



*Forw***AR***d*

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**ForwARd Arkansas  
Year in Review  
2018**





Since our founding in 2014, ForwARd Arkansas has worked to enhance equity and improve student achievement - with the goal of increasing economic prosperity for all Arkansans and making



Arkansas a leading state in education. From 2014-2017, work focused on supporting initiatives in five ForwARd Communities (Crossett, Independence County, Lee

County, Pea Ridge and Springdale) and advancing legislative efforts to improve quality Pre-K throughout the state. Specifically, helped lead an effort to secure \$3 million in additional funding for Pre-K programs, and an additional \$4.3 million in grant funding to be set aside for districts to use for Pre-K, after-school and summer programs and tutoring in 2017.



## Overview

The ForwARd team began the year by developing a cohesive plan and related calendar of work centered around our Communities, convenings and partnership building.



Convener



Catalyst



Partner



Truth teller

To deliver on this plan, our work in 2018 included the following initiatives:

- A series of **ForwARd Together Conversations** that convened a wide range of stakeholders from across the state to identify policies and practices needed to increase equity and drive enhanced educational outcomes for all students.
- The development of and staff support for the work of interdisciplinary **Policy Collaboratives** to develop and advance common-sense policy recommendations around three key themes that emerged from the Forward Together Conversations:
  - Access to high-quality Pre-K programs
  - A strengthened educator pipeline
  - Elevating student employability as a learning outcome
- Convening representatives from the ForwARd Communities, ForwARd's Board of Directors, Implementation Working Group partners and leadership team for an opportunity to collaborate and take part in a robust dialogue around the three policy priorities at the **ForwARd Thinking Leadership Dialogue**.
- In partnership with the University of Arkansas at Little Rock Institute for Chief Data Officers, the convening of an inaugural **ForwARd Data & Policy Symposium** to discuss the importance of quality, integrated, longitudinal data in tracking local and statewide educational outcomes.
- Ongoing support for a coordinated effort in our initial cohort of five diverse **ForwARd Communities** to develop, implement and replicate innovative programs, practices and partnerships necessary to provide new opportunities to advance education for students and communities across the state.

# ForwARd Together Conversations



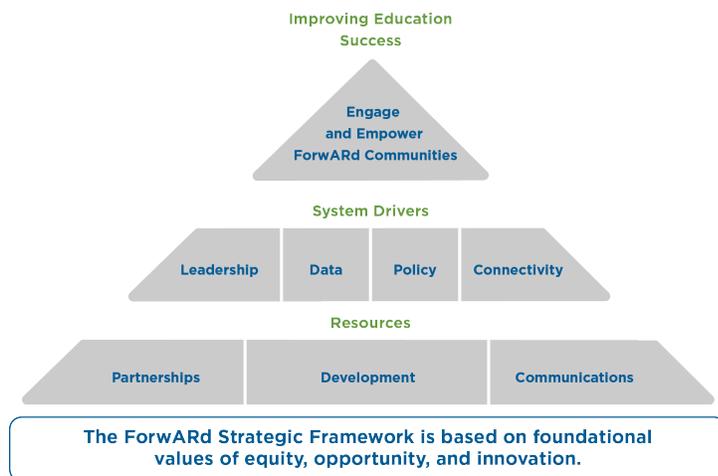
It was important for our statewide policy priorities to be informed by community voice. To listen and learn, in May, ForwARd convened hundreds of Arkansas' local educators, business and civic leaders, policy-makers, parents, students and other partners for *ForwARd Together Conversations*.

Three key themes emerged from these action-focused, small group discussions about policies and practices needed to increase equity and drive enhanced educational outcomes for all students. Grounded in ForwARd's original seven focus areas, these policy themes – access to high-quality Pre-K programs; strengthening the educator pipeline; and elevating student employability as a learning outcome – will guide ForwARd's programmatic and policy priorities for the upcoming legislative session.



## ForwARd Thinking Leadership Dialogue

To build on the momentum coming out of the *ForwARd Together Conversations*, representatives from ForwARd Arkansas' five pilot Communities convened in Little Rock on August 1 for a *ForwARd Thinking Leadership Dialogue* with ForwARd's Board of Directors, Implementation Working Group partners and leadership team for a robust dialogue around the three policy themes.



This roundtable discussion featured presentations and discussions about the progress made in each community over the past two years – noting both success stories and challenges. The goal was to listen, learn and brainstorm actions to inform ForwARd's development of statewide policy priorities around these themes.

