



Arkansas Department of Education

Division of Elementary and Secondary Education

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DESE Launches Academy to Address Critical Teacher Shortages in Special Education

LITTLE ROCK — Students deserve access to an equitable education led by the best teachers in the state. In some content areas, such as special education, school districts face challenges in finding teachers to meet these essential needs. To address this issue, the Arkansas Department of Education's Division of Elementary and Secondary Education is launching the Special Education Resource Teacher Academy.

The academy, which utilizes Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief funds, gives licensed public school educators in grades K-12 the opportunity to earn an additional Special Education Resource endorsement and participate in job-embedded professional development while receiving graduate school credit hours - at no cost to them. For those who participate, DESE will pay tuition fees for up to 15 graduate school credit hours needed to obtain the endorsement, as well as licensure assessment fees.

"The Special Education Resource Teacher Academy joins other Teach Arkansas recruitment efforts to address teacher shortages in critical subject areas," ADE Secretary Johnny Key said. "This pathway helps educators achieve professional development goals while also meeting an essential need for quality educators in special education classrooms. I'm excited for the division to offer this opportunity to educators, and I am confident that students will greatly benefit from having these teachers in the classroom."

For more than a decade, special education has been designated as an academic critical shortage area. This new pathway is designed to address this issue by empowering and equipping content teachers with the knowledge necessary to provide students who have a variety of diverse learning needs, with and without disabilities, the support necessary to meet grade-level expectations.

Additionally, educators obtaining this endorsement will be able to provide special education services within the general education classroom, as supplementary supports, or in special education classrooms. This will expand the district's ability to consider and offer a variety of special education service delivery models. With the growing emphasis on inclusive practices, this opportunity will assist in preparing Arkansas school districts with the skilled staff needed to lead the nation in student-focused "inclusive" education.

DESE is partnering with Harding University in Searcy, Henderson State University in Arkadelphia, and John Brown University in Siloam Springs to offer the academy. The first cohorts begin this summer, with educators receiving ongoing sessions and support throughout the school year as they apply new concepts in their classrooms.

Participating educators also will be part of the Novice Special Education Teacher Mentoring Program at their local education service cooperative, where they will receive additional coaching, professional development, regional networking opportunities, and support throughout the school year.

To participate in the academy, interested educators will apply with one of the partnering universities. The academy must be completed by July 31 of the year following acceptance into the program.

To learn more, go to <https://bit.ly/2Pwqn4z>. For more information about other Teacher Academies, visit <https://bit.ly/2S0gKMb>.

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