



Moving Up

**Promising Strategies to Address
Teacher Shortages in Arkansas**



Introduction

In 2021, TNTP published *Missing Out: Arkansas' Teacher Shortage and How to Fix It*¹, describing teacher shortages in Arkansas, programs the state had in place to address shortages, and the extent to which teachers and potential teachers were aware of and interested in these programs. Since that report was published, Arkansas has sustained existing and created new programs to address teacher shortages, implementing the recommendations we identified in *Missing Out* as well as additional policies included in the Literacy, Empowerment, Accountability, Readiness, Networking, and School Safety (LEARNS) Act², signed in March of 2023.

In this paper, we highlight the promising statewide initiatives that Arkansas has undertaken in recent years to strengthen its teacher pipeline. While it will take time to see the full impact of these new initiatives, the state's supportive licensure pathways and competitive financial value proposition for teachers position Arkansas as a state to learn from, and one that has gone from *Missing Out* to *Moving Up* in the recruitment and retention of effective teachers.

¹ TNTP. (2021). *Missing out: Arkansas' teacher shortage and how to fix it*. https://tntp.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/TNTP_MissingOut_FINAL_web.pdf

² Arkansas State Legislature. (n.d.). SB294 bill information. SB294 Bill Information - Arkansas State Legislature. <https://www.arkleg.state.ar.us/Bills/Detail?id=s-b294&ddBienniumSession=2023%2F2023R>

Statewide Initiatives to Address Teacher Shortages

In *Missing Out*, we found that about 4% of the teachers in Arkansas were uncertified (compared to 1.7% nationally), but that teacher shortages, of which uncertified teachers are one component, varied widely across the state. We found that shortages were concentrated primarily in Southern and Eastern Arkansas, and that students of color were more likely to have uncertified teachers than white students. To address these issues, we made three recommendations:

- Design a supportive pathway to standard licensure for paraprofessionals, long-term substitutes, and classroom aides.
- Raise the average teacher salary statewide, and provide districts whose average teacher salary falls below the target average with additional funding to help narrow their salary gap with nearby districts.
- Design a website that clearly illustrates the state's pathways to teaching and related financial incentives.

In recent years, Arkansas has launched initiatives aligned to each of these recommendations. Additionally, policy makers are taking steps to audit the state's requirements for aspiring teachers to identify and remove barriers to the profession, while maintaining relevant and rigorous teacher licensure requirements. Together, these four areas of focus have positioned Arkansas as a national leader in teacher recruitment and retention strategies. We discuss each component in depth below.

Design Supportive Pathways to a Standard Teacher License, Including for Paraprofessionals

For those with a bachelor's degree or higher, Arkansas has numerous teacher licensure pathways³ that allow candidates to be a full-time teacher while working to meet the requirements for a standard, five-year teaching license (see Appendix A for a full list of alternative routes to teacher licensure). These work-based licensure pathways are especially important for certain career changers and college graduates who need to work full time while preparing to be day one-ready teachers.

For example, the Arkansas Professional Educator Pathway⁴ (ArPEP) and the Arkansas Teacher Corps⁵ (ATC) are two examples of alternative licensure pathways that enable qualified candidates with a bachelor's degree or higher to be full-time, paid teachers while they complete the requirements for a standard, five-year teaching license.

ArPEP is a two-year, work-based program that provides job-embedded coaching to aspiring teachers while they work as a teacher of record under a provisional teaching license.

Over the past three school years, a total of 452 candidates have completed an ArPEP program. Candidates pay \$3,000 to complete an ArPEP program. In a recent survey⁶, 88% of principals

³ Arkansas Department of Education. (n.d.). Pathways to Licensure. <https://dese.ade.arkansas.gov/Offices/educator-effectiveness/pathways-to-licensure>

⁴ Arkansas Department of Education. (n.d.). Arkansas Professional Educator Pathway (ArPEP). <https://dese.ade.arkansas.gov/Offices/educator-effectiveness/become-an-arkansas-teacher/arkansas-professional-educator-pathway-arpep>

⁵ Arkansas Teacher Corps. (n.d.). <https://www.arkansasteacher corps.org/>

⁶ Arkansas General Assembly. (2024). 2024 Principals Survey Summary [PDF]. Arkansas General Assembly. <https://www.arkleg.state.ar.us/Home/FTPDocument?path=%2FEducation%2FAdequacyReports%2F2024%2F2024-01-08%2F2024+Principals+Survey+Summary.pdf>

agreed that ArPEP (formerly known as APPEL) was helpful in recruiting high-quality teachers to their school. ArPEP is an example of an alternative teacher certification program⁷ that is not based in a postsecondary institution. The state education agency and Arkansas' regional education cooperatives operate ArPEP to provide a low-cost, work-based pathway for aspiring teachers with a bachelor's degree. Nationally, from the 2010-2011 to the 2018-2019 school year the only type of teacher certification program that increased enrollment was alternative teacher certification managed outside of postsecondary institutions⁸.

Another pathway to licensure, the Arkansas Teacher Corps (ATC) is a no-cost, three-year program that allows individuals with a bachelor's degree to serve as full-time, paid teachers while receiving job-embedded training and mentoring.

Fellows selected for the ATC teach for at least three years in a geographical area with an acute teacher shortage. Founded in 2013, the Arkansas Teacher Corps is a partnership between the University of Arkansas-Fayetteville, the Arkansas Department of Education, and the Walton Family Foundation. To date, 107 fellows have successfully completed the program and earned a standard, five-year teaching license. Nearly 80% of fellows identify as a racial or ethnic minority, more than half are first-generation college students, and more than 80% are from low-income communities. Based on data from the 2018-2019 school year, the Arkansas Teacher Corps found that students of ATC fellows grew up to 7 percentile points higher in English and Reading on the ACT Aspire tests and were 10% more likely to meet the readiness benchmark in Science than their peers with non-ATC teachers. Given these encouraging

findings, the Arkansas Teacher Corps is in the process of scaling to help the state address teacher shortages and strengthen its teacher workforce. Through a \$3.6 million grant⁹ from the Walton Family Foundation, the ATC will support more than 100 new fellows through 2025. This is nearly twice as many fellows as the ATC supported over the past three years.

\$3.6 M grant will support 100 new fellows

The Arkansas Teacher Residency Model (Recently rebranded to Arkansas Grow Your Own)

While Arkansas offers numerous pathways to the profession for aspiring teachers with bachelor's degrees, we noted in *Missing Out* that the areas of the state most in need of teachers were often also the areas with the lowest percentage of adults holding bachelor's degrees. Additionally, given that Arkansas has the third lowest¹⁰ percentage of residents in the country with a bachelor's degree or higher, this challenge is not exclusive to certain regions. This is why we recommended in *Missing Out* that policy makers develop a licensure pathway that helps paraprofessionals without bachelor's degrees complete their undergraduate coursework while working full-time in a school setting and earning a professional wage. Over a lifetime, those working in education with bachelor's degrees earn an average of \$800,000 more¹¹ than those who working in the same field who only have a high school diploma. By creating a supportive pathway to a teacher license and a bachelor's degree, policy makers can help Arkansas address teacher shortages and promote the economic mobility of its residents.

⁷ Will, M. (2024, January). Teacher preparation explained: Alternative routes, enrollment trends, and more. Education Week. <https://www.edweek.org/teaching-learning/teacher-preparation-explained-alternative-routes-enrollment-trends-and-more/2024/01>

⁸ King, J. E., & Yin, J. (2022). The alternative teacher certification sector outside higher education. 2022 Update. Center for American Progress. <https://www.american-progress.org/article/the-alternative-teacher-certification-sector-outside-higher-education/>

⁹ Anderson, R. (2023, March 2). \$3.6M Walton grant boosts Teacher Corps. Arkansas Democrat-Gazette. <https://www.arkansasonline.com/news/2023/mar/02/36m-walton-grant-boosts-teacher-corps/>

Educators with a bachelor's degree earn **\$800,000** more than those with only a high school diploma

At the October 2021 Arkansas State Board of Education meeting, the Arkansas Department of Education unveiled the Arkansas Teacher Residency Model. This model is not a single, alternative pathway to licensure, but rather a framework that allows districts and institutions of higher education to collaboratively develop a grow your own model for high school students and paraprofessionals. Former Deputy Commissioner at the Arkansas Department of Education, Dr. Ivy Pfeffer, explained why Arkansas needed this model¹²: “We (the Arkansas Department of Education) created a lot of different pathways for teachers to get into the workforce. We realized that all of those pathways were really designed for people who already had a four-year degree.”

Arkansas Grow Your Own (formerly known as the Arkansas Teacher Residency Model) is a framework that districts can use to design a pathway to teacher licensure, both for high school students and paraprofessionals, rooted in authentic, high-quality clinical experiences. The grow your own model allows candidates to be employed in a P-12 school setting while working to meet teacher licensure requirements.

Arkansas Grow Your Own is not only an innovative, locally driven teacher recruitment strategy, it also works in service of the state's teacher retention goals as coaching and mentoring for aspiring teachers are required features of the grow your own model.

For example, candidates must be coached and mentored by a master or lead teacher throughout their work-based internship. This provides highly effective teachers with a paid leadership opportunity without needing to leave their primary role as a classroom teacher. After serving as a master or lead teacher, these individuals could go on to serve as mentor teachers in other capacities in their school or district. This is particularly important given that only 54% of early-career teachers in Arkansas reported having a mentor assigned by their school or district in their first year of teaching, compared to 81% nationally¹³.

54% Arkansas vs. 81% Nationally of early-career teachers reported having a mentor assigned by their school or district in their first year of teaching.

¹⁰ Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis. (n.d.). Economic Research Data: Release Tables. Retrieved from <https://fred.stlouisfed.org/release/tables?eid=391444&rid=330>

¹¹ Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis. (n.d.). Unemployment Rate — Arkansas. FRED Economic Data. Retrieved from <https://fred.stlouisfed.org/release/tables?eid=391444&rid=330>

¹² Mackay, M. (2022, February 18). Arkansas program could solve teacher shortage. THV11. <https://www.thv11.com/article/news/education/arkansas-program-could-solve-teacher-shortage/91-43ff8f30-a0b6-4ce6-a7db-82c2857f801d>

¹³ Learning Policy Institute. (2023). *The state of the teacher workforce: A state-by-state analysis of the factors influencing teacher shortages, supply, demand, and equity*. <https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/state-of-teacher-workforce-interactive>

How does Arkansas Grow Your Own provide a pathway to teacher licensure for high school students?

