

TESTIMONY OF RICHARD A. STOFF, PRESIDENT AND CEO, OHIO BUSINESS ROUNDTABLE
RE: HB 176

October 24, 2017

Chairman Brenner, Vice Chair Slaby, Ranking Member Fedor and Members of the
Education and Career Readiness Committee of the Ohio House of Representatives:

At the beginning of this school year, only four in ten Ohio children entered school ready
for kindergarten. For families living in poverty, the results were way worse.

This is unacceptable – and frames yet the “latest” crisis in public education.

Transmitted with my testimony is a report we released to policymakers last week.

This is a lot more than an education issue. This is a business competitiveness issue. For
this reason, early learning has been on the BRT agenda for the last decade.

The enclosed report – *“What Difference Are We Making”* – is an assessment of our
progress here in Ohio. It should be viewed as a sequel to a report we released some
seven years ago at the beginning of the Kasich administration.

Truth is, while Ohio has made some progress, we have barely moved the needle.

Any legislation that seeks to turn the clock back is legislation that we must oppose. HB
176 will make the kindergarten readiness assessment voluntary. Without a meaningful
assessment, we have no metric to determine whether our kids are ready for school.
Without that, we don’t have a fighting chance to achieve any other meaningful objective
in public education. Early learning is the absolute gateway to success – in life.

Respectfully,



Richard A. Stoff

Enclosure: *“What Difference Are We Making? An Assessment of the State of Early
Learning in Ohio”* The report may also be accessed on-line at
<http://www.ohiobrt.com/resources-and-analysis>

Why is early learning so important? The first years of life are crucial to a child’s lifelong development. Experiences and environments during the early years – birth to five – set the stage for children’s future development and success in school and in life. Research confirms that these early experiences and environments influence brain development by establishing neural connections that provide the foundation for language, reasoning, emotional health, problem solving and social skills.

Why is this a BRT priority? This is in fact an economic development issue. Businesses need employees who are job-ready, team capable, and well-prepared. Research and experience show that Ohio’s failing workforce pipeline can be repaired. Yet, efforts to plug the leak in the state’s talent-pool pipeline must start early. In 2010, the BRT challenged policymakers and ourselves to commit to a bold goal: By 2020, ensure that 90% of Ohio children entering school will be ready to succeed in kindergarten.

What is the purpose of this report? In this report, fashioned as a sequel to our 2010 report, we are taking stock. Where do we stand? Where are we headed? How do we get there? When will we get there? While we have advanced the ball, truth is, we have not done enough. After taking stock, we put forth a new game plan for re-energizing efforts to ensure that all Ohio children enter kindergarten prepared to succeed as learners.

How do we define success? In recent years, the focus of early-learning investments has shifted from safe, caring environments to **high-quality early-learning experiences** that are both safe and affordable – and can help parents, especially those living in poverty, enter the workforce.

Do we set out a new K-readiness goal? Yes, we have a new goal. By 2025, 90% of Ohio children entering kindergarten will be ready to succeed.

What are the BRT’s recommendations for achieving this new bold goal? This is what we want to see happen going forward:

- 1) Fast-track significant state investment to take proven home-visiting and pre-kindergarten programs to scale
- 2) Relentlessly pursue quality programs – such as the Step Up To Quality system – that make a difference
- 3) Strengthen statewide leadership, giving it authority to sustain effective cross-agency decision making

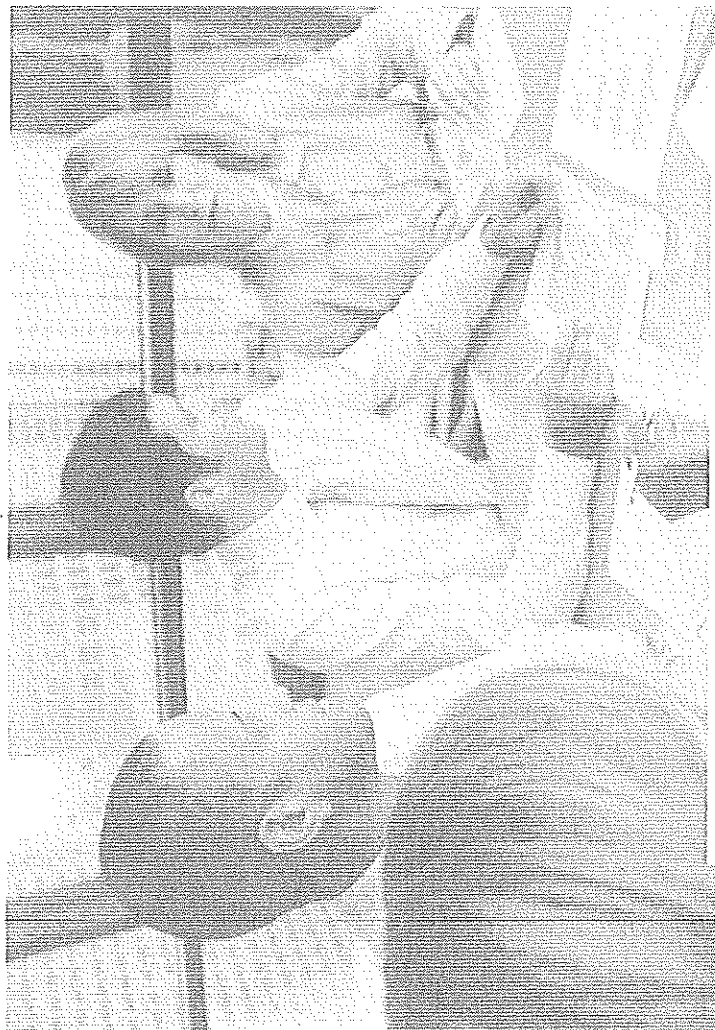


*What
Difference
Are We
Making?*



OHIO BUSINESS
ROUNDTABLE

An Assessment of the State of Early Learning in Ohio



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October 2017

Dear Friends,

In 2010, the Ohio Business Roundtable challenged the leaders of our state, including ourselves, with a big, bold ten-year goal – that 90% of our children would be kindergarten-ready by 2020. Today, we are taking stock. Where do we stand? Where are we headed? How do we get there? When will we get there?

While we have advanced the ball, truth is, we have not done enough.

Truth is, our children can't wait.

The Roundtable values its working relationship with Ohio's elected officials, starting with Governor John Kasich who has demonstrated uncommon, principled leadership on behalf of Ohio's most vulnerable citizens with support from lawmakers on both sides of the aisle.

We acknowledge the support of ReadyNation/Council for a Strong America, The George Gund Foundation, Sisters of Charity Foundation of Canton, United Way of Cincinnati and FutureReady Columbus who helped with our assessment of the state of early learning in Ohio.

We dedicate this report to former Roundtable Chairman John Pepper. No one in America has advocated more for underprivileged children than John Pepper. His career at Procter & Gamble exemplifies corporate citizenship at its best and he has been relentless, well into his retirement, to hold everyone's feet to the fire until we reach our bold goal of 90% kindergarten readiness for every child in this state. Thank you, John, for your inspired leadership.

On behalf of the Membership of the Ohio Business Roundtable,

Tanny Crane

Tanny Crane
President and CEO
Crane Group
Co-Chair
BRT Early Learning Initiative

Albert Stroucken

Albert Stroucken
Chairman and CEO (retired)
Owens-Illinois
Co-Chair
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Gary R. Heminger

Gary R. Heminger
Chairman and CEO
Marathon Petroleum Corporation
Chairman of the Board
Ohio Business Roundtable

Richard A. Stoff

Richard A. Stoff
President and CEO
Ohio Business Roundtable

4 Key Takeaways

Here are the four key takeaways from our report – and on the impact of our efforts to ensure that all Ohio children enter kindergarten prepared to succeed as learners.

The case for investing in young children has been clearly made.

The time for methodical research and development has past. The brain-development research has proven that early-prenatal and postnatal experiences and exposures influence long-term outcomes – and that experiences during the early years influence how well or poorly the brain's architecture matures and functions. Put simply, infants, toddlers and preschoolers who use their newly formed brain connections keep them. Those who do not exercise these connections lose them. Furthermore, research provides powerful evidence of the benefits of quality early-learning experiences – that early interventions matter in children's health, social-emotional and cognitive development – and in children's academic achievement from preschool through postsecondary education.

Collectively, research provides powerful evidence of the benefits of quality early-learning experiences, which provide the necessary foundation for more advanced knowledge and skills.

Ohio is moving the needle, but not fast enough.

Progress is being made on metrics, access, program quality and professional development. For example:

- At the beginning of the 2015-2016 school year, 40% of kindergartners were ready for kindergarten-level instruction (Demonstrating Readiness), which was only incrementally better than the results back in 2010. Recent data have not budged the roughly 23% who entered kindergarten not ready for school (Emerging in Readiness). Children living in economically disadvantaged families are three times more likely to be Emerging in Readiness than are children in families with higher incomes.
- The number of programs participating in the Step Up To Quality (SUTQ) star-rating system has increased more than three-fold since 2010. Yet, only 26% of programs serving Publicly Funded Child Care (PFCC) children are enrolled in SUTQ.
- State and federal investments over the last six years backfilled recession-period cuts, but have shown only modest growth during the past four years.
- After substantial enrollment increases in 2011 and 2012, home-visiting enrollment for prenatal women and infants has leveled off. While applauding some progress, the state's incremental pace in backing early-learning services is *not keeping pace with the need*. Significant state investments are needed now to expand and sustain gains for our youngest children.



