

HEAD START STATE COLLABORATION PROJECT FIVE-YEAR REPORT

MARCH 2001 – FEBRUARY 2006

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Organizational Structures

In 1996, the Administration on Children, Youth, and Families (ACYF) within the United States Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) funded the first five year Head Start State Collaboration Project (Project) in Oklahoma. The Governor of the State of Oklahoma designated the Oklahoma Department of Commerce (ODOC) as the lead agency for the Project. ODOC contracts with the Oklahoma Association of Community Action Agencies (OKACAA) to house the Head Start State Collaboration Office (HSSCO) that serves as the Head Start state point of contact and carries out Project activities. OKACAA also receives state appropriated funds to coordinate Head Start activities throughout the state.

The Office of Community Development within ODOC administers supplemental funds appropriated by the Oklahoma State Legislature. The purpose of these funds is to enhance program quality and augment the responsiveness of all Head Start programs to the needs of low-income families. Federally funded non-Tribal Head Start programs may receive the state funds through a non-competitive program whereby federally funded Community Action Agencies apply for these funds to supplement their federal Head Start program. If a federal Head Start grantee is not a federally funded Community Action Agency, it may receive the funds through a sub-contract with the local Community Action Agency.

The State Legislature began appropriating these funds in 1992, with the original appropriation of \$423,000. By 2001, the annual state appropriation had increased to \$3,316,918, but decreased to \$2,905,620 in 2005. Over the first five years of the Project, funding for Head Start programs had not only increased at the state level, but also at the federal level.

The Second Five Years

During the second five years of the Project, Head Start programs experienced significantly increased requirements for teacher qualifications, higher expectations for program quality and fiscal management, a new training and technical assistance system, a new program evaluation system requiring testing of children, and an actual decline in funding at both state and federal levels.

Project Milestones during This Period

The most significant change for Head Start teachers in Oklahoma was the requirement to obtain bachelor's degrees plus certification in early childhood education in order to continue as lead teachers in Head Start/public school collaborations. This requirement was triggered by the combined effects of the federal No Child Left Behind Act and Oklahoma's establishment of the state pre-K program as part of the elementary school definition.

Professional Development

The effects of these changes on the Head Start programs had an impact on the Project for most of the second five year period, shifting the focus more to the education and professional development priority area. Building upon a history of Head Start/public school collaboration, the Project developed strong partnerships with the State Department of Education and the University of Oklahoma Center for Early Childhood Professional Development.

These relationships were essential in working through the issues raised by No Child Left Behind at federal, state, and local levels, and linking to the Regents for Higher Education and other higher education associates that increased opportunities for Head Start teachers to obtain bachelor's degrees.

Oral Health

Initiatives of the DHHS Administration on Children and Families (ACF) also influenced the focus of the Project in the priority areas of health, and childcare and preschool. Two public health concerns dominated the health priority – oral health care and lead poisoning prevention. The Project was awarded a grant from the State and Territorial Dental Directors (ASTDD) to host a Children's Oral Health Forum in 2003. This resulted in the creation of the Oral Health Coalition, later merging with the Governor's Dental Task Force that targeted serving children and youth with special health care needs.

The merger established the Children's Oral Health Coalition consisting of representatives from all major dental-related entities in the state, including the Oklahoma Dental Association, University of Oklahoma Dental College, Oklahoma State Department of Health Dental Service, Oklahoma State Department of Health Maternal and Child Health Service, State Department of Education, Oklahoma Dental Foundation, Head Start State Collaboration Office, and a local Head Start program.

The Project was subsequently awarded funding from the ASTDD for a follow-up study of the oral health forum. Subsequent to publication of that study, the Project was awarded additional funding from the ASTDD to host with the Children's Oral Health Coalition an Oral Health Forum for Children with Special Health Care Needs that was held in the ensuing Project year.

Lead Poisoning

The Oklahoma State Department of Health (OSDH) received a grant from the Centers for Disease Control for the purpose of eliminating childhood lead poisoning. The Project director served on the Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Project (CLPPP) Advisory Board over the five-year period, and continues to serve in that capacity to ensure Head Start children are included in state processes and procedures as well as state goals for elimination of childhood lead poisoning.

