

Oklahoma Statistics:

State Population..... 3.815 million
(as of 2012)

0-5 population..... 263,235
(as of 2012)

Poverty level..... 621,845 (16.3%)
(from 2007-2011)

of local collaboratives..... 19

Total Early Childhood

Funding..... \$1.5 billion
(In 2010, Oklahoma invested \$293,412,975 in Pre-K; 118,064,627 in Child Care Subsidy; 17,686,657 in the Oklahoma Early Childhood Program; \$15,007,722 in Home Visitation programs; \$1,600,000 in Smart Start Oklahoma)

State/Local Collaborative

Total Funding:..... \$2,870,195
(including public and private dollars)

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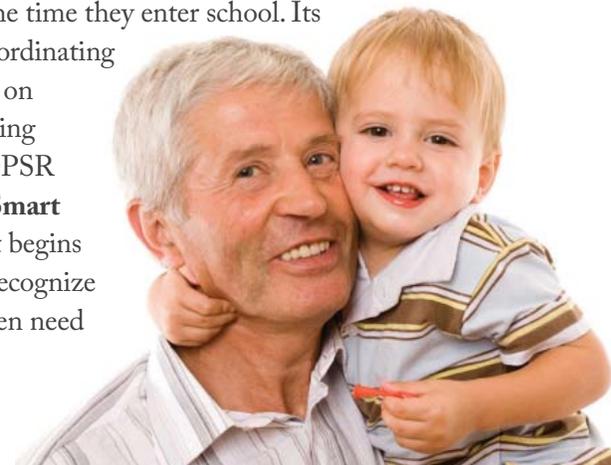
Smart Start Oklahoma

In early 2000, a Governor's Task Force on Early Childhood Education was formed to review the state's efforts to ensure that Oklahoma children are ready to learn when they enter school. The Task Force concluded that coordination is lacking among the many efforts focused on early childhood care, education, family support, and health promotion and care. It found that this disconnected approach diminished the effectiveness of any single initiative, as well as that of the overall effort. It created the Oklahoma Partnership for School Readiness, now known as Smart Start Oklahoma, as a comprehensive strategy to coordinate early childhood services and assure that children are school-ready.

To meet the goal, the Oklahoma Partnership for School Readiness (OPSR) was created by the Oklahoma Partnership for School Readiness Act (HB 1094) in 2003, establishing a statewide board charged with increasing the number of children who are ready to succeed by the time they enter school. Composed of appropriate state agency heads and private sector leaders, this Partnership forges alliances between public and private organizations and pursues strategies for improving learning opportunities and environments for Oklahoma children under six. The 32-member public/private board currently is approximately half members representing state agencies while the other half are private citizens appointed by the Governor.

The Oklahoma Partnership for School Readiness Act also called for a private nonprofit foundation that could access private sources of grants and donations and use funds raised to make the best possible impact on early care and education for Oklahoma's young children. The Foundation obtained its official 501(c)(3) status in February 2004 and operates with a six-member board of trustees.

The Partnership's vision is that all Oklahoma children will be safe, healthy, eager to learn, and ready to succeed by the time they enter school. Its mission is to lead Oklahoma in coordinating an early childhood system focused on strengthening families and improving school readiness for all children. OPSR named its school readiness effort **Smart Start Oklahoma**, an initiative that begins at the local level, as communities recognize that many of their youngest children need better developmental and learning





- Number, location, and status of quality pre-kindergarten programs in the state;
- Percentage of third-grade students reading at or above grade level.

State-Level Governance

At the state level, Smart Start Oklahoma is led by the Oklahoma Partnership for School Readiness Board. While it doesn't have governance responsibility for the local entities that manage Smart Start grants, it guides the local work through technical assistance and support and has authority over the direction of the Smart Start grants.

Through a memorandum of understanding in 2008 and legislation in 2010, Governor Brad Henry appointed the Oklahoma Partnership for School Readiness to serve as Oklahoma's State Early Childhood Advisory Council.

This council serves in an advisory capacity to the

Governor on early childhood system issues relating to workforce, higher education, quality of early childhood programs and services, access to early childhood programs and services, professional development, and special populations.

This designation paved the way for Smart Start Oklahoma to be eligible to apply for federal ARRA funds. The

Council works together to establish and improve public policies that build a system that works for young children and their families.

They analyze and critique policy work on both the state and local levels to understand what works, what could be improved and to understand how early childhood work could be done more efficiently.

