



Southern Regional Action Plan to Improve the Quality of Early Care and Education

Survey on the Status of Implementation Efforts

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Goal 1: All children and families will have the benefit of a quality, comprehensive and coordinated early care and education system.

1.1 Public policy at the federal, state and local level will require planning and coordination across major systems to improve quality, including Head Start, state pre-kindergarten, subsidized child care and licensing.

Action taken between July 1, 2003, and June 30, 2004

All items noted in the previous year report continue. The School Readiness Indicators Initiative was a cross agency project to study indicators effecting young children and their readiness for school. Indicators were identified in four specific categories: Ready Children, Ready Families, Ready Communities and Ready Schools. A press conference was held on April 16, 2004, with the Governor announcing the release of the publication "Getting Ready For School" with a focus on the recent action of the legislature in appropriating \$40 million for Pre-K services for children ages 3 and 4 years in families up to 200% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL). In each area data was reported to provide a long-term look at the inter-workings of policy effecting young children and their families. Data collected and tracked was useful in developing the plan for Pre-K expansions. The coordinated work of the initiative continues and has been incorporated in the Early Childhood Systems Planning Initiative.

Action taken between January 1, 2001, and June 30, 2003

The President's Good Start, Grow Smart initiative which is envisioned as a Federal-State partnership that creates linkages between CCDF, including funds set aside for quality, and State public and private efforts to promote early learning. We meet the intent of the initiative in our state and have implemented training of the early learning guidelines.

In February 2002, the State Board of Education approved the Core Quality Component Model for use in all Arkansas Better Chance Programs. This model increased reimbursement for the public Pre-K program based on the following components: Highly educated staff with salary and fringe benefits, low staff-child ratio, developmental assessment; professional development for staff; and parent involvement and engagement. This was a joint effort of early childhood professionals, state agency staff, Head Start Collaboration office, Pre-K programs and child care staff.

Credentials are now offered for the Infant Toddler and School Age Professional Development System. CEU's or College Credit is offered with all training on the SPECTRUM.

Collaboration with partners has resulted in the development of "Welcome the Children" training for child care providers and early education professionals who serve children and their families who speak Spanish as their primary language. This training includes cultural diversity, assessing children for possible developmental delays, and second language acquisition.

Early learning guidelines for infant and toddler age children, including strategies and activities that caregivers may use to encourage children's learning have been developed. State-wide training for implementation will occur during 2003.

Family Connections is a packet of materials designed to connect families of children aged three to five to the program in which their children are enrolled. The packet contains thirty-two sets of activities, with a common focus and is based on benchmarks from one or more of the five developmental learning strands identified in the Arkansas Early Childhood Education Framework.

A formal agreement is in place with partners, Department of Education, Head Start and the State Library system to encourage and support library use by early childhood programs. The Division trains librarians in the use of their "Story a Month" guides.

The Division is participating in several National Initiatives including the Social Emotional Learning Center grant. A collaborative work group has been established including Head Start, Division of Mental Health, Division of Child Care and Early Education, Arkansas Department of Education, Division of Developmental Disabilities, Department of Education Special Education, Division of Medical Services, and private and public providers of children's mental health services.

We have also been accepted to participate in the Maternal and Child Health Grant for Systems Development in Early Care and Education. There are several components including increasing access to medical homes; better mental health and social emotional development; supporting high quality child care and early childhood education and providing increased parent education and family support services.

The Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Education has assumed the role of lead agency for the state's Healthy Child Care America Grant effective February 2003. Coordination will result in revising the Healthy Children's Handbook, development of a Child Care Licensing Handbook comparing standards and a provider curriculum regarding the social/emotional development of children birth to five.

Arkansas is participating in the Zero to Three sponsored National Infant-Toddler Initiative. Participating partners will develop a strategic plan to improve the infant-toddler care in our state.

The Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Education and Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families serve as joint administrators of the Arkansas team for the School Readiness Indicators Initiative. This is a multi-state initiative that uses child well-being indicators to build a change agenda in states and local communities in order to improve school readiness and ensure early school success.

The Department of Education is managing a pilot project in September 2003 that will implement new and uniform assessment measure for children entering kindergarten, based on the work of the School Readiness Indicators Initiative, the Early Childhood Education framework, Head Start Performance standards, and Pre-K ELLA. Representatives from Head Start, Arkansas Better Chance, Even Start, DHS Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Education, the Department of Education, and private child care providers all worked together to agree upon assessment standards for this project.

The Arkansas Early Childhood Commission (Governor appointed statutory children's cabinet) and the State Board of Education appointed a work group to review and revise

the Early Childhood Quality Approval/Accreditation standards for early childhood programs in Arkansas. This group includes representatives from Head Start, the Department of Education, the Department of Health, and the Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Education.

Action taken prior to December 31, 2000 (the Southern Regional Task Force on Child Care Quality Improvement Initiative began January 1, 2001)

Arkansas has worked across major systems to improve quality for the past four years. The Arkansas Department of Education, the Arkansas Department of Higher Education, the DHS Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Education, and the Head Start Collaboration Project joined together to develop a training program that addresses the issue of pre-literacy skills. What emerged was the Pre-K Early Learning Literacy in Arkansas Initiative (Pre-K ELLA). The joint efforts of all concerned resulted in this 30 hour comprehensive training through use of CCDF quality funds. The training is delivered free of charge all across the state, in Arkansas universities, community colleges and technical institutes.

