



# Advancing Early Childhood Development in Ohio

Early childhood education is foundational to the success of children, families, and communities. Investing in high-quality early learning programs ensures school readiness, strengthens families, and supports workforce participation. This brief outlines key policy recommendations to expand access to childcare, reduce infant mortality, and improve kindergarten readiness in Ohio.

## Policy

Increased funding and policy changes are needed to support equitable access to quality early childhood education and care in Ohio. These recommendations align with best practices and evidence-based strategies to improve child outcomes and strengthen families. Head Start is the most successful, longest-running, national school readiness program in the United States. The program is child-centered, family focused, comprehensive, and community-based. Head Start provides comprehensive education, health, nutrition, dental, mental health, social services, and parent engagement opportunities to low-income, special needs and at-risk children and their families, and is making a difference in Ohio.

## Challenge

Ohio faces significant challenges in providing accessible, high-quality early childhood education and care. Limited childcare access affects parents' ability to remain in the workforce. Workforce shortages in the early education sector, driven by low wages and high stress, impact the availability and quality of services. Additionally, Ohio struggles with high infant mortality rates, particularly in rural and underserved communities, highlighting the need for expanded support programs.

## Opportunity

By implementing the policy recommendations below, Ohio can strengthen early childhood development, support working families, and improve educational outcomes for vulnerable children. Expanding access to publicly funded childcare and Head Start programs will ensure more families receive critical early learning services. Investments in workforce development and employer-supported childcare initiatives will help stabilize and grow the early education workforce. Addressing infant mortality through targeted investments in Early Head Start and home visiting programs will improve health outcomes for Ohio's youngest residents. These strategic actions will create a stronger foundation for children, families, and communities across the state.

## Support Child Well-Being: Budget Recommendations

- Increase eligibility for Publicly Funded Child Care (PFCC) to at least 200% of the federal poverty level and expand access to full-time preschool slots.
- Invest in public-private partnerships and tax policies that support employer-driven childcare solutions to help working families.
- Support the federal-to-local Head Start and Early Head Start funding structure, allowing flexibility for innovation to meet community needs.
- Allocate \$4 million in the state budget for an Early Head Start pilot program targeting rural and high-infant-mortality communities.
- Expand and strengthen home visiting programs through Early Head Start to support at-risk families and improve infant health outcomes.
- Increase funding for early childhood mental health consultation to better support children, families, and early childhood educators.
- Establish an early childhood education fellowship or apprenticeship program to provide paid internships and workforce development opportunities.
- Implement loan forgiveness and workforce support programs for publicly funded Head Start and childcare professionals.

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