First, a district establishes a Memorandum of Understanding with an institution of higher education (IHE) to provide high school students the opportunity to concurrently earn credit towards high school graduation and a post-secondary degree in education. The district and IHE work together to offer a state-approved Pre-Educator Program of Study¹⁴. If a high school student completes the program of study's concurrent credit coursework, they can earn a Certificate of Proficiency in Teaching and 9 credit hours towards a degree in education. Once they complete the coursework and pass the "ParaPro Assessment" from Educational Testing Service, high school students can earn the Certified Teaching Assistant (CTA) credential¹⁵. Once they earn their CTA credential, high school students advance through the levels as described in the box to the right.

Level 1 Candidates have a Certificate of Proficiency in Teaching, a CTA credential, are enrolled in a two or four-year degree program, and work at least ten hours a week in a student-facing role in a P-12 setting. These candidates work towards earning an Associate of Arts in Teaching degree, if enrolled in a two-year degree program, and admittance to an IHE-based Educator Preparation Program. IHEs provide Level 1 Candidates with flexible coursework options, including work-based opportunities to meet course objectives through their student-facing work in a P-12 setting.

Level 2 Candidates have been admitted into an Educator Preparation Program and are continuing to work in a student-facing role in a P-12 setting. At this stage, the district employing the Level 2 Candidates is responsible for increasing their working hours and ensuring that the candidate's work is directly related to their intended licensure subject area or grade span. The district must also ensure that candidates take on more pedagogical responsibility with support from a lead teacher. The Educator Preparation Program and the employing district work together to ensure candidates receive the support they need to pass the Praxis Subject Area Assessments, a requirement to become a Level 3 Candidate.

Level 3 Candidates engage in the student teaching component of their educator preparation program as a work-based internship. When doing so, Level 3 Candidates may fill a teaching vacancy or serve as the classroom teacher at this level if the district has a teacher leader who is the assigned Teacher of Record. These candidates are supervised throughout their internship experience by a teacher leader, school leader, and an educator preparation program faculty member. They also participate in district and school-level professional development. After completing their student teaching and bachelor's degree coursework, candidates are eligible for a standard, five-year teaching license.

¹⁴ Arkansas Department of Education. (2022). Family and Consumer Sciences Program of Study. Retrieved from <https://dcte.ade.arkansas.gov/docs/Resources/FCS%20Program%20of%20Study%20August%202022-23.pdf>

¹⁵ Arkansas Department of Education. (n.d.). Certified Teaching Assistant Certificate Program. Retrieved from <https://dcte.ade.arkansas.gov/docs/Resources/EDIT-%20Certified%20Teaching%20Assistant%20OP.pdf>

How does Arkansas Grow Your Own provide a pathway to teacher licensure for paraprofessionals?

If they do not already have one, paraprofessionals start by earning a Certified Teaching Assistant (CTA) credential. The grow your own model encourages IHEs to offer the required coursework for a CTA credential at times and in a manner (e.g., virtual options, earn field experience credit for work they are already doing) that are conducive for a paraprofessional's schedule. To be considered a Level 1 Candidate, paraprofessionals must have a CTA credential, be enrolled in a two or four-year degree program, and be working in a student-facing role for at least ten hours a week. These aspiring teachers then advance through the levels as described in the box to the right, culminating in a work-based internship to fulfill their student teaching requirement. If they pass the required subject area assessments and earn a bachelor's degree, these candidates are eligible for a standard, five-year teaching license.

How does Arkansas provide financial assistance to Arkansas Grow Your Own candidates?

To help offset the cost of enrolling in the Pre-Educator Course of Study for concurrent credit, the Arkansas Concurrent Challenge Scholarship¹⁶ awards eligible high school students \$125 per course for up to two concurrent credit courses per semester. Level 1 Candidates can leverage the Arkansas Future (ARFuture) Grant¹⁷ to cover the tuition and fees related to earning an Associate of Arts in Teaching degree. This grant can also be applied to the tuition and fees incurred by students enrolled in a four-year institution, but the grant amount is calculated as the average cost of tuition, fees, and other charges at approved two-year institutions. If they meet the grant's requirements, candidates are eligible to receive this grant until

they have received an associate degree or have received funding for five semesters.

Candidates can also use the Arkansas Academic Challenge Scholarship¹⁸ for the tuition and fees associated with a two or four-year degree. This scholarship is available to students pursuing higher education, including recent high school graduates, first-time college enrollees, and students re-enrolling in college. It provides up to \$4,000 in total to students enrolled in a two-year institution and up to \$14,000 in total to students enrolled in a four-year institution. If a teacher graduates with federal student loans, they can utilize the State Teacher Education Program¹⁹ (STEP), a federal student loan repayment program for educators teaching in a subject and geographical shortage area. Eligible teachers can have up to \$6,000 of federal student loans repaid annually for up to three years.

What is the Arkansas Teacher Registered Apprenticeship? How does it relate to Arkansas Grow Your Own?

In 2022, Arkansas became one of the first eight states²⁰ in the country to receive approval from the United States Department of Labor to operate a registered apprenticeship program for teachers. The Arkansas Teacher Registered Apprenticeship²¹ (ATRA) is an example of a grow your own program that provides aspiring teachers with a supportive pathway to a bachelor's degree and a standard, five-year teaching license. The Arkansas Department of Education manages the program — reviewing and approving applications from districts and educator preparation programs as well as allocating funds to education service cooperatives (ESCs). ESCs work with the master or lead teachers in participating districts to monitor apprentices' progress toward completing the program. ESCs also subgrant \$5,000

¹⁶ Arkansas Department of Higher Education. (n.d.). Concurrent Credit Scholarship. Retrieved from <https://sams.adhe.edu/Scholarship/Details/CCS>

¹⁷ Arkansas Department of Higher Education. (n.d.). Arkansas Future (AR Future) Grant Program. Retrieved from <https://sams.adhe.edu/Scholarship/Details/ARFUTURE>

¹⁸ Arkansas Department of Higher Education. (n.d.). Arkansas Concurrent Challenge Scholarship (ACST) Program. Retrieved from <https://sams.adhe.edu/Scholarship/Details/ACST>

¹⁹ Arkansas Department of Higher Education. (n.d.). Arkansas State Teacher Education Program (STEP) Program. Retrieved from <https://sams.adhe.edu/Scholarship/Details/STEP>

²⁰ Arkansas Department of Education. (n.d.). Approved Memo: Arkansas Teacher Residency Apprenticeship. Retrieved from <https://adecm.ade.arkansas.gov/ViewApprovedMemo.aspx?Id=5339>

²¹ Teach Arkansas. (2022, November). Arkansas Teacher Residency Apprenticeship (ATRA) [PDF]. Google Drive. https://drive.google.com/file/d/1EZraNkv_Y5ulZAUEKOUc_Qt1Ta7djzy/view

annual stipends to districts for their master or lead teachers as well as reimburse educator preparation programs (EPPs) for apprentices' tuition. To be eligible for the ATRA, candidates must be enrolled in college coursework leading to a bachelor's degree in education and preferably, have their CTA credential. Apprentices are employed by a school district that provides on-the-job training, compensation, and mentoring from a master or lead teacher. Concurrently, apprentices complete the related technical instruction at an EPP to earn a bachelor's degree in education. Upon completion of the program, apprentices will have a four-year degree, a nationally-recognized apprenticeship certification, and a standard, five-year teaching license. For example, the Arkansas Department of Education, Reach University, Great Rivers ESC, and TNTP are leveraging a \$8.7 million federal Teacher Quality Partnership grant to offer apprenticeships to more than 650 future teachers²² specializing in math, science, and English language arts over the next five years. The program offers three unique, debt-free pathways to teaching — one for high school graduates, one for community college graduates, and one for college graduates. Apprentices are gaining job-embedded experience in one of the 10 districts in the Great Rivers ESC.

Understanding the Impact

The 2023-2024 school year is only the second year for Arkansas Grow Your Own and the first year for the Arkansas Teacher Registered Apprenticeship. While the grow your own model and registered teacher apprenticeship pathway seem poised to strengthen Arkansas' teacher recruitment and retention efforts, we cannot yet fully quantify how they have helped the state address subject and geographical area teacher shortages because these are four-year programs. Fortunately, Arkansas has a comprehensive dataset on its teacher pipeline that the University of Arkansas' Office of Education Policy (OEP) analyzes and reports out on at least annually to the Arkansas Department of Education and Arkansas State Board of Education. As aspiring teachers matriculate through these grow your own pathways and into full-time classroom teaching roles, OEP will provide clear and timely reports that illustrate how Arkansas Grow Your Own and the Arkansas Teacher Registered Apprenticeship are strengthening the state's teacher workforce.

While it will be a few more years before the initial cohorts of candidates complete an Arkansas Grow Your Own pathway, there are some leading indicators that these initiatives will have a demonstrably positive impact on the state's teacher workforce.

²² PR Newswire. (2022, September 30). U.S. Dept. of Education awards Reach University & TNTP \$8.7MM to grow certified STEM-qualified teachers in Arkansas' highest-need districts. <https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/us-dept-of-education-awards-reach-university--tntp-8-7mm-to-grow-certified-stem-qualified-teachers-in-arkansas-highest-need-districts-301632325.html>

²³ New America, GYO Educators National Network. (n.d.). Program Spotlight: Project REACH (Retooling Educators and Paraprofessionals to Achieve Teacher Credentialing). [PDF]. Retrieved from https://d1y8sb8igg2f8e.cloudfront.net/documents/Project_Reach_Spotlight.pdf

Leveraging the state's grow your own model or registered teacher apprenticeship pathway, institutions of higher education across Arkansas are partnering with school districts to create grow your own programs that are expressly designed to address local staffing needs. For example, Project REACH²³, based at the University of Arkansas-Fayetteville, aims to meet Arkansas' rapidly growing need for bilingual and bicultural educators. Project REACH supports paraprofessionals to not only obtain a teaching license and English as a Second Language certification, but also an associate and bachelor's degree. The University of Arkansas-Fayetteville is also working to promote knowledge sharing and collaboration among those interested in the state's Grow Your Own Model. In February of 2024, the university hosted Arkansas' inaugural "Grow Your Own Educators Convening."

