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FULL SPEED AHEAD

2017 Progress on Grade-Level Reading in Arkansas

SPRING 2017





INTRODUCTION

OUR GOAL IS THAT **ALL ARKANSAS CHILDREN WILL READ ON GRADE LEVEL** BY THE END OF THIRD GRADE.

The Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation launched the Arkansas Campaign for Grade-Level Reading (AR-GLR) in 2011 to move the needle on education outcomes in Arkansas by focusing on third-grade reading proficiency. AR-GLR and its partners have been recognized nationally as an effective model to enhance early literacy outcomes. AR-GLR is a collaborative effort that includes over 25 organizations that believe the only way to make measurable progress on grade-level reading is to work collectively with families, educators, policymakers, and business leaders around the state.

AR-GLR is managed in partnership with Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families, the Arkansas Community Foundation, and the Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation. AR-GLR is part of the national Campaign for Grade-Level Reading that includes over 300 communities in 45 states as well as Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

Why Third Grade?

Third grade is a pivotal point for cognitive development and academic learning. Through third grade, children are *learning to read*. After that, they are *reading to learn*. Children who aren't reading proficiently by this point can fall behind since they may have trouble comprehending more complicated reading material for history, English, science, and even word problems in math. Just **31 percent of fourth graders** in Arkansas are reading on grade level, according to the National Assessment of Educational Progress.¹

Students who do not master reading by the end of third grade are **less likely** to graduate high school and pursue higher education and are **more likely** to be incarcerated or live in poverty.²



Our Strategies: How We Get There

Key strategies of the campaign include:

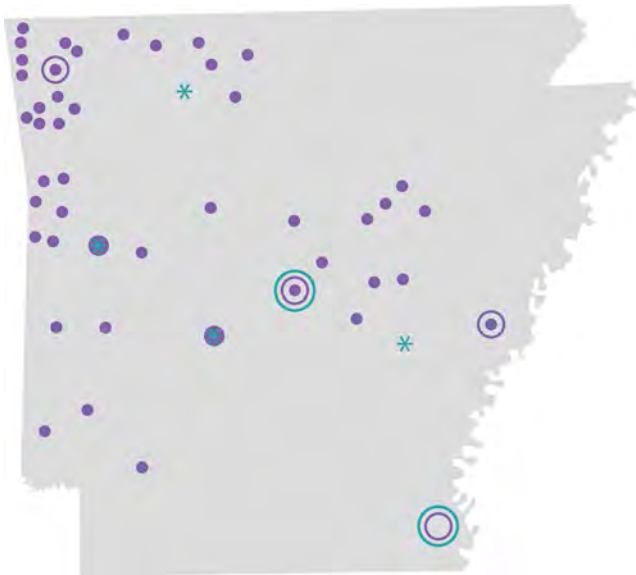
- **Build Local Capacity** - Support local models that increase third-grade reading proficiency through four key impact areas:
 - o Improve School Readiness
 - o Reduce Chronic Absence
 - o Stop Summer Learning Loss
 - o Strengthen Family and Community Engagement
- **Enhance Public Policy** - Develop legislative and administrative policy solutions to increase third-grade reading proficiency.
- **Increase Public Will** - Increase public awareness of the importance of grade-level reading, and move key audience – parents, educators, business leaders, and policymakers – from awareness to action.



KEY STRATEGIES

- ✓ BUILD LOCAL CAPACITY
- ✓ ENHANCE PUBLIC POLICY
- ✓ INCREASE PUBLIC WILL

Where We Work



- **Community Solutions Initiative**
Community-school partnerships to engage parents and communities for local grade-level reading challenges
- **Make Every Day Count**
Partnerships with schools and districts to reduce chronic absence
- * **Summer Learning Initiative**
Community-school partnerships to reduce summer learning loss
- **Talking is Teaching: Talk, Read, Sing**
Community partnerships to engage parents in their children's vocabulary development



WHAT IT TAKES TO HELP CHILDREN READ ON GRADE LEVEL



Family Engagement

Parents and caregivers are a child’s first teachers and most important advocates. High-quality home visiting programs provide parents with resources so they can help their children build vocabulary and other early literacy skills. Parents can ensure children attend school regularly, help them keep learning through the summer, and work with Parent Teacher Associations and other community groups to engage and empower families to advocate for all children.

Child Health

Three healthy meals a day, a good night’s sleep, and a routine and calm atmosphere at home are needed for children to succeed in school. A child with a chronic health issue like asthma or diabetes or who lacks health or dental care may find it difficult to attend school every day or remain focused in the classroom. Children with developmental delays may need additional supports. Children may need help with social and emotional health needs such as learning how to cope, self-regulate, and mediate conflict. Prenatal care, well-child visits, developmental screenings, breakfast and lunch programs, after-school and summer meals programs, and school-based health centers can ensure children are healthy and able to focus on their learning.

