



**Department of Education Reform
Strategic Plan
Fall 2022**

The Department of Education Reform's (EDRE) mission is to produce high-quality research, shape education policy, and grow influential scholars. EDRE enhances education and economic development by producing high-quality, objective research and developing scholars who are focused on improving student outcomes. EDRE studies early childhood, elementary, and secondary education policy and practice to identify improvements that will help all students reach their full potential. EDRE is committed to proactively informing all education stakeholders to positively influence the future of education in Arkansas and beyond.

Shifting landscape

Although education has steadily maintained incremental progress over the years, the pandemic has accelerated the pace of change, impacting students, teachers, education leaders, and policy makers. Longstanding discussions around equity and teacher burnout were brought to the forefront and amplified as schools shut down. Legislators were compelled to make difficult decisions without fully understanding the possible consequences. Despite this, the pandemic did enhance awareness of the importance education plays for the future of the state, the nation, and beyond. For example, according to Pew Research, education appeared among the top 5 most important issues listed by voters for the 2022 mid-term elections. This spotlight on education has sparked a need for rigorous data analysis to inform innovation, change and re-envisioning of the future.

In Arkansas, despite the high in-person instructional rate compared with the rest of the nation, the disruption was still evident. New learning models were introduced, teachers and students were forced to adapt, and parents became part-time instructors while seeking to balance childcare and job responsibilities. Students' learning dropped, mental health issues rose, and teachers' burnout increased. Some of the local effects of the pandemic such as lowered test scores and negative perceptions of learning environments have started to rebound this past year. In Arkansas, according to a recent survey conducted by the EDRE, reading and math test scores are trending higher but still much lower than in pre-pandemic years, and 59% of parents said their children learned more in the 2021-2022 academic year vs. the 2020-2021 academic year. There is still a lot to learn about the recovery, as the debate continues as to whether parents are getting all the information about how their kids are really doing, supported further by low enrollment rates for tutoring programs. Parent involvement in education is important, so it will be important to continue to research and understand how perceptions compare with reality and key implications for the future. Arkansas is invested in prioritizing education, determining how to rebound learning loss, and elevating student success.



**Department of Education Reform
Strategic Plan
Fall 2022**

EDRE services over 260+ school districts across the state and supports new collaborations and actively pursues innovation and new discoveries. EDRE provides services that support the 35,000+ teachers in the state who are focused on educating over 475,000 students. EDRE has established credibility with prominent education leaders in Arkansas and will build on those partnerships as part of the strategic plan moving forward. Together, many stakeholders are committed to accelerating change for Arkansas education and beyond.

EDRE has already established itself as a hub of knowledge creation in Arkansas and across the nation. The department has been at the forefront of influencing education policy changes and classroom practice and has been a leader in providing timely research results during the pandemic. EDRE is nationally recognized as the 4th ranked department in the field of Educational Evaluation and Research, according to Academic Analytics. As Paul Peterson, the Henry Lee Shattuck Professor of Government and Director of the Program on Education Policy and Governance at Harvard University stated, “The Department of Education Reform punches above its weight.” EDRE is well-positioned to continue playing a critical role in actively servicing stakeholders in Arkansas and across the nation to shape the future of education. The department will build on its well-established research and scholarly credibility to accelerate growth and impact.

Strategic planning process

In the strategic planning process, EDRE took a measured approach to understand the current landscape and shape future opportunities. First, the department created a diverse working group across funders, department faculty, and practitioners. The purpose of this group was to establish a shared understanding and then create a joint vision for the future. The members of the working group include:

- Michael Crouch, Senior Program Officer at the Walton Personal Philanthropy Group.
- Tina Fletcher, Education Consultant and Researcher at Fletcher Education Solutions.
- Kate Mamiseishvili, Interim Dean of the College of Education and Health Professions.
- Gary Ritter, Dean of the St. Louis University School of Education.
- Edie Stewart, Director of Educator Preparation at the Arkansas Department of Education; and
- EDRE faculty.

