



OKLAHOMA
PARTNERSHIP
FOR SCHOOL
READINESS



2025

Oklahoma Early Childhood Research Symposium

Contents

A woman with dark hair tied back, wearing a grey t-shirt, is smiling and looking towards three children. The children are sitting on the floor, looking at each other. In the background, there are white shelves with various toys, including two dinosaur figurines (one green, one brown) and three colorful (red, yellow, blue) plastic bottles. The overall scene is bright and cheerful.

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Welcome

On behalf of the Oklahoma Partnership for School Readiness Foundation, welcome to the 2025 Oklahoma Early Childhood Research Symposium.

This year, we gather under the theme *Building Strong Futures for Every Child, Every Family*, a vision that unites researchers, clinicians, early childhood educators, child welfare professionals, and community leaders across Oklahoma. Together, we affirm our commitment to ensuring that every child is safe, healthy, and ready to thrive when they enter school, and that every family has the resources and support they need to nurture that success.

Since our founding in 2003, the Oklahoma Partnership for School Readiness has championed the belief that children are our future, and that building strong futures begins with access to the highest quality care, education, and family supports. This symposium is one of the most important ways we advance that mission, by bringing people together, sharing research, and sparking ideas that lead to action.

We are honored to welcome Dr. Cynthia Osborne, Founder and Executive Director of the Prenatal-to-3 Policy Impact Center (PN3), as this year's keynote speaker. Dr. Osborne is a nationally recognized scholar and thought leader in early childhood education and family supports, whose work has shaped policy and practice across the country. We are honored to have her in Oklahoma to share her expertise on pressing issues such as Paid Family and Medical Leave, a policy shown to enhance child and family well-being while also strengthening businesses and contributing to a more resilient economy.

We hope you find this symposium both energizing and impactful, and that you leave with new connections, fresh insights, and renewed commitment to our shared vision.

Finally, we extend our deep gratitude to our partners, the George Kaiser Family Foundation, the Inasmuch Foundation, Oklahoma Human Services, The Potts Family Foundation, and The Alliance for Early Success for their generous support in making the 2025 Oklahoma Early Childhood Research Symposium possible.

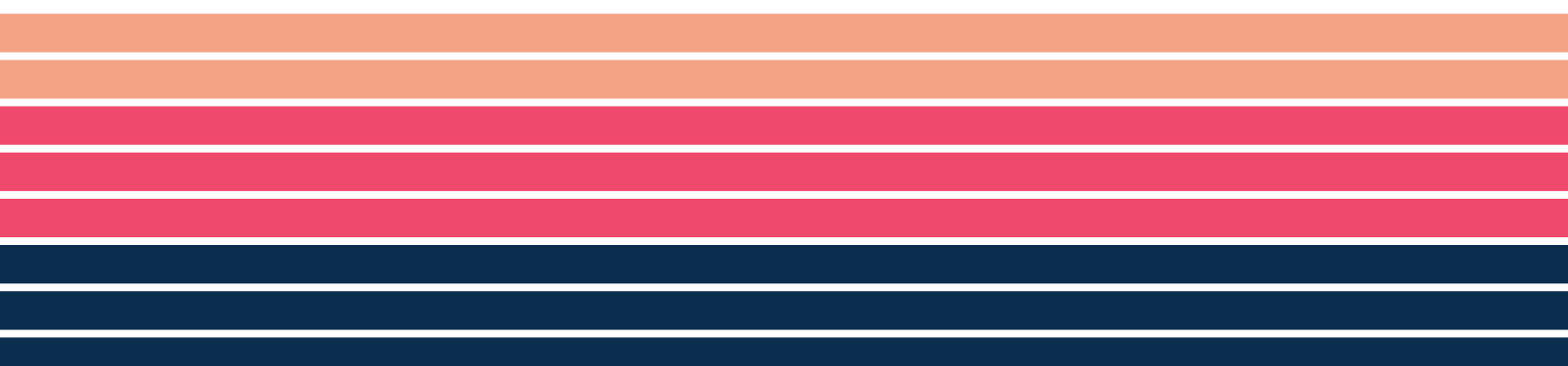
Together, let's build strong futures for every child, every family.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Amy Emerson".

