

Early Childhood Committee

Overview of the Office of Early Childhood

Monday, August 17, 2026 • 1:00 PM



Section 1

Early Childhood Funding Streams



CCDF including School Readiness Assistance (SRA)

SRA is Arkansas's child care subsidy program, funded federally through the Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF).

Total funding amount
\$124,789,900

Number of children served
10,527

Number of providers
890

Using the Direct Services Portion of CCDF:
Ages/population served

Children under 13, or under 18 with a disability, in families:

- At or below 85% of the State Median Income,
- All adults in the household must be working 30 hours, or enrolled full time in school/job training
- TANF-certified families
- Children in foster care
- Families experiencing homelessness as defined by OEC
- Children with special needs, as defined by OEC

How funding flows

- Families apply directly to OEC for a voucher and choose their own provider.
- OEC reimburses that provider based on the child's attendance, so the funding follows the family.
- Providers must be licensed or registered with OEC and hold a CCDF Program Participant Agreement.



Arkansas Better Chance (ABC)

Arkansas's state-funded early childhood program, supported by state general revenue and, in part, TANF.

Total funding amount	Number of children served in 25-26	Number of children to be served 26-27	Number of agencies
\$114,000,000	21,213	23,092	219

Using the Direct Services Portion:

Ages/population served

Children birth to five, with the majority of seats serving three- and four-year-olds, in families:

- At or below 200% of the federal poverty level*
- Meeting Title I income criteria.
- With children that qualify through risk factors such as a developmental delay, a teen parent, or limited English proficiency.

How funding flows

- Local Leads request seats for their communities through the annual Coordinated Funding Request.
- The state appropriation flows to OEC, which awards allocations to grantees:
 - School districts
 - Educational cooperatives
 - Child care centers
 - Family child care homes
 - Home visiting



*Foster children and children of military parents who are on active duty overseas are exempt from the income requirement.

Head Start & Early Head Start

Federally funded early childhood programs, awarded directly to local grantees by the federal government — bypassing OEC.

Total funding amount
\$128,351,357

Number of children served
6,449

Number of grantees
18

Ages/population served

Children birth to five in families:

- At or below the federal poverty guidelines.
- Experiencing homelessness
- Receiving TANF or SSI

Children in foster care are also eligible for this funding.

How funding flows

- Local grantees apply and re-apply directly to the federal Office of Head Start, and funds flow from the federal Administration for Children and Families straight to the grantee.
- There is no state role in the funding decision but OEC houses the Head Start Collaboration Office, which coordinates:
 - Head Start
 - Early Head Start
 - Migrant/Seasonal Head Start



Early Intervention Day Treatment (EIDT)

Federal and state funding through Medicaid, administered by the Arkansas Department of Human Services — not OEC.

Number of children served

6,742

Number of providers

132

Funding

Medicaid reimbursement

Ages/population served

Children birth to six with:

- A documented developmental disability or delay; and
- A doctor's prescription establishing need for services, who meet DHS clinical and Medicaid eligibility criteria.

How funding flows

- DHS's Division of Developmental Disabilities Services determines eligibility and authorizes services, and DHS pays providers directly through Medicaid reimbursement.
- Providers need two approvals: EIDT certification from DHS and a child care facility license from ADE.
- OEC's role is licensing and quality only, with no funding role unless a site also receives ABC or SRA.
 - EIDT does not run through the Coordinated Funding Request.



Preschool Development Grant B-5

A competitive federal award for systems building — one-time funding, administered by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families.

Total funding amount for 2026

\$14,751,000

Award period

January 1 – December 31, 2026

How the funding is being used

- Local Leads, as community-level implementation partners running the child count, CLASS observations, and coordinated enrollment
- Quality enhancement grants paid directly to providers during the transition to a CLASS-based quality system
- Third-party CLASS observations across publicly funded early childhood settings
- Workforce retention incentives, flowing through the Arkansas Early Childhood Association (AECA) - for which AECA has already received over 1,800 applications
- A statewide roadmap for a unified early childhood data system, modernized licensing training modules, and a CCDF budgeting and forecasting tool



Public School Districts

Flexible federal and local funds that school districts may choose to invest in early childhood. These decisions are made locally, not by OEC.