In addition, EDRE created and facilitated three diverse stakeholder focus groups. The first focus group included over 14 alumni from various stages in their careers who hold/held prominent education positions nationally. Listening to alumni enabled the working group to identify factors of success from former students and areas of improvement based on their experience and career path. The second listening session included scholarly collaborators across seven universities to learn how they are leveraging data to inform policy and practice

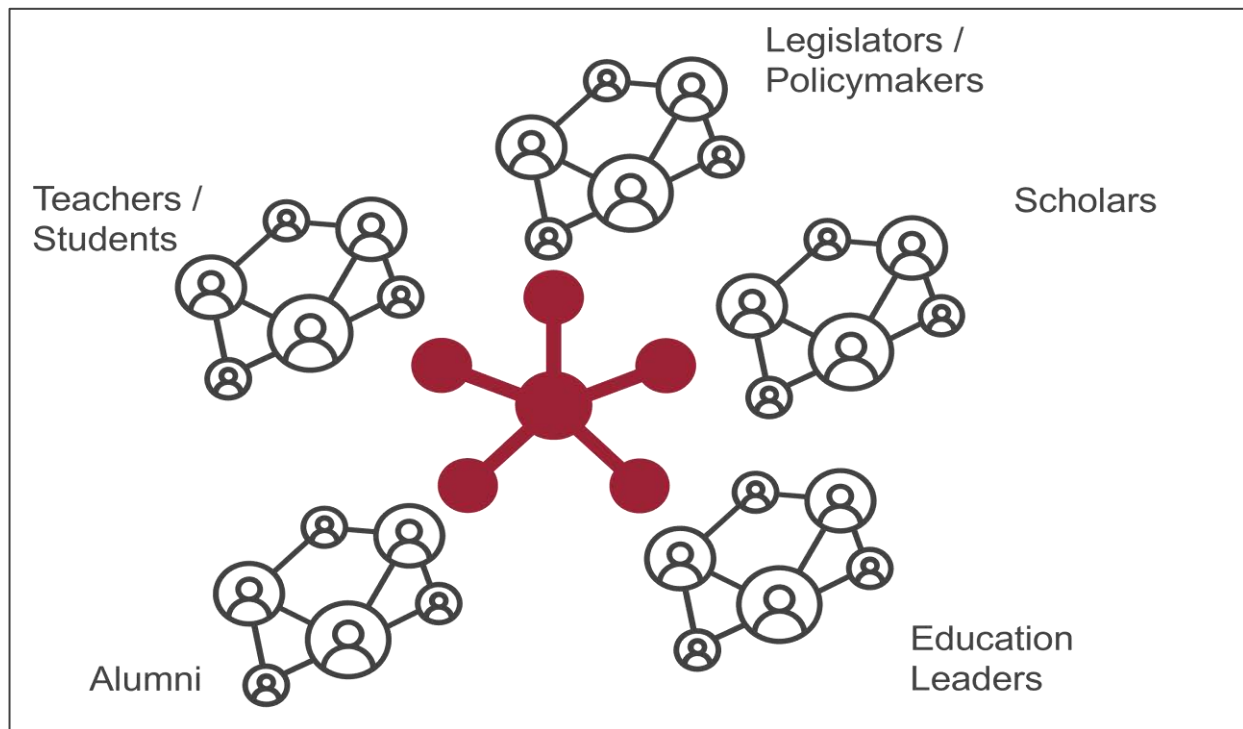
Department of Education Reform

Strategic Plan

Fall 2022

and brainstorm new collaboration models. The final listening session included 12 Arkansas community practitioners from various positions including teachers and administrators. The working group discussed their awareness of EDRE's mission and capabilities and identified leverage points related to education policy.

