



Literacy



Math



Science



**A NOTE FROM
KELLI HILBURN**
PROGRAM ADMINISTRATOR

Children are born learning and don't stop. This important aspect of child development motivates us to provide high-quality learning environments year-round. This extends to our outdoor play areas as play is the primary way children learn.

In your quest to **reach for the stars**, you've created safe playgrounds that allow children to explore the world. These areas make their time outdoors fun and filled with learning. Your commitment to making every place where children are present havens of learning is inspiring.

I had the pleasure of presenting two of your colleagues with the Arkansas Outstanding Early Childhood Professional award. This award, which began in 1988, recognizes individuals who make significant contributions to creating high-quality learning experiences for children in their care. Keep reading to see their stories.

As you keep reading through this edition of *The Buzz*, you'll find indoor **math activities** perfect for those days when it's too hot to be outside for long periods, see the benefits of our **Star Kits**, learn about a child care assistance program available to you, and find information about an upcoming **summit**. You'll also see the latest updates from the early care and education field and the latest star approvals.

Let's make this summer one to remember with outdoor play and positive learning experiences.

Until next time,

Kelli Hilburn
BETTER BEGINNINGS PROGRAM ADMINISTRATOR
OFFICE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD



JOIN US IN OUR GOAL TO
REACH FOR THE STARS
CLICK TO LEARN MORE



CONGRATULATIONS

The 2024 Arkansas Outstanding Early Childhood Professionals are **Dr. Physhuna Jones** and **April Middleton**! Congratulations on being recognized by your colleagues for your passion and dedication to the children and families of Arkansas.

Dr. Jones is the director of **Homer Adkins Pre-K Center** (4-Star) in Jacksonville. She has over 23 years of experience in education and is a strong advocate and cheerleader for the young children in her care.



April is the owner and a teacher at ABC Academy (6-Star) of Valley Springs in Harrison. Her facility is accredited by the National Association for Family Child Care. April has 20 years of experience in education and serves as a model to other early care and education providers for creating high-quality learning environments.



VIDEO CORNER

WATCH NOW 

Unsure about reaching for the next star level? Watch the video below to hear why some of your colleagues did. Then, check out our [provider tools](#) for resources to help you reach for the stars.



LEARNING RESOURCES

PLAY, LEARN, EXPLORE



Let's Make Music

Music is math and this resource shows you how. Have fun measuring and build instruments from the things you can find at home. Then, watch the children groove to their own beat.

[View Resource](#)



3 Paths To Math

Hands-on learning experiences are a great way to help children grasp key math concepts. This resource allows children to bake, book, and build their way into math skills.

[View Resource](#)



Sorting Sacks & Similar Stuff

The ability to organize things by similarities is important for developing math skills. Use this resource for sorting activities that can help children learn their colors, shapes, sizes, and more.

[View Resource](#)



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

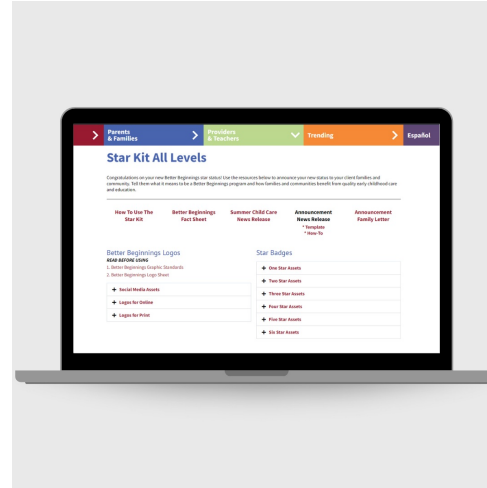
LEARNING IS FUN!



Star Kits

Getting each star level is an achievement worth sharing with your client-families and your community. We've made that easy for you. Check out the Star Kits on our website for a news release, social posts, and more to help you tell the world your exciting news.

[Learn More](#)



Child Care Assistance Program Update

A Child Care Assistance Program is available for Arkansas early care educators for their children who are enrolled in registered or licensed early childhood programs. If you are an early care and education provider who works for a licensed or registered child care provider with an active CCDF Participant Agreement and have young children, you may be eligible! You can find more information about eligibility in [this letter](#).

The application is available in [English](#) and [Spanish](#) and must be submitted to oece.familysupport@ade.arkansas.gov.



Local Leads

We're thrilled to announce that the [second cohort of local early childhood leads](#) has been selected! **These 13 organizations represent an additional 36 counties across the state. Alongside cohort 1, local leads now cover 65 of the 75 counties in Arkansas.** Local Leads are responsible for establishing a comprehensive, localized plan to ensure children and families can access high-quality early childhood education in their communities. If you are a provider in one of these counties, you should expect to hear from your new local lead soon!

If you don't fall within a county selected for Cohort 1 or 2, a final cohort will be selected by the fall. That means every county will have a local lead by October 2024.

[Learn More](#)

CLASS Pilot Program

The [LEARNS](#) Act calls for a "simple, clear, and understandable uniform accountability system...that includes a rating indicative of child outcomes." To fulfill this provision, the Arkansas Department of Education (ADE) is piloting the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) tool, in the counties covered by a local lead. The pilot will begin during the 2024-25 school year. **This does not imply changes to Better Beginnings** but is a chance for Arkansas to explore using a tool that focuses on adult-child interactions.

