



September 16, 2021

Associate Professor Ed Bengtson, Department Head
Department of Curriculum and Instruction
College of Education and Health Professions
University of Arkansas
216 Peabody Hall
Fayetteville, AR 72701

Dear Dr. Bengtson:

Phillips Community College of the University of Arkansas (PCCUA) strongly supports the new Bachelors of Science in Education in Educational Studies Online for Education Para-professionals (ESTO). This kind of program has been needed in Arkansas for a long time. Many of the students at PCCUA are place bound because of family, finances, and numerous other reasons. As you may know through our discussions about this degree, PCCUA is reactivating the Associate of Arts in Teaching. The degree program you have developed will allow PCCUA graduates to continue their education while remaining in Phillips County.

The advantage of this new program offered by UAF is that it will allow paraprofessionals to continue working while completing a degree. Additionally, it situates them perfectly to add a teaching credential through one of the alternate routes recognized by the Arkansas Department of Education. This program serves to provide a high level of development for paraprofessionals because of the curriculum which will include study in education history, educational law, culturally responsive pedagogy, educational psychology, trauma-based education, inclusive based educational practices, professional test preparation, classroom internships and so much more. What a wonderful opportunity to strengthen the paraprofessional core for the local school districts. I was also impressed with the diversity among the faculty who will represent so many educational areas from the College of Education and Health Professions' Department of Curriculum & Instruction including Educational Studies, Elementary Education, Secondary Education, Career and Technical Education, Educational Technology, and Inclusive Education.

PCCUA is actively engaged with the school districts promoting the Educator Rising efforts. This program focuses on reaching and connecting secondary students to the education pipeline. This is so important for this region because the earlier we can recruit students to be teachers the more likely we will be able to enroll them in a guided pathway that helps them complete an education degree.

All regions in PCCUA's service area have teacher shortages. The Helena-West Helena School District in Phillips County has recruited five teachers from the Philippines to teach in the high school. I have met with Superintendent Linda English and she has shared the problems the District has faced trying to recruit faculty in math, science, and other subject areas. Naturally, the College finds that distressing because it often results in underprepared students for us. I understand the difficulty she is facing because PCCUA has faced that same problem. Small rural communities, especially those located in poor and under-resourced communities, have difficulty finding and keeping good instructors. The new program proposed by UAF is exactly what we need because it is based on a "grow your own" concept for people already committed to living in this area.

Please know that PCCUA embraces the opportunity for this program to serve students in our region of Arkansas. We know it can make a difference in the education of the students we serve. Please feel free to call as we continue planning to make this program a reality.

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Deborah King".

Deborah King, Ed.D.
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