State-Level Funding

State funding is targeted to children from birth to 5 years and operates through a granting process. The annual budget of the initiative includes \$1.6 million in state appropriations and additional private dollars raised by the organization. The local collaboratives are funded through contracted state dollars, which primarily fund staff time and some travel and supply expenses.

Funding to local partnerships varies, depending on their size. Norman's budget, for example, is \$132,000, with \$54,900 coming from Smart Start Oklahoma. The United Way provides some salary support while other funding comes from small grants and private donations.

experiences. Smart Start Oklahoma communities seek working collaborative partnerships with elected officials, civic leaders, businesses, educators, providers of social and health services, and parents of young children, in order to apply existing local resources to critical local needs.

At the state level, Smart Start Oklahoma supports communities with grants, technical assistance, and fiscal management. The selected partnerships were chosen through a competitive process, based on regions of the state, and while they don't cover the entire state, as of June 30, 2013, the Smart Start Oklahoma community network includes 19 community-based partnerships and accounts for approximately 46% of the counties in Oklahoma. Due to state budget challenges, there are limited plans for expansion to additional communities or regions. A new community was added in 2014 to the Smart Start Oklahoma network, however it will not receive any funding, but will be able to take advantage of the state office technical assistance.



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Smart Start Oklahoma is required to submit an annual report to the Governor and Legislature that includes the following information:

- Preparedness level of children entering kindergarten;
- Status and results of Board efforts to engage the public regarding the care and education of children under the age of five years and 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 OPSR;
- Availability and cost of quality child care for children under five years of age needing care outside their home;

State-Level Staffing

OPSR has six full-time and two part-time state-level staff. The staff covers areas of administrative assistance, public relations, community mobilization, contract management and supervision, resource development, fiscal management and support.

Advocacy

Smart Start Oklahoma staff provides the public with the best information possible so that child advocates have the information they need to confidently speak for the state's youngest citizens. They provide advocacy resources and tools for early childhood advocates on the website. A key partner in their advocacy efforts is the Oklahoma Institute for Child Advocacy, which provides tools and tips for child advocates as well as legislative news and alerts.

Local Smart Start partnerships work with community organizations on advocacy. For example, Success by 6/Smart Start Norman is working with the Chamber of Commerce to develop an Early Childhood Task Force. One of the Task Force's three goals this year is to create advocates for young children. Its strategies this year include child watch tours for chamber members, legislative breakfasts and meetings with legislators.

Local Collaborative Overview

Smart Start Oklahoma regional partnerships are housed within already existing organizations that serve as their fiscal agent. These regional partnerships operate through a board that mirrors the state level board and also engage large numbers of community volunteers to accomplish their work. Currently the partnerships are housed in United Ways, resource and referral agencies, colleges and universities, youth and family service agencies, community action agencies, community service councils, and one is physically located in a county health department. These agencies serve as the fiscal agent for the Smart Start funding. Some of them provide in-kind office space and other support, while others are reimbursed for their office space and administrative support.

Local collaboratives are linked to the state through face-to-face meetings and conference calls, coordinated by the Community Mobilization Director. The state partnership is currently exploring new and more effective ways to link local partnerships and share lessons learned across communities.

Local-Level Staffing

Staff is hired by the local fiscal agency, with each partnership required to have at least one 0.5 FTE coordinator. In most cases, the coordinators are full-time. The responsibilities of local partnership coordinators are to implement early childhood community mobilization activities and participate in some aspects of state-level work. Coordinators must possess a minimum of a bachelor's degree, with an emphasis in early childhood, child development, social work, community development or a related field and have: demonstrated experience in successful project planning and management; experience working in programs that provide services to families with young children or in a system that provides supports to families with young children; knowledge of best practices in early childhood; and the ability to communicate effectively, both orally and in writing, and to maintain productive working relationships with others.

Local Collaborative Funding

Local partnerships receive an annual grant based on their action plans. The local partnerships received a total of \$1.2 million in 2013. In addition, each partnership raises private dollars and/or in-kind funding, which ranges in amount and types. The majority of local partnerships also receive an additional \$10,000 to \$60,000 in grants from the Oklahoma Partnership for School Readiness Foundation.

“ Local Smart Start partnerships work with community organizations on advocacy. Success by 6/Smart Start Norman is working with the Chamber of Commerce.”



