

IMPLEMENTING 15 ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS FOR HIGH-QUALITY PRE-K: Oklahoma

Oklahoma started its Early Childhood Four-Year-Old Program in 1980 with the intent of serving all 4-year-olds in the state. In 1990, the program received statewide funding for 4-year-olds eligible for the federal Head Start program, but local areas could choose to serve additional 4-year-olds through local funds or tuition. In 1998, Oklahoma became the second state in the nation to provide free preschool for all 4-year-olds, with 99% of school districts providing the program. Through the state’s school finance formula, public school districts receive funding for the Early Childhood Four-Year-Old Program. A per-pupil rate, calculated using the age of the child and the length of the program day, is used to repay districts.

Essential Elements

Fifteen Essential Elements clustered in three categories—Enabling Environment, Support for Educators and Young Learners, and High-Quality Instruction—have been identified among exemplary pre-K programs (Minervino, 2014). Note that practice in the field may vary so as to be either better or worse than might be expected based on specific policy or guidance. Consistency or quality of practice across large-scale programs is more difficult to assess than policy.

Enabling Environment		Rigorous, Articulated Early Learning Policies								Strong Program Practices				
Political Will	Strong Leaders	BA + comp	Class size	Two Adults	Hours/ Dosage	EL Standards	Effective Curriculum	Special Ed	DLL support	HQ Teaching	PD	Child Assessments	Data Driven	Integrated System
○	○	●	●	●	●	●	○	●	●	ND	○	–	○	–

Key: ● Fully Met ○ Partially Met – Not Met ND Not determined

Political will. Despite having one of the most notable universal preschool programs in the country, enrolling more than 73% of all 4-year-olds in the state, political will in the state is largely quiet. Gov. Mary Fallin (R) has publicly supported improving third-grade literacy in the state. In 2015, the legislature passed S285, ensuring that the learning standards for early childhood are aligned with any new subject matter standards adopted. State funding for preschool education is more than a \$1,000 per pupil below its level in 2010 and has been stagnant or declining for the past five years. This is part of a more general problem faced by the state attributed to both recent tax cuts/breaks and the energy market downturn. In 2016-2017, state pre-K spending decreased slightly, totaling \$3,501 per child.

The Oklahoma Champions for Early Opportunities is a statewide network of businesses and community leaders dedicated to advocating to businesses, legislative, and community leaders on the link between early childhood development and economic growth. Most recently, the group has convened a business summit to focus on early childhood development in several cities throughout the state where business leaders and state agency heads discussed Oklahoma’s workforce challenges. Early childhood is fully

supported by the local business community which has taken on the role of educating the lawmakers on the importance of early learning.

Compelling vision and strong leadership. In recent years, there have been some leadership changes in the office, Early Childhood and Family Education, that oversees the pre-K program. Moreover, this department has just one person. However, the state has a tradition of strong leadership at the Department of Education (DOE) and there are strong leaders in other institutions within the state as well as the Early Childhood Education Institute at the University of Oklahoma, Tulsa. Leaders in the early childhood community are joined by leaders in business and philanthropy in promoting a vision of strong early childhood programs throughout the state.

Education and compensation. Oklahoma requires each classroom to have a lead teacher with a BA plus an early learning credential. Teachers are paid on par with other public school teachers.

Adult-child ratio and two adults in the classroom. Oklahoma has a maximum class size of 20 for 4-year-olds and requires a staff-child ratio of 1:10.

Learning time. Programs have the option of operating a part-day (2.5 hours per day) or school-day program (six hours per day) or a combination of both within each district. However, most of the children (87% of enrollment) who attend the pre-K program are in full-day programs. Schools can collaborate with other agencies and programs to provide extended-day services.

Age-appropriate learning standards. In 2016, Oklahoma adopted the Oklahoma Academic Standards, which created vertically aligned pre-K to 12th grade standards. They are comprehensive; and the DOE is providing continuous professional development and support to help districts successfully implement these standards to strengthen pre-K programs and provide effective instruction and learning beyond the early years.

System that ensures effective curriculum. To support curriculum implementation, the Oklahoma Curriculum Frameworks provide supports for aligning and integrating the state standards. In addition, there is a state approved comprehensive curricula list (Big Day for Pre-K and Frog Street) and one subject specific (Pre-K Alpha Friends (HMH) - Literacy Curriculum). Even though curricula selection is a locally determined decision and monitored by the local districts and administrators, the state requires the chosen curriculum be aligned with the state standards.

Support for students with special needs. In 2016-2017, 13.7% of pre-K students were identified as having special needs. Preschool teachers are required to possess specific qualifications and PD is required for those who serve children with special needs. The proportion of children with an IEP in each preschool classroom is limited to less than 50% of children.

Support for dual (English) language learners (DLL). In 2016-2017, 8% of pre-K students were identified as being DLLs. To support these students, extra funding is provided. Professional development requirements include training for certified teachers and support staff who work with English Language Learners.

High quality teaching. According to a study by Georgetown University, the Tulsa public schools preschool program had reasonably high quality as assessed by the CLASS and other indicators in 2006. However, there is a lack of recent statewide data that could be used to draw conclusions about high-quality teaching.

Professional development. Teachers are required to complete 75 clock hours of PD every five years. The content of the PD is required to include: autism, blood borne pathogens, bullying prevention, child abuse, FERPA, hazardous communications, English Learners, and racial and ethnic education. In the 2016-2017 school year, DOE developed policies for individualized professional development plans which were piloted in 2017-2018; with full participation required by all districts and teachers in 2018-2019. Oklahoma does not require on-going classroom-embedded support to be provided to pre-K teachers; however, teachers do receive on-going feedback based on their teacher evaluations.

Child Assessments. Oklahoma does not specify assessment expectations for state-funded prekindergarten programs; but does provide some resources for educators and parents.

Data-driven decision-making. All pre-K teachers are observed using the Tulsa TLE Observation Evaluation System, Marzano Teacher Evaluation Model, or the Marzano Focus Framework. The state receives results of these structured observations as well as the teachers who receive on-going feedback. New administrators attend an initial multi-day training with a final exam; and a one-day re-certification training every two years. Other monitoring information or data are not collected by the state.

Integrated System. There are some components that are aligned, such as the Oklahoma Academic Standards with K-12 standards. However, the system does not collect data nor support the professional development of teachers to effectively integrate child assessments and curriculum.