Strengthening the Teacher Workforce

Spotlighting Two Innovative Paid Residency Models







ForwARd

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The research is clear: an effective educator is the most significant school-based factor impacting student achievement. However, only 40% of candidates enrolled in educator preparation programs (EPPs) are licensed and employed teachers six years later, highlighting an urgent opportunity to improve our support for early-career educators.

As a state, we must ask ourselves, "How can we attract, retain, and support educators to enhance learning and improve student outcomes?" The answer: building a more robust teacher pipeline and effective educator workforce.

To address our geographic and subject-area shortages and enhance retention, the LEARNS Act included funding for tuition reimbursement for new educators who remain in Arkansas to teach. The comprehensive education reform law also requires teacher candidates—whether through a traditional pathway or alternative program—to complete a yearlong residency supported by an experienced mentor educator and a credentialed clinical supervisor.

Even before the passage of LEARNS in 2023, two of our **EPP Design Collaborative** partners, **Southern Arkansas University** and the **University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff**, had begun working with local school districts to make their teacher-candidate experiences more practice-based and better equip future educators for the classroom. Now, they're sharing what led to the creation of their unique paid teacher residencies, key features of their models, and lessons learned so other EPPs can replicate their success.

Preparing Teachers with Local Districts

SAU's Rider Residency

As part of Forward's EPP Design Collaborative, Southern Arkansas University (SAU) committed to dramatically transforming its program. In 2023, SAU developed the **Rider Residency** to provide fourth-year traditional licensure candidates with hands-on classroom experience for one academic year.

Grounded in co-teaching experiences, the Rider Residency includes mutual matching, intensive coaching, data monitoring, and resident pay. SAU's partnership portfolio now includes two distinct models:

Model One

Residents are in their partner schools five days a week for the full year, co-teaching in a classroom with their mentor teacher. They are also allowed to substitute teach on Fridays throughout the program.

Model Two

During the first semester, residents are in their partner schools three days a week, co-teaching in a classroom with their mentor teacher. This increases to five days a week during the second semester.

The Rider Residency Model

- Co-teaching Experiences
- Resident Matching
- Intensive Coaching
- Resident Pay
- Data Monitoring

Co-teaching Experiences

Research supports the effectiveness of co-teaching for improving instructional practice. At SAU, residents work with their mentor for two full semesters to co-plan, co-teach, and co-assess student learning. They prepare materials, meet with colleagues and parents, and assist with instruction. In addition, residents spend a significant amount of time reflecting on their learning, pedagogical strategies, and student learning outcomes. Over time, residents are increasingly involved in planning and implementing instruction.

Resident Matching

Data show that new teachers are 10x more likely to take their first job near their student-teaching location. They are also more likely to work in proximity to their hometown and remain in teaching. Three times a year, SAU and its seven partners host an in-person event on SAU's campus for a strategic matching process between Rider Residency candidates and participating districts. Following the event, districts share their top choices and alternate selections. Future residents also complete an exit survey after interviews, sharing where they want to live during their residency, where they plan to live after graduation, and their rankings for each district. From there, SAU works to make the best matches between district and candidate preferences. Each resident receives one placement offer, and district partners reach out directly to support candidates' shift from "student" to "staff member."

New teachers are

10x

more likely to take a first job near their student-teaching location

Intensive Coaching

SAU is committed to giving regular, real-time support to residents and mentor teachers. Site coordinators conduct four observation-and-feedback cycles and eight classroom walk-throughs, ensuring residents who need additional guidance receive personalized intervention. They also lead bi-weekly on-site professional learning seminars within each partner district, which are planned using observation data and feedback collected from residents. The seminar also focuses on the use of the specific high-quality instructional materials (HQIM). If residents are struggling, any educator within their buildings may submit professional alerts and create individualized professional growth plans. SAU will meet with the resident and mentor teacher together to align on next steps.