EDRE has established a network of collaborators across 30+ diverse stakeholders



"EDRE did a great job of not fitting us all in the same box, they personalized our experience towards our strengths"

-Nate Jensen, EDRE Alumnus

"Arkansas is leading the way in producing state reports due in large part to the EDRE department...In looking at research around teacher attrition post-covid, EDRE is already ahead of the game"

-Tina Fletcher, Education consultant

Alumni focus group key learnings

The alumni focus group consisted of 14 alumni. Overall, they were very complimentary of their experiences with the EDRE, citing the distinguished faculty, personalized experience, and mentorship throughout the program as major strengths. Additionally, they expressed



**Department of Education Reform
Strategic Plan
Fall 2022**

strong appreciation for the research training they received early in the process and the partnership with the Office of Education Policy (OEP) within EDRE. In the future, the alumni recommended integrating “hidden academic skills” more prominently into the program, such as grant-writing, grant-stewardship, and finding additional funding sources. They also suggested augmenting the existing experience with a focus on the intentional recruitment of diverse students, especially from Arkansas, providing access to more methodological tools, and increasing access to collaboration/projects with school districts and state policymakers.

The suggested research areas highlighted by the alumni were complementary and supportive of the existing EDRE focus areas. The alumni discussed opportunities for EDRE to share their success through faculty and alumni stories that highlight the variety of placement opportunities and marketing-oriented videos from EDRE stakeholders. The alumni overwhelmingly were interested in staying connected and expressed a strong desire to give back to EDRE in the form of alumni awards, lecture series, mentoring current students, etc.

Scholar focus group key learnings

The scholar focus group consisted of distinguished scholars from seven different universities. They expressed deep appreciation for the high-caliber research and doctoral program managed by the EDRE, citing the credibility of their students, and research leadership. They also highlighted the partnership with the OEP, and the opportunity to continue to grow and deepen that relationship to influence policy and practice. This group highlighted how crucial EDRE research has been for their understanding of education in Arkansas and its role at the forefront of COVID research. In the future, these scholars suggested a few opportunities for growth, including a summer residency program, and deepening the connection between diversity and inclusion course-related content and policy influence in Arkansas.

The key research areas highlighted were supportive of EDRE’s existing focus areas. Outside of traditional measures, the scholars recommended looking at the number of placement types across graduates, and student research outcomes as key measures, in addition to policy testimonials.

Community focus group key learnings

The community focus group consisted of 12 practitioners in a variety of roles across the state of Arkansas. This group supported the existing EDRE research areas as priority topics in the state and challenged EDRE to think about how the research could continue to help direct and guide policymakers by leveraging doctoral students and local education voices. They also cited the valuable resource EDRE is for tool development and data analysis, suggesting scaling those resources even further by operationalizing a two-way value exchange between school systems and EDRE.



**Department of Education Reform
Strategic Plan
Fall 2022**

The practitioners suggested many ways to better recruit diverse doctoral students through opening access and generating more awareness with promotional activities, creatively offering bridge programs, and exploring alternative delivery method options. The group also emphasized the need to think of multiple student learning outcomes beyond achievement tests and the needs of rural schools in the State. The group was very vocal about how to better engage with local education stakeholders and highlighted the importance of real-time data and dissemination and balancing virtual options with in-person meetings. They all gravitated towards short, 1-hour virtual informational sessions that target specific audiences with research highlights, hot topic discussions, etc. They also suggested regional in-person meetings across the state to help foster community discussions in a meaningful way.