School Readiness

Students entering kindergarten with vital skills – vocabulary, letter recognition, number sense, and social-emotional skills – are more likely to read proficiently by the end of third grade. **Less than half of Arkansas kindergartners are considered ready for school.**³ A child’s learning begins at birth and happens at home and in early care and education settings. Some children, especially those from low-income families, have limited access to books and early care programs that prepare them for success in school. In Arkansas, almost 40 percent of four-year olds from low-income families do not have access to pre-K.⁴



Classroom Instruction

A child spends six to seven hours a day in the classroom during the academic year. Elementary teachers must have deep knowledge of evidence-based strategies for teaching reading, as well as the skills to implement them and use assessment and teaching methods that meet the diverse needs of students. **As many as one in five students has dyslexia or other learning disabilities.** Children should be assessed and provided the support needed to be successful in school.

IN ARKANSAS, ALMOST 40 PERCENT OF FOUR-YEAR OLDS FROM LOW-INCOME FAMILIES DO NOT HAVE ACCESS TO PRE-K.



School Attendance

Attendance is critical to academic success. When children attend school regularly in kindergarten and first grade, they are more likely to read proficiently by the end of third grade. **In Arkansas, more than one in 10 kindergarteners and first graders are chronically absent.** Students who are chronically absent are less likely to read on grade level than their peers, and students from low-income families are twice as likely to be chronically absent. Chronic absence is defined as missing 10 percent or more of the school year for any reason, including excused absences; in Arkansas that is 18 days of school or just two days a month.⁵

Summer Learning

Summer can be a time of academic enrichment or learning loss for children. By not participating in a high-quality summer program, children risk losing two to three months of reading skills. **Only 21 percent of Arkansas students have access to high-quality programs.** With a reported average cost of \$234 a week, most available programs are unaffordable for low-income families.⁶ Many programs that are free or low-cost offer meals sponsored by the U.S. Department of Agriculture to help address the needs of the whole child—physical, social, emotional, and cognitive.

School Resources

School districts have access to a range of resources that include state foundation funding and state and federal funding for English Language Learners and low-income students. School leaders make tough decisions about how to spend those funds, but some leave money unspent, and current allowable expenditures are too broad, and some are not backed by research. As of the end of 2015-2016 school year, **Arkansas school districts had a balance of \$18.4 million in state funds designated for low-income students.**⁷ Districts that do not spend their available funds may need help building their capacity to do so.

Community Engagement

Schools cannot move the needle on grade-level reading alone. All aspects of the community – businesses, nonprofits, faith-based organizations, and individuals – have a role in providing support systems for children and families to succeed. Individuals and organizations in the community can support grade-level reading by increasing public awareness of the importance of literacy; advocating for more resources; volunteering in schools; and supporting early childhood, summer and after-school programs, programs that provide access to books, and efforts to provide access to health care.



2020 MILESTONES



To achieve our goal of all children reading on grade-level by the end of third grade, we have established accountability milestones with AR-GLR partners as our state moves full speed ahead toward third grade reading proficiency for every Arkansas student. For each measure, we have presented a baseline number, current data, and a goal for 2020. In the case of high school graduation and ACT scores, we have set milestones for 2030, as it will take about ten years for 3rd graders in 2020 to reach their senior year in high school.

THIRD GRADE READING ⁸			
Measure	2015	Current	2020
4th graders reading on grade-level according to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)	31% Arkansas ranks 38 out of 52 states	Since the NAEP is given every 2 years an updated data set is not available.	Arkansas ranks in the top 35 states.
CHRONIC ABSENCE ⁹			
Measure	2011-2012	2014-2015	2020
Kindergarten students missing 10 percent or more of the school year	13% of students	16% of students	5% of students
HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION ¹⁰			
Measure	2013-2014	2014-2015	2030
High school graduation rate	87% Arkansas ranks 20 out of 51 states	85% Arkansas ranks 25 out of 51 states	Arkansas ranks in the top 10
ACT SCORES ¹¹			
Measure	2014-2015	2015-2016	2030
Average ACT composite score	20.4 Arkansas ranks 36 out of 51 states	20.2 Arkansas ranks 35 out of 51 states	Arkansas ranks in the top half of states

