

QUALITY COUNTS 2006

In an attempt to gauge the educational progress of the nation and each state, *Education Week* has published state report cards since 1997 in its annual *Quality Counts* series. Released in early 2006, the 10th annual report, *Quality Counts at 10: A Decade of Standards-Based Education*, examines the progress that states have made on a core set of policy indicators related to standards-based education over the past decade: student achievement, standards and accountability, efforts to improve teacher quality, school climate, and resource equity. This policy brief summarizes Arkansas' ratings on the 2006 report, compares Arkansas to its border states on each measure, and illustrates Arkansas' changes over time.

ARKANSAS' 2006 EVALUATION

Arkansas earned an overall grade of B- in education policy this year, slightly above the national average of C+. The state scored at or above average in three out of the four graded categories of education policy.

Student Achievement (no grade)

Since state tests are not comparable across states, *Education Week* does not give states an overall grade for student achievement. Rather, *Quality Counts 2006* tracks state's results on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) between 2003 and 2005 against results on state tests during the same period. In 2005, the percent of students scoring proficient or above on the Arkansas Comprehensive Testing, Assessment, and Accountability Program (ACTAAP) reading exam in Grades 4 and 8 was 52% and 57%, respectively. However, on the 2005 NAEP reading exam, far fewer students scored proficient or above in Grade 4 (30%) and Grade 8 (26%).

Likewise, while the percent of students scoring proficient or above on the ACTAAP math exam was 50% in Grade 4 and 33% in Grade 8, the percent scoring at that same level on the NAEP math exam was only 34% in Grade 4 and 22% in Grade 8. At the same time, it should be noted that Arkansas was one of only seven states where student gains on the NAEP math exam outpaced the nation as a whole in both Grades 4 and 8. (*For more information on Arkansas students' performance on the 2005 NAEP, see [Policy Brief 19](#).*)

Standards and Accountability: C+

Arkansas performed slightly below the national average (B-) this year in terms of state standards and accountability policies, yet better than the C grade the state received last year. According to the report, Arkansas has relatively strong accountability efforts in place. It has adopted clear, content-specific standards in English/language arts, math, science, and social studies/history. It also sanctions and provides assistance to all low-performing schools, not just low-income schools that receive federal Title I dollars. However, Arkansas does not have science and social studies assessments that are aligned to state standards for elementary, middle, and high school students, which lowers its score on this measure.

Efforts to Improve Teacher Quality: A-

Arkansas scored an A- for its efforts to improve teacher quality this year (the national average is C+), up from a B+ last year. This score ranks Arkansas fourth among the 50 states and the District of Columbia on this measure—only Louisiana, South Carolina and Connecticut scored higher. The state does particularly well because it requires prospective teachers to pass a comprehensive battery of tests, and it is one of only 10 states requiring veteran teachers to undergo classroom observations and one of 13 states requiring portfolio

assessments in order earn a more advanced level of certification. Arkansas also scored high for being:

- One of 15 states requiring at least one year of state-financed mentoring of teachers, as well as one of 15 states requiring districts/schools to set aside time for professional development;
- One of 3 states requiring parent notification of out-of-field or uncertified teachers in all schools; and
- One of 13 states that have policies encouraging pay-for-performance programs (Arkansas participates in the Milken Family Foundation's Teacher Advancement Program (TAP)).

School Climate: C+

Arkansas' score for school climate matched the national average this year. This year and last, Arkansas earned a C+ in this category. School climate ratings were determined by student engagement (e.g., absenteeism and misbehavior), school safety, parent involvement, choice and autonomy (e.g., open enrollment and charter school policies), school and class size, and school facilities. Arkansas has room to improve on the measures of student engagement and parent involvement. However, the state gained points because larger percentages of students attend small schools than in most other states. The state also tracks the condition of all of its school facilities.

Resource Equity: B-

Arkansas was graded a B- for equity of resources among rich and poor districts, compared to a national average of C and Arkansas' grade last year of C+. Its positive but small wealth-neutrality score (0.062) shows that there is a small positive relationship between property wealth and school resources; in other words, its wealthier districts tend to have higher per-pupil funding levels than its poorer districts. However, this figure is based on 2002-03 data, the year prior to the implementation of the new funding formula, which targets additional dollars to districts serving low-income students.

