

LEARNS Early

Learning Work Group

October 26, 2023

Work Group Scope and Sequence

Work Group Scope and Sequence

Starting now, this group will meet monthly to address the requirements of LEARNS and to ensure there is sufficient progress to report between meetings.

Date	Anticipated Topics
September 14	Update on ADE Transition
September 28	Definition of K readiness update
October 26	Local early childhood leads update

LEARNS Early Learning Work Group Agenda

Purpose: During this call, we will discuss the update on Arkansas's first cohort of local early childhood leads.

- Review LEARNS requirements for local leads
- Application process
- Cohort 1 selection
- Discussion and next steps



Review LEARNS

LEARNS Requirements

The **LEARNS** Act stipulates that the state appoint and partner with **local early childhood lead organizations**. These local lead organizations will be charged to:

- **Support access** to early childhood programs
- **Identify gaps** in services
- **Foster local partnerships**
- **Create alignment** among public and private providers and agencies within the community
- Establish a **comprehensive, locally supported plan** for providing early childhood programs and services



Challenges

The Executive Order Report named three current challenges in the early childhood system:

- Coordination at the state level is complex, and there is no consistent plan for local coordination.
- No one knows a true unduplicated count of children being served and where gaps exist.
- The current accountability system may not align with child outcomes.

These challenges lead to a system that is **difficult for families to navigate**. Families may be unaware of all of the early care and education options in their community or be unsure what to look for in terms of quality care. Others may have to jump through hoops and apply to multiple options, each with different eligibility requirements, before finding a spot for their child.

Benefits of a Local Lead Model



Serve as the formal **state-local implementation partners** to execute the state's early childhood plan in a manner that **responds to local context**.



Act as a one-stop-shop and provide coordinated information and support for **families to learn about and apply for early childhood programs and services**.



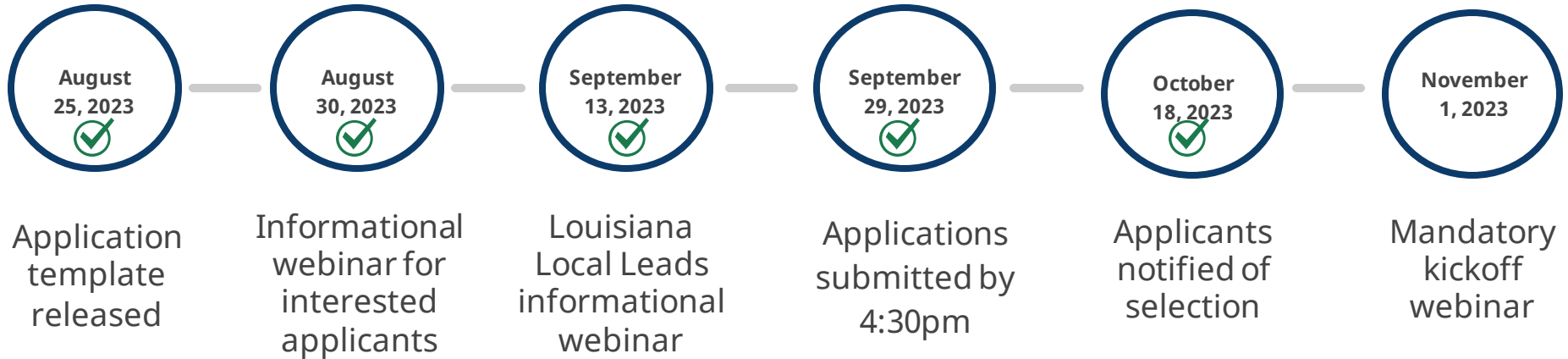
Support **early childhood professionals** to enroll children through public funds, grow their capacity, and improve their quality.



Generate **local support for early childhood and strengthen local partnerships**, with the ultimate goal of expanding access to high-quality early childhood programs at the local level.

Local Leads Application Process

Timeline



Full implementation of local leads statewide must be in place by October 1, 2024.

OEC Updates

There has been great interest in the state around the launch of Request for Applications for local leads:

- Over 50 participants attended the original [webinar](#)
- Just under 100 attended the [webinar](#) featuring a panel from Louisiana
- 35 applications were submitted from all over the state

Key Takeaways from the Louisiana panelists:

- Relationship building with providers and families within the community is essential
- Local leads must uncover and innovate community-specific solutions for community-specific problems

Cohort 1 Selection

Applications Overview

The Arkansas Department of Education received 35 applications from 30 different organizations all over the state to participate in the first cohort of local early childhood lead organizations.