In 2022, Southern Arkansas University and the University of Arkansas-Little Rock received multi-year grants from Forward Arkansas²⁴ to develop partnerships with local school districts to help facilitate paid, yearlong residency opportunities for aspiring teachers. In the fall of 2023, Southern Arkansas University placed approximately 50 paid teacher residents²⁵ in southwest Arkansas, more

than double the number they were able to place in the spring of 2022. In the 2023-2024 school year, the University of Arkansas-Little Rock placed 10 paid teacher residents²⁶ in the Little Rock School District and the Jacksonville/North Pulaski School District. Next school year, they plan to place additional teacher residents by scaling their program to more school districts.

In 2021, these two institutions of higher education, along with six other universities, were selected to participate in Forward Arkansas' Education Preparation Design Collaborative²⁷. Each postsecondary institution received a \$100,000 grant from Forward Arkansas and technical assistance from US PREP and 2 Revolutions to develop an education preparation transformation plan. Based on the strength of their plans, Southern Arkansas University and the University of Arkansas-Little Rock were awarded multi-year grants that they are using to support paid, yearlong teacher residencies as described above. Additionally, Forward Arkansas continues to facilitate the Educator Preparation Program Design Collaborative to provide ongoing technical assistance to and promote collaboration among all 19 educator preparation programs in the state.

²⁴ Forward Arkansas. (2022, December 12). Forward Arkansas invests \$3.6 million to support educator preparation programs at Southern Arkansas University and UA Little Rock. Forward Arkansas. <https://forwardarkansas.org/es/news/forward-arkansas-invests-3.6-million-to-support-educator-preparation-programs-at-southern-arkansas-university-and-ua-little-rock/>

²⁵ TXK Today. (2023, September 28.) Training teachers like doctors: Southern Arkansas University is turning teacher prep upside down. TXK Today. Retrieved from <https://txktoday.com/news/training-teachers-like-doctors-southern-arkansas-university-is-turning-teacher-prep-upside-down/>

²⁶ Anderson, R. (2024, February 13). Program at ULAR, SAU aims to make teachers day-one ready. Arkansas Online. <https://www.arkansasonline.com/news/2024/feb/13/program-aims-to-make-teachers-day-one-ready/>

²⁷ Forward Arkansas. (n.d.). Transforming Educator Preparation. Retrieved from <https://forwardarkansas.org/case-studies/transforming-educator-preparation/#::~:tex-t=In%202021%2C%20Forward%20launched%20the,to%20develop%20plans%20for%20transformation.>

Improve Teacher Pay and the Financial Value Proposition for Teachers

In *Missing Out*, we recommended that Arkansas take steps to improve teacher salaries statewide. In recent years, teacher compensation has been a legislative priority for Arkansas and many adjacent states. In 2022, Mississippi enacted legislation²⁸ that increased the state's minimum annual teacher salary from approximately \$37,000 to nearly \$42,000. In 2023, Tennessee passed a bill²⁹ that will gradually raise the state's minimum annual teacher salary from around \$39,000 to \$50,000 by the 2026-2027 school year. Other states in the region recently enacted one-time pay increases or stipends for teachers. In 2023, Oklahoma mandated pay raises³⁰ ranging from \$3,000 for teachers with zero to four years of experience to \$6,000 for teachers with 15 or more years of experience. Louisiana lawmakers agreed to provide \$2,000 stipends³¹ to teachers in 2023.

On April 12, 2021, former Governor Asa Hutchinson signed legislation³² into law to help address disparities in teacher salaries within the state. In an effort to narrow the gap³³ between the highest and lowest average teacher salaries offered by school districts across Arkansas, this bill created the Teacher Salary Equalization Fund³⁴. This fund provides school districts with additional dollars for teacher salaries and benefits if the district's average annual teacher

salary falls below the statewide target³⁵ set by the Arkansas General Assembly. Eligible school districts receive an additional \$185 per student in state funding, based on their prior school year's Average Daily Membership (ADM)³⁶. For the 2023-2024 school year, 230 of Arkansas' 237 public school districts³⁷ received additional dollars through the Teacher Salary Equalization Fund. As such, the fund is helping nearly every Arkansas public school district work towards the statewide target for average annual teacher salaries. While this is a commendable effort, we encourage policy makers to revisit the current eligibility requirements and/or funding formula for the Teacher Salary Equalization Fund and identify ways to provide targeted support to districts with average teacher salaries that are well below the statewide goal.

On March 8, 2023, Governor Sarah Huckabee Sanders signed the Literacy, Empowerment, Accountability, Readiness, Networking, and School Safety (LEARNS) Act³⁸ into law, an act that Arkansas Education Secretary Jacob Oliva called³⁹ "the most comprehensive education reform initiative in the nation." As its name implies, the LEARNS Act touches multiple facets of education across the state, including several major initiatives aimed

²⁸ Mississippi Legislature. (2022). Senate Bill 2444 [Legislative document]. Retrieved from <https://billstatus.ls.state.ms.us/documents/2022/html/SB/2400-2499/SB2444PS.htm>

²⁹ Tennessee General Assembly. (n.d.). Senate Bill 281. Retrieved from <https://wapp.capitol.tn.gov/apps/BillInfo/Default.aspx?BillNumber=SB0281>

³⁰ Oklahoma State Department of Education. (n.d.). Comprehensive Teacher Pay Reform. Retrieved from <https://sde.ok.gov/comprehensive-teacher-pay-reform>

³¹ O'Donoghue, J. (2023, June 8). Louisiana lawmakers pass state budget plan with only temporary teacher pay increase. Louisiana Illuminator. <https://lailuminator.com/2023/06/08/louisiana-lawmakers-pass-state-budget-plan-with-only-temporary-teacher-pay-increase/>

³² Arkansas State Legislature. (2021). ACT 680 [PDF document]. Retrieved from <https://www.arkleg.state.ar.us/Home/FTPDocument?path=%2FACTS%2F2021R%2FPublic%2FACT680.pdf>

³³ Arkansas Democrat-Gazette. (2021, January 19). Hutchinson's proposal to increase teacher pay in Arkansas. Arkansas Online. <https://www.arkansasonline.com/news/2021/jan/19/hutchinsons-proposal-increase-teacher-pay-arkansas/>

³⁴ Arkansas Department of Education. (2023, May 1.). Teacher salary equalization fund guidelines [Memorandum]. Retrieved from <https://adecm.ade.arkansas.gov/ViewApprovedMemo.aspx?Id=4778>

³⁵ Arkansas State Legislature. (2021). ACT 680 [PDF document]. Retrieved from <https://www.arkleg.state.ar.us/Home/FTPDocument?path=%2FACTS%2F2021R%2FPublic%2FACT680.pdf>

³⁶ Arkansas Department of Education. (n.d.). School Data Reports. Retrieved from <https://adedata.arkansas.gov/statewide/ReportList/Schools/ADMall.aspx>

³⁷ Arkansas Department of Education. (2023, May 5). 2023-2024 Teacher salary equalization funding [Memorandum]. Retrieved from <https://adecm.ade.arkansas.gov/ViewApprovedMemo.aspx?Id=5462>

³⁸ Arkansas State Legislature. (2023, March 8). Senate Bill 294 [Legislative bill]. Retrieved from <https://www.arkleg.state.ar.us/Bills/Detail?id=sb294&ddBienniumSession=2023%2F2023R>

³⁹ Howell, C. (2024, February 8). Education board reviews Arkansas Learns Act. Arkansas Online. <https://www.arkansasonline.com/news/2024/feb/08/education-board-reviews-arkansas-learns-act/#:~:text=%22It's%20all%20coming%20together%2C%22,to%20career%2C%22%20he%20said.>

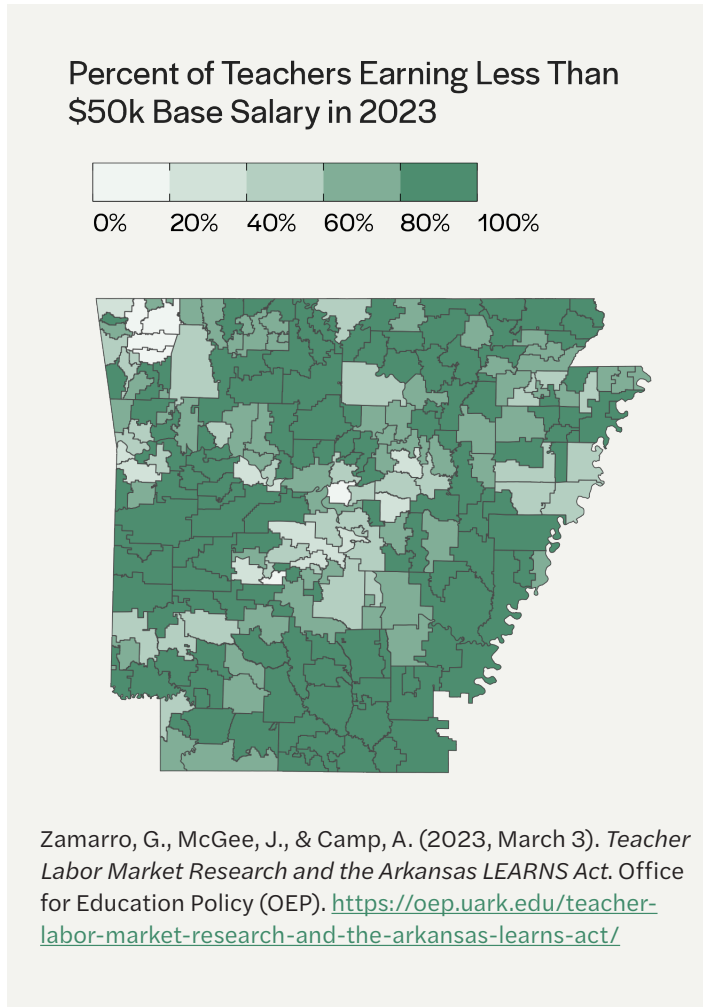
at addressing teacher shortages. Specifically addressing teacher pay, the LEARNS Act significantly increases minimum teacher salaries across the state and strengthens the financial value proposition for Arkansas teachers in other ways, including scholarship and student loan reimbursement increases, licensure exam fee reimbursement, merit bonuses, and paid parental leave.

