

ARKANSAS

★ State Highlight

The Arkansas LEARNS Act. The state legislature passed the [Arkansas L.E.A.R.N.S. Act](#) in 2023, which includes a focus on ensuring student career readiness. As part of the act, the Arkansas Department of Education (ADE) commits to aligning Student Success Plans with career-ready pathways. Additionally, this act requires schools to incorporate career awareness and exploration activities in grades 6-8.



VISION



Career Readiness. In 2023, the state legislature passed the Arkansas L.E.A.R.N.S. Act, and in tandem, Governor Sanders issued an [Executive Order](#) to prioritize the L.E.A.R.N.S. legislation. As part of [L.E.A.R.N.S.](#), the state is prioritizing "readiness," among others. The Arkansas Department of Education commits to build career-ready pathways to a diploma, align student success plans with pathways, and conduct an annual audit of the state's career pathways.

Arkansas has yet to coordinate across agencies in support of career exploration.



POLICY



Student Success Plan. Arkansas requires each student who enters 8th grade to begin developing a [student success plan](#) to assist students in achieving readiness for college, career, and community engagement.

CTE Course Standards. The Arkansas Department of Education has two [course standards](#) focused on career-connected learning for middle schoolers, including an [introductory CTE course](#).

Arkansas has yet to formally include middle school career exploration in state or federal accountability systems.



INFRASTRUCTURE






Career Coach Program Guide. To assist with the implementation of the Arkansas Career Coach Program, the Arkansas Department of Education created an operational guide that provides guidance on creating a local Career Coach Program, marketing the program, creating college and career plans, evaluating programs, program activities and services, and site visits. The manual also outlines expectations and responsibilities and shares key questions to answer with stakeholders.

Student Records Management. Through the Arkansas Career Coach program, each Coach utilizes an approved record-keeping system to organize and collect students' academic and career planning information. Career Coaches are expected to review the records, including career advising records, with students on a regular basis to ensure students are getting the services and support they need.





ARKANSAS • VISION

Category	Status	Description
Leadership Does the state leadership include career exploration as a valued or prioritized component of students' middle school experience?	 Building Emerging Advanced	The LEARNS legislation requires districts to provide career awareness and exploration activities to all public school students in grades 6-8. Exploration activities may include field trips, guest speakers, community services, or other activities that expose students to in-demand occupations.
Career Exploration Definition Does the state formally define career exploration for middle school students?	 Building Emerging Advanced	AR defines career awareness and exploration activities as those that expose students to career and technical and academic fields of study, which may include field trips, guest speakers, community services, dedicated curricula, or other activities designed to introduce students to occupations that are found to be in demand in the state.
Advocacy Are there organizations within the state that are advocating for middle school career exploration?	 Building Emerging Advanced	AR does not have any organizations advocating for middle school career exploration that rose to recognition within the landscape.



ARKANSAS • POLICY

Category	Status	Description
Standards Does the state have policies that establish standard practices for career exploration in middle schools?		ADE's rules for school counseling emphasize providing a career planning process to students. AR passed Act 930 of 2017 , which required school staff to develop Student Success Plans, a personalized education plan to assist students in achieving readiness for college, career, and community engagement, in collaboration with students and their families beginning in the 8th grade. The ADE has two course standards focused on career-connected learning for middle schoolers, including an introductory CTE course .
Accountability Does the state integrate career exploration into their accountability systems?		The state does not integrate career exploration into its ESSA state plan. However, middle school career exploration activities are formally included in the AR Perkins V Plan .
Student Requirements Does the state have policies that require middle school students to complete career exploration activities?		The state requires each student who enters 8th grade to begin developing a student success plan to guide the student along a pathway to graduation, address accelerated learning opportunities, address academic challenges and potential interventions, and include college and career planning components. The plan must be completed in collaboration with the student and parents and be reviewed annually.
Incentives Does the state have policies that incentivize career exploration in middle schools?		AR does not have any incentives directly related to middle school career exploration.



ARKANSAS • INFRASTRUCTURE

Category	Status	Description
<p>Funding</p> <p>Does the state use state or federal funding sources to support career exploration for middle school students?</p>		<p>To support schools' abilities to implement Student Success Plans, the ADE selected <u>vendors</u> that districts can choose from to assist with Student Success Plans for students grades 8-12. The state is supporting the AR Career Coach Program from the Division of Career and Technical Education through Temporary Assistance for Needy Families and state funding. Through this funding, career coach programs will be able to host career exploration camps for middle and high school students.</p>
<p>Professional Development</p> <p>Does the state support the training of school counselors (and other school staff) in career exploration?</p>		<p>Following the passage of Act 930 of 2017, the ADE provided training to schools to help guide the implementation of the Student Success Plans, including a <u>presentation</u>.</p>
<p>Material Supports</p> <p>Does the state provide material supports on the implementation of middle school career exploration?</p>		<p>The ADE provides several resources for districts, including the Back to School Playbook that lists applications and resources aligned to each standard in the middle school career development course and a Career Coach Manual that supports local implementation of the Career Coach Program.</p>
<p>Data Collection</p> <p>Does the state collect data on middle school career exploration opportunities in the state?</p>		<p>As part of the AR Career Coach Program, career coaches must adopt an approved record-keeping system to organize information and track students and their outcomes. Career coaches are encouraged to use the data to ensure progress toward the program's goals and objectives.</p>
<p>CTSOs</p> <p>Does the state support student participation in career and technical student organizations?</p>		<p>AR has <u>middle school chapters</u> in TSA, DECA, FBLA, FFA, and FCCLA.</p>
<p>Organizations</p> <p>Are there organizations within the state that support career exploration in middle schools?</p>		<p>The <u>PEAK Innovation Center</u> collaborates with the school district and the University of Arkansas at Fort Smith to develop classes to help middle school students learn about potential careers.</p>