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EXECUTIVE ORDER TO PRIORITIZE L.E.A.R.N.S. (LITERACY, EMPOWERMENT, ACCOUNTABILITY, READINESS, NETWORKING, AND SCHOOL SAFETY)

WHEREAS: Every Arkansas child should have access to a quality education, a good-paying job, and a better life—right here—in Arkansas;

WHEREAS: Only thirty-five percent (35%) of Arkansas third graders read at grade level, according to the 2022 ACT Aspire, and a child's inability to read sets them up for a lifetime of failure;

WHEREAS: Nearly seventy percent (70%) of those incarcerated cannot read at a fourth grade level;

WHEREAS: Too many Arkansas kids lack access to high-quality education opportunities before kindergarten;

WHEREAS: With ninety percent (90%) of a child's brain developed by age five, it is important that children be prepared for kindergarten so they can read proficiently by third grade;

WHEREAS: More than 140,000 Arkansas students attend schools rated "D" or "F";

WHEREAS: Every student deserves access to effective teachers;

WHEREAS: A 2021 RAND survey found that nearly one-quarter of teachers indicated a desire to leave their jobs, compared with an average national turnover rate of 16 percent before the pandemic;

WHEREAS: Roughly six in ten Arkansas jobs require advanced credentials beyond a high school diploma, though less than half of Arkansas' workers meet these requirements;

WHEREAS: The deployment of affordable and reliable high-speed internet infrastructure is essential for advancing education, economic development, health care, public safety, and workforce development;

WHEREAS: Many Arkansas communities and students lack connections to high-speed, affordable internet; and

WHEREAS: Government must protect children and ensure their safety in school.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, SARAH HUCKABEE SANDERS, acting under the authority vested in me as the Governor of the State of Arkansas, do hereby order the following:

1. The Secretary of the Department of Education shall, in coordination with the Secretary of the Department of Human Services, ensure all students are on track to read at or above grade level upon the completion of third grade by:
 - a. Prioritizing the use of federal and state funds to expand access to quality early childhood education for at-risk children.
 - b. Conducting a kindergarten-readiness analysis for Arkansas, to be completed within ninety (90) days. The analysis should include:
 - i. A count of children age birth to five being served across all early care and education programs by age, economic background, and geography;
 - ii. A review of how “quality” is defined by existing programs and a Department of Education initiated quality evaluation of those seats, from birth to five years of age; and
 - iii. An analysis of the gaps between what is currently offered and what parents and families seek.
 - c. Encouraging businesses to grow early childhood centers to provide more working families with the support needed to enter or remain in the workforce through a pilot program.
 - d. Conducting a comprehensive review to ensure schools and districts are implementing the Arkansas Right to Read Act, AR Code § 6-17-429 (2019), to

be completed within ninety (90) days. The comprehensive review should ensure that, at minimum:

- i. Every student is receiving evidence-based literacy instruction with a curriculum aligned to the Science of Reading; and
 - ii. Every teacher has received training in the science of reading.
- e. Establishing systems, structures, and processes, to commence within ninety (90) days, that incentivize the adoption and implementation of high-quality instructional materials and curricula for core academic instruction for all students and intervention programs for struggling students.
2. The Secretary of the Department of Education shall empower parents by:
- a. Coordinating, alongside the State Board of Education, policies that streamline processes to continue, expand, and replicate effective charter schools.
 - b. Establishing a process, to commence within no more than ninety (90) days, to review and update school and district measurement systems to ensure they incorporate rigorous academic outcomes, annual student progress, workforce preparedness, and to ensure reasonable flexibility from unnecessary accreditation requirements.
 - c. Conducting a review, to be completed in no more than ninety (90) days, on the extent to which school districts provide parents and the public access to information about classroom curriculum, required reading materials and books, and classroom assessments in every public school and public classroom in Arkansas. The Department of Education shall collect and publish the finding of this review no later than December 31, 2023.
 - d. Conducting an external review, to be completed in no more than ninety (90) days, or sixty (60) days from contract approval if needed, of all federal stimulus dollars to understand how and where districts have spent Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Funds, as well as a full account of any outstanding funds.