The OSDH coordinator for the CLPPP and the Project director have developed a working relationship that has enabled Head Start programs to obtain records to ensure that their enrolled children have had blood lead screening tests completed at the appropriate age, or to have the screening tests performed if not previously done. Through the relationship with the OSDH and other partners of the CLPPP, the Project director was able to work with a local Head Start/public school pre-K collaborative program to develop a project linking information about childhood lead poisoning to increasing parent involvement in the school.

The work with this collaborative program was part of the required “Centerpiece Project” of the Project director’s course of study toward earning a Masters Degree in Educational and Community Renewal from the University of Oklahoma, awarded in 2005.

Review of Project Goals

There are eight Project priority areas established by the granting authority: Healthcare, welfare, childcare, education, community service activities, family literacy services, activities relating to children with disabilities, and services for homeless children.

In the first two years of this five-year period there were four Project goals, and those goals were modified slightly in the ensuing years after input from the Project’s Oklahoma Head Start Early Childhood Collaboration Advisory Board. The coordination of planning and service delivery in the eight priority areas of the former fourth goal was incorporated within the first three goals, and goals were stated in a more results-oriented manner. These goals served to address the three fundamental purposes of the Head Start State Collaboration Project:

- To assist in building early childhood systems and access to comprehensive services and support for all low-income children.
- To encourage widespread collaboration between Head Start and other appropriate programs, services, and initiatives; and to augment Head Start’s capacity to be a partner in state initiatives on behalf of children and their families;

- To facilitate the involvement of Head Start in state policies, plans, processes, and decisions affecting the Head Start target population and other low-income families.

The program of work for each of the five years was displayed in a grid format with each stated goal as a section of the plan with stated outcomes to be accomplished by the end of the project year. Specific activities to achieve the outcomes were identified with timelines, responsible parties and partners, tracking processes, and priority areas addressed.

MAJOR ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND GOALS MET

Goal A: To foster and strengthen working coalitions of ACF officials, state officials, state Head Start Association members, Head Start program directors and staff, early childhood professionals, and professionals in other relevant disciplines. Outcomes of this goal were related to improving access to and/or services in the priority areas of education, health care, childcare and preschool, homelessness, and family literacy services. Three major accomplishments that met this goal were:

1. **Reactivate and redirect the advisory board to the Project.** A working advisory board to the Project had been established at the end of the first five-year period. New state-level partners had been invited to meet, and they decided to revise and rename the former Early Childhood Policy Council the Oklahoma Head Start Early Childhood Collaboration Advisory Board (Advisory Board). Board members represent all partners in the early childhood field and also represent at least one of the eight priority areas.

This board agreed to meet either in person or electronically two to three times per year, as needed to address ongoing and current issues related to the early childhood field. This board did not meet three times each of the five years, as other meetings of essentially the same people made additional meetings redundant.

Partners involved in the Advisory Board communicated electronically more efficiently and effectively, keeping current with legislative and organizational changes. In 2005, in lieu of a regular advisory board meeting, the Project hosted a meeting of state-level partners to address professional development issues affecting the early childhood care and education field.

2. **Enhance awareness of the Collaboration Project through continued support of the Governor's Task Force on Early Childhood Education and new evolving statewide system.** The Project had contributed \$20,000 to facilitate the work of the Governor's Task Force on Early

Childhood Education (Task Force), and it concluded its work in the first year of the of the second five years of the Project. A result of the Task Force occurring in the second year of this Project period was legislation that created the Oklahoma Partnership for School Readiness Board, a public-private entity that also became known as Smart Start Oklahoma. The Director of the Oklahoma Department of Commerce is a statutory member of that board, and a representative of ODOC serves as a member of the Project advisory board as well.

Many other persons or representatives serving on the Project advisory board also serve on the OPSR board, and as that board has been involved in early childhood systems building, the Project has continued to support its work. The Project applied for and received \$30,000 in supplemental federal funding that was contracted to the OPSR to continue supporting community mobilization and partnership development with a focus on involving more Community Action Agencies and Head Start programs.

The Project also initiated collaboration activities with the Children's Oral Health Coalition, the OSDH Dental Services Chief and Maternal/Child Health Services Chief, and the Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems Grant that funds OPSR/Smart Start Oklahoma to serve local Smart Start partnerships.

