OVERVIEW
During the 2020-2021 school year, as the COVID-19 pandemic continued, Arkansas preschool enrolled 17,325 children, a decrease of 2,872 children from the prior year. State funding totaled $106,500,000 with an additional $7,500,000 in TANF funds and $33,456,799 in federal recovery funds to support the program, up $31,315,917 (27%), adjusted for inflation, since last year. State spending per child (including TANF and federal recovery funds) equaled $8,511 in 2020-2021, up $2,761 from 2019-2020, adjusted for inflation. Arkansas met 8 of 10 quality standards benchmarks.

WHAT’S NEW
Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, all Arkansas Better Chance (ABC) programs remained open. If a physical closure of a program due to COVID-19 response levels was required, the program followed the guidance of the Arkansas Department of Health and CDC. During the mandatory quarantine periods, ABC programs followed their approved Ready For Learning Plan by providing families with learning activities, materials and supplies, and support and guidance in order to continue the children’s early childhood education remotely. Providers reported an increase in communication and relationships between teaching staff and parents during the 2020-2021 school year.

Despite lower enrollment, each ABC grantees was paid the full awarded grant amount to maintain their business, pay the staff, and provide services for children and families returning to work and school. Arkansas also used $33 million in CARES funding during the 2020-2021 school year in addition to the typical state, local, and federal funding used to support the program.

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 prioritized funding.

ABC/ABCSS components intended to ensure quality include: one teacher with at least a bachelor’s degree per every three classrooms at a site and teachers with an associate degree in the other two classrooms; 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 Pre-kindergarten Teaching Credential. These pathways prepare teachers to work with all children, birth through age five, including children with special needs.
ARKANSAS BETTER CHANCE/ARKANSAS BETTER CHANCE FOR SCHOOL SUCCESS

ACCESS
Total state pre-K enrollment............................................. 17,325
School districts that offer state program.......................... 99% (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................... 6,768
Federally funded Head Start enrollment, ages 3 and 4..... 5,926
State-funded Head Start enrollment, ages 3 and 4............ 0

QUALITY STANDARDS CHECKLIST

POLICY | AR PRE-K REQUIREMENT | BENCHMARK | REQUIREMENT MEETS BENCHMARK?
--- | --- | --- | ---
Early learning & development standards | Comprehensive, aligned, supported, culturally sensitive | Comprehensive, aligned, supported, culturally sensitive | 
Curriculum supports | Approval process & supports | Approval process & supports | 
Teacher degree | One BA per 3 classrooms; AA for other 2 classrooms | BA | 
Teacher specialized training | ECE, CD, ECE SpEd | Specializing in pre-K | 
Assistant teacher degree | CDA | CDA or equivalent | 
Staff professional development | 30 hours/year; PD plans (public teachers only) | For teachers & assistants: At least 15 hours/year; individual PD plans; coaching | 
Maximum class size | 20 (3- & 4-year-olds) | 20 or lower | 
Staff-child ratio | 1:10 (3- & 4-year-olds) | 1:10 or better | 
Screening & referral | Vision, hearing, health & more | Vision, hearing & health screenings; & referral | 
Continuous quality improvement system | Structured classroom observations; Data used for program improvement | Structured classroom observations; data used for program improvement | 

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

RESOURCES
Total state pre-K spending ................................................. $147,456,799
Local match required? .......................................................... Yes
State Head Start spending .................................................. $0
State spending per child enrolled .................................. $8,511
All reported spending per child enrolled* ......................... $12,530

SPENDING PER CHILD ENROLLED

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>State contributions</th>
<th>Federal contributions</th>
<th>TANF spending</th>
<th>Federal COVID-19 relief spending</th>
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$ THOUSANDS

* 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.

Data are for the 2020-2021 school year, unless otherwise noted.