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## **PRESS RELEASE**

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### **Southeast Arkansas Counties Launch ACT Work Ready Communities Initiative**

Three counties in Southeast Arkansas: Arkansas, Grant, and Jefferson, today announced that it will launch efforts to meet all criteria to become certified ACT Work Ready Communities. The initiative will be officially launched during a celebration, which will be held on April 9, 2018, at the State Capitol Rotunda, from 10:30am-11:00am. Governor Asa Hutchinson will be the keynote speaker.

This achievement caps a five month engagement process and begins a two-year phase to earn certification, by meeting county goals as set by the ACT organization. The three counties now join seven other counties in Southeast Arkansas who have been engaged in the initiative since 2016. All ten counties in the region are now involved in the Initiative.

The ACT Work Ready Communities initiative is designed to assist a particular area, region or state in developing its workforce pipeline to provide skilled workers for employers. The framework allows each participating community to quantify and improve the skill levels of its workforce through a standardized workforce skill credential—the ACT National Career Readiness Certificate™—supported by data updated online by Iowa-based ACT on a monthly basis.

To begin this certification process, on Feb. 21-22, 2018 county leaders met in Pine Bluff and attended the ACT Work Ready Communities Regional Academy, an executive leadership and training program designed and facilitated by ACT. Southeast Arkansas Economic Development District (SEAEDD) served as organizers and host for the event with the support of the Workforce Alliance of Southeast Arkansas through the University of Arkansas at Monticello. They then began to work towards an official “Launch Date” and their certification goals by building awareness, cooperation and commitment with local employers, policymakers/elected officials, educators, workforce professionals, and economic developers. The two-day event was held at the Arkansas River Education Service Cooperative and attended by over 80 individuals from all three counties.

“We congratulate Arkansas, Grant, and Jefferson Counties for this significant achievement, and we are proud to add them to our growing list of ACT Work Ready Communities,” said Tony Garife, ACT Regional Manager, Workforce Initiatives. “The progressive thinking and positive action demonstrated by county leadership shows an enduring commitment to growing the economic success of the area. As a result, local residents will begin seeing the important linkage between education and workforce development and the value of matching people to jobs.” Mr. Gene

Higginbotham, SEAEDD Executive Director, also congratulated the three newly added counties indicating that their addition to the Program “is a very significant economic and strategic move toward the overall revitalization of the ten county region”.

The common building blocks of the initiative include:

- ACT WorkKeys® assessments: Standardized tests that measure an individual’s essential work readiness skills in applied mathematics, graphic literacy and workplace documents. According to decades of ACT research, these foundational skills are essential for a majority of today’s jobs.
- ACT National Career Readiness Certificate: A national credential based on assessment results and issued at the bronze, silver, gold or platinum level to indicate career readiness.
- ACT Career Curriculum: ACT KeyTrain® and ACT Soft Skills Suite training tools to help individuals improve their “hard” and “soft” skill levels, as well as ACT Career Ready 101™ to help teachers bring work readiness skills into the classroom.
- Job profiles: A job analysis system that helps employers understand the specific ACT WorkKeys assessment scores required for entry into and effective performance in a given job.

For more information on this initiative, please visit [workreadycommunities.org/AR](http://workreadycommunities.org/AR).