

RECLAIMING
ARKANSAS
EDUCATION

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Arkansas has established a unified plan that aligns funding, accountability, and assessment under one state-led system.



FUNDING

Empower school districts to invest funds in student needs and minimize burdensome administrative requirements.



ACCOUNTABILITY

Establish a comprehensive statewide accountability system to streamline state and federal accountability processes.



ASSESSMENT

Expand access to accelerated coursework by eliminating redundant testing requirements.

Arkansas's plan reduces unnecessary federal compliance so districts can stay focused on student outcomes.



To deliver its unified plan, Arkansas is requested flexibilities from specific ESEA requirements through three mechanisms.

What Is ESEA?

ESEA is the main federal law governing K-12 education. It directs the use of Title funds (e.g., Title I for low-income schools, Title II for teacher training) and sets accountability and testing requirements.

While not all ESEA provisions can be waived, states may request flexibility from certain elements of accountability, assessment, reporting, and school improvement.

Returning Education to the States Waiver

Waives specific ESEA funding and assessment provisions that create barriers to scaling Arkansas's unified strategy. Covers AFUA expansion pilot, state set-aside consolidation, and assessment flexibility for accelerated students.

ED-Flex Waiver

Allows ADE to waive certain ESEA statutory requirements on behalf of districts. Enables statewide and individual LEA waivers through the AR App process to reduce district-level compliance burden.

Revised ESSA Plan

Allows ADE to update its federal education strategy to reflect evolving priorities and needs. Ensures alignment of funding, accountability, and supports to improve student outcomes while increasing coherence and flexibility for districts.

Arkansas requested flexibilities from administrative burden — not from requirements that protect students or civil rights.



Federal Flexibility to Let Arkansas Lead

On July 7, USED granted Arkansas flexibilities under ESEA that allow the state to implement its unified accountability and support plan.

ADE received the following:

- **A Returning Education to the States Waiver**, which allows Arkansas to block and align federal funds with programs and strategies that best serve Arkansas students.
- **An Ed-Flex Waiver** provides school districts with additional flexibility in the use of federal education funds, supporting local decision-making and innovation.
- **A Revised Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) plan**, designed to enhance accountability measures and target school improvement efforts more effectively.

What Changes for Your District?

BEFORE FEDERAL FLEXIBILITY

ACCOUNTABILITY



Schools are identified under separate state and federal systems.

ASSESSMENT



Accelerated students are double tested. They must take the grade-level test even when it duplicates an EOC.

FUNDING



Districts budget grant-by-grant, causing administrative burden. Funding flexibilities apply unevenly across districts.

NOW

Schools are identified under the state accountability system only. One A-F letter grade identifies and supports every school.

Accelerated students in grades 5-8 who complete end-of-course exams are tested once. Those in credit bearing courses take only the EOC for that course.

All districts have more freedom to spend federal funds where needed, and rural districts will pilot expanded flexibility.

Consolidated Plans

Arkansas continues to streamline efforts to reduce red tape by creating a Unified Accountability and Support Plan.

- ✔ **Consolidated Application** - Arkansas has consolidated 17 state and federal applications into a single unified application that becomes the district's strategic planning tool
- ✔ **Consolidated School Improvement Plans**- Arkansas is merging all state and federal requirements for school improvement plans into a single template that informs the district strategic plan (Title I and 1003 requirements).
- ✔ **Consolidated Ed-Flex requests** within AR App

Accountability: One State Letter Grade

ADE will now use the state A-F school letter grade system as the sole, official process for identifying schools for support and improvement.

- ✔ D- and F-rated schools and districts will be prioritized for ADE support resources.
- ✔ Districts no longer track two identification systems — **a single letter grade drives support and monitoring.**
- ✔ Families see one clear rating instead of having to interpret two overlapping systems.
- ✔ Students in Alternative Learning Environments (ALE) are reassigned to their zoned school of record. The zoned school owns the ALE student's outcomes across accountability measures: attendance, achievement, and growth.



