

PARENTS' GUIDE TO PRE-K ADVOCACY



**GOOD2
GREAT**
Expanding Quality
Pre-K in Arkansas



Parents and Guardians: you are the most important person in your young child's life. You are already doing great things to help your child succeed. You are your child's most valuable asset when it comes to making sure their needs are met. We want to help you find the resources you need to prepare your child for life in and out of the classroom.

WHAT IT MEANS TO BE AN ADVOCATE FOR YOUR CHILD

Being an advocate simply means that you know what your child needs. It means that you are willing to speak up or ask questions when those needs are not met. An advocate does not need a fancy title or special training. The everyday things that you do for your child's well-being make you an advocate. Attending a parent meeting at your school or going to a parent/teacher conference are great examples of advocacy. But understanding how your children learn and interacting with them daily matters just as much. Making sure they have the tools, experiences, and skills they need is important too. When you can do those things, they will thrive at home, in school, and in life.

THE POWER OF PARENTS

The early years of a child's life matter most for growing and learning. Their young minds are developing quickly. Almost eighty percent of brain development happens before children even enter kindergarten!¹ So, what you do now helps them as they get older. You are your child's first teacher. To teach and advocate for your child, you have to know your child. This means you understand what makes him special and unique.

Here are a few things you can do every day at home to help your child learn.

Play with your child. Do something fun with your children that they enjoy. Find time to play with them every day. When children play, they discover the world around them. They learn how to get along with people and how to solve problems. They learn and practice language and math. They develop curiosity and self-esteem. For them, it's more than just play.

Talk to your children every day. Words matter a lot for a child's development. Children who hear more words

tend to have higher IQs.² So, talk to your young children as much as possible. Experts say that children should hear at least 30,000 words per day - and it's doable!³ Make time for your child and include your child in what is already happening around you.

- Talk with your children about daily family life - like choosing cereal in the grocery store, sorting laundry, or gathering supplies to give the baby a bath. This gives them a chance to hear more words. You can sing songs together in the car, at bath time, before bedtime, anytime. This helps you engage with your children and exposes them to more words each day. Children are always watching you and asking questions about things you do. That time spent together can turn into a chance to learn.
- You can talk to your children about things you are thinking and doing as you make decisions. Tell them why you are doing the things you do. It is also important to pause and invite children to respond when you talk to them. This ensures that you are talking with your children and not just talking at them. Conversation is back-and-forth: you talk while I listen, then I talk while you listen. These are communication skills that they will need as they grow. Children will use these communication skills to interact with other people like teachers and other children.

Read together often. Reading books together is another great way to help your children hear more words every day. Sometimes, parents are busy. So, it's okay to have someone else reading to your children, too - like a family member, a babysitter, a neighbor or a church member. The more you read to your children, the more words they will learn. They will also learn to love books and reading.

Listen with an open mind. Parents' lives are busy and full of things to do and think about. So listening is a challenge. To listen well, you must put things aside and "tune in" to your child. This means listening to the words and the feelings your child is expressing. Whenever possible, you should get on the same level with your child, face-to-face or eye-to-eye so they know you are tuned in. Listening is not talking. You can't do both at the same time.

Talk with a kind heart. Children learn words from adults who talk with them. But the feelings you express are as important as the number of words that children hear. Children tend to hear more words like, "don't do that," "put that down," or "I'm going to spank you."⁴ These are not positive words. Over time, that can hurt a child's self-esteem. It affects their attitude and how they treat other people. Instead, ask questions to get more information about what they are telling you. You can also explain to them why what they're doing is wrong. Have them think about possible reasons things happened as they did and possible solutions to problems. Praise your child when they do something good and tell them why it was a good thing to do.

THE POWER OF COMMUNITY

As a parent, you are not in this alone. Your children learn from you. But they, also learn from their surroundings. Your children need you to help make sure the world around them is safe and supportive. This includes neighborhoods, schools, businesses, and government. They should do everything they can to keep children healthy, safe, and prepared for the future. What can you do to ensure this?

- Talk with other parents about the issues your child faces. Find out if there are any groups working on that issue. Ask questions. Discuss needs of your child with a teacher, school principal, counselor, or other people who work with your child.
- Join neighborhood groups or create one. Neighborhood groups meet to talk about problems or the great things happening where they live. You can also meet your neighbors and build positive relationships with them. By joining or starting a neighborhood group, you can share your thoughts, get to know your neighbors and work together to make your community better.
- Volunteer at your child's school when you have free time.
- Keep recreational places safe and clean for children to play.
- Take part in decision-making groups. Share your ideas and concerns with those who are in positions of influence. These are folks like school board members, a principal, or a lawmaker.

