

**March 5, 2025**

**Testimony – Future Ready Five (FR5)**

**Presented by Mario Basora, CEO**

**Ohio House of Representatives, Committee on Children and Human Services**

Good afternoon, Chair White, Vice Chair Salvo, Ranking Member Lett, and members of the Committee.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today about Future Ready Five and the exciting work we are doing to serve Ohio's children, families, and communities.

65% of Ohio's children are not ready for kindergarten.

Future Ready Five was founded with a singular mission: to ensure that every child in Ohio, particularly those from underserved communities, has access to the tools, experiences, and support they need to succeed in school, in their future careers, and life. Because 90% of the human brain is largely developed by the age of 5, we believe that to make a real difference and change the future of Ohio's workforce, the work must be focused on the first five years of life.

At Future Ready Five, we are solving the kindergarten readiness crisis by doing four big things:

- First, we have established the Kindergarten Readiness Collaborative (KRC), a cohort of 35 schools, 96 teachers, 475 children, and over 650 parents. The cohort is primed to grow exponentially annually, serving all children across central Ohio's urban and rural counties.
- What gets measured gets done. Our second step in our work is bringing universal assessments to the 0-5 space. Our partner preschools and early learning centers all administer the same two K-Ready assessments 3 times annually to measure growth and impact directly tied to the state standards and the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment (KRA).
- We know that parents and teachers have the greatest impact on children's growth and development. Thus, our third focus is on providing families and schools the best literacy training, resources, and coaching support needed to help their children be kindergarten-ready by age 5.
- Finally, our fourth practice is to learn from the data, identify the best work, share it with others, and spread & implement those best practices across our Kindergarten Readiness Collaborative (KRC). This iterative process will continue until all children have the

opportunity to receive the very best kindergarten readiness instruction and support from their families and teachers.

Over the past year, Future Ready Five's work has shown promising outcomes tied directly to Ohio's kindergarten readiness standards. Specifically, we are excited to share the collective successes of our KRCs' accomplishments. This data has been analyzed and validated by independent data analysts from Measurement Resources®, an Ohio company specializing in program data evaluation:

- In just three months, our KRC children grew their literacy scores by 77% from October to January on The Reading House® early literacy assessment. As a comparison, most effective interventions hope to grow children by 20-40% in a whole year. Our Future Ready Five KRC children were able to double those gains in only 25% of the time.
- Further, we saw a 286% increase in children scoring “advanced” and a 52% decrease in children scoring “delayed” on the Brigance® early learning assessment. The impact of this data cannot be understated. If we can significantly increase the number of children going into kindergarten at an advanced level and simultaneously decrease the number of children going into kindergarten “delayed”, we could see a significant decrease in the number of children diagnosed with learning disabilities and in need of special education services.
- Also, of the 96 teachers who are part of our KRC cohort, only one has left their job and the cohort for other work. While 60 of these teachers began working with us in September, the other 36 started with us in March. And we have only lost 1 of them. While we intended to improve outcomes for children, we may have stumbled on a solution that, in addition to helping children learn, also significantly improves teacher retention rates in early childhood settings.

Although Future Ready Five's successes are promising, to continue our work and have a greater impact on more children, we need your help. Currently, Future Ready Five is funded in partnership by local government and corporate philanthropic dollars. To take the work to scale and have a greater impact, state funding is needed.

We are asking for an amendment to the budget for 2 million dollars to support the expansion of our work from 500 to 2,000 children. This investment could prove powerful, identifying challenges years before children enter kindergarten, and be the antidote to the kindergarten readiness crisis we have found so vexing to solve. If the data continues to show promise once we expand to 2,000 children, you could choose to take it to scale and have an even greater impact on many more children.

At its core, FR5 is about ensuring every child in Ohio — no matter their zip code or family income — has a **clear path to opportunity and success**. By supporting this funding amendment, you are

not just investing in a program. You are investing in Ohio's future workforce, our economic competitiveness, and the health and well-being of the next generation of Ohioans.

Thank you for your time, your attention, and your commitment to Ohio's children. I welcome any questions you may have.

