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OKLAHOMA’S EARLY CHILDHOOD LANDSCAPE

Early Childhood System Overview

There is no singular early learning system that compares with the K-12 system due to multiple funding streams and varied early education settings, services, and professional roles. As a result, state early learning systems are often viewed as fragmented, which can create disconnected experiences and challenges in navigating services for children and families.

Three approaches of early care and education oversight have been categorized to describe the nuanced and complicated early childhood governance structures across the country:

01. Coordination: Places authority and accountability for early learning programs and services across multiple agencies. This can be achieved in two ways: peer agency coordination or coordination through the Governor’s Office.

02. Consolidation: Places authority and accountability for the early childhood system in one executive branch agency for development, implementation and oversight of multiple early learning programs and services.

03. Creation: A new executive branch agency or entity within an agency is created that has the authority and accountability for the early learning system.

Currently, early care and education in Oklahoma is coordinated by the Department of Health, Department of Early Childhood Education, and The Oklahoma Early Childhood Program.



Early Childhood Services

AGE 0-1	AGE 1	AGE 2	AGE 3	AGE 4	AGE 5
Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting Program (MIECHV) Provides home visiting to families living in at-risk communities.					
Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) Provides funding for licensing and quality of child care, ensuring parental choice in child care, supporting the child care workforce, and child care subsidy for low-income families.					
Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five (PDG B-5) Provides funding for states to strengthen the early childhood system. *Awarded to selected states					
Maternal and Child Health (MCH) Block Grant Provides funding to support the health and well-being of all mothers, children, and families.					
Public Assistance Programs (TANF, WIC, SNAP, CHIP, Medicaid, Child Tax Credit)					
Early Head Start (EHS) Provides comprehensive services to low-income pregnant women, infants and toddlers, and their families.			Head Start Provides comprehensive services for low-income children ages three to compulsory school age, and their families.		
IDEA Part C Provides early intervention services to infants and toddlers with disabilities.			IDEA Part B, Section 619 Provides special education and related services to preschool children with disabilities.		

*Oklahoma was an initial recipient of a Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five (PDG B-5) and received a \$3,116,729 award.

Federal Expenditures

Child care and early learning services are most commonly underwritten through two federal programs: the Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF), a federal block grant that supports child care subsidies and quality enhancement initiatives, and Head Start. Compared to preschool programs for older children, the infant and toddler slots funded by these programs are typically available to fewer children.

Funding Source	Amount
CCDF Allocations 2022	\$94,547,284
Head Start Expenditures 2022	\$137,635,270
Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) 2021	\$6,635,887*
IDEA Part C, Early Intervention for Infants and Toddlers 2021	\$8,435,405
IDEA Part B, Section 619 for Preschoolers with Disabilities 2021	\$5,858,891

*The federally-funding Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting Program (MIECHV) supports states to provide voluntary, evidence-based home visiting services to women during pregnancy and to parents with young children up to kindergarten entry.

Family Supports

To best support children in their earliest years, vulnerable families need access to information and services related to nutrition, health care, and other programs such as [Temporary Assistance for Needy Families \(TANF\)](#).

Number of Oklahoma Children 0-5 served by Public Services

331,821

Number of Households Participating in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) | 2023

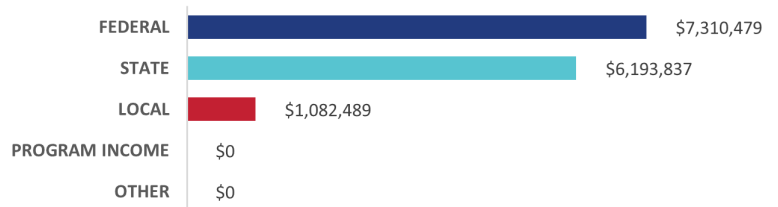
67,485
Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) Participants | 2023

710,813
Number of Children Enrolled in MEDICAID | 2023

130,984
Number of Children enrolled in the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) | 2023

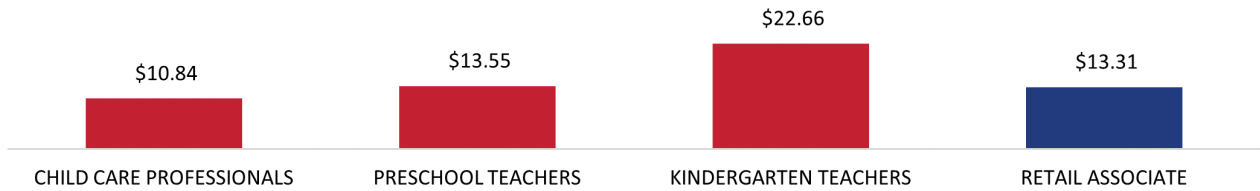
The federal government allocation the [Title V Maternal and Child Health \(MCH\) Services Block Grant](#) to states to support the health and well-being of all mothers, children, and families. States must provide a match for federal funding.

MCH Funds by Source | 2021



Paid family leave policies support working families with time off to bond with a newborn baby, adopted or foster children, or to care for a seriously ill family member. Paid family leave is [associated](#) with positive infant brain function and reductions in infant mortality. The United States does not have a national paid family leave policy, but some states are taking action to enact policies. Currently, Oklahoma does not have a statewide paid family leave policy.

Workforce wages comparison | 2021



Early Childhood Workforce

The early childhood workforce encompasses a wide variety of roles, including child care professionals, Head Start teachers, home visitors, and pre-K teachers. For many of these occupations, [wages earned](#) do not meet the state’s [living wage](#), and many earn at or below the federal poverty level.

