

PRESS RELEASE

Helen R. Walton Children's Enrichment Center
Contact: Michelle Barnes, Executive Director
479-273-3552 (P)
www.ecicnwa.org

1701 NE Wildcat Way
Bentonville, AR 72712
479-271-6803 (F)
www.hwcec.org

Northwest Arkansas Mirrors National Movement to Increase Access to High-Quality Early Learning

While Northwest Arkansas continues to rank as a premier job growth region, the community has identified access to high quality early childhood programs as the top quality of life concern. The Helen R. Walton Children's Enrichment Center (HWCEC) opened the Early Childhood Initiatives Center (ECIC) in 2009 to support the nearly 500 early childhood programs that provide care and education to over 32,000 children in Northwest Arkansas. The goal of the ECIC is to be an anchor of support so that 100% of early childhood education programs in Northwest Arkansas are quality accredited, ensuring that every young child has the opportunity to have a high quality education.

On September 17 from 8:00am -9:30am, business leaders and community leaders will gather in the Hayfield on J Street adjacent to Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art to learn more about the national movement towards expanding early childhood education options and how it impacts the economic and workforce development in Northwest Arkansas. Steven Williams of PepsiCo will lead a conversation between community leaders, including Lynne Walton of the Walton Family Foundation, Karen Parker of the Walmart Foundation, Sara Lilygren of Tyson Foods, Inc, Mike Malone of the Northwest Arkansas Council, and Larry Perkin of Hight Jackson Associates on their relationship with the Helen R. Walton Children's Enrichment Center and Early Childhood Initiatives Center and their areas of expertise as it relates to early childhood education in our region.

Panelists John King Jr., Deputy Secretary of Education at the U. S. Department of Education and Linda K. Smith, Deputy Assistant Secretary and Inter-Departmental Liaison for Early Childhood Development for the Administration for Children and Families at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services will also join the conversation to give their expertise on what is happening in early childhood at the national level.

Michelle Barnes, Executive Director of the Helen R. Walton Children's Enrichment Center and Early Childhood Initiatives Center will speak to the organization's future plans to support the Northwest Arkansas community and workforce through high-quality early childhood education.

"With over 71% of women with children in the workforce, this is no longer a family issue, it's a community-wide issue," said Barnes. "Reliable, quality education and care for our youngest learners is essential in recruiting and retaining the workforce necessary for growth. Having children in a high quality early childhood environment results in families being six times more likely to stay in the workforce, giving employers 3-4 times increased productivity and reduced turnover."

After the panel discussion, attendees will be encouraged to take initiative to increase early learning options through advocating, volunteering, and giving opportunities, because it truly takes a village to raise a child.

This is a free event. To RSVP or learn more about the initiative, please contact Sunny Lane or Kristen Herbert at 479-273-3552 or visit ecicnwa.org.

###

About Helen R. Walton Children’s Enrichment Center

Children are our first priority at the Helen R. Walton Children’s Enrichment Center; our doors opened in 1982. We are a trusted name in both the community and the early childhood industry. Our commitment is to provide families access to the highest quality early childhood education and care. The Center reaches beyond our families served and collaborates with early childhood programs throughout Northwest Arkansas. Visit www.hwcec.org to learn more.

About the Early Childhood Initiatives Center

The ECIC collaborates with the nearly 500 early childhood programs in Northwest Arkansas, to ensure that every child, infant through pre-k, has access to the highest quality of early childhood education and care. High-quality early childhood education benefits the child, workforce and society through increased graduation rates, parental earnings and employee retention, and ensures a talent rich pipeline, leading to a \$9.21 return on investment for every dollar spent in early education. We rely on the generosity of volunteers, advocates and donors in our community. Visit ecicnwa.org to learn more.