3. **Participate in the state homelessness planning process.** Services for homeless children became the eighth Project priority area near the end of the first five years, and the effort to improve homeless services was not as well developed as the other seven areas. Therefore, homelessness was targeted as a high priority for the second five years of the Project.

In the first year of this period, the Project participated in preparing the application for a state team to participate in a federal policy academy to develop a state plan to eliminate homelessness. The application was approved without funding the first year, but ultimately was funded in the third year for participation in both the Policy Academy on Chronic Homelessness in Denver, Colorado, and the Policy Academy on Homeless Families with Children in Miami, Florida.

The Project hosted the two-day training for members of the state team in preparation for the policy academies. The Project director served as co-lead for the Policy Academy on Homeless Families with Children. The members of the team who attended the academies merged the plans developed at each meeting and created a single state plan to address homelessness issues. The policy academies resulted in the Governor issuing an Executive Order creating the Governor's Inter-agency Council on Homelessness, and he appointed the team members as the first members of the council.

Goal B: To serve as a facilitator to improve and expand services for low-income children in Head Start, childcare, and state preschool programs.

Outcomes of this goal were related to access to and/or services in the priority areas of welfare, community service activities, child care and preschool, and family literacy. Three major accomplishments that met this goal were:

1. **Extend the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) campaign and facilitate volunteer income tax assistance services at Head Start Centers.** A pilot project of a Community Action Agency working in collaboration with the Internal Revenue Service initially with six Head Start programs was so successful in assisting individual Head Start families to access thousands of dollars to help achieve self-sufficiency, that six additional Head Start programs were added to the project in the following year.

The project, in coordination with financial literacy training, has put millions of dollars back into strengthening families and communities in Oklahoma. The EITC project is now established as a major program of Community Action Agencies working with Head Start programs, schools, and other community partners.

2. **Develop new partnerships among Head Start, child care, and state preschool programs.** Partnership activities are difficult to measure because they involve dynamic processes that cannot be precisely tracked. There are numerous models for collaboration that further complicate data collection on partnerships, however, one study completed January 31, 2005 by the Oklahoma Head Start Association indicated:

- 395 Head Start classrooms serviced public school children;
- 5,561 public school 4yr olds were served in Head Start; and
- 3,867 4yr old children were served in Head Start but not in public school;
- Approximately 18% of the public school pre-K teachers were provided by Head Start programs.

A survey conducted by the Oklahoma State Department of Education in school year 2005-2006 indicated 30% of school districts in Oklahoma collaborate with Head Start to provide the universal pre-K program.

3. **Improve access to family literacy services.** An opportunity arose for the Project to receive sets of 2 literacy tapes and training manuals in English and Spanish for teacher training. Head Start programs were offered the opportunity to receive these training materials at no cost to the program. The Project was authorized to make copies of the tapes and manuals at minimal cost, and distributed 13 sets of tapes and manuals (26 tapes, 13 manuals).

Goal C: To build the best possible linkages between local, community-based Head Start programs and state early childhood initiatives and policies.

Outcomes of this goal were related to improving access to and/or services in all eight priority areas, with a focus on child care and preschool, education, and activities relating to children with disabilities. Three major accomplishments that met this goal were:

1. **Collect Head Start data and distribute reports.** Using the Head Start Program Information Report (PIR) database, a one-page, two sided fact sheet was developed to provide a quick view of Oklahoma Head Start programs' services to children and families. The fact sheet continues to be updated annually when the most recent PIR data is released. Data is inclusive of all Tribal and non-Tribal Head Start programs in Oklahoma. The fact sheet is distributed to legislators, partners, and to anyone upon request.

The Project director developed a Power Point presentation on collaboration with Head Start, public school pre-K, and child care. The presentation was made to Oklahoma public school administrators at their annual conference, and to Oklahoma school board members and principals at their annual joint conference of school administrators and school board members.

