



# Media Release

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**For Immediate Release**

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**DHS Division Awarded \$1 Million Grant to Boost Early Learning, School Readiness**

The Arkansas Department of Human Services (DHS) Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Education will use a \$1 million grant from the W. K. Kellogg Foundation to strengthen early learning and school readiness standards for young children and find ways to engage parents.

The W. K. Kellogg Foundation officially notified the agency of the grant award today.

“Arkansas has a robust early childhood education system, but we are always looking for opportunities to expand and improve upon what we do,” said Tonya Williams, director of the Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Education. “This grant is a perfect example of that, and we’re grateful to the Kellogg Foundation for the additional funding.”

Williams said the grant application focused on three areas: Redesigning birth-to-five early learning standards, identifying a new kindergarten entry assessment tool and creating a framework to support family engagement in early-learning settings.

A team of experts will review Arkansas’s current learning standards for children from birth to five years old and then make recommendations on updates and additions. Williams said additions likely will include more focus on social and emotional skills needed for kindergarten and higher grades, such as how to manage anger or work in groups.

A new kindergarten assessment, which is an observation tool teachers use to evaluate certain skill levels in children, also would include a review of social and emotional skills as well as some physical skills that children need to master.

“A new assessment tool should look at more than the cognitive skills of language and logic,” Williams explained. “Those are important, but so too is the developmental of fine motor skills, like holding a pencil. We’ll be looking for a tool that has a broader view of kindergarten readiness.”

Williams said the agency included parent engagement because it is critical to a child’s success.

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“Parents are their children’s first educators, and we want to be certain that they understand that role,” she said. “We also want them to fully understand what happens in early-learning settings. The more engaged parents are; the more likely children will be ready for classroom learning.”

*The **DHS Division of Children Care and Early Childhood Education** coordinates child care and early childhood education programs in Arkansas, licenses and accredits child care settings and oversees the Arkansas Better Chance for School Success state-funded pre-k program.*

*The **W.K. Kellogg Foundation (WKKF)**, founded in 1930 as an independent, private foundation by breakfast cereal pioneer, Will Keith Kellogg, is among the largest philanthropic foundations in the United States. Guided by the belief that all children should have an equal opportunity to thrive, WKKF works with communities to create conditions for vulnerable children so they can realize their full potential in school, work and life. The Kellogg Foundation is based in Battle Creek, Mich., and works throughout the United States and internationally, as well as with sovereign tribes.*

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