



Alternative Learning Environments (ALE)

An **Alternative Learning Environment (ALE)** is an intervention program that seeks to eliminate barriers to learning for at-risk students (Ark. Code Ann. §6-48-101). ALE programs are based on the premise that all students can learn if provided with a non-punitive environment that is conducive to learning. ALEs offer smaller class sizes, individualized or specialized instruction, and additional services integrated into the academic atmosphere.

Arkansas law requires every school district to offer an ALE program for all students who qualify. Some districts provide ALE programs in a separate room within a regular school, while others dedicate an entire school facility to their ALE programs. Some districts join with other districts or their education cooperative to provide ALE services for area students.

ALE Eligibility

To be placed in an ALE program, students must be referred by a district's or school's Alternative Education Placement Team because they exhibit or are experiencing two of the following:

- Ongoing, persistent lack of attaining proficiency levels in literacy and math (*Students cannot be placed in an ALE program for academic problems alone.*)
- Abuse: physical, mental, or sexual
- Frequent relocation of residency
- Homelessness
- Inadequate emotional support
- Mental/physical health problems
- Pregnancy
- Single parenting
- Personal or family problems or situations
- Recurring absenteeism
- Dropping out of school
- Disruptive behavior

In 2012-13, 9,573 students – about 2% of the total student population – spent part or all of their day in an ALE program. ALE programs typically have a higher proportion of male students and minority students than exists in the total student population. In 2012-13, the most recent year for which data is available, ALE programs reported being comprised of 66% male students and 45% minority students, compared with the total student population, which is 51% male and 35% minority.

ALE Funding

Because ALE students need intensive services, the state provides districts with funding to serve these students in addition to foundation funding. ALE is one of four funding types known as state categorical funds. (The others are Professional Development, English Language Learners, and National School Lunch.)

ALE funding is provided to districts for students who have been in an ALE program for at least 20 consecutive days. The funding is also based on the amount of time those students spend in the ALE program during each day and throughout the year.

For funding purposes, students are counted on a full-time equivalency (FTE) basis. An FTE student is one who has spent the entire day (6 hours) in the ALE program for the entire year. A .5 FTE student may have spent all day in an ALE for half the year or half of the day all year. To calculate ALE funding for the current year, districts count ALE FTE students from the previous year. In 2012-13, funding was based on 5,428 FTE students from 2011-12. In 2012-13, 210 districts received ALE funding. The remaining 29 districts reported no ALE FTE students in the prior year.

The ALE funding rate established in state statute was \$4,228 per ALE FTE student in FY13 and \$4,305 in FY14.

Year	Total ALE Categorical Funding
2010-11	\$21.1 M
2011-12	\$22.3 M
2012-13	\$23.0 M

ALE categorical funds were not intended to be the sole source of funding for ALE programs. Districts also receive foundation funding for ALE students. In 2012-13, districts received about \$34 million in foundation funding for the 5,428 ALE FTE students.

ALE Expenditures

ALE funding is considered restricted, meaning districts can spend it only on approved ALE programs. Under ALE rules, allowable uses include:

- Salaries and benefits for ALE program employees
- Equipment and instructional materials used in an ALE program
- Fees paid to another district or educational cooperative to operate an ALE program serving other districts' students

In 2012-13, district expenditures of ALE funding totaled nearly \$40 million, well above the amount they received for the year. The districts could spend more than what was provided in part due to transfers of \$16.4 million from National School Lunch (NSL) state categorical funding to pay for ALE programs.

Year	District ALE Expenditures
2010-11	\$33.5 M
2011-12	\$40.6 M
2012-13	\$39.9 M

ALE Fund Balances

Despite districts' expenditures collectively exceeding the funding provided, some districts ended the year with unspent funds. At the end of 2012-13, 143 districts had a collective ALE fund balance of \$1.63 million.