FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Contact: Dr. Joshua P. Starr, jstarr@pdkintl.org

Walton Family Foundation awards $146,000 to Educators Rising to strengthen the teacher pipeline in Arkansas.
Program Is Integral to Strengthening and Diversifying Local Teaching Pipelines

(Little Rock, Arkansas) – PDK International today announced the implementation of the Educators Rising Academy curriculum in the state of Arkansas assisted by a $146,000 grant through The Walton Family Foundation. The program introduces high school students early on to careers in education and diversifies pipelines to the state’s teacher workforce.

Developed by teachers for teachers, with the generous support of the National Education Association, the American Federation of Teachers, and the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, PDK International’s Educators Rising program emphasizes fundamental professional practices that are critical for the next generation of aspiring teachers to develop and take their first steps on the path to realizing their full potential. The program is a centerpiece of a “grow your own” teacher recruitment strategy.

The program includes a curriculum, teacher training, and “Beginning to Teach” micro-credentials for students. In-service teachers who aim to mentor and inspire high school students to teach in their own communities are critical to the program’s success.

“The Educators Rising model helps us move closer toward accomplishing the goals set for our Teach Arkansas Initiative, which promotes the teaching profession and focuses on recruitment and retention,” Dr. Ivy Pfeffer, ADE deputy commissioner, said. “By focusing directly on engaging students and introducing them to best teaching practices and real-world experiences in high school, Educators Rising helps districts and communities create their own teacher pipeline. With this grant from the Walton Family Foundation, additional students and schools around the state will benefit from the program’s proven curriculum, resources, and network opportunities, which will ultimately have a positive impact on learning for future generations.”

With 52 percent of Educators Rising’s current members being students of color, the program aligns with and supplements the ADE’s priority to build an educator workforce that reflects the racial, ethnic, and linguistic diversity of its students. There is a wide range of evidence to support the benefits of a diverse teacher workforce, including its positive impact on strengthening schools and resulting in better outcomes for students of all races/ethnicities, including reduced dropout rates, improved college admissions, and achievement gains.

“Despite the challenges of COVID, PDK remains committed to helping communities find smart, system-level solutions to elevate teaching and learning, address the teacher shortage and prepare the
next generation of highly skilled professionals who look like the students they serve. We couldn’t be happier to debut the EdRising Academy curriculum in Arkansas to help educators and leaders across the state grow their own teachers in a sustainable, research-backed way,” said Dr. Joshua P. Starr, Chief Executive Officer of PDK International.

Educators Rising is a community-based model, in which chapters at schools feed teacher preparation programs at institutes of higher education with the support of State Departments of Education and local funders and foundations.

Arkansas first affiliated with Educators Rising in 2017 as part of the Teach Arkansas campaign to rejuvenate the teacher pipeline. During this time, Arkansas high school students interested in a career in education have had the opportunity to engage in a Career and Technical Student Organization (CTSO) designed around educator preparation, network with other student members throughout the United States, participate in state and national competitions, apply for scholarships, earn micro-credentials, and hold leadership positions.

In 2020, ADE, in partnership with school districts and institutions of higher education (IHEs), established a pathway for high school students to enter the educator workforce. It begins with career-focused education in high school and allows for participating students to receive an industry-recognized credential as a Certified Teaching Assistant (CTA) upon completion of high school career coursework and passing the ETS ParaPro Assessment. The Educators Rising Academy Curriculum aligns to the standards for the program of study leading to the CTA.

Educators Rising worked with the ADE to select partner districts, many of which are located in the Delta region, based on teacher licensure waiver data and attrition rates. There was also an emphasis on recruiting underrepresented populations, such as students of color and males, into the pipeline. Cohort 1 districts were able to pilot the EdRising curriculum during the 20-21 school year and will receive additional professional development and support during 2021, while Cohort 2 districts will begin planning and professional development for a 21-22 curriculum implementation.

“High quality teachers are a vital part of students’ success in the Delta,” said Kim Davis, Senior Advisor with the Walton Family Foundation. “This program will not only recruit from the community but also provide hands-on training – resulting in a pipeline of accomplished teachers who are ready on day one to make a lasting difference.”

The program in Arkansas received a grant from the Walton Family Foundation which is intended to support implementation of grow your own teacher models that target potential educators as early as middle school and will allow Educators Rising to provide 13 Arkansas school districts with:

- The Educators Rising Academy Curriculum, a robust customizable curriculum with 60 lesson plans (including clinical experience) focused on cross-cutting themes: Cultural Competence; Fairness, Equity, and Diversity; Reflective Practice; Ethics; Collaboration; Social Justice and Advocacy; and Self-Efficacy;

- Up to twenty hours of professional development for the Educators Rising Academy Curriculum and ongoing support for teachers implementing the program;

- Support to launch an Educators Rising Chapter at each school to help recruit students and grow awareness of the program at the school and in the community;
Membership for students to participate in regional, statewide and national initiatives, competitions, and scholarships;

Support for regional, state and national conferences; and

Monthly meetings for the State Coordinator and quarterly meetings for Teacher Leaders to meet with the national network, share best practices, and receive additional training.

School districts, institutions of higher education, and other educational stakeholders interested in partnering with Educators Rising to strengthen teacher recruitment efforts should contact Sharlee Crowson, Educators Rising State Coordinator, at 501-682-6349 or sharlee.crowson@arkansas.gov. For more information on Educators Rising, visit www.educatorsrising.org.