



NEWS RELEASE

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May 5, 2008

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ARKANSAS SUBMITS PROPOSAL FOR "DIFFERENTIATED ACCOUNTABILITY" UNDER NCLB

On Friday, the Arkansas Department of Education (ADE) submitted a proposal in response to U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings' announcement last month that state education agencies could apply to participate in a pilot "Differentiated Accountability" system under the federal No Child Left Behind laws. Up to 10 states will be allowed to implement state-designed models as early as the 2008-2009 school year that will distinguish among schools that are considered to be in "school improvement" by applying different labels and consequences to schools depending on the degree to which they miss meeting adequate yearly progress.

The U.S. Department of Education will now enter into a "peer review process" of states' submissions and are expected to announce approval of the models early this summer. The department has not released the number of applications received as of today.

No Child Left Behind calls for all students to score proficient on their state's benchmark exams by 2013-2014. "While the Differentiated Accountability system does not alter that goal, states are allowed to design models that infuse further flexibilities into the process that are intended to benefit both schools and students. We feel that we have submitted a proposal that will better distinguish between schools based on their performances but, even more important, will allow us to more effectively and efficiently target resources in a manner that they will have the greatest impact for students who are struggling to achieve academically," said Dr. Ken James, Commissioner of Education.

Presently, to make adequate yearly progress, Arkansas schools must have a certain percentage of their students scoring proficient or advanced in both literacy and math on the Arkansas Benchmark Exams. The percentage increases yearly to reach the 100 percent goal by the 2013-2014 school year. Not only does the percentage goal have to be met by the whole test-taking population of students, but it also must be met by subpopulations of students that have at least 40 students taking the tests. The subpopulations in Arkansas are white, African-American, Hispanic, English Language Learners, special education and lower socio-economic.

Arkansas' proposed model includes five categories of schools:

- Achieving – these are schools that are not in any phase of school improvement
- Targeted Improvement – these schools have at least 75 percent but less than 100 percent of their subpopulations as well as their combined population scoring at the appropriate level. They will provide tutoring and/or school choice, as mandated by NCLB, but will focus interventions on those students who are not scoring proficient or above.
- Intensive Targeted Improvement – these schools have at least 75 percent but less than 100 percent of their subpopulations as well as their combined populations scoring at the appropriate level but have had a the same subpopulations miss the targeted goal for four or more years. The interventions for students become more intensive at this stage and are based on an assessment provided through the Arkansas Standards and Indicators for School Success inventory.
- Whole School Improvement – these are schools in which less than 75 percent of the subpopulations and/or the combined population of test-taking students have scored at the appropriate level. These schools will self-administer the Arkansas Standards and Indicators for School Improvement and implement research-based interventions based on the findings of the inventory with assistance and monitoring by a regional team of educators. Schools remain in this category for one to three years if these conditions are still met.
- Intensive Whole School Improvement – these are schools in which less than 75 percent of the subpopulations and/or the combined population of test-taking students have scored at the appropriate level for four or more years. For these schools, the Arkansas Department of Education will conduct a Scholastic Audit using the Arkansas Standards and Indicators for School Improvement and assign a professional provider of school improvement services to implement interventions based on the audit's findings. The progress at these schools will be monitored by ADE.

"We anticipate needing to make some tweaks to our model as we progress through the peer review stage, but overall I think we have submitted a sound system that I hope will gain approval from the U.S. Department of Education," said Dr. Ken James.

Arkansas was one of the first seven states to gain approval from USDOE for use of a "growth model" in calculating adequate yearly progress. The growth model credits schools that have low-performing students who are showing sufficient academic growth to reach proficient by their eighth-grade year. Use of the growth model for determining the list of schools in school improvement based on the 2007 Arkansas Benchmark scores resulted in 69 schools remaining off the school improvement list that would have been on it otherwise.

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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.