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*Arkansas' Early Childhood
Comprehensive
Systems
Plan*

The *Arkansas Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems (AECCS) Initiative* is administered by the Arkansas Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS). The Division of Health and the Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Education are partnering to conduct the activities of a grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Health Resources and Services Administration, Maternal and Child Health Bureau.

This report was prepared by the Arkansas DHHS, Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Education, and is based on input from over 150 early childhood leaders and stakeholders from across the state during the planning phase of the AECCS Initiative.

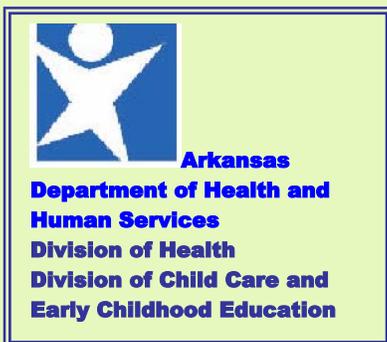


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Arkansas' children and families

Great strides have been made to improve the lives of Arkansas' children and families in the last decade. However, there are many challenges that are yet to be addressed. The need still exists to assure an early childhood infrastructure that has the resources and leadership necessary to create a coordinated and integrated system of services.

Children In Poverty

According to the *Kids Count Data Book (2005)*, Arkansas ranks 44th in overall child well being, with nearly 1 in 4 Arkansas children living in poverty.

Arkansas ranked 49th in the nation in per capita income: each and every person in the state on average had \$7,317 less income than did the average American.

Ethnic Diversity

Many African-American and Hispanic children living in Arkansas do not receive support and access to needed services. The Hispanic population in Arkansas has increased 170% since 1990 (US Census, 2000) because of rapid immigration to work in the poultry industry and farming. The Hispanic population growth occurred statewide and represents

16% of Arkansas' population growth in the 1990s. Almost 17% of the state's population is African-American. In some counties, the African-American population constitutes as much as 50% of the population. Poverty and unemployment are especially prevalent in counties with high percentages of minorities.

Health Care Needs

Seventy-three of Arkansas' 75 counties are defined by the federal government as totally or partially "Medically Underserved Areas" (Arkansas Department of Health, 2000). More than one-half of the state's population lives in rural communities that struggle with access to health care and other basic services. Only 28% of primary care physicians practice in rural areas. As a result of these service problems

and others, individuals from Arkansas may have to drive more than an hour to find health services, and even further if they do not have insurance or Medicaid. To further compound this, the state's transportation infrastructure is heavily dependent on more than 77,000 miles of county roads, the majority of which remain unpaved (AR Highway and Transportation Dept., 2000).

Educational Status

As is often the case, factors that influence health coexist with other high-risk conditions. For example, it is common to find academically disadvantaged students who come from "Medically Underserved" areas, households in which one or both parents are unemployed, or rural areas with poor academic environments that fail to nurture and promote academic achievement. To compound the problem, low educational attainment seems to carry over from one generation to another – academically disadvantaged students frequently come from

households in which one or both parents did not obtain a high school diploma, or in which the student is the first to obtain a secondary or undergraduate degree. A study commissioned by the Southern Education Foundation found that almost 70% of the difference in per-person income between Arkansas and the nation is due to the state's lower levels of education. Stated in another way, if educational levels were approximately equal to other states, in 2004 each Arkansas would have had the benefit of an additional \$5,049 in personal income, and even higher rewards in subsequent years.

Arkansas Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems (AECCS) Initiative

AECCS Mission:

To increase the health and well being of Arkansas' young children and their families by creating a comprehensive and coordinated early childhood system that will maximize existing early childhood investments, address critical needs and assure that **children in Arkansas are healthy and ready to learn by the time they enter school.**

The AECCS partnerships are comprised of over 150 early childhood leaders, including all of the state departments administering programs for young children, health and mental health professionals, higher education, child advocates, early care providers, community based agencies and parents. The initiative is administered by the Arkansas Department of Health and Human Service. The DHHS Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Education is directing programmatic activities of the grant in close partnership with the Division of Health. The Governor's Early Childhood Commission has provided input into the strategic plan, and will continue to advise and facilitate the implementation of the plan.