It is time to "go bold."

Business decision-makers know when addressing chronic and emerging challenges means moving from research and development – and from incremental progress – to a full-scale roll-out.

For those who lead the state of Ohio, this is that time.

Ohio must make significantly larger investments in proven early-learning services to provide access for those who need them – when they need them. Steady intention is required to muster the resources needed to expand the capacity of needed programs serving pregnancy through third-grade to achieve the kinds of ambitious results needed to move Ohio's economic needle.

The value of earlier interventions and home visiting must be harnessed, even for hard-to-reach populations and in geographic areas facing capacity challenges.

Access to a quality preschool experience should become the childhood norm. Leaving four-year-olds behind simply shifts the burden to kindergarten and later grades.

Playing a waiting game is akin to not playing at all for another generation.

Our children can't wait. Ohioans grasp the sobering implications of the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment and of the seriousness of infant mortality rates and addiction statistics. Ohio's citizens – and its business leaders – understand that much more needs to be done to ensure that, *by 2025, 90% of Ohio children entering school will be ready to succeed.*

Convinced that Ohio's current economic realities cannot be an excuse for doing nothing – or for backing away from action on behalf of young children – the Roundtable calls for a greater sense of urgency – for three actions to move the state's early-care and school-readiness agenda forward:

1. Fast-track significant state investment to take proven home-visiting and pre-kindergarten programs to scale
2. Relentlessly pursue quality programs – such as the Step Up To Quality system – that make a difference
3. Strengthen leadership, giving it authority to sustain effective cross-agency decision making



The First Years Last Forever

Investments in early learning pay off right away and in the future

The first years of life are crucial to a child's lifelong development. Experiences and environments during the early years – birth to five – set the stage for children's future development and success in school and in life. And, research confirms that these early experiences and environments influence brain development by establishing neural connections that provide the foundation for language, reasoning, emotional health, problem solving and social skills.

Acknowledging this truth, the Ohio Business Roundtable stepped forward six years ago and challenged policymakers to commit to a bold new goal: By 2020, ensure that 90% of Ohio children entering school will be ready to succeed in kindergarten.¹

The Roundtable didn't stop there. In Talent Challenge 2, it offered a roadmap of specific actions needed to improve all children's kindergarten readiness: Establish new leadership solely accountable to the governor; put the metrics in place (i.e., a state-of-the-art kindergarten readiness assessment to track our progress in meeting all dimensions of children's school readiness); and invest in what matters (i.e., home visiting and quality pre-kindergarten for at-risk children and families).

“By age 5, it is possible to predict, with depressing accuracy, who will complete high school and college and who won't.”

David Brooks, syndicated columnist
The New York Times

It was a bold goal with an action plan to match. And, they came with words of resolve: “Preparing our youngest citizens for future success ... is an economic and moral imperative. The people of Ohio have every right to be indignant if we cannot get this done.”

Before it is too late

The brain-development research is clear: early-prenatal and postnatal experiences and exposures influence long-term outcomes; and the brain is particularly responsive to experiences during early development, which influence how well or poorly its architecture matures and functions. Put simply, infants, toddlers and preschoolers who use their newly formed brain connections keep them. Those who do not exercise these connections lose them.

There is no need to re-litigate this policy issue here. But, here is a metaphor worth thinking about ... that of an apple tree whose root system receives water and nourishment, and whose blossoms are transformed into apples ready for picking. Starved for nourishment the tree's apples will not fully develop – they will drop off the tree and be lost. Similarly, without proper nourishment, children's brains will not fully develop and young children's lives will be damaged.

Recent brain research has only strengthened our understanding of how negative and positive experiences can profoundly affect brain development. For example, we know more about how infants and children who are not exposed to sensory stimulation through play and have few of the stimulating experiences that foster optimal growth often fail to fully develop the neural connections and pathways that facilitate later learning. We know more about the effects of trauma and chronic stress, including abuse and neglect, on early brain development.²

Conversely, researchers have documented that when mothers frequently speak to their infants, their children learn almost 300 more words by age 2 than do their peers whose mothers rarely speak to them.³

Most importantly, this research provides more powerful evidence of the benefits of quality early-learning experiences, which provide the necessary foundation for more advanced knowledge and skills.

“Early learning is one of the most common sense, fiscally responsible solutions for better education, health and economic outcomes. Building a strong foundation for kids from birth to age five is about one thing: the future of Ohio.”

Tanny Crane, President and CEO
Crane Group

Access and Quality are the Keys to Success

Over the past 60 years, public investments in child care and early-learning programs have fluctuated in amount and purpose, just as they have been fragmented in delivery. In the early years, they were designed to expand access to preschool and affordable child care by giving millions of parents,

especially single-parent mothers, a place to leave their children as they pursued training opportunities or a job. Without this assistance, these parents would have been left to choose between unsafe child care or forgoing real economic opportunities to stay at home and care for their children.

In more recent years, the focus of these investments has shifted from safe, caring environments to high-quality early-learning experiences that are both safe and affordable – and can help parents enter the workforce.

The rationale for this shift in focus is clear:

- Too many children start school on a playing field that is not level. They are behind developmentally from a health, social/emotional and cognitive perspective. Very simply, they are not ready for school.
- Families and mental-health professionals have grown to understand that future behavioral challenges are often rooted in positive, ongoing relationship connections or, sadly, in neglect or trauma.
- High-quality child care and early-learning programs can close developmental gaps, and they can generate enormous long-term benefits for young people as they grow to become productive adults, for our economy and for society.
- We in business remain discouraged by our inability to identify and recruit workers who are well prepared and job-ready, and who have the “character skills” required for success on the job. Employers know that their ability to remediate these well-established deficiencies is limited. So, understanding that brain development during the first years of life impacts individuals’ social, emotional and intellectual capabilities, employers recognize that investing in quality early learning improves the workforce pipeline and gives businesses the skilled, productive workers they need.



Early childhood investments pay off

Early interventions really matter and have long-term consequences. Yet, “we don’t have to wait 10 or 20 years to see strong returns on our investments in young children,” says ReadyNation. “Some programs create real savings in a year or less. Early education also improves third-grade scores, and children who do not read well by the end of third grade are four times more likely to drop out.”⁴

The benefits of “smart” early-learning services have been widely documented in children’s health, social-emotional and cognitive development. They have been verified in studies of children’s academic achievement from preschool through postsecondary education, and there is evidence that quality early-learning experiences mitigate K-12 intervention costs. Research indicates that expanding early learning – including high-quality preschool – provides society with a return on investment of up to \$8.60 for every \$1.00 spent.⁵

For a brief sampling of some of this research, see Appendix B: Smart Beginnings.

“In business, we rarely have the luxury of making an investment decision with as much evidence as we have to support the economic value of investing in early-childhood development and education. Put bluntly, in my terms, they are a financial no-brainer. The only question is ‘how strong is the ROI?’ The answer: Two or three or more to one.”

John Pepper
Chairman and CEO (retired)
The Procter & Gamble Company

Ready or Not

This report examines the work that has been undertaken during the past seven years, including efforts to implement the three strategies set forth in the 2010 report. It looks at the progress that has been made in improving children’s kindergarten readiness – and offers explanations for these results. Then it states the obvious – that we have a long way to go before we are, in any sense of the word, “done.” Finally, after taking stock, this report lays out a new game plan for re-energizing efforts to ensure that all Ohio children enter kindergarten prepared to succeed as learners.



Measures that Matter Most

Every measure tells a story

The real purpose of measuring something is to drive action – and to get results. Metrics should drive the future, not simply reflect on the past. That is the purpose of the data included in this report. By analyzing, synthesizing and displaying data, the state and its local communities can focus on those things that matter most; and when the data are not tracking as expected, corrective actions can be taken. There can be a re-set for the benefit of our children.

So, how is Ohio doing?

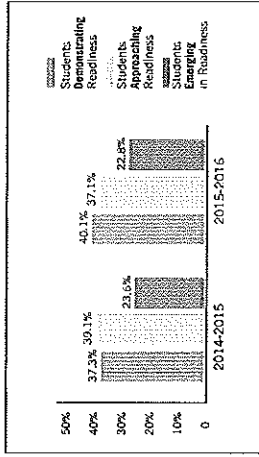


The graphic presentations that follow provide some answers to this question. Each graph tells a story, and together they allow us to see Ohio's bigger picture of kindergarten readiness. And with that vision, the state's leaders and those who care about the well-being of all children can make solid, data-driven decisions that provide clarity about what Ohio's future can be.

Here are some of the measures that matter most – and the stories they tell.

