



LEARNNS

A Vision for Arkansas Education



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 chosen.

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 communities.



Arkansas' 2024 Annual Report

LEARNS charged the Arkansas Department of Education (ADE) to administer a unified early childhood education (ECE) system. To support that vision, ADE is releasing a 2024 Early Childhood Annual Report to share information and learnings from across the entire ECE system and the funding streams it administers.

ADE's 2024 Early Childhood Annual Report overviews the following information about the Arkansas' early childhood education system:

- Publicly-funded early care and education programs
- Trends in access to quality care and education services
- Unified Early Childhood System Supports
- Plans for 2025



Section 1:

Overview of Publicly-Funded Early Care and Education Programs

Context

The Arkansas Department of Education has a limited amount of state and federal funding that allows the state to fund seats for children who are determined eligible. ADE is also responsible for regulating the mixed delivery system of providers.

Funding streams administered by ADE:

- School Readiness Assistance (SRA) funded by the federal Child Care Development Fund (CCDF)
- Arkansas Better Chance (ABC)
- Early Head Start-Child Care Partnership (EHS-CCP) federal grant to ADE
- Early Childhood Special Education (IDEA Part B and Part C)

Funding streams administered by other organizations:

- Early Intervention Day Treatment (EIDT, funded by Medicaid)
- Head Start (HS), Early Head Start (EHS), Early Head Start-Child Care Partnership(EHS-CCP) grants



AR Early Childhood Seat Funding

The largest dedicated early care and education funding streams are captured below. Additional locally-administered funds can be used to serve children (e.g., Title I).

	School Readiness Assistance	Arkansas Better Chance	Head Start/Early Head Start	Early Intervention Day Treatment
Eligibility Criteria	<p>Families that are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> At or below 85% State Median Income (SMI) Working, in school, or in training 20 hours per week <p>Additional eligibility categories include Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)-certified families, children in foster care, child care teachers</p>	<p>Families that are at or below 200% Federal Poverty Level (FPL)</p>	<p>Families that are at or below 100-130% Federal Poverty Level (FPL)</p>	<p><i>Data requested from ADHS Medicaid Team</i></p>
Program Requirements	<p>Licensed centers and family child care providers</p> <p>Level 2 or higher Better Beginnings</p>	<p>Licensed schools and centers</p> <p>Better Beginnings participation</p>	<p>Licensed schools and centers, community action agencies, universities, family child care</p>	<p>Licensed by OEC/EIDT certified through Arkansas Department of Human Services (ADHS)</p>
Average Hours/Days	<p>7 hour day, full year</p>	<p>7 hour day, school year</p>	<p>State administered Early Head Start Child Care Partnership is a minimum of 10 hours</p>	<p>6 hour day, full year</p>

AR Early Childhood Seat Funding

The largest dedicated early care and education funding streams are captured below. Additional locally-administered funds can be used to serve children (e.g., Title I).

	School Readiness Assistance	Arkansas Better Chance	Head Start/Early Head Start/EHS-CCP	Early Intervention Day Treatment
Total Funding and Source	<p>Total: \$94,601,666</p> <p>Source: Child Care Development Fund</p>	<p>Total: \$114M</p> <p>Source: State General Fund and TANF</p>	<p>HS/EHS: \$110,605,314 State EHS-CCP: \$3.5M</p> <p>Source: Federal Administration of Children and Families (ACF) grants</p>	<p><i>Data requested from ADHS Medicaid Team</i></p> <p>Source: Medicaid</p>
Number of Children Served <small>(as of 11/01/2024)</small>	19,905	<p>Total: 23,059 Seats: 19,186 Home visiting: 3,873</p>	<p>HS: 3,949 EHS: 2,711 EHS/CCP: 352 State EHS-CCP: 168</p>	<p><i>Data requested from ADHS Medicaid Team</i></p>
Amount of Public Funding Per Child	<p>\$39 - \$75 per day rate, depending on age and level of Better Beginnings <small>(special needs rate not included)</small></p>	<p>Seat: \$5,105</p> <p>Home Visiting: \$1,894</p>	<p>HS: \$9,968 EHS: \$18,026 State EHS-CCP: \$20,244.73</p>	<p><i>Data requested from ADHS Medicaid Team</i></p>