DEVELOPMENTAL SCREENINGS ¹²			
Measure	2013	2015	2020
Children on ARKids A and Medicaid receiving a well-child exam	48%	45%	75%
PRE-K FUNDING			
Measure	2011	2017	2020
Annual funding for the Arkansas Better Chance pre-K program	\$111 million	\$114 million	\$153.5 million
QUALITY CHILD CARE ¹³			
Measure	2014-2015	2016-2017	2020
Number of child care slots having a Tier 3 Better Beginnings rating	Infants and Toddlers – 6,102	Infants and Toddlers – 8,123	Infants and Toddlers – 8,000
	3 and 4 year olds – 35,046	3 and 4 year olds – 41,470	3 and 4 year olds – 40,000
HOME VISITING ¹⁴			
Measure	2014	2016	2020
Enrollment in home visiting programs	2,359	2,750	3,550
SUMMER MEALS ¹⁵			
Measure	2014	2016	2020
Number of USDA summer feeding programs and number of meals served	Number of programs – 1,010	Number of programs – 1,044	Number of programs – 1,050
	Meals served – 4.3 million	Meals served – 2.5 million	Meals served – 4.7 million
ACCESS TO BOOKS ¹⁶			
Measure	2014/2015	2016	2020
Children receiving books through Dolly Parton’s Imagination Library and Reach Out and Read	Imagination Library (2014) – 10,000 per month	Imagination Library – 16,000 per month	Imagination Library – 110,000 per month
	Reach Out and Read (2015) – 60,000	Reach Out and Read – 65,000	Reach Out and Read – 100,000

EXAMPLES OF PROGRESS: JUNE 2016 – MAY 2017



Governor and Legislature Make Grade-Level Reading a Top Priority in 2017

Our goal of all students reading at grade-level continues to be embraced by Arkansas policymakers. In early 2017, Governor Asa Hutchinson announced R.I.S.E. Arkansas (Reading Initiative for Student Excellence), an initiative led by the Arkansas Department of Education to build a culture of reading, educate parents about the importance of reading, increase access to books at home, and increase professional development for educators. The goals of the initiative are to:

- Increase the number of students in grades three through eight who meet the ACT Aspire reading readiness benchmark by 10 percent within three years;
- Rise above the bottom third in state comparisons within five years on the fourth-grade NAEP reading assessment; and
- Increase the number of graduates meeting the ACT reading readiness benchmark by 10 percent within five years.

During the 2017 legislative session policymakers passed several bills that build on the Governor's momentum. These new laws:

- Require elementary teachers to demonstrate competency in teaching children to read in order to obtain a teaching license;
- Require teacher preparation programs to align instruction with these new licensure requirements;
- Require current and future teachers to demonstrate proficiency in teaching children how to read;
- Require school districts to inform parents about the level at which their child is reading; and
- Require school districts to report publicly on the number of students identified as having dyslexia and receiving interventions.

Combined, these new policies create a solid foundation for moving the state closer to our goal of all children reading on grade level.

Raising the Standard for Early Education in Arkansas

In 2016, an important step was taken to increase the quality of early childhood education with the release of the Arkansas Child Development and Early Learning Standards by the Arkansas Department of Human Services and Arkansas Head Start State Collaboration Office. The new state standards demonstrate the continuum of developmental milestones in the early years from birth to age five.¹⁷ This is an important foundation that will lead to more children being kindergarten ready.



NEW STATE
STANDARDS **FOLLOW**
DEVELOPMENTAL
MILESTONES FOR
CHILDREN FROM
BIRTH TO AGE FIVE

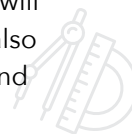


These standards are research-based and provide a set of common expectations for what children typically know, understand and are able to do at different ages in early childhood. The new early learning standards address the following areas of learning, which include all aspects of quality early childhood education: social and emotional development, cognitive development, physical development and health, language development, emergent literacy, mathematical thinking, science and technology, social studies, and creativity and aesthetics. The Division of Child Care at the Department of Human Services is currently developing training for child care and pre-K programs to help implement the new standards.



Increased Funding for Early Head Start and Pre-K

Until this year, the Arkansas Better Chance pre-K program has not had a permanent increase in funding since 2009, making it difficult for local programs to maintain quality standards. An estimated \$20 million in additional funding is needed to sustain the quality of existing pre-K programs, which serve three and four year old children. During the 2017 legislative session, policymakers made a first step toward closing the gap, increasing funding by \$3 million to \$114 million per year. Arkansas also received new one-time funding for Early Head Start Child Care partnerships. The Division of Child Care received \$3.8 million from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, which will provide high-quality programs for 168 infants and toddlers living in high-need areas. Two Head Start programs also received grants: Black River Area Development Corporation in Pocahontas received a grant to serve 88 infants and toddlers, and North Arkansas Development Council received funding for 80 infants and toddlers.



