

ARKANSAS

OVERALL RANK: 48TH¹
TIER 5 (WEAKEST)

STRONGER WEAKER

OVERALL					48
1. RESOURCES AND MEMBERSHIP					50
2. INVOLVEMENT IN POLITICS					47
3. SCOPE OF BARGAINING					45
4. STATE POLICIES			20		
5. PERCEIVED INFLUENCE				37	

AREA 1: RESOURCES AND MEMBERSHIP 50TH

Arkansas’s state teacher union has low membership and scant resources. With just 35 percent of its teachers belonging to the union, the Natural State posts the second-smallest membership density in the country. Further, the Arkansas Education Association (AEA) brings in only \$140 per teacher annually, 46th out of 51 jurisdictions. State spending on education is low: 17.4 percent of state expenditures in Arkansas are directed toward K-12 education (35th). Overall dollars for education (from local, state, and federal sources) are relatively low as well—Arkansas spends \$10,757 per pupil (30th), with 51.1 percent of that money going toward teacher salaries and benefits (45th).

AREA 2: INVOLVEMENT IN POLITICS² TIED FOR 47TH

Teacher unions have been relatively uninvolved in Arkansas state politics over the past decade. Just 0.27 percent of donations to candidates for state office came from the AEA (38th of 51).³ Further, only 0.21 percent of the donations received by state political parties came from teacher unions (44th). Unions had a comparatively quiet presence at the Democratic and Republican national conventions as well: 11.8 percent of Arkansas delegates were teacher-union members (32nd).⁴

*AREA 3: SCOPE OF BARGAINING
TIED FOR 45TH*

Arkansas neither grants nor denies collective bargaining rights to teachers and other public employees. While the law requires that districts maintain personnel policies that stipulate a number of teacher working conditions (including salaries, benefits, and evaluations), it does not explicitly require (or prohibit) bargaining over any of these provisions. As such, all twenty-one items examined in this metric are within the scope of bargaining. The state bars unions from collecting agency fees automatically, however, and does not allow teachers to strike.

*AREA 4: STATE POLICIES
20TH*

Arkansas's state policies are a mixed bag; some align or partially align with traditional union interests, while others do not. For example, the state requires that objective measures of student learning be included in teacher evaluations (counter to union goals), but it does not specify what those measures are or how much weight they should be given. The state allows charter schools to apply for waivers from district regulations and teacher-certification requirements (again counter to union goals), but it also does not grant charters automatic exemptions from such policies, as does the law in many other states. Arkansas does not require districts to consider teacher performance when determining layoffs and has the nation's lowest annual rate of dismissal due to poor teacher performance (0.16 percent). Other state policies are not union-favorable, however: For example, the consequences of unsatisfactory teacher evaluations are more stringent than in many states.

*AREA 5: PERCEIVED INFLUENCE
37TH*

Stakeholders in Arkansas indicate that the state teacher union is active but not universally successful in politics. They report that it fought hard, given recent budgetary constraints, to prevent reductions in teacher pay and benefits. But they also note that policies proposed by the governor in the latest legislative session, and those actually enacted, were only somewhat in line with teacher union priorities.⁵ Stakeholders rank union influence on education policy behind that of the business roundtable/chamber of commerce, education reform advocacy groups, the state association of school administrators, and the state charter school association. They also note that the union often turns to compromise to see some favorable policies enacted rather than maintaining a hard line.

*OVERALL
48TH*

While some of Arkansas's policies favor union interests, its state-level teacher union struggles to build a strong foundation of resources and a powerful reputation in policy debates. Even though bargaining is permitted, the strength of the state union is comparable to that of unions in states where bargaining is explicitly prohibited by law.

“You win some, you lose some” might best describe politics in 2011 and 2012 for the Arkansas Education Association (AEA). Although it supported the state’s Race to the Top (RTTT) application, it actively fought against a number of state policies that would have strengthened the state’s bid but threatened teacher job security and traditional union interests.⁶ Reform proponents did manage to overturn a policy that maintained seniority as a key factor in teacher dismissals,⁷ but it was likely too little, too late. Federal reviewers ultimately dinged the state for its inability to link student and teacher data, its limited alternative routes for educators and principals to enter the profession, and its still-weak enthusiasm for performance-based teacher evaluations.⁸ Arkansas’s RTTT application was ultimately rejected.

In other legislation, the AEA can claim victory for its role in killing off a “parent trigger” bill—which would have allowed parents to remove their children from failing schools. But the AEA failed to advance legislation that would have added yet another way for teachers and staff to appeal disciplinary actions and performance reviews.⁹ And despite union opposition, Arkansas increased the cap on the number of charter schools. Act 987 (passed in 2011) removed the fixed cap, which had been twenty-four, and allows for deliberate (some might say sluggish) growth.¹⁰ The union’s argument that raising the cap would “result in more segregation [and] fewer resources for students” apparently fell on deaf ears.¹¹ So while the tug-of-war in Arkansas continues, one thing is certain: The AEA has been very busy pulling on its end of the rope.

