

## For Immediate Release

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### Application period now open for EAST Initiative grant funding

LITTLE ROCK, Ark. (Aug. 22, 2024) – The EAST Initiative on Wednesday announced the opening of the 2025-2026 EAST recruiting season for consideration in awarding the Department of Secondary Education/Arkansas Department of Education-EAST Grant.

Startup funding is available for more than 10 new EAST programs for the 2025-2026 school year. Funding from the grant will cover technology needed to install a full EAST classroom, and will cover some educator professional development costs that is required in the EAST curriculum.

All Arkansas public or charter schools are eligible to receive grant funding. Districts considering implementation of EAST as part of their curriculum for the next school year should fill out the form found at <https://news.eastlink.me/nextstep>.

Applications for the first round of funding will be accepted through close of business on Friday, December 13.

“EAST is excited to continue expanding our network and to continue empowering students to identify and address challenges beyond the classroom,” said EAST Chief Executive Officer Matt Dozier. “When students are given the chance to transform their innovative ideas into real-world solutions, they are better equipped for success in their communities.”

The educational non-profit earlier this month released to their EAST programs a Community Service Learning (CSL) database which tracks the number of CSL hours earned by students through EAST; the type of hours earned according to state standards; and the stage of service at which the hours were earned. This robust database will result in easier reporting for EAST programs, and seamlessly links CSL hours as reported in the system to individual partners, creating additional resources for students, said Rinda Hall, EAST’s Program Coordinator for Site Support.

Hall said that a limited number of EAST programs participated in beta testing the database during Spring 2024, noting that thousands of CSL hours were logged by the handful of EAST programs participating in testing, including:

- Ahlf Junior High (Searcy) where 61 EAST students logged 490 CSL hours;
- Searcy High School’s EAST students averaged more than 19 hours per student;
- Twenty-one EAST students at Midland Elementary School added 308 hours to the database;
- and Vilonia High School’s EAST students logged 2,915 hours, averaging more than 69 hours per student.

EAST students are engaged and excited about learning, Hall said, pointing to data released by the Arkansas-based nonprofit. In a survey of more than 3,400 students across 42 schools, data showed that the EAST experience is 22% more engaging than other core courses. The survey was conducted through a tool called the Wellington Engagement Index (WEI). Created by educators, WEI was designed to measure student engagement, and to give administrators and teachers opportunities for reflection as they challenge students to solve real problems in their communities.

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**About EAST:** EAST is a nonprofit organization headquartered in Little Rock that focuses on the future of education with an emphasis on community service and career readiness. Greenbrier High School first offered EAST in the 1995-96 school year; EAST now has programs in more than 250 schools across three states. Through EAST, students are encouraged to think critically and innovate to create positive change in their communities with the technology EAST provides for their classrooms. EAST offers year-round training to students; and professional development for EAST educators and for all classroom teachers through Education Unleashed. To learn more about EAST, visit [www.eastinitiative.org](http://www.eastinitiative.org).