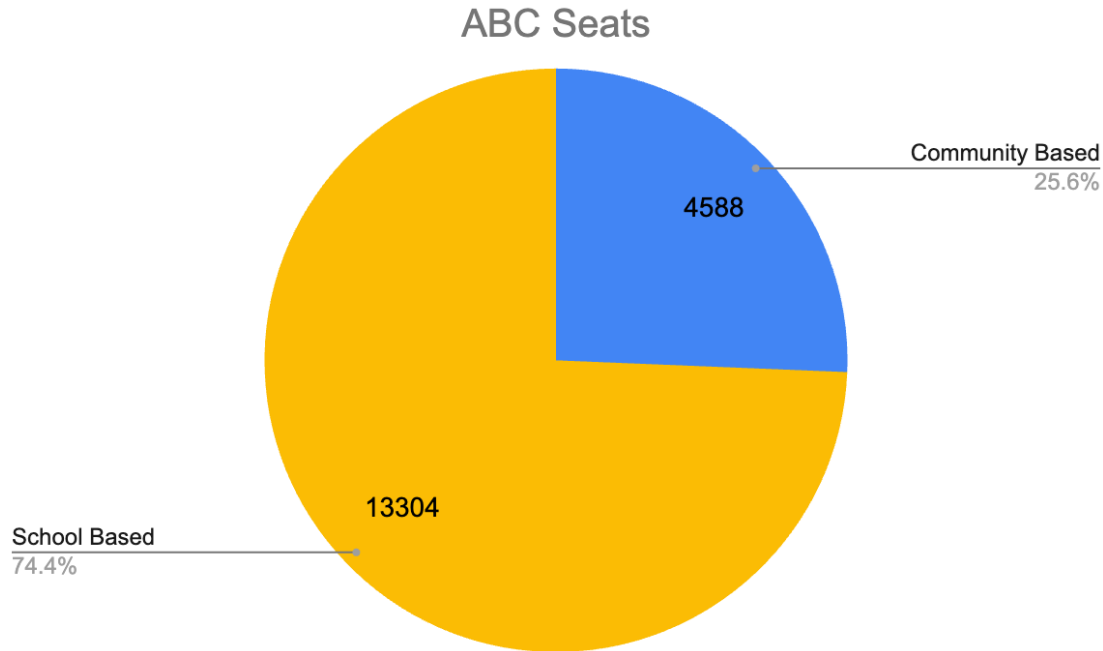
Early Childhood Special Education

Federal IDEA Part B (3-5 year olds) and IDEA Part C (0-3 year olds) funds ensure children in Arkansas can receive the special education services for which they qualify.

	IDEA Part B (3-5 year olds)	IDEA Part C (0-3 year olds)
Total Funding and Source	<p>IDEA Part B 611 Source of Funds 6702: Fund total is combined sum to serve 3-21</p> <p>IDEA Part B 619 Source of Funds 6710: \$5,904,426.66</p> <p>State Preschool SOF 2260: \$16,897,920</p> <p>Additional SPED Funding: State: \$6,000,000 Federal 3-5: \$1,104,978.26</p>	<p>IDEA Part C total funding: \$4,834,253</p> <p><i>Medicaid: Awaiting reports for a summary of this information</i></p>
Number of Children Served (as of 10/01/2024)	10,244	1,691

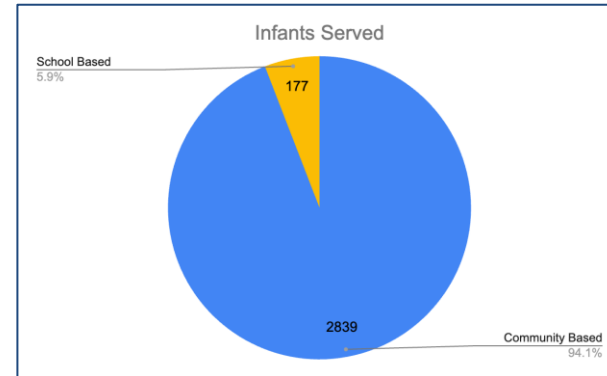
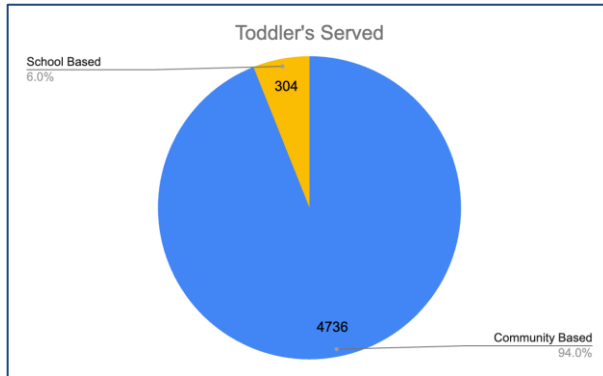
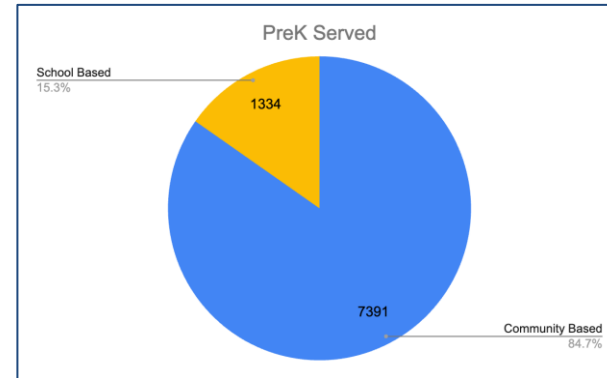
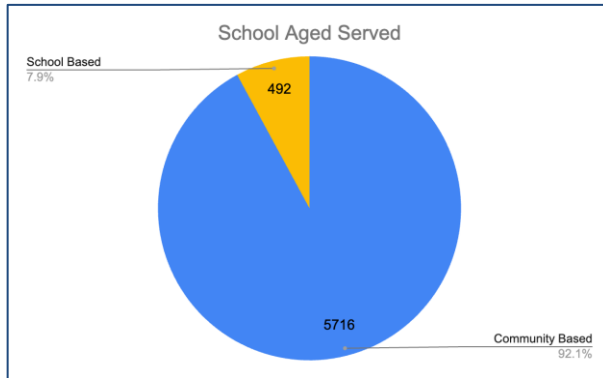
AR Early Childhood Providers- ABC Seats

ABC seats serve children for the duration of a school day, 178 days out of the year. Each provider receives \$5,105 per child per year



AR Early Childhood Providers- SRA Seats

SRA seats serve children for the full year for a full day. There is a \$9,240 annual average for a preschool aged child attending full time.



