

# **Interim Study on Grade-Level Reading**

**October 2014**

**Interim Study Proposal 2013-001**

**Sponsored by Senator David Johnson**

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## Acknowledgment

During the 2013 legislative session, Senator David Johnson requested an interim study to determine effective strategies to ensure that all Arkansas students are reading at grade level by the end of third grade by 2020.

A working group was formed to guide the development of the report. The following organizations served on that working group.

Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families  
Arkansas Association of Educational Administrators  
Arkansas Campaign for Grade-Level Reading  
Arkansas Department of Education  
Arkansas Department of Human Services  
Arkansas Education Association  
Arkansas Out of School Network  
Arkansas Public Policy Panel  
Arkansas School Boards Association  
Rural Community Alliance  
Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation

## Executive Summary

In the 2012-2013 school year, only 76 percent of Marvell-Elaine students graduated from high school, and 100 percent of graduates who went to college took remedial classes. The Marvell-Elaine School District (MESD) is working to change these outcomes for its students by starting early – in pre-K and the early elementary grades. **They know that a child’s ability to read on grade level by the end of third grade is a strong predictor of how well he will perform in school, how likely he is to graduate from high school, and how likely he is to enter college and graduate.** Over the past few years, MESD has made significant progress. The percentage of third graders reading on grade level increased from 53 percent during the 2010-2011 school year to 69 percent during the 2012-2013 school year. The elementary school has moved from having a Needs Improvement Focus designation to become an Achieving school.

Arkansas’s economic success is dependent on raising educational achievement. We need to make sure that all third graders are reading on grade-level and that all schools are making the kind of progress that Marvell-Elaine is making. **Unfortunately, national assessments show that only 32 percent of Arkansas’s fourth graders are reading on grade level, and there are huge gaps along economic and racial lines.** Fortunately, the research tells us what we need to do – we need to make sure that children are ready for school, we need to improve what happens during the school day, and we need to improve what happens after school and during the summer.

## What can we do to make sure children are ready for school?

Recent research on brain development has dramatically changed the way we think about early childhood education. The building blocks for learning begin with language development, which starts before a child reaches her first birthday. Having access to quality learning environments at home and in early care settings is critical to prepare children for school.

**Current Policy.** In Arkansas, preschool education is not provided through one single program or system. Rather, there is an array of resources that includes state and federally funded programs as well as providers for which parents must pay. The locations of preschool programs vary as well and may include family day care homes, child care centers, schools, and home-based programs. Support for early childhood education is provided through the Arkansas Better Chance (ABC) program, Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF), Head Start, the Maternal Infant and Early Childhood Home Visiting Program, Title I and NSLA funds, and fees paid by parents to private providers.

**Outcomes.** The early childhood period (birth to age 5) is a time of rapid brain development. Early experiences are the foundation on which all later learning is built; they play a large role in determining how brain connections or “wiring” are formed. This sets the stage for language development and later reading. Longitudinal research shows that children who attend pre-K programs are more likely to graduate from high school, attend college, earn higher wages and hold a job, and less likely to use public assistance or commit a crime. Two 2013 studies find that children who attend ABC show positive outcomes, including improved scores in vocabulary and math through the second grade and in literacy through the third grade, and that ABC has shrunk the education gap between economically disadvantaged students and other children.

**Gaps and Barriers.** While the research is clear about the value and impact of early childhood education, including the state’s ABC program, funding for ABC has not kept pace with inflation. Only 56 percent of eligible 3- and 4-year olds in the state have access to high quality pre-K, either through ABC or Head Start. Funding that could be used for pre-K is being spent on less effective programs.

**Models.** States like Alabama, Oklahoma, Georgia, and New Jersey provide lessons on how Arkansas can better support pre-K. Furthermore, innovative models in Georgia; Tulsa, Oklahoma; and Providence, Rhode Island provide examples for how to focus on early language development starting from birth.

## What can we do to improve what happens during the school day?

While there are many different strategies that could be used to improve what happens during the school day, this report focuses on support for Priority and Focus schools, teacher preparation and certification, chronic absence, and retention of students.

### Support for Priority and Focus Schools

Every child deserves the opportunity to attend a school that can provide him with the education he needs to succeed in life. Some schools have a more difficult time meeting the needs of their students, for a range of reasons that include low levels of parent engagement, limited professional development for teachers, and a lack of leadership by the administration or school board.

**Current Policy.** When the U.S. Department of Education approved an Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) waiver for the state, Arkansas established a new K-12 accountability system. Schools are broadly classified into two groups – Achieving or Needs Improvement. Those schools on the extremes are further classified as Exemplary, Needs Improvement Focus, or Needs Improvement Priority. Priority and Focus schools are required to work with some combination of Arkansas Department of Education (ADE) employees and outside consultants to develop and implement plans that will help them become Achieving schools. Priority Schools can also apply for federal School Improvement Grants. Schools that are under academic or fiscal distress must work with ADE’s Office of Intensive Support.

**Outcomes.** In 2011-2012, 10 elementary schools received a Priority designation, and 41 were classified as Focus schools. Of the 10 Priority Schools, two have improved. Seven of the 41 Focus Schools moved up to become Achieving Schools; two schools closed, and the other 32 remained as Focus Schools. The majority of elementary schools fall into the Needs Improvement category, and over half of the schools designated as Achieving Schools in 2011-2012 dropped to Needs Improvement in 2012-2013.

**Gaps and Barriers.** In the first two years of implementation of the state’s new accountability system, the majority of elementary schools classified as Focus or Priority did not improve their status. Some possible reasons include districts not having the capacity to take advantage of resources, school boards having difficulty making decisions that would move their district forward, and challenges maintaining momentum when outside providers are not on campus.

**Models.** Brady Elementary School in the Little Rock School District, George Elementary School in the Springdale School District, and Marvell-Elaine Elementary School are examples of schools that effectively used the resources provided to them to turn their schools around.

## Teacher Prep and Certification

Children spend six to seven hours every day with their teachers. The education that teachers receive in college and their ongoing professional development are critical to their ability to succeed in the classroom.

**Current Policy.** State policy for teacher preparation and certification includes the competencies that should be mastered by teachers and the minimum scores required for passage of teacher certification exams. Beginning in Fall 2015, the competencies for teachers of young children will be grouped into birth through kindergarten and kindergarten through 6<sup>th</sup> grade. K-6 competencies will cover seven different areas related to literacy. To receive certification as a K-6 teacher, individuals must take and pass the Praxis exam, which includes four sections, one of which is reading language arts. Individuals will be required to receive a passing score on each section, which is a new policy. Another recent policy change, a 2013 law regarding children with dyslexia, requires that teacher preparation programs include information on the identification of students at risk of dyslexia.

**Outcomes.** In May, ADE released its first “Educator Preparation Performance Report.” The report provides information about graduates’ success at the institution and program level. Information includes licensure exam pass rates; required credit hours; surveys that gauge novice teachers’ perception of program; program field experiences, clinical practice and faculty data; enrollment/race data, numbers of teachers prepared, licensed and working in Arkansas public schools; and out-of-state teacher data. Statewide, 98.8 percent pass the Early Childhood Content Knowledge section of the current pre-K through 3<sup>rd</sup> grade licensure exam on the first try, and 83.1 percent pass the Principles of Learning Teaching: Early Childhood section of that exam on the first try. The pass rates vary across colleges of education from a low of 33 percent to a high of 100 percent.

**Gaps and Barriers.** One challenge we have had as a state is evaluating the quality of our teacher preparation programs and sharing that information publicly. The “Educator Preparation Performance Reports” are a big step toward addressing this gap. Implementation of teacher preparation requirements under the new dyslexia law cannot be handled solely by colleges of education. They will need to draw upon other disciplines such as Speech Language Pathology.

**Model.** UALR has already begun to add references to dyslexia in relevant teacher education courses, and they are developing a two-year graduate level dyslexia therapist training program that would result in a certification.

## Chronic Absence

When children miss school, they miss out on instruction from their teachers. If they miss too much school, they have a difficult time catching up with their classmates. In the early grades, they are missing out on the building blocks for reading they will need throughout the rest of their life.

**Current Policy.** Under state law, local school boards have the responsibility to develop and adopt student attendance policies. Most local policies define excused and unexcused absences and set numbers of absences at which parents and the legal authorities will be notified. The number of days that students are present and absent is used to calculate an average daily attendance (ADA). This is the standard metric used by schools and districts to assess whether or not they have an attendance problem.

**Research.** A growing body of research on school attendance makes the case for looking at attendance in a different way. Rather than using ADA as the yardstick, districts around the country are beginning to use a

measure called chronic absence. Chronic absence is defined as missing more than ten percent of the school year, for any reason. Both excused and unexcused absences are counted. Research has also found that a significant percentage of children scoring below proficient on state and national assessments are chronically absent.

**Gaps and Barriers.** Research shows there are three main types of reasons children miss school: myths, barriers, and aversion. Myths are usually beliefs that parents and other caregivers, and sometimes teachers and administrators, have about the importance of school attendance. One common myth is that absences are only a problem when they are unexcused. Barriers that keep children from coming to school include struggling with treatable health issues such as asthma, diabetes, or cavities. Aversion can also be a reason that kids miss school. For example, a child who is not doing well in school will find ways to avoid going to school, like telling his parent that he does not feel well.

**Models.** Several states – Indiana, Maryland, and Utah – have established policies and public awareness campaigns that focus on the impact of chronic absence on their states’ educational outcomes.

## Retention

Retention has long been a controversial policy among education researchers, professionals, and parents. A large body of research shows that retained students tend to have worse social-emotional outcomes and are more likely to drop out of school than similar students who are promoted. However, critics argue that social promotion puts students into grades before they are ready for the work, forces teachers to deal with unprepared students, and gives parents a false sense of progress for their children.

**Current Policy.** In 2003, legislation was passed in response to the Lakeview decision. The new law established a statewide educational assessment system, made school districts responsible for providing instruction that prepares students to demonstrate proficiency, and required Kindergarten through 2<sup>nd</sup> graders who are not reading proficiently to receive intensive reading instruction. That law also required that students in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade or above who are not reading proficiently be retained if they do not participate in remediation activities or score proficiently.

**Research/Outcomes.** In 2002, Florida began requiring 3<sup>rd</sup> grade students to be retained if they did not score at least a Level 2 (“limited success”) on the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test. In addition to retention, Florida implemented a series of other interventions for students who did not meet this score and were not granted an exemption from the policy. A recent study on the statistical significance and effectiveness of the policy in Florida found no significant evidence that student outcomes improved long term. Additionally, the study found no statistical evidence of retention's impact on students needing remedial courses in later grades.

**Gaps and Barriers.** Retention policies are expensive. An Oklahoma analysis found that retaining between 2,200 and 3,200 students would have cost the state an additional \$18 million to \$25 million for the extra year of school the state would have to provide.

# What Can We Do to Improve What Happens After School and During the Summer?

## Parent Engagement

Students benefit academically when their parents are engaged. Ideally parent engagement is two-pronged – providing an avenue for input from parents on school issues and providing input to parents about their children’s education, their teachers, and the quality of their children’s school. An effective parent engagement strategy will result in a family-school partnership and will meet the needs and interests of the families of diverse student populations.

**Current Policy.** Both federal and state policy set guidelines for parent engagement by schools and school districts. Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) requires schools receiving Title I funding to develop parent involvement policies. Arkansas is one of just 17 states that require all schools to develop parent involvement plans and have parent involvement facilitators.

**Research.** Parent and community ties can improve learning outcomes for children and consequently improve whole schools when part of an overall system of quality education. This is especially true when student achievement and school improvement are seen as a responsibility of both school officials and parents. This partnership brings about relationships of trust and respect between home and school. Children benefit from their parent’s involvement because parents become the primary supporters of their learning, encourage determination and persistence, lead by example by participating in lifelong learning opportunities, and advocate for proper programming and placement.

**Gaps and Barriers.** Some schools and some parents see parent engagement as limited to boosterism for the school or required parent-teacher conferences. Too many parents only hear from their children’s school when their child is in trouble—academically or behaviorally. And in a few cases, schools really do not want the input or action of all parents. They view parent’s efforts to intervene on their child’s behalf or in broader policies as a nuisance or hindrance.

**Models.** Several states have implemented strategies to support stronger family-school partnerships: Michigan’s Parent Engagement Toolkit, Indiana’s Family Friendly School Designation, Tennessee’s Parent Involvement Report Cards, Maryland’s Comcast Parent Involvement Matters Award, and Kentucky’s Institute for Parent Leadership.

## Summer and After-School Programs

When school is out during the summer, many children have no access to educational and enrichment activities that can help them continue to learn. As a result, the first few weeks of school are spent re-teaching material from the previous grade. Over time, without summer learning opportunities, children can fall several grades behind their peers.

**Current Policy.** The 21st Century Community Learning Centers program (21C CLC) is the only federal funding source dedicated to after-school programs. No such funding exists at the state level. The Positive Youth Development Act was passed in 2011 but has not been funded. School districts can use NSLA or Title I funds for summer or after-school programs, but few do so.

**Research.** Low-income students are more likely to experience summer learning loss than their higher income peers because they have less access to educational opportunities in their homes and communities.



Low-income students can fall behind two to three months each summer, which by 5<sup>th</sup> grade can put them two and half to three grade levels behind their peers.

**Gaps and Barriers.** Children from low-income families are much less likely to participate in summer and after-school programs than their higher income peers. Availability, cost, and transportation are some of the reasons. In Arkansas, parents report that just 37 percent of low-income 6 to 11 year olds participate, compared to 68.4 percent of children in families with incomes above 200 percent of the federal poverty line.

**Models.** Several programs around the state have had success helping children gain or maintain reading skills over the summer - Boys and Girls Club of Central Arkansas, Marvell-Elaine Reads, Life Skills for YOUTH, and UALR Children International.

## Reading Programs

Reading programs are typically provided to school-age children within the context of school-provided academic programs. However, resources need to be available throughout the community to surround children, particularly low-income children, with reading experiences.

**Current Programs.** Public libraries are a key source of books and reading programs around the state. However, many small towns do not have a public library. According to the Arkansas State Library survey, there are 228 libraries and branches distributed across the state. Nonprofit organizations also support reading through programs that provide books and related materials to children, tutoring programs that provide volunteers to tutor children at their schools or in other settings such as after-school programs, and programs where adults read books to kids.

**Research:** Communities ranking high in achievement tests have several factors in common: an abundance of books in public libraries, easy access to books in the community at large and a large number of textbooks per student. A 2006 study shows that in middle-income neighborhoods the ratio of age-appropriate books per child is 13 to 1; however, in low-income neighborhoods the ratio is 1 book for every 300 children.

**Gaps and Barriers.** Reading program resources are unequally distributed throughout the state. Most counties have some library access and one or more private non-profit reading programs. However, the accessibility of some small communities to public resources may be limited. Also, the private non-profit programs are not statewide in coverage.

**Models.** Model reading programs include Every Child Ready to Read, the Central Arkansas Library System, Imagination Library, and Reach Out and Read.

## Recommendations

### **What we can do to make sure children are ready for school.**

1. Provide cost of living adjustment for ABC pre-K funding.
2. Reassess the current ABC quality cost model.
3. Expand ABC to serve more children.
4. Require NSLA funds in Focus and Priority schools to be used for BLR recommended solutions, such as pre-K, and narrow the list of allowable activities under NSLA for all schools.
5. Improve the quality ratings of private infant and toddler providers and make the ratings easily accessible to the public.

### **What we can do to improve what happens during the school day.**

1. Conduct an ongoing assessment of the value of school improvement consulting expenditures by updating the 2012 BLR report.
2. Use the information provided by ADE's "Educator Preparation Performance Report." to improve teacher preparation programs.
3. Request an ADE Commissioner's memo to clarify attendance reporting definitions and requirements and ongoing monitoring of data quality.
4. Refrain from adopting a mandatory retention policy.

