The Arkansas Better Chance (ABC) program began in 1991 as a part of a statewide education reform initiative. Since the first funding of $10 Million in 1991, the ABC funds were earmarked with the option to serve children birth to 5 years old based on family income, developmental, and/or economic risk factors. During the 2003 Legislative Session, Act 49 was passed, better known as Arkansas Better Chance for School Success (ABCSS), which includes priorities for funding for 3- and 4-year-olds up to 200% of the federal poverty level. Districts that have 75% of their children scoring below proficient in literacy and math on the State Benchmark exams and those children in schools designated as in “school improvement status” received funding priority. To date, a total of $111 Million is appropriated for the ABC/ABCSS programs which provide pre-K access in diverse settings, including Head Start, education service cooperatives, public schools, private business, family care homes, and nonprofit organizations.

The ABC/ABCSS program is funded through an appropriation in the Arkansas Department of Education’s (ADE) Public School Fund budget. ADE contracts with the Arkansas Department of Human Services’ (DHS) Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Education (DCCECE) to administer the program. The DCCECE is responsible for all operational duties associated with ABC through a shared governance structure with the AR Department of Education and AR State Board of Education.

Core components of ABC/ABCSS are intended to ensure quality education through provision of the following: qualified staff (teachers with a minimum of a bachelor’s degree and teacher assistants/paraprofessionals with a minimum of a CDA or its equivalent); low child-to-teacher ratios; health and development screenings; parent involvement and community engagement; non-curriculum, specific statewide evaluation (Work Sampling); an approved list of curriculum (which aligns with the state Early Learning Standards and Kindergarten Standards); and observations using the Environmental Rating Scale (ECERS).

Arkansas provides a Birth through Kindergarten Licensure as well as the Birth through Prekindergarten Teaching Credential to provide an additional professional pathway for individuals wishing to pursue a more advanced level of knowledge and skill in working with young children and their families. These options provide a route to higher education for the preparation of teachers and teacher assistants for all children, birth through age five, including children with special needs.

The Arkansas Child Development and Early Learning Standards: Birth through 60 Months was approved in 2016 replacing the Arkansas Early Childhood Education Framework for Three- and Four-Year-Old Children. The new standards encompass birth through five years of age and are aligned with the Arkansas Academic Standards for K-4/Language Arts and Math. Kellogg Foundation funding supported development of the Early Learning Standards via a cadre of Arkansas early education professionals as well as standards review and critique by nationally recognized leaders in the early childhood education field. ABC utilizes the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale to evaluate classroom quality and to design needed technical assistance for improvement, as well as evaluating the impact on child outcomes through a longitudinal study that is updated annually.

In December 2014, Arkansas was awarded a competitive federal Preschool Development Grant for $14.9 million. This grant afforded the state an opportunity to expand quality services to an additional 1,364 four-year-old children and enhance preschool services for 1,506 children enrolled in the ABC/ABCSS programs.

### ACCESS RANKINGS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>4-YEAR-OLDS</th>
<th>3-YEAR-OLDS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### RESOURCE RANKINGS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STATE SPENDING</th>
<th>ALL REPORTED SPENDING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### TOTAL BENCHMARKS MET

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CURRENT STANDARDS</th>
<th>NEW STANDARDS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ACCESS

Total state pre-K enrollment................................................. 20,285
School districts that offer state program .................100% (counties)
Income requirement.......................................................... 200% FPL
Minimum hours of operation ..............................7 hours/day; 5 days/week
Operating schedule.................................School or academic year
Special education enrollment, ages 3 and 4 ..................8,675
Federally funded Head Start enrollment, ages 3 and 4 ....7,506
State-funded Head Start enrollment, ages 3 and 4................0

QUALITY STANDARDS CHECKLIST

POLICY                      | AR PRE-K REQUIREMENT | CURRENT BENCHMARK | MEETS CURRENT BENCHMARK? | NEW BENCHMARK                      | MEETS NEW BENCHMARK?
---                        |                     |                  |                        |                              |                        
Early learning & development standards | Comprehensive, aligned, supported, culturally sensitive | Comprehensive | ✓ | Comprehensive, aligned, supported, culturally sensitive | ✓ |
Curriculum supports | Approval process & supports | New in 2015-2016 | — | Approval process & supports | ✓ |
Teacher degree | BA; AA (beyond the first classroom at a site) | BA | | BA | ❌ |
Teacher specialized training | ECE, CD, ECE SpEd | Specializing in pre-K | ✓ | Specializing in pre-K | ✓ |
Assistant teacher degree | CDA | CDA or equivalent | ✓ | CDA or equivalent | ✓ |
Staff professional development | 30 hours/year; PD plans | For teachers: At least 15 hours/year | ✓ | For teachers & assistants: At least 15 hours/year; individual PD plans; coaching | ❌ |
Maximum class size | 20 (3- & 4-year-olds) | 20 or lower | ✓ | 20 or lower | ✓ |
Staff-child ratio | 1:10 (3- & 4-year-olds) | 1:10 or better | ✓ | 1:10 or better | ✓ |
Screening & referral | Vision, hearing, health & more; Support services | Vision, hearing, health & at least one support service | ✓ | Vision, hearing & health screenings; & referral | ✓ |
Meals | Breakfast, lunch, snack | At least one meal/day | ✓ | Discontinued | — |
Monitoring/ Continuous quality improvement system | Structured classroom observations; Data used for program improvement | Site visits | ✓ | Structured classroom observation; program improvement plan | ✓ |

RESOURCES

Total state pre-K spending ................................................. $111,000,000
Local match required? .......................................................... Yes
State Head Start spending .................................................. $0
State spending per child enrolled ........................................ $5,472
All reported spending per child enrolled* ......................... $7,696

* Pre-K programs may receive additional funds from federal or local sources that are not included in this figure.
** Head Start per-child spending includes funding only for 3- and 4-year-olds.
*** K-12 expenditures include capital spending as well as current operating expenditures.