Licensed and Registered Facilities

Schools, centers, and family homes must be licensed or registered in order to receive funding from ADE. These numbers have remained largely consistent in 2024.

		Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Centers (Community-Based, Head Start, School District)	Quality Rated*	1,110	1,098	1,072	1,079
	Total	1,402	1,393	1,374	1,373
EIDT	Quality Rated	133	138	138	141
	Total	162	169	169	170
Licensed and Registered Family Homes	Quality Rated	128	130	123	123
	Total	213	208	203	204
Out of School Time	Quality Rated	71	72	75	76
	Total	145	152	164	162

Children Served by Quality Rating

Preliminary Child Count data from Cohorts 1 and 2 indicate that the majority of children served through public funds are in sites at Levels 2 - 4. A comprehensive breakdown and analysis of TOTAL children served through public funds will be available after a statewide Child Count takes place in 2025.

	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5	Level 6
Schools	25	265	3,633	4,204	2,430	748
Head Start/ Early Head Start	0	0	2,724	1,808	125	521
Centers	51	4,561	3,568	978	682	766
EIDT	537	3,170	2,729	247	59	0
Licensed and Registered Family Homes	0	166	123	68	15	86
Total	613	8162	12,777	7305	3311	2121

Early Childhood Workforce

ABC Workforce Data

	ABC Lead Teachers	Percent	ABC ParaProfessionals	Percent
Doctorate	10	0.93	0	0.00%
Master's	200	18.55	14	1.29%
Bachelor's	643	59.65	110	10.17%
Associate's Degree (AA)	179	16.60	259	23.94%
Child Development Associate (CDA)/Technical Certification	30	2.78	482	44.55%
High School Diploma	16	1.48	217	20.06%
Total	1078	100.00%	1082	100.00%

ECE WAGE\$ Recipients

As a result of WAGE\$ in 2024, nearly 2000 teachers benefited from nearly \$3M in stipends. With recovery funds expiring, this initiative will not continue in FY 26.

	Dates	Stipends Paid	Participants	Employers	Average Payment	Average Wage/Hr
WAGE\$	Jan-Sep 2024	\$ 2,726,767.75	1,987	649	\$ 1,128.15	\$15.73
	Jan-Dec 2023	\$ 6,060,767.75	2,152	665	\$ 1,681.22	\$15.64



Teacher Education and Compensation Helps (TEACH) Early Childhood Scholarship Recipients

In 2024, Arkansas invested a little over \$4M in scholarships that served over four hundred early childhood teachers and directors. 20,734 AR children were cared for in settings who participated in TEACH EC

Awards	Degree Program	Academics	Compensation
Teacher: 204	Certificate: 11%	Completion Rate: 95.66%	Start of year average wage/hr: \$14.71
Assistant Teacher: 156	Associates Degree: 52%	Average GPA: 3.484	End of year average wage/hr: \$15.48
Director: 36	Bachelor's Degree: 27%		
Other: 59	Master's Degree: 7%		
Total: 455	Licensure Program: 2%		
	Coursework only: 1%		

Section 2:

Trends in Access and Quality

Context

In 2024, Arkansas experienced the following as it relates to access to quality care and education services, across the funding streams it administers:

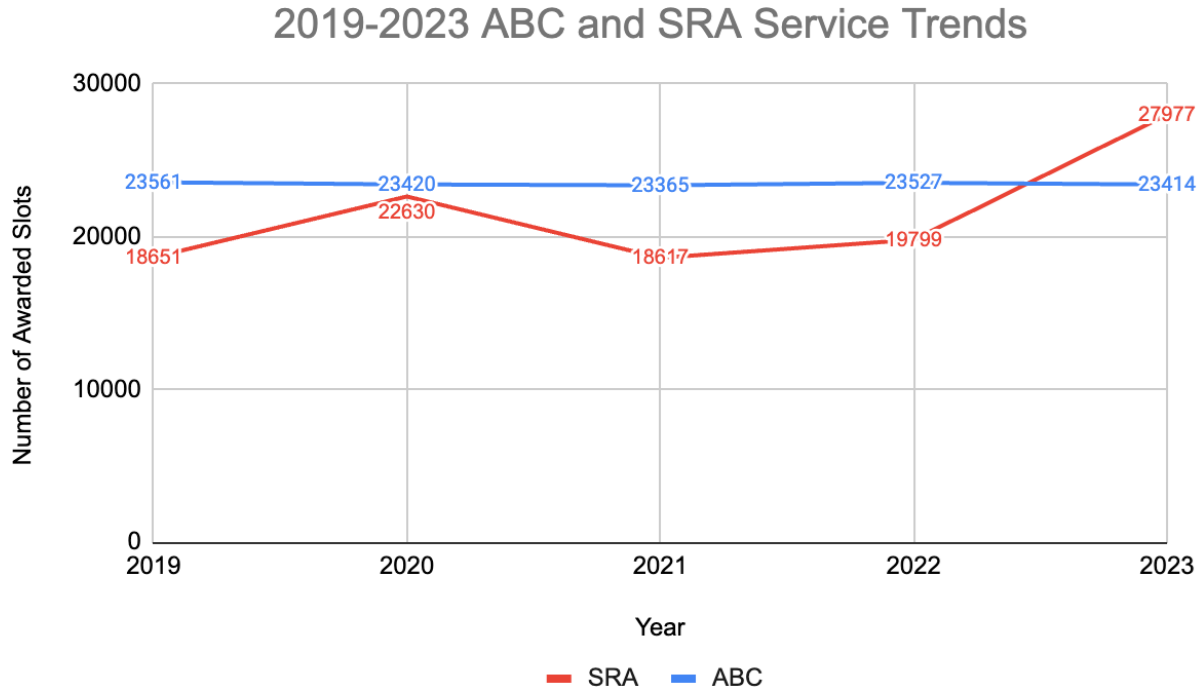
- More children than ever before qualified for CCDF funding.
- CCDF requirements were updated to better reflect family needs by doing the following:
 - changing work requirements from 30 hours to 20 hours, and
 - providing a 90 day provisional approval for families.
- Arkansas Better Chance and the Early Head Start Child Care program administered by OEC had little to no changes due to funding.



