principle 3 Assurances

Each SEA must select the appropriate option and, in doing so, assures that:

Option A	Option B	Option C
<input type="checkbox"/> 15.a. The SEA is on track to fully implementing Principle 3, including incorporation of student growth based on State assessments into educator ratings for teachers of tested grades and subjects and principals.	<p>If an SEA that is administering new State assessments during the 2014–2015 school year is requesting one additional year to incorporate student growth based on these assessments, it will:</p> <input type="checkbox"/> 15.b.i. Continue to ensure that its LEAs implement teacher and principal evaluation systems using multiple measures, and that the SEA or its LEAs will calculate student growth data based on State assessments administered during the 2014–2015 school year for all teachers of tested grades and subjects and principals; and <input type="checkbox"/> 15.b.ii. Ensure that each teacher of a tested grade and subject and all principals will receive their student growth data based on State assessments administered during the 2014–2015 school year.	<p>If the SEA is requesting modifications to its teacher and principal evaluation and support system guidelines or implementation timeline other than those described in Option B, which require additional flexibility from the guidance in the document titled <i>ESEA Flexibility</i> as well as the documents related to the additional flexibility offered by the Assistant Secretary in a letter dated August 2, 2013, it will:</p> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 15.c. Provide a narrative response in its redlined ESEA flexibility request as described in Section II of the ESEA flexibility renewal guidance.

CONSULTATION

An SEA must meaningfully engage and solicit input from diverse stakeholders and communities in the development of its request. To demonstrate that an SEA has done so, the SEA must provide an assurance that it has consulted with the State’s Committee of Practitioners regarding the information set forth in the request and provide the following:

1. A description of how the SEA meaningfully engaged and solicited input on its request from teachers and their representatives.
2. A description of how the SEA meaningfully engaged and solicited input on its request from other diverse communities, such as students, parents, community-based organizations, civil rights organizations, organizations representing students with disabilities and English Learners, business organizations, and Indian tribes.

Consultation

Since the announcement of the opportunity to seek ESEA Flexibility, the Arkansas Department of Education (ADE) has been busy gathering thoughts from teachers, school leaders, parents and the general public on measuring school and teacher effectiveness, rewarding school success and helping schools improve.

ADE took an aggressive approach to engage and obtain input from educators including teachers and their representatives, parents and the general public to inform the development of this application. The Department hosted five rounds (two meetings each day) of public open forums across the state to solicit feedback from educators and interested community members from November-December, 2011. These face-to-face meetings afforded opportunities to share information about proposed accountability redesign concepts and engage in meaningful dialogue with constituents.

Teachers and administrators participating in these meetings provided valuable input that was incorporated into the state’s ESEA’s flexibility request. They were primarily concerned about the training required to support teachers and administrators in the new Teacher Evaluation and Support System. Attendance at the ten meetings included the following:

98 students
 22 parents
 102 teachers
 300 administrators
 83 community members

At each meeting, ADE staff gave an overview of the Principles contained within the waiver request—college and career ready expectations for all students; state-developed systems for differentiated recognition, accountability and support; and support for effective instruction and leadership, including new legislation for teacher evaluation and support systems. Links to the ESEA Flexibility documents were shared at each meeting.

Notice of the meetings was provided in a commissioner’s memo and posted on the ADE website (Attachment 1). In addition, a statewide press release notified media outlets of the dates, times and locations of the public forums (Attachment 2). Professional organizations—Arkansas Association of Educational Administrators (AAEA), Arkansas School Boards Associations (ASBA) and the Arkansas Education Association (AEA)—disseminated the notice among their members. Input was solicited from Native American leaders, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, special education community action groups, as well as schools and districts with high student populations of English Learners (ELs).

The ADE provided a public comment email address (ade.escacomments@arkansas.gov) to seek ongoing input from all teachers, school administrators, parents and community members. In addition, all stakeholders had opportunity to submit comments through a statewide survey posted on the ADE website <http://adesharepoint2.arkansas.gov/memos/Lists/Approved%20Memos/DispForm2.aspx?ID=515&Source=http%3A%2F%2Fadesharepoint2%2Earkansas%2Egov%2Fmemos%2Fdefault%2Easpx>. The survey yielded more than 200 respondents.

