

*When our smallest  
students shine,  
Cleveland thrives.*

**If you are a member of the press and would like to speak with us, please contact:**

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## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

**What is PRE4CLE?** PRE4CLE is Cleveland's plan to expand access to high-quality preschool to all 3- and 4-year-olds in the city. PRE4CLE helps families find and enroll in high-quality preschool programs, connects preschool providers to tools and resources to increase their quality and serve more children, and provides strategic leadership and advocacy to accelerate the availability of high-quality preschool in Cleveland. PRE4CLE fulfills a core priority of *Cleveland's Plan for Transforming Schools* and is led by the Cleveland Early Childhood Compact.

**How was PRE4CLE developed?** *Cleveland's Plan for Transforming Schools*, a plan to fundamentally reinvent public education in Cleveland, specifically called for a plan to expand and support high-quality preschool education across the city.

The Cleveland Early Childhood Compact is a group of organizations and individuals who represent early childhood development, education, civic, business, labor, government and philanthropy. They came together to develop an implementation plan, called PRE4CLE, to provide Cleveland's 3- and 4-year-old children with high-quality preschool experiences that help build the academic and social skills they need to be successful in kindergarten, school and life. It is chaired by Cleveland Metropolitan School District (CMSD) Chief Executive Officer Eric Gordon and Marcia Egbert, Senior Program Officer for Human Services at The George Gund Foundation – a true public-private partnership.

**How does PRE4CLE do its work?** PRE4CLE provides resources and strategic leadership to accelerate the availability of high-quality preschool by increasing the number of high-quality preschools, removing barriers to preschool access, and connecting families to high-quality preschool opportunities.

For providers, PRE4CLE provides connections to professional development, teacher education, and technical assistance opportunities to strengthen their quality. PRE4CLE also partners with high-quality providers to expand their capacity and support outreach to parents.

For families, PRE4CLE is raising awareness about the critical importance of high-quality preschool, and connecting families with the tools and resource to find the right preschool for their child. PRE4CLE also works to remove barriers to preschool access, such as cost.

PRE4CLE's high-quality preschool partners, called PRE4CLE Providers, have:

- Environments that are fun, welcoming, safe and caring,
- Staff and teachers who are well trained and professional,
- Curriculum based in research with lesson plans for each day's activities,
- Educational activities to prepare your child for kindergarten,
- Creative and imaginative play to inspire a lifelong love of learning, and
- Feedback about your child's learning and progress.

All PRE4CLE Providers also have at least three out of five stars from Ohio's Step Up To Quality Rating system.

**Why is high-quality preschool important?** Research shows that high-quality preschool helps establish a foundation to ensure kids are ready for school, better behaved and get along better with other children in school. When all young children have high-quality early learning and development experiences, the long-term economics of a community improve because children graduate high school, go on to college or career training, and have better paying jobs. For more information on the impact of high-quality preschool in Cleveland, see PRE4CLE's annual report.

**What is the need for high-quality preschool in Cleveland?** There are 11,400 preschool-aged children in Cleveland, but only enough high-quality preschool slots for 51% of them. PRE4CLE is working to close that gap, both by increasing the number of high-quality slots available and by connecting families with enrollment opportunities.

**How is PRE4CLE funded?** PRE4CLE is funded by a mix of existing and new public and private funds. Current funders include the Cleveland Metropolitan School District, corporate contributions, and philanthropic support. PRE4CLE also builds on the existing funding available to preschool children through federal Head Start, child nutrition and child care funds, state public preschool expansion funds, and Cuyahoga County's Universal Pre-Kindergarten program.

**What is PRE4CLE's goal?** By 2020, PRE4CLE aims to have at least half of Cleveland's children enrolled in high-quality preschool settings. As PRE4CLE's work continues, the ultimate goal of PRE4CLE is to ensure that every child in Cleveland enters kindergarten ready to succeed.

**Who is responsible for ensuring PRE4CLE meets its goals?** The Cleveland Early Childhood Compact is responsible for the governance and oversight of PRE4CLE. The Cleveland Early Childhood Compact is a group of individuals who represent Cleveland's early childhood development, education, civic, business, labor, government and philanthropy communities.

**Who oversees PRE4CLE's day-to-day operations?** Starting Point and the Educational Service Center of Northeast Ohio (ESC) are leading the implementation of the PRE4CLE Plan. The Cleveland Early Childhood Compact selected these two organizations as a joint administrative entity through a request for proposal process. Starting Point and the ESC report to the Cleveland Early Childhood Compact. Katie Kelly is the Executive Director of PRE4CLE.

**Which preschool providers can participate?** High-quality preschool depends on high-quality providers. Providers that wish to partner with PRE4CLE must have at least three out of five stars on the state's Step Up To Quality rating (SUTQ) system. PRE4CLE works across the full spectrum of early childhood settings: public preschools, Head Start, private preschools, private child care providers, and home-based care. Partnering with PRE4CLE is voluntary for any preschool provider in Cleveland.

