

Top 10 Things to Know about Teacher Effectiveness and the Arkansas Teacher Excellence and Support System (TESS)

1. Arkansas knows that teaching is incredibly challenging work. Being a great teacher – helping all students gain new knowledge and skills like reading critically, writing inspiringly or precisely applying math to real situations – is far from easy. Great teachers work tirelessly. Great teachers constantly improve and have to be disciplined thinkers and strong leaders in their classrooms. Arkansas wants to recognize those teachers who are constantly moving toward excellence.
2. Arkansas’s goal is to improve the quality of its teaching force. The new evaluation instrument, combined with a new standard on student growth, helps identify specific areas for teacher development. Students will be impacted as their teachers receive frequent feedback, and more targeted support and professional development to improve in areas that need development, while also being recognized for areas in which they are currently strong.
3. TESS is a differentiated system designed to recognize and support the varied levels of experience and expertise in the teaching profession. All teachers will participate in a summative evaluation at least once every three years, although districts may choose to evaluate all teachers more frequently. All teachers will have multiple informal observations annually. Evaluators must be employees of the school district who have demonstrated proficiency through a certification process as determined by the Arkansas Department of Education.

4. Arkansas believes teachers should play an active role in their own development. The TESS evaluation system is a process in which teachers are deeply engaged. Teachers will become more skilled educators only when they reflect on their practice, examine the learning of their students, identify areas for growth and participate in dialogue with peers and evaluators on how to improve.
5. Arkansas values teachers in all grades and disciplines. All teachers contribute to the learning of their students, even if this learning is not currently measured by a standardized assessment.
6. Arkansas wants to develop an environment in which students and teachers can grow. Teachers should work in an environment that promotes growth. TESS will help keep the focus on continued learning for students through continued professional growth of educators. Because the system is based on evidence of teacher and student performance, a teacher will collaboratively develop a professional growth plan that outlines goals for improved professional practice and leadership development. To accomplish this, the school environment must be grounded in trust and in the belief that students can always learn more and that teachers and schools can make that happen.
7. Arkansas believes all students deserve an excellent teacher. We ask teachers and principals to have the courage and commitment to lead the way to a new evaluation system built on the premise of shared responsibility, meaningful relationships among all school learners and a commitment to a new system built around a continuum of professional growth and student learning.

8. Arkansas expects that all teachers can help their students grow academically. TESS contains measures to determine the extent to which each teacher's students demonstrate academic growth. Academic growth is the amount of learning that takes place during a school year. Even students above or below grade level can still make one year's worth of growth in one year's worth of classroom instruction. The amount of learning that students experience as a result of their time in a teacher's classroom is an important measure of that educator's effectiveness. It is not the only one, and that is why TESS will incorporate multiple measures in determining levels of performance.
9. Arkansas law requires that teacher ratings (as a group) be reported on the school performance report. Teachers will not be ranked in any way or individual ratings be published. The effectiveness ratings: Distinguished, Proficient, Basic, and Unsatisfactory, will provide important feedback to improve school systems.
10. Arkansas classroom teachers are playing a leading role in building and testing the new evaluation system. During the 2013-14 Pilot year, schools and districts will have the opportunity to provide more systematic, regular support to their teachers and to use the process of conducting evaluations and evidence collection to improve conversations centered on teaching and learning. The information derived from the evaluations will be key to making systemic changes that support student achievement and growth.