

Office of Early Childhood

AR State Board of Education

Ashelyn Abney, OEC Director

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LEARNS Act: Requirements for Early Childhood

LEARNS envisions a seamless early childhood system in Arkansas that ensures:

All children enter kindergarten ready to learn and prepared for lifelong success as a result of their experiences in high-quality early care and education.

Families can access the resources their child needs on their pathway to kindergarten, regardless of the setting they choose for their child.

Providers deliver high-quality early learning experiences, through a workforce that is prepared to care for and educate young children.

There are **enough affordable, safe spots** for children, made accessible for families through state, local, and community leadership.

The **local and state economies** benefit from thriving families who are supported to hold jobs, raise children, and participate in their community.

Establishing Local Leads

- Lead work in local area
- Administer Child Count
- Coordinate Funding Request
- Maintain Local Plan and Needs Assessments
- Assist with CLASS Implementation



Simplifying Licensing

- Health and Safety Priority
- Retraining Licensing Specialists
 - Coaching
 - Compliance
- Finalizing New Rules for SBE Approval

Licensed Childcare Facilities	FY26
Registered Childcare Homes	4
Licensed Family Homes	183
Licensed Childcare Centers	1510
Licensed Out of School Time	184

Improving Quality

- CLASS Pilot
 - All classroom observations
 - Shift in focus to teacher-child interactions
- Redesign of our Quality Rating System
 - Student Outcomes
 - Parent Satisfaction
 - Health and Safety
- High-Quality Instructional Materials



School Readiness Assistance (SRA)

CCDF Federal Block Grant

- Budget Adjustments
 - New baseline rates established November 2025
 - Collapsed quality payments
- Priority Waitlist for SRA
 - Foster children;
 - Families eligible to receive TANF (TEA/ESS) assistance;
 - Homeless families as designated by OEC; and
 - Special needs families as designated by OEC.
- Collaboration
 - Early Childhood Commission
 - Monthly Webinars

SCHOOL READINESS ASSISTANCE	FY26
Projected Grant Award: Oct 1-Sept 30th- quarterly payments	\$127,000,000 Current Balance (\$22,347,000)
Children Served	14,659
Licensed Childcare Centers Currently serving SRA children	762
Waitlist	3014

Arkansas Better Chance (ABC)

State Funded Program

- Licensed Teaching Staff
- Curriculum Requirements
- Payment Revised
 - Enrollment payment
 - Reviewing the practice of dual enrollment
- Grant Review
 - Eliminated waste
 - Focus on improving quality
 - Mental health support

ABC All	FY26
Grant Award	\$114,000,000
Children Served	21,236
Licensed Childcare Centers or Schools	460
Home Visiting Program	3,236

2026–2027 Arkansas Better Chance (ABC)



2026–2027 ABC State Board of Education Proposal

2026 – 2027 ABC Programs	Slots	Amount Per Child	Total Award
Center Based	19,849	\$5,105	\$101,329,145
Home Visiting	3,243	\$1,894	\$6,142,242
Total	23,092		
Total Award Amount			\$107,471,387