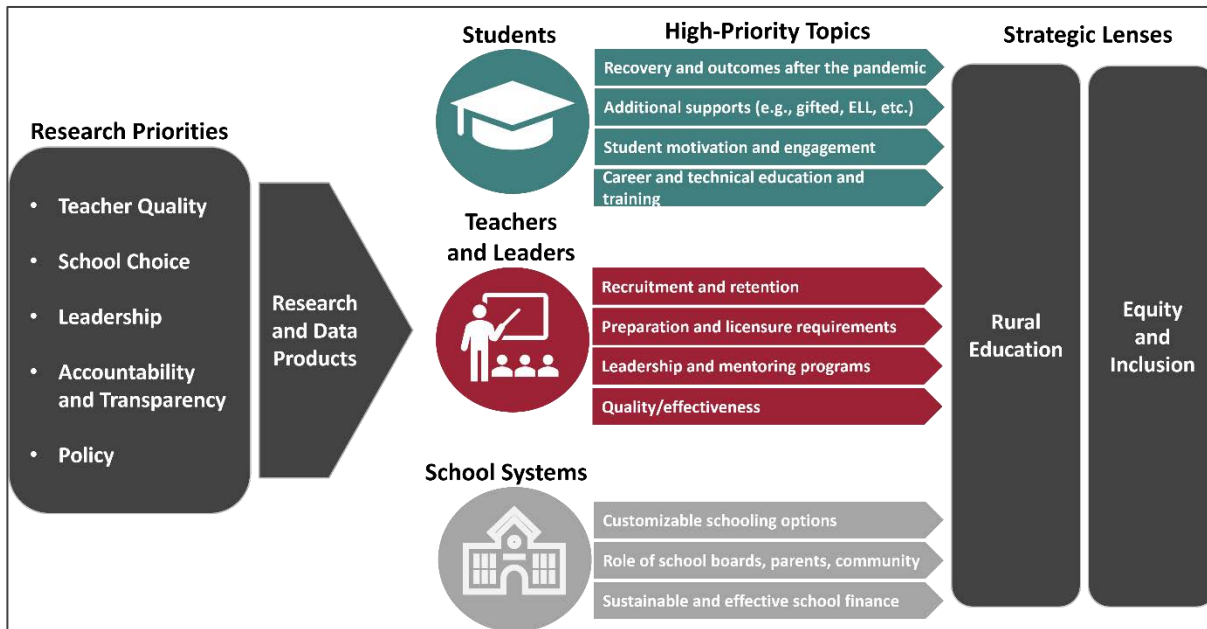
High Priority Topics

Overall, the focus group sessions validated the strategic direction, generated new and innovative ideas to support accelerating impact, and prioritized research topics in a meaningful way. This collaborative approach led EDRE to develop the following visual that communicates how the high priority topics and strategic lenses align with the original research priorities. This allows for clarity on key focus areas and enables stakeholders across multiple areas to understand the primary areas of focus for EDRE.

EDRE was founded based on a focused set of research priorities. From these, the department has always developed high priority topics that change and evolve based on the education landscape. This year, EDRE has validated the initial priority topics through the three focus groups and aligned them within three key audiences – (1) students, (2) teachers / leaders, and (3) school systems. The rising importance of rural education to Arkansas, and the national spotlight on equity and inclusion has given EDRE strategic lenses through which all research and data products are seen. This intentional addition serves as a reminder of the importance in the shifting landscape of today's education environment.



Department of Education Reform Strategic Plan Fall 2022



Five-year strategic plan (2023-2028)

The last two years have highlighted the unintended consequences of static strategic plans, often leaving organizations and institutions stranded, and seeking new ways of working and improving agility. EDRE will intentionally make this plan dynamic and iterative as they test and learn across the strategic objectives. They will frequently revisit the actions and measures to understand progress and adapt as needed. This will allow the department to enhance the provision of real-time value across their stakeholders and be able to proactively anticipate changes and growth opportunities.

Across each goal, EDRE has collaboratively developed strategic objectives, key actions, and measures. These strategic objectives all align to the original goals and support the overall strategy of EDRE – to produce research, shape policy, influence practice, convene collaborators, and prepare scholars. Over the past 17 years, meaningful and important progress has been made across each of these goals, but with the shifting landscape and changing environment, there is an opportunity to rethink priorities and develop new initiatives that will catalyze change to reach even greater heights for the future. EDRE is laser-focused on generating the best outcomes and meaningful impact across the state of Arkansas and beyond.