Kindergarten Readiness Measures

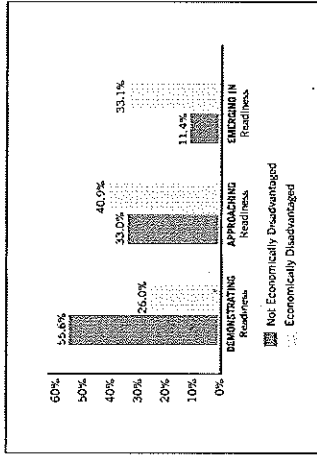
Statewide KRA Scores, 2014-2015 and 2015-2016
At the beginning of the 2015-2016 school year, 40% of kindergartners were ready for kindergarten-level instruction (Demonstrating Readiness); 37% needed targeted learning supports to be ready for kindergarten-level instruction (Approaching Readiness); and 23% needed significant support to engage in kindergarten-level instruction (Emerging in Readiness). *It is important to note that recent data – compared to those generated by the old KRA-L in 2010 – have not budged the roughly one in four children who entered kindergarten not ready to engage in kindergarten-level instruction.*



Source: Ohio Department of Education

Statewide KRA Performance by Levels of Economic Disadvantage, 2015-2016

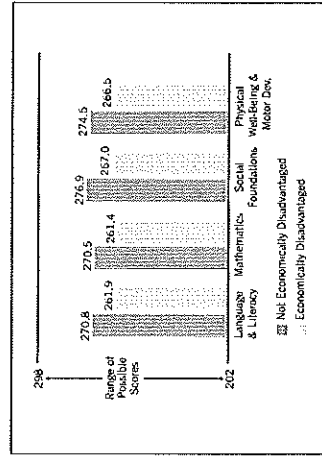
While children living in families of all incomes can face challenges to be ready for kindergarten, those living in economically disadvantaged families face larger hurdles. Children from economically advantaged families are twice as likely to be Demonstrating Readiness; in contrast, economically disadvantaged children are three times more likely to be Emerging in Readiness than are children in families with higher incomes. This explains the Roundtable's emphasis on early learning services for high-need children living in low-income families.



Source: Ohio Department of Education

Average Statewide KRA Scores by Four Development Areas, 2015-2016

The KRA helps families and teachers learn about each child's skills, learning and developmental needs, just as KRA scores in the aggregate help inform classroom instruction and choices for a range of child development programs. Consistent with the KRA performance gaps in the aggregate by levels of economic disadvantage reported above, this graph shows gaps on all four assessment domains. Each of these domains contributes to a child's readiness to engage in kindergarten-level instruction. Possible scores range from 202 to 298.

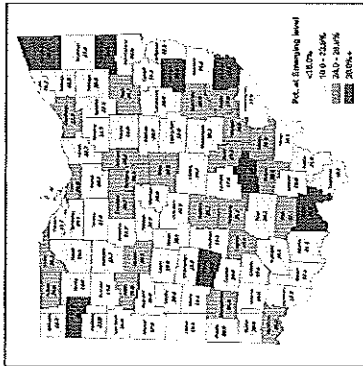


Source: Ohio Department of Education

Access to High-Quality Services

Children at Emerging in Readiness level on KRA, by county, 2014-2015

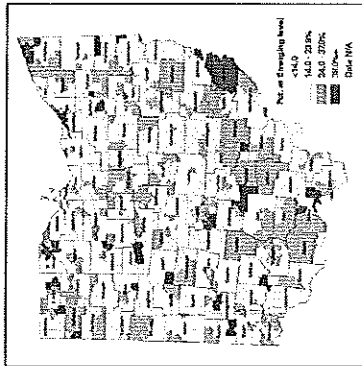
In only 18 of Ohio's 88 counties were there fewer than 18% of children entering kindergarten in the Fall 2014 who were at the Emerging in Readiness level on the KRA. This illuminates the widespread nature of the readiness problem and helps local planners align Ohio's health and human-service programs, which are largely county-administered, to the challenges within school district boundaries. This map speaks to the need for more rigorous engagement of health, behavioral health and social-service program support of the kindergarten readiness mission for individual children and for counties demonstrating the largest readiness gaps.



Source: Ohio Department of Education

Children at Emerging in Readiness level on KRA, by school district, 2014-2015

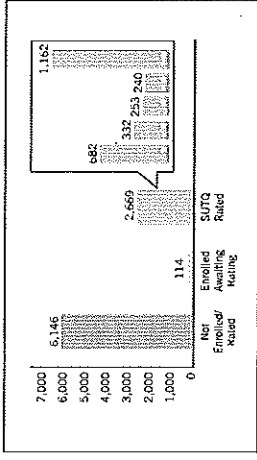
Mapping kindergarten readiness metrics geographically helps illuminate local, regional and statewide challenges – just as it helps inform policy, research, educational and child-development approaches to achieve optimal results. This map calls out the need for overall improvement (the darker areas have higher percentages of children at the Emerging in Readiness level), with most-intensive interventions needed for urban, rural and Appalachian districts.



Source: Ohio Department of Education

Number of programs participating in Step Up To Quality star rating system, June 2017

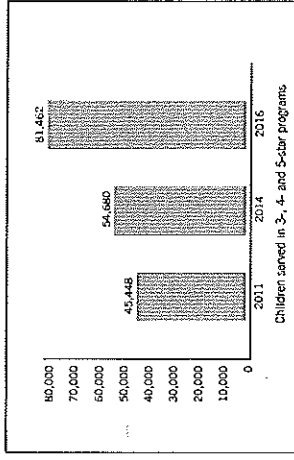
State Quality (SUTQ) rates programs based on state quality-program standards. The number of programs enrolled in SUTQ has increased more than three-fold since 2010 (from 880 to 2,669 plus those enrolled and in queue for rating). Yet, only 26% of programs (1,612) serving Publicly Funded Child Care (PFCC) children are enrolled in SUTQ – and only 10% of these programs (641) are rated three-, four- or five-stars (high quality). State law requires all Center-Based and Type A PFCC providers to attain the high-quality standard by 2025 to continue receiving public funds. Therefore, the challenge going forward is to increase the pace of enrollment for PFCC programs – and for private-pay programs that are enrolling at much lower levels. Overall, two-thirds of Ohio's child care and early-learning centers are *not enrolled* in SUTQ.



Source: Ohio Department of Job and Family Services and Ohio Department of Education

Number of children served in high-quality settings, 2011-2017

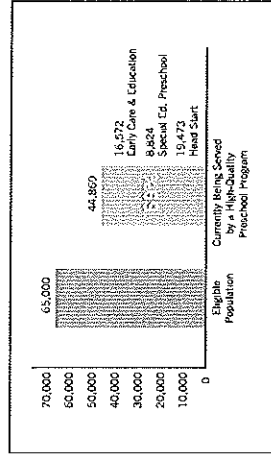
In just five years, the number of children served in high-quality programs – i.e., programs with SUTQ three-, four- and five-star ratings – increased 79%. Presently, 81,462 Ohio children are served in high-quality programs. While this progress deserves applause, meeting statutorily-set 2020 and 2025 targets remains a concern.



Source: Ohio Department of Job and Family Services and Ohio Department of Education

Number of eligible four-year-olds served in ECE, Head Start, Special-Education Preschool, 2016-2017

In 2010, the percent of eligible four-year-olds served in state preschool programs was in the single digits (with Head Start in the mid-teens). At 69%, it is much higher today, reflecting Ohio's priority on enrolling more children living in economically disadvantaged families in quality-preschool programs. In fact, 12,740 new public-preschool slots (Early Care and Education) have been added since FY 2013. Additionally, the 69% served figure *does not* include eligible four-year-olds solely enrolled in highly rated SUTQ programs utilizing the exact same standards as ECE, which should be counted for an accurate assessment of Ohio's preschool standing.



Source: Ohio Department of Education



Plugging the Leak in Ohio's Talent-Pool Pipeline

What's been accomplished?

How did Ohio's leaders respond to the three recommendations advanced by the Roundtable in 2010? What were the consequences of their actions? What can we learn from the data presented on pages 9 through 12 about Ohio's efforts to improve children's access to evidence-based, voluntary home-visiting and high-quality pre-kindergarten experiences? Where do we stand? Where are we headed? And, what is it going to take to ensure that 90% of our children arrive in kindergarten ready to succeed?

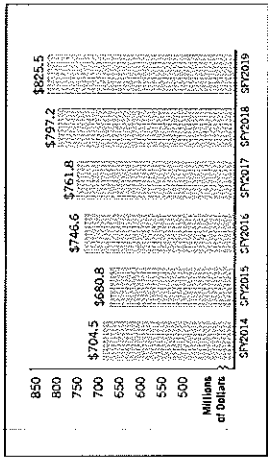
Taking stock: Ohio's leaders respond to the Roundtable's 2010 recommendations

In 2010, the Roundtable called for a *new leadership structure* – solely accountable to the governor – with the responsibility for consolidating services and funding to create a world-class system of early learning. The initial effort to create a new leadership structure was reflected in Ohio's \$70 million federal Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge grant, awarded in 2011, with assistance from the Roundtable. It laid out Governor John R. Kasich's agenda to close the kindergarten readiness gap between children with high needs and their peers.