Chair White, Vice Chair Salvo, Ranking Member Lett, and members of the Committee,

Good afternoon, my name is Cerita, and I reside in Reynoldsburg with my husband Lavelle and our 3-year-old son, also named Lavelle. We call him “Deuce” for his nickname. My husband and I are college sweethearts that met at Bowling Green State University in 2011. We moved to the Columbus area in 2019 after I completed my Master’s Degree in Education within School Counseling. We chose Columbus as a way to explore a new city together within our home state as I am from the Greater Cincinnati area, and he is VERY proud Cleveland native (and would remind you of this every chance he can as ALL Cleveland sports are a huge deal to him). Navigating parenthood has been extremely fulfilling, challenging at times, full of exhaustion, but more so full of pride and joy. Two of the things that my husband and I have learned to lean on are: partnership with each other, and within our community.

When we learned about Future Ready 5 within our childcare facility, Little Incredibles, it was no brainer for us to jump on board. Being that I work in education as a school counselor, I recognize and understand all too well the different challenges that affect students from different racial, socioeconomic, and geographical backgrounds, even as early as kindergarten. When I attended the first informational session with the CEO and COO and learned how Future Ready 5 thrives in addressing barriers for 0–5-year-olds, it left me feeling empowered and ready to make the changes I could, right in my own home. While I know so many wonderful educators that are extremely talented in the classroom, and I have a background in education myself, as a new mom, it’s still not easy to navigate on your own. They say “it takes a village” for a reason, and I knew I had found our village in this community.

Life is busy for all of us, and we are just trying to make it through the long days. I often leave work overstimulated and overwhelmed, but I look forward to family time. Being able to enjoy family time AND put the quick, easy, and researched-based educational resources that FR5 provides into practice, is like cracking a secret code! Future Ready 5 has been a blessing in helping us stay encouraged and positive at home. As I mentioned before, my husband and I lean on partnership. While he is more versed in the Khan Academy Kids technology subscription that FR5 provides for Lavelle, I make sure to tune in to the monthly evening workshops and use the fresh, rotating variety of free educational resources our FR5 kindergarten readiness coordinators provide for our family. I find myself hanging on every word they passionately share during the live workshops, and my heart swells with joy when I see Lavelle’s face light up knowing he can now recognize that “hook rhymes with book and look”. He’s also understanding dialogic reading concepts, and recognizing letter sounds more and more. I’m learning to make many educational things a game and I adore reading to him at night. The incentives outside of the educational resources, like recognizing our son’s attendance, participation, and hard work, sharing the data and growth that he’s made throughout the year, and even just the personalized gifts from FR5 for consistently putting in the extra effort are just more added bonuses. My husband and I were already inspired and knew that FR5 was an investment in our son’s future, but the thoughtful incentives help to display just how zealous this organization is when it comes to engaging with families and staying connected. Plus, knowing that I can always reach out to someone if I have questions or concerns is priceless.

All in all, I am overjoyed and extremely grateful for Future Ready 5. I appreciate all the time that is dedicated to helping families like ours. We hope to be a part of this community for a long time as we will be welcoming our 2<sup>nd</sup> child come August!

My request is that our representatives of Ohio will fund Future Ready Five for many, many years to come, for the sake of *my* children and all children in Central Ohio, from Cincinnati to Cleveland, and all the zip codes between. All children deserve to thrive, and no one can do it alone. It truly takes a village, and I’m grateful every day that our child care center chose Future Ready Five to be a part of our village. I hope FR5 can

continue to reach all centers, as well as those children who are *not* in child care centers, but as an educator, I know State funding is necessary to make that happen.

Thank you

Chair White, Vice Chair Salvo, Ranking Member Lett, and members of the Committee,

My name is Hannah Gallagher. I am a Pre-K Teacher at Messiah Christian School in Reynoldsburg, OH. I am here today to talk about how beneficial Future Ready 5 has been to our school, our teachers and most importantly, our students. I am in my first official year teaching. Last year I started as a Teacher Assistant, then began teaching halfway through the school year. Learning from Future Ready 5 this year has been an amazing experience. Each month I am able to go to workshops and learn so much beyond a traditional teacher educator program. There are teachers there with all different amounts of experience. There are teachers that are just beginning like I am, to teachers with 30+ years of experience in teaching in the early childhood education world! Not to mention all the experience from the staff of Future Ready Five! Anything I have struggled with; I have received the best advice from those around me at our monthly workshops. I am so appreciative for these workshops. Without them, I'm not sure how my first year in education would have turned out for me.

Future Ready 5 has given our school so many resources for our children. Every workshop we have received books, tablets, flashcards, videos, strategies, activities, Heggerty curriculum, you name it. They also have shown us ways to create high-quality resources. Future Ready 5 has gone over different ways that are science-based and researched-backed for teaching. Most importantly, they teach us in a way to make sure our students' young minds can understand. I have added so much I have learned from the Future Ready 5 workshops into my daily curriculums for my children and I see them learning more and more each day.

