



Arkansas Department of Education

Division of Elementary and Secondary Education

Jacob Oliva, Secretary

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Commerce, Education Promote Apprenticeship Programs on National Apprenticeship Day

LITTLE ROCK — Arkansas is celebrating National Apprenticeship Day with groundbreaking momentum after the Arkansas General Assembly passed Act 695 in March 2025, officially establishing Arkansas Workforce Connections as the designated State Apprenticeship Agency within the Arkansas Department of Commerce. With this new legislation and robust support from Gov. Sarah Huckabee Sanders' education reform legislation (LEARNS and ACCESS), the state is better positioned than ever to meet employer needs, strengthen regional economies, and offer residents direct pathways to great careers through paid, on-the-job training.

Act 695's historic move grants Arkansas Workforce Connections the authority to register and oversee apprenticeship programs statewide, empowering Arkansas to fast-track the growth of high-skill, high-wage talent across critical industries like healthcare, advanced manufacturing, information technology, engineering, and education.

"Apprenticeships are a great way to learn a trade, gain valuable skills, and prepare for the next step in someone's career," Gov. Sanders said. "That is why my administration is working to make them more attainable for all Arkansans through LEARNS and ACCESS. Together, we will build the framework Arkansas needs to ensure every student who graduates high school is ready to enlist, enroll, or find employment."

Arkansas Workforce Connections, the Office of Skills Development, and apprenticeship program sponsors (organizations such as the Arkansas Builders & Contractors Association, Arkansas Construction Education Foundation, institutions of higher education, and Apprenticely) work with companies to design, launch, and fund apprenticeship programs that meet their specific workforce needs. By localizing control of apprenticeship programs, Arkansas will be able to strengthen partnerships with employers and educational institutions and customize programs to meet regional workforce demands.

For those looking to prepare for a high-pay, in-demand career, Registered Apprenticeship is a great option to get a paycheck while learning on the job. Nearly every industry utilizes the apprenticeship model to prepare people for great careers, and with more than 95 registered apprenticeship

programs already serving over 9,165 Arkansans, businesses now have more support than ever to grow a skilled and ready talent pool in the Natural State.

"Apprenticeship programs are essential to shaping the future of Arkansas' workforce," said Arkansas Secretary of Commerce Hugh McDonald. "These programs provide individuals with the skills and experience needed to be successful, ultimately strengthening our communities and helping grow the Arkansas economy. We are committed to supporting and expanding opportunities for Arkansans to pursue meaningful careers through apprenticeships."

Apprenticeship programs, along with Career and Technical Education programs and industry certifications, have been a primary focus of Gov. Sanders over the last two years. Gov. Sanders' LEARNS Act, that transformed and streamlined Pre-K to Grade 12 education two years ago, set the foundation for recent reformative higher education legislation (ACCESS). Through both LEARNS and ACCESS, the state has made career and technical education, industry certifications, and apprenticeship programs — as well as funding — readily attainable for Arkansans.

"Now that Arkansas' education system is truly aligned for the first time in history, students have more opportunities than ever before to obtain financial support and pursue a career of choice, whether that career requires a college degree, industry certification, or apprenticeship," Arkansas Secretary of Education Jacob Oliva said. "It is an exciting time in Arkansas, and we look forward to working with our partners at Commerce to strengthen the relationships between K-12 education, higher education programs of study, and industry needs."

Education Apprenticeships

For those interested in a career in education, the Arkansas Department of Education's Division of Elementary and Secondary Education offers two teacher apprenticeship programs: the Arkansas Teacher Registered Apprenticeship for Grades K-12 and the new Special Education Teacher Apprenticeship. Currently, 31 apprentices, 14 school districts, and six colleges and universities are participating in the K-12 program.

Through the program, apprentices earn a salary and real-world experience by working in a school district while completing related technical instruction — all under the supervision of a mentor. The program is a win-win for everyone, as the mentors, who are educators with a Master or Lead Teacher designation, assist the apprentices while receiving a \$5,000 yearly stipend. Upon completing the program, which can take two-to-four years, participants graduate with an apprenticeship designation and a standard teaching license.

This January, the department soft launched the Special Education Apprenticeship program. Currently, eight apprentices and three school districts (Bentonville, Pine Bluff, and Watson Chapel) are participating, with plans to expand the program this fall.

More Information

For more information about apprenticeship programs in Arkansas, visit <https://arkansasosd.com/apprenticeship/> or <https://dese.link/TeacherApprenticeship>.



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