### **What we can do to improve what happens after school and during the summer.**

1. Develop Awards program for school districts with successful parent engagement models.
2. Provide an institute modeled after Kentucky to provide parent training focusing on parents reaching other parents.
3. Encourage building-level leadership training programs to provide training on successful parent engagement.
4. State library and AR-GLR partner to identify counties/communities needing additional library resources.
5. Establish an informal group of reading programs in the state to share best practices, mentor new programs, and expand to areas with identified needs.
6. Require NSLA funds in Focus and Priority schools to be used for BLR recommended solutions, such as summer and after-school programs, and narrow the list of allowable activities under NSLA for all schools.
7. Provide funding to pilot the Positive Youth Development Act

## Why Is Third Grade Important?

Reading proficiently by the end of third grade impacts a variety of outcomes: 1) children’s ability to learn after third grade, 2) children’s academic outcomes as measured by standardized tests, grades, and course failures, 3) non-academic outcomes such as self-esteem and behavioral issues, and 4) the strength of our state’s economy.

### **Reading to Learn**

True reading comprehension is not just the ability to recognize words and articulate them, but also the ability to understand the underlying concepts expressed by those words. Reading serves as a crucial skill to a student’s growth across all subject areas. As children move beyond the third grade, the reading skills needed to do their work become more sophisticated. The transition from third to fourth grade marks a shift from “learning to read” to “reading to learn.”<sup>i</sup> From reading and writing in the social sciences to the application of mathematical principles to real world situations, students make use of reading skills on a daily basis across their coursework.

### **Academic Outcomes**

A 2010 study on the long-term impact of third grade reading found that students with higher reading scores at the end of third grade also had higher scores when they reached eighth grade. The study, which looked at the performance of 26,000 Chicago public school students, also found that third grade reading skills are a strong predictor of a ninth grade student’s GPA (positively) and number of course failures (negatively).<sup>ii</sup>

A 2011 study of nearly 4,000 students born between 1979 and 1989 documented the impact of reading proficiency on staying in school. Almost all (96 percent) readers who were proficient in the third grade graduated from high school. However, four times as many non-proficient students failed to graduate by the age of 19. Most troubling, nearly one in four (23 percent) below-basic readers failed to obtain a high school diploma by 19 (although the researchers were unable to authoritatively determine whether the students had actually dropped out).<sup>iii</sup>

### **Non-Academic Outcomes**

Failure to achieve reading proficiency has also been linked to other factors that may harm a student’s chances at academic success. Unskilled readers have low self-esteem, which reduces their confidence in their ability to thrive academically. They are also significantly more likely to engage in behaviors that lead to disciplinary troubles and, indeed, may result in suspensions that prevent their learning. Because of these factors, poor reading indirectly shapes educational achievement.<sup>iv</sup>

### **Impact on the Economy**

The economic consequences of not graduating from high school are grave. High school dropouts are more likely to be unemployed, spend more time in poverty, use more public assistance, and more likely to be on death row than people who have a high school diploma.<sup>v</sup>

What would cutting the dropout rate mean for Arkansas? A 2013 report found that addressing the high school dropout rate would have a huge impact on economic growth in the state. According to the report, the high school graduation rate in Arkansas was 71 percent in 2012. If the state increased that rate to 90 percent, 7,200 additional students would have graduated. The economic benefits to the state would be:

- \$81 million in increased annual gross state product,
- \$64 million in increased annual earnings,

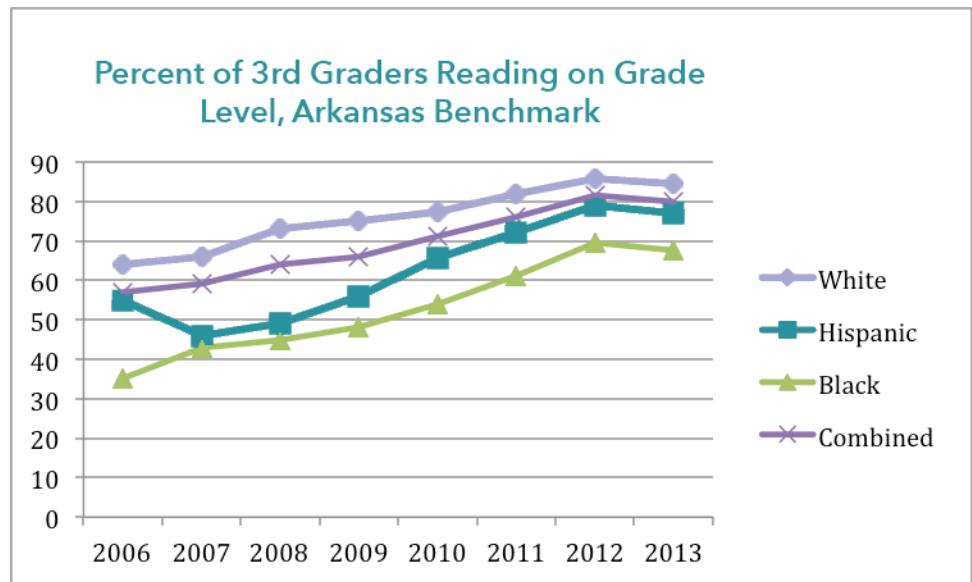
- \$49 million in increased annual spending,
- \$7.2 million in increased home sales,
- \$7.5 million in increased auto sales, and
- \$4.9 million in annual state/local tax revenue. <sup>vi</sup>

The societal problems that we usually associate with adults often have their roots in the reading skills developed (or not) by students during their earliest school years. As a recent report on the subject concluded, “The bottom line is that if we don’t get dramatically more children on track as proficient readers, the United States will lose a growing and essential proportion of its human capital to poverty, and the price will be paid not only by individual children and families, but by the entire country.”<sup>vii</sup>

## Do Arkansas Third Graders Read Proficiently?

### **Benchmark**

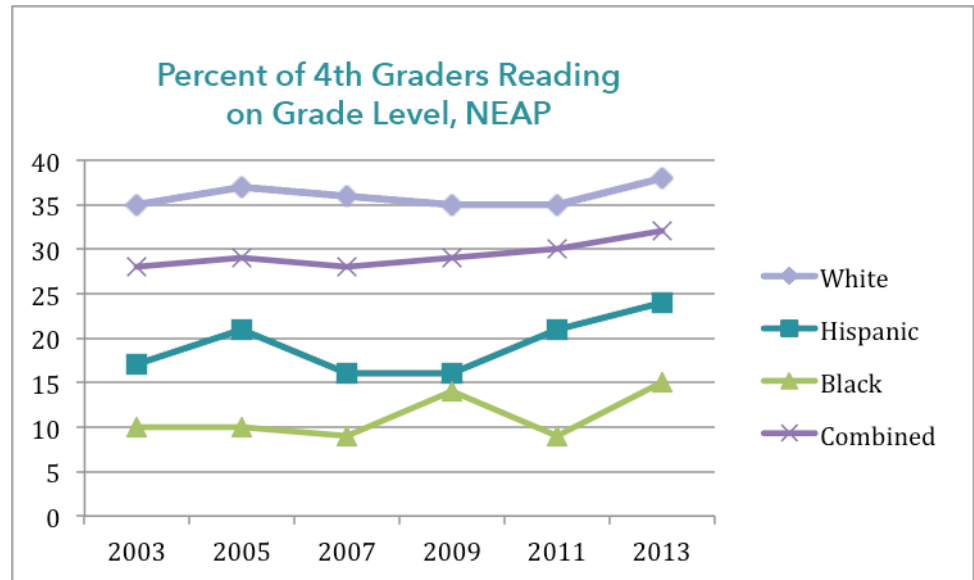
The main measure that Arkansas has used to assess whether students are reading proficiently by the end of the third grade is the Arkansas Benchmark Exam. The Benchmark is given annually in the late spring. As the chart below indicates, reading proficiency for third graders steadily increased between the 2005-2006 and 2011-2012 school years. The rates for students in racial and ethnic subgroups increased as well, and the achievement gap between white children and Black and Hispanic children shrunk. However, white children are still reading proficiently at higher rates than Black and Hispanic children. In 2013, 80.1 percent of all third graders could read on grade level. While 84.5 percent of white third graders could read proficiently, only 76.9 of Hispanic third graders and 67.6 percent of Black third graders could do so. The gap between white and black students is 17 percent. During the past two school years, 2012-2013 and 2013-2014, proficiency rates for all children have dropped. Recent Benchmark data show that only 77 percent of third graders read proficiently in 2013-2014.<sup>viii</sup>



Source: Arkansas Department of Education

**NAEP**

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) is the best measure at this time for assessing how Arkansas's reading scores compare to other states. The NAEP is given every two years between January and March. As this chart shows, the percentage of fourth graders reading on grade level is significantly lower on the NAEP than on the Benchmark and has been fairly steady over the past decade. In 2013, 32 percent of fourth graders were reading on grade level, an increase of 4 percentage points since 2003. As with the Benchmark, disparities between racial and ethnic groups are large, but the gaps are shrinking. In 2013, 38 percent of white, 24 percent of Hispanic, and 15 percent of Black fourth graders read on grade-level.

**PARCC**

Arkansas is participating in the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC), one of two consortia of states developing assessments that align with the new Common Core State Standards. Other PARCC states include Colorado, District of Columbia, Illinois, Indiana, Louisiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, Mississippi, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Rhode Island.<sup>ix</sup> Arkansas will begin using the PARCC during the 2014-2015 school year. The PARCC gives Arkansas the best of both the Benchmark and the NAEP – it provides an assessment based on the standards that are being taught to students as well as a way for Arkansas to see how it compares to other states.

**What can we do to make sure children are ready for school?**

Recent research on brain development has dramatically changed the way we think about early childhood education. The building blocks for learning begin with language development, which starts before a child reaches her first birthday. Having access to quality learning environments at home and in early care settings is critical to prepare children for school.

**Current Policy**

In Arkansas, preschool education is not provided through one single program or system. Rather, there is an array of resources that includes state and federally funded programs as well as providers for which parents must pay. The locations of preschool programs vary as well and may include family day care homes, child care centers, schools, and home-based programs.

**Head Start.** Head Start is a federally funded program that originated in the late 1960s as an intervention for low-income families to insure their children start school on a level playing field. The program is divided into Head Start (for three- and four-year olds) and Early Head Start (for children birth to age three). Head Start

in Arkansas is operated through 20 grantees serving 8,775 children and families. Early Head Start has 10 grantees serving 1,167 children and families. A separate grantee provides services to 368 children whose parents are migrant or seasonal workers.

**Arkansas Better Chance.** The ABC program actually consists of two programs. The original ABC program, established in 1990, serves children from birth to age 5 with a variety of risk factors. Annual funding is about \$10 million. Added in 2004-2005, Arkansas Better Chance for School Success (ABCSS) targets 3 and 4 year olds in families with incomes below 200 percent of the federal poverty level and who live in school districts that are in school improvement status or in which at least 75 percent of children perform poorly on state benchmark exams in math and literacy. Funding for the ABCSS is \$100 million annually. The ABC program is funded through a general revenue appropriation in the ADE Public School Fund budget. ADE contracts with the Department of Human Services Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Education (DCCECE) to administer the program. ABC programs are provided in family day care homes and child care centers and by public schools. Together, ABC and Head Start serve 56 percent of eligible 3 and 4 year olds.

**Child Care Development Fund.** Arkansas receives funding from the federal government for the Child Care Development Fund (CCDF). DCCECE administers the CCDF, which is used to help low-income families pay for child care. The amount of assistance is determined by a sliding fee scale, based on family income. Parents determine which child care provider will use their assistance; the provider must be licensed or registered by DCCECE.<sup>x</sup> Total federal funding for FY 2014 is about \$50 million.

To increase the quality of child care providers receiving child care assistance, DCCECE launched the Better Beginnings program in 2010. Better Beginnings is a quality rating improvement system (QRIS), which is a systemic approach to assess, improve, and communicate the level of quality in early care and education programs. Better Beginnings, is a “building block” approach, which means that programs must meet all requirements at one level before moving to the next. Minimum licensing requirements are the foundation on which Better Beginnings is built. The requirements at level 1 of Better Beginnings help the administrator or primary caregiver start the process for quality improvement. At level 2 the staff becomes more involved in the process. Level 3 sets even higher requirements for all components.<sup>xi</sup>

**NSLA and Title I.** In addition to ABC funding, school districts also use both NSLA and Title I to fund pre-K. Arkansas’s state poverty funding (more commonly known as “NSLA funding”) is the part of the state-funded adequacy package for schools that is targeted to low-income students. It is named NSLA after the National School Lunch Act program, the eligibility for which determines each school district’s student count for state NSLA funding. This funding provides programs and services to benefit low-income students. It is also a potential source of funding for programs, such as pre-K, that have been shown to improve educational outcomes and close the achievement gap for low-income students.

Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) is national legislation focused on educational supports for districts with high percentages of low-income students. There is a wide variety of eligible programs for which the funding may be used, including Supplemental Education Services. However, with ADE’s ESEA waiver, few districts are opting to use Title I funds for services provided by external providers now that they are no longer required to do so. Pre-K is an eligible use of Title I.

Some large districts such as Little Rock and Springdale have developed stand-alone early childhood education centers in separate school buildings. Other districts offer programs in one or more classrooms at some or all of their elementary schools. Because of the funding sources, many of the school programs have income eligibility restrictions.

**Home Visiting.** Arkansas’s voluntary home visiting programs offer a variety of services that are primarily home-based. Funding for home visiting includes ABC and the federal Maternal, Infant and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) grant. MIECHV supports several evidence-based home visiting models. Those with an early childhood education focus include Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters (HIPPY), Early Steps to School Success, Parents as Teachers (PAT), and Early Head Start.

HIPPY promotes preschoolers’ school readiness and supports parents as their children’s first teacher by providing instruction in the home. HIPPY offers weekly, hour-long home visits for 30 weeks a year, and two-hour group meetings monthly. HIPPY is unique in that the services are offered directly to parents, who then work with their own 3-, 4-, and 5 year-old children. A HIPPY site typically draws the home visiting paraprofessionals from the same population that is served and have most often been served by the HIPPY program, themselves. PAT provides parents with information about how their child develops and provides parenting support. The PAT model includes one-on-one home visits, monthly group meetings, developmental screenings, and a resource network for families. Parent educators conduct the home visits. Local sites offer at least 10 to 12 home visits annually with more offered to higher-need families. PAT may serve families from pregnancy to kindergarten entry.

**Private Providers.** In addition to these public programs, private providers and school districts offer early childhood education services. Such providers, which include Montessori schools and faith-based programs, provide early childhood education services to many children of all income levels, often for a fee charged to parents.

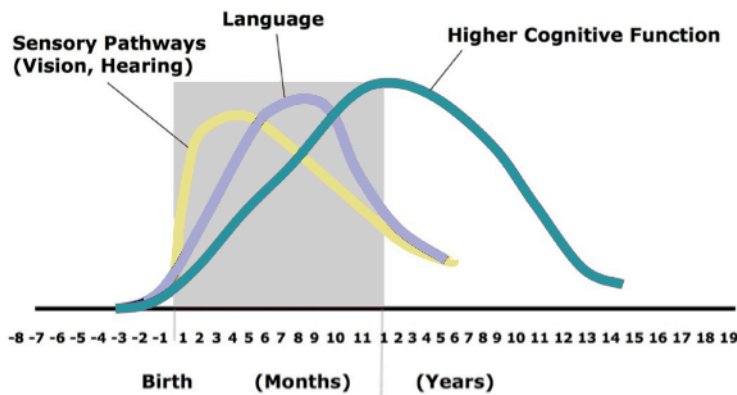
### **Research and Outcomes**

Since the 1950s, research has pointed to the value of intervening early with children to improve their chances of academic success and subsequent economic self-sufficiency. There have been notable longitudinal studies including the Perry Preschool Study and a recent report from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services on Head Start. Arkansas has benefitted from research provided by the Arkansas Research Center (ARC) and the National Institute of Early Education Research (NIEER) specific to the state’s ABC program. There has also been substantial research by Nobel Prize winner James Heckman and others, on the economic value of investing in early childhood education programs.

