

STRENGTHENING THE GRID



2022 Progress Report



EXCEL
BY EIGHT

Introduction

Excel by Eight partners with families and communities to improve health and education outcomes for Arkansas children prenatal to age eight. **Our vision is that Arkansas is a state where all children have a strong start to reach their full potential.**

Strong Start Statement

Excel by Eight acknowledges that every child in Arkansas deserves a strong start, but not every child starts in the same place. A strong start means education and health outcomes are not determined by barriers related to age, disability, gender, income, race/ethnicity, geography, or community resources. Family, community, and policymakers play a vital role in ensuring a strong start is available for every child.

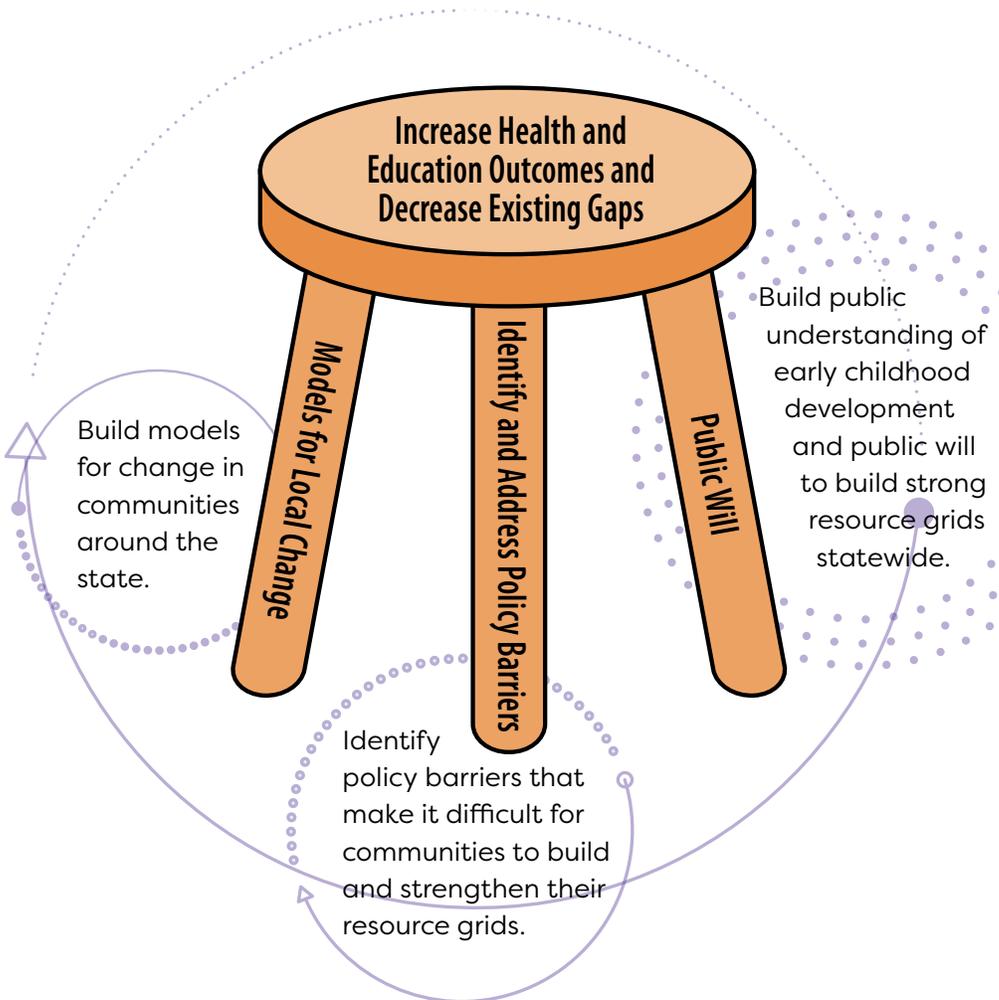
Across Arkansas, there are already programs and practices designed to help children, starting from birth, achieve their full educational and health potential, including physical, mental, and oral health. Unfortunately, the grid of resources families need are often unevenly distributed, making it difficult for them to access these critical health, family, education, and community supports.

Today, nearly 12% of births in Arkansas are preterm, remaining steady from 2021. Despite decreasing by a full percentage point since last year, Black babies remain the most likely to be born preterm at 15.6%, followed by Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander babies at 14.9%, white babies at 11.1%, multiracial babies at 10.8%, Asian babies at 10.3%, and Hispanic babies at 9.7%.¹ Only 15% of parents can find high-quality



care for their infants and toddlers,² and only 53% of 3- and 4-year-olds are enrolled in pre-K.³ By third grade, only 35% of students meet the reading readiness benchmark on the ACT Aspire. The good news is that this number has increased by five percentage points over the 2020-2021 school year. The bad news is that the disparities persist for children of color: Only 19.5% of Black third graders and 28.1% of Hispanic third graders meet or exceed the reading readiness benchmark, compared to 41.2% of white students.⁴

Despite these challenges, Excel by Eight remains committed to increasing children’s health and education outcomes by partnering with our local E8 communities, promoting the E8 Foundations’ policy work, and building public support around the importance of the earliest years of a child’s life. We call this our three-legged stool.