WHERE DECISIONS HAPPEN

AT YOUR CHILD'S SCHOOL

Your children spend most of their time at school. So it is important to know what is going on there. You need to know if your child's needs are being met. Here are some ways to do this.

- **Build a relationship with your child's teacher, the school staff, and principal.** Make sure they know who you are so that you feel comfortable talking to them and getting information regularly. You can email them, visit the school, or call.
- **Go to parent/teacher conferences or school open houses** so you can learn more about the school and discuss your children's strengths and challenges with their teachers.
- **Go to school board meetings.** Decisions about your school are being made here. This is a good opportunity to listen in.
- **Vote in school board elections.** Learn who the candidates are, and take part in making sure that these elected officials represent you and your child's school.
- **Use the parent center and other school resources that your district offers.** If you are unsure what is available, ask your child's principal about it.

A real example: In Prescott, Arkansas, parents saw that their schools needed more diverse teachers. So, the parents came together and talked to the superintendent about it. The superintendent then made a committee to create a minority teacher recruitment plan. Because the parents talked to the superintendent, a parent was added to the committee.

AT CITY HALL

City councils are responsible for the things outside of the school building like the local playground, the library, or the swimming pool. Here are some ways you can have a say in what your child needs from your community.

- **Find out who your city council member is and meet that person.** Tell your council member what you like and don't like about your community and what your child needs.
- **Go to city council meetings and hear what they are talking about.** Speak up at a council meeting on any concerns you have. Be sure to mention the good things in your community, too.
- **Vote in local elections.** Take part in making sure that elected officials will represent you well.

A real example: On August 25, 2015, nearly 50 youth and adults came together in Marvell, Arkansas. They talked about needs in their community – like pre-K, health care, and safety. This helped parents understand things and give input about their needs. This will be one of many parent conversations in Marvell.

AT THE STATE CAPITOL

Legislators make the laws that make life better (or worse) for you and your children. They decide how much money goes toward things like child care, after school programs, and insurance coverage for children. They also vote on how those programs work.

- **Find out what is going on at the Capitol.** You can watch the news, read newspapers, or visit the Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families website to read short updates (www.aradvocates.org).
- **Contact your lawmakers and tell them how you feel.** You can write them, call, Tweet or interact with them on Facebook. Hold them accountable by telling them how you want them to vote and what laws to make.
- **Visit the state Capitol!** All committee and legislative meetings are open to the public. So, you can see firsthand what is happening and even talk to lawmakers in person.
- **Vote in elections.**

A real example: In 2015, lawmakers talked about giving money to pre-K. So, parents and community leaders called and emailed the governor's office. They told him that they wanted to see more money for pre-K. It worked! Pre-K received a funding boost of \$3 million.



In 2015, you qualify for Head Start if:		In 2015, you qualify for ABC if:	
You have this many people in your household:	You make this amount of money or less each year:	You have this many people in your household:	You make this amount of money or less each year:
1	\$11,770	1	\$23,540
2	\$15,930	2	\$31,860
3	\$20,090	3	\$40,180
4	\$24,250	4	\$48,500
5	\$28,410	5	\$56,820
6	\$32,570	6	\$65,140
7	\$36,730	7	\$73,460
8	\$40,890	8	\$81,780

RESOURCES TO HELP YOUR CHILD SUCCEED

EARLY EDUCATION PROGRAMS

The best thing you can do is place your child in a quality pre-K program. Early education helps your child be more successful in school. You can choose the right pre-K program for your child. There are privately owned centers and Head Start programs. Some school districts have pre-K classes. There are also home visiting programs, such as HIPPPY. For parents who have trouble paying for pre-K, there are programs to help cover the cost. These programs are paid for by federal and state governments.

PRE-K PROGRAMS IN ARKANSAS

Head Start is the pre-K program funded by the federal government. Kids whose families can't afford to pay for pre-K can go to Head Start for free. We have a chart below to help you see if you qualify. Homeless children and kids in the foster care system can also go to Head Start for free. To find the closest Head Start center to you, go to the Arkansas Head Start website: <http://www.arheadstart.org/> or call (501) 371-0740.

Arkansas Better Chance is the pre-K program funded by the state of Arkansas. It also gives free pre-K to kids whose families can't afford to pay for it. The seats in both Head Start and ABC fill up fast. So, it is important that you contact a center that has ABC seats early. To find more about ABC, you can visit this site: www.arkansas.gov/childcare or call: 501-682-9699.

