

State of Oklahoma

Part C SSIP Narrative: Phase II

April 1, 2016
Oklahoma State Department of Education
SoonerStart & Special Education Services



PART C PHASE II SSIP NARRATIVE

INTRODUCTION

SoonerStart is Oklahoma's early intervention program designed to meet the needs of infants and toddlers with disabilities and developmental delays. The lead agency in the SoonerStart program is the Oklahoma State Department of Education (OSDE). The Oklahoma State Department of Health (OSDH) contracts with OSDE to provide direct services to children, and this interagency agreement has been implemented since the inception of the program. Oklahoma's Early Intervention Act (1989) provides the framework for the SoonerStart program. This legislation outlines the governance, funding, quality standards and partner agencies supporting IDEA Part C services to infants and toddlers with disabilities and their families.

Vision and SIMR

The State-identified Measureable Result for Oklahoma was defined in Phase I as:

By FFY 2018, at least 49 percent of Oklahoma infants and toddlers with disabilities who receive at least six months or more of early intervention services at the Tulsa County site will demonstrate age-level functioning in the acquisition of skills and knowledge (including early language, literacy and communication) when they exit the SoonerStart program.

In FFY 2013, the percentage of infants and toddlers who demonstrated age-level functioning in the acquisition of skills and knowledge when they exited SoonerStart services in Tulsa was 42 percent.

Achieving this goal is still the vision of the IDEA Part C Oklahoma program leadership. The Phase II leadership team consists of seven representatives of SEA and Part C leadership, local SoonerStart service sites and providers, and other state initiatives. This team has worked diligently in the past few months to craft a State Systemic Improvement Plan (SSIP) that can be implemented at the local level with state support. Multiple stakeholders have been consulted in the process, resulting in a widely-approved Plan to improve the SIMR.

The members of the Phase II leadership team are:

- Dr. Rene Axtell, Assistant State Superintendent for Special Education Services, State Department of Education
- Mark Sharp, Executive Director of SoonerStart, Special Education Services, State Department of Education
- Dr. Ginger Elliott-Teague, Director of Data Analysis, Special Education Services, State Department of Education
- Jennifer Horton, Regional Early Intervention Coordinator, Tulsa SoonerStart, State Department of Education
- Kim Macy, Lead Clinician & Speech Language Pathologist, Tulsa SoonerStart, State Department of Health
- Gina Richardson, Program Consultant, SoonerStart, State Department of Health
- Michelle Pitchford, Director of Preschool Services, SoonerStart, State Department of Education

Phase I Revisited

Oklahoma formed a state team to guide the development of the SSIP Phase I process. The initial meeting, held in January 2014, consisted of SoonerStart leadership personnel from the OSDE (lead agency) and OSDH who developed a plan of activities, timelines and lists of potential stakeholders. A diverse group of Early Childhood stakeholders was assembled and were included in all aspects of the SSIP development process. The stakeholders represented state office personnel, local site personnel, and representatives from Head Start, childcare agencies, preschool services and other early childhood initiatives in Oklahoma.

The stakeholders were presented an explanation of the SSIP process and participated in a broad discussion regarding improving outcomes for children across the state. Stakeholders were presented in-depth information about the required components of IDEA Part C programs and the structure of Oklahoma's SoonerStart program. Stakeholders met approximately 8 times since 2014 to analyze data and infrastructure strengths and weaknesses in order to narrow the focus of the SSIP to a select set of improvement strategies. The Phase I review process identified more than twenty potential strategies to Oklahoma's SIMR that were heavily focused on foundational improvements to build SoonerStart's capacity statewide (see Appendix A). The original set of strategies can be categorized into eight themes:

- Data systems
- Fiscal planning
- Assessment tools and procedures
- Early literacy assistive technology
- Service delivery processes and standards
- Professional development
- Resource and partnership development
- Quality standards

Data analysis

Stakeholders' broad data analysis from many sources found that children in Oklahoma have many risk factors affecting their educational and developmental outcomes. The percentage of children in grades Pre-K through 3 who exhibit school readiness in Oklahoma has decreased in the past 3 years. Improving the outcomes of infants and toddlers with disabilities in the acquisition of skills and knowledge (including early language, literacy, and communication) is an important factor in school readiness and grade level learning. The SSIP stakeholder's analysis of SoonerStart SPP/APR data indicated that compliance requirements do not present a barrier to improvement of child outcomes.