Assessment: One Test for Accelerated Students

ADE will allow students accelerated students in grades 5–8 to complete end-of-course exams prior to high school.

- ✓ Students taking accelerated courses prior to 9th grade, including Geometry, Biology or English I and II, will now **only take the end-of-course exam associated with the course**. Students will no longer take the grade level assessment, reducing double-testing.

Implementation: Scores for these students will **count twice**: once in the year they were originally tested in and once in their 10th grade year for the relevant subjects (Geometry, Biology or English II).

Funding Flexibilities: State Activity Funds

ADE will consolidate its ESEA state activity funds (Title I-IV) into one pool for more flexible state-level support.

- ✔ ADE was granted increased flexibility on spending state-level ESEA activity funds. ADE will now be able to block grant state activity funds by focusing spending on activities related to state student achievement priorities and supporting districts most in need of improvement.

Implementation: ADE will review current set-aside spending to look for opportunities to support districts with a focus on strategies most likely to drive improvement and align state set-aside resources to those evidence-based approaches.

Funding Flexibilities: AFUA Pilot

ADE will extend funding flexibilities that currently exist in law to all Small, Rural School Achievement (SRSA) eligible districts in a pilot.

- ✔ SRSA-eligible districts, based on the most recent eligibility list, **can use Title II-A and IV-A funds for any allowable Title I-A, II-A, III, or IV-A/B purpose** — no transfer required expanding Alternative Fund Use Authority (AFUA) flexibility. 72 districts are eligible based on current SRSA status and 64 based on RLIS eligibility (136 districts/109,550 students). This will also apply to the equitable services calculations for non-public schools located in those districts.

Implementation: In the coming months, ADE will reach out and notify eligible districts about participation details including: guidance on allowability, how to complete future applications and federal reporting for their districts

Funding Flexibilities: ED Flex

Under ED-Flex, ADE will have discretion to waive select federal program requirements for districts to reduce administrative burden and increase flexibility in how funds are used to meet local needs.

- ✔ **Title I, Part A carryover limitations:** allowing LEAs to carry over more than 15 percent of Title I funds
- ✔ **125% Special Allocation Rule:** allowing LEAs to allocate funds more flexibly to schools to meet their needs.
- ✔ **Time Certification Forms:** allowing LEAs to waive time certification forms for employees paid 100% of the time with federal funds.
- ✔ **Title IV, Part A programmatic percentage requirements:** allowing districts to spend to spend Title IV part A more flexibly.
- ✔ **Threshold for Eligibility to Implement Title I, Part A, Schoolwide Programs:** allows any campus otherwise eligible to receive Title I, Part A, funds to implement a Title I, Part A, schoolwide program regardless of the percentage of students from low-income families.

Implementation: ADE will fold ED-Flex waiver requests into the AR App process.

Flexibilities Support All Students

Arkansas is maintaining all standards pertaining to students with disabilities and English learners.

Districts will continue to provide students with high-quality instruction and appropriate supports, and the state will continue to monitor outcomes and progress.

Arkansas is requesting to reduce administrative requirements that divert money away from students.

The flexibilities extend options that already exist in law for some districts so that more districts can access them, while protections for high-need students remain in place.

Arkansas is streamlining supports for struggling schools.

The flexibilities would allow Arkansas to use its A-F system to identify and support all D- and F-rated schools, which is more than three times the number required under federal law.

Arkansas was granted flexibilities from parts of federal law that reduces administrative burdens and enhances the opportunities for all students across the state



What's coming next?

ADE will share more guidance for districts about implementing these flexibilities in the coming months, including:

1

2025-2026 A-F Ratings — Further guidance on ADE support resources available for D- and F-rated schools.

2

Ed-Flex process — The step-by-step process and timeline for requesting waivers through the AR App.

3

Ed-Flex guidance — Further guidance on what can — and can't — be requested under the ED-Flex waivers.

4

AFUA pilot process — The step-by-step process and timeline for how to apply and expectations for pilot districts.

Questions?