**Brain Development.** Over the past 15 years, new research developments have dramatically changed the way we think about early childhood education. The early childhood period (birth to age 5) is a time of rapid brain development.<sup>xii</sup> Early experiences are the foundation on which all later learning is built; they play a large role in determining how brain connections or “wiring” are formed. Babies start to understand the link between words and their meanings as early as 6 months. This sets the stage for language development and later reading. The chart below<sup>xiii</sup> shows when these brain connections happen. Brain development related to vision and hearing and language peaks before a child celebrates her first birthday. The connections related to higher cognitive function (e.g., memory, comprehension, and problem solving) peak a little later, but still well before a child begins pre-K.<sup>xiv</sup>

# Human Brain Development

Neural Connections for Different Functions Develop Sequentially



Source: C.A. Nelson (2000)

**Word Gap.** Children from different backgrounds have very different early experiences in how often their parents talk with and read to them. In the Hart and Risley study of 1995, 40 volunteer families — from three economic classes— were followed during the first three years of their new children's lives. Every month, the researchers recorded an hour of sound from the families' homes to track the total number of words spoken in each home. Children from low-income families heard roughly 30 million fewer words directed at them than their more affluent peers. The average vocabulary of a low-income 3-year old was 500 words. By contrast, a higher-income child used 1,100 words.<sup>xv</sup> This became known as the word gap. Subsequent research has revealed that the word gap is a factor in the achievement gap between the poor and higher income students.

**Longitudinal Research.** The impact of pre-K has been studied by following children who participated in preschool programs until they are adults. The following is a summary of the results of three long-term studies.

1. Compared to children who did not receive a high quality early intervention, children who attended the high quality **Perry Preschool Program** when they were 3 and 4 years old were more likely to graduate from high school, earn higher wages and hold a job, and less likely to have committed a crime by age 40.
2. Children from birth through age 5 who attended the **Abecedarian Program** in North Carolina had higher mental health, language and math scores by age 21 than their peers who did not receive a high-quality early intervention and were more likely to have attended a four-year college.
3. By age 26, children who had received comprehensive educational and family support services from ages 3 to 9 through the publicly-financed **Chicago Child-Parent Centers** were less likely to have been arrested, have problems with substance misuse and be on food stamps, and more likely to have completed high school, have health insurance and be employed full-time relative to comparison groups of children not enrolled in the program.<sup>xvi</sup>

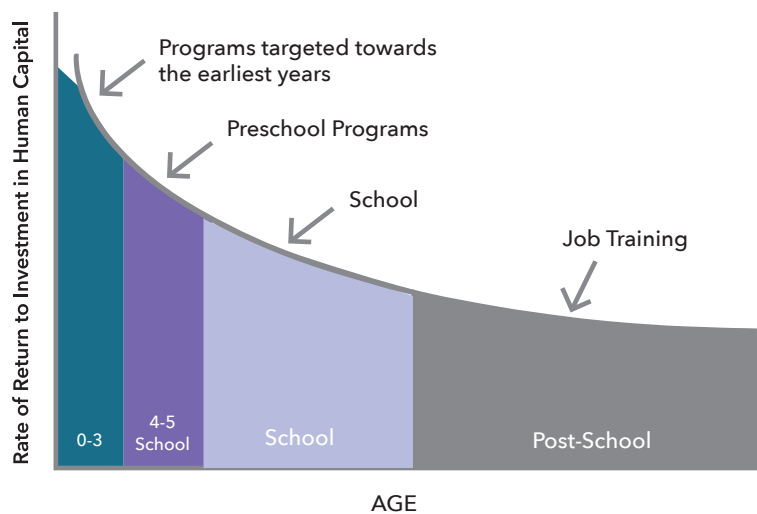
**Head Start Impact Study and Follow-up, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.** The Head Start Impact Study found fault in some areas with Head Start programs at the national level.<sup>xvii</sup> Dr. W. Steven



Barnett, Director, NIEER, addressed the study's conclusions, as well as concerns expressed by Head Start proponents. After a review of the study, he concluded that Head Start produces modest benefits, including some long-term gains for children.<sup>xviii</sup> However, Dr. Barnett also acknowledged that Head Start could produce better results if the program was better focused and made other improvements.

**Value of Early Investment.** James Heckman, a Nobel-winning economist from the University of Chicago, has proven that the quality of early childhood development strongly influences health, social, and economic outcomes. His research supports investment in young children and in coaching their parents because those early investments will generate the greatest return. But the opposite is happening: We actually spend far less on younger children than on older children and adults.<sup>xix</sup>

Rates of Return to Human Capital Investment at Different Ages:  
Return to an Extra Dollar at Various Ages



**ABC Outcomes.** Two 2013 studies on ABC find that it has meaningful impact on children who participate. More importantly, ABC has helped to shrink the education gap between economically disadvantaged students and other children. The first study, conducted by NIEER followed the same group of Arkansas students since the 2005-2006 school year and found that children who attend ABC show positive outcomes, including improved scores in vocabulary and math through the second grade and in literacy through the third grade. Children who attended ABC programs fared better in the study than children who did not.<sup>xx</sup> The second study, performed by ARC, shows that pre-K is helping to close the education gap between low-income students and their more affluent counterparts. It also showed that children who attended ABC were more prepared for kindergarten than children who did not attend.<sup>xxi</sup>

### **Gaps and Barriers**

While the research is clear about the value and impact of early childhood education, including the state's ABC program, funding for ABC has not kept pace with inflation; many 3 and 4 year olds in the state do not have access to high quality pre-K; and funding that could be used for pre-K is not being spent on pre-K.

- 1. Cost of Living Adjustment for ABC.** ABC is by far the largest public source of pre-K funding in the state; however funding has not been increased since 2008. The cost of living for K-12 state

programs determined to be part of adequacy has been increased by 13.84 percent between 2008 and 2015. According to the Consumer Price Index (CPI), costs are projected to rise by 12.4 percent<sup>xxii</sup> from 2009 to 2015. Increases consistent with the CPI would have made \$13.8 million more available to care for these children. Providers are reaching the breaking point in their efforts to continue to serve the same number of low-income three- and four-year olds with consistent top quality pre-K. Information provided by DCCECE shows that two providers serving 426 children closed their businesses in 2012, and in 2013 three more small providers serving 50 children closed.

2. **Unmet Need.** With current funding for ABC and Head Start, just 56 percent of income-eligible three- and four-year olds have access to quality pre-K. The needs of children with disabilities may also be unmet. Arkansas ranks 36th nationally, with 25 percent of children under six receiving developmental screenings.<sup>xxiii</sup>
3. **Use of NSLA.** Despite the fact that pre-K is an eligible use of NSLA funding, few districts use it for this purpose. The Bureau of Legislative Research established pre-K as one of the best uses for NSLA in its January 2014 report, "Success in High Poverty Schools."<sup>xxiv</sup> In 2013, only about 3.5 percent of NSLA funding (about \$7 million) was used for pre-K. Just 57 of the 239 school districts did so. Four of these districts used more than 20 percent for pre-K: Greene County Tech, Guy-Perkins, Marmaduke, and Rector. Fifteen other districts used more than 10 percent of their funding for pre-K.
4. **Use of Title I.** In 2013, only 1.6 percent (about \$2.4 million) of Title I funding was used for pre-K. Just 55 school districts and one charter school used it for that purpose. Three of these districts used more than 20 percent of their Title I funding for pre-K: Caddo Hills, Marion, and Wonderview. Ten other districts used more than 10 percent of their funding for pre-K.

### **State Pre-K Models**

NIEER compiles an annual state yearbook assessing state pre-K programs. Southern states including Florida, Georgia, Oklahoma, and West Virginia were recognized as leaders in the nation (2<sup>nd</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, and 3<sup>rd</sup> respectively) for the number of children enrolled in publicly financed preschool programs. Both Florida and Oklahoma served more than 70 percent of 4 year olds. Alabama continues to finance expansion of its pre-K program at the urging of its business community.<sup>xxv</sup> New Jersey provides an interesting approach to covering differing costs across provider types.

**Oklahoma.** Oklahoma offers universal access to pre-K for 4 year olds. Universal access means all that want to participate may do so regardless of income level, but the program is not mandatory. The program has high teacher and classroom standards. All pre-K teachers must have a college degree and a certificate in early-childhood education, and they are paid the same wage as K-12 teachers. The student-teacher ratio must be at least 10-1, and class sizes are limited to 20.<sup>xxvi</sup> Oklahoma funds pre-K through its education funding formula and accounts for the high per-pupil costs of a quality pre-K programs by giving more "weight" to pre-K children than K-12 students in determining allocations. Oklahoma funds both full- and half-day programs, weighting pre-K per child allocations at 130 percent and 70 percent of the K-12 rate, respectively.<sup>xxvii</sup> Evaluations of the Oklahoma pre-K program show that children who participated entered kindergarten with higher vocabulary scores and they knew more letters and letter-sound associations.<sup>xxviii</sup>

**Georgia.** The Georgia pre-K program is also for 4 year olds only. The state program provides universal access funded by the Georgia lottery program. In June 2013, the new Georgia Early Learning and Development Standards, aligned with the Common Core Georgia Performance Standard, were released.

Teachers were trained in the standards during the 2013-2014 school year, and a full rollout is planned in the 2014-2015 school year. A bachelor's degree is required for new lead teachers. Assistant teachers are required to have a Child Development Associate (CDA) credential. Maximum class size is now 22 students, and a teacher-student ratio of 1:11 is allowed.<sup>xxix</sup>

**Alabama.** The Alabama program provides access for 4 year olds but is limited by availability of locations. The program has high standards and met all 10 of the NIEER quality benchmarks. The program has had significant support from the state's business community. A task force, composed of the Business Council of Alabama and the Alabama School Readiness Alliance, made recommendation for expanding access to the programs, and in 2013-2014, funding increased from \$19 million to \$28 million.<sup>xxx</sup>

**New Jersey.** A New Jersey Supreme Court case called the Abbott decision requires that all 3- and 4- year-old children in the highest-poverty school districts receive a high-quality preschool education. As a result, all children in 31 school districts are eligible to receive a full-day/full-year pre-k program from teachers certified in early education. In 2008, New Jersey passed a law that set differentiated pre-K allocations per child, based on the setting where the care is provided. These rates were based on an analysis of actual expenditures conducted by the state Department of Education. The allocations included in the 2008 act were \$11,506 for public schools and \$12,934 for licensed child care programs.<sup>xxxi</sup>

### **Word Gap Models**

Several local and state-based initiatives have launched over the past year to address the word gap research described above. These efforts are working to increase the words heard by children, especially low-income children, in their home before they enter kindergarten. A deficit in the number of words low-income children hear prior to kindergarten is a barrier to development of reading skills.

**Talk with Me Baby.** A partnership in Georgia among the state Departments of Early Learning, Education, and Public Health, as well as the Atlanta Speech School and the Emory University Schools of Medicine and Nursing has launched the Talk With Me Baby campaign. The campaign seeks to build public awareness of the importance of talking with infants and children. Resource kits provide new parents with information and activities for interaction with infants. Nurses and WIC nutritionists coach expectant and new parents on the importance of "language nutrition." Materials are available and videos are shown in the waiting rooms of OB/GYNs, pediatricians, and WIC offices.<sup>xxxii</sup>

**Talking is Teaching.** In Tulsa, Oklahoma, "Talking is Teaching" is a new effort to support parents' and caregivers' efforts to increase the number of words infants and toddlers hear spoken every day. The campaign will use a community-wide approach engaging pediatricians, business owners, faith-based leaders, librarians and others. "Talking is Teaching" will share with parents and caregivers how simple actions – like describing objects seen during a walk or bus ride, singing songs, or telling stories for just five minutes, three times a day – can significantly improve a baby's ability to learn new words and concepts. The campaign joins with the Tulsa Educare program and is supported by the George Kaiser Family Foundation.

**Providence Talks.** The City of Providence, Rhode Island is using home visitation programs and a grant to establish a program that monitors how many words are spoken by caregivers for children. The caregiver receives the information monthly and is coached on strategies and resources for improving the quantity of spoken words. So far, parents have increased the number of words spoken to their children by 55 percent. The program was launched in 2014.<sup>xxxiii</sup>

## What Can We Do to Improve What Happens During the School Day?

While there are many different strategies that could be used to improve what happens during the school day, this report focuses on support for Priority and Focus schools, the State Personnel Development Grant, teacher preparation and certification, chronic absence, and retention of students.

### State Support for Priority and Focus Schools

Every child deserves the opportunity to attend a school that can provide him with the education he needs to succeed in life. Some schools have a more difficult time meeting the needs of their students, for a range of reasons that include high percentages of children from low-income families, low levels of parent engagement, limited professional development for teachers, and a lack of leadership by the administration or school board.

#### Current Policy

In 2012, the U.S. Department of Education approved a waiver to ESEA for Arkansas. Most of the waiver is focused on a goal of strengthening strategic initiatives that address graduation rates, achievement gaps and persistently struggling schools. Through the waiver, ADE established a new accountability system that classifies schools based on whether or not they achieve annual measurable objectives (AMOs) in performance or growth for all students and for a Targeted Achievement Gap Group (TAGG), which includes students who are economically disadvantaged, English language learners, or who have a disability.

**School Classifications.** Schools are broadly classified into two groups – Achieving or Needs Improvement. Those schools on the extremes are further classified as Exemplary, Needs Improvement Focus, or Needs Improvement Priority. The table on the next page provides a description of each category and the level of ADE engagement required and district autonomy allowed for each.<sup>xxxiv</sup>

Accountability Status	Description	ADE Engagement/ District Autonomy
<b>Exemplary</b>	High performance High progress High TAGG performance High TAGG progress	Very low ADE engagement  Very high district autonomy
<b>Achieving</b>	3-yr Arkansas Comprehensive School Improvement Plan (ACSIP) – meet all performance, graduation rate, and growth AMOs for All Students and TAGG 1-yr ACSIP – meet all performance and graduation rate AMOs for All Students and TAGG, but miss growth AMOs for All Students and TAGG	Very low ADE engagement  High district autonomy
<b>Needs Improvement</b>	Does not meet performance, graduation rate, or growth AMOs for All Students and TAGG	Low to Moderate ADE engagement  Moderate district autonomy

<b>Needs Improvement Focus</b>	Schools with largest, persistent gaps between Non-TAGG and TAGG students	Very high ADE engagement Low district autonomy
<b>Needs Improvement Priority</b>	Schools with persistently lowest achievement in math and literacy over three years for All Students	Very high ADE engagement Low district autonomy

Source: [http://www.arkansased.org/public/userfiles/Flexibility/ESEA\\_Flexibility\\_Information.pdf](http://www.arkansased.org/public/userfiles/Flexibility/ESEA_Flexibility_Information.pdf)

ADE has developed supports for and requirements of Priority and Focus schools based on the following turnaround principles:

1. Provide strong leadership
2. Ensure effective teachers
3. Redesign the school day, week, or year to provide additional time for student learning and teacher collaboration
4. Strengthen the school's instructional program
5. Use data to inform instruction
6. Establish a school environment that improves safety
7. Engage families and communities

**Support for Priority Schools.** ADE assigns each Priority school a School Improvement Specialist (SIS) who helps them develop and implement a Priority Improvement Plan (PIP) and to broker resources. The SIS is present on campus one day a week. The SIS works with principals to build skill sets, including how to support the instructional process, what to look for in the classroom, and that their visibility makes a difference. The SIS helps the principal establish a leadership team and shows them how to disaggregate data to improve instruction. ADE works with the entire leadership team so that if the principal leaves, the rest of the team can help bring the new principal along. In addition to working with the SIS, Priority Schools must select an external vendor, from an ADE-approved list, that works with them one day a week to implement their PIP. Some schools have multiple vendors on site; they can use their School Improvement Grant funds, described below, to apply for additional consultants. Priority Schools can also access the services of the State Personnel Development Grant (SPDG) office.

