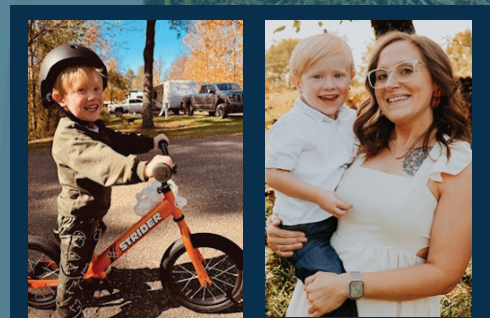


## Section 2



# Early Learning & Child Care

- Availability, affordability, and quality of child care options



## FAMILY PROFILE

## Erin Finley Noble County



“Erin says too often families are required to sacrifice the quality of care their child receives because options are few and far between, especially in Ohio’s rural counties. Even if they have choices, the cost is crushing.”

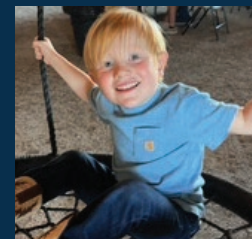
*When Erin Finley became pregnant through IVF, she quickly got on waitlists for child care near her home in Caldwell and near her work in Belpre. Even as her son was about to turn three, she still hadn’t heard from one program where she had applied. Another reached out about an opening when her child was a year-and-a-half.*

Four months after delivering, Erin went back to work. Co-workers told her about a family child care provider near their employer. That worked for a while, but the caregiver ultimately closed.

Erin found a second in-home provider in Marietta, which is along the way of her 45-minute commute to work. But she grew to have concerns about her son’s safety and abruptly removed him even though she didn’t have an alternative arrangement.

Today, the child attends Caldwell’s Noble Learning Center, a 5-Star program under Ohio’s Step Up to Quality rating system. A social worker specializing in infant and early childhood mental health, Erin, 32, loves her son’s teachers, but the cost can be overwhelming. She was paying \$776 per month, though for a period, she’s been getting a steep discount that she doesn’t expect to last once the program releases its new rates. Infant care at the learning center is substantially more expensive than for a preschool-age child.

Though she would like to buy a home, Erin struggles to save. Ohio’s Publicly Funded Child Care program isn’t an option for her—she earns too much to qualify for assistance.



Erin says too often families are required to sacrifice the quality of care their child receives because options are few and far between, especially in Ohio’s rural counties. Even if they have choices, the cost is crushing. She knows of families who are using in-home providers that they worry are caring for too many children and who don’t meet Step Up to Quality standards. “That makes me nervous,” Erin says.

Her sister, who just gave birth, settled on a different solution.

She and her husband gave up on working the same schedule. Each accepted a different shift, so one of them can always be with the baby.





