

First Annual Early Childhood Coalition Conference

The Potts Family Foundation, with broad support from seven private foundations and the Oklahoma Business Roundtable, sponsored the first annual Oklahoma Early Childhood Coalition Conference. The conference was held on October 26th at the newly renovated Skirvin Hotel in downtown OKC, and attracted over 160 attendees from across the state.

The goals for this conference could be summarized into three areas. First, we wanted to provide a national perspective and to share best business practices in early childhood promotion and advocacy. To achieve that goal we invited Ready Nation Deputy Director Nancy Fishman, who was our keynote luncheon speaker. Her power point presentation, which is now on our new 25 by 25 website (www.ok25by25.org), covered the resources available through Ready Nation – many of them free – and the over 1,500 business leaders available to advocate on behalf of early learning initiative across this country.

Second, we wanted to highlight and showcase the strengths that Oklahoma has in our four focus areas: evidence-based family support, evidence-based literacy/numeracy; access to affordable high quality child care, and access to preventive mental and physical health services. To achieve that goal we invited eleven subject matter experts to cover those four areas. The names and organizations they represent are also listed at our new website under the Events tab.

Third, working in four different breakout sessions, the experts were asked to share with attendees WHY their particular area/program/service was critical to our demographic (children 0-5 and their parents), HOW the current economic and budgetary climate is creating challenges for those programs, and WHAT recommendations or solutions they had to address those challenges.

Following the breakout sessions, which were repeated to allow all participants to attend two of the four sessions, participants were asked to share their thoughts with other attendees at their tables and to capture and write down the critical challenges and solutions they heard from the presenters and Q&A held in the breakout sessions. That input was collected and summarized for review in the final portion of the conference.

In the latter part of the conference, we invited four Oklahoma legislators, all of whom will be returning to the legislature in 2017, to share their thoughts and views on the upcoming legislative session and their involvement and interest in early childhood development. Nancy Fishman facilitated that discussion. Consensus “challenges and solutions” from the table discussions were provided to Nancy and she sought responses from each of the legislators, covering each of the four focus areas. Given the prospects of a third consecutive budget shortfall, many of the recommendations, as one might guess, were focused around the lack of sufficient and sustainable funding for many of these programs.

One of the more unique aspects of this conference was the inclusion of around 30 university students, from seven different state universities/colleges, who are currently enrolled in early childhood education programs. Because of the generous support of our sponsors, they were able to attend the conference for free. The feedback we received from a number of them and their professors was quite positive and, we believe, reflected well on the quality of the content and our speakers/presenters.

We are in the process of post-conference evaluation and the preparation of a summary report, which we hope to have posted on our website by December 1, 2016. Correspondence back out to attendees will include, among other items, a link to the summary report.

The Conference concluded with the comment that we were honored to be walking beside each of our fellow advocates on the journey to improve the future of our state; A challenge was given to join forces with unlikely partners to build momentum on behalf of Oklahoma’s youngest and modest citizens.

A welcome was also extended to additional organizations and legislators to become a part of the Allied Organizations and Legislative Caucus respectively to help raise Oklahoma’s rankings of early childhood wellbeing to the top 25 states by 2025!

What follows are summaries from the four breakout sessions and an overall evaluation of the conference and facility. The first is from table discussions following the two breakout sessions as heard from the attendees of those sessions. The second is from the subject matter experts who led the breakout sessions. As you might expect, there are strong similarities. The third is the evaluation, by attendees, of the conference itself. The purposes of having the attendees compiling their consensus findings were to test both the message of the experts as well as the listening and engagement skills of the attendees. We think both were attained.

Oklahoma Early Childhood Annual Conference
October 26, 2016
Breakout Session Summaries
By Attendees

	Family Support	High Quality Childcare	Literacy/Numeracy	Preventive Health
Current Obstacles	<p>Limited services due to lack of funding/subsidizing (10)</p> <p>Stigma or lack of understanding of home visits or government programs (6)</p> <p>Quality of professionals (5)</p>	<p>Workforce qualification requirements do not match wages of today (8)</p> <p>Funding/subsidizing childcare (8)</p> <p>Lack of high quality childcare available (5)</p>	<p>Math anxiety amongst pre-school educators (6)</p> <p>Funding for literacy and numeracy programs: e.g. providing reading materials etc. (5)</p> <p>Limited quantity of literature in lower income families homes for children (5)</p>	<p>Lack of state, federal and legislative funding (7)</p> <p>Parents and communities are not educated about the importance of healthy lifestyle and preventive services (3)</p> <p>Child Health Insurance Program (CHIP) has issues at the federal level. Needs reauthorization before 11 Oct. 2017 (3)</p>
Suggested Solutions	<p>Provide increased or stabilized funding (7)</p> <p>Reduce stigma of home visits by rebranding program or associating it with another program. (4)</p> <p>Reduce stigma on support services by educating parents and communities about the benefits of these programs (3)</p>	<p>Provide or increase subsidies/funding (4)</p> <p>Raise wages for childcare providers (4)</p> <p>Family tax credits for childcare expenses (3)</p>	<p>Pediatricians apply Reach Out And Read 3 part model:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Awareness to parents on importance of literacy</i> 2. <i>Prescribe a book</i> 3. <i>Provide literacy rich environments in waiting rooms, homes, etc.</i> (7) <p>Schools/centers provide math nights to increase comfort level of math for teachers and parents (5)</p>	<p>Provide/continue/increase funding from state/federal resources for preventive services and health coverage (7)</p> <p>Expand health insurance coverage (4)</p> <p>Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) must receive reauthorization (3)</p>