**Support for Focus Schools.** With Focus schools, ADE's work is more targeted since the school most often tends to be struggling with just one area, either literacy or math, rather than both. Professional Development Specialists at ADE are assigned to Focus Schools and work with them one day a month. If a school needs more support, then ADE will provide it for them. Focus schools can select a vendor from the state-approved list or they can hire their own school improvement specialist. Most schools hire their own person. Some will repurpose an existing staff person, such as a literacy specialist. If a Focus school does not make progress on their AMOs or interim measurable objectives after one year of implementation of their PIP, then they are required to hire an external provider.<sup>xxxv</sup>

**School Improvement Grants.** School Improvement Grants are authorized by ESEA and the funds are provided by the U.S. Department of Education to ADE. Arkansas receives about \$6 million a year and invites Priority Schools to compete for the funds. The schools must use the funds to implement one of four models: turnaround, restart, school closure, or transformation.<sup>xxxvi</sup>

**Office of Intensive Support.** ADE has established an Office of Intensive Support to work with those districts that are under academic or fiscal distress or that are otherwise under state watch or governance.

**State Personnel Development Grant.** The State Personnel Development Grant is an office supported by ADE to provide resources, professional development, and consultation for a particular model that is designed to help close the achievement gap between certain groups of students. This model is called Response to Instruction and Intervention (RtI<sup>2</sup>).

**Outcomes**

The following table shows all elementary schools that were classified as a Priority or Focus School for the 2011-2012 or 2012-2013 school years. In 2011-2012, 10 schools received a Priority designation, and 41 were classified as Focus schools. Of the 10 Priority Schools, two improved – Wilson Elementary in the Little Rock School District became an Exemplary School, and Boone Park in the North Little Rock School District was named an Achieving School. The other 10 schools maintained their Priority status. Seven of the 41 Focus Schools moved up to become Achieving Schools – Marvell, Washington in Fayetteville, Morrison and Tilles in Fort Smith, Brady in Little Rock, Lynch Drive in North Little Rock, and George in Springdale. Two schools closed, and the other 32 remained as Focus Schools. The majority of elementary schools fall into the Needs Improvement Category, and over half of the schools designated as Achieving Schools in 2011-2012 dropped to Needs Improvement in 2012-2013.<sup>xxxvii</sup>

District	School	2011-2012	2012-2013
Augusta	Augusta Elementary	Focus	Focus
Dermott	Dermott Elementary	Focus	Focus
Dollarway	Alzheimer-Martin Elementary	Priority	Priority
Fayetteville	Washington Elementary	Focus	Achieving
Forrest City	Central Elementary	Focus	Focus
Forrest City	Stewart Elementary	Focus	Focus
Fort Smith	Harry C. Morrison Elementary	Focus	Achieving
Fort Smith	Tilles Elementary	Focus	Achieving
Fort Smith	Trusty Elementary	Priority	Priority
Hamburg	Wilmot Elementary	Focus	Focus
Helena-West Helena	J.F. Wahl Elementary	Focus	Closed
Hermitage	Hermitage Elementary	Focus	Focus
Hot Springs	Langston Magnet	Focus	Focus
Hughes	Mildred Jackson Elementary	Focus	Focus
Jonesboro	Health/Wellness Environment Magnet	Focus	Focus
Jonesboro	Microsociety Magnet	Focus	Focus
Lakeside	Lakeside Elementary	Focus	Focus
Lee County	Whitten Elementary	Priority	Priority
Little Rock	Bale Elementary	Focus	Focus
Little Rock	Baseline Elementary	Priority	Priority
Little Rock	Brady Elementary	Focus	Achieving
Little Rock	Franklin Incentive Elementary	Focus	Focus
Little Rock	Geyer Springs Elementary	Priority	Priority
Little Rock	M.L. King Magnet Elementary	Focus	Focus
Little Rock	Romine Interdistrict Elementary	Focus	Focus
Little Rock	Stephens Elementary	Focus	Focus
Little Rock	Wakefield Elementary	Focus	Focus
Little Rock	Wilson Elementary	Priority	Exemplary

Magnolia	Central Elementary	Focus	Focus
Magnolia	East Side Elementary	Focus	Focus
Marvell-Elaine	Marvell Primary	Focus	Achieving
Mineral Springs	Saratoga Elementary	Focus	Focus
Mulberry	Marvin Primary	Focus	Focus
North Little Rock	Belwood Elementary	Focus	Closed
North Little Rock	Boone Park Elementary	Priority	Achieving
North Little Rock	Crestwood Elementary	Focus	Focus
North Little Rock	Indian Hills Elementary	Focus	Focus
North Little Rock	Lynch Drive Elementary	Focus	Achieving
North Little Rock	North Heights Elementary	Focus	Focus
North Little Rock	Pike View Elementary	Focus	Focus
North Little Rock	Seventh Street Elementary	Focus	Focus
Pine Bluff	Greenville Elementary	Priority	Priority
Pine Bluff	Oak Park Elementary	Priority	Priority
Pulaski County	Harris Elementary	Priority	Priority
Pulaski County	Murrell Taylor Elementary	Focus	Focus
Smackover	Smackover Elementary	Focus	Focus
Springdale	George Elementary	Focus	Achieving
Springdale	Monitor Elementary	Focus	Focus
Springdale	Parson Hills Elementary	Focus	Focus
Stephens	Stephens Elementary	Focus	Focus
Texarkana	Union Elementary	Focus	Focus

In 2012, the Bureau of Legislative Research (BLR) released a report outlining what has been spent on outside consultants and what has been accomplished with those funds. They found that between 2007 and 2011, nearly 300 schools had received some type of service from a school improvement provider, with a total cost of nearly \$70 million. BLR compared schools that received consulting services to those that did not and found the schools that hired consultants typically had lower test scores in 2006 and higher percentages of low-income students, which is to be expected considering the schools that hired school improvement consultants are, by nature, low performing schools, and high rates of poverty are associated with lower student performance.

BLR found that schools receiving services had significantly higher gains in both math and literacy proficiency between 2007 and 2011 than schools that received no services. Schools that received services saw their literacy proficiency rates increase 18.6 percentage points from 40.5 percent in 2006 to 59 percent in 2011. By contrast, schools that did not receive consulting had an increase of 12.4 percent from 48.2 percent in 2006 to 60.6 percent. Average annual literacy gains were the highest for schools working with the Arkansas Leadership Academy, Evans Newton, and Elbow to Elbow. Further analysis found that Elbow 2 Elbow, Evans Newton, and JBHM had statistically significant literacy gains.<sup>xxxviii</sup>

### **Gaps and Barriers**

In the first two years of implementation of the state's new accountability system, the majority of elementary schools classified as Focus or Priority did not improve their status. Some possible reasons for their difficulty include the following:

- 1. Districts Don't Have the Capacity to Take Advantage of Resources:** Given the staff and leadership challenges that some schools and districts face, they may have difficulty taking advantage of the resources that are available to them. For example, all Priority Schools are eligible to apply for School Improvement Grants, but some schools do not apply, either because they do not know how to make a proposal competitive or do not have the capacity to actually write the proposal. One district turned back NSLA funds because they did not have the human resources to implement proven strategies like tutoring, pre-K, or summer and after-school programs. Schools may also lack capacity to partner with nonprofits in their community that could provide some of these programs.
- 2. School Boards:** In some communities, school boards struggle to make the decisions that need to be made for the district. For example, the school board may prevent a superintendent from taking personnel actions that would improve instructional strength. In other cases, a school board might be reluctant to remove a superintendent who is not doing his or her job.
- 3. Challenges with Outside Vendors:** Currently, Priority Schools choose an outside vendor from the state-approved list. However, those vendors are only on campus one day a week. ADE has acknowledged that schools might be better served by using the available resources to hire somebody who can be present all week, provide continuity, and keep the improvement process moving forward even when the principal gets pulled in other directions. ADE has requested this flexibility in their pending ESEA waiver amendment.<sup>xxxix</sup>

## **Models**

**Brady Elementary School.** Brady Elementary School is in the Little Rock School District, and principal Tyrone Harris attributes its success to core instruction and the support provided to children who need additional help. When Brady was first identified as a Focus school, a specialist from ADE met with Harris and his staff several times a week and attended their leadership team meetings. The specialist also accompanied Harris on classroom observations. They discussed what they saw and then shared it with the teachers.

Harris and his team, which includes a strong literacy coach, use data from instruments such as SOAR and TLI to determine the extra supports the children need, which might include small intervention groups led by paraprofessionals or volunteers. They hold weekly grade-level planning meetings where teachers share what they need, and then the literacy coach provides those resources.

Brady also operates an after-school enrichment program from October to March, three days a week for two hours after school. The school use both literacy and math assessments to identify those children most at need – children who score at the basic or below basic levels. While not required, the program is strongly encouraged, and most of the students identified participate. Children can ride the school bus home. Two days a week they focus on instruction, with a 1:10 teacher/paraprofessional to child ratio. On Thursdays, they focus on fun activities that allow the children to use their literacy and math skills, such as theater and hands-on math projects. Harris has used both NSLA and Title I funds to support the program.

**George Elementary School.** In Springdale, George Elementary had met standards two years in a row under the old accountability system, but when the new system went into place, the school was classified as a Priority school because it did not meet its AMO for the TAGG. About 70 percent of the students are English language learners (ELLs) and 86 percent receive a free or reduced price lunch. ELLs who do not attend pre-K often speak little English when they get to kindergarten. With support from ADE, Principal Annette Freeman focused on three strategies 1) research-based professional development, 2) data-driven decision making, and 3) addressing the whole child.



Freeman and her team used the data to figure out what was and was not working and then changed the things that were not working, providing teachers with professional development to implement those new strategies. They immediately realized that they had been teaching to meet the needs of children whose primary language was English, and needed to shift to include strategies that work for teaching ELLs. One change they made was to focus more on phonemic awareness and phonics since many of the ELLs did not know all of the English sounds.

Freeman shared classroom-level data with all teachers and helped them set SMART goals. They reviewed the data every two weeks and set action plans for moving the needle before the next meeting. They used the data to assign children to flex groups and tutors based on their instructional needs. If a child is stuck, they use the data to analyze why and help the child move forward. They use Title I funds to pay tutors who are certified teachers and invest in a system that links assessment and instruction.

Finally, Freeman and her team understood that children have to attend school to achieve. The staff used their data to identify those children with health and social issues and reached out to their families at home before school started. The goal was to build relationships with the families and connect them to resources such as dental care, health insurance, or a place to live.

**Marvell Primary School.** During the first year of the new accountability system, Marvell-Elaine Primary School was designated a Needs Improvement Focus school. In 2011-2012, 68 percent of their students read on grade level. By the next school year, 81 percent of the students were reading on grade level. Marvell's success is attributed, in large part, to leadership. Principal Sylvia Moore is respected by her staff, and she works elbow-to-elbow with them. She has a tremendous literacy coach who works one-on-one with teachers. Marvell's outside provider was Education Consulting Services (ECS). With the support of the principal and literacy coach, ECS employed a coaching model with the teachers. The consulting team helped the teachers develop lesson plans, taught with them in the classroom to model new strategies, observed implementation of those new strategies, and provided ongoing feedback. ECS also helped Marvell determine which formative assessment would be best for them to use and helped them develop an assessment wall so they could track student progress on a regular basis.<sup>x1</sup>

## Teacher Preparation and Certification

Children spend six to seven hours every day with their teachers. The education that teachers receive in college and their ongoing professional development are critical to their ability to succeed in the classroom.

### Current Policy

State policy for teacher preparation and certification is focused on two key areas: the competencies that should be mastered by teachers and the minimum scores required for passage of teacher certification exams. A new state law on dyslexia also impacts teacher preparation.

**Competencies.** ADE determines the competencies that should be mastered by all teachers. For elementary teachers, the current competencies are designed for pre-kindergarten through 4<sup>th</sup> grade and for 4<sup>th</sup> through 8<sup>th</sup> grade. Beginning with students entering teacher preparation programs in Fall 2015, the competencies for teachers of young children will be grouped into birth through kindergarten and kindergarten through 6<sup>th</sup> grade. The competencies for elementary teachers of grades K-6 will cover the following areas related to literacy:

1. Reading – Foundational Skills
2. Reading – Literature

3. Reading – Informational Text
4. Writing
5. Speaking and Listening
6. Language (grammar)
7. Disciplinary Literacy (reading and writing in other subjects)<sup>xli</sup>

Each college of education in the state develops course offerings based on the competencies. The colleges will spend the next year developing their curricula for the new K-6 competencies. It is expected that these new competencies will lead to increased course offerings related to literacy. Seventeen colleges and universities currently offer Bachelor's Degree programs in early childhood education.

**Licensure.** Individuals who have completed a bachelor's degree in early childhood education (or elementary education in the near future) must take and pass the Praxis exam in order to receive the current P-4 and new K-6 teaching licenses. The exam for the new K-6 license has four parts – math, reading language arts, science, and social studies. An individual must receive a passing score on each section. Any subtest can be retaken if a passing score is not received on that section. This is a recent change to the policy; previously, an individual could fail a portion of the test yet still have an overall passing score.<sup>xlii</sup>

In Arkansas, a passing score on the reading and language arts subtest will be 165, which is the same passing score for all other states that use the Educational Testing Service Praxis exam except for one state. Connecticut requires a score of 174. The states with the same requirement as Arkansas are Alabama, Delaware, the District of Columbia, Hawaii, Idaho, Indiana, Kentucky, Maine, New Hampshire, New Jersey, Rhode Island, Utah, Vermont, and West Virginia.

**Dyslexia.** Another recent policy change that colleges of education must take into account is a bill passed during the 2013 legislative session regarding children with dyslexia. The new law requires screening for dyslexia between kindergarten and 2<sup>nd</sup> grade, further evaluation if warranted, and appropriate interventions if dyslexia is identified. Current teachers must receive professional development on dyslexia, and teacher preparation programs must include information on the identification of students at risk of dyslexia.

ADE has developed a Dyslexia Resource Guide to provide school districts, public schools, and teachers with guidance to meet the needs of children with dyslexia. ADE has addressed the definition of dyslexia, indicators of students with dyslexia, the use of Response to Intervention, universal screening for K-2<sup>nd</sup> grade students, dyslexia evaluation, instructional approaches, dyslexia therapist training and approved programs, professional awareness, and reporting. According to the new law, schools must have individuals serving as dyslexia interventionists at the therapeutic level, no later than the 2015-2016 school year. However, no Arkansas universities currently have dyslexia therapist training programs. For now, ADE will allow training provided by either a nationally accredited training program or one aligned with the International Multisensory Structured Language Council or the International Dyslexia Association. ADE has also worked with AETN to develop an online professional development module on the indicators of dyslexia and the science behind teaching a student who is dyslexic.<sup>xliii</sup>

### **Outcomes**

In May, ADE released its first "Educator Preparation Performance Report." The report provides information about graduates' success at the institution and program level. Information includes licensure exam pass rates; required credit hours; surveys that gauge novice teachers' perception of programs; program field experiences, clinical practice and faculty data; enrollment/race data; numbers of teachers prepared, licensed and working in Arkansas public schools; and out-of-state teacher data. Future reports will include a

link to teacher-student growth measures; novice teachers' employer surveys; standardized test scores (GRE, SAT and/or ACT) for program completers; and recruitment and retention data.

