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This report was submitted to Governor Stitt and the legislature November 1, 2019, as required by Title 10 O.S. § 640.2.
Dear Governor Stitt,

With support from the Oklahoma Partnership for School Readiness (OPSR), I am pleased to present OPSR’s 2019 Annual Report on the state of early childhood in Oklahoma to you and the Oklahoma legislature.

Oklahoma has a long-standing track record of success when it comes to our early childhood programs. Our state has achieved national recognition for pioneering universal access to pre-k (recognized again this year as fourth strongest in the country); for creating a rewards-based star ratings system by which all licensed childcare centers are reviewed, helping to ensure quality care for children and educated choices for parents; and for our state’s collaborative partnership across state, private and nonprofit entities that has been led by OPSR since 2003, which also serves as your Early Childhood Advisory Council.

While Oklahoma has proven ourselves again and again to be a “Top 10 State” in initiatives involving early childhood, we have systems gaps in significant need of improvement. The Oklahoma Department of Human Services reports that 46 percent of our children birth through five live in counties classified as high or high-medium risk for poor school readiness; those are highly concentrated in the southeast, southwest and northeast quadrants of our state, showing an increased need to help our rural families. Additionally, the cost and availability of childcare continues to be a barrier for families, especially those with infants and toddlers. Because 62 percent of Oklahoma children age birth to five have all parents in the workforce, it is an economic imperative that we address this burden on working parents ready to help grow Oklahoma’s economy. Simultaneously, we know high-quality childcare helps mitigate exposures to Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES) in our children, readying them not only for school but also for healthy, productive lives. Sadly, Oklahoma continues to top national charts ranking ACES exposures among children. Without interventions, this cycle of exposure most often continues for multiple generations.

However, there continues to be much hope on the horizon for Oklahoma’s young families. With a $3M federal Preschool Development Grant Birth-5 from the Administration for Children and Families matched with state and private funds and in-kind resources, Oklahoma - led by OPSR - now has a comprehensive needs assessment identifying the systems gaps and the needs of the most vulnerable children in our state. Built by a statewide network of diverse partners, this agreed upon assessment has formed the foundation for a new multi-year strategic plan supporting the unique needs of Oklahoma’s families and communities while more efficiently using existing federal, state, local and nongovernmental resources to align and strengthen the delivery of existing programs.

With your naming of our state’s first ever Secretary of Human Services and Early Childhood Initiatives and your support of Oklahoma’s application for the subsequent PDG B-5 grant that has the potential to bring millions more to our state, OPSR is grateful for your leadership.

Sincerely,

Natalie Burns
OPSR Chair
History
In 2003, the Oklahoma legislature signed House Bill 1094, which created our organization, the Oklahoma Partnership for School Readiness (OPSR). This legislation recognized more state level action is required to successfully support families and children from birth to age five-years-old. At the state level, OPSR engages and informs policy makers and the public on how to improve children’s health and development. Together, OPSR leads public and private partnerships so that children arrive at school with knowledge, skills, and physical and emotional health to achieve success. OPSR provides recommendations on early childhood to the governor and legislature by utilizing data, research and best practices that engage parents, nonprofits, community partners and business leaders.

Mission
Our mission is to lead Oklahoma in coordinating an early childhood system that strengthens families and ensures all children are ready for school.

Vision
Our vision is that all Oklahoma children are safe, healthy, eager to learn and ready to succeed by the time they enter school.
Legislative Mandates
• Conduct an assessment of existing public and private programs to determine their effectiveness and efficient use of state dollars.

• Implement a public engagement campaign and establish a structure to facilitate communication to develop and improve school readiness opportunities at the local level.

• Encourage public and private programs, services, and initiatives be brought together to provide coordinated, community-based, effective and cost-efficient programs.

• Maximize the extent to which private sector funding is leveraged and federal, state and local funds are coordinated with private funds.

• Establish standards of accountability in school readiness programs and policy and recognize and promote best practices.

• Submit an annual report to the legislature and governor.

Foundation
In conjunction with the establishment of OPSR, the OPSR Foundation (OPSRF) was created to solicit and receive public and private funds. The foundation supports OPSR’s mission and vision by expanding the breadth in which our organization can financially support early childhood research, programs and initiatives. In this capacity, the OPSR Foundation operates as a 501(c)3. Currently, the foundation is made up of passionate, dedicated advocates, some of whom worked to improve school readiness prior to the formation of OPSR. Our foundation is proud of OPSR’s hard work over the past 15 years but knows there is much more to be gained if Oklahoma continues to invest in children from birth to the time they enter school.

Elections of new officers were held April 5, 2019. OPSR is thankful to all officers who generously shared their time to serve on the executive committee and help spread OPSR’s mission.