2. **Expand and/or improve education opportunities in early childhood programs.** The Project director served on the Team of Natural Allies, one of state 8 teams that participated in training sponsored by the University of North Carolina to work with Oklahoma higher education institutions to include coursework on inclusion of children with disabilities, and to improve articulation from 2 year to 4 year higher education institutions. Follow-up activities resulted in a statewide meeting with the Oklahoma Regents for Higher Education, followed by higher education faculty meetings that worked on improving course articulation.
3. **Provide timely continuous communication among state agencies, public officials, early childhood professionals, parents, and other organizations working in the eight priority areas; and better integrate the Project technology-based information system with the OKACA Web site and Head Start Web page.** The Project maintains moderated E-mail communication groups for both Tribal and non-Tribal Head Start directors, and information distribution lists on early childhood collaboration, oral health, and homelessness. Information on all eight priority areas is regularly distributed to partners through these groups that are created so that any approved member of a group may send information to others in the group with approval of specific moderators in the Project office.

The Web page of the Project was redesigned to more clearly reflect the purposes of the Project, and the link to Head Start programs was revised to more clearly identify the grantees. The Web page became an important tool to reach large numbers for promoting professional development opportunities and other information about Head Start.

STATE LEVEL PARTNERSHIPS, COALITIONS, AND WORKGROUPS

Activities and Accomplishments with Partners during This Period in the Priority Areas

Childcare and Preschool Services

Oklahoma Head Start Association – HSSCO made monthly and quarterly reports and participated in association activities. HSSCO director created and made available to local Head Start grantees a PowerPoint presentation on Head Start collaboration techniques and issues with regard to partnerships with public schools and child care programs. The HSSCO director also presented the PowerPoint in several statewide public school administrator conferences.

Early Childhood Association of Oklahoma – Initiated HSSCO participation in conference and session presentations at conferences.

Oklahoma Partnership for School Readiness (Smart Start Oklahoma) – HSSCO supplemental funds supported community mobilization efforts to increase involvement of Community Action Agencies and Head Start in local Partnerships.

Oklahoma State Department of Education – Partnership between Early Childhood/Family Education Department and HSSCO increased and strengthened local Head Start/Pre-K collaborations.

Health Care Services

Oklahoma State Department of Health – Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Program collaborated with HSSCO; Maternal and Child Health/Dental Service collaboration with HSSCO increased access to oral health services; Turning Point Council partner increased local community partnerships including Community Action Agencies and Head Start.

Oklahoma Commission on Children and Youth – Governor’s Dental Task Force Merged with Oral Health Coalition to form the Children’s Oral Health Coalition.

Oklahoma Dental Association – Oral health partner supported Children’s Oral Health Coalition.

Oklahoma Dental Foundation – Oral health partner supported Children’s Oral Health Coalition; Mobile Dental Units served underserved populations statewide, including Head Start.

Children’s Oral Health Coalition – Partner in Oral Health Forum, Oral Health Forum Follow-up, and oral health advocacy.

Oklahoma Partnership for School Readiness (Smart Start Oklahoma) – Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems Grant.

Family Literacy Services

University of Oklahoma Center for Early Childhood Professional Development – partnered with HSSCO in “Early Steps to Literacy” to improve early literacy training of early childhood teachers including Head Start teachers.

Oklahoma Department of Libraries – HSSCO coordinated Memorandum of Understanding with Oklahoma Department of Libraries, ACF Region VI, Oklahoma Head Start Association, and Oklahoma Association of Community Action Agencies to provide library cards for 4yr old Head Start children.

Oklahoma Department of Human Services – Division of Child Care collaborated with HSSCO and state pre-K, to develop Oklahoma Early Learning Guidelines and Core Competencies for Early Childhood Practitioners in response to the Good Start, Grow Smart initiative.

Education Opportunities in Early Childhood

Oklahoma Association of Community Action Agencies – OKACAA quarterly conferences included a Head Start Track planned in collaboration with ACF Region VI T/TA system, OHSA, and HSSCO.

Regents for Higher Education – HSSCO partnered with University of Oklahoma Center for Early Childhood Professional Development in planning statewide “Early Childhood Higher Education Articulation Summit” targeted to higher Education presidents, deans, and faculty. The summit included a session on Head Start presented by Susan Johnston with Carlton Reid, Region VI ACF Office.

Tulsa Community College (TCC) – HSSCO director distributed survey developed by Dr. Carla Goble, TCC professor, to Head Start teachers to determine the impact of pursuing higher education degrees while employed in Head Start. HSSCO director presented results of study on a panel at NAEYC Conference in Chicago, IL.

