**Arkansas**

**OVERVIEW**

During the 2021-2022 school year, Arkansas preschool enrolled 19,097 children, an increase of 1,772 from the prior year, as the program began to recover from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. State spending totaled $106,500,000 and an additional $7,500,000 in TANF funds and $23,535,701 in federal recovery funds supported the program, down $22,161,173 (14%), adjusted for inflation since last year. State spending per child (including TANF and federal recovery funds) equaled $7,202 in 2021-2022, down $2,016 from 2020-2021, adjusted for inflation. Arkansas met 8 of 10 quality standards benchmarks.

**WHAT'S NEW**

For the second year in a row, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Arkansas paid each Arkansas Better Chance (ABC) grantee the full awarded grant amount during the 2021-22 school year, to maintain their business, pay staff, and provide services for children and families. Arkansas is also in the second year of the Pre-K R.I.S.E. Early Childhood Literacy Initiative with a sharpened focus on early literacy by providing professional development grounded in the Science of Reading to strengthen instruction in foundational literacy as well as provide high quality instructional materials to align research and practice. The LearnERS: Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) Coaching Framework is being piloted to combine collaborative relationships to support CQI by providing job embedded professional development to early childhood educators across the state based on individual CQI growth plans. The T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood Arkansas Scholarship and the Step Up to WAGE$ wage supplement programs have been developed in Arkansas to increase the level of education for early childhood educators while making the educational process affordable, increasing wages, and reducing turnover.

In December 2022, Arkansas was awarded a federal Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five (PDG B–5) three-year renewal grant for $12 million. The state plans to use the funding to provide additional support for enhancement of infant and toddler care, family engagement and trauma informed care for children ages three to five.

**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 Assessment, and children in schools designated as “school improvement status” receive 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 child assessment (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.

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**ACCESS RANKINGS**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>4-YEAR-OLDS</th>
<th>3-YEAR-OLDS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>6</td>
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**RESOURCE RANKINGS**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>STATE SPENDING</th>
<th>ALL REPORTED SPENDING</th>
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<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>12</td>
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**TOTAL BENCHMARKS MET**

8

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THE STATE OF PRESCHOOL 2022 - STATE PRESCHOOL YEARBOOK - NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR EARLY EDUCATION RESEARCH - WWW.NIEER.ORG
ARKANSAS BETTER CHANCE/ARKANSAS BETTER CHANCE FOR SCHOOL SUCCESS

ACCESS

Total state pre-K enrollment................................. 19,097
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.................... 7,297
Federally funded Head Start enrollment, ages 3 and 4........ 5,758
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 | Yes
Curriculum supports | Approval process & supports | Approval process & supports | Yes
Teacher degree | One BA per 3 classrooms; AA for other 2 classrooms | BA | No
Teacher specialized training | ECE, CD, ECE SpEd | Specializing in pre-K | Yes
Assistant teacher degree | CDA | CDA or equivalent | Yes
Staff professional development | 30 hours/year; PD plans; Coaching for novice teachers | For teachers & assistants: At least 15 hours/year; individual PD plans; coaching | No
Maximum class size | 20 (3- & 4-year-olds) | 20 or lower | Yes
Staff-child ratio | 1:10 (3- & 4-year-olds) | 1:10 or better | Yes
Screening & referral | Vision, hearing, health & more | Vision, hearing & health screenings; & referral | Yes
Continuous quality improvement system | Structured classroom observations; Data used for program improvement | Structured classroom observations; data used for program improvement | Yes

For more information about the benchmarks, see the Executive Summary and Roadmap to State Profile Pages.
* Indicates that while policy meets the benchmark, it is not being implemented fully.

RESOURCES

Total state pre-K spending................................. $137,535,701
Local match required?................................. Yes
State Head Start spending................................. $0
State spending per child enrolled............................ $7,202
All reported spending per child enrolled*................. $11,086

PERCENT OF POPULATION ENROLLED IN PUBLIC ECE

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>3-YEAR-OLDS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-K</td>
<td>Head Start†</td>
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<tr>
<td>17%</td>
<td>9%</td>
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<tr>
<td>29%</td>
<td>6%</td>
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† 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

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<th>$ THOUSANDS</th>
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<tr>
<td>PRE-K*</td>
<td>$11,086</td>
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<tr>
<td>HDST†</td>
<td>$9,217</td>
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<tr>
<td>K-12‡</td>
<td>$12,945</td>
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* 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 2021-2022 school year, unless otherwise noted.