Mentor teachers are required to participate in an initial eight-hour SAU-provided training before participating in the Rider Residency. SAU also provides two four-hour training sessions each semester, delivered by site coordinators and informed by resident practice and mentor feedback. At the end of each session, mentors complete an exit survey, noting any specific areas for which they would like additional training in the future. Residents cover classrooms during semester trainings.

Resident Pay

SAU and its district partners have integrated resident pay into the Rider Residency model, citing research indicating that these investments could increase opportunities to attract and retain more candidates.

Each school district determines its pay levels, with most residents receiving a paraprofessional rate. All residents accumulate their first year in the Arkansas Teacher Retirement System.

Data Monitoring

To continue improving the Rider Residency, SAU and individual districts also engage in quarterly governance meetings. These gatherings enable SAU and its partners to track the longitudinal impact on resident retention, teacher effectiveness, and student achievement. For example, as residents convert to full-time teachers, hiring districts can compare outcomes for novice educators who completed the Rider Residency with those who did not. They can also track the model's efficacy in educator retention and student outcomes.

Building and Sustaining the Model

In 2021, SAU's Admissions, Field Experience, and Licensure Office facilitated candidate applications, secured district placements, and helped candidates complete licensure requirements. To better support residents and district partners, admissions and licensure responsibilities were shifted to faculty and advisors, and site coordinators were hired to support the implementation of the Rider Residency. SAU eliminated all separate field-experience courses, normally completed during students' junior year, and embedded teaching experience directly into coursework. For candidates who are not participating in the Rider Residency but still need to complete the one-year residency requirement, approximately 20 out of 150 individuals, site coordinators are responsible for finding placement.

Each partner school district formally agrees to governance meetings through a Memorandum of Understanding, which outlines SAU's responsibility to provide program data; a district's commitment to require attendance from building-level administrators; and the joint pledge to meet four times a year to review program data, discuss implementation, and plan for future needs of the district. An initial governance meeting supports broader design and implementation decisions, as well as residency model design and pay. This also offers an opportunity to share information about the selection and interview processes and to collect information on district-adopted HQIM. Quarterly governance meetings are facilitated by site coordinators and attended by school-level administrators and EPP or district leadership to discuss resident performance data, improvement opportunities, mentor and site selection, resident and mentor support, and changes to coursework.

An Expanding Impact

After four years of participating in the Forward Arkansas EPP Design Collaborative, the Rider Residency has fundamentally transformed the experience of new educators in south Arkansas.

77%

Collective in-district hiring retention rate for Rider Residency graduates

Since implementation, SAU has increased enrollment in its traditional licensure programs by 12% and its graduation rate by 47%.

It also passed the state's new Science of Reading Audit, demonstrating that its residents are being exposed to rigorous and relevant curriculum and clinical experiences. **To date, participating districts have paid 133 Rider Residents more than $2 million and boast a collective 77% in-district hiring retention rate.** Evidence shows that Rider Residents are positively impacting student outcomes. SAU and El Dorado School District analyzed student proficiency rates across grade levels and subject areas. Results revealed that 11 of the 16 classrooms with Rider Residents outpaced peer classrooms without them.

Growing the Teacher Workforce Through Strategic Staffing

UAPB-PBSD Paid Residency Model

In 2023, the **University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff** (UAPB) and **Pine Bluff School District** (PBSD) found themselves at an inflection point. UAPB, a historically Black institution in southeast Arkansas, served a small but growing pool of approximately 60 teacher candidates. Dr. Kimberley Davis-Hunt, the then-new dean, recognized the need for UAPB to transform its residency model to provide candidates with sustained, authentic, paid classroom experience. At the same time, PBSD was emerging from state control and consolidation. Only 42% of its K-12 teachers were licensed, with persistent shortages in elementary education, special education, math, science, and fine arts.

UAPB and PBSD developed a shared vision for a paid, year-long residency model to ensure day-one-ready first-year teachers. Over the next two years, through Forward's EPP Design Collaborative, UAPB and PBSD began to explore various approaches.

