

LEARNS Early Learning Work Groups Kick Off

Work Group Members

Facilitator(s): Tonya Williams, Lori Bridges, Dawn Jeffery

- Richard T. Atkinson, Ozark Opportunities, Inc. Head Start
- Alexandria Galleur, Penny Lane Child Care Center
- Anna Strong, AR Chapter of American Academy of Pediatrics
- Diana Nathan, Parent
- Leigh Keener, Teacher
- Shelley Ray, Teacher/Junction City SD
- Jamie Ward, Curricula Concepts
- Jenny Barber, Russellville School District/Pre-K Administrator
- Bill Sims, Grow Learning Center/Early Intervention
- Tara Armstrong, Camden Fairview School District
- Fredricka Tabor, White River Health
- Gwen Couthren, Guy Fenter Education Service Cooperative
- Brandy Wolfenbarger, Pre-K Administrator/Springdale SD



Meeting Norms

Prior to Meeting

- Tonya Williams will send out agenda and materials at least 3 business days in advance of each meeting.
- Members review all materials and come prepared to share feedback.

During Meeting

- Mute yourself when not speaking.
- Keep feedback centered on topic at hand.
- Stay engaged (e.g., actively participate and use the chat function).
- Be mindful of how much “air time” each member receives.
- All ideas are valued.

Materials (notes, slides) will be posted after the meeting for members who can not attend.



FOIA

Legislative Intent:

To ensure that public business is performed in an open and public manner so that the electors shall be advised of the performance of public officials and of the decisions that are reached in public activity and in making public policy

FOIA

Who is subject to FOIA?

- All government entities
- Private entities that receive public funds and are intertwined with government activities

FOIA - Public Records

Definitions:

- Writings, sounds, electronic info, or videos that (a) are kept and (b) constitute a record of performance or lack of performance of official functions

LEARNS Act

LEARNS stands for Literacy, Empowerment, Accountability, Readiness, Networking, and Safety. On Jan. 11, 2023, Gov. Sarah Huckabee Sanders signed the LEARNS Executive Order, which calls for the Arkansas Department of Education (ADE) to conduct an analysis of key aspects of the state's education system and produce corresponding reports.

On March 8, 2023, the LEARNS Act was signed into law, signaling the start of the largest overhaul of education in the state's history.

After completing these analyses called for in the LEARNS Executive Order, **ADE is eager to engage stakeholders as implementation of the LEARNS commitments begins.**



Executive Order Report Commitments

LEARNS calls for the state to build on the good work of its early childhood programs, to date, by unifying programs and funding under the Arkansas Department of Education (ADE). As Arkansas implements this legislation, ADE committed to:

- **Partner with those closest to children and classrooms:** Create a system of strong state-local partnerships to improve access to quality early care and education options in all communities in Arkansas.
- **Know how many kids already have a seat:** Collect an accurate count of all children served by publicly funded early care and education in partnership with local leads to provide leaders with information to guide decision making.
- **Define excellence:** Establish a single vision for quality early care and education that is tied to kindergarten readiness and drives improvement for all sites, in partnership with local leads.



LEARNS Early Learning Requirements

The LEARNS Act sets up Arkansas to improve the experience of families and providers by:

- Unifying early childhood programs into the Arkansas Department of Education.
- Establishing local early childhood lead organizations
- Convening stakeholders to advise on the unification
- Establishing an accountability system indicative of child outcomes
- Reducing bureaucracy and burdensome licensing regulations
- Increasing transparent, family-friendly reporting



Milestones

LEARNS articulates a set of timelines for the early childhood transition.

Milestones	Timeline
Transition plan in place	July 2023
Pilot group of local leads identified	September 2023
CCDF lead authority transfers to ADE	By October 1, 2023
Revise licensing requirements, following a review and revision for burdensome requirements and incorporation of academic approval	December 2023
Academic approval required for all licensed centers accepting public funds	By January 1, 2024
Report to legislature on local early childhood lead selection and training process	By March 1, 2024
Local early childhood leads are selected, trained, and have developed community plans (following a pilot and scale up process)	By October 1, 2024
Pilot year of practice ratings for uniform accountability system based on child outcomes	Fall 2024

Work Group Purpose

The Arkansas Department of Education is convening work groups around key areas of LEARNS for external stakeholders to **provide ideas, expertise, and feedback to ADE as they develop rules and policies.**

- School Safety
- Early Learning
- Parental Empowerment
- Teaching and Learning
- Educator Workforce
- Career Readiness



Early Learning Work Group Charge

For Early Learning, the key areas that LEARNS requires new rule/policy are:

- Transition of programs to ADE (*by October 2023*)
 - Review of all early learning rules previously overseen by ADHS
 - CCDF State Plan
- Definition of K readiness
- Licensing review (*by January 2024*)
- Local leads (*by August 2024*)
- Uniform accountability system based on child outcomes (*by August 2024*)

Engagement from this group and other stakeholders is essential to ensure that all early learning policy is representative of the perspectives of all part of the state's early childhood system.



Scope and Sequence

To accomplish the timeline outlined in LEARNS, this group will meet biweekly for the next several months to discuss the following topics. Adjustments may be made or additional topics added at a later date based on the pace and timing of work group meetings.

Date	Anticipated Topics
July 6	Kick Off
July 20	Transition plan
August 3	Local early childhood leads
August 17	Definition of K readiness

Next Steps

- Tonya Williams will send draft materials in advance of next meeting
- Work group members review background materials
 - LEARNS Act
 - CCDF State Plan
 - ABC Governing Rule