

*Washington Early Learning State and Local Coordination Project***Best Practices in State and Local Coordination Research:
North Carolina, Arizona and Oklahoma**

This summary of research about best practices and lessons learned from North Carolina, Arizona and Oklahoma is intended to inform Washington's efforts to enhance state and local coordination of prenatal to 3rd grade early learning systems. It was undertaken to inform recommendations for a structure that can help Washington realize its *Early Learning Plan* vision by enhancing coordination among state and local agencies, organizations, professions and individuals working to promote the learning and development of young children. The State and Local Coordination Project will recommend a plan to build this infrastructure, including clear and coordinated roles, responsibilities and communication in early 2013.

The objectives for this research are to:

1. Gather information and lessons learned about state and local early learning governance structures and coordination mechanisms from one to three other states
2. Gather information about what elements of coordination have resulted in improvements in child outcomes, in program effectiveness and efficiency and in maintaining and expanding state and local funds for early learning.

The states represent three very different approaches from which we can learn. Each of the three state's Early Learning Advisory Councils span early care and education, family support, and health systems. Each is mandated to focus on prenatal or birth to five years or kindergarten entry Two, North Carolina and Arizona, have state-level agencies that allocate significant funding to local communities to meet aims that span early care and education, family support and health. Both of these state-level organizations, one a non-profit and the other a public agency, have boards that are appointed and controlled by the Governor and Legislature.

North Carolina's coordinating body is housed in the Governor's Office and includes state agencies and the North Carolina Partnership for Children (Smart Start) with its connection to local non-profits partnerships and constituents. In Arizona, First Things First (a public agency but not a state agency), which has state agency leaders in ex officio board positions, serves as the coordinating body. First Things First has a system of regional councils rather than non-profits. Oklahoma's coordinating body is a school readiness board, external to the agencies, and staffed by Smart Start Oklahoma. For comparison purposes, the state population data for Washington and the best practices states is provided in the table below.

State Population Data	Washington	Arizona	North Carolina	Oklahoma
2010 Population (2010 census)	6,724,540	6,392,017	9,535,483	3,751,351
Children under six (2009)**	521,853	608,679	766,578	314,719
Percent young children of color	40%	61%	45%	42%
Percent with family incomes < 200% FPL	40%	54%	51%	53%
Percent families incomes < 100% FPL	18%	27%	26%	25%
** National Center for Children in Poverty, State Early Childhood Profiles (Based on 2010 Community Survey, data from 2009) Note: 2012 FPL (federal poverty level) for a family of four at 200% is \$46,100/yr.; at 100% is \$23,050/yr.				

An introductory table on the following page summarizes key early learning coordination characteristics for the three best practices states. (Refer to the graphic Overview of State-Local Early Learning Agencies and Coordination in Washington State for information about Washington's coordination structures). Following the table, are sections on each state. The state sections include descriptions of governance and coordination structures and processes, followed by lessons learned, as suggested by those interviewed and based on that state's experiences. The research draws upon key person interviews with one leader in each state, along with print and online resources, including each state's Race to the Top application. (See Appendix A: List of Sources.). The specific "lessons learned" are drawn from the key person interviews.

Characteristics of Early Learning Coordination in the Best Practices Research States			
	Arizona	North Carolina	Oklahoma
Coordinating Body	<i>First Things First</i> (FTF) Board of Directors. FTF is a public agency. Membership: FTF Board of Directors is appointed by Governor and confirmed by the Legislature. Directors of three state agencies providing early learning services serve as ex officio Board members.	<i>The Early Learning Advisory Council</i> ECAC is a council, housed in the Governor's office. Membership: agency directors from the North Carolina Partnership For Children, (Smart Start), Division of Health, Office of Early Learning, and the Division of Child Development and Early Education.	<i>Oklahoma School Readiness Board</i> (OSPR) is a State Board. Members appointed by the Governor. Key state agencies sit on OPSR. Smart Start Oklahoma (foundation arm of OPSR) provides staffing (University of Central Oklahoma serves as the Smart Start Oklahoma fiscal agent).
Coordinating Body Roles	Create strong, accountable state and local early learning infrastructure ♦Conduct biennial assessment of unmet need Review and approve needs assessments♦Administer state funds, solicit additional funds and enter into contracts♦Submit annual report	Early childhood system planning♦accountability & sustainability♦fiscal responsibility ♦programmatically oversight for RTT grant♦implementation planning, dispute resolution♦Collaboration and new funding♦progress review ♦Continuous quality improvement ♦Advise and make recommendations to the Governor	Lead state and local early learning coordination♦Conduct needs assessment♦Implement public awareness campaign♦Promote best practices♦Establish standards of accountability♦Maximize private investment♦Issue annual report♦Make recommendations to the Governor
Lead for state-local coordination	<i>First Things First</i> (public agency) Annual Budget: \$160M (97% goes to local partnerships)	<i>North Carolina Partnership for Children</i> (a 501 (c) (3) not-for-profit organization) Annual Budget: \$130M (95% goes to regional grants)	<i>Smart Start Oklahoma</i> (not incorporated) Annual Budget: \$1.6 Million. 2012, maximum local grant is \$125,000
Local Structures and Roles	31 Regional councils of volunteer members (appointed by FTF) staffed by FTF, cover the state. Regional Councils: Complete needs assessment & recommend funding plans based on FTF strategy toolkit. FTF Board approves, & makes grants.	A Network of 77 private non-profit local Smart Start partnerships covers the state. Local Smart Start Partnerships: Independently develop and implement strategies and investments to meet state performance goals. (Data entered into NCPC state data system.)	18 local Smart Start Communities (coalitions) cover 52 of 77 counties. Local Smart Start Communities: Conduct needs assessment, select activities, complete grant application, conduct activities and submit an annual report.

North Carolina

History and Context

North Carolina has been a pioneer in developing and coordinating early learning programs that improve child outcomes. The best known early learning initiatives are: TEACH –a professional development pathway; the state's Tiered Child Care Quality Rating and Improvement System; Assuring Better Child Health and Development (ABCD) - a campaign to increase developmental screening and referrals; More By Four Preschool Program; and a Ready Schools Initiative. Early Learning became a priority for the state when Governor Jim Hunt established Smart Start in 1993. Smart Start is perhaps the most well known element of North Carolina's early learning system, which has been sustained through the terms of three governors.

