



**EXHIBIT D1**

**Research Report**



# **Selected Issues Affecting Teacher Recruitment and Retention**

**May 19, 2020**

**Prepared for**

**THE HOUSE INTERIM COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND  
THE SENATE INTERIM COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION**

**2019-2020  
Adequacy  
Study**

**BUREAU OF LEGISLATIVE RESEARCH**

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## INTRODUCTION

As part of the 2020 adequacy process, the Bureau of Legislative Research (BLR) was asked to examine teacher recruitment and retention issues, in addition to the statutorily required analysis of teacher salaries (the teacher salary report will be presented later in the adequacy process). As part of the House and Senate Education Committees' review of teacher recruitment and retention efforts, the Division of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), in a separate report, will examine data on the supply, distribution, and attrition of public school teachers in Arkansas public school districts and public charter schools. In addition, Augenblick, Palaich and Associates (APA) provided information on attracting and retaining educational staff electronically in April 2020. The APA information addressed how comparable states handle recruitment and retention and how those programs differ from Arkansas's.

This BLR report will supplement those analyses by providing information on additional issues and efforts affecting schools' ability to attract and retain qualified teachers. This report provides a summary of relevant findings from BLR's survey of school superintendents, principals, and teachers, as well as from interviews with principals conducted during site visits to a randomly selected sample of schools. The report also includes information on teacher health insurance and state financial incentives to attract teachers to particular districts and disciplines. The first section will provide information on the surveys and site visits. The next sections will provide findings from the surveys and site visits by topic, including information on state financial incentives. The final section will examine teacher health insurance.

## BLR SURVEYS AND SITE VISITS

The following sections of the report will focus on responses to the BLR survey and site visits. As part of the 2020 adequacy process, the BLR conducted online surveys of superintendents and principals in Arkansas. The BLR also visited a randomly selected, representative sample of 74 schools and interviewed their principals. Teachers in the 74 randomly selected schools were also invited to complete an online survey. The online surveys allowed the BLR to collect specific, quantitative data from districts, while the principal interviews involved more open-ended qualitative questions. This report provides the questions and responses from all four surveys related to teacher recruitment and retention. Responses to other survey questions have been or will be presented in other reports throughout the Adequacy Study process.

Below is information about each survey, including the dates the surveys were conducted and the response rates.

To elicit the most candid responses, district and school staff were assured their answers would not be individually identified, therefore responses are provided only in aggregate. Quotes used from the surveys and site visits are provided only where the respondent and school cannot be identified.

## SUPERINTENDENT SURVEY

The superintendent survey was conducted using online questionnaires. The **superintendent survey** was distributed beginning July 23, 2019, and the last district responded **November 21, 2019**. The BLR received responses from all 235 school districts and 24 of the 25 open-enrollment public charter schools. The Friendship Aspire-LR open-enrollment public charter school (fka Covenant Keepers) did not respond. (The Excel Center open-enrollment public charter school was not surveyed because they serve adult students).

## PRINCIPAL SURVEY

The principal survey was conducted using online questionnaires. The **principal survey** began October 14, 2019, and the last principal response was received **December 12, 2019**. A total of **1,045** principal surveys were distributed and **752** principals completed the survey, providing a **72%** response rate.

## PRINCIPAL INTERVIEWS DURING SITE VISITS

The **school visits and principal interviews** began October 29, 2019, with the final visits on **December 18, 2019**. The BLR visited a total of **74** schools and interviewed the principals of those schools. Some schools invited other staff members to the interviews, and some included their superintendents in the conversation.

## TEACHER SURVEY

The BLR invited certified teachers in the 74 randomly selected schools to complete an online teacher survey. Each principal was asked to provide the name of a teacher or staff member who would distribute the teacher survey instructions and individual access codes to his/her colleagues. Generally only certified teachers assigned to teach a class were invited to complete the survey (i.e., not administrators), but the survey pool also included guidance counselors, English as a second language teachers, alternative education teachers, library/media specialists and instructional facilitators, regardless of whether they were assigned to teach a class.

**Teachers accessed the survey online** using an individual code that was distributed to them by the teacher representative assigned by the principal. A total of **2482** surveys were distributed, and **1288** teachers responded by **January 15, 2020**, for a response rate of nearly **52%**.

## BARRIERS TO TEACHER RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

Superintendents and principals were asked to rank the recruitment and retention issues in their districts from most significant to least significant. The top barriers to recruiting teachers were difficulty in offering competitive salaries and the scarcity of appropriately licensed teachers.

The top barriers to retention were difficulty in offering competitive salaries and high demand for teachers with certain credentials.

In both the 2018 and 2016 superintendent surveys, difficulty in offering competitive salaries were ranked as the highest barriers for both recruitment and retention.

**Superintendent Survey Question: RANK** the teacher **RECRUITMENT** issues facing your district, where 1 is the MOST SIGNIFICANT ISSUE and 10 is the LEAST SIGNIFICANT ISSUE.

Barrier	Avg. Rank
School- or district-level leadership	8.0
Retirement benefits	7.1
School/district reputation or school accountability label	7.0
Inadequate community or parent support	6.9
Student population	6.2
Cost of health insurance	4.9
Location of district or individual school	4.6
Inadequate housing options in the area	4.5
Scarcity of appropriately licensed teachers	3.2
Difficulty in offering competitive salaries	2.7

**Superintendent Survey Question:** RANK the teacher **RETENTION** issues facing your district, where 1 is the MOST SIGNIFICANT ISSUE and 10 is the LEAST SIGNIFICANT ISSUE.

Barrier	Avg. Rank
School- or district-level leadership	8.5
Retirement benefits	7.7
School/district reputation or school accountability label	7.7
Inadequate community or parent support	7.6
Student population	6.7
Inadequate housing options in the area	5.5
Cost of health insurance	5.4
Location of district or individual school	5.2
Teachers leaving the profession	5.1
High demand for teachers with certain credentials	3.9
Difficulty in offering competitive salaries	2.7

Principals were also asked to rank recruitment and retention issues for their school from most significant to least significant. As with superintendents, for recruitment, the highest ranked barriers were difficulty in offering competitive salaries and scarcity of appropriately licensed teachers.

For retention, the highest ranked barriers were difficulty in offering competitive salaries and high demand for teachers with certain credentials.

**Principal Survey Question:** RANK the teacher **RECRUITMENT** issues facing your school, where 1 is the MOST SIGNIFICANT ISSUE or barrier and 10 is the LEAST SIGNIFICANT ISSUE or barrier.