COVID-19’s Impact on the Early Childhood Workforce

The pandemic has placed heightened attention on the concerning realities of the nation’s early childhood workforce, including poverty-level wages, lack of access to health insurance, and lack of paid sick leave. Child care providers often report difficulty with food security, housing, or paying for utilities, and they will often hold an additional job to meet their basic needs. As a consequence, the turnover in the child care workforce has become a salient issue during and after the pandemic, leading to providers not being able to find and retain quality early childhood educators.

The pandemic also highlighted how closely tied the child care industry is to the economic success of the country. Child care and school closures had an [estimated cost of about \\$700 billion](#) in lost revenue and productivity, about 3.5 percent of the national gross domestic product (GDP). From September 2019 to November 2020, around [700,000 parents](#) with children under the age of five left the workforce. Women were particularly impacted, as more than [one in three women caregivers](#) were forced to leave the workforce or reduce their work hours during the pandemic. While the child care sector is starting to recover from significant workforce shortages

experienced during the height of the pandemic, there were still about [10 percent fewer child care professionals in the field in September 2022 compared to February 2020](#).

POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

- ❓ Could Oklahoma benefit from a restructuring of its early care and education services?
- ❓ Do families in Oklahoma have knowledge on how to access the services available to them?
- ❓ How could Oklahoma make it easier for families to navigate services?

THE SCIENCE AND ECONOMIC CASE FOR INVESTING IN EARLY CHILDHOOD

Investing early in young children has produced a substantial return on investment for society, families, and children, making the case for policymakers to expand early childhood supports and funding opportunities. Nobel Prize-winning economist, Dr. James Heckman, has been studying the economic impact of quality early childhood programs in the Perry Preschool Project. As detailed below, conclusions have been drawn about the multifaceted positive impact of quality early childhood programs.

For every dollar spent in quality early childhood education programs for children that are disadvantaged, taxpayers can expect a [return on investment](#) of at least 13 percent.

Contemporary understanding of a return on investment includes nurturing productive citizens (reduction in incarceration, and increased employment and tax-paying ability), improved health outcomes (improved healthy behaviors and increased health expenditure due to higher income), and reduced need for social services (reduction in retention, special education, and welfare supports).

Return on investment also includes inter-generational benefits, as children of the Perry Preschool Project participants, on average, had higher earnings as a result of improved home environments.

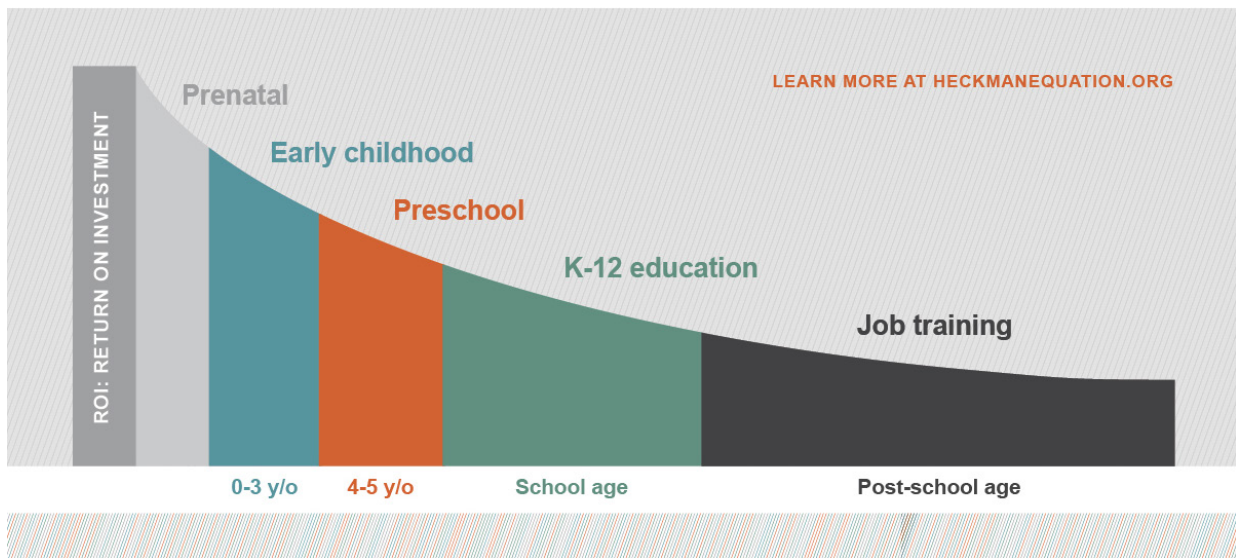
- Grew up in stable two-parent households
- Reported higher graduation rates
- Lower school suspension rates
- Reduced criminal activity
- Higher full-time employment

Clearly, investing in the learning and growth of young children is vital for economic development. Quality early childhood education has been proven to contribute to many short- and long-term benefits for children, including preparing them to be a successful future workforce.

Business leaders depend on a skilled workforce to support today’s economy. Gains from quality early education extend far beyond childhood and foundational skills necessary for the workforce such as problem-solving, decision-making skills, and collaboration, are developed during early childhood. Early childhood not only yields better outcomes for young children but also can save taxpayers money and ensure future generations are prepared to enter the workforce.



■ **Rate of return to investment in human capital**



Source

Impact on the Business Sector

The child care industry is vital to the economic success of states. In 2022, the U.S. child care industry was valued at \$60.4 billion, [and is projected to grow](#) at a compound annual growth rate of more than four percent from 2023 to 2030. Child care revenue is comparable to other important industries such as medical and diagnostic labs (\$47.2 billion), spectator sports (\$46 billion), pipeline transportation (\$44.5 billion), and water transportation (\$43.3 billion).

