



## NEWS RELEASE

### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### ARKANSAS BENCHMARK SCORES CONTINUE STEADY CLIMB

Arkansas students continued to show improvement in the latest round of state Benchmark scores, with increases being made at every grade level which also resulted in a closing of the achievement gap for the second consecutive year.

"You know you're on the right path when each year marks progress toward your goals," said Dr. Ken James, Arkansas Commissioner of Education. "That we've experienced yet another year of good news proves that we have the right mix of support, accountability and high expectations manifested in our public education system to provide our students a foundation of skills and knowledge to allow them to compete across both state and national borders. The important thing now is to leave those successful components in place, all the while building upon their strengths."

Governor Mike Beebe added, "'Education is the foundation our state's future must be built on. We celebrate our students' achievements today, but we can't afford to rest or become complacent. We've worked hard to make record investments in our kids and in our schools. We must make this good news a starting point, not a destination, on our path to provide every Arkansas child with a world-class education."

The spring administration of the Arkansas Benchmark Exams marked the inauguration of the Augmented Benchmark Exam. Arkansas legislation calls for students to take two forms of tests each year, a criterion-referenced one that tests students' knowledge of the state's curriculum; and a norm-referenced one, which allows comparison of Arkansas students' performance to that of students across

the country. In the augmented version of the test, both sets of test items were incorporated into one examination, which allowed students to take one test instead of two.

The Arkansas Benchmark exams were administered to all students in grades three through eight in two content areas: literacy and reading. An equating exercise between the 2008 Augmented Benchmark test and last year’s Benchmark exams allows for continued comparison of scores across the years. Student scores fall into four categories: below basic, basic, proficient and advanced. A score of proficient and above indicates mastery of grade-level material. The table below shows the increase in students scoring proficient and above at each grade level in each subject, with the only exception being seventh grade literacy, which remained constant at 57 percent.

Dr. James pointed to a number of firsts with this year’s scores:

- First time over 60% proficient and above in grade 3 Literacy
- First time over 70% proficient and above in grade 4 Math
- First time over 60% proficient and above in grade 4 Literacy
- First time over 60% proficient and above in grade 5 Literacy
- First time over 70% proficient and above in grade 6 Math
- First time over 60% proficient and above in grade 7 math
- First time over 50% proficient and above in grade 8 math

**Percent scoring proficient or advanced on the Arkansas Benchmark Exam**

Grade	2005 Math	2006 Math	2007 Math	2008 Math	2005 Literacy	2006 Literacy	2007 Literacy	2008 Literacy
Third	58%	67%	74%	<b>79%</b>	50%	57%	59%	<b>64%</b>
Fourth	50%	60%	65%	<b>74%</b>	51%	61%	59%	<b>67%</b>
Fifth	41%	50%	61%	<b>67%</b>	47%	56%	59%	<b>64%</b>
Sixth	43%	57%	68%	<b>72%</b>	57%	59%	60%	<b>63%</b>
Seventh	43%	50%	58%	<b>62%</b>	50%	53%	57%	<b>57%</b>
Eighth	33%	44%	48%	<b>56%</b>	57%	66%	63%	<b>67%</b>

“The exciting point to note about this year’s scores is that at all grade levels in both literacy and math, we have more than half of our students scoring proficient and above,” Dr. James said. “Just three years ago, that milestone seemed a daunting one to reach. Credit for these results must go to our excellent, hardworking classroom teachers and school-level administrators who provide their students with high expectations, productive learning environments and meaningful interventions, all of which are imperative for students’ performing to their full potential.”

For the second year in a row, the scores also represent a narrowing of the achievement gap. While this did not occur across the board, the gap between the percentage scoring proficient and above narrowed on eight of the 12 tests between whites and African-Americans and seven of 12 tests between whites and Hispanics.

“All of these instances represent what we think of as the best kind of narrowing, because all scores improved,” Dr. James said. “What you don’t want to see is narrowing due to dropping scores for the higher achieving group.”

Under the federal No Child Left Behind Act, all students are to score proficient or above by the 2013-2014 school year. In Arkansas, schools are held accountable for having an increasing percentage of their students scoring proficient or above each year, which is called making “adequate yearly progress,” or AYP. Schools that do not make AYP are at risk of being placed in school improvement. The Arkansas Department of Education plans to inform schools of AYP status by the beginning of the school year.

Because the state contracted with a new company to design the Augmented Benchmark exams, the norm-referenced portion of the augmented test is a new instrument and, therefore, its scores cannot be compared to previous years’ scores. However, the scores for the SAT-10 questions on the test are listed in the table below. The scores are listed as percentile scores. A score at the 62<sup>nd</sup> percentile would mean that on average, Arkansas students scored as well or better than 62 percent of their nationwide cohort.

Under Arkansas law, students in grades kindergarten through nine participate in norm-referenced testing. Because the testing company inadvertently supplied some districts ordering practice tests the actual version of the kindergarten test, the kindergarten tests from this spring will not be scored. An alternative assessment will be administered to first graders (last year’s kindergarteners) early in the 2008-2009 school year so teachers will have valid scores to use when developing educational plans for their students.

**Percentile scores on the SAT-10 for Arkansas students**

<b>Grade</b>	<b>Mathematics Problem Solving</b>	<b>Reading Comprehension</b>	<b>Comprehensive Language</b>	<b>Science</b>
1	48	41		
2	49	41		
3	56	48	34	

4	65	64	33	
5	61	56	41	52
6	64	46	44	
7	56	53	45	54
8	64	53	41	
9	63*	53	46	

\*The ninth-grade score is for mathematics.

All 2007 test scores at school and district levels are available on the Arkansas Department of Education's Web site, **ArkansasEd.org**.

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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.**