Excel by Eight Team



Reginald Ballard
Community Consultant
Excel by Eight



Angela Duran
Executive Director
Excel by Eight



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Excel by Eight



Jamie Ward
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Jessi Rice Woods
Communities Director
Excel by Eight

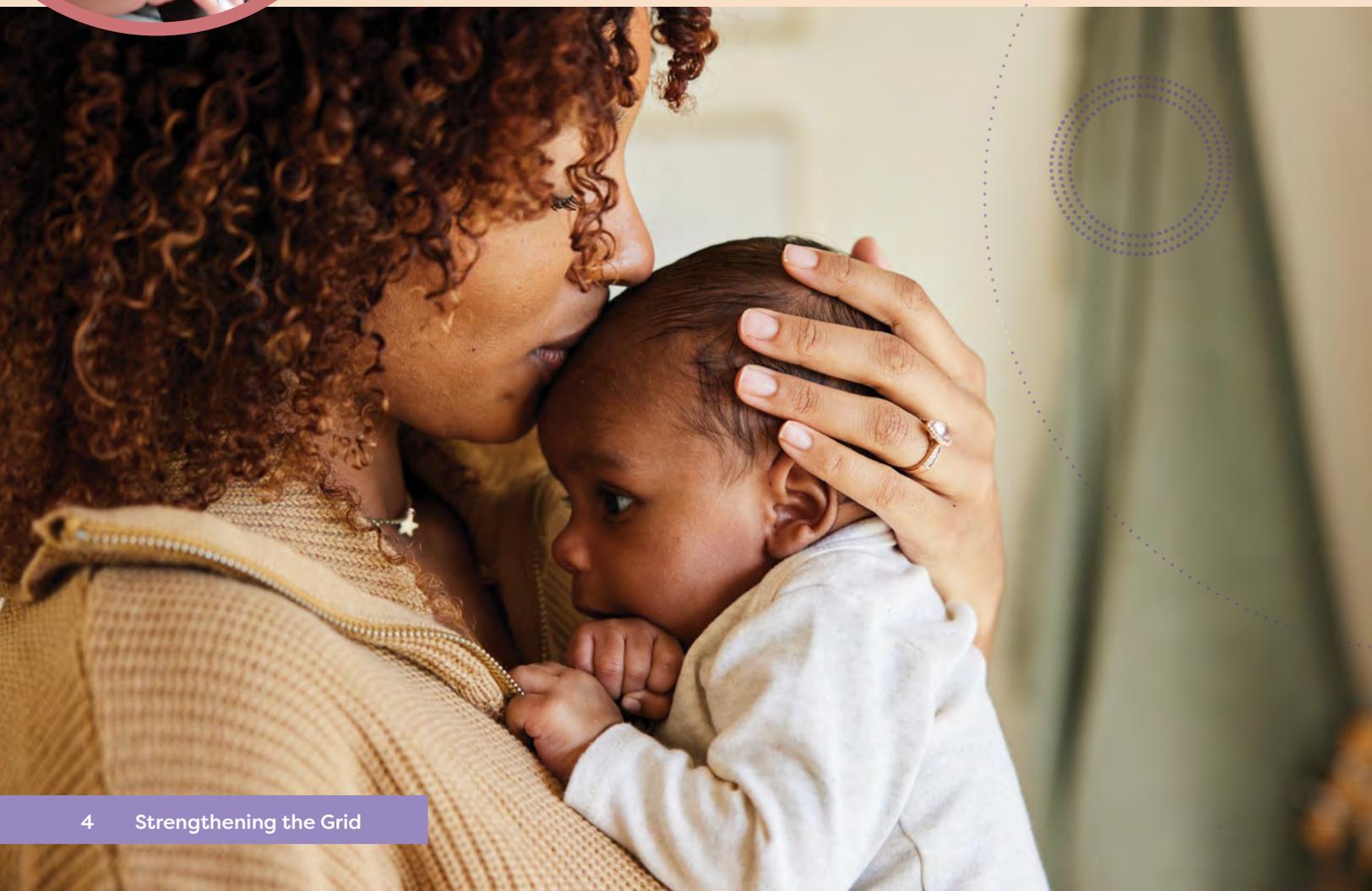
Resource Grid

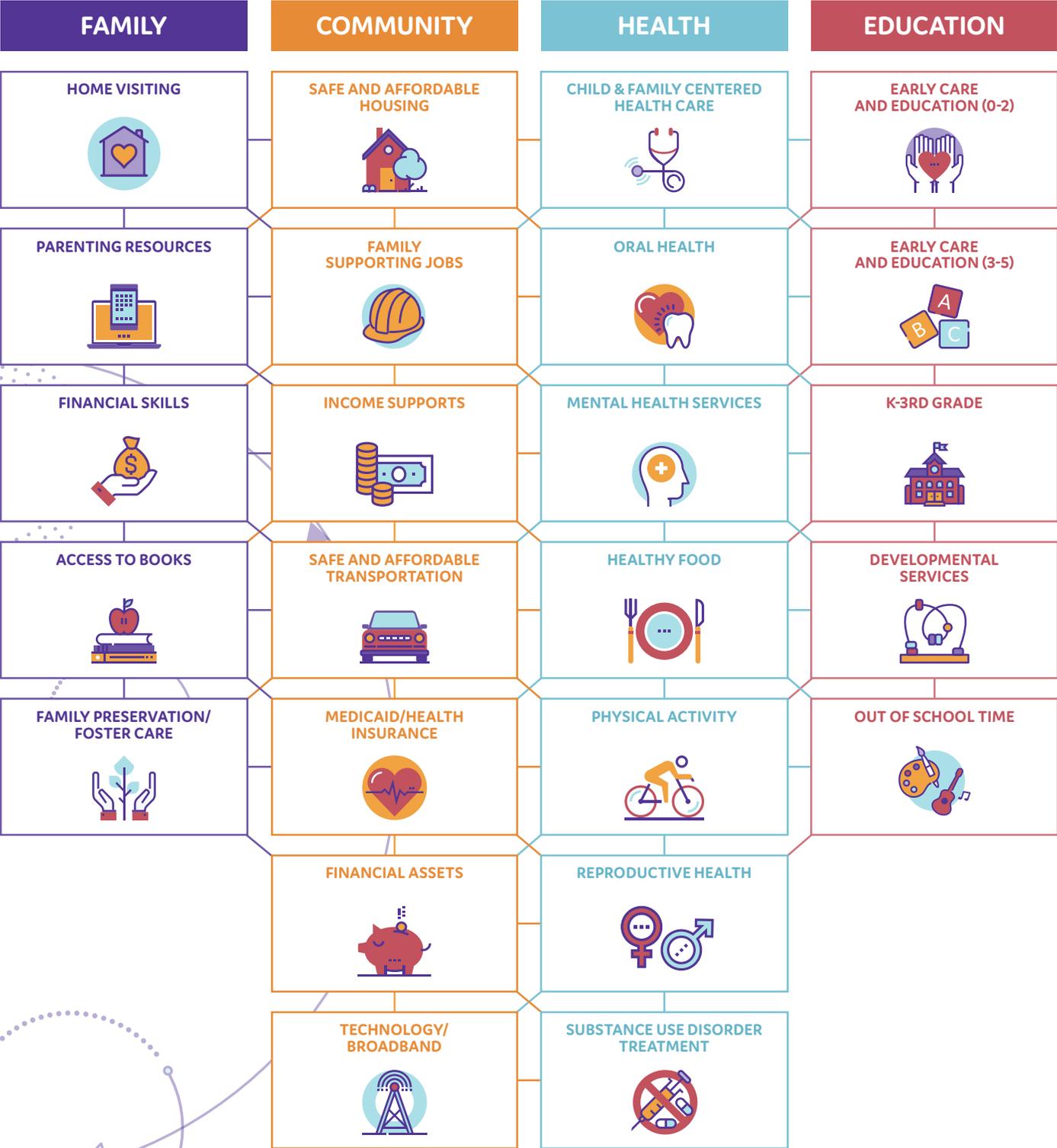
The array of resources children and families need operates like a power grid. Some parts may be incomplete