Nationwide, [inadequate infant toddler care](#) costs working parents an estimated \$78 billion a year in lost income, costs businesses more than \$23 billion a year in lost productivity, and costs taxpayers \$21 billion a year in lower income tax and sales tax revenue, costing Americans a total of \$122 billion annually. Furthermore, when child care and schools closed during the pandemic, roughly [\\$700 billion was lost in revenue and productivity](#), equivalent to about three and one half percent of the national gross domestic product (GDP).

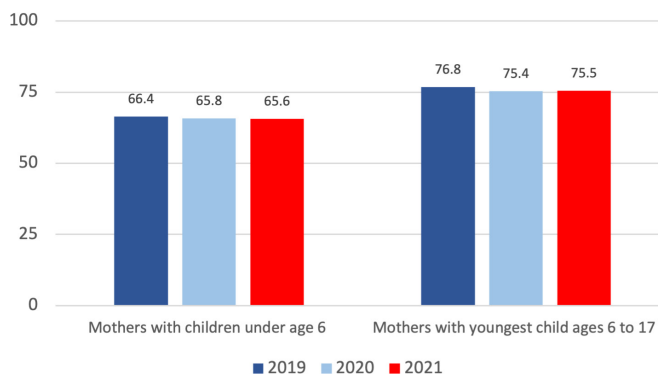
Parent Participation in the Workforce

In the United States, nearly [15 million](#) children under age 6 have working parents that need weekly child care. Child care is critical not only in providing families the option to return/enter the workforce, but also contributes to family members maintaining their jobs and work-life balance. Research has shown that inadequate child care negatively impacts family income, business profitability and productivity, state revenue and the overall economy.

Mothers are a substantial part of the workforce and [caregiving responsibilities](#) at home and work threaten women's ability to remain and progress in the workplace. When new mothers leave the workforce, businesses suffer. [On average, businesses lose \\$92,000](#) when a mother leaves their current position during the first year of motherhood. As of 2022, mother's [workforce participation rates](#) peak at 75.5 percent for mothers with school-aged children (ages six to 17), and decreases while children are younger. Just over 65 percent of mothers with children under

age six and 62.3 percent of mothers with children under the age of three participate in the workforce. Although half of mothers with infants (58.5 percent) participate in the workforce, they are the least likely group to do so.

Labor force participation rate of mothers by age of youngest child, 2019-21 annual averages



[Source](#)

During the COVID-19 pandemic, child care disruptions threatened families' ability to participate in the workforce. Specifically, more than one in three women caregivers, according to the [RAPID-EC survey](#), were forced to leave the workforce or reduce their work hours, even though most could not afford to do so. While progress has been made to mitigate the effects of the pandemic on women's workforce participation, as of November 2022, there are still 1.8 million women who are [missing from the work force](#) since 2020.

Business leaders and policymakers can capitalize on the economic benefits of early care and education by investing in measures that support working families, particularly mothers and their young children. Investing in quality early childhood programs produces positive outcomes for children, business, and for overall society.

POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

- ❓ How does compensation, including wages and benefits, affect the hiring and retention of highly qualified early childhood educators?

- 2 What disparities within the education workforce exist that affect retention rates for early childhood educators?
- 2 How might local communities develop pathways and strategies for recruiting and retaining the early childhood workforce?

IMPACT OF HUNGER ON STUDENT LEARNING

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) defines [food insecurity](#) as, “a state of limited or uncertain access to adequate food.” As of December 2022, the USDA reported [12.8 percent](#) of US households were food insecure during the calendar year. This represents a more than two percent increase in food insecurity from 2020.

Effect of COVID-19 Pandemic on Food Insecurity

Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the role schools play in providing food and nourishment for children and families has grown significantly. National rates of food insecurity in households with children [doubled](#) from May-October 2020, with communities of color being most affected. With over [200,000](#) students experiencing food insecurity, Oklahoma’s prevalence of food insecurity of [14.3 percent](#) is significantly higher than the national average. In response to increasing food insecurity across the nation, the USDA sponsors several child nutrition [programs](#) to ensure school aged children receive nutritious meals and snacks to promote health and educational readiness. However, Oklahoma is not capitalizing on available public funds to combat food insecurity, ranking [47th](#) in federally funded electronic benefits transfer and summer meal program participation.

Effect of Food Insecurity on Child Development

Food insecurity leads to [increased](#) illness and de-

creased academic achievement and hunger affects concentration, memory, and skill development critical to academic success. Hungry children may suffer from calorie and vital nutrient deficiencies that [impact](#) their physical and psychological development resulting in negative impacts on learning outcomes, including early literacy skills, executive functioning, and social behavior. The International Reading and Literacy [study](#) found students who self-report arriving at school hungry score lower on reading assessments than student who are not hungry. Additionally, hungry children are [two times](#) more likely than their food secure peers to experience poor health, which may lead to chronic absenteeism.



Promising Practices in School Nutrition

Several states have implemented innovative child nutrition programs to supplement and enhance national-level programs. California, Maine, Colorado, Minnesota, New Mexico, Vermont, Michigan, and Massachusetts [provide](#) free, healthy meals for all students. [Colorado's](#) nutrition program includes a collaboration with Food Bank of the Rockies to provide healthy snacks to children during school breaks. No Kid Hungry partnered with public schools in [North Carolina](#) to reduce chronic absenteeism by establishing a program that includes breakfast as part the structured schedule during the instructional day. Additionally, No Kid Hungry provides guidance for developing [after school meal programs](#) and supports a school meal design [guide](#) to engage students and communities in school meal programs.

POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

- 🔗 How can current child nutrition programs expand to increase access to no-cost school meal programs to children across the state, especially those who live in rural communities?
- 🔗 What state-level interventions can reduce barriers to accessing nutritious food options in school and community settings?