AMY EMERSON
Board President

Oklahoma Partnership for
School Readiness Foundation



2025 Oklahoma Early Childhood Research Symposium SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

**First Americans Museum –
Hall of the People**

Monday, Oct. 6

12-1 p.m.

Registration and check-in

1 p.m.

Opening remarks: Carrie Williams,
Executive Director of OPSR

1:15 p.m.

SESSION ONE

**How are the Children? Data on the Status of
Families, Communities and Children Post-
COVID**

AJ Griffin, Ed.D.,
Executive Director of the Potts Family Foundation

2:15 p.m.

Break

2:30 p.m.

SESSION TWO

**The State of Suspension and Expulsion
in Oklahoma: A Comprehensive Mixed-
Methods Investigation**

Dr. Courtney Dewhirst, Dr. Brittany Hott, Breanna
Martin, & Kokab Khalilipaji, University of Oklahoma

3:30 p.m.

Poster Session/Social Hour

See Page 10 for Poster Submissions

5:00 p.m.

End of Day One

Tuesday, Oct. 7

8-9 a.m.

Registration, check-in, and breakfast

9 a.m.

Welcome from Carrie Williams,
Executive Director of OPSR

9:05 A.M. KEYNOTE ADDRESS

**Building a Comprehensive System of Care:
How Paid Family and Medical Leave Can
Support Families with Young Children**

Dr. Cynthia Osborne,
Executive Director of the Prenatal-to-3 Policy Impact
Center

10:30 a.m.

Break

10:45 a.m.

SESSION ONE

**Understanding Access and Barriers to
Childcare in Oklahoma: An Approach to
Strengthening Early Childhood Systems and
Women's Economic Opportunity**

Wendy Doyle, United WE, Dr. Adrienne Redmond-
Sanogo & Dr. Don Murray, Oklahoma State University

11:45 a.m.-1:15 p.m.

Lunch/Networking

1:15 p.m.

SESSION TWO

**Understanding Family Engagement in
Oklahoma's SoonerStart Early Intervention
Program**

Dr. Grace Kelley & Dr. Ginger Elliot-Teague, SRI

2:15 p.m.

Break

2:30 p.m.

SESSION THREE

Public-Private Partnership Panel

Sarah Rahhal, Sunbeam Family Services, Sarah Roberts,
Inasmuch Foundation, & Annie Koppel Van Hanken,
George Kaiser Family Foundation

3:30 p.m.

Symposium Ends

Session Details

Day 1

OPENING REMARKS



Carrie Williams

Executive Director, Oklahoma Partnership for School Readiness

Carrie Williams has served as Executive Director of the Oklahoma Partnership for School Readiness Foundation since May of 2021. During her tenure, she has overseen Oklahoma's Early Childhood Advisory Council and facilitated streamlining of programs and services on behalf of Oklahoma's children and families. She leads

the Oklahoma Clearinghouse for Early Childhood Success, which has funded implementation of more than \$8 million in projects to improve outcomes for children and families through public/private partnerships. Carrie's work includes a collaborative effort between OPSR and Oklahoma Human Services to secure \$36 million from the Administration for Children and Families to improve Oklahoma's early childhood system. Prior to joining OPSR, Carrie served as executive director of Rainbow Fleet from 2014-2021. During her time there, she led efforts to allocate spaces and create opportunities for students entering the early childhood field to practice what they learn in the classroom.



SESSION ONE

How are the Children? Data on the Status of Families, Communities and Children Post-COVID



AJ Griffin, Ed.D.

Executive Director of the Potts Family Foundation

Dr. AJ Griffin is CEO of the Potts Family Foundation, where she leads initiatives to strengthen Oklahoma families by empowering local communities, supporting strong families and building systems that increase children's opportunity to thrive. A former Oklahoma State Senator, she authored landmark legislation on autism care, foster reform, and healthcare access. Dr. Griffin holds degrees from Oklahoma State University, the University of Central Oklahoma and a Doctorate in Education from Baylor

University. A passionate advocate for systemic change, she serves on numerous state and national boards. Her leadership continues to shape public policy and empower communities across Oklahoma.