Access Trends

ABC and SRA Over Time

While children enrolled in ABC has remained steady, children enrolled through SRA has increased over the past years.



Access to Quality Rated Sites

Total Quality Rated Sites

There were approximately 300 fewer quality rated sites in 2024 compared to 2 years prior due to returning to normal operations post COVID pandemic.

	2022	2023	2024
Total number of quality rated sites	1,728	1,441	1,419
Number of sites newly rated	53	110	76



Site Type by Quality Rating

In 2024, 72% of sites overall were rated Levels 1-3.

	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5	Level 6	Total
Centers (Community-Based, Head Start, School District)	71	345	315	190	98	60	1,079
EIDT	16	67	48	7	3	0	141
Licensed and Registered Family Home	25	44	25	7	3	19	123
Out of School Time	8	46	14	6	2	0	76
Total	120	502	402	210	106	79	1,419
Percent of Sites	8.5%	35%	28%	15%	7.5%	6%	

Shifts in Quality Rated Sites

In 2024, 76 sites were newly rated and 180 sites improved in ratings. Levels 4-6 saw substantial proportionate growth.

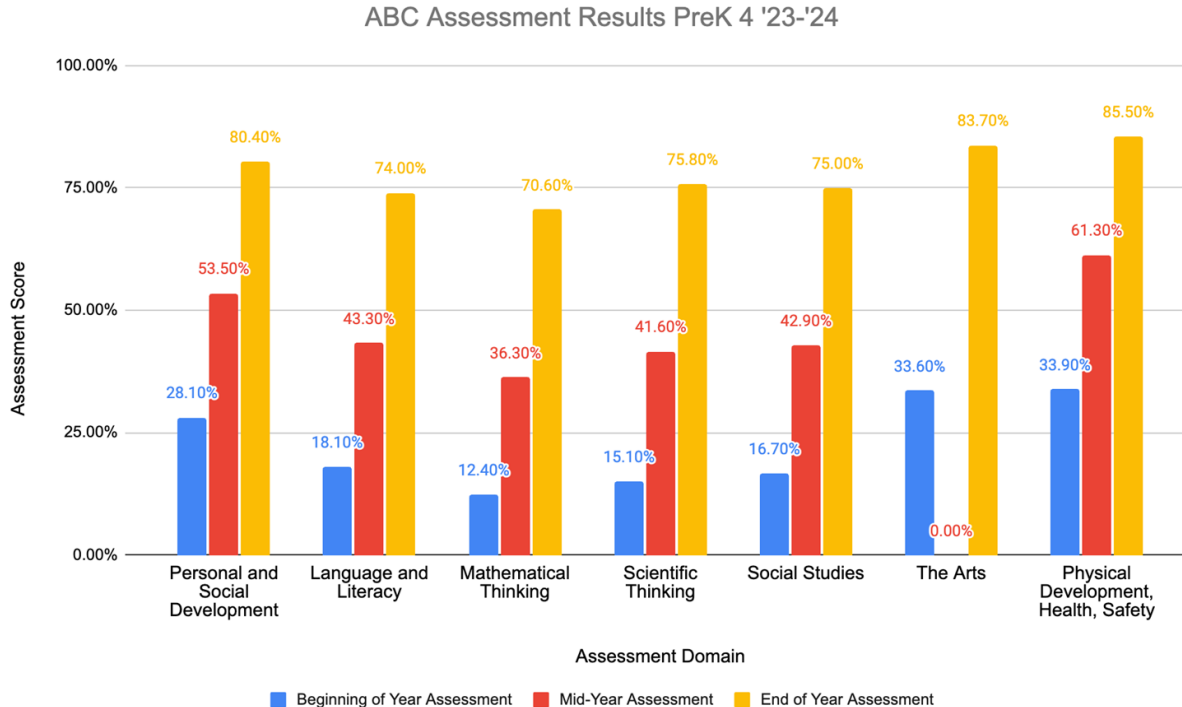
	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5	Level 6	Total
Number of Sites	120	502	402	210	106	79	1,419
Sites newly rated at this level	5	66	46	71	40	28	256
Percent newly rated	4%	13%	11%	34%	38%	35%	18.04%