Minimum Annual Teacher Salary

A key component of the LEARNS Act is elevating the state’s minimum teacher salary to \$50,000 and providing one-time \$2,000 raises to teachers earning more than \$50,000 annually. By increasing Arkansas’ minimum teacher salary from \$36,000 to \$50,000 annually, the state’s minimum teacher salary ranking catapulted from the bottom 10% to the top 15% of states in the nation, according to the National Education Association’s teacher salary benchmarks⁴⁰. What’s more, Arkansas has the second lowest total cost of living⁴¹, lower than every state with a higher minimum teacher salary. Adjusting for the cost of living, Arkansas has the highest minimum teacher salary in the nation.

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The University of Arkansas’ Office of Education Policy examined the proportion of teachers in each school district with base salaries less than \$50,000 and found that more than half of teachers statewide will benefit from Arkansas’ new minimum teacher salary⁴². Researchers also found that teachers most likely to benefit from the increased base salary are concentrated in high-poverty areas that are more likely to have teacher shortages.



⁴⁰ National Education Association. (n.d.). Educator pay and student spending: How does your state rank? <https://www.nea.org/resource-library/educator-pay-and-student-spending-how-does-your-state-rank/starting-teacher>

⁴¹ Rothstein, R. & Jennings, C. (2024, January 17). Cost of Living by State. Forbes Advisor. <https://www.forbes.com/advisor/mortgages/cost-of-living-by-state/>

While raising base salaries, the LEARNS Act also eliminated the state’s minimum salary schedule for teachers with more education and years of experience, giving districts the autonomy to set their own salary schedules. In the coming years it will be important to monitor the extent to which districts are able to increase salaries for effective teachers in order to retain them as they gain experience, while continuing to meet the state’s \$50,000 minimum teacher salary requirement.

Beyond Base Salaries — Working Towards a Competitive Financial Value Proposition for Teachers

In addition to increases to base salaries, the LEARNS Act included other provisions aimed at making teaching in Arkansas a more financially attractive profession. These include reducing financial barriers to entry with loan repayment, scholarships, and licensure fee reimbursement for teachers in shortage areas as well merit bonuses and paid parental leave.

Student Loan Repayment

In the LEARNS Act, Arkansas supplemented the state’s new minimum teacher salary with certain financial incentives designed to recruit and retain teachers. The State Teacher Education Program (STEP)⁴³, a federal student loan repayment program, is for educators teaching in a subject or geographical shortage area. At least 13 other states⁴⁴ in the country offer similar, targeted loan forgiveness programs for educators, such as those working in hard-to-staff subject areas.

Prior to the LEARNS Act, STEP allowed eligible teachers to have \$3,000 in federal student loans repaid annually for up to three years. Eligible teachers can now have up to \$6,000 of federal student loans repaid annually for as many as three years. This is an example of how Arkansas has strengthened its financial value proposition for teachers in a manner that is designed to address critical subject and geographical teacher shortage areas.

Arkansas Teacher Academy Scholarship

The LEARNS Act also created a new college scholarship for aspiring teachers – the Arkansas Teacher Academy Scholarship⁴⁵. The scholarship will cover a student’s college tuition and fees for two to four years, the cost of obtaining a teaching license, and the fee for the required licensure exam. After graduating from college, these individuals must teach in an Arkansas public school for at least as many years as they received this scholarship. The Arkansas Department of Education worked with key stakeholders to design the specific parameters for this scholarship. During their July 2023 meeting⁴⁶, the LEARNS Work Group on educator preparation provided feedback on draft rules for this scholarship and a proposed application process. Prior to the start of the 2024-2025 school year, we anticipate that the Arkansas Department of Education will share their recommended guidance for this scholarship with the Arkansas State Board of Education for their review and rulemaking.

⁴² Zamarro, G., McGee, J. & Camp, A. (2023, March 3). Teacher Labor Market Research and the Arkansas Learns Act. University of Arkansas. <https://oep.uark.edu/teacher-labor-market-research-and-the-arkansas-learns-act/>

⁴³ Arkansas Department of Higher Education. (n.d.). Arkansas State Teacher Education Program (STEP) Program. Retrieved from <https://sams.adhe.edu/Scholarship/Details/STEP>

⁴⁴ Cloos, K. (2024, February 28). All the states that will pay off your student loans. Earnest. <https://www.earnest.com/blog/all-the-states-that-will-pay-off-your-student-loans/>

⁴⁵ Arkansas Teacher Academy Scholarship Program Act (n.d.). Arkansas Code of 1987, Title 6 (Education), Subtitle 6 (Postsecondary Education Financial Assistance Programs), Chapter 82 (Scholarships), Subchapter 22. Retrieved from <https://casetext.com/statute/arkansas-code-of-1987/title-6-education/subtitle-6-postsecondary-education-financial-assistance-programs/chapter-82-scholarships/subchapter-22-arkansas-teacher-academy-scholarship-program-act>

⁴⁶ Arkansas Department of Education. (2023, July 20). Learns Work Group: Educator Preparation [PDF document]. Retrieved from <https://learns.ade.arkansas.gov/File/sqg0233s.pdf>

Licensure Exam Fee Reimbursement

In most states, teachers are required to pass at least one exam to earn a standard license, especially if they enroll in a traditional teacher preparation program. To prevent the cost of licensure exams from becoming a barrier to the profession, Arkansas and at least nine other states⁴⁷ have taken steps to cover some or all of these fees for candidates. In Arkansas, certain public school teachers can be reimbursed for the fees associated with a licensure exam if (1) they earned a passing score and (2) added the subject area to their license. Those who earned their license between August 1, 2023 and July 31, 2024 are eligible to be reimbursed for teacher licensure exam fees if they meet one of the following criteria:

- Receive a standard teacher license or endorsement in a critical subject shortage area⁴⁸;
- Receive a standard teacher license or endorsement in a subject area that has been identified as a shortage area for the region⁴⁹ in which they teach; or
- Teach in a public school identified in the Tier 1 priority level for geographic shortages⁵⁰ during the current academic year.

Merit Teacher Incentive Fund

More than half of states⁵¹ statutorily require, or explicitly encourage, additional pay for teachers who work in a shortage area based on geography or subject matter, including through stipends and signing or retention bonuses. States including Louisiana⁵² and Pennsylvania⁵³ provide additional compensation to mentor teachers. To help retain the state's top teachers, the LEARNS Act established the Merit Teacher Incentive Fund⁵⁴. Teachers, including aspiring teachers participating in yearlong residencies, can earn up to a \$10,000 annual bonus if they have an annual rating of effective or highly effective on a state-approved evaluation system and:

- Demonstrate outstanding growth in student performance based on value-added growth model scores;
- Serve as a mentor to aspiring teachers who are participating in a yearlong residency; or
- Teach in a subject or geographical area deemed to be a critical shortage area.

At least for the first year of this fund, the state earmarked \$10 million for merit bonuses that will be paid to high-performing teachers by June 30, 2024. The draft rules for the Merit Teacher Incentive Fund were developed by the Arkansas Department of Education and reviewed by the LEARNS work group on teacher effectiveness⁵⁵. During the March 2024 Arkansas State Board of Education meeting, the draft rules for the Merit Teacher Incentive Fund were released for public comment.

⁴⁷ Putman, H. (2022, July 20). How states are making licensure tests free to aspiring teachers. NCTQ Blog. <https://www.nctq.org/blog/How-states-are-making-licensure-tests-free-to-aspiring-teachers>

⁴⁸ Arkansas Department of Education. (2023). 2023-24 Shortage Areas [PDF document]. Retrieved from https://dese.ade.arkansas.gov/Files/23-24_Doc_with_all_geographic_and_ESC_by_subject_9.26.23_REVISIED_10_9_2023_EEF.pdf

⁴⁹ Ibid

⁵⁰ Arkansas Department of Education. (2023). Geographical Teacher Shortage Area List 23-24 [PDF document]. <https://drive.google.com/file/d/18HUKJBG-mZ7mDs3rul-NiL3Zsn9bAVOPt/view?pli=1>

⁵¹ Education Commission of the States. (2022, December). Teacher Recruitment and Retention 2022. <https://reports.ecs.org/comparisons/teacher-recruitment-and-retention-2022-18>

⁵² Minton, J. (2024, January 22). Mentor teachers to receive additional \$1,500 stipend thanks to state funds. The Advocate. https://www.theadvocate.com/baton_rouge/news/communities/st_francisville/mentor-teachers-to-receive-additional-1-500-stipend-thanks-to-state-funds/article_9c06e982-b6ef-11ee-ad49-4bd28750b223.html

⁵³ Murphy, J. (2024, January 11). PA tackles teacher shortage by offering up to \$15k stipends to student teachers. PennLive. <https://www.pennlive.com/education/2024/01/pa-tackles-teacher-shortage-by-offering-up-to-15k-stipends-to-student-teachers.html>

⁵⁴ Arkansas Code of 1987. Title 6. Education. Chapter 17. Personnel. Subchapter 29. Merit Teacher Incentive Fund Program. Section 6-17-2903. Merit Teacher Incentive Fund Program Creation. Casetext. Retrieved from <https://casetext.com/statute/arkansas-code-of-1987/title-6-education/subtitle-2-elementary-and-secondary-education-generally/chapter-17-personnel/subchapter-29-merit-teacher-incentive-fund-program/section-6-17-2903-merit-teacher-incentive-fund-program-creation>

⁵⁵ Arkansas Department of Education. (2023, July 20). LEARNS Work Group: Educator Preparation [PDF document]. Retrieved from <https://learns.ade.arkansas.gov/File/sqg0233s.pdf>

Paid Parental Leave

Arkansas is among a growing number of states that are enacting paid maternity or parental leave policies as part of their teacher recruitment and retention strategy. Prior to 2023, only a handful of states⁵⁶, offered teachers paid parental leave. In 2023, Arkansas, Oklahoma, Tennessee, and South Carolina enacted legislation⁵⁷ to provide teachers with some form of paid maternity or parental leave. Tennessee now provides up to six weeks of paid parental leave for public school teachers and administrators. Oklahoma now offers up to six weeks of paid maternity leave for public school employees. Both states plan to fully reimburse school districts for the costs of their employees' leave. On April 24, 2023, Governor Sanders signed into law⁵⁸ twice that much: up to twelve weeks of paid maternity leave for full-time public school teachers if their school district participates in a cost-sharing agreement with the state to pay half of the associated costs. This is particularly notable given that more than seventy percent of Arkansas teachers are female⁵⁹.