3. The Secretary of the Department of Education shall reward good teachers and create a strong pipeline by:
 - a. Conducting a review and publishing a report, to be completed in no more than ninety (90) days, on Arkansas' educator workforce. The report should include:
 - i. An analysis of teacher shortage areas by geographic region, subject area, and student demographics groups, including consideration for teacher certification status.
 - ii. An analysis of teacher pipeline and retention metrics, including considerations for teacher training pathways.
 - b. Working with the Professional Licensure Standards Board and the State Board of Education to evaluate the burden of licensure fees on teachers in the State of Arkansas and consider eliminating new teacher licensure fees for one calendar year, as authorized through Ark. Code Ann. § 6-17-422(h)(3)(C).
 - c. Publishing on the agency's website, within ninety (90) days, a user-friendly, readable, and accessible list of alternative certification programs to help districts recruit high-quality teachers.
 - d. Launching a process, to commence in no more than ninety (90) days, to review educator preparation and licensure requirements to:
 - i. Remove any unnecessary, outdated, or burdensome requirements;
 - ii. Implement best practices from other states; and
 - iii. Decrease time-to-hire and reduce bottlenecks to attract experienced individuals and content experts, currently working in private industry, into the teaching profession.

- e. Ensuring that all graduates receiving a degree or alternate teacher training certificate from a state-approved educator preparation program in Spring 2027 and beyond have completed a one-year supervised residency alongside an experienced mentor teacher in a school setting.
4. The Secretary of the Department of Education shall ensure that all Arkansas students are meeting the demands of today's workforce by:
- a. Engaging third-party experts to conduct an annual audit of the state's career pathways, the first of which shall be completed in no more than 180 days. The annual audit should include:
 - i. An analysis of the alignment of the programs, degrees and certificates, and industry-recognized credentials offered by Arkansas K-12, postsecondary, and workforce institutions;
 - ii. An analysis of the alignment of these programs, degrees and certificates, and industry-recognized credentials with high-growth, high-demand, high-skill, and high-wage employment opportunities in Arkansas;
 - iii. An evaluation of the outcomes of individuals who participate in or receive these programs, degrees and certificates, and industry-recognized credentials such as academic achievement, college readiness, postsecondary enrollment and completion, attainment of degrees, certificates, credentials of value, and employment and wages; and
 - iv. An analysis of the return on investment of the programs, degrees and certificates, and industry-recognized credentials offered by Arkansas K-12, postsecondary, and workforce institutions.
 - b. Identifying available funding for high-quality workforce apprenticeships and other high-quality work-based learning workforce programs, including those within Arkansas education institutions.
5. The Secretary of the Department of Education shall make educational and career

opportunities accessible by:

- a. Working in partnership with the Department of Commerce to support their efforts to expand broadband statewide.
 - b. Monitoring and publicly reporting in no more than ninety (90) days on student access to high-speed internet in each school and school district.
6. The Secretary of the Department of Education shall ensure Arkansas schools provide safe learning environments free from violence by:
- a. Conducting a comprehensive review, to be completed within ninety (90) days, to ensure schools and districts are implementing Arkansas's school safety laws under AR Code § 6-15-1303. The comprehensive review should include ensuring that schools and districts have:
 - i. Annual active shooter drills and school safety assessments in collaboration with local law enforcement;
 - ii. A school safety plan and annual training for all school district employees and students;
 - iii. Floor plans and pertinent emergency contact information provided to appropriate first responders; and
 - iv. Safeguards to ensure floor plans and school safety plans remain concealed from the public record and unavailable for public inspection.
 - b. Ensuring each school district has identified an individual in each district responsible for overseeing school safety.
 - c. Implementing strategies to increase the presence of trained law enforcement officers and Commissioned School Security Officers on campuses.

- d. Launching a process to review the recommendations put forward by the 2022 Arkansas School Safety Commission final report and proposing regulations to the state Board of Education in no more than ninety (90) days.

This Executive Order shall become effective upon its signing and shall remain in full force and effect until amended or rescinded by further executive orders.

IN TESTIMONY WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand and cause the Great Seal of the State of Arkansas to be affixed this 11th day of January, in the year of our Lord 2023.

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