

Arkansas Early Childhood Commission

January 20, 2026

Agenda

- **Call to Order**
- **Approval of Minutes**
- **Old Business**
- **New Business**
- **Announcements & Public Comments**
- **Next Meeting**
- **Adjournment**

Call to Order

Tyra Greenwood

Approval of Minutes

Tyra Greenwood

Old Business

Tyra Greenwood

Appeal Review Panel Application Approval

New Business

Tyra Greenwood

OEC Updates

Ashelyn Abney

LEARNS in 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.



OEC LEARNS Act Alignment

By the 2026-2027 school year, ADE's quality efforts will be fully aligned with the LEARNS vision in Arkansas' ECE system.

- ❑ An **ECE High-Quality Instructional Materials (HQIM) list and supports for adoption** are in place for providers
- ❑ **All professional services** such as training, coaching, and technical assistance from contracted vendors will be aligned with the vision for quality, with a distinct focus on child outcomes.
- ❑ **The CLASS tool** will be the main measure of and driver towards quality in all publicly-funded classrooms across the state for the QRIS
- ❑ **Local leads will be full implementation partners for state efforts**, with plans that align all local efforts to state priorities
- ❑ **Updated licensing regulations** will drive a clear focus on health and safety in all components of licensing work, including training, resources, and internal/external processes and systems



Current Progress

2025-2026 is the last transition year to full implementation, which means Arkansas will focus on accomplishing a core set of actions that set the field up for large system change.

Finalize the HQIM rubric and evaluate curricula against the rubric	On track
Release a Call for Proposals for professional services to ensure each contract maximizes spending and is aligned to the state's vision for quality	On track For discussion today
Scale the CLASS tool statewide by observing every classroom at least once and finalize decisions on reporting and calculations to give results to providers by fall 2026	On track
Position local leads to be full implementation partners of the state's efforts by submitting an annual child count, coordinated funding request, and local plans as well as conducting regional information campaigns on early childhood options for families and coordinating the states QRIS implementation efforts	On track For discussion today: the integration of Head Start
Update all licensing resources, develop training structure, and organize team to fully implement new regulations.	On track For discussion today

Head Start Collaboration Office

OEC submitted the Head Start Collaboration Office renewal application on December 1, 2025 in alignment with the LEARNS charge to consolidate HSCO into OEC.

Historically, the Head Start Collaboration Office (HSCO) contract has been held by state agencies, while housed within the Arkansas Head Start Association.

- As charged by LEARNS, OEC is committed to fully integrating Head Start into the state's seamless early childhood system. Transitioning HSCO into OEC will allow further integration between regional Head Start grantees and local lead strategy.
- HSCO activities will be closely aligned with LEARNS priorities and statewide early childhood goals.
- OEC has received an extension for the remainder of the FFY2025 grant period. OEC anticipates an official transition as early as March.

OEC looks forward to continuing close collaboration with Arkansas Head Start Association.



Licensing Regulations and Teams

OEC is modernizing licensing by pairing updated regulations with focused support and training so providers can meet updated standards that prioritize child health and safety.

LEARNS has called to “reduce any burdensome unnecessary rules for the licensing of childcare facilities.” As licensing regulations undergo a thorough review, OEC is strengthening support to the field through enhancements to the licensing division, including:

- A **dedicated team focused on coaching and technical assistance** to support providers in meeting new requirements
- A **separate team focused exclusively on compliance**, ensuring child health and safety remains the top priority

Additionally, OEC is dedicating PDG funds to support training for all new licensing regulations to ensure a smooth transition for the field.

PDG B-5 Systems Building Grant Award Update

The U.S. Dept of Health & Human Services' Administration for Children and Families has awarded Arkansas a Preschool Development Grant Birth Through Five (PDG B-5) specifically focused on systems building.

Arkansas has been awarded nearly \$15 million from January to December 2026 to build on existing LEARNS Act efforts to advance a unified early childhood system by:

- Expanding local leads' work
- Supporting the ECE workforce
- Improving data systems

The state will be partnering intentionally with stakeholders statewide to ensure the plan reflects local priorities and current context.