The following table shows the number and percentage of students who passed the current early childhood components of the PRAXIS on their first attempt between September 2012 and August 2013. A passing score on each exam is 157. Higher percentages pass after taking the test several times.<sup>xliv</sup>

	Early Childhood Content Knowledge				Principles of Learning Teaching: Early Childhood			
	N	Mean Score	Number Passing	Percent Passing	N	Mean Score	Number Passing	Percent Passing
ASU	145	176	144	99.3	151	165	116	76.8
ATU	98	178	97	99	81	166	64	79
Harding	111	178	111	100	89	169	77	86.5
Henderson	58	175	58	100	83	166	70	84.3
John Brown	31	183	31	100	22	176	21	95.5
Lyon	7	181	7	100	7	169	6	85.7
OBU	22	180	22	100	13	167	11	84.6
Philander Smith	5	167	4	80	3	*	*	*
SAU	53	175	52	98.1	50	161	30	60
UA	108	178	107	99.1	132	172	121	91.7
UAFS	47	176	47	100	52	164	44	84.6
UALR	46	178	46	100	58	169	51	87.9
UAM	32	170	30	93.8	38	164	27	71.1
UAPB	7	169	6	85.7	6	155	2	33.3
UCA	106	178	104	98.1	99	170	92	92.9
U of Ozarks	13	177	13	100	6	172	6	100
Williams Baptist	14	177	14	100	15	169	12	80
Statewide	909	177	898	98.8	910	167	756	83.1

## Gaps and Barriers

**Evaluating the Quality of Teacher Prep Programs.** One challenge we have had as a state is evaluating the quality of our teacher preparation programs and sharing that information publicly so that individuals who want to become teachers can make informed choices about the schools they attend. The new “Educator Preparation Performance Reports” will go a long way toward achieving this goal. As much or more importantly, because this information will be public, colleges of education will be encouraged to address those areas where improvement is needed.

**Implementing the New Dyslexia Law Requirements.** Dyslexia is a neurological disorder that interferes with the acquisition and processing of language. Varying in degrees of severity, it is manifested by difficulties in receptive and expressive language, including phonological processing, in reading, writing, spelling, handwriting, and sometimes in arithmetic. As a result, as colleges of education think about how to teach about dyslexia, they will need to draw upon other disciplines.

## Model

**UALR.** The University of Arkansas at Little Rock College of Education and Health Professions is developing its approach to preparing educators for the new dyslexia law in three ways. First, they are adding references to dyslexia in relevant teacher education courses on topics such as teaching methods, diagnosis, differentiation, and reading. This includes understanding what dyslexia is, understanding the markers and how to assess for them, using the RTI process to meet the needs of children with dyslexia, and recognizing

which instructional methods are most effective. Second, they are developing a two-year graduate level dyslexia therapist training program that would result in a certification. As a first step, UALR is identifying existing faculty members who want to become certified so they can teach in the program. Finally, UALR is interested in research around dyslexia, particularly around interventions.

## **Chronic Absence**

When children miss school, they miss out on instruction from their teachers. If they miss too much school, they have a difficult time catching up with their classmates. In the early grades, they are missing out on the building blocks for reading that they will need throughout the rest of their life.

### **Current Policy**

Under state law, local school boards have the responsibility to develop and adopt student attendance policies.<sup>xlv</sup> Most districts take advantage of the Model Policy Service provided by the Arkansas School Boards Association. Therefore, local attendance policies can vary, but there is a lot of similarity. For example, local district policies tend to define two types of absences – excused and unexcused. Excused absences require a parent’s permission and include reasons such as illness, school activities, court appearance, etc. All other absences are usually considered unexcused. Excessive absences are usually defined based on a number of days absent, and parents are contacted when the number of absences begins to approach that limit. Once the limit has been reached, districts notify the prosecuting attorney.

The number of days that students are present and absent is used to calculate an average daily attendance (ADA). This is the standard metric used by schools and districts to assess whether or not they have an attendance problem.

### **Research**

A growing body of research on school attendance makes the case for looking at attendance in a different way. Rather than using ADA as the yardstick, districts around the country are beginning to use a measure called chronic absence. Chronic absence is defined as missing 10 percent or more of the school year, for any reason. Both excused and unexcused absences are counted. ADA can mask chronic absence. While 95 percent ADA is considered good, an analysis of six elementary schools in Oakland, California that had 95 percent ADA, found their chronic absence rates ranged from 7 percent to 16 percent.<sup>xlvi</sup>

The theory behind the measure of chronic absence is that when a child is not in school, for any reason, he is missing out on instruction, and is less likely to have academic success. Analysis of chronic absence data in a growing number of districts around the country provides evidence that this common sense statement is in fact true. A recent analysis of Arkansas data found that more than one in 10 kindergartners and first graders are chronically absent, and half of all chronically absent students in grades 1 through 3 are not reading proficiently.<sup>xlvii</sup>

Using chronic absence as a measure rather than the number of days absent, can also help schools and districts act more proactively to address absence problems. They can look at chronic absence rates for various subgroups of children to determine where to target resources, starting at the beginning of the school year. If they review chronic absence rates for individual children on a regular basis, they can identify children with high chronic absence rates as early as August or September, rather than waiting until they have accumulated a certain number of days absent.

### **Gaps and Barriers**

Attendance Works has engaged school districts around the country to address chronic absence. In that work, the group has identified three categories of reasons that children miss school – myths, barriers, and

aversion.

**Myths.** The myths are usually beliefs that parents and other caregivers, and sometimes teachers and administrators as well, have about the importance of school attendance. One common myth is that absences are only a problem when they are unexcused. Another belief is that it is acceptable to miss school sporadically; therefore it is only a problem when children miss several days in a row. And finally, parents place more value on attendance when children are older, believing that the early grades, and kindergarten and pre-K especially, are primarily about child care and less about learning.

**Barriers.** There are also barriers that keep children from coming to school. For example, a child who does not have access to health or dental care may be struggling with treatable health issues such as asthma, diabetes, or cavities. Children who rely on the bus to get to school may be absent when they miss it and have no other way to get to school because their family does not have a vehicle.

**Aversion.** Finally, aversion can be a reason that kids miss school. A child who is not doing well in school will find ways to avoid going to school like telling his parent that he does not feel well. A child who is bullied at school may also seek out reasons to stay at home. And finally, parents who had negative experiences when they were in school will give in to their children's requests to stay home or prioritize other tasks or activities over taking their children to school.

Over the past school year, seven school districts have been working with the Arkansas Campaign for Grade-Level Reading and Attendance Works to analyze chronic absence data, develop strategies for reducing chronic absence, and as a result, increase academic outcomes for children. These districts are Blytheville, Conway, Dermott, Flippin, Marvell-Elaine, Pulaski County, and Springdale. They have identified a few challenges to developing and implementing chronic absence strategies:

1. **Inconsistent Data:** Over the past few years, ADE has worked with districts around the state on a transition to a new web-based data system, called E-school. The integration of all districts into the system will be completed in the 2014-2015 school year. As school and district personnel learn the new system, the transition has led to some inconsistencies in how attendance data is reported. For example, an analysis of data found that statewide chronic absence rates doubled between the 2011-2012 and 2012-2013 school years, which is not a likely occurrence.
2. **Law Enforcement:** While referral to the prosecuting attorney for excessive absences is a key tenet of most local attendance policies, districts report little action on those referrals from law enforcement and the courts.

### **Models**

**Indiana.** In 2013, the Indiana legislature passed a law that changed the state's *definition of chronic absenteeism* to include excused and unexcused absences and sets the mark at missing 10 percent of the school year. The new law requires the state Department of Education to *provide schools with resources and guidance* in best practices and strategy to reduce chronic absenteeism. Schools, in turn, must develop "*chronic absenteeism reduction plans*" that will be incorporated into school improvement plans. Legislators also established an interim study committee to examine the definitions of excused and unexcused absences, as well as the use and effectiveness of school district-court partnerships in serving habitually truant students (along with suspended and expelled students).

**Maryland.** Maryland has a strong commitment to data tracking and reporting. Chronic absence and average daily attendance are maintained on the Maryland State Department of Education's report card website.

**Utah.** Utah is engaged in a public awareness campaign among various stakeholders, educating them about the importance of school attendance and its relationship to academic achievement. The stakeholders include the state teacher’s union, PTA, cities, elected officials and community leaders. The campaign includes the following components:

1. Public service announcements in English and Spanish with Gov. Gary R. Herbert or Real Salt Lake soccer player Sebastian Velasquez
2. Proclamations announced by several major cities in Utah, and
3. A back-to-school event with Gov. Herbert where he issued a formal proclamation declaring September as Attendance Awareness Month.

## **Retention**

Retention has long been a controversial policy among education researchers, professionals, and parents. While research shows that retained students tend to have worse social-emotional and educational outcomes, critics argue that social promotion causes problems as well.

### **Current Policy**

As a result of the Lakeview Supreme Court decision, the Arkansas legislature passed a bill in 2003 that established a statewide educational assessment system in literacy and math for children in grades K-12. Each school district must ensure that educators in that district provide instruction to prepare students to demonstrate proficiency in the skills and competencies necessary for successful grade-to-grade progression and high school graduation.

Any student who exhibits a substantial deficiency in reading, based upon statewide assessments conducted in Kindergarten through 2<sup>nd</sup> grade or through teacher observation, should receive intensive reading instruction. The student’s reading is reassessed, and intensive reading instruction is provided until the deficiency is corrected. Parents must be notified in writing of the deficiency and given a description of the services being provided to the child and the proposed supplemental instructional services and supports that will be provided to the child that are designed to remediate the identified area of reading deficiency.

Students in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade and above who do not meet the satisfactory pass levels in the most recent benchmark assessment must participate in remediation activities as required in the student's individualized academic improvement plan beginning in the school year the assessment results are reported. Parents must be notified. Students that do not participate in the academic improvement plan are to be retained in their current grade until they have participated in an academic improvement program or passed the benchmark.<sup>xlviii</sup>

To implement the requirements of this legislation, ADE supports the application of an effective Response to Intervention System (RTI). According to the National Center on RTI (2010), the critical components of a research-based RTI system are as follows:

- Data-based decision making
- Screening
- Progress monitoring
- Multi-level prevention system

RTI infuses these components through a multi-tiered systematic framework that is designed to provide effective instruction, screening, progress monitoring and providing research-based interventions when

necessary. Ideally, this framework of actions is implemented to prevent students from requiring special education services when possible. The RTI system should include three levels of prevention:

- **Tier I: Primary prevention** involves the delivery of high-quality core instruction that meets the needs of most students in the class.
- **Tier II: Secondary prevention** involves the delivery of research-based intervention(s) of moderate intensity to address the learning or behavioral challenges of most at-risk students in the class.
- **Tier III: Tertiary prevention** involves the delivery of individualized intervention(s) of increased intensity for students who show minimal response to secondary prevention.

Arkansas' implementation of an effective RTI framework is designed to intervene early and often for those students experiencing reading and mathematics difficulty. Implementing this model with fidelity at the school and classroom level allows teachers and administrators to have confidence that every child has the opportunity to achieve success.<sup>xlix</sup>

### **Research/Outcomes**

A large body of research shows that retained students tend to have worse social-emotional outcomes and are more likely to drop out of school than similar students who are promoted.<sup>l</sup> A review of 91 studies found that retention by itself does not appear to benefit students. Retained students experienced either no academic gains or short-term gains that faded over time, and the negative effects carried over to postsecondary education and employment outcomes in adulthood.<sup>li</sup>

Social promotion, or the practice of advancing students with their peers whether or not they demonstrate the required skills for the next grade, has been defended as preventing damage to a child's social and psychological well-being. However, critics argue that this practice puts students into grades before they are ready for the work, forces teachers to deal with unprepared students, and gives parents a false sense of progress for their children.<sup>lii</sup>

A more recent development in education policy has been the advent of test-based retention or promotion, which is tied to additional interventions for retained students.

In 2002, Florida began requiring 3<sup>rd</sup> grade students to be retained if they did not score at least a Level 2 ("limited success") on the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test. In addition to retention, Florida implemented a series of other interventions for students who did not meet this score and were not granted an exemption from the policy. These include requiring schools to develop academic improvement plans customized to retained students' needs; requiring students to attend a summer literacy camp; assigning retained students to a "high-performing teacher"; and providing an additional 90 minutes of daily reading instruction during students' retained year.<sup>liii</sup>

In the first year that Florida's retention policy was implemented, the percentage of third graders retained jumped from 2.8 percent to 13.5 percent. After two years, students retained under the policy performed significantly better in both reading and math than comparable students who were promoted. Retained students were also less likely to be retained in a subsequent grade.<sup>liv</sup> A more recent study on the statistical significance and effectiveness of third grade retention policy in Florida found no significant evidence that student outcomes improved long term. Additionally, the study found no statistical evidence of retention's impact on students needing remedial courses in later grades.<sup>lv</sup>

Florida's policy incorporated retention side by side with strenuous reading interventions for students determined to be falling behind. The effects of retention versus these other interventions cannot be easily disentangled, and the implementation of these interventions appears to matter a great deal. For example,

retained students under a similar test-based promotion policy in Chicago were found to fall behind their promoted counterparts by the sixth grade, whereas evaluations of the Florida policy using the same method showed gains increasing over time.<sup>lvi</sup> While social promotion was ended in both examples, the details of implementation led to different results for students. Studies of test-based retention in Chicago and Florida have not examined the social or emotional impacts on retained students. KIPP uses Light's Retention Scale to determine whether or not retention is likely to be successful. The scale takes into account a host of factors including age, gender, physical size, parent involvement, behavior, and history of delinquency, attendance, and previous retentions.<sup>lvii</sup>

### **Gaps and Barriers**

In recent years, several states have passed policies requiring students to be retained if they have not reached reading proficiency by the end of third grade. Florida, Oklahoma, Ohio, and North Carolina are just a few examples. As the research has shown, Florida's policy has worked, at least in the first few years following retention, because of the additional supports they have provided to help the children achieve reading proficiency, either before or after they reach the third grade. But those supports cost money. And retention policies without support cost money as well.

**Cost of Educating Students for Another Year.** Retaining students is expensive. Oklahoma's retention law passed in 2011 and was to go into effect for children reaching the end of third grade during the 2013-2014 school year. When the results were released this spring, 16 percent of third graders statewide scored unsatisfactory on the state reading exam. Almost 8,000 third graders could have been retained.<sup>lviii</sup> In 2011, an analysis showed that retention of between 2,200 and 3,200 students would have cost the state an additional \$18 million to \$25 million for the extra year of school the state would have to provide.<sup>lix</sup> Given the actual numbers of children who failed the exam this past year, the costs might have been double or triple that amount, for just one class of retained students. In May, the Oklahoma legislature passed a law that would make it possible for a child who scored unsatisfactory on the reading test to be promoted, as long as a team of parents and teachers approve. Governor Mary Fallin vetoed the bill, but the legislature overrode her veto.<sup>lx</sup>

**Cost of Reading Intervention.** The cost of reading interventions varies depending on student needs and the program that is selected for each student. A recent cost-effectiveness analysis on reading programs revealed that some intensive reading programs can cost as much as \$12,000 per student. Direct additional costs of these interventions include materials such as computer-based lessons and quizzes, additional books, and manuals and teacher guides.<sup>lxi</sup> Every reading intervention also requires more adult time than the typical classroom environment. An analysis of 12 published studies by the University of Texas Center on Instruction shows that costs per student of personnel range from \$156 to \$6,487; the midpoint of costs was just under \$2,000 per student per year.<sup>lxii</sup>

**Cost of Professional Development.** Florida has spent \$300 million on teacher professional development for reading alone over the last seven years, more than \$3,000 per teacher per year.<sup>lxiii</sup>

## **What Can We Do to Improve What Happens After School and During the Summer?**

### **Parent Engagement**

Students benefit academically from parent engagement. Ideally parent engagement is two-pronged - providing an avenue for input from parents on school issues and providing input to parents about their children's education, their teachers, and the quality of their children's school. An effective parent



engagement strategy will result in a family-school partnership and will meet the needs and interests of the families of diverse student populations.

