

Kindergarten Readiness

The Crystal Ball into Our State's Future

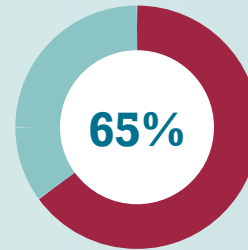
Kindergarten readiness is an outcome measure indicating how the early childhood systems in Ohio support or fail the healthy development of children.

Across Ohio, five-year-olds spend their summer eagerly telling anyone who will listen that they're heading to kindergarten. They're excited about making new friends, learning to read, and enthusiastically answering the question, "What do you want to be when you grow up?"

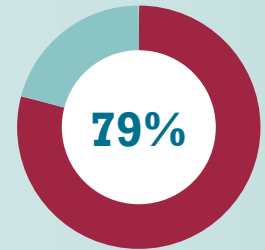
How well has Ohio prepared these eager young children for kindergarten and what does kindergarten readiness tell us about what their futures hold?

Latest Kindergarten Readiness Assessment results reveal: THERE ARE MORE OHIO KINDERGARTNERS ENTERING THE CLASSROOM NOT READY TO LEARN THAN EVER.

In the fall of 2022, 72,445 Ohio kindergarteners (65%) were NOT demonstrating readiness. And for families with low incomes, this number increases:



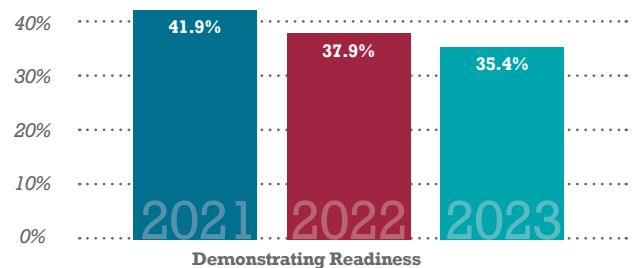
Ohio kindergarteners
NOT demonstrating
readiness



Low-income
Ohio kindergarteners
NOT demonstrating
readiness

Students from families with low incomes are more than two times less likely to demonstrate kindergarten readiness than their more affluent peers. This gap in kindergarten readiness exists in suburban, Appalachian, rural, and urban counties. Even counties that perform relatively well overall see a gap in readiness for children from families with low incomes. **More alarming is that this readiness gap doesn't close—nearly the same percentage of children who do not demonstrate readiness for kindergarten also do not demonstrate proficiency in fourth grade reading or eighth grade math.**

The percentage of Ohio's kindergarteners demonstrating readiness on the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment for the last three years.



Ohio policymakers must invest in evidence-based solutions that will correct the current downward trajectory and allow Ohio's children to thrive.

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

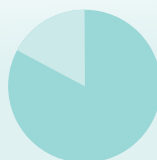
More than half (57%) of 3- and 4-year-olds are not enrolled in preschool.ⁱⁱⁱ



In fact, Ohio's publicly funded child care programs are serving **22,000 fewer children** today than they were prior to the pandemic.^{iv}

Ohio ranks 31st in infant maltreatment. The rate of child abuse and neglect (maltreatment) for Ohio infants increased by 20% from 2017 to 2020.ⁱⁱ

20%



In 2019, **ONLY 17%** of families who needed home visiting services received them.

There are only **6.4 early childhood credentialed mental health service providers per 10,000 children** ages 0-5 in Ohio.



THE **TOP 5** THINGS OHIO POLICYMAKERS MUST DO RIGHT NOW TO SUPPORT KINDERGARTEN READINESS

1 Invest in Access to Child Care & Early Learning

- **Restore** the Governor's proposed increase for publicly funded child care eligibility from 142% to 160% FPL. The proposed **\$202 million** cut over the biennium would cause 15,000 children and families to lose access to needed care.
- **Restore** the House cut of **\$150 million** in Ohio ARPA funds to support 12,000 child care scholarships for parents in critical care occupations (including child care professionals) earning between 161-200% FPL.
- **Restore** the House proposal of Child Care Infrastructure Grants focused on babies and toddlers. The Senate cut this investment in half and eliminated any focus on the eligibility of communities with high infant mortality rates, leaving only **\$15 million** over the biennium to support child care deserts.
- **Maintain** the Governor's investment in preschool and restore the House proposal of an additional **\$30 million** over the biennium.

2 Invest in Infant & Early Childhood Mental Health & Safety

- **Restore** cuts to the Governor's proposed investment in the only state budget line directly supporting young children's mental health. The House cut the executive proposal by **\$10 million** and the Senate further cut it by **\$5.5 million** over the biennium, leaving the program with only \$3 million and \$4 million in each of the respective fiscal years. This is a nearly 70% cut to the Governor's proposed investment.
- **Restore** cuts to Family and Children's Services totaling **\$107 million** over the biennium.

3 Invest in Infant Vitality & Home Visiting

- **Restore** the Governor's proposed Infant Health and Infant Vitality Grants (nearly **\$4 million**.)
- **Restore** cuts to the Governor's proposed increase to Help Me Grow Home Visiting—a nearly **\$20 million** cut over the biennium equating to a 15% decrease.

4 Invest in Maternal & Young Child Health Care

- **Restore** the Governor's proposal to extend Medicaid coverage to pregnant women and children under age 19 with incomes up to 300% of FPL and adopted through private agencies with special health care needs. (The state share of this investment was valued at **\$76.4 million** over the biennium.)
- **Restore** the House proposal to implement multi-year continuous Medicaid coverage for eligible babies, aged 0-3.
- **Restore** the House proposal on Medicaid reimbursement for Doula services.

5 Invest in Housing, Nutrition, & Family Stability

- **Restore** cuts that support safe housing for pregnant women, Healthy Beginnings at Home, which the Senate reduced from the Governor's budget proposal by **\$13.5 million** over the biennium, a nearly 80% cut.
- **Restore** TANF earmarks in FY25 that support nutrition, stability, and safety for babies and young children, including the Ohio Commission on Fatherhood and the Ohio Children's Trust Fund (nearly **\$10 million** for those programs.)

OHIO BABIES ARE COUNTING ON YOU TO RESTORE MORE THAN HALF A BILLION IN CUTS.

i. Unless referenced below, the data included in this publication are available in Groundwork Ohio's 2023 Early Childhood Dashboard (www.groundworkohio.org/dashboard).

ii. Ohio Department of Education (2023). Retrieved from <https://reports.education.ohio.gov/report/report-card-data-state-kindergarten-readiness>

iii. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families (2017, 2020).

iv. Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2023). 2023 Kids Count Data Book. Baltimore, MD. Retrieved from www.aecf.org.

v. Ohio Governor's Office of Children's Initiatives, Informal Public Records Request, May 2023