

ARKANSAS SOAR

Overview

1. What is SOAR?

*SOAR stands for **Student Ordinal Assessment Ranking**. SOAR is a percentile value that is a measure of students' academic progress on statewide assessments from one year to the next. Each student with at least two consecutive years of state assessment scores is assigned a SOAR Value. This percentile value indicates how much a student has learned from the one year to the next, as compared to how much other students in the state learned who started with the same score the previous year (academic peers).*

SOAR Values range from 1 to 99, where higher values represent higher growth for a student relative to his/her academic peers and lower values represent lower growth relative to his/her academic peers. This method for measuring student growth works independently of assessment performance levels. Therefore, all students, no matter the scores they earned on past state tests, have an equal chance to demonstrate growth at the highest rank on the next year's test. Currently, SOAR values are calculated in literacy and mathematics for students in grades 4 through 8, and for Algebra and Geometry.

2. Why did Arkansas develop the SOAR growth model to measure student progress?

Arkansas developed "SOAR" as a measure of student progress that compares changes in a student's scores to changes in scores of other students with the same scores the prior year. A SOAR Value measures student progress by comparing one student's progress to the progress of other students with the same performance histories. We refer to these students as "academic peers."

3. What questions can SOAR data help answer?

- ***Growth in comparison to other students: How does my student's growth in literacy achievement or math achievement compare to the growth in achievement of other students in Arkansas who started with the same scale score last year?***

SOAR shows how a student's achievement at the end of the year compares with that of other students who started the year at the same achievement level.

- ***SOAR Growth vs. Achievement Status: Did my students demonstrate growth in achievement even if they did not change performance levels on the state assessment?***

SOAR values are a measure of educational progress independent of students' starting proficiency levels. All students, no matter the scores they earned on past state tests, have an equal chance to demonstrate growth at any of the SOAR percentile values on the next year's test.

- **School, District Growth: How much academic growth did students in my class, school or district demonstrate this year?**

SOAR values are percentile values that can be aggregated to help us understand growth at a group, classroom, grade, school, and district levels. The median SOAR value for a group of students is the value used to describe growth for that particular group. The median is the middle score when you rank students' individual SOAR values from highest to lowest. The typical median student SOAR value for students in Arkansas is 50.

4. How does SOAR measure student growth differently than the state's other growth models?

It is helpful to think of growth as a statistic that puts achievement on a state assessment into greater context. State assessment achievement scores answer the question: how did a student fare relative to grade level standards in a given year. SOAR values are growth percentile values that add another layer of understanding by providing a measure of how a student changed from one year to the next relative to other students.

Percentiles are commonly understood values that express the percentage of cases that fall below a certain score. For example:

- ✓ *A student with a growth percentile of 90 in 5th grade mathematics grew as much or more than 90 percent of her academic peers from the 4th grade math assessment to the 5th grade math assessment. Only 10% of her academic peers grew more in math than she did.*

OR...

- ✓ *A student with a growth percentile of 23 on the 8th grade literacy assessment grew as much or better than 23 percent of her academic peers from the 7th grade assessment to the 8th grade literacy assessment. This student grew less than 77% of her academic peers.*

Because growth is measuring change in performance rather than absolute performance, it doesn't matter how a student performed on the previous

assessment. In any given testing year, each student has an equal opportunity to grow at the 99th percentile. In other words, even though a student may not **achieve** a score of 278 out of 280 this year, it is possible for a student to have **grown** at the 99th percentile from last year to this year. Although a student may perform well below the proficiency mark, that student could potentially have a high growth percentile.

5. What does SOAR show that standard Arkansas ESEA reports don't?

Traditional student assessment reports provide information about a student's performance, whereas growth reports provide information about how much change or "growth" there has been in performance from year to year. ESEA reports measure growth as the expected growth to the standard based on a trajectory to ensure a student's growth is moving incrementally to bring them to grade-level proficiency by grade 8. SOAR is a different growth calculation, a measure that only calculates growth relative to academic peers and ranks each student accordingly.

6. Is growth measured by progress a better measure of student performance than ESEA status?

It is important to keep in mind that the SOAR Value is useful to the extent that it is another piece of data that educators may use to better understand their students' performance, and in particular, their students' change in performance from one year to the next.

7. Will SOAR growth data be used for accountability determinations?

No, ESEA accountability looks at both status and growth. The growth model for accountability measures a students' growth toward the pre-determined standard for each grade level. SOAR growth will be used for educator evaluation ratings at the teacher, school and district levels.

8. When do SOAR reports become available?

*Currently, SOAR reports are available for 2012, 2013 and 2014 on the ADE Data Center in the Student Ordinal Assessment Rank (SOAR) Data Portal.
<https://adedata.arkansas.gov/Login.aspx?ReturnUrl=%2fsdp>*

9. For which grades and subjects will Arkansas report SOAR data?

Arkansas will initially report growth for literacy and mathematics for grades 4 through 8, as well as for Algebra and Geometry. Because SOAR uses students' previous state assessment results to calculate growth percentiles, there will be a transition from current data to future data.

10. Will all students be included in SOAR data?

SOAR data will be calculated for all students who take state math and literacy assessments and have prior year scores from which to calculate the SOAR value, based on the ordered rank.

11. How will SOAR growth data be disseminated to districts, schools, and teachers?

Teachers, schools, and districts may access SOAR data using their TRIAND logins and passwords. SOAR reports are available for 2012, 2013 and 2014 on the ADE Data Center in the SOAR in the Student Ordinal Assessment Rank (SOAR) Data Portal.

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12. How will a teacher's SOAR score impact his/her evaluation?

Teachers' median SOAR values are included in the evaluation as a companion to teachers' performance ratings on the Danielson Framework. The expectation is for teachers to meet or exceed the established growth threshold. Teachers whose SOAR value does not meet the threshold cannot receive an overall rating of "distinguished." Teachers whose SOAR values don't meet the threshold for two consecutive years will have their overall rating lowered a level.

If a teacher's SOAR value and the teacher's performance rating do not support similar inferences about a teacher's effectiveness, then additional measures and artifacts may be helpful to the teacher and evaluator to further illuminate the source of the divergence.

13. What additional information will the Department provide to teachers, administrators, and other education stakeholders on how growth data is calculated and how to use it effectively? Where can I find this information?

The Department hopes that this new measure of student performance provokes high-quality conversations about students, schools, curriculum, and the teaching and learning that take place in every classroom across the state. Set aside time to explore the causes for high and low levels of growth and learn to recognize the characteristics of students performing at the poles of the growth spectrum. The Department encourages educators to utilize other ADE resources for information and professional development that can be accessed at: <http://arkansased.org>

The Department will be integrating visualizations of SOAR data into the student GPS as additional data supports.