### **Current Policy**

**Federal.** ESEA, which originally passed in 1965, was seen as an opportunity for low-income parents to hold their children’s school districts accountable. The act spurred interest in providing parents information on topics such as teacher quality and assessment data so they, in turn, could demand improved public schools. However, those ideals have not been fully recognized. In an effort to move forward on this promise, this spring the U.S. Department of Education released the “Partners in Education Framework” to encourage and assist schools in improving parent engagement.

Family engagement has long been part of federal policy through Title I of the ESEA. Title I, which provides additional funding to schools based on rates of poverty, requires that those schools develop parental involvement policies. Title I outlines the actions required by state departments of education, districts, and schools in relation to parent involvement. The law states that parents are to be included in the decision-making efforts of the schools and districts. Schools must insure inclusion, enabling parents’ access to information about their child’s education to the “extent practicable, in a language that parents can understand.”<sup>lxiv</sup> Additionally, Title III of ESEA specifically addresses participation of parents of English Language Learners in relation to language instruction programs and language acquisition.

**Arkansas.** Thirty-nine states and the District of Columbia have enacted laws concerning family engagement policies. According to a 2005 report by the Education Commission for the States 17 states including Arkansas require all districts (not just Title I recipients) to implement parental involvement policies. Arkansas requires schools to have parent involvement plans and parent involvement facilitators at every school. Recent legislation has attempted to strengthen the impact of parent involvement requirements in the schools. Act 1002 of 2011 required ADE to monitor school districts’ parent involvement plans and evaluate their implementation and effectiveness. Also, act 1423 of 2013 requires that parent-friendly summaries of the parental involvement plan be provided to parents at the time the plans are finalized.

ADE has promulgated rules to govern the implementation of parent involvement plans. The rules state that all districts must have a parent involvement plan that is part of the district’s Arkansas Comprehensive School Improvement Plan (ACSIP). A parent facilitator must be designated. Efforts are to be made to involve parents in roles such as:

1. Involvement in the education of their children
2. Volunteer activities
3. Learning activities that support classroom instruction
4. Participation in school decisions
5. Collaboration with the community
6. Development of school goals and priorities
7. Evaluating the effectiveness of the ACSIP<sup>lxv</sup>

The rules require Title I schools to comply with federal guidelines for parental involvement plans, which include the following:

1. Insuring that parents with disabilities have support and services to enable them to participate
2. Requiring that schools provide an information packet describing programs and ways parents can be involved
3. Designating a licensed teacher as parent facilitator on top of her teaching responsibilities, for which she receives supplemental pay

The rules also outline strategies for schools to capitalize on community resources and encourage the use of parent centers. ADE is required to monitor the development and implementation of the plans every six years.

Fifteen states encourage or direct employers to enable parents to attend school activities such as parent/teacher conferences. Arkansas does not, but did pass legislation (Act 1028 of 2007) to allow state employees one day paid leave for participation in their children's educational activities. In 2012, several states, including Massachusetts, added family engagement to their educator evaluation systems, as one of the components used to evaluate teachers and administrators.<sup>lxvi</sup>

The Arkansas State Board of Education has undertaken a review of parent engagement. The National Association of State Boards of Education produced a guide titled, "How Schools Work and How to Work with Schools." Some of the discussion is summarized below:

1. To reach parents include networking through other parents and information enclosed with utility bills
2. Collaborate with the local Parent Teacher Organization
3. Identify target groups and key communicators including religious organizations
4. Conduct outreach through media that parents use, local service providers, and other channels
5. Build parent trust and understand cultural nuances
6. Go to locations outside the school to meet with parents

The State Board also discussed the need for a handbook on parent communication. Two former teachers of the year are studying the Parent Academy in Kentucky and the Parents and Teachers Program in St. Louis. They will share the results with the State Board.<sup>lxvii</sup>

### **Research**

Parent and community ties can improve learning outcomes for children and consequently improve whole schools when it is part of an overall system of quality education.<sup>lxviii</sup> This is especially true when student achievement and school improvement are seen as a responsibility of both school officials and parents. This partnership brings about relationships of trust and respect between home and school. Children benefit as parents become the primary supporters of their learning, encourage determination and persistence, lead by example by participating in lifelong learning opportunities, and advocate for proper programming and placement.<sup>lxix</sup>

For parent engagement policies to work, both educators and families must have the prerequisite skills, knowledge and belief systems. This requires professional development for educators and training for parents. Merely opening the school doors for parent meetings is not sufficient. It takes careful planning and sustained effort to reach families who are reticent about interactions with school personnel or just busy with their lives. The Dual Capacity-Building Framework shared by the U.S. Department of Education can be used to clarify where existing programs are strong and where more work is needed.<sup>lxx</sup>

Capabilities	Connections	Confidence	Cognition
<p><b>Families have...</b></p> <p>enhanced knowledge and understanding of educational policies and programs, such as those associated with special needs and Title I increased their knowledge and understanding of what their children should know and be able to do from birth through secondary school</p> <p>enhanced their own skills associated with literacy and language acquisition, degree completion, and job skills.</p> <p><b>District and school staff have increased their...</b></p> <p>knowledge of the strengths and weaknesses of the families and communities</p> <p>knowledge and understanding of culturally responsive practices and pedagogy</p> <p>portfolio of ways to build respectful and trusting relationships.</p>	<p>Levels of relational trust have increased between families and school staff.</p> <p>The number and scope of parent-to-parent networks and connections has increased.</p> <p>The number of cross-cultural networks (across race, socioeconomic status, education level, etc.) has increased between school staff and families.</p> <p>Families and staff have increased their connections to community agencies and services.</p>	<p>Families and school staff indicate an increase in their comfort level and sense of self-efficacy when engaging in home-school partnership events and activities.</p> <p>An increased number of families and staff from diverse backgrounds take on positions of leadership at the school or in the community.</p>	<p>Families' beliefs about the role they play in their children's education have broadened to include multiple roles.</p> <p>District and school staff members' core beliefs about family engagement have been discussed and documented.</p> <p>Staff and families' belief systems about the value of home-school partnerships are linked to learning and school improvement.</p> <p>Staff members have a commitment to family engagement as a core strategy to improve teaching and learning.</p>

For parent engagement programs to be successful staff must honor and recognize families' existing knowledge, skill, and forms of engagement. They must create and sustain school and district cultures that welcome, invite, and promote family engagement and development. Finally, staff must develop and connect all family engagement initiatives to student learning.<sup>lxxi</sup>

### **Gaps and Barriers**

Some schools and some parents see parent engagement as limited to boosterism for the school or required parent-teacher conferences. Too many parents only hear from their children's school when their child is in trouble—academically or behaviorally. And in a few cases, schools really do not want the input or action of

all parents. They view parent's efforts to intervene on their child's behalf or in broader policies as a nuisance or hindrance.

Parents, educators, and others in communities across Arkansas identified the following challenges to parent engagement and solutions for addressing them.

- **Lack of Knowledge.** Many parents do not engage because they do not understand how schools and school districts operate. Organizations like the Arkansas Public Policy Panel and the Rural Community Alliance help parents learn about education issues and school practices so they feel comfortable getting involved. They provide community groups with data about their schools, explain school funding, and assist parents in navigating the school administration and school political setting.
- **Cultural Competence.** Some parents do not engage because they feel that teachers and administrators do not have the cultural competence to understand and communicate with parents whose cultures are different than their own. Schools could involve churches and other individuals and organizations that parents trust to help them connect.
- **Parent Literacy.** Parents may have limited education and literacy skills, which can pose a barrier to helping their children with schoolwork. ADE has developed materials that parents can use at home to better understand what their children are learning at school.
- **Age of the Child.** As children grow older, schools tend to reach out to parents only when there is a problem, and the interactions are not always positive. Pre-school is an ideal time to work with parents in a non-threatening environment to make it easier for parents to continue staying involved as their children move into the K-12 setting. The Arkansas Head Start program has a strong program for getting parents involved in their children's activities.
- **Distance to Schools.** School consolidation in rural areas has lengthened already long travel distances to reach school facilities. Children often take the bus to school, and parents without reliable transportation have a difficult time getting there. Schools could offer parent workshops in locations closer to the families' homes, or even conduct home visits, showing their willingness to meet the parents where they are.<sup>1</sup>

Research on parent engagement has summarized the following barriers, several of which were mentioned above:

- Resources and abilities such as English proficiency, child care responsibilities, and inadequate transportation
- Expectations and motives such as different cultural expectations of what is required,
- Cultural capital in the school environment such as social class differences between school personnel and parents
- Principal leadership in working directly with parents and setting the tone for teachers. Minority principals may be better able to develop effective policies and practices in reaching minority parents. <sup>lxxii</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> These barriers were identified in one or more of the following surveys and discussion groups:

Survey of Rural Community Alliance membership, October 2013.

Discussion group with Arkansas Public Policy Panel South Arkansas Caucus, November 2013.

Discussion group with Arkansas Campaign for Grade-Level Reading Community Solutions Initiative grantees, December 2013.

### **Model Parent Involvement Programs**

**Michigan Parent Engagement Toolkit.** Michigan has developed a webpage and toolkit to help both parents and schools “Collaborate for Success.” The toolkit has a section of resources for parents and one for school officials. The information for parents includes information about the school system so parents can better understand the educational process; explanation of their rights as a parent and their child’s rights as a student; information about how to get involved in their child’s education; and resources on how to support their child at any age.

**Indiana Family Friendly School Designation.** Indiana Act 422 of 2013, charged the Indiana Department of Education (IDE) with responsibility to develop the Indiana family friendly school designation program. Schools are allowed to voluntarily request an assessment by IDE to evaluate and improve parental involvement in the school. In turn, the IDE may designate a school as an Indiana family friendly school, if it is determined that the school has policies that increase parental involvement and foster high student achievement. IDE developed standards to evaluate parent involvement, which includes surveys of teachers, students, and parents. IDE shares best practices with schools, annually assesses the designations, and submits results to the state board of education.<sup>lxxiii</sup>

**Tennessee Parent Involvement Report Cards.** In Tennessee’s report card proposal, a four-year pilot program will be set up involving two of Tennessee’s struggling schools. Parents of students in kindergarten through third grade will be given a blank report card at the same time they receive their children’s report cards. The parents will do a self-evaluation of their involvement, giving themselves a grade of excellent, satisfactory, needs improvement, or unsatisfactory. The program may be expanded depending on how many parents participate. Ideally, the parents grading themselves will become aware of either the good job that they are doing regarding their children’s education, or possibly become aware of areas where they may be able to make improvements.<sup>lxxiv</sup>

**Maryland’s Comcast Parent Involvement Matters Award.** Comcast worked with the Maryland State Department of Education to develop the Parent Involvement Matters Award. The award is given to parents (and others with legal responsibility for a child) whose exemplary contributions to public education have led to improvements for Maryland’s public school children, teachers, schools, programs, and/or policies. The award is used to highlight the positive impact parents have on public schools and encourage all parents to get involved in whatever way they can. The areas of parental involvement eligible for the awards are 1) communication, 2) volunteering, 3) learning, 4) community collaboration, and 5) decision making. Nominees must have made a significant, positive impact on public education with their involvement project within the last 24 months.<sup>lxxv</sup>

**Kentucky’s Institute for Parent Leadership.** The Pritchard Committee in Kentucky set up a Governor’s Commonwealth Institute for Parent Leadership to assist parents in developing their school leadership and advocacy skills. Corporate sponsors provide funding for six-day institutes in three, two-day sessions, free of charge. The Institute support informed parents and developed their skills as effective advocates for improving Kentucky public schools. The program educates parents on how to assess the progress of their children’s schools; informs parents on how to become partners in improving their schools; motivates parents to help other parents become involved; and support parents after they become involved.<sup>lxxvi</sup>

**OneCommunity Reads, *UnaComunidad Leyendo!*** During the 2012-2013 school year, OneCommunity Reads, *UnaComunidad Leyendo!* partnered with the Springdale School District to pilot Parents Taking Leadership Action (PTLA). PTLA was designed to complement the district’s existing Family Literacy Program, where parents spend 10 hours a week learning English, spending time in their child’s classroom, and learning about community resources. PTLA is a 15-week parent engagement program that builds upon

the strengths of parents as they learn about their child's academic world. Its goals are to strengthen parent-school communication, increase educational awareness, and enhance the leadership potential among parents from diverse populations. PTLA includes "legacy" projects where parents assess the needs of their school and community and develop an action plan to implement changes and address those needs. A recent example is a parent guide on what to do if a child is being bullied. PTLA parents also participate with their children in the Feed Your Brain, *Alimenta Tu Cerebro* summer reading club. During the 2013-2014 school year, 43 families with children at George and Lee Elementary schools participated in PTLA.

## Summer and After-School Programs

When school is out during the summer, many children have no access to educational and enrichment activities that can help them continue to learn. As a result, the first few weeks of school are spent re-teaching material from the previous grade and over time, without summer learning opportunities, children can fall several grades behind their peers.

### Current Policy

**Positive Youth Development Act.** The Positive Youth Development Act was passed by the Arkansas legislature as Act 166 of 2011. The act established the intent and structure for the use of state funds for grants to local communities to operate high quality after-school and summer programs. The rules for the program were approved in July 2013. However, efforts to secure funding for pilot programs based on the legislation have been unsuccessful. The act builds on the standards, practices, and goals recommended by the 2008 Governor's Task Force on Best Practices for After-school and Summer Programs. The task force called for expanded access to safe, challenging, engaging, and supervised learning experiences.

The program as proposed would give priority consideration to a community where any local school (a) has 50 percent or more students eligible for free and reduced lunches; and (b) has been designated by ADE as being in school improvement. The program would serve children and youth ages 5 through 19 who are members of a family with a gross income of no more 200 percent of the federal poverty guidelines. Higher income families can participate by paying a fee based on income.

A key element of the program is community engagement and collaboration among schools, public institutions, private agencies, business, and other community-based organizations working together to create a "community learning environment" for students. These approaches include academic supports and skill building activities; programs that improve health and wellness; art, theater, music programs; service learning or community service experiences; activities that link academic curriculum to actual work experiences; services to disconnected youth; and family and community engagement. Finally, the programs must adhere to quality standards and measure outcomes. Outcome measures would include but are not be limited to: student achievement, academic skills, school engagement; social, emotional, and behavioral development; health and wellness; and reduced contact with the judicial system.

**Arkansas NSLA Categorical Funding.** NSLA, which is described on page 16, can be used to pay for after-school and summer programs. Unfortunately, it is seldom used for those purposes. In 2010, Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families (AACF) released a report questioning the effectiveness of the use of NSLA funds. The report called for a reduction in the large NSLA fund balances maintained by many districts, which was addressed by Act 1220 of 2011. The AACF report also called for reducing the wide range of uses for NSLA funds, noting "just 12 percent of the \$157.8 million sent to Arkansas schools in the 2008/2009 school year to help poor students was spent on proven programs." In particular, AACF identified lack of NSLA spending on three research-proven programs: high-quality before- and after-school and summer programs, high-quality early childhood education, and school initiatives that promote student health.