As I just mentioned, Future Ready 5 has also supplied our children with free tablets and a free subscription to the Khan Academy Kids app, right at their fingertips. The practice exercises they have done through Khan Academy Kids has made a huge difference. Certain areas they have struggled in, preschoolers are now excelling in. I can keep moving forward on my lesson plans, instead of needing to reteach things over and over. It also has been a great tool to keep the parents involved in our students' learning. Future Ready 5 gives us the resources, help and knowledge to teach our youngest learners so much more beyond just the 4 walls of the classroom.

Future Ready 5 has also brought to our attention so many community resources and partnerships that are there to help our school, teachers and families, such as Spark, RISE, a variety of free programs at library and museum (just for FR5 participants), COSI, and more. Teachers and families also have unlimited access to highly qualified instructional coaches and kindergarten readiness coordinators, who show us the best way to set up our classrooms and how to plan interventions based on data. I would have never known about these resources right here in Central Ohio if it wasn't for Future Ready 5.

Future Ready 5 helps to ensure that our young students are ready for kindergarten in all aspects. Future Ready 5 helps to ensure our children have a promising future. I truly believe everything they are learning through Future Ready 5 will help set them up for K-12 and life beyond.

Thank you for allowing me to share my experience today. My hope is that our representatives of Ohio will fund Future Ready Five for years to come, so that I can continue to grow as an educator and enjoy watching my students thrive academically and beyond. All children, teachers, and families deserve to experience the various benefits FR5 can offer. Our community and great state of Ohio deserves to experience the benefits FR5 can offer for its youngest generation who is ready to thrive!

Rae Stewart  
Owner and Director  
Little Incredibles Early Learning Center  
3702 Lifestyle Blvd  
Columbus, OH, 43213  
rstewart@incrediblesohio.com  
February 24, 2025

Ohio State House Representatives  
77 S High St  
Columbus OH, 43215

**Chair White, Vice Chair Salvo, Ranking Member Lett, and members of the Committee,**

My name is Rae Stewart, and I am the Owner and Director of Little Incredibles Early Learning Center. I'm a proud graduate from Wright State University with a Bachelor's in Early Childhood Education and hold an active teaching license. Over the years, I have had the privilege of working with children from grades Pre-K through 3 within the Columbus City School District.

I am writing to express my heartfelt gratitude for the Future Ready 5 (FR5) initiative and to advocate for its continued funding. FR5 has profoundly impacted our school community, transforming lives and enhancing the educational experiences of our children, families, and staff.

My son, Ezra, is currently attending preschool at Little Incredibles, where he is being exposed to a tremendous array of learning experiences designed to prepare him for kindergarten. The engaging activities in our classrooms are complemented by visits from local community partners such as COSI and the local library. These enriching experiences not only make learning enjoyable but also foster a lifelong love of inquiry and exploration in our children.

Furthermore, FR5 has made a significant investment in the professional development of our staff by providing access to CDA (Child Development Associate) courses at Columbus State and paid training opportunities. Through the monthly collaborative, teachers are provided opportunities to learn how to prepare preschool students for kindergarten. During these sessions a plethora of age appropriate activities and methods based on Ohio's Early Learning Standards and the latest Early Childhood Development and Educational research are explored. Teachers walk away with a wealth of resources and ideas to share with staff and use with our students. FR5 enables our educators to enhance their skills and expertise. This commitment to professional growth directly translates into improved educational practices in our classrooms, ultimately benefiting every child we serve.

FR5 has also prioritized parental involvement by offering valuable parent workshop opportunities. These workshops empower families with the knowledge and resources they need to support their children's growth and development at home, creating a stronger partnership between parents and educators.

As we look to the future, it is essential to recognize that continued funding for FR5 will play a vital role in sustaining and expanding these impactful programs. By ensuring that our children have access to quality early childhood education, we are not just making an investment in their futures; we are building a foundation for healthier, more vibrant communities across Ohio.

I urge you to support the Future Ready 5 initiative, as it has proven to be a catalyst for change, bringing hope and opportunities to children and families in our state. Together, we can continue to create a bright and incredible future for every child in Ohio.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Rae Stewart  
Owner/Director  
Little Incredibles Early Learning Center