Mississippi County

Getting Ready for School

Children
Families
Schools
Communities

2003

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Children, Families, Schools, Communities

Mississippi County 2003

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Foreword

Today in Arkansas and around the country there is an increased awareness that children need to start school ready to learn. When children have a strong educational foundation, they are more likely to succeed not only in school but also in life.

One way to know whether our children are starting school ready to learn is to track their progress. The most important early learning outcome for a young child is the development of reading proficiency. We look toward the fourth grade benchmark exams to determine children are reading at grade level. But we can not wait until fourth grade to measure progress because it is very hard to help children catch up. Rather, we must identify the factors for very young children that may influence their ability in later years.

This report presents many indicators that may influence the way a child progresses in the future. By tracking the indicators listed in this document, we have the opportunity to change policies so that we may have Healthy Children, Healthy Families, Healthy Schools, and Healthy Communities. The School Readiness Indicators team believes that Every Child in Arkansas needs

- High Quality Early Learning Experiences
- A Nurturing Family Environment
- Opportunities and Supports to be Successful in School, and
- A Healthy and Safe Community in which to live.

Over the coming years, we will continue to track and pursue strategies that will move us toward the goal of *Getting Ready for School*.

We acknowledge the support of the Department of Human Services, Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Education for the publication of this document, Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families for staffing the initiative, and the Ford Foundation for financial support of the School Readiness Indicators Project. As a part of a 17 state Initiative, Arkansas is pleased to present *Getting Ready for School*.

Arkansas School Readiness Initiative Team

Getting Ready for School

Arkansas is facing a pivotal moment in determining the direction for public education for children. Increasing the state's offering of quality pre-K programs for three and four year olds has emerged as one of the best strategies for improving student outcomes. During the extraordinary legislative session of 2004, Act 49 was passed to require the state to provide quality pre-kindergarten services for children living in families earning up to 200% of poverty, roughly $37,000 for a family of four. Funding was provided totaling $40,000,000 to expand pre-kindergarten services. This publication is a compilation of data designed to provide reliable measures with which to guide the state's families, legislative leaders, educators, and communities in creating the best path to be sure our young children are ready to learn.

In 2002, Governor Huckabee agreed to have Arkansas, under the guiding hand of the Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Education, participate in a multistate, foundation-driven School Readiness initiative to build measures of school readiness. Janie Huddleston, director of the Division, invited the nonprofit organization Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families to serve as the project manager. Together, they assembled a group of state and private agency representatives who could collect, assemble, and compare data to paint a picture of school readiness. States around the country are publishing similar reports to reflect conditions and improvements in the way in which families, communities, and schools give children the best opportunity to learn, grow, and succeed.

Research tells us that a child's academic success can be predicted by a number of variables in that child's early experience. Individual indicators specific to the child may influence his ability to learn, such as weight and health at birth. As the child grows, other physical, emotional, and social skill development will ultimately influence performance in school. Children's knowledge and skills are directly related to their health status and to the environment into which they are born. The family is a critical factor in shaping children's early development. It is, therefore, important to take into account the details of a child's environment, including conditions such as size of household, whether there are two parents or one, age and education level of the parent(s), household incomes, etc.

When parents send their children to school, they want them to be successful. The school must be ready. Schools must have appropriate class sizes, materials, equipment, facilities, and appropriately trained teachers to provide environments ready to teach young children. On a practical level, families and schools operate within the specific context of a local community. Both families and schools have better chances for educating children when their communities have jobs, services, and recreation spaces that will support families with young children.

This report introduces a series of indicators collectively grouped to reflect each domain that influences a child's ability to succeed in school. It is not intended to be a comprehensive list, but instead a dynamic and ever-improving set of measurements to help policymakers create the best opportunities for children to succeed at school. These data will be collected and published annually. State agencies entrusted to educate and serve young children, families, and community stakeholders may use these data to monitor child outcomes and to determine where intervention and improvements are necessary.

This report groups individual indicators into four dynamic areas: **Ready Children**, **Ready Families**, **Ready Schools**, and **Ready Communities**. In each area, data were selected for accessibility, the potential for being gathered annually, and ability to reflect the potential for a child's educational success. Policymakers need to be sensitive to the complexities inherent in these data, remembering to take into account the interactions and overlap between the four areas. For instance, the number of affordable, accessible, quality early childhood services might be identified as a community asset or deficit, as well as a necessary resource for families with young children. The interaction of all of these systems together provides a big picture for helping children succeed in school. Further, the assembling of current data begins to tell the story of educational success and recognizes the role of all those responsible for helping our children to learn.

Ready Children

A healthy child is ready to learn. Even before birth, opportunities exist to ensure the health of the child and the mother. To thrive, a child needs a healthy start in life with someone providing the necessary elements to ensure the future. A child needs the proper care provided by the family but also can benefit from the experiences provided through high quality early childhood programs and services.

According to the *Kids Count Data Book*, published by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the conditions under which a child is born can have effects on the child's lifelong development, but more immediately, his or her ability to succeed in school. Several conditions have been identified as being particularly important risk factors:

- A birth to a teenage mother
- A birth to a mother who has completed less than 12 years of education
- A birth to a mother who has not received prenatal care during the first trimester
- A birth to a single parent

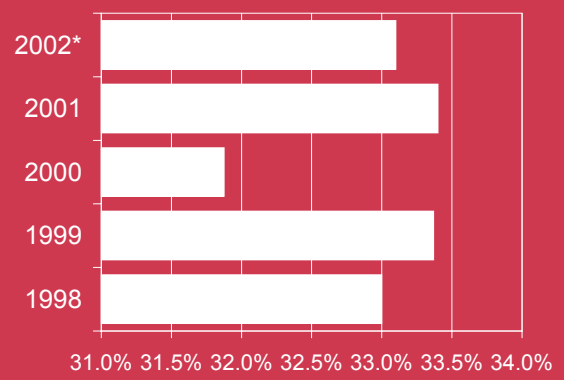
The age at which adults become parents is also a contributing factor in child well-being. Several studies have documented that children of teenage mothers compared to children of older mothers have lower levels of cognitive and educational attainment, lower levels of academic achievement, and higher levels of behavioral problems. (Zaslow, *et al.*)

When parents provide children an enriching environment and read to them regularly, there is significantly more success with early reading skills. In general, a mother's educational level is a strong indicator of whether a child will experience success in school. Children with mothers who have completed more schooling tend to perform better in reading, mathematics, and general knowledge tests. (West *et al.*)

Since brain and body development begin before birth, babies born to healthy mothers and healthy families have reduced risks of serious immediate health problems. A primary concern is prenatal care, the first chance to promote healthy children.

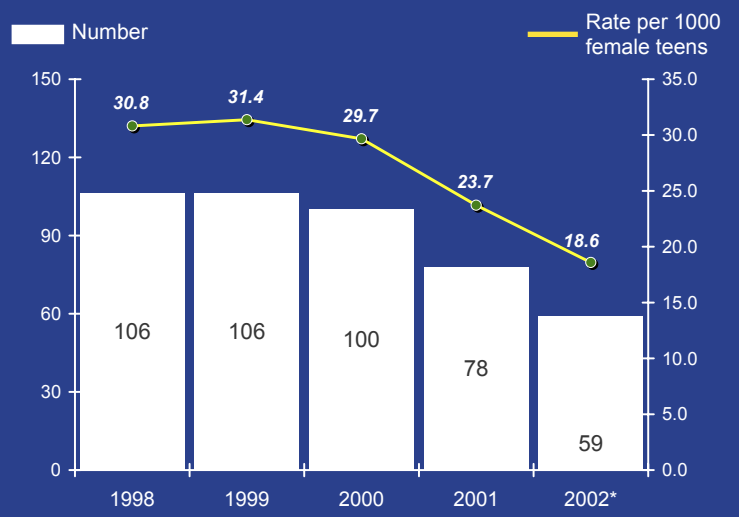
Births to Mothers with Less than 12th Grade Education

The percent of all births where the woman (all ages) has received less than 12 years of formal education



* 2002 is preliminary.

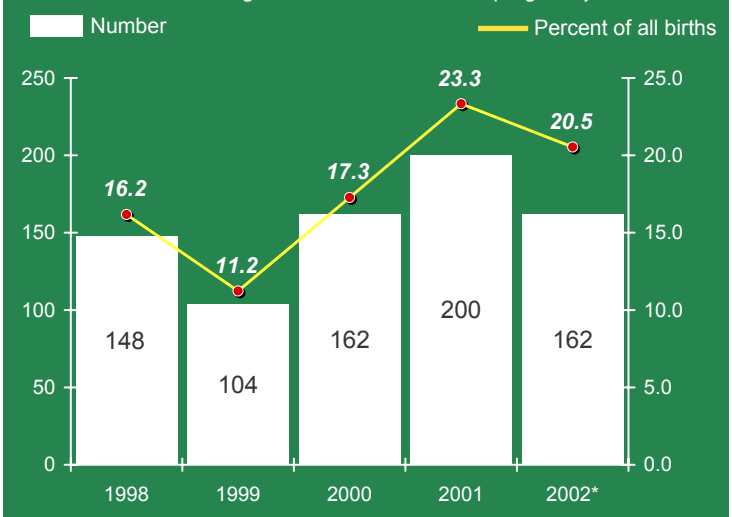
Births to Teens, Age 10-17



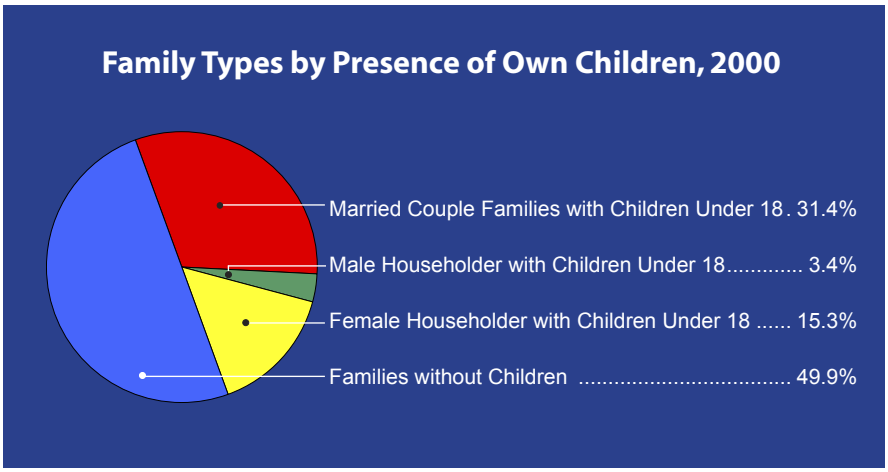
* 2002 is preliminary.