Arkansas also engaged stakeholders through a comprehensive approach that included a number of strategies to seek input and shape the creation of a next generation accountability system that fosters college and career readiness for all students. These included the core-working group, the stakeholder committee representing critical groups—civil rights, parents, business, educators and partner educational agencies—and the state’s Committee of Practitioners. Students were also given an opportunity to weigh in during meetings at local high schools. A listing of the meetings and those in attendance is provided in Attachment 2.

The ADE’s stakeholder engagement went beyond efforts mentioned above to include meetings with focus groups—Arkansas Association of Special Education Administrators, an advisory group of Arkansas school superintendents, the state’s commission for closing the achievement gap (Attachment 23), civil rights groups and adult English language learners (Attachment 24). Additional information was presented at statewide meetings—Arkansas Association of Educational Administrators, Arkansas School Boards Association and Arkansas Education Association (Attachment 20). These presentations were disseminated with each professional organization’s statewide membership. The public was afforded an opportunity for feedback through a statewide survey and a designated email address for the ESEA flexibility request.

The Commissioner’s Superintendent Advisory Council was convened to share and discuss the draft plan. The conversation generated concerns about how to ensure students with disabilities (SWD) and ELs master the Common Core State Standards. ADE affirmed its commitment to working with key entities and organizations to ensure educators have the skills necessary to support learner-centered instruction for college and career readiness.

In addition, the State Board of Education conducted a weekend work session focused on the ESEA Flexibility application.

Some comments from stakeholders during our public meetings were:

“I appreciate the geographic locations of the hearings.”

“I think a lot of these schools have languished...we can do a lot of things with consequences but until we set appropriate realistic goals for students and teachers to achieve...we are going to stay constantly frustrated by the results we get.” *Brenda Gullett, Former State Board Member*

And, one we have tried to adhere to as this application was written:

“Be thoughtful as you work on this Flexibility request, especially in the areas of (a) communication to school employees and the public and (b) smoothness of transitional implementation.”

ADE will continue its stakeholder engagement subsequent to approval of its ESEA Flexibility request. Staff will tour the state to educate schools and members of the public on changes being made to the state’s accountability system. ADE will also produce online tutorials and videos to explain aspects of the new system. This effort will be aimed at teachers, principals, parents and members of the public with the goal of ensuring the legitimacy of the state’s plan.

Of great importance will be the ongoing collaboration between Arkansas’s current Commissioner of Education Johnny Key and the State Board of Education to continue the momentum the state is experiencing with the implementation of the Common Core State Standards defining the path to readiness for college, careers and informed citizenship.

Arkansas has continued its work through stakeholder engagement. The additional components in this renewal request have been ongoing since the initial approval of Arkansas’s request. Feedback from numerous forums with the Superintendent’s Advisory Council, Education Cooperative Directors, Committee of Practitioners, ACSIP Pilot Advisory Committee members and other stakeholders has been thoughtfully integrated into this requested renewal. Additionally, during the development of its Equitable Access to Excellence Educators Plan the ADE partnered with the South Central Comprehensive Center (SC3) at the University of Oklahoma and the Region VI Equity Assistance Center, the Intercultural Development and Research Association, and the South Central Collaborative for Equity (IDRA SCCE) to facilitate the Civil Rights Stakeholders Group meetings. Opening dialogue has occurred with Disability Rights Arkansas, Inc. and the ADE has been in consultation with SC3 to expand the work of engaging stakeholders to be more inclusive of civil rights organizations as well as those representing students with disabilities, English Learners, businesses, institutions of higher education and Indian tribes.

The ADE will continue to receive input from these stakeholders as the transitions in assessment and accountability systems are taking shape under the guidance of the current leadership.

(Attachment 19)

The flexibility requested in this application will help ensure improvement in this area.

EVALUATION

The Department encourages an SEA that receives approval to implement the flexibility to collaborate with the Department to evaluate at least one program, practice, or strategy the SEA or its LEAs implement under principle 1, 2, or 3. Upon receipt of approval of the flexibility, an interested SEA will need to nominate for evaluation a program, practice, or strategy the SEA or its LEAs will implement under principles 1, 2, or 3. The Department will work with the SEA to determine the feasibility and design of the evaluation and, if it is determined to be feasible and

appropriate, will fund and conduct the evaluation in partnership with the SEA, ensuring that the implementation of the chosen program, practice, or strategy is consistent with the evaluation design.