Determining the Components of a Comprehensive Early Childhood System

The Quality 2000 Initiative came to the conclusion that there are eight necessary components of an early care and education system (Kagan and Cohen, 1997).

1 Quality Programs

- *Create Learning Environments and Opportunities
- * Advance Children's Healthy Development
- * Foster Accreditation
- *Create and Maintain Links with Community Resources
- *Create and Maintain Links with Family Childcare

2 Child-Based, Results Driven System

- *Define Appropriate Results
- *Establish Mechanisms to Collect Results
- *Assure that Results Are Used Appropriately

3 Parent, Family, Community and Public Engagement

- *Support Parents as Consumers
- *Increase Workplace Commitments to Families and Business/Community Involvement
- * Increase Community Awareness

4 Individual Licensing

- *Credential All Who Work with Young Children
- *Create Credentialing System - Compensate Teachers Accordingly
- *Create Administrator/Director/Master Teacher and Leadership Credentials

5 Improve Content Of/Resources For Professional Development

- *Examine the Content of all Preparation Programs
- *Create the Content and the Incentives
- *Create Opportunities for Advocacy and Leadership

6 Program Licensing

- *Eliminate Exemptions
- *Streamline, Coordinate and Adequately Fund Facility Licensing
- *Promote National Guidelines

7 Funding and Financing

- *Identify the Costs of a Quality System
- *Raise Staff Compensation
- *Identify Revenue Sources
- *Develop a Long-term Financing Plan

8 Governance, Planning and Program Accountability

- *Establish Governance Mechanisms at the State Level
- *Establish Governance Mechanisms at the Local Level

AECCS Process Results in Systems Plan

As the Arkansas Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems (AECCS) Initiative began, work groups were formed around the five areas of concern:

- *Early Care and Education
- *Medical Homes
- *Social and Emotional Health
- *Family Support
- *Parenting Education

Work groups began the process of visioning long-term outcomes, expressing these by developing logic models. Their work was informed by the data gathered in the *School Readiness Indicators Initiative*. Each group followed the recommended procedure of addressing desired results first, working backwards from those results to determine process.

The strategic plan was systematically designed by examining planning activities in light of all eight components of the system described by Kagan and Cohen, in order to effect permanent and systemic change for children and families that will make a difference. By examining the strength of each component of the system, determinations have been possible that identify true systems change, not merely a “tweaking” of pieces of the infrastructure.

Core Values

The Arkansas Department of Health and Human Services is administering the SECCS grant through the leadership of the Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Education and the Division of Health. Resulting strategic plans and implementation activities are guided by the following **core values**:

Compassion – listening and caring about each other.

Courage – Valuing prudent risk and innovation

Respect – Honoring each other’s diverse culture including individual needs and preferences.

Integrity – Conducting ourselves in an honest, fair, and ethical manner

Trust – Inspiring confidence through our program management, transparency and communication.

Indicators of School Readiness

Indicators of child well being are being tracked and analyzed by the University of Arkansas Child Data Center to determine trends that will inform program decisions, funding strategies, etc. This effort is a continuing activity of the **School Readiness Indicators Initiative**. Indicators are reviewed periodically, with ability to add new indicators as needs are identified. Work groups of the **AECCS Initiative** have helped to identify some missing indicators, and have used the indicators being tracked to guide the strategic planning process. Tracking and analysis of this trend data will be an ongoing part of the **AECCS** evaluation.