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**Breakout Session Summaries
By Subject Matter Experts**

	Family Support	High Quality Childcare	Literacy	Numeracy	Preventive Health
Current Obstacles	<p>Lack of funding</p> <p>Lack of supportive technology for clients after home visits.</p> <p>Lack of a statutory mechanism to help families meet their basic needs.</p> <p>Community confusion as to what programs are operational</p>	<p>Reimbursement rates for providers are not sufficient.</p> <p>Cost of childcare.</p> <p>Lack of support for childcare programs to attain higher quality levels.</p> <p>Access to quality childcare.</p> <p>Legislatures do not hear from large factions of childcare providers.</p> <p>Low wages/poor benefits for childcare workers.</p>	<p>Oklahoma infrastructure has not kept up with Reach Out and Read growth rate.</p> <p>Number of clinics unable to fundraise for themselves & provide books</p> <p>Lack of connections with medical providers in rural areas to assist with funding.</p>	<p>Widespread "math anxiety" amongst preschool educators.</p> <p>Lack of math content and logistics.</p> <p>Cost of providing professional development in teaching math</p> <p>The budget crisis impact on providing in- service training.</p>	<p>Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) needs to be reauthorized before October 2017.</p> <p>State budget failures resulting in cuts in provider rates and reduction/elimination of services.</p> <p>SoonerCare enrollment has not expanded it's income qualification requirements for families to match with Oklahomas improving economy.</p>
Suggested Solutions	<p>Provide funding to Oklahoma State Department of Health to increase family services.</p> <p>Provide state funding for the purchase of technology to make family services more efficient.</p> <p>Draft proposal that grants State Department of Health the ability to purchase/distribute technology to families.</p>	<p>Develop a coalition including childcare providers so they can better educate the legislators.</p> <p>Increase reimbursement rates for providers to 75 percent.</p> <p>Revise eligibility and copay chart so low income families can become eligible.</p> <p>Increase funding for quality initiatives.</p> <p>Improve business practices</p> <p>Improve quality through Tech.</p> <p>Assistance & Provider Education</p> <p>Increasing parent wages.</p>	<p>Interested parties to sponsor clinics in home community.</p> <p>Advocate for state funding</p> <p>Recruit potential providers in rural areas.</p> <p>Book Drives</p>	<p>Provide resources necessary to overcome young children's math proficiency barriers.</p> <p>Provide in-service training to help teachers 1) develop <i>a understanding of math</i> 2) <i>recognize the "habits of mind"</i> of a math thinker.</p> <p>Design institutional structures and policies to support teacher's ongoing learning.</p>	<p>Advocate at federal level to reauthorize CHIP.</p> <p>Combat poverty- provide support for the agencies that have been most effective in the past five years with their approaches. Both for funding and expansion.</p> <p>Funding- continue to educate stake holders and policy makers on the importance of children having access to high quality health care.</p>
Experts	Annette Jacobi	Lesli Blazer/ Paula Koos	Lori Lake	Susan Kimmel	Buffy Heater

October 26 Conference: Evaluations

Topic	% that rated Good-Excellent
Location/Skirvin Hotel	98%
Keynote Speaker Inspirational	73%
Family Services: Clear Understanding of Topic	91%
Family Services: Met Expectations	87%
Quality Childcare: Clear Understanding of Topic	81%
Quality Childcare: Met Expectations	74%
Literacy/Numeracy: Clear Understanding of Topic	90%
Literacy/Numeracy: Met Expectations	91%
Preventive Health: Clear Understanding of Topic	57%
Preventive Health: Met Expectations	52%
Table Discussions: Obstacles/Solutions Identified	53%
Legislative Panel: Addressed Issues	51%
Recommend our Next Conference to Colleagues	98%