- 🔗 How might state and local programs support families experiencing food insecurity understand the importance of nutrition on childhood development?

FOSTERING INNOVATION IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

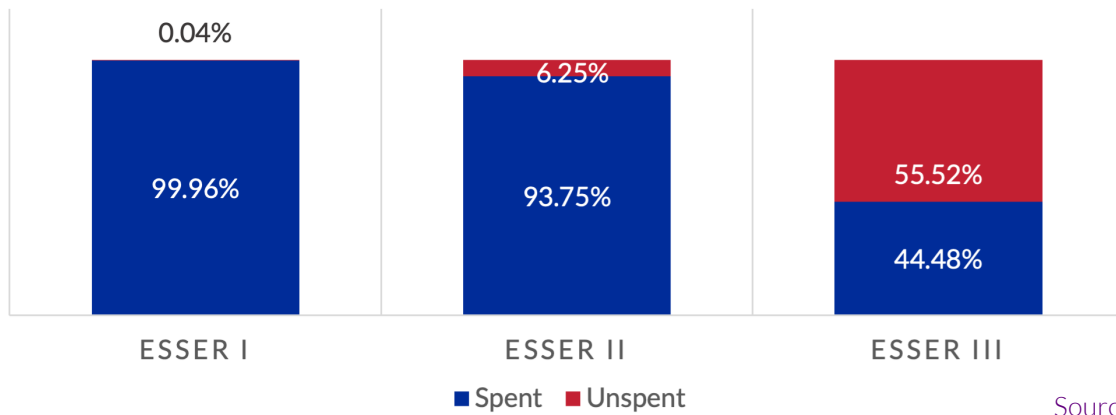
Despite a widespread [decline](#) in student proficiency in math and reading, as evidenced by decreasing [scores](#) on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) across the county, teaching methodology has remained largely unchanged for decades. As states work to recover from the pandemic and make up for lost instructional time, state and district leaders have implemented a variety of different interventions including, [high-dosage](#) tutoring, [expanded](#) learning time, and [targeted](#) subject material instruction aimed at reducing the pandemic's impact and improving student outcomes.

However, as ESSER funds are scheduled to expire in September 2024, districts are increasingly compelled to explore innovative ways to reimagine the classroom beyond conventional boundaries.

Educator Workforce

One way states and districts are fostering innovation in the classroom is through changes in teaching

Oklahoma ESSER Spending



structures. Team teaching or co-teaching is an approach that involves two or more teachers working together to plan, deliver, and assess instruction for a group of students. There are several different co-teaching models, including the “one teach, one observe” [model](#), the “one teach, one assist” [model](#), and others. Models can include one teacher having the primary instructional responsibility, while the other assists students with their work or monitors for behaviors. These team-based models typically aim to redesign the school day without adding an additional cost to state, district, and school budgets. The most notable examples include the [Next Education Workforce](#) initiative through Arizona State University’s Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College and [Opportunity Culture](#). These programs create an effective education workforce through collaboration with schools and partners, to offer students deeper, personalized learning experiences. [Research](#) suggests team-based models have demonstrated increased effectiveness by lowering the student-to-teacher ratio. A lower student-to-teacher ratio allows for more time and attention per student, which has been [found](#) to increase student [achievement](#).

School Models

Public school models designed to offer students a different educational experience from a traditional school, are funded by federal, state, and local dollars or a combination of these sources. While the structure varies by state and choice option, generally a portion of the per pupil funding that would typically go to the student’s assigned traditional public school is allocated to their school of choice. Students do not pay tuition to attend public schools of choice.

■ **Charter Schools:** Charter schools are publicly funded but [independently](#) managed. To operate, the founder(s) are required to develop a plan and receive approval from a local or state-based authorizer. Charter schools have greater operational autonomy than traditional public

schools over areas like staffing, curriculum, and time. In exchange, charter schools are also supposed to face greater accountability; they must meet the expectations included in their charter contract, or their authorizer can close them. Though most charter schools are brick-and-mortar buildings where students and teachers meet in person, some charter schools are also virtual.

➤ Oklahoma [statute](#) grants the ability for charter schools to operate in the state.

■ **Magnet Schools:** Magnet schools are public schools that allow students to focus on a specific learning track, such as engineering, language immersion, or the performing arts. Unlike traditional public schools or charters, magnet schools can use a selective admissions process to include testing requirements. As of the [2021-22 school year](#) there are 3,015 magnet schools across the country serving a little over five percent of the student population.

➤ Although there is no statewide statute in Oklahoma that explicitly authorizes magnet schools, the state’s legal basis [grants](#) local school districts autonomy in supervision and establishing curriculum, thereby enabling the flexibility to create and operate magnet schools in the state.

■ **Open Enrollment:** Open enrollment policies allow families to choose a district-operated school, other than the one they are assigned to, depending on where they live. These policies may pertain to district schools within a district (intra-district) or to district schools across districts (inter-district). As of 2022, 43 states have some form of open enrollment policies, with only 11 states having mandatory policies requiring districts to offer open enrollment policies under state law.

➤ Students in Oklahoma can [request](#) a transfer to a school in any district, regardless of where they live. State law [does allow](#) districts to set capacity limits for transfer students.

Instructional Practices

■ **High Dosage Tutoring:** High-dosage tutoring [refers](#) to intensive, personalized instruction, often involving one-on-one sessions or small group settings, occurring at least three times a week or totaling around 50 hours over a semester. An exemplary model recognized by the Biden-Harris administration and the U.S. Department of Education is the [Guilford County Schools](#) (GCS) high-dosage tutoring initiative. This program collaborates with local universities and high schools, pairing their students with peers who have faced significant learning setbacks due to the impact of COVID-19.