**How many providers participate in PRE4CLE?** PRE4CLE established quality standards for PRE4CLE partner preschool programs, called "PRE4CLE Providers," that includes a 3- to 5-star rating in Ohio's Step Up To Quality rating program, and additional requirements for teacher education and smaller class sizes. As of June 2019, there are 118 PRE4CLE Providers.

**How does PRE4CLE support providers in Cleveland?** PRE4CLE focuses on increasing the number of 3-, 4-, and 5-star rated programs in Cleveland.

For providers that want to improve their quality ratings, PRE4CLE, through its lead agency Starting Point, connects them to financial assistance, new classroom tools, professional staff development, and technical assistance. Preschool providers who partner with PRE4CLE have access to many resources, including financial support for expansion, access to professional development for staff, marketing and outreach for their programs, and connections to other supports and partnerships. Additionally, programs that partner with PRE4CLE are eligible for other financial and quality supports as new resources become available.

**How does PRE4CLE help parents and families?** PRE4CLE connects parents and families to high-quality preschool programs that meet their needs. PRE4CLE does this through:

- Providing digital tools, such as a preschool search tool and eligibility calculator on the PRE4CLE website, to help families connect with the right high-quality preschool for their child;
- Individualized follow-up via phone and mail to provide families with preschool recommendations tailored to their specific needs, and resources to simplify the enrollment process;
- An outreach campaign focused on connecting with families about the importance of a high-quality preschool experience;
- Events and community partnerships geared to provide families with opportunities to interact with preschool engagement specialists and providers; and
- Raising awareness about quality through the PRE4CLE logo; when families see the PRE4CLE logo at a preschool, they know that their child is learning in a safe and supportive environment with well-trained, professional staff and a research-based curriculum.

**How many preschool children have been enrolled in high-quality programs through PRE4CLE?** As of June 2019, PRE4CLE helped enroll a total of 4,903 children in high-quality preschool slots. This is 2,046 more children than when PRE4CLE began its work in 2013.

**How will PRE4CLE's success be measured?** The Center on Urban Poverty and Community Development at Case Western Reserve University (CWRU) prepared an analysis of the state of preschool education in Cleveland and its problems and challenges when PRE4CLE was established. PRE4CLE uses this research to establish benchmarks to measure success. To evaluate the success of the plan, PRE4CLE will track overall availability of and enrollment in high-quality preschool programs in Cleveland and at the neighborhood level and track kindergarten readiness of children enrolled in high-quality preschool programs.

**What will the impact be on the community if PRE4CLE is successful?** Several studies have shown significant economic benefits for communities that invest in high-quality preschool. The White House points to a \$7.00 annual rate of return for each dollar invested in early learning, realized through reductions in spending on later interventions, like remediation, repeated grades or special education.



The Federal Reserve Bank of Cleveland found that quality early childhood programs for low-income children generate an overall 16% rate of return on investment, 12% of which is a public rate of return. This translates into higher lifetime earnings and reduced dependence on public support programs, both of which yield a significant return on investment for Cleveland.

A high-quality preschool program also yields additional benefits to the economy by making Cleveland an attractive place for families to raise their children.

**What will the impact be on families and children if PRE4CLE is successful?** Currently, less than half of Cleveland's children are prepared for school when they begin kindergarten. Research shows that children who participate in high-quality early childhood programs are more likely to:

- Have better developed language skills when they get to kindergarten and then are more likely to meet read on grade level in 3rd grade—a predictor of success.
- Pursue college or vocational training programs, and have good careers as adults.
- Earn more money during adulthood and break the cycle of poverty.

**How does PRE4CLE's work align with other early education initiatives happening in Cleveland?** Cleveland is fortunate that it has a number of groups working to provide the best possible start to Cleveland's children. PRE4CLE collaborates with many of these organizations to ensure PRE4CLE's work complements other work in the community. In fact, representatives from the Cuyahoga County Office of Early Childhood, the Cleveland Metropolitan School District, and PNC Foundation's Grow Up Great program sit on PRE4CLE's advisory board, the Early Childhood Compact.

**What does PRE4CLE do that is innovative compared to other initiatives in the state?** Instead of adding another layer to the community's preschool landscape, PRE4CLE works within the existing early childhood infrastructure in Cleveland to expand access to and enrollment in high-quality preschool. PRE4CLE takes a comprehensive approach to expanding access to high-quality preschool opportunities that includes every facet of the preschool landscape – children, families, providers, and early childhood educators.

