

Project Name

Evaluation of Oklahoma's Early Childhood Programs
21-265-02-Early Childhood

Priority Program Evaluation: expected completion is six to eight months from the date of the entrance conference, which took place October 6, 2020.

Project Background

Early childhood programs are generally considered those that support the healthy and safe development of children leading into entering kindergarten and through the 3rd grade. From a public policy perspective, states invest in these programs to improve the likelihood that children (particularly those from low-income families) will attain educational and economic success. In Oklahoma, there are a variety of programs delivering a myriad of services – at times overlapping – with seemingly little coordination. Factors leading to the fragmented delivery of programs are the types of funding streams (federal, state, federal/state matches, state/private partnerships and state/federal/private partnerships), as well as the number of entities involved in the delivery of such programs. Finally, programs have differing qualification standards and service populations.

The most familiar early childhood program in Oklahoma is likely the Preschool, or 4-year-old, program, which is offered at no cost to families through the State Department of Education (SDE). This program has the highest participation level of any early childhood program in the state. However, as early childhood is defined as the period of a child's development from birth to age 8, there are many programs and services utilized by families before a child enters the state's educational system.

Original Scope and Project Description

Project Description: Evaluate outcomes of the program.

Scope of Work: Examine outcomes of the program and forecast long-term economic impact of state investment.



Material Findings from Entrance Conference

During the Entrance Conference with SDE, the LOFT evaluation team observed the difficulty in identifying all the entities involved in the delivery of early childhood programs, especially for programs with funding sources outside the Department of Education. Additionally, while early childhood is defined as birth through 8 years of age, many programs focus on a more specific age group within that range. For example, “school readiness” programs are defined as those serving children from birth through 5 years old (kindergarten age), while other early childhood programs focus on birth through 3 years of age. And, overlapping services do not necessarily mean duplication of services, as families may layer programs to meet a child’s needs.

It was also established that Oklahoma’s Preschool program has been studied extensively.

Evaluation Objectives

Through this evaluation, LOFT seeks to:

1. Provide an overview of all publicly funded early childhood programs, including their funding sources, how they are delivered, and to whom.
2. Identify the respective goals and measurable performance outcomes of programs, their organizational structure and associated costs.
3. Establish the level of coordination that exists among the various programs and explore potential opportunities to better leverage funds and resources.
4. Determine the effectiveness of early childhood programs, how corresponding outcomes are measured, and whether there are sustained benefits.

Due to the breadth of this topic, the LOFT evaluation team recommends excluding the state’s Preschool program from analysis.