Today, the governor's senior staff are indeed actively engaged in the planning, implementation and decision making related to early learning. The Governor's Early Childhood Officer has organized external stakeholders and state-agency representatives to work on a range of issues, including standards and assessments, professional development, quality and access. **Yet, the consolidation of leadership with control of early-learning initiatives across state agencies has not been achieved. And, in truth, the intent of the Roundtable's recommendation was that all early-learning initiatives from prenatal to age six (education, workforce and health) were to have been consolidated in a cabinet-level post directly accountable to the governor.**

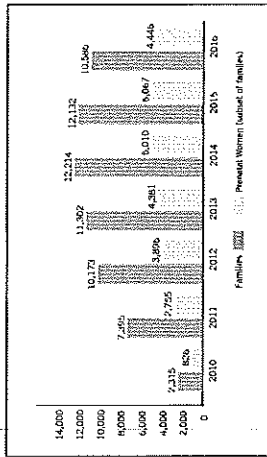
Ohio investment in early childhood services, FY 2014 – FY 2019

State and federal investments over the last six years backfilled recession-period cuts and made modest growth investments in some of the programs that serve Ohio's youngest children. Final FY 2018 FY – 2019 biennial budget figures show that the Kasich Administration prioritized TANF and Casino Fund spending to ensure early-childhood policies were funded, while many other general government programs were held steady or experienced funding cuts.



Source: Office of the Governor

Number of Ohio families and women enrolled prenatally in home-visiting programs, 2010-2016
 After substantial enrollment increases from 2011 through 2014, home-visiting enrollment for prenatal women and infants leveled off and then dropped as officials took time to address program quality. In recent years, funding levels and conservative state-eligibility requirements led to lower enrollment. The state's current biennial budget authorizes enrollment up to 12,656 in FY 2019.



Source: Ohio Department of Health

Other results are more encouraging. For example:

- The Roundtable's 2010 report documented that Ohio was losing ground – that it was no longer a leader among states in the provision of services to young children and their families. It told us, for example, that as recently as 1998, Ohio was one of just eight states selected for funding comprehensive initiatives for young children and families. In contrast, when the 2010 report was written, the percentage of eligible children served in state preschool programs was in the single digits. Help Me Grow, the state's home-visiting program, served only one in five eligible children. Ohio only met three of ten quality benchmarks in its state-funded preschool program and only 880 of Ohio's 5,800-plus child care centers were participating in the state's quality rating system.
- Most disturbing was the Roundtable's revelation that Ohio's response to the economic downturn in 2008 through 2010 included deep cuts in many programs serving young children. The Roundtable reported: "According to an analysis of all the budget-balancing efforts across the country prepared by the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL), Ohio led the nation with the largest percentage decrease in investments for early-childhood initiatives."
- The good news reported here is that over the last three biennial budgets – FY 2014 through FY 2019 – the Kasich Administration moved beyond backfilling significant cuts, which it inherited, to advance a new early-childhood agenda. Overall, final annual investments of an estimated \$826.5 million in state and discretionary federal funds have expanded available resources. Final FY 2018 – FY 2019 biennial budget figures show that the Administration prioritized TANF and Casino Fund spending to ensure early-childhood policies were funded, while many other general government programs were held steady or experienced financial loss.
- Additionally, securing one of the nation's largest federal Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge Grants (\$70 million), with the Roundtable's direct assistance, ratcheted up Ohio's capacity to serve young children. The Administration deserves credit for these two actions in a difficult budget environment. They set the stage for future efforts to take proven early-learning programs to scale.
- Progress can be found in the number and percentage of eligible four-year-olds enrolled in high-quality preschool programs. Three high-quality programs provide preschool options for families earning at or below 200% of the federal poverty level (\$40,320 annual earnings for a family of three). Families may enroll their children in the state's Early Care and Education (ECE) program or highly rated SUTQ programs, Ohio's Preschool Special Education program or the federal Head Start program (in which eligibility is at or below 130% of the federal poverty level). Presently, 44,869 children from economically disadvantaged families are voluntarily enrolled in programs designed to help them be fully prepared for kindergarten. At 69% of the eligible children, participation rates are up more than five-fold since 2010.
- In recent years, the state has focused on elevating the quality of programs serving young children. With the SUTQ quality rating and improvement system driving change, emphasis has been on moving beyond state licensure of child care, Head Start and school district programs to ratings based on the state's quality-program standards. A "quality" program is defined by having achieved a one- or two-star rating, while "high-quality" programs must attain ratings of three, four, or five stars.
- Today, 2,783 of Ohio's 8,929 licensed programs are enrolled in SUTQ, and 26% of the programs serving children receiving Publicly Funded Child Care subsidies participate. Since 2011, the number of children served in high-quality programs has increased by approximately 80%.
- The number of Ohio families and pregnant women enrolled in Help Me Grow and other voluntary home-visiting programs has risen substantially – more than four-fold since 2010. Yet, the supply of

In 2010, the Roundtable also called for *metrics* – the adoption of a new comprehensive "kindergarten readiness assessment" to track progress in meeting all dimensions of children's school readiness, and development of a quality rating system focused on the "readiness" of the places where we're sending our children. With these metrics, the kindergarten-readiness assessment and the quality rating system would be tied together, and with that linkage, if a child scores low on the readiness assessment, it probably has something to do with the efficacy of his or her early-learning environment.

Today, the state has and is using such an assessment – **the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment (KRA)** – arguably the most state-of-the-art metric of its kind in the country. The new KRA replaced the old Kindergarten Readiness Assessment – Literacy (KRA-L) in August 2014. The new assessment's 50 questions address a child's growth and development in four domains: Language and Literacy, Social Foundations, Mathematics, and Physical Well-Being and Motor Development. The KRA is part of an Early Childhood Comprehensive Assessment System designed in partnership with the state of Maryland.

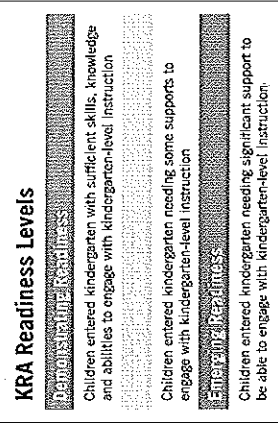
This new system includes a formative assessment for children ages 36-72 months, a kindergarten-readiness assessment, a technology system and professional development modules. Another part of this system, the Early Learning Assessment (ELA), will evaluate a child's development at age three. The ELA will be coming online in the near future and it is important that a child's pre-kindergarten teachers get her or his ELA scores. The Step Up To Quality System (SUTQ) also has been fully implemented and new targets for increasing the number of programs enrolled are being pursued.

Finally, in 2010, the Roundtable called for **new investments in home visiting and quality pre-kindergarten for at-risk children and families**. Since that recommendation, funding for public pre-kindergarten programs has increased substantially, while investments in home visiting have remained relatively stable. However, as documented on page 12, Ohio's voluntary home visiting programs have increased significantly the number of families and pregnant women being served. In addition, program administrators have worked diligently to generate better child outcomes. Today, Ohio's home visitors solely follow "evidence-based-practice" family support models – the highest standard for public home-visiting programs. As a result, Ohio now operates the largest evidence-based-practice home-visiting program in the nation.

Taking stock: Where Ohio stands – and where it's headed

Clearly, there are some encouraging trends in the data presented on pages 9 through 12, reflecting a growing commitment to plug one of the most serious leaks in Ohio's talent-pool pipeline. That leak is at the beginning – in early education – as documented by the fact that less than 50% of our youngest children can demonstrate kindergarten readiness.

In taking stock, let us start with a disappointing result: children's performance on the state's new kindergarten assessment is only incrementally better than the results on the old KRA-L. To be sure, these two assessments measure very different things – the KRA-L focused on literacy skills, while the new KRA is more robust and holistic. Yet, it is worth noting that the two years of KRA data largely validate each other.⁶



Making a positive difference for Ohio's youngest citizens

Ohio's Step Up to Quality (SUTQ) Validation Study, conducted independently by COMPASS Evaluation and Research, Inc., in February 2017, confirms that participation in any level of SUTQ star-rated programs is meaningful and beneficial. Specifically, the study's findings include the following:

- There is a strong correlation between children scoring higher on Ohio's KRA and attendance at a 3-5 star-rated program.
 - Programs that are star-rated show higher quality classroom practices compared to programs that are not star-rated.
 - Students who attend publicly funded childcare programs over a longer period of time score higher, on average, on the KRA.
- This initial review of SUTQ indicates that it is moving students in the right direction. It is providing low-income families with something more than early care and child care; it is giving them an educational experience that will better prepare their children for the next step in their schooling.

evidence-based family-practice programs is still overwhelmed by the need for these services. Ohio's quality home-visiting program should be taken to scale for those who need it – when they need it.