Early Childhood Education Framework/Strategies and Activities are used extensively throughout the state. Training in curriculum development based on the framework continues to be offered state-wide as a part of the Child Care Endorsement Project. The Early Learning Guidelines include a developmental Rating Scale as a companion piece based on the five developmental strands. For each of the learning strands, benchmarks are identified and strategies and activities along with skills and behaviors that are observable.

Home Visiting Programs HIPPPY (Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters) and PAT (Parents as Teachers) focus on parents who stay home with their children, and also assist parents in becoming actively involved in their child's learning.

Early Childhood Special Education/Arkansas Department of Education and the Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Education entered into a formal agreement to ensure that Child Development Association students have training to qualify them to serve as paraprofessionals in local education agencies (LEA).

Professional Development - In 1997 working in collaboration with the Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Education and Department of Education, the Arkansas Head Start Collaboration Project organized a Staff Development Work group that consisted of thirty representatives from institutions of Higher Education, Head Start Grantees, community child care programs, education service cooperatives and early childhood programs. Key points of discussion included availability of training opportunities, the need for a state registry, linkage of advanced training experiences to benefits, and the need for involvement of professional associations. This group of committed early childhood professionals has grown to include a lengthy list of stakeholders including: partnering state agencies, the business community, parents/families, public Pre-Kindergarten, resource and referral programs, center based programs, family child care home providers, faith based programs, Department of Labor, Bureau of Apprenticeship

and Training, and Workforce Education. Representatives from these groups continue to meet and work in various committees to assume the challenge of supporting maintaining and guiding the Arkansas Early Professional Development System (AECPDS) including the Practitioner Registry and the Training Registry.

The State Early Childhood Quality Approval/Accreditation standard has been in place for several years. The programs are rated each year based on the ECERS rating scale.

1.2 Public policy at the federal, state and local level will support families by linking early care and education programs to health coverage, physical and mental health care, nutrition, economic support, transportation and parenting education services.

Action taken between July 1, 2003, and June 30, 2004

All actions noted in previous year report continue. The Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems planning project has established five working groups. These groups are responsible for developing the long-range plan for early care and education in Arkansas. The work areas include Family Support; Parent Involvement; Medical Home for Children; Social Emotional Development and Early Care and Education. Each group has developed a logic model with the final result "All Children ready for School". Specific projects and initiatives are under development and will be finalized during the next year of planning.

The Social-Emotional group has recommended and the Division has implemented a pilot project supporting Community Mental Health Centers working with Early Care programs to offer services to children in child care settings. Three pilot projects have been selected for a two-year pilot with an evaluation component.

An expanded HIPPY (Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters) program for TANF clients is still operating in 7 pilot counties. The Division is collaborating with DHS/Division of County Operations to ensure high quality services to TANF parents. Participation counts towards the parents work requirement hours.

Action taken between January 1, 2001, and June 30, 2003

Legislation was passed in the Regular 2003 session to allow TEA parents to stay at home with their infants until they reach one year of age provided the child is enrolled in a quality early learning program such as Early Head Start or PAT.

Children's Safety seat training is provided through a collaboration project with Arkansas Children's Hospital to ensure that children are transported safely.

The Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Education provides enhancement grants to schools to retrofit the buses with harnesses to transport younger children.

The number of programs in the Child and Adult Care Food Program has been expanded due to intense outreach across the state.

The Nutrition Advisory Council has been re-developed to support nutrition efforts across the state. Representatives from state and local agencies share information and outreach ideas to support proper nutrition and deal with food scarcity.

Regarding policy in the family assistance area, the full time student hours were reduced from 15 to 12 thus allowing more participation from families.

Family Connections is a packet of materials designed to connect families of children aged three to five to the program in which their children are enrolled. The packet contains thirty-two sets of activities, with a common focus and is based on benchmarks from one or more of the five developmental learning strands identified in the Arkansas Early Childhood Education Framework.

Action taken prior to December 31, 2000 (the Southern Regional Task Force on Child Care Quality Improvement Initiative began January 1, 2001)

Outreach has been conducted for AR Kids First, the state's health insurance program for children.

Strong HIPPY (Home Instruction for Parents of Pre-school Youngsters) and PAT (Parents as Teachers) programs are available in the state to support parents.

Coordination with the Division of County Operations (Administrator of the TANF Block Grant) ensures economic support for families leaving welfare.

1.3 *Federal, state and local policies and systems will ensure coordinated, seamless transitions for children moving among early care and education programs and into kindergarten.*

Action taken between July 1, 2003, and June 30, 2004

Activities reported in the previous year continue. All children entering Kindergarten in Fall of 2004 were screened for readiness. Readiness Skills included those previously developed as a part of the School Readiness Indicators Initiative. The Iowa Inventory was the tool used by Kindergarten teachers. To ensure proper transition activities, the Division has issued a "Getting Ready for Kindergarten Activity Calendar" for parents, and a teacher guide for instruction on the Kindergarten Readiness Indicators.

