



OKLAHOMA
PARTNERSHIP
FOR SCHOOL
READINESS

ANNUAL REPORT

July 1, 2024 – June 30, 2025

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This report was submitted to Governor Stitt and the Oklahoma legislature on November 1, 2025 as required by Title 10 O.S. § 640.2

Dear Governor Stitt, President Pro Tempore Paxton, and Speaker Hilbert,

On behalf of the Oklahoma Partnership for School Readiness (OPSR) Board, it is our honor to present the 2025 OPSR Annual Report. This publication provides an analysis of Oklahoma’s early childhood system, as well as a comprehensive overview of the significant contributions made by OPSR staff and our valued partners across the state—united in our mission to strengthen families and advance the well-being and success of young children statewide.

Oklahoma’s future depends upon ensuring every child is safe, healthy, and ready to learn by the time they enter school. To that end, we remain steadfast in our commitment to fostering coordinated, cost-effective public and private programs and initiatives—rooted in community partnerships—that support children from birth to age five and the families who nurture them.

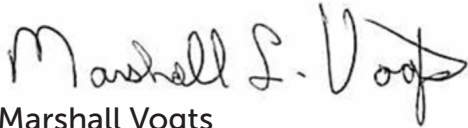
OPSR’s work is grounded in strong public-private partnerships. Our efforts are guided by the Pathway to School Readiness, a comprehensive framework that ensures all children and families have equitable access to the supports necessary for early success. The pathway encompasses three critical components:

- Children and Families Have Access to Health Services
- Children Are Engaged in High-Quality Care and Learning
- All Parents Have Access to Education and Support Services

Through this unified approach, OPSR is helping to shape a brighter, more prosperous future for Oklahoma’s children and, in turn, for our entire state. Ensuring that every child is ready for school is more than an educational objective—it is a foundational investment in lifelong opportunity. School readiness fosters curiosity, confidence, and achievement, setting children on a trajectory toward academic success, meaningful careers, and economic independence. When children are ready for school, they are more likely to thrive in school and beyond, creating ripple effects that strengthen families, communities, and the state’s workforce for generations to come.

Ensuring that these pathways remain accessible to all children and families requires ongoing commitment and strategic investment. As a state, we must continue to prioritize programs and services that elevate children and families. Research consistently affirms that these investments are both morally sound and fiscally responsible. As Nobel Laureate economist James Heckman has stated, *“High-quality early childhood programs can yield a return on investment of 7 to 13% per year, per child—through improved education, health, social behaviors, and employment outcomes.”*

By continuing to invest in early childhood care and education, we are building the foundation for a stronger, more resilient, and more prosperous Oklahoma—today and for generations to come.



Marshall Vogts
OPSR Chair
Community Development Division Director at Oklahoma Department of Commerce

Dear Partners, Advocates, and Stakeholders,

The Oklahoma Partnership for School Readiness (OPSR) is proud to present our 2025 Annual Report. This past year has been a landmark chapter in our journey to ensure every child in Oklahoma, beginning at birth, is on a path toward school readiness, family well-being, and lifelong success.

This report provides a comprehensive landscape analysis of Oklahoma’s early childhood care and education system. It highlights the many accomplishments and collaborative efforts being led by OPSR on behalf of young children and their families, showcasing the collective progress toward building a stronger, more equitable foundation for school readiness across the state.

This year we achieved a major legislative victory that brought the Pathway to School Readiness to life in a historic way.

A Victory for Families and the Workforce: House Bill 2778

In partnership with Oklahoma Human Services and bipartisan legislative support, HB2778 became law, establishing the Oklahoma Strong Start Program. This three-year pilot offers free child care to eligible employees in licensed facilities statewide, addressing a critical workforce challenge. Funded by the Preschool Development Grant and the State of Oklahoma, the program reflects the connection between workforce stability, economic security, and quality child care. OPSR is proud to have led the development, advancement, and administration of this pioneering initiative.

Looking Ahead: A New Focus on Paid Family and Medical Leave

Building on the success of the Oklahoma Strong Start Program, OPSR is now focusing on Paid Family and Medical Leave (PFML), a policy that supports Oklahoma’s School Readiness Pathway. Research shows paid leave after birth, adoption, or medical emergencies leads to healthier children, stronger family bonds, and higher workforce retention. However, many Oklahoma families—especially in rural areas and low-wage jobs—lack access and must sacrifice income or careers when caregiving. OPSR is leading statewide advocacy to develop PFML policies tailored to Oklahoma’s needs, advancing our mission to support families from the start.

Commitment to Data and Action

Systems change requires vision, investment, and collaboration. OPSR is committed to conducting actionable research and evaluation that inform sound policy, elevate best practices across Oklahoma’s early childhood care and education system, and bring proven, evidence-based strategies to scale. The collective commitment of partners and stakeholders to Oklahoma’s children makes this progress possible, and we remain deeply grateful for your continued partnership and dedication.

Together, we will continue to advocate, innovate, and build an early childhood system that fulfills every Oklahoma child’s potential.

With gratitude and hope,



Carrie Williams
Carrie Williams
Executive Director
Oklahoma Partnership for School Readiness (OPSR)

In 2003, the Oklahoma legislature signed House Bill 1094, which created our organization, the Oklahoma Partnership for School Readiness (OPSR). 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 early childhood policy recommendations to the Governor and Oklahoma Legislature by utilizing data, research and best practices to engage parents, nonprofits, community partners and business leaders. OPSR is designated as Oklahoma’s Early Childhood State Advisory Council and works to improve the quality, availability, and coordination of programs and services for children from birth to age 5.



Mission

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

Vision

OPSR’s vision is that all Oklahoma children are safe, healthy, eager to learn and ready to succeed by the time they enter school.

Legislative Duties

Under the Oklahoma Partnership for School Readiness Act, duties include:

- Conduct a thorough assessment of existing public and private programs to determine their effectiveness and to maximize the efficient use of current state funds;
- Implement a public engagement campaign and establish a structure to facilitate communication between communities;
- Provide leadership at the state level to encourage communities to develop and improve school readiness opportunities at the local level to encourage and empower local communities;
- 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;
- Serve as the administrator of the statewide child care resource and referral network;
- Serve as the state clearinghouse for early childhood education and development programs and services;
- Establish standards of accountability in school readiness programs and policy and recognize and promote the best practices;
- Submit an annual report to the Oklahoma Legislature and Governor.



Legislative Mandates of the Annual Report

As part of the Oklahoma Partnership for School Readiness Act, OPSR submits an annual report to the Oklahoma Legislature and governor that shall include, but not be limited to the following information:

- Preparedness level of children entering kindergarten.
- Status and results of the efforts of the board to engage the public regarding the care and education of children under age 5 and of the efforts of the board to develop and promote private-sector programs and voluntary parental involvement.
- Detailed summary of community initiatives and programs funded in whole, or in part, by the board.
- Availability and cost of quality child care for children under age 5 needing care outside their home.
- Number, location, and status of quality pre-kindergarten programs in the state.
- Percentage of third-grade students reading at or above grade level.

OPSR Foundation

OPSR is a Public-Private Partnership

The OPSR Board was created under the Oklahoma Partnership for School Readiness Act (Title 10 O.S. § 640) and is the designated body that serves as Oklahoma’s State Early Childhood Advisory Council as authorized under the federal Head Start Act of 2007 (PL 110-134, Section 642B).

The OPSR Foundation is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit created under Oklahoma law (Title 10 O.S. § 640.3) to serve as a fiduciary partner with the OPSR Board and accepts both public and private funds to support early childhood initiatives. Our Foundation board includes passionate and dedicated advocates, many of whom have worked to improve school readiness before the formation of OPSR. We are thankful to all officers who generously share their time serving the Foundation and its committees to spread OPSR’s mission.

OPSRF Board Members

Dr. Amy Emerson,
OPSRF Board President
Pediatrician, Director of Hope-Driven Parenting

AJ Griffin,
OPSRF Vice President
Executive Director, Potts Family Foundation

Ginny Bass Carl,
OPSRF Board Past President
CEO, Giving Well, LLC

Suzanne Thompson,
OPSRF Board Secretary
Former Executive Director of CART and El Reno Public School Foundation

Mike Gibson,
OPSRF Board Treasurer
Retired CPA

Pam Campbell,
OPSRF Board Director
10th District Outreach Director, Federal Reserve Bank, Kansas City

Marsha Schmidt,
OPSRF Board Director
Business Manager, The McIntosh Group; Business Manager, Site Solutions

Collette Shepard-McIntire,
OPSRF Board Director
Lakeshore Learning Materials

Annie Koppel Van Hanken,
OPSRF Board Director
Chief Program Director, George Kaiser Family Foundation

OPSR Partnership Board Members

Public Sector Representatives or their Designees

State Superintendent of Public Instruction
Lindel Fields
Designee: Sharon Morgan

State Commissioner of Health
Keith Reed, Commissioner
Designee: Lorri Essary

Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services
Gregory Slavonic, Interim Commissioner
Designee: Stephanie Bell

Oklahoma Department of Commerce
John Budd, Director
Designees: Marshall Vogts & Jessica Izquierdo

Oklahoma Department of Libraries
Natalie Curry, Director
Designee: Trisha Hutcherson

Department of Human Services
Jeffrey Cartmell, Director
Designee: Deb Smith

Oklahoma Health Care Authority Administrator
Clay Bullard
Designee: Kasie McCarty

Oklahoma Commission on Children and Youth
Annette Wisk Jacobi, Director
Designees: Danielle Dill & Caitlin Merritt

State Department of Rehabilitation Services
Melinda Fruendt, Director
Designees: Tonya Garman

Oklahoma Educational Television Authority
Shawn Black, Interim Executive Director
Designee: Darrell Strong

Oklahoma Department of Career and Technology Education
Brent Haken, Director
Designee: Teena Friend

Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education
Sean Burrage, Chancellor
Designee: Gina McPherson

Cabinet Secretary with Responsibility for Education Agencies
Dr. Dan Hamlin

Dean of the College of Human Environmental Sciences, Oklahoma State University
Dr. Jon Pedersen
Designee: Dr. Jennifer Stepp

State Director of Head Start Collaboration
Paula Brown
Designee: Zoe Campbell & Curtis Mays

Private Sector Representatives Appointed by the Governor

Representative of Licensed Child Care Providers
Rachel Proper, Vice President, Child Care, Inc.

Representative of the Licensed Child Care Industry Appointed by the Governor from a List Submitted by an Association Representing the Licensed Child Care Industry
Angie Clayton, Kids R Us of Tecumseh

Two Parents of Children Age 8 or Younger
Brett Vanderzee, Music & Preaching Minister, The Spring Church of Christ
Dr. Jennifer Pham, Director of Pharmacy, Oklahoma City Indian Clinic

Representative of a State Association of Federally Funded Early Childhood Programs
Suzie Powers
EHS Director/CCP Manager, Northeast Oklahoma Community Action Agency, Inc.

