

PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release

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We Mean Business on Early Childhood

The day and age of “daycare” is gone. Early education is critical to ensure every young child is prepared for school success. A child that spends at least one year in a high-quality early education environment is three times more likely to graduate from high school, attend secondary education and utilize less social services. There is a \$9.21 return for every \$1 invested in early education. High-quality early education supports Northwest Arkansas' economic position, today's workforce and creates a talent pipeline for tomorrow's workforce needs.

While NWA continues to rank in the top 5 premier job growth regions, our community has identified access to high quality early childhood programs as the top quality of life concern in our region. Quality educational options are critical to attract a highly skilled workforce to the region. Access to high quality learning is a soft infrastructure need in our rapidly growing community.

"Early childhood education is critical to helping meet Northwest Arkansas' workforce needs. The services provided through the Early Childhood Initiative Center (ECIC) ensure the demand for high quality early childhood options are met by supporting and training early childhood professionals in the nearly 500 licensed early childhood education programs in NWA. Strong early childhood programs help us recruit talent to the area and ensure working families have the support needed to remain in the workforce. Longer term, high quality early childhood education programs will also help better develop our future talent pipeline," said Mike Malone, President/CEO of Northwest Arkansas Council.

The Greater Northwest Arkansas Development Strategy, issued in January 2015, listed “improving early childhood education” among other topics to make Northwest Arkansas a more “competitive and prosperous region.”¹

The Helen R. Walton Children's Enrichment Center (HWCEC) and the Early Childhood Initiatives Center (ECIC) are holding the “It Takes a Village to Raise a Child” launch event on Thursday, September 17 in the hayfield on J Street in front of Crystal Bridges. 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 2 representatives from the Department of Education and Department of Health and Human Services will hold a panel discussion to discuss the important role early childhood development has on the region's economic and workforce development.

“With over 71% of women with children in the workforce, this no longer a family issue, it's a community-wide issue,” said Michelle Barnes, Executive Director of the Early Childhood Initiatives Center. “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.”

Tomorrow’s workforce is being shaped by today’s early childhood programs. Investing in this community wide effort will improve the fiscal health of Northwest Arkansas by strengthening human capital, enhancing economic growth, increasing revenues, and ensuring a talent rich pipeline for the NWA workforce. It truly takes a village to raise a child.

¹The Greater Northwest Arkansas Development Strategic, January 2015, page 11

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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 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.