No Prenatal Care During First Pregnancy Trimester

The number of all births in which the mother did not begin prenatal care during the first three months of pregnancy



* 2002 is preliminary.

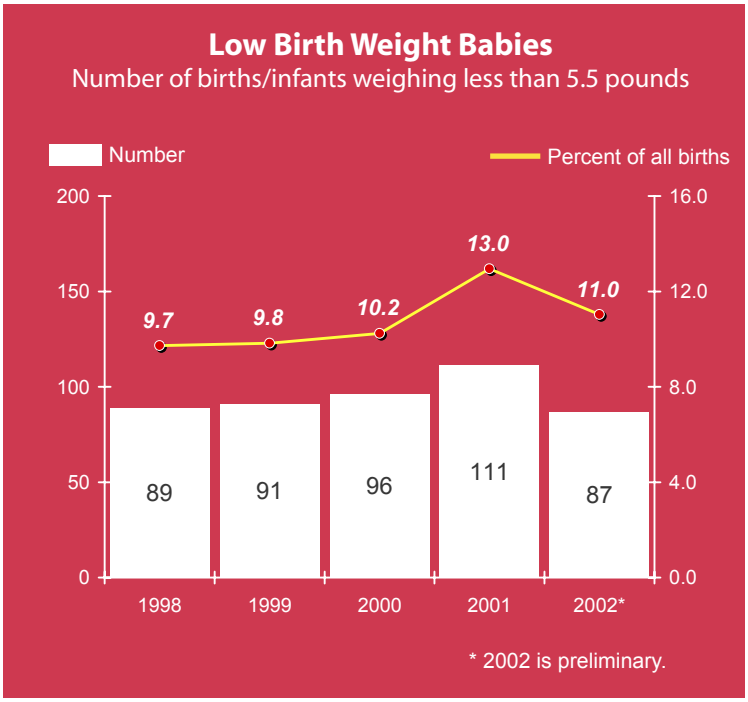


The challenge of paying for these health needs can exceed the capability of many low-income families. ARKids First is a state sponsored insurance program to assist families in meeting these challenges. The program has been expanded to offer two coverage options. ARKids A offers low-income families who qualify for Medicaid a comprehensive package of benefits. ARKids B provides basic coverage for families with higher incomes, up to 200 percent of the federal poverty level. According to the latest report from the Census Bureau, 12.2 percent of Arkansas' children do not have health insurance compared to a national rate of 12.5 percent--an indication of the effectiveness of the ARKids First Program.

Children born to or growing up in a family headed by a single parent usually do not have access to economic resources that can provide a stable family environment. Single mothers raising children are usually employed in lower-paying jobs which do not provide benefits or access to health care. Their children are at increased risk for low academic achievement, increased probability of dropping out of high school before graduation, and increased chance of becoming a teenage parent. In addition, children raised by a single parent are also more likely to suffer from depression, stress, anxiety, and aggression.

Rates of low birth weight are an important measure of infant health. The number and percent of low birth weight babies in Arkansas continues to be at high levels. Such tiny babies have a high probability of experiencing development problems throughout life. Some of the increase in low birth weight babies over the last decade can be attributed to the increase in multiple births and the trend of women delaying motherhood until later years. However, the economic conditions of the mother and the lack of access to health care are significant contributing factors.

All children need access to comprehensive health and mental health services that provide preventive care when they are well and treatment when they are ill.



Today more than 9 million children under age 19 have no health insurance – with nearly 90 percent of them in working families.

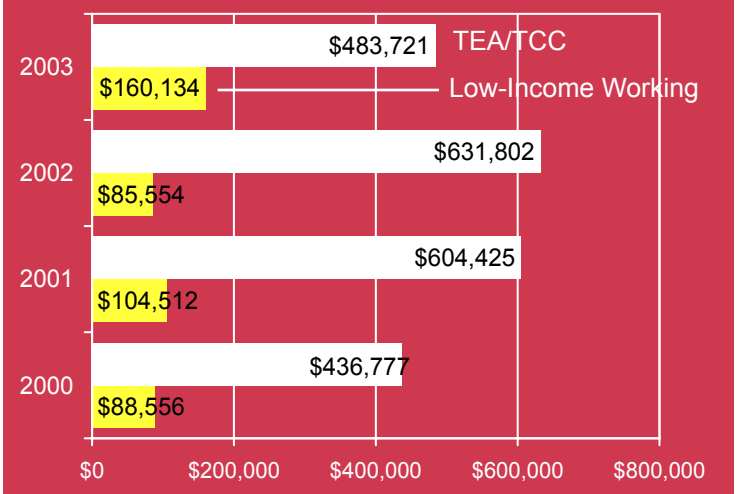
— Children's Defense Fund, Healthy Start.

ARKids First Enrollment

	Jun 1999	Jun 2000	Jun 2001	Jun 2002	Jun 2003
ARKids A (full Medical coverage)	1,946	1,977	2,819	3,940	4,242
ARKids B (reduced coverage)	752	1,201	1,264	1,055	986
Total ARKids	**2,698**	**3,178**	**4,083**	**4,995**	**5,228**

Child Care Voucher Program
State Fiscal Year 2003

	Children	Families	Amount
TEA/TCC	463	223	$483,721
Low-Income Working	163	78	$160,134
Foster Care	0	0	$0
Protective Services	0	0	$0



care. Arkansas is one of 40 states that does not require providers who care for children in their homes to have any early childhood training prior to serving children. Arkansas is also numbered among the states that allow teachers in child care centers to start work without prior training. (Azer and Caprano)

Only 18.6% of the licensed capacity of early care and education programs in Arkansas meet the state's quality approval/state accreditation standards.

Arkansas has recently been recognized by the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) for outstanding quality standards for pre-K programs, but it has been criticized for the fact that so few children were served by these programs. Quality early care and education programs have a lasting impact on a child's learning and development. Children who attend quality early care and education programs are more likely to perform well on standardized tests, complete high school, and continue their education beyond high school graduation.

Due to economic circumstance, most mothers of young children are working, even in married couple families. Since young parents generally have lower incomes, two incomes are needed to meet the family's day-to-day expenses. Working mothers must therefore have access to child care for their children.

When mothers work, the demand for child care increases and access to quality programs becomes a concern. Research has shown that children from economically distressed families especially need the help provided through quality early childhood programs, but these children are the least likely to receive the top quality

Child Care Licenses, August 2003

	Licensed Number	Licensed Capacity	Capacity Meeting Quality Standards	
Child Care Centers	38	1,512	604	39.9%
Infant/Toddler Centers	21	696	337	48.4%
School Age Centers	6	180	82	45.6%
Child Care Family Homes	27	311	0	0.0%
Total Licenses	92	2,699	1,023	37.9%

	Mississippi	State
Children per Licensed Slot		
Age 0 - 13	**4.3**	**4.1**
Children per Quality Slot		
Age 0-13	**11.3**	**22.0**
Age 0-4	**4.4**	**9.6**
Age 5-13	**89.9**	**73.1**

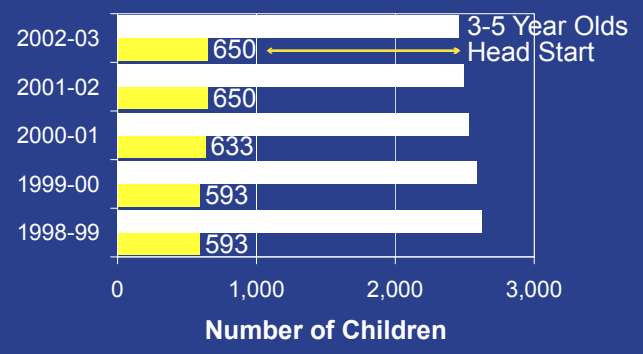
Number of Children Served at Any Time During Program Year
(Not Full-time Equivalent)

Arkansas Better Chance Program

1998-99	1999-00	2000-01*	2001-02	2002-03
266	389	340	328	275

Head Start

1998-99	1999-00	2000-01	2001-02	2002-03
593	593	633	650	650



*2000-01 includes ABC summer transition program.

"Children who come from disadvantaged backgrounds benefit even more from quality early care and education programs."

— From Neurons to Neighborhoods: The Science of Early Childhood Development

Number of Children Served by State and Federally Funded Programs During Program Year (Not Full-time Equivalent)

Early Special Education (2002)	Even Start Served (2002-03)	ABC Full Year (2002-03)	CCDF (2002-03)	Head Start (2002-03)	Early Head Start (2002-03)	Total Served	Population Age 0-5 (2002)	Percent Served
201	0	275	626	650	168	1,920	4,958	38.7%

The Department of Human Services, Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Education administers the Special Nutrition Program (SNP). Through this program reimbursement is provided for well-balanced, nutritious meals served to individuals enrolled in the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP), National School Lunch Program (NSLP), Special Milk Program (SMP), and the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP). The program is available to public and private organizations providing licensed or registered nonresidential day care services.

Thirty-one million people live in households that are unable to afford adequate and nutritious food, including 12 million children.

— Children's Defense Fund Action Council

USDA Child and Adult Care Food Program, July 2003

(Special Nutrition Program for Child Care)

Day Care Centers		Head Starts		Homes	
Number	Licensed Capacity Participating	Number	Licensed Capacity Participating	Number	Licensed Capacity Participating
7	334	17	962	32	357

Total Children Participating = 1,653

Percent of the Licensed Capacity Participating = 61.2%

Special needs may arise for the young child who is experiencing difficulties which interfere with normal development in any one of a number of developmental areas, including cognitive, physical (motor), speech/language, self-help, and/or behavioral/social skills. Early Childhood Special Education services are provided for any eligible child 3-5 years of age as needed at no cost to the family. These services are individually planned to prepare the child with special needs for future school success. This program is available through local school districts and at education service cooperatives located throughout the state.

