



Ohio Association for the Education of Young Children

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Testimony Of

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Governor DeWine's Executive Budget Proposal

Chairman Richardson, Ranking Member Isaacson, and members of the House Finance Subcommittee on Primary and Secondary Education, I am honored to provide my written testimony on Governor DeWine's Executive Budget. I previously provided oral testimony to House Finance Subcommittee on Health and Human Services.

My name is Kimberly Tice, and I am the Executive Director of the Ohio Association for the Education of Young Children. Ohio AEYC is a statewide professional association that represents close to 2,000 members and also supports the entire early childhood profession across Ohio.

According to one of the nation's oldest and largest multidisciplinary centers devoted to the study of young children and their families, the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, "A comprehensive review of research on several measures of the quality of early childhood education suggests that the instructional practices of preschool teachers have the largest impact on young children's academic and social skills." Educators who are professionally trained and compensated can offer experiences that

facilitate children's growth, giving them the opportunity to acquire key cognitive, physical, social and emotional skills they will need for a lifetime of learning and achievement.

As policymakers respond to the complex science of early learning by raising expectations and educational requirements for early childhood educators, we must simultaneously fund necessary supports, establish realistic timelines, and provide increased compensation that reflects the value, importance, and return on investment generated by early childhood educators' highly skilled work.

A Unified Profession of Highly Qualified and Well-Compensated Early Childhood Educators Increases Families' Options for Safe, High-Quality Early Learning Experiences

As Ohio businesses struggle to find employees, working parents are struggling to find child care. This is due to a workforce crisis within the child care sector that is resulting in closures of classrooms and entire facilities. It is clear that staffing challenges are real and getting worse, and that compensation is both the problem and the solution. When our current systems cause harm to educators, they can also harm children and their families. Ohio's economy can't recover if child care is not available to support the workforce.

The work of early childhood education professionals is complex, nuanced, and essential. Without highly-qualified early childhood educators, far too many children will continue to start behind in kindergarten and stay behind throughout their academic career. Far too many parents will find themselves unable to find and maintain stable work—or participate in the workforce at all. Far too many of our state's children who are struggling the most—children of color, children living in poverty, and children living in rural regions—and will fall farther behind. Simply put, our state's short- and long-term economic success is impossible without our high-quality child care programs supported by the necessary financing to address the true cost of quality, which includes adequate compensation for the profession.

Recommendations

Utilize the Unifying Framework for the Early Childhood Profession

In an unprecedented show of unity, the [Unifying Framework for the Early Childhood Education Profession](#) was developed over three years by a task force of 15 leading national organizations. Together, these organizations, which represent members of the early childhood field working across states, settings, and age bands, partnered with a diverse range of stakeholders and more than 11,000 individuals to produce the Unifying Framework.

The Unifying Framework provides clarity for the road ahead to bridge the current early childhood workforce to building a well-compensated, effective, and diverse profession prepared to fully deliver on the promise of high-quality early learning for all children. The Unifying Framework offers recommendations in four key areas:

- A clearly defined profession, with distinct roles and responsibilities;
- Competencies for early childhood educators;
- Aligned professional preparation, pathways, and licensure;
- Professional compensation;
- Supportive infrastructure and shared accountability.

Adoption of the Unifying Framework as a decision-making tool will assist Ohio in making strategic long-term purposeful policy and funding decisions.

For example, to increase compensation in alignment with the Unifying Framework, Ohio can:

- Develop and implement wage scales and career pathways that align with the designations established in the Unifying Framework, promote pay parity, and lay the groundwork for cost of quality studies that accurately reflect what's needed for ECE compensation.
- Create a compensation scale that is based on a simplified, clarified, and equitably accessible career pathways that leads to K-12 parity for educators working in all settings and with all ages.

- Ensure wage scales address the need for professional benefits, include cost of living increases, and consider the implications of differentiating salary increases at different levels to incentivize educational attainment, based on the current needs and future goals for the workforce. Establish goals and plans for implementation for the wage scale – including interim goals and a timeline for full implementation and funding considerations.
- Employ strategies for ensuring wage increases take place across the early childhood system, e.g., that self-employed family child care providers and programs not receiving public funds are also able to create and implement wage scales.

Offer or expand access to professional benefits, including paid leave, health insurance, retirement, loan forgiveness, child care assistance, and substitute pools.

Develop or leverage federal, state, and employer-supported systems to offer and increase access to compensation that includes benefits, including by:

- increasing the utilization of contracts and grants paying for health insurance costs
- increasing access to navigators specifically focused on the early childhood workforce establishing categorical eligibility for early childhood educators to receive child care assistance
- developing a community-level system for qualified substitute pools that allow educators to take advantage of professional development.
- supporting debt-free college through comprehensive scholarships and/or loan forgiveness.

Our legislature and state agencies should use increased and targeted funding, legislation, and smart regulation to advance these recommendations, particularly for members of the profession, professional preparation programs, and employers/owners. The Unifying Framework provides a roadmap for investments and decision-making over time to build the early childhood profession Ohio's young children deserve.

Ensure Educator Voice in Policymaking

A commitment to a more equitable, effective policymaking process requires harnessing the powerful experiences of those who are immersed in that system. To truly understand how policies will impact our early childhood community, we must invest in cultivating meaningful dialogue with teachers and families through a "human-centered design" approach. By listening carefully to their insights and giving educators an equal seat at the table, this administration can ensure robust representation across all voices when forming future plans, policies and funding decisions.

Short-Term Recommendations for Temporary Relief

The Committee requested submission of innovative ideas and creative incentives to address the child care staffing crisis. As identified above, isolated, one-time investments will not address what is needed most to address complex issues resulting in the child care staffing crisis which existed long before the pandemic and have only been exacerbated by the pandemic. The child care industry needs an investment of federal and state funding as parents cannot afford to pay any more and early childhood educators who have subsidized the system with low wages for decades, cannot afford to earn any less. However, as the Committee has heard, there is an urgent need to do what is possible now to provide relief to the child care industry.

The following recommendations should be considered:

- Utilize available state discretionary ARPA funds to provide supplemental salary payments directly to early childhood educators.
- Fund the critical occupation scholarships for child care as recommended in the Governor's budget. Consider going one step further and establish categorical eligibility for all early childhood educators.
- Provide payment based on enrollment vs. attendance to provide predictable, stable, and adequate funding. Attendance based payment resulting in monthly variation makes it difficult to make informed decisions around budgeting, staffing, and enrollment. The resulting financial stability makes it possible to increase compensation for staff.

- Provide opt-in rate enhancements received as a result of SUTQ/PFCC participation to go directly to staff wages.
- Increase the market rate beyond the newly announced payment rates in acknowledgement that the market rate survey is constrained by current low wages when programs quantifying current operating expenses and do not reflect the true cost of care.
- Research an employer payroll tax as an option for funding child care. A recent article, [“With U.S. Child Care in Crisis, Businesses Must Step Up”](#) states, “No business is free from needing a child-care system, both today and in the future. They do, however, currently get one for free.”

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony. We are happy to be utilized as a resource and to connect you directly to early childhood educators and families in your district who stand ready to share first-hand experiences with you related to this testimony.