# Early Learning Access

## What does the data tell us?

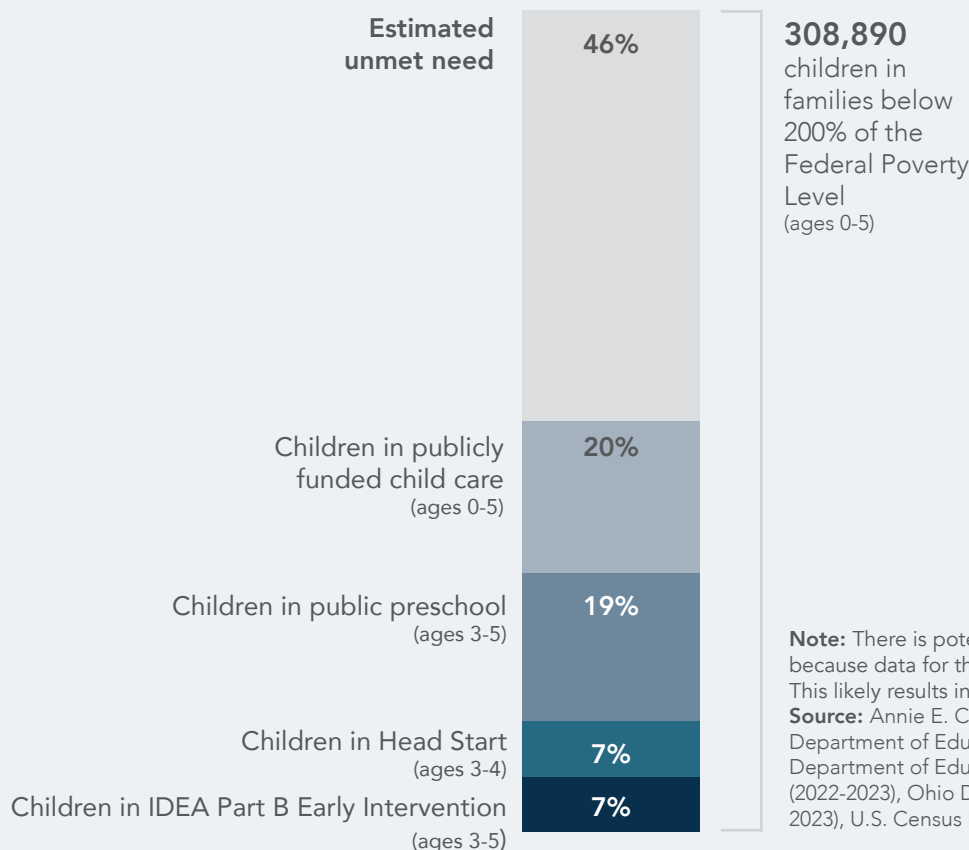
*Access to quality early learning is necessary to build a strong foundation for young children in Ohio. Safe, stable, and nurturing environments and early learning experiences are essential for children’s healthy growth and development. Children’s early experiences lay the groundwork for physical, emotional, social, and intellectual growth later in life.*

High-quality early childhood education, such as child care, Head Start, preschool, and early intervention services can improve school readiness and build the foundation for future educational achievement. Quality early childhood education and early learning supports can also counteract the harms and exposure to stressors faced by children living in poverty or other difficult circumstances.<sup>1,2</sup>

### Early learning access

Many Ohio children from families with low incomes **did not have access to early learning programs** in 2022-2023.

Percent of children, ages 0-5, with family incomes below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) who were enrolled in early childhood education



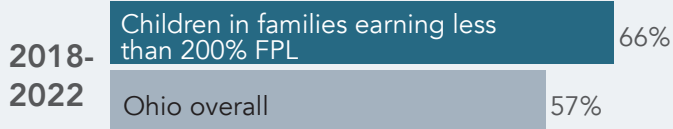
**308,890** children in families below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level (ages 0-5)

**Note:** There is potential for overlap among children served because data for these programs come from multiple sources. This likely results in an underestimate of unmet need.  
**Source:** Annie E. Casey KidsCount Data Center (2022), Ohio Department of Education and Workforce (October 2023), U.S. Department of Education, IDEA Section 618 Static Tables (2022-2023), Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (July 2023), U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey (2022)

### Not enrolled in preschool

1 Most young children in Ohio are not enrolled in preschool. Preschool enrollment has declined in the past decade, especially among children from families with low incomes.

Percent of children, ages 3-4, with family incomes below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL), who are not enrolled in school



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-year estimates, as compiled by the Annie E. Casey Kids Count Data Center

