

Office of Early Childhood

AR State Board of Education

Ashelyn Abney, OEC Director

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LEARNS Act: Requirements for 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.

Strengthening OEC Systems

Core Values:

- Child Centered
- Leadership
- Customer Service
- Collaboration

Organizational Effectiveness:

- Standard Operating Procedures
- Error Reporting
- Internal Reviews
- Grants
- Streamlining Process



Alicia Atwood



Paige Cox



Kelli Hilburn



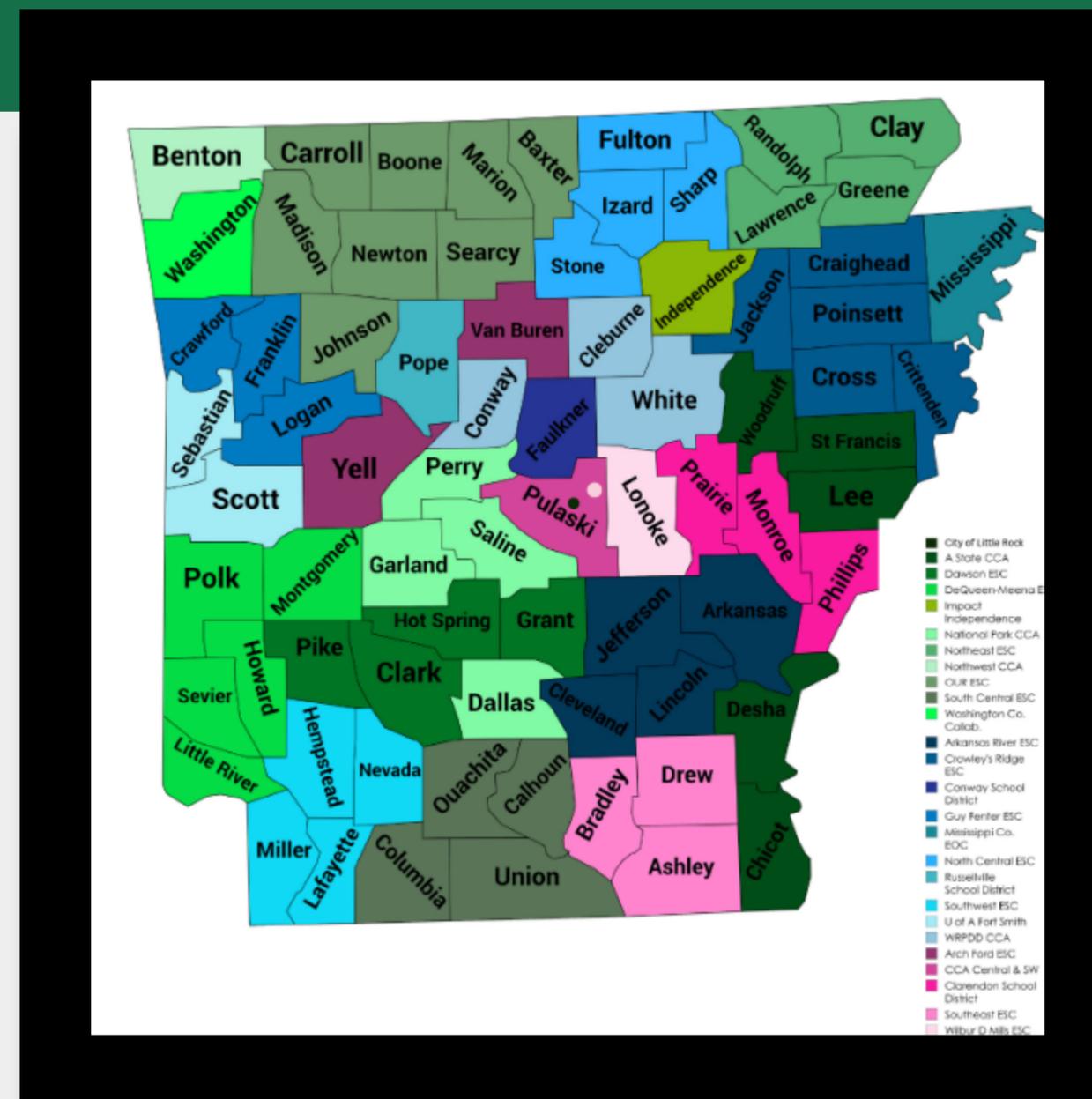
Jennifer Douglas



Brandy Ishmon

Establishing Local Leads

- Lead work in local area
- Administer Child Count
- Coordinate Funding Request
- Maintain Local Plan and Needs Assessments
- Assist with CLASS Implementation



Simplifying Licensing

- Health and Safety Priority
- Retraining Licensing Specialists
 - Coaching
 - Compliance
- Finalizing New Rules for SBE Approval

| Licensed Childcare Facilities | FY26 |
|-------------------------------|------|
| Registered Childcare Homes | 4 |
| Licensed Family Homes | 183 |
| Licensed Childcare Centers | 1510 |
| Licensed Out of School Time | 184 |

Improving Quality

- CLASS Pilot
 - All classroom observations
 - Shift in focus to teacher-child interactions
- Redesign of our Quality Rating System
 - Student Outcomes
 - Parent Satisfaction
 - Health and Safety
- High-Quality Instructional Materials





School Readiness Assistance (SRA)

CCDF Federal Block Grant

- Budget Adjustments
 - New baseline rates established November 2025
 - Concentrated quality payments
- Priority Waitlist for SRA
 - Foster children;
 - Families eligible to receive TANF (TEA/ESS) assistance;
 - Homeless families as designated by OEC; and
 - Special needs families as designated by OEC.
- Collaboration
 - Early Childhood Commission
 - Monthly Webinars

| SCHOOL READINESS ASSISTANCE | FY26 |
|--|--------|
| Children Served | 14,659 |
| Licensed Childcare Centers Currently serving SRA children | 762 |
| Waitlist | 3014 |