All children in the Arkansas Better Chance (ABC) programs (Arkansas public Pre-K) will be assessed using Work Sampling Systems, an observational assessment. The assessment will be conducted three times annually and results will be forwarded to the Kindergarten teachers for use in Kindergarten readiness assessments. Currently there are approximately 22,000 children in public school kindergarten, and we anticipate approximately 18,000 to 20,000 children being assessed using WSS on-line.

Action taken between January 1, 2001, and June 30, 2003

The Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Education and Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families serve as joint administrators of the Arkansas team for the School Readiness Indicators Initiative. This is a multi-state initiative that uses child well-being indicators to build a change agenda in states and local communities in order to improve school readiness and ensure early school success.

The Department of Education is managing a pilot project in September 2003 that will implement new and uniform assessment measure for children entering kindergarten, based on the work of the School Readiness Indicators Initiative, the Early Childhood Education framework, Head Start Performance standards, and Pre-K ELLA. Representatives from Head Start, Arkansas Better Chance, Even Start, DHS Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Education, the Department of Education, and private child care providers all worked together to agree upon assessment standards for this project.

Action taken prior to December 31, 2000 (the Southern Regional Task Force on Child Care Quality Improvement Initiative began January 1, 2001)

- ❖ Head Start guidelines established eligibility on an annual basis.
- ❖ Income guidelines for the state Pre-K program are the same as the CCDF program.
- ❖ A developmental checklist was added to the Early Childhood Framework.

Goal 2: Rigorous licensing requirements and/or regulatory processes will be enacted to ensure that children are adequately protected in all early care and education settings.

2.1 States will establish staff-child ratios and maximum group sizes for centers and homes that meet NAEYC¹, NAFCC², APHA³ or AAP⁴ national standards.

Action taken between July 1, 2003, and June 30, 2004

Through the Healthy Child Care America project we have compared all standards especially those in the area of group size. A work group of the Systems Planning effort is developing a proto-type for a tiered regulation and reimbursement systems. Group sizes are being considered in this process. The standards for public Pre-K (Arkansas Better Chance) include ratios and group size standards that meet national standards.

Action taken between January 1, 2001 and June 30, 2003

The Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Education has assumed the role of lead agency for the state's Healthy Child Care America Grant effective February 2003. Coordination will result in revising the Healthy Children's Handbook, development of a Child Care Licensing Handbook comparing standards and a provider curriculum regarding the social/emotional development of children birth to five.

Group sizes have been added to the Minimum Licensing Standards.

Action taken prior to December 31, 2000 (the Southern Regional Task Force on Child Care Quality Improvement Initiative began January 1, 2001)

We did not meet the national standards.

2.2 States will develop and enforce health, fire and safety requirements for all early care and education settings that reflect standards set forth by the APHA and the AAP.

Action taken between July 1, 2003, and June 30, 2004

No action

Action taken between January 1, 2001, and June 30, 2003

The Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Education has assumed the role of lead agency for the state's Healthy Child Care America Grant effective February 2003. Coordination will result in revising the Healthy Children's Handbook, development of a Child Care Licensing Handbook comparing standards and a provider curriculum

regarding the social/emotional development of children birth to five. Upon completion of the Child Care Licensing Handbook comparing the standards, licensing staff will make recommendations about areas of top priority.

Action taken prior to December 31, 2000 (the Southern Regional Task Force on Child Care Quality Improvement Initiative began January 1, 2001)

All standards set forth by the APHA and the AAP are not met.

- 2.3 *State law will require strict enforcement of licensing requirements. States will use a range of sanctions that will include license revocation when a provider is unable or unwilling to meet requirements.***

Action taken between July 1, 2003, and June 30, 2004

No change from previous reporting period.

Action taken between January 1, 2001, and June 30, 2003

Arkansas uses the following range of sanctions when a provider is unable or unwilling to meet the minimum licensing regulations.

- a. Corrective action
- b. Adverse Provisional license
- c. Suspension
- d. Revocation

We also promulgated a new regulation this year that gives the State the ability to revoke a license if any document is falsified or false information is submitted to the Licensing unit.

Action taken prior to December 31, 2000 (the Southern Regional Task Force on Child Care Quality Improvement Initiative began January 1, 2001)

Arkansas uses the following range of sanctions when a provider is unable or unwilling to meet the minimum licensing regulations.

- a. Corrective action
- b. Adverse Provisional license
- c. Suspension
- d. Revocation

- 2.4 *States will conduct at least three unannounced monitoring visits per year to verify compliance with requirements.***

Action taken between July 1, 2003, and June 30, 2004

AR Minimum Licensing Standards require three unannounced licensing visits annually.

Action taken between January 1, 2001, and June 30, 2003

Arkansas Minimum Licensing Standards require three unannounced licensing visits annually.

Action taken prior to December 31, 2000 (the Southern Regional Task Force on Child Care Quality Improvement Initiative began January 1, 2001)

Arkansas Minimum Licensing Standards require three unannounced licensing visits annually.

- 2.5 States will require that child care providers, early childhood teachers and others who have regular access to children in early childhood settings have federal and state background checks using fingerprinting and screening against the state child abuse registry.**

Action taken between July 1, 2003, and June 30, 2004

No action

Action taken between January 1, 2001, and June 30, 2003

Arkansas Minimum Licensing Standards require federal and state background checks using fingerprinting and screening against the state child abuse registry. (All owners and operators must do both - employees residing in the state for less than six years must do both).