# Policy Collaboratives

Drawing upon the themes identified in the *ForwARd Together Conversations*, ForwARd developed and provided staff support for the work of three interdisciplinary *ForwARd Policy Collaboratives* of leaders from across Arkansas who worked together to develop and advance common-sense policy recommendations to inform outreach to legislators and stakeholders during the 2019 legislative session.

## POLICY PRIORITIES

<p><b>Access to High-Quality Pre-K</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quality incentives, in the form of refundable tax credits, for early childhood educators and for programs, so teachers and staff can earn a family-supporting wage and improve outcomes for children</li> <li>• Incentives and/or requirements for programs to move up to Levels 2 and 3 of the Better Beginnings</li> <li>• Quality Rating Scale, and in the long term, expanding the rating system to include Levels 4 and 5 for the highest-quality programs</li> <li>• Support for innovative local funding solutions for early childhood education throughout Arkansas</li> <li>• Formation of an Early Childhood Caucus among policymakers</li> </ul>
<p><b>A Strengthened Educator Pipeline</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support for teacher recruitment and retention efforts, including expansion of alternative programs</li> <li>• Educator preparation program improvement and increased connectedness between programs</li> <li>• Expansion of professional development and training, incorporating approaches to mental health</li> <li>• Enhanced leadership training and development to improve preparedness and expertise of school and district leaders</li> </ul>
<p><b>Elevating Student Employability as a Learning Outcome</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Development of a cohesive state strategy and accompanying regulatory structure for enhancing employability</li> <li>• Support for continued connection and increased public-private investment in career education, bringing the business voice into education to ensure accurate, up-to-date industry needs for skilled labor and the future of work</li> <li>• A Scholarship Lottery program for high school students pursuing a technical certification</li> <li>• Career and technical education capstone courses offered on a 5.0-grade-point-average scale</li> <li>• Improved processes for allowing licensed professionals to teach career and technical education courses</li> <li>• Support for project-based learning curriculum, as exemplified by ForwARd Communities and ForwARd's partnership with the Clinton School of Public Service and the Little Rock School District</li> <li>• Certainty for Arkansas schools around waivers of academic rules and regulations</li> <li>• Support for efforts, led by Arkansas Department of Higher Education, to create uniform course codes across institutions</li> <li>• Support for broadband expansion and greater, more affordable access to broadband</li> </ul>

## ForwARd Data & Policy Symposium

Underlying all of ForwARd's work is an understanding and strong belief that access to quality, integrated longitudinal data to track outcomes between Pre-K, K-12, postsecondary education/training and workforce participation is essential to inform future planning and resource allocation.



In 2017, ForwARd organized an effort to analyze the state's existing Pre-K data, and how that data connected to or fell short of connecting to the larger K-12 data system. Working with Westat, a nationally recognized research company, we found an abundance of qualitative findings – story after story that told us Pre-K helps close the opportunity gap and set students up for academic success from a very young age – but a lack of quantitative data to back those stories up with hard numbers. This work highlighted the need to identify and recommend data quality improvements that will lead to a more reliable data system that will better track student success beginning in Pre-K, continuing through high school and beyond.

In September 2018, ForwARd and the University of Arkansas at Little Rock Institute for Chief Data Officers partnered to convene a diverse group of more than 100 local stakeholders and national thought leaders at ForwARd's inaugural *ForwARd Data & Policy Symposium*, where they discussed the importance of data in tracking educational outcomes. Topics explored also included the importance of data as a determinant of policy, how data collaboratives are advancing in other states and how we might adopt similar initiatives to collect and utilize data in Arkansas.

Throughout the *Symposium*, there was agreement that data should be viewed not just as an outcome measure, but also as:

- **A tool** – for continuous improvement in our classrooms and schools
- **A response** – to the Every Students Succeeds Act and its demands for evidence-based practice
- **A strategy** – to ensure equity and opportunity for all our children from birth to career
- **A resource** – to inform public policy and identify best practices

The *Symposium* confirmed that there is a robust appetite for sharing data in Arkansas. There is also an understanding that development and implementation of a longitudinal data system is critically important to our ability to address inequities, improve educational outcomes and track the effectiveness of policies in our state.

ForwARd is now working to create a collaborative environment that fosters world-class academic research capabilities and capacity for educational, workforce and economic development data-sharing within state government.

