

# Early Childhood Education:

## WRF's Impact, Influence, and Leverage



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## WRF Leadership in Early Childhood Education

The Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation (WRF) believes all Arkansas children should have the best start in life possible. Research shows that investments in children's earliest years help prepare them for success in school, work, and life. Arkansas must close achievement gaps, strengthen schools, and better prepare its workforce to ensure that every Arkansan can share in prosperity.

Only 31 percent of Arkansas third graders are reading on grade level according to the National Assessment of Educational Progress. Closing the third-grade reading proficiency gap would help Arkansas become one of the top five states in indicators of economic, family, and child well-being. WRF is committed to the goal that every Arkansas third-grader will read on grade level, allowing our state to:

- **Increase educational attainment** with near universal high school graduation rates
- **Increase post-secondary educational attainment** with more students graduating from college with certificates and degrees
- **Create jobs** with family-supporting wages through businesses started or expanded in response to the high-skilled workforce
- **Grow the economy** as higher family incomes lead to increased spending and state tax revenues



WRF's investments in early childhood education positively **impact** families, schools, and communities; **influence** programs, policy, and public discourse; and **leverage** public and private dollars. In support of thriving Arkansas children, the Foundation and its partners have:

- Brought exemplary **whole-family models** for early childhood education to the state, such as the **School of the 21st Century (21C)** model created at Yale University and implemented in Arkansas in 1992, resulting in Arkansas's early childhood education rank soaring from near the bottom to near the top of the national list.
- Invested in **research and advocacy** to improve access and quality of early education, such as the partnership between the Pew Charitable Trusts and **Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families** that led to the passage of Act 528, requiring the state to invest in evidence-based models for its home visiting programs.
- Built movements that **cast a new vision** for our state's early childhood system through initiatives such as the **Arkansas Campaign for Grade-Level Reading (AR-GLR)**, a statewide campaign launched by WRF and partners in 2011 that is committed to early



# Early Childhood Education

## WRF's Impact, Influence, and Leverage

literacy success for every Arkansas student. Among 300+ communities nationwide, *AR-GLR* has been recognized by the national Campaign for Grade-Level Reading as a Pacesetter four years in a row. Momentum from and partnership with the campaign led to Arkansas Governor Hutchinson announcing his support for third-grade reading proficiency in 2017.

### WRF's Impact

The Foundation's investments in early childhood have had a positive impact on individuals, families, schools, and communities in Arkansas. Select examples of WRF's **impact** are listed below:

- **Arkansas Department of Human Service's Early Childhood Division.** In 1992, WRF supported the development of the Department's Parents as Teachers program to support parent engagement in early student learning. In 2001, WRF granted \$1.5 million to sustain the program after state budget cuts.
- **School of the 21st Century (21C) Network.** 21C was created at Yale University in 1988. This model transformed public schools into year-round, multi-service centers with an emphasis on early childhood education and a comprehensive whole-child approach. In 2001, WRF invested \$3.2 million to create a 21C network in Arkansas in partnership with Yale and has provided additional grants that totaled \$3 million to assess and expand Arkansas's 21C Network. The state leveraged resources and used a national model to implement 21C in one-fifth of public pre-K and elementary schools, and Arkansas's ranking on early childhood education soared from near the bottom to near the top of the national list.
- **Make Every Day Count.** Since 2014, WRF has granted \$200,000 to the **Make Every Day Count** initiative through a partnership with *AR-GLR* and **Attendance Works**, the national policy and practice expert on school attendance. In Arkansas, one in 10 kindergarten and first-grade students are chronically absent, which means students miss 10 percent or more of a school year. Since its launch in Arkansas, Make Every Day Count has grown to support more than 40 school districts around the state to build the case for school and educator interventions that increase attendance and reduce chronic absence. With WRF's investment, Monitor Elementary School in Springdale reduced its chronic absence rate from 19 percent to six percent within two years by developing positive, culturally sensitive interventions and school policies.




