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## **Collaboration Identifies Actions to Improve Child Well-Being Amid COVID**

*OPSR leads Oklahoma to ensure equitable access to early childhood care & education*

OKLAHOMA CITY, OK (September 25, 2020) — In response to COVID-19, the Oklahoma Partnership for School Readiness (OPSR) Board has developed seven recommendations to ensure equitable access to early childhood care and education for Oklahoma children. These recommendations address how all early care and education programs can safely care for children; parents should be equipped to make informed choices on selecting early care and education programs; and financial supports and relief packages can be leveraged to maintain Oklahoma’s early childhood infrastructure throughout the pandemic.

For three months, OPSR lead more than 40 early childhood stakeholders, including representatives from Head Start/Early Head Start, child care, public schools, home visiting, early childhood mental health, tribes, special education and health, to identify what is necessary to complete our state’s economic recovery and protect the stability of families with young children.

“Working with OPSR and statewide partners to increase access to quality early childhood education has been a very rewarding process. Oklahoma is now positioned to collaboratively build the cross-sector early childhood system we have long sought,” said Kay Floyd, Head Start State Collaboration Office director and OPSR Board member.

These seven recommendations include a strong focus on equity and how to best utilize both state and federal resources. See an overview below:

1. Collect real time data on early childhood care and education program supply and demand.
2. Coordinate and widely disseminate protocols and resources for all early care and education providers serving children, birth-to-five, to operate safely under COVID-19 group education and care guidelines.

3. Stabilize the child care industry through the distribution of emergency relief grants and responsive subsidy policies and extend direct support to families who need access to early childhood care and education.
4. Utilize a cross-sector communications team to disseminate information for parents on health and safety, program options and availability, and costs to inform their choices when selecting group care and education options.
5. Recruit and retain qualified early childhood care and education providers.
6. Support the expansion of partnerships between Head Start, child care and pre-K to serve 3- and 4-year-olds in response to the impact of COVID-19 on program accessibility.
7. Leverage funding and partnership opportunities to enhance program quality for infants and toddlers throughout Oklahoma's early childhood care and education system.

Throughout the development of these recommendations, stakeholders spoke to OPSR about how investing in these urgent actions would result in quality, reliable early learning care and education.

“During this collaboration, professionals from every avenue in the state voiced their best thoughts and ideas on uniting and supporting early childhood providers,” said Lori Beasley, professor, Family Life Education, University of Central Oklahoma. “With these recommendations, our state leaders have the opportunity to make Oklahoma children a priority through accessible, quality care for all.”

In addition, OPSR's research indicated that by allowing parents to work with the knowledge that their children are in high quality care, our state's workforce would benefit as would the health and safety of all Oklahoma families.

“As Oklahoma's Early Childhood Advisory Council, the OPSR Board is proud to work with so many cross-sector supporters to guide our state into action, cultivate and undertake a combination of policies and strategies that will help reduce trauma that some children are experiencing during these difficult times while ensuring their health and safety,” said Debra Andersen, OPSR executive director.

To download these recommendations, [click here](#). To learn more about this project, [click here](#). Or visit the OPSR website at [www.okschoolreadiness.org](http://www.okschoolreadiness.org).

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### **About Oklahoma Partnership for School Readiness (OPSR)**

In 2003, House Bill 1094 created the Oklahoma Partnership for School Readiness and added Oklahoma to a growing list of states that recognized more action is required to successfully support families and children from birth to preschool — thus improving school readiness. Together, through both public and private partnerships, they work to help children arrive at school with the knowledge, skills and physical and emotional health to achieve their dreams.

Today, their mission is to lead Oklahoma in coordinating an early childhood system that strengthens families and ensures all children are ready for school. For more information, visit <https://www.okschoolreadiness.org>.