Selection of the Primary Intervention Site

The criteria for site selection were identified as failure to reach the 61% state target in FFY 2013, and large enough to provide services to a sufficient number of infants and toddlers to make a statistical difference in the statewide results. The Tulsa County site was chosen as the local site to initiate improvement strategies due to historically low results related to the percentage of children who exit SoonerStart functioning at age- level in the acquisition of skills and knowledge, and the potential to positively impact a larger number of children due to the large caseload. Using the FFY 2013 data for the Tulsa County results for Early Childhood Outcome Statement B-2, the baseline for measuring improvement was set at 42.50%. Targets were set for FFY 2014 through FFY 2018 and the final SIMR established.

For FFY 2013, the Tulsa County SoonerStart site reported completion of 308 ECOs, representing 24% of the ECOs completed statewide (1263). Tulsa County accounts for a substantial proportion of all child outcomes reported in Oklahoma, suggesting that an intervention in this

location would affect state outcomes and potentially other SoonerStart sites. The 618 exiting data indicated that 490 infants and toddlers exited the SoonerStart program in Tulsa County in FFY 2013, representing 20% of all children who exited the program statewide. Race and ethnicity data indicated that over half (56%) of those infants and toddlers were minorities and two-thirds (67%) were male.

Tulsa APR data for FFY 2013 indicated that two-thirds (69%) of all children who exited the program after receiving services for six months or longer, had both entry and exit ratings for early childhood outcomes. However, approximately 20% of the children did not receive IFSP services for 6 months or longer, and 11% did not receive valid entry or exit dates. Comparatively, 27% of children statewide did not receive IFSP services for 6 months or longer and 9% did not receive valid entry or exit dates in FFY 2013.

Infrastructure analysis

The OSDE partners with the OSDH to implement service delivery functions. The OSDH promotes Quality Standards for personnel, provides direct early intervention services for families, and maintains data system for entering all services delivered. The Part C Interagency Coordinating Council (ICC) members appointed by Governor advise and assist the OSDE.

Oklahoma's SSIP stakeholders conducted a broad analysis of the state infrastructure to determine whether systemic issues might present barriers to the performance of infants and toddlers with disabilities. The OSDE, as the lead agency, supports the infrastructure functions of Governance, Fiscal Operations, Accountability, Data, Professional Development and Technical Assistance for the SoonerStart Early Intervention Program. The SSIP stakeholders identified the strengths and weaknesses of its infrastructure in each of these component areas (Section 2(c)).

The areas of strengths were identified as:

- Statewide Governance structure: strong stakeholder involvement; the collaborative partnership and interagency agreement between OSDE and OSDH; local-level support for early intervention services.
- Accountability: statewide standards aligned with Part C regulations; general supervision system of monitoring utilizing data and on-site reviews; Performance Management Process (PMP) for personnel; local and state data publically reported.
- Data: new Part C Data system designated as a priority for the OSDE; strong data governance system; dedicated data analysis staff.
- Technical Assistance: designated Program Manager to assist local sites with program and Part C compliance; discipline-specific technical supervisors.
- Professional Development: staffers have shown the ability to provide quality PD; staff desire PD; options available to receive PD from quality programs such as SERC and ABLE Tech.
- Quality Standards: high-qualified personnel, with most licensed; RBI as statewide standard for IFSP development.

