

Identifying Indicators that Predict Postsecondary Readiness and Success in Arkansas

The Arkansas Department of Education identified college and career readiness indicators in their Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) plan. Using two statewide cohorts of grade 6 students and data from 2008/09 through 2017/18, this study examined how well middle school and high school indicators that are aligned to the ESSA plan predict a postsecondary readiness outcome (ACT score of 19 or higher) and success outcomes (college enrollment in one term and enrollment persistence for more than one term within eight years of beginning grade 6).

Key findings

- **A majority of students in the two grade 6 cohorts enrolled in college, though less than half attained postsecondary readiness in high school.** Within eight years of beginning grade 6, 58 percent of students enrolled in college, and 49 percent persisted for more than one term. In high school 60 percent of all students took the ACT exam, and 39 percent of all students scored 19 or higher. Among students with ACT scores, 65 percent scored 19 or higher.
- **The postsecondary readiness indicators accurately predicted postsecondary outcomes for most students.** Middle school indicators accurately predicted the readiness and success outcomes for 70–82 percent of students, and high school indicators accurately predicted the outcomes for 75–83 percent of students, after student background characteristics were controlled for.
- **The study highlighted indicators that were major predictors of readiness and success outcomes; a subset of indicators were major predictors for two or more of the outcomes.** Middle school indicators that were major predictors of at least two outcomes were proficiency in English language arts and math, regular attendance, no expulsions, and no suspensions. High school indicators that were major predictors were regular attendance, grade point average, enrolled in at least one advanced course, and no expulsions (see table).

Major middle school and high school predictors of postsecondary readiness and success outcomes

College and career readiness indicator	Readiness outcome		Success outcome			
	ACT score 19 or higher		Enrollment ^a		Persistence ^b	
	Middle school	High school	Middle school	High school	Middle school	High school
Proficient in English language arts	✓	na	✓	na	✓	na
Proficient in math	✓	✓	✓		✓	
Proficient in science	✓	✓				
Present more than 95 percent of days enrolled			✓	✓	✓	✓
Present 91–95 percent of days enrolled			✓	✓	✓	✓
Attained grade point average of 2.8 or higher	na	✓	na	✓	na	✓
Enrolled in advanced course	na	na	na	✓	na	✓
Never suspended			✓		✓	
Never expelled			✓	✓	✓	✓

✓ indicates a major predictor (significantly correlated with an outcome and predicting at least a 10 percentage point change in the probability of a student attaining the outcome). na is not applicable.

a. Enrolled in college for at least one term, regardless of the degree or certificate being pursued or attained, within eight years of beginning grade 6.

b. Enrolled in college for more than one term within eight years of beginning grade 6.

Source: Authors' analysis of data for 2008/09–2017/18 from the Arkansas Department of Education, Arkansas Division of Higher Education, National Student Clearinghouse, and National Center for Education Statistics Common Core of Data (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.).