Barrier	Avg. Rank
School- or district-level leadership	7.5
Retirement benefits	6.7
School/district reputation or school accountability label	6.5
Inadequate community or parent support	5.7
Student population	5.6
Inadequate housing options in the area	5.2
Cost of health insurance	4.8
Location of district or individual school	4.8
Scarcity of appropriately licensed teachers	4.4
Difficulty in offering competitive salaries	3.7

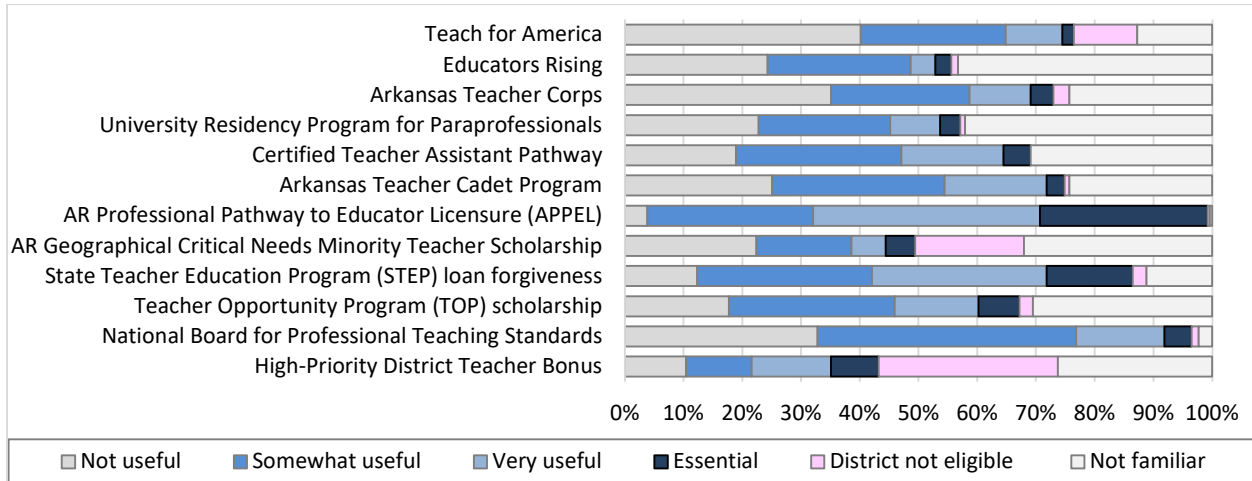
**Principal Survey Question:** RANK the teacher **RETENTION** issues facing your school, where 1 is the MOST SIGNIFICANT ISSUE or barrier and 11 is the LEAST SIGNIFICANT ISSUE or barrier.

Barrier	Avg. Rank
School- or district-level leadership	7.8
Retirement benefits	7.4
School/district reputation or school accountability label	7.2
Inadequate community or parent support	6.3
Inadequate housing options in the area	6.3
Student population	6.2
Location of district or individual school	5.5
Cost of health insurance	5.3
Teachers leaving the profession	5.2
High demand for teachers with certain credentials	4.9
Difficulty in offering competitive salaries	3.9

## PROGRAMS TO ADDRESS RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

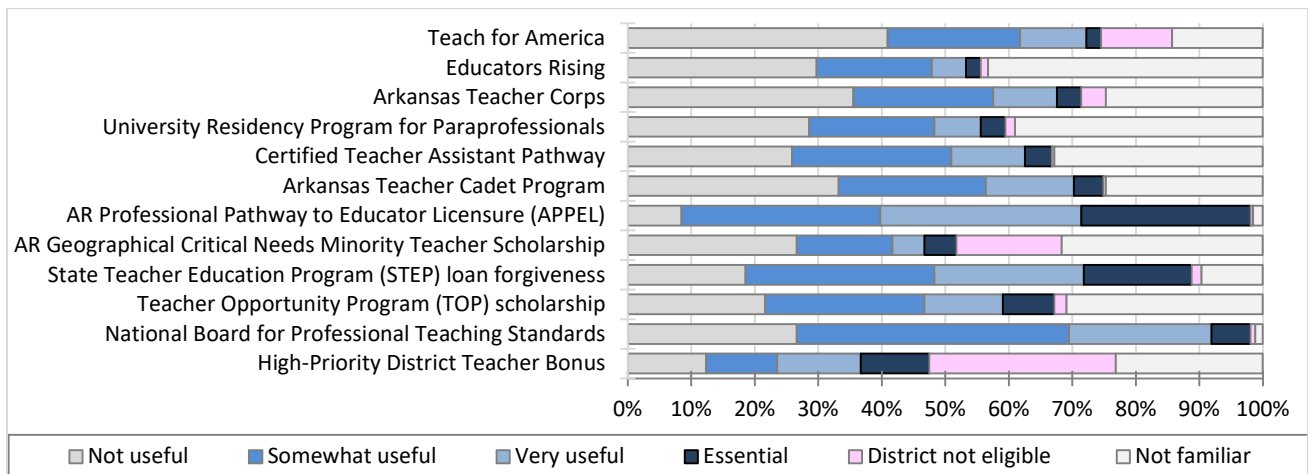
In response to teacher shortages in certain subjects or geographic regions of the state, Arkansas policymakers have enacted a number of teacher recruitment and retention initiatives over the years. The following charts show superintendent and teacher responses to questions about the effectiveness of the programs.

**Superintendent Survey Question:** Please **RATE** the following programs in terms of their helpfulness in **RECRUITING** high quality teachers to your district.



Superintendents were also asked to list any other recruiting programs they have found useful. The recruiting tool superintendents cited most frequently was partnering with colleges and universities. Several schools also mentioned Act 1240 waivers. In addition, three superintendents mentioned that Teach for America was a great recruiting tool, but their districts are no longer in a region eligible to receive TFA teachers.

**Superintendent Survey Question:** Please **RATE** the following programs in terms of their helpfulness in **RETAINING** high quality teachers in your district.