Focus

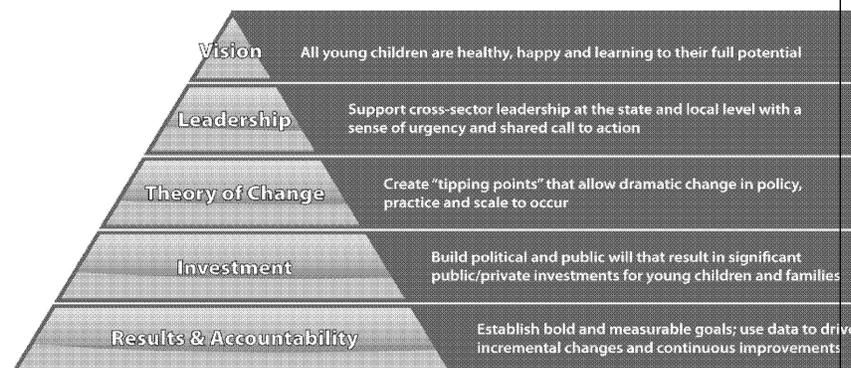
North Carolina's early learning system spans early learning, family support and health, with PreK-3rd education and alignment a more recent additional focus (starting in 2006). The state works to advance a high-quality, comprehensive, and accountable system of early learning starting with a healthy birth by:

- Creating a strong and accountable state and local infrastructure with measurable statewide goals and population-based performance outcomes that is generating results for children and local partnerships. It also helps to raise millions of dollars in local and private funds (\$17.2 in the 2009-10 fiscal year) that amplify state investments.
- Providing tools that support parents in raising healthy, happy successful children.
- Advancing child health and raising the quality of early care and education and PreK 3rd education.

Coordination and Governance

Shared decision-making, shared resources, and shared accountability for outcomes among participating organizations at the state- and local-level characterize North Carolina's governance structure. North Carolina's system building is based on a consistent framework for action and population-based performance goals. The components of North Carolina's Early Learning and Development (ELD) system include state agencies, the North Carolina Partnership for Children and its network of local partnerships. The system is coordinated through the State's Early Learning Advisory Council, which is housed in the Governor's Office.

Figure 2: North Carolina Collaborative Governance & Leadership: Framework for Action



System-Building Framework. The state consistently approaches system-building and new initiatives based on their *Collaborative Governance & Leadership Framework for Action* (graphic from the state's RTT application).

Measurable Goals, Data-Driven Decision-Making. NCPC established its Performance Based Incentive System (PBIS) with measurable, statewide goals for increasing health, well-being and development of children birth to five in 2001. Annual statewide and county data snapshots identify areas where children are doing well and those that need attention. Local partnerships then take responsibility for making decisions about how to best address areas of need. For example, a performance goal holds local partnerships accountable for ensuring that at least 75 percent of all children with special needs in every county -- who receive subsidies or other assistance-- are in high-quality 4-5 star rated programs. As a result, 94 percent of these children are now in high-quality care settings.

State-Level Implementing Agencies. The state manages its Early Learning and Development System, primarily through its Department of Health and Human Services [DHHS] (which houses the Division of Child Development and Early Education and Division of Public Health), and the Department of Public Instruction (which houses the Department of Early Learning).

The North Carolina Partnership for Children [NCPC] (also known as Smart Start), a statewide non-profit is closely connected to state government entities that govern various parts of the state's Early Learning and Development (ELD) system. NCPC leads and coordinates the 77 local non-profit Smart Start partnerships. NCPC receives substantial state funding (\$160 million in the last fiscal year), 97% of which is directed to local partnerships (amounts range from \$400,000 to \$18 million each) to improve outcomes and foster coherence across the statewide network. NCPC is required to raise an additional 10% in cash or in-kind resources, which is regularly and substantially exceeded.

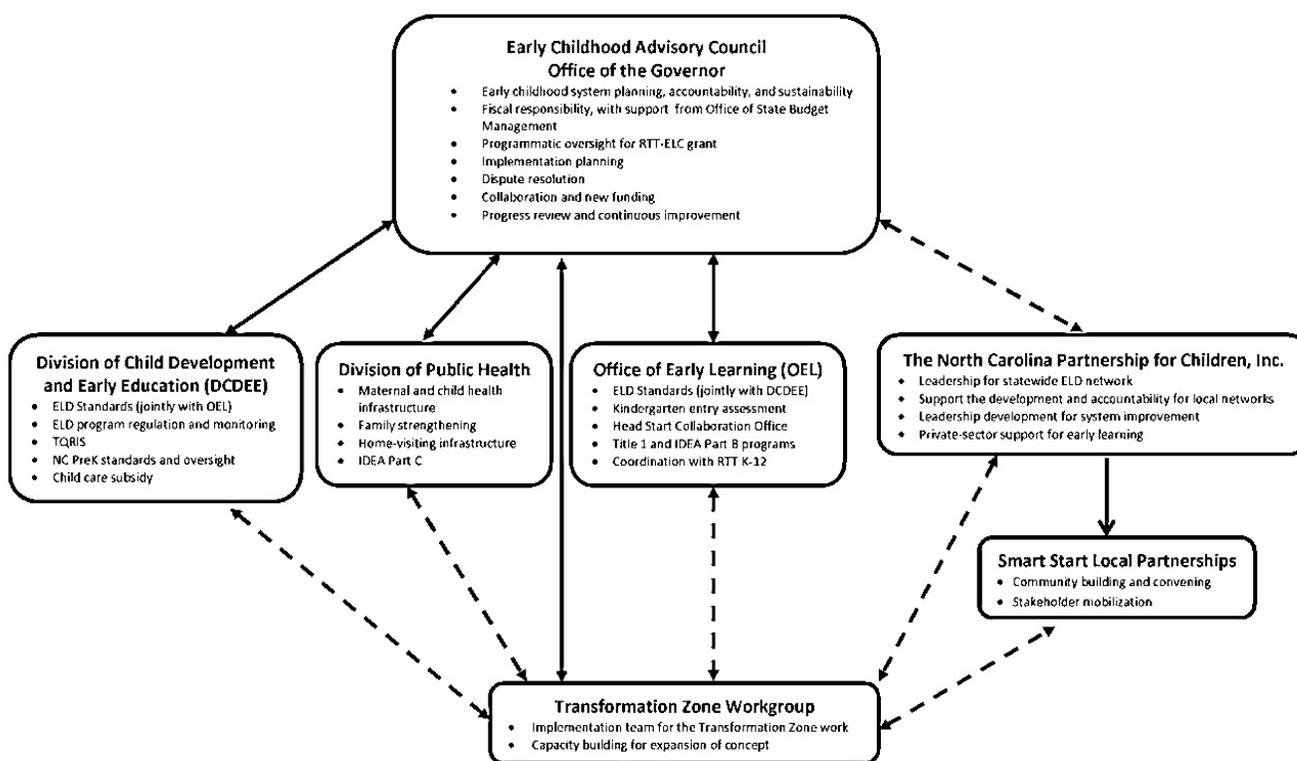
NCPC plays several important roles: providing statewide leadership, coordination and support to the development of local infrastructure and systems; setting standards and ensuring accountability for community level outcomes; and building private sector support for early learning. NCPC's authority comes from the North Carolina General Assembly (143B-168.12(a) (7)), which has charged NCPC with ensuring that all children birth-to-five have access to high-quality early education and development services. As a condition of receiving state funds, the Partnership is required to meet conditions mandated by the statute, which encompass much of what is found in organizational by-laws. All but six of the 26 board positions are named in the legislation or appointed by public officials, (e.g., the Governor or the Minority Leader of the House of Representatives giving state officials majority control of the organization).