Action taken prior to December 31, 2000 (the Southern Regional Task Force on Child Care Quality Improvement Initiative began January 1, 2001)

Arkansas Minimum Licensing Standards require federal and state background checks using fingerprinting and screening against the state child abuse registry. (All owners and operators must do both - employees residing in the state for less than six years must do both).

- 2.6 States will ensure that all licensing and early care and education staff are educated in recognizing signs of child abuse and are trained in the state's child abuse reporting laws.**

Action taken between July 1, 2003, and June 30, 2004

No action

Action taken between January 1, 2001, and June 30, 2003

All state licensing and early care and education staff are trained in recognizing signs of abuse and child abuse reporting laws at least annually.

Action taken prior to December 31, 2000 (the Southern Regional Task Force on Child Care Quality Improvement Initiative began January 1, 2001)

All state licensing and early care and education staff are trained in recognizing signs of child abuse and child abuse reporting laws periodically.

2.7 States will have a well-trained regulatory workforce with average caseloads between 50 and 75 per staff person⁵ and a system capable of providing technical assistance.

Action taken between July 1, 2003, and June 30, 2004

No change from previous reporting period.

Action taken between January 1, 2001, and June 30, 2003

Arkansas has a well-trained licensing workforce with average caseloads between 50 and 75 per staff person. They are capable of providing technical assistance to providers when necessary. We also utilize contracted staff in the area of business development and quality.

Action taken prior to December 31, 2000 (the Southern Regional Task Force on Child Care Quality Improvement Initiative began January 1, 2001)

Arkansas has a well-trained licensing workforce with average caseloads between 50 and 75 per staff person. They are capable of providing technical assistance to providers when necessary. We also utilize contracted staff in the area of business development and quality.

2.8 States will ensure parental right of access to their child's early care and education facilities.

Action taken between July 1, 2003, and June 30, 2004

In Arkansas, parents have access to their child's early care and education program at any time.

Action taken between January 1, 2001, and June 30, 2003

State minimum licensing standards ensure parental right of access to their child's early care and education program at any time they choose.

Action taken prior to December 31, 2000 (the Southern Regional Task Force on Child Care Quality Improvement Initiative began January 1, 2001)

State minimum licensing standards ensure parental right of access to their child's early care and education program at any time they choose.

Goal 3: States will support development of quality early care and education programs for all children.

3.1 States will provide all early care and education providers with resources to help them improve the quality of care and education they deliver, such as technical assistance and training, accreditation support, grants to meet health and safety requirements and grants to support family child care home networks.

Action taken between July 1, 2003, and June 30, 2004

All activities reported in the previous year continue. Arkansas is a participant in the National Infant and Toddler initiative. This group has recommended development of family child care networks to support quality expansion. Additionally, zoning issues

have been a barrier to expansion of family child care and this group is working towards legislative action for a zoning preemption that would allow family care to operate in residential areas.

Resources, both financial and human are targeting improving quality and increasing the numbers of state accredited programs in Arkansas.

Action taken between January 1, 2001, and June 30, 2003

Additionally, grants are now provided to assist providers in attaining and maintaining the State Quality Approval/Accreditation Standard. Plans are being developed this year to establish and support family child care home networks.

Action taken prior to December 31, 2000 (the Southern Regional Task Force on Child Care Quality Improvement Initiative began January 1, 2001)

Arkansas provides supports for providers in the following areas: Scholarships for CDA and college coursework, technical assistance and training in areas of quality, professional development and business aspects.

Enhancement grants are available quarterly to assist providers in meeting and maintaining health and safety requirements.

3.2 States will have Child Care Resource and Referral networks to deliver quality early care and education enhancement support services to providers, such as outreach, training and technical assistance.

Action taken between July 1, 2003, and June 30, 2004

Activities reported in previous year continue. The four local CCR&R's have made application to NACCR&R for Quality Assurance status. Each R&R will be required to meet the NACCRRA standards to continue to receive funding from the Division.

Action taken between January 1, 2001, and June 30, 2003

The four local Resource and Referral agencies work in coordination with the Division in several projects:

- a. A representative serves on the Governor's Family Friendly Employer Initiative steering committee.
- b. Baby boxes are offered to new parents.
- c. The bi-annual market rate survey was completed by the resource and referral agencies this year.
- d. The Regional Conference was hosted by the Arkansas Child Care Resource and Referral network this year and was a huge success.

Action taken prior to December 31, 2000 (the Southern Regional Task Force on Child Care Quality Improvement Initiative began January 1, 2001)

The Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Education works in coordination with the four local Child Care Resource and Referral Networks to support providers and parents.

3.3 States will implement a rating system to recognize providers for incremental levels of quality.

Action taken between July 1, 2003, and June 30, 2004

The Core Quality Model for ABC (Public Pre-K) is still in place, reimbursement rates were increased during the last legislative session. The state was honored by the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) as being one of only three states ranked with 9 of 10 quality standards components in their 2003 report. The 2004 report was issued in November and Arkansas was the only state scoring 10 of 10 in Quality Standards for public Pre-K programs.

Work continues on development of a tiered strategy for quality that includes regulation and reimbursement for all licensed programs.