While comprehensive assessments are ongoing to gauge the program's effectiveness, GCS has reported promising initial findings. [Preliminary data](#) suggests improvements in learning outcomes across various student demographics and schools. Beyond measurable academic gains, anecdotal evidence [points](#) to the program fostering increased student confidence and a reduction in academic frustration, signaling a positive impact on overall student growth and well-being.

■ **Expanded Learning:** Programs or interventions that increase the amount of instruction and learning students participate in, such as after-school, summer, or in-school programs, can be highly beneficial for combatting learning loss if effectively implemented. While expanded learning time interventions can take a variety of forms, the following strategies have seen up to [eight months](#) of learning recovery.

- **Acceleration Camps:** Students receive full-day interventions for a length of time determined by each LEA.
- **Double Blocking:** Students receive an extra period each day for additional subject matter remediation.
- **Mandatory Summer School:** Students must attend mandatory summer instruction to be promoted to the next grade level.

■ **Targeted Subject Matter Instruction:** Benjamin Franklin Elementary in Meriden, CT, was able to [maintain](#) their pre-pandemic math scores by adding class time for targeted instruction throughout the day. Students in second and third grade received an hour of math instruction per day, while students in fourth and fifth grade received 90 minutes with the additional support of focused tutoring for students who had fallen behind. Benjamin Franklin Elementary's demographics closely align with the national average, with three in four students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch and a majority identifying as Black, Hispanic, or multiracial, supporting this as a promising practice for learning recovery.

POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

- ❓ What measures or incentives could encourage a culture of collaboration among schools, educators, and community stakeholders to share successful innovative instructional practices?
- ❓ In what ways can school choice programs ensure equity in access to education for all students, particularly those from low-income families or underserved communities?
- ❓ How can policy encourage experimentation and adaptation in teaching methods within public schools while simultaneously upholding accountability for student outcomes?

SCIENCE OF READING

In 2022, [24 percent](#) of Oklahoma's fourth grade students scored at or above proficiency on the NAEP yet Oklahoma's fourth grade reading proficiency is below the 2022 national average of [33 percent](#). Fourth grade reading proficiency is important as it is a [predictor](#) of later academic outcomes including high school graduation and college application rates, and lifetime earning potential. To increase students' reading proficiency, they must be properly taught how to read using evidence-aligned strategies and methods grounded in the neuroscience of how the

human brain learns to read. The body of research related to evidence-aligned reading instruction is referred to as the [science of reading](#) and represents the collection of practices gathered from five decades of multi-disciplinary research in education, psychology, linguistics, and neuroscience. Many practicing teachers are not trained in the science of reading, and instead teach students to read using ineffective practices.

Teacher Preparation in the Science of Reading

The National Council on Teacher Quality's (NCTQ) 2023 Teacher Prep Review found that only [25 percent](#) of education preparation programs nationwide adequately train teachers in the science of reading. The same review evaluated twelve Oklahoma [programs](#), and determined only three programs adequately train pre-service teachers in evidence-based literacy instruction.

As of 2022, 45 states and the District of Columbia have enacted literacy legislation to fix the lack of evidence-based teaching practices surrounding literacy instruction. While NCTQ reports 32 states required educator preparation programs to address evidence-based literacy instruction, only 20 states require [verification](#) that teacher candidates understand and can apply the science of reading. There are challenges to reforming education preparation programs. For instance, reading methods professors may have been trained in reading philosophies not aligned with reading and may continue to train pre-service teachers using ineffective practices. In addition, faculty have some academic freedom over what they teach; therefore, modifying curriculum can be a slow and arduous process.

Efforts to Align Literacy Instruction with the Science of Reading

The practice of aligning reading instruction to the science of reading has gained traction nationally. More specifically, states like [Arkansas](#), [Colorado](#), [Mississippi](#), and [North Carolina](#) are:

- Aligning state literacy standards to the science of reading;
- Funding professional development for teachers in the science of reading;
- Requiring that reading interventions for students are aligned with the science of reading;
- Working to align teacher licensure exams with the science of reading;
- Requiring educator preparation programs to include coursework in the science of reading.

Oklahoma and the Science of Reading

Oklahoma amended the [Reading Sufficiency Act](#) in 2019 to require the following: five literacy elements be taught in K-3 classrooms (i.e., phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension), universal literacy screening for K-3 students, reading instruction/intervention and progress monitoring for those identified with areas of concern; and third grade students meet competencies of reading in order to be promoted to fourth grade.

In 2024, Oklahoma [established](#) the Help Elevate Reading Outcomes for Every Student (HEROES) literacy instructional team to support district-level in developing sustainable and systematic literacy programming and implementation. Additionally, Oklahoma teachers have access to science of reading professional development and [training](#) including Language Essentials for the Teachers of Reading and Spelling and evidence-based literacy instruction communities of practice.

POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

- ❓ How can teachers develop the skills to support evidence-based literacy instruction across the education continuum from pre-kindergarten through twelfth grade?
- ❓ In what ways can the educator preparation program review and approval process be reformed to require the inclusion of science of

reading aligned syllabi, curriculum, and course materials?