Technical Assistance and Support to Regional Collaboratives:

The Smart Start Oklahoma (SSO) state office provides support to its local community offices and contractors in the areas of community mobilization, fiscal matters, public relations, and development. The TA is delivered by SSO staff and is supported by state appropriation funds and assistance from the Foundation. This support includes individual phone calls, webinars, conference calls, annual contractor meetings and periodic face-to-face training sessions. There is a continuing need and desire for more TA and training opportunities as there is a growing emphasis on early childhood systems building in Oklahoma's TA approach. In prior years, the focus was primarily on program development and implementation. Currently, Oklahoma is integrating Dr. Penny Foster-Fishman's ABL_e Change Framework into its systems work. This conceptual and methodological tool helps to support systems change.

Smart Start Oklahoma is also exploring ways to better connect its community-based contractors with state-level board members so that the board can provide input into the community-based work as well.

Local community partnerships express the need for more networking time and opportunities to reach out to each other for advice and ideas. They also call each other for advice and sometimes a new coordinator will shadow a more seasoned community leader in another county to learn first-hand about the work. No formal program of peer mentoring exists.

Local Collaborative "Snapshot":

The Norman Success By 6/Smart Start Partnership was originally housed at the Center for Children and Families. In 1999, following a Child Watch Tour with the First Lady of Oklahoma, Norman leaders began to envision the establishment of a Success By 6 initiative. In 2001, Norman leaders submitted a grant proposal to Bank of America to develop a local early childhood infrastructure and plan of action for children from birth to kindergarten. And in 2003, they received a Department of Human Services planning grant. During the planning stage, a three-year strategic plan was created and task forces were established in the areas of Parent Education and Support, Improving Child Care Quality and Access, Health Promotion and Broad-Based Public Engagement.



In 2004, \$85,000 in Smart Start funding was received. In 2005, the Smart Start/Success By 6 Initiative was moved to The United Way of Norman. The Director of the United Way is a true believer in early childhood supports and services as an investment in the community and has often said, "If we get early childhood right, we will be able to reduce funding to other things." While Smart Start does not receive United Way agency funding, office space and services are provided, as is some salary support.

The goal of Success By 6/Smart Start Norman is that all children in our communities are safe, healthy, eager to learn and ready to succeed by the time they enter school. This collaborative is the convener of early childhood work in two counties, Cleveland and McClain, and is located in Norman. While Norman is urban, most of Cleveland and McClain Counties are rural, which poses challenges to meet the varying needs in both counties.

A community resource van is one example of a project that includes a strong partnership between Smart Start, the public libraries and health and human services agencies. A major project activity is the distribution of books to children in Cleveland and McClain Counties. The van is also part of community events, such as health fairs, and is important in getting information and resources out to families of young children. The van helps achieve the partnership's literacy goal and has helped make the partnership visible in the community. Other areas of focus include the distribution of parenting information and parent support in low income housing communities; a school readiness class for parents of children 0 -5; distributing books to children during their first well-visit through a partnership with the medical community; and child watch tours to educate the community about what is needed to help every child be ready to succeed.

Pros and Cons of the Smart Start Oklahoma State/Local Model:

Pros

- The current model encourages true local efforts that are based on community needs and are governed by local early childhood system representatives.
- The model fosters partnerships and brings everyone together to meet the needs of young children and their families.
- Working directly with the state office and other local partnerships gives local staff increased knowledge and ideas to consider in their community.
- Having legislation in place fosters a steady focus on early childhood issues.
- The vision of a neutral public/private partnership at the state and local level creates the broadest table and gets the best results.

Cons

- There is limited fiscal capacity of the local agencies in some communities to support the SSO community work.
- There is lack of control and oversight authority at the state level to ensure the skills of the community grantees are appropriate to effectively carry out the SSO charge.
- The lack of consistent measurements to track the effectiveness of the community-based work results in an inconsistent message about the success of the organization.
- Messaging about the 19 different local initiatives lacks consistency; each is very different and not enough is done to create overall consistency.
- State funding is awarded on a competitive basis, which can result in an increase or decrease for the duration of the contract period; funding changes affect the ability to operate.
- State appropriated funding for Smart Start is in the Department of Human Services' budget and is not legislatively mandated; therefore, it can fluctuate and change with changing priorities and funding needs within the Department.
- Funding is a greater challenge for smaller local partnerships, where private funds are more difficult to secure.

- Sometimes state and local entities compete against each other in an attempt to leverage and raise private funds; there is not always a clear delineation of roles and responsibilities between state and local fundraising efforts.