The First Connections program provides early intervention services for children with special needs, birth to thirty-six months, and to their families. For the very young child, eligibility for services can be determined on the basis of a developmental delay or a medical diagnosis that has a high probability of resulting in a developmental delay. The Division of Developmental Disabilities Services within the Department of Human Services has administrative responsibility for implementation of this program.

Early Childhood Special Education, 2002

Early Intervention, Age 0-2 104
Early Childhood, Age 3-5 97

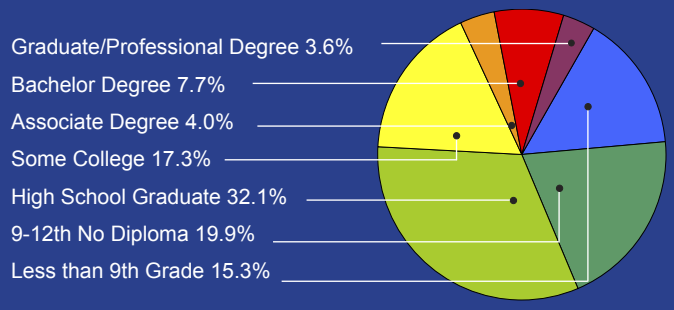
Ready Families

Research clearly points to the importance of families in shaping young children's social and emotional well-being as well as their readiness for school. There is a critical need for renewed effort to increase parents' awareness of the relationship between early home experiences and later school readiness and success. Few would disagree that parents are a child's first and most important teachers, and almost everything that children learn in the first years of their lives comes from their families. These early experiences establish habits that determine methods of seeking new experiences and even methods of thinking about those very experiences. The influence of families in the lives of children is of even greater significance and magnitude than had been previously thought.

The home environment is critical not only to a child's development, but also to his or her readiness for school and subsequent school performance.

– America's Smallest School: The Family.

Educational Attainment, Persons 25 Years+, 2000



	Mississippi	State
High School Graduate and Above	64.7%	75.3%
College Graduate and Above	11.3%	16.7%

The economic stability of the family has a major influence on a child's growth and development. It may be difficult for children to receive the optimal home experiences, which assure success in school, when parents are struggling with economic issues. Parents face many challenges such as having enough income to adequately provide for the children, having to work two jobs to make ends meet, worrying about child care arrangements, not having access to health care, or not having the education to read to and work with young children. Arkansas ranks at or near the bottom in the percent of adults who have a college degree.

According to the report, *Facing the Facts About Arkansas Education,*

> "Parents who are involved in their children's education make a difference. Good education demands parents who read to their children, talk with their children's teachers, and who are advocates for academic excellence in their community. Studies show that the expectations of adults are among the most powerful influences for children's performance in school. Regardless of race or income level, students who receive consistent messages of high expectations always do better."

The best predictor of how well a child will succeed is the economic status of the family as measured by the poverty level.

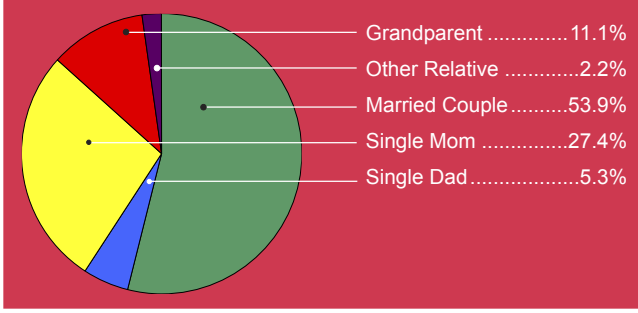
Living in poverty is more likely for children raised by a single parent. Over the past few decades the number of single parent families, especially those headed by single mothers have increased. In a recent report on poverty in Arkansas, researcher Juanita Sandford stated: "Dependence on only one income in a family -- and that one provided by a female -- correlates with poverty more than any other single factor."

Past research has indicated that children from single-parent families are more likely to experience less healthy lives than children from two parent families. They are also more likely to drop out of school, bear children out of wedlock, and have trouble keeping jobs as young adults. These children may also be subjected to various forms of child abuse.

Poverty Rates by Family Type and Presence of Children, 2000

Type of Family	Poverty Rate
All Families	19.0
Families with kids under 18	26.7
Families with kids under 5	32.0
Single mothers with kids under 18	56.3
Single mothers with kids under 5	61.3
Single Black mothers with kids under 5	66.0

Children Less Than 18 Years of Age Living with Types of Families, 2000



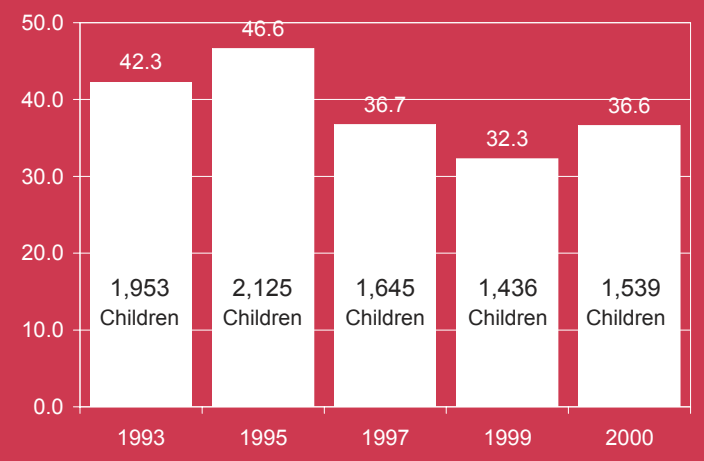
Federal Poverty Level Income Thresholds for 2003
(Size of Family and Number of Related Children Under 18 Years)

Size of family	One	Two	Three	Four	Five	Six	Seven	Eight or more
				(dollars)				
Two persons Householder < 65 years	12,682							
Three persons	14,810	14,824						
Four persons	19,289	18,660	18,725					
Five persons	23,220	22,509	21,959	21,623				
Six persons	26,429	25,884	25,362	24,586	24,126			
Seven persons	30,479	29,827	29,372	28,526	27,538	26,454		
Eight persons	34,175	33,560	33,021	32,256	31,286	30,275	30,019	
Nine persons or more	40,948	40,404	39,947	39,196	38,163	37,229	36,998	35,572

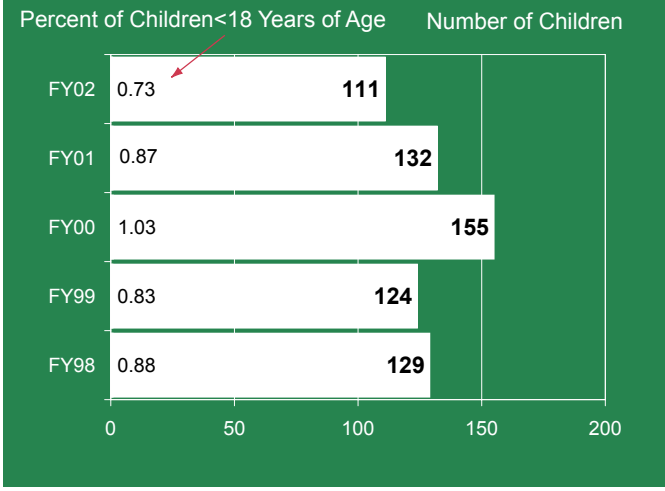
"...the child who is being raised by a single mother is two to three times as likely to be raised in poverty as a child being raised by both parents.

--Leaving Too Many Children Behind: A Demographer's View on the Neglect of America's Youngest Children

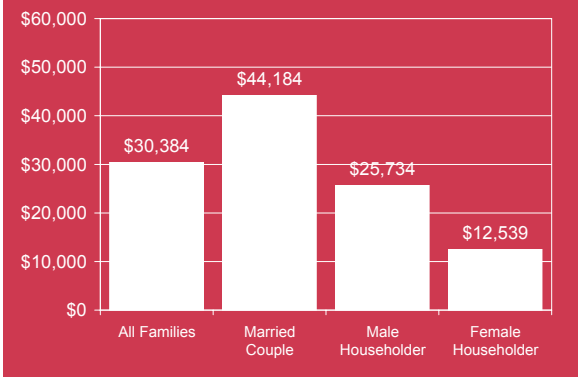
Percent of Children in Poverty, Age 0-4



Child Maltreatment



Median Family Income by Family Type and Presence of Children Under 18, 2000



The newest phenomenon facing today's families is the increasing numbers of grandparents who are raising their grandchildren. This trend is expected to continue.

A number of factors have created this group, such as parents who are in jail, in drug rehabilitation centers, or those who simply are not capable of raising their children. (Hodgkinson) These seniors find themselves with strains of indefinitely extended parental responsibilities – both emotional and financial.

Children born to or growing up in a family headed by a single parent usually do not have access to economic resources that can provide a stable family environment.

Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families developed the family income standard (FIS), which is the amount of money a working Arkansas family needs to earn in order to provide basic necessities. According to the FIS, a family of four with two parents employed needs $33,814 annually in Mississippi County to meet expenses without assistance from government or charities.

As welfare reform began and more welfare mothers were required to go to work, the number of families and children on welfare has decreased. But there has also been an increase in the poverty rate. This dichotomy is due to the increase in the working poor—parents who are working but not earning enough to support their family's basic needs.

Number of Children with Parents in Labor Force, 2000

	Age 0-5	Age 6-17
Two Parent Families		
Both parents in labor force	1,274	3,236
Single Parent Families		
Father only in labor force	221	578
Mother only in labor force	1,122	2,027
Total number of children (who might need child care)	2,617	5,841

One of the primary purposes of TEA (Temporary Employment Assistance) in Arkansas is to end the dependence of needy families on government benefits by promoting job preparation, work, and marriage.