In December 2012, the BLR released an analysis of the relationship between the poverty status of school districts, student academic achievement, and the impact of NSLA funding on achievement. The BLR research showed a negative relationship between student achievement and the percentage of low-income students. Additionally, there was little change in the relationship between 2006 and 2011. This lack of change indicates that NSLA funding levels are not associated with achievement gains. BLR reported the large and expanding number of uses for which districts are allowed to spend NSLA funding. There are 19 allowable uses in statute and another 12 added through rules adopted by the State Board of Education. The BLR report noted that spreading NSLA funding so broadly may dilute the impact of the funding.

In March 2013, after the legislative session was underway, the House and Senate education committees met jointly to enable new members to hear a review of the BLR research on NSLA funding and to hear similar research by the University of Arkansas's Office of Education Policy (OEP). OEP's research focused on potential revisions to the NSLA funding model. They also addressed the need for a menu of promising programs on which to focus NSLA expenditures.

The research conducted by all three groups—AACF, BLR, and OEP—had a common theme: The potential effectiveness of NSLA funding on improving educational outcomes for low-income students was being undermined because funding was not adequately targeted, and districts were not focusing their NSLA spending on promising or research proven strategies.

During the 2013 legislative session, a bill was drafted that would have called for restrictions in the use of NSLA funding, but it was not presented or discussed in committee. However, the intentions of the bill and another aimed at adjusting the distribution formula for the NSLA program were included in the bill that updates school adequacy funding— Act 1467 of 2013.

Act 1467 set the tone for a study that was legally required to be conducted prior to the 2014 fiscal session. "It is clear that the evidence strongly suggests that an increase of national school lunch state categorical funding for the upcoming school year is unlikely to produce the expected increase in academic achievement for the students for whom the funding is provided." Act 1467 required 1) a list of evidence-based programs for which NSLA funds can be expended by school districts; and 2) a new NSLA funding formula that provides funding for economically disadvantaged students on a sliding scale and weights the funding to provide more money to districts for students who qualify for free meals than it provides to students who qualify for reduced-priced meals.

The legislature failed to complete this legally required study. In the midst of the 2014 session the education committees met to make an official motion recommending that they do nothing at this point in time.

**Title I.** Title I of ESEA, which is described on page 16, can be used by school districts to conduct after-school and summer programs. According to the U.S. Department of Education, the percentage of schools nationwide offering extended learning time increased dramatically — from 9 to 41 percent between 1994 and 1999. In Title I schools offering instructional programs before or after school or on weekends, an average of 12 percent of students participate, while 25 percent participate in summer programs where they are offered.<sup>lxxxvii</sup> Still, more than half of all Title I schools offer no programs of this kind.

**ESEA Title IV, Part B.** Another section of ESEA is for the 21st Century Community Learning Centers program (21C CLC), the only federal funding source dedicated to after-school programs. The primary purpose of 21C CLC is to establish or expand community learning centers that operate during non-school hours. The program must provide students in high poverty schools with intensive academic enrichment

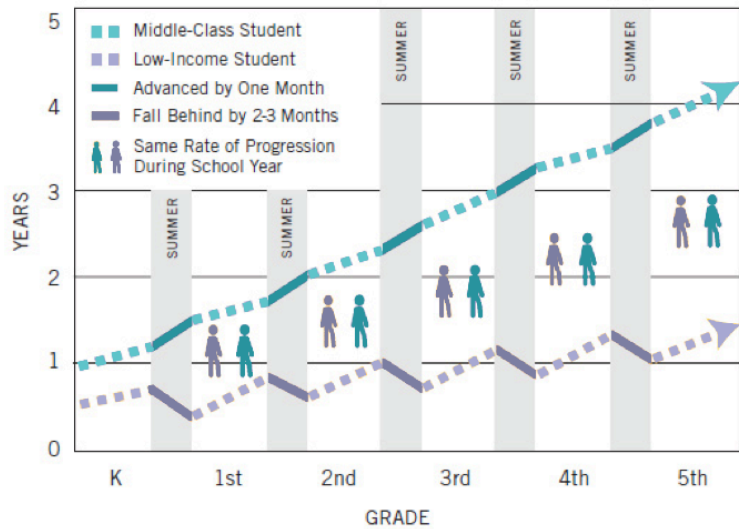
opportunities along with other activities designed to complement the students' regular academic program. Community learning centers must also offer literacy and related educational services to families of the targeted student.<sup>lxxviii</sup>

21C CLC began in 1995 and was reauthorized and changed as part of No Child Left Behind (NCLB). Administration of the 21C CLC moved from federal to state government, institutionalizing the management of extended learning programs as part of the work of state education agencies. NCLB strengthened the academic components of 21C CLC and also required state education agencies to fund programs that serve a high percentage of students from low-income families. Within this context, the federal government made it clear that it views extended learning programs as a promising strategy to close the achievement gap between poor and affluent students and between white students and students of color.<sup>lxxix</sup>

**Research**

**Summer Learning Loss.** Low-income students are more likely to experience summer learning loss than their higher income peers because they have less access to educational opportunities in their homes and communities. Low-income students can fall behind two to three months each summer, which by 5<sup>th</sup> grade, can put them two and a half to three grade levels behind their peers. Quality summer learning programs can help bridge the enrichment experience gap. These programs can give students the chance to master material they did not learn in the previous school year, prevent learning loss, propel learning gains, and provide low-income students with enrichment opportunities similar to those experienced by their middle-income peers.<sup>lxxx</sup>

**Low Income Students Fall 2.5 to 3 Years Behind by Fifth Grade**



**Quality Program Requirements.** Summer program attendance will not result in positive outcomes if the programs are not high quality. Four indicators of quality out-of-school programs successful in preventing summer learning loss are:

1. High quality instruction,
2. Alignment with school curricula,
3. Engaging and rigorous programming, and
4. Maximized participation and attendance.<sup>lxxxii</sup>

Other program characteristics that support learning gains for participants include:

1. Small group or individualized instruction,
2. Early intervention during primary grades,
3. Parent involvement and participation, and
4. Careful evaluation of implementation process.<sup>lxxxiii</sup>



In 2008, the Arkansas Governor’s Taskforce on Best Practices for After-School and Summer Programs developed guidelines including measures of success for meaningful evaluations. The group proposed that the state should have a coordinated system that holds out-of-school programs accountable for positive child and youth outcomes. After extensive discussions, the Task Force proposed adapting existing minimum child-care licensing requirements in Arkansas for licensed school-age care programs to address the unique needs of after-school and summer programs. Considerable overlap exists between child-care health and safety regulations and other quality standards appropriate for after-school and summer programs. These minimum requirements provide a foundation for building higher standards but need to be revised to address the needs of children and youth in after-school and summer programs, particularly those for older youth.

The Task Force strongly urged Arkansas to move beyond establishing a system based on minimum standards to the development of higher nationally recognized quality standards for all after-school and summer programs. For this to be effective, incentives such as financial support and technical assistance would be needed; also, widespread public education would be required to encourage programs to strive to meet higher standards and for parents to recognize the benefits of participation in high-quality programs for their children and youth. Adapting regulations that are flexible enough to apply to all after-school and summer programs, determining which regulations apply to certain programs and settings, and acknowledging barriers that some programs face in meeting such regulations are all challenges that must be addressed.<sup>lxxxiii</sup>

### **Gaps and Barriers**

**Access to After-School and Summer Programs.** As the table on the next page shows, children from low-income families are much less likely to participate in summer and after-school programs than their higher income peers. In Arkansas, parents report that just 37 percent of low-income 6 to 11 year olds participate, compared to 68.4 percent of children in families whose incomes above 200 percent of the federal poverty line. The patterns are the same for older children – just 43 percent of low-income kids ages 12 to 17 participate, compared to 70 percent of higher income kids. Arkansas children participate at rates similar to national averages.<sup>lxxxiv</sup>

Out-of-School Activities in 2012	6-11 year-olds Family Income 200% FPL or lower	6-11 year-olds Family Income > 200% FPL	12-17 year-olds Family Income 200% FPL or lower	12-17 year-olds Family Income > 200% FPL
Arkansas	37.3	68.4	43.0	70.2
U.S. Average	38.3	65.5	43.9	72.7

Parents, educators, and others in communities across Arkansas identified the following challenges to summer learning and solutions for addressing them.

- 1. Lack of Organized Summer Learning Opportunities:** Many communities, particularly in rural areas, have few or no organized summer learning opportunities. Schools and pre-K programs such as ABC and Head Start are usually not open in the summer.
- 2. Summer School Should Be Different From the School Year:** Too often, summer school is just a repeat of what happened during the school year, and it does not engage children who would rather be doing other things. Additionally, if the methods used during the school year were not

effective with the children, they are not likely to be effective a second time around. Effective summer schools take more of a summer camp approach that meshes learning and fun.

3. **Children Need Access to Books During the Summer:** Many children have no books at home. School libraries could open for a half day a week during the summer. Schools could send home reading kits over the summer that include books and activities the children could do with their parents.
4. **Affordable Summer Learning Materials:** Many of the summer learning opportunities that exist are operated on a shoestring by a church or other nonprofit. These organizations need access to reasonably priced, standardized reading curricula that build on and support what children are learning during the school year.<sup>2</sup>

### **Models**

**Boys and Girls Club of Central Arkansas.** The Boys and Girls Club of Central Arkansas (BGCCA) conducted Project Read 2020 at three North Little Rock clubs in the summer of 2013. BGCCA hired four reading specialists from the North Little Rock School District (NLRSD) who provided 30 minutes of support to each student each day. NLRSD provided end of year reading scores, and BGCCA assessed the children at the end of the summer to see if their scores had changed.

Project Read 2020 began with 150 children. By the end of the summer, just over 100 had completed the program. As the table below shows, of those children who stayed with the program, the percentage reading at or above grade level, according to the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) increased from 38 percent at the beginning of the summer to 52 percent. Correspondingly, the percentage of children reading below grade level decreased from 62 percent at the beginning of the summer to 48 percent.

Beginning of Summer	# of kids	% of kids
Below grade level	63	62%
At grade level	10	10%
Above grade level	29	28%
Total	102	
End of Summer		
Below grade level	49	48%
At grade level	8	8%
Above grade level	45	44%
	102	

The project was so successful in its first year that the North Little Rock School District provided and paid for the teachers in 2014. The BGCCA is providing memberships for the students, which is a strong incentive for good attendance in the program. Students who miss more than six times lose their club membership. Teachers in the program report that attendance has not been a problem this summer. As members, children can participate in the breakfast and lunch program, play games, and swim.

<sup>2</sup> These barriers were identified in one or more of the following surveys and discussion groups:

Survey of Rural Community Alliance membership, October 2013.

Discussion group with Arkansas Public Policy Panel South Arkansas Caucus, November 2013.

Discussion group with Arkansas Campaign for Grade-Level Reading Community Solutions Initiative grantees, December 2013

**Marvell-Elaine Reads.** Marvell-Elaine Reads is a partnership between Boys, Girls, Adults, Community Development Center (BGACDC) and the Marvell-Elaine School District (MESD). During a six-week summer day camp, Marvell-Elaine Reads provides a full day of literacy-based instruction to students by combining BGACDC's Children's Defense Fund Freedom School with the Marvell-Elaine Elementary School's summer school program.

In 2013, 50 children entering grades 1-4 participated in the camp. For the first two weeks, students attended summer school in the morning and Freedom School in the afternoon. The final four weeks, students attended Freedom School all day. Twenty children entering kindergarten also participated in a month long summer camp during June to help them prepare for their first day of school.

Children improve their literacy skills, connect to their culture, develop self-discipline, and participate in community service and social action. The program includes motivational songs and chants, recognitions, and reading books aloud. The day is organized around a weekly theme and a book of the day. The theme of the week and the book are expanded into related creative activities.

This innovative partnership combines the district's resources (teachers, buildings, and support functions such as cooks, drivers, and custodians) with the resources BGACDC has raised for Freedom School so that eligible students in the district have access to an extended quality summer learning opportunity.<sup>lxxxv</sup>

**Life Skills for YOUTH.** Life Skills for YOUTH (LSY) was founded in 2007 as a faith-based program at Temple Baptist Church in southwest Little Rock. LSY provides both after-school and summer programs. Most of the students come from southwest Little Rock schools. In the summer, students come from Benton, Bryant, and North Little Rock as well.

The eight-week summer program runs from 7:30 am to 6:00 pm during the week and serves both breakfast and lunch to children ages 4 to 18. Teachers are not certified but are trained and have relative experience. LSY focuses on literacy, math, writing, and Spanish, and provides STEM and arts activities to older students. In addition to these academic activities, the program teaches social and emotional skills through their anger, time, and money management (ATM) curriculum. The program is funded through city contracts, child care vouchers, fees to parents, and foundation grants. LSY also finds staff through the Little Rock and the Workforce Center summer employment programs.

**UALR Children International:** UALR Children International offers after-school and summer programs in Little Rock. The Mind Your Own Business Summer Camp, which serves 150 Kindergarten through 5<sup>th</sup> grade students, runs for four weeks at Wakefield Elementary. In the morning, Little Rock School District teachers focus on literacy and math. In the afternoon, artists, business people, and educators work with the children to develop small businesses.

Each grade develops its own business, starting with the creation of a business plan. Most create products such as greeting cards, jewelry, wind chimes and bookmarks. At the end of the summer, the children sell their products at the River Market, with profits going to charities like Arkansas Children's Hospital, the Single Parent Scholarship Fund, and the Little Rock Zoo.

The program is effective in helping students use the academic skills they learn in the morning and apply them in the afternoon. According to pre- and post-tests, 89 percent of children increased reading scores by an average of 15 percent, and 93 percent increased math scores by an average of 6 percent. They use the Buckledown curriculum and assessment for reading and math. They have also developed their own business curriculum assessment.

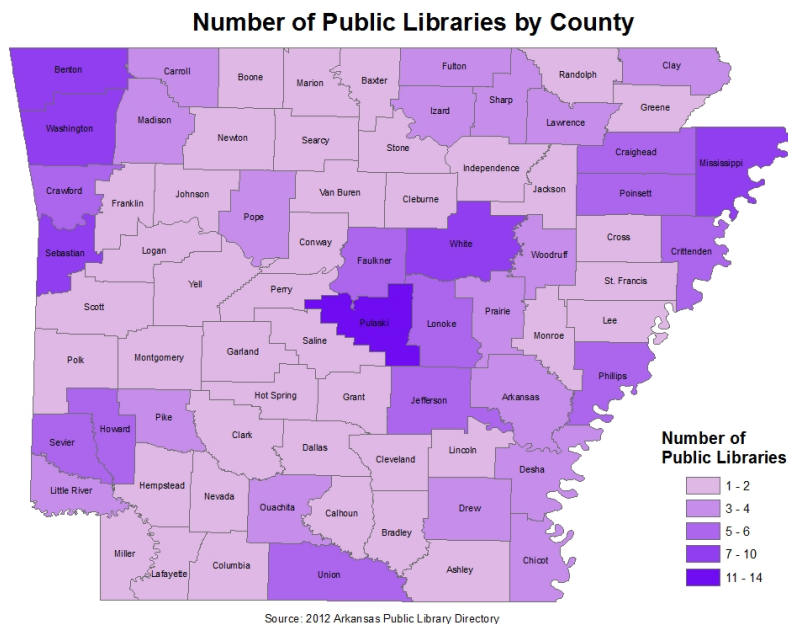
Funding for the program comes primarily from UALR Children International. They provide expenses for the camp staff and afternoon supplies for making products. Wakefield pays for the morning academic teachers and provides buses. The school is also a summer feeding site and therefore provides lunch and breakfast to the children.