Three benefits of the CLASS tool include:

- It measures the quality of teacher-child interactions.
- It's correlated to educational outcomes for children.
- It's used in classrooms serving children from birth to 3rd grade across the country.

The pilot will include building a pool of observers, providing teachers and leaders with training and feedback, and collecting information on the current quality of early childhood and education classrooms, as measured by CLASS. This is an opportunity for early childhood leaders and programs to become trained in the tool, practice using the tool, and provide information to ADE on how this tool works in classrooms and for children.

These evidence-based, in-depth measures help to inform a consistent definition of early childhood quality, show how well classrooms support children's growth and development, and provide teachers and leaders with actionable information to improve.

Those participating in the CLASS pilot will receive free training on the importance of interactions and ways to achieve the highest quality care in classrooms. Participants will also receive feedback following observations to improve the classroom quality. The pilot class will also have the opportunity to offer feedback to ADE and shape the direction of quality initiatives for children birth-5 in our state.

Contact your [local lead](#) with any questions regarding the CLASS pilot. If your county is not yet covered by a local lead, contact Lori Bridges at Lori.Bridges@ade.arkansas.gov or 501-682-5557 with any questions.



Active Minds, Active Bodies
Thursday, June 20 and Friday, June 21

Join our friends with [Curricula Concepts](#) to learn about the importance of self-care for yourself and physical activity for young children at no cost to you. The summit will be in Greenbrier, AR.

[Sign Up](#)

June Provider Information Call
Tuesday, June 4

Zoom with representatives from the Office of Early Childhood for the latest news and updates in early care and education. Begins at noon!

[Get Zoom Link](#)

A yellow banner for "BETTER BEGINNINGS STAR APPROVALS" featuring a large circular image of a teacher and children, a star with "QUALITY CARE!", and two smaller circular images of children.

BETTER BEGINNINGS
STAR APPROVALS

QUALITY CARE!

Better Beginnings is focused on making **quality care and education more accessible to families of young children across Arkansas**. More high-quality access means more kids are better prepared for kindergarten. To meet this objective, Better Beginnings encourages providers to improve their facility's Star Ratings. Below are the most recent facilities to advance their quality standards.



The following programs are now **6-star** Better Beginnings providers:

- Bearden Early Head Start Center, Bearden
- DeWitt High Quality Preschool, DeWitt
- Green Forest ABC Preschool, Green Forest



The following programs are now **5-star** Better Beginnings providers:

- Charleston First Step, Charleston
- Spradling Elementary Preschool, Fort Smith
- Star City ABC, Star City
- The After School Program at Elmdale Elementary, Springdale
- The After School Program at Knapp Elementary, Springdale
- The After School Program at Sonora Elementary, Springdale
- The After School Program at Westwood Elementary, Springdale
- Tonya's Tots, Mount Vernon



The following programs are now **4-star** Better Beginnings providers:

- ASU Early Learning Center at Rosewood, West Memphis
- ASU Wynne ABC Preschool, Wynne
- Cavanaugh Elementary Preschool, Fort Smith
- Dawson Co-op/ Bauxite ABC, Bauxite
- Huntsville Pre-K, Huntsville
- Osceola School District Preschool, Osceola
- Step by Step Learning Center, Perryville
- The After School Program at Walker Elementary, Springdale



The following programs are now **3-star** Better Beginnings providers:

- Bumble Bee Academy, North Little Rock
- Deta Freshstart Academy LLC, Little Rock
- Lake Point Kiddie Cottage, Maumelle
- Little Fishers Preschool, Huntsville
- The After School Program at Smith Elementary, Springdale
- The After School Program at Turnbow Elementary, Springdale
- The After School Program at Tyson Elementary, Springdale
- The House of Harmony, Little Rock
- Victory Childcare Center, El Dorado



The following programs are now **2-star** Better Beginnings providers:

- Home Away From Home Child Care, Jonesboro
- Learning Nest Preschool El Dorado
- Learning Station Child Development Center, Fouke

- Ouachita Child Enrichment Center, Camden

ONE-STAR PROVIDERS

There are no new **1-star** Better Beginnings providers.

Level Up Resource

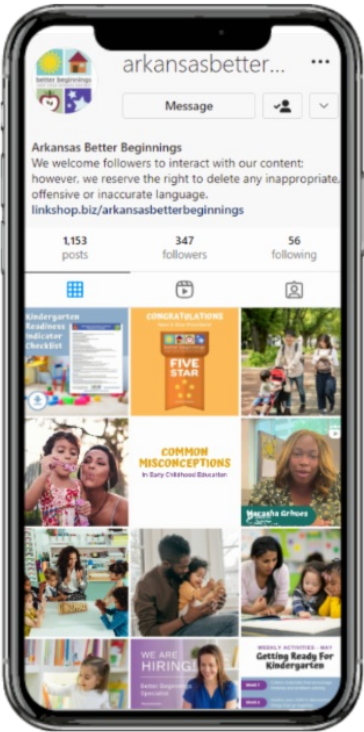
Looking to increase your star level? Check out our [Provider Tools](#) to get started!

[Learn More](#)



Better Beginnings means better opportunities. Investing in quality care and education for all Arkansas children creates better opportunities for our children, families, workforce, and communities.

[Visit Our Website](#)



FOLLOW US FOR MORE RESOURCES



Better Beginnings is Arkansas' tiered quality rating and improvement system for child care, early education, and school-age programs that have gone above and beyond the state minimum requirements. Better Beginnings is administered by the Arkansas Department of Education and Office of Early Childhood.



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