Community-Level Structures. A network of 77 local non-profit Smart Start partnerships covers all 100 counties. Each of these partnerships is a non-profit organization with a board of directors that mirrors NCPC and represents key government and private sector leaders, service providers, parents and others in the community. The local partnerships are community conveners that bring together and mobilize community stakeholders from early care and education, health and family support to create comprehensive supports for young children and their families and to achieve community-level outcomes. Each is

held accountable for population-based performance goals (e.g., “60% of all children in every county receiving child care subsidies will be in 4-5 star settings” or “75% of subsidized children with special needs must be in 4-5 start settings”).

Coordinating Structures and Mechanisms. The state’s early learning and development work is coordinated through the Early Childhood Advisory Council (ECAC), created by Governor Beverly Purdue in July 2010 to advise and make recommendations to the Governor and all state agencies about early childhood. Selection of ECAC as the lead agency for North Carolina’s Race to the Top- Early Learning Grant underscores the importance of its role. North Carolina’s Early Learning Advisory Council (ECAC) is housed in the Governor’s Office. Members, appointed by the Governor include: agency and division heads from Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and the Department of Public Instruction (DPI); North Carolina Partnership for Children (NCPC); local Smart Start partnerships; the University System; the Community College system; Head Start Collaboration; philanthropy; business; and the medical community. The structure and roles are shown on the following page (graphic is from Race to the Top (RTT) Early Learning Challenge application).

North Carolina Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge Governance Organizational Chart



Early Childhood Advisory Council Goals and Roles. The initial 2010 *ECAC Strategic Report* (slowed down, but not changed by work on the Race to the Top application) sets out five major goals for the Advisory Council:

1. Develop an integrated, comprehensive 3-year strategic plan;
2. Strengthen the quality of programs and expand opportunities for participation;
3. Strengthen the awareness and commitment among families, business and policy makers to ensure that young children are healthy, learning and thriving;
4. Strengthen coordination and collaboration;
5. Support the implementation of an integrated data system.

As identified in the *Strategic Report*, ECAC responsibilities (13 in all) include: creating a shared vision; strengthening collaboration and coordination among sectors; identifying resources; making policy and budget recommendations to the Governor; coordinating and overseeing relevant federal grants; assessing needs; and preparing a statewide strategic report addressing the activities of the Advisory Council. The ECAC will focus first on development of a 3-year strategic plan (Goal 1) and formalization of the ECAC structure and operation. More information about this should be available in the fall of 2012.

North Carolina Partnership For Children's Local Partnership Council. As stated in the NCPC authorizing legislation, a Local Partnership Advisory Council (LPAC) serves in an advisory capacity to The North Carolina Partnership for Children, Inc. (NCPC). To ensure communication between local Smart Start partnerships and NCPC, LPAC nominates local partnership representatives to serve on NCPC board committees. These local partnership representatives may be executive directors, current local board chairs or past local board chairs who have served in that capacity for at least one year. They are responsible for: representing local partnerships; ensuring that information from NCPC board committees is communicated to local partnerships, and, ensuring that other issues important to local partnerships, not only those related to NCPC board issues, get communicated to NCPC.

Today, there is cycle of state-local partnership communication and input on shared issues. It begins with issues to be considered by the NCPC board being given to Local Partnership Advisory Council members who solicit and provide feedback to the state Partnership. Local feedback is included in information provided to the State Partner's Board of Directors and committees. Summaries of board action are given to all of the Local Partnership executive directors as well as the LPAC. This feedback is brought into the North Carolina Advisory Council as well.

State and Local Communication. State and local communication occurs largely through NCPC and the local Smart Start partnerships through meetings, e-mail list serves, webinars and personal interactions. The NCPC executive spends the majority of her time working with local partnerships.

Data. North Carolina utilizes a Performance-Based Incentive System (PBIS) initiated in 2001 to measure the progress of the statewide organization and its 77 local partnerships. Goals are population-based (e.g., 75% of child with special needs receiving child care subsidies are in 4-5 star rated child care settings). Measures include: early care and education (e.g., placements, quality, teacher compensation, and staff stability); family support; and health.

The state North Carolina Partnership for Children and each local partnership prepare annual reports used as the basis for celebration, quality improvement, technical assistance and revised goal setting. (See 2010 state report at <http://www.azff.gov/WhoWeAre/Board/Documents/Program%20Committee/Family%20Support/Family%20Support%20Feb%202017%202012%20Meeting/09%20North%20Carolina%20Partnership%20for%20Children%20Inc%20PBIS%20Final%20ResuIts.pdf>). See a sample local partnership report at http://www.ccpfc.org/news/data-research/pbis/cumberland_fy09-10.pdf).

Local partnerships and their grantees ensure that data is entered into the state database with young children participating in Department of Public Instruction Programs (including Head Start) assigned a student identifier for easier cross-reference. Data system improvements, (part of the State's Race to the Top grant) will augment information about programs, teachers, and children as well as integrate data across agencies and with the state longitudinal data system.

Prenatal to PreK and K-3 Integration. Joint coordination of prenatal, family support and early care and education services occurs at the state Early Learning Advisory Council and local partnerships. Since North Carolina schools are county-managed, the connection between the Early Learning and Development System and schools is dependent on the leadership and cooperation between the two systems.

The state's Ready Schools Initiative, established in 2006 with a grant from the Kellogg Foundation, used resources to leverage interest in strengthening PreK-3rd education and alignment. The North Carolina Board of Education adopted a definition of Ready Schools and identified eight pathways that lead to ready elementary schools (see: <http://www.smartstart.org/readyschools/nc-ready-schools-history-accomplishments>). The project was rolled out in 2008 with a toolkit and pilot projects. To date, the project has positively impacted the development of an estimated 18,535 children (preK-3rd) in 53 elementary schools and 20 school districts receiving technical assistance and implementation grants.