## Reading Programs

Reading programs are typically provided to school-age children within the context of school-provided academic programs. These can range from Accelerated Reader, which is an example of a supplemental reading program, to Reading First, Reading Recovery and other classroom models for teaching reading. However, resources need to be available throughout the community to surround children, particularly low-income children, with reading experiences.

## Current Programs

**Libraries.** As a mostly rural state, many of the public libraries are the only educational institution in the community – due to school consolidations – and may be the only entity providing Internet access. They become community centers, and residents go to them for more than checking out a library book. They are a critical resource for children and communities. However, many small towns do not have a public library. According to the Arkansas State Library survey there are 228 libraries and branches distributed across the state. Twenty-four counties have independent county units with the headquarters generally located in the county seat. There are 16 regional systems serving 48 counties. The print materials available in these libraries range from almost a million documents in the Central Arkansas Library system to one small library with less than 10,000 documents. The map below provides one look at the disparity across counties in terms of the number of libraries each has.



The majority of funding for public libraries comes from local millage revenues. Libraries that are not supported through a millage rely on city or county budget allocations for funding. There are eight city libraries with a dedicated library tax. Limited state funding is also available through state general revenue. To qualify for state funding, a library must have a millage; just three counties have no millage. The amount

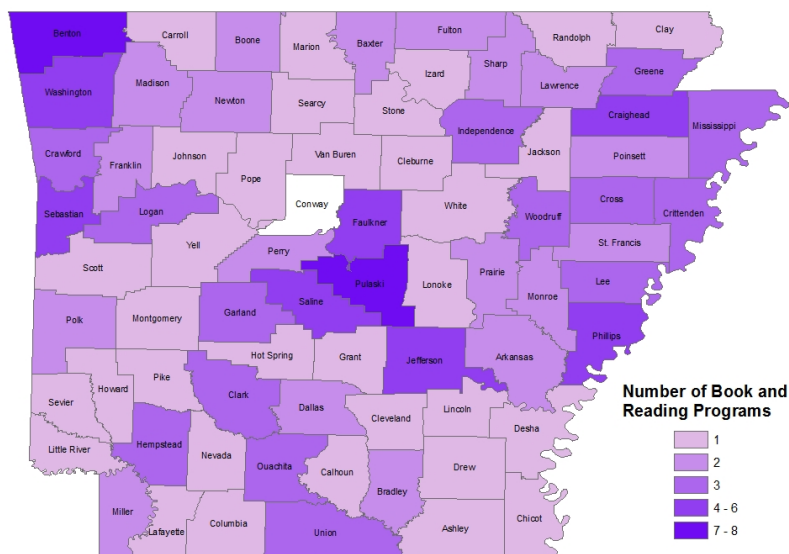
of state aid awarded is based on the population served, whether the library is regional in scope, the qualifications of the head librarian, etc. The FY2014 aid was distributed to 41 regional or local libraries. The largest system, Central Arkansas Library System, received \$581,910, while the library serving the smallest population, Newton County Library, received \$31,045. In some years the state also provides a limited amount of general improvement fund money. Those awards are made on a competitive grant basis. During the most recent round in 2014, 18 libraries were funded for a total of \$141,000. The largest award of \$22,359 was made to the Gassville Branch Library, and the smallest was \$800 to the Kingston Community Library.<sup>lxxxvi</sup>

The Blind and Physically Handicapped Library central office is in Little Rock at the Arkansas State Library. The Arkansas State Library provides an actual library for state agencies and their employees, as well as serving to coordinate funding programs for local libraries.

**Nonprofit Organizations.** The community supports provided by nonprofit organizations generally fall into one of three types of programs: programs that provide books and related materials to children, tutoring programs that provide volunteers to tutor children at their schools or in other settings such as after-school programs, and programs where adults read books to kids.

There are a wide variety of **book and reading programs** within the state but most serve limited geographic areas. As the map below shows, some parts of the state have an abundance of these programs and others have very few. While the programs covered by the map are not an exhaustive list of what is available around the state, they include Able Paws, Arkansas Reads, AR Kids Read, Bookcase for Every Child, Eudora Reads, HIPPIY, MLK Reads, Marvell-Elaine Reads, OneCommunity Reads, Parents as Teachers, Dolly Parton Imagination Library, Reach Out and Read, Reading on the Ridge, Rock 'n Read, Save the Children, Stories on Wheels, University of Arkansas Summer Reading program. Each program has its own unique point of access and delivery system. For example, Reach Out and Read provides a book to each child at their well child check-ups through pediatricians.

**Number of Book and Reading Programs by County**



Several nonprofit and school partnerships have developed over the past few years to provide volunteer **tutoring programs**. MLK Reads is a partnership between Second Baptist Church in downtown Little Rock and Martin Luther King Elementary School. Members of the church and other community volunteers provide tutoring to children twice a week. AR Kids Read partners with over 40 elementary schools in the Little Rock, North Little Rock, and Pulaski County school districts. During the 2012-2013 school year, over 400 adult volunteers provided tutoring to more than 900 children.

## **Research**

**Access to Books.** Home and out-of-school access is essential for successful reading skills. One way to improve the reading achievement of low-income children is to increase their access to books. Sixty-one percent of low-income families have no books at all in their homes for their children.<sup>lxxxvii</sup> Yet, research indicates that having books in the home is twice as important as the father's education level for developing reading skills.<sup>lxxxviii</sup> Other research shows that even 15 minutes a day of student out-of-school reading can expose students to more than a million words of text in a year.<sup>lxxxix</sup>

Community literacy resources impact student reading abilities. Communities ranking high in achievement tests have several factors in common: an abundance of books in public libraries, easy access to books in the community at large and a large number of textbooks per student.<sup>xc</sup> A 2006 study shows that while in middle-income neighborhoods the ratio of age-appropriate books per child is 13 to 1, in low-income neighborhoods the ratio is 1 book for every 300 children.<sup>xcii</sup>

While many associate reading with school age children, age 5 and up, exposure to books at an early age leads to improved literacy throughout life. Child care centers must provide sufficient access to quality books. This is especially important in low-income areas, where children may not have access to books at home. Research has indicated that there is a serious lack of quality books in many child-care centers, and many states do not have clear guidelines for using books in child-care settings and pre-K classrooms. Some states, however, have set up clear and consistent guidelines and rules regarding early literacy instruction. Georgia is a state that has made progress in this area.<sup>xciii</sup> Arkansas has requirements for k-12 school libraries but not for early childhood programs.

**Tutoring.** Reading Partners is a volunteer tutoring program that serves more than 7,000 students in nearly 140 schools throughout California, Colorado, Maryland, New York, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Texas, and Washington, DC. A randomized control trial revealed that Reading Partners boosted three different measures of reading proficiency – reading comprehension, reading fluency, and sight-word reading – for second- to fifth-grade students. Tutoring by community volunteers twice a week for 45 minutes each session resulted in an additional one and a half to two months of growth in literacy for Reading Partners students over a control group of students who also received supplemental reading services.<sup>xciii</sup>

## **Gaps and Barriers**

**Unequal Distribution of Resources.** Local funding (i.e. dedicated taxes, donations, contributions, etc.) accounts for approximately 90 to 95 percent of libraries' total funds. State and federal funds, when available, provide additional resources. Libraries with less than 1 mil of dedicated library support are at a disadvantage when it comes to providing quality library service. Even at 1 mil, the hours of operation, kinds of programs, and variety of resources can be impacted by a low tax base, small or declining population base, or a lack of commercial and industrial tax base. For example, in Searcy County, which has 3 mils for dedicated library service, the tax base is still restricted due to a large portion of the county being a National Forest.<sup>xciv</sup>

Of the 72 counties that have a millage, 10 have rates of less than 1 mil, and they are congregated mostly in the southwest and eastern portions of the state—Calhoun, Lee, Little River, Monroe, Montgomery, Nevada, Pike, Poinsett, Polk, and Scott counties. Four others have a rate of less than 1 mil for the county, but within the county, a city library also has a millage that brings the total for the county to the 1 mil level or higher. For example, Union County has a millage of 0.4, but the city of El Dorado separately has a 1.0 millage for a city library.<sup>xv</sup>

Data from the state library on program participation at local libraries is limited. Using the best data available, the circulation of materials for each attendee in children’s programs ranges from one book per child in Nevada County to 48 per child in Lee County. Using the county population of youth from birth to age 9, the circulation ranges from less than one book per child (0.7) in Crittenden County to 25 books per child in Van Buren County. Regardless of the accuracy of these estimates, it seems certain that more public resources are available in some parts of the state and that both public and private programs in some areas reach a larger percentage of children in their service areas.

### **Models**

**Every Child Ready to Read (ECRR)** is a parent education initiative that emphasizes the importance of parent and caregiver involvement in early literacy. The ECRR toolkit allows public libraries to play an essential role in supporting early literacy in their communities. The Public Library Association (PLA) and Association for Library Service to Children (ALSC) support public libraries efforts on early literacy by focusing on educating parents and primary caregivers on the importance of early literacy, and pre-reading skills. ECRR is supported by the Arkansas State Library.

**The Central Arkansas Library System (CALs)** serves about 317,500 people locally. There are 14 libraries in the system, eight within Little Rock, and satellite locations in Jacksonville, Maumelle, Perryville, Sherwood, and Wrightsville. In 2010, there were over 2 million visits to Central Arkansas Library System branches, and users checked out over 2.4 million items.

CALs provides a Lap Time Story Time program for babies and preschoolers from birth to 3 years old. They have recently received training for the Every Child Ready to Read program and plan on implementing it in fall 2014. There are programs throughout the school year for school-aged children, and each branch has after-school programs. More reading programs are available in the summer.

The Hillary Rodham Clinton Children’s Library and Learning Center has implemented the Our Club Afterschool program in partnership with Pulaski County Youth Services. The Children’s Library was built with the expressed purpose of serving children and families of the underserved community located south of I-630. This branch is attracting families from all over but it is also serving the surrounding community and providing after-school activities for the children in the area. They are also involved in community outreach from this location with the emphasis of reaching the underserved children not utilizing this resource and those children with special needs.

**Imagination Library** is a program initially developed in 1995 by Dolly Parton so that every preschool child (birth to 5 years old) in her home of Sevier County, Tennessee would have its own library of books that would encourage a love of reading and learning. The program was so successful that Ms. Parton decided to offer her Imagination Library for replication in any community that will support it. There are only a few requirements for replication – the program must be open to all preschool children in the community and a local nonprofit must raise \$25 per child per year to pay for the books and mailing costs. The books are chosen by a committee specializing in early childhood literacy. Special attention is given to age appropriateness and the development of such positive themes as promotion of self-esteem and confidence, regard for diversity, and appreciation of art. There are 30 Imagination Library affiliates covering 40

communities in Arkansas. Almost 9,000 children receive a book in the mail each month. In 2013, more than 100,000 books were delivered.

**Reach Out and Read** is a nonprofit organization that promotes early literacy and school readiness in pediatric exam rooms nationwide by giving new books to children and advice to parents about the importance of reading aloud. Arkansas has 35 Reach Out and Read locations. Most of them are in Central and Northwest Arkansas. The program has not yet reached the Eastern edge of the state with the exception of a few programs in the Jonesboro area. The program delivered about 63,000 books to children last year.



## Recommendations

### What we can do to make sure children are ready for school.

1. Provide a cost of living adjustment for Arkansas Better Chance (ABC) Pre-K funding. The state-funded ABC program has not had a cost of living increase for seven years—since 2008. A cost of living increase equivalent to the CPI for those years is \$13.8 million.
2. Reassess the current ABC quality cost model. The ABC program funds providers based on a cost per child model. The model is based on out of date cost information, and it requires providers to match funds for 40 percent of the costs.
3. Expand ABC to serve more children. Currently ABC and Head Start together serve just 56 percent of eligible 3 and 4 year olds. In some areas of the state, there are waiting lists, and in other areas, there are no programs. ABC serves families with incomes up to 200 percent of the federal poverty line. Families whose incomes fall just above that line may also need financial support to afford quality care, but they are not eligible.
4. Require NSLA funds in Focus and Priority schools to be used for BLR recommended solutions, such as pre-K, and narrow the list of allowable activities under NSLA for all schools. Numerous studies have concluded that NSLA funding is not achieving the desired effect of reducing the achievement gap. Too many school districts are using it for purposes that do not improve achievement for low-income and struggling students.
5. Improve the quality ratings of private infant and toddler providers and make the ratings easily accessible to the public. The Better Beginnings quality rating system should be strengthened to require higher staff training standards and lower child-to-caregiver ratios. Existing providers should receive support to meet these new standards.

### What we can do to improve what happens during the school day.

1. Conduct an ongoing assessment of the value of school improvement consulting expenditures by updating the 2012 BLR report. In 2012, the Bureau of Legislative Research (BLR) released a report outlining what has been spent on outside consultants and what has been accomplished with those funds. Ongoing assessment would provide accountability for the millions of dollars spent annually in school improvement services.
2. Use the information provided by ADE’s “Educator Preparation Performance Report” to improve teacher preparation programs. Teacher preparation programs are an essential component of improving literacy achievement. Strong programs for kindergarten through grade six should provide stronger emphasis on literacy competencies and the needs of diverse student populations.
3. Request an ADE Commissioner’s memo to clarify attendance reporting definitions and requirements and ongoing monitoring of data quality. Attendance data are not consistently maintained from district to district. The way that schools and districts record and interpret tardies, part-day attendance, and excused and unexcused absences varies across the state.
4. Refrain from adopting a mandatory retention policy. Mandatory retention policies will require

significant funding from the legislature, and there is little to no evidence confirming its impact on students' performance and success over time. Retention policies should be viewed as a last resort rather than a first alternative. Therefore, the state should refrain from altering the law already in place that allows school districts and parents to make student specific decisions about retention and academic intervention.

### **What we can do to improve what happens after school and during the summer.**

1. Develop an awards program for schools and/or districts with successful parent engagement models. Indiana has a "Family-Friendly School" designation for schools that do a good job with parent engagement. To be identified as "Family Friendly," a school or district would need to engage a mix of parents that is representative of racial, ethnic, and income diversity.
2. Provide an institute modeled after Kentucky to provide parent training focusing on parents reaching other parents. The Kentucky program is a corporate sponsored six-day training program broken into two-day sessions free to parents.
3. Encourage building-level leadership training programs to provide training on successful parent engagement. Follow the model of the Family Literacy Program and OneCommunity Reads where parents spend time in the classroom and learn about community resources.
4. State library and AR-GLR partner to identify counties/communities needing additional library resources. AR-GLR and the state library would collaborate to identify "book deserts" or areas of the state with insufficient access to public libraries. Alternative solutions such as summer access to school libraries and book distribution non-profits would be developed.
5. Establish an informal group of reading programs in the state to share best practices, mentor new programs, and expand to areas with identified needs. The starting place would be reading programs that are represented by members of the AR-GLR Advisory Committee. This group could meet a few times a year to share information and identify needs and areas of the state not being served.
6. Require NSLA funds in Focus and Priority schools to be used for BLR recommended solutions, such as summer and after-school programs, and narrow the list of allowable activities under NSLA for all schools. This would require legislation to change the extensive list of eligible uses of the funds currently permitted by law.
7. Provide funding to pilot the Positive Youth Development Act. The Act was passed in 2011 to set up standards for summer and after-school programs administered by non-profit organizations and coordinated with school officials. A pilot program to identify strong models would require \$5 million of state funds. A possible fund source is state NSLA funds.

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