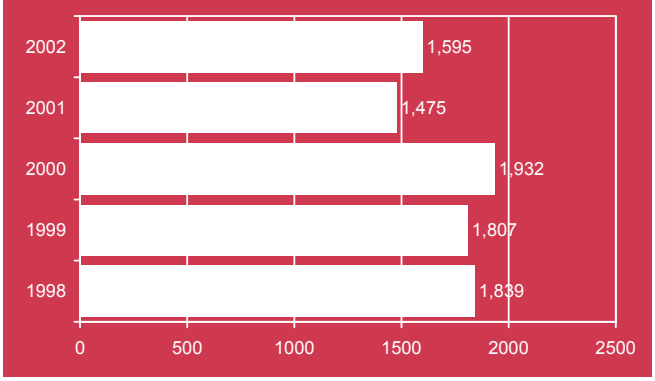
Females, 16 Years and Over In the Labor Force, 2000

	Total Females	Females in Labor Force	% Females in Labor Force	Females w/ Children in Labor Force
Mississippi County	20,404	10,406	51.0%	4,622
State of Arkansas	1,077,083	585,708	54.4%	234,420

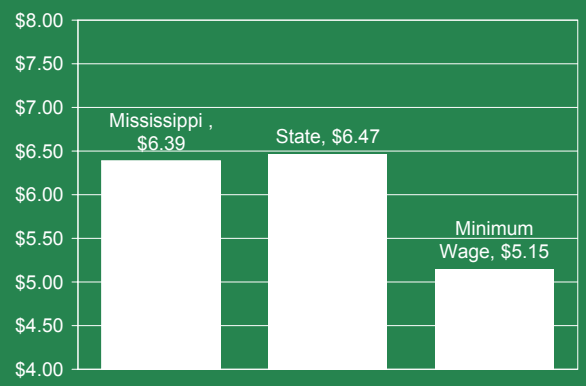
Grandparents as Caregivers, 2000

Total families	13,970
Grandparents living in household with one or more own grandchildren under 18	1,934
Grandparents responsible for grandchildren	1,215
Percent of all families	8.7
Percent of grandparents living with grandchild	62.8

Temporary Employment Assistance Children

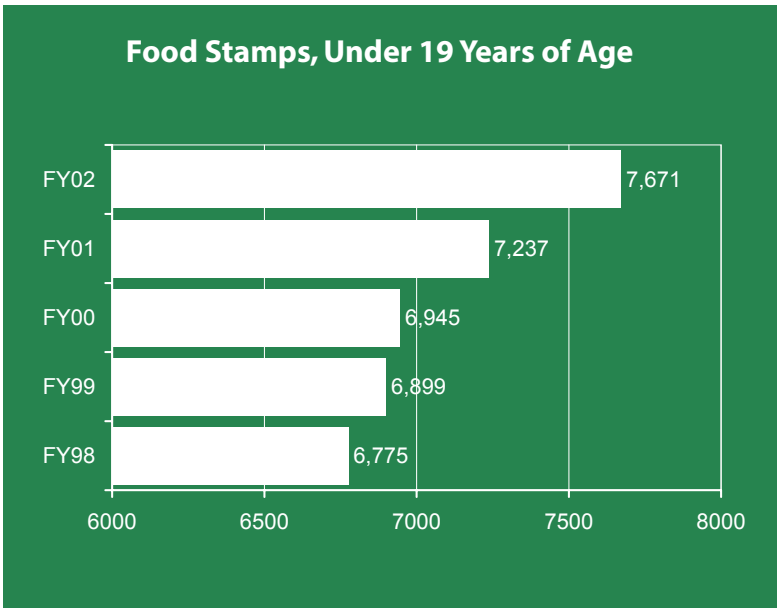


Average Hourly Wage of TEA Recipients, December 2003



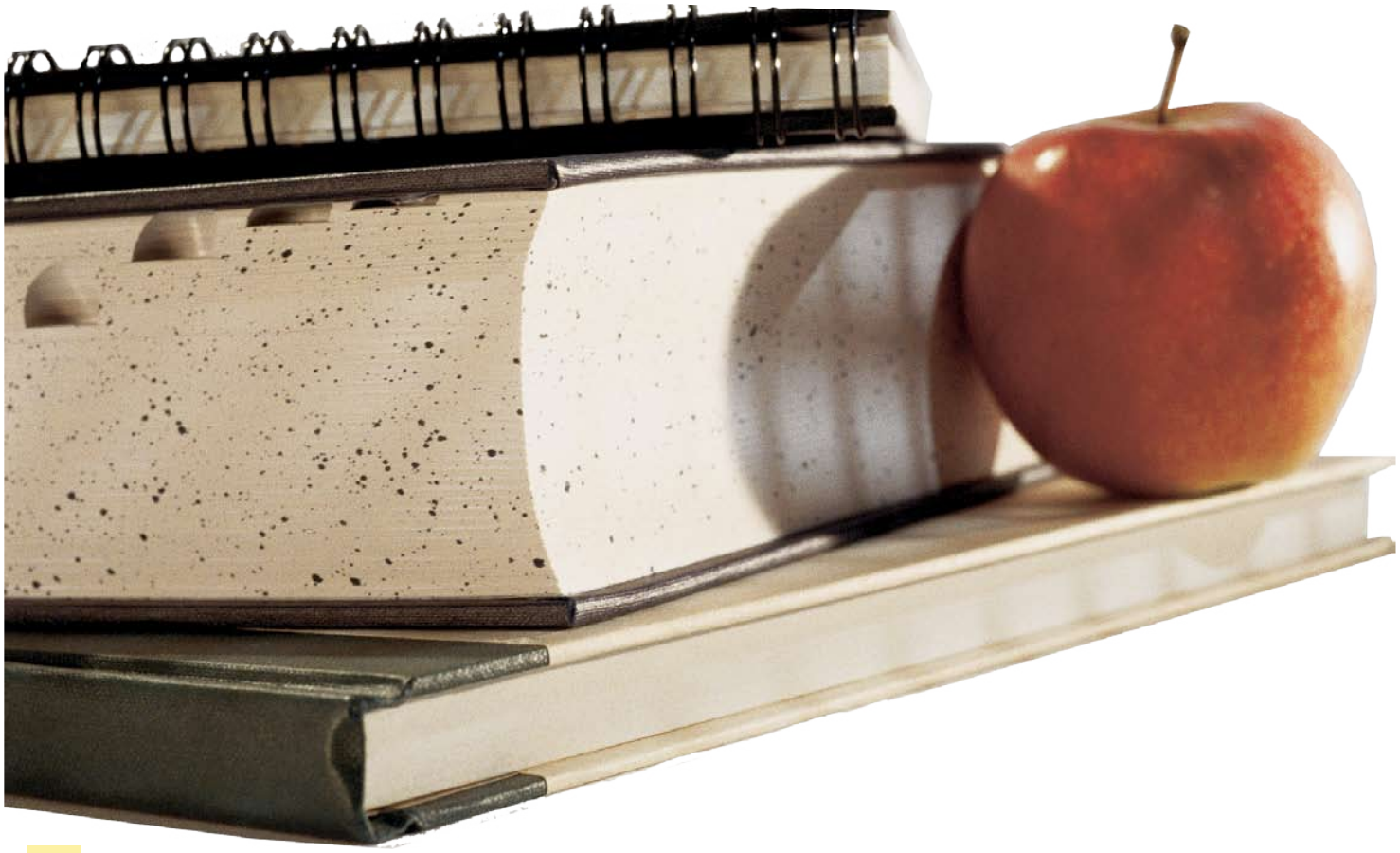
Transitional Employment Assistance closures in Mississippi County due to employment for December, 2003 was 41.7% compared to 50.5% for the state.

It is important for early childhood educators and physicians to identify hungry children and refer them to available resources. This is often a problem that is hidden because families are embarrassed to admit they cannot provide adequate nutrition for their children. "It is estimated that 375,000 Arkansans live in food insecure households. This estimate places Arkansas as the 11th most food insecure state in the nation with 13.6% of its households insecure." (Nord *et al.*)



Low-income children who experience hunger are more likely to have behavioral and emotional problems than do children who have enough to eat.

- Hunger: Its Impact on Children's Health and Mental Health.



Ready Schools

Current research shows that the transition from preschool to kindergarten is one of the most difficult that a child faces throughout their education. Schools must provide smooth transition at all levels and this is best accomplished by providing continuity of both curriculum and assessment. Since 1995 curriculum frameworks in core content areas have been in place for children in Arkansas public schools for kindergarten through twelfth grade. The Arkansas Early Childhood Education Framework: Benchmarks, Strategies, and Activities was developed in 1996 and aligned with the Kindergarten Framework. By 2002 a Framework for Infants and Toddler Care was in place and being used. All of the frameworks align so that transitions occur smoothly for young children moving from one program to another.

In another innovative step to be sure children are ready for kindergarten, the Arkansas Legislature enacted Act 825 of 2003. This required the Department of Education to establish a list of skills and knowledge that a child should have in order to be ready to enter kindergarten. A pilot program was conducted with children entering kindergarten in fall of 2003. A total of 36 elementary schools participated, representing a cross section of the state's population. The Kindergarten Readiness Indicator Checklist (KRIC) contained 38 specific tasks and each child in the pilot was screened prior to entering kindergarten to determine their competency level.

Of the children participating only six percent had received special education services prior to kindergarten, and sixty percent of the children had been involved in some type of preschool program.

Beginning in the fall of 2004, all children in Arkansas entering public school will be screened. The School Readiness project will begin tracking the data on children entering kindergarten in future publications.

Schools must be ready and responsive to the diverse cultural, physical, emotional, and developmental needs of children, especially children in poverty, children of color, children for whom English is not their first language, and children with disabilities.

Since the mid-1990s, Arkansas has experienced a tremendous growth in the Hispanic population. Statewide there was an increase of 337 percent. The influx of this new minority has presented special challenges to our public schools. With a growing number of children between the ages of 5 and 17 speaking a language other than English at home, additional resources in early childhood education as well as in K-12 will be required.

