



## NEWS RELEASE

### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:**

Julie Johnson Thompson  
Office: 683-4788 Cell: (501) 580-6508  
Email: [julie.thompson@arkansas.gov](mailto:julie.thompson@arkansas.gov)

### **ARKANSAS' ASSESSMENT PLAN EARNS FULL APPROVAL**

Arkansas' educational assessment system received full approval under Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Act of 1965 (ESEA) as amended by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), the U.S. Department of Education (USDOE) informed the state late Tuesday. Each state's assessment system must earn federal approval by the end of the 2006-2007 school year for states to avoid financial penalties.

"This is welcome news and a tremendous step for us," said Dr. Ken James, Arkansas Commissioner of Education.

In his letter to Dr. James, USDOE Assistant Secretary Henry Johnson wrote, "My decision is based on input from peer reviewers external to the U.S. Department of Education (the Department) and Department staff who reviewed and carefully considered the evidence submitted by Arkansas. I have concluded that the evidence demonstrates that Arkansas' standards and assessment system satisfies the NCLB requirements."

Arkansas was notified by USDOE in June that the state's assessment system was placed in "approval pending" status, largely because it used a portfolio – or a series of tasks – to assess the academic achievement of students with limited English abilities instead of the Benchmark Exam administered to other students. In August, the state Department submitted a new plan in which it agreed to assess

these students using the regular exam but with accommodations such as lengthened testing time and the use of language dictionaries.

Full approval of the assessment system also finalizes approval of the state's "growth model" that was submitted for use in calculating schools' adequate yearly progress under NCLB. This model credits schools for improving the scores of individual students even though they have not reached "proficient" on the Benchmark Exams. Under NCLB, all students must score proficient or above by the 2013-2014 school year.

"We are one of only five states that have an approved growth model," Dr. James said. "This model goes a long way toward putting the focus on improved achievement for every child. We believe this will allow recognition of the good work being done at schools with challenging populations while still keeping in mind the goal of bringing every child to proficiency."

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***The Arkansas Department of Education strives to ensure that all children in the state have access to a quality education by providing educators, administrators and staff with leadership, resources and training.***