



UNIVERSITY OF
ARKANSAS

College of Education
& Health Professions
Curriculum & Instruction

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To whom it may concern,

Historically there has been a shortage of qualified teachers pursuing careers in smaller rural settings in Arkansas. According to the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), there were 735 individuals statewide teaching under ACT 1240 –Approval to Waive Licensure (AWL), and there were 379 individuals teaching with an Emergency Teaching Permit (ETP) in AY 2020-2021. Of those individuals, 519 were teaching with either an AWL or ETP in the rural East and South regions of the state. The proposed Educational Studies BSE program addresses this teacher shortage issue in rural areas of Arkansas.

Past attempts to bring individuals to these areas from outside the region have only provided temporary relief and the problem continues to worsen as people from the outside only stay a few years and then leave to return to more urban/suburban areas. School superintendents in these areas have expressed the need to grow their own teachers using the paraprofessional/teaching assistant position as a stepping stone to becoming fully licensed teachers; however, there has never been an attempt to develop such a program due to the challenges of not having an online bachelor's degree in education available that would serve as a degree completion program for those who have an Associate Degree in Teaching (Paraprofessional/Certified Teaching Assistant credential). According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics May 2020 report, there were 10,570 teaching assistants working in Arkansas. In the nonmetropolitan (rural) areas of East Arkansas and South Arkansas there were 1,950 teaching assistants working in 2020.

The need for an accessible alternative licensure pathway for those working in schools as paraprofessionals/teaching assistants was brought to the University of Arkansas – Fayetteville's attention by school superintendents in the Helena area (rural Delta area) on October 27, 2017 during a meeting at the Great Rivers Education Services Cooperative. Later, in October 2021, DESE identified the need in the rural areas of the state for a "grow-your-own" pathway to teacher licensure and announced the Arkansas Teacher Residency Model. DESE has recently supported the Educators Rising program in Arkansas which according to the Department of Educator Effectiveness and Licensure had 812 high school juniors and seniors during the 2020-2021 academic year who have expressed an interest in working in their local schools as a teaching assistant after graduating from high school. 133 of these students live in the rural areas of East and South Arkansas and will have the opportunity to be employed in their home school districts upon graduation from high school, go to their local community college to work toward their Associate of Arts in Teaching degree (paraprofessional certification), and continue to an online bachelor's degree program that has the necessary support for candidates as they pursue their teaching license.

The College of Education and Health Professions at the University of Arkansas – Fayetteville can provide both the online access to the required for licensure bachelor's degree in education and the necessary support for candidates' successful completion of licensure requirements through the Arkansas Teacher Corps.

Sincerely,

Ed Bengtson, Department Head-Curriculum & Instruction

Rhett Hutchins, Program Coordinator, Educational Studies