The areas of weaknesses were identified as:

- Statewide governance structure: personnel shortages across the state; high turn-over; need for frequent and close collaboration between OSDE and OSDH regarding implementation of the SSIP; lack of a consistent and effective communication strategy for disseminating information to all staff and service providers; need to support new data system; interagency expectations; lack of understanding the federal requirements at the local level; lack of consistency in general guidance; low frequency of onsite guidance.
- Accountability: lack of local access to data; inability to aggregate or disaggregate data for reporting purposes; current data systems are not integrated with each other.

- **Fiscal resources:** decreasing state funding; heavy reliance on in-kind agency supports that may not be available each year; narrow funding stream with no third-party payers or family cost participation.
- **Data:** SoonerStart database not “user friendly”; retrieval of some data requires third-party agency; longitudinal data not collected; lack of detailed business rules for data-entry; lack of interface between OSDE data system and the secondary database operated by OSDH.
- **Technical Assistance:** lack of technical supervisors; funding challenges create difficulties in gaining TA from outside sources.
- **Professional Development:** lack of comprehensive professional development system designed specifically for early intervention personnel; scheduling can be problematic for PD; reactionary PD vs proactive PD; lack of a PD coordinator; insufficient pre-service training.
- **Quality Standards:** no written standards for early care and education to support high quality practices and evidenced-based interventions for children with disabilities.

Based on the analysis of the SoonerStart infrastructure and Oklahoma’s focus on literacy objectives, the SSIP stakeholders affirmed their decision to focus on improving outcomes for infants and toddlers in the acquisition of skills and knowledge to improve early literacy skills in support of the state’s overall emphasis in this area. The stakeholders determined that increasing the percentage of children who exit SoonerStart services demonstrating age-level functioning in the acquisition of skills and knowledge (including early literacy, language and communication) will improve outcomes for infants and toddlers in Oklahoma (ECO Outcome Statement B-2).

Selection of the SIMR

Oklahoma’s SIMR is aligned with the Oklahoma State Department of Education’s current initiatives and priorities as well as state legislation. The Oklahoma Reading Sufficiency Act (RSA) was designed to ensure that all Oklahoma children are reading on grade level at the end of the third grade. Although half of Oklahoma’s counties rank as medium to high-risk for children being unprepared for school, Universal Pre-K programs statewide increase literacy opportunities. The SIMR was selected through a systematic process of data analysis and infrastructure analysis by the SSIP stakeholders during regular meetings held throughout 2014.

Oklahoma engaged in a systematic process to identify, select, and analyze existing data to determine if a significant number of infants and toddlers with disabilities that received early intervention services were exhibiting improvement or functioning within age expectations by the time they exited the program. The state agency leadership team identified data sources from SPP/APR indicators, 618 data collections, and other data impacting outcomes for children to review. Stakeholders identified the results for Early Childhood Outcomes as the most applicable data for determining areas of low performance among infants and toddlers with disabilities, and the ECO was selected as basis of the SIMR.

On a statewide level, Oklahoma has continued to decrease in performance in ECO Statement B-2 from 60.50% in FFY 2010, to 50.40% in FFY 2011, to 49.20% in FFY 2012. Table 1 presents the baseline data for Oklahoma’s SIMR. SSIP stakeholders determined the following measureable and rigorous targets for FFY 2014 through FFY 2018.

Table 1: ECO Statement B-2 State Targets for FFY 2014-2018				
FFY 2014	FFY 2015	FFY 2016	FFY 2017	FFY 2018
42%	42%	43%	45%	49%

Phase I Modifications

The primary modification to Phase I that was conducted in Phase II was to narrow the scope of the SSIP from 20 identified improvement strategies to six with the input of a wide variety of stakeholders. The original list of twenty improvement strategies was presented to stakeholders who narrowed and revised the list to meet the current needs of SoonerStart and Oklahoma's infants and toddlers with disabilities. They remain faithful to the original proposals.

The selection of updated improvement strategies was made after getting substantial input from important stakeholders representing community organizations, assistive technology consultants, early childhood service providers, and central SEA and SoonerStart leadership. Several venues were used to gather this input.