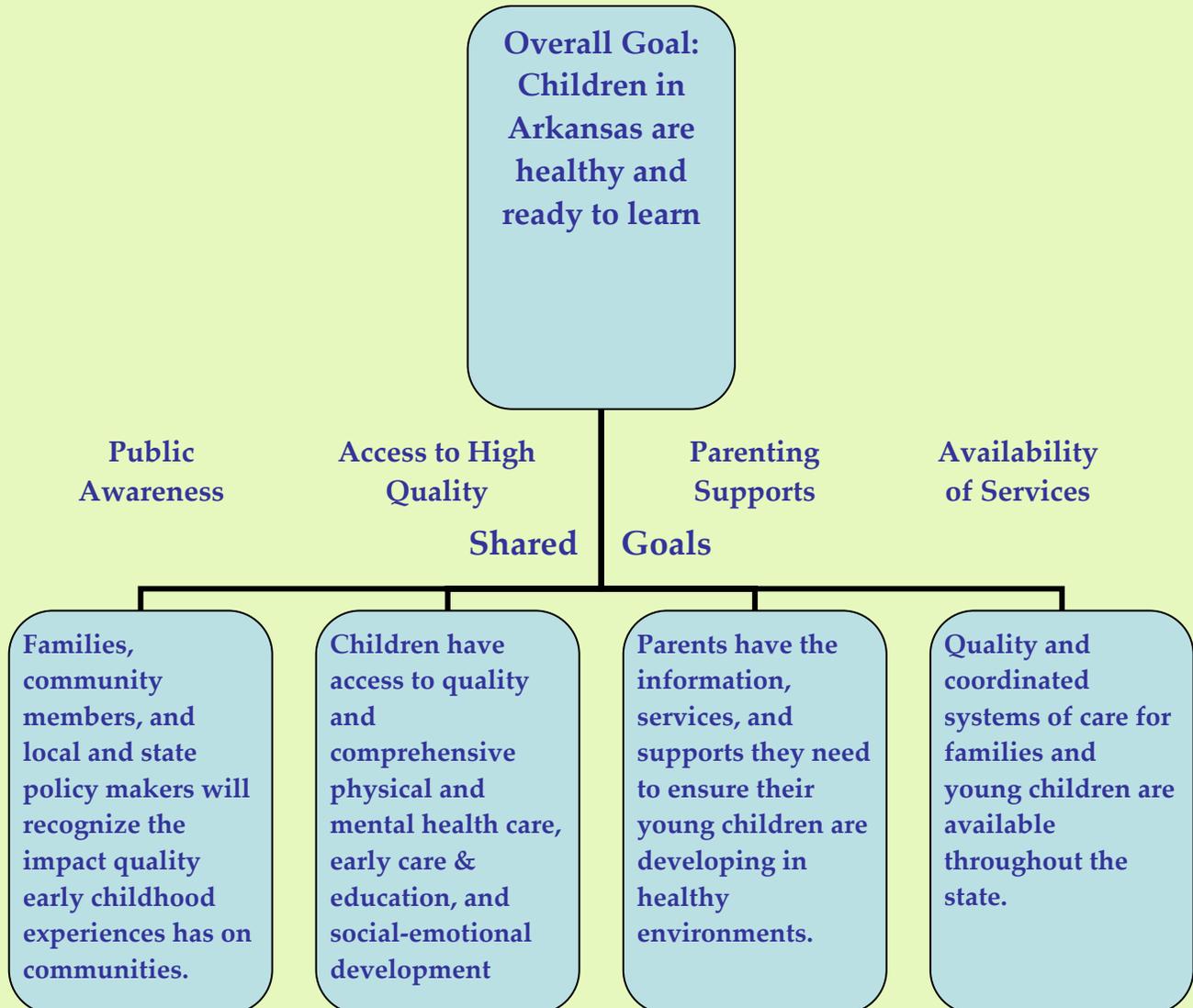
School Readiness Indicators by Work Group

Early Care & Education Work Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Numbers (%) of children served in quality care • Births to mothers with less than 12th grade education • Number (%) of children in poverty • Kindergartners with age appropriate skills and behavior • 4th grade math and literacy proficiency • Children in special education • Employment distribution and average annual earnings
Medical Homes Work Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Numbers of children enrolled in ARkids First • Prenatal Care • Immunization Rates • WIC • Access to health professionals
Social Emotional Work Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child Abuse and Neglect • Access to health (and mental health) professionals • Maternal Depression • Children in special education • Kindergartners with age appropriate skills (social/emotional) and behavior
Family Support & Parenting Education Work Groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poverty rates by family type and presence of children • Child Abuse and Neglect • Food stamp usage • Median Household Income • 4th grade math and literacy proficiency

