

Key Takeaways

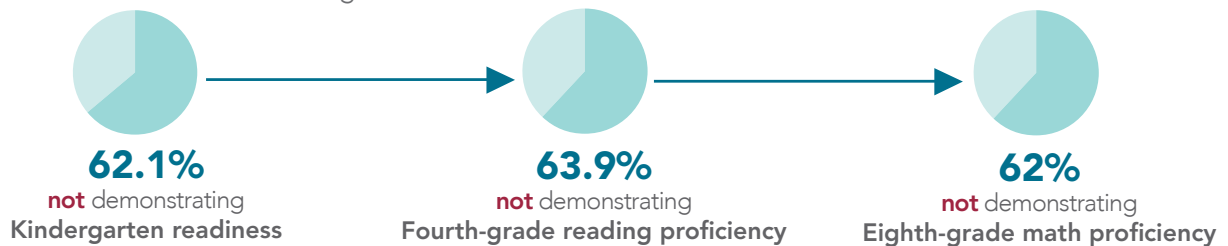
Ohio's youngest children need our support to reach their full potential.

What does the data tell us?

1 Early investments can lay the foundation for good outcomes.

Ohio kids are starting behind in kindergarten and staying behind. Kindergarten readiness screeners provide an important snapshot of a child's strengths and needs as well as insight into the diverse experiences Ohio children are having long before entering the kindergarten classroom.

Research shows a strong connection between a child's readiness to enter kindergarten and their math and reading skills throughout their academic career. When children are prepared for kindergarten, they are prepared for future academic success. This is why early investment reaps such substantial rewards. Not only does it improve school readiness but builds a strong foundation for a lifetime of success for Ohio kids.



2 Babies carry the burden.

In Ohio, babies bear a disproportionate burden of our failing systems. Even where there have been investments in high quality birth-to-five interventions, disparities remain. In Ohio, infant mortality rates continue to be worse than the U.S. average at 6.9 infant deaths (under age 1) per 1,000 births, with a **large and appalling racial disparity**.

The important goal of reaching a first birthday should be the floor, not the ceiling of success. Yet, upon birth, Ohio babies and their families are faced with insurmountable challenges:

- There are almost twice as many cases of neonatal abstinence syndrome in Ohio than in the U.S. overall.
- More young children experience maltreatment (child abuse or neglect under age 1) in Ohio than in most other states. The trend only gets worse for Ohio babies with a 20% increase from 2017 to 2020.

Less than 1 in 5
Ohio babies from families with
low incomes have access to any
early learning program.



While there are many ways we can begin to improve outcomes for our young children, focusing state efforts on its very youngest citizens is an **urgent moral imperative** as well as a **wise state investment**.

Key Takeaways

3 Ohio's families are strong, but our systems are weak.

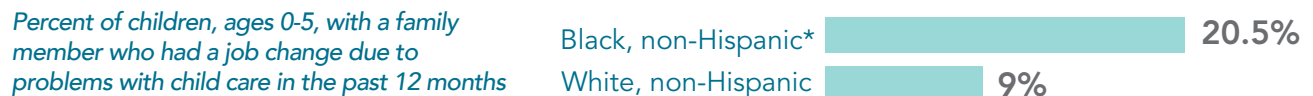
Family resiliency is defined as, “talking together about what to do, working together to solve problems, families knowing they have strengths to draw on, and staying hopeful even in difficult times.”

Most Ohio parents with young children report that their families are resilient. Yet, Ohio ranks 50th in the nation for family resiliency. Our families are sending a message to our systems that, despite their best problem-solving, strength, and hope, they are carrying the weight of policy and system failures. *While Ohio families are strong*, policies, programs, and systems must do a better job supporting the families who need it most.



4 Our future depends on fostering the promise of every child.

Many families face obstacles that include systemic racism and multi-generational poverty. These challenges disconnect them from the opportunities they need to thrive. For example, Black families are more than twice as likely to change jobs due to problems with child care than white families. To close gaps in outcomes, investments and policies must ensure that every child has a strong foundation while racism and other forms of discrimination are dismantled.



5 There are families behind the facts.

Each data point in this Dashboard represents the experiences of real Ohio children and families, but their voices are often missing from the picture.

Insights, perspectives, and stories from Ohio families are critical data that must be amplified to provide context and meaning to the numbers. Parents and caregivers are seeking deeper relationships with, and recognition by, the systems that they rely upon—they want their voices to be heard when it comes to the future of their children. Further, evidence instructs us that increasing family engagement in policymaking yields substantial returns for individual children, their families, and the systems that seek to serve them.*

Storytelling ensures that the data is grounded in the experiences of Ohio children, families, and communities. Five families who are engaged in Groundwork Ohio's **Family Action Network** were interviewed and have graciously shared their personal stories with us through a video interview and written story for this Dashboard.



*Source: *Amplifying Family Voice to Advance Equitable Outcomes for Young Children*, June 2021, Groundwork Ohio.