Governor Appointees

Dr. Hokehe Effiong
Pediatric Specialist, Jackson County Memorial Hospital

Jacqueline Evans, Thrive Network FCCH Ambassador

Kelly Kay
President & CEO, YMCA of Greater Oklahoma City

Dr. Sada Knowles
Dean of New College, Oklahoma Christian University

Melissa Larimore
Community Programs Director, Youth & Family Services, Inc.

Cindy Lee
Executive Director, HALO Project

Dr. Amanda McCabe
Adjunct Professor for the Educational Psychology Department at Oklahoma State University

Anthony Stafford
Senior Program Director, Sunbeam Family Services

Kody Suanny
Executive Director of Great Plains Youth & Family Services, Inc.

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

Pat Potts†
Founder of the Potts Family Foundation

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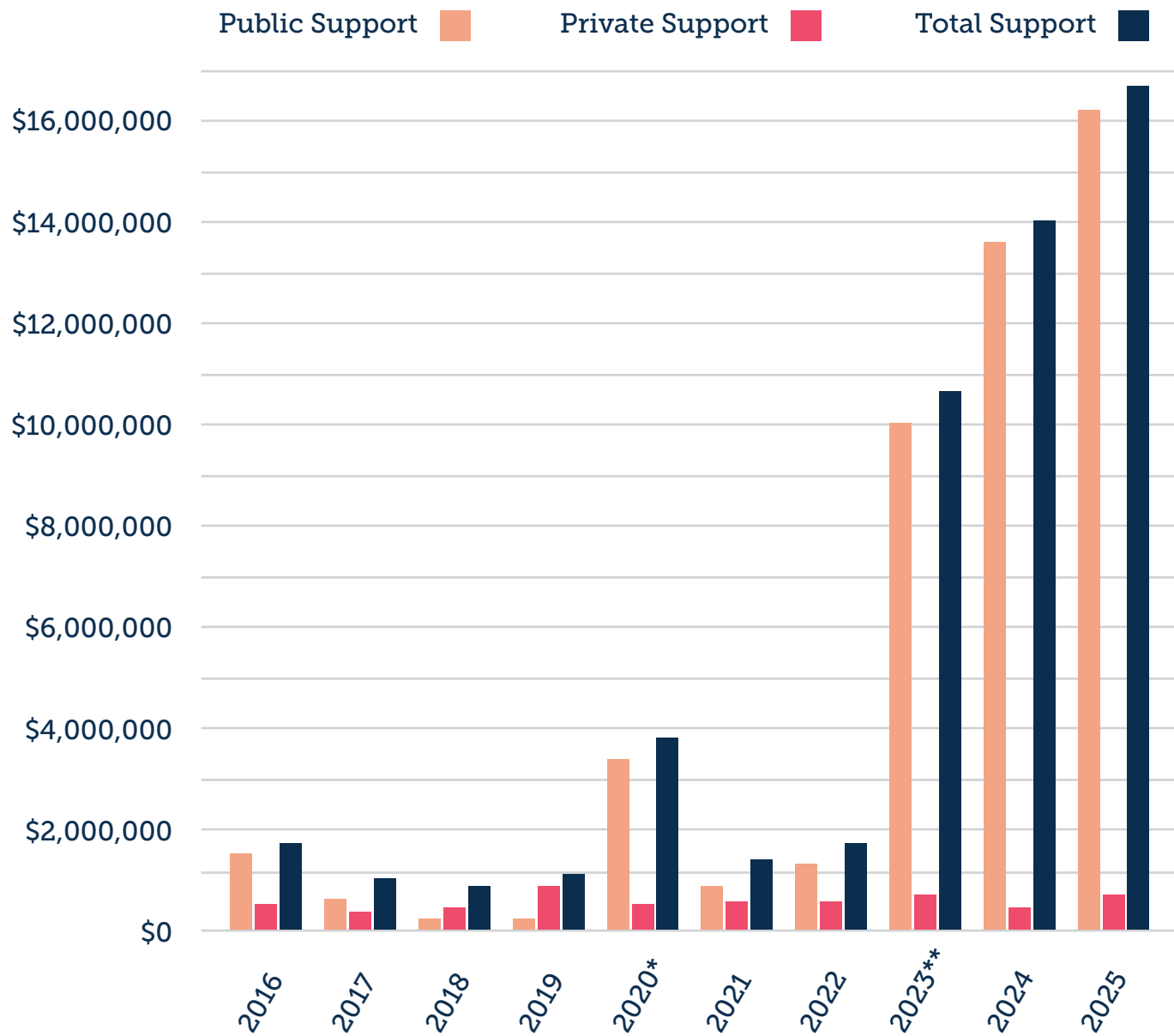
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*FY20 OPSR received the PDG Planning Grant for \$3,000,000, distributed through OPSRF.

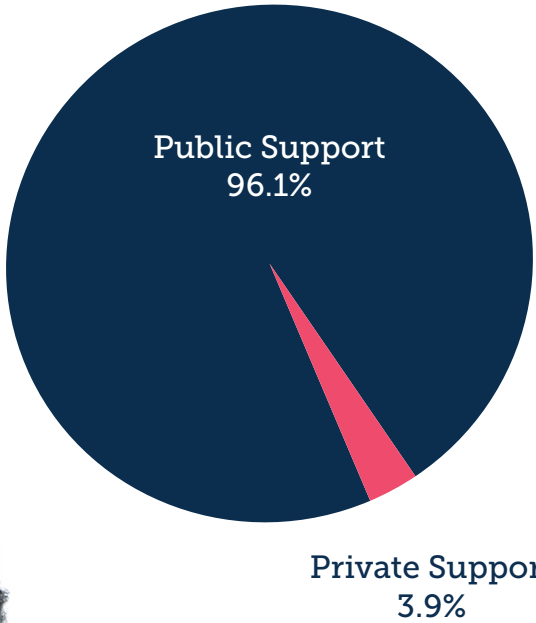
**FY23 OPSR and the Oklahoma Child Care Resource and Referral Association (OCCRA) merged resulting in an expanded budget for OPSR in FY2023. In addition, OPSR received funding through OKDHS from the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Administration for Children & Families for the PDG B-5 Renewal Grant in the amount of \$1,807,436.

Public Support - \$16,228,535.00

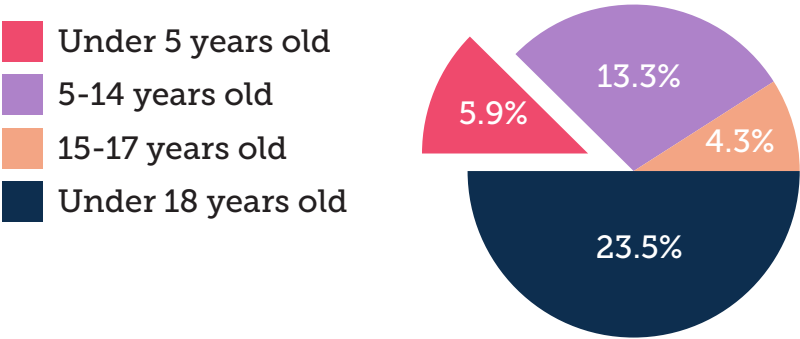
- Oklahoma Department of Human Services
- Oklahoma State Department of Education
- U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Administration for Children & Families

Private Support - \$664,200.00

- Alliance for Early Success
- George Kaiser Family Foundation
- Inasmuch Foundation
- American Heart Association
- Blue Cross Blue Shield of Oklahoma
- Lloyd & Peggy Stephens Foundation

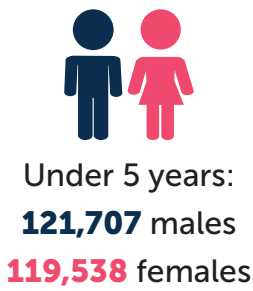


Population by Age in Oklahoma¹:

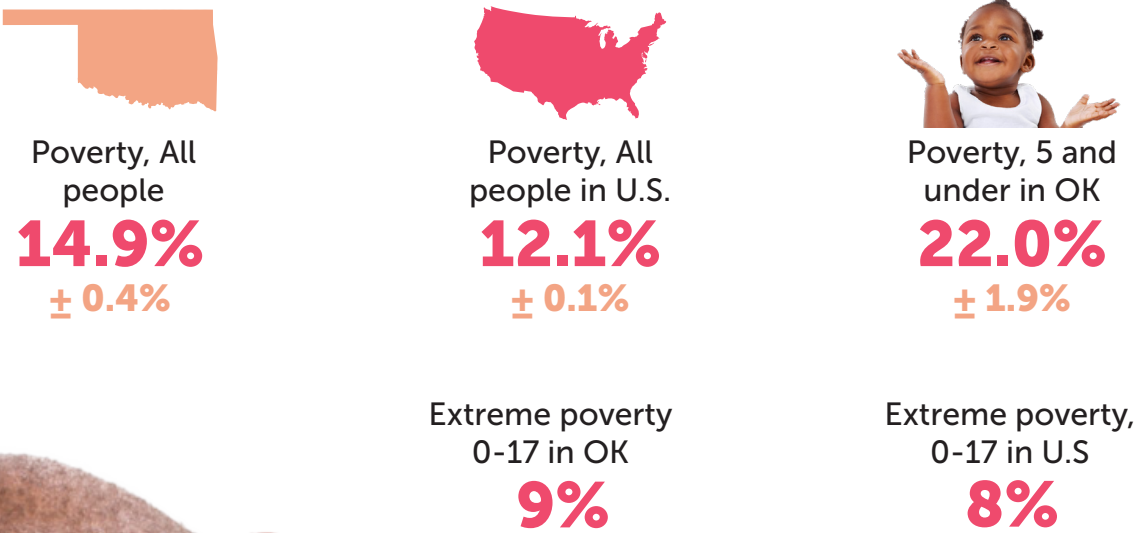


*percentages are out of the entire population of Oklahoma and will not sum to 100%