Performance Measurement:

Smart Start Oklahoma seeks to provide better opportunities to the children and families in the state. The mission is to lead Oklahoma in coordinating an early childhood system focused on strengthening families and school readiness for all children. Its

vision is that all Oklahoma children will be safe, healthy, eager to learn and ready to succeed by the time they enter school. SSO produces a report annually, which highlights state and local successes, challenges, and recommendations.

The local partnerships are required to report on locally-developed output and process measures, and indicators developed by the state office. The output and process measures vary from community to community. Indicators include the number of collaboration models, child population, income, ethnicity, number and type of child care facilities, reading proficiency levels, and number and types of literacy programs. The state lacks standard performance measures and no statewide database exists to collect Smart Start Oklahoma data.

Local partnerships use a variety of methods to determine the effectiveness of their programs. For example, some use parent reporting to determine how successful their parenting classes met their goals. Others partner with their universities to create more rigorous evaluation techniques and reporting.

Major Accomplishments

Local Smart Start communities have successfully built collaborative relationships across early childhood systems components. These relationships lead to outcomes beyond the services that Smart Start funds.

There is a concerted focus on young children at the state level and in 19 regions of Oklahoma. These partnerships provide the “table” where all things early childhood can be discussed and acted upon.

“ Smart Start Oklahoma’s vision is that all Oklahoma children will be safe, healthy, eager to learn and ready to succeed by the time they enter school.”

As a result of the collaborative environment created at the state level, **Smart Start Oklahoma has been requested to facilitate “special projects” between state agencies**, such as using the Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems funding to integrate training for home-based providers (i.e., early intervention, home visitation) within the Child Care Professional Development Registry.

Key Components to Success at the State Level

Smart Start Oklahoma recognizes the value of relationships to impact systems changes. Bringing together stakeholders and being willing to participate in collaborative efforts organized by others helps to build those relationships and develops a sense of trust among partners and a clear vision and mission among organizations.

Having a clear set of desired outcomes that are part of a larger agreed-upon goal of improving school readiness for all children through systems-change is key to achieving success.

Technical assistance must be consistently available to help community collaboratives stay on track with this work.

Key Components to Success at the Local Level

The right people must be involved from the beginning and it should be a requirement to have the individuals who are most critical to the mission involved at the start.

There must be a clear understanding of systems and systems change from the beginning. Conduct a systems scan to really know what is in place and working and what needs to be improved relative to school readiness.

It is critical to long-term success to get and keep the planning group engaged, not just seated around the table.

Don't just meet for the sake of meeting. Real change happened because of the systems scan undertaken by the regional partnership and the in-depth conversations held among partners and the public.

Start the planning process with a look at mindsets and components of an early childhood system.

Be certain there is a common understanding and inclusion of the broad system components in thinking and planning: education, health, child care, children with special needs, and abuse prevention. This understanding will play a role in the development of the framework for better action steps later on.

Lessons Learned

Develop measureable outcomes from the beginning. Ensure that the goal, as well as the measurements, desired outcomes, and approaches to achieving the goal are consistent and agreed upon.

Ensure that sufficient staff and technical assistance capacity are in place to help with the successful execution of the agreed upon work.

Find small wins. It is important to organize some actions with widespread participation and to celebrate early wins.

Help the broader community see its role in early childhood work. Sell the goal of school-readiness as everyone's job and everyone's win.

You need a champion. Having a visible champion is important at the state level and in each community to ensure that the early childhood mission is heard and that the efforts are visible. “A champion can bring his or her power to our mission!”

Be clear about your messages and make sure everyone understands them.

Fit into community groups that already exist. Figure out how your mission fits with already existing organizations. Be part of the answer to achieving others' missions. If the Chamber's goal, for example, is quality of life, show how school readiness is part of the answer to achieving that goal.





A strong statewide identity is needed. There should be statewide branding and communications strategies so that everyone in the state recognizes and understands the Smart Start brand and what it means.

Develop statewide goals and strategies before providing funds to local communities. The state needs to have clear expectations when there is a broad goal like school readiness. Local partnerships need to know the expectations from the beginning.

Interviews

Debra Andersen, *Executive Director*, Smart Start Oklahoma

Megan Tyler, *Director of Community Mobilization*, Smart Start Oklahoma

Christy Emig, *Community Coordinator*, Success by Six/ Smart Start/Cleveland and McClain Counties

Resources

- Oklahoma Institute for Child Advocacy website: www.oica.org
- Smart Start Oklahoma website: <http://www.smartstartok.org>
- Success by Six Norman website: [http:// www.sucessbysixnorman.com](http://www.sucessbysixnorman.com)