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Adequate Yearly Progress in Arkansas 2009-10

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At the end of October, the Arkansas Department of Education released annual adequate yearly progress (AYP) figures for Arkansas schools. These results are based on benchmark and end-of-course test scores in math and literacy for both overall populations and subgroups within schools. They are used to determine whether a school meets state standards and, given their performance in the most recent two years, whether they are placed in the "school improvement" category.

BACKGROUND

Since the federal government's passage of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) in 2001, states have developed benchmark tests to measure student proficiency and hold schools accountable for their results on these tests. The Arkansas testing system, which began with the Arkansas Comprehensive Testing and Assessment Program (ACTAAP) in 1999, has evolved into today's benchmark and end-of-course exams. Results on these exams determine whether schools and districts meet state standards using a measuring stick referred to as *adequate yearly progress* (AYP). If they fail to make AYP two years in a row, schools and districts are placed into school improvement (SI) by the state, in which they are subject to degrees of state intervention depending on the breadth and duration of their failures.

Arkansas measures adequate yearly progress (AYP) based on the percentage of students scoring at or above a state-established proficiency score on state tests. The percentage of students achieving proficiency required to make AYP increases each year, with the aim of getting all students to proficiency by the 2013-14 academic year. Currently, required proficiency rates are between 64% and 71%, depending on grade and subject. AYP is measured not only from average overall test scores, but also from the scores of sub-populations within schools. Schools are held accountable for different racial groups (white, Hispanic, and African-American), for economically disadvantaged students, for students with disabilities, and for students with limited English proficiency. For each of these groups, the state measures AYP in both math and literacy, giving fourteen categories in which a school must make AYP in order to be in good standing.¹

¹ There are a couple exceptions to this rule. Schools can have their test scores measured by a growth model in which

This means that a school with relatively good overall test scores but poor scores in one subject for a single subgroup of students can fail to make AYP. Such a school could just as likely enter school improvement (SI) as one which has persistently below-average test scores for their full student population.

A QUICK TUTORIAL ON AYP & SI

Of Arkansas' 1,075 public schools, just over half (572 schools) met state standards as defined by adequate yearly progress (AYP) for 2009-10. Table 1 shows the number of Arkansas schools making AYP for 2009-10. However AYP and SI are not the same thing. Notice that schools making AYP are divided between those in school improvement (SI) and those not, as well as those not making AYP. To be placed in SI, a school must fail to make AYP two years in a row. The same pattern holds for schools currently in SI: to exit it, a school must make AYP two years in a row. Thus schools currently in SI who made AYP this year will return to good standing if they make AYP again next year. Similarly, schools on alert this year for failing to make AYP will enter SI with another year of failing results. The total number of Arkansas schools in school improvement for 2009-10 was 420, up 17 from 403 schools in 2008-09.

Table 1. Schools in AYP and SI, 2009-10

	In School Improvement	In Good Standing	Total
Made AYP	126	446	572
Failed AYP	294	209	503
Total	420	655	1,075

sufficient growth independent of proficiency rates can qualify a school as meeting state standards. Additionally, the state has a "safe harbor" provision which allows schools who fail standards in the normal way to instead seek "achieving" status by showing high attendance or graduation rates, a high testing rate, and sizable progress in increasing proficiency rates. Lastly, having failing AYP scores for a subject or population in a single year can sometimes be overcome by using a three-year average if previous years' test scores were better.

The rate of schools making AYP differed depending on whether they were in SI or not. 68% of schools not in SI made AYP for 2009-10, while only 30% of those in SI succeeded in meeting state standards. While informative, these numbers should not be taken as indicating the success or failure of state SI efforts.

RECENT CHANGES: USING GROWTH FOR ACCOUNTABILITY

The accountability model familiar to most Arkansas educators sets goals based on what percentage of a school's students score at or above a pre-determined level, that is, a proficiency cutoff. Schools are accountable to this percentage of students scoring at the proficient level both for their overall student population as well as for student subgroups. This model is helpful and informative in revealing a snapshot of schools' performance on state tests. However, the AYP model has come under criticism for primarily emphasizing getting students in the middle over the proficiency cutoff, thereby de-emphasizing learning gains for high- and low-performing students. In Arkansas, SI ... adequate yearly "progress" does not exactly mean "progress." Rather, AYP assesses the extent to which students meet increasingly difficult benchmarks. However, a school with no "progress" but high scores could certainly meet AYP. Conversely, a school with "progress" but not in all subgroups, may fail to meet AYP. Indeed, AYP is not a measure of progress at all.

In response to this criticism, the state has developed a growth model to measure student achievement. This growth model takes account of student gains across the full range of achievement, thereby determining AYP by whether a sufficient number of students are making satisfactory progress, whether they are low, average, or high achievers. Taking advantage of this new development, 56 schools opted to use the growth model for 2009-10 and succeeded in making AYP under it. Forty-seven of these schools thereby avoided alert status,

while nine avoided being put into a further stage of school improvement. Through either the normal proficiency model or the state's safe harbor provisions, these schools would have failed AYP; however, through this new alternative, they have succeeded.

