



Newsletter From Rep. Tara Shephard District 79

March 14, 2025

Week 9 of the 2025 Regular Session

In a move to reform Arkansas' higher education system, the House recently passed HB1512, which lays the groundwork for the creation of the Arkansas ACCESS Act. This bill is designed to address critical issues surrounding access to education, affordability, and student success across the state, with its principles encapsulated in the acronym ACCESS—Acceleration, Common Sense, Cost, Eligibility, Scholarships, and Standardization.

The *Acceleration* component of the ACCESS Act focuses on enhancing the readiness of high school students for higher education and future careers. It aims to broaden accelerated coursework options in Arkansas high schools.

The *Common Sense* provisions of the bill seek to foster unbiased learning environments in higher education. The bill also introduces the "Purple Star Campus" designation, recognizing institutions that support servicemembers and military families.

Addressing *Cost* concerns, the ACCESS Act proposes reforming the funding model to encourage diverse educational pathways, including non-degree credentials. The bill introduces a new productivity-based funding model that factors in the return on investment for students.

The *Eligibility* section of the bill works toward creating uniformity and efficiency in college admissions. It expands the types of exams that can be used for college admissions.

In terms of *Scholarships*, the ACCESS Act expands the Workforce Challenge Scholarship and increases the Arkansas Academic Challenge first-year award from \$1,000 to \$2,000.

Finally, *Standardization* is a key focus, aiming to reduce the time it takes for students to earn their degrees. The bill proposes the standardization of course numbering across all state-supported institutions, making it easier for students to transfer credits.