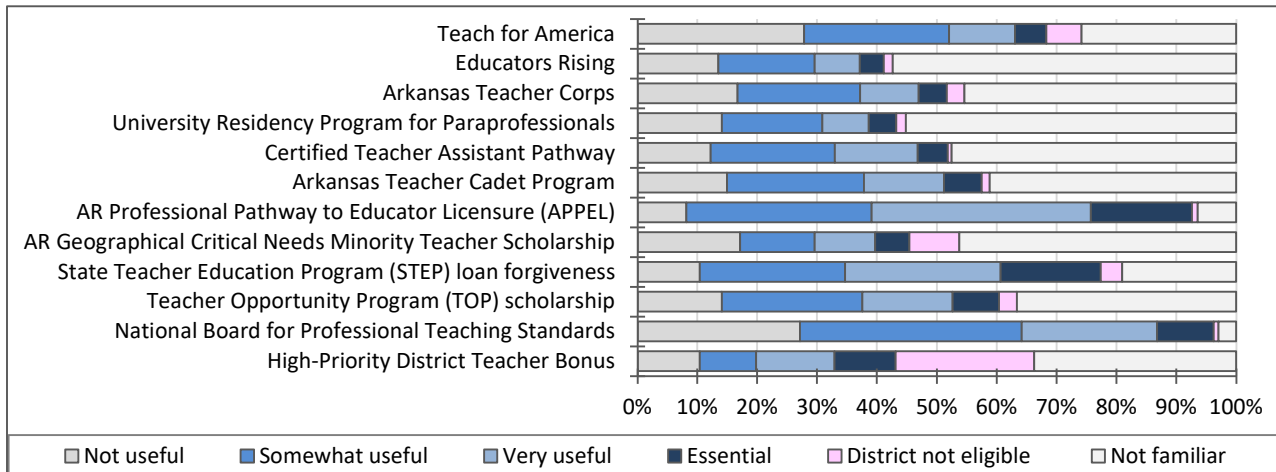
For recruitment and retention, the program that the most superintendents rated essential and very useful was the Arkansas Professional Pathway to Educator licensure (APPEL). The program with the highest number of superintendents choosing not useful was Teach for America. The two programs with the highest number of superintendents stating that they were unfamiliar with the program were Educators Rising and University Residence Program for Paraprofessionals.



When asked what other recruitment and retention tools were useful to their districts, superintendents mentioned Act 1240 waivers, salary and benefits, and creating a positive working culture.

When asked for any additional comments on teacher recruitment and retention, 17 superintendents added comments, with three trends showing. Three superintendents mentioned the need for increased salary. Three superintendents stated that it works best to “grow [their] own” teachers. Finally, three superintendents stated that they have no problems recruiting and retaining teachers; the three districts are not in rural areas of the state and have a free and reduced lunch rate lower than 50%.

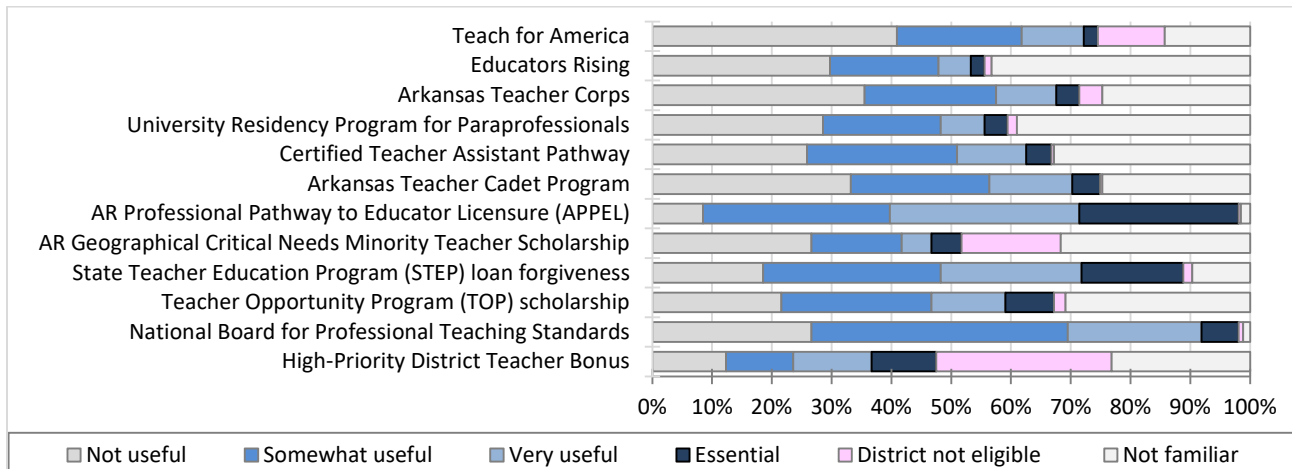
**Principal Survey Question:** Please **RATE** the following programs in terms of their helpfulness in **RECRUITING** high quality teachers to your school.



Principals selected STEP as the most chosen essential and very useful program, along with APPEL. The highest ranked not useful programs were Teach for America and National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. Educators Rising and the University Residency Program for Paraprofessionals were the programs with which principals were the least familiar.

Principals were also asked to list any other recruiting programs that they have found useful in recruiting teachers. Principals’ most commonly cited recruiting tools were partnering with universities and colleges, including having interns and student teachers. One principal mentioned that it gives the school an opportunity to observe the intern’s work.

**Principal Survey Question:** Please **RATE** the following programs in terms of their helpfulness in **RETAINING** high quality teachers in your school.



As with recruitment, APPEL and STEP were frequently chosen as essential. APPEL and National Board for Professional Teaching Standards were frequently chosen as very useful. As with recruitment, Teach for America was the most listed not useful program and Educators Rising and University Residency Program for Paraprofessionals were the least known.

Principals were also asked to list any additional programs they have found useful in retaining teachers. Principals' most commonly cited retention tools included salary, having a positive culture, and providing mentoring programs for new teachers.

When asked for any additional comments on teacher recruitment and retention, principals' comments cited salary more than any other issue, followed by culture. Several principals also mentioned increased numbers of students with mental health and behavior issues.

The following chart summarizes state expenditures for the major programs in state statute in FY2019. While some funding goes directly to individual teachers, other funding is distributed to programs that support them. Details of the programs are below.