## ForwARd Communities

Over the course of the last year, ForwARd has provided ongoing support for a coordinated effort its initial cohort of five diverse Communities to develop, implement and replicate innovative programs, practices and partnerships necessary to provide new opportunities to advance education for students and communities across the state. While the work being done in these districts, which host a combined network of 54 schools, is expansive, much is aligned with the priority areas identified earlier in the year through the *ForwARd Together Conversations*. Promising areas of innovation for Arkansas schools have also emerged from these Communities and through ForwARd’s work throughout the state.

### FORWARD COMMUNITIES PROGRESS TO DATE, 2018

<p><b>Access to High-Quality Pre-K</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Southside School District in Independence County has expanded Pre-K to include students as young as two years old</li> </ul>
<p><b>A Strengthened Educator Pipeline</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Batesville School District in Independence County has established an energy efficiency plan that will save \$1 million that will go back into increasing teacher salaries</li> <li>• Midland School District in Independence County has dedicated \$314,000 to training faculty in STEAM education</li> <li>• Springdale School District launched a targeted social media teacher recruitment ad campaign to fill their teacher pipeline with more diverse candidates</li> </ul>
<p><b>Elevating Student Employability as a Learning Outcome</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Crossett School District is opening Crossett High School, a new school with programs focused on preparing students for careers</li> <li>• Independence County launched a Promise Scholarship program to extend educational equity through higher education attainment and workforce training</li> <li>• Lee County is working to implement a partnership with nearby Hendrix College to give students internships with a focus on community engagement and empowerment</li> <li>• The EAST Lab Initiative in Lee County is developing virtual-reality tours of schools within the District for new students and families</li> <li>• Pea Ridge School District launched a STEM curriculum for K-8 students linked to next generation science standards and college/career readiness</li> <li>• Pea Ridge School District passed a mileage to build a new high school where students can earn college credits</li> <li>• Springdale School District broke ground on phase two of the Don Tyson School of Innovation which will enable them to provide students more access to the arts</li> </ul>

<p><b>Partnerships Encouraging Innovation</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Both Lee County and Crossett School District are working to incorporate additional arts programming into their curriculum by building partnerships with local artists and organizations</li> <li>• Cedar Ridge School District in Independence County has put more than 1,500 hours into rewriting a modern curriculum for their students</li> </ul>
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## Strategic Partnerships

Over the past year, ForwARd has worked to build a variety of strategic partnerships to enhance equity and improve student achievement in communities across the state.

These partnerships include, but are not limited to:

- Continuing to grow our relationship with the **Arkansas Department of Education** to drive outcomes. In 2018, this included:
  - Deepened collaboration with existing Department leadership
  - Regular meetings and engagement with State Board of Education members
  - Continued participation in the State Board of Education’s Family and Community Engagement Task Force
  - Exploring sustainable funding streams and in-kind contributions by the Department to support ForwARd’s efforts
  - Taking advantage of opportunities, as they arise, to partner with the Department in writing grant proposals to support ForwARd’s efforts
- Developing a Delta Initiative to support students in Southeast Arkansas and provide access to mentorship opportunities, the arts, internships, literacy programs and more
- Building opportunities for additional arts education in our ForwARd Communities with the **University of Arkansas School of Art** and **Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art**
- Leading a panel focused on promoting and maintaining equity in an educational landscape that is consistently evolving at the **Grantmakers in Education** conference, which brought together organizations from across the U.S. to refine their perspectives on investing in education
- Participating in a practicum project with the **University of Arkansas Clinton School of Public Service** in Little Rock

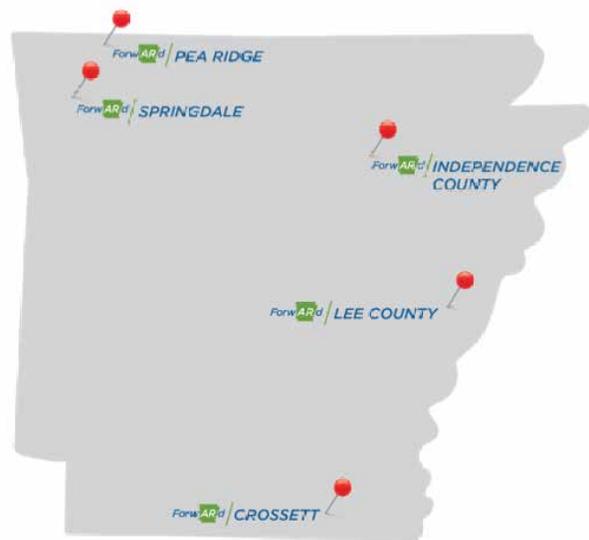
- Raising our visibility as a thought leader, through opportunities such as sharing best practices from Pea Ridge at the Office of Innovation in Education’s annual event
- Partnering with **Think Big Little Rock** to implement local funding solutions to lead to expansion of high-quality Pre-K seats throughout Little Rock School District
- Working with **Alliance for Early Success** to advocate for high-quality Pre-K throughout Arkansas, increase Pre-K teacher compensation, enhance professional development opportunities for Pre-K teachers and improve Arkansas’s Pre-K data systems