Department of Education Reform
Strategic Plan
Fall 2022

Goal 1: Improve the quality of education provided to Arkansas children who will eventually join the state's workforce.		
	Key actions	Measures
	Convene collaborators Create and maintain the EDRE Community Education Leadership Committee to garner valuable feedback	Establish Fall 2022 Ongoing meetings Spring 2023-2028 - Increased awareness of EDRE and associated work - High community engagement in research studies
	Shape policy Establish ongoing connection with the Arkansas Department of Education (ADE) leadership and staff to discuss priority topics and identify new areas of collaboration and research	Ongoing meetings Spring 2023-2028 - EDRE credibility across the ADE as seen through engagement with EDRE faculty - Presentations to ADE leadership/staff, State Board of Education, etc.
	Influence practice - Host ongoing high-quality virtual engagements for AR education stakeholders to inform and engage them in research dissemination - Host regional meetings with AR education stakeholders that promote discussion and research dissemination	Ongoing meetings Spring 2023-2028 # of AR education stakeholders engaged - Feedback received from AR education stakeholders (e.g., through an annual survey)
	Prepare scholars Introduce summer residency program for PhD students that places them in a diversified education setting and enables them to build partnerships and collaborate on new research opportunities	Begin program Spring 2025-2028 - Feedback received from PhD students - Feedback received from partner organizations
	Produce research - Annually produce Arkansas-related research and data products - Engage in studies and research related to AR education issues	Annual production Spring 2023-2028 Produce at least 6 AR-related products annually that have meaningful impact for policymakers and practitioners
	Produce research Hire a policy-focused faculty member in vacant position that will increase AR research productivity	Qualified faculty hired by Fall 2023 Successful search for new faculty member/department head



College of Education and Health Professions

Education Reform

Department of Education Reform Strategic Plan Fall 2022

	Produce research Collaborate with AR-based researchers, policymakers, and practitioners on research projects and partnerships	Starting Spring 2023-2028 # of collaborative projects with AR research scholars - At least 2 new research projects with AR collaborators annually # of multidisciplinary / sector research projects
3. Place and support alumni, students, and faculty in positions where they can positively influence Arkansas education	Convene collaborators - Actively seek out new placement opportunities for graduates, faculty, and students - Actively engage EDRE graduates, faculty, alumni, and students in prominent positions in AR so they feel connected - Develop and generate alumni, faculty and student marketing stories who are in prominent positions to place on website Prepare scholars - Generate alumni referrals for PhD program	Starting Spring 2023-2028 # of alumni, faculty, and students in prominent positions - Marketing results of key stories # of alumni referrals - Alumni engagement
4. Engage with national organizations and other states to publicize EDRE's work in Arkansas and to learn about ideas that could positively influence education in the state	Convene collaborators Seek out opportunities to participate in national/regional education policy meetings (e.g., Southern Regional Education Board, American Enterprise Institute, Education Policy Academy, etc.)	Conference participation Spring 2023-2028 - EDRE faculty and student participation in national conferences - AR education stakeholders engaged in meaningful discussion

Goal 2: Develop and implement demonstration projects in public schools that link research findings to classroom practice.

Strategic objectives	Key actions	Measures
1. Routinely engage with education stakeholders to identify and develop demonstration project ideas	Influence practice Discuss demonstration project ideas and collaboration opportunities with stakeholders	Annual production Spring 2023-2028 # of discussions on demonstration project ideas



Department of Education Reform
Strategic Plan
Fall 2022

2. Launch/conduct new demonstration projects	Influence practice - Work with stakeholders to develop prospective evaluations of promising policies or practices Shape policy - Leverage local voices from demonstration projects to inform and influence future policy and practice	Annual production Spring 2023-2028 - At least two demonstration projects annually # of stakeholders engaged in demonstration projects # of policies/practices impacted from demonstration projects
3. Produce and promote scholarly findings from completed demonstration projects	Influence practice - Disseminate scholarly findings from demonstration projects to key audiences - Leverage new forms of media and communication to scale results / learnings	Annual production Spring 2023-2028 # of education stakeholders that have been engaged with demonstration project results - Hits, mentions, and usage of online and media stories

Note: demonstration projects are defined as any research project that prospectively evaluates a program, service, or feature of the education system.