LEVELS AND TYPES OF SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Schools which have been placed in school improvement are subject to different levels and types of state intervention. The intensity of the intervention depends on the length of time the school has been in school improvement, as well as whether the failure to meet standards is due to persistent problems with particular subgroups, or with the school as a whole.

Table 2 provides a count of schools in various stages of school improvement (SI) for the 2009-10 school year as well as the year prior. As mentioned above, the total number of schools in SI for 2009-10 was 420, compared to 403 a year earlier. For 2009-10, the number of schools in each of the first four years of SI decreased from a year earlier. For example, while 76 schools entered the first year of SI in 2008-09, only 70 did for 2009-10. The number of schools in Year 5 or higher increased slightly, from 93 to 97 schools. Perhaps the most hopeful figure is the 126 schools previously in SI who are achieving; that is, the schools met state standards for 2009-10. This figure is up from 2008-09, when 90 schools were achieving but still in SI. These schools can exit SI if they meet state standards again for the 2010-11 year.

Overall, Arkansas' 2009-10 AYP results show some promise. The increased number of schools in SI is due not to a greater influx of schools failing to make AYP, but to a higher number of schools in SI which have succeeded in making AYP for one year, thus putting themselves on the cusp of exiting SI.

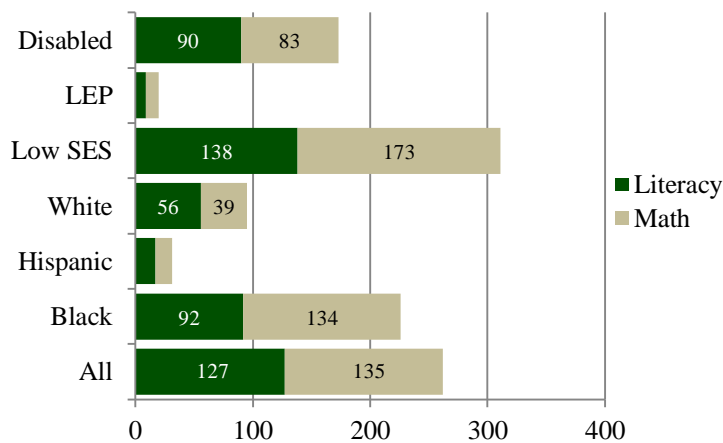
Table 2. Arkansas Schools in School Improvement, 2008-09 and 2009-10

Stage of SI	2009-10		2008-09	
	Schools in SI	% of AR Schools	Schools in SI	% of AR Schools
Not in SI	655	61%	678	64%
Schools in SI	420	39%	403	36%
Total Schools	1,075	100%	1,081	100%
Schools in SI				
Achieving, still in SI	126	12%	91	8%
Year 1	70	6%	76	7%
Year 2	50	5%	58	5%
Year 3	46	4%	48	4%
Year 4	31	3%	37	3%
Year 5 or higher	97	9%	93	9%
Total SI Schools	420	39%	403	36%

SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT: WHO AND WHY?

As mentioned before, 420 schools in Arkansas are in school improvement (SI) based on 2009-10 test scores. These schools can be classified in three groups: those entering SI for the first time, those continuing into a further phase of SI, and those still in SI who made AYP.² Figure 1 provides the number of SI schools failing different subgroups and subjects. For math and literacy, notice that AYP failure rates are similar. Subgroup failures are occurring most frequently for economically disadvantaged ("Low SES") students, with failures for African-Americans and schools' overall populations not far behind. The prevalence of these trends suggests that schools should focus more on raising achievement for these populations. The numbers also inform schools currently in good standing about what subgroups their neighboring schools are failing, serving as a potential warning against similar shortcomings. Statewide, a strengthened emphasis on raising achievement for economically disadvantaged and African-American students could greatly help reduce the number of schools in SI and bringing all Arkansas students to proficiency.

Figure 1. Failing Subjects and Populations for Schools in SI, 2009-10 (N=420)



Of the 14 categories in which a school can fail AYP, the least common are those for Hispanic students and students with limited English proficiency. Further, these two groups presumably have substantial overlap. The fewest schools fail AYP for Hispanic and LEP populations largely because there are very few schools for which these subgroups are relevant. Compared to the other subgroups, few schools in Arkansas have large enough populations in these subgroups for them to count toward AYP. Statewide, nine percent of Arkansas

² Schools in the last category will exit SI and return to good standing if they make AYP again next year, in accordance with the two-years requirement.

