

High-Quality Early Care and Education

A two-generation solution for a productive Arkansas workforce

A skilled, productive workforce is essential for a strong Arkansas economy. High-quality, affordable early care and education (ECE) supports this workforce now and into the future. Sixty-four percent of children under age six—roughly 138,000 children total—have all available parents working outside the home; yet, many of these children are not in high-quality ECE programs.¹ This lack of access and quality is detrimental to parents’ work productivity and puts our future workforce at risk.

Brain development from birth to age 5 sets the foundation for children’s future success.² It is therefore essential that early care and education consist of responsive, high-quality environments that nurture optimal brain development and promote cognitive and socioemotional development. Parents need high-quality ECE programs so they can work and support their families.

However, the current ECE system does not fully meet the needs of Arkansas families or employers. Statewide, 30 percent of families live in “child care deserts” where there is a lack of adequate supply of early learning centers; for families in rural areas, this number is 49 percent.³ Additionally, enrolling children can be cost-prohibitive for many families at

\$4,700-6,720 per year—just slightly less than in-state tuition.⁴ Meanwhile, the state pre-K program serves less than one-third of Arkansas’ four-year-olds.⁵

High-quality, affordable early care and education can support a productive workforce—both now and into the future

Research demonstrates that high-quality early care and education benefits the current workforce and bolsters academic outcomes that aid the future workforce. For example:

- The Arkansas Better Chance pre-K program improved children’s literacy and math scores, with benefits sustained

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through second grade for literacy, language and math scores, and through third grade for literacy. Children who attended the program were less likely to be held back in school by the end of third grade than those who didn't attend any pre-K.⁶

- The Chicago Child-Parent Center program reported a 29 percent increase in high school graduation rates by age 20 among its participants.⁷ Meanwhile, Michigan's pre-K program reported a 35 percent increase in graduates.⁸
- Another study found that children in higher-quality child care were better-prepared for school at age 4 than children in lower-quality

child care. At age 15, they were still performing slightly above their peers and also experienced lower levels of behavior problems.⁹

Policymakers should promote access to high-quality ECE

Arkansas policymakers must ensure that more at-risk children have access to high-quality early care and education that can support critical brain development. Without improvements to early learning systems, Arkansas will not have the workforce we need to compete and succeed in the global marketplace.

¹ <https://datacenter.kidscount.org>

² <https://www.nap.edu/read/9824/chapter/1>

³ <https://childcaredeserts.org/index.html?state=AR>

⁴ http://usa.childcareaware.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/AR_Facts.pdf ; <https://trends.collegeboard.org/college-pricing/figures-tables/tuition-fees-sector-state-over-time>

⁵ http://nieer.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Arkansas_YB2017.pdf

⁶ <http://nieer.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Arkansas20Longitudinal20Report20May2013n.pdf>

⁷ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/11343481>

⁸ <https://www.bridgemi.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/GSRP-evaluation-may-21-12.pdf>

⁹ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2938040/>

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