Results and Lessons Learned

Results

North Carolina's twenty years of early learning work have been the subject of more than thirty evaluations. As a state, North Carolina has been successful in improving both program quality and outcomes for children through initiatives such as TEACH,

Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System, the More By Four Preschool Program and Ready Schools Initiative. Improvements in system, child and family outcomes include:

- A strong and accountable state and local infrastructure with measurable population-based performance outcomes that is generating results for children and local partnerships, and raising millions of dollars in local and private funds (\$17.2 in the 2009-10 fiscal year) that amplify state investments.
- Providing tools that support parents in raising healthy, happy successful children. 16,178 parents and guardians have participated in early literacy programs and 80% of adults increased the time they spend on literacy activities with children.
- Advancing child health. More children receive developmental screenings- 98% of children in participating counties received recommended screenings after the launch of the Assuring Better Health and Development Campaign (ABCD) compared to 81% before the campaign.
- Raising the quality of early care and education. 68% of all children (124,096) in early care and education attended 4- and 5- star programs, up from 10% in 2000.
- Increasing Grade Level Reading. Third-grade math and reading scale scores and achievement levels were better for poor children who attended More at Four than their peers who did not attend More at Four. These results are of key importance, given that 90% of the children who attended More at Four were poor at that time. In addition, more children are reading at grade level in 3rd grade in counties that received higher amounts of Smart Start funding when children were younger.
- Ready Schools. The PreK- 3rd grade Initiative, launched in 2006, has developed toolkits and implemented initial projects which have positively impacted the development of 20,137 children (K-3) in 12 school districts. (See toolkits, accomplishments and lessons learned at: <http://www.smartstart.org/category/readyschools/ready-schools-home>)

Lessons

The following lessons are drawn largely from the key person interview. Those interviewed were asked to reflect on what they have learned about creating a statewide early learning system, or what they might have done differently.

1. Keep the engine safe. Use the time when there is a supportive gubernatorial administration to enact policies that make it as hard as possible to dismantle the driving force. NCPC and Smart Start were established by a supportive Governor, as a governor-centric model, where the Governor appoints the majority of the NCPC board positions. This makes it easier for an unsupportive Governor to dismantle it. In retrospect, as North Carolina moves toward another gubernatorial election, it might have been wiser to change policies so that more board members were appointed by the board rather than by the Governor.
2. Establish a continuous, organized and phased process of quality improvement with strong stakeholder engagement at the center. Start by: setting ambitious and achievable goals; providing supports and incentives to help programs meet the goals; working to achieve a tipping point; establishing higher standards and policy; achieving penetration (scale) of increased policies and standards; and subsequently setting higher goals. This approach focuses attention on the goals, and promotes the sense of accomplishment and efficacy necessary to advocate for and reach the next level. It also provides an objective basis for providing technical assistance and taking next steps if goals are not met.
3. Local partnerships are fundamental to building systems and building public will. Local partnerships have been vital to Smart Start's results and ability to weather changes in administration. Community governance structures engage and educate diverse and powerful constituencies, generate support for needed policy and resources and tell the story to local communities. They are close to the ground, know what needs to be done in their community and have the relationships necessary to cultivate improvements in practice.
4. State-local communication and feedback loops are vitally important. Communication and feedback loops help to: keep the people across the network informed and engaged; surface challenges and opportunities that boost results; and create a sense of identify in the larger effort. This is key to long-term sustainability and to building a connected state-local early learning system that gets results for kids.
5. Ensure that local partnerships see that they are part of a bigger statewide effort. North Carolina's local partnerships are independent non-profit organizations. However, the Smart Start network delivers the most powerful results for children when local partnerships view themselves both as "locally-owned" and as part of a larger statewide strategic effort. Since this can be difficult, consider creating incentives and communication loops that support this "both/and" perspective right from the beginning. An example would be to have state system partners participate in the hiring and evaluation of local coordinators and executive directors.

6. Success of the statewide effort is dependent on capable local leaders. Not surprisingly, with 77 partnerships, Smart Start has found that when local partnership executive directors are not sufficiently skilled, relationships with community and results suffer. Having the local partnerships guided by local boards of directors is important, but it would be worth exploring having a state system partner involved in the hiring and evaluation of local coordinators.

Arizona

Arizona's current early childhood system is much younger than North Carolina's, having only five years on the ground compared to North Carolina's twenty years of experience. In that time it has built partnerships, structures, a culture and systems to make initial investments. It has also undergone the uncertainty and challenge that comes from a statewide election challenging its dedicated revenue stream. That measure was defeated.

First Things First, established by a vote of the people with a dedicated tobacco products revenue source, is the state's best-known initiative and leads the state's early learning system. First Things First was established during the tenure of Governor Napolitano who preceded current Governor Jan Brewer.

History and Context

The early foundations for Arizona's early childhood initiative began in 2001 when a community committee came together to develop a plan for a coordinated public-private support system. The following year the Governor created the State Board on School Readiness (by executive order) which created a five-year action plan for a well-funded collaborative system.

Arizona's current statewide early childhood structure began with the 2006 passage of Proposition 203, (a tobacco products citizen's initiative) which created the Early Childhood Development and Health Board, now known as First Things First. Statutory declarations indicate that First Things First was established to provide "necessary coordination and funding for early childhood development and health in Arizona".

First Things First is a public agency with an executive director who is appointed by a board of directors. Board members are appointed by the Governor and confirmed by the Legislature (see *Arizona Revised Statutes - Title 8 Children - Sections 81151- to- 81181 Early childhood development and health fund*). The passage of this proposition marked the beginning of a voter-protected dedicated revenue stream for early childhood and a statewide governance structure with diverse representation and 31 Regional Partnership Councils. Like North Carolina, the authorizing statute specifies purpose, board membership, structure (including regional councils) and much of the guidance found in organizational by-laws. In 2010 Arizona voters re-affirmed their commitment (69% in support) to high-quality early childhood development and health when those funds were at risk.

Description

First Things First leads Arizona's early learning system building and is the part of their system from which we can learn the most about state and local coordination, so it is the primary focus of this research.

First Things First is a statewide, public agency with statutory requirement to "provide dedicated funding to improve the quality, accessibility and affordability of early childhood development opportunities in the setting of the parents' choice" (*Arizona Revised Statutes, Title 8, Section 81151, Chapter 13*). Today, \$130 million per year is generated by the tobacco products tax. By statute 90% of funds are dedicated to local communities. A significant portion of the funds is allocated based on a formula of population and poverty. The remaining amount is allocated at the Board's discretion. First Things First establishes Memoranda of Agreement with state agencies for specific areas of work. For example, First Things First is providing funds to the Department of Health Services for child care subsidies.

