



**OHIO  
CHILDREN'S  
BUDGET**  
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# ISSUE BRIEF

## ISSUE: Quality Child Care and Preschool

Ohio offers quality care and education to at-risk 0-4-year olds through publicly funded child care (PFCC) and public preschool. The vast majority of Ohio kids who receive publicly funded early childhood experiences do so through child care programs. These early childhood programs for 0-4-year olds support the essential development of social, emotional, and cognitive skills for kids as they prepare to enter kindergarten and are a necessary support for working families.

### Policy

Ohio's publicly funded child care is available to children of working parents at or below 130 percent of the federal poverty level (FPL). Once qualified, families can remain eligible until they surpass 300 percent FPL. The length of child care services is determined by the parents' work schedule, ranging from hourly care to over 60 hours per week, and parents' financial contribution is determined by income level. PFCC is administered by the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services. All licensed providers serving PFCC kids must be rated at least 1-star by July 2020 and 3-stars by 2025 in the state's Step Up to Quality rating and improvement system in order to continue receiving state funds.

Ohio's public preschool is available to 4-year olds (and some 3-year olds) whose families are at or below 200 percent FPL with no parental work requirement. State-funded preschool programming is offered for 12.5 hours each week throughout the school year and is often supplemented by additional child care services. Public preschool slots are administered through the Ohio Department of Education and all programs are rated 3-stars or above in Step Up to Quality.

### Challenges

In FY17, only 91,063 children ages 0-4 were served by publicly funded child care or public preschool, accounting for only 38.2 percent of 0-4-year olds at or below 130 percent FPL. Of those children enrolled in child care or preschool, fewer than half are in high-quality programs as defined by Ohio's Step Up to Quality rating and improvement system.

Both programs fail to fully meet the needs of working families who are living in poverty. Ohio's publicly funded child care has one of the lowest eligibility thresholds in the country, minimizing the number of families that can access the program. Public preschool has a higher eligibility threshold, but only offers services for 12.5



hours a week, forcing working families to supplement the program with other child care arrangements.

While Step Up to Quality provides a strong continuous improvement framework for getting quality services to at-risk children, failure to adequately invest in this system has left too few children with access to the quality rated programs that drive children's education and health outcomes and yield the greatest return on investment.

Although both programs have similar goals and overlapping programming, each is housed in a different department creating silos in their administration, namely the varying eligibility thresholds between the programs. These programs are also often isolated from other early childhood services, such as evidence-based home visiting.

Quality child care and preschool are vital to serving young children in poor families. However, because they have been under-resourced, Ohio's current program capacity reflects barriers to access based on race, rural geography and age of the child, with babies and toddlers facing the most challenges to accessing quality programs.

## Opportunities

Quality child care and preschool programs targeting our most at-risk kids during the critical early years of development offer a 13 percent return on public investment. These quality programs improve school readiness, lifelong health outcomes, and social emotional development while offering an essential support for working families. Investing in quality child care and preschool is good for families and good for Ohio's economy.

Local communities like Cuyahoga County, Montgomery County, and Cincinnati have invested local dollars to expand access to quality programs. Ohioans recognize the importance of investing in early care and education—it's time for the state to prioritize these investments.

## Support Child Well-Being: Recommendations

Support all providers serving children in publicly funded child care in achieving 1-star by 2020 and 3-stars by 2025 in Ohio's Step Up to Quality rating and improvement system to ensure kids receive the quality care they need to thrive.

Expand eligibility for publicly funded child care from 130 percent FPL to 200 percent FPL to ensure quality care for more of our most at-risk kids, align PFCC with public preschool eligibility, and support working families who struggle to work without the support of child care.

Evaluate programs from an equity lens and utilize data to make targeted investments that eliminate barriers to access based on race, rural geography and age of the child.

Support the development of a coordinated early childhood system that eliminates silos between publicly funded child care, public preschool, evidence-based home visiting and other child serving programs; offers a coordinated continuum of care for at-risk young children; promotes continuity of care for children and families and leverages state investments in children over the life course.

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