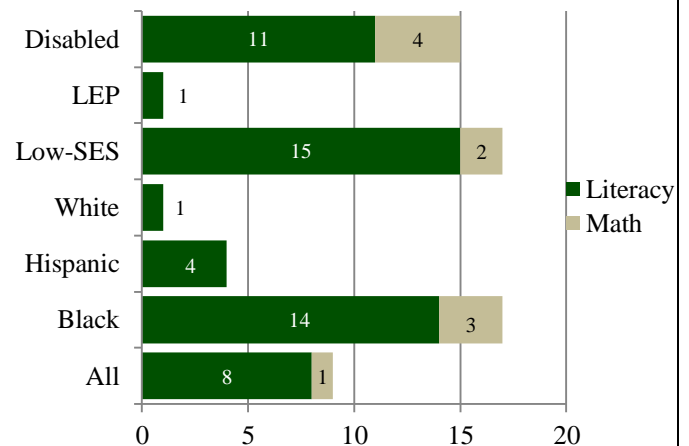
students are Hispanic, and this percentage is distributed unevenly across schools and regions. Thus the very low numbers for schools failing AYP are due not to broad proficiency among these groups, but more likely to the low number of schools which have enough students to be subject to AYP in those categories.

SCHOOLS EXITING SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

One-hundred schools in SI in 2008-09 made AYP. Of them, 66 failed to make it two years in a row and exit SI, while the other 34 were successful in making AYP for 2009-10 based on their 2009-10 results. This number is comparable to the previous year, when 31 schools exited SI. Most schools exiting SI based on 2010 scores were in Targeted Improvement Years 1, 2, or 3. These schools had the chance to exit SI because they made AYP in 2008-09 as well.

To exit school improvement, these 34 schools had to substantially improve their performance in both school-wide and subgroup proficiency. They were placed in school improvement earlier by failing to make AYP in any one of 14 categories (two subjects by seven population groups). Specifically, they needed to increase proficiency rates in the subjects and populations for which they were being placed in SI. Figure 3 summarizes the categories in which these 34 schools were falling short of state standards in 2007-08 before making AYP two years in a row. As the figure shows, these schools were failing far more in literacy than in math. Most markedly, 14 of these schools were failing in literacy for African-Americans and 15 for economically disadvantaged students, while 11 of them were failing state standards in literacy for students with disabilities. These schools met the challenge of improving proficiency for low-performing subgroups, and this achievement is to be congratulated.

Figure 3. Previous AYP Failure for Schools Exiting School Improvement in 2009-10 (N=34)



HOW MANY AYP CATEGORIES ARE SCHOOLS FAILING?

Because of wide variations in how schools can fail AYP, educators have been interested in the commonalities among different types of AYP failure. In addition, knowing how these types of failure change for different levels of SI is useful. Two tables are given below for this purpose. Table 3 lists the average number of categories in which schools failed AYP. As averages, these are generalized results for schools with different AYP statuses for 2009-10. We see in Table 3 that 42.5 percent (214 of 503 schools) fail AYP in only one or two categories, while just over one-third (174 schools of 503) fail AYP in four or more categories.

Table 3. Number of Failed Categories for Schools Not Making AYP, 2009-10

Number Failed Categories	Number of Schools
One	117
Two	97
Three	112
Four or More	174
Missing Information	3
Total	503

Table 4. Schools Failing AYP for Whole Population or Subgroups

School Status	Total Schools	Failing Both Overall and Subgroups	Failing Overall Only (No Subgroups)	Failing Subgroups Only
Alert	209	102	3	100
SI Year 1	70	45	1	24
SI Year 2	50	26	0	24
SI Year 3	46	16	0	30
SI Year 4	31	19	0	12
SI Year 5 or higher	97	66	2	29
All Schools Failing AYP	503	274	6	219

Table 4 distinguishes schools by whether they failed AYP for a subgroup or for their full student population. Two points are worth making based on Table 4. First, at every level of school improvement there are a large number of schools that are failing for subgroups but not their full population; this number varies between one-third and two-thirds of all schools in each level of SI. Second, AYP failure for a school's overall population but not subgroups is extremely rare. Out of the 503 schools either in alert or SI, only 6 schools fit this description. Thus, it is safe to say that schools failing AYP either do so in subgroups only, or in subgroups as well as their full student population.

CONCLUSION

Arkansas AYP results for 2009-10 yield a few lessons, and a few hopeful signs. Arkansas schools either entering or continuing in SI need to focus on improving achievement for African-American, economically disadvantaged and disabled students. While improvement is needed in both math and literacy, schools are failing slightly more frequently in literacy. Likewise, schools exiting SI overcame the same problems those entering it currently face. Overall, Arkansas' accountability model remains focused on improving achievement for historically low-performing subgroups, and for some schools this model is yielding results.

Schools failing AYP do so for a broad range of reasons, and some have broader shortcomings than others, as seen by the variation in the number of AYP categories schools are failing. For this reason, the state has wisely adopted smart accountability, which takes into account whether schools are in SI for overall or subgroup reasons.

Finally, though the overall number of schools in SI is up from 2008-09, there is promise in the number of schools currently on the verge of exiting SI by meeting state standards two years in a row. With another year of focus and achievement, these schools will have successfully returned themselves to full autonomy and adequate student achievement.

For more information about this policy brief, please contact the Office for Education Policy at oep@uark.edu