

# Arkansas

## 2016 College- and Career-Readiness Policies and Practices

*The Southern Regional Education Board has long emphasized the critical need to strengthen students' readiness to succeed after high school. SREB's recommendations to improve readiness (SREB.org/Readiness) cover standards, assessments, transitional courses, postsecondary placement and remedial education. To support states' efforts, SREB compiled information through interviews of P-16 education agency staff and review of numerous documents to determine state progress as of fall 2016 on the recommendations. This state profile summarizes selected findings for each of the five areas. SREB plans to update this information annually.*

### Standards

*Does the state have statewide college- and career-readiness standards in reading, writing and mathematics? Do K-12 and postsecondary education agree on the same standards?*

Arkansas Act 743 (2011) requires that the Arkansas College and Career Readiness Standards be aligned to national college and career benchmarks. Act 845 (2013) created the Council on Postsecondary Education and Career Readiness, which facilitates the collaboration of K-12 and postsecondary education in developing college- and career-readiness standards. The standards align school curriculum and graduation standards with postsecondary requirements and the business community's expectations for employability. The Council's members include representatives from K-12 school districts and two- and four-year higher education institutions; also represented are the Arkansas Department of Workforce Services, Arkansas Department of Career Education, Arkansas Community Colleges, the Arkansas State Chamber of Commerce, Arkansas Economic Development Commission, Arkansas Science and Technology Authority, Arkansas Association of Educational Administrators and the Arkansas Education Association.

### Readiness Assessments

*How does the state assess high school students' readiness? What are the options for students who do not meet them?*

In the Arkansas Comprehensive Accountability and Assessment Program, ACT Aspire is the assessment program for grades three through 10. It is administered to ninth and 10th graders and provides an ACT predictor score to indicate readiness. Students who score in the "ready" or "exceeding" range are on track to meet the Arkansas College and Career Readiness Standards for graduation. Via legislation, all 11th-grade students may take the ACT once free of charge and may take the test multiple times at their own expense. Schools may also use PSAT, SAT, Accuplacer and Asset to determine college readiness.

Students who complete Arkansas's Smart Core college preparatory curriculum with a GPA of 2.0 on a 4.0 scale are eligible for unconditional admission to any state postsecondary institution, but each institution has the autonomy to require additional assessments to determine placement. The minimum state required ACT score is 19, but postsecondary institutions may set a higher threshold.

Information on literacy and math skills is available in the individual postsecondary institution's student success plan or remediation post-test scores submitted to the higher education agency. Legislation also requires that students have access to concurrent or dual enrollment courses. A quantitative literacy and mathematical reasoning course may substitute for college algebra for students who do not intend to major in a STEM field. Other placement and readiness criteria vary by college and university for both STEM and non-STEM majors.

## Transitional Courses and Interventions

*Does the state require transitional readiness courses or other interventions for students who are not ready to succeed in college-level courses?*

Students who score 19 or below on the ACT may take transitional courses designed to improve their readiness while they are still in high school. Arkansas legislation requires school districts to offer transitional courses but does not require students to enroll. Arkansas offers Transitional English—an embedded Literacy Ready and English 12 course—for credit as well as a career-focused transitional literacy course. Algebra III or the Math Ready course may count as the transitional course and the fourth math credit. Schools cannot require, but students are encouraged to retake, the ACT after completion of these courses. The Arkansas Department of Higher Education collects student data. In 2016, SREB worked with schools in Arkansas to provide students in Literacy Ready and Math Ready courses the opportunity to retake the ACT exam. SREB collected data and analyzed the pre-2015 ACT scores with the post-2016 ACT scores. Findings show that high school seniors who take the Literacy Ready and Math Ready courses can substantially increase their readiness for college (see <http://www.sreb.org/blog-post/readiness-courses-are-making-difference>).

## Postsecondary Placement

*How do institutions place a student who is not ready for college-level work? Are the same standards, assessments and qualifying score levels applied statewide or systemwide? Are multiple criteria and measures used in placement decisions?*

The 2016 Higher Education Student Placement Policy identifies multiple factors for placement. The Arkansas Higher Education Coordinating Board set a minimum score of 19 on ACT tests as an indicator of college readiness. Some Arkansas institutions use 19 in math for non-STEM majors and 21 or higher for STEM majors to determine course placement. Each institution can set individual standards and requirements for placement in credit-bearing courses. Indicators for literacy and math placement include scores on ACT or other placement tests, GPA and other factors determined by the individual institution. ACT Aspire is in its second year in Arkansas, and the State Board of Education can set literacy and math cut scores to be reported in four levels. A new Arkansas Department of Higher Education placement policy requires colleges and universities to use data-driven practices and to use the data for placement decisions.

## Remedial and Developmental Education

*Are there state or system policies for remedial and developmental education in colleges? What curricular and support paths are available for students? Is corequisite instruction—an academic course taken in conjunction with another course—required or optional? How do institutions and the state monitor student progress? What evidence is available on the effectiveness of these interventions?*

There is no statewide consistency in how remedial or developmental education is offered. SREB Readiness Courses can count as remediation course requirements for students who successfully complete them in the high school senior year. Students who score below the ACT cut score may be admitted to the college and assigned to student support services for assistance. Some institutions offer remedial assistance via the corequisite model, which allows the student to enroll in the credit-bearing course and receive remedial assistance at the same time. Some colleges and universities continue to use the traditional stand-alone non-credit remedial courses. Students who receive the Arkansas Academic Challenge Scholarship are required to complete all remedial instruction within their first 30 hours of college after receiving the scholarship.