PDG B-5 Implementation Timeline

OEC plans to follow this tentative timeline for PDG B-5 in 2026.

Quarter 1 January-March	Finalize key vendors, establish CLASS protocols, develop plan for grants to the early childhood field.
Quarter 2 April-June	Begin developing licensing training modules, a CCDF budgeting tool, and early data dashboards. Begin distributing quality grants to the early childhood field.
Quarter 3 July-September	Test, refine, and pilot licensing modules, budgeting tools, and data dashboards
Quarter 4 October-December	Prepare local leads to launch Coordinated Enrollment. Launch licensing modules, continue refining budgeting tools and data dashboards. Complete all grants to the early childhood field

PDG B-5 Systems Building Grant Details

OEC plans to allocate PDG B-5 funding across three key categories to accelerate work already underway through LEARNS and broader early childhood system building.

PDG funds are designed to be flexible, allowing OEC to respond to emerging needs and adjust investments as implementation progresses.

Expanding local leads' work	~\$5,000,000
Supporting the ECE workforce	~\$7,000,000
Improving data systems	~\$2,000,000

OEC will continue to seek input from stakeholders statewide as funding is deployed, ensuring implementation reflects evolving state and community priorities.

School Readiness Assistance

**Dr. Chris Barnes
Brandy Ishmon**

School Readiness Assistance

Overview & Updates

- Rates & Copayments remained the same since 11/01/25
- OEC continues to monitor spending on a regular basis
- Current funding is tied to a Continuing Resolution
(**Expires 01/30/26**)
- **“Defend the Spend”** initiated (**NEW**)