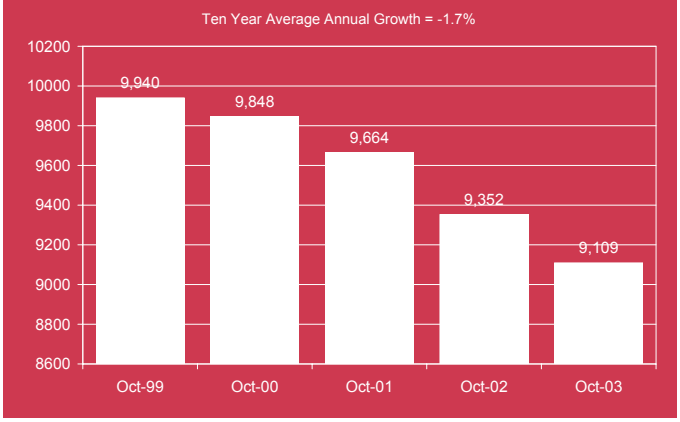
Kindergarten -Grade 3 Enrollment by Race or Ethnicity

	Asian	Black	Hispanic	Native American	White
2003-04	10	1,438	67	2	1,335
2002-03	8	1,502	78	1	1,378
2001-02	7	1,536	84	5	1,385
2000-01	5	1,592	78	6	1,423
% change	100.0%	-9.7%	-14.1%	-66.7%	-6.2%

Hispanic Enrollment by School District

	2001-2002			2002-2003		
District	Hispanic	Total	Percent	Hispanic	Total	Percent
Armorel School District	10	459	2.2%	17	427	4.0%
Blytheville School District	44	3,577	1.2%	38	3,386	1.1%
Gosnell School District	38	1,343	2.8%	39	1,363	2.9%
Manila School District	31	1,019	3.0%	25	1,004	2.5%
Osceola School District	17	1,753	1.0%	16	1,718	0.9%
South Mississippi County School District	68	1,513	4.5%	62	1,454	4.3%

Public School Enrollment Grades K-12



Public school enrollment in Mississippi County declined 1.7% in the past ten years. Completion of high school is a major factor in ensuring higher future earnings over the lifetime of a student and is important in ensuring future economic security for our citizens.

High School Graduation Rates

	1999	2000	2001	2002
Armorel School District	80.0	90.2	92.3	100.0
Blytheville School District	71.9	64.2	69.5	66.8
Gosnell School District	89.1	84.7	88.7	83.7
Manila School District	66.3	76.0	68.1	81.4
Osceola School District	69.9	75.3	71.9	82.5
South Mississippi Co. School District	61.7	58.1	81.2	50.3

Suspension is one of the most common disciplinary consequences used in schools for student problem behaviors, and rates of its use continue to rise. Suspension has been related to school failure, drop-out, deliquency, and criminal behavior. Students who are suspended tend to receive lower grades, are more likely to have learning or emotional disabilities, or to have academic skill deficits. They are three times more likely to drop out of school. Over 80 percent of incarcerated adults have dropped out of school.

Suspensions and Expulsions

(Occurrences, not a student count)

2002-03	2,112
2001-02	2,118
2000-01	2,449
% Change	-13.8%

...as much as suspension is used, it is not effective in reducing the behavior problems it's intended to address. For example, research indicates that students who exhibit the most challenging behavior have been suspended multiple times, yet suspension does not appear to reduce subsequent undesired behavior.

- Christle, Nelson, and Jolivette

The use of suspension does not appear to be reserved for extreme behavior problems that pose a physical threat to others. Researchers have found it is commonly used for disobedience, disrespect, attendance problems, and classroom disruption. It does not appear to be effective in reducing the behavior problems it is intended to address.

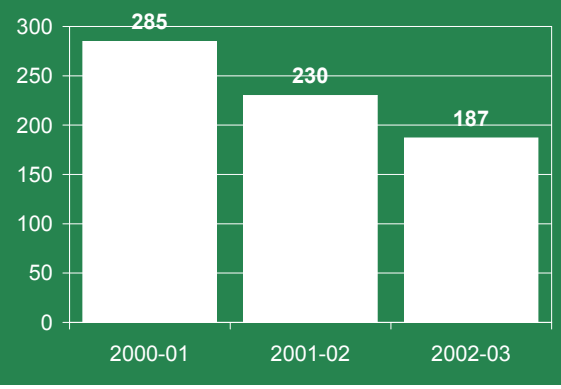
According to Arkansas Law 6-18-507, suspension means dismissal from school for a period of time that does not exceed ten days, and expulsion means dismissal from school for a period of time that exceeds ten days.

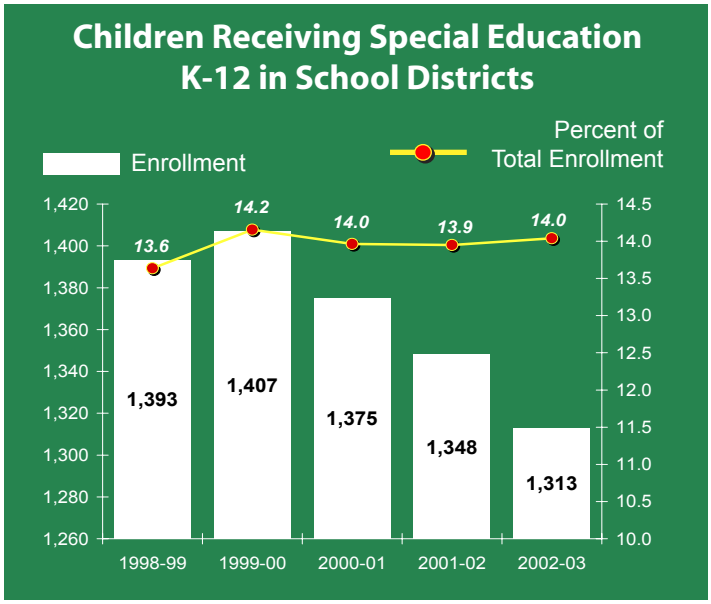
Retention at any grade level is associated with later high school dropout, as well as other long-term effects.

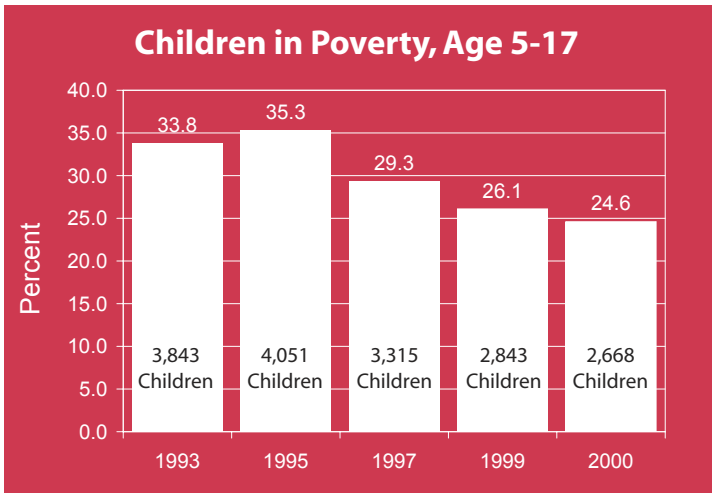
- Grade Retention: Achievement and Mental Health Outcomes.

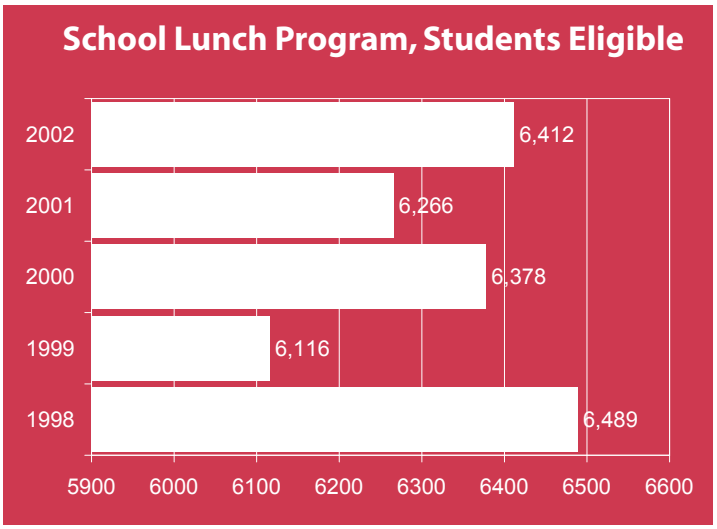
Retentions

Students retained from the prior year at the same grade level









Children in Poverty, 5 to 17 Years of Age, by School Districts, 2000

School District	Number of Children in Poverty	Poverty Rate
Armorel School District	14	04.1
Blytheville School District	1,311	31.2
Gosnell School District	195	14.4
Manila School District	122	12.7
Osceola School District	632	31.7
South Mississippi County School District	338	22.1
State of Arkansas		19.0

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) guarantees an education and any necessary services to children with disabilities in order to prepare them for employment and independent living. This law, in conjunction with the Americans with Disabilities Act has pushed the movement to include children with special needs in mainstream classrooms or what are sometimes called natural environments.

When children reach school age, developmental delays associated with pre- and post-natal malnutrition often result in a greater need for costly special education services. Undernourished children also are more susceptible to illness and therefore more likely to be absent from school. Children who attend school hungry have diminished attention spans and are unable to perform tasks as well as their nourished peers. In these cases, the full value of the education provided is lost.

Poverty continues to plague many areas of the state, with the percent of children living below the poverty line in some school districts exceeding 40 percent.

Grade 4 Test Scores on ACTAAP, 2004
Arkansas Comprehensive Testing, Assessment, and Accountability Program
(percent meeting or exceeding proficiency in math and literacy)

School District	Math	Literacy
Armorel School District	75%	85%
Blytheville School District	37%	53%
Gosnell School District	74%	71%
Manila School District	46%	73%
Osceola School District	41%	56%
South Mississippi County School District	47%	52%

Criterion Referenced Test, Benchmark Examination, April 2004.

Being a good reader in early grades is one of the strongest predictors of later success in school. Research suggests that students who fail to read at grade level by the fourth grade have a higher likelihood of dropping out of school. (Barrington) Educators note that being able to read at grade level is critical by the fourth grade because that is when teaching and learning styles begin to shift. In the early grades, children are learning to read; after fourth grade they are reading to learn. In the later grades educational success depends, to a large extent, on how well students can read.

Ready Communities

Children, families, and schools do not exist as separate, isolated units. They exist within and draw support from the surrounding community. The economic state of the community is critically important for the success of families and schools since all the elements are interdependent. Stable populations, low crime rates, affordable housing, plentiful jobs with adequate wages, and access to health care are some of the characteristics that make a community a viable and supportive place to live. High population growth sometimes leads to a shortage of affordable housing, but housing can also be a problem in areas of declining population.

