

Dr. Ken James
Commissioner of
Education

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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.*

Accreditation status presented

The State Board of Education approved the 2007 accredited list of schools presented by the Arkansas Department of Education after hearing appeals from officials whose schools had received probationary status during the accreditation process. After granting two of the appeals, 793 schools are fully accredited, 47 schools are in probationary status and 227 are in accredited-cited status. In addition, 16 school districts are in accredited-cited status.



which earn a citation.

Janice Warren, superintendent of the Crossett School District, asks the State Board of Education at its August meeting to consider removing Crossett High School from accreditation probation for not offering the full 38-required courses.

The state's Standards of Accreditation spell out which violations earn probation and

The five reasons behind probationary status for schools in 2007 are: 1) a teacher in a

classroom with an expired Arkansas teaching license; 2) no gifted and talented program; 3) a teacher in a classroom without a valid Arkansas teaching license; 4) failing to teach the required minimum 38 courses; and 5) teachers teaching out of area and/or an expired alternative license.

The list of schools and the reasons for their status can be found on ArkansasEd.org, the department's Web site, by visiting the following link:
<http://ArkansasEd.org/schools/schools.html>

ACT scores hold steady

In 2007, 21,408 graduating seniors in Arkansas took the ACT college placement exam with an average composite score of 20.5 and reached all time highs in the areas of math and reading at 19.9 and 20.9 respectively, according to scores released by ACT today. "While the average score decreased by a tenth of a point from last year, we had nearly 400 more seniors taking the exam in 2007. That number is great news for the state, because it means more students are seriously considering going to college," said Dr. Ken James, Arkansas Commissioner of Education.

"I am encouraged by the number of students taking the ACT," said Dr. Steve Floyd,

Research available for educators

Edvance Research, Inc. runs the Regional REL Reference Desk for the Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) - Southwest, for the U.S. Department of Education. The purpose of the Regional REL Reference Desk is to provide educators and others with timely, evidence-based research to help guide their decisions about effective education policies, programs, and practices in the field. In response, answers or referrals will be offered that rely on evidence, or indicate when a topic lacks scientifically based research.

Educators and others in the southwest region may obtain technical assistance through the REL Reference Desk by calling Toll Free 1-877-EDVANCE (1-877-338-2623) or e-mailing technicalassistance@edvancersearch.com

interim director of the Arkansas Department of Higher Education. "We're seeing more students coming into college ready for college level work, and while there is room for improvement, we're seeing results from initiatives that have been put into place. We expect to see numbers of test takers increase as well as improvement in the test results."

Dr. James and Dr. Floyd both pointed to the Smart Core curriculum, which has become the default curriculum for the class of 2010, as well as the presence of Advanced Placement classes or their equivalents in all Arkansas high school as strategies that will better prepare students for college.

The average composite ACT score for the nation was 21.2, up from 21.1 in 2006.

"We still have some catching up to do, but with Smart Core solidly in place, we are confident that gap will begin to close over the next few years." Dr. James said.

Smart Core is the state's college- and workplace-readiness curriculum. It is slightly more rigorous than what ACT calls its "core curriculum," which includes three mathematics courses up to Algebra II, four years of grade-level English and three science courses. Smart Core requires the same basic curriculum but it calls for four mathematics courses with the same sequence of Algebra I, Geometry and Algebra II but adds a fourth, higher-level mathematics course as well. Smart Core became the default curriculum for the graduating class of 2010, so its full effects are still not realized, Dr. James said.

Nationwide, students who take ACT's core curriculum score much higher than other students. The same holds true in Arkansas: students who took the core curriculum outscored their fellow Arkansas seniors by two to three points on each ACT test: English, Math, Reading and Science. The same achievement gap between those who take the more rigorous courses and those who don't is evident among subpopulations of students as well, as is illustrated in the chart below:

Arkansas Average ACT Composite Scores	Number Tested	Percent Taking ACT Core or More	Core or More ACT Composite Score	Less than Core ACT Composite Score
All Students	21,403	62	21.3	18.3
African-American	3,464	58	17.6	15.3
Am. Indian/Alaska Native	213	55	21.5	18.7
Caucasian	14,775	67	22.1	19.3
Hispanic	624	59	19.8	16.8
Asian Am/Pacific Islander	392	74	21.2	19.9
Other/No Response	1,935	36	21.6	19.3

Upcoming Events

August 24

Deadline to register for [Beginning Administrator Induction Training](#)

August 29

[Pathwise Mentor Recalibration](#) - Harding University

August 30-September 14

Window for [training sessions on SIS Cycles 2-7](#)

August 31

Registration deadline for [Free and Reduced Price Meal Application/Verification Process](#) workshop

September 5

[Praxis III Preparation for Novices and Mentors](#) - Harding University

September 6

Distance Learning Workshop: [Free and Reduced Price Meal Application/Verification Process](#)

September 11, 12

Beginning Administrator Induction Training

September 12, 19

[Pathwise Mentor Training](#) - Harding University

September 14

[AP Equipment and Materials Grant Application](#) deadline

September 17-19

[Pathwise Mentor Training](#) - UCA Campus

September 26

[Pathwise Mentor Recalibration](#) - UCA Campus

September 26-28

[Pathwise Training](#) - Western Arkansas Co-Op

On the individual subject exams, Arkansas students averaged 20.5 on the English test, 19.9 on math, 20.9 on reading, and 20.2 on science. Arkansas students must score a 19 or higher on the ACT English and mathematics tests to avoid being placed in remedial courses in college. By those standards, 64 percent of Arkansas students are deemed ready for college English coursework and 53 percent for college level mathematics.

Social studies frameworks to remain for 07-08 school year

After meeting with officials from the Arkansas Department of Education and a group of Arkansas historians, Gov. Mike Beebe decided to keep in place the Social Studies frameworks developed in 2006 by a committee of social studies educators and approved by the State Board of Education in early 2007.

"I acknowledge the deep concerns expressed by some parties who fear that the new frameworks will decrease the emphasis on Arkansas history as a stand-alone course," Gov. Beebe said in a statement released August 8. "Let me again assure everyone that Arkansas students will be taught a separate semester of Arkansas History between the seventh and twelfth grades, as required by law.

"There is also concern about the practical ability to teach the required semester of Arkansas History alongside other mandated Social Studies courses in the seventh and eighth grades. We will continue working with the frameworks committee, education officials, and the other interested parties I met with to ensure that these logistical concerns are addressed. At the elementary level, I believe a consensus has emerged that the new frameworks will strengthen Arkansas History, but we will diligently monitor that progress, as well.

"With the beginning of the school year only a few weeks away, it would not be practical to delay the implementation of the approved Social Studies frameworks. However, the discussion and hard work surrounding the importance of Arkansas History in the education of our children will continue toward a resolution before the next school year.

"I thank everyone who has given valued input during this entire process. It bodes well for Arkansas's future that so many people are passionate about ensuring that our children get a full picture of our past."

High school needs more rigor

All Arkansas students need to complete the rigorous Smart Core curriculum in high school, Dr. Ken James said at the August 16 organizational meeting of the Arkansas Legislative Task Force on Higher Education Remediation, Retention and Graduates Rates. Currently, about 10 percent of students opt out of the default curriculum, though some pockets of the state have larger percentages of their students opting out.



Smart Core has been recognized nationally as the appropriate curriculum to provide the skills needed whether students go to work or to college after graduating from high school.

Dr. James said he would work with legislators to look at whether it would be feasible to eliminate the opt out through legislation when the 87th General Assembly meets

in regular session in 2009.