ARKANSAS RANKINGS BY AREA AND INDICATOR

OVERALL RANK: 48TH			
Area and Rank ^a	General Indicator	Sub-Indicator	Sub-Indicator Rank/Status ^b
AREA 1: RESOURCES & MEMBERSHIP 50	Membership	By rank, what percentage of public-school teachers in the state are union members?	50th
	Revenue	By rank, what is the total yearly revenue (per teacher in the state) of the state-level NEA and/or AFT affiliate(s)?	46th
	Spending on education	By rank, what percentage of state expenditures (of state general funds, state restricted funds, state bonds, and federal "pass-through" funds) is directed to K-12 education?	35th*
		By rank, what is the total annual per-pupil expenditure (of funds from federal, state, and local sources) in the state?	30th
		By rank, what percentage of total annual per-pupil expenditures is directed to teacher salaries and benefits?	45th
AREA 2: INVOLVEMENT IN POLITICS 47	Contributions to candidates and political parties	By rank, what percentage of the total contributions to state candidates was donated by teacher unions?	38th
		By rank, what percentage of the total contributions to state-level political parties was donated by teacher unions?	44th
	Industry influence	By rank, what percent of the contributions to state candidates from the ten highest-giving sectors was donated by teacher unions?	41st
	Status of delegates	By rank, what percentage of the state's delegates to the Democratic and Republican conventions were members of teacher unions?	32nd
AREA 3: SCOPE OF BARGAINING 45*	Legal scope of bargaining	What is the legal status of collective bargaining?	Permitted
		By rank, how broad is the scope of collective bargaining?	38th*
	Automatic revenue streams	What is the unions' legal right to automatically collect agency fees from non-members and/or collect member dues via automatic payroll deductions?	Agency fees prohibited
	Right to strike	What is the legal status of teacher strikes?	Prohibited
AREA 4: STATE POLICIES 20	Performance pay	Does the state support performance pay for teachers?	State supports/encourages
	Retirement	By rank, what is the employer- versus employee-contribution rate to the teacher pension system?	12th
	Evaluations	What is the maximum potential consequence for veteran teachers who receive unsatisfactory evaluation(s)?	Eligible for dismissal
		Is classroom effectiveness included in teacher evaluations? If so, how is it weighted?	Evidence of student "learning" required
	Terms of employment	How long before a teacher earns tenure?	Three years ^c
		Is student/teacher performance considered in tenure decisions? If so, how is it weighted?	Not included
		Is seniority considered in teacher layoff decisions? If so, how is it weighted?	Optional; May be considered among other factors ^c
		Is teacher performance included in teacher layoff decisions? If so, how is it weighted?	Not required
Class size	By rank, what percentage of the teaching workforce was dismissed due to poor performance?	1st	
	Is class size restricted for grades 1-3? If so, is the restriction higher or lower than the national average (20)?	Yes; Higher	

Area and Rank	General Indicator	Sub-Indicator	Sub-Indicator Rank/Status
AREA 4: STATE POLICIES 20 (cont.)	Charter school structural limitations	Is there a cap (limit) placed on the number of charter schools that can operate in the state (or other jurisdiction) and/or on the number of students who can attend charter schools?	State cap with ample room for growth
		Does the state allow a variety of charter schools: start-ups, conversions, and virtual schools?	Yes
		How many charter authorizing options exist? How active are those authorizers?	Single option; Some activity
	Charter school exemptions	Are all charter schools automatically exempt from state laws and state/district regulations (except those that safeguard students and fiscal accountability)? If not, are they eligible for exemptions?	No; Schools can apply for exemptions
		Are all charter schools automatically exempt from state teacher-certification requirements? If not, are they eligible for exemptions?	No; Schools can apply for exemptions
		Are all charter schools automatically exempt from collective bargaining agreements (CBAs)? If not, are they eligible for exemptions?	Partially; Full automatic exemption for some schools
AREA 5: PERCEIVED INFLUENCE^d 37	Relative influence of teacher unions	How do you rank the influence of teacher unions on education policy compared with other influential entities?	Third- or fourth-most influential
	Influence over campaigns	On a scale from always to never, how often do Democratic candidates need teacher-union support to get elected?	Sometimes/Often
		On a scale from always to never, how often do Republican candidates need teacher-union support to get elected?	Rarely/Sometimes
	Influence over spending	To what extent, from strongly agree to strongly disagree, do you agree that even in times of cutbacks, teacher unions are effective in protecting dollars for education?	Neutral
		Given recent budgetary constraints, would you say that teacher unions generally make concessions to prevent reductions in pay and benefits or fight hard to prevent those reductions?	Fight
	Influence over policy	To what extent, from strongly agree to strongly disagree, do you agree that teacher unions ward off proposals in your state with which they disagree?	Neutral
		On a scale from always to never, how often do existing state education policies reflect teacher-union priorities?	Sometimes
		To what extent, from totally in line to not at all in line, were state education policies proposed by the governor during your state's latest legislative session in line with teacher-union priorities?	Somewhat in line
		To what extent, from totally in line to not at all in line, were legislative outcomes of your state's latest legislative session in line with teacher-union priorities?	Somewhat in line
	Influence over key stakeholders	On a scale from always to never, how often have the priorities of state education leaders aligned with teacher-union positions in the past three years?	Sometimes
		Would you say that teacher unions typically compromise with policymakers to ensure that their preferred policies are enacted, or typically need not make concessions?	Compromise

* Tied with another state

^a Area ranks are calculated using a weighted average of sub-indicators. For a more detailed description, see Appendix A.