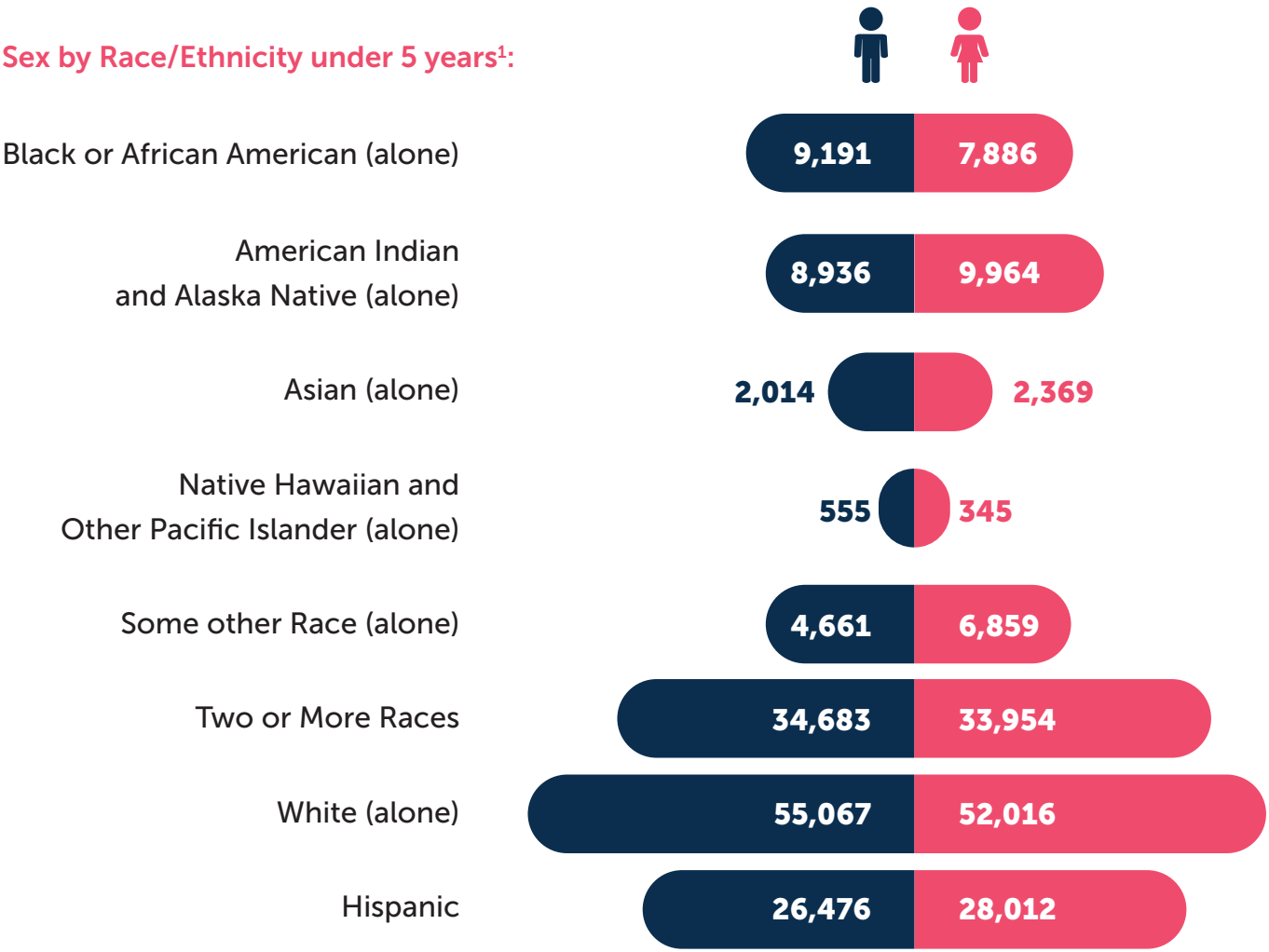
Age by Gender in Oklahoma¹:



Poverty by Age in Oklahoma^{3,4}:



Sex by Race/Ethnicity under 5 years¹:



Poverty Status of Families in the Past 12 Months ⁵						
Families	All Families - US	All Families - OK	Married Couple Families - US	Married Couple Families - OK	Female Householder, No spouse present - US	Female Householder, No spouse present - OK
	Percent Below Poverty Level					
Families with related children of householder under 5 years	11.9%	18.1%	4.2%	6.5%	36.2%	46.5%
Families with a householder who is White alone	6.0%	9.1%	3.5%	5.0%	18.5%	25.8%
Families with a householder who is Black or African American alone	16.4%	19.2%	6.5%	3.6%	27.1%	37.8%
Families with a householder who is American Indian and Alaska Native alone	16.2%	15.5%	8.9%	7.8%	29.6%	28.4%
Families with a householder who is Asian alone	6.9%	10.5%	5.5%	6.6%	14.1%	26.2%
Families with a householder who is Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander alone	13.8%	—	8.7%	—	25.1%	—
Families with a householder who is Some Other Race alone	15.2%	17.2%	10.0%	13.3%	27.6%	36.9%
Families with a householder who is Two or More races	11.6%	13.4%	6.6%	6.5%	25.4%	34.8%
Families with a householder who is Hispanic or Latino Origin (of any race) or African American alone	13.6%	16.3%	8.4%	10.8%	26.8%	33.1%
Families with a householder who is White alone, not Hispanic or Latino	5.7%	8.8%	3.4%	4.9%	17.6%	25.8%

Selected Characteristics of People at Specified Levels of Poverty in the Past 12 Months ⁶						
Population for whom poverty status is determined	Less than 50% of the poverty level - US	Less than 50% of the poverty level - OK	Less than 100% of the poverty level - US	Less than 100% of the poverty level - OK	Less than 125% of the poverty level - US	Less than 125% of the poverty level - OK
Family households	4.6%	5.8%	9.8%	12.5%	13.1%	16.5%
Married-couple family	2.0%	2.5%	5.3%	6.7%	7.6%	9.6%
Female householder, no spouse present households	12.9%	15.9%	24.3%	31.3%	30.6%	38.9%
Other living arrangements	12.4%	13.7%	22.5%	26.2%	27.1%	32.0%

THE PATHWAY

Children & Families Have Access to Health Services

Research shows that healthy children are better able to engage in experiences crucial to the learning process. Fundamental needs are:

- Babies are born on time and healthy.
- Children have access to health care.
- Children are physically and emotionally healthy.
- Children are on a positive development trajectory.

Children Engaged in High Quality Care & Learning

Children in high-quality early care and learning are more likely to succeed in school and throughout their lifetime. Objectives here are:

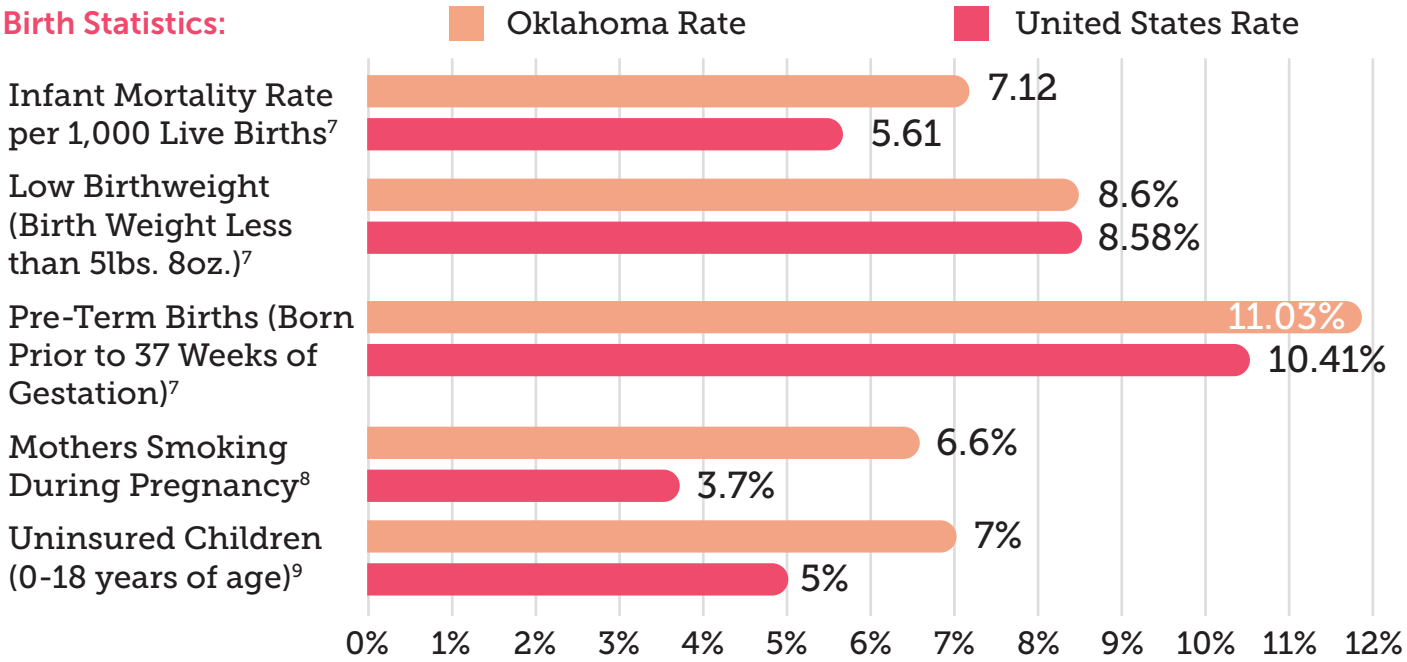
- Children have access to high-quality, developmentally appropriate programs with professionals.
- Children attend early learning programs and schools consistently.
- Children learn in safe environments with positive climates that support social-emotional development.

All Parents Have Access to Education & Support Services

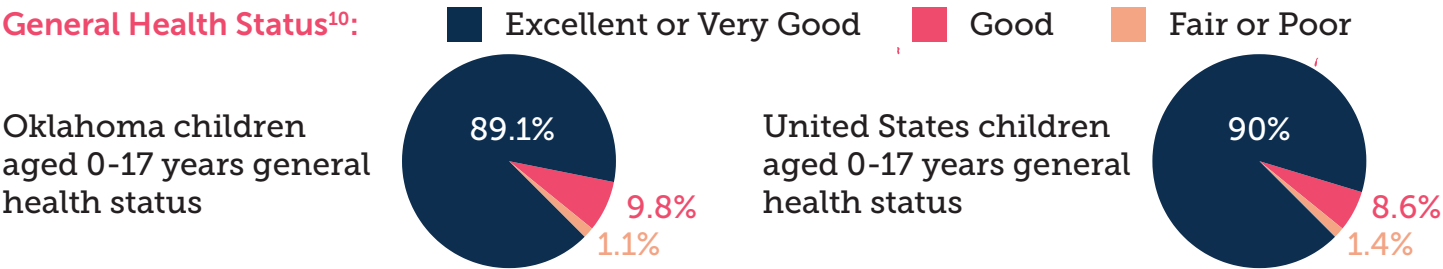
Educated, skilled and supported family members and caregivers are better equipped to expose children to educational opportunities. This means:

- Children have safe, stable and nurturing relationships with caregivers.
- Families have the knowledge, skills and social support for their children’s optimal development.
- Children live in economically secure families.
- Communities are safe, toxic-free and economically viable in support of children and their families.



