



ARKANSAS
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

each day
communications

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

23 Educators Selected for Inaugural Arkansas Excellence in Teaching Fellowship Program

LITTLE ROCK, Ark. (Oct. 6, 2025) – Following a competitive application process, the Arkansas Department of Education (ADE) has selected 23 high-performing educators from across the state to participate in an inaugural fellowship program. Now through May 2026, the teachers will participate in virtual convenings to improve their practice, raise awareness of the teaching profession, and increase understanding of the state's Merit Teacher Incentive Fund.

"We launched the Arkansas Excellence in Teaching Fellowship to recognize some of the highest-performing K-12 educators in the state," said Arkansas Department of Education Secretary Jacob Oliva. "This unique program is not only a reward for their excellence in the classroom, but a unique opportunity for them to grow professionally, build lasting connections, and make an even greater impact in their schools and communities."

All 23 teachers are recipients of the Merit Teacher Incentive Fund. In exchange for participating in the Arkansas Excellence in Teaching Fellowship and sharing their experiences as merit pay recipients, selected teachers will benefit from professional learning, networking, and collaboration and receive a \$1,500 stipend.

"Arkansas is fortunate to be home to brilliant educators who make tremendous gains with their students," said Brandie Benton, the Arkansas Department of Education Assistant Commissioner for Teacher Effectiveness, Licensure. "We're excited to introduce this new opportunity for teachers to connect with each other from across the state, share their best practices, and make more people aware of the progress they're advancing in our schools."

Each Day Communications will operate the fellowship in collaboration with the ADE. For more information about the Arkansas Excellence in Teaching Fellowship Program, visit the [program page](#) on the ADE website.

Arkansas Department of Education

The Department of Education (ADE) is a dedicated service agency that provides leadership, support and service to schools, districts and communities so every student graduates prepared for college, career and community engagement.

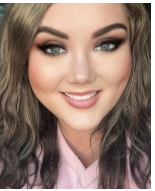
Arkansas Excellence in Teaching Fellows



Lance Walters is a 5th-grade teacher at Lakewood Elementary School in North Little Rock. He has taught for 18 years. Lance was motivated to teach by his desire to make a positive impact on students in the classroom and the opportunity to creatively design lessons that inspire those curious to learn. He is the proud father of two daughters and lives with his wife Kristy in Sherwood.



Amber Hern is an English language arts teacher at Danville High School in Danville. She has over 13 years of teaching experience. Mrs. Hern was motivated to become an educator by her passion for cognitive brain development and its powerful impact on a student's ability to learn. She lives in Russellville with her husband and is the proud mother of two sons, one who serves our country in the Air Force and the other in law enforcement.



Hayleigh Harris is a 5th-grade English language arts teacher at Valley View Middle School in Jonesboro. She is a third-generation teacher. Hayleigh and her husband have a six-month-old baby boy.



Carlie Qualls is a 5th-grade English language arts teacher at Cave City Elementary, with more than 15 years of experience. In addition to her classroom role, Mrs. Qualls is a novice teacher mentor, the district's English as a Second Language coordinator, and preschool director. She also volunteers with the booster club, coaching peewee basketball and organizing youth sports. She lives in Cave City, proudly known as the home of the world's sweetest watermelons, with her husband and two sons.



Lee Ketchum is a 5th-grade teacher at Central Elementary in Magnolia. She is in her 31st year of teaching, spending 22 years in the classroom in Louisiana before moving to Arkansas in 2017. Lee has two daughters and two grandchildren who bring joy to her life. Her motivation for teaching is rooted in a passion for being a positive influence in the lives of children, helping them grow both academically and personally.



Mark Bauer is a geometry teacher at Rogers High School in Rogers. Teaching is his second career, and after 22 years, he still loves geometry. He lives with his wife and son in Fayetteville, where he can be found woodworking, building with LEGO, or reading 100+ year old geometry books.



Cheron Atkins-Butcher is a 5th-grade teacher at Sherwood Elementary in Sherwood. She has taught in the Pulaski County Special School District for 26 years, after proudly serving her country in the US Army as a combat veteran with the 82nd Airborne Division. Cheron attained her Master of Arts in Teaching from Harding University. She is also a mother of two daughters and has two amazing grandsons.



Chelsea Jones is a 4th-grade teacher at Parkview Elementary School in Van Buren. She is in her 12th year of teaching and holds a Masters Degree in Educational Leadership. Chelsea grew up in Van Buren and married her high school sweetheart in 2009. She has three daughters who all attend Van Buren schools.



Lyndsey Laster is a third-grade teacher at Poyen Elementary School. She has been teaching for 13 years. Lyndsey grew up in Poyen, attending Poyen School District from kindergarten through 12th-grade, and she enjoys giving back to the community that raised her. She is passionate about helping students grow as readers, writers, and problem-solvers. She now lives in Prattsville with her husband, Jeremy, and their two children, Wyatt and Addy Belle.



