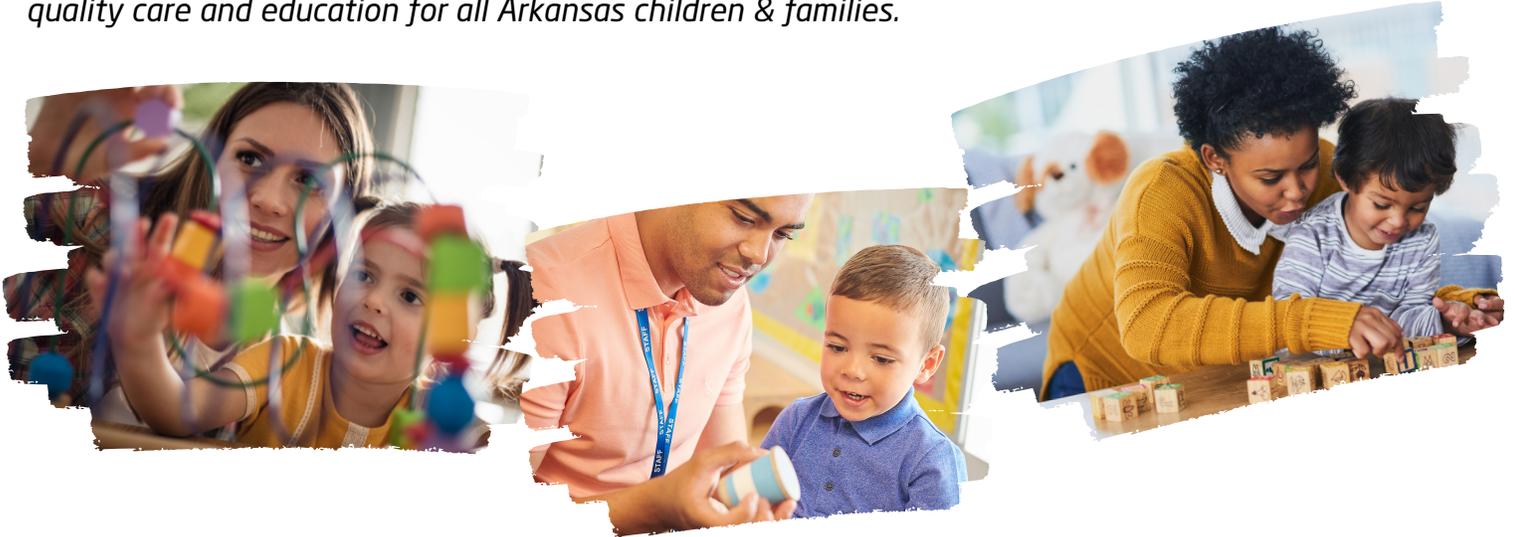


2022 Policy Agenda

OUR MISSION

To connect, develop, and represent Arkansas early childhood care and education professionals. In doing so, we elevate the diversity, equity, and vibrancy of the profession and to ultimately promote high-quality care and education for all Arkansas children & families.



Recommendations for Achieving Our Vision

Based on what we have learned about what is necessary to create a quality early childhood education system and the current state of early childhood education in Arkansas, we make the following recommendations and pledge to advocate for the changes needed to achieve our vision.

- 1 Increase Pay and Benefits for the Early Childhood Educators**
Competitive salaries and benefits are necessary to attract and retain an early childhood workforce that has the skills and experience necessary to provide quality early care and education.
- 2 Support the Establishment or Expansion of Quality Child Care Programs**
The need for more infant and toddler care is a statewide problem, and in most counties, less than 25 percent of the demand is met by quality programs.
- 3 Support Families to Pay for Quality Child Care**
Current state and federal funding only covers child care for about half of eligible low income families, and families with incomes just above the eligibility cutoffs have a difficult time paying for even lower quality child care.





1

Increase Pay and Benefits for Early Childhood Educators

Competitive salaries and benefits are necessary to attract and retain an early childhood workforce that has the skills and experience necessary to provide quality early care and education.

Expand T.E.A.C.H. So More Early Childhood Educators Can Achieve Higher Education

[T.E.A.C.H.](#) was launched in Arkansas in 2019, and is operated by the Arkansas Early Childhood Association, with funding from the Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Education (DCCECE) at the Department of Human Services. So far, 55 early childhood educators have received scholarships, release time pay, and counseling to help them obtain degrees at community colleges around the state, and there is currently a waiting list. Expanded funding would allow more educators to apply, colleges to participate, and degrees to be covered.

Explore the Creation of a Recommended Minimum Salary Scale for Early Childhood Educators in Government-funded Programs

A pay scale could specify a series of compensation steps and ranges for the wages and benefits of early childhood educators inclusive of those working with infants, toddlers, and preschoolers across settings. A scale could reflect the skills, knowledge, and competencies of early childhood educators; establish a minimum level of salary; and be linked to providers' education level and years of experience, as well as the local cost of living. The exploration of a salary scale should consider the challenges providers may face budgeting for increased salaries and ensuring compensation equity across educators given various funding streams.