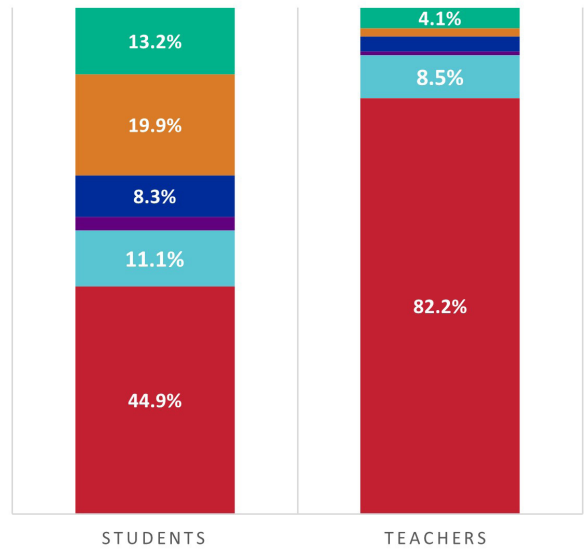
- How could a state-level menu of reading curricula that embed the five pillars of literacy instruction reduce the burden on individual districts to identify high-quality, evidence-aligned reading programs?

STATE OF THE TEACHER WORKFORCE

While teacher shortages have been a concern across the country, the nature and severity of shortages varies across school locations and types, subject areas, and teacher demographics. However, a common thread throughout the landscape of shortages is the disproportionate impact on low-income students and students of color.

Research indicates that teachers are the most important school-based factor for student growth and achievement. Yet, like so many other states, Oklahoma often struggles to recruit and retain a high-quality and diverse educator workforce. While 52 percent of students in the United States identify as people of color, nearly 80 percent of teachers are white. In fact, 40 percent of public schools don't have a single teacher of color. In 2022, despite more than 55..

Student Diversity VS. Teacher Diversity in Oklahoma | 2022 - 2023



- American Indian/Alaska Native
- Asian/Pacific Islander
- Two or More
- White
- Other
- Black
- Hispanic

Source

percent of Oklahoma's students identifying as people of color, the educator workforce is over 82 percent white.



Oklahoma Teacher Enrollment & Completion 2014-2021



Source

Pathways into the Teaching Profession

While specific programs and pathways differ by state, teachers generally enter the classroom through either a traditional preparation program housed in an institution of higher education (IHE) or an alternative preparation program that provides a pathway into the classroom without the requirement of a four-year degree in teaching. While studies have found mixed results around how the type of preparation program impacts student achievement, teachers who enter the classroom through a traditional preparation program tend to have more knowledge of curriculum and instructional methods, demonstrate higher rates of self-efficacy, and stay in the classroom longer than those prepared through alternative programs. Oklahoma provides both traditional and alternative pathways for individuals seeking to enter the teaching profession.

From 2014 to 2021, Oklahoma’s educator preparation programs (EPPs) reported high numbers in student enrollment at the start of each school year with low retention in yearly completion, coupled with a steady decline in overall EPP completion.

In addition to supporting multiple educator preparation programs, Oklahoma offers a variety of alternative pathways for educators seeking certification including:

Alternative Placement Program (excludes Early Childhood, Elementary, Special Education): Available to individuals holding at least a bachelor’s degree from an Oklahoma Regents for Higher Education accredited institution, with a GPA of at least 2.5 and two years of qualified work experience in a field related to the area of certification sought. Applicants must demonstrate multiple competencies in a field that corresponds to the grade-level certification sought through documentation of an academic major, minor, work or volunteer experience, publication, or other avenues. Additionally, program participants must complete 6 to 18 college credit hours of professional education or 90-270 clock hours of professional development within 3 years of entering the program.



Provider Type	Description	Policy in Oklahoma
Traditional Providers at Institutions of Higher Education (IHES)	Teacher education programs in schools of education at colleges/universities statewide; bachelor’s degree and licensure eligibility upon graduation.	Oklahoma offers 194 educator preparation programs across 23 providers.
Teacher Residency Programs	Year-long practice-based training with experienced teachers; residents earn stipend, eligible for licensure.	Not identified in state policy.
Teach for America (TFA)	Nontraditional program recruiting college grads to teach in high-needs schools; summer training, licensure coursework while employed.	TFA places corps members in Greater Tulsa area.

Alternative Early Childhood and Elementary

Pathway: Individuals holding a terminal degree or a bachelor's from an accredited institution and at least two years of qualified work experience in an early childhood or elementary field are eligible to apply. Program participants must meet specific benchmarks over a three-year period, at which point a standard teaching certificate is issued.

Additional alternative pathways for individuals seeking licensure include:

Career Development Program for Paraprofessionals: For teaching assistants to acquire certification in early childhood, elementary, and special education only.

Troops To Teachers: For members and veterans of the US military. As of 2023, the program is on pause, but individuals can still apply to lower the amount of college credit required.

Four-Year Olds and Younger Certificate: For Child Development Associates in Head Start programs to teach young students in public schools.

Oklahoma Title I Paraprofessional Teaching Credential: For teaching assistants at Title I schools.

POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

- ❓ How does Oklahoma work to hold teacher preparation and certification programs and pathways accountable?
- ❓ Are there policies in place to foster and invest in innovative methods aimed at broadening diversity within the teacher workforce?
- ❓ How can Oklahoma develop and define additional pathways for educators entering the workforce?
- ❓ How do Oklahoma's teacher preparation programs align with other efforts to recruit and retain high-quality educators?

HIGHER EDUCATION AFFORDABILITY**Postsecondary Affordability in Oklahoma**

Postsecondary affordability speaks to a student's (and their family's) ability to pay for all the necessary educational costs and corresponding resources, such as textbooks, while also having enough money to cover essential needs, such as food and housing. Affordability is different for each student given their means, as well as available state and federal aid. In 2018, Oklahoma families had to pay an average of 35 percent of their income to afford to send one full-time student to a four-year institution.