Action taken between January 1, 2001, and June 30, 2003

In February 2002, the State Board of Education approved the Core Quality Component Model for use in all Arkansas Better Chance Programs. This model increased reimbursement for the public Pre-K program based on the following components: Highly educated staff with salary and fringe benefits, low staff-child ratio, developmental assessment; professional development for staff; and parent involvement and engagement. This was a joint effort of early childhood professionals, state agency staff, Head Start Collaboration office, Pre-K programs and child care staff. This model establishes a higher rate for quality care based on the components listed above.

Action taken prior to December 31, 2000 (the Southern Regional Task Force on Child Care Quality Improvement Initiative began January 1, 2001)

The Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Education in conjunction with the Arkansas Early Childhood Commission examined this issue and recommended at the time that we wait to implement this plan due to changes in the Arkansas Better Chance (Pre-K) model.

3.4 States will implement tax and other incentives to develop and expand early care and education programs that demonstrate a higher level of quality.

Action taken between July 1, 2003, and June 30, 2004

Arkansas continues to have a refundable tax credit for parents using accredited child care settings. Proposals are being drafted to include to percentage refund available.

Action taken between January 1, 2001, and June 30, 2003

Arkansas has a refundable tax credit available for parents who choose to place their children in a quality approved/accredited program.

Action taken prior to December 31, 2000 (the Southern Regional Task Force on Child Care Quality Improvement Initiative began January 1, 2001)

Arkansas has a refundable tax credit available for parents who choose to place their children in a quality approved/accredited program.

3.5 States will use a formal mechanism to seek parental input in program evaluations and will use that information in making policy decisions related to early care and education programs.

Action taken between July 1, 2003, and June 30, 2004

The Division has provided financial support to the Arkansas School Board Association as a cosponsor of the Study Circle project. A study circle topic on Early Care and Education has been used throughout the state. These study circles bring together a wide range of persons including parents to discuss issues affecting local communities in their delivery of services for young children. The Division will use the responses and work plans from the local study circles in making policy decisions regarding the EC Comprehensive Systems planning document.

Action taken between January 1, 2001, and June 30, 2003

We plan to complete additional formal surveys involving parents this year.

Action taken prior to December 31, 2000 (the Southern Regional Task Force on Child Care Quality Improvement Initiative began January 1, 2001)

Two formal surveys have been completed involving parents. One was a Customer Service Satisfaction survey and the other is a Facility Survey.

3.6 States will identify and support the use of effective research based curricula.

Action taken between July 1, 2003, and June 30, 2004

Continued use of Pre-K ELLA (Literacy Training) and Early Care and Education Framework training for all caregivers in the state supports use of effective research based curricula. Selection of Work Sampling Systems supports use of research based curricula, as WSS is a research based assessment that is curriculum neutral. A work group was established in June of 2004 to review the menu of approved curricula and to determine whether others should be added. A final report is expected by July of 2005.

Action taken between January 1, 2001, and June 30, 2003

Arkansas is participating in five National Initiatives with experts available to deliver research findings in all areas of learning. We are building a system of Early Care and Education based on effective research findings.

Action taken prior to December 31, 2000 (the Southern Regional Task Force on Child Care Quality Improvement Initiative began January 1, 2001)

Arkansas has worked across major systems to improve quality for the past four years. The Arkansas Department of Education, the Arkansas Department of Higher Education, the DHS Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Education, and the Head Start Collaboration Project joined together to develop a training program that addresses the issue of pre-literacy skills. What emerged was the Pre-K Early Learning Literacy in Arkansas Initiative (Pre-K ELLA). The joint efforts of all concerned resulted in this 30-hour comprehensive training through use of CCDF quality funds. The training is delivered free of charge all across the state, in Arkansas universities, community colleges and technical institutes. This curriculum is based on effective research in the area of literacy.

Strategies and activities were added to the Early Childhood Framework. These also utilized effective research based curricula.

Goal 4: Staff in early care and education settings will be appropriately credentialed and adequately compensated.

4.1 States will maintain a professional development system that ensures, at a minimum, providers in early care and education settings meet standards set forth by NAEYC, NAFCC, APHA or AAP.

Action taken between July 1, 2003, and June 30, 2004

Not met in all licensed programs. Public Pre-K standards are in compliance.

Action taken between January 1, 2001, and June 30, 2003

We do not meet these standards.

Action taken prior to December 31, 2000 (the Southern Regional Task Force on Child Care Quality Improvement Initiative began January 1, 2001)

We do not meet these standards.

4.2 States will require approved ongoing annual professional development for staff, appropriate to their education levels and job requirements, as specified in APHA and AAP. States will provide and implement a professional development system that verifies trainers, approves training and tracks the training of participants.

Action taken between July 1, 2003, and June 30, 2004

A Professional Registry is in place as a part of the AR Early Childhood Professional Development System. A complete evaluation of the system is scheduled for next year.

Action taken between January 1, 2001, and June 30, 2003

A Registry has been implemented in the State as part of the Arkansas Early Childhood Professional Development System.

Action taken prior to December 31, 2000 (the Southern Regional Task Force on Child Care Quality Improvement Initiative began January 1, 2001)

A Registry has been implemented in the State as part of the Arkansas Early Childhood Professional Development System.

4.3 The federal government and states will provide universally available, comprehensive scholarships to early care and education providers who are pursuing a CDA or two- or four-year degree in child development, early childhood education, early childhood special education or child care administration. Scholarships will address the costs of tuition, fees and books and will support components such as travel costs, paid release time and child care.