Increase Income for Early Childhood Educators Through a Tax Credit Tied to Education Levels

Louisiana has an Early Childhood Teacher and Director tax credit that ranges from \$1756 to \$3511, depending on the level of education of the teacher. Educators are incentivized to obtain additional education and can continue to receive the credit annually as long as they are employed in the early education field. The credit is refundable, meaning that you receive it even if it is more than you owe in taxes. Since 2008 when the credit was passed in Louisiana, the number of educators at each level has increased dramatically, as has the number of child care centers at higher quality levels.

Allow Early Childhood Educators to Participate in the Teacher Retirement System

Most child care providers are small businesses or nonprofits with relatively few employees. One way to provide retirement benefits to early childhood educators and administrators is to allow them and/or their employers to make contributions toward retirement through the state's teacher retirement system, which is currently open to preK-12 educators in the state's public schools.

2

Support the Establishment or Expansion of Quality Child Care Programs

The need for more infant and toddler care is a statewide problem, and in most counties, less than 25 percent of the demand is met by quality programs.

Increase Reimbursement Rates to Reflect the True Cost of Quality Care

One of the main reasons that parents cannot find quality infant and toddler care is that current reimbursement rates and what parents can afford to pay do not cover the true cost of quality care. The state already pays differential rates depending on quality level, age of child served, and child to teacher ratios, but higher rates are necessary to encourage more providers to enter the market. Higher rates would also allow child care providers to pay higher wages and offer more benefits.

Expand Use of Subsidy Agreements for Infants and Toddlers

One way to stabilize revenue for child care centers is to offer subsidy agreements that guarantee funding for a certain number of children over a set period of time. The state already does this for Pre K and for Early Head Start - Child Care Partnership grants. They could expand subsidy agreements for more infants and toddlers, providing much needed steady revenue for the most expensive part of child care center budgets.

Expand the Pilot Family Child Care Network Statewide

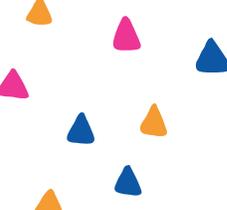
The University of Arkansas/Early Care and Education Projects has started a statewide Family Child Care Network, with the goals of increasing the quality and capacity of current providers and increasing the number of providers around the state. Care provided in a family child care home is often parents' choice for their infants and toddlers, but in recent years the number of family child care providers has declined in Arkansas and nationwide. The network continues to add members and can be expanded to serve hundreds of providers statewide.

Expand Shared Service Alliances to Help Providers With Business Needs

Since the overwhelming majority of child care providers are small businesses or nonprofits, they have difficulty paying for all of their business needs. Shared Service Alliances bring child care centers and family child care homes together to share the costs of services such as bookkeeping, billing and fee collection; audits; marketing and enrollment management; payroll and human resources; and purchasing. Shared Service Alliances work best when they are designed with providers to meet their needs. The University of Arkansas/Early Care and Education Projects has launched a Shared Services Alliance in the form of a website - areceresources.org. State funding could provide for expansion of this and other shared services for providers.

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2

Support the Establishment or Expansion of Quality Child Care Programs

The need for more infant and toddler care is a statewide problem, and in most counties, less than 25 percent of the demand is met by quality programs.

Encourage and Support Braiding and Blending of Funding Streams

Child care providers are often nervous about braiding or blending various funding streams to cover the cost of operations because they do not want to risk losing funding by breaking program rules. As a result, they may have separate classrooms for each funding source, which can create inequities. Knowing that they have “permission” and guidance on blending funding streams, along with coaching on how to do it, can make them feel more comfortable and ultimately lead to higher quality care for all the children in their building.

Provide Resources for New Child Care Providers to Get Started and/or for Existing Providers to Expand

Equipment and materials costs for quality child care can be a barrier to start-up or expansion because they are difficult to recoup through ongoing revenue, which doesn’t even cover operating expenses. Child care centers may need cribs, high chairs, chairs, tables, shelves, rugs, developmental toys and educational materials, child-sized toilets and sinks, kitchen equipment, and playground equipment. The state could provide resources to pay for these needs, with a focus on areas of the state that have the greatest need.

3

Support Families to Pay for Quality Child Care

Current state and federal funding only covers child care for about half of eligible low income families, and families with incomes just above the eligibility cutoffs have a difficult time paying for even lower quality child care.

Increase State and/or Federal Funding for Child Care So More Families Can Be Served

The state could dedicate general revenue or identify another potential funding source to increase funding to provide subsidies to families and/or offer subsidy agreements to child care providers. Congress could also increase funding for the Child Care and Development Fund and/or Head Start.

AECA has adopted these recommendations, which were developed by the Arkansas Early Childhood Education Task Force. The task force is staffed by Excel by Eight.

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We believe the early childhood workforce is a key player when it comes to children's education. Early childhood professionals not only support brain development and school readiness, parents of 130,000 Arkansas children rely on our services to earn a living. **STRONG BRAINS** are built through **RELIABLE RELATIONSHIPS** and **STIMULATING PLAY** with loving adults.



We need YOU to take ACTION to support our Public Policy Agenda for 2022. Use #keyPLAYers in your social media posts and our virtual backgrounds in Zoom meetings and our button in email signatures. Help us spread the message about what is necessary to create a quality early childhood education system and the current state of early childhood education in Arkansas.

We also invite you to join the nearly 1,500 professionals from around the state who have come together for more than 50 years on behalf of children and families in Arkansas. Visit our website and join today!

www.arkansasearlychildhood.org