State Expenditures	Districts	Charters	Education Co-ops	Higher Education Institutions	Other Organizations	Individuals	Total
High-Priority District Teacher Recruitment and Retention	\$2,099,997	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$2,099,997
National Board of Professional Teaching Standards	\$35,993	\$228	\$48,641	\$62,947	\$357,200	\$14,332,157	\$14,837,166
Teacher Opportunity Program (TOP)	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$233,965	\$233,965
State Teacher Education Program (STEP)	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$64,992	\$64,992
AR Geographical Critical Needs Minority Teacher Scholarship Program	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$60,750	\$60,750
Non-Traditional Licensure Grants	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$45,250	\$45,250

## SALARY AND OTHER FINANCIAL INCENTIVES

### High-Priority District Incentive Bonus

Originally enacted in 2003, Arkansas's high-priority district incentive program provides grants to districts to pay for teacher bonuses. These bonuses were specifically mentioned by the Special Masters and the Supreme Court in the Lake View case as one of the measures taken to bring the teacher salary issue into constitutional compliance. Districts are eligible for the funding if they have:

- At least 80% of students qualifying for free or reduced-price lunch
- A total of 1,000 or fewer students

Classroom teachers (including guidance counselors and librarians) working the full school year in the eligible districts receive bonuses. The bonuses are provided in the following amounts:

- A one-time signing bonus of \$5,000 to newly hired teachers for the first full year of teaching in a high priority district
- \$4,000 for teachers in their second and third years of teaching in the same high priority districts
- \$3,000 for teachers who are 1) teaching a fourth or subsequent year in the same high-priority district; 2) taught in one high-priority district but began employment in another high-priority district; or 3) are teaching in a high-priority district but do not meet the previous requirements

If the funding provided by the General Assembly is not enough to pay eligible teachers these bonus amounts, DESE calculates the three bonus rates on a pro rata basis.

## **National Board of Professional Teaching Standards Certification**

Enacted by Act 1225 of 1997, DESE provides grants to districts to cover the costs associated with obtaining the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards certification, including a teacher's participation fee and substitute pay for up to three days of the teacher's absence from the classroom while pursuing certification. The funding also pays national board certified teachers, once certified, an annual bonus for up to ten years.

## **LOAN FORGIVENESS OR SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAMS**

The following are programs in place in Arkansas to help teachers with the cost of their education. Arkansas has additional programs that have never been funded; those are discussed at the end of this report.

### **Teacher Opportunity Program**

DESE's Division of Higher Education Teacher Opportunity Program (TOP) was created in 2005 to provide tuition reimbursement grants to teachers and administrators. The program provides scholarships for up to six credit hours completed each academic year. Individuals are eligible for TOP awards if they are currently a licensed teacher or administrator working in Arkansas schools and enrolled in "college-level courses directly related to their employment" (§6-81-604). The statute indicates that the scholarship will be awarded in an amount up to "the cost of his or her student fees, books, and instructional supplies at the public institution of high education in this state assessing the highest rate of student fees."

The statute does not specify that recipients be employed in a particular geographic area or that their coursework be aimed at licensure in a subject matter shortage area. However, the statute does prioritize funding based on the subject area in which recipients are pursuing licensure. Act 160 of 2017 specified that the first priority for the funding are applicants pursuing licensure in the following areas:

- Science, technology, engineering, or math
- Computer science
- Literacy or reading
- Prekindergarten education
- Special education

### **State Teacher Education Program**

Beginning in 2009, the State Teacher Education Program (STEP) provides yearly federal student loan repayment grants of up to \$3,000 to teachers who are currently teaching in a subject or geographic shortage area in an Arkansas public school (as defined by DESE). Teachers must reapply each year and are eligible for grants for up to three years. Minority teachers who teach in these areas are eligible for an additional loan repayment for federal student loans in the amount of \$1,000 per year.

### **Arkansas Geographical Critical Needs Minority Teacher Scholarship Program**

Begun in 2001, the Arkansas Geographical Critical Needs Minority Teacher Scholarship Program provides scholarships to attract qualified minority teachers to the Delta and critical teacher shortage areas. The program, which is administered by the University of Arkansas in Pine Bluff, provides scholarships (\$1,500 annually) to minority students enrolled in undergraduate teacher education programs who commit to teaching in an area of the state with a shortage of teachers or in the Delta. Recipients may be full-time or part-time students, and students may receive the award for up to four years. Students receiving four years of the scholarship are obligated to teach two years as a licensed teacher, and those who received less than four years of the scholarship must work one school semester for each year of scholarship. Recipients who do not follow through with their teaching obligation must repay all or part of their award.

## Non-Traditional Licensure Grants

These grants are part of the Arkansas Professional Pathway to Educator Licensure (APPEL) program. The APPEL program allows individuals with at least a bachelor's degrees to become certified to teach while employed as a teacher by completing a two-year teaching preparation track. Participants pay a fee for the program. As part of that program, DESE offers Non-Traditional Licensure Grants to some participants to help cover these fees and other expenses. Teachers are eligible for the grants if they teach a shortage subject area and/or if they teach in a high-poverty school or district.

## SITE VISIT RESPONSES

Below are some representative comments from the site visits. Principals frequently mentioned salary as an issue; many specifically mentioned disparities in salaries across the state. Other frequently mentioned issues were dealing with students' mental health and other challenges that students are facing, availability of teachers (especially in critical shortage areas), and finding teachers that reflect the demographics of the student body.

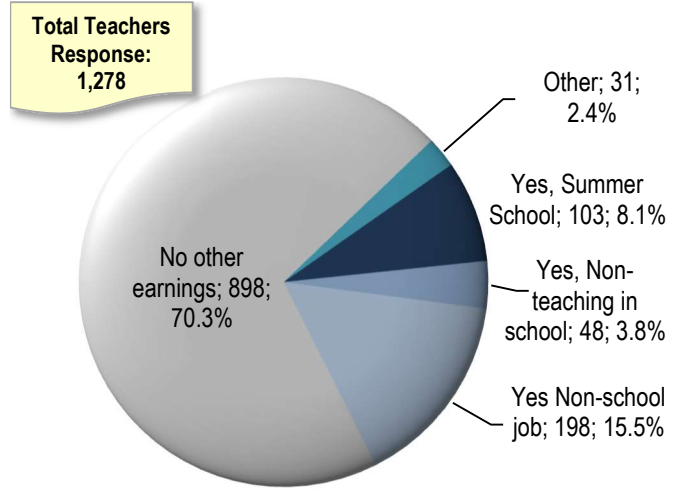
- We are a small school and it is very hard for us to keep and retain teachers because of our salary. Something has to be done about the salary gap. We pay state minimum, and five minutes from here another district pays \$5,000 or \$10,000 more. We are a boot camp. We hire teachers, put lots of money into PD, and then they leave us. We pay the minimum and we can't afford to pay more than that. Our teachers are doing the same job as the teachers in the other districts and getting paid less money.
- Seeing more students with mental health challenges. In addition to knowing the curriculum, staff also need help knowing how to deal with students with social and emotional issues and how to handle discipline accordingly. Staff need help knowing how to address students with different backgrounds, and their social and economic issues.
- I've been in on the hiring process the last two years. We hired an art teacher and had one applicant, hired an English teacher and had one applicant and had to call and get her to apply. We advertise for a basketball coach and we have fifteen people apply. When it comes to classroom teachers, social studies and history a lot of people apply, but otherwise we struggle to get quality applicants. Jobs would be open four or five weeks with no applicants.
- Want the teachers to reflect the demographics of my school so that they can be more able to relate to students. School is 60% Hispanic, 33% African American, and 7% Caucasian. It has been challenging to find teachers that mirror the student population.