# Early Childhood Education

WRF's Impact, Influence, and Leverage

## WRF's Influence

Throughout its history, the Foundation has positively influenced public discourse, programmatic best practices, and policy pertaining to early childhood education. Select examples of WRF's **influence** are listed below:

- **Arkansas Home Visiting Campaign.** In 2012, WRF awarded \$80,000 to the Pew Charitable Trusts, with a subgrant to Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families (AACF), to increase the impact and accountability of Arkansas's home visiting investments. Through strategic policy and advocacy, Pew and AACF led the passage of Act 528 of 2014 that requires 90 percent of the state's investment in voluntary home visiting to support evidence-based models. The state currently invests in four evidence-based models: Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters (HIPPY) USA, the Nurse Family Partnership, Parents as Teachers, and Healthy Families America.
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- **AACF.** AACF was established in 1977 with core support from WRF. The Foundation continues to fund AACF for policy and advocacy leadership on early childhood education. AACF is a leader in statewide advocacy for Arkansas Better Chance (ABC) funding, the Arkansas Home Visiting Campaign, school attendance and out-of-school suspension policies, and many other issues affecting early literacy. In the most recent legislative session, AACF supported six specific bills that would impact early education and successfully advocated for \$4.3 million to create a new grant program supporting high-quality pre-K seats, tutoring, and out-of-school learning opportunities in high-poverty school districts.
  - **Arkansas Opportunity to Learn Campaign.** Since 2009, WRF has awarded \$625,000 to the Schott Foundation for Public Education for Arkansas's participation in the National Opportunity to Learn Network. The **Arkansas Opportunity to Learn Campaign (AR-OTL)** is a network committed to strengthening the outcomes of public education in Arkansas. AR-OTL's core partners are AACF, the Arkansas Public Policy Panel, the Arkansas United Community Coalition, and the Rural Community Alliance. Through subgrants, communications support, and technical assistance, this grassroots coalition has achieved significant policy wins such as Act 1059, a law that bans out-of-school suspensions and expulsions in most cases for K-5 students in Arkansas.

# Early Childhood Education

## WRF's Impact, Influence, and Leverage

- **AR-GLR.** In 2012, WRF founded *AR-GLR*, a statewide initiative to ensure all Arkansas students read at grade level by the end of third grade. *AR-GLR* engages stakeholders to address parent and community engagement, school readiness, attendance, and summer learning to move the needle on early literacy outcomes. Since founding *AR-GLR*, the Foundation has invested nearly \$3 million into the Campaign's operations, advocacy, strategic communications, technical assistance, and place-based strategies. *AR-GLR* is managed in partnership with AACF, the Arkansas Community Foundation, and an advisory committee of more than 25 organizations.
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- **ForwARD Arkansas (ForwARd).** In 2014, WRF partnered with the Walton Family Foundation and Arkansas Department of Education to create a new vision for the state by launching *ForwARd*. Through a process that involved approximately 100 hours of expert interviews, 8,500 surveys, and 550 focus group participants, *ForwARd* developed a comprehensive plan for public education in Arkansas and cast a bold vision that every Arkansas student will graduate high school prepared for success in college and the workplace. Among *ForwARd*'s seven focus areas is high-quality pre-K. With other WRF early education partners, *AR-GLR* and AACF, *ForwARd* has advocated for policies that ensure all students, starting with those in highest need, have access to high-quality early childhood learning opportunities so they arrive at kindergarten ready to learn.
  - **Arkansas Educational Television Network (AETN)/Talk, Read, Sing.** In 2016, WRF awarded \$75,000 to AETN to support *Talking is Teaching: Talk, Read, Sing*, a public awareness and parent engagement strategy led by *AR-GLR* to empower parents and caregivers of children ages zero to five to talk, read, and sing with their children to promote positive child development. The initiative uses communications via billboards, bus signs, posters, and other collateral and provides tools for up to 6,000 parents of young children in Little Rock and Eudora to help them talk, read, and sing to their children.
  - **Reading Initiative for Student Excellence (R.I.S.E.) Arkansas.** In December 2016, Governor Asa Hutchinson announced support for the goal of third-grade reading proficiency for every Arkansas student through momentum from *AR-GLR*. Shortly thereafter, Governor Hutchinson and the Arkansas Department of Education announced *R.I.S.E. Arkansas*, a public-private partnership committed to literacy success for Arkansas students. The goal of R.I.S.E. Arkansas is to create a culture of reading by assisting parents with reading at home and increasing the depth of knowledge for teachers in the science of reading instruction.