School Readiness Indicators:
Children & Families Have Access to Health Services



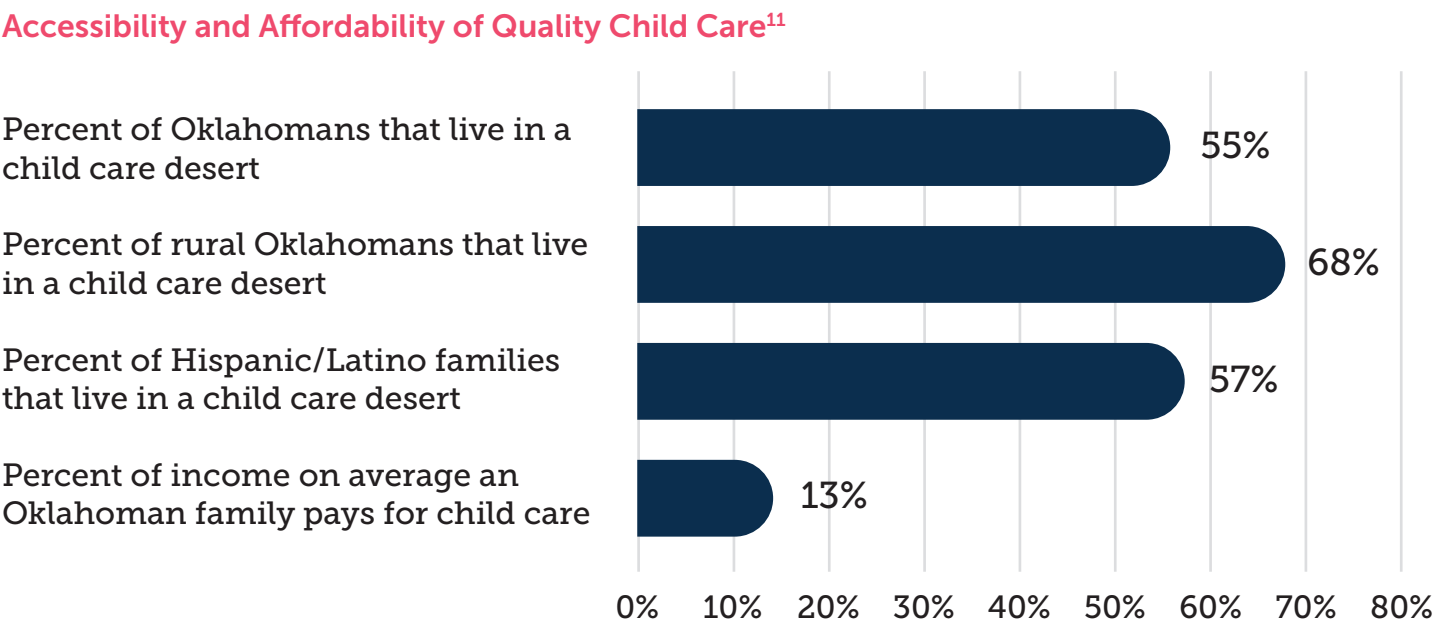
Child and Teen Deaths per 100,000⁹: **Oklahoma - 40 United States - 29**



Health Indicators¹⁰:

		
Percentage of children aged 0-17 years who live in a households where someone smokes	13.8%	10.8%
Percentage of children aged 0-17 years who received one or more preventive health visits in the past 12 month	76.2%	79.1%
Percentage of parents with children aged 9-35 months who completed a standardized developmental tool	41.9%	36.8%
Percentage of children aged 6 months-5 years that met all 4 flourishing items	76.4%	78.1%
Percentage of children aged 1-17 years who received one or more preventative dental care visits during the past 12 months	77.8%	79.8%
Percentage of children aged 0-17 years with special health care needs identified with the CSHCN screener	24.2%	20.9%

School Readiness Indicators:
Children Engaged in High-Quality Care & Learning



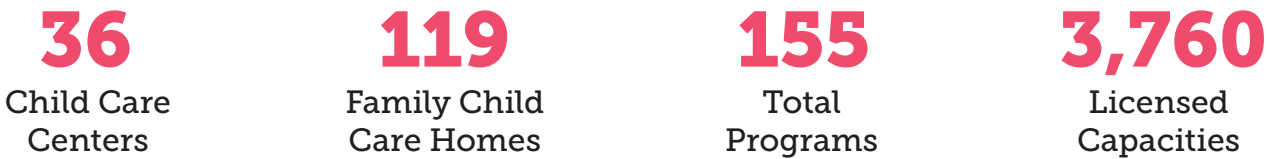
School Readiness Indicators:
Children Engaged in High-Quality Care & Learning

Licensed Child Care¹²

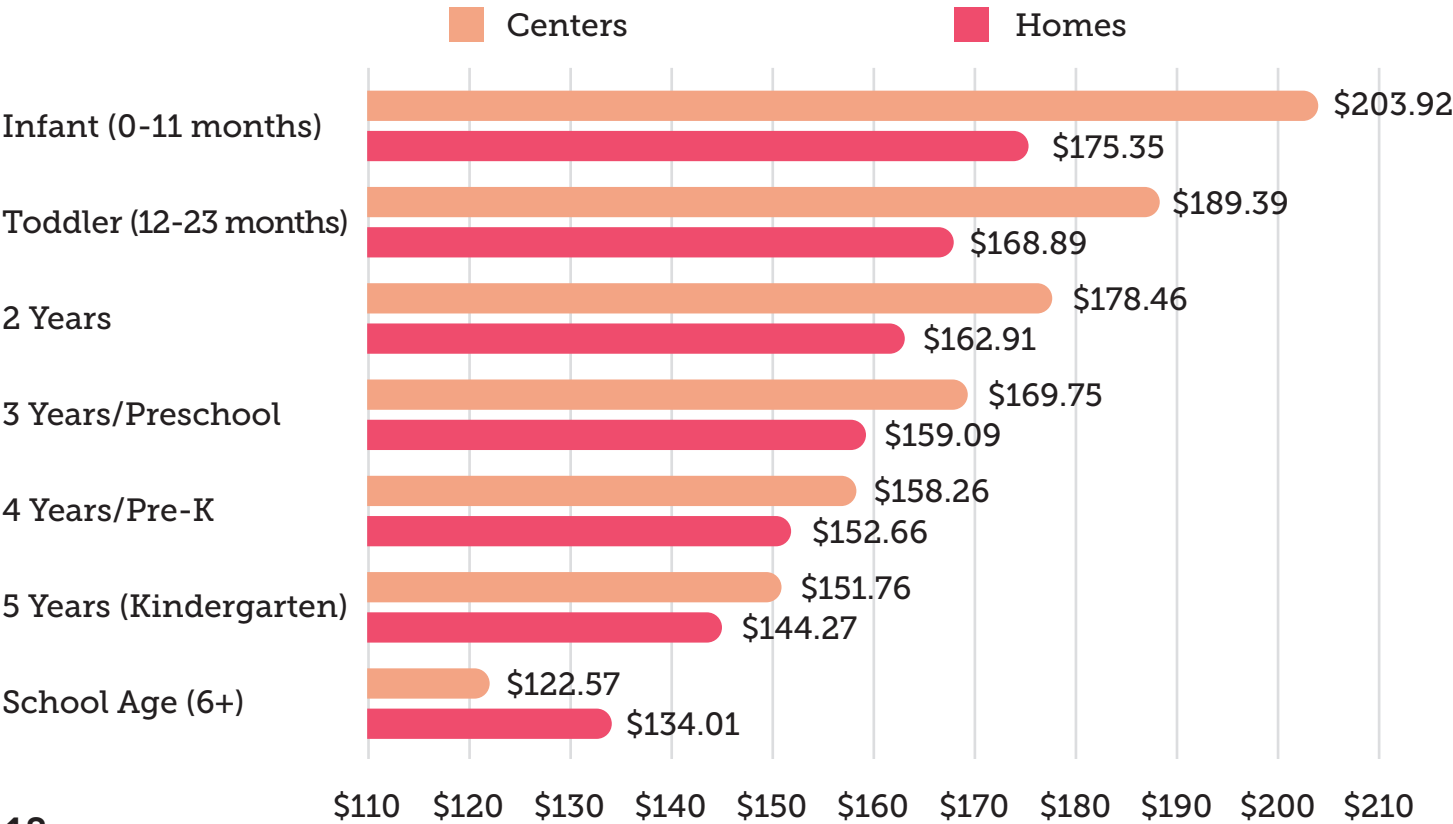
Children Needing Care While Parents Work			
Age	Child Population (number)	Children with all working parents (number)	Percent of Children Needing Care
0-5 Years	294,104	181,059	62%
6-12 Years	380,683	266,090	70%
0-12 Years	674,787	447,149	66%

Availability of Licensed Child Care ¹³				
Month	Child Care Centers	Family Child Care Homes	Total Number of Programs	Licensed Capacity
July 2024	1,524	1,576	3,100	127,025
June 2025	1,488	1,457	2,945	123,265

From the beginning of FY25 to the end of FY25 - there was a net **loss** of:



