Arkansas preschool enrolled 20,186 children in 2018-2019, a decrease of 432 children from the prior year. State funding totaled $105,776,553 with an additional $7,500,000 in TANF funds to support the programs, down $4,800,418 (4%), adjusted for inflation, since last year. State spending per child (including TANF funds) equaled $5,612 in 2018-2019, down $115 from 2017-2018, adjusted for inflation. Arkansas met 8 of 10 quality standards benchmarks.

What's New
As a result of the State Transformation Act 910, during the 2019-2020 school year the Arkansas Better Chance (ABC) program officially transitioned from the Arkansas Department of Human Services (DHS): Division of Childcare and Early Childhood Education (DCCECE) to the Arkansas Department of Education: Division of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) with a team of nine staff members. DESE has administrative oversight of the ABC Program and works collaboratively with the DCCECE to ensure the continuation of high-quality services for preschool age children in the state.

Background
The Arkansas Better Chance (ABC) program began in 1991 as part of a statewide education reform initiative, with funding ($10 million) earmarked to serve children birth to 5 years old based on family income, developmental, and/or economic risk factors. In 2003, legislation known as Arkansas Better Chance for School Success (ABCSS) set priorities for funding, supporting 3- and 4-year olds in households with incomes up to 200% of the federal poverty level. School districts with 75% or more of their students scoring below proficient in literacy and math on the State Benchmark exams (statewide assessment), and children in schools designated as “school improvement status” received funding priority.

In 2014, Arkansas was awarded a $14.9 million federal Preschool Development Grant (PDG) enabling the state to expand quality services to 1,368 additional children and enhance preschool services for 1,464 children already enrolled during the 2018-2019 school year. After the grant ended in June 2019, the Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Education (DCCECE) provided resources through federal Child Care and Development Funds to continue funding these services. The funding and requirements align with the ABC program requirements.

ABC/ABCSS components intended to ensure quality include: teachers with at least a bachelor’s degree and an associate’s degree beyond the first classroom at a site; teacher assistants/paraprofessionals with a minimum of a CDA or equivalent; low child-to-teacher ratios (1:10); health and development screenings; parent involvement and community engagement; statewide evaluation (Work Sampling); an approved list of curriculum aligned with the 2016 Arkansas Child Development and Early Learning Standards; and classroom quality observations to inform technical assistance; and an evaluation of child outcomes through a longitudinal study.

Arkansas provides additional pathways for those working with young children to gain advanced knowledge and skill, such as Birth through Kindergarten Licensure and a Birth through Prekindergarten Teaching Credential. These pathways prepare teachers to work with all children, birth through age five, including children with special needs.
**ACCESS**

Total state pre-K enrollment ........................................... 20,186
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 .................. 8,385
Federally funded Head Start enrollment, ages 3 and 4 ...... 6,561
State-funded Head Start enrollment, ages 3 and 4 .......... 0

**QUALITY STANDARDS CHECKLIST**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>POLICY</th>
<th>AR PRE-K REQUIREMENT</th>
<th>BENCHMARK</th>
<th>REQUIREMENT MEETS BENCHMARK?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Early learning &amp; development standards</td>
<td>Comprehensive, aligned, supported, culturally sensitive</td>
<td>Comprehensive, aligned, supported, culturally sensitive</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum supports</td>
<td>Approval process &amp; supports</td>
<td>Approval process &amp; supports</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher degree</td>
<td>BA; AA beyond first classroom at a site</td>
<td>BA</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher specialized training</td>
<td>ECE, CD, ECE SpEd</td>
<td>Specializing in pre-K</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant teacher degree</td>
<td>CDA</td>
<td>CDA or equivalent</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff professional development</td>
<td>30 hours/year; PD plans</td>
<td>For teachers &amp; assistants: At least 15 hours/year; individual PD plans; coaching</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maximum class size</td>
<td>20 (3- &amp; 4-year-olds)</td>
<td>20 or lower</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff-child ratio</td>
<td>1:10 (3- &amp; 4-year-olds)</td>
<td>1:10 or better</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Screening &amp; referral</td>
<td>Vision, hearing, health &amp; more</td>
<td>Vision, hearing &amp; health screenings; &amp; referral</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuous quality improvement system</td>
<td>Structured classroom observations; Data used for program improvement</td>
<td>Structured classroom observations; data used for program improvement</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For more information about the benchmarks, see the Executive Summary and Roadmap to State Profile Pages.

**RESOURCES**

Total state pre-K spending ........................................ $113,276,553
Local match required? .................................................. Yes
State Head Start spending .......................................... $0
State spending per child enrolled ................................. $5,612
All reported spending per child enrolled* ...................... $9,332

* 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.

**PERCENT OF POPULATION ENROLLED IN PUBLIC ECE**

3-YEAR-OLD:
- Pre-K: 18%
- Head Start†: 10%
- Special Ed††: 5%
- Other/None: 67%

4-YEAR-OLD:
- Pre-K: 32%
- Head Start†: 7%
- Special Ed††: 10%
- Other/None: 51%

† Some Head Start children may also be counted in state pre-K.
†† Estimates children in special education not also enrolled in state pre-K or Head Start.

**SPENDING PER CHILD ENROLLED**

- PRE-K*: $9,332
- HDST**: $8,188
- K-12***: $11,595

Data are for the 2018-2019 school year, unless otherwise noted.