Activities Relating to Children with Disabilities

University of North Carolina – Collaborated with HSSCO and other Oklahoma early childhood partners in “Natural Allies” project to strengthen inclusiveness as a component of early childhood professional development opportunities.

Oklahoma Commission on Children and Youth and Oklahoma State Department of Education – partnered with HSSCO in development of MOU on children with disabilities.

Children’s Oral Health Coalition – Partnered with HSSCO in application for Children and Youth with Special Health Care Needs Oral Health Forum.

Welfare and Family Support Systems

Glenwood Research and Office of Head Start – HSSCO led a state level group to develop two state interdisciplinary teams (Tribal and non-Tribal) to pilot-test Office of Head Start Domestic Violence Curriculum.

Oklahoma Marriage Initiative – (TANF funds) Collaboration with HSSCO provided Healthy Relationship and Fatherhood Training of Community Action Agency and Head Start staff.

Oklahoma Department of Human Services (DHS) – HSSCO and DHS collaborated to host two meetings of state partners to address issues with regard to child care subsidy reimbursement in Head Start, child care, and state pre-K collaborative programs. The State Child Care Administrator, Child Care Subsidy Programs Manager, and HSSCO Director worked with local programs to resolve questions of possible double payment for child care services, while encouraging maximum collaboration between the two programs.

Community Service Activities with Community Partners

“Communities of Promise” – HSSCO supplemental funds established new and strengthened existing Communities of Promise, a national youth development program for ages birth to 21.

Oklahoma Childcare Resource and Referral Association – HSSCO supplemental funds supported county data collection from all Head Start grantees to be included in an annual Oklahoma Child Care Portfolio. Funds leveraged additional dollars to publish five times more copies of the portfolio and to improve the final quality of the publication.

Oklahoma Association of Community Action Agencies – HSSCO supplemental funds provided eight regional financial literacy “training of trainers” meetings. The OKACAA Homebuyer Education Director provided two trainings in each of four regions of Oklahoma.

Services for Homeless Children

Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services (ODMHSAS) HSSCO hosted two multidisciplinary team site meetings in preparation for attending the Federal Policy Academies on Chronic Homelessness in Denver, CO, and on Families with Children in Miami, FL. HSSCO Director Co-chaired the teams with ODMHSAS Director of Treatment and Recovery.

Governor's Interagency Council on Homelessness (GICH) – HSSCO director was appointed by the Governor to serve as member of GICH, and served as Secretary.

Oklahoma State Department of Education (SDE) – HSSCO Director presented session on homelessness with SDE Homelessness Coordinator.

BEST PRACTICES IDENTIFIED

Over the course of the five years, there were many opportunities to learn and develop best practice models for partnership and collaboration with partners, both local and state level. Following are some of the best practices identified.

- Memorandums of Understanding can bring partners together and help keep them working together, but they must be revisited on a regular basis to maximize usefulness.
- Involve all appropriate partners from the beginning in systems development
- Plan statewide meetings with partners to identify and overcome barriers to partnership.
- Collaboration works best when voluntary, but strongly encouraged with incentives.
- Collaboration should be understood as a fundamentally local issue that can be encouraged and supported at the state level.
- Working closely with state Head Start Association and state T/TA specialists – both Tribal and non-Tribal – leads to the best training and education opportunities.
- Make extra effort to reach out to and involve Tribal and Migrant programs, if present in the state.

- Be available upon request to consult with local programs in developing local partnerships.
- Make full use of electronic communication networks/Internet/Web site.
- Budget for partners' participation if partners are requested to be a part of teams.
- Joint presentations involving like partners work best when addressing the partners' specific groups.
- Take advantage of appropriate opportunities for supplemental funds and other funding opportunities from all sources.
- Develop a quick-read Head Start Fact Sheet with essential state and national data.
- Utilize Head Start program staff or parents on committees or at meetings when possible.
- Incorporate ACF priorities into the eight priority areas.

PROJECT ASSESSMENT SURVEY RESULTS

The Head Start State Collaboration Office is required to assess the overall effectiveness of the Project in meeting the established purpose and goals during each five year funding cycle. A committee of the Project Advisory Board was appointed to coordinate the evaluation process and develop a survey.