Debra Andersen
Executive Director

Jerry Burger
Secretary prior to April 5, 2019
Governance Chair after April 5, 2019

Ann Cameron
Director prior to April 5, 2019
President after April 5, 2019

Kathy Cronemiller
Vice President prior to April 5, 2019
Treasurer after April 5, 2019

Phil Dessauer
Director after April 5, 2019

Bill Doenges
President prior to April 5, 2019

Carl Edwards
Director after April 5, 2019

Robert Harbison
Treasurer prior to April 5, 2019
Director after April 5, 2019

Annie Koppel Van Hanken
Vice President after April 5, 2019

Lindsay Laird
Director after April 5, 2019

Janet McKenzie
Governance Chair prior to April 5, 2019
Secretary after April 5, 2019

Liz McLaughlin
Director after April 5, 2019
The Oklahoma Partnership for School Readiness Board is comprised of agency leaders and governor appointees that are responsible for carrying out state and federal legislatively defined mandates. During FY19, the following members served on the OPSR Board.

**Polly Anderson**  
Executive Director  
Oklahoma Educational Television Authority  
Designee: Curtis Calvin

**Blayne Arthur**  
Executive Director  
4-H Foundation

**Tom Bates**  
Interim Commissioner of Health  
Oklahoma State Department of Health  
Designee: Ed Rhoades, Joyce Marshall

**Justin Brown**  
Director  
Oklahoma Department of Human Services  
Designee: Lesli Blazer

**Natalie Burns**  
OPSR Board Chair  
Community Volunteer

**Ann Cameron**  
OPSR Immediate Past Chair  
Community Volunteer

**Kathy Cronemiller**  
Owner  
Child Care, Inc.

**Joy Culbreath**  
Education Director  
Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma

**William “Bill” Doenges**  
Community Volunteer

**Marianne “Marny” Dunlap, MD**  
Children’s Hospital at OU Medical Center

**Kay C. Floyd**  
State Director of Head Start Collaboration  
Oklahoma Association of Community Action Agencies  
Designee: Zach Cole

**Melinda Freundt**  
Director  
Oklahoma State Department of Rehabilitation Services  
Designee: Rita Echel

**Kent Gardner**  
General Counsel  
The Funk Companies

**Joy Hofmeister**  
Superintendent  
Oklahoma State Department of Education  
Designee: Cindy Koss and Tiffany Neill

**Annette Jacobi**  
Executive Director  
Oklahoma Commission on Children and Youth

**Glen Johnson**  
Chancellor  
Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education  
Designee: Gina McPherson

**Melody Kellogg**  
Director  
Oklahoma Department of Libraries

**Brent Kisling**  
Executive Director  
Oklahoma Department of Commerce  
Designee: Marshall Vogts

**William Lightfoot**  
First Vice President  
CBRE

**Marcie Mack**  
Director  
Oklahoma Department of Career and Technology Education  
Designee: Janet Karner

**Melissa McLawhorn Houston**  
Secretary of Education and Workforce Development

**Misty Montgomery**  
OPSR Board Secretary  
Community Volunteer

**Jessica Ockershauser**  
Communications Manager  
Chesapeake Energy

**Becky Pasternik-Ikard**  
Chief Executive Officer  
Oklahoma Health Care Authority  
Designee: Shelly Patterson

**Ryan Posey**  
OPSR Board Treasurer  
HSI Sensing

**Ray H. Potts**  
OPSR Board Vice Chair  
Potts Exploration, LLC

**Sarah Roberts**  
Senior Program Officer  
Inasmuch Foundation
OPSR Board

Anthony Stafford  
*OPSR Board Member-at-Large*  
Big Five Community Services, Inc.

Terri White, MSW  
*Commissioner*  
Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services  
Designee: Audra Haney

Annie Koppel Van Hanken  
*Senior Program Officer*  
George Kaiser Family Foundation

Stephan M. Wilson, PhD, CFLE  
*Regents Professor and Dean*  
College of Human Services Oklahoma State University  
Designee: Jennifer Stepp

OPSR would also like to thank the following members who served on the board during this fiscal year: Executive Director of Department of Commerce Deby Snodgrass, Director of DHS Ed Lake, Director Oklahoma State Department of Rehabilitation Services Noel Tyler, and Director of Oklahoma Department of Libraries Susan McVey.

The OPSR Board held elections for its executive committee on June 20, 2019. OPSR looks forward to working with our new officers and would like to extend our sincerest gratitude for the FY18 – FY19 officers for providing their leadership and vision for the past two years.

Incoming Officers

Annette Jacobi  
*Chair*

Sarah Roberts  
*Vice Chair*

Angie Clayton  
*Secretary*

William Lightfoot  
*Treasurer*

Natalie Burns  
*Immediate Past Chair*

OPSR Staff

The OPSR staff works every day to carry our OPSR’s mission and implement its many projects across various sectors of health and mental health, policy, early care and education, and family supports. Because of new funding through the Preschool Development Grant B-5, OPSR was able to hire new staff to help complete the requirements of the grant. Each bring different backgrounds and new perspectives that have been beneficial across all of OPSR’s work. Staff during FY19 included,

Debra Andersen  
*Executive Director*

Diane Bell  
*Program Director*

Vicki Bumpas  
*Accountant*

Torri Christian  
*Program Coordinator*

Angela Duckett  
*Program Coordinator*

Gabrielle Jacobi  
*Program Director*

Kimberly Jumper Brown  
*Program Coordinator*

Chris Lee  
*Administrative Specialist*

Courtney Maker  
*Administrative Coordinator*

Ed Martin  
*Grants Manager*

Katherine Parker  
*Community Relations Specialist*
2019

Achievements
Project HOPE

About HOPE
Project HOPE is a health equity grant awarded to OPSR in 2018 that focuses on promoting the optimal well-being of children birth to five by preventing and mitigating early childhood adversities and reducing racial, ethnic, geographic and economic inequalities. When OPSR applied for this grant, OPSR assembled a cross sector state stakeholder group comprised of individuals connected to this work. This group, the Early Learning, Equity and Diversity Team, or E-LEaD Team, is charged with maintaining a diversity and equity focus.