First Things First is a statewide organization with a network of 31 Regional Partnership Councils with volunteer members. First Things First values cultural competency and enjoys strong relationships with Arizona's Tribal nations. Each Tribal nation was offered the choice of joining a regional council or forming its own. Ten Nations now have their own council. Others are part of geographically-based regional councils. The regional councils (also specified in statute) are responsible for regional planning, assessment of regional needs and assets, developing and allocating funds that support regional strategies to address identified needs and overseeing regional plan implementation. Regional partnership boundaries were established to maximize

coordination with other governmental units. Each is charged with leading local system-building efforts, conducting needs assessments, prioritizing needs and recommending funding plans. Then First Things First confirms the funding plan, issues competitive RFP's, funds and monitors contracts. They also provide intensive staffing and policy support for the Regional Partnership Councils.

First Things First characterizes its state and local organizational governance as bringing together the best of both top-down and grassroots styles with a broad unifying vision and a street-level sense of practicality. In developing their shared state and local governance structure, Arizona looked closely at North Carolina and made the decision to establish a single organization with regional councils, rather than a network of independent local non-profits like North Carolina. Both options have inherent strengths and challenges. There are some tensions between First Things First and some regional councils concerning independence and decision-making. On the other hand, there is strength in the consistent vision and strategic plan and economies of scale realized by a central policy approach and centralized data communications and financial systems.

As a relatively new governance structure and agency, First Things First recently created a number of processes and documents that describe its agreements about structure, roles, policy and the best practices in which it invests. Two documents that may be particularly helpful to our consideration of coordinating structures, values and roles are the:

- Responsible Governance Statement, which states the organization's values, the components of the governance system, along with the roles and responsibilities of the board and executive. (See: <http://www.azff.gov/WhoWeAre/Board/Documents/Policy%20and%20Procedures/2-101%20Responsible%20Governance%20Statement.pdf>)
- Principles of Engagement for FTF Board, Staff, Council Members and volunteers, a signed statement of commitment to a standard of excellence, in our own behavior founded in trust, respect, integrity, teamwork, camaraderie, loyalty, interdependence and mutuality (See: <http://www.azff.gov/WhoWeAre/Board/Documents/Policy%20and%20Procedures/2-103%20Principles%20of%20Engagement%20Statement.pdf>)

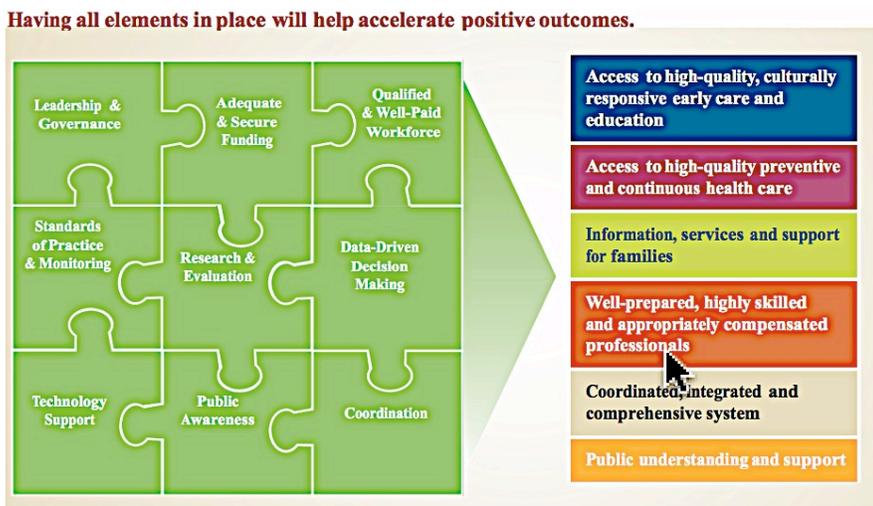
Focus

Arizona's early learning system focuses on children from birth to five years and their families. Their work spans family support, health, early care and education and health. Through its staff and Board, its 31 regional councils, its partnerships and grantees First Things First works to:

- Create a strong and accountable state and local infrastructure with a culture of strong internal and external cooperation and culturally-responsive investments guided by local communities;
- Support parents in raising healthy children who are prepared for success in school and in life;
- Advance child health (implementation to date is limited);
- Raise the quality of and access to high quality early learning programs.

System Building Framework and Goals

Arizona utilizes the strategy framework noted in the figure to the right, recognizing that all the pieces must be in place to achieve their goals (right hand column.) The *First Things First Strategic Plan Road Map* includes nine elements: leadership and governance; adequate funding; a qualified and well-paid workforce; standards of practice and monitoring; research and evaluation; data-driven decision-making; technology and support; public awareness; and coordination.



Coordination and Governance

State implementing agencies include First Things First and three state agencies. The First Things First Board of Directors is designated as Arizona's Early Childhood Council (and as the lead agency for its Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge).

State Implementing Agencies. Coordination among implementing agencies is advanced by the statutory requirement that directors of the three state agencies that manage other key early learning functions agencies have ex officio seats on the First Things First Board of Directors. The state-level implementing agencies are:

- First Things First;
- The Arizona Department of Education, which has oversight of state- and federally-funded school-based programs within districts and charters. It manages the Head Start State Collaboration Office to establish linkages among Head Start, child care, social welfare, health and state funded preschool programs, and K-12 Education;
- The Department of Health Services which regulates child care and private preschools; and
- The Department of Economic Services, which manages child care subsidies and TANF.

Planning processes. Stakeholder involvement in planning is central to First Things First values and practice. Stakeholders are involved in board committees and advisory sub-committees focusing on issues such as Cultural Responsivity, developmental screening and early learning and family support Indicators. Committees include regional partnership representatives, state agency representatives, advocates, philanthropists, experts in the field (including some national advisors), and board members.

Values and Decision-Making. The *First Things First Strategic Road Map* includes a statement of values about how decisions are made:

- By involving public and private partners and communities;
- By focusing on desired outcomes for all children;
- By emphasizing local planning and implementation;
- By utilizing ongoing and rigorous analyses of qualitative and quantitative data, proven best practices and system and program outcomes.

State-Local Structure. First Things First invests heavily in its staffing policy and communications infrastructure tools for the regional councils and provides intensive policy and communications staff support to the volunteer regional councils.