Applicants included:

- 11 educational cooperatives
- 4 school districts
- 4 Child Care Aware organizations
- 4 independent organizations/non-profits
- 3 higher education institutions
- 2 Head Start grantees
- 1 city government
- 1 Chamber of Commerce



Selection Process

All applications included:

- A proposed catchment area
- Description of the organization's suitability for this work, including history of successfully completing similar roles
- Plans for fostering collaboration between community partners
- Plans for supporting the needs of families
- Letters of support from local organizations

A committee of ADE staff thoroughly reviewed every application and made their selection based on organization history, alignment of plans with ADE's vision, and geographic location.



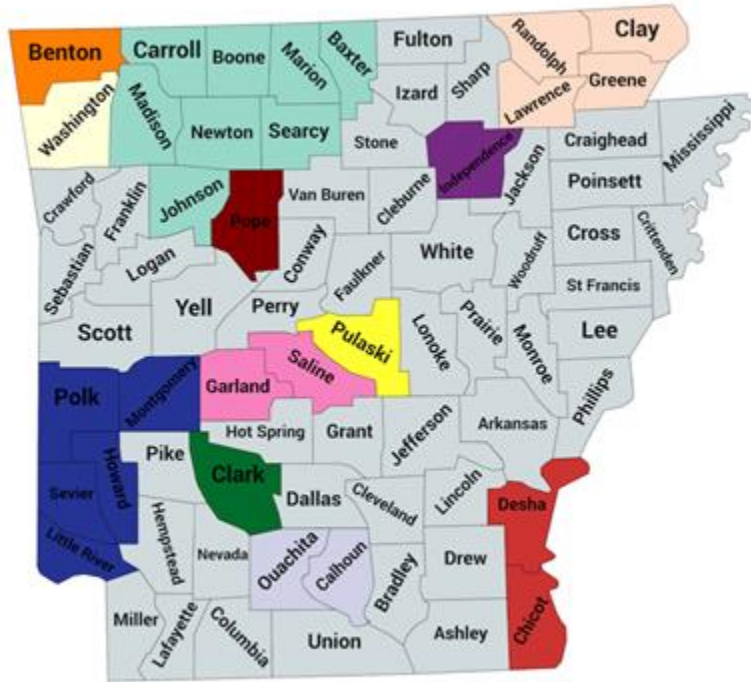
Selected Applicants

Of the 35 applications, 12 organizations were selected to participate in the first cohort of local leads. Their reach will cover 27 counties.

- Arkansas State University, Child Care Aware
- Child Care Aware of Northwest Arkansas
- City of Little Rock
- Dawson Education Cooperative
- DeQueen Mena Education Service Cooperative
- IMPACT Independence County Foundation's Excel by Eight Collaborative
- National Park College, Child Care Aware of West Central Arkansas
- Northeast Arkansas Education Cooperative
- Ozarks Unlimited Resources Education Service Cooperative
- Russellville School District
- South Central Service Cooperative
- Springdale School District



Geographic Reach of Cohort 1



- Cohort 1**
- Arkansas State University, Child Care Aware
 - Child Care Aware of Northwest Arkansas
 - City of Little Rock
 - Dawson Education Cooperative
 - DeQueen Mena Education Service Cooperative
 - IMPACT Independence County Foundation's Excel by Eight Collaborative
 - National Park College, Child Care Aware of West Central Arkansas
 - Northeast Arkansas Education Cooperative
 - Ozarks Unlimited Resources Education Service Cooperative
 - Russellville School District
 - South Central Service Cooperative
 - Springdale School District



Local Leads Deliverables

Under the LEARNS Act, local early childhood leads are required to **establish a comprehensive, locally supported plan** for providing early childhood programs and services within the community.

According to [LEARNS](#), the early childhood plans require local leads to:

- Conduct a needs assessment
- Conduct an unduplicated count of children served through public funds
- Establish a local collaborative governing structure
- Identify shared resources that can support access to and quality of early childhood programs
- Coordinate enrollment processes for families

In the pilot year, the first cohort of local leads will be responsible for:

- Convening early childhood providers
- Conducting an unduplicated child count
- Establishing an early childhood plan, informed by a needs assessment
- Sharing information with families on their early childhood options

Discussion

- What would you want to see local leads prioritizing in your communities? What supports would they need to do so?
- What are you excited by?
- What outstanding questions do you still have about local leads?

You can capture your notes at tinyurl.com/LEARNS23.



Next Steps

Next Steps

- Next Meeting Topic: Licensing
- November Provider Call
 - 11/7 at 12:00pm
 - Featuring Louisiana local leads and providers