Project Focus
At the beginning of our work with Project HOPE, OPSR examined several indicators of health across our state and noticed several large disparities, including infant mortality. Oklahoma is currently ranked 43rd in the nation for infant mortality at 7.4 deaths per 1000 live births, compared to a national average of 5.8. The rate is significantly higher for black and American Indian infants, which is double or nearly double the rate for white infants. This was particularly concerning and OPSR wanted to examine root causes driving high rates by hearing directly from families regarding barriers faced during pregnancy and the early years of a child’s life.

INFANT MORTALITY RATES BY RACE AND HISPANIC ORIGIN*
2014 — 2016

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>American Indian</th>
<th>Hispanic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rate</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>13.4</td>
<td>11.3</td>
<td>7.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Oklahoma State Department of Health, Center for Health Statistics, Health Care Information, OK2Share
*Hispanics may be of any race
Looking Ahead...

In the upcoming fiscal year, once stories are gathered, community Sensemaking will begin, in which patterns and common themes of lived experience are analyzed in order to see how a community can move the needle to more positive experiences and outcomes. OPSR will work with caregivers and providers to increase awareness of resources and information, while continuing to prioritize community voice.

Hopeful Futures

OPSR partnered with the Center for Public Partnerships and Research at the University of Kansas to collaborate on a new story gathering technique called Sensemaker. Sensemaker gives community members, both families and providers, the opportunity to share and reflect on their lived experiences. OPSR will be able to examine the patterns of stories in-depth, allowing us to gain a new understanding of what families need to thrive.

Since developing our Sensemaker framework, titled Hopeful Futures, OPSR had a successful testing period at the OKC Indian Clinic. Additionally, OPSR has engaged with two tribal partners in the state, the Cherokee and Chickasaw Nation, to pilot the Hopeful Futures project and gather stories. In order to do this OPSR has been developing a partnership with those nations, which led to an increased interest in adapting a community engagement focus area. Aided by our strong partnerships across the state, OPSR hopes to implement Hopeful Futures within their communities.
Project SHINE

About SHINE
Oklahoma was one of five states selected by Child Trends, the nation’s leading research organization focused on improving children’s lives, to participate in the State-level Home Visiting Integration with Early Childhood Data Systems (SHINE) Initiative. OPSR understands the need to link home visiting data with other data on children’s well-being and outcomes in order to create the most efficient and positive program and policy recommendations for young children.

In collaboration with our partners, the Oklahoma State Department of Education, the University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center and the Oklahoma Department for Human Services, OPSR was successful in helping create a link with home visiting and Soonerstart data.

Linking Data in Oklahoma will...

- Ensure services are reaching all families in need.
- Create more coordinated and aligned services at the state level.
- Assess the impact of home visiting services by analyzing data about the services received in a child’s life and how those services contributed to a child’s outcomes.
Looking Ahead...
As part of their work with Oklahoma on the SHINE Initiative, Child Trends will provide technical assistance to OPSR in writing the 2019 Annual Home Visiting Report. With assistance from Child Trends, OPSR hopes to further develop the narrative around why home visiting is so vital in our state and brainstorm new ways to visualize our home visiting data.

2019 National Summit on Quality in Home Visiting Programs
On February 1, 2019, Debra Andersen presented on the SHINE Initiative at the 2019 National Summit on Quality in Home Visiting Programs alongside Kristine Campagna (Chief of the Office of Family Home Visiting and Newborn Screening, Rhode Island Department of Health), Dale Epstein (Senior Research Analyst, Child Trends) and Van-Kim Lin (Research Scientist, Child Trends). They described how several states through the SHINE Initiative are pioneering the way to link home visiting data with other early childhood data to support more informed policy making.

SHINE Convening
OPSR convened nearly 100 home visitors, researchers and agency leaders on March 11, 2019. The objective of the convening was to identify research and policy questions to be addressed through data linking and what data will be required to answer these questions. For example, providers would like to be able to answer the following questions about families and children enrolled in home visiting:

- How are children doing later in school?
- Are children reaching appropriate milestones?
- Did parenting skills improve?
- What other services are the family or child receiving?
- Do parents know about safe sleep?

Looking Ahead...
As part of their work with Oklahoma on the SHINE Initiative, Child Trends will provide technical assistance to OPSR in writing the 2019 Annual Home Visiting Report. With assistance from Child Trends, OPSR hopes to further develop the narrative around why home visiting is so vital in our state and brainstorm new ways to visualize our home visiting data.
About OKFutures
Designated as the lead entity by Governor Mary Fallin, the OPSR Foundation was awarded $3.1 million under the Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families in December 2018 to administer the Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five (PDG B-5), titled OKFutures. Oklahoma’s goal is to create the country’s most effective early childhood mixed delivery system. By building seamless connections between existing resources, informed through a deeper understanding of gaps and inefficiencies, Oklahoma will ensure low-income and disadvantaged children have equitable access to early learning opportunities.

The goals of the grant are:

1. Create a comprehensive Needs Assessment that includes updated data on program participation, quality cost analysis, data integration, unduplicated count of pre-k and Head Start, and assess professional development.

2. Develop a five-year strategic plan to create early childhood system improvements, such as increasing participation by underserved populations, enhancing the capacity of the workforce, and establishing a high-quality, and an aligned early learning framework.

3. Increase parental knowledge of availability of early childhood programs, while engaging parent perspective to inform system design.

4. Share best practices by building upon exemplary programs and increasing capacity of early childhood providers.

5. Implement quality improvements across standards, policy, and financing and identify recommendations for future priorities.
In order to accomplish these activities, multiple teams were convened to guide, inform and assist in the implementation of grant goals and objectives: Family and Community Engagement Team, Professional Development Team, Quality Improvement Team, Steering Committee, Evaluation Team, and the E-LEaD Team (see page nine). Ultimately, 162 people representing four foundations, seven tribes, two hospitals, 17 state agencies, three universities, nine private businesses and nine nonprofits have contributed to activities of the grant thus far.
Developing the Needs Assessment and Strategic Plan

For assistance in developing the Needs Assessment and Strategic Plan, OPSR contracted with the Urban Institute of Washington D.C. The Urban Institute team working on the OKFutures grant was in Oklahoma June 4-8 as part of their work for the Needs Assessment. The objective of the Needs Assessment is to analyze the current landscape of the Oklahoma’s early childhood care and education mixed delivery system, while informing the implementation of changes to the system to maximize the availability of high-quality programs for low-income families. In order to inform the needs assessment, the team conducted eight focus groups with families across the state in Tulsa, Oklahoma City, Tahlequah, Ada, Enid and Shawnee. They also had the opportunity to present at the OPSR Foundation Board and OPSR Board Executive Committee meetings, as well as attend and hold focus groups at the Tribal Child Care Association Meeting.

From June 20-28, OPSR staff traveled across the state to host 11 Community Conversations. These facilitated conversations provided communities a voice to describe the current state of early childhood, areas for improvement and strategies to accomplish goals. The information gathered from these conversations was incorporated into the strategic plan, which lays out a plan for an equitable and sustainable system for improving developmental and academic outcomes for children, especially those most vulnerable and underserved.

Looking Ahead...

The completed Needs Assessment and Strategic Plan were submitted to ACF in the first half of FY20. As of publication of this report, the Needs Assessment has been accepted.
**ECIDS**

Supported through the OKFutures grant, OPSR was able to progress in the state’s work to improve accountability and transparency of early childhood services by securing technical assistance in the development of an early childhood integrated data system (ECIDS). An ECIDS creates securely linked data across various early childhood programs to inform decisions regarding various early childhood systems.

In April 2019, a request for proposal (RFP) was released to provide technical assistance in the planning of Oklahoma’s ECIDS. Representatives from three state agencies and OPSR formed a review committee to evaluate nine proposals submitted in response to the RFP. Ultimately the OPSR Foundation awarded a contract to Third Sector Intelligence (3SI) with Foresight Law + Policy and Chapin Hall as subcontractors, collectively known as the “contractors.” Between awarding the contract on May 29, 2019 and the end of the fiscal year, June 30, 2019, OPSR and the contractors received significant buy-in from state leadership and partners. On June 13, the contractors travelled to Oklahoma City to hold a kickoff session at OPSR to establish a project oversight committee with representation from OSDH, OKDHS, OSDE and Cabinet Secretary Steven Buck. Throughout the process, State Superintendent Joy Hoffmeister, OKDHS Director Justin Brown, Cabinet Secretary Steven Buck have been actively involved in setting priorities for the ECIDS.

**Looking Ahead...**

For the next fiscal year, 3SI, Foresight Policy + Law and Chapin Hall will submit a data inventory, data systems integration and data governance plan to serve as a blueprint for the development of an ECIDS.

**LENA Grow**

During FY19, with the support of Public Service Company of Oklahoma and through funding provided by the American Electric Power Foundation, LENA Grow pilots were conducted at Tulsa Educare and Delaware Child Development Center. LENA Grow is an innovative, research-based professional development program for infant, toddler and pre-k teachers. Measuring the most predictive elements of child outcomes, LENA Grow supports stakeholders at every level, helping teachers gain the skills to measurably improve classroom quality by boosting interactions. The program couples LENA’s “talk pedometer” technology with weekly coaching sessions. Teachers gain data insights that go far beyond typical feedback, leading to quality improvement without additional burdens on their schedules.

Both sites reported that the data was easy to read and the tools were user friendly. Delaware Child Development Center reported that because the tool indicated their adult-child interactions were already at high-levels, they felt comfortable not needing to continue the project. Tulsa Educare expressed that they felt the tool was wonderful and plan to use it in the future.

**Looking Ahead...**

In the upcoming fiscal year, LENA Grow will be piloted in three new sites in 22 classrooms across the state through the OKFutures grant. Implementation is scheduled for November 2019.
The 2019 Oklahoma Early Childhood Research Symposium, Promoting Equity: Comprehensive Early Childhood Strategies, was held at the University of Central Oklahoma’s Nigh University Center January 17, 2019. The annual research symposium engages various stakeholders by promoting best practices for school readiness. This year’s research symposium provided participants the opportunity to ensure that authentic stakeholder voice is included in the development of comprehensive policies, practices and programs. Through this, Oklahoma is ensuring that young children and families have equitable access to the array of services intended to support healthy physical, cognitive and emotional development.

The keynote speaker for this year’s symposium was Dr. Brenda Jones Harden of University of Maryland College Park. Her presentation, Promoting Equity through Early Childhood Interventions, examined the evidence on the benefits of interventions like home visiting, parenting programs and early childhood education on children experiencing risks like poverty and ACEs. Other presentations included Engaging with Hispanic Communities to Promote Strong Families and Healthy Children by Dr. Alicia Salvatore, Listening to Community Voices in the Development of an Early Childhood Intervention by Dr. Susan B. Sisson, and Promoting Healthy Environments in Early Care and Education: Recommendations for Happy Healthy Homes by Dr. Salvatore and Dr. Sisson.

Champions for Children Award
This year’s 2019 Champion for Children was awarded to Bill Doenges. From Tulsa, Doenges has been an advocate for early childhood since before the inception of OPSR and was even named as one of OPSR’s very first board members in 2003. Throughout the years, his commitment to children, families and community has made an impact across our state. Most recently, Doenges served as OPSR Foundation President until April 5, 2019. OPSR is grateful to have worked with him since our founding and is grateful to have him as our 2019 Champion for Children.
Kindergarten Readiness*

*Unless otherwise noted, data in this section is provided by the OKFutures Needs Assessment
The Oklahoma School Readiness Pathway serves as our roadmap to identify, monitor and report how Oklahoma is, or isn’t, meeting school readiness benchmarks. It was developed to depict the complexities of the interlocking systems that comprise school readiness with OPSR’s goal that Oklahoma’s early childhood system be coordinated, aligned and adequately funded. The Pathway illustrates how health, early care and learning, and family support influence a child’s readiness for school. Beginning at birth through school entry, this framework allows us to monitor outcomes and indicators that inform action such as policy changes and investments in quality improvement.

**OKLAHOMA SCHOOL READINESS PATHWAY**

**Children & Families Have Access to Health Services**
- Babies who are born on time & healthy.
- Children have access to health care.
- Children are physically & emotionally healthy.
- Children are on a positive development trajectory.

**Children Engaged in High Quality Early Care & Learning**
- Children have access to high quality, developmentally appropriate programs with professionals.
- Children attend early learning programs & schools consistently.
- Children learn in safe environments with positive climates that support social-emotional development.

**All Parents Have Access to Education & Support Services**
- Children have safe, stable & nurturing relationships with their caregivers.
- Families have the knowledge, skills & social supports for their children’s optimal development.
- Children live in economically secure families.
- Communities are safe, toxic-free & economically viable in support of children & their families.
Pathway Framework
To help guide the pathway, OPSR adopted a framework to articulate skills and system components that must be in place to ensure children are prepared and successful in kindergarten and beyond. This framework differs from the pathway because it provides a broader context of how a community can support specific skills to prepare children for school. Families, communities and schools each have responsibilities in providing opportunities for children to be prepared upon school entry.
Early Care & Education

Need
Oklahoma is home to over 317,000 children aged birth through five. Our children are racially and ethnically diverse with nearly one third living in rural areas and many facing substantial economic need. There are three main programs within Oklahoma’s early childhood care and education (ECCE) mixed-delivery system that serve our children: licensed child care, universal pre-k, and Head Start/Early Head Start (including Tribal Head Start/Early Head Start).

One quarter of young children in Oklahoma live in single-parent households. Given the working patterns of Oklahoma families, more than two-thirds of young children in the state are likely to need child care and over 35,000 children need care during nontraditional hours. Access to high-quality, safe and affordable childcare is essential for families of young children to achieve economic stability.

While the majority of young children in the state live in urban areas around Oklahoma City and Tulsa, 34 percent live in rural areas. Rural Oklahomans face unique challenges in accessing childcare, healthcare services and other resources important to a child’s growth and development. A lack of public transportation in rural areas is often cited by community members and key stakeholders as a serious challenges to families who need access to available resources.

Source: Oklahoma Child Care Resource and Referral Association, Inc., Oklahoma State 2018 Profile
Quality
Quality and availability vary across Oklahoma’s ECCE mixed-delivery system, as evidenced both by existing administrative data and parent, provider and stakeholder perspectives. Interviews and focus groups with parents revealed that parents’ assessment of program quality includes the program’s star rating, with two- and three- star programs considered high-quality. They also indicated that quality was one of the most frequent reasons for enrolling a child in a child care program.

In the interviews and focus groups, parents and providers identified what they believe to be the most important elements of quality childcare, aside from star rating. In order of frequency, the most commonly mentioned were:

1. Safety and cleanliness of facilities and classrooms
2. High-quality learning and preparation for kindergarten
3. Teacher quality, including meaningful interaction with children, individualized attention, and teacher qualification and experience
4. For Spanish-speaking parents, staff members that are bilingual and programs that provide bilingual instruction
5. Open communication between staff and parents
6. Low teacher-child ratios

Oklahoma has made substantial investments in quality, but stakeholders suggest that additional work is required to align standards across ECCE programs. In the most recent NIEER report, Oklahoma met all but one benchmark of quality. However, despite the high marks that Oklahoma’s ECCE system receives on quality, studies have found that many students, particularly those that are low-income, do not enter kindergarten with the skills they need to succeed. In 2014, OKDHS developed the county-level Oklahoma School Readiness Risk Index to measure children’s readiness for kindergarten and found that 46 percent of children from birth to five live in counties classified as High Risk or High-Medium Risk for poor school readiness. The report found that counties with the highest risk are concentrated in the southeast, southwest, and northeast quadrants of the state. Socioeconomic status also has implications for school readiness, with more than one-third of children from low-income households entering kindergarten classes already behind their higher-income peers.
**Accessibility**

Parents across the state report that accessibility is one of the most important considerations when enrolling a child in an ECCE program. Affordability and location are the most important factors in terms of accessibility with hours of operation, if the program is full, recommendations from a family member or friend, and if the program accepts subsidies being other factors.

There are many barriers for parents accessing childcare with high cost and inadequate supply being the two largest barriers for children's participation in ECCE programs. Other key barriers to access include a shortage of Spanish-speaking caregivers, a lack of childcare options for families working nontraditional hours, low percentage of children with disabilities receiving services through SoonerStart, and insufficient awareness of available ECCE services in communities.

Studies of Oklahoma’s ECCE mixed-delivery system consistently find that parents perceive affordability to be the main barrier in accessing childcare, especially for those with infants and those earning just above the income threshold for childcare subsidies. Care of infants is the most expensive out of any age group, with the cost being slightly higher in centers than in homes. Families earning just over the income threshold are falling through the cracks because they can no longer afford care. Parents communicated frustration at being penalized for working by losing subsidies. Total number of families receiving childcare subsidies has declined substantially in Oklahoma, though the recent CCDBG funding increase may help reverse this trend. Between 2015 and 2018, the number of parents that reported receiving help from OKDHS to pay for childcare fell from 38 percent to 22 percent, while average hourly wages remained stagnant, increasing challenges around affordability.

The high price of childcare hinders some families from working. Many parents drop out of the labor force because it can be more economical to quit work than pay for childcare. In one survey, one in ten mothers of toddlers in Oklahoma reported that someone in their family had to quit a job, not take a job or greatly change a job due to childcare.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AVERAGE WEEKLY COSTS OF CHILD CARE IN OKLAHOMA BY AGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&lt; 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PERCENTAGE OF ELIGIBLE CHILDREN IN OKLAHOMA RECEIVING SUBSIDIES BY AGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&lt; 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Beyond affordability, the second major barrier to child care is inadequate capacity in some regions of the state and for certain groups of children. Estimates show that in every region, the demand for care is not being met. Past studies document capacity constraints are particularly dire in rural areas and for infants and toddlers. Though waiting list data are not maintained by the state, parents and professionals commonly cite long waiting lists as a top barrier to finding a provider, and parents report being on waiting lists for up to a year before being accepted into a program, or in some cases never hearing back.

Oklahoma’s geography also makes it difficult to serve all children, with families living in rural areas often completely isolated from childcare options. Analysis by the Center for American Progress shows that 55 percent of Oklahoma’s population lives in childcare deserts, meaning that these individuals live in a census tract that either is lacking any childcare options or has so few that there are more than three children for every childcare slot.

Finally, in some cases, ECCE programs may be available to parents, but parents may not be aware that they exist, hindering uptake. Parents reported hearing about programs primarily through word of mouth, highlighting the importance of increasing community awareness. Stakeholders and childcare providers emphasized a need to increase parents’ awareness of the importance of early learning through positive, approachable messages so they understand the value of enrolling their children in ECCE programs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics of Accessibility of Child Care Facilities in Oklahoma</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Characteristics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accepts Subsidy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nontraditional Hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serves &lt; 1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Serves 1 year</td>
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<tr>
<td>Serves 2 years</td>
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<tr>
<td>Serves 3 years</td>
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<tr>
<td>Serves 4 years</td>
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<td>Serves 5 years</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Health

Acessing Health Care in Oklahoma

ECCE has a long history of supporting the health of children, families and communities. Oklahoma’s early childhood system continues this tradition by working to address substantial health needs among young children and families. Addressing issues related to health, mental health and substances abuse are critical to ensuring family well-being and allowing families to enjoy all the potential benefits of participation in high-quality ECCE programs. Recognizing the strong body of research that shows that healthy students have better attendance, behavior and achievement, Oklahoma believes that ECCE programs also play a role in fostering access to health-related services for children and families, especially those with the greatest need.

As of 2018, Oklahoma ranks 47th out of 50 states in overall health and is well below the national average on a variety of indicators. The state ranks 41st for no or delayed prenatal care, 40th for preterm births, 42nd for infant mortality and 38th for mothers who initiated breast-feeding. Existing studies and original data analysis also document substantial racial, ethnic and socioeconomic disparities in child and adult health, as well as healthcare coverage. Health insurance coverage is a pressing issue in our state, with Oklahoma having the second highest uninsured rate in the country. Lack of coverage can create challenges for young families and ECCE providers. Families who are uninsured face difficulty accessing health services. Oklahoma providers and parents identify health as their top priority area, citing insufficient opportunities for screenings and services with physicians and dentists across the state, particularly in rural areas. Nearly one in three parents report experiencing difficulty accessing health services with quality and affordability as major concerns.

PERCENTAGE OF POPULATION UNINSURED 2018

UNINSURED LOW-INCOME INFANTS & TODDLERS 2018*

*Source: 2019 State of Babies Yearbook
Children with Disabilities
Children in Oklahoma are more likely to have a disability than children in the United States as a whole (4.9 percent versus 4.0 percent, respectively). Of children with a disability, one-third live in poverty in Oklahoma, compared with 30.9 percent nationwide. Screening young children for developmental delay is an important way to ensure that children with disabilities and their families receive the supports they need. Research shows that children who receive screening and early intervention for developmental issues may be more likely to enter school ready to learn. Over the past 10 years, the number of Oklahoma children referred for screening has increased from 6,638 in 2004 to 9,088 in 2014.

Effects of Substance Abuse in Oklahoma
Substance abuse is also a major issue in the state, with the Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services (ODMHSAS) identifying it as Oklahoma’s number one public health problem. Although total overdose deaths involving opioids have declined from their highs in 2009, deaths involving synthetic opioids and heroin have been rising in the state, and the incidence of neonatal abstinence syndrome (NAS) and neonatal opioid withdrawal syndrome (NOWS) increased fivefold between 2004 and 2014. The economic cost to Oklahoma is estimated at $7 billion annually for expenses related to lost productivity, health care, public safety, social services, costs to business and property loss. In Oklahoma, addiction contributes to 85 percent of homicides, 80 percent of prison incarcerations, 75 percent of divorces, 65 percent of child abuse cases, and 55 percent of domestic assaults.

*Source: 2019 State of Babies Yearbook*
Defining Family Support
Family support services supplement health services to improve family well-being. These services are key to ensuring that children can participate and succeed in the ECCE system, as healthy growth and development are bolstered by family economic security, good parenting, and adequate supports for ECCE access.
Barriers and Impact on Trauma

Economic, familial and structural barriers stand in the way of statewide child and parent well-being. For more than a decade, the state’s poverty rate has been higher than the national average, and in recent years this gap has widened. Children from birth to age five in Oklahoma are more likely to live in poor and low-income households with 21 percent living in households earning below the federal poverty level (FPL) and an additional 48 percent living in households earning below 200 percent of the FPL.

Structural barriers associated with the state’s rural geography make it difficult for many families to access not only ECCE programs, but other family support services. Oklahomans who do not own a car and lack adequate access to public transportation may struggle to get to childcare, work, school, job training and healthcare services. Additionally, Oklahoma is ranked 41st in the country for internet access, which may limit families’ awareness of services, as well as parents’ ability to search and apply for jobs. This problem is most severe in rural areas. Our state’s rural geography has also made food access a major issue. Oklahomans are more likely to have low or very low food security than the average American and an estimated 654,640 Oklahomans are food insecure, meaning that they do not have consistent access to food. In 45 of our 77 counties, 50 percent or more of the population lives in areas with low access to food. This causes serious hardships for people on government food assistance programs like SNAP and WIC who have restrictions on what they can buy.

The hardship caused by these various issues can cause trauma in people’s lives. Research has increasingly recognized the consequences of various types of trauma, known as adverse childhood experiences (ACEs). Oklahoma is the only state that falls in the highest prevalence quartile for eight of the most commonly assessed ACEs. At-risk families with a child between birth and age three in Oklahoma are more likely to experience ACEs than the general population with 21 percent reporting having experienced four or more ACEs. The prevalence of ACEs in Oklahoma is concerning given that research has linked ACEs to a variety of outcomes, including higher likelihood of risky health behaviors, chronic health conditions, incarceration, and lower education attainment and earnings. Adults’ ACEs can also affect children’s development. One study found that for each parental ACE identified, a child’s suspected risk of developmental delay increased by 18 percent.

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PERCENTAGE OF POPULATION EXPERIENCING AT LEAST ONE ACE 2018*

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>U.S.</td>
<td>21.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oklahoma</td>
<td>31.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: 2019 State of Babies Yearbook
Addressing This Data
Recognizing the impact that ACEs can have on children’s social, emotional and behavioral development, Oklahoma’s ECCE system has been working to respond to providers’ strong demand for professional development around trauma-informed care in early childhood settings. Signed into law in 2018, the state’s three-year Task Force on Trauma-Informed Care is intended to help this effort gain traction. Oklahoma’s approach to combating ACEs has recently been buoyed by a study at the University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center that found that positive parenting practices have protective effects on young children affected by ACEs.