Arkansas Better Chance (ABC)

State Funded Program

- Licensed Teaching Staff
- Curriculum Requirements
- Payment Revised
 - Enrollment payment
 - Reviewing the practice of dual enrollment
- Grant Review
 - Eliminated waste
 - Focus on improving quality
 - Mental health support

| ARKANSAS BETTER CHANCE | FY26 |
|---------------------------------------|--------|
| Children Served | 21,236 |
| Licensed Childcare Centers or Schools | 460 |
| Home Visiting Program | 3,236 |

Arkansas Better Chance (ABC) Program

2026 – 2027 Grant Allocations

Action Items



2026 – 2027 Arkansas Better Chance (ABC)



2026 – 2027 ABC State Board of Education Proposal

| 2026 – 2027 ABC Programs | Slots | Amount Per Child | Total Award |
|---------------------------------|---------------|-------------------------|----------------------|
| Center Based | 19,849 | \$5,105 | \$101,329,145 |
| Home Visiting | 3,243 | \$1,894 | \$6,142,242 |
| Total | 23,092 | | |
| Total Award Amount | | | \$107,471,387 |

Two agencies have converted home visiting slots to their center-based programs.

- **Highland School District PAT** – This program requested to convert 27 home visiting slots to center-based slots, giving the center-based program a total of 33 slots.
- **Southeast Arkansas Education Service Cooperative HIPPIY** – This program requested to convert 80 home visiting slots, resulting in an increase of 40 center-based slots for the program.

2026 – 2027 ABC Program OEC Request



The Office of Early Childhood (OEC) would like approval for the 2026 – 2027 program year to support foster children, as well as homeless children, as the need arises. ABC provides waivers for identified children to receive immediate services. The placement of foster care and/or displaced children in an ABC program that is full will add a per-child award above the amount awarded for that program year until a slot becomes available for that child in their program.

OEC is requesting the allocation of 24,000 ABC slots throughout the program year.