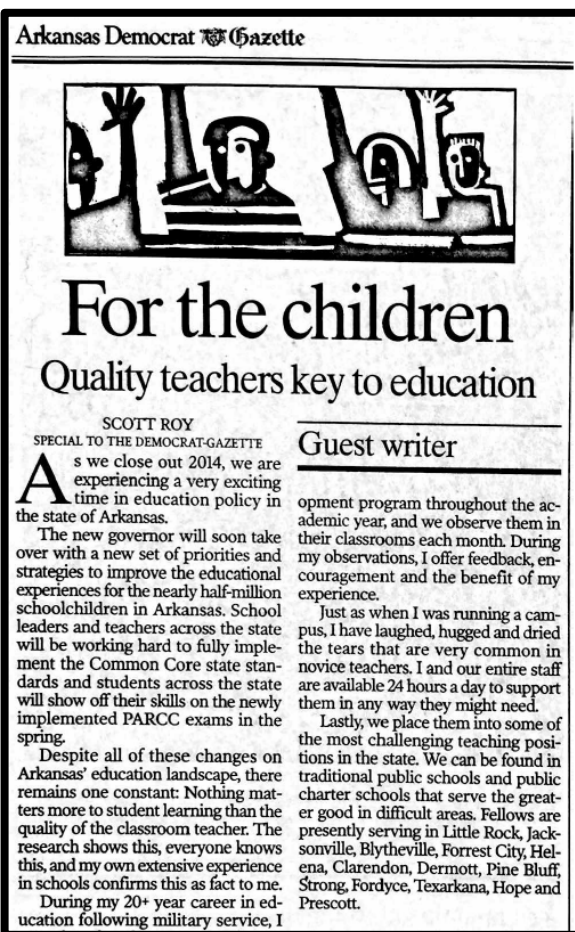


For the Children: Quality teachers key to education

By Scott Roy, Special to the Democrat-Gazette

As we close out 2014, we are experiencing a very exciting time in education policy in the state of Arkansas.

The new governor will soon take over with a new set of priorities and strategies to improve the educational experiences for the nearly half-million schoolchildren in Arkansas. School leaders and teachers across the state will be working hard to fully implement the Common Core state standards and students across the state will show off their skills on the newly implemented PARCC exams in the spring.



Despite all of these changes on Arkansas' education landscape, there remains one constant: Nothing matters more to student learning than the quality of the classroom teacher. The research shows this, everyone knows this, and my own extensive experience in schools confirms this as fact to me.

During my 20+ year career in education following military service, I served as a bus driver, teacher, department head, middle school assistant principal, middle school principal and finally high school principal. During that time, I learned an unfortunate truth--it is extremely difficult to find top-caliber teachers to fill less desirable positions in small, rural and often impoverished areas. Since I had personally experienced this challenge myself as a school leader, I have been on the lookout for promising strategies to address this problem.

Thus, when the possibility to step back into that world as an agent of change presented itself, I jumped at it. In my position as director of teacher development with the Arkansas Teacher Corps (ATC), I am making it my mission to fill that need in our state.

I have the unique perspective of being the only person to observe each and every ATC teacher in the first two years of the corps, based out of the University of Arkansas. I have driven tens of thousands of miles, eaten more fast food than I care to mention, and spent many a night away from my family in pursuit of my mission to support new teachers in classrooms serving Arkansas students.

Our mission at ATC is threefold. First, we must locate and select talented and service-oriented individuals to become ATC Fellows. We are an alternative certification program, so essentially we take top college graduates--generally from fields other than education--and turn them into teachers. Our fellows, each of whom share our mission to serve students in disadvantaged schools, have ranged from two Ph.D.s to a retired 54-year-old executive to numerous young people fresh out of college.



ATC Director of Teacher Development and Support Scott Roy authored the following op-ed in December 2014 for the Arkansas Democrat Gazette.

Secondly, we train them in the summer in our six-week institute, we have a rigorous professional-development program throughout the academic year, and we observe them in their classrooms each month. During my observations, I offer feedback, encouragement and the benefit of my experience.

Just as when I was running a campus, I have laughed, hugged and dried the tears that are very common in novice teachers. I and our entire staff are available 24 hours a day to support them in any way they might need.

Lastly, we place them into some of the most challenging teaching positions in the state. We can be found in traditional public schools and public charter schools that serve the greater good in difficult areas. Fellows are presently serving in Little Rock, Jacksonville, Blytheville, Forrest City, Helena, Clarendon, Dermott, Pine Bluff, Strong, Fordyce, Texarkana, Hope and Prescott.

By now, you may be wondering how we do this. Well, I'll tell you: ATC is currently funded by grants and gifts, we work on a shoestring budget, and we pay missionary salaries! Moreover, without the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville providing us human resource and office space support, we would cease to exist.

Most importantly, we are able to place excellent and energetic teachers in schools that need them because we recruit bright and mission-oriented people all across Arkansas.

Our mission is to see that each and every Arkansas student has a highly qualified teacher; the need is great and the demand from schools for teachers far outpaces ATC's ability to supply them. There is particular need for those trained in math or science. Therefore, again this year, we are searching far and wide for talented people with a sense of commitment and duty. We look for the difference-makers.

If you are a soon-to-be graduate, a military veteran ready to work with students, or a businessperson interested in a new and rewarding career, consider applying for a 2015 Arkansas Teacher Corps Fellowship. Applications are available at www.arkansasteachercorps.org and are due Dec. 28. We now have more than 30 Arkansas Teacher Corps Fellows teaching in schools across the state; we hope to double that number working with our students in the fall of 2015.

If you are talented, full of energy, and committed to Arkansas students, we look forward to reviewing your application this spring.

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Scott Roy, a lifelong educator, serves as the director of teacher development for the Arkansas Teacher Corps. (www.arkansasteachercorps.org).

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<http://www.arkansasonline.com/news/2014/dec/06/for-the-children-20141206/>