## WRF's Leverage

# Early Childhood Education

## *WRF's Impact, Influence, and Leverage*

WRF has leveraged additional public and private investments beyond its own resources to ensure quality early childhood education for all Arkansas students. Select examples of WRF's **leverage** are listed below:

- **Arkansas Community Foundation.** In 1976, WRF, in partnership with a number of community leaders throughout the state, established the Arkansas Community Foundation. The Community Foundation is a key partner in Good to Great, *AR-GLR*, and many of the Foundation's early childhood education strategies and initiatives. The Foundation has leveraged the resources of the Community Foundation in support of its mission by repurposing an existing endowment at the Community Foundation to support *AR-GLR*'s summer learning strategies.
- **Good to Great.** In 2014, WRF leveraged a \$1.2 million investment from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation to increase access to high-quality early childhood care in Arkansas by providing \$300,000 to the Arkansas Community Foundation and brokering a partnership between the Community Foundation, AACF, the Arkansas Public Policy Panel, Arkansas State University, and the University of Arkansas Clinton School of Public Service Center for Community Philanthropy to implement the **Good to Great** initiative. Together, these partners developed a model for improved early childhood education at 13 public and private childcare centers in Prescott and Marvell, Arkansas.
- **High-Quality Pre-K Expansion.** The Arkansas Better Chance program provides early care and education for 24,000 mostly three- and four-year-old children from low-income families. In 2015, the U.S. Department of Education announced \$1 billion in Preschool Development Grants. WRF funds were used to resource a grant-writer that contributed to the Arkansas Better Chance program being awarded \$60 million to add almost 1,400 new pre-K slots and increase services for roughly 1,500 children. In addition to new federal funding, Arkansas legislators increased funding for the Arkansas Better Chance program by \$3 million during the 2015 and 2017 legislative sessions with advocacy support from WRF grantee partners.
- **HIPPY USA.** In 2016, WRF awarded \$72,000 to develop and pilot a home visiting curriculum for two-year old children in support of the school readiness goal of *AR-GLR*. Through the development of an evidence-based two-year-old curriculum, HIPPY USA will be able to leverage nearly \$8 million in existing Arkansas Better Chance program funding to provide home visiting to more than 1,000 two-year-olds in Arkansas.

# Early Childhood Education

*WRF's Impact, Influence, and Leverage*

## Where Do We Go From Here?

As we near the end of Moving the Needle (MTN) 2.0 the WRF Board and staff will reflect on outcomes, analyzing and interpreting lessons learned, and plan for the future through a three-year **Reflection, Analysis, and Planning (RAP)** process. RAP will culminate with the adoption of the Foundation's next strategic plan.

During the RAP process, we will dig deep into the role that investments in early childhood education have played in achieving the MTN vision and goals. As we evaluate the impact of our strategy, we will strive to answer the following questions:

- How have investments in **early childhood education** supported the change we seek through MTN, and where has it fallen short?
- What is the scope of our state, regional, and national network for change in **early childhood education**?
- Are we making progress as quickly as possible, and does quickly mean effectively?

Throughout its history, WRF has valued the importance of early childhood education as a lever for comprehensive change. These values and our legacy guide us through each phase of RAP.