- Additionally, the state's eligibility standards for its home-visiting programs should be broadened. Presently, program enrollment is limited to low-income, first-time expectant moms or those with infants under age six months. Subsequent pregnancies can present challenges and many infants and toddlers present risk factors after the six-month developmental milestones. Providing family supports to a wider audience reflects a common-sense approach – one that incorporates what we know about at-risk pregnancy, child development and brain development, as well as the personal and public cost of waiting to intervene.

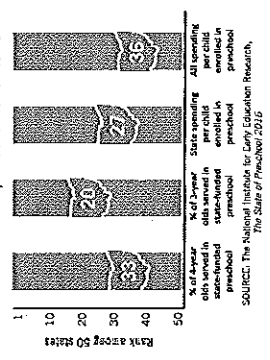
Taking Stock: How Ohio stacks up – interstate comparisons

Comparing states' investments in early learning isn't a simple, straightforward matter. Preschool enrollment numbers, state appropriation levels and children's performance on kindergarten assessments can be compared, but it is often difficult to draw meaningful conclusions about what the data mean. Straight across comparison can be tricky because program and service delivery systems are different from state to state. Eligibility and quality standards vary widely among the states. Assessment systems and performance expectations are not consistent across state lines.

One effort at interstate comparisons is The National Institute for Early Education Research's (NIEER's) The State of Preschool 2016. Most of the data reported in this state preschool yearbook come from a survey conducted by NIEER under contract to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES).

How does Ohio stack up? In terms of access to preschool, it was near the middle of the pack in 2015-2016 – 33rd in the percent of four-year olds served in state-funded preschool, and 20th in the percent of three-year olds enrolled in these programs. Ohio was 27th in state spending per child enrolled in preschool, but it was only 36th in all spending per child enrolled.

How Ohio Stacks Up: Interstate Comparisons 2015-2016



Yet, as previously suggested, *simple rankings like these can be misleading*. For example:

- In constructing its resource rankings, NIEER reported \$59 million in spending on Ohio's state-funded preschool program in 2016, which was just 8% of the state's 2016 investment (\$746.6 million) in early childhood services. Competing definitions of state preschool and Ohio's investment in a system of programs serving children prenatal-through-kindergarten account for this rather significant discrepancy.
- NIEER's preschool yearbook pegs Ohio's total state preschool enrollment in 2015-2016 at 14,765, a number considerably smaller than the enrollment numbers presented in this report. Why? Because NIEER focuses on the Ohio Department of Education's publicly funded preschool program, which means that thousands of three- and four-year olds solely served in SUTQ three-, four- and five-star programs (meeting the same standards) as well as those served by Pre-School Special Education and Head Start are excluded from NIEER's rankings.

NIEER's access rankings are based on the percent of all four-year olds and three-year olds enrolled in state preschool programs. Therefore, Ohio's access rankings reflect the state preschool enrollment of just 8% of all four-year olds, and 3% of all three-year olds. In contrast, the ODJFS reports that 69% of eligible (i.e., economically disadvantaged) four-year olds were served by state preschool programs (i.e., ECE, Head Start and Special-Education Preschool) in 2016-17. This discrepancy reflects NIEER's focus on Universal Pre-K and the state of Ohio's emphasis on enrolling more high-need children living in economically disadvantaged families in quality preschool programs.

Moving the School-Readiness Needle

Wanting to solve a big problem – by creating the breakthrough or successfully changing the established paradigm – is a natural desire. But this kind of problem-solving – like ensuring that every child enters kindergarten ready to succeed – is difficult. Some might argue, futile.

But it's not. Across Ohio, several *community-based early-learning "laboratories"* are moving the needle by improving all children's readiness for kindergarten.

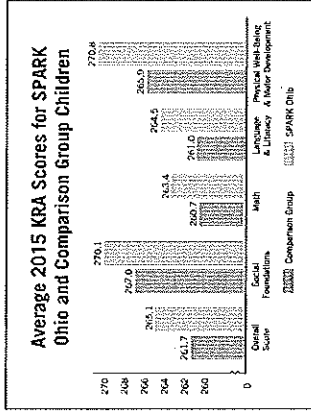
SPARK Ohio. Built on the Sisters of Charity Foundation of Canton's Quality Child Care initiative, SPARK (Supporting Partnerships to Assure Ready Kids) is a family-focused kindergarten-readiness program that has served 9,800 children in Stark and 11 other counties since 2003. The initiative gets children ready for school and works closely with families and schools to ensure effective transitions. Its goals include improving access to high-quality early-education experiences, improving school readiness of children participating in the program and improving parents' and families' understanding of readiness for learning. Launched initially to serve 1,000 children ages three to five in the Canton area, SPARK uses a home-visitation model with paraprofessionals serving as parent partners in the development of individual learning plans. The program aligns with Ohio's early-learning content standards and provides books, supplies and learning materials.

Beginning with the 2016-17 school year, SPARK is serving 22 school districts in 11 Ohio counties. Program sites are funded, in part, by a Race to the Top grant for a demonstration project in rural counties, and by \$1 million in state funding to expand into three new counties and provide support across existing sites. Additional support has been received from the Ohio Department of Education, local departments of Job and Family Services, libraries, school districts, United Way chapters, foundations and community-based organizations.

Most importantly, SPARK is getting results. In Stark County, children enrolled in the SPARK program significantly outscored their non-SPARK peers on the 2015-16 KRA, and an independent evaluation has determined that SPARK children significantly and consistently outperform their non-SPARK peers in the same classrooms in reading and mathematics, **at least through the fifth grade.**

Compared with their non-SPARK peers in the same classrooms, SPARK children statewide demonstrate increased readiness for kindergarten in rural, small town and urban environments. Whatever characteristics place a child at risk, SPARK helps bridge the gap to ensure she or he is ready and eager to begin school – and the program can be effectively replicated in any type of community.

- **Appalachia Ohio.** The Corporation for Ohio Appalachian Development (COAD) and its community partners are launching coordinated projects, including initiatives to ensure that early-childhood programs skillfully transition children when they age into new programs or change programs based on their needs. Training for existing child-care personnel and potential child-care providers to become quality early-childhood providers, and efforts to promote greater philanthropic investment in the region's children, are also part of this work.
- **Cincinnati.** Preschool Promise, a broad coalition of public, non-profit and business organizations, are working to expand access to quality public and community-based preschool programs through tuition assistance for income-eligible families.
- **Cleveland.** Two early learning initiatives are working collaboratively – one in the city and the other throughout Cuyahoga County. A 2014 Case Western Reserve University report showed that children who were entered in high-quality pre-K programs scored higher on the old KRA-L, and had a 36% greater chance of passing the Third-Grade Reading Assessment.
- **Columbus.** In Ohio's capital city, 69% of the children who participated in Early Start Columbus entered kindergarten on track in language and literacy skills; in contrast, only 42% of all Columbus children entered kindergarten on track in these areas.
- **Dayton.** The county's Preschool Promise initiative is working to ensure that all children have the opportunity to attend at least one year of high-quality preschool, with a scale-up strategy and a target of 4,000 children to be served.
- **Toledo.** The Toledo Community Foundation, Aspire, a re-energized Head Start program and their community partners are focused on ensuring that young children county-wide enter kindergarten ready to succeed – and on educating families and the community about the social, emotional and academic benefits of preschool attendance.



Collectively, these early-learning "laboratories" – all working to expand quality-preschool experiences – are rooted locally, driven by an explicit policy strategy and backed by a broad coalition of public, private, non-profit and philanthropic organizations. All are working to develop sustainable funding streams capable of supporting innovative childhood development and early-learning services. Two of these communities – Cleveland and Cincinnati – have won voter support for preschool levies, proving there is a political will for early learning.

These indigenous initiatives are learning actively from each other – coming together to do something that ultimately can change things for children and families in their own service areas and statewide. Much can be learned from their experiences, which are described in greater detail in Appendix A at the end of this report.





Ready or Not A renewed call to action

Since 2010, the early-childhood game plan has moved the needle on metrics, access, program quality and professional development. Coordinated efforts and focused investments have placed Ohio in a position to accelerate action. And, **acceleration is needed because the good, incremental progress of the past is not good enough.**

Why haven't the results been better? There are multiple explanations, including the fact that six years is a short period in which to expect huge changes. In addition, many of our young children – especially those who are economically disadvantaged – are enrolled in programs that are not high quality, and even more children are still being left behind because there are not enough program “slots” to serve them.

We have seen it in both voluntary home-visiting and pre-kindergarten programs where tight money has prevented the state and its communities from meeting the demand for more high-quality child development and early-learning services, which has important implications for student outcomes.

Poverty's influence also needs to be acknowledged. With poverty comes a host of stressors and hardships that influence a child's life and relationships with caregivers and others in her or his social network. In the absence of adequate buffering relationships and supports, these stressors can adversely affect the architecture of a young child's brain. And, the strain poverty creates on families impedes a young child's ability to learn, which compromises efforts to increase kindergarten readiness.

Another factor – not foreseen a few years ago – is the opiate epidemic that has profound consequences for young children. The number of children prenatally exposed to opiates is rapidly increasing, and the children of parents with opiate addictions are at increased risk for neuropsychological dysfunction. Children raised in substance-abuse environments are vulnerable to the toxic stress common within families struggling with addiction – that is, depression, anxiety, PTSD and behavioral and learning difficulties, as well as significant attachment problems. Many of these children will struggle as they ready themselves for kindergarten.