Shared Goals

Many issues have been determined to be crosscutting, and as such need to be addressed through the partnerships formed across the entire initiative. At first crossover issues seemed problematic, as stakeholders had to seek expertise from other program areas in order to address challenges within their own specific program area. As the process has evolved, stakeholders have come to see other program areas as resources that are integrally necessary to their own area of concern. As a result three critical components of system integration have emerged as key to accomplishing desired long-term outcomes:

- *Shared Goals
- *Enhanced Partnerships, resulting in
- * Effective Strategies



Action Steps to Accomplish Shared Goals

Public Awareness

“Quality Counts” Campaign -- Develop and implement a robust public education campaign that will create a demand for high quality early experiences, and inform parents and informal caregivers about the importance of the first five years.

Access to High Quality

Implement a statewide voluntary Quality Rating System and incentive program for Early Care and Education settings.

Early Childhood Mental Health Initiative – expansion and sustainability

Early Childhood Health Initiative – Begin to provide health consultation to early childhood programs

Parenting Supports

Develop statewide parenting education coordination - Convene task force to define purpose and scope of coordinating body.

Continue to implement *Strengthening Families Through Early Care and Education* throughout the state.

Launch parent website through “Quality Counts” to provide parents with needed information.

Availability of Services

Support and encourage the development of “eligibility wizard” (EQUA Star {Eligibility & Qualification Universal Application})- first incorporating programs within DHHS/DCCECE (“division model”), then incorporating programs from other divisions and agencies, eventually converting to online provision of universal application.

Early Care and Education
Work Group

Primary Issue: Many young children are not receiving the quality early childhood experiences needed to succeed in school.

Major Goals:

- Young children will have access to quality child care programs
- Families of children will have knowledge of high quality early education
- Early educators will have access to systems that support their ability to provide services to all children

Major Activities:

- Implement a statewide Quality Rating System for child care programs
- Implement a Public Education Campaign that will create a demand for high quality child care programs
- Identify and approve curricula for child care programs
- Assure consistent funding is available to support early education goals
- Improve tracking system of professional development

Programs:

- Quality Rating System Initiative
- Quality Counts Public Relations campaign
- Early Childhood Health Initiative
- Curriculum Review Program
- Arkansas Strengthening Families Initiative
- AECPDS (professional development)
- Evaluation
- Economic Impact Study
- Expansion Project for Public Pre-K
- ABC Longitudinal Study
- CDA Scholarship Program
- NAEYC Associate Degree Program

Responsible Parties:

- Quality Rating System Workgroup
- Quality Rating System Advisory Group
- Quality Counts PR Campaign Committee
- Curriculum Review Committee
- Arkansas Department of Health and Human Services
- Division of Health
- Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Education
- Arkansas Department of Education
- Child Care Bureau
- Arkansas Early Childhood Association
- Participating Colleges

Medical Homes
Work Group

Primary Issue: Many young children are not receiving adequate health care.

- Major Goals:**
- Young children will have health insurance
 - Young children will receive adequate health care and preventive services such as immunizations
 - Families of children and early educators will have knowledge of medical home concepts

- Major Activities:**
- Increase access to health insurance through the Quality Rating System for child care programs
 - Ensure child health information forms are completed at all licensed child care facilities
 - Bring together families, early care and education professionals and allied health professionals including physicians to discuss medical home concepts
 - Provide a network of Child Health Care Consultants
 - Provide child care programs access to the immunization registry

- Programs:**
- Quality Rating System Initiative
 - Minimum Licensing Standards Review
 - Informal Learning Collaborative
 - Early Childhood Health Initiative
 - Immunization Registry Program

- Responsible Parties:**
- Quality Rating System Workgroup
 - Arkansas Department of Health and Human Services
 - Division of Health
 - Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Education
 - Program Support and Licensing Units
 - Community Health Promotions Specialists
 - Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families
 - Arkansas Better Chance
 - Medical Homes Advisory Group
 - Arkansas Foundation for Medical Care

**Social-Emotional Health
Work Group**

Primary Issue: Many young children are not developing the social-emotional skills needed to succeed in school.