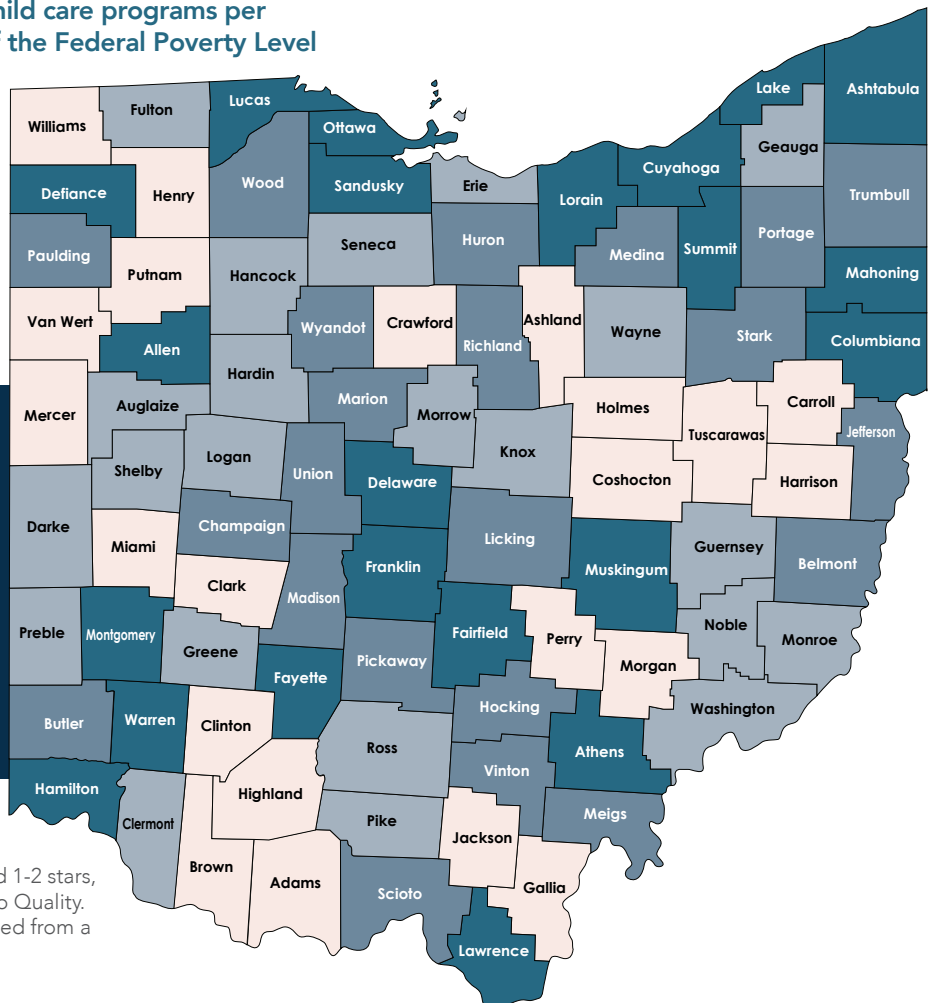
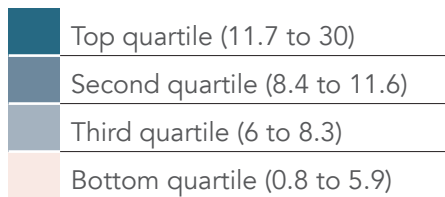


Publicly funded preschool in Ohio, available to children at or below 200% FPL, has historically been defined as 12.5 hours per week during the school year, which is a burden for working families to utilize, especially where transportation is not provided. A historic investment in preschool for 3- and 4-year-olds was made in 2023 with the goal of serving over 11,000 more Ohio children and the state has committed to piloting full-time preschool slots to meet the needs of working families.

### Publicly funded child care access

Too many low-income working families don't have access to publicly funded child care.

Number of quality-rated publicly funded child care programs per 1,000 population, ages 0-5 below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level



2

Ohio has the lowest income eligibility for publicly funded child care in the country at 145% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL).<sup>3</sup> Even for these families, access is limited based on whether you can find an available program to utilize the subsidy where you live and whether it meets the need of your family and child.

Note: Programs are considered quality if they are rated 1-2 stars, and high quality if they are rated 3-5 stars by Step up to Quality. As of July, 2024, quality rated programs were transitioned from a 5-star rating system to a three-tiered system.