Improving Child Care Quality Through Better Beginnings

The community of Conway believes education is a cornerstone of their economy, being home to three higher education institutions (Central Baptist College, Hendrix College and the University of Central Arkansas). The Conway Area Chamber of Commerce's strategic plan includes a vision to "Keep Conway Learning." Traditionally chambers of commerce focus on the current workforce and increasing the percentage of high school and college graduates. The Conway Chamber expanded its approach to include the next generation's workforce.

Proceeds from an annual festival in Conway have been used to provide college scholarships to local high school graduates since it began in 1985. In 2012, money raised from the festival began supporting early childhood education through the efforts of Arkansas Preschool Plus, in addition to college scholarships. Arkansas Preschool Plus received \$35,000 from the effort in 2017.

Arkansas Preschool Plus provides child care centers in the Conway area with training, materials and other support. Started as a pilot with five centers in 2012, Preschool Plus is now working with 24 centers as a reliable resource for specialized, on-site training. Since nearly all of the child care centers in the Conway area are small businesses, Preschool Plus offers the training during lunch breaks or after hours to minimize the time teachers are out of the classroom. Preschool Plus also helps centers improve the quality of the care they provide and increase their rating through the state's Better Beginning quality rating system.

Keeping Our Kids in School

Discipline policies that send students home lead to missed instruction time and project-based learning, which cannot be replicated with at-home assignments. As a result, communities around the state are starting to think differently about discipline in schools for young children. In Prescott, the district eliminated its zero-tolerance policy for fighting so students are not automatically given out-of-school suspension for this infraction. Additionally, teachers and

administrators in the district completed training in conscious discipline and restorative justice. These approaches focus on reconciliation rather than punitive measures.

Act 1059, passed during the 2017 legislative session, builds on this momentum by banning out-of-school suspensions and expulsions for students in grades K-5, unless a student poses a harm to himself/herself or others and all other measures have been tried and failed. Research shows that such punishments are not effective in changing behaviors and have an added consequence of harming academic performance because the students are missing classroom instruction.

Chronic health issues can also be a cause of excessive absences, but Marshallese students in Arkansas have had limited access to health care because they have been ineligible for ARKids First. The Arkansas Legislature passed House Concurrent Resolution 1012 to increase access to health care and reduce days missed due to illness, by asking the Governor to take steps to extend ARKids First coverage to children born in the Marshall Islands.

Imagining Books in Every Child's Home

Every month, more than 16,000 children in Arkansas receive a free book in the mail from one of 47 community affiliates of Dolly Parton's Imagination Library. The organization has the goal of building home libraries for all children from birth to age five. The program is paid for by community donations so there is no charge to families for the books.



Des Arc School District became an Imagination Library affiliate in 2005.

During the first year of the program, 20 percent or more of entering kindergartners were considered not developed in written language, math concepts, attentive behavior or general knowledge. Ten years later, virtually all kindergartners were considered developed in all categories. Between 2014 and 2016, the number of children in Arkansas receiving books from Dolly Parton's Imagination Library has increased by 6,000. Currently 56 of the 75 counties in Arkansas are participating or in the planning stages. With new affiliates beginning this year, it is estimated 20,000 children will be receiving books by the end of 2017.

Head Start Students Achieving Gains in Literacy

Each year in Arkansas, over 10,000 young children and their families, and some pregnant women, receive a comprehensive array of quality early childhood services through Early Head Start and Head Start (EHS/HS). The programs emphasize the role of parents as their child's first and most important teacher and help build relationships with families to support child and family-well-being. EHS/HS programs provide a learning environment that supports children's growth in multiple areas: social emotional, physical, language, cognitive, literacy, and math.

The Arkansas Head Start State Collaboration Office (HSSCO) provides training and other supports to EHS/HS programs around the state and has developed several efforts to strengthen their work on early literacy, including an annual read-a-thon to engage family members in reading to children at the Head Start centers, enrolling families in Dolly Parton's Imagination Library, and a summer book drive in partnership with Books-a-Million. HSSCO also wrote a book and produced a companion video called "Reading is Electric."

These efforts are beginning to pay off. During the 2015-2016 school year, the percentage of Head Start students assessed as meeting or exceeding expectations on literacy increased from 70% in the fall to 86% in the spring. The percentage of children exceeding expectations increased from 14% to 26%.

For more examples of progress, go to www.ar-qlr.net/solutions/bright-spots.

