

Community School Readiness Assessment and Improvement Plan for Haskell, Latimer,
LeFlore & Pittsburg Counties in Southeastern Oklahoma

Community School Readiness Improvement Plan:

- A. Identify community strategies for actions to improve the following system measures in the 5 priorities addressed in the Community School Readiness Assessment:
 - a. Easy Access to needed services
 - i. KI BOIS Area Transit System (KATS) is our rural public transportation system. It is operating a fleet of over 200 buses and vans that transport people to doctor appointments, Senior Citizens Centers, grocery stores, work, and other locations within city limits. It is available to anyone. It is not fully funded, therefore has to charge for services. Costs are kept at a minimum to make access to the system easier. KATS meets the ADA requirements of public transit providers. KATS is the non-emergency transportation for Sooner Ride. Sooner Ride(s) are available at no cost for those with a Medicaid number. Sooner Ride requires a three day notice.
 - ii. Services and programs available in the geographic area have made an effort to increase access to needed services for its members by expanding enrollment opportunities. For example, Sooner Care and DHS Childcare Subsidy Benefits Program allow parents to enroll themselves and their children in services through their website. Children First, Child Guidance and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) service providers allow for enrollment by phone. Head Start encourages families to submit their application for enrollment at the various Centers located throughout the community or with their Head Start staff.
 - b. Stronger inter-agency service coordination and referral network
 - i. In our research for the Community School Readiness Assessment we were unable to find any policy, procedure, or standard for inter-agency service coordination or referral network. Our Community School Readiness Assessment revealed that each agency or service provider determines if/when to refer families to programs/services that will address the child and/or family's need. Without a standard or framework for referrals or even a standard referral process it is difficult, if not impossible, to confirm families of young children are getting all the services they need.
 - ii. Tribal – The Choctaw Nation has a strong inter-department coordination and referral network within their tribal framework for families who have a CDIB card. Non tribal expectant mothers can be referred for prenatal care if their spouse is Native American (with any tribe) with a CDIB card.
 - c. Aligned policies and practices across settings

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- i. Some of the early childhood services/programs in service area have aligned practices. For example public schools, Head Start and libraries have uniform goals to increase literacy rates and to establish early learning principals. The libraries provide summer reading programs and story times to encourage reading of all ages. Child care providers that receive Department of Human Services (DHS) funding have aligned policies that follow the early learning guidelines for children.
 - ii. Children First and Parent Pro have aligned practices in that they are both a home visitation program. These programs provide home visits from a nurse to offer support services through education and available resources to young families.
 - iii. Tribal services provide aligned policies and practices across all tribal programs and settings.
 - d. System is responsive to and respectful of family needs and voice
 - i. It appears that families participating in Children First and Parent Pro have a voice in scheduling the appointment with a home visiting nurse. It is difficult to determine if the system has stayed abreast of emerging family needs or have incorporated their voice when evaluating state programs/services offered to the public. Some programs are less bureaucratic and have the flexibility to respond to emergent needs and family feedback. Other programs must wait until their state agency realizes a change is needed and can officially make the change to their system. With our state budget shortfalls, it should be noted that programs/services receiving state and federal dollars are often overwhelmed trying to meet the ever increasing requirements of the grantor. This alters the provision of service to be rigid and compliant based rather than focusing holistically on the family's needs/voice.
 - e. Resources are leveraged and expanded to meet needs
 - i. Oklahoma's severe budget shortfalls do not allow room for programs and providers to expand their services. Providers are expected to maintain current levels of service while enduring budget cut after budget cut. Expansion for programs and services supported by state funding is not realistic. Efforts are made through coalition building to formulate an informal referral network for families. Coalition building also allows for the identification of duplicate services. The goal of reducing duplication is to streamline services and leverage budgets existing budgets to, at the

least, maintain the current level of services. A wide scale system for leveraging is not in place at this time.

- f. Services provided are of high quality
 - i. State and federally funded programs/services are required to abide by the quality standards mandated by their funding source. These programs may have additional quality standards in addition to mandated standards. Families accessing these services should expect to receive quality care. Other programs/services determine their own quality standards for services rendered. In our research for the Community School Readiness Assessment, we were unable to ensure all other programs/services are of high quality or what level of service quality they provide. This determination requires feedback from service recipients, as well as the referral network.

- B. Identify strategies for financing and/or financial incentives to increase investments for early childhood programs and services in the geographic area. Consider local, state, federal and private investments.
 - a. State Funding
 - i. Due to the severe budget shortfalls in the state budget, strategies should encompass maintaining existing funding levels and preventing loss of services. Education of the State Legislature is paramount to ensuring legislators understand the value of early childhood programs and their impact on our future.

 - b. Federal Funding
 - i. Continued federal funding for existing programs is unsure at this time. The number of federal programs is vast. In the future, providers need to “think outside the box.” Providers need to form strong collaborations, be creative and innovative in their approach, and seek out non-traditional opportunities.

 - c. Private Foundations
 - i. There are private foundations willing to invest in early childhood programs. Not all service providers, especially non-profits, are able to meet threshold requirements of private foundations. Some of these include 100% of your board contributing financially to your agency, budgets must be under a certain level or over a certain level, or program operates in a specific geographic. This is where strong collaborations can

be very beneficial. Agencies have to be willing to commit the time and effort required to find the right opportunity from a foundation that aligns with their mission. Agencies who have received state or federal funding in the past should be able to meet all reporting and compliance expectations.

- d. Local Funding
 - i. Local funding should always be considered a viable option to finance services. However, local businesses are not immune to the financial woes of our state. Local funding is generally a good fit for small projects or time limited projects within the area served by the business or entity. These are good opportunities for non-traditional partners to come together in support of early childhood initiatives.
- C. Provide state-level policy, procedures and/or funding recommendations to the Oklahoma Partnership for School Readiness Board to improve conditions for young children and their families in the targeted geographic area.
 - a. We would suggest that any future state-level policies, procedures, and/or funding recommendations require a review panel made up of a cross section of policy makers, service recipients and local providers. Practical procedures and policies need to be realistic and reasonable for the people providing and accessing services.
 - b. State-level policies are often crafted for metropolitan area needs by those who are not service recipients and/or providers. Practical procedure and policies need to be perceptive of rural dynamics including barriers to access.