**Ohio ranks LAST (51st) out of 50 states and D.C. for Eligibility for Child Care subsidy by household income.<sup>4</sup>**



***Most families are working and need care.***

More than 95% of families with young children reported working and 20% reported working at more than one job. 71% reported using non-parental care in the past month and over half of those families used center-based care.<sup>5</sup>



***Child care is difficult to secure.***

More than 1 in 3 respondents reported having difficulty finding child care and 15% of respondents reported that their child care was unreliable.<sup>6</sup>




***Families with children with delays and disabilities have a harder time accessing high-quality early learning environments.***

Nearly 1 of 5 family respondents had at least one child with a disability. 60% of these families found it difficult to find a child care provider who could meet their child's needs.<sup>7</sup>



 **Ohio's performance**

**Early Learning Access**

	Baseline	Most Recent	Trend
 <b>3 Early Head Start access, income-eligible children.</b> Percent of income-eligible children, ages 0-36 months, who were enrolled in Early Head Start	10.4% (2019)	10.3% (2022)	No Change
<b>Early Learning Access.</b> Percent of children, ages 0-5, with family incomes below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level who were enrolled in early childhood education	44.9% (varied years 2019-2021)	53.6% (varied years 2022-2023)	Improved
<b>Not enrolled in preschool.</b> Percent of children, ages 3-4, with family incomes below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level, who were not enrolled in school	61% (2012-2016)	66% (2018-2022)	No Change

For additional information see the Data Appendix.



**3 Ohio ranks 42 out 50 states and D.C. for children having access to Early Head Start.<sup>8</sup>**



# Early Learning Cost & Affordability

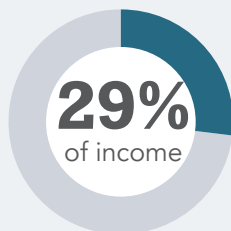
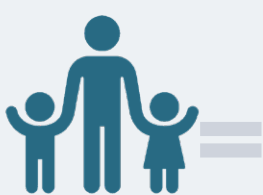
## What does the data tell us?

*Child care is a critical support for working parents. Yet, many families struggle to afford the cost of quality child care or live in a region with limited supply.*

### Child care cost burden

The average Ohio household with two children spends 29% of its income on child care. This ranged from a high of 47% in Jefferson County to a low of 19% in Union County.

Child care costs for a household with two children as a percent of median household income



The average family with two children spends 29% of its income on child care

Median household income: \$65,720 (2022)

**Source for percent of income:** Living Wage Institute and U.S. Census Bureau, Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates, as compiled by County Health Rankings and Roadmaps (2022-2023)

**Source for median income:** U.S. Census Bureau Profiles

### Child care prices continue to increase

In 2023, for center-based care, annual infant care averaged \$12,351, annual toddler care averaged \$11,125 and annual preschooler care averaged \$9,580, up to a 23% increase from 2021.<sup>9</sup>

Annual child care expenses in Ohio (avg, 2023)

Infant care:

**\$12,351**

Toddler care:

**\$11,125**

Preschooler care:

**\$9,580**



## Ohio's performance

### Early Learning Cost & Affordability

	Baseline	Most Recent	Trend
<b>Child care cost burden.</b> Child care costs for a household with two children as a percent of median household income	26.8% (2020-2021)	29.0% (2022-2023)	No Change
<b>Child care affordability.</b> Annual price of center-based child care			
Infant care:	\$10,118 (2021)	\$12,351 (2023)	
Toddler care:	\$9,050 (2021)	\$11,125 (2023)	
Preschool care:	\$7,966 (2021)	\$9,580 (2023)	



