

## PRESS RELEASE

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### Kick off to Kindergarten

**Families of Helen R. Walton Children’s Enrichment Center gather to help prepare young children to succeed**

Earlier this week, the parents of Pre-K students at the Helen R. Walton Children’s Enrichment Center (HWCEC) attended “Kick off to Kindergarten”, an annual program designed to put preschool students on the path to success. Families participated in an open dialogue with teachers and other parents on ways they can help make the transition from preschool to Kindergarten.



“Parents are often surprised at the expectations schools have for their youngest learners when entering Kindergarten. We host this annual event to address any concerns regarding these expectations, discuss how we support our children to ensure a smooth transition, and go over some of the important topics families can focus on together,” Holly Marshall, HWCEC Preschool Coordinator.

Holly has also been communicating with many of the elementary school partners to evaluate the impact high quality learning has on students who enter kindergarten. Establishing an open dialogue between school counterparts gives teachers a chance to share how early childhood development directly impacts school success. It also provides important feedback that can be shared with the Early Childhood Initiative Center (ECIC) partners.

Sue Bentel, Thomas Jefferson Elementary school teacher observes a difference in social and emotional skills in young children when they have not attended a high quality early childhood education program, “For children who have not attended high quality preschool, one of the most difficult transitions is sharing the attention of adults and interacting appropriately with their peers. Children need to learn to work with and beside others cooperatively. This is not always easy if they have never had the chance to practice these socialization skills.” She adds, “Kindergarten teachers are very grateful for all that preschool teachers do to help prepare children for school!”

Willowbrook Elementary teacher Kaci Crow also shared differences in school readiness of children after attending a high quality early learning program, “Students are more independent and have an awareness of structure and how a school environment works. A majority of the students come in with some knowledge of letters, sounds, nursery rhymes, and fairy tales”.

Parents become partners with the early education providers in the care and education of their young children. Parent communication and engagement begins in these earliest programs, which can also help identify developmental delays and recommend early intervention. Sugar Creek Elementary Tammy Taverno, “High quality preschools also communicate closely with parents about their child’s development and can possibly offer suggestions to help the child successfully make the transition to the kindergarten environment. Preschools can also offer early intervention for students with developmental and academic challenges”.

Last fall, the Center announced the relocation of the Helen R. Walton Children’s Enrichment Center and the expansion of the Early Childhood Initiatives Center. The new location is off J Street in Bentonville, in the land adjacent to Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art and the Scott Family Amazeum. The Center will support more than 500 other licensed programs in the Northwest Arkansas region as they seek to obtain and maintain state and national accreditation.

The ultimate goal of the Early Childhood Initiatives Center is for 100% of centers in Northwest Arkansas to become quality accredited through the State of Arkansas’ Better Beginnings program, ensuring that every young child has access to a high-quality early education.

The Helen R. Walton Children’s Enrichment Center is a nonprofit partner in the national Invest in Us campaign. See [www.ecicnwa.org](http://www.ecicnwa.org) for more information on the Early Childhood Initiatives Center campaign to improve the quality of care and education provided by the nearly 500 Arkansas child care programs that serve over 32,000 children in the region.

The organization expects to have renderings of the new building this spring, and will break ground shortly thereafter. Investment opportunities are still available, ranging from as little as \$500 up to \$1 million plus on-going program support for naming rights of the Early Childhood Initiatives Center.

*For more information, contact Sunny Lane or Kristen Herbert at (479) 273-3552 or visit [ecicnwa.org](http://ecicnwa.org).*

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#### **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](http://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](http://ecicnwa.org) to learn more.

#### **About Invest in US**

Invest in US is a non-partisan challenge to business leaders, philanthropists, advocates, public officials and the public to build a better nation through high quality early childhood programs for children from birth to age five. When we invest in them, we invest in us. [www.investinus.org](http://www.investinus.org)