Arkansas is one of four states (Delaware, New Jersey, Washington) to offer full-time public school teachers up to twelve weeks of paid maternity leave. Currently, no state offers more than twelve weeks of paid maternity leave. Offering paid maternity leave strengthens the value proposition of teaching and for some, makes it a more attractive career opportunity.

More than **70%** of Arkansas teachers are female

1 of 4 states to offer full-time public school teachers up to **12** weeks of paid maternity leave

⁵⁶ Will, M. (2019, April 1). With no paid parental leave, many teachers return to class before they're ready. Education Week. <https://www.edweek.org/leadership/with-no-paid-parental-leave-many-teachers-return-to-class-before-theyre-ready/2019/04>

⁵⁷ Will, M. (2023, June 22). Paid parental leave for teachers is happening in more states and districts. Education Week. Retrieved from <https://www.edweek.org/teaching-learning/paid-parental-leave-for-teachers-is-happening-in-more-states-and-districts/2023/06>

⁵⁸ Arkansas Code of 1987. Title 6. Education. Chapter 17. Personnel. Subchapter 1. General Provisions. Section 6-17-122. Paid maternity leave. Casetext. Retrieved from <https://casetext.com/statute/arkansas-code-of-1987/title-6-education/subtitle-2-elementary-and-secondary-education-generally/chapter-17-personnel/subchapter-1-general-provisions/section-6-17-122-paid-maternity-leave>

⁵⁹ Arkansas Department of Education. (n.d.). State of Arkansas Staff Demographic Statistics- Certified Teaching Staff [Webpage]. Retrieved from <https://insight.ade.arkansas.gov/HCPT/AdditionalReporting?lea=AR>

Understanding the Impact

Given that it has only been a year since the passage of the LEARNS Act, it is too soon to draw any conclusions about the extent to which this legislation has sustainably strengthened Arkansas' financial value proposition for teachers. In 2024, the Arkansas General Assembly will complete its biennial educational adequacy study⁶⁰. Informed by this report, the General Assembly will consider adjusting the state's school funding formula, including how much money the state will distribute to school districts for teacher salaries and benefits. The study's findings could also inform changes to how the Teacher Salary Equalization Fund is administered. For example, policy makers could adjust the eligibility requirements for this fund and/or the formula that determines how many additional dollars school districts receive to help narrow the gap between the school districts with the highest and lowest average teacher salaries. In the 2025 legislative session, we anticipate that policy makers

will need to address questions about the long-term availability of state funding to help school districts meet the minimum teacher salary.

Forthcoming guidance from the Arkansas Department of Education on the Merit Teacher Incentive Fund will also give district leaders a better understanding of how this fund can help them reward and retain their top teachers. As OEP highlighted in their LEARNS Act analysis⁶¹, when flexible teacher pay and performance bonuses have had a positive impact on student outcomes, those improvements have taken at least three years to materialize (e.g., District of Columbia⁶², Wisconsin⁶³). Finally, it will be important to study how the state's teacher scholarship opportunities and expanded federal student loan repayment program are utilized. This data will help Arkansas determine how best to sustain, scale, or sunset its financial assistance programs to recruit and retain teachers.

⁶⁰ Arkansas Legislature (2022, September 6). [PDF document]. Retrieved from <https://www.arkleg.state.ar.us/Home/FTPDocument?path=%2Feducation%2FK12%2FAd-equacyReports%2F2022%2F2022-09-06%2FHandout+F2+Draft+2022+Educational+Adequacy+Report%2C+BLR.pdf>

⁶¹ Zamarro, G., McGee, J. & Camp, A. (2023, March 3). Teacher Labor Market Research and the Arkansas Learns Act. University of Arkansas. <https://oep.uark.edu/teacher-labor-market-research-and-the-arkansas-learns-act/>

⁶² Adnot, M., Dee, T., Katz, V., & Wyckoff, J. (2017). Teacher turnover, teacher quality, and student achievement in DCPS. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 39(1), 54-76. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0162373716663646>

⁶³ Biasi, B. (2021). The labor market for teachers under different pay schemes. *American Economic Journal: Economic Policy*, 13(3): 63-102. <https://www.aeaweb.org/articles?id=10.1257/pol.20200295>

Communicate and Promote Arkansas' Pathways to Teacher Licensure and Opportunities for Financial Assistance

In *Missing Out*, we recommended that Arkansas design a website that clearly illustrates the state's pathways to teaching and related financial incentives. Teach Arkansas⁶⁴ (teacharkansas.org), a digital hub that clearly communicates the state's pathways to teaching, the financial assistance available to teacher candidates, and the benefits of a career in teaching, was launched in 2022. Led by Forward Arkansas, in partnership with the Arkansas Department of Education (ADE), this statewide initiative created a centralized source of clear and digestible information about Arkansas' flexible and supportive pathways to teacher licensure as well as the financial incentives available to aspiring teachers. For example, Teach Arkansas features a tuition calculator to help candidates identify how to complete their bachelor's degree and obtain a teacher license with little to no debt. Teach Arkansas also organizes and illustrates the various pathways to teaching available to candidates based on their level of education and employment status (i.e., for current high school students, for two and four-year college students, for career changers).

Understanding the Impact

The website was developed to help recruit more candidates into teaching, particularly to address geographic and subject area teacher shortages. To amplify this resource to prospective teacher candidates, Forward Arkansas launched an extensive media campaign incorporating traditional, digital, and social media from March through September 2022. The media campaign targeted areas of the state with heightened teacher shortages and contributed to over 41,000 users visiting the website during this window of time. Over 2,000 of those visitors took advantage of another key feature of Teach Arkansas — access to career advisors. 2,007 individuals requested to meet with an ADE-trained career advisor to receive tailored guidance and support in pursuing a teacher license. Nearly half of them identified as career changers, and close to a quarter identified as two- and four-year college students — highlighting that the website reached and resonated with multiple audiences. Forward Arkansas surveyed prospective candidates who met with a career advisor to gain a better understanding of their interest in becoming a teacher. Just over half of respondents said they were highly likely and 19% of respondents said they were somewhat likely to pursue a teacher license.

⁶⁴ Teach Arkansas. (n.d.). Teach Arkansas. Retrieved from <https://teacharkansas.org/>

Establish Relevant and Rigorous Teacher Licensure Requirements

Arkansas, like many states⁶⁵, requires aspiring teachers to demonstrate subject matter competency to be admitted to an Educator Preparation Program or to earn a standard, five-year teaching license, depending on the teacher licensure pathway. To do so, candidates must earn a qualifying score on the Praxis Subject Test for the grade-level and/or subject area that they wish to be licensed to teach. Unfortunately, these licensure exams can be a barrier to the profession⁶⁶. The National Council on Teacher Quality obtained pass rate data for first-time test takers from 38 states and the District of Columbia⁶⁷. For these states, they found that 45% is the average first-attempt pass rate on the subject test for aspiring elementary school teachers. Between 2020 and 2022, pass rates of first-time test takers in Arkansas were below 50%⁶⁸ on roughly half of the Praxis Subject Tests.

Recently, the Arkansas Department of Education launched the Licensure Assessment Ready program⁶⁹ to provide no-cost high-quality tutoring and resources. This program is similar to those established over the past year in North Carolina⁷⁰ and Rhode Island⁷¹. To help candidates prepare for the Foundations of Reading exam, the program provides four, two-hour virtual tutoring sessions. Working with a tutor, participants review frequently tested topics and practice sample test questions. Each ESC has a tutoring specialist available to help candidates

prepare for a Praxis Subject Test. Hundreds of aspiring teachers⁷² have leveraged this program's tutoring supports to help them prepare for the licensure exams.

Arkansas also has a rigorous, performance-based pathway to a standard, five-year teaching license for candidates who nearly earn a qualifying score on a Praxis Subject Test. Arkansas' Alternate Assessment Plan⁷³ (AAP) provides flexibility to aspiring teachers that score within minus two (-2) standard error of measurement (SEM) of the qualifying score on a subject area test. These candidates can earn a standard, five-year teaching license once they complete an approved micro-credential⁷⁴ or performance-based content assessment (e.g., Praxis Performance Assessment for Teachers), have taught for three years in their content area, and received effective or highly effective ratings on the TESS evaluation rubric. To complete the required three years of teaching, AAP participants teach on a renewable, provisional license that is limited to three years. In 2022, 178 candidates received provisional licenses to help them complete their AAP, more than double the 64 provisional licenses granted in 2021. Other states, including Colorado⁷⁵ and Massachusetts⁷⁶, have established their own alternative methods for candidates to demonstrate subject matter competency, such as Arkansas' Alternate Assessment Plan.

⁶⁵ National Council on Teacher Quality. (n.d.). Content Knowledge. Retrieved from <https://www.nctq.org/yearbook/national/Content-Knowledge-90>

⁶⁶ Will, M. (2021, July 21). First-time pass rates on teacher licensure exams were secret until now. See the data. Education Week. <https://www.edweek.org/teaching-learning/first-time-pass-rates-on-teacher-licensure-exams-were-secret-until-now-see-the-data/2021/07>

⁶⁷ Putman, H., & Walsh, K. (2021). Driven by data: Using licensure tests to build a strong, diverse teacher workforce. Washington, D.C.: National Council on Teacher Quality. <https://www.nctq.org/publications/Driven-by-Data:-Using-Licensure-Tests-to-Build-a-Strong,-Diverse-Teacher-Workforce>.