In addition, several school principals located near the state borders indicated that they often hire retired teachers from other states.

**WORKING CONDITIONS**

**Teacher Survey Question:** During the previous summer, did you have any earnings from any of the following:

Around 30% of teachers responding worked during the previous summer. The average amount teachers earned over the summer was \$2,753.



**Teacher Survey Question:**

What were the primary reasons you chose to teach at your current school? Participants were allowed to choose up to three reasons, which is why percentages will sum to more than 100%.

Teachers responding overwhelmingly chose location as the primary reason they chose to teach at their current school, followed by proximity to family and school’s rating or reputation. These same reasons were the three top reasons in 2018 and 2016.

Responses	Teachers	Percent
Location	849	65.8%
Proximity to family	542	42.0%
School’s rating or reputation	303	23.5%
Salary	285	22.1%
School leadership	262	20.3%
Student population	196	15.2%
Other	184	14.3%
Spouse’s occupation	138	10.7%
Benefits	126	9.8%
Workload	43	3.3%

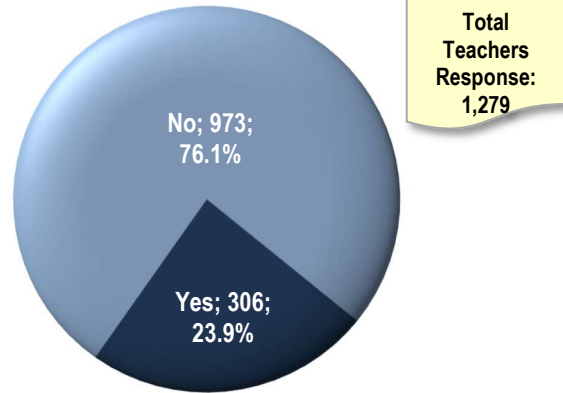
**Teacher Survey Question:** Under what conditions, if any, would you be willing to relocate to teach at a school in a high-poverty or remote rural community? As with the previous questions, participants were allowed to choose up to three options, so percentages sum to more than 100%.

Responses	Teachers	Percent
Higher salary	608	47.1%
Already working in high-poverty or remote rural community	515	39.9%
None	289	22.4%
Student loan forgiveness	271	21.0%
Better benefits	227	17.6%
Moving to a community nearer family or friends	206	16.0%
School leadership	205	15.9%
Promotion to administration or higher position	155	12.0%
Other	28	2.2%

Nearly 40% of teachers responded that they already work in a high-poverty or remote rural community. Almost 50% of teachers responded that they would be willing to relocate to teach at a high-poverty or remote rural community school for a higher salary. This is much higher than in 2018, when only 35% of teacher stated that they would relocate for a higher salary. However, in 2016, more than half of teachers (about 53%) responded that they would relocate for a higher salary.

**Teacher Survey Question:**

Are you currently considering transferring to another school or district?



**Teacher Survey Question:**

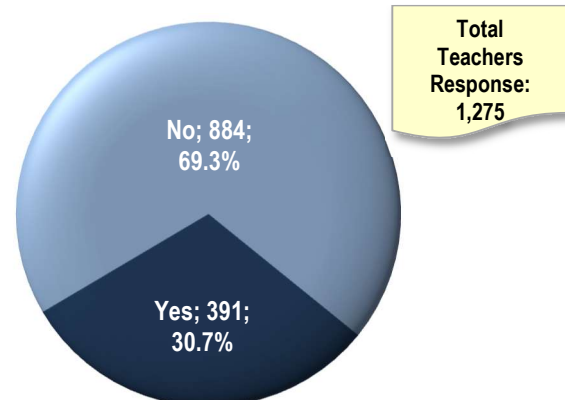
If you answered “Yes” above, why? Teachers were allowed to select up to three reasons.

Responses	Teachers	Percent
Stress/workload	145	47.4%
Higher pay	134	43.8%
Leadership issues in current school/district or better leadership in other school/district	97	31.7%
Student discipline	90	29.4%
Location	73	23.9%
Personal reason (spouse’s job change, aging/ill parent, etc.)	61	19.9%
Seeking different type of teaching position	49	16.0%
Paperwork and bureaucratic issues	44	14.4%
Seeking position in administration	32	10.5%
Student population	24	7.8%
Other	13	4.2%
School’s parent involvement	11	3.6%
Health insurance benefits	9	2.9%
Planned downsizing at current school	2	0.7%

Of the 24% of teachers who indicated that they were considering transferring to another school or district, almost 50% indicated stress or workload as a reason. In addition, 43% indicated that they were considering a move for higher pay. In 2018, 20% of teachers responding said that they were considering transferring to another school or district, with almost half citing higher pay as one of the reasons.

**Teacher Survey Question:**

Are you currently considering quitting the teaching profession and leaving K-12 education?



**Teacher Survey Question:** If you answered “Yes” above, why? Teachers were asked to select up to three reasons.

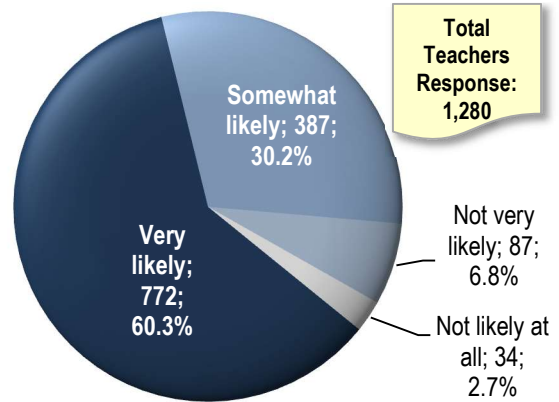
Responses	Teachers	Percent
Stress/workload	240	61.4%
Salary	157	40.2%
Lack of student accountability	142	36.3%
Lack of respect for the profession	139	35.5%
Paperwork and bureaucratic issues	114	29.2%
Student discipline	110	28.1%
Retirement	68	17.4%
Issues with current school/district leadership	59	15.1%
Standardized Testing	47	12.0%
Health insurance benefits	33	8.4%
Lack of parent involvement	28	7.2%
Personal reasons (spouse’s job change, aging/ill parent, etc.)	25	6.4%
Teacher Excellence and Support System	18	4.6%
Lack of career opportunities	16	4.1%
Other	15	3.8%
Personal skills and abilities are better suited to another profession	11	2.8%

Almost one-third of teachers stated that they were considering quitting the teaching profession. Of those that answered yes, the most frequently cited reasons were stress/workload (61.4%), salary (40.2%), and lack of student accountability (36%). This is a higher number considering quitting the profession than in 2018, where about a quarter of teachers stated they were considering quitting the profession.