These and other partnerships also allow us to encourage alignment between local education and economic development priorities and explore new opportunities to support students and families outside the classroom.

## Community Schools

Investment in the community schools model and supports outside the classroom promises to be an exciting area of innovation for ForwARd. Studies have shown that the community school model is a viable solution to meeting the unique needs of rural schools. Through community partnerships, schools connect students and their families to assistance and resources, including healthcare, before- and after-school enrichment programs and free meals during the school day, to name a few. By bringing families and the community together, community schools have the potential to bridge the limited resources many rural communities experience. For example, if a school partners with a local health center, students can see a pediatrician during the school day, which is beneficial for the entire family.

ForwARd is currently working with the **Rural Community Alliance** and other partners to develop a unique regional community schools model to provide critical support for small rural districts. In November, we presented the community schools model at the Southern Education Foundation’s 2018 Issues Forum, where education stakeholders gathered to discuss the politics of equity in public education and how the South can best serve all of its students through innovative and evidence-based solutions.



## Improved Communications

In 2018, we worked to update the ForwARd brand and launched a new website ([www.forwardarkansas.org](http://www.forwardarkansas.org)) that elevates stories of impact coming out of ForwARd Communities. Since its launch in September, the new website has garnered more than 5,100 page views, and users spent an average of 3 minutes and 12 seconds on the site – 71 percent longer than the average session duration of 2 minutes and 17 across various industries.

ForwARd has also increased its social media presence, posting regularly to Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn, as well as engaging audiences on those platforms with a particular emphasis on Facebook. Since January, Facebook users have generated 3,685 actions to interact with and amplified ForwARd contact by actions that range from clicking and commenting on posts to sharing and viewing videos.

ForwARd has established thought leadership on a number of important issues in mainstream media, as well. This includes:

- A contributed opinion piece in *Arkansas Business* from Hugh McDonald that was timed to coincide with the *ForwARd Data & Policy Symposium* and focused on the importance of data in evaluating the investments we're making in education across the state
- Letters-to-the editor in the *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette* featuring Susan Harriman's reaction to the Arkansas Bureau of Legislative Research's report on teacher salaries statewide, as well as a piece from Jerri Derlikowski and Candace Williams (Rural Community Alliance) on the importance of the community schools model
- A series of editorial pieces has appeared in Northwest Arkansas' *Celebrate* magazine focusing on educational advancements and innovations being made across the Springdale and Pea Ridge communities

The team has also been working to finalize the development of the ForwARd portal, an online learning community that will assist Arkansas educators and administrators in advancing their communities' educational objectives by:

- Providing a platform for crowdsourced ideas and best practices
- Stimulating interest in and enhancing involvement with initiatives to advance education in Arkansas
- Building strong and mutually beneficial ties between and within ForwARd Communities

Also on the horizon for 2019, a quarterly e-newsletter that would be sent out to ForwARd's listserv, other partners and also promoted on social media. This newsletter would include recent organizational updates, relevant news articles, links to ForwARd blog posts and, in the future, any calls to action.



**Susan Bonesteel Harriman** Susan Bonesteel Harriman is the executive director of ForwARd Arkansas. She has spent more than 30 years in public education, first as a teacher of academically challenged high school students and moving to a district director of career education. Starting in 2010, Harriman served as the special projects director at the Arkansas Department of Education. Prior to working at ADE, she taught graduate courses at a teacher certification program at a public university, served as the director of state services at the National Center for Educational Accountability, and as the Secretary's Regional Representative at the U.S. Department of Education. Susan holds a master's degree in education, a bachelor's degree in business and a lifetime teaching certificate.