The committee had difficulty implementing this process, and there were several delays in developing the survey. The final form of the survey was developed directly from the federal Head Start State Collaboration Project grant application, carefully following the purposes and goals of the Project to ensure relevant responses.

The first attempt to gather information surveyed Head Start directors and agency executive directors with a written, E-mailed instrument resulting in only eight responses of a potential 55. The second attempt used the same survey distributed by hand to the same respondents producing more responses, but still an inadequate number. The Project director created a list of state and local partners to increase the potential number of respondents, and created an electronic survey using a commercial survey instrument. The survey was sent to 94 people, and 31(33%) responded to the survey.

The results of the survey are analyzed in two ways. Exhibit 1 is a table indicating first the expertise or interest of the respondent, then each Project

purpose or goal is stated, followed by the questions and the actual responses received. The responses are tabulated according to how well the Project purposes and goals are being met (Very Well, Adequately, Not Adequately), and related open-ended comments are included. Overall the responses and comments were very positive and indicate an understanding of the Project purpose and goals.

Exhibit 2 is an analysis of how the responses were distributed, and indicates that not all respondents answered every question. This analysis indicates that more than 95% of respondents answered questions #2 and #7 as meeting Project purposes and goals very well or adequately; and about 92% answered questions # 3 and #5 as meeting Project purposes and goals very well or adequately.

These questions related to:

- ✓ Building early childhood systems and access to comprehensive services and support for all low income children (#2);
- ✓ Including Head Start Association representatives and local Head Start agencies in unified planning regarding early care and education services at both state and local levels, including collaborative efforts to plan for the provision of full working-day, calendar-year early care and education services for children (#7);
- ✓ Encouraging widespread collaboration between Head Start and other appropriate programs, services, and initiatives and to augment Head Start's capacity to be a partner in state initiatives on behalf of children and their families (#3);
- ✓ Meeting new priorities established in 1998 with regard to Head Start agencies collaborating with entities involved in state and local planning processes to better meet the needs of low-income children and families (#5).

This analysis also indicates that about 90% of respondents answered questions #1, #4, and #6 as meeting Project purposes and goals very well or adequately.

These questions related to:

- ✓ Creating a visible presence of Head Start at the state level, assisting in the development of significant, multi-agency and public-private partnerships between Head Start and interested parties (#1);
- ✓ Including involvement of Head Start in state policies, plans, processes, and decisions affecting the Head Start target population and other low-income families (#4); and

- ✓ Supporting the coordination of Head Start services in the eight Project priority areas (#6).

Finally, this analysis indicates two areas that should be targeted for strengthening in the next five years with about 41% answering question #9 and 43% answering question # 8 as meeting Project purposes and goals very well or adequately.

These questions related to:

- ✓ Engaging in other innovative collaborative development initiatives including planning for collaborative training and professional development initiatives for child care, early childhood education, and Head Start services managers, providers, and staff (#9);
- ✓ Encouraging local Head Start agencies to appoint representatives to groups conducting state level collaborative efforts (#8).

CHALLENGES AND NEXT STEPS

Three of the biggest challenges in continued progress in collaborative systems building are:

- Developing adequate data collection to inform the collaboration and coordinated services system;
- Creating a system of collaborative professional development;
- Achieving a truly seamless system of early childhood care and education that diminishes waiting lists of three and four-year old children who are not served in any program.

Some next steps toward addressing these challenges are:

- To continue to work with state level partners who are working on coordinated data collection and single location access to all related data. These are ongoing efforts in the area of health services, social services, education related services, transportation, and emergency information, to name the most significant. The HSSCO is involved in related groups in all these areas.
- To work closely with state level service providers to raise awareness of the barriers to access those living in poverty or other disadvantaged circumstances experience. This includes access to health care services, child care services, education related services, housing, transportation.

- To increase collaborative efforts with early care and education partners so that Head Start can serve as many as possible eligible children;
- To address the issue of Head Start waiting lists and/or those not eligible for Head Start by improving referral systems to other appropriate programs for those children who are unlikely to ever access the Head Start program.

The Head Start State Collaboration Office will work with partners to address these challenges and to continue to carry out the purposes of the Head Start State Collaboration Project during the next five years of the Project.