

OPPORTUNITIES TO ADVANCE EDUCATION IN ARKANSAS

ESSA & PRE-K



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On behalf of ForwARd Arkansas, the Office of Innovation for Education (OIE) collaborated with *ForwARd* officers and several state agencies to develop the series: *Opportunities to Advance Education in Arkansas*. This series of working documents uncover and highlight potential intersections among *ForwARd*'s recommendations, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), and related efforts among Arkansas agencies to transform Arkansas. These intersections are unpacked and situated in Arkansas' current context to provide a richer understanding of the current work, identify potential next steps, and spotlight the unprecedented opportunities to advance and accelerate Arkansas' transformation.

ForwARd Arkansas. ForwARd Arkansas is a partnership of parents, educators, civic leaders, business professionals, and policy makers committed to helping every Arkansas student graduate prepared for success in college and the workplace. In early 2015, following extensive input from stakeholders, the ForwARd Arkansas Steering Committee crafted "A New Vision for Arkansas Education". The vision outlines seven areas of focus which include recommendations for realizing the vision.

Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). ESSA was signed into law December 10, 2015 replacing the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) in the latest reauthorization of the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act. ESSA includes provisions for federal education funds and outlines the requirements under which state and local education agencies receive, distribute, use, and are accountable for the use of these funds.

The language of ESSA provides states and districts with more flexibility, enabling states to determine long-term goals for student success. Given this historic opportunity, it is timely to review state agency initiatives that might intersect with new opportunities under the law.



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Unprecedented Opportunity. ESSA represents a unique opportunity at the state and local district levels to reimagine how federal, state, and local efforts and resources might be coordinated to enhance educational opportunities and outcomes to benefit all students in Arkansas and to close long-standing differences in student success. The launch of the *ForwARd* initiative to advance education in Arkansas provides additional intersections from which momentum might be gained to advance equity and access to opportunities to close those success gaps for the children in Arkansas.

In this Series

ESSA includes numerous opportunities for the advancement of early learning in Arkansas, including updated provisions for Pre-School Development Grants program, early learning coordination and improvement within communities, greater alignment with schools and improved capacity building for educators and staff serving children. Readiness at Kindergarten entry supports the Arkansas Department of Education's Vision for Excellence in Education of "transforming Arkansas to lead the nation in student-focused education."

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Intersection with Arkansas Agencies	Every Student Succeeds Act	<i>Opportunities to Improve & Coordinate Pre-K Programs</i>
<p>Improve the overall quality of care in infant and toddler programs (Arkansas Early Childhood Commission, Goal 1).</p> <p>Strengthen and expand local and state partnerships with other agencies and organizations for connected action (Arkansas Early Childhood Commission, Goal 5).</p>	<p>Under Title I, Improving the Academic Achievement of the Disadvantaged, states may use funds to support strategic planning and implementation of Early Childhood Education programs (ECE), focused on improving the school readiness of “low-income and disadvantaged” children and improving transitions into the K-12 system. Strategic plans under ESSA (Sec. 1111) must describe how states will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Align and strengthen the delivery of existing programs • Improve both participation and program quality while maintaining the availability of services 	<p>Quality and availability of pre-K varies markedly across Arkansas and within communities. Arkansas could further incentivize the use of Better Beginnings, the state’s quality rating and improvement system, to encourage continuous improvement of pre-K programs.</p> <p>Communication between ECE programs and schools and alignment of readiness goals can be strengthened, improving the quality of what is offered and allowing for more seamless transition from pre-K to the K-12 system.</p> <p>Through strategic planning, Arkansas can strengthen coordination of existing programs such as Arkansas Better Chance (ABC), Head Start and home-based programs to prepare children to meet readiness benchmarks.</p>
<div style="border: 2px solid #003366; border-radius: 15px; padding: 10px;"> <p style="text-align: center;"><u>ForwARd Recommendations</u></p> <p>Set clear standards for what high quality means in Arkansas, based on established research, and improve all pre-K seats to meet these new, high-quality standards. Develop or select strong readiness indicators. Tightly align ABC and Head Start with strategic goal of Kindergarten readiness (Foundational Recommendation 1, Quick Wins 1 & 2).</p> </div>		<p>Explore how existing resources and support structures might facilitate collaboration among schools and communities in efforts to improve the transition from pre-K to K-12.</p>

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Intersection with Arkansas Agencies

Improve the overall quality of care in infant and toddler programs (Arkansas Early Childhood Commission, Goal 1).