**TEACHER CAREER AND RETIREMENT**

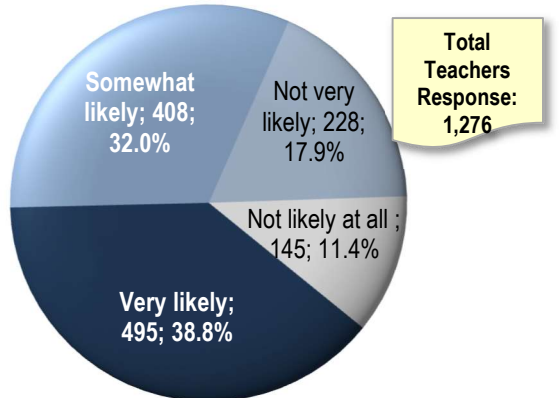
**Teacher Survey Question:**

As of now, how likely are you to spend your entire career in K-12 education?



**Teacher Survey Question:**

As of now, how likely are you to spend your entire career as a classroom teacher in K-12 education?



**Teacher Survey Question:** How close are you to retirement?

Responses	Teachers	Percent
Probably retire within 1-10 years	426	33.0%
Probably retire in 11-20	396	30.7%
Probably retire in 21-30 years	285	22.1%
Probably retire in 31-40 years	84	6.5%
Probably retire within 1 year	50	3.9%
Probably retire in 41 or more years	36	2.8%

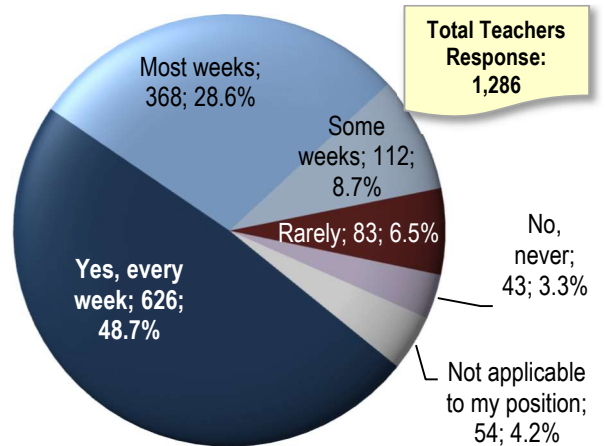
Ninety percent of teachers indicated that they were very likely or somewhat likely to spend their entire careers in K-12 education. Seventy percent of teachers indicated that it was very likely or somewhat likely that they would spend their entire careers as classroom teachers. Meanwhile, 37% of the respondents indicated that they were within 10 years of retirement.

**TEACHING ENVIRONMENT AND TEACHER PREPARATION**

**TEACHER PLANNING TIME**

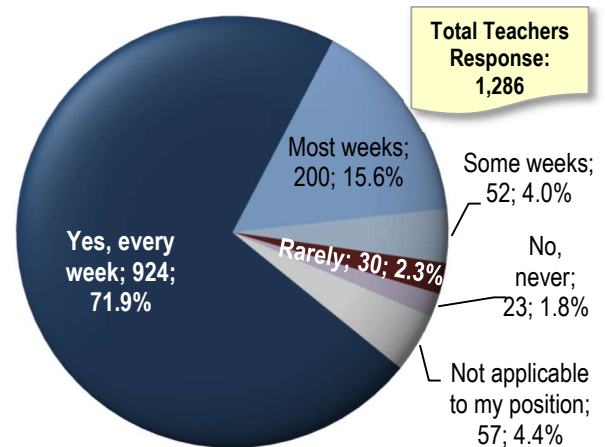
**Teacher Survey Question:**

Do you receive at least 200 minutes per week to schedule conferences and plan instruction?



**Teacher Survey Question:**

Is your planning time provided in increments of at least 40 minutes during the instructional day?



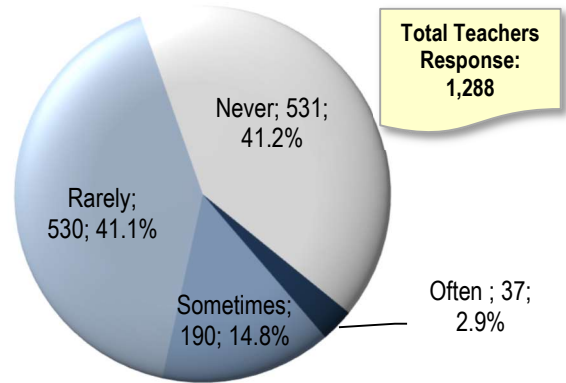
More than three-quarters (77%) of teachers responding indicate that they receive their full planning time every week or most weeks. In addition, 87% indicated that the time is provided in increments of at least 40 minutes during the instructional day. This is a lower percentage of teachers indicating that they receive the required amount most weeks (down from 85% in 2018), but about the same percentage of teachers indicating that they receive the time in at least 40-minute increments during the school year (88% in 2018).



**SCHOOL SAFETY**

**Teacher Survey Question:**

When you are at school, how often do you fear for your own physical safety?