Cost of Licensed Child Care¹²



School Readiness Indicators:
Children Engaged in High-Quality Care & Learning

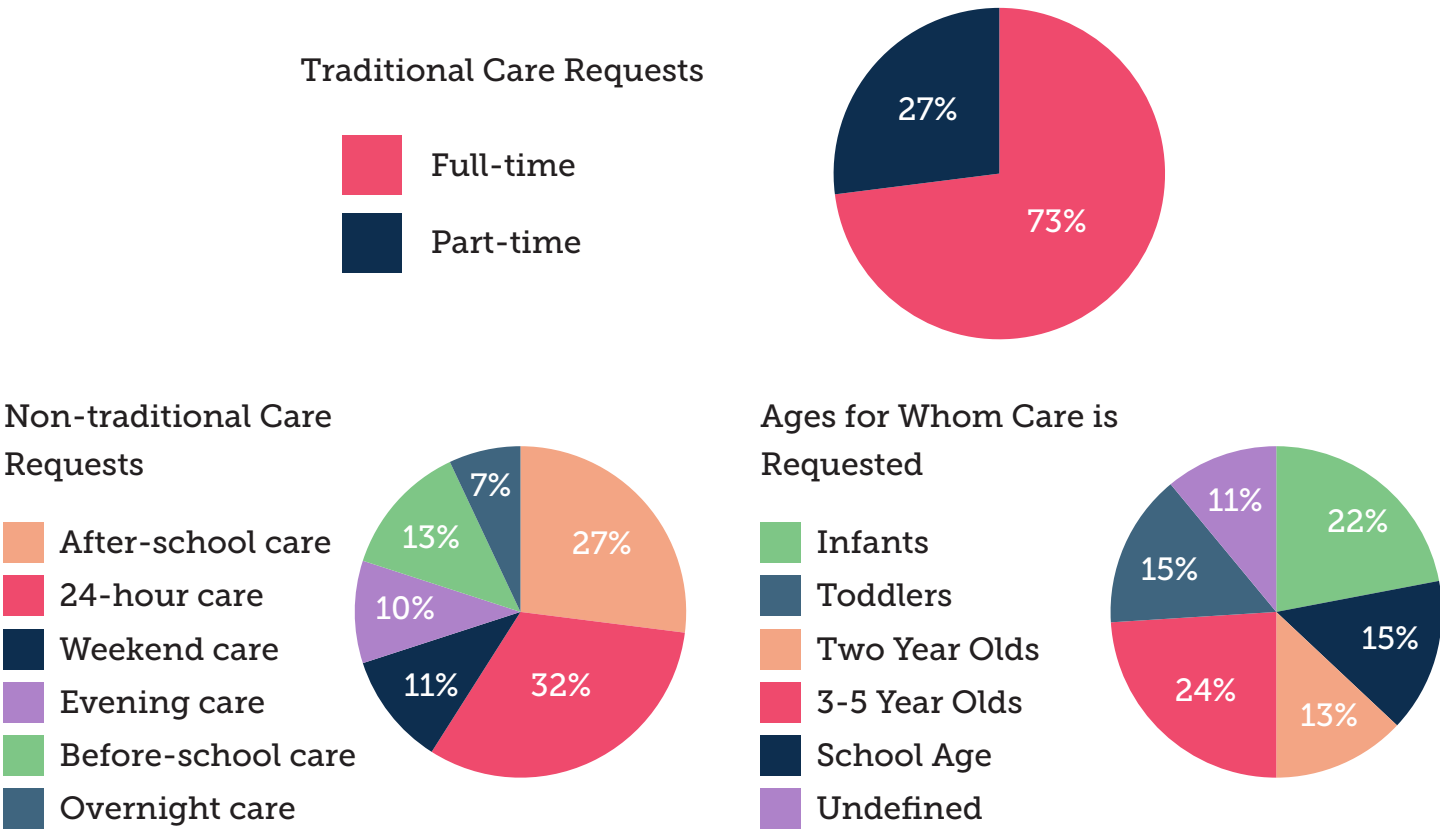
Child Care Subsidy¹²



Availability of Pre-K and Kindergarten¹²

Early Education		
Age	Number of sites	Number enrolled
Pre-K, 4 years old (½ day)	37	2,392
Pre-K, 4 years old (full day)	511	32,927
Kindergarten (½ day)	5	531
Kindergarten (full day)	45	48,463

Family Requests to Child Care Resource & Referral¹²



Head Start & Early Start¹⁴

Oklahoma Head Start/Early Head Start (HS/EHS) is a federal program aimed at fostering the school readiness of children aged birth to 5, particularly those from low-income backgrounds. The program is designed to enrich their emotional, cognitive and social development. Eligibility extends to children in low-income families, as well as children in foster care, those experiencing homelessness, or from families receiving public assistance. These programs offer comprehensive services that include health and nutrition support, mental health services, and family engagement opportunities.

- **Head Start:** Serves families with children between ages 3 and 5.
- **Early Head Start:** Served pregnant women and families with children under age 3.

At the time of publication, the most recent Head Start data for FY25 were not yet released. OPSR will update the online version of this report with the new figures as soon as they become available.

Oklahoma has
383
Head Start Centers Statewide

13,496

Total Families Served

145

Pregnant Women Served

945

Families Experiencing Homelessness Served

2,210

Families Received Mental Health Services

2,981

Families Received Emergency/Crisis Intervention Services

14,991

Total Children Enrolled

728

are Children in Foster Care

1,007

Children Received Care for a Chronic Health Condition

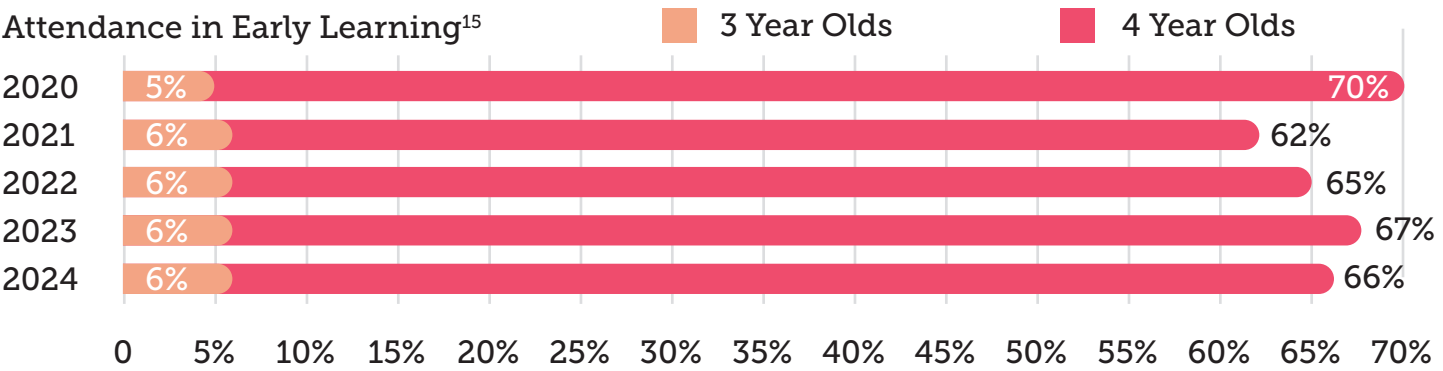
2,724

Children are Dual Language Learners

5,441

Children Received Preventive Medical Care

Universal Pre-K



Quality Standard Benchmarks ¹⁵	2024
Preschool Access for 4-year-olds – ranked nationally	#6
Preschool access for 3-year-olds – ranked nationally	#22
Percent of children enrolled in state prekindergarten (2022-2023)	66%
Oklahoma School Districts offering State-Funded Pre-K Programs	100%
NIEER’s Quality Standards Met	9/10
Total state Pre-K enrollment	38,457

2024/2025 State Public Enrollment Totals ¹⁶							
Grade	Hispanic	Am. Indian	Asian	Black/ African Am.	Pacific Islander	White	Multi-Racial
Pre-K for 3 Year Olds – Half time	23.0%	3.5%	1.7%	9.8%	0.0%	50.0%	12.1%
Pre-K for 3 Year Olds – Full time	16.9%	17.9%	1.3%	4.4%	0.4%	41.2%	14.2%
Pre-K–Half time	26.6%	5.0%	4.0%	4.7%	0.3%	44.4%	15.2%
Pre-K– Full time	22.0%	11.2%	2.1%	7.5%	0.3%	41.2%	15.5%
Kinder–Half time	5.9%	17.7%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	70.6%	5.9%
Kinder–Full time	21.7%	10.8%	2.3%	7.7%	0.4%	41.7%	15.3%

Early Intervention¹⁷

Number of
Children Served:
10,024

Family outcomes: Percent of families who report that EI services have helped the family:

96%

Know their
rights

95%

Effectively
communicate their
child’s needs

97%

Help their child
develop & learn

Positive Early Learning Experiences Policy in Oklahoma ¹⁸	
Infant/Toddler Credential Adopted	YES
Allocated CCDBG Funds	YES
Infant Eligibility Level for Child Care Subsidy above 200% of FPL	YES
Level of teacher qualification required by the state	No credential beyond a high school diploma
Group Size Requirements Meet or Exceed EHS Standards	1 of 3 Age Groups
Adult/Child Ratio Requirements Meet or Exceed EHS Standards	1 of 3 Age Groups
State Reimburses Center-Based Child Care	NO
“At-Risk” Children Included in Part C Eligibility Definition	NO



Family Support Services¹⁹

Families Served by Home-Based Family Support Programs	2022	2023	2024
Home Visits Completed	38,552	30,593	32,520
Families Served	2,796	2,924	3,189
Children Served	2,331	2,226	2,367
Counties Served	58	62	58

*Note. Data from the 2025 Oklahoma Home Visiting Annual Outcomes Report (July 1, 2024-June 30, 2025) will be available December 2025 here: <https://www.okschoolreadiness.org/data-research>.

Child and Family Well-Being in Oklahoma¹⁰

	Oklahoma	United States
Percentage of Families that Reads to Children Every Day, 0-5 Years	33.9%	41.7%
Percentage of Families that Tell Stories or Sings to Children Every Day, 0-5 Years	48.7%	53.0%
Percentage of Mothers Who Rate Their Mental Health as “Excellent” or “Very Good,” 0-17 Years	64.4%	68.6%

Oklahoma’s National Ranking⁹

- **21%** of children in Oklahoma live in poverty, which for a family of two adults and two children was below **\$30,900** in 2023 (**40th** in U.S.)
- **40th** in economic well-being
- **40th** in family and community context
- **43th** in health
- **48th** in education (ahead of only Alaska & New Mexico)
- **26%** of children in Oklahoma have parents that lack secure employment
- **27%** of children in Oklahoma live in households with a high housing cost burden
- Oklahoma does **not** have paid family leave¹⁸
- Oklahoma does **not** have paid sick time that covers care for a child¹⁸

Estimated total population birth through age 3 experiencing homelessness is **7,306, or 3.63%** of all infants and toddlers. Of these, **8.6%** are receiving early childhood services through SoonerStart, Head Start or home visiting, leaving **6,431** children unserved.²⁰

Strong Readers Act: 2023-2024 Governor’s Report²¹

Oklahoma third-grade reader average (by year)	Met RSA levels
2024	71.2%*
2023	69.6%
2022	67.7%
2021	63.3%

*28.8% of Oklahoma third graders did not meet Reading Sufficiency Act levels in 2024, of those:

- 58.6% were on an IEP
- 49.6% were English language learners
- 35.5% were economically disadvantaged

Did Not Meet RSA level	2022	2023	2024
American Indian/ Alaskan Native	31%	29.7%	27.5%
Asian	23.4%	24.7%	21.5%
Black	50.3%	49.2%	46.7%
Hispanic	55.9%	40.9%	40.4%
Pacific Islander	55.3%	52.3%	45.0%
White	25.1%	23.1%	21.5%
2+ Ethnicities	30.3%	29.3%	26.6%

*Note. As stated on page 7 of the 2023-2024 Governor’s Report: “Current data reporting methods include self-reported data from districts, and thus, limit the conclusions which can be confidently drawn from this report. Data is reported at the site level rather than by student level. Therefore, it is difficult to know if data changed due to student improvement or movement to another school. Data shows if students met a set target. However, it does not show the rate of improvement to determine if students made reasonable progress through the year.”