First Things First Strategy Toolkit. First Things First has a menu of evidence based practices that Regional Councils can select from in developing their early childhood system and funding recommendations. Each strategy contains a standard set of information including: descriptions, standards of practice; and unit cost. (See Toolkit at:

<http://www.azff.gov/pages/webmain.aspx?PageID=2D427ADB35B34BB09F353B77B74AB9BA>). This toolkit includes information regarding more than 70 strategies. Of particular interest to our Washington effort is the *Coordination Standard of Practice- Community Partnerships*

(<http://www.azff.gov/pages/WebMain.aspx?PageId=9E8669C97C0C408B9F3567C855744398&StrategyId=97>.)

Community Level Structures. The state has 31 regional councils with 350 volunteer members leading early childhood initiatives in their communities. Members are appointed by the First Things First Board and include: parents; representatives of Arizona's federally-recognized tribes; child care and preschool providers; health professionals; and members of faith, business and philanthropic communities. Councils and their members: collect information regarding the strengths and desires of their community; prioritize specific needs; plan how to address those needs; choose collaborators; and identify funding necessary to carry out their plan. Needs assessments and funding plans are posted on the website at: <http://www.azff.gov>.

Tribes have significant autonomy and are given options about whether they choose to participate as separate councils or as part of the regional councils. 19 of the state's 22 tribes participate. Ten have elected to form a separate regional partnership council. Nine participate through their regional councils.

State and Local Communication. Communicating and building public awareness are core functions, considered central to sustainability and to improving child outcomes (referenced in statute and in the *Strategic Road Map*.) First Things First mirrors

the private sector in combining communications, branding, community outreach and mobilization and Tribal Affairs in a single External Affairs section. They note that the intensive focus on these combined functions contributed mightily to building sufficient public will to stave off a 2010 challenge to the dedicated early learning revenue source.

First Things First invests in public awareness campaigns (and campaign evaluation), designed to improve parent knowledge and inform behavior, and in earned media. The agency and its work are typically cited in 3-6 print/broadcast news articles per week in papers across the state and First Things First sends weekly clippings to all council and board members. Regular communication between First Things First Regional Council staff and Council members, planning processes, newsletters and e-mail updates keep state and local staff, volunteers and Board members informed. All needs assessments, funding plans and annual reports and meeting agendas and summaries are publicized online.

Data Systems. The state has separate data systems for early learning and K-12, but First Things First monitors the impact of its birth to five services in three tiers:

1. Grantee accountability;
2. Programmatic accountability (e.g., did the Arizona Parent Kit impact parental knowledge and behavior?); and,
3. Statewide accountability (statewide studies to determine whether services result in children arriving at school healthier and ready to succeed.) Longitudinal analyses include: a large scale longitudinal study of the impact of quality early childhood experiences; geographic analyses of programs and services; and measurement of children's progress over time compared to children who were not able to access the same services.

A committee of national research advisors (see <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop-earlylearningchallenge/applications/arizona-appendix.pdf>, Page 528) recently advised First Things First to invest in implementation and reflective practice (continuous quality improvement), rather than its current longitudinal studies. The Committee report will be presented to the First Things First Board in June, at which time it will become publicly available.

Prenatal to PreK and K-3 Integration. This is an area of ongoing effort and there are no major lessons that are not noted elsewhere. This does underscore the point that connections made in one area create disconnects in others. First Things First is mandated to focus on children birth to five, which does not promote a P-3rd approach.

Results and Lessons Learned

Results

First Things First, now in its 6th year, has broad system results and early childhood outcome results. System results include: a substantial dedicated revenue stream; a citizen's movement; and a strong state and local governance structure that is attending to the well-being and progress of young children.

Child and family results (from the annual report) include:

- 7,709 families enjoy stronger, more supportive parent-child relationships because of home visiting;
- Approximately 36,000 children in 711 center- and home-based settings have access to high quality child care (QRIS);
- 11,433 fluoride varnishes were applied.

Lessons

The following lessons are drawn largely from the key person interview. Those interviewed were asked to reflect on what they have learned about creating a statewide early learning system, or what they might have done differently.

1. Governance is key to sustainability and system integration. System integration is tough work and can take years. Institutionalizing governance structures in statute with mandated purposes, participation and authorities fosters durable systems that are less dependent on individual leaders and overcomes resistance to change. Arizona made progress with its early informal structures, but it was uneven. At some point you need more horsepower to take it to the next level.
2. Having someone who stays awake at night thinking about the big picture and "place" to have the conversation boosts the ability to improve systems and outcomes. Kids need it all, not just family support or health or education. In Arizona, the First Things First Board, staff and volunteers (in 31 regional councils) focus on how each part of the system improves child outcomes rather than at the quality and results of individual services or agencies.

However, no matter what you put “under one roof”, coordination with others will still be needed. Arizona addresses this at the state level through First Things First’s broad mandate to improve school readiness (instead of individual programs) and by including the directors of the Department of Economic Security, Department of Health Services and the Superintendent of Public Instruction as non-voting *ex officio* members of the FTF Board of Directors (9 members, appointed by the governor and confirmed by the legislature). The Board is a place to have the state-level conversation. This common direction flows through to the First Things First regional councils and their system building and services. Not to say there are not tensions, because there will be tensions in any choice made. However, looking at the options, this is a good choice for Arizona.

3. It is important to create a culture and develop the relationships necessary for system leaders and partners to hash out disagreements, so that families get the best possible quality of service. Though it can be tough, disagreements about policy, turf, or resources, need to be settled so that families do not pay the price. Someone needs to be on the lookout for big issues and prepare to call the question and take the first step.
4. Co-creation and co-funding at the state level makes it easier for local communities. The more that state agencies and players can integrate policy, funding, reporting and data, the easier and more efficient it is for local communities and agencies. In one example of this, the Arizona Department of Health Services and First Things First have issued joint RFP’s for funding from both agencies. In doing so, they streamlined purposes, requirements and reporting.
5. Systematic regional planning and funding cultivates allegiance to the statewide goals, values and culture of reflective practice. To state the obvious, funding stimulates participation. It can be used to develop consistent platforms for planning, practice, accountability and system building.
6. Deep and broad stakeholder engagement is critical for making sound strategic decisions and building public will. Arizona credits their stakeholder involvement in all aspects of planning -- from policy and public awareness campaigns to statewide indicators --to regional council recommendations of funding plans -- with identifying the right things to do and building the public will to defeat the 2010 challenge to their dedicated revenue stream.
7. Nurturing and communicating values and “brand promise” pays big dividends. First Things First “promised” that they would be accountable for: improving school readiness; focusing on what works; and moving away from “business as usual”. They bring their values and brand promise into everyday practice and focus intensely on communications and community outreach. This has played a big role in their significant systems development and reach in a relatively short time and factors largely in the public support for early learning.
8. Investments in staffing, policy, tools, and data infrastructure strengthen consistency and quality of regional council recommendations, programs and information needed for accountability and program improvement. Arizona has invested heavily in statewide infrastructure. They provide staff for each Regional Council, a menu and toolkit of evidence-based programs and a central data system. The *Resources Strategy Toolkit* includes the set of evidence-based practices from which regional councils can select when making their funding recommendations. For an example *Standard of Practice for Community Partnerships* see: <http://www.azfff.gov/pages/WebMain.aspx?PageId=9E8669C97C0C408B9F3567C855744398&StrategyId=97> See. For Child Care Health Consultation see: <http://www.azfff.gov/pages/WebMain.aspx?PageId=9E8669C97C0C408B9F3567C855744398&StrategyId=84>.