or malfunctioning, or the connections may be frayed or broken altogether.

Resources such as high-quality learning opportunities,

healthy food, physical and mental health services, safe housing, and supportive relationships help children reach their full potential. An unreliable or patchy flow of resources can result in a range of developmental delays, with long-lasting consequences for children's health and well-being. When all families and communities are equally plugged in, children have what they need to thrive.





HOP

JUMP OVER

IMPORTANT

POWERFUL

CREATIVE

A HELPER

LOVED

HONEST

FUNNY

REAL

SMART

KIND

BRAVE

I AM

EXCEL BY



Excel by Eight Foundations

A child's experiences in the first three years are the bricks and mortar of brain development. Research consistently shows the brain develops faster from birth to age three than any other period in life, with more than one million new neural connections forming every second. A sturdy brain architecture becomes the foundation for core social and emotional intelligence, early executive functioning and self-regulation, and literacy – skills that are all critical for later health and success.

Parent figures play a lead role in healthy development, but many are stretched in the earliest months and years of their child's life. The Excel by Eight Foundations (E8F) Collaborative's policy agenda builds on existing research and knowledge of how to best support families with infants and toddlers. We want children to have healthy beginnings and families to feel supported and have access to high-quality child care and early learning experiences.

When we invest in the first three years of a child's life, we build a strong foundation for their future learning, behavior, and health and reduce the need for more expensive interventions later. Not only do infants, toddlers, and families benefit from a strong start but entire communities do, as well.

Over the past year, the state of Arkansas has made significant progress on E8F's policy agenda and secured resources to help advance our three policy categories: Healthy Beginnings, Supported Families, and High-Quality Child Care and Early Learning. In 2023, the E8F Collaborative will engage in a planning process to set new goals for the next several years that build on this early progress.



Healthy Beginnings

A healthy beginning starts before birth. Expectant mothers need access to comprehensive prenatal and postnatal care, screenings, and services to ensure infants are born safely and continue to thrive. Once born, infants need access to ongoing well-child visits, developmental screenings, and any needed therapy services and social supports identified by those screens.

HealthySteps® Launches in Arkansas

The Arkansas Children's Care Network (ACCN) and the Arkansas Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics, with support from the Blue & You Foundation and Walmart Foundation, have partnered to implement a demonstration of HealthySteps in Arkansas. Arkansas is a preferred state for HealthySteps, meaning the program is prioritizing bringing new sites on board, promoting program sustainability beyond philanthropic investment, and making sure the program reaches even more children and families across the state. The medical system – pediatricians, family medicine doctors, nurse practitioners, and other health professionals who deliver well-child checks for children – is a universal way to reach all families.

THIS WORK COUNTS

In the first few months of operation, **9,948** infants and toddlers have received services through HealthySteps.

HealthySteps has 225 practices reaching more than 350,000 children in 25 states and Washington D.C., including seven practices in Arkansas: Best Start Pediatrics (Springdale), Harvey Pediatrics Operated by Arkansas Children's (Rogers), Hot Springs Pediatric Clinic, Pediatric Partners (Fort Smith), the Circle of Friends Clinic at Arkansas Children's Hospital (Little Rock), The Children's Clinic of Jonesboro, and Little Rock Pediatric Clinic. HealthySteps' national goal is to reach one million children by 2032.

One of the eight core components of HealthySteps is screening for family needs, which includes maternal depression, social determinants of health, and other risk factors. In a striking statistic from one HealthySteps site that began screening for maternal depression in July 2022, 92% of mothers screened were positive for the condition. The HealthySteps Specialist provided resources to the mothers to help them address their mental health.

HealthySteps® Sites in Arkansas



The Power of Relationships

A HealthySteps Specialist worked with a family who had dealt with infertility issues for quite some time. The mother was overjoyed when she discovered she was pregnant with twins. However, the babies had several medical complications after birth and required frequent visits to the doctor. The health challenges and increased appointments put a strain on the parents' relationship, and they ultimately divorced – leaving the mother as the primary parent for two medically fragile children.

The mother was not able to work because she needed to be able to care for her children full-time. In the meantime, bills were piling up, the rent was overdue, and the mother had no way to catch up. She received an eviction notice and had 30 days to either pay the rent or find another place to live.

The HealthySteps Specialist met with the mother because of a positive screen on the HealthySteps Family Needs Questionnaire. Housing was the top priority for the pediatric primary care team. The Specialist was able to find a local resource to assist the mother with paying her past-due rent. When the Specialist called to follow up with the overwhelmed parent, she could hear the relief in her voice. “When they told me, I cried,” the mother said.

The Specialist continues to follow the family regularly to assist with social and developmental needs of the medically complex children. If it were not for HealthySteps and the Family Needs Questionnaire, the team would not have identified this family's hardship and been able to support solutions for their challenges.