See if you're eligible by looking at the table above.

HIPPY stands for the Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters program. It is a 30-week school readiness program for 3-, 4-, and 5-year-old kids. HIPPY is a home-based program. Program staff members visit the child's home every week to partner with parents. For more information about HIPPY, call the state office at 501-364-3671 or visit their website <http://www.archildrens.org/services/HIPPY>

There are many early childhood programs out there for your children. You can find a program in your area on the Better Beginnings website, www.arbetterbeginnings.com; scroll down to Find Child Care. If paying for child care is difficult, you may be eligible for child care assistance. More information is available at <http://humanservices.arkansas.gov/dccece/Pages/DCCECE-FAQ's.aspx#2> or by calling 1-800-322-8176.



WHAT IS A QUALITY PROGRAM FOR YOUR CHILD?

Arkansas rates the quality of pre-K and other early childhood programs through **Better Beginnings**. They rate pre-K providers with a three-star scale. On this scale, a one-star rating means that a center meets basic quality standards. A three-star rating means that a center reaches a higher level of quality standards.

When choosing a program for your child, you should ask if:⁵

- the program is **licensed and follows appropriate health and safety standards**.
- the **staff is well trained in early childhood development**. This can be in the form of a college education or training where they learn how to work with children.
- the **environment is age-appropriate**. This means that the equipment, toys, and activities help children learn what all 3- or 4-years-olds should be learning.
- the **groups are small** and there are **enough teachers to care for children**.
- the staff supports children's development by **playing with them and responding to them**.
- children **are learning to use and understand words and enjoy many books**.
- there is a **curriculum that includes observation and individualized instruction**. This means three things. First, teachers have learning experiences planned for every day. Secondly, teachers are watching your children to see what they know and can do. Also, the teachers plan specific activities to help your child learn.
- they **encourage families to be partners in their children's learning**. This means that you work together with the staff to make sure your child is learning at school and at home. They also invite parents to give input on what the children learn and things they do in pre-K.
- they have or can tell you about **well-rounded support services** that help your child and family. This means that they can tell you things your child may need like health or developmental screenings.

Arkansas Better Beginnings thinks about these things when they decide quality levels. Their website keeps a list of the quality places around the state. To find one near you, go to <http://arbetterbeginnings.com/> and click "parents and family." You can also call: 501-682-9699 to find out more about pre-K and other early childhood center's ratings.

PLACES TO GO FOR RESOURCES

There are a lot of groups and websites to support you. Trying to figure out where to go for help can be a lot think about. Here's a list of organizations, what they do, and how you can contact them to get what you need:

PARENT RESOURCES ABOUT PRE-K AND OTHER EARLY EDUCATION SERVICES IN ARKANSAS

Arkansas Head Start: 501-371-0740

<http://www.arheadstart.org/>

You'll find: information about Head Start programs.

Arkansas DHS Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Education: 501-682-8590

www.arkansas.gov/childcare

You'll find: information about Arkansas Better Chance pre-K programs and other early childhood services.

Arkansas Department of Education (ADE): 501-682-4475

<http://www.arkansased.gov/>

You'll find: contact information for schools, school board leaders, and other things like school-based health centers, special education, etc.

Arkansas HIPPY office: 501-364-3671

www.archildrens.org/services/HIPPY

You'll find: information about home-based early childhood services in Arkansas.

Arkansas State University Childhood Services: 870-972-3055

asuchildhoodservices.org

You'll find: workshops for parents and technical assistance for early education staff.

Dennis Development Center – Arkansas Children's Hospital: (501) 364-1830

www.arpediatrics.org/clinical-programs/dennis-developmental-center

You'll find: a place to go for developmental screenings after doctor recommendation.

The First Connections Program – Division of Developmental Disabilities Services: 1-800-643-8258,

<http://humanservices.arkansas.gov/ddds/pages/firstconnectionsprogram.aspx>

You'll find: services and support for babies and toddlers with disabilities. The "1-800" number will put families in touch with a service coordinator in their county.

HEALTH SERVICES FOR YOUR FAMILY

Arkansas Department of Health: 501-661-2000

www.healthy.arkansas.gov/

You'll find: places to go for your child and your family's health needs (shots, mental health, rural health, in home services, services for pregnant women, etc.).

Health Insurance: 501-682-1001

<http://access.arkansas.gov>

You'll find: how to get insurance for your kids through ARKids First. ARKids First includes dental, medical, and eye insurance. This site also tells you how to get insurance for low-income adults through Medicaid or Private Option.