^b Where possible, we report a state's rank as compared to other states on a given metric. For example, out of 51 states, Arkansas has the 50th-highest percentage of teachers who are union members. Otherwise, we report a status: Arkansas permits collective bargaining, and union agency fees are prohibited. For a more detailed description of our metrics and methodology, see Appendix A. To request the raw data for your state, send an email to uniondata@edexcellence.net.

^c As of March 2011, Arkansas teachers do not have tenure; after a three-year probationary term, they reach "non-probationary" status. State law allows districts to set their own criteria for granting such status and does not require that they consider teacher effectiveness. However, "non-probationary" teachers receive the same basic protections as those who have tenure in other states in that their contracts are permanent unless the district chooses not to renew them (as opposed to continuing contracts which must be renewed on an annual basis).

^d For all survey questions, stakeholders were asked specifically about teacher unions, candidates, policies, and leaders in their state. In addition, we asked about unions and policies in the "current legislative session," but because legislative calendars vary from state to state, responses refer to policies proposed and enacted within the 2010-11 window.

ENDNOTES

¹ A state's overall rank is calculated as follows: First, we score it on multiple sub-indicators (sub-indicator data and scores for Arkansas are shown in the table, *Arkansas Rankings by Area and Indicator*). Second, we take a weighted average of the sub-indicators in each of five areas. In each area, we use that average to place the states in rank order: For example, in Area 1: Resources and Membership, Arkansas is ranked 50th of 51 based on the weighted average of its sub-indicators. To generate the state's overall rank, we average the five area ranks together, then re-order the states. For a more detailed description of data sources and methodology, see Appendix A.

² Readers should note that these figures include only direct donations from unions and union-connected PACs, but not their spending on electioneering/advertising, mobilizing the union's own membership, lobbying, or advocacy. A recent *Wall Street Journal* report found that donations and lobbying activities account for a small share of union political spending compared with their expenditures on member mobilization and advocacy. Even the AFT agreed, making the argument that since its mission is organizing and activism, it will naturally spend significant amounts on these activities. Thus, the percentages we report here are extremely conservative representations of what unions actually spend on politics. For more information, see Appendix A, Area 2; Tom McGinty and Brody Mullins, "Political Spending by Unions Far Exceeds Direct Donations," *Wall Street Journal*, July 10, 2012; and Jeff Hauser, "Wall Street Journal Compares Union Political Spending to Corporate Donations," AFL-CIO, July 10, 2012.

³ Arkansas is one of just four states where local teacher associations did not contribute to candidates and political parties. In Arkansas, the AEA was the lone union donor to candidates; it also gave to parties, as did national teacher unions.

⁴ At the time of publication, the 2000 conventions were the most recent for which such detailed data were available in forms that met rigorous standards. However, 2008 data provided by the Democratic National Convention were highly correlated with the reliable figures from 2000.

⁵ We asked stakeholders about unions and policies in the "current legislative session," but because legislative calendars vary from state to state, responses refer to policies proposed and enacted within the 2010-11 window.

⁶ "Race To The Top," Arkansas Education Association, accessed July 27, 2011, <http://www.aeaonline.org/members/RTT.asp>.

⁷ "AEA Supports HB2178 'Teacher Evaluation Bill,'" Arkansas Education Association, accessed July 27, 2011, <http://msg4svc.net/servlet/Pv?c=703d6e6561617226733d30266d3d32323326743d4826723d302664613d30267469643d30>.

⁸ Race To The Top Technical Review Form – Tier 1, accessed June 29, 2012, <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop/phase1-applications/comments/arkansas.pdf>.

⁹ Arkansas Senate Bill 884, 88th General assembly, March 2011, <http://www.arkleg.state.ar.us/assembly/2011/2011R/Bills/SB884.pdf>.

¹⁰ According to the Arkansas Senate newsletter: "When the number of charter schools gets to within two of the limit, the limit increases by five. (For example, if the state Board of Education approves 22 charter schools the maximum number allowed will go up to 29.)" See http://www.arkansas.gov/senate/newsroom/index.php?do:newsDetail=1&news_id=302.

¹¹ "Clarification: HB 1894 'Parent Trigger' Bill Fails In House Education Committee," Arkansas Education Association, accessed July 27, 2011, <http://msg4svc.net/servlet/Pv?c=703d6e6561617226733d30266d3d32323526743d4826723d302664613d30267469643d30>.