



In 2011, the Arkansas Campaign for Grade-Level Reading (AR-GLR) was launched by the Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation to move the needle on education outcomes by focusing on third-grade reading proficiency.

Now, more than five years since the launch, AR-GLR is a thriving, collaborative effort that includes a “big tent” of over 35 organizations that believe the only way to make measurable progress on grade-level reading is to work collectively with families, educators, policymakers and business leaders around the state. Managed in partnership with Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families, the Arkansas Community Foundation and the Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation, AR-GLR has had a dual focus on state policy change and building local capacity since its inception, with active local GLR efforts in five communities.

Key strategies of AR-GLR’s exemplary statewide effort include: *Enhancing Public Policy*, by developing legislative and administrative policy solutions to increase third-grade reading proficiency; *Building Local Capacity*, by supporting local models that increase third-grade reading proficiency through the five key impact areas of school readiness, reducing chronic absence, improving classroom instruction, stopping summer learning loss and strengthening family and community engagement; and *Increasing Public Will*, through strategic communications to a broad range of audiences.

AR-GLR’s strong policy component, led by Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families, the state’s KIDS COUNT organization, emphasizes policies that research has shown can have a positive impact on early reading achievement and early school success. Current priorities include increased funding for high-quality pre-K programs, funding for after-school and summer programs, and increasing developmental screening, follow-up and treatment.

Working strategically with energy, creativity and unstoppable commitment to bigger outcomes and sustainable scale, AR-GLR and its diverse array of partners are more focused than ever on moving the needle and closing the gap.

The following recent developments of the Arkansas effort are positioning the state for timely and sustainable impact:

- The launch of (with an initial pilot in Little Rock) Talking is Teaching: Talk, Read, Sing — a parent engagement effort designed to empower parents and caregivers of children ages 0 to 5 to boost children’s vocabulary and improve school readiness.

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- The continuation of its laser focus on early detection of developmental delays by partnering with Arkansas Children's Hospital's Natural Wonders Partnership Council to increase developmental screenings and services.
- The release in 2016 of the Arkansas Child Development and Early Learning Standards by the Arkansas Department of Human Services and the Arkansas Head Start State Collaboration Office. The standards demonstrate the continuum of developmental milestones in the early years from birth to age 5.
- The engagement of more than 45 school districts in the Make Every Day Count Learning Community to help schools, districts and communities track chronic absence and implement plans for keeping children in the classroom, which has led to the inclusion of chronic absence as an accountability measure in the state's ESSA plan.
- The leadership of the governor and the Arkansas Department of Education in launching R.I.S.E. (Reading Initiative for Student Excellence), which includes an Annual Reading Conference, district reading campaigns and the RISE Academy to support K-2nd grade teachers and training for literacy specialists.
- The setting of an ambitious state goal, increasing the number of third-grade students meeting the ACT Aspire reading readiness benchmark by 10 percent in three years and moving from 37 percent of third graders reading on grade level to 80 percent by 2030.
- The passage of several bills during the 2017 legislative session that build on the governor's momentum by requiring elementary teachers to demonstrate competency in teaching children to read in order to obtain a teaching license, requiring teacher preparation programs to align instruction with these new requirements, requiring school districts to inform parents about their child's reading level and requiring school districts to report publicly on the number of students with dyslexia. A bill prohibiting out-of-school suspensions and expulsions for students in grades K–5 also passed.

In addition to these exciting new developments, AR-GLR continues its critical focus on supporting local efforts to develop and implement solutions to grade-level reading challenges by building capacity and supporting the mobilization of local stakeholders in five communities across the state. And AR-GLR continues its successful track record of replicating proven and promising programs such as Dolly Parton's Imagination Library, which is providing 16,000 children birth to age 5 with a free book each month, and Reach Out and Read, which is now serving over 40,000 Arkansas children.