Goal 3: Enhance the positive perception of education quality in Arkansas thus contributing to the ability of the state to attract new business and a highly qualified workforce.		
Strategic objectives	Key actions	Measures
1. Identify, study, and promote positive developments, bright spots, and opportunities for improvement in AR education	Influence practice Distribute and publicize awards to AR districts celebrating successes (e.g., for high academic growth)	Results from Spring 2023-2028 - Types of awards given - Media coverage of school district awards - Feedback from school districts
	Produce research Conduct research projects related to AR public schools and highly promote positive findings, bright spots, and opportunities for improvement	Annual production from Spring 2023-2028 At least two new research projects on AR public schools annually
2. Assist faculty, students, and other AR education stakeholders participating in regional and national gatherings	Convene collaborators Seek opportunities to participate in high-profile regional or national gatherings	Conference participation from Spring 2023-2028 AR scholars and stakeholders are recognized for their expertise and innovative ideas
3. Support faculty, students, alumni, and other AR stakeholders in pursuit of high-profile awards	Prepare scholars Proactively identify awards to pursue, and invest resources in achieving those awards	Annual awards from Spring 2023-2028 - Achieve multiple awards annually - Increased national prominence of EDRE and education in Arkansas



Department of Education Reform
Strategic Plan
Fall 2022

4. Place and support students and alumni in prominent positions that enhance department visibility and demonstrate the quality of education in AR	Prepare scholars - Place graduates in diverse, high-profile positions across a variety of fields - Create media stories and coverage of diverse alumni placements	Measure Spring 2023-2028 # of different types of alumni placements - Media coverage of alumni placements
	Prepare scholars Create internal and external marketing campaign with faculty, students, and alumni stories to enhance awareness of the department and recruit high-quality, diverse students	Measure Spring 2023-2028 - Marketing effectiveness # of qualified PhD applications - Diversity of qualified PhD applications
	Convene collaborators - Establish an Alumni Advisory Board Prepare scholars - Establish sustainable feedback loops on doctoral program and opportunity areas	Establish Fall 2022 Ongoing meetings from Spring 2023-2028 Increased alumni engagement (e.g., recruitment, research, etc.)

Goal 4: Conduct a comprehensive and coordinated program of research within the five priority areas.

Strategic Objectives	Key actions	Measures
1. Actively engage with both AR and national education stakeholders to identify promising research opportunities and promote findings within each of the priority areas	Produce research - Actively seek research opportunities across all five priority areas - Develop a robust pipeline of ideas related to each of the five priority areas	Annual productivity Spring 2023-2028 # of research projects within each research priority area # of publications in each research priority area
2. Develop learning agendas around research priority areas and identify opportunities for coordination and collaboration across areas and faculty	Produce research - Collaboratively develop learning agendas around priority topics - Publicize strategic learning agendas broadly and across more stakeholders to drive awareness - Actively invite collaboration in research areas across different stakeholders	Annual productivity Spring 2023-2028 - Increased awareness of strategic research priorities across key stakeholders - New research collaboration partners
3. Annually produce a substantial number of peer-reviewed and other research products and track the	Produce research Generate a substantial number of peer-reviewed and other scholarly products	Annual productivity Spring 2023-2028 - Total # of publications by research priority area - Diversity of journals and other scholarly publication outlets



Department of Education Reform Strategic Plan Fall 2022

number of publications by priority area	Produce research Disseminate and present research among scholarly audiences broadly	Annual productivity Spring 2023-2028 - Awareness of research among key scholarly audiences (e.g., conferences, invited lectures, etc.) # and diversity of presentations of research among scholarly audiences
4. Seek opportunities to increase research capacity in priority areas through external funding, post docs, etc.	Produce research Create new ways of increasing research capacity in priority areas	Annual productivity Spring 2023-2028 - External funding - New research positions or capacities

Goal 5: Translate research findings into informational resources useful to school practitioners, policy makers and other interested parties.