Major Goals:

- Young children will receive developmental screening including social-emotional health
- Families of children and early educators will have the capacity to prevent and manage mental health problems
- Families of children will have access to mental health services if needed

Major Activities:

- Provide mental health consultation within early care programs
- Assess children for developmental and behavioral health using standardized screening tools
- Support child care programs through the use of Behavior Specialists
- Increase access to mental health services for children with emotional disturbances

Programs:

- Quality Rating System Initiative
- Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation Project
- Early Childhood Health Initiative
- Behavior Specialist Program
- Arkansas Strengthening Families Initiative
- Violence Against Women Program
- ACTION System of Care
- Angels Program
- Arkansas System of Care Assessment and Framework

Responsible Parties:

- Quality Rating System Workgroup
- Social Emotional Advisory and Work Groups
- Arkansas Head Start
- Community Mental Health Centers
- Mid-South Health System
- Arkansas Department of Health and Human Services
- Division of Health
- Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Education
- Arkansas Department of Education/Special Education
- Arkansas Children's Trust Fund
- University of Arkansas Cooperative Extension
- National Zero to Three
- University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences

Family Support Work Group

Primary Issue: Basic needs of many young children (and families) are not being met.

- Major Goals:**
- A single point of entry to systems and services that will link families to needed resources
 - Families of children and early educators will obtain information about protective factors
 - Training and technical assistance for those who serve young children and their families

- Major Activities:**
- Develop an accessible information system
 - Implement *Strengthening Families Self-Assessment* with all child care programs
 - Develop online course that provides information about protective factors for children
 - Offer a research-based, comprehensive curriculum in family support principles

- Programs:**
- Welcome the Children Program
 - Parents as Teachers
 - Quality Rating System Initiative
 - Arkansas Strengthening Families Initiative
 - Promising Practices Program
 - Arkansas State Improvement Grant
 - Family Development Credential Project
 - Arkansas Careers Pathways Initiative
 - Schools of the 21st Century

- Responsible Parties:**
- Quality Rating System Workgroup
 - Family Support Advisory and Work Groups
 - Even Start
 - Parents as Teachers National Center
 - Arkansas Department of Health and Human Services
 - Division of Health
 - Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Education
 - Arkansas Department of Education/Special Education
 - Arkansas Children's Trust Fund
 - University of Arkansas Cooperative Extension
 - National Zero to Three
 - University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences
 - University of Missouri at Kansas City

Parenting Education
Work Group

Primary Issue: Many parenting education opportunities are available but there is no effective coordinated system.

Major Goals:

- Statewide parenting education services are coordinated
- Affordable, accessible, and appropriate parenting education opportunities are available for families
- Consistent funding is available for parenting education

Major Activities:

- Create a statewide parenting education coordinating body
- Include family/child activities in Quality Rating System
- Include family feedback in the Quality Campaign
- Implement a parent mentor network
- Develop a tool kit for parents
- Develop an incentive plan for business participation

Programs:

- Parents as Teachers
- Quality Rating System Initiative
- Hometown Health Coalitions Network
- Arkansas State Improvement Grant
- Family Development Credential Project
- Arkansas Strengthening Families Initiative

Responsible Parties:

- Quality Rating System Workgroup
- Parent Education Advisory and Work Groups
- Even Start
- Parents as Teachers National Center
- Arkansas Department of Health and Human Services
- Division of Health
- Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Education
- Arkansas Department of Education/Special Education
- Arkansas Parent Training and Information Center
- University of Arkansas Cooperative Extension
- Arkansas Parent Mentor Network
- Healthy Hometown Coalitions
- University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences