

# SOCAG Community School Readiness Assessment and Improvement Plan

## Community School Readiness Assessment:

### Cities of Altus, Hollis and Mangum

#### **Priority 1: Babies must be born on time and healthy (Prenatal – birth)**

##### A. Availability/Accessibility of Resources:

Jackson County Health Department is located in Altus and offers family planning services, Sooner Care (State Health Insurance), ParentPro home visitation resource, and WIC (Women Infant Children food system) for pregnant women. They are located in the north part of Altus so some families face challenges getting to the facility. There were 1600 provided family planning services in 2013. Greer County Health Department is located in Mangum and offers family planning services and WIC for pregnant women. There were 175 provided family planning services in 2013. Harmon County Health Department is located in Hollis and offers family planning services and WIC for pregnant women.

Jackson County Memorial Hospital in Altus delivers babies in the Women's Center with labor, delivery, and recovery in a family friendly room. They will schedule a tour for expecting parents to see the facility upon receiving a request. Three OB/GYN doctors and one Nurse Practitioner see pregnant mothers in the Women's Associates Health Clinic. Women from Hollis and Mangum also use Jackson County hospital.

DHS offices in Jackson, Harmon, and Greer Counties provide SoonerCare (Medicaid), TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families), and SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) for families that qualify. Case workers are sometimes available to families in need during weekends or evenings.

Early Head Start (EHS) provides home-based services for pregnant mothers that are interested and meet the federal income poverty guidelines. SOCAG serves two at a time in this program. Six have received services this year; two mothers in Altus and one in Mangum. The Mobile Educator is available to talk to the mother and her family during the pregnancy, accompany her to doctor appointments, and uses the "Healthy Babies" curriculum during visits. A registered nurse consultant makes a well-baby check within two weeks to see mother and baby. The baby is normally enrolled in EHS Home-Based services when born.

Life Services at Pathways in Altus offers Pregnancy options, family planning, information, and donated items needed by pregnant women and their new baby.

Altus Air Force Base Advocacy Office has a program for expecting military families that provides educational materials and baby supplies. They also share information at booths in the community when invited.

Jackson County Memorial Hospital Counseling Center can see pregnant mothers referred for evaluation for possible postpartum depression. Head Start and medical providers initiate referrals if they see problems could be arising.

#### B. Cost/Affordability:

Some services for the Health Departments are on a sliding scale based on income, but most are available for families that qualify under guidelines.

JCMMH Hospital takes most health insurance plans and SoonerCare. Services are 24 hours every day at the hospital. Payment plans may be arranged to pay co-pays out if needed. Travel time to appointments out of town can take a toll on the family's finances due to meals, mileage and work time lost.

DHS services are based on qualifications depending on the service sought.

EHS enrolls families based on poverty guidelines and documented pregnancy. There is limited enrollment opportunity due to space. EHS is federally funded at 80% and depends on community support for the other 20% in donated time, space and materials.

Pathways does not charge the pregnant mother, however there are training classes that are a part of the program in order to get supplies. The hours are limited for services. Donations from the community are used to operate.

There is no cost for military families to participate in activities on the base. Other families are not invited to attend these functions.

JCMH Mental Health Clinic accepts insurances including SoonerCare. Patients are referred by their doctor or Early Head Start. There is a sliding scale for patients with no insurance.

#### C. Quality of Resource/Responsiveness to Families:

Families find the Health Departments to be friendly but do not always have the time to wait on the appointment. Some days are more crowded than others.

Jackson County Hospital and the Women's Clinic has times when they have more patients than they can serve. There is no neonatal unit so babies born requiring special services often must be sent by helicopter to Children's hospital in Oklahoma City or Tulsa. Some women choose to use doctors in Lawton or Oklahoma City because there are more services available or they are a high risk pregnancy.

DHS offices seems uninviting to some families. The glass barrier and extra security make them seem less than approachable.

EHS requires an application before a family can qualify for services. Often the family feels that the information required is too intrusive. Applications are taken from all families with those that are over the income guidelines and those that are eligible but no space is available being put on a waiting list. Staff sometimes give inadequate information because the program is our newest, started at SOCAG in 2011 (Head Start began at SOCAG in 1965).

Women that have used Pathways speak highly of the information they received and the helpfulness of the staff. They were able to earn points to obtain needed items for their new baby.

Military families participating in classes and baby showers gain information and supplies for their new baby and build support groups of other military parents.

Many persons are reluctant to accept mental health services. Those that take advantage of the referral find it helpful. Appointments are available through 6 pm on four weekdays.

#### D. Service Coordination/Referral Networks and Program Alignment:

The Health Departments have personnel participate in community events to promote the services offered. They are available to speak to groups of parents and have brochures describing services. They have bi-lingual staff to translate as needed. They will assist families in enrolling in SoonerCare on-line when needed. The Jackson County Health Department has ride vouchers for patients that call ahead and tell the desk they need a ride.

The doctors from the Women's Health Clinic speak at community events and as guest speakers to pregnant women about health issues. This information can be important as many young people do not realize that everything they put in their body can affect their baby; food and substances. Sooner Ride is available for women with SoonerCare to go to needed appointment in other towns but they must arrange for the ride in advance.

The Department of Human Services has many things in place that help families. A translator and kiosk are in their lobby area so families may enroll in SoonerCare easily.

Head Start offers a recruitment carnival annually to bring together as many community service providers as possible for families to visit with in booths while the children have fun doing activities. EHS staff continue to gain knowledge about other programs so they can best conduct referrals for families. Staff have continuing professional development through conferences and in-service training and are also encouraged to continue their college education in early childhood.

Pathways will loan books and videos to other programs that are assisting pregnant mothers.

Altus AFB sends staff to participate in events in town and allows their dentists and nurses to speak at community meetings about health issues. They encourage families to become involved in the local community.

JCMH Mental Health and Head Start have a collaboration that assists in referrals of pregnant women enrolled that may need assistance. Mental health professionals meet with Head Start staff about questions they have regarding the parents. The mental health professionals are licensed in their field.

## **Priority 2: Toddlers must be on a positive developmental trajectory (0 – 3)**

### **A. Availability/Accessibility of Resources:**

Jackson County, Greer County, and Harmon County Health Departments offer immunizations, health services, Text4Kids, and WIC. JCHD also offers SoonerStart for children 0-3 with disabilities and ParentPro parenting classes with home visitation. The health department's goals are to enhance development and well-being of children, prevent childhood disease, and ensure that children grow up to be healthy adults. Immunizations, head lice and rash checks, blood lead screening, weight and height check, hearing screenings, and newborn metabolic screening are available at no fee.

Jackson County Memorial Hospital in Altus has an emergency room and other services for children who become ill or injured. A family member is able to remain with the child in the hospital with recliners in the rooms. JCMH Pediatric Clinic has pediatricians and a pediatric nurse that make children birth to age 18 years and parents comfortable with their care. A variety of health insurance is taken, including SoonerCare. JCMH also has a family health clinic in Mangum. Altus Air Force Base Pediatric Clinic sees children that are military dependents for their care. There is no fee for the family for services on the base. Quartz Mountain Medical Center in Mangum and Altus provides care for families. Hollis has a family doctor that sees all ages in the family. Hollis also has Shortgrass Community Health Center that sees patients from families on a scale based on income. They also have a mobile unit that can go into rural areas.

DHS offices in Jackson, Harmon, and Greer Counties provide child care subsidy payments, Sooner Care, Child Care Services (CCS) licenses, Child Support Services, SNAP, and Child Welfare Services (CWS). Families are assigned a case worker to assist them.

Altus has three Head Start centers serving 20 children age 2-3 years and 4 children 1-2 years, five child care centers, and eight child care homes. Three of the child care homes are open for evening services. There is a Head Start center serving 4 two year olds, two child care centers, and one child care home licensed in Mangum and open for daytime hours. There is a Head Start center serving 8 two year olds and three licensed child care

homes in Hollis that are all open during the day. Developmental and health screenings are completed on each child enrolled in Early Head Start.

The Altus Air Force Base Child Care Center cares for children of military families and Department of Defense employees from six weeks of age. There are three part day Mother's Day Out programs operated by churches.

#### B. Cost/Affordability:

Children services at the Health Departments are no charge to families.

Costs for medical care depend on the families' ability to have health insurance. Many children qualify for SoonerCare if the parents complete the application. Some children are not documented and cannot qualify. Shortgrass Clinic can sometimes help these children and families.

DHS can help families with young children to obtain child support, money for food, and find child care while they attend work or school/training. DHS case workers state that parents want their child to attend Early Head Start, but the hours often indicate that the child will also need before or after care at another facility. These facilities do not have slots for part time children.

Early Head Start has limited spaces for children due to limited class sizes and is based on the poverty guidelines. Parents that work two jobs or have only one child are often over the income guideline.

Child care is a huge cost of families that do not qualify for subsidy or follow the rules. Families sometimes make poor choices based on cost and leave their child with relatives or friends. The risk of this to children is great because they are missing out on a rich, language learning environment if they are placed in front of a television or video game.

Families are often isolated or estranged from extended family and may not have funds for their child to attend a program. Toddlers need to begin socializing with other children, learn words, and play with others. Parents want the best for their child, but they also must ensure shelter and food are in place.

#### C. Quality of Resource/Responsiveness to Families:

Families find the Health Departments to be friendly but do not always have the time to wait on the appointment. Some days are more crowded than others. Parents like the Text4Kids because it reminds them when immunizations, well-baby checks, and possible developmental skills are coming up.

Jackson County Memorial Hospital has times when they have more pediatric patients than they can serve. Very ill children often must be sent to Lawton, Oklahoma City or

Tulsa. Quartz Mountain Medical Center is Mangum says they have a 100 % response rate on their Facebook page. Parents like the feeling of being answered quickly.

DHS offices seems uninviting to some families but once they get to know a case worker things seem easier. Relationships help persons cope with the struggles they are experiencing.

EHS requires an application before a family can qualify for services. Families often do not hear about the program until the slots are full. Class size is limited to 8 with two qualified teachers. These teachers must have continuous professional development which means there are days the class is not scheduled to be in session. Parents need to feel good about their child being at the location of care while they are at school or work in order for it to be a successful collaboration that benefits the child.

Families that take their children to the park together are able to learn from one another and be a source of information. Many times this is not possible because the parent must be at a job or the neighborhood is not safe.

#### D. Service Coordination/Referral Networks and Program Alignment:

The Health Departments have personnel participate in community events to promote the services offered. They are available to speak to groups of parents and have brochures describing services. They have bi-lingual staff to translate as needed. They will assist families in enrolling in SoonerCare on-line when needed. The Jackson County Health Department has ride vouchers for patients that call ahead and tell the desk they need a ride.

Sooner Ride is available for children with SoonerCare to go to needed appointment in other towns but they must arrange for the ride in advance. Health Department, EHS, and DHS staff are available to help parents to make the calls needed.

The Department of Human Services has many things in place that help families. A translator and kiosk are in their lobby area so families may enroll in SoonerCare easier.

Head Start offers a recruitment carnival annually to bring together as many community service providers as possible for families to visit with in booths while the children have fun doing activities. EHS staff continue to gain knowledge about other programs so they can best conduct referrals for families.

Child Care subsidy payments can help families choose a care setting that is right for their child and the hours the parent works.

Socializations provided by EHS could be opened up to other families that are interested. It is a time for learning about a topic from a professional, sharing ideas with other families, and observing children at play.

Community focus must be on the importance of school readiness and staying in school. According to Kids Count, Oklahoma ranks 42<sup>nd</sup> in a state-to-state comparison of education for 2016. Addressing this issue could be important to having a strong workforce for the future.

### **Priority 3: 3-year-olds must be safe, secure, and healthy**

#### A. Availability/Accessibility of Resources:

Jackson County Health Department is located in Altus and offers immunizations, Sooner Care, ParentPro home visitation resource, and WIC. Food insecurity is a topic that comes to the top of community needs and concerns every three years when SOCAG conducts a Community Assessment. WIC helps young struggling families to be able to provide milk products, cheeses, cereals, fruits and vegetable and other items to their children.

Immunizations help to keep each member of the community healthy. These were provided to 2583 people in 2013 at JCHD. Greer County Health Department is located in Mangum and offers health services and WIC for young children. Immunizations were provided to 955 people in 2013. Harmon County Health Department is located in Hollis and offers health services and WIC. Immunizations were provided for 502 people in 2013.

Jackson County Memorial Hospital in Altus has an emergency room and other services for children who become ill. A family member is able to remain with the child in the hospital with recliners in the rooms. JCMH Pediatric Clinic has pediatricians and a pediatric nurse that make children birth to age 18 years and parents comfortable with their care. A variety of health insurance is taken, including SoonerCare. JCMH also has a family health clinic in Mangum. Altus Air Force Base Pediatric Clinic sees children that are military dependents for their care. There is no fee for the family for services on the base. Quartz Mountain Medical Center in Mangum and Altus provides care for families. Hollis has a family doctor that sees all ages in the family. Hollis also has Shortgrass Community Health Center that sees patients from families. They also have a mobile unit that can go into rural areas.

DHS offices in Jackson, Harmon, and Greer Counties provide SoonerCare (Medicaid), TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families), and SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) for families that qualify. These benefits assist families with assistance so the parent can attend training for a job and allow food for the family. Case workers are sometimes available to families in need during weekends or evenings.

Head Start (HS) provides center-based services for 3-year-olds from families that are interested and meet the federal income poverty guidelines. Classes for this age group are full-day this year. There are also six licensed Child Care Centers in Altus with space for 3-year-olds; one is a 3 Star center, 4 are 2 Star, and the other is 1 Star. There are 7 Licensed Child Care Homes in Altus. Three of these have hours available at night or on weekends. Altus Air Force Base Child Care Center (CDC) has classes for 3-year-old children. They also have child care homes on base operated under their authority. Both of these have a

payment scale based on earnings of the family. During deployment exercises the center and/or homes may have longer hours to assist in the mission.

Jackson County Memorial Hospital Counseling Center receives referrals from Head Start and medical physicians on possible evaluation of children with extreme behaviors.

#### B. Cost/Affordability:

Some services for the Health Departments are on a sliding scale based on income, but most are available for families that qualify under guidelines. Their website says that services are at no fee to the family. They are open weekdays.

Jackson County Memorial Hospital accepts most health insurance plans and SoonerCare. Services are 24 hours every day at the hospital. Payment plans may be arranged to pay co-pays out if needed. Work time lost because a child is ill is difficult on families where the parent does not have paid leave available.

DHS services are based on qualifications depending on the service sought. They only cost the family time to complete paperwork and interviews needed.

HS enrolls families based on poverty guidelines and diagnosed disability. There is limited enrollment opportunity because 3-year-olds classes can only enroll 17. Each class has a Teacher with a degree and an Assistant Teacher with a CDA or equivalent. Both staff must do professional development through the year. HS is federally funded at 80% and depends on community support for the other 20%. While there is no fee to families, they are highly encouraged to volunteer to learn more about child development and count toward the program match to funding.

JCMH Mental Health Clinic accepts insurances including SoonerCare. Patients are referred by their doctor or Head Start. There is a sliding scale for patients with no insurance.

#### C. Quality of Resource/Responsiveness to Families:

Families find the Health Departments to be friendly but do not always have the time to wait on the appointment. Some days are more crowded than others.

Jackson County Hospital has times when they have more patients than they can serve or the child's illness requires specialized doctors and equipment. Families report that the hospital staff are very helpful during the transition, but it is a frightening time. They must use resources or depend on friends to take them to be with their child in another location.

DHS offices have glass barriers and extra security which can be overwhelming to new families, however these measures are in place for everyone's protection. The buildings are nice. The services help many families that find themselves in a crisis situation. Kids Count shows there were 35 children abused in Jackson County in 2014 and 2 in Greer County.

HS requires an application before a family can qualify for services. Staff have been instructed to interview each applicant and help with the process as much as needed.

Many persons are reluctant to accept mental health services. Those that take advantage of the referral find it helpful. Appointments are available through 6 pm on four weekdays.

#### D. Service Coordination/Referral Networks and Program Alignment:

The Health Departments have personnel participate in community events to promote the services offered. They are available to speak to groups of parents and have brochures describing services. They have bi-lingual staff to translate as needed. They will assist families in enrolling in SoonerCare on-line when needed. The Jackson County Health Department has ride vouchers for patients that call ahead and tell the desk they need a ride.

The pediatricians in our area speak at community events and as guest speakers to groups on health issues. Altus AFB sends staff to participate in events in town and allows their dentists, doctors, and nurses to speak at community meetings about health issues.

The Department of Human Services has many things in place that help families. A translator and kiosk are in their lobby area so families may enroll in SoonerCare easily. The collaboration between DHS and HS helps foster children be placed when there are slots available and the child is new to the community. Families that are under so many stressors may be a cause of abuse of children. Young children are an easy target.

Head Start offers a recruitment carnival annually to bring together as many community service providers as possible for families to visit with in booths while the children have fun doing activities. Staff have continuing professional development through conferences and in-service training and are also encouraged to continue their college education in early childhood. Mental health professionals help staff to identify personal stress and work on that part of their self so they can be their best with the children.

Information from every program could be put into a document for quick reference in referring families to services needed.

Many groups and agencies are concerned about the safety of children and the feasibility of their play spaces in Altus, Hollis and Mangum. Altus was able to receive funding for both a nice playground with equipment for toddlers through grade school aged children and a playground with “Thunder” basketball court for toddlers through all ages. Mangum has a Slash Pad that is very nice for families during the heat of the summer. Hollis has a committee that is working on the restoration of the city pool and park.

## **Priority 4: 4-year-olds must be on a path to school readiness**

### **A. Availability/Accessibility of Resources:**

Altus, Hollis and Mangum Public Schools all have pre-kindergarten that is full-day during the school year. Parents are responsible for school supplies and buying the child's meals, unless they qualify for free or reduced meals under the school lunch program through USDA. The class size should be 20, however if more children come than they have room they will increase the class size first before adding additional classes. Children are prepared for kindergarten at the location where they will attend the following year. Parents have limited access due to security unless they arrange to volunteer in advance. Each of the schools have special services for children that qualify for an Individual Education Plan. Each of the schools has a Homeless Liaison that coordinates food boxes as needed for weekend snacks for children that are in crisis conditions. Pre-kindergarten is optional, however most working parents want to send their child in order to save on child care that they were having to pay up until this age.

SOCAG Head Start has a collaboration with Altus Public Schools for three 4-year-old pre-K classes in the Head Start centers. These children are dually enrolled and receive comprehensive Head Start services as well as pre-K classroom time that meets the PASS skills. These children's families meet the criteria for the Head Start program. Each family receives two home visits a year and two parent/staff conferences. Each classroom has an Oklahoma Certified Early Childhood Teacher and an Assistant Teacher with a CDA or degree. Meals, transportation to and from school, and supplies for these children are included in the Head Start grant at no cost to the family. Enrolled children that may need an IEP receive assessment and specialized services through the special education department at Altus Public School on site.

Altus has one Christian School. They have a pre-Kindergarten class of 15 students. Parents pay tuition for their child to receive education with a Bible-based curriculum. Class sizes are small and families are very happy with the services. There are some scholarships available for children and families that want this option but cannot afford the cost.

Mangum Public Schools and Hollis Public Schools have full-day, school-year Pre-Kindergarten classes at the elementary school building. It is an optional program but most parents send their child. Parents are responsible for purchasing all supplies and meals for the child unless they qualify for free or reduced lunches.

Altus AF Base has an elementary school that is part of the Altus Public School system, however it is the only building that has 4-year-old pre-kindergarten through fourth grade. This school is set up to benefit families living on base as well as to provide a stable school for parents that work on base to bring their child. Rivers Elementary has an A+ rating and is best known for great parent participation.

B. Cost/Affordability:

Public School Pre-kindergarten and Head Start services do not have a fee. Since it is not mandatory some families will decide to wait until their child is kindergarten age before they send them to school.

DHS services are based on qualifications depending on the service sought.

C. Quality of Resource/Responsiveness to Families:

HS requires an application before a family can qualify for services. Head Start offers transportation to school for families that want it. It helps with attendance.

Military families often are looking for similar services they encountered at their last assignment base when they come to Altus. Sometimes the labels used are different and the family must spend time tracking down what services are available to them.

Many persons are reluctant to accept mental health services. Those that take advantage of the referral find it helpful. Appointments are available through 6 pm on four weekdays.

D. Service Coordination/Referral Networks and Program Alignment:

Head Start offers a recruitment carnival annually to bring together as many community service providers as possible for families to visit with in booths while the children have fun doing activities. EHS staff continue to gain knowledge about other programs so they can best conduct referrals for families. Staff have continuing professional development through conferences and in-service training and are also encouraged to continue their college education in early childhood.

Altus AFB sends staff to participate in events in town and allows their dentists and nurses to speak at community meetings about health issues.

JCMH Mental Health and Head Start have a collaboration that assists in referrals of pregnant women enrolled that may need assistance. Mental health professionals meet with Head Start staff about questions they have regarding the parents. The mental health professionals are licensed in their field.

**Priority 5: 5-year-olds ready for school (5)**

A. Availability/Accessibility of Resources:

Altus, Hollis, and Mangum Public Schools have full-day school-year kindergarten available for all students that are 5 years old by September 1st. Bus transportation is available to most children that are outside of a mile range of the school building. This is the first year that all Altus Pre-K and Kindergarten classes are in the same location, except the Base elementary and Head Start/Pre-K classes.

DHS offices in all three counties work with families that are in need of services. Sometimes the family is not sure what they need or what is available. This is especially true for children placed in kinship care in place of foster care. The 2012 Kids Count Policy Report indicates that 26% of foster children were in kinship placement in Oklahoma.

#### B. Cost/Affordability:

Combining the classes by grade in Altus has been challenging according to the principal but beneficial for the children and staff. With the focus on only children that are four and five years of age, the teachers work together on lesson planning, children learn from one another, and the administrative staff are able to gear their responses toward the young child. A hurdle that parents face is having to take older children to other buildings.

DHS services are based on qualifications depending on the service sought. Kinship care placement of children is good for them because they are able to maintain a connection with the family. Kinship placement can also cause stress on the adults that have not been used to having a child in their home.

JCMH Mental Health Clinic accepts insurances including SoonerCare. Patients are referred by their doctor or Head Start. Head Start pays the fee for evaluation on enrolled children referred by them. There is a sliding scale for patients with no insurance. Counseling sessions or play therapy can be arranged if needed.

#### C. Quality of Resource/Responsiveness to Families:

Altus Public Schools held town halls and meetings with parents before making the decision to go to graded schools. Parents could see that the research had been completed and the best interest of their child's education was in the forefront. It seemed to be a good approach.

Families find the Health Departments to be friendly but do not always have the time to wait on the appointment. Some days are more crowded than others. The families trust the staff and depend on them to answer many health questions.

DHS case workers help all families serving children in foster care. These families are pleased with the services they receive and grateful to help children that are displaced.

Mental health services frighten parents, but after they get over the initial stigma and accept the service, they are delighted. These parents tell others how the sessions with the counselor and play therapy changed their child tremendously.

#### D. Service Coordination/Referral Networks and Program Alignment:

Transportation for all children in kindergarten might better ensure attendance on cold days. Staggering start times has helped parents that drive their children.

Mental health screening for all kindergarten children might be considered to help with the developing social and emotional skills of school.

# Community School Readiness Improvement Plan:

## Cities of Altus, Hollis, and Mangum

### **Priority 1: Babies must be born on time and healthy (Prenatal – birth)**

#### A. Identify community strategies for actions to improve the following system measures in the 5 priorities addressed in the Community School Readiness Assessment:–

*Easy access to needed services* – The Jackson County Health Department has an agreement with Southwest Transit to pay for rides to and from the patient’s house to the clinic if they request the service when making the appointment. This service needs to be made known to all clients that want to use it through promotional materials.

*Stronger inter-agency service coordination and referral network* – Parent Pro and Early Head Start could work together with other services for pregnant mothers to ensure they have the services that best fit their needs.

*Aligned policies and practices across settings* – Begin by learning about each of the policies and practices for the various programs and then discuss how we could work together for the good of the pregnant women served.

*System is responsive to and respectful of family needs and voice* – Meetings of pregnant women in the area, including those who have recently had their baby, could be beneficial in discovering what systems in place worked well and which could use some more attention.

*Resources are leveraged and expanded to meet needs* – Programs should continue to work together toward the goal of providing the services each pregnant mother needs for her baby to be born at full term and healthy.

*Services provided are of high quality* – Each program providing services to pregnant women is responsible for checking to ensure the service provided is the best possible and is meeting the needs of those served.

#### B. Identify strategies for financing and/or financial incentives to increase investments for early childhood programs and services in the geographic area. Consider local, state, federal and private investments.

Smart Start may want to focus on prenatal and birthing in Oklahoma by having a symposium made up of leading experts in the field for providers to attend and then input from around the state on ways families and agencies see improvement could be made.

#### C. Provide state-level policy, procedure and/or funding recommendations to the Oklahoma Partnership for School Readiness Board to improve conditions for young children and their families in the targeted geographical area.

A focus on maintaining SoonerCare services for pregnant women that need to have their care covered so babies will be born healthy.

## **Priority 2: Toddlers must be on a positive developmental trajectory (0 – 3)**

A. Identify community strategies for actions to improve the following system measures in the 5 priorities addressed in the Community School Readiness Assessment:

*Easy access to needed services* – A “one-stop shopping” type of application would be helpful for families with toddlers. This could reduce unnecessary paperwork, time spent at various agencies, and stress on the family trying to connect with services.

*Stronger inter-agency service coordination and referral network – Aligned policies and practices across settings* – There are a number of well-meaning policies, procedures, and guidelines; The Head Start Program Performance Standards, Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework, Oklahoma DHS Child Care Licensing Regulations, the Oklahoma PASS Skills for Pre-Kindergarten, and the Oklahoma Early Learning Guidelines for Children. The difficulty becomes apparent when all programs must fit into a mold even if it may not be best for the funding they are provided.

*System is responsive to and respectful of family needs and voice* – Families can have a voice in many ways. The Head Start program has a Policy Council that is 51% parent membership, the School Board members are elected by voters, most child care centers listen to parent issues, and parents can comment when regulations are being revised. Unfortunately parents do not always understand protocol necessary for meetings and issues often do not arise until after a new policy or program change has been put into place.

*Resources are leveraged and expanded to meet needs* – Waiting for services can be difficult on families so coping skills or activities might be put in place for waiting areas that could make the time seem to be shorter. This would take community awareness and volunteer recruitment of persons that would enjoy assisting at an immunization clinic once a week or similar fulfilling community involvement.

*Services provided are of high quality* - All services regardless of funding should be held to high standards that are developmentally appropriate for children that are served. This may indicate finding a way to relieve home care givers so they can receive training that will assist them in bringing the level of care to the highest potential.

B. Identify strategies for financing and/or financial incentives to increase investments for early childhood programs and services in the geographic area. Consider local, state, federal and private investments.

Early childhood professionals need to continue to advocate for quality care for all children in all programs and educate everyone they have access to within their area. This may mean inviting

officials in to centers to observe and learn about the reasons school readiness are dependent on quality care.

C. Provide state-level policy, procedure and/or funding recommendations to the Oklahoma Partnership for School Readiness Board to improve conditions for young children and their families in the targeted geographical area.

Funding at the state level in Oklahoma to change the outlook on education would be helpful to all communities. Each job advertisement that the SOCAG Head Start program places has at least one inquiry as to why the person must have a high school diploma. It is apparent that the public does not see the connection between education and the ability to instill that love of learning in others. A state-wide push on the importance of life-long learning may help to begin changing public opinion.

### **Priority 3: 3-year-olds must be safe, secure, and healthy**

A. Identify community strategies for actions to improve the following system measures in the 5 priorities addressed in the Community School Readiness Assessment:

*Easy access to needed services* – Since it has been difficult to obtain answers about all programs in Southwest Oklahoma that serve 3-year-old children, one would imagine that the same type of barriers exist for families. A guide developed of services available with descriptions and requirements would be great for families to have an informed decision on where to place their child.

*Stronger inter-agency service coordination and referral network* – A system of one application for all services available would be a great future goal for families. Until we are able to get to that point, information from each program serving families should to be given to all staff of each agency to better be able to guide families toward assistance.

*Aligned policies and practices across settings* – The National Centers for Quality Assurance are holding training sessions for Head Start programs by region this coming month on utilizing the QRIS systems in each state. This seems to be a beginning of recognizing that we can work together for the good of children enrolled in various programs.

*System is responsive to and respectful of family needs and voice* - Resources and new streams of funding are always needed in the field of early education. We have come a long way, but need to continue in educating the public that child care and other programs are not just places that you leave your child while you are at work, but are places that are assisting in the development of the young minds that will be in charge in the not so distant future.

*Resources are leveraged and expanded to meet needs* – Assistance for parents that are experiencing numerous stressors could help to prevent abuse of children before it is able to escalate to that level.

*Services provided are of high quality* - This may indicate a need for funding that brings mental health consultants into child care settings to help their staff with stress and coping skills.

B. Identify strategies for financing and/or financial incentives to increase investments for early childhood programs and services in the geographic area. Consider local, state, federal and private investments.

Funding should be made available for mental health services including stress reduction techniques for adults that care for children and the parents of the children.

C. Provide state-level policy, procedure and/or funding recommendations to the Oklahoma Partnership for School Readiness Board to improve conditions for young children and their families in the targeted geographical area.

#### **Priority 4: 4-year-olds must be on a path to school readiness**

A. Identify community strategies for actions to improve:

*Easy access to needed services* – Information about all programs for 4-year-olds in each community would be helpful for families to make informed decisions of what is best for their child and family.

*Stronger inter-agency service coordination and referral network* – Altus Public School and Head Start Teachers will begin meeting in the summer to discuss the best placement for students going into kindergarten. The Early Childhood Learning Center Principal and the Head Start Program Director have discussed the need for this communication in order to best serve the child and family in the coming school year.

*Aligned policies and practices across settings* – Obesity is an issue in Oklahoma therefore it would be beneficial to encourage the use of a curriculum that encourages movement and physical activity throughout the day in all programs. Habits learned early may stay with the person through life.

*System is responsive to and respectful of family needs and voice* – Programs need to continue (or begin if necessary) surveying parents about their program to determine if it met the needs of the child about to enter kindergarten and if there are ways that the program could be improved for the next group.

*Resources are leveraged and expanded to meet needs* – Collaborations between public school, child care and Head Start need to be encouraged and highlighted for their strengths together as well as independently.

*Services provided are of high quality* – All 4- year-old programs should have similar safety requirements because each child needs the highest quality. Playgrounds at all facilities need to meet the same standards to ensure safe play spaces that encourage an extension of classroom learning.

B. Identify strategies for financing and/or financial incentives to increase investments for early childhood programs and services in the geographic area. Consider local, state, federal and private investments.

Continued funding for state-funded pre-kindergarten is important because families have come to depend on the service being available for their child.

C. Provide state-level policy, procedure and/or funding recommendations to the Oklahoma Partnership for School Readiness Board to improve conditions for young children and their families in the targeted geographical area.

Families need to continue to have choices in where their child attends and to even have the option of not sending the child to any program. More information could be provided on the various 4-year-old programs so that parents can make informed decisions regarding their child.

### **Priority 5: 5-year-olds ready for school**

A. Identify community strategies for actions to improve the following system measures in the 5 priorities addressed in the Community School Readiness Assessment:

*Easy access to needed services* – Additional bus transportation for children that are within the mile walk but the weather or other people may not be cooperative.

*Stronger inter-agency service coordination and referral network* – Altus Head Start Teachers and Altus Kindergarten Teachers will meet in July to discuss individual children and their needs. This is a positive step for children. Our goal is to attempt to track a percent of the children served to determine how they are doing and if changes in our program would be warranted.

*Aligned policies and practices across settings* – Families in Kinship Care should be eligible for a number of assistance programs from DHS so the children do not feel that they are causing undo stress on the caretaker. All agencies working with the family need to know the families benefit level so they can assist them in making a request if necessary.

*System is responsive to and respectful of family needs and voice* – Parents of kindergarten students need to be encouraged to participate in the PTO at the school their child attends, attend school board meetings to listen, and read articles to stay informed of changes in Early Education.

*Resources are leveraged and expanded to meet needs* – Mental health screening services could be provided to deter future problems students may have. Providers might offer a screening day.

*Services provided are of high quality* – Public schools in Oklahoma may need the opportunity for training and technical assistance on quality improvement. Most of the schools in our area did not score well on the A – F grading system. This causes parents to lose faith in the school and worry that their child may not be getting what is needed.

B. Identify strategies for financing and/or financial incentives to increase investments for early childhood programs and services in the geographic area. Consider local, state, federal and private investments.

Since some states have changed policies for families in kinship care in order to meet the immediate needs of these children, Oklahoma could look at the states that have a plan to determine what will work.

C. Provide state-level policy, procedure and/or funding recommendations to the Oklahoma Partnership for School Readiness Board to improve conditions for young children and their families in the targeted geographical area.

Full day kindergarten is available in Southwest Oklahoma with State Certified Teachers to help the child along their educational path. More emphasis could be given to the importance of the step in the child's life through publicity campaigns to encourage families to support all educational endeavors in their children.

#### Resources:

Oklahoma School Readiness Reach-By-Risk Report 2016

Kids Count by Annie E. Casey Foundation [www.datacenter.kidscount.org](http://www.datacenter.kidscount.org)

Oklahoma Department of Human Services 2016 Annual Report [www.okdhs.org](http://www.okdhs.org)

Oklahoma Health Department Data <https://www.ok.gov/health2/>

United States Census Bureau <https://www.census.gov>

Oklahoma Child Care Locator <http://childcarefind.okdhs.org/childcarefind/>

Stepping Up For Kids <http://www.aecf.org/m/resource doc/>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention <http://www.cdc.gov/>

Information used to write this report was gathered at stakeholder meetings held in Altus to discuss services, satisfaction, and ideas, conversations with parents of young children, telephone call and meetings with providers of services, and data from the above resources.

4/30/2017