Check here if you are interested in collaborating with the Department in this evaluation, if your request for the flexibility is approved.

OVERVIEW OF SEA'S REQUEST FOR THE ESEA FLEXIBILITY

Provide an overview (about 500 words) of the SEA's request for the flexibility that:

1. explains the SEA's comprehensive approach to implement the waivers and principles and describes the SEA's strategy to ensure this approach is coherent within and across the principles; and
2. describes how the implementation of the waivers and principles will enhance the SEA's and its LEAs' ability to increase the quality of instruction for students and improve student achievement.

Overview

The vision of the Arkansas Department of Education (ADE) is to provide an innovative, comprehensive education system focused on outcomes that ensure every student in Arkansas is prepared to succeed in post-secondary education and careers. To assist in achieving this vision, the adoption and implementation of Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and membership in the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) has played an integral role.

Arkansas defines college and career ready as, "The acquisition of the knowledge and skills a student needs to be successful in all future endeavors including credit-bearing, first-year courses at a postsecondary institution (such as a two- or four-year college, trade school, or technical school) or to embark successfully on a chosen career." The foundation that CCSS will provide clearly demonstrates the move toward having students master rigorous content at deeper levels through the use of problem-solving and critical thinking skills.

Former Commissioner of Education Dr. Tom Kimbrell led in the development of goals to move the state toward having all students ready for college and career. Ambitious goals were required to guide the work and provide the road map to high achieving learning communities. Most are closely tied to the requirements of the flexibility application and are as follows:

Goal 1: Learning Standards, Next Generation Assessments and Accountability

Provide resources, tools and services to districts and schools that support the implementation of the Common Core State Standards and a common assessment system.

- Analyze and share openly how districts spend money efficiently and effectively on strategies that ensure high levels of teaching and learning and result in enhanced and sustained student success.
- Create an accountability system that will integrate academic and operational performance

measures to yield data for determining how resources should be targeted, distributed and managed for increased and sustained student success.

Goal 2: Supporting Persistently Struggling Schools

Strengthen strategic initiatives that address graduation rates, achievement gaps and persistently struggling schools.

- Identify and promote effective early childhood, elementary, middle school and high school policies, practices and tools targeted to dropout prevention and recovery.
- Promote out-of-school learning opportunities for students who need additional time to learn and be successful.
- Identify alternative organizational structures to meet the needs of students left unmet by traditional school programs, structures and time frames.
- Identify persistently struggling schools and present districts with a focused number of options to be implemented for reform and innovation and develop a comprehensive monitoring system to support schools in their transformation work.
- Keep students engaged and on-track to graduation by increasing personalized support; ensuring multiple pathways are available to help students to stay on track academically and accelerate learning when appropriate; and using data to better identify and respond to those at-risk of failure in a more timely and effective manner.
- Assess and focus on the teaching of essential career skills for all students, such as knowing workplace expectations, coming to work on time and having a customer service orientation.
- Promote a culture of college and career readiness in Arkansas through rigorous and relevant course requirements.

Goal 3: Improving Educator Effectiveness

Enhance state, district and school leadership capacity and support for aligning Arkansas's education systems for early learners, K-12 students and postsecondary learners.

- Develop customizable tools that help leaders at the local level make well-informed decisions.
- Assist districts with technology integration that results in increased use and analysis of data that will inform and improve instruction.
- Identify, develop and disseminate exemplary recruitment, preparation, licensure, mentoring, supervision and evaluation practices.

Goal 4: Strengthening Stakeholder Partnerships

Deepen essential partnerships with stakeholders through ongoing communication that will result in enhanced educational opportunities for Arkansas students.

- Leverage partnerships to provide input, support and resources for key strategic initiatives of this plan.
- Cultivate relationships with child-serving agencies to maximize scarce resources, reduce duplication of efforts and provide a coherent set of services to children and families.
- Pursue grants to support the mission, vision and strategies of this plan.

By setting goals such as these, the state of Arkansas has made great progress in education over the past 20 years, moving from near the bottom of state comparisons to being ranked fifth in the nation this year according to *Education Week's Quality Counts* rankings (Attachment 3). However, we realize there is room for improvement, particularly in the area of student achievement. Analysis of statewide data and review of policy has revealed there are elements of accountability

present, but our desire is to ensure a more inclusive and consistent system of accountability for our state and its schools.