Support restructuring, expanding and growing Better Beginnings/Quality Rating Improvement System (Arkansas Early Childhood Commission, Goal 4).

Strengthen and expand local and state partnerships with other agencies and organizations for connected action (Arkansas Early Childhood Commission, Goal 5).

Every Student Succeeds Act

Title II support is available for states to develop, revise or update comprehensive literacy in early education through grade 12 (Sec. 2221). Additionally, state grants will be allocated competitively to high poverty communities. States must consult with stakeholders within the state and schools must detail the need and describe how the funds will enhance language and literacy program quality. Within Title IX, Pre-school Development Grants, states applying for competitive grant funding must use funding (among other requirements) to:

- Conduct periodic statewide needs assessments
- Develop a strategic plan
- Improve the overall quality of ECE programs in the state

Opportunities to Improve & Coordinate Pre-K Programs

Programs such as Literacy Education for All could offer an early learning element to fund and coordinate efforts of ECE programs, LEA's, and their public and private partners' efforts to develop, implement or revise evidence-based programs for high-quality comprehensive literacy instruction for students most in need.

Coordinating efforts under ESSA with efforts already underway through Arkansas' Pre-school Development Grant might expand the reach of existing grant activities.

Pre-K to K-12 transition could be enhanced by updating ADE Early Literacy Learning in Arkansas (ELLA) training to align with and build on revised Arkansas Child Development and Early Learning Standards (April, 2016; birth through 60 months). Consider how standards support the development of learning goals for children, which are required as part of Better Beginnings, the state's quality rating and improvement system.

Ensure early English Learner screening measures to determine language proficiency, improve identification and provide targeted support. Inclusion of K-2 ELA progress in the state accountability indicator will draw attention to these critical years of language acquisition.

ForwARd Recommendations

Set clear standards for what high quality means in Arkansas, based on established research, and improve all pre-K seats to meet these new, high-quality standards. Develop or select strong readiness indicators. Tightly align ABC and Head Start with strategic goal of Kindergarten readiness (Foundational Recommendation 1, Quick Wins 1 & 2).