Practically speaking, the opiate issue has already siphoned resources away from early learning. Ignoring it now will only make matters worse.

Here the actions of both the Kasich Administration and the General Assembly are to be applauded. The Administration has aggressively attacked the opiate crisis since day one. Bold stances on Medicaid expansion, law enforcement salariness and practice changes, and stricter health care professional standards mitigated drug misuse. The MOMS program's teams of doctors and other health professionals helped women and moms who are struggling with opioid use. The Start Talking initiative encouraged all Ohioans to address the problem with young people and each other.

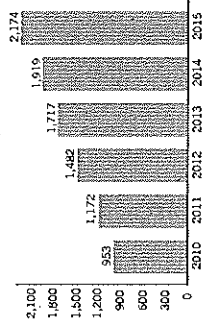
The Ohio General Assembly added new dollars – beyond the governor's recommendation – in Ohio's FY 2018 – FY 2019 biennial budget to help local governments and child welfare agencies deal with this crisis. And now, a Third Frontier Commission investment could quickly bring promising drug-addiction breakthroughs from the research laboratory to the front lines of the fight against Ohio's opiate epidemic.

The Roundtable supports the ongoing efforts of state government, non-governmental organizations and the private sector to tackle the infant mortality and opiate addiction crises because the early brain development years are so fleeting – yet, so impactful on the totality of a child's life, including her or his future learning opportunities.

Infant Mortality and Ohio's Opiates Epidemic

- The rate for babies born drug-addicted increased 128% during the five-year period from 2010 to 2015.

Ohio Babies Born Drug-Addicted
Babies hospitalized with Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome (NAS), 2010-2015



- Babies born in Ohio's Appalachian region are almost twice as likely as the average Ohio newborn to be born drug-addicted.
- A recent survey by the Public Children Services Association of Ohio showed that parental drug use was identified at the time of removal for 50% of the children taken into custody by Ohio's child-protection agencies in 2015.
- 70% of children age one or younger placed in Ohio's children-services system are children of parents with substance-use disorders involving opiates and cocaine.
- Ohio's overall infant mortality rate rose from 6.8 infant deaths per 1,000 live births in 2014 to 7.2 in 2015. The white infant mortality rate rose from 5.3 to 5.5, and the black infant mortality rate increased from 14.3 to 15.1, with black babies dying at nearly three times the rate for white babies.
- Ohio's rate of black infant mortality in 2014 was third highest nationally for the 39 states where a rate could be calculated.

SOURCES: Ohio Department of Health and Ohio Public Children Services Association of Ohio



Our Children Can't Wait

Ohioans grasp the sobering implications of Kindergarten Readiness Assessment. They understand the seriousness of infant-mortality rates and addiction statistics, which are documented in the sidebar on page 21. And, so do Ohio's business leaders.

Business decision-makers know when addressing chronic and emerging challenges means moving from research and development to a full-scale roll-out. **For those who lead the state of Ohio, this is that time.**

Much more needs to be done to position individual children, diverse communities and the state for the educational, social and economic challenges of 2020 and beyond. **Playing a waiting game is akin to not playing at all for another generation.** And, no new investment, or only marginal investment, means Ohio's competitiveness slips again.

“The path to a good education and a successful career starts early. High-quality early learning from birth to age five helps children enter kindergarten ready to learn and prepared to thrive in elementary school and beyond. Positive early-childhood experiences build the foundation for a skilled workforce and a competitive economy.”

Albert Stroucken
Chairman and CEO (retired)
Owens-Illinois

Recommendations: A Renewed Call to Action

The Roundtable continues to believe that the core driver of kindergarten readiness is **access to quality, cost-effective early-learning experiences.**

This means that any actions to enhance a public early-childhood system must contribute to improved supply and better approaches to connecting parents and their children to the programs they need. These actions also must expand parental and guardian convenience, affordability and perception of how quality impacts their children. Finally, these actions must improve providers' curriculum and practices used to reduce achievement gaps, foster equity and help each child fully develop.

These attributes provide the basis for a challenging roadmap of specific, strategic actions needed to re-energize Ohio's kindergarten-readiness initiatives by improving the ability of families, providers and communities to apply pertinent child-development knowledge.

Ohio's current economic realities cannot be an excuse for doing nothing – or for backing away from action on behalf of young children. There are three areas in which policymakers should act **with a clear sense of urgency** to move the state's early-care and school-readiness agenda forward – to re-set with an early-learning action agenda **to ensure that, by 2025, 90% of Ohio children entering school will be ready to succeed.**



Fast-track significant state investment to take proven programs to scale

Ohio must fast track significantly larger investments in proven early-learning programs to provide access for those who need them – when they need them. State officials must build upon the Kasich Administration's success – in a difficult budget environment (FY 2018 – FY 2019) – in expanding investments in our children's earliest years.

Steady intention is required to muster the resources needed to expand the capacity of needed programs serving pregnancy through third-grade to achieve the kinds of ambitious results needed to move Ohio's economic needle. It is time for Ohio to embrace taking programs to scale at appropriate dosage for eligible populations.

- The value of earlier interventions and home visiting must be harnessed, even for hard-to-reach populations and in geographic areas facing capacity challenges. This means connecting multiple programs into a comprehensive voluntary home-visiting strategy that is driven by a precise focus on outcomes. It also means changing arbitrary eligibility standards that curb short-term state costs and exacerbate long-term challenges.

- Access to a quality-preschool experience should become the childhood norm. Leaving preschoolers behind simply shifts the burden to kindergarten and later grades.
- Families must be respected and given the tools and information necessary to optimize their child's developmental potential.

What kind of investment will “fast-tracking” require? What will it cost to take proven early-learning programs to scale? It is not entirely clear. So, **Ohio's next Governor and members of the Ohio General Assembly should commission an independent study to quantify the investment needed to achieve 90% kindergarten readiness by 2025.**

Pay for Success models that shift the risk from the public to the private sector should be thoroughly investigated to finance such expanded investment.

Investing together, the results will pay off for all Ohioans as youngsters become better performing students and well-rounded adults.

2

Relentlessly pursue quality programs that make a difference

Ohio's families and children maximize their opportunities and growth when early-childhood and early-learning programs meet quality standards. Going forward, this means directing state investment in programs that:

- meet quality, evidence-based standards or models;
- employ qualified professionals; and
- enroll in the independently-verified, standards-based Step Up To Quality star-rating system.

Research constantly illuminates more about what constitutes quality programming. State leaders should stay nimble in their approaches to take advantage of what works, yields the best outcome and provides the best return on public investment.

Ohio knows the means to better outcomes: provide sufficient resources and give eligible families the chance to enroll their children in three-, four- and five-star early learning and care programs. This requires investments for new ECE and home visiting slots, and for child welfare services. It necessitates the operational capacity to continue supporting programs as they enroll in SUTQ and attain the higher quality ratings required by current law.

Policy makers should also give serious and thoughtful consideration to requiring all licensed early childhood programs to be enrolled and rated in the Step Up to Quality system – not just programs receiving public funds. If research and common sense show the quality of the program impacts a child's outcomes, then all Ohio families deserve to be fully informed about the quality of their choices for their children. All parents and families must see the benefits of quality early learning services before Ohio can develop the political will to go bold by investing in quality programs that make a difference.

What is high quality?

High-quality early-learning programs engage families by offering welcoming, caring environments in which well-trained professionals use a research-based, developmentally appropriate curriculum to prepare every child for kindergarten and beyond. Imaginative play is used to create rich learning experiences that encourage children to follow their natural curiosity. And, all policies and practices are used to reduce achievement gaps, foster equity and develop the whole child, with emphasis on a wide range of cognitive, physical and social-emotional skills essential for creating a competitive workforce.

3

Strengthen leadership, giving it authority to sustain effective cross-agency decision making

Consolidating early childhood leadership – solely accountable to the governor – is so important for several reasons. First, how decisions are made and carried out matters, and who makes decisions and has responsibility for coordinating activities across organizational boundaries also matters. And, when programs for young children are fragmented and disjointed, governed by myriad state agencies and policymaking bodies, early learning programs and services can easily be “lost” between multiple and sometimes competing priorities.

Second, new state investment in early learning should only come with effective, consolidated leadership solely accountable to the governor. When everyone is in charge, no one is in charge. So, improved leadership and accountability will allow for tighter management of disparate services and diverse funding streams. They will also generate focused results and public value.

Third, consolidated leadership will support efforts to use “predictive analytics” to inform what needs to be done – and why – to achieve 90% kindergarten readiness. By mining, analyzing and synthesizing the data from the Early Learning Assessment (ELA), Kindergarten Readiness Assessment (KRA), the new Third Grade Reading Assessment and the state's Step Up To Quality system, predictions can be made about students' future performance. And, good, fully analyzed data can be used by policymakers to promote enhanced quality, identify best practices and target new investments that will improve children's readiness to succeed in kindergarten and beyond.⁷

This kind of thinking and strategizing cannot be carried out by multiple state agencies, with parochial agendas, in a fragmented, disjointed environment. Good stewardship requires discipline and the direction of the state's chief executive.