Arkansas has been known historically as a small state, burdened with high levels of poverty in its mainly rural population. The state has instituted many reforms, including the legislated consolidation of many small schools and districts over the past ten years. The majority of the schools in the state, however, still remain small and rural. Due to the size of these rural communities, many schools do not have a large student population, and thus many of their subpopulations do not meet the minimum number (N) that are examined and used for student achievement accountability for the current No Child Left Behind (NCLB) requirements. Our proposal would address those students currently not being identified as part of an at-risk group and ensure they become part of the subpopulation used for accountability purposes.

We believe all of the Principles contained in this Flexibility application will move us toward greater success in closing the achievement gap. For too long, segments of our student population have struggled to achieve at desired levels. Implementation of the CCSS is the vehicle to re-energize our focus on classroom instruction and this flexibility is a timely opportunity to move from a compliance mindset to a focus on long-term, continuous improvement. Work has begun to assist educators in this endeavor. Extensive statewide professional development and outreach for teachers, administrators and parents began in July 2011. A successful system of professional development delivery exists in our state through regional educational cooperatives, educational television network, live streaming and regional institutes. All components of this system are being employed for two-way communication as we implement these new standards.

The theory of action underlying this change process is pictured in Figure 1 below. In the development of each of the Flexibility Principles, the steps of the hourglass were followed from bottom to top in order to provide a clear and cohesive plan based upon core values and beliefs.

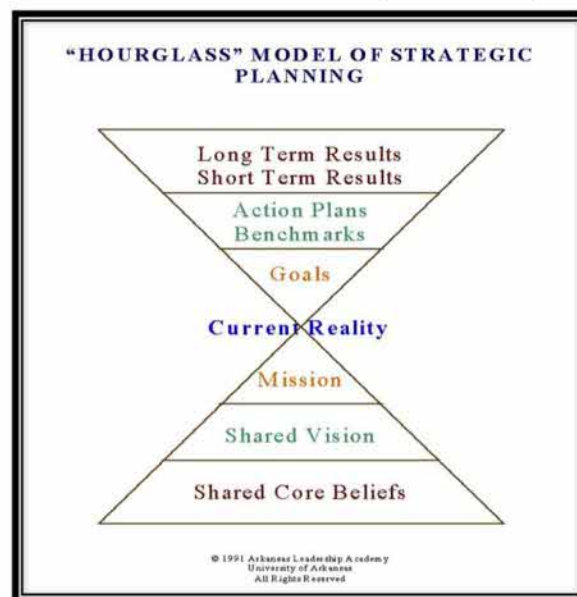


Figure 1. Theory of action for change.

Public regional meetings around the state indicated the majority of respondents believed the disaggregation of data under NCLB by subgroups has been positive, shedding new light on the issue of achievement gaps for historically underachieving groups. One gap that is clearly growing smaller is that of our Hispanic/EL subpopulation. Other subpopulations have increased in their achievement, but not at rates enabling the gap to close. According to assessment data, the current accountability system has enabled large achievement gaps to persist in our student population. For example, only 16 percent of schools meet the minimum number of special education students for accountability, when 96 percent of our schools have a subpopulation of special education students attending their school. This reveals a gap of 80 percent of our schools that are not being held accountable for the achievement of this subpopulation. This Flexibility request proposes to require schools to be accountable for all low-achieving students by examining all students as well as a targeted group based on their membership in historically underperforming subpopulations, thus requiring accountability for all students in their care. While each subpopulation would continue to be reported separately and still be used to trigger interventions and support, all would be included for accountability purposes and expected to meet proficiency and growth targets.

Significant advances in Arkansas's longitudinal data system and expanded interagency partnerships have enabled cross-agency data sharing and enriched Arkansas's available research and information for decision making across public preschool through postsecondary education systems. Arkansas was among the first states to meet 10 of the 10 essential elements of statewide longitudinal data systems outlined by the Data Quality Campaign. Further, Arkansas meets nine of the 10 actions to support effective data use and is on track to meet all 10 actions in the immediate future. Arkansas established the Arkansas Education to Employment Tracking and Trends Initiative (AEETT) among the ADE, Arkansas Department of Higher Education (ADHE) and the Arkansas Department of Workforce Services (ADWS) in 2009 to enable cross-agency data sharing and support research connecting P-20 leading indicators with postsecondary and career outcomes. The AEETT Initiative allows creation of detailed High School Feedback reports to inform Arkansas high schools regarding their students' preparation for successful postsecondary education and/or the workforce outcomes.