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<p>Improve the overall quality of care in infant and toddler programs (Arkansas Early Childhood Commission, Goal 1).</p> <p>Strengthen and expand local and state partnerships with other agencies and organizations for connected action (Arkansas Early Childhood Commission, Goal 5).</p>	<p>Under Title III, Language Instruction for English Learners and Immigrant Students, provisions focus on improving school readiness and transitions for English Learners and immigrant students, including from ECE programs to elementary schools.</p> <p>ESSA strongly emphasizes greater alignment of ECE and elementary education. If a district uses Title I resources for ECE, their plans must describe how they will “support, coordinate, and integrate services” including describing how the district will support participating students transition to local elementary schools. If using Title I funds, districts must also continue to comply with Head Start Standards (Sec. 1112).</p>	<p>Arkansas has the opportunity to identify the models and best practices that support high-quality early childhood programs for vulnerable children. Programs with promising practices that support readiness and transition can be identified and practices can be shared. As of 2016, the ADE is currently revising the kindergarten entry assessment tool (QELI) and expects a new tool by the 2017 school year. Arkansas could update the guide, “Getting Children Ready for Kindergarten” to reflect the revised early learning standards and create an updated electronic version for parents and providers.</p> <p>By requiring coordination with ECE, strategic planning, and use of Head Start standards, ESSA provides the opportunity to review readiness indicators to strengthen and improve the transition of low-income students from pre-K to kindergarten.</p> <p>Arkansas can continue to implement and refine compliance with Head Start Standards to improve quality and readiness. The development and dissemination of guidance from the state can help deepen school districts understanding of Head Start Standards.</p>
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Intersection with Arkansas Agencies	Every Student Succeeds Act	<i>Opportunities to Build Capacity</i>
<p>Improve the overall quality of care in infant and toddler programs (Arkansas Early Childhood Commission, Goal 1).</p> <p>State policies should create an integrated system of professional development uniting the early childhood sectors- child care; Head Start; pre-K; public schools; early intervention and special education services (Arkansas Early Childhood Commission, Goal 3).</p> <p>Strengthen and expand local and state partnerships with other agencies and organizations for connected action (Arkansas Early Childhood Commission, Goal 5).</p>	<p>Within Title IX, Pre-school Development Grants (PDG), states applying for competitive grant funding must use funding (among other requirements) to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct periodic statewide needs assessments • Develop a strategic plan • Improve the overall quality of ECE programs in the state 	<p>As part of a recently formed partnership between the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Alliance for Early Success, the Ounce of Prevention Fund and the University of Washington, Arkansas has an opportunity to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase funding levels for the Arkansas Better Chance pre-k program with an emphasis on allocating resources for quality improvement initiatives and teachers' compensation • Ensure that all children enrolled in ABC, regardless of settings, have a highly-qualified teacher with a four-year college degree and the appropriate credential for early childhood • Improve the program's professional development system, with a focus on increasing job-embedded supports for continuous improvement, strengthening instructional leadership, and greater integration with the K-12 system
<div style="border: 2px solid #003366; border-radius: 15px; padding: 10px;"> <p style="text-align: center;">ForwARd Recommendations</p> <p>Set clear standards for what high quality means in Arkansas, based on established research, and improve all pre-K seats to meet these new, high-quality standards. Develop or select strong readiness indicators. Tightly align ABC and Head Start with strategic goal of Kindergarten readiness (Foundational Recommendation 1, Quick Wins 1 & 2).</p> </div>		<p>As part of a recent funding from the Kellogg Foundation to support ESSA, Arkansas has an opportunity to increase the capacity of local school readiness teams, and implement child development, early learning standards and a framework for family engagement.</p>

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Intersection with Arkansas Agencies	Every Student Succeeds Act	<i>Opportunities to Increase Access & Engagement</i>
<p>Improve the overall quality of care in infant and toddler programs (Arkansas Early Childhood Commission, Goal 1).</p> <p>Engage families in the child's education through research-based programs that enhances child outcomes and success in school (Arkansas Early Childhood Commission, Goal 2).</p> <p>Strengthen and expand local and state partnerships with other agencies and organizations for connected action (Arkansas Early Childhood Commission, Goal 5).</p>	<p>ESSA requires states to list the number and percentage of students enrolled in preschool programs. Under Title I, states must include information on how they are using, developing, improving or collaborating with pre-K programs in their plans (Sec. 1111). Title I funds may be used to promote family and parental engagement, along with professional development provided with “teachers, principals, and other school leaders...and parents and family members (Sec. 1116). ECE programs are an allowable use of funds under Title I. States must describe how they will assist districts and schools using Title I funds for ECE programs.</p> <p>Targeted improvement programs in schools under Title I may use funds to deliver early learning services (Sec. 1111 & 1115). Under Title IV, 21st Century Schools, ESSA opens the federal charter school program to ECE programs. This new provision allows public charter schools receiving grants to use federal dollars to add pre-K classrooms (Sec. 4103).</p>	<p>Enrollment is the state reporting focus under ESSA, however, Title I requirements provide an opportunity for Arkansas elementary schools to obtain enrollment data and follow student outcomes from preschool services through early grades to identify and strengthen sustained benefits. Schools could:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct a community needs assessment with all stakeholders to identify barriers that impede enrollment • Develop a strategic plan, developed in collaboration with schools and communities, that addresses actions steps to remove barriers and provide training to promote family and parental engagement • Maximize Title I funds, through strategic planning, to increase current pre-k seats and provide more services to low-income students <p>With Title IV, traditional and charter public schools have a new funding opportunity to include pre-K, increasing pre-K seats. Communities may invest in evidence-based programs, such as Promise Neighborhoods and Community Schools.</p>
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