Legislative and Political Advocacy Efforts

Advocacy is at the heart of OPSR’s mission to ensure every Oklahoma child has the best start in life. As the managing organization for the statewide Invest in Kids Coalition, OPSR unites child care professionals, nonprofit leaders, advocacy organizations and grassroots volunteers to strengthen policies for children ages 0–5 and their families. Through the coalition, OPSR conducts extensive legislative tracking at both the state and federal levels on bills that impact young children, providing coalition partners with timely updates, analysis and opportunities for civic engagement. This coordinated effort ensures that early childhood voices are heard and that lawmakers understand how their decisions shape the future of our state.

The 2025 Oklahoma legislative session demonstrated the power of this united advocacy. OPSR and the coalition supported and helped advance several landmark bills, including HB2778, which establishes the Child Care Employee Recruitment and Retention Pilot Program (aka: Oklahoma Strong Start Program). This program creates a pathway for child care workers to receive free child care for their own children, a benefit worth up to \$12,000 annually, recognizing that a strong early childhood workforce is essential for Oklahoma’s economy and families, as each child care professional supports six to eight working parents.

OPSR’s advocacy coalition also contributed to other key victories: SB364, eliminating corporal punishment in schools for children with disabilities; HB1875, initiating a feasibility study for a unified public assistance application system; and HB1847, streamlining licensing requirements to expand family child care capacity. These wins represent meaningful progress in safety, access and workforce support, showing what’s possible when policymakers, providers and advocates work together.

Beyond legislative achievements, OPSR works year-round to foster a culture of advocacy through training, events, and direct engagement opportunities. In 2025, OPSR staff participated in numerous community, regional, and national public policy discussions, including presenting testimony at four legislative interim studies on topics ranging from child care best practices to workforce development and family supports. These opportunities allow OPSR to help shape policy discussions outside of the regular session and keep the needs of young children and their families at the forefront.



INK Day

The centerpiece of this work each year is Invest in Kids Day (INK Day). INK Day 2025, held on April 7, brought together more than 235 passionate advocates to champion policies that support Oklahoma's youngest children and their families. The day began with a robust advocacy training session led by current and former legislators, policy experts, and seasoned advocates. Participants learned practical strategies for engaging lawmakers effectively, gaining valuable insight into the legislative process and how their voices can shape policy.

Following the training, attendees boarded buses bound for the Oklahoma State Capitol. OPSR leaders addressed lawmakers at the House and the Senate, highlighting the importance of early childhood investments. Volunteers visited legislative offices, shared their personal stories, and observed the policymaking process firsthand from the galleries of both chambers. The day concluded with a celebration of recognition as OPSR received official commendations from the Oklahoma House of Representatives, the Oklahoma State Senate, and the Mayor of Oklahoma City, cementing the impact of Invest in Kids Day as a powerful platform for advocacy and collaboration.

OPSR remains committed to mobilizing advocates and protecting the resources children need to thrive. The message is clear: when we stand together for young children, we can create lasting change, both in the lives of families today and for the future of Oklahoma.



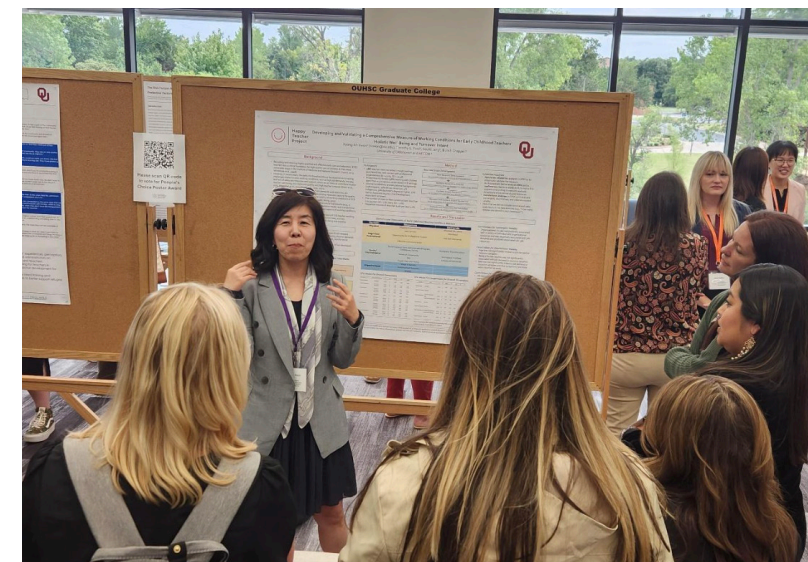
OPSR's Annual Research Symposium

OPSR grounds its policy and advocacy efforts in data-driven decision-making and the latest research in early childhood care and development. By examining emerging trends and best practices, OPSR remains committed to promoting evidence-based programs that support young children and their families. A key element of this commitment is the annual **Oklahoma Early Childhood Research Symposium**, which serves as a platform to disseminate cutting-edge research and foster interdisciplinary collaboration. This year's symposium convened more than 125 researchers, clinicians, early childhood educators, and child welfare professionals from across the field to engage in dialogue and knowledge exchange. In addition to presentations and panel discussions, the symposium featured 23 scientific poster presentations on a wide range of topics, including preschoolers' self-regulation patterns, the impact of working conditions on teacher well-being, and educators' perspectives on the role of play in early learning. Poster presenters represented a diverse array of institutions, including the University of Oklahoma, Oklahoma State University, University of Oklahoma – Tulsa, University of Utah, University of Illinois – Chicago and Sungkyunkwan University in South Korea. Through initiatives like the Research Symposium, OPSR continues to advance its mission of supporting high-quality, research-informed early childhood policies and practices across Oklahoma.

Presentations

The symposium featured a distinguished slate of presentations and a keynote address that collectively advanced the discourse on early childhood education and care across Oklahoma. Dr. Walter Gilliam, Executive Director of the Buffett Early Childhood Institute and the Richard D. Holland, Presidential Chair in Early Childhood Development at the University of Nebraska, presented the keynote address. In his address, **"Early Child Care Expulsion Rates,"** Dr. Gilliam shared research and insights on the prevalence, causes and long-term consequences of expulsion in early learning settings. As a nationally recognized leader in early childhood education, Dr. Gilliam's keynote set a compelling tone for the symposium, calling attention to the need for equity-driven policies and support systems in child care programs.

Among the featured sessions was **"Voices of Tribal Child Care: Stories of Success and Resilience,"** a powerful panel discussion with Jennifer Holding, Director of Child Care and Development (Osage Nation), Jonna Beartrack, CCDF Director (Kiowa Nation), and Sha Toyekoyah, Subsidy Monitor (Caddo Nation of Oklahoma). The panelists shared impactful narratives highlighting the resilience and progress of tribal child care programs across Oklahoma.



The session “Leveling up Your Parent Engagement” was delivered by Madison Wingate, M.Ed., Isabel Rodriguez, M.Ed., and Caitlin Merritt—Community Planners with the Oklahoma Commission on Children and Youth. Their presentation provided practical, research-informed strategies to strengthen partnerships between families and early learning providers.

“Nature-Based Play and Learning,” moderated by Dr. LaDonna Atkins, professor at the University of Central Oklahoma, featured panelists Rep. Jacob Rosecrants (District 46, Oklahoma House of Representatives), Mary Tepera Jones, architect at Good Fieldwork, and Dr. Arianna Pikus, assistant professor at Texas A&M University. This session underscored the cognitive, social and emotional benefits of outdoor, nature-based environments in early childhood development.

In “Happy Teacher Wellness Intervention: Holistic Approaches to Impact the Head Start Workforce,” Dr. Kyong-Ah Kwon, professor at the University of Oklahoma’s Jeannine Rainbolt College of Education, and Mia Kile, associate professor of Interior Design at the University of Oklahoma, shared holistic strategies aimed at improving educator well-being and retention in Head Start programs.

Dr. Diane Horm, Founding Director of the Early Childhood Education Institute at the University of Oklahoma-Tulsa, presented “Indoor Air Quality,” emphasizing the link between environmental conditions and the health and learning outcomes of children and staff in early childhood settings.

Finally, Dr. Barbara Sorrels, CEO of Connected Kids and The Institute for Childhood Education, delivered “Screen-Based Childhood: The Disappearance of Play and the Impact on Growth and Learning,” a compelling presentation on the developmental implications of increased screen time and the critical need to reintroduce play-based learning.

Collectively, these sessions and the keynote address provided a comprehensive, evidence-based exploration of current challenges and promising practices in early childhood education. The symposium reinforced its commitment to innovation, equity and the promotion of high-quality care, and learning environments for all children in Oklahoma.

Child Care Resource and Referral

The Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) program, administered by OPSR on behalf of the Oklahoma Department of Human Services, serves as a vital hub for families, child care professionals, and communities across the state. Its mission is simple yet transformative, to ensure every family in Oklahoma can access affordable, high-quality child care and early education. CCR&R achieves this mission through community-based resource and referral services that connect families to trusted care options, while also equipping providers with the tools and guidance they need to succeed.

Through a network of eight regional contracts, CCR&R provides localized, hands-on support to all 77 counties in Oklahoma. These regional partners offer expertise and personalized assistance, ensuring families can find care that meets their needs and providers have access to training, technical assistance, and business resources. This work directly supports the Pathways for School Readiness framework by strengthening early care and learning opportunities, bolstering family stability and helping children enter school healthy, safe and ready to learn.



1,055

Licensed Child Cares
Received Services



2,703

Types of Consulting Services
were Supplied to Providers



864

Hours of Professional
Development Reached

3,685

participants



3,088

Families Received Child Care
Referral Information

(1,912 via the statewide CCR&R
online search portal and 1,176 via
phone consultation)

Thrive Network

Family Child Care Home (FCCH) providers offer more than 14,000 high-quality child care slots each year in Oklahoma, serving as a vital part of the state’s early care and education system. The Thrive Network – A Home Child Care Collective, designed and delivered by OPSR’s CCR&R statewide management team, strengthens this sector by connecting more than 750 members with quality improvement services, technical assistance, and professional development, at no cost through CCR&R’s eight regional contracts. This work directly supports the Pathways for School Readiness framework by enhancing early care and learning, bolstering family support, and promoting healthy child development.

Monthly Thrive Network meetings in each region provide professional learning, peer connection and practical strategies to help providers improve quality, meet licensing standards, and expand capacity. A ninth cohort offers targeted support and resources in Spanish for Hispanic FCCH providers in the Oklahoma City metro.