SESSION TWO

The State of Suspension and Expulsion in Oklahoma: A Comprehensive Mixed-Methods Investigation

PRESENTERS



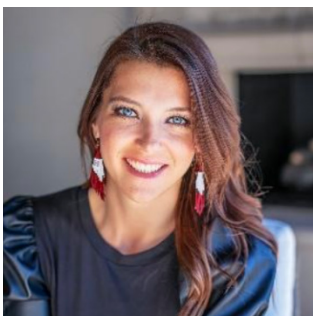
Courtney Dewhirst, Ph.D., is an Associate Professor of Early Childhood Education at the University of Oklahoma. Her research focuses on stress and resilience in educational contexts, with a particular emphasis on strengthening the early childhood workforce through evidence-based professional development systems, policy advocacy and sustainable support structures for practitioners. Dr. Dewhirst's comprehensive approach addresses critical workforce challenges, including preparation, retention and ongoing professional development of early childhood educators to ensure high-quality educational experiences for all young children. Her current research includes trauma-informed practices, exclusionary discipline

reduction and social-emotional learning in early childhood settings. Dr. Dewhirst serves on the board for the National Association of Early Childhood Teacher Educators and has secured over \$12 million in research funding. She has authored numerous peer-reviewed publications and presents regularly at national conferences on topics ranging from teacher preparation to high-quality in-service coaching and professional development for early childhood educators.



Brittany L. Hott, Ph.D., BCBA-D, is a Professor of Special Education and Associate Director of the Institute for Community and Society Transformation (ICAST) at the University of Oklahoma. She is a Board-Certified Behavior Analyst with Doctoral Distinction (BCBA-D). Dr. Hott's research focuses on school-based interventions designed to support rural students with learning and behavioral disabilities. She is focused on translating special education research into effective practices for rural schools. Her publication record includes more than 60 peer-reviewed articles, 25 program evaluations, four books and numerous technical assistance documents. Dr. Hott has secured over \$30 million in research and personnel preparation

grants. She currently serves as Executive Editor of Rural Special Education Quarterly and as Associate Editor of Intervention in School and Clinic. Dr. Hott chairs the American Council on Rural Special Education (ACRES) Research Committee and the Teacher Education Division (TED) of the Council for Exceptional Children Publications Committee.



Breanna Martin, M.Ed., BCBA, LBA-OK, earned her Master's Certificate in Applied Behavior Analysis before completing her graduate studies at the University of Oklahoma, where she obtained a Master's in Special Education. She is a Trust Based Relational Intervention® (TBRI) practitioner and holds a teaching certificate in mild/moderate disabilities as a special educator. Breanna has provided behavioral support to children and adults with developmental disabilities across various settings such as schools, organizations, and community programs for 15 years. She has a passion for implementing trauma-informed and evidence-based practices within the field of behavior analysis. Currently, Breanna is pursuing a Doctoral Degree in Special Education at the University of Oklahoma as a SPIDERS scholar, where she focuses her research on the complex relationship between traumatic experiences and maladaptive behavior, emphasizing trauma-informed practices and applied behavior analysis in school settings.



Kokab Khalilipaji is a current Ph.D. student of Educational Psychology/ LXDT, at the University of Oklahoma. She holds a B.A. in English Literature and an M.A. in Educational Psychology. With over ten years of professional experience, she has worked extensively in clinical and educational settings with children experiencing developmental disorders, anxiety, learning difficulties and challenges in self-regulation. Drawing on expertise in motivation, interest and learning theories, she has designed and implemented interventions to support children's growth across developmental stages. Her work also extends to bilingual and multilingual contexts, where she has collaborated with families, teachers, and professionals to create inclusive and supportive environments for learners with diverse needs. She has pursued research and practice in instructional design and learning experience design and technology (LXDT), with a particular interest in the role of artificial intelligence in education. Most recently, she has examined suspension and expulsion practices affecting young children in Oklahoma.



