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CONTACT: Kimberly Mundell

PHONE: (501) 683-4788

kimberly.mundell@ade.arkansas.gov

DESE Releases ACT Aspire Test Results

97 Percent of Students Complete Assessment;

Results Provide One Indicator of Pandemic's Effect on Student Learning

LITTLE ROCK — The Arkansas Department of Education's Division of Elementary and Secondary Education released today preliminary test results from the spring 2021 statewide administration of the ACT Aspire for grades 3 through 10. This was the first statewide summative assessment administered in two years, as COVID-19 disrupted the administration of the test in the spring of 2020. Despite a challenging school year, 97 percent of students statewide completed the assessment, with results providing a valuable snapshot of student learning throughout the pandemic. While all subject areas showed expected decreases, educators can use the results to accelerate learning in specific subject areas this summer and fall.

"The results are not surprising and reflect a learning loss that was expected not only here in Arkansas but around the country," ADE Secretary Johnny Key said. "Because Arkansas schools were open since the beginning of the 2020-2021 school year, we are confident that additional learning loss was mitigated. We now have reliable, accurate data, along with other measures, to help us identify where the biggest impacts occurred. We clearly have a lot of work to do to accelerate learning this school year; however, we are committed to providing additional supports to assist districts in their efforts this school year."

The largest decrease in test results occurred in math, with 34.60 percent of students in grade 5 meeting math readiness benchmarks compared to 49.17 percent in 2019. The declines in readiness in all subject areas could be attributed to multiple factors, such as the chosen instructional method (on-site, remote, hybrid), the number of days required to quarantine, and student engagement. Because an assessment was not administered in 2020, the 2021 administration of the ACT Aspire also marks the first time third-grade and fourth-grade students took the online assessment. To help provide a better understanding and explanation, DESE is partnering with ACT to conduct a study to determine the impact of various factors on test scores; a report is expected this fall.

It is important to note that ACT Aspire results reflect a single, point-in-time measure of student learning. Districts collect multiple data points throughout the school year that measure student learning progress. While the 2021 ACT Aspire results show shifts across performance levels, districts should note where specific skill gaps occur within reporting categories. Students in any level may be performing on grade level in some skills and below grade level in others. Targeting and providing needed support on essential grade-level knowledge and skills will help accelerate learning for students.

Districts are able to access their test results beginning today and are encouraged to thoroughly review their data to guide them in addressing learning loss at their schools. Recent legislation waived the A-F state rating scale for the 2020-2021 school year, so schools will not receive a letter grade for that time period.

Parents are encouraged to take advantage of school and community resources, such as the "Rise and Shine" programming on Arkansas PBS, summer learning opportunities, and after school programs, to help their child.

Scores can be accessed on the 2021 Assessment: Test Scores webpage at <https://bit.ly/3AZALod>.

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