### Cost is a significant influence in navigating care.

*For most, cost is the top concern (72%), followed by provider quality (64%) and location (57%) when selecting child care. Families are burdened by more than just base child care fees. Over half (54%) report paying for transportation fees, nearly half (47%) pay additional fees for supplies, and 30% face punitive late fees. Families living in poverty are more likely to face late fees.<sup>10</sup>*



### Child care is unaffordable.

*Over half of the respondents surveyed reported needing full-time care. Almost 60% of the respondents felt that their current child care was not affordable. Over half of respondents whose children were not enrolled in child care cited the expense of child care as the reason.<sup>11</sup>*





# Early Intervention

## What does the data tell us?

*Early Intervention provides critical support to young children experiencing developmental delays or disabilities, ensuring they have access to resources and services during their most formative years.*

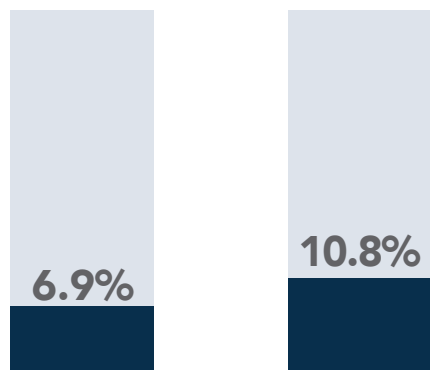
By addressing challenges early, children gain the opportunity to build essential skills, fostering their cognitive, social, and emotional development. This not only sets the stage for school readiness, but also creates a solid foundation for lifelong learning and success. Early Intervention empowers families, enhances outcomes, and helps every child reach their fullest potential.

**The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) includes services for young children with disabilities ages 0-5:**

1. **IDEA Part B:** Services for school-aged children, including children ages 3-5 years with special education needs in preschool
2. **IDEA Part C:** Early intervention for babies and toddlers ages 0-36 months, including Help Me Grow home visiting

### Preterm births can result in developmental delays.

Data suggests that many of Ohio’s babies and young children who are at higher risk for developmental delays are **not getting the early intervention services they may need.**



Children receiving IDEA Part C Early Intervention services

Children born preterm

Source: U.S. Department of Education (2022-2023); Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2022)




### Early Intervention is an invaluable support for families.

34% of respondents reported using Early Intervention and 95% of parents who received Early Intervention reported that it was helpful or met their needs.<sup>12</sup>

 **Ohio's performance**

**Early Intervention**

	Baseline	Most Recent	Trend
<b>Early Intervention service access.</b> Percent of children, ages 0-2, receiving IDEA Part C Early intervention services	5.6% (2020-2021)	6.9% (2022-2023)	Greatly Improved
 <b>4 Early Intervention accessibility.</b> Percent of children, ages 0-2, who received a referral for Early Intervention and received Early Intervention services	74.9% (SFY 2021)	81.5% (SFY 2023)	No Change
<b>Met Early Intervention need.*</b> Percent of children, ages 0-2, who were eligible for IDEA Part C Early Intervention and received services	88.9% (2021)	86.9% (2023)	No Change
<b>Language and communication, Early Intervention.</b> Percent of infants and toddlers with Individualized Family Service Plans (IFSPs) who were functioning within age expectations for acquisition and use of early language and communication knowledge and skills by the time they turn 3 years old or exit the program	45.4% (FFY 2020)	42.3% (FFY 2022)	No Change
<b>Language and communication, Special Needs Preschool.</b> Percent of preschool students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) who were functioning within age expectations for acquisition and use of early language, communication, and literacy knowledge and skills by the time they turn 6 years old or exit the program	48.5% (FFY 2019)	46.0% (FFY 2021)	No Change

\*Disaggregated data is available. Met Early Intervention need is disaggregated by eligibility category and can be found in the Data Appendix.



**7% of children receiving Early Intervention in FY 2023-2024 were exited from the program not because they didn't need services, but because there were challenges in contacting the families.**

**That means 1,042 kids who needed services didn't receive them.<sup>13</sup>**

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