FAFSA Overview

The Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) is a form used to determine how much and what kind of financial aid students and their families are eligible to receive from the federal government. Students must complete the FAFSA in order to determine eligibility for funding such as Pell Grants (which do not have to be repaid), Federal Student Loans, and the Federal Work Study Program. States also use the FAFSA to determine eligibility for state financial aid.

The FAFSA Simplification Act, which passed in December 2020 as part of the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021, makes several changes to the application, effective Academic Year 2024-2025, in order to better serve students:

- Streamlines the FAFSA form and creates a new interface that directly retrieves tax information from the IRS.
- Replaces the Expected Family Contribution (EFC) with the Student Aid Index (SAI) to help colleges better understand students' needs, while also enabling financial aid offices to better articulate aid packages to families.

- Expands access to federal aid by linking eligibility to the family size and the federal poverty level.
- Returns eligibility for Pell Grants to students who are incarcerated.
- Eligibility restored for students who were misled by schools or whose schools closed while enrolled.

While the FAFSA serves as a gateway to financial aid, it is estimated that the high school class of 2022 left over \$3.5 billion of unclaimed financial aid on the table. By providing support services to students, states can ensure more students have access to the funds necessary to pursue postsecondary education.

Student Debt

In comparison to the national average, Oklahomans are more likely to have educational debt, with roughly half of Oklahoma graduates making payments on student loans. The average student debt of an Oklahoma graduate is \$27,876.

It follows that many students, especially students from low-income families, struggle to afford a postsecondary education. As of 2019, students receiving Pell grants could afford fewer than 25 percent of public four-year institutions nationally. Students that do choose to take out loans to cover the growing gap between total cost of attendance and financial aid often find themselves saddled with student loan debt for years to come. Not surprisingly,

affordability – or lack thereof – is a major barrier for many students.

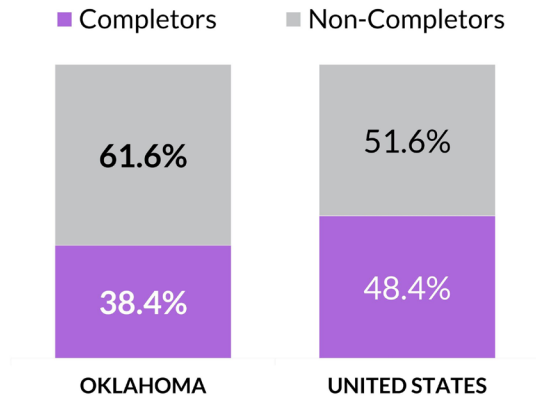
Basic Needs Insecurity

One distinction to keep in mind when discussing the cost of higher education is the difference between an institution’s so-called “sticker price” and the actual out-of-pocket costs that students and families pay. The sticker price refers to the tuition that an institution charges for each student. However, there are a number of other factors that determine what a student actually pays to access higher education, including student aid (grants and loans), mandatory fees, and living expenses related to housing, food, and transportation costs.

As noted above, the complete cost of college includes more than tuition and books; students must also pay for food and housing, transportation, and childcare. Unfortunately, an increasing number of postsecondary students have struggled to meet their basic needs since the onset of the pandemic. Oklahoma does not currently track statewide basic needs insecurity at the postsecondary level, making it difficult to determine the true range of student need.

Compared with the national average, students at Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs), Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs) are much more likely to experience food insecurity. Nationally, three in five

■ Percentage of Oklahoma High School Seniors Who Completed FAFSA*



12th grade enrollment: **45,576**

State Rank: **47**

Oklahoma left **\$44 Million** in Pell Grant Dollars on the table in 2021.

[Data Source 1](#) [Data Source 2](#)

* As of April 2023.

OKLAHOMA AVERAGE COST OF ATTENDANCE BY INSTITUTION TYPE			
	2-YEAR PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS	4-YEAR PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS	4-YEAR PRIVATE NONPROFIT INSTITUTIONS
In-State Tuition and Fees	\$4,194	\$8,064	\$29,905
Room and Board	Not required or not available.	\$9,219	\$9,918

Data Source

students experience basic needs insecurity, and it is fair to assume postsecondary students in Oklahoma experience it at similar rates.

Efforts to Improve Postsecondary Affordability in Oklahoma

Three aid programs aim to make postsecondary education more affordable in Oklahoma:

- [Oklahoma Tuition Aid Grant \(OTAG\)](#) | This is a need-based financial aid program for Oklahoma students who attend “eligible colleges, universities and career technology centers.”
- [Oklahoma College Assistance Program](#) | This initiative provides resources for Oklahoma students regarding college planning, financial literacy, and student loan repayment.
- [Oklahoma’s Promise](#) | This scholarship program for qualifying 8th, 9th, 10th, and 11th graders in Oklahoma provides tuition at an a 2-year or 4-year institutions, or a portion of tuition at a private Oklahoma university or for approved programs at “public technology centers.”

POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

- ❓ Which metrics best speak to measuring and understanding postsecondary affordability?
- ❓ How can the state and postsecondary institutions better reduce students’ basic needs insecurities?
- ❓ In what ways can Oklahoma increase its FAFSA completion rate?