**Teacher Survey Question:**

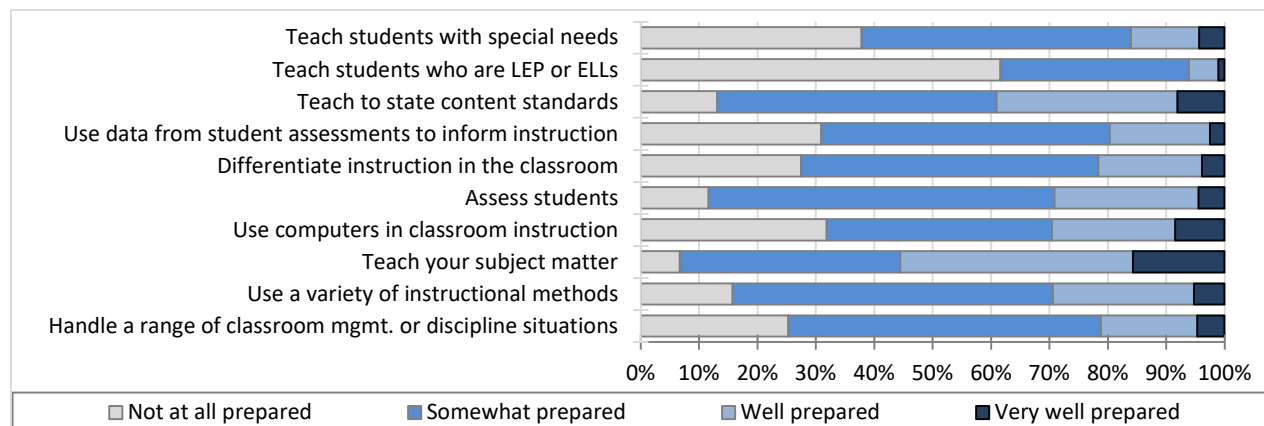
Which of the following issues, if any, are you concerned about at your school? Teachers were asked to select two primary reasons, so percentages will sum to above 100%.

Responses	Teachers	Percent
Gun violence/school shooting	418	32.4%
In-person/physical bullying	422	32.7%
Fighting among students	447	34.7%
Online bullying	367	28.4%
Drugs/drug-related crime	240	18.6%
Violence against teachers	142	11.0%
Community/neighborhood violence	170	13.2%
Sexual violence among students	32	2.5%
Other	66	5.1%

Most teachers responding (82%) answered that they rarely or never fear for their own safety at school. Teachers responding were most concerned about gun violence/school shooting, in-person/physical bullying, and fighting among students.

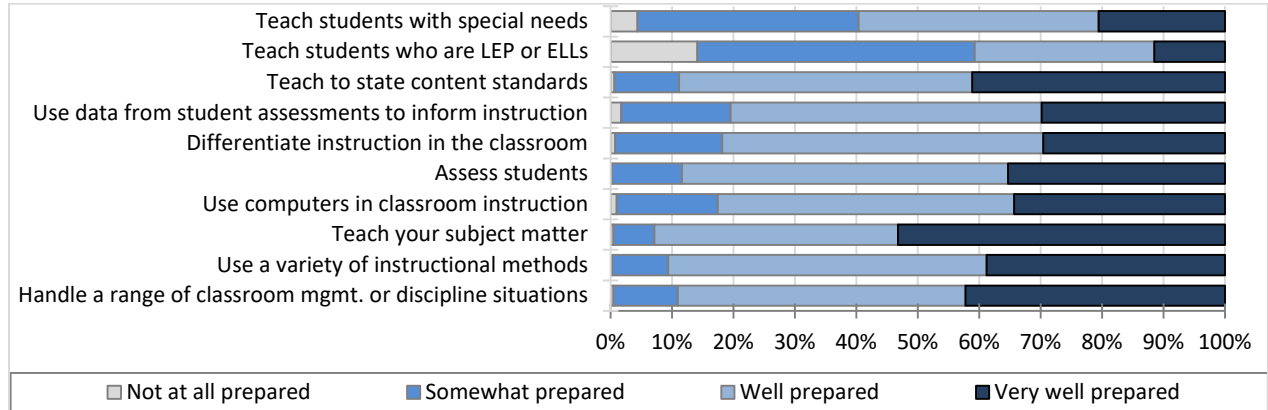
**TEACHER PREPARATION**

**Teacher Survey Question:** In your FIRST year of teaching, how well prepared were you to:



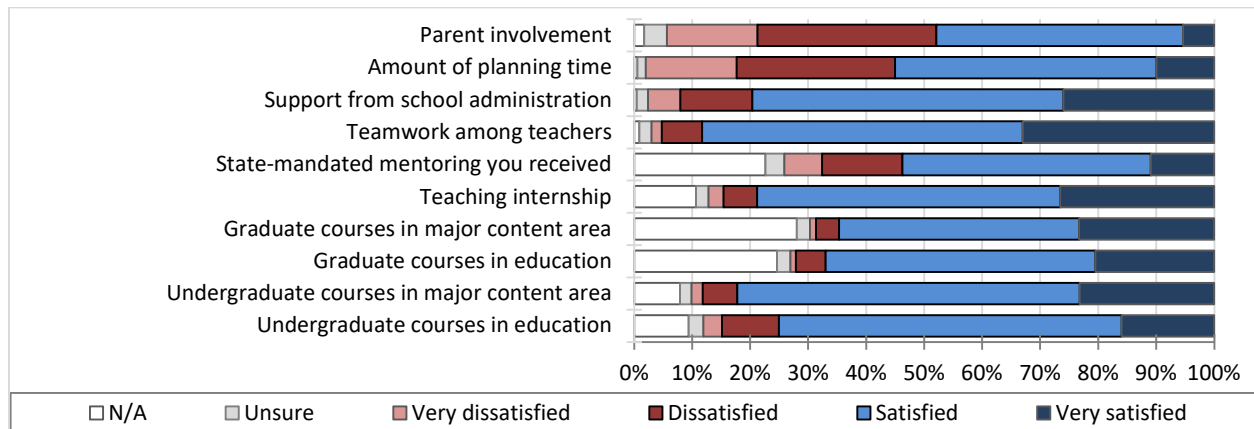
Teachers indicated they were least prepared in their first year to teach students who are limited-English proficient or English-language learners, followed by students with special needs. Teachers indicated that they were most prepared to teach their subject matter, followed by using computer in classroom instruction.

**Teacher Survey Question:** THIS YEAR, how well prepared are you to:



Teachers' answers here show that they feel much more prepared than they did during their first year of teaching. Teachers still indicated that they were least prepared to teach students who are limited-English proficient or English-language learners, followed by teaching students with special needs. Teachers still indicated that they were most prepared to teach their subject matter, followed by handling a range of classroom management or discipline situations. The number of teachers indicating that they were very well-prepared to teach their subject matter rose from 188 in their first year to 638 this year.

**Teacher Survey Question:** Please indicate your satisfaction with the following components of your teacher preparation and current position.