Supported Families

Infants and toddlers need quality health care; stimulating learning opportunities; and nurturing, responsive relationships for healthy development. A system of support should be in place at or before birth to ensure every child and parent receives the needed information, assessments, and referrals for a strong start. Home visiting programs are a key strategy for providing these resources.

Expanding Home Visiting with ARHOME

Home visiting is a voluntary program that takes place in the homes of families with young children. Caregivers are matched with trained providers from their own communities, such as educators, nurses, or social workers. During these regular visits, providers focus on enhancing prenatal care, strengthening the parent-child relationship, promoting early learning, or identifying and addressing potential health and developmental issues.

In late 2022, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services approved a waiver request from the Arkansas Department of Human Services. The request will add several Life360 Homes to the state's Medicaid expansion, called Arkansas Health and Opportunity for Me (ARHOME).

The Maternal Life360 home will allow birthing hospitals to offer evidence-based home visitation services to at-risk pregnant women, continuing until the child is 2. **As many as 12,500 women could benefit from this program.**

DHS is finalizing rules and regulations for the Life360 homes, and several birthing hospitals have already submitted letters of interest for establishing Maternal Life360 homes.

MIECHV Reauthorization and Expansion

In December 2022, Congress reauthorized and expanded the Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) program as part of its end-of-year budget package. An estimated 140,000 families across the United States partner with home visitors each year to enhance parent-child relationships and improve physical health, mental health, learning, and safety outcomes.⁵

With this five-year reauthorization and expanded funding levels, MIECHV-funded programs will have increased stability and resources to enhance existing services, reach new constituents, increase compensation for home visitors, and continue to evaluate their impact on children and families. MIECHV supports the Arkansas Home Visiting Network (AHVN), the goal of which is to build stronger families and brighter futures for the children and communities of Arkansas.

THIS WORK COUNTS

Since 2019, **2,100** additional infants and toddlers and their families are receiving home visiting services each year through Early Steps to School Success, Family Connects, HIPPY, Nurturing Families, Parents as Teachers, and SafeCare.



High-Quality Child Care and Early Learning

High-quality child care must be accessible and affordable. Whether it's in a center or through a home-based program, stimulating learning opportunities and nurturing, responsive relationships are crucial to healthy brain development.

Bridging the Pay Gap for Early Childhood Educators

The T.E.A.C.H. (Teacher Education and Compensation Helps) Early Childhood® Arkansas Scholarship Program, a licensed program of the Arkansas Early Childhood Association (AECA), was developed to upgrade the level of education of teachers working with young children while making the educational process affordable, increasing wages and reducing turnover.

With an infusion of \$40 million in American Rescue Plan funding, the AECA has significantly ramped up the number of T.E.A.C.H. participants. During the fall semester of 2022, **258 early childhood educators were enrolled in the program**, about 100 of whom work with infants and toddlers.

This level of participation represents more than a **400%** increase from July 2021. Over the past state fiscal year, six educators completed certificates or degrees through T.E.A.C.H., leading to an increase in quality care for 39 infants and toddlers. Once the 107 who are currently in the pipeline complete their programs, quality of care will increase for nearly 700 additional infants and toddlers.

American Rescue Plan funding is also being used to fund Step Up to WAGE\$, a companion program to T.E.A.C.H. Step Up to WAGE\$ is an education-based wage supplement initiative that pays biannual stipends to teaching staff serving ages birth to 5 years. It provides annual stipends to early childhood educators ranging from \$500 to \$6,000 based on level of education.

Increasing Quality in Early Care and Education

The Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Education (DCCECE) at the Department of Human Services established the Better Beginnings Quality Rating System in 2010 to assess the quality levels of child care providers throughout the state. For more than a decade, Better Beginnings has had three levels – 1, 2, and 3. DCCECE has made several policy changes and investments to increase the quality of child care centers and family child care homes throughout the state.

First, DCCECE now requires all child care providers that want to accept vouchers from parents to have at least a Level 2 Better Beginnings rating. Second, DCCECE has used American Rescue Plan funding to make grants to providers so they can buy new equipment and materials and make other improvements to help them raise their quality ratings. Over the past few years, DCCECE has made 1,409 quality improvement grants totaling approximately \$97 million.

THIS WORK COUNTS

The number of infants and toddlers served annually in early childhood education programs with a Level 3 quality rating has increased by **2,737** since 2019.

As a result, the percentage of child care providers with no Better Beginnings rating has dropped significantly from 36% to 12%, and both the percentages of providers at Level 2 and Level

3 have increased.⁶ Beginning January 1, 2023, DCCECE has added three new quality levels – 4, 5, and 6 – giving providers an opportunity to move further up the scale.

CHANGES IN BETTER BEGINNINGS LEVELS OVER TIME

	No Rating	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
2019	36%	29%	3%	32%
2022	12%	23%	28%	37%

Arkansas Women’s Commission Recommendations

Governor Asa Hutchinson signed an executive order in February 2022 forming the Arkansas Commission on the Status of Women (Arkansas Women’s Commission). This Commission was charged with analyzing barriers to entry for women in the Arkansas workforce, with a specific focus on single mothers, women entrepreneurs, STEM field recruitment of women, and the child care economy in the state.

Quality child care is essential to a thriving Arkansas economy. According to a report from the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation, the child care crisis costs Arkansas an estimated \$865 million a year in lost earnings, productivity, and revenue.⁷ The lack of reliable, safe child care options is preventing parents from coming into the workplace, forcing parents – most often the mother – to significantly reduce their hours or leave the labor force entirely.