Strategic objectives	Key actions	Measures
1. Actively engage with key audiences to understand their priorities and develop approaches to provide relevant content to meet their needs	Influence Practice - Create research dissemination effectiveness framework to increase coverage and awareness - Identify best methods of dissemination to reach key audiences	Ongoing dissemination Spring 2023-2028 # of translational publications by topic - Target audience feedback on translational content
2. Utilize translational content to inform policymakers	Shape policy - Leverage key influencers to translate and communicate research to policymakers - Shape research-informed policy in the state and beyond	Ongoing dissemination Spring 2023-2028 - Policies influenced by EDRE research - Policymakers' testimonies
3. Actively promote research findings and translational products among key audiences including news outlets, policymaker groups (e.g., National Conference of State Legislatures and National Governors Association), and education policy groups (e.g., PIE Network and 50 CAN)	Shape policy Proactively identify key audiences and craft dissemination plan for translational content	Ongoing media placements Spring 2023-2028 - Summary of dissemination by channel, audience type, etc. - Efficiency or views of research translational content by channel - Presentations to and citations from key audiences



Department of Education Reform

Strategic Plan

Fall 2022

Goal 6: Serve as a state and national information resource for public education to provide knowledge generated by research to a broad audience.		
Strategic objectives	Key actions	Measures
1. Serve as experts and trusted resource for key media outlets.	Influence practice - Leverage U of A media team to help proactively promote media placements - Invest time in interviews and media relations	Ongoing media placements Spring 2023-2028 - Media placements and coverage - Increased awareness of EDRE impact
2. Serve as experts for government organizations including task forces, legislative hearings / briefings, court cases, etc.	Shape policy Provide legislative briefings and testimony on education topics to create better-informed policymakers	Ongoing productivity Spring 2023-2028 - Increased awareness of EDRE expertise - Increased requests for EDRE participation
3. Serve as experts for non-profit and academic institutions including expert panels, invited presentations, strategy sessions, etc.	Influence practice Provide expertise to non-profit organizations and academic institutions working on education	Ongoing engagement Spring 2023-2028 # of roles at non-profit organizations (e.g., director) # of invited presentations, panels, etc.

Goal 7: Facilitate the scholarly exchange of views about education reform.		
Strategic objectives	Key actions	Measures
1. Host prominent and diverse outside scholars for free, public lectures.	Prepare scholars Identify nationally recognized scholars to be hosted on the U of A campus for free, public lectures to increase awareness and generate new initiatives	Scholar public lectures annually Spring 2023-2028 # of lectures and attendees # and diversity of meetings between outside scholars and local stakeholders
2. Bring in outside scholars and other prominent experts to participate in an annual conference and/or regional conferences for Arkansas education stakeholders and publish a summary of the conference proceedings.	Convene collaborators Engage nationally recognized scholars in an EDRE annual conference and / or scalable regional conferences that enable a broad audience to engage, learn, and grow	Annual conference Spring 2023-2028 # of outside scholars/experts engaged in conferences/meetings # of downloads/reads for published proceedings - Conference feedback survey



Department of Education Reform
Strategic Plan
Fall 2022

3. Take an active role in organizing and planning academic conferences and other scholarly meetings.	Convene collaborators Proactively seek out academic conferences and meetings to hold leadership positions and influence discussion topics / research dissemination	Annual conferences Fall 2023-2028 # of leadership roles in academic conferences and scholarly meetings
4. Collaborate with faculty from other departments, disciplines, and universities.	Convene collaborators Establish a scholars' forum / group that meets to share feedback and exchange about education policy	Establish Fall 2022 Ongoing meetings Fall 2023-2028 # of collaborative initiatives # of scholars / collaborators engaged - Increased awareness and credibility of EDRE among top scholars

Anticipated outcomes and activation

EDRE believes this strategic plan will lead to:

1. Meaningful and impactful research projects;
2. Informed policymakers and policies influenced by EDRE;
3. Improved education in AR and beyond;
4. Increased collaborators and collaboration projects; and
5. Highly qualified graduates launched into diverse placements.

EDRE will strategically prioritize the key actions within each priority to generate anticipated outcomes and success measures. The faculty will work together towards the strategic objectives of the plan with the activities described above. They will spend time activating and cultivating core external collaborator groups across alumni, scholars, and practitioners. They will also continue to leverage core assets such as OEP to partner across data-driven projects and expertise. Additionally, EDRE is committed to building collaborative relationships across the state with practitioners and policymakers and disseminating research to result in meaningful impact. There will be a continuous improvement plan in place to regularly evaluate results and iterate the strategic plan as needed across the dynamic, ever-changing education environment.