⁶⁸ McKenzie, S., McGee, J., Zamarro, G., Camp, A. & Wilson, T. (2023, March 24). Teacher Workforce Report [PDF document, Page 19]. Retrieved from <https://learns.ade.arkansas.gov/File/pne1zds4.pdf#page=19>

⁶⁹ Arkansas Department of Education. (n.d.). Licensure Assessment Ready. Retrieved from <https://dese.ade.arkansas.gov/Offices/educator-effectiveness/educator-support--development/licensure-assessment-ready>

⁷⁰ Brown, C. (2023, June 9). Governor Cooper allocates \$3 million in federal funding to help aspiring NC teachers. North Carolina Newsline. Retrieved from <https://nc-newsline.com/briefs/governor-cooper-allocates-3-million-in-federal-funding-to-help-aspiring-nc-teachers/>

⁷¹ Bateson, L. (2023, July 2). RIDE to offer free teacher test prep, Praxis test vouchers. Turn to 10. Retrieved from <https://turnto10.com/news/crisis-in-the-classroom/ride-free-offer-teacher-test-prep-praxis-vouchers-shortage-university-partnership-rhode-island-department-education-commissioner>

⁷² McGee, J. (2022, November). The Impact of Teacher Licensure Policies [PDF document]. Retrieved from https://www.transform.ar.gov/wp-content/uploads/Arkansas-Teacher-Pipeline_Nov-2022-DTP-Meeting.pdf

⁷³ Arkansas Department of Education. (n.d.). Alternate Assessment Plan (AAP). Retrieved from <https://dese.ade.arkansas.gov/Offices/educator-effectiveness/licensure/alternate-assessment-plan-aap>

⁷⁴ BloomBoard. (n.d.). Pedagogy Assessment Micro-credentials. Retrieved from <https://bloomboard.com/program/arkansas-ppt/>

⁷⁵ Colorado Department of Education. (n.d.). Colorado Teacher Endorsement Requirements. Retrieved from <https://www.cde.state.co.us/cdeprof/endorsementrequirements>

⁷⁶ Massachusetts Tests for Educator Licensure. (n.d.). About M-TEL Flex. Retrieved from https://www.mtel.nesinc.com/PageView.aspx?f=HTML_FRAG/GENRB_Anouncement_Flex.html

In 2022, 178 candidates received provisional licenses to help them complete their AAP, more than double the 64 provisional licenses granted in 2021.

Reviewing and Refining Opportunities for Candidates to Demonstrate Subject Matter Competency

On January 11, 2023, Governor Sanders published Executive Order 23-08⁷⁷ to prioritize literacy, empowerment, accountability, readiness, networking, and school safety (LEARNS). This executive order required the Arkansas Department of Education to review the state’s educator preparation and licensure requirements within 90 days and to remove any unnecessary, outdated, or burdensome requirements and implement best practices from other states. During the July 2023

Arkansas State Board of Education meeting, the Arkansas Department of Education recommended adjusting the state’s qualifying score on certain Praxis Subject tests.

According to the Arkansas Department of Education, researchers found no significant difference⁷⁸ in the effectiveness of Arkansas teachers who scored within two standard errors of measurement (SEM) on these licensure exams.

As of September 1, 2023, the qualifying score is two SEM below⁷⁹ the recommended figure by Educational Testing Service for eligible Praxis Subject tests. This decision is similar to recent teacher licensure exam policy changes in Missouri⁸⁰, Kentucky⁸¹, and other states⁸² working to address teacher shortages. The Arkansas Department of Education also proportionally lowered the Alternate Assessment Plan (AAP) score for eligible subject area tests to reflect the new qualifying score.

⁷⁷ Governor of Arkansas. (n.d.). Executive Order to Prioritize L.E.A.R.N.S (Literacy, Empowerment, Accountability, Readiness, Networking, and School Safety). Retrieved from https://governor.arkansas.gov/executive_orders/executive-order-to-prioritize-l-e-a-r-n-s-literacy-empowerment-accountability-readiness-networking-and-school-safety/

⁷⁸ Arkansas Department of Education. (2023, July 13). State Board of Education, July 13, 2023 [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m2N8b7zD1jM>

⁷⁹ Arkansas State Board of Education. (2023, July 13). Agenda for July 13, 2023 [Meeting agenda]. Retrieved from <https://meetings.boardbook.org/Public/Agenda/1133?meeting=590565>

⁸⁰ Manley, E. (2022, June 14.). Missouri’s top educators expand test-score certification to fight teacher shortage. FOX2now. <https://fox2now.com/news/missouri/missouri-top-educators-expand-test-score-certification-to-fight-teacher-shortage/>

⁸¹ Ragusa, J. (2022, December 12). Kentucky Education Professional Standards Board approves alternate licensure assessments. Kentucky Teacher. <https://www.kentuckyteacher.org/news/2022/12/kentucky-education-professional-standards-board-approves-alternate-licensure-assessments/>

⁸² Will, M. (2022, June 28). States relax teacher certification rules to combat shortages. Education Week. <https://www.edweek.org/teaching-learning/states-relax-teacher-certification-rules-to-combat-shortages/2022/06>

⁸³ Governor of Arkansas. (n.d.). Executive Order to Prioritize L.E.A.R.N.S (Literacy, Empowerment, Accountability, Readiness, Networking, and School Safety). Retrieved from https://governor.arkansas.gov/executive_orders/executive-order-to-prioritize-l-e-a-r-n-s-literacy-empowerment-accountability-readiness-networking-and-school-safety/ Arkansas Department of Education. (2023, July 13). State Board of Education, July 13

⁸⁴ Howell, C. (2023, September 18). Oliva addresses board on teacher licensure. Arkansas Online. <https://www.arkansasonline.com/news/2023/sep/18/oliva-addresses-board-on-teacher-licensure/#:~:text=Education%20chief%20suggests%20adding%20pathways,2023%20at%207%3A25%20a.m.&text=Arkansas%20Education%20Secretary%20Jacob%20Oliva%20last%20week%20broached%20with%20state,licensure%20besides%20taking%20qualifying%20tests>

Passed in April 2023, House Bill 1609 requires that aspiring teachers have the option to demonstrate subject matter competency by earning a qualifying score on the relevant Praxis Subject Test or by completing an AAP. This legislation will allow candidates to complete an AAP to demonstrate their subject matter competency without first attempting to earn a qualifying score on a Praxis Subject Test. The bill also adjusted the requirements for completing an AAP to include measures of student academic growth based on a value-added growth model or other measures approved by the State Board of Education. The state board has yet to consider additional student academic growth measures for this new component of the Alternate Assessment Plan.

Understanding the Impact

In response to the LEARNS Executive Order⁸³, the Arkansas Department of Education is continuing to explore ways to refine teacher licensure requirements and implement best practices from other states. During a [September 2023 working session](#)⁸⁴ with the Arkansas State Board of Education, Education Secretary Jacob Oliva raised the idea of expanding opportunities for aspiring teachers to demonstrate subject matter competency in hopes of growing the profession, without lowering the bar to entry. While it is unclear how this work will ultimately shape the role that licensure exams play in Arkansas, we encourage state leaders to make policy decisions that are in support of the state's flexible, supportive, and rigorous licensure pathways designed to meet candidates' varying needs.

⁸⁵ These figures are from data provided by the University of Arkansas Office of Education Policy.

Teacher Shortages in Arkansas Today

In light of the extensive recent efforts to address teacher shortages in Arkansas, we revisited statewide teacher shortage data to understand the extent to which these efforts are having their intended effect. The short answer is, it's too soon to tell. We do not see major changes in the patterns of geographical or subject-area teacher shortages, but this is to be expected since most of the initiatives we describe above have been in place for less than a year. Additionally, COVID and subsequent recovery efforts added additional stress for teachers that may have impeded recruitment and retention efforts in recent years. While we are not yet seeing statewide improvements in teacher shortages, it is important to understand where those shortages stand today in order to track progress going forward.

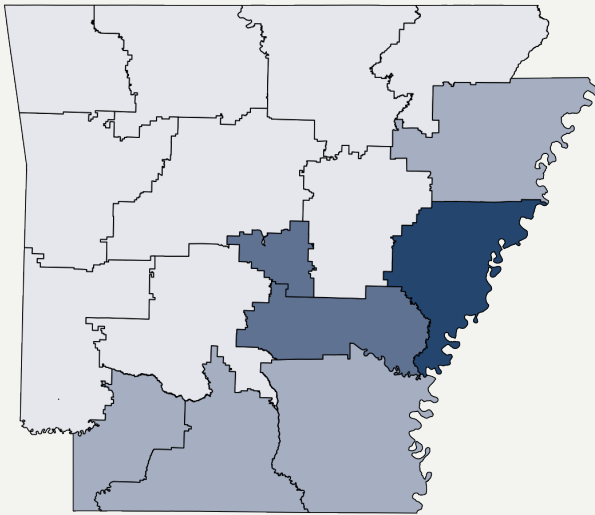
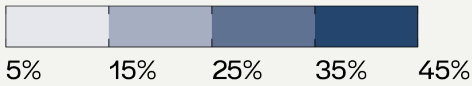
There are approximately 40,000 teachers employed in public schools across Arkansas.⁸⁵ In the 2022-23 school year, more than 5,000 were not licensed in the grades or subjects they taught and nearly 4,000 left the profession and/or the state before the 2023-24 school year. Meanwhile, in 2022-23, about 2,000 potential teachers completed educator preparation programs in Arkansas. The gap between demand (unlicensed teachers and attrition) and supply (new completers of educator preparation programs) is called Total Demand Percent (TDP). The University of Arkansas Office of Education Policy calculates TDP yearly for both subject areas and geographic areas to quantify teacher shortages and identify areas that are eligible for shortage-related incentives.