Session Details

Day 2

SYMPOSIUM WELCOME

Carrie Williams, Executive Director of OPSR

Keynote Address



Building a Comprehensive System of Care: How Paid Family and Medical Leave Can Support Families with Young Children

Dr. Cynthia Osborne is a Professor of Early Childhood Education and Policy in the Department of Leadership, Policy, and Organizations at the Peabody College of Education and Human Development at Vanderbilt

University. She is also the founder and executive director of the national Prenatal-to-3 Policy Impact Center, an academic research center that translates the science of the developing child into state-level policies with the strongest evidence base of effectiveness. Osborne holds a Ph.D. in Demography and Public Affairs from Princeton University, a Master's in Public Policy from Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government and a Master of Arts in Education from Claremont Graduate University.

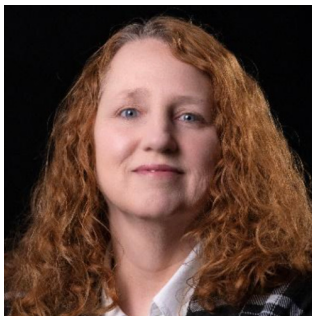
SESSION ONE

Understanding Access and Barriers to Childcare in Oklahoma: An Approach to Strengthening Early Childhood Systems and Women's Economic Opportunity

PRESENTERS



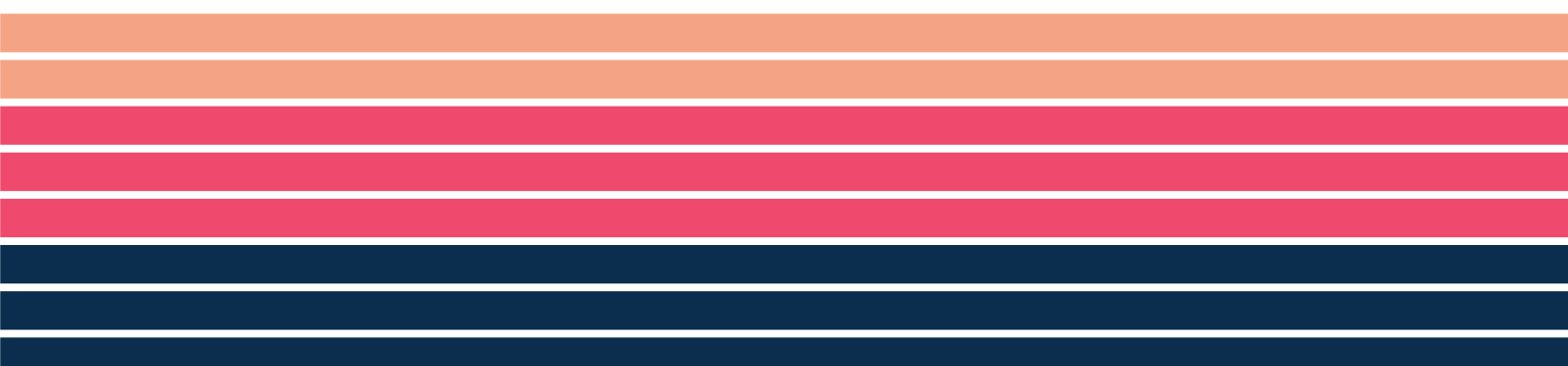
Wendy Doyle is the President and CEO of United WE, a national, nonprofit, nonpartisan think-and-do-tank driving systemic change by elevating all women economically and civically. Under her leadership, United WE has become a nationally recognized leader in research, advocacy and policy solutions that remove economic barriers for women. During her 12-year tenure, United WE has conducted more than 30 research studies, secured more than 50 policy actions and supported the appointments of more than 200 women to civic leadership roles.



Dr. Adrienne Sanogo is the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs and an Associate Professor of Mathematics Education in the College of Education and Human Sciences at Oklahoma State University. She has over a decade of experience as a faculty member and nearly eight years of higher education leadership, overseeing recruitment, retention, enrollment, online education and scholarships. Her research explores technology integration in mathematics education, with a particular focus on the affordances and challenges of generative AI in teaching and learning. She has published and presented nationally on teacher education, equity in mathematics classrooms and the use of AI in instructional design. In addition to her academic work, she is actively engaged in statewide initiatives to address childcare capacity and early childhood education policy in Oklahoma.