Title I, Part A

May serve children below the grade at which the district provides free elementary education, with priority to children most at risk academically.

IDEA, Part B, Section 619

Serves children ages three to five identified with a disability, plus two-year-olds who will turn three during the school year. It funds special education and related services for children within a preschool classroom.

Rural Education Achievement Program (REAP)

Districts designated rural by the U.S. Department of Education may apply REAP funds to any activity allowable under Title I, Part A — which federal guidance specifically includes high-quality preschool.

Local taxes

Fully at district discretion. A district may invest local funds in early childhood classrooms, quality improvements, or other early learning priorities.



Efficiencies

OEC brought spending in line with available funding while preserving family choice.

School Readiness Assistance

- Copayments assist OEC in stabilizing the School Readiness Assistance program
- Maximum reimbursement rates are set at the 75th percentile of market rate
 - OEC is currently working on an updated Market Rate Survey and Cost Analysis
- Provider payments are made weekly
- The SRA team is conducting provider checks to ensure proper funding expenditures

Arkansas Better Chance

- No longer paying for funded seats that were not filled
- Allocations based more precisely on demonstrated community need
- Enrollment verified more frequently, with unused seats reallocated
- The ABC team is conducting provider checks to ensure proper funding expenditures
- ABC team is cross checking the SRA waitlist to identify children that may be eligible for ABC



Section 2

Questions

Questions submitted in advance of the Early Childhood Committee meeting,
Monday, August 17, 2026.



Supply & Stability

How many licensed providers are currently operating, how many opened and closed this month, and what is the net change in capacity?
What were the reasons for closures, broken down by county?

- There are 1825 licensed providers currently operating in Arkansas
- As of 8/11/2026, 16 providers were approved to become a licensed provider in August 2026.
- As of 8/11/2026, 9 licensed providers had closed in August 2026.
- Net Change in Total Licensed Capacity is 475
 - Infant/Toddlers capacity: -44
 - Preschool capacity: 245
 - School aged capacity: 266

Reason for closures, broken down by county:

County	Number of Providers That Closed	Reason
Pulaski	2	Unable To Renew Their Lease, Ownership Change
Sebastian	2	Unknown, Relocation
Polk	1	Financial
Washington	1	Consolidation Of License Program On The Same Campus
Franklin	1	Owner Retirement
Union	1	Retirement
Dallas	1	New Ownership



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Enrollment & Utilization

How many children are currently enrolled by age group (infant, toddler, preschool, school-age), and what is capacity utilization statewide and by region?

As of August, 2026, there are 10,527 children enrolled in the SRA program across age groups.

- **Enrollment by age group:**
 - Infant: 277
 - Toddler: 1,552
 - Preschool: 4,555
 - School-age: 4,143
- **Capacity SRA utilization statewide is ~13.2%**
- **Capacity by region*:**
 - Central: ~16.3%
 - Northeast: ~13.2%
 - Northwest: ~6.5%
 - South Central: ~18.1%
 - Southeast: ~18.3%
 - Southwest: ~17%
 - West Central: ~18.2%

*Capacity varies greatly based on the weight of population within each region. Regional percentages do not directly average to the statewide percentage.



SRA & ABC Reach

How many children are served through SRA vouchers and Arkansas Better Chance, including breakdowns for children with disabilities and rural vs. urban participation?