ALIGNING ATTAINMENT EFFORTS TO WORKFORCE NEEDS

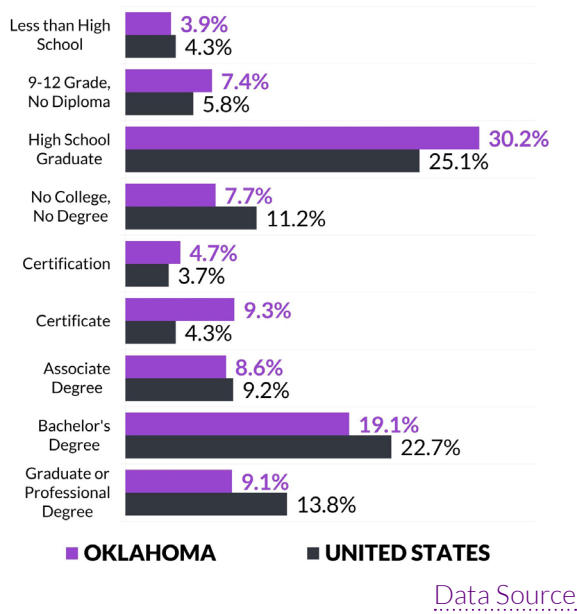
As employers struggle to fill [open positions](#), career readiness education plays a critical role in addressing the disparity between jobs available and the skillsets of job seekers—also known as the [skills gap](#)—and helps prepare job seekers for open positions. Middle-skill jobs—jobs that require more than a high school diploma but less than a four-year degree—make up [roughly 52 percent](#) of the labor market. However, only [43 percent](#) of the workforce have access to the skills training needed to fill those jobs, creating a [worker shortage](#). In 2019, about [70 percent](#) of jobs in Oklahoma required a postsecondary degree of some kind, but only about [50 percent](#) of the working age population in Oklahoma have a postsecondary degree or credential. Thus, Oklahoma’s goal is to increase the percentage of working-age adults with a postsecondary degree to [70 percent](#) by 2025.

As the demographics of higher education and workforce needs continue to change, there is growing recognition of the value different types of credentials provide for students. Postsecondary pathways are the varying opportunities students may pursue to become college and career ready. The full scope of postsecondary pathways includes:

- [Workforce Training Programs](#): Programs that offer students new and/or improved skills often aligned to a specific industry.
- [Industry Credentials](#): Vocational certifications, licenses, or badges that are recognized by local, state, or national business and industry partners.

- **Certificates:** Awards that usually require less than one or two years to complete and prepare individuals for middle-skill jobs (such as nurses and welders).
- **Postsecondary degrees** include associate, bachelor's, and graduate degrees that provide students with the opportunity to gain knowledge and skills that can be used toward employment or further study.

Oklahoma Postsecondary Attainment By Credential Type



[Early colleges](#) also seek to eliminate some of these barriers. Early college programs provide high school students the opportunity to graduate high school with an associate degree or transferable credits to another four-year university. In a study conducted by the American Institutes for Research, [early college students were more likely than their traditional high school counterparts](#) to enroll in any type of college after graduation. Early college students were also more likely to attain a bachelor's degree within four years and six years after high school graduation.

High-quality career coaching and career readiness education allows all K-12 students to meaningfully navigate postsecondary plans through exploration,

engagement, and experience activities inside and outside the classroom. Career coaching and career readiness education should empower students to directly enter skilled positions in the workforce, pursue a postsecondary pathway, or enlist in the military after graduation. At the postsecondary level, career-related experiences and coaching create [a bridge](#) between the classroom and the workforce, while also providing opportunities for adult learners to re-skill, up-skill, or attain a postsecondary degree or credential.

Oklahoma Examples:

- **Upskill OK:** Facilitated by the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education, Upskill OK connects employers, students, and educational institutions with credential programs to promote the skilling and upskilling of the Oklahoma work force, especially in high-need fields. Employers can submit interest forms to partner with Oklahoma institutions of higher education and students & employees can utilize the platform to be connected to these opportunities.

Examples from Other States:

- **Indiana:** The Indiana Commission for Higher Education (IN-CHE) offers the [Next Level Jobs Workforce Ready grant](#) for Indiana residents who have completed their high school diploma but have not attained a postsecondary degree or credential. The grant covers the tuition and fees for students participating in eligible high-value certificate programs at select institutions of higher education. The grant is available for students for two years and covers the certificate program's course credit requirements.
- **Missouri:** The [Apprenticeship Missouri](#) program, coordinated by the Missouri Department of Higher Education and Workforce Development, seeks to collaborate with employers, providers, and partners to "skill up" the Missouri workforce by expanding opportunities for work-based learning and apprenticeships. Through this program, Missouri

is now [ranked third nationally](#) in registering new apprentices and ranked fourth in the nation for completed apprenticeships.

- **Tennessee:** In Tennessee, two institutions of higher education have developed partnerships with business and industry to meet workforce needs while providing students with opportunities to pay for their education. In 2017, TCAT Murfreesboro and Nissan partnered to create the Smyrna Campus, a technical training center representing a [public-private partnership between Nissan and the College System of Tennessee](#) to create educational opportunities that are closely aligned to current workforce needs in the region.

POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

- ② In what ways can policymakers connect workforce development opportunities to affordable postsecondary pathways? What is the role of business and industry in this connection and what incentives are currently offered to leverage their role?
- ② How can Oklahoma strengthen its workforce development opportunities to ensure credit mobility for participating students?
- ② How can Oklahoma continue to strengthen its workforce development pipeline and retention of individuals who complete a postsecondary pathway?





Established in 2001, [The Hunt Institute](#) honors the legacy of James B. Hunt, Jr., the former governor of North Carolina who distinguished himself as an ardent champion of education.

The Hunt Institute brings together people and resources to inspire and inform elected officials and policymakers about key issues in education, resulting in visionary leaders who are prepared to take strategic action for greater educational outcomes and student success.

In 2016, The Hunt Institute became an independent, nonprofit entity and joined forces with Duke University's Sanford School of Public Policy to pursue research, educational partnerships, and events related to improving education policy.

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4000 Centregreen Way | Suite 301 |
Cary, NC 27513 | 984-377-5200