Dr. Don Murray is an Assistant Professor of Social Foundations of Education at Oklahoma State University. His scholarship investigates the history and ethics of education, focusing on how education operates as a contested arena of social, cultural, and political power. His recent projects examine cosmopolitan ethics, the history of teacher activism in Oklahoma, and how educators have responded to the state's "divisive concepts" legislation. Don situates access to childcare as an expression of rooted cosmopolitan ethics—the idea that communities thrive when local environments are built to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to flourish.



SESSION TWO

Understanding Family Engagement in Oklahoma's SoonerStart Early Intervention Program

PRESENTERS



Grace Kelley, Ph.D. has more than 30 years' experience with state and national organizations that serve children and families in need. Areas of expertise include policy and program evaluation, fiscal resources for early care and education programs and developing and evaluating programs with education, health and human services programs. Work also involves providing technical assistance on building capacity of state systems, organizations and individuals related to implementing and sustaining evidence-based practices and data-informed decision making. Special projects include development of a framework building high quality early intervention and preschool special education programs. Additional specialties include systems development, organizational management, policy and program development and evaluation, and strategic planning related to a variety of human services organizations, both nonprofit and government.



Dr. Ginger Elliott-Teague is Senior Education Researcher and Technical Assistance Specialist with the national Center for IDEA Early Childhood Data Systems (DaSy) at SRI International. With degrees in Public Policy from Rice University and Indiana University Bloomington, she has 20 years of experience in research, program evaluation and data management. Before joining SRI, she worked at the Oklahoma State Dept. of Education as the Director of Data Analysis for Special Education Services. She specializes in early childhood special education and early intervention data and program improvement. Her current research projects focus on family participation in early intervention in Oklahoma and across the nation.



SESSION THREE

Public-Private Partnerships Panel

PANELISTS



Annie Koppel Van Hanken is a chief program officer who oversees GKFF's early childhood education, common education and arts initiatives. Before joining the Foundation in 2002, Van Hanken worked in inner-city Los Angeles at a community-based youth development center. She serves as board president for Tulsa Educare and is a member of the national Educare Network board of directors. Van Hanken also serves on the board of Oklahoma Public School Resource Center, The Opportunity Project and is a gubernatorial appointee on Oklahoma

Partnership for School Readiness Board of Directors. She is a mayoral appointee on Tulsa's commission for children, youth and families. She has a master's degree in education, with an emphasis on learning disabilities, from the University of Texas at Austin and a dual bachelor's degree in English and history, with a minor in classics, from Tulane University.



Sarah Roberts has served as Vice President of Programs at Inasmuch Foundation for over 20 years. The Foundation provides grants to enrich the quality of life and strengthen organizations to benefit people and communities. Inasmuch Foundation's grantmaking approach focuses on partnership and collaboration to inspire lasting change in Oklahoma City by focusing on these specific areas: community and civic engagement, journalism, education and human services. The Foundation has placed emphasis on forging public/private partnerships

to fund evidence-based interventions for vulnerable children and families as well as attracting much needed federal investments to Oklahoma City.

Sarah was an instructor with the Clarksville Montgomery County School System in Tennessee where she taught 5th grade. Sarah is a graduate of Bishop McGuinness High School (1992) in Oklahoma City and Sweet Briar College (1996) in Virginia where she received a Bachelor of Arts in Government with a teaching certificate.



Sarah Rahhal, LCSW, is the Chief Executive Officer of Sunbeam Family Services and a Licensed Clinical Social Worker with over 35 years of commitment to community well-being. Under her leadership, Sunbeam Family Services has significantly expanded its impact across central Oklahoma, focusing on early childhood services, mental health, and family support programs through trauma-informed, evidence-based programs. Sarah achieved the Infant Mental Health Endorsement and frequently speaks on topics including leadership, mental health, trauma-

informed care, and child development. She earned her Bachelor's degree in Psychology from the University of Minnesota and her Master's in Social Work from the University of Oklahoma. Her dedication has been recognized through numerous honors, including the C.V. Ramana Award and the Journal Record's Most Admired CEOs in both 2023 and 2025. She is a graduate of Leadership OKC Class 30 and also serves on the Imagination Library Advisory Board. Sarah's career reflects Sunbeam's mission of building brighter futures with ALL children and families.