ABC Snapshot of Assessment Data

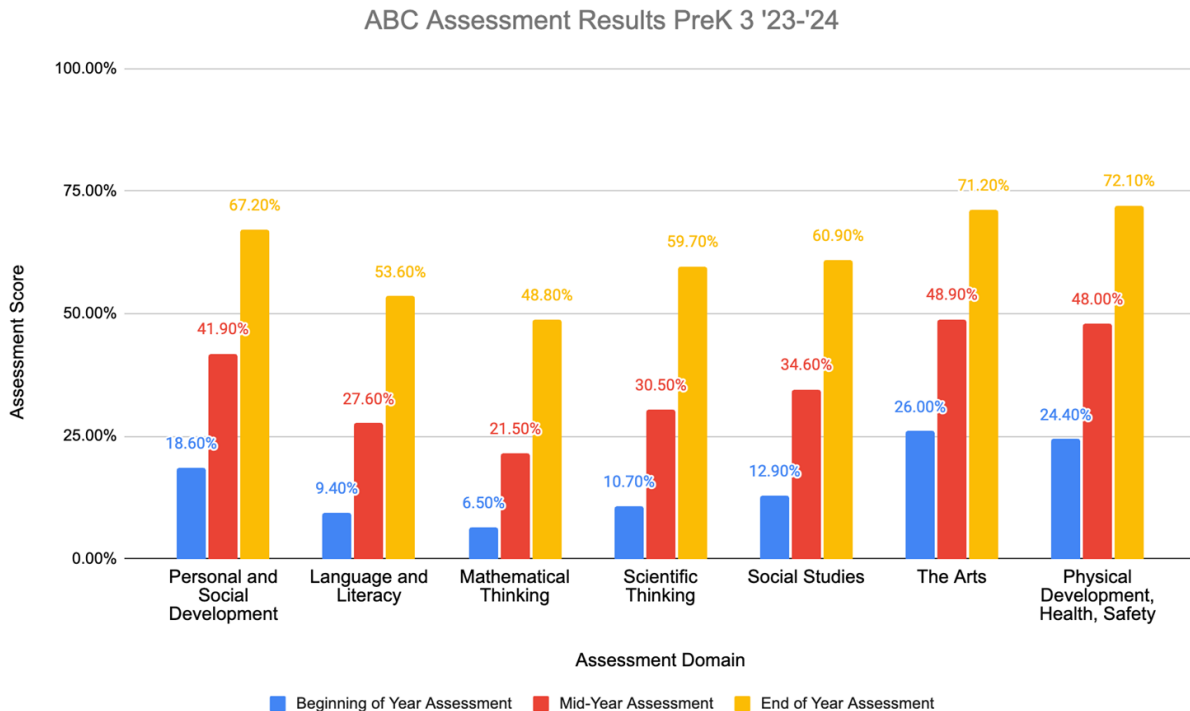
ABC Assessment Data: PreK 4

Statewide, ABC Prek 4 children demonstrated gains in each assessed domain by the end of the 2023-2024 school year, with at least 70% scoring proficient.



ABC Assessment Data: PreK 3

Statewide, ABC Prek 3 children demonstrated gains in each assessed domain by the end of the 2023-2024 school year, with at least 45% scoring proficient.



Section 3:

Unified Early Childhood System Supports

Key Accomplishments

Arkansas strives to leverage all of its funding to establish a seamless early childhood system. Here's what the state worked towards in 2024:

- Launched a local lead to represent every county in the state
- Implemented Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) pilot program to measure adult-child interactions in early childhood classrooms
- Launched a new technology system for School Readiness Assistance (child care) to replace outdated system
- Worked with Early Childhood Subcommittee of State Board to develop a Strategic Plan for Early Childhood focusing on access, improving quality, workforce, updating IT systems and communications [Arkansas Office of Early Childhood Strategic Plan](#)
- #1 in Early Childhood Systems in the nation for 3rd year in a row (WalletHub)

[States with the Best & Worst Early Education Systems in 2024](#)



Local Leads Update

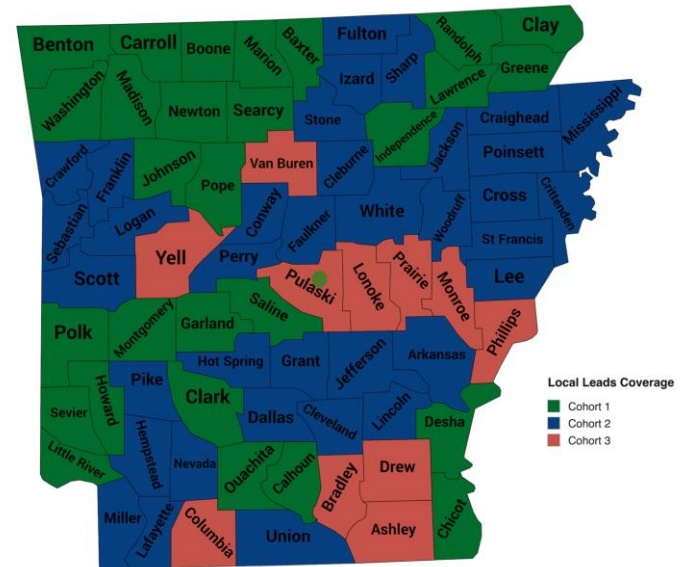
Statewide Coverage

In every corner of the state, there is now a state-designated local lead responsible for understanding access and gaps, and planning for improvement to ECE access and quality in their region.

In accordance with LEARNS, 26 local early childhood lead organizations are responsible for coordinating and supporting early childhood in their communities.

