



TEACH Pine Bluff Initiative

L.E.A.P. Recommendation Addressed: Pipeline

Introduction

The Educational Alliance is an ad hoc committee of GFPB, Inc. (Go Forward Pine Bluff) and consists of representatives from the education sectors within the City of Pine Bluff, Arkansas. The Alliance's purpose is to implement the L.E.A.P. (Leadership, Education, Accountability, Pipeline) initiative as recommended by the Education Pillar of Go Forward Pine Bluff. The L.E.A.P. strategies focus on: (1) developing primary and secondary education institutions that are academically and financially sound, and (2) improving the education options provided by our high schools and institutions of higher education to meet the specific needs of employers in Pine Bluff and surrounding areas.

Recognizing the immediate need to attract **certified** educators, the Educational Alliance elected to focus on establishing a quality teacher pipeline. This document outlines the incentive entitled TEACH Pine Bluff which aims to enhance effectiveness in recruiting and retaining **certified** teachers. TEACH Pine Bluff supports teachers who want to work in Delta area schools and will incentivize that commitment. Further, many education degree holders recognize the long-term benefit of obtaining a master's degree as it relates to future promotion and higher salaries. It is the consensus of the Alliance that an increase in the numbers of **certified** teachers will reverse the negative academic impact of long-term substitute teachers, stem the loss of practical teaching skills, and provide a pool of candidates to replace 45 to 65 teachers annually as a result of retirement, death, and attrition.

TEACH Pine Bluff

The TEACH Pine Bluff initiative is a result of partnerships with higher education institutions to supply the three school districts with **certified** graduates. The three Pine Bluff school districts are Pine Bluff School District, Watson Chapel School District, and Dollarway School District. The Superintendents of the Educational Alliance seek to recruit new and retain currently **certified** teachers by offering full-tuition fellowships towards obtaining a master's degree while teaching in Pine Bluff. Graduates from across the nation will be eligible, and the master's degree should be obtained from accredited Arkansas universities. Fellows who choose the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff to pursue their master's degrees will receive, upon completion, a bonus equal to the difference between the cost of the master's degree and \$20,000. Together, the pipeline of teachers with master's degrees will allow the school districts to accomplish the goals of the TEACH Pine Bluff initiative while fueling the respective education departments with an added incentive to attract undergraduate students to the profession.

Financial Commitment

As part of the public-private partnership between the City of Pine Bluff and Go Forward Pine Bluff, the private dollars raised from the business community are designated for the L.E.A.P. strategies. Go Forward Pine Bluff has earmarked \$690,000.00 over three years for TEACH Pine Bluff. These dollars will finance master's degrees for a minimum of thirty teachers.

Policies and Procedures

Teachers interested in TEACH Pine Bluff must have a bachelor's degree from an accredited college or university and be licensed to teach in the State of Arkansas. All **certified** teachers are encouraged to apply immediately. The application is on the Go Forward Pine Bluff website under the TEACH Pine Bluff tab (www.goforwardpinebluff.com/TeachPineBluff). Completed applications should be submitted online through the application portal. Applicants must pursue a master's degree in their content area.

The selection process is competitive and standardized across the three districts using a sliding scale which considers district need, expertise in the desired content area, demonstrated and anticipated classroom performance. TEACH Pine Bluff will offer a minimum of nine (9) slots, (three (3) per district), per year over the next three (3) years. TEACH Pine Bluff Fellows will be required to obtain the master's degree within four (4) years and must commit to serving a minimum of three (3)

years (in the same district) following the completion of the degree. Non-compliance with the terms and conditions of TEACH Pine Bluff will result in Fellows having to refund Go Forward Pine Bluff the cost paid for their tuition. The financial assistance will be on a reimbursement basis following each completed semester. Fellows must remain in good academic standing to receive semester reimbursement. A reimbursement guarantee letter will be provided to assist Fellows with access to financing their tuition payments.

Non-Licensed Teachers

The Educational Alliance is committed to encouraging degreed individuals to pursue non-traditional licensure. There are currently resources through the State Department of Education and Title II funds that support teachers as they work to increase the number of licensed teachers.

As a long-term solution, the districts are working to implement the Teacher Cadet program which will harness the desire of current students that aspire to become teachers. This program will provide a pathway for students to reach their career goals. The Teacher Cadet program and TEACH Pine Bluff will work to strengthen the academic climate of the school districts and therefore yield graduates that are contributing citizens.

National Board Certification Grant

Go Forward Pine Bluff recognizes that many teachers currently hold master's degrees and therefore the above incentive does not apply. A second master's degree is optional but must be in the content area in which the applicant teaches. The Arkansas River Education Service Cooperative (ARESC) offers training for teachers aspiring to become nationally **certified**. Subsequently, Go Forward Pine Bluff will provide grants to cover the cost of the initial examination. Only under unique circumstances will a teacher receive a second grant from Go Forward Pine Bluff to take the exam. Applicants must (1) complete all training and test modules from ARESC with a letter from the ARESC director acknowledging successful completion, and (2) provide evidence that a majority of their students consistently achieve above-average standardized test scores and classroom grades (letter grade of B) in the content area over three years. Applicants must submit evidence of classroom performance during the interview phase. Teachers who pass the national exam as a TEACH Pine Bluff Fellow must commit to teaching four years in the same district during the time of funding approval. A national board certification grant is also an option for **certified** teachers who only hold a bachelor's degree.

Fellow Awards

All awards are subject to applicants completing the above requirements, availability of funding, and signing of a contract attesting to policies and procedures of the award. Any recipient of the funds from Go Forward Pine Bluff as part of the TEACH Pine Bluff Initiative must commit to residing within the county limits of Jefferson County, Arkansas during the contract period.