Arkansas, however, does perform comparatively better on the McLoone Index and the Coefficient of Variation, which are other measures of the disparity between district spending. In addition, approximately 22% of students attend schools in districts with per-pupil expenditures at or above the U.S. average (\$8,041), far below last year's measure of 45%. Along with New Mexico and New Hampshire, Arkansas also increased per-pupil spending by more than 50% between 1993-94 and 2002-03. However, Arkansas still ranks 39th for average expenditure per pupil, when adjusted for regional cost differences. (*For more information, see Fact Sheets No. 4 and 5, at <http://www.uark.edu/ua/oep/legislative.htm>*)

ARKANSAS' POSITION COMPARED TO SURROUNDING STATES

Compared to its surrounding states, Arkansas' scores were better on some measures and worse on others (see Table 1). Arkansas had one of the top grades for its efforts to improve teacher quality, and it also performed relatively well in terms of resource equity. The state's grades given for standards and accountability and school climate were roughly in the middle among the border states. Some interesting highlights include:

- The only two states to earn A-grades on any measure were Arkansas (A- teacher quality) and Louisiana (A in standards and accountability).
- Arkansas scored higher than Texas on three of the four measures and scored only slightly lower on the fourth measure, standards and accountability.
- Missouri was the only state to score above Arkansas' grade of C+ on school climate this year.

Table 1: Summary Grades for Arkansas and Border States, 2006

State	Standards and Accountability	Efforts to Improve Teacher Quality	School Climate	Resources Equity
Arkansas	C+	A-	C+	B-
Louisiana	A	A	C-	B
Mississippi	C+	C	D+	C-
Missouri	D+	B-	B	C
Oklahoma	B+	B	C+	B-
Tennessee	B	C+	C+	C
Texas	B-	C-	C	C-

ARKANSAS' *QUALITY COUNTS* TRENDS

Since *Quality Counts* is an annual report, we can view changes over time. Table 2 presents Arkansas' scores in 1997, 1999, 2001, 2003, 2005, and 2006. Over the past 10 years, Arkansas has improved its rating in two of four graded categories (efforts to improve teacher quality and school climate), and slightly declined in two other categories (standards

and accountability and resource equity). Education Week no longer gives grades for resource adequacy, given the ongoing debate across the country about what an "adequate" education costs. Even so, Arkansas improved its standing in this category from 1997 to 2003, and would likely have scored even higher this year had a grade been given, considering its substantial increase in per-pupil expenditures over the past few years.

Table 2: Summary Grades for Arkansas, 1997-2006

Category	1997	1999	2001	2003	2005	2006
Standards and Accountability	B	D	D	B-	C	C+
Efforts to Improve Teacher Quality	C+	C-	C-	B	B+	A-
School Climate	C-	D+	D+	C	C+	C+
Resource Equity	B	B-	B-	B-	C+	B-
Resource Adequacy	F	C+	C+	C	no data	no data

CONCLUSION

While there are certainly other ways to measure the quality of an education system and student learning, *Education Week's* latest "*Quality Counts*" report does provide insight into how Arkansas' educational system compares to other states and the nation on several important measures. Based on the 2006 report, Arkansas scored at or above the national average on three of the four measures graded by the organization and continues to improve over its performance in prior years. Most notably, Arkansas ranks 4th nationwide for its efforts to improve teacher quality. The state is also

keeping pace with its border states on each of *Education Week's* measures.

In recent years, Arkansas' policymakers and education leaders have made great strides in addressing equity and adequacy concerns, and with the state Supreme Court's latest ruling that the state must do more, further improvements are underway. Future evaluations will determine whether the legislature's changes are actually helping to improve student achievement and educational opportunities for all students in the state.

RESOURCES

Quality Counts at 10: A Decade of Standards-Based Education. <http://www.edweek.org/qc06>

Quality Counts 2005: No Small Change, Targeting Money Toward Student Performance.
<http://www.edweek.org/ew/toc/2005/01/06/index.html>

Quality Counts 2003: If I Can't Learn From You.
<http://counts.edweek.org/sreports/qc03/index.cfm>

Quality Counts 2001: A Better Balance.
<http://counts.edweek.org/sreports/qc01/index.cfm>

Quality Counts 1999: Rewarding Results, Punishing Failure. <http://counts.edweek.org/sreports/qc99>

Quality Counts 1997.
<http://counts.edweek.org/sreports/qc97>

Education Week's 2006 "Quality Counts" report, along with individual state data, are available online free of charge until February 4, 2006, at the following web address:
<http://www.edweek.org/qc06>

To receive a copy of this Policy Brief or other information, please visit <http://www.uark.edu/ua/oep> or contact the University of Arkansas' Office for Education Policy at (479) 575-3773.