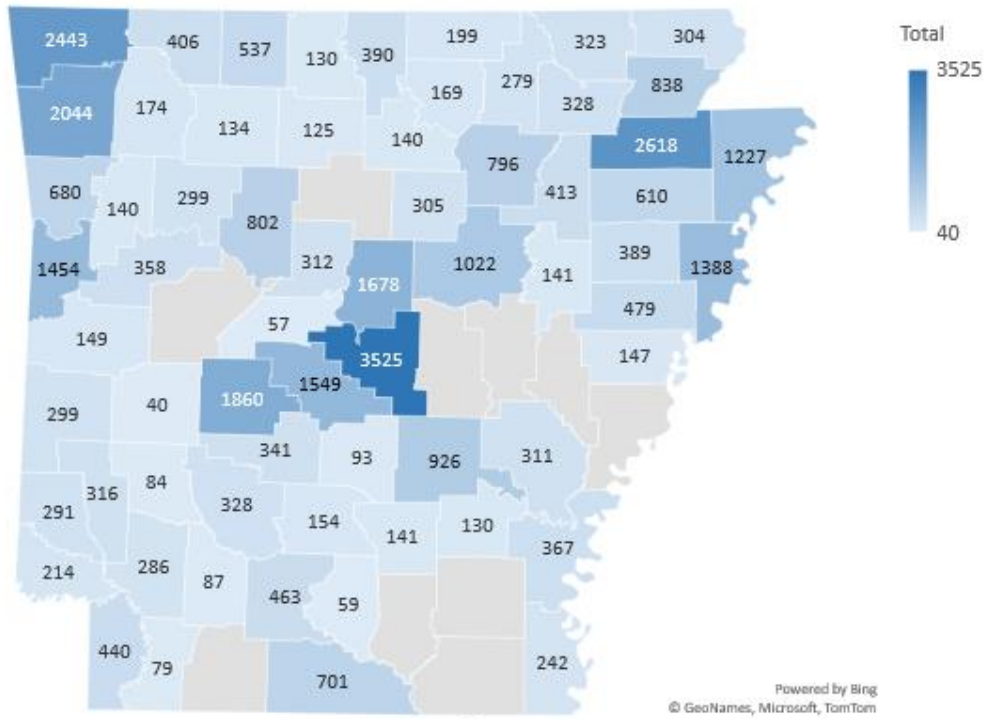
Local lead organizations include:

- 14 Educational Cooperatives
- 5 Child Care Aware
- 3 School Districts
- 1 University
- 1 City Government
- 1 Community Action Agency
- 1 Chamber of Commerce
- 1 Private Non-Profit Organization



Children Served by Public Funds by County

This map shows the total number of children served in publicly-funded child care programs by county, providing a first of its kind real-time snapshot of publicly-funded spots utilized across the state in counties covered by local leads cohorts 1 and 2.



As of 10/1/2024 (child count), cohorts 1 and 2

Powered by Bing
© GeoNames, Microsoft, TomTom



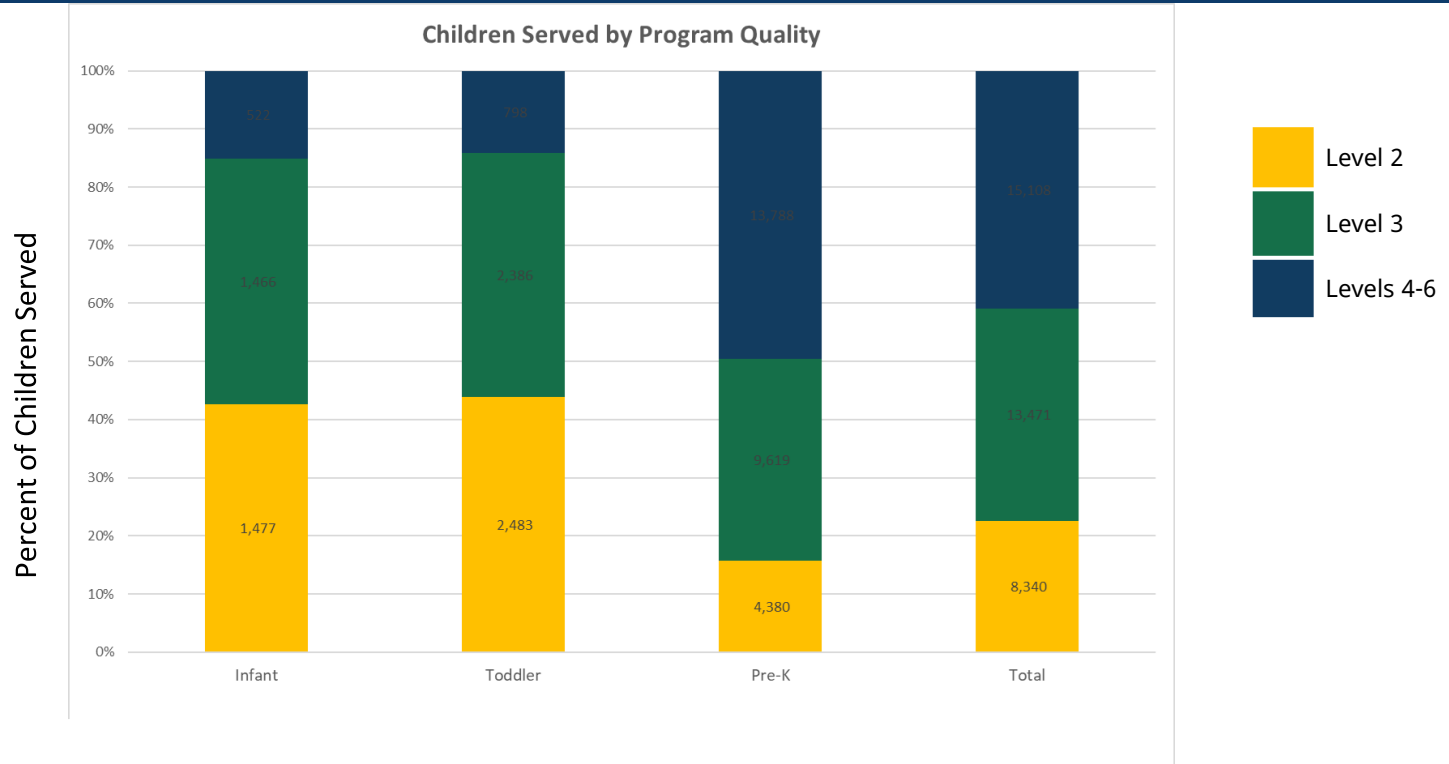
Cohort 1 and 2: Child Count

39,793 children are served through early childhood funds, with the largest number of children served in the four- year-old age groups and the smallest number of children served as infants.