A highlight of the year is the Annual Thrive Summit, which in 2025 brought together more than 200 FCCH providers under the theme “Kindness in Action.” The weekend included a screening of the documentary Make a Circle, breakout sessions tailored to provider needs, and keynotes focused on advocacy, self-care, and professional growth. Providers left encouraged, empowered, and reminded that through kindness, connection and advocacy, they are building stronger futures for the children in their care.

By fostering high-quality, culturally responsive early learning environments, the Thrive Network is elevating the quality and sustainability of home-based child care while advancing Oklahoma’s vision that every child can thrive from their earliest years.



Hispanic Providers Conference

One of the most vibrant examples of how CCR&R supports Oklahoma’s child care industry is the annual Hispanic Providers Conference. This event brings together Spanish-speaking child care professionals from across the state, creating a unique space for networking, professional development, and fellowship. In 2025, more than 175 participants gathered in Oklahoma City for a day dedicated to learning and connection, reinforcing CCR&R’s commitment to meeting the needs of all early childhood educators, including those who serve diverse linguistic and cultural communities.

This year’s keynote address was delivered by Lety Valero, a bilingual (English/Spanish) international presenter and certified Conscious Discipline instructor. Valero has 25 years of experience in roles ranging from teacher to preschool director and is also the creator of the popular “Feeling Buddies” program, designed to guide children through the five steps of self-regulation. Her engaging presentation equipped attendees with practical strategies to help children calm, focus, and thrive, leaving participants inspired and better prepared to support the emotional and social development of the children in their care.

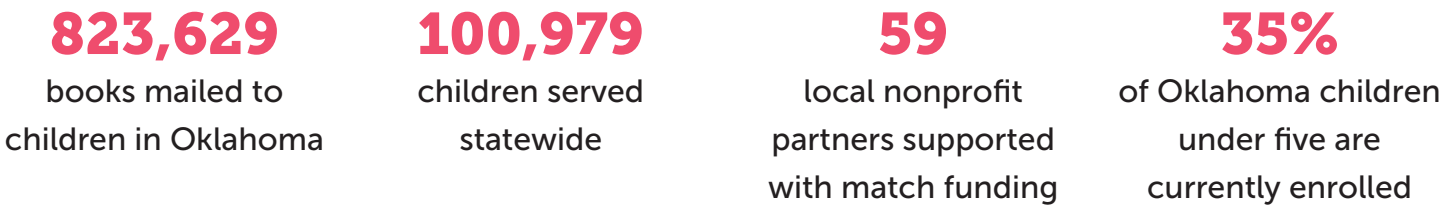


Dolly Parton’s Imagination Library

The Dolly Parton Imagination Library (DPIL) is a book gifting program that mails free, high-quality books to children from birth to age 5, no matter their family’s income level. Each month, DPIL mails a high-quality, age-appropriate book to all registered children, addressed to them, at no cost to the child’s family.

In 2025, OPSR entered into a contract with the Oklahoma State Department of Education to serve as the state’s managing partner for Dolly Parton’s Imagination Library. By leveraging the state’s \$2 million investment, along with additional funding from the Preschool Development Grant (PDG), the program has significantly expanded its reach across Oklahoma. Our goal is to serve every county and enroll 65% of children under age five.

2025 Program Highlights



Oklahoma Clearinghouse for Early Childhood Success

The Oklahoma Clearinghouse for Early Childhood Success (the Clearinghouse), a program of OPSR, enhances the well-being of Oklahoma children and their families by continuously redefining quality, accelerating innovation, and implementing both research-informed practices and practice-informed research. These efforts aim to support and improve early childhood systems while maximizing public-private partnerships. Initially established in 2020 by the Oklahoma Department of Human Services, the Clearinghouse was transferred to OPSR in 2021.

Focus on Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health

The submission window for Round 7 opened in October 2024, and presentations were held on Feb.4, 2025. A total of 11 proposals were submitted; of these, four were approved for publication on the website, and three were selected for implementation through the Preschool Development Grant (Little Otter Health, Improving Access to Reflective Consultation and IECMH Endorsement for Early Childhood Educators, and Strengthening Oklahoma’s IEMCH Workforce).

Healthy Environments and Relationships

The submission window for Round 8 opened in April 2025, and presentations were held on June 17, 2025. A total of nine proposals were submitted; of these, two were approved for publication on the website, and as of June 2025, one has been implemented (Rooted Together: A Cultural Guide for Families).



Projects Supported by the Clearinghouse During FY25:

Conscious Discipline

Supported by a \$1.8 million grant from the Clearinghouse, Sunbeam Family Services strengthened Oklahoma’s child care workforce through Conscious Discipline training—an evidence-based program that promotes early childhood well-being and life skills development. To increase accessibility, Sunbeam offered week-long academies and two-day trainings across the state, including virtual and Saturday sessions. Originally aiming to reach 2,370 participants, Sunbeam surpassed expectations by training 3,904 educators, caregivers, and mental health professionals. Additionally, five individuals were certified as Conscious Discipline Endorsed Facilitators (CDEFs) to ensure long-term program sustainability through continued professional development. With a total of 33,508 hours of training, more than 50,666 children were impacted. The investment translated to \$37 per child impacted, \$56 per training hour, \$480 per provider trained, and an average of \$27,150 invested per county, demonstrating a cost-effective approach to strengthening early childhood education across Oklahoma.

Sunbeam was awarded American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA)/Clearinghouse (CH) funds in FY24 but expensed them in FY25, totaling \$300,847.00 (public support \$270,762.28, private support \$30,084.72) from July 2024 to August 2024.

Pyramid Model

With funding from the Clearinghouse, the Oklahoma Head Start Collaboration Office, and the Oklahoma Association of Community Action Agencies delivered a series of Pyramid Peer Learning Communities (PLCs) for licensed child care providers. These online and in-person PLCs supported providers in completing Pyramid Model eModules and applying its evidence-based strategies to promote young children’s behavioral and emotional development. A total of 39 PLCs, 36 online and three in person, reached 565 child care providers, including 271 from rural areas where access to resources is often limited. To support implementation, participants received a \$50 stipend and a Discovery Source Classroom Kit. Additionally, 200 centers were awarded turtle sandboxes to create “cozy corners,” designated spaces that help children self-regulate and manage strong emotions in a calming environment.

OACAA was awarded American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA)/Clearinghouse (CH) funds in FY24 but expensed them in FY25, totaling \$37,979.41 (public support \$34,181.47, private support \$3,797.94) from July 2024 to August 2024.



TBRI Training for Child Care (Lilyfield)

With a \$146,593.98 grant through the Clearinghouse, Lilyfield of Oklahoma trained 44 child care providers, including 14 teachers and directors across 26 classrooms, in Trust-Based Relational Intervention (TBRI) and trauma-informed classroom practices. Informed by neuroscience and sensory processing, the training aimed to reduce fear, enhance learning, and support healing for children who have experienced trauma. In addition to training, Lilyfield offered consultation and resources such as self-regulation tools, sensory items, and social-emotional learning materials. Participants were also referred to the EmpowerParents program for continued support through classes, support groups, and one-on-one mentoring.

Completed September 2024. Lilyfield was awarded American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA)/Clearinghouse (CH) funds in FY24 but expensed them in FY25, totaling \$58,309.42 (public support \$52,478.48, private support \$5,830.94) from July 2024 to September 2024.

Supporting Children with Autism (TOCA)

The Autism Foundation of Oklahoma (AFO) led the Training Oklahoma Childcare Providers to Support Children with Autism (TOCA) program to enhance awareness and support inclusive child care environments. With funding from the Clearinghouse, 400 participants completed virtual and in-person training, resulting in a 30% increase in autism knowledge. Participants received the Autism Resource Guide, sensory kits, and self-regulation tools to strengthen classroom support. ASCEND consultants reported a 100% satisfaction rate, highlighting the program’s success. Through TOCA, AFO has improved autism care and built a statewide network of trained early childhood providers.

The initial project was renewed under Title V with a nine-month, \$290,000 contract. This funding enabled AFO to expand Navigating Autism training to 372 additional providers, translate the Resource Guide into Spanish, distribute 245 sensory kits, and conduct 62 consultations supporting 78 children.

The project was completed in September 2024 with initial funding and in October 2025 with Title V funding. AFO was awarded American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA)/Clearinghouse (CH) funds in FY24 but expensed them in FY25, totaling \$118,838.18 (public support \$106,954.36, private support \$11,883.82) from July 2024 to September 2024. Additionally, AFO was awarded FY25 Title V funds totaling \$290,000 (public support \$275,000, private support \$15,000).

Air Quality in Child Care

OK-AIR, a project by the Early Childhood Education Institute at the University of Oklahoma, explored whether low-cost air cleaning devices could improve air quality and health in early childhood settings. Partnering with five Head Start and Early Head Start centers, the project impacted 206 children, 56 teachers and five site directors. Supported by the Clearinghouse, the team installed air filtering and UV light systems, along with monitors to track pollutants, temperature and humidity. Data on absenteeism, health and development were gathered through focus groups, assessments and surveys. Early findings suggest that cleaner air may reduce absenteeism and support healthier, more productive learning environments.

Completed September 2024. OUHSC was awarded American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA)/Clearinghouse (CH) funds in FY24 but expensed them in FY25, totaling \$150,754.81 (public support \$135,679.33, private support \$15,075.48) from July 2024 to September 2024.

Outdoor Learning Environments

OPSR invested \$2.6 million from the Clearinghouse for Early Success to improve outdoor learning environments at 29 licensed child care programs, with one additional site funded by Blue Cross Blue Shield. Originally planning to fund 20 sites, OPSR expanded to 30 locations due to overwhelming demand, having received more than 190 applications from 55 of Oklahoma’s 77 counties. The funding supported construction and upgrades of playgrounds designed to promote physical, cognitive, and emotional development. These outdoor spaces help improve focus, behavior, and problem-solving skills, laying a strong foundation for children across Oklahoma to thrive.

Total expended in FY25 was \$1,678,355.49 (July 2024–September 2024) to finalize awarded providers from FY24. Additionally, \$75,000 in private dollars (BCBS of Oklahoma) was awarded in FY24 and spent in FY25 for one additional outdoor learning environment.



Quality Enhancement Initiative

With support from the Clearinghouse, Rainbow Fleet implemented the Quality Enhancement Initiative (QEI), a training and resource program designed to improve early care and education in Oklahoma’s Family Child Care Home (FCCH) settings. The initiative established provider cohorts focused on Child Development Associate (CDA) training and National Association for Family Child Care (NAFCC) Accreditation. One cohort served 32 native Spanish speakers, with 71.8% earning their CDA through fully Spanish-language instruction and materials. Rainbow Fleet also partnered with the Thrive Network to offer a self-paced, hybrid model, expanding access across the state. Through the QEI Project, 182 individuals were trained. Nearly 82% met CDA or Accreditation requirements, and 52% received certification. Many participants serve in child care deserts, improving care quality for an estimated 1,062 children and their families. Completed September 2024.