Additional projects enabled significant advances in Arkansas's longitudinal data system that enhanced the Teacher Student Data Link (TSDL) to promote effective use of data for local decision making. The Expand Enterprise Data Warehouse with Local Assessment Data and Teacher Student Link to Feed Data Visualization project, the Enterprise Architecture project, the Daily Roster Verification Pilot project, and Educator Data Integration project have expanded the longitudinal data system's architecture and capabilities necessary to support expanded district, school and classroom level data visualization and reporting tools. Pilot projects integrate classroom level assessment scores with summative and interim assessment scores for use with Arkansas's data visualization and reporting tools. This will enhance local and state-wide data-informed decision making as described throughout this ESEA Flexibility proposal. These advances in the P-20 longitudinal data system, coupled with changes to educator evaluation policy, position Arkansas to meet 10 of 10 *State Actions* recommended by the Data Quality Campaign as essential to linking data use to improved student achievement (Data Quality Campaign (DQC), 2011 *Ten State Actions to Ensure Effective Data Use*. Retrieved from <http://www.dataqualitycampaign.org/build/actions>). These state actions enable leaders at the state and local levels to connect professional development and credentialing decisions to leading

and outcome indicators including student growth and achievement outcomes.

Improvement of instructional leadership at all levels from classroom to boardroom is a primary focus in our state and is imperative with the move to CCSS. Extensive work by educators and other stakeholders under the direction of Charlotte Danielson and Doug Reeves resulted in establishing congruent and consistent teacher and administrator evaluations that are aligned with interventions and support. Educators around the state have already realized that implementation of CCSS, next-generation assessments, the development of tiered support systems, differentiation and their ability to have students ready for college and career will all reflect on their professional evaluations. Legislation in 2011 strengthened this effort and provided statutes to hold individuals, schools, and districts accountable for improvement of instructional practices, and ties student achievement results to evaluation outcomes (Attachment 5).

The interventions planned for Priority and Focus schools will also address improvement of instructional leadership and effective instructional practices. Our nationally recognized longitudinal data system has been utilized to identify schools that have been persistently low achieving. There is legislation already in place to address systemic leadership development and school support systems that will be instituted in Priority and Focus schools (Attachment 6). For all other schools, an extensive multi-tiered system of differentiated intervention and support exists to meet improvement needs. This is funded through a state grant and includes positive behavioral supports and strategies targeted toward closing the achievement gap. Streamlined digital access of support resources will be developed by the ADE and be online by Spring of 2013 for school and public access.

The combination of CCSS, next generation assessments, a focus on persistently low achieving schools and new professional evaluation systems will create a sense of urgency in the area of improving classroom instruction. Accountability for all of our state's student population will underscore the rationale for effective and efficient methods of ensuring both students and adults are continuous and high achieving learners. The simplified reporting system outlined in this Flexibility application combined with our longitudinal data system will enable educators and stakeholders to share in the ownership of improved student and adult learning, resulting in greater numbers of our children prepared for college and careers.

The Arkansas Department of Education (ADE) is committed to the vision of providing an innovative, comprehensive education system that insures all Arkansas students have the opportunity to learn and succeed in attaining college and career readiness (CCR) with the goal of entering the workforce prepared for productive citizenry. ESEA Flexibility has enabled the ADE to pursue this vision with a high degree of commitment coupled with responsiveness to state-specific issues that have impacted and continue to impact state and local learning systems.

Public schools in Arkansas have experienced unprecedented change in the past two decades as population has increased, demographics have shifted, and communities have grown or declined in response to rapidly changing policy and economic conditions. Arkansas's ESEA Flexibility Renewal Application provides the ADE with an opportunity to share evidence of successes and continued challenges as the ADE strives to be a responsive, integrated learning system designed to support continuous improvement for all of Arkansas's students.

Principle 1: College and Career Ready Expectations for All Students

In its 2012 ESEA Flexibility Proposal, ADE asserted its commitment to rigorous CCR standards and aligned, next-generation assessments by outlining a plan for transition to full implementation of the standards by the 2014-2015 school year.

