

# EARLY CHILDHOOD

SUMMER 2019 | BRIEF 1

## WHO IS THIS LEARNER?

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) defines early childhood years as birth through age 8. Typically associated with Pre-Kindergarten and kindergarten, early childhood spans from PK-3rd grade in public schools. Children's brains develop more rapidly from birth to age eight than at any other point in their lives, making these years critical. The foundations for their social skills, self-esteem, perception of the world and moral outlook are established during these years, as are their cognitive skills. Oklahoma's early childhood classrooms are committed to providing all children access to developmentally appropriate classrooms so they can attain the academic and personal skills they need to be academically successful.

SoonerStart provides preschool special education services to students birth to three years of age. In 2018, SoonerStart served 13,015 children, 5,558 of whom received services through an Individualized Family Service Plan.

In Oklahoma, academic standards are vertically aligned for 4- and 5-year olds, and Family Guides are available to help families ensure learning continues at home.

## WHY IT MATTERS

### OKLAHOMA PRE-K

- 74% of students are enrolled in Pre-K.
- 99.4% of Oklahoma school districts report offering Pre-K.
- 39,807 students are enrolled in Pre-K.
- 87% of students enrolled in Pre-K are full day and 13% are enrolled in half day.
- 127 districts collaborate to offer Public Pre-K.
- 2,210 educators teach Pre-K in Oklahoma.

### OKLAHOMA KINDERGARTEN

- 52,515 students are enrolled in kindergarten.
- 2,902 educators teach kindergarten in Oklahoma. Oklahoma has 51,997 first-grade students, 50,453 second grade students and 51,839 third-grade students.

## THINGS TO CONSIDER

3 Core Considerations for early childhood teachers are:

- Know child development and learning. Understanding typical development and learning at different ages is a crucial starting point.
- Know what is individually appropriate. Continually observe children's play and interaction with the physical environment and others to learn about each child's interests, abilities and developmental progress.
- Know what is culturally important—children's families and the values, expectations and factors that shape their lives at home and in their communities.

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- How can you champion the importance of daily “play” in children’s learning and development?
- How can you be an instructional champion for all young learners, regardless of ability?
- How can you champion welcoming school environments that create clear and open communication for all families?

## ATTENDING TO EQUITY

Practices in early childhood programs should promote equity and foster open communication with and between families in the early childhood setting. Oklahoma’s Pre-K is funded as a grade level. High-quality early education improves outcomes, narrows achievement gaps and conveys long-term benefits for children in school and life.

**Equitable early childhood education is achieved when we:**

- Focus on children’s strengths.
- Value and honor families as children’s first teachers.
- Assess children in authentic ways.
- Recognize and address differences among children and students of all abilities.
- Promote play to develop strong language skills, creativity, social intelligence and confidence.
- Create a climate and culture conducive to learning by fostering social and emotional skills, attitudes and behaviors.
- Honor families as children’s first teachers.

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