Selected Housing Characteristics
Percent of occupied housing units

Vacancy rates available housing to rent or own	9.4%
No phone	8.8%
No vehicle available	12.5%
Renters Payment 30% or more of income	34.1%
Owners payment 30% or more of income	19.2%

Persons Commuting Into and Out of Mississippi County, 2000

County	Living in Mississippi Co. Working in Other Counties	Living in Other Counties Working in Mississippi Co.	Net
Clay	2	93	91
Craighead	563	655	92
Crittenden	217	179	-38
Greene	148	118	-30
Poinsett	181	379	198
Randolph	0	41	41
All Other Counties	84	138	54
Other States	621	2,271	1,650

There is a net gain of 2,058 workers commuting into Mississippi County.

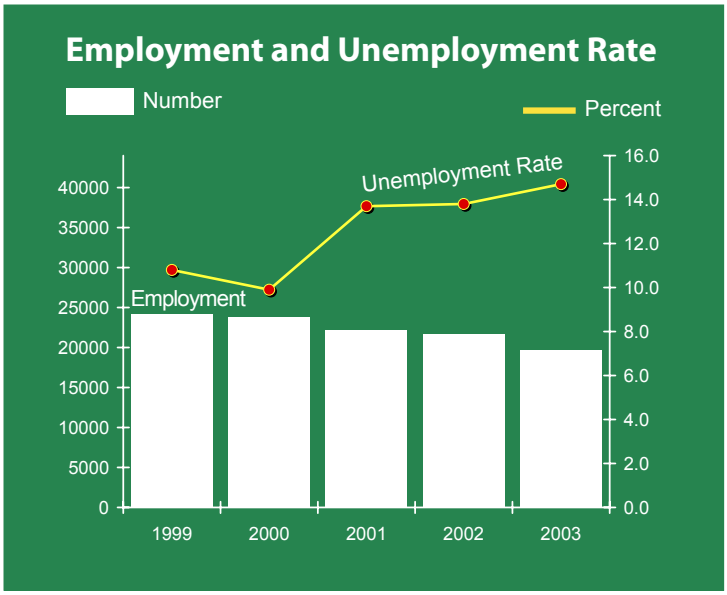
Total number of persons living in and working in Mississippi County is 18,296.

Total workers 16 and over commuting to work is 20,112.

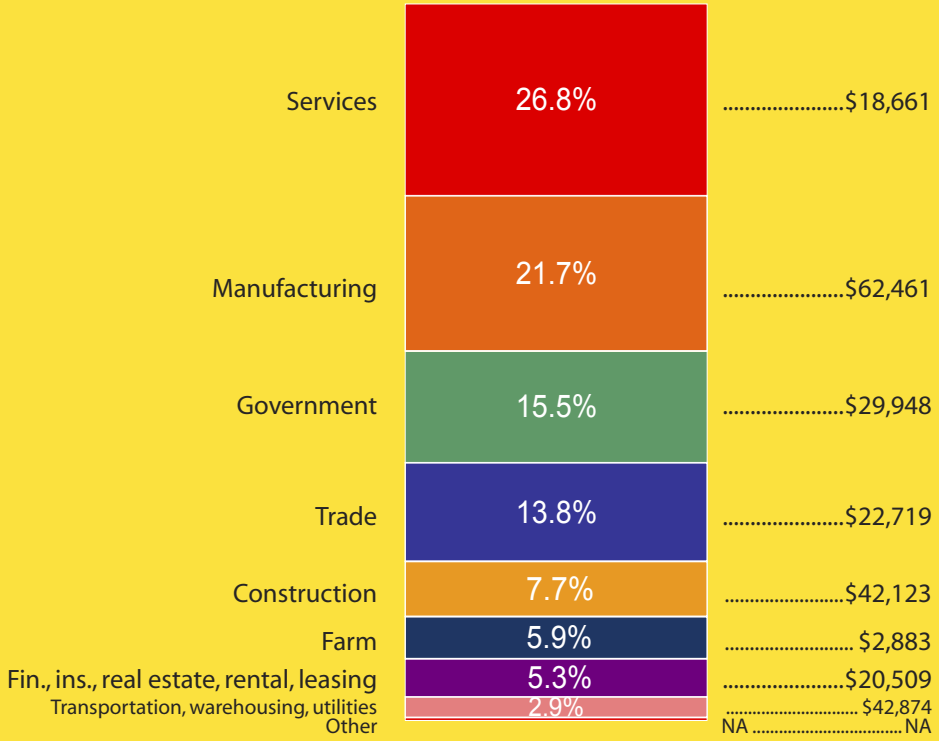
Without enough jobs in a community to support the population, residents must leave to find work. The state has many employment centers that draw commuters from surrounding areas, but that creates problems with child care for the workers who leave their place of residence. Mothers must then decide if they want their child close to them at work or if the child should remain near the home.

Population by City, 1990-2000

	1990 Census	2000 Census	Numerical Difference	Percent Change
Bassett town	199	168	-31	-15.6
Birdsong town	104	40	-64	-61.5
Blytheville city	22,906	18,272	-4,634	-20.2
Burdette town	148	129	-19	-12.8
Dell town	258	251	-7	-2.7
Dyess town	466	515	49	10.5
Etowah town	0	366	366	-
Gosnell city	3,783	3,968	185	4.9
Joiner city	645	540	-105	-16.3
Keiser city	805	808	3	0.4
Leachville city	1,743	1,981	238	13.7
Luxora town	1,338	1,317	-21	-1.6
Manila city	2,635	3,055	420	15.9
Marie town	129	108	-21	-16.3
Osceola city	8,930	8,875	-55	-0.6
Victoria town	110	59	-51	-46.4
Wilson town	1,068	939	-129	-12.1



Employment Distribution and Average Annual Earnings, 2002

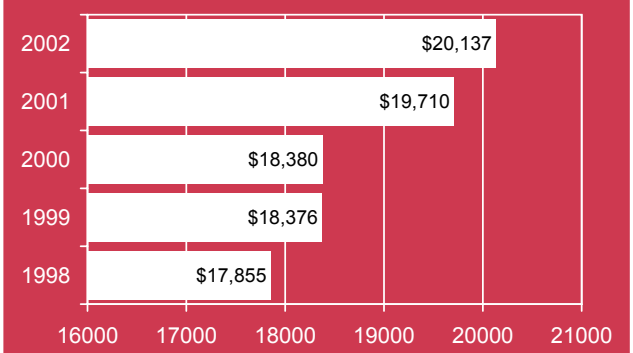


Other includes: Management of companies and enterprises, which is part of all divisions; Agriculture, forestry, fishing, and related activities; and Mining.

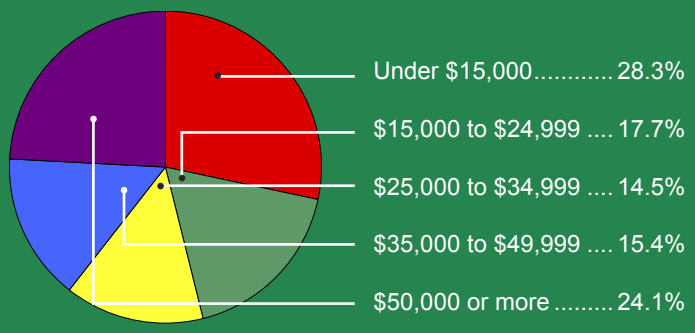
Jobs are important but the income produced by the jobs is also critical. Many communities across the state do not have jobs that pay wages or salaries high enough to support families.

Economic measures such as per capita personal income and median household income provide a means to gauge the economic health of a community.

Per Capita Personal Income



Household Income Distribution, 2000



Total households 19,309

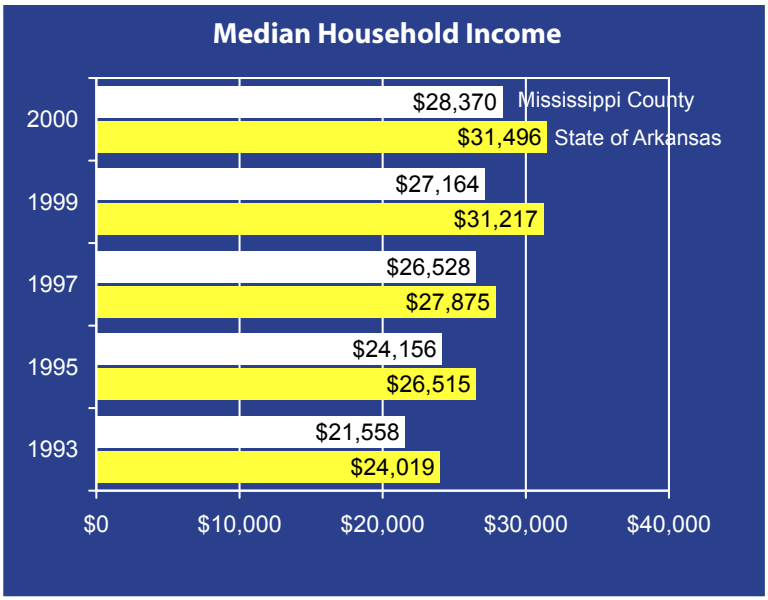
Poverty Levels, 2000

For persons of all ages for whom poverty status is determined

Persons in poverty (100% of poverty)	11,752
percent	23.0%
Persons with income below 150% of poverty	7,065
percent	13.8%
Persons with income between 150% and 199% of poverty	5,196
percent	10.2%
Persons with income above 200% of poverty	27,057
percent	53.0%

Eligibility for many poverty assistance programs is based on the relationship of the person's or family's income to the federal poverty levels. For example, under the new guidelines, Early Childhood Education programs will serve families with income up to 200 percent of poverty.

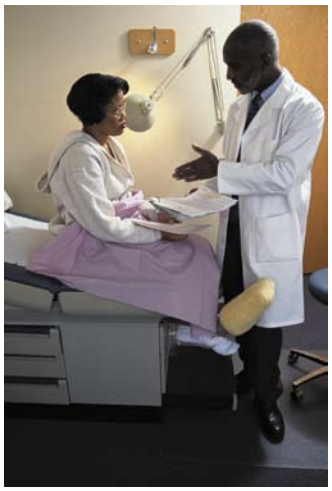
Quality of life issues are important when looking at communities and include such things as access to health care and incidence of crime.