Action taken between July 1, 2003, and June 30, 2004

Activities reported in past year continue. A CDA Advisory committee makes recommendations to the Division regarding CDA scholarships. Arkansas is a pilot state with the NAEYC two-year community college accreditation project.

Action taken between January 1, 2001, and June 30, 2003

Scholarships are provided for early care professionals through the use of the quality money in CCDF. Release time for providers taking Pre-K ELLA is paid through quality dollars.

Action taken prior to December 31, 2000 (the Southern Regional Task Force on Child Care Quality Improvement Initiative began January 1, 2001)

Scholarships are provided for early care professionals through the use of the quality money in CCDF.

- 4.4 *States will work with educational institutions to ensure that coursework is accessible in order to meet the early care and education workforce training needs, such as courses offered at night, on weekends, in accelerated formats, on-line and in various languages. Courses will address the varying educational levels of the workforce.***

Action taken between July 1, 2003, and June 30, 2004

The Department of Labor Child Care Apprenticeship program continues in 7 of the CDA institutions in Arkansas. As a pilot state with the NAEYC two-year accreditation project for community colleges work will continue in articulation agreements. Several on-line courses are now in place including CDA, Mentoring and Pre-Employment training.

Action taken between January 1, 2001, and June 30, 2003

Our Best Care training is offered on-line and has been utilized extensively. This is one of our basic level classes.

Courses are offered based on need. This varies by institution.

The DOL Apprenticeship program offers classes in the evening and Saturday blocks so that providers can work and obtain their education as well.

Action taken prior to December 31, 2000 (the Southern Regional Task Force on Child Care Quality Improvement Initiative began January 1, 2001)

A group of higher education institutions wrote a grant and began work to establish common core courses for CDA, which resulted in a 9-hour college course. Key people saw the need for change in how training is delivered and began to offer classes at night, on weekends and on-line.

- 4.5 *The federal government and states will provide financial incentives that reward completion of approved levels of professional development.***

Action taken between July 1, 2003, and June 30, 2004

No new action.

Action taken between January 1, 2001, and June 30, 2003

Arkansas has participated in the Department of Labor Apprenticeship Grant that provides incentives for providers that complete approved levels of professional development.

In February 2002, the State Board of Education approved the Core Quality Component Model for use in all Arkansas Better Chance Programs. This model increased reimbursement for the public Pre-K program based on the following components: Highly educated staff with salary and fringe benefits, low staff-child ratio, developmental assessment; professional development for staff; and parent involvement and engagement. This was a joint effort of early childhood professionals, state agency staff, Head Start Collaboration office, Pre-K programs and child care staff.

Action taken prior to December 31, 2000 (the Southern Regional Task Force on Child Care Quality Improvement Initiative began January 1, 2001)

There was nothing available at that time.

4.6 *The federal government and states will provide college loan forgiveness programs for persons earning an approved degree who work for a specified period of time in early care and education programs.*

Action taken between July 1, 2003, and June 30, 2004

No change from previous year.

Action taken between January 1, 2001, and June 30, 2003

Several education institutions have made Federal program information available to students who have participated in loan forgiveness programs.

HIPPY (Home Instruction for Parents of Pre-School Youngsters) utilizes the Americorp program in locations across the state.

Action taken prior to December 31, 2000 (the Southern Regional Task Force on Child Care Quality Improvement Initiative began January 1, 2001)

There was no program at this time.

4.7 *States will work toward a system whereby staff with approved degrees or credentials will receive employment benefits and compensation at comparable levels to the state's public education system.*

Action taken between July 1, 2003, and June 30, 2004

Action taken during the most recent legislative session increased salaries for teachers and aides in public Pre-K programs to same scale as public school teachers.

Action taken between January 1, 2001, and June 30, 2003

We have been participating in an Educational Adequacy Study for the past several months. At this time included in the matrix, which specifies that what is needed for an adequate education in our state is \$100 million for Pre-K education. It also specifies

that staff with approved degrees will receive employment benefits and compensation at comparable levels to the state's public education system.

Action taken prior to December 31, 2000 (the Southern Regional Task Force on Child Care Quality Improvement Initiative began January 1, 2001)

There was no movement in this area prior to 2001.

4.8 States will ensure meaningful agreements and processes to enable the transfer of credits between and among approved two- and four-year degree programs.

Action taken between July 1, 2003, and June 30, 2004

Participation with NAEYC in the community college accreditation project will support articulation between two- and four- year programs.

Action taken between January 1, 2001, and June 30, 2003

The Higher Education committee has worked on this issue. As a result several articulation agreements exist between two and four year institutions. This is still a goal for us because it is not a state-wide systemic change.

Action taken prior to December 31, 2000 (the Southern Regional Task Force on Child Care Quality Improvement Initiative began January 1, 2001)

There were no agreements at this time.

Goal 5: Families will have the information to make well-informed decisions about the quality of their child's care and education and to be actively involved in their child's care and education.

5.1 States will support Child Care Resource and Referral networks that are easily accessible to parents and that provide information on child development, quality indicators, provider choices, vacancies and linkages to additional information.

Action taken between July 1, 2003, and June 30, 2004

Support continues for the 4 local CCR&R's. Plans are in place to solicit and expand the R&R services to unserved areas of the state.