**Terry Mazany** Terry Mazany is senior fellow for ForwARd Arkansas working to improve community and educational outcomes. Prior to his role with ForwARd, Terry was President and CEO of The Chicago Community Trust, one of the nation's leading community foundations. In this role, he helped organize several Chicago initiatives including the Plan for Economic Growth and Jobs, and innovative civic dialogues engaging more than 100,000 in conversations to improve the community. Before working in philanthropy, Terry enjoyed a career in public education, serving as the interim CEO of Chicago Public Schools, a district administrator for the Oakland Unified School District in California, and in Southfield, a Detroit area school district. Terry is past chairman of the National Assessment Governing Board that oversees the National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP), and was Principal Investigator for metropolitan Chicago's Clinical Data Research Network. He

is a former member of the board of directors of the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago. In addition, he serves on the boards of numerous nonprofit organizations, including Skills for Chicagoland's Future, Independent Sector, and We Charities USA.

**Cory Biggs** Cory Biggs is associate director of ForwARd Arkansas, helping lead development and implementation of ForwARd's strategic plan. Cory is also instrumental in the organization's partnership with the Arkansas Department of Education (ADE), helping to align the agency's work to the recommendations found within ForwARd's "New Vision for Arkansas Education." Cory previously served as attorney specialist and coordinator of special projects for ADE. Cory holds a master's degree from the Clinton School of Public Service, a doctorate in law from the University of Arkansas at Little Rock's William H. Bowen School of Law and a bachelor's degree from the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville.

**Jerri Derlikowski** is director of research and innovation of ForwARd Arkansas, providing research on education funding, policy, and innovative programs. She formed Community Resource Innovations in 2015, working with individual communities and schools in underserved areas of the state. Jerri also facilitates the work of the Arkansas Coalition for Community Schools. She served as Director of Education Policy for Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families (AACF), where she focused on policies to provide equitable education opportunities for low-income children and families. She worked for 13 years at the Bureau of Legislative Research, first as fiscal staff, then leading a newly formed research unit. In that role, she

directed biennial adequacy studies to inform legislative decisions on education funding and policy needs. Jerri has bachelor's degrees in social work and computer science, in addition to a master's degree in education.

**Courtney Lincoln** is Chief of Staff for ForwARd Arkansas. Prior to joining ForwARd, Courtney spent 14 years working on Capitol Hill. From 2012 to 2017, she served as Deputy Chief of Staff to a Member of the U.S. House of Representatives and managed all operations in his Washington, DC office. While working in Congress, she worked on numerous legislative issues but focused primarily on legislation associated with banking policy. Courtney holds a bachelor's degree in letters from the University of Oklahoma.

**Thurman Green III** is a community engagement consultant in Lee County (Marianna) and Crossett for ForwARd Arkansas. He holds a BA in Political Science from Philander Smith College, an M.P.A. from the University of Arkansas-Little Rock and a M.P.S. from the University of Arkansas Clinton School of Public Service. His professional background consists of higher education focusing on academic retention strategies for first generation, low-income college students at the University of Arkansas-Little Rock, University of Central Oklahoma and Philander Smith College.

**Malachi Nichols** is the director of evaluation and data quality for ForwARd Arkansas. He holds a Ph.D. in Education Policy, a B.S. in Mechanical Engineering, and a minor in African and African-American Studies from the University of Arkansas. During his tenure as a student, he served in various positions, including a Robotics Teacher, Director's

Assistant to an AmeriCorps Service Member at Prism Education Center in Fayetteville, AR. His research interests include K-20 education, values-based education, and non-cognitive skills. He has published in various academic journals including *Politics and Policy* and the *Journal of School Choice*. Malachi's program evaluations include a university level need-based grant program, a university level peer-mentoring program, and pull-out services for students with academic disabilities in K-12.

**Celia Swanson** is the senior consultant of Board and partner relations for ForwARd Arkansas. She is a senior executive who spent 25+ years at Walmart Inc. championing its culture and its people. She is notably recognized as the first female executive vice president at Walmart breaking the glass ceiling for women. Her deep expertise in retail, large-scale transformation, company culture and multi-generational workforce engagement serves as the cornerstone of her career legacy. Swanson is also known for her community leadership in Northwest Arkansas. She was recently selected by the Northwest Arkansas business community as the 2016 Athena Woman of the Year for her excellence in community service, board leadership and regional impact in Northwest Arkansas. She was also the only leader to receive the top two operations awards from Sam's Club and Walmart U.S. Originally from Nebraska, Swanson is based in Bentonville, Ark. She enjoys traveling, the outdoors and spending time with close friends and family.



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