First, meetings were held in Tulsa between December 2015 and February 2016 with local SoonerStart personnel and local community representatives. Facilitators guided those discussions to gather recommendations on how to proceed with the SSIP. Their goals and feedback focused on how SoonerStart and community groups might collaborate to raise awareness of all families of the importance of early literacy practices in the home. These discussions resulted in Strategy 5, a summation of several Phase I strategies that focused on developing local resources to promote early literacy. The stakeholder group is now evolving into a leadership team to guide the implementation of this strategy in the community.

Second, community representatives and all Tulsa SoonerStart personnel were asked to prioritize the Phase I improvement strategies by theme using a paired comparison rating tool. The themes were paired off, and stakeholders prioritized one theme in each pair. This produced an overall weighted ranking of themes. SoonerStart personnel overwhelmingly emphasized professional development, with fiscal planning, resource development, and early literacy AT close together. The leadership team used this feedback to select among the potential strategies.

Third, the leadership team met and defined the six improvement strategies the SSIP would emphasize. This list was shared with stakeholders, including SEA special education leadership and the ICC (advisory council for Part C in Oklahoma), who provided additional feedback. Further revisions were made, and the final list was approved.

The selected improvement strategies are:

1. Develop new Part C statewide data system linked to the Part B system;
2. Develop interface between new Part C data system and OSDH's tracking and billing system;
3. Develop and provide training on procedures for data input, management, and use;
4. Improve provider and case manager training on the benefits and uses of assistive technology, and expand its use among infants and toddlers with disabilities;
5. Increase provider, family and community access to early literacy resources; and
6. Improve methods for professional development for personnel, providers, and community.

Phase II Component #1: Infrastructure Development

The SoonerStart program is focusing its attention on improving the child data collection and management system by July 1, 2017 for the infrastructure component in the SSIP. This focus was selected as a result of the infrastructure review conducted in Phase I, during which multiple data-related elements were identified as substantial weaknesses for Part C. As shown previously, it was noted that accountability is weaker than it could be because there is an “inability to disaggregate data to show a complete picture of results [and] current data systems do not integrate with each other (Section 2(c)).” Additionally,

“... [the] SoonerStart database [is not] not “user friendly”; [the] retrieval of some data requires third-party agency; [it] does not collect longitudinal data; ... detailed business rules for data-entry for local site staff [do not exist]; [and the] secondary database operated by OSDH does not feed information into OSDE SoonerStart database.”
(Section 2(c))

Improvements to the data system infrastructure also align well with the implementation drivers model (Fixsen and Blase, 2006-2012). A critical organization driver is a functioning decision-support data system. Weak data systems inhibit good decision-making by being unreliable and ineffective. They cannot show whether implementation is completed with fidelity. Such problems are compounded when personnel do not show competency because they are not consistently trained to reliably enter valid data into that system. These core problems have plagued the SoonerStart data system for years.

We have identified three improvement strategies to address these concerns. Each is intended to enable personnel to provide improved services to infants and toddlers with disabilities and their families.

1. Develop new Part C statewide data system linked to the Part B system.
2. Develop interface between new Part C data system and OSDH’s tracking and billing system.
3. Develop and provide training on procedures for data input, management, and use.

SoonerStart services are provided as an interagency program between OSDE and OSDH. This unique program has many strengths and challenges. Currently, the OSDE maintains a database that collects data elements required by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Part C. The OSDH collects data regarding the frequency and intensity of services. Both systems have common data elements causing duplicate data entry on a daily basis. By using a single shared child identification number, the interface will eliminate this double entry, reducing entry errors and saving substantial time and resources. We anticipate the savings to be at least an hour per data entry clerk per day. The new system will permit providers to enter their service notes personally in the field, which will produce additional savings in the form of paper supplies and data entry time.