- The SRA program is currently serving 10,527 children
- Children Served in Rural Counties
 - 2,010
- Children Served in Urban Counties
 - 7,286
- Children Served in Benton/Washington Counties
 - 1,231
- Number of Children with Disabilities
 - 16

The ABC program served 21,213 children during the 2025-2026 program year including:

- Children Served in Rural Counties
 - 10,559
- Children Served in Urban Counties
 - 8,523
- Children Served in Benton/Washington Counties
 - 2,131

Among the 21,213 children served, 2,310 were identified as having disabilities.



SRA Waitlist

How many families/children are waiting for CCDBG vouchers, what is the average and longest wait time, how many were removed from the list (and why), and which counties show the greatest unmet need?

● 2,364 families are on the waitlist for SRA vouchers ● Number of children on the waitlist (3,428 total): ○ Infant (0-18 m): 535 ○ Toddler (19-35 m): 882 ○ Preschool (36-59 m): 958 ○ School age (>= 60 m): 1,053 ● The average wait time is 254.25 days ● The longest recorded wait time is 531 days	● Homeless/Teens ○ Families: 77 ○ Children: 92 ● Children with Special Needs ○ Families: 3 ○ Children: 3 ● Transitioning out of Foster Care* ○ Families: 8 ○ Children: 10 ● TANF ○ Families: 224 ○ Children: 380
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ABC Waitlist

How many children are on the ABC waiting list, and of those, how many are unable to enroll due to lack of classroom space versus lack of staffing?

ABC does not maintain a statewide waitlist. Local programs may maintain waitlists when demand exceeds available funded slots.

Programs reporting waitlists indicate that children are waiting due to limited ABC-funded slots, not classroom space or staffing shortages.



Workforce

What is the current teacher vacancy and turnover rate, average wages/benefits, and how many teachers earned credentials or participated in scholarship programs this month? What is the director vacancy rate?

OEC does not currently track teacher or director vacancy and turnover rates, but there is data on more specific parts of the system.

- Average wages for the 2026-27 school year:
 - ABC lead teacher: \$45,853
 - ABC paraprofessional: \$23,846
 - OEC does not track the wages and benefits of all early childhood teachers.
- For the TEACH Early Childhood Arkansas Scholarship Program:
 - 172 TEACH scholars took summer college courses
 - 11 submitted graduation documents for review to date; Summer II term just ended
 - 251 TEACH scholars enrolled for fall as of August 11th



Quality & Compliance

How many providers are participating in quality improvement, how many licensing deficiencies or serious incidents were recorded, and how many programs are on corrective action plans, probation, or lost their license?

- In the 2025-2026 school year, over 3,000 classrooms across more than 1,200 sites received a CLASS observation as part of the pilot year of the new QRIS.
- As of 8/14/2026, there were 83 licensing deficiencies recorded in August. There have been 6 serious injuries reported to date.
- As of 8/11/2026, there are two providers are on Corrective Action Plans and none on Probation. One provider currently has a suspended license.



Finance

What is the year-to-date spending against the CCDF and ABC appropriations, what remains, what were administrative costs, and how timely were provider payments this month?

As of August 10, 2026, the Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) has a projected yearly budget of \$124.8 million and the Arkansas Better Chance (ABC) Program has a budget of \$114 million.

- **CCDF budget (Oct 1- Sept. 30- timeline)**
- **Expended - \$66.3 million expended**
- **Remaining- \$58 million remaining**
- **Total: \$124 million**
- **CCDF expenditures as of 8/10/26 include:**
 - \$45.2 million in Direct Services
 - \$12.9 million in Quality activities
 - \$3.9 million in Non-Direct Services
 - \$3.3 million in administrative costs
 - \$987,408 in Infant-Toddler Quality activities
- **Provider payments continue to be processed on a weekly basis, and the vast majority are issued on time.**
 - While occasional delays may occur due to minor processing or system issues, these instances are rare, typically affect only an individual provider, and are resolved as quickly as possible to minimize any impact.



Finance

What is the year-to-date spending against the CCDF and ABC appropriations, what remains, what were administrative costs, and how timely were provider payments this month?