Successes, Learning and Continued Challenges in Principle 1

Success

- Arkansas’s public schools have transitioned instruction to align with the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) beginning with Grades K through 2 in 2011-2012, Grades 3 through 8 in 2012-2013, and Grades 9 through 12 in 2013-2014.
- By March 31st, the day this renewal is due, Arkansas schools will be half-way through the test administration window for the performance-based component of Arkansas’s next-generation assessment. For the first time since the adoption of CCR aligned Standards in 2010 Arkansas’s public school students are completing assessments fully aligned to the content standards for which they are receiving instruction. .
- Over 5,000 Arkansas teachers and leaders were surveyed over the summer of 2013 regarding implementation of CCSS and changing instructional practice.
 - Ninety-one percent of principals and 74 percent of teachers indicated they believed the standards were more rigorous and raised expectations for student learning.
 - Ninety-one percent of teachers and 95 percent of leaders had participated in professional development on the CCSS to include incorporating instructional shifts into lesson planning, classroom instruction and assessment, and design of curriculum units.
 - Eighty-five percent of teachers felt completely or somewhat prepared to align instruction with the new standards. Forty-seven percent of teachers surveyed felt they had received adequate support for the transition in standards and instruction and 38 percent felt they had received comprehensive support. Eighty-nine percent of teachers indicated moderate to high confidence in their ability to align lesson plans and instruction to CCSS, and 81 percent indicated moderate to high confidence in aligning assessment and curriculum design with CCSS expectations.
 - Ninety-five percent of principals felt somewhat or completely prepared to support their teachers in aligning instruction. Fifty percent of principals felt their district leaders had adequately supported them to transition their schools and 40 percent felt they had comprehensive support from their district leaders.
 - Eighty percent of teachers surveyed indicated they had been observed and received feedback on how to more fully incorporate the new standards into instructional practice with some 52 percent receiving feedback four or more times during the year and 39 percent receiving feedback 2 to 3 times during the year.
 - Forty percent of principals surveyed indicated K-8 teachers’ practices were somewhat aligned with CCSS. Twenty-eight percent of principals indicated their K-8 teachers were fully aligned with CCSS.
 - Eighty-seven to ninety-one percent of teachers surveyed correctly identified model instructional practices aligned with CCSS in literacy. Sixty-seven to ninety-three

- percent of teachers surveyed correctly identified model instructional practices aligned with the CCSS shifts in mathematics.
 - Eighty-five percent of principals indicated they were creating more opportunities for teacher collaboration focused on CCSS implementation. Also, 75 percent indicated they were using classroom observations as opportunities to give feedback to teachers that reflects expectations under CCSS, 75 percent were ensuring curricular materials were aligned with new expectations, 75 percent were sharing resources and providing professional development opportunities to support teachers' implementation of new standards.
 - Eighty-one percent of leaders and 64 percent of teachers agreed or strongly agreed that new standards, next generation assessments, and the Teacher Excellence and Support System could be implemented as integrated components to continuously improve the instructional system in their schools.
- Equitable opportunity and access to rigorous CCR courses and instruction have been expanded and enhanced through the offering of online content through Virtual Arkansas <http://virtualarkansas.org/> Virtual Arkansas is a partnership between the ADE and Arkansas Education Service Cooperatives to provide twenty-four hour a day, seven day a week access to high quality, rigorous instruction for a variety of courses. These courses are available to communities challenged with geographic isolation and challenged with scarce availability of qualified teachers for required courses.

The increased rigor of the standards and the enhanced characteristics of assessment items on the next generation assessments represent a new foundation from which Arkansas's LEAs will evaluate the progress of their continuous improvement efforts.

Learning

This ESEA Renewal opportunity presents itself at a critical time in this transition. Student level assessment results from 2015 will reflect students' readiness on CCR constructs rather than constructs assessed in previous assessments—Arkansas's Benchmark and End of Course Exams. These differences in the constructs assessed limit the comparability of students' prior state assessment scores to their performance on the next-generation assessments (PARCC in 2014-15). Thus, results from 2015 assessments will function as a baseline for LEAs and the ADE to evaluate the transition from Arkansas's state standards to more broadly comparable CCR standards.