Geographical Shortage Areas

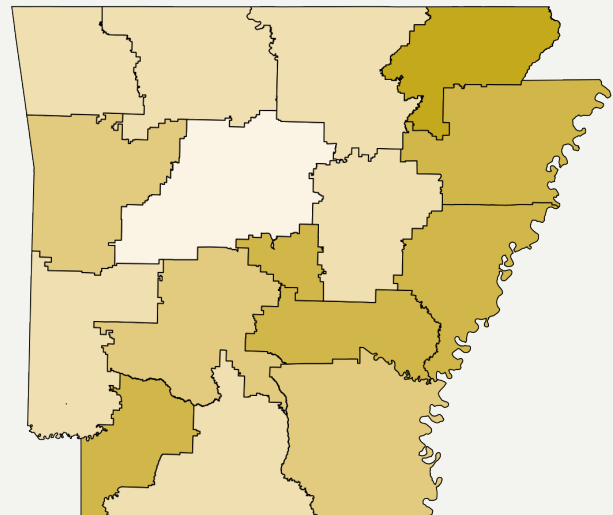
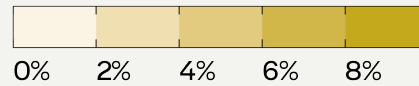
In *Missing Out*, we found that teacher shortages were mainly concentrated in Southern Arkansas and in the Delta region.⁸⁶ That pattern still holds three years later, with ESCs in these regions also experiencing greater *increases* in teacher shortages than other areas of the state. However, these are the very areas of the state that benefitted most

from salary increases and are most in need of Arkansas Grow Your Own and the Arkansas Teacher Registered Apprenticeship pathway (with a lower percentage of adults holding bachelor's degrees⁸⁷ than other areas of the state), so there is reason to be optimistic that teacher shortages in these areas may decrease as these initiatives evolve.

Teacher Total Demand
Percent: 2023



Change in Teacher Total
Demand Percent: 2021-2023



Source: University of Arkansas Office of Education Policy

⁸⁶ In *Missing Out*, we defined teacher shortages as the percentage of teachers in a district who were not certified in the subject they were teaching. When the University of Arkansas Office of Education Policy began calculating teacher shortage areas for the state in the 2021-22 school year, their calculations of teacher shortages, Total Demand Percent, included not only unlicensed teachers but also account for teacher attrition and potential teachers completing educator preparation programs. OEP continues to refine its methodology for calculating these shortage areas to increase their accuracy and usefulness over time, but as these calculations change it may mean that year-over-year comparisons from different reports do not align. In this report, we used the most recent OEP methodology and applied it to all prior years to calculate shortages over time.

⁸⁷ TNTP. (2021). *Missing out: Arkansas' teacher shortage and how to fix it*. https://tntp.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/TNTP_MissingOut_FINAL_web.pdf

Subject Area Shortages

Teacher Total Demand Percent across subject areas increased in recent years, from 13% in 2021 to 18% in 2023. While there is no consistent national data on teacher shortages, the trend in Arkansas is similar to many other states⁸⁸ that saw increases in teacher turnover, vacancies, and teaching positions filled by individuals not fully licensed in the subject(s) they are teaching compared to pre-COVID levels.

Both greatest increase and highest demand for Foreign Language teachers. Demand for Elementary teachers continues to be the lowest of all subject areas, but increased notably from 2021 to 2023.

Demand increased in almost all subjects, with the exception of Physical Education and Health and Computer Science. The large drop in Computer Science demand is likely driven by the additional positions created by the state’s Computer Science Education Advancement Act of 2021⁸⁹ (which required all high school students to take at least one Computer Science class and all high schools to have at least one Computer Science teacher) being filled, bringing demand for Computer Science teachers more in line with other subject areas.

Change in Teacher Total Demand Percent by Subject: 2021-2023

● TDP 2021 ● TDP 2023

Subject Area	TDP 2021	TDP 2023	Change
Foreign Language	15%	27%	12%
Secondary Science	18%	24%	7%
Secondary English Language Arts	13%	23%	10%
Middle School English Language Arts	18%	22%	4%
Computer Science	22%	43%	-21%
Secondary Mathematics	18%	22%	4%
Middle School Science	16%	22%	6%
Middle School Social Studies	15%	21%	6%
Career & Technical	14%	21%	6%
Special Education	12%	20%	8%
Middle School Mathematics	14%	20%	6%
Secondary Social Studies	9%	18%	9%
Fine Arts	16%	18%	3%
All Subjects	13%	18%	5%
Early Childhood Education	14%	16%	2%
Physical Education and Health	15%	17%	-2%
Elementary	1%	7%	6%

Source: University of Arkansas Office of Education Policy

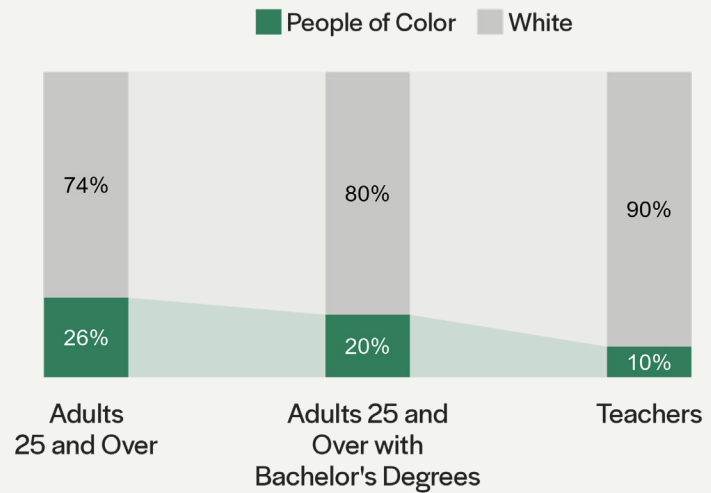
⁸⁸ Teacher shortages in the United States. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://teachershortages.com/>

⁸⁹ Arkansas Department of Education. (2022, February 10.). Rules for the Computer Science Education Advancement Act of 2021 (Act 414) Passed by the AR SBE [Memo]. Arkansas Department of Education. Retrieved from <https://adecm.ade.arkansas.gov/ViewApprovedMemo.aspx?id=5060>

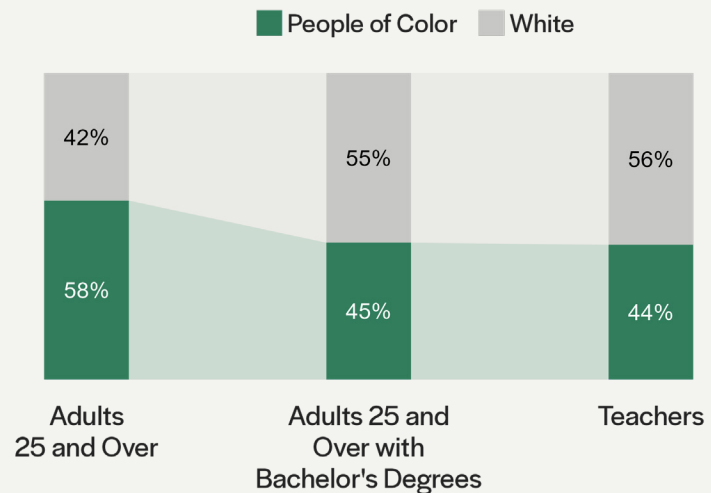
Teacher Diversity and Teacher Shortages

In *Missing Out*, we noted that the regions of the state experiencing the direst teacher shortages were also those with the lowest percentage of adults with bachelor’s degrees, making it more challenging to recruit teachers locally and necessitating a supportive pathway for aspiring teachers to obtain a bachelor’s degree *and* a teaching license while working full-time as paraprofessionals. Another demographic trend underscores this need. Across the state, people of color make up about a quarter of Arkansans, but only 20% of bachelor’s degree holders and 10% of teachers. However, in Great Rivers ESC in the Arkansas Delta, which has the largest teacher shortages and highest percentage of people of color in the state, the pattern looks different. In the counties that make up Great Rivers ESC (St. Francis, Lee, Phillips, and Monroe), people of color and white people with bachelor’s degrees become teachers at virtually the same rate – the teacher diversity gap is driven entirely by the disparity in bachelor’s degree attainment.

Percent of Arkansas Adults Who Are Teachers, by Race



Percent of Great Rivers Adults Who Are Teachers, by Race



Source: 2022 American Community Survey, U.S. Census Bureau

With adults of color making up the majority of the potential teacher population in Great Rivers ESC and with bachelor’s degree holders in these counties going into teaching at similar rates regardless of race, it will be necessary for Arkansas communities like those in Great Rivers ESC to recruit and retain more teachers of color in order to address their teacher shortages. Because of the disparities in bachelor’s degree attainment, supportive pathways to teacher licensure which allow candidates to obtain their degree along the way are a critical component, and Arkansas Grow Your Own and the Arkansas Teacher Registered Apprenticeship have great potential to address shortages in the areas of the state most in need of teachers.

Recommendations

In recent years, through the LEARNS Act and initiatives like the Arkansas Grow Your Own and Arkansas Teacher Registered Apprenticeship, the state has undertaken tremendous efforts to improve teacher recruitment and retention and address teacher shortages.

Therefore, we do not recommend additional initiatives at this time. Rather, we recommend that the state carefully attend to the implementation of these initiatives- the details of how programs are designed and rolled out are critical to their success, and we highlight some key considerations for implementation below. In addition, the state should continue to monitor the programs it has put in place to determine whether they are working as intended and how they can be refined in the years ahead.

Continue to develop and expand supportive pathways to teaching.