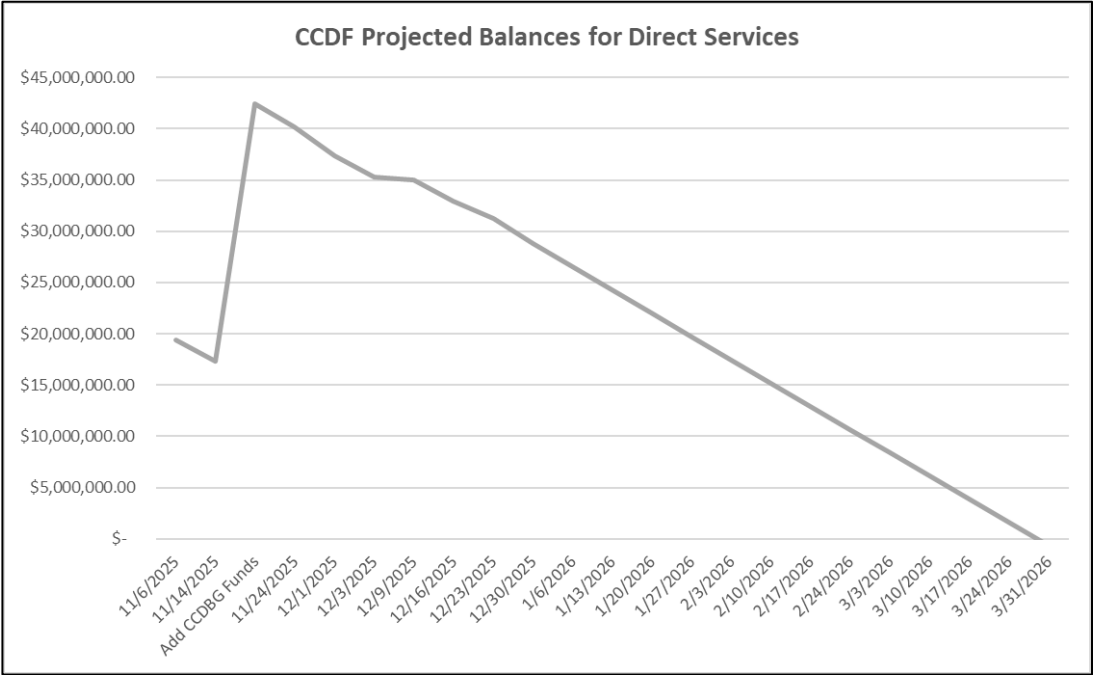
School Readiness Assistance

CCDF Fund Balances As of January 6, 2026

FUNDING CATEGORY	FUND BALANCE
Dedicated Direct Services	\$27,719,767.34
Quality Services	\$ 1,082,839.87
Infant & Toddler Quality Services	\$ 844,110.94
Non-Direct Services	\$ 5,047,779.35
Administrative Services	\$ 1,688,779.10
TOTAL FUNDS	\$36,383,276.60

School Readiness Assistance

Direct Service Spend Projections (Avg Weekly Spend: \$2,297,436.49)



Week	Direct Services Spend
11/06/25	\$2,615,262.84
11/14/25	\$2,070,813.70
11/24/25	\$2,314,028.64
12/01/25	\$2,813,352.36
12/03/25	\$2,057,518.75
12/16/25	\$2,337,058.21
12/23/25	\$1,675,535.08
12/30/25	\$2,495,922.31

School Readiness Assistance

“DEFEND THE SPEND” JUSTIFICATION

- Implemented by US DHHS ACF to ensure CCDF funds are used responsibly and in full compliance with federal requirements
- Identifies funding risks early to protect program stability and avoid payment disruptions
- Demonstrates strong stewardship and accountability to federal partners, legislators, and stakeholders
- Requires states to attest that mechanisms are in place to prevent fraud and waste and to provide detailed description of fund uses prior to drawing down funds

Better Beginnings

Paige Cox

Call for Proposals

Paige Cox

About Call for Proposals

ADE funds vendors to support providers and teachers to improve classroom quality across child care and schools. Beginning in 2026-2027, all professional services will:

- Increase opportunities for job-embedded coaching
- Establish local lead organizations as a key partner in the distribution of improvement resources
- Focus quality improvement contracts on three key subject areas

In order to achieve these outcomes, ADE released a Call for Proposals for interested vendors in August 2025.



Timeline

Year	Key Focus	Description
Year 1 2025-26	Application and Recommendations	Call for proposals application launches, OEC reviews and finalizes professional services vendor recommendations.
Year 2 2026-27	Professional services launch	Vendors begin offering professional services units

Unit Types and Subject Areas

Funding for professional services that will be awarded through this opportunity is limited to the following unit types and subject areas.

Unit Types	Subject Areas
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Job-embedded Coaching• Group Training• Technical Assistance (virtual and on-site)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Adult-Child Interactions• High-Quality Instructional Materials (HQIM) and Child Assessment• Foundational Support

Vendor Requirements

If selected to deliver funded professional services, vendors must:

- **Coordinate closely** with local leads to deliver professional services in alignment with their local plans to improve access to quality
- **Provide units** only for subject areas for which they successfully achieve approval
- **Report monthly to ADE** on units provided; collect feedback from participants, providers, and local leads; and adhere to all requirements
- **Participate in quarterly updates** with ADE to understand and improve professional services

Vendors will get paid for the units they deliver, which may not always correlate with the maximum number of units they are approved for.

Decision Criteria

OEC will award grants based on the following criteria:

- Vendor qualifications and experience
- Proposed service delivery model
- Coverage (geographic reach, unit type, and subject area)
- Available budget

Professional services will start in July 2026. Vendors will be notified of recommendations shortly.

CLASS Updates

Alicia Atwood

CLASS

During the 2025-2026 program year, the goal is for every publicly funded classroom to receive at least one CLASS Observation.

- Arkansas observers have entered 1178 observations into the myTeachstone portal.

Observers per Age Level Certification

Number of Observers per Age Level Certification

- Pre-K 2nd Edition: 411 observers
- Infant-Toddler 2nd Edition: 83 observers
- Pre-K, K-3 2nd Edition: 47 observers
- **Infant 2008**: 100 observers
- **Toddler 2008**: 150 observers
- **Pre-K 2008**: 27 observers
- **Upper Elementary 2008**: 1 observer

Observation Certification Courses

- In January and February of 2026, Arkansas Affiliate Trainers will redeliver the Observation Certification Course 26 times to Early Childhood Leaders in Arkansas.