The results of Arkansas students' Benchmark and End of Course Exams demonstrated an interesting trend over six years (three years prior to ESEA Flexibility and three years of ESEA Flexibility). In general, student performance on grade level standards steadily improved from 2009 through 2012 (Figure 2). The improvements in literacy and mathematics dipped in 2013 and 2014 concurrent with the implementation of new CCR standards in the tested grades.

- Literacy performance improved significantly in 2012 compared to prior years, and although schools demonstrated a dip in literacy, results are higher in 2014 than in 2011, the baseline for ESEA Flexibility.
- Students' mathematics scores show a larger drop in 2013 and 2014 which may represent specific and significant construct differences between CCR standards and Arkansas's prior standards in mathematics at particular grade levels.

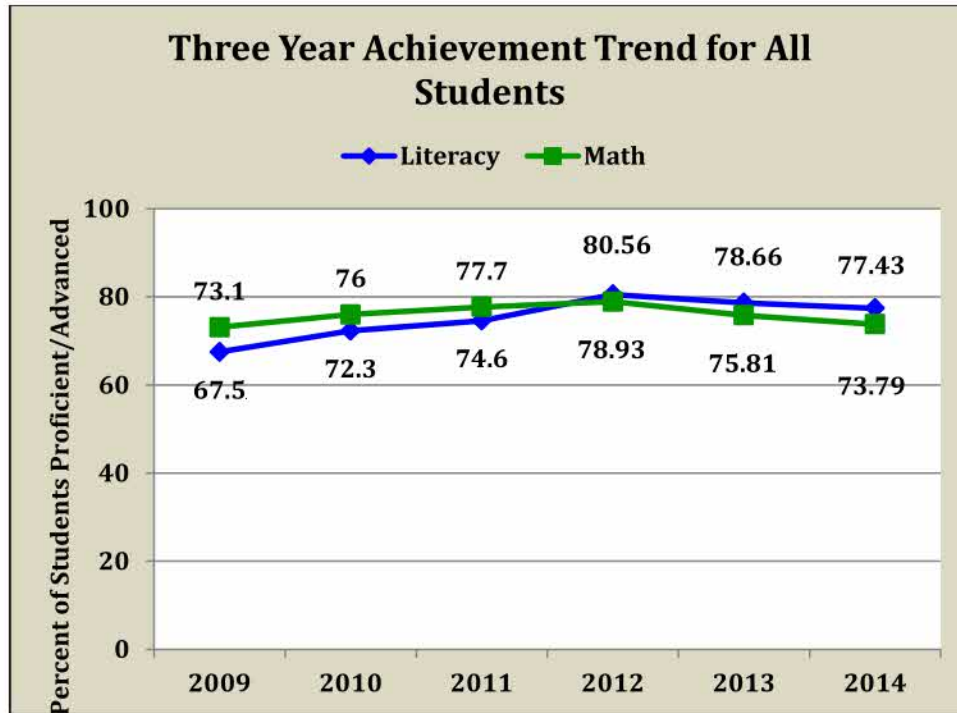


Figure 2. Three-year math and literacy achievement trends.

The ADE encouraged LEAs to examine the fidelity of their implementation of CCR standards, as well as the trends in their assessment results to inform their continuous improvement planning during this significant instructional and assessment transition.

Challenges

The transition to CCR standards and next-generation assessments has not been without challenges.

- Challenges were noted from the teacher and leader survey on CCSS implementation:
 - Overwhelmingly, teachers (72 percent) and leaders (69 percent) selected time constraints and their own limitations as the major obstacles to their efforts to consistently and successfully implement the new standards. Sixty-nine percent of principals indicated they felt their teachers' biggest obstacle to successful implementation was time.
 - Forty-nine percent of teachers and 43 percent of principals indicated students' prior knowledge was an obstacle to consistent and successful implementation of the new standards.
 - Almost half of all teachers and leaders surveyed indicated better and/or more aligned instructional and assessment resources were needed to support more successful implementation of the new standards.
- The timing of implementation of new standards three years in advance of assessments aligned to the standards has been a challenge for teachers and leaders trying to inform the effectiveness of their transition using student assessment data, particularly in mathematics where the shifts in grade level content create the greatest disparity in expectations between what is being taught and what is still tested. In some cases, teachers have felt compelled to align instruction to the new standards and still include units of instruction on the old

standards out of concern for how students' performance on the Benchmark and End of Course Exams may impact schools' accountability ratings as well as students' possible remediation/intervention plans.

