



ARKANSAS DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

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LITTLE ROCK: For the first time, more than 60 percent of Arkansas students at each grade level scored at or above proficient on both the mathematics and literacy Arkansas Augmented Benchmark Exams. The exams, administered in April 2009 to 209,000 third- through eighth-graders, are recognized nationally as some of the most rigorous in the country. Academic growth is also evident in the state's norm-referenced exams, End of Course Exams and end-of-level Grade 11 Literacy exam.

(All state-level test scores are listed by grade and subject on the accompanying charts. District- and school-level scores for all exams are available on the Arkansas Department of Education's Web site, ArkansasEd.org.)

"It's a great day when a state can report that more than two-thirds of its students are achieving proficiency, especially when those results reflect continued academic growth at each grade level," said Diana Julian, Ed.D., interim commissioner for the Arkansas Department of Education. "The truth borne out in these scores is that when all students are held to high expectations, taught by highly-skilled teachers and supported by a quality learning environment, academic success is a realistic goal for each and every one of them."

In addition to the benchmark scores, the state also released results from the norm-referenced sections of the standardized exams, which are listed as the ARSM9 scores for kindergarteners and the SAT-10 scores for first through ninth graders. This makes the second year that the norm-referenced questions have been incorporated into the state's Benchmark Exam, resulting in a single testing-instrument for Arkansas students called the Augmented Benchmark Exam. The rest of the questions on the Augmented Benchmark Exams are called criterion-referenced

items because they test a student's mastery of Arkansas's required curriculum, also known as the state's "frameworks."

Norm-referenced questions allow for comparison of Arkansas students' scores to their counterparts across the nation and are reported in percentiles. The scores are listed as percentile scores. A score at the 62nd percentile would mean that on average, Arkansas students scored as well or better than 62 percent of their nationwide cohort. The percentile scores in most testing areas were slightly higher in 2009 than they were in 2008.

The state also released results for End of Course Exams in Algebra I and Geometry as well as the Grade 11 End of Level Literacy Exam. These also show a healthy pace of growth, with more than 60 percent scoring at or above proficient on each of the mathematics tests and 57 percent at or above proficient on the Literacy exam.

The Algebra I, Geometry and Grade 11 Literacy results – along with those of the criterion-referenced portion of the Augmented Benchmark Exams in third through eighth grades – are used to determine school-improvement status for schools under the federal No Child Left Behind laws.

Beginning next school year, the Algebra I exam will be utilized as the state's first "high stakes exam" as students will have to obtain a passing score on it before they are allowed to pass the course. The passing grade is set lower than is the bar for scoring "proficient." If a student does not pass the Algebra I exam the first time, the student undergoes remediation and has two subsequent attempts to pass the exam. If a student still has not passed, an alternative method of instruction and an alternative form of assessment are administered, providing a total four opportunities to pass the exam.

Benchmark exams in science were administered to fifth- and seventh-graders in the state for the second time last spring, as was the Biology End of Course exam. While scores increased on all of these over last year's, fewer students are reaching proficiency in science: 43 percent of fifth-graders, 33 percent of seventh graders and 41 percent in biology (spring administration, which is when the majority of students take the exam). Science scores are not used to determine school improvement status.

"We anticipate continued improvement in our science scores," Julian said. "In addition to recent curricular changes that should strengthen the teaching of science across the grades, we also know that shining the spotlight of accountability in a subject area has proved to be a true motivator. These scores will no doubt continue to climb."

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.