As of August 10, 2026, the Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) has a budget of \$124.8 million and the **Arkansas Better Chance (ABC) Program** has a budget of \$114 million.

- ABC budget (July 1- June 30 timeline)
- Expended: \$12.7 million expended
- Remaining: \$101.3 million remaining
- Total: \$114 million
- ABC expenditures 8/10/26 include:
 - \$12.2 million in Grants and Contracts
 - \$469,061.04 in Operations
- Provider payments continue to be processed on a monthly basis
Per enrollment with the expectation of 100% enrollment



Access Gaps

Which counties currently have no infant care or qualify as child care deserts, what is average tuition by age group, and how many providers accept versus decline vouchers?

- Of the 1,825 Licensed Child Care Providers in the state, 890 providers accept SRA.
- Lafayette County is the only county that currently has no licensed infant and toddler care.
- Currently, there is no mechanism to identify average tuition rates.
 - Market Rate Survey & Cost Analysis : Procurement process - Contract Review 8/18/26



SRA Outcomes

How many families newly entered or exited the program this month, what is the employment status of subsidy-receiving parents, and what are the latest kindergarten readiness and family satisfaction results for ABC graduates?

SRA

- Seven families have been newly added to the SRA program this month.
- We are currently working to reconcile the number of families that have exited the program.
- Of the 6,941 families being served, 5,819 are employed.



ABC Outcomes

How many families newly entered or exited the program this month, what is the employment status of subsidy-receiving parents, and what are the latest kindergarten readiness and family satisfaction results for ABC graduates?

Kindergarten Readiness for ABC Graduates		
Domain	Children Assessed	Percent of Children Meeting Proficient
Personal and Social Development	12,483	82.5%
Language and Literacy	12,484	75.4%
Mathematical Thinking	12,482	71.2%
Scientific Thinking	12,484	76.7%
Social Studies	12,482	75.4%
The Arts	12,478	86.4%
Physical Development, Health, and Safety	12,479	87.7%



2026 ADE Summit sessions

OEC-led and OEC-partnered sessions at the 2026 ADE Summit, with presenters.

- **Closing the Gap V2: How Pre-K Outcomes Shape Long-Term Success**
 - Dr. Sarah Argue and Jennifer Douglas
- **Collaborative Leadership for CLASS Implementation: Lessons from Bald Knob Early Childhood**
 - Amy Pinkston, Local Lead, and Abby Baker, Bald Knob Early Childhood Center
- **Impact Through Quality: Introducing the New Quality Support System**
 - Kelly Haley
- **Stronger Together: Partnering with Business to Expand Child Care Access**
 - Jennifer Douglas and Allison Williams
- **Charting the Course: From Pre-K Play to ATLAS Success**
 - Wendy Green, Chrissy Sain, Katlin Neimeyer, and Shasta Pentecost
- **What's on the Menu? Strengthening CLASS Interactions in Pre-K**
 - Wendy Green, Chrissy Sain, Katlin Neimeyer, Shasta Pentecost, and Jodi Whitman



ADE Summit

Could you let us know if anything regarding early childhood was presented or discussed at this year's ADE Summit? If so, please share the topics and any provider input that was gathered.

OEC led or partnered on six sessions at the 2026 ADE Summit.

Provider input gathered:

- Pre-K outcomes and kindergarten readiness — using the Early Development Instrument to identify developmental inequities before children enter the classroom
- CLASS implementation — how a Local Lead and a preschool director used shared goal-setting, aligned professional development, and coaching to strengthen classroom practice
- The new quality support system — updates to the HQIM Approved Curriculum List and changes to the curriculum review process
- Business partnerships to expand child care access — cross-sector work on affordability, accessibility, and quality
- Pre-K to kindergarten transition — using CDELS standards and HQIM curricula to target the readiness skills measured by the ATLAS screener
- Interactions at mealtimes — drawn from more than 150 CLASS observations, showing 30 to 45 minutes a day often treated as time to get through

