

Policy Agenda

2024-2025

The early childhood workforce is the heart of every Arkansas community.



Half of Arkansas's children are in non-parental care at least 10 hours per week.

Before kindergarten, many will spend **11,500 hours** in child care and pre-K. That's more time than they will spend in school from kindergarten through ninth grade.

Early childhood educators literally shape children's brains to become Arkansas's future students and professionals.



Family access to early childhood education is compromised by low teacher compensation.

A 2022 [UAMS workforce study](#) reported that although 77% of Arkansas early childhood educators work full time, many still do not earn enough to pay for basic necessities. Thus, they are leaving child care for higher paying service industry jobs. Due to severe staff shortages, child care businesses are forced to close.



In 2021, the [U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation report](#) cited that absences and **employee turnover cost employers \$665 million per year in Arkansas.**

An estimated \$200 million in tax revenue is lost annually due to child care issues.



What We Know

- **1.** Child care is a necessity.
- **2.** Stable child care is critical to our economy.
- **3.** Child care programs struggle to retain staff.
- **4.** Families cannot afford to pay more.

There is no single strategy that can be put in place to solve early education challenges, but a combination of benefits has been shown to stabilize employment and reduce turnover. If we make child care more accessible, children, parents, and employers will be more secure, and the state's economy will grow.



What We Need

1. **Tax credits to encourage ALL stakeholders (business owners, teachers, parents) in the early childhood system to create or seek out high quality care**

Louisiana's School Readiness Tax Credits

stand out as a nationwide model because their systematic approach has become an effective lever in promoting business development, improving teacher preparation and retention, and creating greater access to higher quality care for all children. Each dollar spent on Louisiana's early care and education sector returns \$1.78 to local economies.

2. **Reduced child care fees for the ECE workforce**



We can sustain a program similar to Kentucky's Employee Child Care Assistance Partnership. It would allow any employee working 20 hours or more per week in a licensed child care center or family child care home to receive a child care subsidy, regardless of their household income. This offers care at a far lower cost for parents who work in early childhood education without revenue loss for the employer. **We commend the Office of Early Childhood for launching this type of support in January 2024.**

3. **Expansion of funds to support the T.E.A.C.H.[®] scholarship program**

T.E.A.C.H.[®] is a program that provides scholarships for ECE educators to gain credentials and skills known to improve teaching quality. The program was launched in Arkansas in 2019. It is operated by the Arkansas Early Childhood Association with funding from the Office of Early Childhood (formerly the Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Education). Currently, there is a waiting list to participate. We have more than 400 early childhood educators registered for the spring semester of 2024, and a waiting list of others who want to participate. Sustained funding would allow more educators to apply, more colleges to participate, and more degrees to be earned.

When combined, these benefits serve as a comprehensive approach to educator compensation.

This approach does not further burden families struggling to pay for child care.

And it enables the child care sector to compete with other service industries.

Without these benefits, families will see a continued decline in child care options throughout the state.



We are at a crossroads

“ There is a demand throughout our state for more quality child care options, but without qualified staff we cannot meet that need. Early childhood professionals have worked tirelessly on possible solutions. At this point, we believe the answer must come from outside the sector.

A question we should ask ourselves: Why do we consider the education of a kindergartener a common good and paid for with public dollars, but the education of a three-year-old, during which time is the fastest for brain development, is dependent on the ability of families to pay? **”**

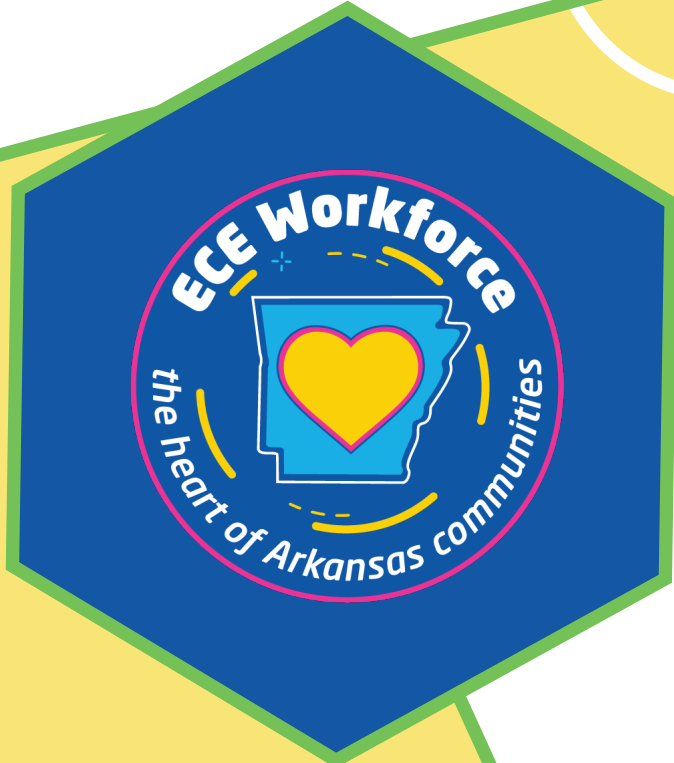
Paul Lazenby, AECA Executive Director



The Arkansas Early Childhood Association (AECA) is a non-profit organization comprised of 1,200 early childhood professionals who share a common concern about the well-being of young children and their families.

AECA has worked for more than 50 years to promote quality care and education for the children of Arkansas.

Voice your support for policies that promote stability for early childhood educators. Visit our website and become an AECA member.



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