A Final Observation

In our 2010 report, we asserted that the road to college – and to healthy and productive lives – begins at birth. We challenged Ohio to invest in our youngest children to succeed as learners before it invested in anything else.

Today, we reaffirm our commitment to an action agenda that makes quality, cost-effective early-learning experiences accessible to all Ohio children. Only through early learning will Ohio's young children enter kindergarten ready to succeed in the classroom and beyond. And, only through positive early-learning experiences will the foundation be laid for a skilled, competitive workforce and a thriving Ohio economy.

APPENDIX A

Ohio's Community-Based Early Learning Laboratories

Appalachia

A recent study by the Crane Center for Early Childhood Research and Policy – *Profiles of School Readiness Among Rural Appalachian Children From Low-Income Homes* (2016) – points to a growing number of studies showing that children who grow up in rural areas, including the Appalachian region, tend to lag behind their non-rural peers in their educational achievement. It gives us data from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, which document that kindergartners in rural settings perform more poorly than suburban and urban kindergartners on measures of both mathematics and reading. And the Crane report asserts that gaps in educational achievement may be attributed, in part, to characteristics of the homes, schools and community environments of rural children compared to their urban and suburban peers.

Ohio's Appalachian region is home to one in six Ohio children and presents diverse, and often long-standing, challenges to school preparedness across 32 distinct counties. Several local programs are working diligently on a host of early-childhood issues. A few program highlights include the following:

- The Waterford Institute, a non-profit, education-technology company, has launched an on-line preschool/early-learning pilot called "Upstart" at no-cost to sites in Adams, Athens, Belmont, Ross and Scioto counties. Upstart can serve up to 25 children in each county. While the program is not a substitute for high-quality preschool, it is being studied as a potential way to bring opportunities to four-year-old children who may be in home settings and not enrolled in other preschool programs.
- Live Healthy Kids is a nutrition and cooking-curriculum program reaching second graders in ten school districts, as well as at after-school and summer programs. It teaches young children the importance of healthy eating for their growth and gives them hands-on cooking experience.
- In partnership with Belmont and Jefferson County Community Action Agencies, using a TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families) workforce development grant, the Corporation for Ohio Appalachian Development (COAD) is training Head Start parents, existing child-care personnel and newly recruited potential child-care providers to become *quality* early-childhood providers. The participants learn new skills in the nationally-recognized Child Development Associate Credential (CDA) program, a 135-hour series of courses in child development, professionalism, business practices and quality early learning. The project's goal is to train entry level practitioners for work in child-care home and center programs now and for the future.
- On a regional level, early-childhood leaders are galvanizing to move forward on kindergarten-readiness recommendations and action steps advanced by two recent reports: the Crane report cited above, and the Children Defense Fund Ohio's 2016 report, *Ohio's Appalachian Children at a Crossroads: A Roadmap for Action.* Coordinated by COAD and its community partners, this work involves cohesive early-childhood approaches to effectively transitioning children when they age into new programs or change programs based on their needs, efforts to advance philanthropic investment in the region's children and creation of a collaborative data hub capable of analyzing and synthesizing data across different programs, systems and counties.



Community-Based Early Learning Laboratories

The Cincinnati Preschool Promise

Coming out of a period of civil unrest in 2001, the United Way of Greater Cincinnati established Success By 6 (SB6), a community movement that emphasized the importance of kindergarten readiness. Through targeted investments and evaluation efforts, SB6 set a community baseline and sowed the connection between kindergarten readiness and third grade reading.

In subsequent years, numerous collaborators – including the Strive Partnership, the Chamber's Leadership Cincinnati, funders and advocacy organizations – joined the effort. Later, a return on investment study commissioned through the University of Cincinnati and a Rand study that verified preschool's benefits sparked interest in the business community – and confirmed the need for new funding, both for the school district and expanded, high-quality preschool services.

Collectively, these developments gave birth to the Cincinnati Preschool Promise (CPP), a unique partnership between the Cincinnati Public School District and United Way of Greater Cincinnati, which will begin operation at the beginning of the 2017 school year (August). With a focus on increasing access to high-quality preschool for children living within the boundaries of the Cincinnati Public School district, the expected participation rate over time is 75% of 9,150 three- and four-year-old children. **GOAL:** 85% of children will be prepared for kindergarten by 2020. Toward this end, CPP will expand access to quality public and community-based preschool programs (i.e., three or more stars in the state's Step Up To Quality SUTQ program) through tuition assistance for income-eligible families; and increase the number of quality preschool programs by providing support for quality improvements.

SUSTAINABLE FUNDING: Issue 44 was placed on the ballot in November 2016 with the support of The Cincinnati Business Committee and the Cincinnati Regional Business Committee, with endorsements by more than 60 leading organizations including the Cincinnati USA Regional Chamber, African American Chamber of Commerce, Hispanic Chamber of Commerce and Indian American Chamber of Commerce. Voter approval of the 2016 combined levy means \$1.5 million a year (for five years) for the CPP, with another \$33 million a year going directly to the Cincinnati Public Schools for its K-12 services. Some of the preschool dollars will be used to support public-preschool services. In addition, CPP will seek private funding to address barriers to participation (e.g., transportation options) or deterrents to increasing quality.

RESULTS:

- Since CPP is new, no program results are presently available. It is important to note, however, that two-thirds of Cincinnati's preschool children live in families earning below 200% of the federal poverty level.
- Only 42% of preschool seats in Cincinnati are considered high quality, and half of the city's preschool seats are in programs not participating in SUTQ.



Community-Based Early Learning Programs

Invest in Children and PRE4CLE/Cleveland

In 1999, officials in Cuyahoga County joined with private-sector leaders in business and philanthropy to create the public/private partnership now known as Invest in Children. Its goal was to create a high-quality, comprehensive early-childhood system of services for children prenatally through age five, and to build community awareness of the importance of healthy early-childhood development.

Seventeen years later, this partnership is stronger than ever, as demonstrated by a new 2016 investment of \$23 million, including \$10 million in public funds, to expand and enhance the county's successful Universal Prekindergarten (UPK) program, which makes high-quality preschool affordable to low- and moderate-income families through generous scholarships. This new funding is in addition to the annual \$4.7 million in public dollars that was already committed.

Invest in Children recently received a grant from the U.S. Department of Education to conduct a feasibility study and determine whether a Pay for Success funding model can be implemented for UPK in the future. Other sustainability strategies also are being explored.

Since its launch in 2007, UPK has served more than 12,000 children. Currently, 2,000 children aged three to five are enrolled in UPK, and that number will double in the Fall of 2017 thanks to the new investment in public and private dollars.

A second initiative, PRE4CLE, was born out of the 2012 Cleveland Plan for Transforming Schools, an effort to reinvent public education led by Mayor Frank Jackson. PRE4CLE was launched in 2014 as part of that plan.

GOAL: Improve children's kindergarten readiness by offering every three- and four-year-old Cuyahoga County child access to high-quality preschool.

SUSTAINABLE FUNDING: The Cleveland Metropolitan School District invests \$15 million a year in the district-based preschool program. Also, Cuyahoga County invests \$7 million a year in its preschool children through the UPK program – and additional funding has been contributed by businesses and philanthropic organizations.

RESULTS:

- Since PRE4CLE's inception in 2014, preschool enrollment in Cleveland has grown from 24% to 36% of all preschool-aged children served in high-quality preschool classrooms.
- A 2014 report by Case Western Reserve University (CWRU) showed that children who entered in high-quality UPK and Cleveland Metropolitan School District programs scored an average of 3 points higher on the KRA-L. Research conducted by CWRU documented that these higher KRA-L scores translated into a 30% greater chance of passing the Third Grade Reading Assessment.



Community-Based Early Learning Programs

FutureReady and Early Start Columbus

Greater Columbus is rich with programs and services, dedicated teachers, social workers and visionary leaders who have made it their mission to improve the kindergarten readiness of all children. Among these, two organizations stand out.

FutureReady Columbus, a public/private organization, integrates existing services and supports a "cradle through career" approach to education and workforce excellence. Chaired by Tanny Crane, FutureReady's early-childhood initiatives, including ready4success and SPARK (which has been available in Columbus since 2013), identify promising practices for early-literacy and mathematics development, work with community partners to increase the number of early-learning and academic-assistance programs, and assist agencies and programs in tracking performance toward enhanced kindergarten readiness.

Operating in partnership with FutureReady, Early Start Columbus was launched in 2014 by then-Mayor Michael Coleman and then-City Council President (now Mayor) Andrew Ginther. Both Columbus City Schools and community-based providers are eligible to participate in this prekindergarten-expansion program, which uses data from ready4success to help inform instruction and supports professional development for teachers.

FutureReady, Columbus City Schools, Franklin County Department of Job and Family Services, Action For Children and the state of Ohio are invaluable partners in this initiative.