Araya Ossius is a 4th grade science teacher at Eastside Elementary School in Greenbrier. She is in her 11th year of teaching. Araya loves getting to teach her students new and exciting things they have never learned before, but she also loves building relationships with her students. She and her husband have been married for five years and have a beautiful, energetic two-year-old daughter.



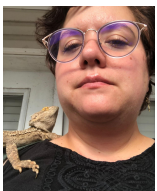
Monica Brewington is a 5th-grade math teacher at M.D. Williams Int. School in Pocahontas. She has 35 years in education, with 29 years in the classroom. Monica comes from a family deeply rooted in education, with a legacy of teachers among her aunts, cousins, siblings, and multiple generations of school board service. Monica lives in Pocahontas with husband, an administrator at Pocahontas. She has two sons, who are coaches/educators in Bentonville.



Kim Herdes is a 4th-grade teacher at Willowbrook Elementary School in Bentonville. She has taught at the elementary level for 18 years and is passionate about helping students see that with hard work, they can achieve anything. She lives in Rogers with her husband and two daughters.



Lou Petrone has taught 8th-grade math and Algebra 1 for 23 years at Woodland Junior High in Fayetteville. He is inspired by the amazing things students can accomplish. His time in banking in New York, Sydney, and Hong Kong gave him an appreciation for math and how it is applied in business and finance. Lou grew up in Pittsburgh and is a sad Steelers fan.



Melissa Rogalla is a Biology, Pre-AP Biology and Environmental Science teacher at eStem High School in Little Rock. Melissa was motivated to become a teacher to inspire future generations to become critical thinkers and to help them understand the natural world and their place in it. Melissa lives in North Little Rock with her amazing husband, two kids, three cats, and the beauty of nature around her.



Tiffany Moore teaches math at Spring Hill High School in Hope, where she helps students grow in confidence and problem-solving skills. She began teaching 19 years ago, spending her first 16 years in elementary classrooms. Since she was young, Tiffany dreamed of being a teacher, inspired by her Aunt Becky and other amazing educators in her life. She and her husband, Chopper, live in Prescott with their four children: Jayce, Carson, Mason and Audrey.



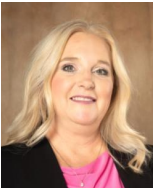
Lissa Monroe is a 3rd-grade teacher at Ward Central Elementary in Cabot. She has taught for more than 28 years. Lissa was a struggling reader at a young age, so when she finally learned how to read, she knew she wanted to help others succeed and make a difference in their lives. Lissa and her husband Steve reside in North Little Rock and have four sons, three daughters-in-law, and five grandchildren!



Sonya Taylor is a dedicated 5th-grade teacher at Thomas C. Brunson Elementary in the Warren School District, where she has proudly served for 28 years. Inspired by her parents, who instilled in her the value of education and helping others, Sonya pursued her lifelong calling to teach. In the classroom, Sonya is passionate about helping students succeed in math. Sonya lives in Warren with her husband, Jerry, and has one daughter.



Beverly Rogers is a 3rd-grade teacher at Cherokee Elementary School in Highland. She has been an educator for 21 years and is passionate about creating engaging, hands-on learning experiences for her students. Beverly lives in Agnos with her son and daughter and enjoys supporting her children's extracurricular activities in her free time.



Heather McGhee is the Mentor teacher for two residents in fifth grade at Fairview Elementary School in Fort Smith. She has taught for 32 years. Her favorite subject to teach is writing. She lives in Alma with her husband and youngest daughter.



Melanie Brotherton is a 3rd-grade teacher at Drew Central Elementary in Monticello, where she has taught for 27 years. She was inspired to pursue education by her children and a supportive second-grade teacher. Melanie is married, with three children and seven grandchildren. Her love for her family continues to fuel her passion for teaching and shaping young minds.



Jamie Bond is a 3rd-grade teacher at Genoa Central Elementary in Genoa. It is her first year in this role, previously teaching 4th grade for 13 years. Jamie has four daughters and 12 grandchildren. She became a teacher because no other profession exists where you can shape the minds of our future.



Ginny Schwope is a 3rd-grade math and science teacher at Nashville Primary School in Nashville. She has taught in the United States for 12 years and for five years in Mexico. Ginny is passionate about helping every child learn and challenges herself to find strategies to meet all needs in her classroom. She lives in Saratoga with her husband and teenage son.



Jessica Adair is a dedicated math educator in the Vilonia School District with more than 11 years of experience. Passionate about student growth and academic success, Jessica brings energy, structure, and care to her classroom every day. Outside of school, she's a proud mom of two, trying to balance her professional dedication with a strong commitment to family.

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