Action taken between January 1, 2001, and June 30, 2003

The four local Resource and Referral agencies work in coordination with the Division in several projects:

- a. A representative serves on the Governor's Family Friendly Employer Initiative steering committee.
- b. Baby boxes are offered to new parents.
- c. The bi-annual market rate survey was completed by the resource and referral agencies this year.
- d. The Regional Conference was hosted by the Arkansas Child Care Resource and Referral network this year and was a huge success.

Action taken prior to December 31, 2000 (the Southern Regional Task Force on Child Care Quality Improvement Initiative began January 1, 2001)

The Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Education works in coordination with the four local Child Care Resource and Referral Networks to support providers and parents.

5.2 States will support early care and education providers in promoting parental involvement and in seeking parental input into the development and improvement of their programs.

Action taken between July 1, 2003, and June 30, 2004

Act 604 of 2003 established a requirement for all schools to have a parent involvement coordinator. With numerous programs for young children offered within school settings, we have developed partnerships to offer parent involvement activities through the school settings.

A Kindergarten readiness calendar of activities for parents has been made available to all parents of children ages 3 and 4 years in licensed child care settings.

Action taken between January 1, 2001, and June 30, 2003

We plan to complete additional formal surveys involving parents this year.

Action taken prior to December 31, 2000 (the Southern Regional Task Force on Child Care Quality Improvement Initiative began January 1, 2001)

Two formal surveys have been completed involving parents. One was a Customer Service Satisfaction survey and the other is a Facility Survey.

Goal 6: Quality early care and education programs will be financially accessible to all children.

6.1 Federal and state governments will adjust the child care tax credit expense limits to accurately reflect the cost of quality care.

Action taken between July 1, 2003, and June 30, 2004

No action

Action taken between January 1, 2001, and June 30, 2003

Due to budget cuts we were unable to get our tax bill approved.

Action taken prior to December 31, 2000 (the Southern Regional Task Force on Child Care Quality Improvement Initiative began January 1, 2001)

We have taken no action regarding the child care tax credit expense limit.

6.2 States with income taxes will establish refundable child and dependent care tax credits.

Action taken between July 1, 2003, and June 30, 2004

A 20% refundable credit is in place. Proposals have been submitted to increase this credit to 60%.

Action taken between January 1, 2001, and June 30, 2003

Arkansas has a 20% tax credit for all parents and a refundable tax credit available for parents who choose to place their children in a quality approved/accredited program.

Action taken prior to December 31, 2000 (the Southern Regional Task Force on Child Care Quality Improvement Initiative began January 1, 2001)

Arkansas has a 20% tax credit for all parents and a refundable tax credit available for parents who choose to place their children in a quality approved/accredited program.

6.3 State and federal child and dependent care tax credit income-eligibility and expense limits will be indexed for inflation.

Action taken between July 1, 2003, and June 30, 2004

No new action

Action taken between January 1, 2001, and June 30, 2003

In the 2003 Legislative session the state dependent care tax credit was brought up to meet the Federal dependent care tax credit.

Action taken prior to December 31, 2000 (the Southern Regional Task Force on Child Care Quality Improvement Initiative began January 1, 2001)

Not indexed at this time.

6.4 Federal, state, local and private funds will be sufficient to meet 100% of the need for direct early care and education financial aid, based on initial eligibility levels at 85% of the state median income. Federal law will allow and states will implement redetermination policies that allow families to retain early care and education financial aid until they reach 100% of state median income.

Action taken between July 1, 2003, and June 30, 2004

No response.

Action taken between January 1, 2001, and June 30, 2003

We provide services for families up to 60% of the State Median Income.

Action taken prior to December 31, 2000 (the Southern Regional Task Force on Child Care Quality Improvement Initiative began January 1, 2001)

We provide services for families up to 60% of the State Median Income.

6.5 Federal and state governments should develop policies and systems to assure families receiving financial aid pay no more than 10% of their gross income for early care and education.

Action taken between July 1, 2003, and June 30, 2004

No response.

Action taken between January 1, 2001, and June 30, 2003

Our child care subsidy policy committee is reviewing all regulations in this area.

Action taken prior to December 31, 2000 (the Southern Regional Task Force on Child Care Quality Improvement Initiative began January 1, 2001)

Only about 6% of our families pay a co-pay.

- 6.6 States will set payment rates at no less than the 75th percentile based on a market rate survey conducted every two years for each level and type of care. Annual inflation adjustments to payment rates will be made between market surveys.**

Action taken between July 1, 2003, and June 30, 2004

No response.

Action taken between January 1, 2001, and June 30, 2003

Arkansas sets payment rates at the 75th percentile based on a market rate survey. Starting this year we will conduct annual market rate surveys and adjust accordingly.

Action taken prior to December 31, 2000 (the Southern Regional Task Force on Child Care Quality Improvement Initiative began January 1, 2001)

Arkansas sets payment rates at the 75th percentile based on a market rate survey. Annual inflation adjustments to payment rates are made between market rate surveys.

- 6.7 States will implement payments to providers commensurate with the quality-rating level achieved by the early care and education programs.**

Action taken between July 1, 2003, and June 30, 2004

A work group from the EC Systems Planning initiative is developing a tiered strategy for quality. Payments are made in the public Pre-K program (Arkansas Better Chance) commensurate with higher quality requirements.

