

Introduction

History

Oklahoma has a well-earned reputation for being a leader in early childhood. The development and implementation of universal Pre-K and a quality rating system for licensed child care facilities are just two examples of why Oklahoma is considered a pioneer in early childhood care and education. Oklahoma was the second state in the United States to offer Pre-K to all 4-year-olds. Fourteen years later, 38,411 children enrolled in the Pre-K program, about 74% of the 4-year-old population³. Oklahoma Department of Human Services (OKDHS) has operated a Statewide Quality Rating and Improvement Systems (QRIS), called “Reaching for the Stars”, since 1998. Oklahoma is rated first in the nation for child care center oversight and second in the nation overall behind the Department of Defense (DoD)⁴. In addition, Oklahoma has a wide-range of voluntary early care and education programs including Early Head Start, Head Start, SoonerStart, and multiple home visitation programs – to name a few.

In 2003, Governor Brad Henry reinforced Oklahoma’s commitment to early childhood by signing HB 1094 creating the Oklahoma Partnership for School Readiness Act with the purpose of promoting school readiness through community-based efforts. This act established the Oklahoma Partnership for School Readiness Board (OPSR) to which Smart Start Oklahoma serves as staff support. The act also established the Oklahoma Partnership for School Readiness Foundation (OPSRF). The OPSRF serves to establish guidelines for the disbursement of funds received from any public or private source.

³ Barnett, W.S., Carolan, M.E., Fitzgerald, J., & Squires, J.H. (2011). *The state of preschool 2011: State preschool yearbook*. New Brunswick, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research.

⁴ NACCRRRA (2011, March). *We can do better 2011 update: NACCRRRA’s ranking of state child care center regulations and oversight*. National Association of Child Care Resource & Referral Agencies.