The Arkansas Women’s Commission released its findings at the end of the year in a report that analyzed the role of Arkansas women in the labor market and economy. The Commission’s

Family Caregiving Subcommittee conducted research related to the continuing challenges Arkansas women face regarding child care. Based on this research, the subcommittee issued four recommendations:

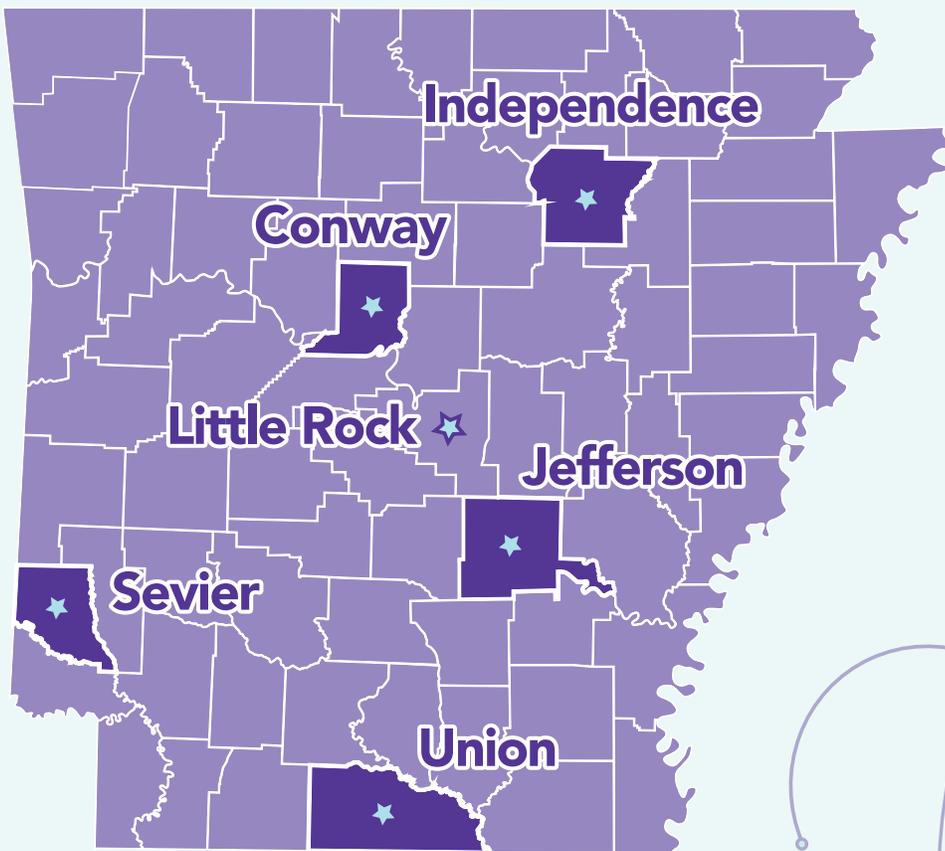
- Meaningfully engage the business community to address child care challenges.
- Provide technical assistance and capacity building for expanding existing child care businesses.
- Incentivize Arkansans to enter or remain in the early childhood education profession.
- Explore the related issue of elder care responsibilities, which fall disproportionately on women.⁸



Busy Bee Day Care in Mountain View is the only licensed center for infants and toddlers in Stone County and has a waiting list that’s a year out. Watch this video to hear from owner Rita Ward about some of the challenges she faces as an in-home child care provider.

Local Communities

Local models for change across Arkansas are designed to strengthen the grids of resources within each community that are necessary for children to thrive. Excel by Eight partners with six communities in this effort: Conway County, Independence County, Little Rock, Sevier County, Union County, and Jefferson County, which launched in 2022.



Conway County

Through the American Rescue Plan, child care facilities across the state were able to access federal funds to help stabilize their operations in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and improve quality and availability of child care slots. Child Care Aware of Northcentral Arkansas actively supported Conway County's facilities to take advantage of this opportunity to elevate and expand care in their community. Successes include five facilities increasing their Arkansas Better Beginnings quality rating from Level 1 to Level 2, which allows them to continue accepting vouchers from families in 2023 and receive a higher reimbursement rate. One facility moved from Better Beginnings Level 2 to Level 3, the highest quality rating available at that time. Additionally, one provider was awarded funding to open a new center, which will bring 89 new child care slots, including infant and toddler care, to Morrilton and the surrounding area.

In 2023, the Conway County steering committee will focus on increasing parent access to early development resources as well as engaging families directly in local community planning efforts about young children.

Conway County Steering Committee

John Gibson, Chair, Conway County Community Foundation

Robbie Belew, Curricula Concepts

Shandee Gordon, Wonderview School District

Shawn Halbrook, South Conway County School District

Lora Hendrix, South Conway County School District

Amber Holland, Community Service, Inc.

Princess Johnson, Parent

Kara Jones, Conway County Center for Exceptional Children

Aida Kuettle, South Conway County School District

Stephanie Lipsmeyer, Morrilton Area Chamber of Commerce

Michelle Mallett, Conway County Juvenile Probation and Arkansas Coalition for Juvenile Justice

Dr. Susan Okroglic, Community Service, Inc.

Kaila Parker, Parent

Jenifer Riley, Community Service, Inc.

Jamie Stacks, Wonderview School District

Karey Tapley, South Conway County School District

Candace Williams, Rural Community Alliance

Logan Williams, Nemo Vista School District

Sharon Wilson, South Conway County School District

Independence County

Out of five goals in Independence County, one is to strengthen the foundation for oral language and literacy. The E8 steering committee was awarded a \$60,000 grant to invest in LENA, a professional development opportunity focused on increasing adult-child interactions. Research shows that increased verbal interactions between children and the adults who care for them, called conversational turns, are one of the most important factors in language development.⁹ Program participants included 4-year-olds and educators from early childhood centers in Independence County's four school districts – Batesville, Cedar Ridge, Midland, and Southside.

Through weekly data reports and coaching sessions, teachers were able to implement a more equitable talk environment in real time. Children who started the program in the “low talk” range, about 15 conversational turns per hour, increased

their conversational turn rate by 42% by the final week. Overall, each center saw an increase in the quantity of adult-child interactions across all children during the 10-week program:

- 96% of teachers reported seeing positive changes in children's language development.
- 91% of teachers reported feeling more confident in their teaching abilities after the first five weeks of the program.

Planning and strategy development in Independence County are ongoing in areas of physical child development, social-emotional development, oral health, and access to child care. With the help of the federal American Rescue Plan Act dollars, child care facilities in Independence County added a total of 128 infant and toddler slots, a 50% increase in county-wide capacity.