Since the publication of *Missing Out*, Arkansas has made numerous, promising programmatic and policy changes to strengthen the state's pathways to teaching. Arkansas Grow Your Own and the Arkansas Teacher Registered Apprenticeship are supportive routes to the profession that help districts grow their own teachers and promote economic mobility through bachelor's degree attainment. Recent legislation laid the groundwork for the expanded use of performance-based measures for licensure, recognizing that licensure exams are not the only way to determine if a candidate is a day one-ready teacher. Looking ahead, we encourage the state to maintain its commitment to strengthening its teacher workforce and addressing teacher shortages through pathways that help Arkansas grow its own teacher talent. To do so, policy makers must continue to be cognizant of the financial implications of teacher licensure requirements. Arkansas is addressing this by reimbursing

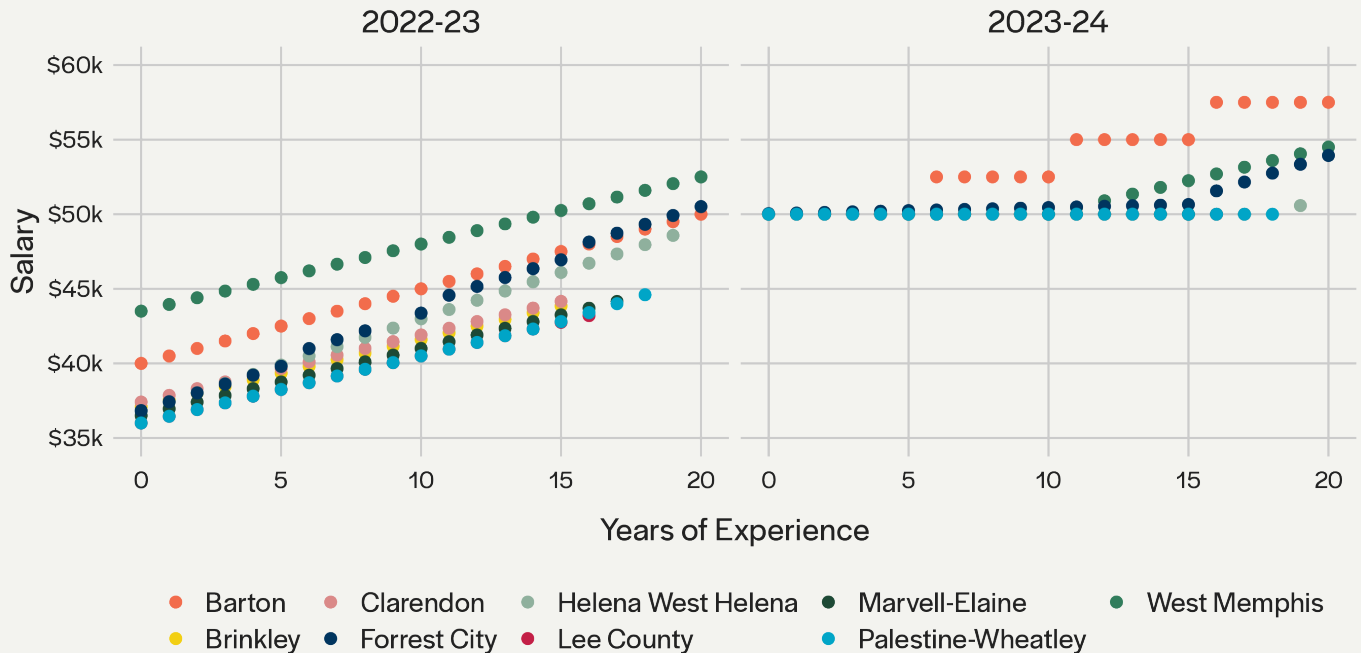
candidates for licensure exam fees, offering a range of scholarship and loan forgiveness opportunities, and offering work-based pathways to licensure.

However, a new potential financial challenge for aspiring teachers looms. According to the LEARNS Act Executive Order, by 2027 all teacher candidates must complete a yearlong residency to obtain a license. As that deadline approaches, it is important for policy makers to **ensure that teacher candidates will receive a professional wage if they are teaching full-time during their yearlong residency.** If not, this will create a significant financial barrier to the teaching profession, limiting the pool of potential teachers to those that can afford an unpaid (or partially paid) yearlong residency. This would likely exacerbate geographical teacher shortages and diversity gaps, as well as teacher shortages overall.

Continue to work toward a financial value proposition that helps Arkansas recruit *and* retain teachers where they are needed the most.

By elevating the minimum teacher salary across the state to \$50,000, Arkansas made a commendable effort toward leveling the playing field for teacher recruitment. For example, in Great Rivers ESC (shown below), new teachers in most districts are earning more than \$10,000 more than in the 2022-23 school year, which may help attract new teachers to some of the highest-shortage districts in the state.

Great Rivers Salary Schedules Before and After LEARNS Act



Zamarro, G., Camp, A. McGee, J., Wilson, T. & Vernon, M. (2023). *Changes in Teacher Salaries Under The Arkansas LEARNS Act*. Office for Education Policy (OEP). https://edre.uark.edu/_resources/pdf/changes-in-teacher-salaries-under-the-arkansas-learns-act-research-brief_nov2_final_rb2023-02.pdf

However, current salary schedules in many districts do not yet incorporate salary increases beyond the \$50,000 starting salary. Given that districts now have the flexibility for districts to set their own salary schedules, we encourage all districts, especially those working to address teacher shortages, to consider how they will **raise teacher salaries annually based on factors such as their demonstrated effectiveness with students and teacher leadership roles**. If certain districts can only offer relatively flat salary schedules beyond the \$50,000 minimum, it will be challenging for them to retain teachers. We encourage policy makers and elected officials to study districts' teacher salary schedules, particularly in areas with higher rates of teacher shortages, and consider how existing initiatives (i.e., Merit Teacher Incentive Fund) and other funding could be leveraged to help Arkansas recruit and retain teachers where they are needed the most.

Refresh the Teach Arkansas website and dedicate resources to supporting potential teacher candidates who visit the site.

Given Arkansas' recent policy and programmatic efforts to strengthen the teacher workforce through new licensure pathways, scholarships, and financial incentives, we recommend **refreshing the content on Teach Arkansas to reflect the totality of the state's resources for aspiring teachers**. Since there are many new pathways to teaching and forms of financial assistance, it is important to highlight application requirements, steps, and deadlines. With an eye towards teacher retention, this content refresh should also amplify new opportunities for current teachers, such as stipends for serving as mentor teachers to aspiring teachers. During Teach Arkansas' initial launch, a multi-

pronged media campaign played an important role in promoting the website to potential teacher candidates. We encourage the state to similarly invest in a digital, social, and traditional media campaign once the website's content has been refreshed. Ideally, a targeted media campaign would occur annually to, among other things, call attention to upcoming deadlines for scholarships. To help local media outlets promote the website and its resources, we recommend **updating the media toolkit on Teach Arkansas to reflect its refreshed content.**

To maximize Teach Arkansas' potential, we encourage the state to **dedicate a team of trained career coaches** to support potential teacher candidates who reach out for more information through the website. There should also be a system in place for tracking how these individuals matriculate through the pipeline. Such a system will provide the state with data that can be used to improve the website and the support provided by career coaches.

Focus on progress monitoring and continuous improvement.

As the state continues to implement initiatives aimed at teacher recruitment and retention, it is critical for the Arkansas Department of Education to **continue to leverage its robust K-12 data warehouse and partnership with the University of Arkansas' Office of Education Policy** to (1) report at least annually on how the policies and programs described herein are being used by aspiring and current teachers and (2) identify targeted opportunities for continuous improvement in a data informed manner. That said, given the nascent nature of many teacher recruitment and retention initiatives in Arkansas, we encourage policy makers to exercise patience as candidates matriculate through the pipeline and into the profession. Certain core components of Arkansas' teacher recruitment and retention strategy have only existed for, at most, three years, including:

- Arkansas Grow Your Own;
- Arkansas Teacher Registered Apprenticeship (8th in the nation to gain federal approval); and
- \$50,000 minimum annual teacher salary (6th highest in the nation and highest in the nation adjusting for cost of living).

Through its commitment to offering supportive licensure pathways designed to produce day one-ready teachers and developing a competitive financial value proposition for teachers, Arkansas has positioned itself as a state to learn from as policy makers across the nation work to strengthen the teacher workforce.

Appendix A:

Teacher Pathways and Incentives

Program Name	Who is it for?	Description
Alternative Routes to Licensure		
Arkansas Professional Educator Pathway (ArPEP)	Bachelor's degree holders	A two-year, low-cost (\$3,000) program run by the Arkansas Department of Education that provides job-embedded coaching to aspiring teachers while they work as a teacher of record under a provisional teaching license.
Arkansas Teacher Corps (ATC)	Bachelor's degree holders	A no-cost, three-year program allowing individuals with a bachelor's degree to serve as full-time, paid teachers in a geographical shortage area while receiving job-embedded training and mentoring.
Master of Arts in Teaching	Bachelor's degree holders	A master's degree program offered at 11 Arkansas universities leading to first-time licensure.
Teach for America	Bachelor's degree holders	A program leading to first-time licensure requiring 2-year commitment to teach in an area of the state identified as high minority and high poverty.
American Board (ABCTE)	Bachelor's degree holders	A self-paced, online program leading to first-time licensure in middle grades and selected high school (primarily STEM) subjects.
Highly Qualified Professor	Bachelor's degree holders	A licensure option for college instructors with a minimum of 3 years of teaching experience in the licensure content area at an accredited institution of higher education.
Provisional Professional Teaching License	Bachelor's degree holders	A licensure option for professionals with a minimum of 3 years of working experience in the specific content area of the class to be taught.
iTeach Arkansas	Bachelor's degree holders	A self-paced, online program leading to Arkansas licensure in any first-time licensure area with the exception of Special Education K-12, Elementary Education K-6, Adult Education, and Guidance and School Counseling.
Arkansas Teacher Residency Model (Recently rebranded to Arkansas Grow Your Own)	Non-bachelor's degree holders	A framework that districts can use to design a pathway to teacher licensure for high school students and paraprofessionals, allowing candidates to be employed in a P-12 school setting while working to meet teacher licensure requirements.

Educators Rising	High school students	A nationwide Grow Your Own program that offers students the opportunity to develop necessary classroom skills and experience teaching through co-curricular learning and supervised clinical experiences while still in high school. Districts participating in Arkansas Grow Your Own must establish an Educators Rising High School Chapter as a part of the program.
Financial Incentive Programs		
TEACH Grant	College students	Federal grant of up to \$3,772 per year for college students who sign an agreement to serve in a high-need field at a school that serves low-income families for at least four complete academic years
Arkansas Teacher Academy Scholarship	College students	Scholarship established under the LEARNS Act that covers college tuition and fees for two to four years, the cost of obtaining a teaching license, and the fee for the required licensure exam.
State Teacher Education Program (STEP)	Current educators	Loan repayment program for current educators teaching in a subject and geographical shortage area of up to \$6,000 per year for up to three years.
Teacher Loan Forgiveness Program	Current educators	Federal loan forgiveness program for highly qualified teachers at schools serving low-income students of up to \$17,500 for math, science, and special education teachers and \$5,000 for teachers of other subjects.
Teacher Opportunity Program (TOP)	Current educators who wish to continue their education	Tuition reimbursement grant for out-of-pocket expenses paid for up to six college credit hours completed for each academic year up to \$3000.
Test Fee Reimbursements	Current educators	Licensure test fee reimbursements of up to \$399 for teachers who have earned a standard license in a critical shortage or geographical shortage area or in computer science.

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