When these three strategies are fully implemented as designed, we expect to realize several positive results. These include improved monitoring of children’s needs and services, reduced data entry errors, more effective use of resources, and more efficient data sharing across agencies. These results will lead to improvements in site compliance and service provision. A more reliable and accurate data system will enable EIS programs, personnel and providers to be more confident that evidence-based activities and services actually have an impact on child outcomes. The new system will also provide a solid foundation of sustainability by enabling more efficient and accurate data collection and monitoring for the long term.

Alignment & Partnerships

The SoonerStart program is working closely with the Oklahoma Part B leadership to improve the entire special education data infrastructure. The Part B team has recently developed its own data system (OK EdPlan) with which the SoonerStart system will be closely aligned. One of the key components to improving both systems is the inclusion of a data element that will allow a child to be charted from birth to 21, if the child is eligible for both SoonerStart and Part B services.

We anticipate that this mechanism linking SoonerStart and Part B will greatly enhance service provision to children with IEPs because their full service history will be available for review from the age of entry into SoonerStart. Additionally, this knowledge may improve service provision by other state agencies as well as research about children with disabilities.

The linkage between SoonerStart and the OSDH is being developed with the close involvement of several members of the Health Department who have years of experience with SoonerStart and the PHOCIS system. OSDH personnel are strongly committed to developing the interface, in part because data entry is currently completed by OSDH clerks. By relieving their data entry duties for SoonerStart, their job descriptions can be expanded to meet other OSDH needs.

Implementation Plan

The development of the new data system and the OSDE-OSDH interface are being overseen by a core design group consisting of top leadership in OSDE-SES, SoonerStart personnel and providers, and representatives from the Health Department. Public Consulting Group (PCG) is the lead contractor for the data system and the funding for the project has been fully dedicated by OSDE-SES. Training will be conducted collaboratively by PCG and SoonerStart personnel as outlined in the work plan for strategy 3. The evaluation of the improvements and training will be completed by OSDE-SES personnel, specifically the Part C Data Manager and SSIP Monitor.

Logic models and work plans have been developed for each of the three infrastructure implementation strategies, with action steps and timelines. Logic models are contained in Appendix X. The first year work plans are contained in Appendix X. Both tools outline the activities that will be taken to achieve the expected objectives and outcomes.

Timeline

The core design group began its system review in January, 2016. It has met four times to review the IFSP process and federal reporting requirements. PCG has begun designing the components. Originally, the group wanted the system to be fully functional by July 1, 2016. However, programming constraints, training needs, and reporting requirements will likely push the open system date to December 2, 2016, following the Oklahoma Child Count snapshot. The core components of the system and the OSDE-OSDH interface will be operational on that date. Training will occur through the fall months of 2016. The work plans specify proposed timelines in detail.

Expected outcomes & measurement

As stated previously, when we implement these strategies to improve the infrastructure supporting SoonerStart, we expect to realize several positive outcomes. Specifically, when the three strategies are fully implemented:

1. **Data entry errors will be eliminated because of the data validation procedures imbedded in the system (Strategy 1).**
 - a. The reduction in errors will be measured by a count of errors during the end-of-year review of critical data elements.

2. **Time and resources will be saved because:**
 - a. **imbedded validation procedures preclude the current method of in-person, file-based end-of-year data validation (Strategy 1); and**
 - b. **clerks will not have to enter service encounter and child information twice (Strategy 2).**
 - i. Savings in time and resources will be measured by the amount of in-person, file-based data validation that is completed, and the amount of time saved by clerks.
3. **Duplicate data entry will be eliminated because the OSDE-OSDH interface will reliably update each other on a daily basis (Strategy 2).**
 - a. The reduction in need for duplicate data entry will be measured by a count of times clerks must enter the same data into both systems and the count of data transfer errors.
4. **Personnel will confidently monitor children's services and outcomes and use their data to improve both (Strategy 3).**
 - a. Personnel confidence will be measured by gathering confidence reports directly from individuals.
 - b. Personnel's meaningful use of data will be measured by observations and reports of how data is used to make decisions about children's services and outcome improvement.