

Arkansas  
Department of  
Education  
Legislation



2021  
Legislative  
Session



## Career and Technical Education

**What it does:** Post transformation, clarifies the new governance structure and subsequent alignment of responsibilities. The State Board will have general oversight and rule-making authority.



## Right to Read Act

**What it does:** Extends the original timeline by two years for an educator to demonstrate proficiency in the knowledge and practices of scientific reading instruction.



## Teacher Recruitment and Retention Plans

**What It does:** Requires all districts to develop a plan to focus on recruitment of teachers and administrators “reflective of the racial and ethnic composition” of the student body.



## Professional Licensure Standards Board (PLSB)

**What it does:** Updates and clarifies the duties of the ethics subcommittee as well as the PLSB staff. Changes the educator response timeline from thirty days to fourteen days to enable the PLSB staff to maximize the investigation time needed for each individual case.



## Succeed Scholarship

**What it does:** Changes the language of the requirement for eligibility from having an IEP or ISP to being identified as a student with a disability. Allows for a lottery to be used to award scholarships.



## School Choice

**What it does:** Clarifies where to send the application and increases efficiency in submission of the application by allowing electronic and in-person submissions. Districts will be required to have a policy describing accepted methods of delivery. Changes will also set a state-wide application window of January 1 to May 1 of each year. Also clarifies when a parent may appeal a denial of an application.



## Charter Schools and Act 1240 Waivers

**What it does:** Improves clarity and transparency for Charter Schools and Act 1240 Waivers. Plans for future emergencies by allowing the State Board to modify, revoke or grant waivers to districts without each district coming to the State Board. Clarifies the procedures for “transfers” and “assignments” of charters.



## Academic Facilities and Transportation

**What it does:** Adds language prohibiting a person from driving a school bus who within the past three years has been convicted of operating a vehicle “while under the influence of intoxicating liquor or drugs.” Enhances efficiencies, resources, and cost savings by eliminating unneeded paperwork and submission of master plans. Clarifies Partnership Program funding in regards to proof of replacement and adds criteria to be considered when evaluating “unscheduled” maintenance.



## Education Renewal Zones

**What it does:** Aligns ERZ practices with the mission and vision of DESE, clarifies the purpose of ERZs and provides a structure that avoids inefficient and costly overlap in supports and services to schools and school districts. School districts will no longer have to apply for services from ERZs as they will be offered statewide.



## Academic Standards and Assessment

**What it does:** Updates language to reflect the role of the SBE. Provides that DESE may take action authorized under the Standards for Accreditation when a district fails to align the content of each class and subject area with the Arkansas Academic Standards. Changes the date by which student assessments must be scored and returned to school districts from July 1 to August 1, allowing districts to offer assessments later in the school year.



## Background Checks

**What it does:** Provides that criminal convictions over 10 years old that are non-violent and non-sexual would not prevent a classified or a certified employee from receiving a license or being employed. Will require classified employees to complete a background check every five years, aligning with teacher requirements.



## Computer Science Courses and Staff

**What it does:** Requires every student in Arkansas to have one credit in computer science before graduation, beginning with the 9th grade class in 2022-2023. Also requires a certified computer science educator to be employed in every high school in Arkansas beginning with the 2023-2024 school year.



## College and Career Coaches

**What it does:** Clarifies the partnership requirements for an applicant to be considered eligible for funding. Potential applicants may not submit an application without collaboration between a school district or districts and an institution of higher education, an education service cooperative, or a non-profit organization. Would also expand the Coaches current duties to include assisting students complete their student success plans by the end of grade eight (8).



# Enhanced Student Achievement Funding

**What it does:** Will change the way districts plan, budget, and demonstrate success that ESA funding is achieving the desired outcome- improving achievement of Arkansas's students. By July 2022, each district will submit a three-year plan that outlines how ESA funds will be allocated, based on categories identified in statute. The categories replace the former list of allowable expenditures and are evidence-based strategies that have a direct impact or create conditions to promote student success. The categories can be summarized as:

- Enhancement of staffing that exceeds requirements of Standards for Accreditation
- Academic supports and interventions
- Social-emotional and behavioral supports
- Physical and mental health resources
- Early intervention resources
- Expansion of academic or career education programs
- Access to post-secondary supports, including college/career readiness resources

Districts must budget 100% of ESA funds, justify transfers to other categories, and update budgets annually in the review of ESA plans. Districts will determine whether strategies are showing expected results and may be subject to increased monitoring, additional support, or corrective action if goals are not met over time.





## Teacher Salary Equalization

**What it does:** Creates a category of funds dedicated to increasing the average teacher salary in districts that have an average teacher salary lower than the targeted average (NEA).



## A-F Pause

**What it does:** Due to the disruption of K-12 education caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, this bill would pause the issuance of “A” through “F” letter grades to schools for the 2020-2021 school year.



## School Safety

**What it does:** Will require school districts to conduct comprehensive school safety audits every three years. Also amends drill requirements for lockdowns and requires that mental health training be added to the teen suicide awareness and prevention PD required every four years.