



History of the Arkansas Early Childhood Association

The Arkansas Association on Children under Six (now the Arkansas Early Childhood Association) traces its roots back to the early 1950s when two women from Little Rock felt the need to bring together people who were concerned with the education and welfare of preschool children. The women, Maggie Reynolds, who was a day care consultant for the State Department of Public Welfare (now Arkansas Department of Human Services) and Gay Gattis, supervisor of a nursery school laboratory for high school students in child development at Little Rock High School (now Central High School) reached out to others who were involved in early childhood in Little Rock. In time the Preschool Association of Little Rock with twelve charter members was organized. The group continued to meet and to grow, to attract members from outside Little Rock, to hold workshops, and to promote quality care and education for preschool children. In 1963, the group formally organized, held a conference, adopted a constitution and voted to join the Southern Association on Children under Six (now SECA). With a membership of eighty-three and dues of \$2.00, AACUS became an affiliate of SACUS in 1964.

Two local affiliates formed in 1974, one in the Little Rock area and one in northeast Arkansas. Since that time, additional affiliates have been formed in different areas of the state.

The Southern Association on Children under Six (SACUS) changed its name to the Southern Early Childhood Association (SECA) and in 1993, the Arkansas Association on Children under Six (AACUS) became the Arkansas Early Childhood Association (AECA).

Since its affiliation with SECA in 1964, AECA has been a strong supporter of SECA. The state has hosted five SECA conferences, four members have served as SECA President, and AECA members are frequent presenters at the annual SECA conferences.

AECA members have been involved in advocating for the improvement of early care and education for children in Arkansas since its organization. The early focus was on preschool children when members worked to get Amendment 53 passed. This amendment removed the constitutional barrier of age restrictions for public school education in Arkansas, thus paving the way for public school kindergarten. In time, the focus was expanded to include infants, toddlers and early primary grade children. AECA has also been involved in supporting efforts to insure the availability of good child care programs in local communities. Advocacy efforts by AECA continue as it works with other groups with the same focus.

Membership in AECA has grown, dues have increased, and conferences are larger and held in convention centers rather than local schools and churches. In 1986, AECA celebrated its 25th Annual Conference and its 50th Annual Conference in 2011. Throughout the years of growth and change, the primary concern of AECA has remained the same as it was in 1964 – the education and welfare of children in Arkansas.

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