	Infants	Ones	Twos	Threes	Fours	Total
School Readiness Assistance	1,310	1,825	2,129	2,216	2,305	9,785
Arkansas Better Chance	189	231	375	4,538	9,513	14,846
Head Start	694	833	894	1,359	1,594	5,374
Other (Medicaid, Other School District, IDEA Part B)	374	933	1,527	2,337	2,879	8,050
Total	2,567	3,822	4,925	10,450	16,291	38,055

Children Served by Quality Rating

In 2025, Arkansas will be able to capture the level of quality that all children served through public funds are accessing. This chart shows children across Cohort 1 and 2 counties.



As of 10/1/2024 (child count),
cohorts 1 and 2

CLASS Pilot Update

CLASS Pilot: Observation Counts

In Fall 2024, the 29 counties that make up Cohort 1 participated in 188 CLASS observations, where Arkansas certified observers used an evidence-based tool to assess adult-child interactions.

	Number of Sites	Number of Classrooms	Number of Observations	Number of Trained Observers	Average Score*	Median Score*	Minimum Score*	Maximum Score* (out of 7)
Pre-K	88	150	154	115	5.27	5.33	2.00	6.81
Toddler	19	26	26	43	4.64	4.93	2.25	5.79
Infant	11	12	12	27	5.72	5.69	4.38	6.81
Overall	118	188	192	*128	5.21	5.33	2.00	6.81

As of 12/13/24

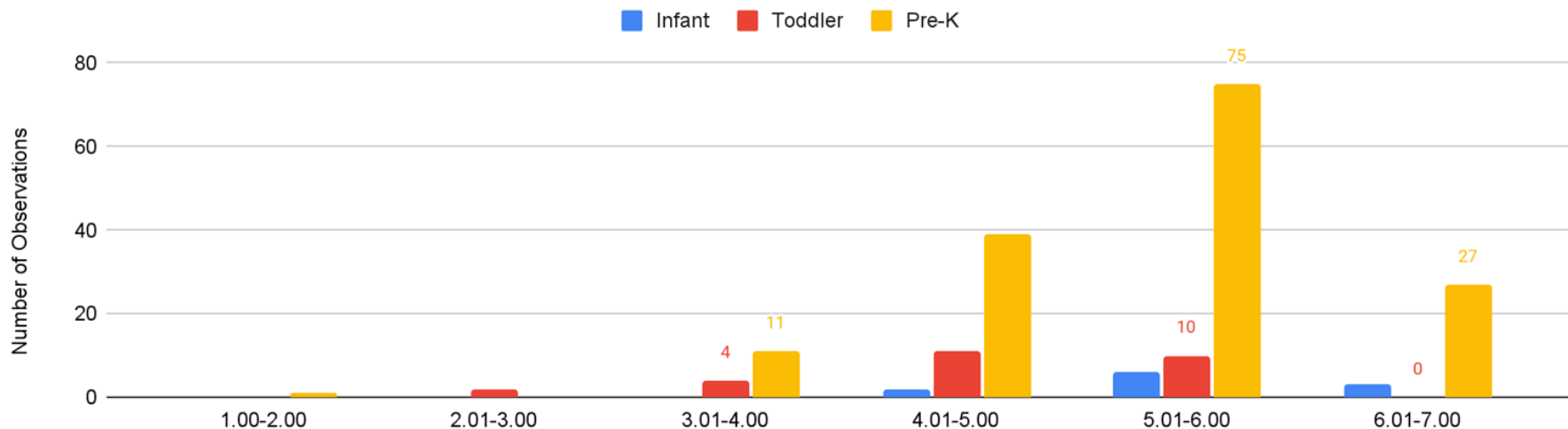
*Observers can be certified CLASS observers in multiple age bands

*Calculations of scores do not include the negative climate dimension.

Distribution of Overall CLASS Scores

Observers score interactions using a series of metrics, which are then rolled up as dimension, domain, and overall scores. Generally, 1-2 is low, 3-5 is mid, and 6-7 is high.