Action taken between January 1, 2001, and June 30, 2003

In February 2002, the State Board of Education approved the Core Quality Component Model for use in all Arkansas Better Chance Programs. This model increased reimbursement for the public Pre-K program based on the following components: Highly educated staff with salary and fringe benefits, low staff-child ratio, developmental assessment; professional development for staff; and parent involvement and engagement. This was a joint effort of early childhood professionals, state agency staff, Head Start Collaboration office, Pre-K programs and child care staff.

Action taken prior to December 31, 2000 (the Southern Regional Task Force on Child Care Quality Improvement Initiative began January 1, 2001)

Payments were not commensurate with the quality rating level.

- 6.8 States will examine the financing of quality early care and education in their state and work toward providing payment rates that recognize the cost commensurate with the standards set forth in this action plan.**

Action taken between July 1, 2003, and June 30, 2004

No response.

Action taken between January 1, 2001, and June 30, 2003

We have been participating in an Educational Adequacy Study for the past several months. At this time included in the matrix, which specifies that what is needed for an

adequate education in our state is \$100 million dollars for Pre-K education. It also specifies that staff with approved degrees will receive employment benefits and compensation at comparable levels to the state's public education system.

Action taken prior to December 31, 2000 (the Southern Regional Task Force on Child Care Quality Improvement Initiative began January 1, 2001)

Payments were not commensurate with the standards set forth in this action plan.

- 6.9 States will design and aggressively implement outreach initiatives to provide families with easy-to-understand early care and education financial aid information and application assistance.**

Action taken between July 1, 2003, and June 30, 2004

No response.

Action taken between January 1, 2001, and June 30, 2003

Arkansas has utilized many forms of outreach to provide families with easy to understand financial aid and application assistance. We have reduced our waiting list for services from over 5,000 families to 500. Families on the waiting list are processed with a 30 day time limit.

Action taken prior to December 31, 2000 (the Southern Regional Task Force on Child Care Quality Improvement Initiative began January 1, 2001)

Not much outreach was completed due to limited funds.

Goal 7: States will ensure that accountability is built into all systems, programs and activities undertaken to achieve the goals of this action plan.

- 7.1 States will convene appropriate stakeholders to develop written strategic plans for improving the quality of early care and education programs in the state. These plans will include key goals, quantifiable measures of progress and program outcomes for all quality enhancement activities.**

Action taken between July 1, 2003, and June 30, 2004

The Division serves as lead agency for the AR Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems Planning Initiative. This initiative concerns five specific areas related to early

care and education and each work area has developed a logic model to track progress. The work of the School Readiness Indicators initiative has been rolled over to the systems planning and each of the five work areas are tracking data for school readiness.

Action taken between January 1, 2001, and June 30, 2003

We have completed two strategic plans and are in the process of developing a third strategic plan for the next five years. This plan will include key goals, quantifiable measure of progress and program outcomes for all quality enhancement activities.

Action taken prior to December 31, 2000 (the Southern Regional Task Force on Child Care Quality Improvement Initiative began January 1, 2001)

Arkansas has implemented a strategic plan.

7.2 States will collect and analyze data and produce written annual reports on progress toward identified goals. Reports will be made readily available to the public.

Action taken between July 1, 2003, and June 30, 2004

The "Getting Ready for School" document provides a statewide view on school readiness. County by County reports are also available.

Action taken between January 1, 2001, and June 30, 2003

The Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Education and Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families serve as joint administrators of the Arkansas team for the School Readiness Indicators Initiative. This is a multi-state initiative that uses child well-being indicators to build a change agenda in states and local communities in order to improve school readiness and ensure early school success. Data will be collected state-wide and at the county level to indicate school readiness.

Action taken prior to December 31, 2000 (the Southern Regional Task Force on Child Care Quality Improvement Initiative began January 1, 2001)

Child Care Issues reports collected data both state-wide and at the county level. Fifty-two indicators were identified included poverty, teenage pregnancy and K-12 test scores.

7.3 States will use data and annual reports to make continuous policy improvements and evaluate quality enhancement activities.

Action taken between July 1, 2003, and June 30, 2004

Activities from the previous year continue.

Action taken between January 1, 2001, and June 30, 2003

All Arkansas Better Chance programs are reviewed on an annual basis using the ECERS rating scale. Programs that do not receive a composite score of 5.5 are not renewed.

Licensing monitor forms must be submitted to receive an enhancement grant from the Division.

The Registry system tracks all trainers and ensures that they adhere to the standards of the Arkansas Early Childhood Professional Development System.

We are in the process of completing our 5-year Strategic Plan that includes many other accountability outcomes.

Action taken prior to December 31, 2000 (the Southern Regional Task Force on Child Care Quality Improvement Initiative began January 1, 2001)

Every professional services contract contains performance objectives and is evaluated based on those.

¹ NAEYC – National Association for the Education of Young Children

² NAFCC – National Association of Family Child Care

³ APHA – American Public Health Association

⁴ AAP – American Academy of Pediatrics

⁵ American Public Health Association & American Academy of Pediatrics. 2002. *Caring for our children: National health and safety performance –Guidelines for out-of-home child care programs*. Washington, DC: American Public Health Association.