WIC (Women, Infants, and Children): www.healthy.arkansas.gov/programsServices/WIC

You'll find: your nearest health unit, support for healthy foods, and other resources.

OTHER FAMILY SUPPORT SERVICES

Arkansas Department of Human Services: 501-682-1001

<http://humanservices.arkansas.gov>

You'll find: how to get SNAP (or food stamps), how to get cash assistance (TANF), how to get help with your electric bill (home energy assistance), and help while you're in between jobs (transitional employment assistance). Call 800-795-3272 if you experience discrimination and want to report it.

Department of Housing and Urban Development – Little Rock Field Office: 501-918-5700

You'll find: How to get public housing assistance through help with rent (vouchers), housing choice (section 8), and finding fair and safe mixed housing.

Call your local housing authority to file any complaints

Free Tax Help: 1-877-777-4778

www.irs.gov

You'll find: people to help you with taxes and answer your questions. Taxpayer Assistance Centers are in the following areas:

- NW Arkansas: Fayetteville, 479-442-3948
- NE Arkansas: Jonesboro, 870-802-0219
- Central Arkansas: Little Rock, 501-396-5711
- SW Arkansas: Ft. Smith, 479-649-8602

There are VITA (Volunteer Income Tax Assistance) sites that help with tax prep for free. To find the one closest to you, go to <http://irs.treasury.gov/freetaxprep/> and type in your zip code.

VOTING, LAWMAKERS, AND THE STATE CAPITOL

Arkansas Legislature: <http://www.arkleg.state.ar.us/>

You'll find: how to find your senator and representative, phone numbers and email addresses of your lawmakers, when and what time committee meetings are held, bills, and laws.

Arkansas Secretary of State Office: 501-682-1010

www.sos.arkansas.gov

You'll find: how to register to vote, when the elections are held, information about people who are running for office, and how to run for office.

Project Vote Smart: 406-859-8683

www.votesmart.org

You'll find: detailed information about your senator, representative, and congressmen, what issues they support, and how they vote on things.

GETTING INVOLVED IN ADVOCACY - GRASSROOTS ORGANIZING

Arkansas Public Policy Panel: 501-376-7913

www.arpanel.org

You'll find: when meetings will be held about different issues, days to go to the Capitol, and ways to have your voice heard on things you care about.

RESEARCH AND ADVOCACY TOOLS ABOUT EDUCATION IN ARKANSAS

Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families: 501-371-9678

www.aradvocates.org

You'll find: short reports, research, and updates on what is happening at the capitol, people who can answer questions about policies, and chances to take action on things you care about.

Arkansas Campaign for Grade Level Reading: 870-692-3176

www.ar-qlr.net

You'll find: tips, events, and information on how to help your child read and learn on grade level from the time they are born up to 3rd grade.

ONLINE RESEARCH AND ADVOCACY TOOLS ABOUT EDUCATION IN THE UNITED STATES

Child Advocate: www.childadvocate.net

You'll find: resources about mental and physical health issues of kids.

Children's Defense Fund: www.childrensdefense.org

You'll find: newsletters and updates about things parents, lawmakers, and communities need to do to help kids get a fair and safe start in life.

National Association for the Education of Young Children: <http://www.naeyc.org/>

You'll find: resources on children's development from the time they are born to the age of 8.

National Institute of Early Education Research: <http://nieer.org>

You'll find: news and research about young kids in school.

Southern Early Childhood Association: www.southernearlychildhood.org

You'll find: papers, research, and resources about early childhood in the south.

United States Department of Education: www.ed.gov

You'll find: things that the federal government is doing to help young children and how much money they give to Arkansas for education.

NOTES

¹ Center on the Developing Child. In Brief: The Science of Early Childhood Development. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 2007. http://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/briefs/inbrief_series/inbrief_the_science_of_ecd/

² "Smart Talk: Early Language and the Brain." The Economist. February 20, 2014. <http://www.economist.com/blogs/babbage/2014/02/early-language-and-brain>

³ Danielle Wood. "30,000 Words: Is Your Child Getting Enough?" 2009. Education.com http://www.education.com/magazine/article/30000_words/

⁴ Betty Hart and Todd R Risley. "The Early Catastrophe: The 30 Million Word Gap by Age 3." American Educator. Spring 2003.

⁵ Quality definition adapted from the Florida State University Center for Prevention and Early Intervention Policy's "10 Components of Quality Child Care for Infants and Toddlers."

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LEARN MORE ABOUT GOOD 2 GREAT AT WWW.ARADVOCATES.ORG



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