The two components that the most teachers ranked very satisfied were teamwork among teachers and teaching internship. Undergraduate courses in education and undergraduate courses in major content areas were the two components the highest numbers of teachers ranked satisfied. Teachers were least satisfied with parent involvement and amount of planning time. The overall numbers indicate that most teachers are satisfied or very satisfied with most of the components.

## HEALTH INSURANCE

This section of the report provides information about the changes in the state's health insurance plan and its impact on districts and teachers over time.

The Public School Employee Health Insurance Plan has long been funded by three sources:

- A premium payment the employee pays each month
- A monthly contribution paid by each district for each employee participating in the health insurance plan
- Annual lump sum payments the Department of Education pays Employee Benefits Division (EBD) from funding appropriated for that purpose.

For many years, the plan was supported only through district payments and employee premiums. In 2005, in the midst of the Lake View lawsuit, the General Assembly addressed financial problems with the state Public School Employee Health Insurance Plan, which was said to be "on the brink of collapse". To resuscitate the program, the General Assembly directed \$35 million in new funding to the EBD to subsidize the cost of public school employees' health insurance. The Special Masters reviewing the Lake View case for the Supreme Court noted in their October 3, 2005, report that the increase in funding for insurance was "undoubtedly a good thing." However, the Masters minimized its importance as a part of an adequate education. In discussing the increase in funding in the October 2005 report, they wrote that "its effect upon education is indirect at best and does not excuse the failure to fund educational resources adequately."

Still, the General Assembly increased the annual direct state payments by \$15 million beginning in FY2010. Despite the funding increases, by 2012, the premiums charged to employees had become unaffordable for many public school employees, and the General Assembly began making significant changes.

Act 517 of 2013 increased the minimum amount districts were required to pay for their employees. For many years, school districts paid EBD a statutorily established minimum of \$131 per month for each participating employee, but Act 517 increased the minimum monthly district contribution to \$150 beginning January 1, 2014. Subsequent legislation required the minimum district contribution to increase annually thereafter. The General Assembly also appropriated a total of \$10 million in General Improvement Funds for teacher health insurance benefits, and \$8 million in funding was provided to replenish the Public School Employee Health Insurance Catastrophic Reserves, which had become depleted. According to EBD at the time, this \$8 million also helped avoid 2013 mid-year rate increases.

Despite the new funding and district contribution rate, the Public School Employees' health Insurance Plan announced significant rate increases for the 2014 plan year. The board announced that the employees' share of most plan premiums was to increase by about 50% over 2013 rates. In October 2013, Governor Beebe called a special session to address the issue. The General Assembly passed four measures to generate \$43 million for 2013-14 in one-time funding and \$26.4 million for 2014-15 in new, ongoing funding for the Public School Employees Health Insurance Plan.

Then in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Extraordinary Session of 2014, the General Assembly passed Act 7, which required public school employees to work an average of at least 30 hours per week to be eligible to participate in the state's health insurance plan. While this change meant that part-time employees would be ineligible for the state health insurance benefits, this ineligibility meant they could qualify for insurance and possibly premium subsidies that were newly available through the federal Affordable Care Act. Additionally, Act 6 of that same extraordinary session made spouses of public school employees ineligible for insurance through the state's public school employees' plan, if they had access to their own employer-sponsored health insurance. Act 6 also prohibited the State and Public School Life and Health Insurance Board from

adopting any plans that did not include a deductible. A deductible is an upfront annual charge an employee must pay before the plan begins paying for most services. Finally, in May 2014, the State and Public School Life and Health Insurance Board approved a new policy to offer each enrollee a \$75 per month discount for visiting a doctor annually for a wellness check-up.

As of April 2020, enrollees still receive \$75 per month discounts for annual wellness check-ups. In addition, in 2019, the State and Public School Life and Health Insurance Board approved a \$250 reduction in deductibles for public school employees. Plan rates have not increased since 2017, when they rose 2% from 2016.

## **UNFUNDED FINANCIAL INCENTIVE PROGRAMS**

There are a number of other programs in statute that aim to encourage individuals to enter the teaching profession or make it more financially feasible to do so. However, many of these programs have never been funded. Below are descriptions of some of the programs that have received never funding.

### **University Assisted Teacher Recruitment and Retention Grant Program**

Arkansas Code §6-81-1301 established this grant program within ADHE in 2001 to attract qualified teachers to the Delta and geographical areas with critical teacher shortages. The program was designed to provide scholarships of \$2,000 per year to students working toward a Master of Education degree at a program approved by the Arkansas Higher Education Coordinating Board. This program has not been funded since it was enacted in 2001.

### **Dual Licensure Incentive Program**

Under this program, teachers employed by an Arkansas school district and taking coursework to obtain licensure in an additional subject area declared to be a critical shortage area may receive up to \$3,000 in reimbursement for tuition, student fees, books and instructional supplies. However, no awards have been made for this program since 2011.

### **Moving Expenses in Particular Regions**

This statute allows the Division of Higher Education to pay moving expenses for licensed teachers in the Delta and areas of the state with critical shortages of teachers. The program would allow teachers to receive up to \$1,000 for documented moving expenses.

### **Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math Fund**

This state law established “supplemental grants” of an unspecified amount for teachers teaching science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) (§ 6-17-2701). The aim of the grant program was to reduce the loss of STEM teachers, attract STEM teachers back to the classroom and encourage students to enter STEM professions. The statute gives the Arkansas Economic Development Commission (AEDC) the authority to promulgate rules for the program, in collaboration with DESE.

### **Teacher Candidate Loan Forgiveness Program**

Act 709 of 2017 created this loan forgiveness program to provide loans of up to \$5,000 per year (up to a lifetime total of \$10,000 per individual) for students enrolled in a degree program leading to a teacher licensure in a high-needs subject area. The program requires recipients to commit to teaching for at least five years in a school or school district located in a geographic area identified by DESE. The critical shortage areas in the legislation were identified as those mentioned in statutory language that was repealed later in the legislative session. Under the program, students’ loans would be forgiven at a rate of 20% per year for each year the student works in the critical need district.

### **Scholarships for Teachers in High-Needs Subject Areas**

Act 934 of 2017 created this scholarship program to provide scholarships of up to \$5,000 per year (up to a lifetime total of \$10,000 per individual) for students enrolled in an undergraduate degree program leading to teacher licensure. The program requires recipients to commit to teaching in a public school for at least five years in a high needs subject area. Under the program, recipients who do not teach at least five years will be required to repay their scholarship on a pro rata basis for each year they are not employed as a teacher in a high-needs subject.