Independence County Steering Committee

Jamie Rayford, Chair, Batesville Area Chamber of Commerce

LaToshia Carroll, Cedar Ridge School District

Jennifer Douglas, Batesville School District

Amy Finster, White River Health System

Jessica Gilmer, Midland School District

Mary-Katherine Hardin, STARS Academy

Gracie Hellums, STARS Academy

Novella Humphrey, Southside School District

Kristie Jenkins, Southside School District

Crystal Johnson, Batesville Area Chamber of Commerce

Abbi Limbaugh, Cedar Ridge School District

Whitney Massey, Baker Family Dentistry

Lisa McGhee, Southside School District

Bani Meharg, Midland School District

Dr. Lesley Milton, Tooth Be Told Pediatric Dentistry

Debbie Mize, Child Care Aware of Northcentral Arkansas

Brandi Nelson, UAMS North Central

Leslie Patterson, Pinnacle Pointe

Kimberly Poole, Southside School District

Dr. Julia Roulier, University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences

Mindy Shaw, Batesville School District

Dr. Nikki Yonts, Lyon College



LENA – short for **L**anguage **E**nvironment **A**nalysis – is a professional development opportunity for early childhood educators that uses cloud-based software and a small, wearable device – often referred to as a “talk pedometer” – to measure and increase conversational turns that happen between a child and an adult caregiver. Watch this video from Independence County to see LENA in action.

Jefferson County

Jefferson County, E8's newest member community, is led by the Arkansas River Education Service Cooperative. The steering committee has been formalized and includes representatives from K-12 education, health, home visiting, business, philanthropy, and higher education.

In 2023, the local steering committee will launch the research phase of the E8 process, gathering community input on priority areas by hosting data walk events and talking with parents, educators, service providers, and other stakeholders who work on behalf of families with children ages 0-8.

Data walks are gallery-style presentations of statistics related to boxes on the E8 resource grid. Excel by Eight presents initial data to participants and asks them to react. This helps us better understand where children are excelling and where we may need to shore up local resources.

Jefferson County Steering Committee

Cathi Swan, Chair, Arkansas River Education Service Cooperative

Peter Austin, Jefferson Regional Medical Center

Jennifer Barbaree, Pine Bluff School District

Dr. Steven Bloomberg, Southeast Arkansas College

Dr. Kimberly Davis, University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff

Jason Duren, United Way of Southeast Arkansas

Sherrie James, Southeast Arkansas Behavioral Healthcare System

Angela Lopez, Arkansas Department of Human Services

Chad Pitillo, Simmons Bank

Allison Thompson, Jefferson County Alliance

Dr. Sarper Turker, Arkansas Lighthouse Charter Schools

Dr. Gary Williams, White Hall School District

Tom Wilson, Watson Chapel School District



Little Rock

Little Rock has focused on digital equity in 2022, a priority area that gained awareness during the pandemic when schools and families needed more than ever to be able to use technology effectively for virtual learning. Digital equity involves not only ensuring community-wide access to affordable broadband and devices but also equipping residents with the skills needed to maintain devices and navigate the web.

The City of Little Rock was awarded \$5,000 by Heartland Forward to pilot computer skills classes in English and Spanish. Classes will address knowledge gaps for hardware care and for using education-related applications so that parents can communicate better with school leaders and stay updated on grades, school events, educational resources for at-home learning, and more. The Arkansas Regional Innovation Hub is creating course content and leading courses beginning in Spring 2023.

Additionally, two graduate-level researchers are surveying Little Rock residents to find out where there might be gaps in internet access, whether due to spotty broadband or affordability issues. The results from the study will help the steering committee identify strategies to strengthen digital access in the future.

Other priority areas in Little Rock include child care affordability and food security.

Little Rock Steering Committee

Jennifer Glasgow, Chair, City of Little Rock

Sarah Argue, Pulaski County Imagination Library

Natalie Baber, Our House

Patty Barker, Arkansas Hunger Relief Alliance

Dr. Jay Barth, William J. Clinton Presidential Library and Museum

Larry Clark, Life Skills for Youth

Lisa Donovan, Central Arkansas Library System

Kathy French, AR Kids Read

Tyra Greenwood, Arkansas Home Visiting Network

Arisbeth Johnson, ALAS-WINGS

Esther Jones, Little Rock School District – Early Childhood Education

David Kuchinski, The Centers for Youth and Families

Tiffany Lepard Tassin, Foster Parent

Desirae McBride, Our House

Jacqueline McEuen, Little Rock School District – School Health

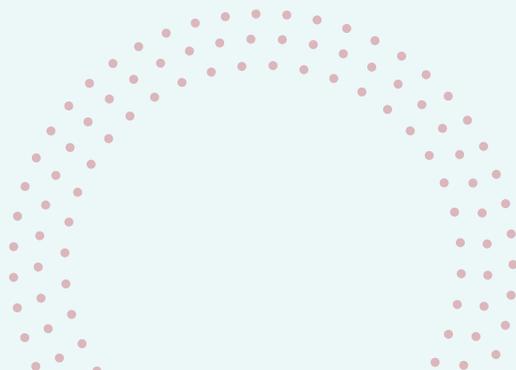
Mike Ramirez, Arvest Bank

Al Richardson, Life Skills for Youth

Rhonda Sanders, Arkansas Foodbank

Anna Strong, Arkansas Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics

Wendy Ward, University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences



Sevier County

The Early Learning Parks Project that began in 2021 expanded throughout Sevier County and more than doubled the funding investment originally awarded by Save the Children. Arkansas Community Foundation granted \$14,000 to expand the StoryWalk®, install a Born Learning Trail at a second site, and increase access to free books for young children.

Additionally, more than \$5,000 in materials and labor has been contributed in-kind by local community organizations and residents. This project provides free recreational and learning resources in easy-to-access public spaces, focused on early learning and development. Follow the link below or scan the QR code to learn more about what has been accomplished and the project's impact in the community.

