



Arkansas Department of Education

Division of Elementary and Secondary Education

Jacob Oliva, Secretary

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ADE Selects 6 Organizations for Third Local Leads Cohort to Improve Early Childhood Education

LITTLE ROCK — The Arkansas Department of Education announced today the six organizations selected for the third early childhood local leads cohort. With this third cohort, all 75 counties are now represented by 26 organizations focused on creating a comprehensive, localized plan to ensure children and families can access high-quality early childhood education programs in their communities.

In addition to creating a localized plan, the local leads are aligning the local plans to the state's vision for early childhood education, as defined by the LEARNS Act. The LEARNS Act transferred the Office of Early Childhood to ADE in an effort to improve access to quality early childhood education programs and expand and improve the education system to include birth to post-secondary education.

“It is critical every child has access to a quality education from the start, and thanks to our Local Leads program, families in all 75 counties will have options in their area,” Governor Sarah Huckabee Sanders, said. “Through Arkansas LEARNS, we are expanding access to early childhood education and ensuring our young learners are on the path to success early on.”

“This third cohort completes efforts to connect all 75 counties with early childhood advocates who are focused on ensuring all students have access to high-quality early learning programs,” ADE Secretary Jacob Oliva said. “Children deserve access to the best programs that create a firm foundation of learning from an early age, and we are excited to now have organizations statewide to help that occur.”

The organizations listed below were selected following a competitive application process. ADE invited school districts, education service cooperatives, higher education institutions, public agencies, and nonprofits or businesses with a social services mission to apply to participate in the program. Throughout the last year, ADE received more than 50 applications across three application cycles. The last six programs selected to participate will each serve a different geographic area, as defined in their application.

Organization	Area
Arch Ford Education Service Cooperative	Yell and Van Buren Counties
Clarendon School District	Monroe, Phillips, and Prairie Counties
Early Education and Care Connections, Inc. - Child Care Aware of Central and Southwest Arkansas	Pulaski County (excluding the city of Little Rock and Jacksonville School District)
South Central Service Cooperative	Columbia County
Southeast Arkansas Education Service Cooperative	Ashley, Bradley, and Drew Counties
Wilbur D Mills Education Service Cooperative	Lonoke County and Jacksonville School District

The local leads are making great strides in communities around the state. Cohorts 1 and 2 host in-person provider meetings in their region to engage in vision-setting activities for their community, share critical information from the state, and listen to the experiences and challenges providers in their area are facing. This was the first time providers of all site types (i.e., child care centers, family child care, public school Pre-Ks, and Head Start) collaborated with others in their community to develop a plan to improve access to high-quality early childhood programs in their region. Both cohorts also have submitted plans to ADE for initial and sustained engagement with providers in their designated counties.

As a result of the local leads' efforts, the department will have an unduplicated count of all publicly-funded children in early childhood programs. The child count will help the state better understand and solve the current gaps regarding access to early childhood care and education.

Local leads also have received training in the Infant, Toddler, and/or PreK-3rd CLASS tools, an evidence-based tool used to measure the quality of interactions in early learning classrooms. Classroom observations begin this fall and will continue into the spring.

The same activities and impact can be expected from the organizations in the third cohort beginning this fall and winter.

"Serving as a local lead has been incredibly meaningful," said Katlin Niemeyer, a local lead captain for the Southwest Arkansas Education Cooperative. "I'm connecting providers to the resources they need, and through this work, we're making real improvements in early childhood care across our community."

To learn more about the local leads program and to see the complete list of participating organizations, go to <https://dese.link/local-leads>.

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