We are BETTER TOGETHER!

Early childhood education is not about competition—it's about togetherness. Together, we are growing the minds and shaping the future of the next generation.

CLASS is a powerful learning tool that supports teachers in excelling in the most meaningful areas of development—building strong relationships, fostering effective communication, and creating engaging, supportive learning environments where children THRIVE!



Congratulations to these early childhood educators that spent three days focusing on the CLASS Pre K Observation tool. I have no doubt we will see them observing in centers soon!



CLASS Training Feedback

- “I am thrilled to be a part of CLASS infant/toddler training being offered for the first time!! Thanks for the opportunity!!”
- “The trainer was wonderful. She clearly broke down the processes and provided answers to questions when asked. ”
- “The materials are helpful and practical and I really enjoy the CLASS Observation tool. Thanks!”

Teachstone Custom Events

- Getting Started with CLASS - **352**
- Pre-K: Developing Regular Routines - **317**
- Toddler: Supporting Positive Behavior at Centers - **232**
- Getting Started with CLASS - **222**
- Infant: Early Language Support during Routine Care - **216**



Teachstone Custom Events

TEACH
STONE®



ADE Observers Summit

Friday, January 23, 2026
12:00-12:45 p.m. CT

The Arkansas Department of Education (ADE) Office of Early Childhood, and Teachstone® will host a live, virtual professional development session focused on improving classroom interactions. This 45-minute session will provide certified CLASS® Observers with useful content and actionable strategies. All attendees will receive certificates of completion.

Unleashing the Power of Effective Note-Taking

Learn how to streamline your note-taking process, ensuring accuracy and efficiency, and elevate the quality of your CLASS observations. This session will equip you with strategies for capturing precise and detailed observations quickly.

REGISTER TODAY

events.bizzabo.com/ADE-Observers



TEACH
STONE®



ADE OEC CLASS® Strategies Summit

Tuesday, February 3, 2026
3:30-4:15 p.m. CT

The Arkansas Department of Education (ADE), Office of Early Childhood and Teachstone® will host a live, virtual professional development summit focused on improving interactions. These 45-minute sessions will cover relevant topics for Toddler and Pre-K educators and provide participants with useful content and actionable strategies. All attendees will receive certificates of completion.

Analysis and Reasoning at Centers (Pre-K)

When children have opportunities to think about the how and why, they gain a deeper understanding of concepts. The strategies and tips in this session will help you encourage children's problem-solving and reasoning skills during center time.

Deep Thinking in the Block Center (Toddler)

In block play, toddlers develop motor, social-emotional, problem-solving, and additional skills. This session stresses the importance of modeling and engaging in open-ended play with toddlers while focusing on process, rather than outcome, as key to children's development.

REGISTER TODAY

events.bizzabo.com/ADE-OEC



CLASS Custom Events Feedback

- “This session was really good. Children need a consistent routine and they should be kept busy with lots of talking and instruction. Being prepared is the key to being productive through the day.”
- “It was very informative and I learned so much. Thanks.”
- “I have to admit, I was thinking I already know this but as the session continued the presenter reminded me of things I have stopped doing in my classroom that I need to start doing.”



Local Leads

Jennifer Douglas

Local Leads

26 Local Leads Statewide - Priorities for 25-26

CLASS Pilot Implementation

- Training observers and completing
- One observation in all publicly funded classrooms

Unduplicated Child Count & Coordinated Funding Request
Implementation of Local Plan



Working Groups

Kindergarten Readiness

Workforce

HQIM

Family & Community Engagement



Upcoming Events & Public Comments

**Next Meeting:
April 21, 2026**

Meeting Feedback

We want to hear from you! Let us know how helpful you found this meeting in this [survey](#).

