

March 5, 2025

Testimony – Future Ready Five (FR5)

Presented by Mario Basora, CEO

Ohio House of Representatives, Committee on Children and Human Services

Good afternoon, Chair White, Vice Chair Salvo, Ranking Member Lett, and members of the Committee.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today about Future Ready Five and the exciting work we are doing to serve Ohio's children, families, and communities.

65% of Ohio's children are not ready for kindergarten.

Future Ready Five was founded with a singular mission: to ensure that every child in Ohio, particularly those from underserved communities, has access to the tools, experiences, and support they need to succeed in school, in their future careers, and life. Because 90% of the human brain is largely developed by the age of 5, we believe that to make a real difference and change the future of Ohio's workforce, the work must be focused on the first five years of life.

At Future Ready Five, we are solving the kindergarten readiness crisis by doing four big things:

- First, we have established the Kindergarten Readiness Collaborative (KRC), a cohort of 35 schools, 96 teachers, 475 children, and over 650 parents. The cohort is primed to grow exponentially annually, serving all children across central Ohio's urban and rural counties.
- What gets measured gets done. Our second step in our work is bringing universal assessments to the 0-5 space. Our partner preschools and early learning centers all administer the same two K-Ready assessments 3 times annually to measure growth and impact directly tied to the state standards and the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment (KRA).
- We know that parents and teachers have the greatest impact on children's growth and development. Thus, our third focus is on providing families and schools the best literacy training, resources, and coaching support needed to help their children be kindergarten-ready by age 5.
- Finally, our fourth practice is to learn from the data, identify the best work, share it with others, and spread & implement those best practices across our Kindergarten Readiness Collaborative (KRC). This iterative process will continue until all children have the

opportunity to receive the very best kindergarten readiness instruction and support from their families and teachers.

Over the past year, Future Ready Five's work has shown promising outcomes tied directly to Ohio's kindergarten readiness standards. Specifically, we are excited to share the collective successes of our KRCs' accomplishments. This data has been analyzed and validated by independent data analysts from Measurement Resources®, an Ohio company specializing in program data evaluation:

- In just three months, our KRC children grew their literacy scores by 77% from October to January on The Reading House® early literacy assessment. As a comparison, most effective interventions hope to grow children by 20-40% in a whole year. Our Future Ready Five KRC children were able to double those gains in only 25% of the time.
- Further, we saw a 286% increase in children scoring “advanced” and a 52% decrease in children scoring “delayed” on the Brigance® early learning assessment. The impact of this data cannot be understated. If we can significantly increase the number of children going into kindergarten at an advanced level and simultaneously decrease the number of children going into kindergarten “delayed”, we could see a significant decrease in the number of children diagnosed with learning disabilities and in need of special education services.
- Also, of the 96 teachers who are part of our KRC cohort, only one has left their job and the cohort for other work. While 60 of these teachers began working with us in September, the other 36 started with us in March. And we have only lost 1 of them. While we intended to improve outcomes for children, we may have stumbled on a solution that, in addition to helping children learn, also significantly improves teacher retention rates in early childhood settings.

Although Future Ready Five's successes are promising, to continue our work and have a greater impact on more children, we need your help. Currently, Future Ready Five is funded in partnership by local government and corporate philanthropic dollars. To take the work to scale and have a greater impact, state funding is needed.

We are asking for an amendment to the budget for 2 million dollars to support the expansion of our work from 500 to 2,000 children. This investment could prove powerful, identifying challenges years before children enter kindergarten, and be the antidote to the kindergarten readiness crisis we have found so vexing to solve. If the data continues to show promise once we expand to 2,000 children, you could choose to take it to scale and have an even greater impact on many more children.

At its core, FR5 is about ensuring every child in Ohio — no matter their zip code or family income — has a **clear path to opportunity and success**. By supporting this funding amendment, you are

not just investing in a program. You are investing in Ohio's future workforce, our economic competitiveness, and the health and well-being of the next generation of Ohioans.

Thank you for your time, your attention, and your commitment to Ohio's children. I welcome any questions you may have.