



Arkansas Department of Education

Johnny Key, Commissioner

Transforming Arkansas to lead the nation in student-focused education

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Arkansas Sees Strong Special Education Licensure, Educator Preparation Program Gains

LITTLE ROCK — While the need for special education teachers remains, the Arkansas Department of Education is pleased to report that strong, consistent gains in special education licensure and educator preparation programs are addressing the shortage.

"Not only has Arkansas seen a steady increase in the number of special education licenses awarded the last several years, we also have seen encouraging increases in the number of future educators entering special education preparation programs," ADE Commissioner Johnny Key said. "In order to transform Arkansas to lead the nation in student-focused education, we must increase our teacher pipeline, especially in the area of special education. Through our efforts and ongoing collaboration with higher education and special education stakeholders, we are seeing growth." Originally making the academic shortage areas list in the early 1990s, special education currently is one of 15 academic shortage areas for 2018-2019.

"It is essential that we move the needle in a positive direction and that students with disabilities demonstrate academic growth," said Matt Sewell, ADE's director of Special Education. "With so many schools facing the challenge of finding certified teachers, however, it makes achieving this goal somewhat difficult. This promising news of the increased numbers of students enrolled in Special Education preparation programs of study is exciting and is a step toward achieving that goal. Having access to qualified teachers in the area of Special Education will assist in our mission to improve outcomes as we work together to prepare students with disabilities for college, careers and community engagement."

The Numbers

According to a survey of Arkansas universities that have approved special education programs, the number of Arkansas students enrolled in special education programs at institutions of higher education increased to an all-time high of 976 for the fall of 2018. This is an increase of 13 percent from 2017 and a 55 percent increase from 2015.

While numerous special education license categories have experienced increases over the last few years, ADE reports that Special Education (K-12) and Early Childhood/Special Ed Integrated (B-K) categories have seen the most growth. The number of Special Education (K-12) licenses increased 66 percent in 2018 to 937, as compared to 565 licenses in 2017. This licensure category has

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consistently increased over the last four years, with an increase of 59 percent in 2017, followed by increases of 52 percent in 2016 and 46 percent in 2015. Early Childhood/Special Ed Integrated (B-K) more than doubled in 2018 with 37 licenses.

Current Special Education Licenses*

License	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Early Childhood/Special Ed Integrated (B-K)	3	3	4	18	37
Special Education (K-12)	160	233	355	565	937

*For a list of additional special education licenses, visit <https://bit.ly/2QtEcv9>. For a list of available special education licensure areas and approved programs, visit <https://bit.ly/2PiTRNL>.

Special Education Fall Program Enrollment Totals

Year	Enrollment Totals
2015	630
2016	722
2017	866
2018	976

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ADE's Efforts to Increase the Teacher Pipeline

The increases in both special education licenses and special education program enrollment can be attributed to multiple efforts, namely a 2013 change in Educator Licensure Rules that created the Special Education (K-12) license and Act 839 of 2015 that created a task force on the best practices for special education.

The Special Education (K-12) license allows education students to major in special education and obtain a special education license instead of taking additional classes and adding special education onto an existing license. The rule change also created the Special Education/Early Childhood Integrated (B-K) license, which provides an opportunity for a first-time license and an additional add-on license for individuals who want to work with students in the birth-to-kindergarten age range. In addition to the law and rule change, as well as participating in recruitment and retention programs, ADE partnered with special education educators in 2017 to conduct an extensive special education paperwork review. As a result, ADE was able to streamline paperwork by reducing unnecessary and duplicate paperwork and simplifying forms. The reduction in paperwork not only reduces the administrative burden on special education teachers, it also gives them more time to focus on planning and instruction.

ADE also is supporting special education teachers through increased professional development opportunities. ADE first awarded each education service cooperative a \$20,000 grant in 2017-2018 to improve recruitment and retention efforts and is in the process of reviewing and renewing the grants for the 2018-2019 school year. With the grants, coops are providing scholarships for novice teachers to receive professional development regarding special education instructional strategies, communication, and behavior management and classroom materials that promote educational growth for students. Coops also are conducting surveys and encouraging special education teacher feedback to determine retention.

More Information

Those interested in becoming a special education teacher can call the ADE Educator Preparation Unit at (501) 683-4560. To learn more about special education in Arkansas, visit <https://bit.ly/1zdgyUI>.

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