GOAL: Improve all children's kindergarten readiness by expanding access to high-quality prekindergarten programs and services for every four-year-old in Columbus. The goal is universal access, with a typical participation rate of 68%. Presently, 12,000 four-year-olds reside in Columbus, so the program's target is about 7,700 children.

SUSTAINABLE FUNDING: The city of Columbus has provided \$5 million a year in General Revenue Funds for the last three years. In addition, the city is working with FutureReady Columbus and other partners to develop a sustainable and comprehensive funding model.

RESULTS:

- In 2016, 69% of the children who participated in Early Start Columbus entered kindergarten on track in language and literacy skills. In contrast, only 42% of all Columbus children entered kindergarten on track in these areas.



Community-Based Early Learning Programs

Preschool Promise, Montgomery County/Dayton

Learn to Earn Dayton is a cradle-to-career initiative designed to ensure that all Montgomery County students reach their full potential and are college and career ready. Its early-childhood component was launched in 2007 as ReadySetSoar by the Montgomery County Family & Children First Council and the Frank M. Taft Foundation.

In 2014, the City of Kettering and the Kettering City Schools partnered with Montgomery County to establish the Preschool Promise Pilot, started as only tuition assistance for low-income families. The Pilot informed the design of a more comprehensive initiative focused on educating the community about the importance of high-quality preschool, expanding and improving the quality of preschool programs and assisting families in finding and paying for preschool experiences.

Today, Preschool Promise, Inc. is a 501(c3) organization that will serve all four-year-olds across Dayton in the 2017-18 school year, and the pilot will continue in Kettering as the program works to scale up countywide, with a target of 6,500 children to be served.

GOALS: Ensure that all children have the opportunity to attend at least one year of high-quality preschool.

SUSTAINABLE FUNDING: Voters in the city of Dayton approved a 0.25% income tax increase in November 2016. Four million dollars of the estimated proceeds will be used to fund preschool for four-year-olds in the city. Other funding options are being investigated to take the program countywide, at an annual cost of \$12 to \$16 million. Preschool Promise also receives funding from several business partners and local school districts.

RESULTS:

- While the most recent KRA scores are still being analyzed, Learn to Earn Dayton reports that 96% of Montgomery County children who scored in the highest band on Ohio's old KRA-L went on to be "proficient" readers in third grade; only 63% of children who scored in the lowest performing range on this assessment were "proficient" readers in third grade.



Community-Based Early Learning Programs

Stark County's SPARK Program

Built on the Sisters of Charity Foundation of Canton's Quality Child Care Initiative, SPARK (Supporting Partnerships to Assure Ready Kids) was developed in 2003 in partnership with the W. K. Kellogg Foundation. This family-focused kindergarten-readiness program has served 9,800 children in Stark and 11 other counties. The program operates in collaboration with the local early childhood hub, the Early Childhood Resource Center, which has forged strong, longstanding partnerships with a broad array of early-childhood stakeholders.

GOALS: (1) Improved access to high-quality early-education experiences; (2) Improved school readiness of participating children; and (3) Improved parental engagement in and understanding of children's readiness for learning.

SUSTAINABLE FUNDING: SPARK is funded by many private and public entities, including foundations, United Way chapters, libraries, departments of Job and Family Services, and schools. In addition, the state of Ohio allocated \$1.1 million of its Race to the Top funding to expanding SPARK into three rural communities. Most recently, a \$1 million appropriation was included in the state's last biennial budget to support SPARK at existing sites and expand it into three new counties. Stark County foundations recently collaborated on a four-year plan to increase the number of Stark County SPARK children from 23% to 48% of children living in families at 200% of poverty or below.

RESULTS:

- SPARK children significantly outscored their non-SPARK peers on the 2015-16 KRA.
- An independent evaluation has determined that SPARK children significantly and consistently outperform their non-SPARK peers in the same classrooms in reading and mathematics, at least through the fifth grade.
- Using a KRA-based typology developed by the Ohio Department of Education, SPARK children – whether rural, urban or suburban – enter school significantly better prepared to succeed than their non-SPARK peers.



Community-Based Early Learning Programs

Aspire and the Toledo Community Foundation

In Lucas County, the Toledo Community Foundation is ground zero – the center of impactful reforms in public education. Dating back to 2008, the Foundation has led efforts to transform the county's two urban and six suburban school districts into high performing organizations capable of producing the skilled workers needed for a robust local economy.

ASPIRE. In partnership with the Lucas County Family Council and the local United Way organization, the Foundation established Aspire in 2012. A cradle-to-career success organization, Aspire was created to serve as a convener – to create a shared focus for a broad range of organizations committed to helping children and families throughout the community. Aspire is built on the StriveTogether platform, and within three months had attracted the support of nearly 300 nonprofit, education and business leaders.

GOALS: (1) Make outcomes visible and create accountability for achieving those outcomes; and (2) facilitate the adoption of continuous improvement by providing education and the necessary tools and training for community-based organizations.

Neither a service provider, nor a funder, Aspire is working to harness community resources in a more productive way using data and continuous improvement methodologies. Presently, it is focused on ensuring that young children enter kindergarten ready to succeed. It also is educating families and the community about the social, emotional and academic benefits of preschool attendance.

SUSTAINABLE FUNDING: In addition to the Foundation, Aspire receives funding support from major corporations in the community, many of which are represented on the Board of Managers. Discussions are ongoing about placing a levy on the ballot, but there are no plans presently to go in that direction.

HEAD START: Toledo Community Foundation has a history of taking risks to improve outcomes for the community's youth. Its Head Start initiative is one such example.

Head Start is Lucas County's largest source of public funding to support high-quality early-childhood education. Yet, for years, the county's Head Start program lacked the elements of quality that research says are essential, and was not achieving strong outcomes for children in poverty. When the federal government announced in 2011 that it would require Head Start programs to compete for funds, the Foundation worked with Toledo Public Schools and other community partners to craft a high-quality federal grant proposal.

In a game-changing opportunity for area youth, the federal government decided to split the grant between the Foundation-led coalition and another operator, Brightside, a Pittsburgh-based, for-profit early education and child-care provider. Today, the two grantees are working collaboratively to offer high-quality services to approximately 2,000 high-poverty children in Lucas County. Nearly all classrooms are rated 5 stars in the state's SUTQ system.



APPENDIX B

Smart Beginnings: A Renewed Call to Action

Smart early-learning services pay off right away. We don't have to wait a decade or longer to see strong returns on our investments in young children. Here is a sampling of some of the research behind this assertion.⁸

Children's health, social-emotional and cognitive development

- Rigorous evaluations have demonstrated that a diverse set of home-visiting models can improve outcomes for children and parents.⁹
- Voluntary home-visiting programs help prevent problems by giving parents simple strategies and guidance on how to provide a supportive and nurturing environment for children while managing the natural stress of parenting. This coaching translates to better parenting and less trauma. For example, federally-funded home-visiting programs including Early Head Start, Healthy Families America (HFA), the Nurse-Family Partnership (NFP) and Parents as Teachers (PAT) have demonstrated impacts on parenting skills.¹⁰

Children's academic achievement

- Evaluations of pre-kindergarten programs have shown reductions in participating children's odds of grade retention and special-education placement by up to 50%.¹¹
- A 2011 study concluded: "Preschool children's knowledge of mathematics predicts their later school success into elementary and even high school. Further, it predicts later reading achievement even better than early-reading skills."¹²
- Targeted, high-quality preschool can boost high-school graduation rates by 30-50% among children from low-income families. One early-education program even boosted participants' college completion, earnings and employment. These outcomes matter for today's workforce, which increasingly demands education beyond high school.¹³

Quality of the workforce

- A 20-year study examined the character skills of 800 kindergartners and followed them until age 25.¹⁴ The study found statistically significant associations between measured character-skill scores (i.e., social-emotional skills) in kindergarten and key young adult outcomes across multiple domains of education (e.g., more likely to earn a college degree), employment, criminal activity (e.g., less likely to have spent time in juvenile detention and/or arrested by early adulthood), substance use and mental health.
 - Pennsylvania's Pre-K Counts Public Private Partnership program cut the portion of children at risk for problematic social and self-control behavior from 22% to 4%.¹⁵ A recent study of Educare found that children who were randomly selected to attend this high-quality early-education and care program, from ages two to three, had fewer behavior problems, as rated by parents, than children who were not included.¹⁶
- Return on Investment (ROI)**
- Research indicates that expanding early learning – including high-quality preschool – provides society with a return on investment of up to \$8.60 for every \$1.00 spent. About half of the return on investment originates from increased earnings for children when they grow up.¹⁷

APPENDIX B continued

• An independent analysis of the Nurse Family Partnership concluded that it produced a benefit-cost ratio of almost three to one and average net savings of almost \$17,000 per family by improving children's health, reducing child abuse and neglect, increasing their readiness for school, and reducing their future crime.¹⁵

The evidence is clear. These and many other studies confirm that the foundation for social/emotional development, intellectual growth and work success — and subsequently the quality of the workforce — is laid long before children enter kindergarten. And, this is particularly true for children with economically disadvantaged backgrounds.



Endnotes

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