CALL TO ACTION



Achieving the goal of **all** Arkansas children reading on grade-level by the end of third grade will require families, educators, business leaders and policymakers to come together with shared determination. **Everyone has a role to play.**

<p>Families</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Talk, read, and sing to your children from birth, to support early brain development and strong vocabularies• Bring more books into your home by enrolling your children in Dolly Parton’s Imagination Library• As children are learning to read, ask them to read aloud to you each day• Make sure children are in school every day, except when they are sick, even in pre-K and kindergarten, when the foundations of reading are being taught• Access free and affordable resources such as public library summer reading programs to keep children reading over the summer	<p>Educators</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Create welcoming environments where parents see staff that look like them and speak their language• Provide increased professional development opportunities for educators on how to teach reading, raising the quality of instruction for all children• Use data-driven practices to differentiate instruction so that all children learn to read• Use attendance data to identify children who are at risk of being chronically absent and develop proactive strategies for keeping them in school• Partner and pool resources with nonprofits to provide summer learning programs
<p>Business Leaders</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Support employees’ involvement in their children’s education, including time off to attend parent teacher conferences• Expand programs like Dolly Parton’s Imagination Library and Reach Out and Read that provide books for families to read at home• Support public investment in quality pre-K and summer learning programs	<p>Policymakers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Support increased investment to raise the quality of existing pre-K programs and make them accessible to more children• Ensure that all teachers are trained in evidence-based practices for teaching reading• Provide financial resources for summer learning programs

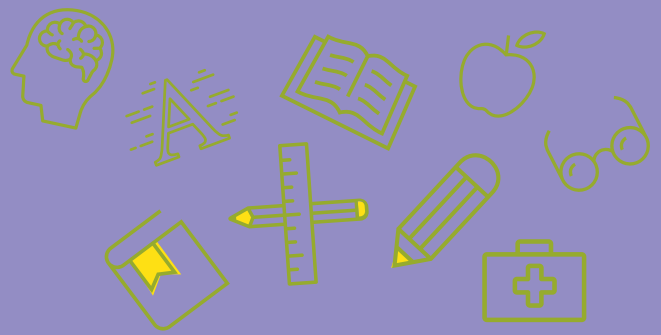
Learn how you can do your part for the Arkansas Campaign for Grade-Level Reading.

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Facebook: [ARGradeLevelReading](https://www.facebook.com/ARGradeLevelReading)

ENDNOTES



¹ National Center for Education Statistics: <https://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/states>.

² Alliance for Excellent Education: http://all4ed.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/Arkansas_econ.pdf.

³ Analysis of Qualls Early Learning Inventory data.

⁴ ForwArd Arkansas analysis of data provided by Arkansas Head Start, Arkansas Department of Education and American Community Survey.

⁵ Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families' analysis of Arkansas school attendance data.

⁶ Afterschool Alliance, "America After 3PM": http://www.afterschoolalliance.org/AA3PM/detail.html#s/AR/summer/p_of_children_in_programs_2014.

⁷ Analysis of Arkansas Department of Education expenditure data for NSLA funds in 2015-2016.

⁸ National Center for Education Statistics: <https://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/states>.

⁹ Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families' analysis of Arkansas Department of Education data.

¹⁰ National Center for Education Statistics: https://nces.ed.gov/ccd/tables/ACGR_RE_and_characteristics_2014-15.asp.

¹¹ ACT Report, The Condition of College and Career Readiness 2016: http://www.act.org/content/dam/act/unsecured/documents/CCCR_National_2016.pdf.

¹² Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families, analysis of Department of Human Services data.

¹³ Data provided by Arkansas Department of Human Services.

¹⁴ Data provided by Arkansas Home Visiting Network.

¹⁵ Data provided by Arkansas Hunger Relief Alliance.

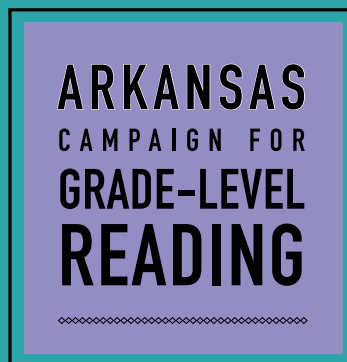
¹⁶ Data provided by Dolly Parton Imagination Library and Reach Out and Read.

¹⁷ Arkansas Child Development and Early Learning Standards: [http://www.arheadstart.org/Ark_Early_Learning_Standards%20\(19\)%20\(1\).pdf](http://www.arheadstart.org/Ark_Early_Learning_Standards%20(19)%20(1).pdf).

AR-GLR PARTNERS



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