

Conference pitches teaching career

Program encourages more high school students to become educators



By Cynthia Howell [twitter](#)

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PHOTO BY BENJAMIN KRAIN
Benton High School students (from left) Melody Cadmus, Kylie Kriger and Kelsie Rankin and about 400 other high school students interested in teaching careers participate in an event Friday at the University of Central Arkansas in Conway.

CONWAY -- The Arkansas Department of Education is ramping up efforts to attract and retain teachers for Arkansas' 479,000 public school students.

State education leaders unveiled the Teach Arkansas campaign Friday to about 400 high school students at the 2018 Impacting Tomorrow Summit on the University of Central Arkansas campus.

The second annual, daylong conference targeted the growing number of students statewide who are enrolled in Teacher Cadet and Orientation to Teaching courses at their high schools or are members of their schools' Educators Rising organization.

Johnny Key, Arkansas' education commissioner, explained the dilemma and the motivation for the multifaceted Teach Arkansas initiative.

"In the last six years, we have seen a decline from nearly 8,200 students enrolled in education preparation programs to down to less than 4,000," Key told his teenage audience about the 3,659 teacher candidates in the most recently completed 2016-17 school year. "The students coming after you will feel the effect of that decline."

He asked the students to visualize a baby born now who grows into a kindergartner and then a high school student.

<http://www.arkansasonline.com/news/2018/feb/03/conference-pitches-teaching-career-2018-1/>

"That child needs you to be that person working side-by-side with them," he said, "to help them learn the skills they need to be successful and to become the citizens we want ... not just in this state but in our nation."

Victoria Groves-Scott, dean of the College of Education at the University of Central Arkansas, told the conference audience that she has been a teacher for more than 30 years, including a stint as an elementary school special education teacher.

"I have loved every job that I've had in education," Groves-Scott said, but she acknowledged that some people will attempt to discourage teacher aspirants because of the potential for hard work and relatively low salaries.

"Here is what I want to say: Don't listen to them. They do not know what they are talking about," Groves-Scott said. "Is it a hard job? Yes. It is a hard job. Is it worth every minute of every day that you walk into that room? Yes, it is," she said, adding that in no other career would adults contact her -- like they do -- to say that she made a difference in their lives.

Jeff Dyer, the state Education Department's teacher recruitment and retention program adviser, told the students that a teaching career can encompass a lot of other careers and interests.

"Do you want to be an actor? Please, you can play a different role every day in the classroom. Do you want to be a scientist? You can blow something up every day in the classroom," he said. "You get to be part of something that is bigger than you. It's really an incredible profession."

In addition to supporting Teacher Cadets -- a South Carolina course that has recently expanded from eight schools to 58 schools in Arkansas -- and other high school programs that enable students to explore teaching careers, the Teach Arkansas campaign will offer regional test preparation and support sessions for teacher candidates.

Additionally, as a result of changes in state law and rules, the state will soon provide teachers who have at least three years of experience with opportunities to become designated lead and master teachers.

In regard to attracting former teachers to re-enter the field, state leaders intend to advertise that professional development requirements have been reduced from 60 to 36 hours a year, and much of that training is available online at no cost to the returning teacher.

Arkansas has a total of 33,303 certified teachers plus 9,461 certified staff that include superintendents and principals.

The goals of the Teach Arkansas campaign are:

- Increase by 20 percent the number of candidates -- fewer than 4,000 now-- entering Arkansas teacher preparation programs within five years.
- Increase the number of new or novice teachers in public schools by 10 percent in five years.
- Decrease the state's teacher attrition rate -- which is 33 percent of early career teachers and 34 percent of veteran teachers -- by 15 percent in five years,.
- Increase the number of teachers re-entering the teaching profession by 5 percent within five years.
- Increase the number of teachers who are members of minority populations by 25 percent in five years.

Emilee Webb, a sophomore at Poyen High School, attended Friday's conference in hopes of helping her determine whether a teaching career is in her future. She's also considering psychiatry or therapy. Her school is on the brink of starting a Teacher Cadet program.

Nekeethia Jordan, a junior at Little Rock's Central High, and Robert Manriquez, a Parkview High senior, are more certain about their choice of a teaching career. Manriquez wants to teach high school English. Jordan is set on teaching sixth grade math. Both are enrolled in the Little Rock School District's Excel Teacher Cadet program in which they simultaneously earn high school graduation credit and college hours.

"I'm here to figure out which college I really want to go to and to get more information on how to become a teacher and what the benefits are of teaching in Arkansas," Jordan said.

Manriquez said the course "is something that I figured gives me experience and college credit hours. This event mainly lets me get to know the community around teaching."

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