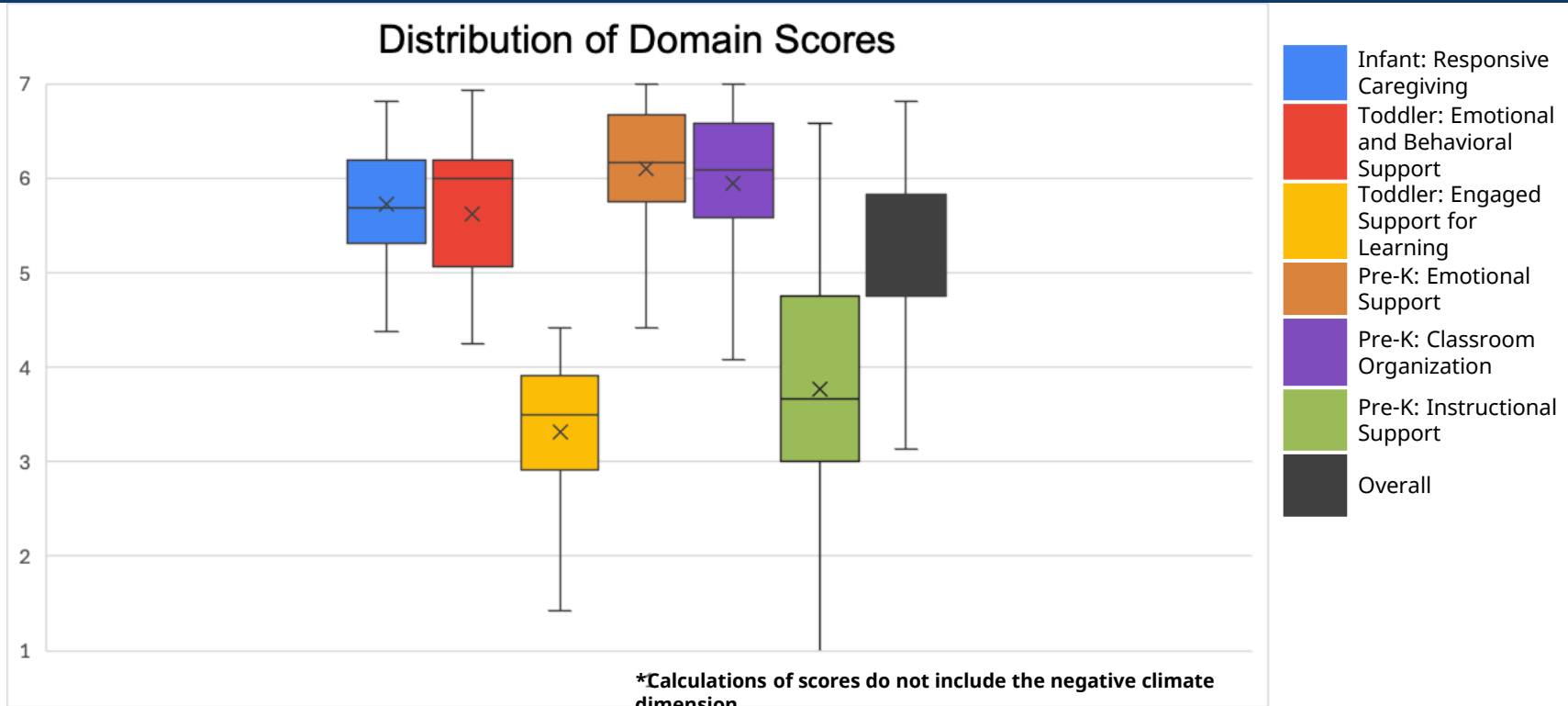
Distribution of Observation Scores by Age Configuration (without Negative Climate)



*Calculations of scores do not include the negative climate dimension.

CLASS Scores by Domain

For Pre-K and toddler classrooms, Instructional Support and Engaged Support for Learning are typically the most challenging domains to score highly on nationally.



Additional System Supports

Funds for Additional Supports

ADE funds entities to provide training, technical assistance, and other resources to early childhood providers, teachers, and families across the state. As ADE continues to build a unified system, it may continue to refine its approach.

	Funding Source	ABC	CCDF	PDG <i>(One time funding ending Dec 2025)</i>	Total
Workforce Supports	Professional Development, Coaching, Training	\$3,152,750	\$5,914,470	\$4,141,435	\$13,208,655
	Scholarships	\$248,190	\$550,000		\$798,190
Behavioral Supports	Mental Health Consultation	\$199,480	\$1,637,876	\$1,362,707	\$3,200,063
	Conscious Discipline	\$320,090	\$299,102	\$1,540,305	\$2,159,497
Family Supports	Home Visiting	\$461,160	\$553,350		\$1,014,510
	Family Engagement	\$342,050	\$528,797		\$870,847
	Additional Supports <i>Dolly Parton Imagination Library & Zero to Three (Safe Babies Court Team)</i>		\$786,500		\$786,500
Community Engagement	Communications		\$499,182		\$499,182
	Local Leads			\$4,050,000	\$4,050,000
	Child Care Aware		\$2,700,000		\$2,700,000
Academics	Child Assessment	\$948,860			\$948,860

Looking forward: 2025

Looking Forward: 2025

In 2025, the Office of Early Childhood will continue to commit to the following efforts to better serve children, families, and providers across the state:

- Licensing
 - Complete a licensing review and implement revisions from stakeholder input
- Increasing Access
 - Providers will receive awards for the Infant/Toddler Contracted seats program
 - Collect data on increased family access to services as a result of the recent CCDF requirement updates
- Local Leads
 - Implement community plans in every cohort to drive access to quality
 - Complete Coordinated Funding Requests
 - Support local leads in collecting private pay enrollment data
- CLASS
 - Collect CLASS data across all cohorts
 - Begin revisions of Better Beginnings utilizing CLASS data and stakeholder input
- High Quality Instruction Materials
 - Conduct a curriculum review to ensure ADE's recommended list consists of HQIM
- Workforce
 - Work with the Division of Career and Technical Education to develop an early childhood professional pathway
 - Work with the Assistant Commissioner, Office of Educator Effectiveness to implement P-2nd grade license for early childhood