

Arkansas Early Childhood Commission (AECC) Meeting

October 21, 2025

Meeting Minutes

Members Present: Tyra Greenwood, Deborah (Debbie) Mays (Zoom), Rep. Denise Garner, Dr. Jason Williams, Senator Jane English, Haley Sisson (Zoom), Lorrie McClure, Dr. Shelli Henehan (Zoom)

Members Absent: Senator Greg Leding (Rep. Garner Proxy)

I. Call to Order

Tyra Greenwood called the AECC Commissioner's Meeting to order on October 21, 2025, at 10:02 a.m. Tyra Greenwood read the AECC's mission statement.

II. Approval of Minutes - A motion was made to approve the July 22, 2025 meeting minutes. The motion carried. The meeting minutes were approved.

III. New Business Item #1 – Attorney Daniel Schuler presented a review of policies, procedures, organizational scope, mission, roles and responsibilities of the AR Early Childhood Commission and Office of Early Childhood.

New Business Item #2 – Ashelyn Abney, Interim Director of the Office of Early Childhood and Dr. Chris Barnes provided updates on the following Program and Processes:

- **Portal Issues**
- **Processing Timely Payments**
- **Better Beginnings Application** – Automatically Given Provisional Level 2;
- **CLASS Observations** – 806 Observations; 657 Done During Learning Year; 149 During Transition Year; New QRIS System Will Begin July 1.
- **Proposed Task Force** – Recommends AECC Set Up Sub-Committee
- **Call for Proposals** – Deadline is Nov 1; 2 Proposals Received So Far
- **TEACH Scholarships** – Fall 2025 317 Scholars in the Program; 140 Associate Degrees; 124 Bachelor's Degrees, 13 Master's Degrees; 13 Certificates of Proficiencies; 7 Technical Certificates; 16 Early Childhood Pre-K; 29 High School Students Enrolled With Interest in Early Childhood
- **Local Leads** – 26 Local Leads; All Counties Have Been Covered; 3 Priorities: CLASS Observations, Child Count, Coordinated Funding
- **Funding - Dr. Chris Barnes** – CCDF Is A Federally Funded Program; Funds Are Received Annually; Funds Have To Be Obligated In 2 Years and Spend In 3 Years; \$42M of Carryover Funds; \$7.25M Remaining; Have Received Some Funds From FY26 in The Amount of \$9.1M; 80% of Funding is Discretionary; Currently, Discretionary Is Not Available to Us Because it Requires a Continuing Resolution or Budget Amendment at the Federal Level; Currently Spending \$13M Monthly; 5 Weeks of Remaining Funding Left; Use Part of ABC Funds for State Match;
- **Funding Recommendations - Deputy Director Stacy Smith:**

- **#1 - TANF Funds** – 30% (\$18.9M) Can Be Put Into CCDF, If AR Chooses To Do So; Would Increase CCDF Funds By \$1.5M; Would Be Legislative Change
- **#2 - Carry Over Amounts** – FY23 \$443M in Carry Over Funds; Amount of Money Has Decreased; OEC Salary Increase Was \$20k
- \$8M Decline – Received in Q4 – Researching Formula (How Formula Was Calculated and Why We Lost The Money?) Rep. Mayberry Mentioned on Oct 15; Working to Recover \$8M That Was Cut; If Formula is Corrected, Could Possibly Have \$16M;
- The State's Plan: Reduce Rates, Implement Co-Pay; Reduction in Professional Service Contracts; ADE's Goal Was To Make Sure There Was Enough Money to Get to October of Next Year (Before Knowledge of Government Shutdown)
- There needs to be an update to the Market Rate Survey. The AECC can make a recommendation for this to be done in the Spring.
- **#3 Target Specific Groups** – Remove school-age from CCDF, Increase rates infant-PreK,
- Risk: Program Finding: Could lose funding for not complying with program rules
- **#4 Change Eligibility** – Increase work requirement hours
- Risk: Removes families in need; remove 72-month lifetime limit (wait list)
- **#5 - If There Was State Funding** (in the future) – Stability of one-time funds (current rates & co-pays); Offering Grants to Providers (for business related expenses); Regional Grants/Funding (based on regional needs) with Local Leads; Expand ABC (change rules)
- Debbie Mays motioned to form an Emergency Workgroup to include Chris Barnes, a member of OEC of their choosing, Dr. Lorraine McKelvey, two child care representatives, Shahid Sheeik, Dawn Coyer, two willing legislators from each party. Dr. Williams suggested the workgroup also include someone to represent as a family member. The purpose of the workgroup is to assist and advise OEC so there's a voice at the table when deciding which of the options would work best for everyone involved.
- OEC staff will be available to assist, but will not be making any recommendations.

VI. Announcements – None

Public Comments – Provider Impact

- Dawn Colyer
- Sarah Wheeler
- Karen Marshall
- Katie Vega
- Maranda Gilliland
- Cassidy Pettit
- Skylar Thomas
- Cristin Beene
- Beth Flippo
- Jody Abernathy

V. Next Meeting

The next meeting will be held on January 20, 2026, at 4 Capitol Mall, in the Auditorium.

VI. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 12:21 p.m.