



2018-19 ADVOCACY AGENDA

The Invest Early Coalition is a group of Arkansans who are committed to working together to improve education, health, and well-being for children during their most formative years (0-5).

Arkansas families are struggling to find affordable, high-quality early childhood education for their children, especially infants and toddlers. Having poorly compensated educators and under-resourced programs hurts the quality of education and number of children our state can serve. It also makes it difficult for our state to recruit new businesses and retain good employees.

Arkansas must improve compensation and reduce turnover for teachers in Arkansas Better Chance pre-K, Early Head Start and Head Start, and community-based programs and expand public-private partnerships. We must improve quality standards and data collection for early childhood programs to target resources most effectively. We also must increase investment in research-based programs such as home visiting, developmental screenings, and access to books in the home. The Invest Early Coalition's advocacy agenda for 2018-19 includes the following:



1. **RAISING AWARENESS OF THE IMPORTANCE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION:** We are working together to raise awareness about the importance of early learning, new research on brain development, and how parents and communities can get children ready for success in school and beyond.
2. **PROVIDING QUALITY INCENTIVES AND IMPROVING COMPENSATION:** We are working together to provide increased compensation and incentives to improve program quality, so teachers and staff can earn a family-supporting wage and improve outcomes for children.

A 2018 study by UAMS found that early childhood educators are significantly underpaid compared to K-12 teachers and other highly-trained professionals, despite having one of the most important roles in our education system and economy. Poor compensation and benefits are driving these educators to other fields. Some programs have 100% turnover each year, which affects kids directly: Stable, positive adult-child interactions have the biggest impact on quality early learning.

Incentives such as Louisiana's successful package of [School Readiness tax credits](#) would help early childhood educators support their families, earn higher credentials, and improve program quality. Our Coalition is advocating for:

- **Educator Quality Incentive:** Provide a refundable tax credit for teachers and staff employed in a Better Beginnings program, which increases as they earn higher credentials (\$1,500-\$3,000). In Louisiana, 4,000 educators received an average tax credit of \$2,150 over 2013-2015.
- **Program Quality Incentive:** Provide a refundable tax credit to Better Beginnings programs ranging from \$1,000-2,000 per child each year based on their quality ratings. This incentive goes directly into the program to further improve outcomes.
- **Helping Families Afford High-Quality Programs:** Encourage families to choose high-quality programs by strengthening Arkansas's existing tax credits to make quality programs more affordable, and raise awareness of these incentives.

3. DEVELOPING TEACHING EXPERTISE: We will work to secure seed money for a pilot T.E.A.C.H. program.

The T.E.A.C.H. (Teacher Education And Compensation Helps) Early Childhood program has been proven to improve educators' credentials and compensation, as well as workforce stability. It provides scholarships to help educators earn higher education levels and improve their teaching skills. Our Coalition is working to secure private-public partnerships and federal grants to launch a T.E.A.C.H. program in Arkansas.

4. IMPROVING ECE DATA AND RESEARCH: We will continue working with researchers, state agencies, and providers to improve early childhood data collection and analysis to help target support and resources most effectively.

Our Coalition is bringing together stakeholders to help the state increase its data and research capacity to give a clearer picture of families' needs and long-term child outcomes.

SECONDARY ECE PRIORITIES:

- Broaden the **Arkansas Better Chance (ABC) eligibility criteria** to include more children and encourage more programs to use ABC money to serve infants and toddlers.
- Reallocate state resources to provide **highly-trained coaches** for teachers and parents.
- Provide incentives or requirements for programs to move up to Levels 2 and 3 of the Better Beginnings quality rating system and **add Levels 4 and 5** to encourage programs to meet even higher standards.
- Ensure children receive **developmental and mental health screenings** and necessary treatment.
- Expand **early literacy programs**, including the Dolly Parton Imagination Library.

To join our Invest Early Coalition, visit www.aradvocates.org/campaigns/invest-early, or contact Rebecca Zimmermann at (501) 371-9678; rzimmermann@aradvocates.org