Given all the data on our state’s school readiness, OPSR is developing a strategic plan that establishes a set of working goals and action areas for Oklahoma to serve as guideposts for program improvement across Oklahoma’s ECCE mixed-delivery system. The goals of the strategic plan are:

- Align systems of care to produce more seamless, high-quality and cost effective services for families with young children.
- Secure affordable, quality early care and education for children from birth to age three.
- Boost choices families have for culturally responsive care and services that support parents’ ability to work and family well-being.
- Prioritize the urgent health and mental health needs of young children and their families.
- Communicate better with families about how to support the development and well-being of their children.
OPSR maintains its own social media accounts as well as works with traditional media outlets in order to communicate with a variety of individuals across the state. These outlets allow OPSR to maintain a positive public image while sharing information about Oklahoma’s early childhood programs and services. OPSR hopes that our efforts help keep the public better informed, so that outcomes for young children and their families improve and become more equitable.

**Social Media**

OPSR’s use of social media was consistent and effective during FY19. In fact, the addition of a full-time community relations specialist, who manages all media, at the end of FY18 allowed OPSR to closely monitor insights including page views, likes, comments, etc. For instance, during FY19, OPSR’s followers on Facebook increased by more than 100. On top of the increased consistency of OPSR’s social media use, communications with early childhood stakeholders, business leaders and the general public via Facebook and Twitter were important engagement tools, particularly those focused on OPSR’s two major grants: Project HOPE and OKFutures. These online tools provided a platform for OPSR to share the progress of these grants with posts, photos, slideshows and links to the OPSR website and other resources. OPSR saw some of its best online interactions around events involving community feedback, the January 2019 Research Symposium, and the June 2019 Community Conversations, conducted to gather input into the strategic plan.

**Traditional Media**

Traditional media includes print, broadcast and radio. During FY19, OPSR was mentioned in broadcast and print media to announce the receipt of grant funding. The media was also interested in OPSR’s activities to promote equity. A majority of OPSR’s efforts shifted to social media, therefore traditional media decreased compared to the previous fiscal year. However, looking to FY20, OPSR has plans to work with several outlets to utilize paid media opportunities and thus increase our traditional media reach.

- okschoolreadiness.org
- facebook.com/opsreadiness
- twitter.com/opsreadiness
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>State Support</th>
<th>OPSRF</th>
<th>Totals</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FY 2010</td>
<td>$1,894,962</td>
<td>$422,383</td>
<td>$2,317,345</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FY 2011</td>
<td>$1,666,155</td>
<td>$700,966</td>
<td>$2,367,121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FY 2012</td>
<td>$1,538,802</td>
<td>$720,050</td>
<td>$2,258,852</td>
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<tr>
<td>FY 2013</td>
<td>$1,540,415</td>
<td>$1,327,089</td>
<td>$2,867,504</td>
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<tr>
<td>FY 2014</td>
<td>$1,554,928</td>
<td>$1,051,035</td>
<td>$2,605,963</td>
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<td>FY 2015</td>
<td>$1,580,362</td>
<td>$463,471</td>
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<td>FY 2016</td>
<td>$1,439,785</td>
<td>$445,526</td>
<td>$1,885,311</td>
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<td>$518,611</td>
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<td>$819,562</td>
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<tr>
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<td>$267,849</td>
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<tr>
<td>FY 2019</td>
<td>$283,024</td>
<td>$690,076</td>
<td>$973,100</td>
</tr>
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Fiscal Year 2019 has been a phenomenal year for OPSR! The designation from Governor Fallin as the lead entity for the Preschool Development Grant Birth to Five enabled OPSR to fully realize its mission to lead Oklahoma in coordinating an early childhood system that strengthens families and ensures all children are ready for school. We are grateful to Governor Fallin and Jake Yunker, Governor Fallin’s Policy Director for their support and guidance in receiving this incredible funding opportunity during her term in office.

We are also appreciative of Governor Kevin Stitt, who was elected on the same day the OKFutures grant application was submitted. Governor Stitt announced a new cabinet position of Human Services and Early Childhood Initiatives, and wisely appointed Steve Buck to serve as Cabinet Secretary. The smooth transition of leadership, and Governor Stitt’s acknowledgment of the importance of early childhood to our state’s overall success is a key component to his goal of making Oklahoma a Top 10 State.

We couldn’t do this work without the OPSR Foundation and Board. Collectively over 40 individuals support and guide the work of this successful public/private partnership created to improve the well-being of young children and their families. They are truly amazing and dedicated servants to Oklahoma and we thank them for their time, expertise and passion as leaders in early childhood.

In order to accomplish our objectives under the OKFutures grant, teams of state, tribal, local and family members were created to inform and guide our activities. The needs assessment is reflective of the collective wisdom of our stakeholders, and will ensure that we are on the right track. Thank you to all of our partners who served on these teams. Additional information is available on our website for details of our accomplishments, plan and partners.

I am especially proud and appreciative of the OPSR staff, who have worked tirelessly this year to ensure that funding requirements for OPSR, OKFutures, Project HOPE and Project SHINE were implemented professionally, collaboratively and successfully. Onboarding of new staff was swift, and they have found their stride and collectively, we are preparing to continue to support the vision and mission of OPSR for the future.

With thanks,

Debra Andersen
Executive Director