After attending a Forward convening in early 2025, its leaders found a solution: to restructure some of the district's existing paraprofessional roles from stand-alone classified staff into paid residency positions for EPP residents.

UAPB UNIVERSITY of ARKANSAS AT PINE BLUFF

PINE BLUFF SCHOOL DISTRICT

UAPB-PBSD Paid Residency Model

- Mentor Co-teaching
- Full-time Paraprofessional Roles
- Resident Pay & Tuition
- UAPB Site Coordinator Support

PBSD engaged its school board, reaffirming the move as a strategic investment in licensed teachers for a long-term workforce benefit. The UAPB-PBSD Paid Residency Model officially launched in the summer of 2025, centering on five key components:

Mentor co-teaching

All UAPB residents are assigned a mentor teacher in their same licensure area, spending the required 18 hours in the first semester and 24 hours in the second semester in classroom practice. They begin the school year in July to align with PBSD's calendar, engaging in summer training and instruction, material preparation, student data meetings, and professional learning communities. UAPB and PBSD leadership review current candidate licensure areas and district staffing needs to achieve a strong match for each resident.

Full-time paraprofessional roles

Residents are not simply extra hands for coverage—they are developing teachers in protected, instructionally focused roles. Experiences vary depending on the specific paraprofessional roles they fill. For example, in high school-level and special education settings, residents are in classrooms with their mentor teachers for the full day, just as a paraprofessional would. These roles will continue to evolve.

Resident Pay & Tuition

Historically, UAPB candidates have struggled to simultaneously complete student teaching, maintain paid employment, and complete coursework. Resident pay helps to remove such barriers. PBSD residents are paid approximately $20,000, plus benefits, with Title I and other allowable funds. Resident tuition is also covered by funds from the National Center for Teacher Residency's Black Educator Initiative.

Site Coordinator Support

UAPB site coordinators engage in cycles of observation and feedback with residents, helping connect coursework to classroom practice throughout the year. They also provide more informal support through resident check-ins. In many cases, candidates are not only adjusting to increased educator responsibilities, but also to having a full-time job. In addition, site coordinators facilitate monthly meetings with mentors for training and with principals to discuss resident progress. At the district level, site coordinators engage in bi-monthly project team or governance meetings with UAPB's dean, PBSD's assistant superintendent, and PBSD's executive director of talent acquisition and teacher recruitment.

Strengthening the Model

A joint district and EPP project team meets bimonthly to discuss progress with the PBSD assistant superintendent, PBSD executive director of talent acquisition and teacher recruitment, UAPB dean of the school of education, and UAPB site coordinator.



Beyond formal meetings, the project team provides real-time feedback and solves problems via regular communication.

From these gatherings, mentor teacher capacity quickly emerged as the most critical and constrained resource. To meet needs in the first year of implementation, some mentors were asked to oversee two residents, and, in some cases, placements were changed mid-year to ensure residents had a mentor who was a good match. As cohort sizes increase, PBSD is considering strategies for deeper engagement and support for potential mentor educators, as well as earlier matching processes. UAPB is also hiring additional site coordinators to expand the model.

Evaluating the Impact

Feedback from district leadership and residents' licensure exam results point to promising qualitative outcomes. Onboarding residents to PBSD systems, expectations, and culture during the residency eases the transition into first-year teaching. UAPB faculty report shifts in self-efficacy, professionalism, and candidate performance, with licensure exam pass rates surpassing those of previous years under the traditional student-teacher model.

By November of the first year of program implementation, 50% of UAPB's residents were licensed and ready to be hired as full-time teachers.

Moving Arkansas ForwARd

As EPPs and K-12 districts continue to implement year-long residency models, Forward Arkansas believes there is an opportunity to shift how our state attracts, retains, and supports educators. We are committed to moving Arkansas forward by:

1. Sharing resources that other partnerships can use to support their next steps, including through our website.
2. Connecting with and convening all partners involved in this work to highlight and answer questions about best practices for replication.



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