"Arkansas is one of the least healthy states in the country. We eat too much. We exercise too little. We smoke. The Medicaid programs alone costs us more than $3 billion annually in Arkansas. It serves almost 600,000 people in a state with a population of fewer than 2.7 million people. Those numbers are astounding when you think about them. I've become convinced that the serious health problems and the staggering costs to the taxpayers that result from those health problems can only be addressed by behavioral changes on the part of Arkansans.

A third of all U.S. children are now expected to have some symptoms of diabetes by age 14. It is estimated that 95 percent of the juvenile diabetes cases are related to diet and lifestyles with only 5 percent of cases related to hereditary factors. Americans are eating 200 more calories a day than they did a decade ago. Those calories can add up to 20 pounds annually. Obesity is costing this country $56 billion annually in lost productivity and $61 billion in medical care. We cannot continue to focus on simply treating diseases once they occur. The costs are too high, both in terms of human misery and limited financial resources. The fiscal health of Arkansas and the county is going to depend on the physical health of our citizens."

Governor Mike Huckabee
Governor's Column on Health and Arkansas; March 17, 2004



Health Professionals, 2002

	Number		Number		Number
Total Physicians	42	Total Dental	38	Total Nursing	449
Primary Care Physicians	29	Total Optometry	7	Licensed Practical Nurse	188
Total Chiropractors	4	Total Social Work	16	Registered Nurse	244

Adult and Juvenile (Age 0-17) Arrests by Type of Crime

	Number					Rate Per Thousand				
	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
Adult Arrests for Alcohol/Drug Crimes	1,677	1,691	1,472	1,291	1,165	48.2	49.1	40.3	35.7	32.7
Adult Arrests for Property Crimes	617	448	406	492	386	17.7	13.0	11.1	13.6	10.8
Adult Arrests for Violent Crimes	121	140	126	126	89	3.5	4.1	3.4	3.5	2.5
Juvenile Arrests for Alcohol/Drug Crimes	111	112	112	74	76	15.9	16.4	16.4	11.0	11.7
Juvenile Arrests for Property Crimes	320	183	229	251	203	45.9	26.8	33.5	37.5	31.2
Juvenile Arrests for Violent Crimes	38	11	19	37	52	5.5	1.6	2.8	5.5	8.0

The Business Approach to School Readiness

Families, schools, and the communities must be active partners to ensure that each child is ready for school, will succeed in school, and will become a contributor to society. This responsibility is too often left only to the parents and the schools.

Success also depends on the involvement of the business community, according to Charles Bruner, author of *A Stitch in Time, Calculating the Cost of School Unreadiness*:

> "Corporate leaders have been instrumental in many states in developing early childhood agendas, because they recognize the long-term value of an educated workforce to economic development and growth and because they recognize the need for safe and reliable child care for the productivity of the current workforce."

According to an article, written by two research economists with the Federal Reserve Bank in Minneapolis, as states are planning for the future with limited budgets, they cannot ignore the importance of investing in early childhood development programs. Investment in early childhood programs is usually at the bottom of the priority list for economic development, yet the benefits obtained from such programs far exceeds the cost. (Grunewald and Rohick)

The investment returns from early childhood development programs for students and society are great and well documented. The authors quote well-documented research and studies such as the High/Scope study of the Perry Preschool in Ypsilanti, Michigan, the Syracuse Preschool Program, and the Abecedarian Project in North Carolina. They also examined the work of Martha Farrell Erickson and Karen Kurz-Riemer who found that the first few years of life are critical in determining the quality of life and contribution to society that a child will make as an adult.

The emphasis that Minnesota has placed on education has resulted in one of the nation's most educated workforces. However, at the other end of the spectrum are children who are raised in poverty situations, enter kindergarten without the fundamentals, begin their school experiences at a disadvantage, and never catch up with the rest of society. These children end up with low educational achievement, have no real skills, will always be assigned to low-paying jobs, and may be more likely to commit crimes.

With these children shut out of a chance for a higher quality of life, they impose costs on society that affect economic development. According to the Minnesota study, "investment in early childhood development programs brings a real (that is, inflation adjusted) public return of 12 percent and a real total return, public and private, of 16 percent. We are unaware of any other economic development effort that has such a public return, and yet early childhood development is rarely viewed in economic development terms."

The researchers concluded, "The return investment from Early Childhood Development is extraordinary, resulting in better working public schools, more educated workers, and less crime…the costs of not making such an investment are just too great to ignore."

What do all of these facts and figures really mean? How can we make a difference in the lives of young children as they grow and mature into our future citizens? The work of the School Readiness Indicators team is just a starting place. As a state we begin the work of looking at our systems of care and education and developing new questions as we search for new answers to the age old dilemma of ensuring our children are healthy and successful in their lives.

Attention to school readiness must begin long before the preschool years and it must encompass more than academic development alone. This report takes a focused approach to many factors affecting our children and their families, our schools and our communities. As we continue to track school readiness indicators we will identify a strategic systemwide approach to school readiness. By addressing family and economic security, healthy communities, healthy children, and high quality early care and education to prepare children for success in school, we will reach the goal for all Arkansas children of *Getting Ready for School*.

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Definitions and Sources for Tables and Charts

1 Births to Teens: The number of births in which the woman was less than 18 years of age. Arkansas Department of Health, Center for Health Statistics, *Vital Statistics*.

2 Births to Mothers with Less than 12th Grade Education: The percent of all births where the woman (all ages) has received less than 12 years of formal education. Arkansas Department of Health, Center for Health Statistics, *Vital Statistics*.

3 No Prenatal Care During First Pregnancy Trimester: The number of all births in which the mother did not begin prenatal care during the first three months of pregnancy. Arkansas Department of Health, Center for Health Statistics, *Vital Statistics*.

4 Family Types by Presence of Own Children: A family includes a householder and one or more other people living in the same household who are related to the householder by birth, marriage, or adoption. A married-couple family is one in which the householder and his or her spouse are enumerated as members of the same household. The categories, male householder, no wife present and female householder, no husband present, include families maintained by the householder without the respective spouse present. An Own Child is a never-married child under 18 years of age who is a son or daughter of the householder by birth, marriage (step-child), or adoption. U.S. Census Bureau, Census of Population and Housing, Summary File 1, Arkansas, 2000.

5 Low Birth Weight Babies: The number of all births in which the infant weighed less than 2,500 grams or 5.5 pounds. Arkansas Department of Health, Center for Health Statistics, *Vital Statistics*.

6 ARKids First Enrollment: The number of children enrolled in ARKids First, an insurance program provided by the state of Arkansas for children who come from working poor families without insurance. The ARKids First waiver program and SOBRA Medicaid, the largest category of children's Medicaid, were combined under the ARKids umbrella. SOBRA became ARKids A and the waiver program became ARKids B. Arkansas Department of Human Services, Report IM-2414.

7 Child Care Voucher Program: The number of children attending child care through the voucher program which provides subsidized child care to low income working families. The voucher program is a federal program which assists families that meet eligibility criteria with the cost of child care. Arkansas Department of Human Services, Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Education.

8 Child Care Licenses: The number of child care licenses issued and the capacity by type of facility. Children per slot: The total number of children by age groups divided by the total capacity of licensed centers or the total capacity of those meeting the state early childhood accreditation/quality approval standards. These standards ensure quality programs for young children. Arkansas Department of Human Services, Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Education.

9 Number of Children Served at Any time During Program Year:

Arkansas Better Chance Program: The number of children served at any time during the program year in the Arkansas Better Chance Program (ABC). The summer ABC program was discontinued after 1999, and the funds were transferred to the classroom and HIPPY programs. The ABC program is intended to serve educationally deprived children, birth to 5 years of age. Children's Research, Institute for Economic Advancement, UALR and the Arkansas Better Chance Data Center.

Head Start: Each Head Start program is funded to provide services to a designated number of children and exists to provide and to promote a high quality, developmentally appropriate child development program for economically deprived children 3-5 and/or 0-3 years of age, thus reducing the potential for school failure. Arkansas Head Start Association-State Collaboration Project, *Arkansas Head Start Association Directory*.

Head Start Enrollment Compared to 3-5 Year Old Population: A comparison of the number of Head Start slots with the 3-5 year old population. Number of slots does not include migrants. Arkansas Head Start Association-State Collaboration Project, *Arkansas Head Start Association Directory* and the U.S. Census Bureau.

10 Number of Children Served by State and Federally Funded Programs: The number of children served in various early childhood programs during the program year divided by the population 0 - 5 years of age.

The ABC and Head Start programs have been defined above.

Early Special Education: Preschool child count under part B of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Arkansas Department of Education, Special Education.

Even Start: The number of children enrolled in the Even Start Literacy Program, which is a grant program to help break the cycle of poverty by improving the educational opportunities of the nation's low income families through the integration of early childhood education, adult literacy, and parenting education into a unified family literacy program. Arkansas Department of Education, Even Start Family Literacy Program.

Child Care and Development Fund: The number of children served at any time during the program year in the Child Care and Development Fund, which assists low-income families and those transitioning off welfare to obtain child care so that they can work or attend training or education. Eligible children are those under age 13 (or up to age 19, if disabled). The state currently serves families at 60 percent of the state median income. Arkansas Department of Human Services, Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Education.

Early Head Start: Head Start programs for age 0-3.

11 USDA Child and Adult Care Food Program: The number of children served by the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP), which is a federal program providing healthy meals and snacks to children and adults receiving day care. Facilities serving children include child care centers, Head Start programs, after school care programs, and family day care homes. Arkansas Department of Human Services, Special Nutrition Program.

12 Early Childhood Special Education: Early Childhood Special Education services are defined as "special education and related services provided to eligible children with disabilities aged three to five, inclusive" in the federal law Individual Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). The Arkansas Department of Education is designated as the agency for administering and providing general supervision of education programs statewide for children with disabilities ages three through five. The federal law "Individuals with Disabilities Education Act" (IDEA) defines Early Intervention Services as services designed to meet the developmental needs of each child birth to three with disabilities and the needs of the family related to enhancing the child's development. The Lead Agency in Arkansas for Early Intervention is DHS/Developmental Disabilities Services. Arkansas Department of Education, Special Education.