Oklahoma

History and Context

The roots of Oklahoma’s current coordination structure were established in 2003 with legislation that created the Oklahoma Partnership for School Readiness and its supporting foundation, the Oklahoma Partnership for School Readiness Foundation. The partnership board then named the school readiness effort *Smart Start Oklahoma* and encouraged continued investments in Oklahoma’s youngest children and their families.

Oklahoma invests in early childhood. The state is known for providing universal voluntary preschool for all four-year-olds. It has the nation's oldest QRIS and the best child care regulatory framework according to National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (*We Can Do Better*, 2011).

Oklahoma is also becoming known for its Oklahoma Champions for Early Childhood (OK-CEO), a growing network of business professionals formed in 2010 to help create awareness of the importance of establishing quality early childhood programs. There have been three governors since its universal Pre-k program and QRIS were put into place in 1998 by Governor Francis Keating (R) who was succeeded by Governor Brad Henry (D) and current Governor Mary Fallin (R).

Description

Oklahoma's nationally-recognized preschool, QRIS and licensing programs are managed by state agencies. State and local coordination efforts, the subject of this brief, are carried out by:

- Oklahoma Partnership for School Readiness (OPSR) a public private partnership board which serves as the State Early Childhood Advisory Council; and
- Smart Start, Oklahoma, the state's early childhood initiative that provides staff support to the Oklahoma Partnership for School Readiness and coordinates a network of local Smart Start partnerships. (Smart Start was established as the OPSR foundation.)

OPSR serves as a "neutral" place where agencies, business and stakeholders can have cross-cutting conversations about the school readiness of young children, percentages of children reading at or above grade level by 3rd grade and the status of programs and supports that contribute to children's success. By law (HB 1904) OPSR is responsible for: conducting a needs assessment; implementing a public engagement campaign; providing leadership to encourage communities to develop and improve school readiness opportunities; encouraging coordination of services; maximizing private sector funding; submitting an annual report with specified information. Its accountabilities are limited to conducting the needs assessment and submitting an annual report. Upon being designated as the state's Early Learning Advisory Council, OPSR took on the additional responsibilities required by federal legislation (e.g., statewide needs assessment, identification of opportunities and barriers, establishment of unified data collection system). OPSR is staffed by Smart Start Oklahoma.

The 32 member Board includes: state agencies serving young children and families; the Head Start State Collaboration Director; a Head Start Agency; the cabinet secretary for education; and representatives of higher education; tribal governments; migrant programs; parents, business community and philanthropy as well as statewide organization representatives; community volunteers, health care providers; and the Oklahoma Educational Television Authority.

Smart Start Oklahoma serves both as staff to OPSR and lead in developing and coordinating a network of local Smart Start Communities. Smart Start is supported through state, federal and private funds. As the name suggests, Smart Start was modeled after the North Carolina Smart Start Initiative, without the large infusion of state funding. At both the state- and local-level, Smart Start convenes early childhood stakeholders, to coordinate and collaborate in designing services for young children and families. It has a presence in eighteen local communities (covering 55 of 77 counties).

Smart Start jointly sponsors a growing network of business professionals, known as Oklahoma Champions for Early Childhood (O-CEO). O-CEO was formed in 2010 to help create awareness of the importance of continued investment in Oklahoma's youngest children and their families and is jointly sponsored by the Potts Family Foundation, the Oklahoma Business Roundtable and Smart Start Oklahoma.

The state Smart Start Partnership's annual budget is in the range \$1.6 million per year. (Local partnerships raise an additional \$2.5 million per year in cash support and matching funds for their work.) The University of Central Oklahoma serves as fiscal and human resources agent for the state-level Smart Start.

Focus

OPSR focuses on kindergarten readiness. The Smart Start partnerships work encompasses child care, literacy, family support, children's health and mental health and public engagement focused largely on young children birth to five and their families.

Coordination and Governance

OPSR's mission is to lead Oklahoma in coordinating an early childhood system focused on strengthening families and school readiness for all children. It is charged by state and federal statute with making recommendations to the Governor. The influence of the recommendations varies depending on the Governor. (OPSR does not have decision authority.)

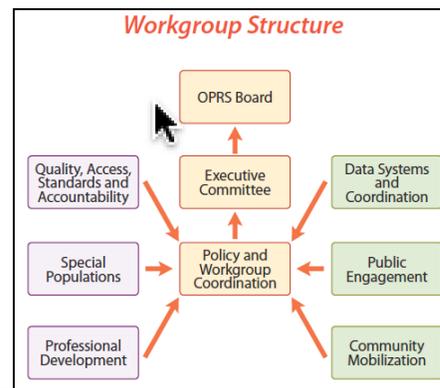
In 2010, OPSR was named as Oklahoma's State Early Childhood Advisory Council (HB 3126) and expanded its duties in accordance with federal legislation. Membership is mandated by state statute (updated in 2010) and includes workgroups through which it obtains broad input from stakeholders such as: parents; business leader; philanthropists; policy makers; state agency staff; and K-12 and higher education professionals.

OPSR oversees about \$2 million in state funds through the Oklahoma Department of Human Services budget for community mobilization and state-level coordination projects. State agencies (Department of Health and Department of Human Services) provide in-kind technical assistance to the Board.

OklahomaOPSR/ State Advisory Council Workgroups

The Advisory Council Workgroups are listed below. The work group structure is shown in the accompanying chart.

