

Early Childhood (0-5)

Early Childhood Education: Positive, encouraging adult-child interactions are important to high-quality early learning, in both home and classroom environments. Children who receive high-quality early childhood education (ECE) are better prepared to succeed in K-12, are more likely to go on to college, and see improved outcomes as adults. But the ECE workforce is facing major challenges, including high turnover, food and economic insecurity, and high levels of depression. There is also a lack of financial incentives that promote professional development and a better-trained workforce. These challenges stem from underfunding of the ECE system and low wages paid to ECE staff. Support for the ECE workforce is necessary to build skills for children's positive social and emotional development.

Health and Education Linked: Ensuring that children receive developmental screenings, referrals, and support services that lead to assessments and treatment improves outcomes for learning and healthy brain development. Infants and toddlers should have access to mental health screenings so that parents and caregivers can address issues early on by nurturing social-emotional learning. The Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnostic and Treatment (EPSDT) provides comprehensive and preventative health services for children under 21 enrolled in Medicaid. For ages birth to 9 months, Arkansas Medicaid requirements cover only five of seven EPSDT visits recommended by the American Academy of Pediatrics Bright Futures program.

What to Ask Candidates

- What are your thoughts on increasing funding to support high-quality infant and toddler programs?
- What are your thoughts on a refundable tax credit for early childhood educators based on their level of education or credentials?
- What can be done to increase the number of well child visits in Arkansas's Medicaid Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnostic and Treatment schedule to meet the American Academy of Pediatrics Recommendations for Preventative Pediatric Health Care?

More than Half of Arkansas's Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Workforce has Less than a Bachelor's Degree, and Average Pay is Well Below Other State Averages

Education Level	Percentage
Less than a bachelor's degree without credentials	34.1%
Less than a bachelor's degree with credentials	28.6%
Any degree in unrelated field	6.4%
Bachelor's degree or higher in related field, regardless of credentials	30.7%

Average Pay Rate in Arkansas	Dollars
ECCE with Associate's degree without credentials	\$24,315
ECCE with Associate's degree with credentials	\$25,459
ECCE with Bachelor's degree in related field, regardless of credentials	\$32,240
All women in Arkansas	\$37,733
ECCE with Master's degree or higher in related field, regardless of credentials	\$40,206
Arkansas kindergarten teachers	\$45,850
All men in Arkansas	\$51,694