Rainbow Fleet was awarded American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA)/Clearinghouse (CH) funds in FY24 but expensed them in FY25, totaling \$183,952.07 (public support \$165,556.87, private support \$18,395.20) from July 2024 to September 2024.

Rooted Together

Rooted Together is a community-driven initiative that provides a cultural guidebook for non-Native parents, caregivers and educators raising Indigenous children in Oklahoma. Developed in partnership with Muscogee Nation Child and Family Services and the Muscogee Nation Cultural Department, the toolkit will include storytelling resources, traditional practices and language activities grounded in Muscogee cultural knowledge. It empowers non-Native caregivers to foster culturally affirming environments that support Indigenous children’s emotional, social and developmental well-being. Began implementation in June 2025; to be completed June 2026.

Rooted Together was awarded \$50,000 in FY25.



Advancing Oklahoma’s Early Childhood System through Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five Renewal Grant

In 2022, the Oklahoma Department of Human Services (OKDHS) received a three-year, \$36 million Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five (PDG B-5) Renewal Grant from the Administration for Children and Families (ACF). As Oklahoma’s Early Childhood State Advisory Council, the Oklahoma Partnership for School Readiness (OPSR) leads the implementation of PDG B-5 activities and deliverables.

Through this work, OPSR and its partners are addressing Oklahoma’s most pressing early childhood needs, strengthening the workforce, enhancing family engagement and access to resources, expanding data-driven decision-making, and improving coordination across agencies and services.



Project Activities



B-5 Needs Assessment

Revise and enhance the 2019 Needs Assessment with updated data and visuals that reveal opportunities for investment and improvement.



Statewide B-5 Strategic Plan

Revise and enhance the 2019 Strategic Plan that communicates opportunities for alignment and collaboration across the early childhood care and education system.



Parent and Family Engagement

Ensure families are informed about and connected to early childhood resources, services, and supports.



Workforce Support

Invest in resources and supports across the early childhood system that attracts, prepares, and retains a professional and effective early childhood workforce.



Enhance Quality and Expand Access through Subgrants

Design and execute subgrant opportunities that increase quality and accessibility of early childhood services and supports across the early childhood care and education system.



Program Quality Improvement

Implement strategic and innovative approaches to improve and enhance early childhood services and supports across the early childhood care and education system.

Over the past year, PDG B-5 has fueled unprecedented collaboration, data gathering, and systems planning for Oklahoma’s youngest children. State, local, tribal, and community partners have worked side by side to build a more coordinated, family-centered early childhood care and education system.

The grant’s purpose is clear: to expand access to high-quality early learning, health, and family support services. This year, PDG B-5 investments supported a range of activities, from updating the statewide needs assessment and analyzing agency plans, to hosting family and provider engagement events across all 77 counties.

One parent who joined a community café in western Oklahoma put it simply: “It feels like someone is finally listening.” That sentiment was echoed across the 1,014 survey responses received from parents and professionals statewide.

The insights gained through PDG B-5 are shaping the 2025 Oklahoma Early Childhood System Strategic Plan Update, a five-year roadmap that reflects the voices of families, the expertise of providers, and the shared commitment of state partners.

PDG Project Highlights

Strategic Plan Update

The 2025 Oklahoma Early Childhood System Strategic Plan Update outlines a shared vision for strengthening the state’s early childhood care and education (ECCE) system infrastructure—spanning early learning, family support, and health services. Anchored in collaboration, efficiency, and results, the plan focuses on ensuring every child and family has access to the right supports at the right time, regardless of zip code. The update was developed by OPSR, serving as the state’s Early Childhood Advisory Council, in close partnership with state agencies, providers, and families. It draws on the 2024 PDG B–5 Needs Assessment Update, the 2024 True Cost of Care Study, and the 2025 Fiscal Map Project, as well as a cross-walk analysis of 17 partner and agency plans. The plan consists of six strategic directions:

- 1. Align the early childhood system to provide coordinated, high-quality, and effective services.
- 2. Coordinate and sustain funding across public and private sectors.
- 3. Center families in decision-making, engagement, and service delivery.
- 4. Expand access to affordable, high-quality early childhood services.
- 5. Integrate health and mental health supports across the early childhood system
- 6. Strengthen and support the early childhood workforce to meet rising needs.

Pyramid Model Implementation

Through PDG funding and CCR&R network , Oklahoma advanced statewide implementation of 64 Pyramid Model sites. The Pyramid Model Framework is designed to promote social-emotional development and inclusive practices in early learning environments. During the year, Implementation Coaches and OPSR staff completed national and community-wide training, launched fidelity assessments using Pyramid Model instruments, and began certifying new trainers to expand statewide capacity. These coordinated efforts are strengthening workforce competency, supporting positive child outcomes, and embedding evidence-based practices across Oklahoma’s early learning system.

Local-Level Public Awareness Campaigns

Through a competitive RFP process, OPSRF piloted five community level projects to raise awareness of early childhood resources and opportunities at the local level. Communities hosted events that distributed literacy materials, facilitated health and nutrition education, and provided trauma-informed training for the community. These efforts elevated local voices, deepened family engagement, and expanded access to early learning resources. Collectively, these campaigns demonstrate how community-driven approaches can enhance trust, awareness, and participation in early childhood systems.

Learn the Signs. Act Early. (LTSAE)

The LTSAE initiative expanded its reach to families, educators, and health providers, increasing statewide awareness of developmental milestones, developmental screening, and early identification. Partnerships with the Metropolitan Library System, Parent Promise OKC, and the Oklahoma State Health Department brought training and materials to libraries, home visiting staff, and community events. The project also advanced tribal partnerships, developed new training resources, and a family-focused website. These actions strengthened early identification systems and empowered families and professionals with the knowledge and tools to support children’s healthy development.

Early Childhood Transition Summit

The 2025 Oklahoma Early Childhood Transition Summit convened 140 early learning professionals, educators, and community partners to strengthen collaboration around transition between early learning settings, services, and systems. Featuring national expert Gregg Santucci and multiple breakout sessions, the summit provided practical strategies to support children and families through key developmental transitions to support learning. A statewide resource fair complemented the training sessions, giving attendees the opportunity to connect with agencies, programs, and tools available to support children and families across Oklahoma. By fostering

cross-sector coordination and professional learning, the event advanced PDG B-5 goals of improving a young child’s transition to Pre-Kindergarten and Kindergarten.

Telehealth Services for Child Care Providers

To promote the health and well-being of Oklahoma’s early childhood workforce, OPSR continued its PDG B-5-supported telehealth initiative offering free telemedicine and teletherapy services to 800 licensed child care providers statewide. This year, more than 100 new providers registered to access care, addressing persistent barriers to physical and mental health services. The initiative reduces provider stress, supports retention, and builds a more resilient workforce—ensuring that those caring for young children can access care for themselves.

Accreditation Support

OPSR supported 70 child care programs to pursue national accreditation, improving program quality across the state. Technical assistance and targeted funding supported providers in meeting rigorous criteria related to staff qualifications, curriculum, facility improvements, and family engagement. This investment fosters higher-quality environments for children and professional recognition for educators, advancing Oklahoma’s long-term goals for early learning excellence.

Teacher Retention and Recruitment (Categorical Eligibility)

In an effort to stabilize and grow the early childhood workforce, Oklahoma launched a transformative new initiative in the second quarter of 2025: the Teacher Recruitment and Retention Pilot, now branded as Strong Start. This landmark program was passed by the Oklahoma legislature in May 2025 and marks a significant step forward in addressing long-standing workforce challenges in the child care sector. The three-year pilot program provides a powerful new benefit—child care for early educators’ own children. Specifically, early childhood educators working in licensed child care programs that accept OKDHS subsidy are now categorically eligible for subsidized child care for their children enrolled in a licensed program. This policy addresses one of the most common barriers to retention and recruitment in the field—child care affordability for the workforce itself.

Child Care Capacity and Quality Grants

Through a competitive RFP process, OPSRF funded 8 capacity and quality grants to provide critical resources to expand access to child care in high-need areas and improve learning environments across Oklahoma. Grants supported facility improvements, curriculum enhancements, and professional development for early educators. These targeted investments

help address child care deserts, promote quality improvement, and ensure that more families can access safe, enriching early learning options close to home.

The Impact and the Road Ahead

Through the PDG B-5 Renewal Grant, Oklahoma has built the relationships, data systems, and shared strategies needed to transform its early childhood system. The progress achieved through this investment has laid the groundwork for lasting change—and we are already seeing its impact. Parents report feeling more connected to resources, providers are engaging in new cross-agency collaborations around quality and workforce, and state partners are aligning priorities to reduce duplication and improve efficiency.

In its final year, PDG B-5 efforts will continue to focus on implementation:

- Strengthening collaborative governance through the OPSR Board
- Aligning PDG B-5 initiatives with state budget priorities and private investment opportunities
- Advancing data dashboards and metrics through the Early Childhood Integrated Data System (ECIDS) to track progress in real time
- Continuing family and provider engagement to ensure lived experience drives decision-making

As the three-year PDG B-5 Renewal Grant concludes in December 2025, OPSR will release a series of evaluative reports highlighting key outcomes, lessons learned, and recommendations from more than 80 PDG-funded projects implemented across the state. These insights will help inform policy, guide investment, and sustain momentum beyond the life of the grant.



Honoring Pat Potts 1933-2025

Pat Potts was a visionary leader whose life was characterized by service, compassion, and an unwavering dedication to Oklahoma’s children. Together with her beloved husband, Ray, Pat built a legacy grounded in philanthropy, education, and community empowerment. They founded the Potts Family Foundation and the Oklahoma Center for

Nonprofits, changing the landscape for charitable organizations and early childhood programs across the state.

Pat’s passion for early childhood development was deeply personal. She believed that building a stronger Oklahoma began with investing in its youngest citizens. Over the years, the Potts Family Foundation has invested in and supported innovation in early learning and family support. Pat, along with long-time friend Linda Manaugh, worked tirelessly to ensure Oklahoma children impacted by the pandemic weren’t omitted from the state’s response by securing over \$9 million in ARPA funding. Her advocacy culminated in the OKCPS First Choice Fund—a \$5 million initiative launched just months before her passing to expand early learning, support teachers, and improve school safety. Pat’s leadership helped countless families thrive, and her work continues to shape policy and practice today.

Pat Potts leaves behind a legacy of love, leadership, and lasting change. Oklahoma is better because she—and Ray—believed in its future.



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