1. Professional Development and Workforce Group- recommendations for state-wide early childhood professional development including 2- and 4- year institution efficacy and capacity;
2. Quality Access, Standards and Accountability- recommendations for improving quality, access and early learning standards for early childhood programs and services;
3. Data Systems and Coordination- recommendations for unified data systems and opportunities, as well as identifying barriers to collaboration and community coordination,
4. Special Populations- recommendations regarding inclusion of underserved groups in early childhood services and programs;
5. Policy Work Group Coordination- Monitoring to ensure that all other workgroups accomplish tasks set by OPSR Board, review of workgroup recommendations, oversight of revision of the state plan and assistance to the executive committee in identifying cross cutting issues;
6. Community Mobilization- review of annual work plans and recommendations from communities and their local councils (In addition to the workgroup, a Community Mobilization Committee meets quarterly);
7. Public Engagement –Work with OPSR Foundation to develop and implement public engagement plan;
8. Finance Committee - (to be determined).



In addition to standing committees, ad hoc committees are established as needed. Workgroups are chaired by a board member or member designee and include experts in the subject area and at least two local community representatives.

There is no formal connection between local communities and OPSR. Smart Start provides travel expenses for local Smart Start Community representatives to attend each OPSR meeting and workgroup meeting.

Decision-Making. Many decisions are reached through joint agreement. However, final decisions are made by implementing agencies and the Governor, informed by recommendations and input development through the Smart Start Workgroups. OPSR and Smart Start influence in decisions varies depending on the Governor and agency directors.

System Goals. Oklahoma's goal is that all children will be healthy, eager to learn, and ready to succeed by the time they enter school. There are four primary objectives for the next three years of the council's work:

- Develop recommendations for a school readiness definition and pilot a school readiness assessment;
- Conduct a statewide needs assessment concerning the quality and availability of early childhood education and development programs, prioritizing infant and toddler programs. Findings from the needs assessment will inform recommendations to increase the overall participation of children in the early childhood programs, including outreach to special populations;
- Develop recommendations for a cross-sector professional development system. This will include assessing the capacity and effectiveness of two- and four-year institutions of higher education to prepare the early childhood workforce;
- Develop recommendations for a statewide, coordinated longitudinal data system. Tasks will include signing a memorandum of understanding with an interagency team of data experts and charging a workgroup with developing recommendations.

State Implementing Agencies. Three state agencies implement much of Oklahoma's early childhood programs. Each agency director is a member of OPSR.

- The Oklahoma Department of Education is responsible for preschool, K-12, Part C and special education;
- The Oklahoma Department of Human Services is responsible for child care licensing, child care subsidies, Reaching for the Stars (QRIS);
- The Oklahoma Department of Health oversees public health and provides technical assistance to OPSR on home visiting, obesity prevention, tobacco use prevention and developmental screening (in partnership with Oklahoma Department of mental Health and Substance Abuse).

Community Level Structures. 18 Smart Start Communities represent Smart Start locally. Each partnership selects a fiscal agent. Smart Start Oklahoma facilitates some local planning and communication. Review of materials shows that much of the case for action and investment is based on need rather than on collective goals or performance targets. Smart Start feels that it does not yet have outcomes that it can point to, but that it is on the verge of producing improvements in outcomes.

The 2012 RFP to Local Smart Start Communities requires that communities retain a coordinator develop a governance structure and a strategic plan and produce an annual plan (all within Smart Start and State SAC Grant purposes) and will allow a maximum award of up to \$125, 000 per Community. Local Smart Start communities focus on five areas: business engagement, early care and education, family support, health and mental health and public awareness. Each determines its activities within the following specific roles:

- Promote and communicate research-based best practices in early childhood programs;
- Coordinate existing community programs to increase effectiveness and efficiency;
- Build new partnerships within communities that include a broad range of public and private stakeholders in early childhood (including parents);
- Educate local governmental and business leaders about the importance of investing in early childhood;
- Ensure that local community needs are an integral component of state level planning and coordination efforts;
- Implement public engagement campaigns.

Data Systems. Data systems are managed across several state agencies, each having separate data systems (developed and managed separately). The individual agencies can track services for individual children and have some capacity to track provider training and credentials, but the State lacks the infrastructure to connect data across agencies. The ability to connect children with needed services was identified as a top next priority for Oklahoma data systems (OPSR 2010 Data Roundtable).

Prenatal to PreK and K-3 Integration. The majority of Oklahoma's coordinating efforts are focused on children under six and their families.

Results and Lessons Learned

Results

- Some individual Oklahoma programs have impressive program and child outcome results. For example: Oklahoma's universal voluntary preschool program for four year olds reaches 71% of four year olds in the state. Another independent evaluation showed 28% more growth in vocabulary over the year due to the program, and 44% more growth in early math skills (Lamy, Barnett Kwanghee. NIEER. 2005). However, this is not related to governance and coordination efforts.
- Business leaders and the Oklahoma Business Roundtable are engaged in supporting early childhood through the Oklahoma Champions for Early Childhood (38 champions);
- Coalitions in 55 of the state's 77 counties are engaged in building early childhood systems, and increasing public awareness and investment.
- Promising work is underway. Each coalition will prepare an annual report in 2013.

Lessons Learned

The following lessons are drawn largely from the key person interview. Those interviewed were asked to reflect on what they have learned about creating a statewide early learning system, or what they might have done differently.

- Business champions help build public support during tight times. Oklahoma credits business leader champions through OK-CEO with maintain focus and minimizing reduction of early learning funding through the state's budget crisis and conservative administration.
- Oklahoma's coordination structure, with OPSR workgroups provides systematic opportunity for stakeholder input. Each workgroup includes stakeholders in addition to OPSR members. Each has a workplan and the structure for coordination of efforts, with each workgroup forwarding recommendations to the Policy and Coordination workgroup and this is working well.
- There are strong building blocks but less connection and synergy between programs than in North Carolina and Arizona. Oklahoma invests in high quality programs. Its work on how the programs work together to boost child and family outcomes, and its community partnerships are in the early stages. There are no outcomes yet. Modest investments and incentives to create coordinated systems of care are thought to be contributing factors.

List of sources

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 - a. First Things First state Statute 8-1151. Attachment J.
 - b. First Things First Governance System. Attachment R
4. First Things First 2011 Annual Report (http://www.azftf.gov/WhoWeAre/Board/Documents/FTF_Annual_Report_2011.pdf)
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4. HB 1904 Act creating the Oklahoma School Readiness Partnership (<http://www.smartstartok.org/sites/default/files/imce/Signed%20HB1094.pdf>)
5. Oklahoma Partnership for School Readiness/Smart Start Oklahoma, Local Project Funding Announcement March 19, 2012