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Over \$3 million in federal grant dollars awarded to Oklahoma

Improvements in early childhood in the forecast

OKLAHOMA CITY, OK (Jan. 23, 2019) — The Oklahoma Partnership for School Readiness (OPSR) has been awarded a federal grant of over \$3 million from the U.S. Departments of Health and Human Services and Education. The Preschool Development Grant, titled Oklahoma’s Future Begins with Children (OKFutures), is a one-year grant that will focus on improving the coordination and quality of existing early childhood services and increasing families’ knowledge and capacity to support their children birth through five-years-old.

“Oklahoma has long been nationally respected for our advances in early childhood,” said Natalie Burns, OPSR board chair. “This grant is a tremendous opportunity for our state to build on those successes with a solid plan for the future. By focusing on equity and the efficient use of resources, we can expand access to much-needed high-quality support and education programs, particularly for those children who have experienced trauma and adversity.”

Designated the lead entity by former governor Mary Fallin, OPSR worked with other state agencies and stakeholders in early childhood to ensure business leaders, community members and providers’ input shaped the goals and vision of the application.

“I am incredibly pleased HHS has awarded the Oklahoma Partnership for School Readiness (OPSR) the Preschool Development Birth Through Five grant,” said Sen. Jim Inhofe. “When Congressman Cole and I first sent a letter in support of their grant approval, we wanted HHS to see just how determined our state is to strengthen its education infrastructure, and I am glad they did. OPSR is committed to ensuring Oklahoma’s most vulnerable children have better learning opportunities and as I look to my future, my twenty kids and grandkids, I am glad we have organizations like OPSR dedicated to building a solid foundation for Oklahoma’s future. Congratulations.”

Burns said that OPSR is grateful for all of the statewide support for this grant including the letter led by Sen. Inhofe and Rep. Tom Cole. Additionally, six agencies, including the Oklahoma Commission on Children and Youth, Oklahoma Department of Commerce, Oklahoma

Department of Human Services, Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services, Oklahoma State Department of Education and Oklahoma State Department of Health, were critical to the grant's application, all signing a memorandum of understanding with OPSR to affirm their support necessary to implement the grant.

Under the grant, partnerships like this will continue to thrive with a strong focus on collaboration between Head Start programs, child care and pre-K providers, local and state governments, tribal organizations, private entities and Oklahoma's education system.

"We are excited for the opportunity to partner with OPSR and others on the OKFutures grant. Research tells us that access to high-quality Pre-K is a critical building block for children to develop the literacy skills that will ensure their success throughout their educational experience and beyond," said Joy Hofmeister, state superintendent of public instruction.

Within OKFutures' timeline, OPSR and their partners plan to perform a state-level needs assessment and create a strategic plan to optimize existing early childhood resources.

"The Oklahoma Department of Human Services Child Care Services (DHS) works in partnership with OPSR, community organizations, tribes, state agencies and other stakeholders to develop child care services in communities around the state. We know when children have access to high-quality child care they have the opportunity to develop to their fullest potential and are more prepared for preschool. We look forward to continuing our partnership with OPSR through the OKFutures grant," said Ed Lake, DHS executive director.

In total, 44 states and one territory were awarded funding through the Preschool Development Grant. Grant recipients will have the opportunity to apply for renewal grants prior to the end of 2019. And as OKFutures moves forward, Oklahoma will see a significant impact on the quality of supports for children birth through age five and their families.

For questions about this grant, contact Debra Andersen, OPSR executive director, at dandersen@okschoollreadiness.org. To learn more about OPSR or get updates on the grant's progress, visit www.okschoollreadiness.org.

For a complete list of award recipients, visit <https://childcareta.acf.hhs.gov/event/preschool-development-birth-through-five-initial-grant-awards?fbclid=IwAR3E3SsHIcAP6O6sIO8ALATkhcHJ2MgYIRdS8ZqxxRVivxiHM6AM6NWYAY>.

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About Oklahoma Partnership for School Readiness

In 2003, House Bill 1094 created the Oklahoma Partnership for School Readiness (OPSR) 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, we work to help children

arrive at school with the knowledge, skills and physical and emotional health to achieve their dreams. Today, our 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>.