Additionally, local leadership in Sevier County has worked in 2022 to identify strategies in the following priority areas: food security, social-emotional health, and early literacy. Child food security has been a long-term priority for this community, surfacing during data walks in 2019. Other priority areas became apparent during the pandemic.



In collaboration with partners from across Arkansas, Excel by Eight worked to improve area parks and recreation spaces in Horatio with a focus on early childhood development. Watch this video to learn more about the project.



Sevier County Steering Committee

Janet Cantrell, Co-Chair, University of Arkansas Division of Agriculture, Cooperative Extension Service

Mary Runnels, Co-Chair, Arkansas Department of Human Services

Erika Buenroostro, University of Arkansas Cossatot

Cheryl Byrd, DeQueen-Mena Education Service Cooperative

Sherry Dinger, Parkhill Preschool

Deborah Hedge, Sevier County Health Unit

Kimberly Johnson, Little Bitty City Enrichment Center

Kim Kennemore, DeQueen-Mena Education Service Cooperative

Debbi Neal, Horatio City Council

Amy Smith, Horatio School District

Beth Tody, Horatio School District; Excel by Eight

Angie Walker, Dr. Randy Walker Family Practice & Allergy Clinic

Union County

The E8 coalition in Union County, led by the SHARE Foundation and United Way, identified four priority areas in alignment with their organizational goals and the Excel by Eight resource grid. Priorities include child care availability, mental health, parent and family resources, and affordable housing. In 2023, the steering committee will approve goals, guide needs assessments, and review and evaluate strategies that are locally appropriate, feasible, and impactful for children ages 0-8 and their families.

Union County Steering Committee

Alexis Alexander, E8 Core Team, United Way of Union County

Gloria Billings, E8 Core Team, Arkansas Department of Human Services, Division of Children and Family Services

Debbie Watts, E8 Core Team, SHARE Foundation

Pam Blake, Families and Children Together (F.A.C.T.), Inc.

Becky Dixon, Smackover-Norphlet School District

Karen Hicks, The CALL in Arkansas

Heidi Klappenbach, Family Connects

Kathy Love, Hannah Pregnancy Resource Center

Ellen Lowe, Junction City School District

Debbie McAdams, El Dorado School District

Kaitlyn Rigdon, Union County Chamber of Commerce

Tequila Smith, Families and Children Together (F.A.C.T.), Inc.

Kimberly Thomas, Strong-Huttig School District



Excel by Eight Milestones

FAMILY	BASELINE	PROGRESS	GOAL
 Number of funded home visiting slots ¹⁰	2018-19 8,221	2021-22 8,990	2030 30,000
 Children receiving books through Dolly Parton's Imagination Library ¹¹	2019 30,031/month	2022 77,701/month	2030 191,000/month

COMMUNITY	BASELINE	PROGRESS	GOAL
 Children (0-18) under 200% of poverty who are uninsured ¹²	2019 7.6%	2022 5.0%	2030 5.0%

HEALTH	BASELINE	PROGRESS	GOAL
 Medicaid recipients 3, 4, and 5 years of age who had one or more well-child visits with a primary care provider during the year ¹³	2017 57%	2020 64%	2030 70%
 Medicaid recipients birth to 5 who received any dental or oral health service ¹⁴	2018 33%	2020 27%	2030 35%
 Medicaid recipients receiving dyadic mental health services ¹⁵	2018-19 1,421	2021-22 1,136	2030 TBD
 Statewide participation in free and reduced-price school breakfast compared to lunch ¹⁶	2018-19 63%	2020-21 74%	2030 70%
 Child food insecurity rate ¹⁷	2017 23%	2020 20%	2030 20%
 6 th , 8 th , 10 th , and 12 th graders who ever used any drug, including alcohol, marijuana, tobacco, and other illegal drugs ¹⁸	2018 20%	2021 16%	2030 18.5%

EDUCATION	BASELINE	PROGRESS	GOAL
 <p>Child care vouchers paying for a slot in a Level 3 Better Beginnings rated program¹⁹</p>	<p>2018-19</p> <p>Infants & Toddlers: 2,086</p> <p>3-5 years of age: 3,649</p>	<p>2021-22</p> <p>Infants & Toddlers: 4,952</p> <p>3-5 years of age: 8,356</p>	<p>2030</p> <p>All vouchers pay for slots in Level 3 programs or higher.</p>
 <p>Children receiving at least one ASQ or Brigance screen at 9, 18, and 30 months and autism screen at 18 and 24 (or 30 months)²⁰</p>	<p>2018-19</p> <p>NR</p>	<p>2021-22</p> <p>2,276</p>	<p>2030</p> <p>32,025</p>
 <p>3rd graders meeting reading readiness benchmark on the state assessment, the ACT Aspire²¹</p>	<p>2018-19</p> <p>38%</p>	<p>2021-22</p> <p>35%</p>	<p>2030</p> <p>80%</p>
 <p>4th graders reading at proficient or above according to the National Assessment of Educational Progress²²</p>	<p>2019</p> <p>31%</p> <p>Arkansas ranks 43rd</p>	<p>2022</p> <p>30%</p> <p>Arkansas ranks 39th</p>	<p>2030</p> <p>Arkansas ranks in the top 25 states</p>
 <p>Students receiving dyslexia interventions²³</p>	<p>2018-19</p> <p>4.8%</p>	<p>2021-22</p> <p>6.2%</p>	<p>2030</p> <p>20%</p>





Excel by Eight Steering Committee

Loretta Alexander

Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families

Rev. Cory Anderson

Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation

Tamara Baker

Arkansas Department of Health

Patty Barker

Arkansas Hunger Relief Alliance

Chrissy Chatham

Delta Dental of Arkansas Foundation

Jerri Clark

Arkansas Department of Education,
Division of Elementary and Secondary Education

Jerri Derlikowski

ForWARD Arkansas

Geania Dickey

Arkansas Early Childhood Association

Dr. Nikki Edge

University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences

Audrey Freshwater

Save the Children

Olivia Gardner

Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families

Jackie Govan

Arkansas Head Start Association,
Head Start State Collaboration Office

Tyra Greenwood

Arkansas Home Visiting Network, Arkansas Children's

Kelli Hilburn

Arkansas Department of Human Services,
Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Education