Poster Presentations



1. Attitudes of Early Childhood Teachers Toward Screen-Based Picture Book Reading

Darshani Abeyrathna and Vickie Lake, *University of Oklahoma-Tulsa*

2. Cumulative Classroom-Level Needs and Teacher Job Commitment: The Mediating Roles of Depressive Symptoms and Emotional Exhaustion

Weiyi Cheng and Kyong-Ah Kwon, *University of Oklahoma*

3. Supporting Families' Access to Quality Care for Infants and Toddlers: System Leaders' Perspectives

Kathleen Gallagher and Cara L. Kelly, *Early Childhood Education Institute, University of Oklahoma*

4. Oklahoma Early Childhood Staff's Knowledge and Perceptions of Indoor Air Quality in their Early Childhood Settings

Elnaz Ghorbani, Diane Horm, Craig Van Pay, Dawn Loraas, and Changjie Cai, *Early Childhood Education Institute, University of Oklahoma*

5. Triadic Dual Language Storybook Reading for Adjustment of Afghan Refugee Children

Sun Geun Kim and Kyong-Ah Kwon, *University of Oklahoma*

6. Boosting Early Literacy Through Enhanced Head Start Programs: The Role of Attendance and Home Environments

Cara L. Kelly, Melissa Acton, and Kathleen Gallagher, *Early Childhood Education Institute, University of Oklahoma*

7. Examining Infant-Toddler Care Quality: Insights from a Statewide Early Childhood Program

Cara L. Kelly, Diane Horm, Denise Vega Ruvalcaba, and Craig K. Van Pay, *Early Childhood Education Institute, University of Oklahoma*

8. From Isolation to Integration: Connecting Oklahoma Families, Schools and Communities to Prevent Early Childhood Expulsion

Bre Martin, Savannah Gandy, Kokab Khalilipaji, Brittany Hott, and Courtney Dewhirst, *University of Oklahoma*

9. Examining Classroom Quality as a Moderator in the Association between Teacher Well-Being and Teacher-Child Relationships

Junghyun (Jenny) Min, Kyong-Ah Kwon, and Timothy G. Ford, *University of Oklahoma*

10. Child Characteristics and Self-Regulation Shaping Classroom Interactions

Denise Vega Ruvalcaba, Kathleen Gallagher, and Cara L. Kelly, *Early Childhood Education Institute, University of Oklahoma*

11. Understanding Sources of Teachers' Stress and Support in Early Childhood Classrooms

Ronald Ssentuuwa, Elnaz Ghorbani, Kathleen Gallagher, and Denise Vega Ruvalcaba, *Early Childhood Education Institute, University of Oklahoma*

12. The Subsidy Squeeze: How Child Care Providers Experience Benefits, Barriers and the Eligibility Cliff in Categorical Programs

Presenters and authors:

Dan Wang, Sarah E. Connelly, Courtney Dewhirst, & Lisa White, *University of Oklahoma*, and Amber H. Beisly, *University of Oklahoma-Tulsa*

13. Professional Well-Being in Early Childhood Education: The Role of Motivation and Job Resources

Huiying Zhang, Junghyun Min, Sun Geun Kim, Weiyi Cheng, Kyong-Ah Kwon, and Timothy G. Ford, *University of Oklahoma*

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Dr. Jon Pedersen

State Director of Head Start Collaboration
Paula Brown

Private Sector Representatives Appointed by the Governor

Representative of Licensed Child Care Providers

Rachel Proper, Vice President, Child Care, Inc.

Representative of the Licensed Child Care Industry Appointed by the Governor from a List Submitted by an Association Representing the Licensed Child Care Industry
Angie Clayton, Kids R Us of Tecumseh

Two Parents of Children Age 8 or Younger

Brett Vanderzee, Music & Preaching Minister,
The Spring Church of Christ
Dr. Jennifer Pham,
Director of Pharmacy, Oklahoma City Indian Clinic

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ARCHIVE INFORMATION

Presentations from the 2025 Symposium of Early Education will be archived on OPSR's website at okschoollreadiness.org/research-symposium

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