- Ensuring students with special learning needs, English language learners (ELs), economically disadvantaged, and low achieving students access rigorous CCR expectations is an ever-present challenge that is made easier with appropriate tiered response systems. To expand educators' tool boxes of strategies for ensuring all students access rigorous CCR expectations the ADE is expanding its professional development in Response to Intervention to all schools in Arkansas starting in 2016 through 2020 (page 36).

Although Arkansas has encountered challenges in the implementation of CCR aligned standards and assessments, transition continues as the ADE, teachers, and leaders strive to meet the challenges.

Principle 2- Differentiated Accountability, Recognition, and Tiered Support System

In Arkansas's initial application for ESEA Flexibility, the ADE responded to stakeholder input by simplifying the accountability and reporting system with the goal of streamlining disparate state and federal accountability systems. ESEA Renewal will allow Arkansas to come closer to realizing the goal of a unitary, focused system of accountability, recognition, and tiered support informed by enhanced information systems and feedback loops (Figure 3).

Accountability System and Feedback Loop

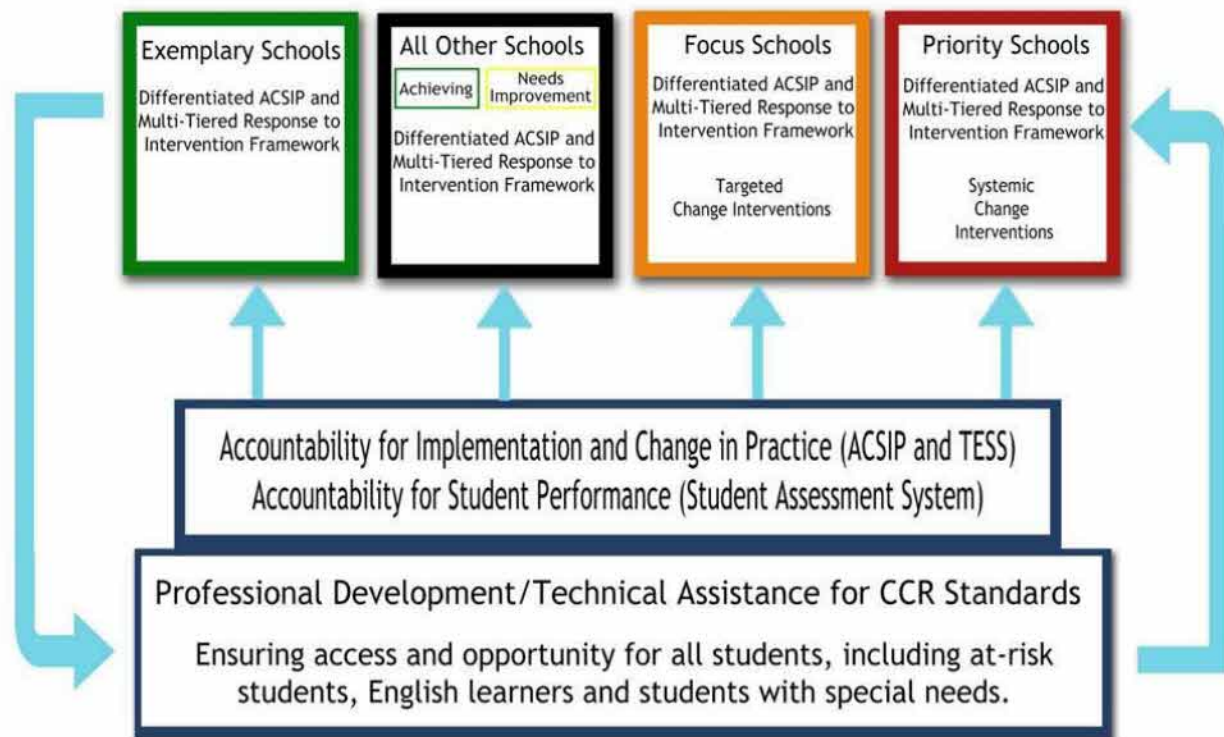


Figure 3. Differentiated Accountability and Feedback Loop