Ellie Hill

Arkansas Research Center

Sarah Kinser

Arkansas Community Foundation

Bill Kopsky

Arkansas Public Policy Panel

Mike Mertens

Arkansas Association of Educational Administrators

Lauren Morris

Arkansas Community Foundation

Dr. Charlotte Parham

Arkansas Imagination Library

Dr. Kiffany Pride

Arkansas Department of Education,
Division of Elementary and Secondary Education

Dr. Chad Rodgers

Arkansas Foundation for Medical Care

Rhonda Sanders

Arkansas Foodbank

Carla Sparks

Arkansas Children's

Candace Williams

Rural Community Alliance

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Take Action

Families, policymakers, and business and community leaders can help strengthen resource grids in Arkansas to give children a strong start.



Families

- Make sure the children in your life receive their well-child check ups and developmental screens at their 9-month, 18-month, and 30-month visits.
- Visit the Better Beginnings website at ARBetterBeginnings.com to find quality early childhood programs for your children or extended family members.
- Track your child's milestones with the CDC's "Learn the Signs. Act Early." tools at cdc.gov/milestones.

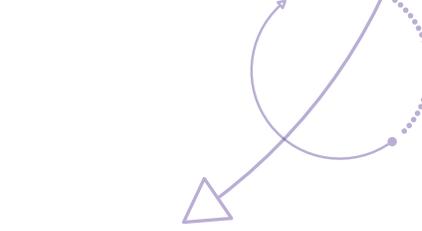
Communities

- Develop partnerships to expand home visiting services.
- Develop partnerships among early childhood education providers, schools, and local dentists to ensure children receive preventive oral health care and treatment.
- Work with mental health providers in your community to make sure they are providing dyadic mental health services for young children and their caregivers.

Policymakers

- Ensure young children receive the developmental and autism screenings and services they need to reach their full potential.
- Increase the quality of early childhood education programs.
- Make child care affordable for families.

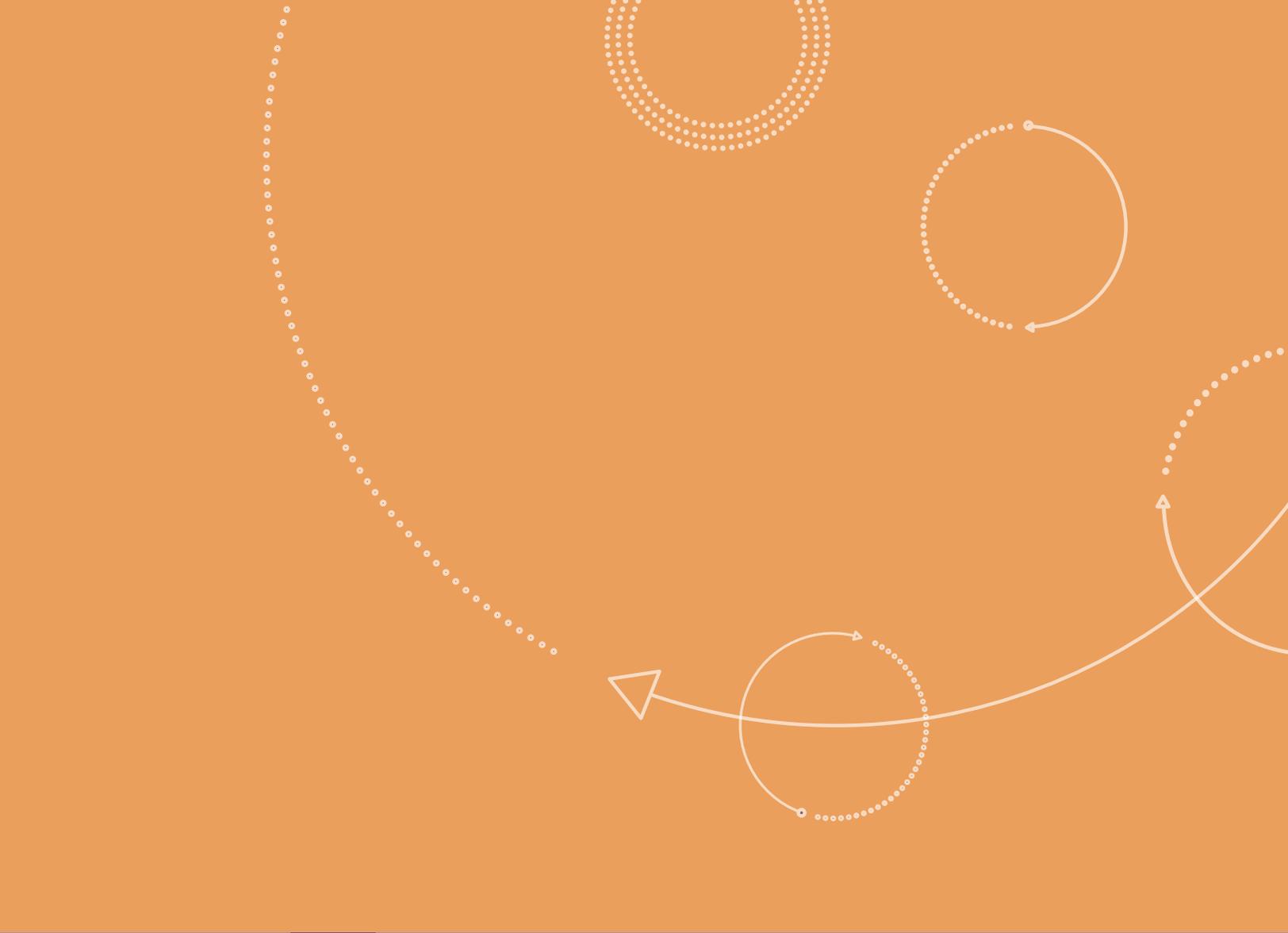




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