



Early Care and Education: Strengthening Children’s Development and Ohio’s Workforce

groundWork Recommendations for the SFY 2010-2011 budget:

- Maintain Executive Budget proposed funding for Public Preschool (*ODE GRF 200-408*) at \$34.8 million per year and the Early Learning Initiative (*ODJFS GRF 600-535*) at \$79.9 million per year.
- Align, coordinate, and improve the early childhood system through the creation of the Center for Early Childhood Development within the Ohio Department of Education.
- Maintain current eligibility levels for child care, the Early Learning Initiative, and Early Childhood Education (Public Preschool) at 200 percent of the Federal Poverty Level.

Access to affordable, quality early care and education enables children to learn and develop in a safe, consistent environment while offering parents the opportunity to focus on employment, reducing absences and increasing efficiency in the workforce.

Ohio has invested in high-quality early education programs with the support of sound research indicating the incredible opportunity for children to learn and develop in the first years of life. The quality of life for a child and the contributions the child makes to society as an adult can be traced to the first few years of life, with 85 percent of a child’s brain being formed by the age of five. During the first six years of life a child undergoes tremendous growth and change. If this period of life includes support for language, motor skills, social skills and social-emotional functioning, the child is more likely to succeed in school and later contribute to society.¹

Early Care and Education Programs in Ohio

Ohio has three programs targeted for young children before they reach kindergarten. The Early Learning Initiative (ELI), Childcare, and Early Childhood Education (public preschool) programs vary in eligibility and program structure, but all programs ensure children are in a licensed setting with quality standards focused on the child’s safety and developmentally appropriate instruction. The Early Learning Initiative and Public Preschool programs align their curriculum with Ohio early learning content standards, developed by early childhood professionals to align with Ohio’s kindergarten through 12th grade curriculum. The early learning content standards focus on four content areas, including English language arts, mathematics, social studies and science.²

Program Descriptions

The *Early Childhood Education* (public preschool) program is administered by the Ohio Department of Education’s Office of Early Learning and School Readiness. Children ages three to five at 200 percent of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) and below are eligible for the program. Early Childhood Education programs are offered within Ohio school districts. The *Early Learning Initiative* is a partnership between the Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS) and the Department of Education, representing providers in Head Start centers, community-based licensed child care settings, school districts and education service centers. Families that participate in ELI services pay based on a sliding scale of the families percentage of FPL, with co-payments ranging from \$0 dollars to \$1,219. *Child care* subsidies are provided by ODJFS for families up to 200 percent of

¹ Rob Grunewald and Arthur Rolnick, *A Proposal for Achieving High Returns on Early Childhood Development*, Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis, 2005.

² Ohio Department of Education, *Early Learning Content Standards*

the FPL. Subsidies for this program are based on the child care market rate, a biennial definition of subsidy rates based on a mandated state survey of comparable child care costs.

Table 1: Number of Children Served In Ohio’s State-Funded Early Education Programs SFY 2009

	Number of Children Served	Percent of Eligible Children Served at 200 percent of FPL and below ³
Early Learning Initiative	12,000 ⁴	7 %
Public Preschool	6,400	4 %
Child care for children birth through five	73,587 ⁵	17%

Early Care and Education Supports Working Families

High-quality, safe child care settings with qualified teachers do not come without a price-tag. The need for assistance to pay for child care, especially in this troubled economy where more parents are returning to the workforce, is growing daily. Nationwide data suggests that child care costs throughout the country are high, with some parents paying more in childcare than other household costs, including food, housing, and even tuition.⁶ In Ohio, full-time child care costs averaged \$6,641 in 2007. The average annual price for an infant in 2006 was \$6,916, and \$5,385 for a four year old child in 2007. With the price of child care rising faster than average rate of inflation, quality child care is out of reach for too many families and leaves families making difficult choices with negative impacts on children.⁷

Early education programs provide Ohio’s working families with safe, reliable, and developmentally appropriate child care options that allow parents to focus on employment and reduce further reliance on state assistance. Research has found that unscheduled absences cost small businesses an average of \$60,000 annually and large companies an average of \$3.6 million. Nearly one-quarter of unscheduled absences are due to family issues, including early care and education needs.⁸ We must continue to support Ohio’s children and families by recognizing that early care and education is a necessity that contributes to skilled, healthy Ohioans, successful businesses and strong communities.⁹

Early Education in Other States

In SFY 2009, 33 state legislatures in acted to increase their investments in high-quality early education programs even in the face of declining revenues and rising deficits. They did so to provide immediate financial relief to struggling families, build the long-term human capital and workforce competitiveness of their states, and give more children a better chance to succeed in school, in life, and in the global economy. These states included Oklahoma, now serving 70 percent of their four-year-olds in their preschool program; Illinois who is now phasing in universal access to pre-k for all three and four year olds; and West Virginia, currently serving 46 percent of four-year-olds in their pre-k program, and phasing in universal access by 2013. These investments in public preschool programs are in addition to any child care or Head Start programs these states are providing. **In comparison, Ohio is serving approximately 6 percent of all three-and-four year olds in our Early Childhood Education and Early Learning Initiative programs combined.** Ohio cannot afford to decrease funding for early education if it is truly to remain competitive in a 21st century education system and economy.

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³ Data on number of low-income children based on the National Social and Economic Supplement of the current population survey. www.nccp.org.
⁴ At the time of this report, the Early Learning Initiative Program Report was not yet available, although the Ohio Department of Education confirmed verbally to the authors of this report that all 12,000 ELI slots were filled.
⁵ Ohio Department of Job & Family Services, Bureau of Child Development, Point in time count, September 2008.
⁶ National Association of Child Care Resource & Referral Agencies, *Parents and the High Price of Child Care:2008 Update*
⁷ National Association of Child Care Resource & Referral Agencies, *Report: Price of Child Care Rising Faster Than Average Rate of Inflation*, July 2008.
⁸ National Economic Development and Law Center, *Ohio Economic Impact Executive Summary*, November 2004.
⁹ Ohio Department of Job and Family Services, January 21, 2009, <http://www.jfs.ohio.gov>