13 Educational Attainment, Persons 25 Years and over: The percentage of persons 25 years and over who have attained less than 9th grade; 9-12th with no diploma; high school graduate; some college; associate degree; bachelor degree; and graduate/professional degree in 2000. U.S. Census Bureau, Census of Population and Housing, Summary File 3, Arkansas, 2000.

14 Poverty Rates by Family Type and Presence of Children and 15 Federal Poverty Level Income Thresholds: *Poverty status* is determined from income data. Poverty thresholds are arranged in a two dimensional matrix based on family size and number of children in the family. (See number 4 for definitions of families.) The total income of the family was tested against the appropriate threshold to determine the poverty status of the family. If the family income was less than the corresponding cutoff, the family was classified as *below poverty level*. The number of children below poverty was the sum of all children in families below the poverty level. The percent of children in poverty was the sum of children below the poverty level divided by the total number of all children in families. U.S. Census Bureau, Census of Population and Housing, Summary File 3, Arkansas, 2000.

16 Percent of Children in Poverty, Age 0-4: The percent of children 0-4 years of age in poverty was the sum of children below the poverty level divided by the total number of all children 0-4 years of age in families. U.S. Census Bureau, Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates.

17 Children Less than 18 Years of Age Living with Types of Families: The percentage of children living with a married couple family, a family headed by a single female, a family headed by a single male, grandparents, or another family member. Families are two or more persons related by blood, marriage or adoption. U.S. Census Bureau, Census of Population and Housing, Summary File 1, Arkansas, 2000.

18 Child Maltreatment: The number of children for whom an allegation of maltreatment has been founded and the percent of the population that is less than 18 years of age. Arkansas Department of Human Services, *Annual Statistical Report*.

19 Grandparents as Caregivers: The number of grandparents living in household with one or more own grandchildren under age 18 and responsible for child care. U.S. Census Bureau, Census of Population and Housing, Summary File 3, Arkansas, 2000.

20 Median Family Income by Family Type and Presence of Children Under 18: Family income represents the incomes of all family members 15 years old and over related to the householder. The median divides the income distribution (by family type—see number 4) into two equal parts, one having incomes below the median and the other having incomes above the median. U.S. Census Bureau, Census of Population and Housing, Summary File 3, Arkansas, 2000.

21 Number of Children with Parents in the Labor Force: The number of children under age 18 by type of family whose working parent(s) might need child care. U.S. Census Bureau, Census of Population and Housing, Summary File 3, Arkansas, 2000.

22 Females, 16 and Over in the Labor Force: The number of females in the labor force divided by the female population 16 years and over. The number of females 16 and over in the labor force who have children. U.S. Census Bureau, Census of Population and Housing, Summary File 3, Arkansas, 2000.

23 Temporary Employment Assistance Children: The Arkansas Personal Responsibility and Public Assistance Reform Act of 1997 created the Transitional Employment Assistance (TEA) Program as a result of the national welfare reform movement. The TEA program was implemented on July 1, 1998 to work with low-income families to assist in their transition from dependence on public assistance to self-reliance through employment. This program replaced AFDC, Aid to Families with Dependent Children. Arkansas Department of Human Services, *Annual Statistical Report*.

24 Average Hourly Wage of TEA Recipients: The average hourly wage for December 2003. Arkansas Department of Human Services, Division of County Operations.

25 Time Limited Transitional Employment Assistance, Closures by Reason: The number of cases closed during December 2003 due to employment. Arkansas Department of Human Services, Division of County Operations.

26 Food Stamps, Under 19 Years of Age: The number of children under 19 years of age, who receive food stamps. The Food Stamp program is designed to provide nutrition to low income individuals and households in the form of coupons. The amount of coupons allotted is based on the household size, resources, and income. Arkansas Department of Human Services, *Annual Statistical Report*.

27 Hispanic Enrollment, School Districts with Highest Rate: The number and percent of Hispanic students by school district. Arkansas Department of Education, Office of Data Administration, Statewide Information System.

28 Kindergarten-Grade 3 Enrollment by Race or Ethnicity: Arkansas Department of Education, Office of Data Administration, www.as-is.org/search/search_all/index.html (February 4, 2003).

29 Public School Enrollment Grades K-12: The enrollment in grades K-12, for all districts combined for the county total. Arkansas Department of Education.

30 High School Graduation Rates: Graduation (completion) rates are the percent of students enrolled during grade 9 and completing grade 12. Arkansas Department of Education, Office of Data Administration, http://www.as-is.org/search/distgrad99-02.xls (November 19, 2003).

31 Retentions: Students retained from the prior year at the same grade level. Arkansas Department of Education, Office of Data Administration, Statewide Information System.

32 Suspensions and Expulsions: School disciplinary actions taken, including in-school suspension, out-of-school suspension, expelled, expelled for weapons, expelled for drugs, and expelled for dangerousness. Arkansas Department of Education, Office of Data Administration, Statewide Information System.

33 Children Receiving Special Education K-12 in School Districts: The number of students counted under the P.L. 94-142 grant for all districts combined for each school year. Students in special education placements are those who have been identified as disabled according to criteria set forth in state and federal regulations, and who are receiving special education and related services as necessary. The percent is determined by dividing the enrollment in special education by the total enrollment. Arkansas Department of Education, Special Education.

34 School Lunch Program, Students Eligible: The number of students eligible for free/reduced price lunches in the public schools, grades K-12. Students are eligible based on income and family size guidelines established for the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program, administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Arkansas Department of Education, Statewide Information System.

Definitions and Sources for Tables and Charts (cont'd)

35 Children in Poverty, Age 5-17: See numbers 15 and 16 for definitions of poverty. The percent of children 5-17 years of age in poverty was the sum of children below the poverty level divided by the total number of all children 5-17 years of age in families. U.S. Census Bureau, Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates.

36 Children in Poverty, 5 to 17 Years of Age, by School District: See numbers 15 and 16 for definitions of poverty. Estimates of poverty levels for school age children will be made biennially by the US Census Bureau to comply with Title 1 requirements. U.S. Census Bureau, Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates.

37 Grade 4 Test Scores on ACTAAP: Number and percent of Students in Grade 4 meeting or exceeding proficiency in math and literacy on the Criterion Referenced Test, Benchmark Examination, Combined Population, April 2004. Arkansas Department of Education.

38 Commuting Workers by County: Persons leaving their county of residence to work in another county. Highest net gain counties are the counties into which more workers come to work than the number of residents who leave. Highest net loss counties are those in which more residents leave to go to work than workers enter the county. U.S. Census Bureau, Census of Population and Housing, Summary File 3, Arkansas, 2000.

39 Selected Housing Characteristics (as a Percent of Occupied Housing Units): A housing unit may be a house, an apartment, a mobile home, a group of rooms, or a single room that is occupied (or, if vacant, is intended for occupancy) as separate living quarters. A housing unit is considered occupied if it is the usual place of residence of the person or group of persons living in it.

Vacancy rates represent the number of vacant units for sale only or for rent divided by the sum of occupied units and available units, and then multiplied by 100.

No phone and no vehicle are occupied households with no phone or no vehicle available.

Gross rent as a percentage of household income in 1999 is a computed ratio of monthly gross rent to monthly household income (total income for 1999 divided by 12).

Selected monthly owner costs as a percentage of household income in 1999 is a computed ratio of owner costs to monthly household income (total income divided by 12).

U. S. Census Bureau, Census of Population and Housing, Summary File 3, Arkansas, 2000.

40 Population by City: The total number of people residing in a specific area (cities, towns, or CDPs) as enumerated by the decennial census on April 1st of years ending in zero. A Census Designated Place (CDP) is a concentration of population and housing that is not within an incorporated boundary. U.S. Census Bureau, Census of Population and Housing, Summary File 1, Arkansas, 2000.

41 Employment and Unemployment Rate: The number of persons age 16 and over who are employed. The unemployment rate is the number of unemployed divided by the civilian labor force. Arkansas Employment Security Department, Labor Market Information Section, Arkansas Labor Force Statistics, Annual Averages.

42 Employment Distribution and Average Annual Earnings: Compiled from Private Nonfarm Employment and Earnings by Industry. Based on the North American Industrial Classification System (NAICS). U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Economic Analysis, REIS CD, May 2004.

43 Per Capita Personal Income: Total personal income of the residents of a given area divided by the resident population of the area. U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Economic Analysis, REIS CD, May 2004.

44 Household Income Distribution: The income of a household includes the income received during calendar year 1999 of the householder and all other individuals 15 years and over in the household, whether or not they are related to the householder. U.S. Census Bureau, Census Population and Housing, Summary File 3, Arkansas, 2000.

45 Poverty Levels (as a Percent of Income): See numbers 15 and 16 for definitions of poverty. For this table, each person's income was measured against the poverty threshold and expressed as a percent of the threshold. For example, a person under age 65 whose income in 1999 was below $8,667 was considered to be below the poverty level. A person whose income was between $8,667 and $12,999 was classified as having income below 150 percent of the poverty level. A person whose income was at least $13,000 but less than $17,334 was classified as having income between 150 and 199 percent of the federal poverty level. Any person whose income was $17,334 or higher was classified as having income at or above 200 percent of the federal poverty level. U.S. Census Bureau, Census of Population and Housing, Summary File 3, Arkansas, 2000.

46 Median Household Income: Median household income divides the income distribution into two equal parts, one having incomes above the median and the other having incomes below the median. U.S. Census Bureau, Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates.

47 Health Professionals: Total physicians (all medical doctors licensed to practice in the state of Arkansas), primary care physicians (medical doctors participating in family practice, general practice, obstetrics/gynecology, pediatrics or internal medicine), chiropractors, all dental professions (endodontics, general dentistry, oral surgery, orthodontics, pediatric dentists, periodontics, prosthodontics, dental assistants, and dental hygienists), optometrists, social workers, and all nurses. Arkansas Department of Health, Center for Health Statistics, Health Professions Licensing Survey, Manpower Statistics, 2002, www.healthyarkansas.com/state/hpl2002/HPL_2002.HTM (June 1, 2003).

48 Adult and Juvenile Arrests by Type of Crime: The number of juvenile and adult arrests for violent crime, property crime, and drug/alcohol related crimes and rate per 1,000 juveniles or adults. Arkansas Crime Information Center, *Crime in Arkansas*.

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