**Has kindergarten readiness improved in children who are enrolled in preschool programs that are part of PRE4CLE?** PRE4CLE analyzed Cleveland Metropolitan School District's Kindergarten Readiness Assessment data for children who attended high-quality preschools. The Kindergarten Readiness Assessment (KRA) is

administered by a child's teacher in the fall of their kindergarten year. The assessment is administered in three ways: selecting an answer to a question the teacher asks, performing a requested task, or being observed by the teacher during school and at recess.

The KRA assesses four areas of a student's development and learning through a variety of tasks, such as:

1. **LANGUAGE AND LITERACY:** making predictions and answering questions about a text, identifying rhyming words or letter sounds, and writing simple words, including their name.
2. **MATHEMATICS:** identifying numbers, counting, sorting, and identifying or comparing sizes.
3. **SOCIAL SKILLS:** cooperating and conversing with peers, following directions, sharing, taking turns, and expressing feelings and ideas.
4. **PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT AND WELL-BEING:** demonstrating fine and gross motor skills with control, coordination, and balance.

Each child receives a score for each area as well as an overall score. The overall score is the total of the scores in each of the four areas and is divided into three bands of performance: Demonstrating Readiness, Approaching Readiness, and Emerging Readiness. The Language and Literacy assessment also divides its score into two levels: on-track and not on-track.

65% of PRE4CLE children who entered kindergarten in the fall of 2018 were Demonstrating or Approaching Kindergarten Readiness and 49% of PRE4CLE children were On-Track on the Language & Literacy subscale.

## EARLY CHILDHOOD EXPERTS

PRE4CLE's staff and Executive Committee members are experts on various subjects related to early childhood education. To arrange an interview, contact PRE4CLE Director Katie Kelly at 216-224-9554 or [kkelly@pre4cle.org](mailto:kkelly@pre4cle.org).

The following is a list of subjects on which PRE4CLE staff and Executive Committee members are experts.

- High-quality preschool including:
  - its importance;
  - what a high-quality program contains;

- the need for high-quality preschool in Cleveland;
  - the economic impact of high-quality preschool;
  - community impact of having its children enrolled in high-quality preschool;
  - community impact of having high-quality preschool providers in the neighborhood;
  - faith-based perspectives on high-quality preschool; and
  - Ohio's Step Up to Quality rating system.
- Kindergarten readiness including:
  - what children need to know as they enter kindergarten;
  - how preschool prepares children for kindergarten; and
  - the long-term implications of high-quality preschool on a child's health, education, and career.
- Early childhood teachers including:
  - certifications required in high-quality programs;
  - the difference teachers make in a young child's education;
  - teacher salaries; and
  - professional development.
- Funding including:
  - local, state and federal government funding trends;
  - philanthropic sector investment in PRE4CLE; and
  - the business community's involvement in PRE4CLE.
- Legislation and education policy including:
  - trends in early childhood education policy across the nation;
  - proposed local, state and federal education policy changes; and
  - current local, state and federal legislative action.



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**PRE4CLE LEADERSHIP & STAFF BIOGRAPHIES***Early Childhood Compact Leadership***Marcia Egbert****Co-chair of PRE4CLE's Early Childhood Compact**

Marcia Egbert is The George Gund Foundation's senior program officer for human services. Prior to joining the Foundation in 1998, she was vice president of the National Urban Policy Institute, a social policy analysis and lobbying firm in Columbus, Ohio. She also served as government relations director for the Cuyahoga County Commissioners and worked for the speaker of the Ohio Houses of Representatives.

Egbert is active in a number of local, state and national organizations of grantmakers including the Early Childhood Funders Collaborative, Grantmakers Income Secretary Task Force; Funders Network on Reproductive Health and Rights, and the Public Policy Committee of Philanthropy Ohio. She is also founding board member of the Health Policy Institute of Ohio. Egbert is a two-time alumna of the Ohio State University, having received both a B.A and J.D. degrees from that institution.

**Eric Gordon****Co-chair of PRE4CLE's Early Childhood Compact**

Eric Gordon was appointed Chief Executive Officer of the Cleveland Metropolitan School District (CMSD) in June 2011 after having served as the district's Chief Academic Officer for four years. He is responsible for the leadership and daily management of Cleveland's 40,000-student school district. Mr. Gordon, together with Cleveland Mayor Frank G. Jackson and other business, philanthropic, and educational leaders, successfully lobbied Ohio legislators in 2012 to pass The Cleveland Plan, a revolutionary package of education reform legislation that was signed into law on July 2, 2012. The Cleveland Plan has received national attention for its strong bipartisan support and unprecedented collaborative process that united the people of Cleveland around a collective mission to transform their public school system.

Cleveland's CEO is active nationally in the implementation of the Common Core State Standards curriculum and in the implementation of Social and Emotional Learning Standards for children. Eric also serves as a member of the Executive Committee of the

Board of Directors of the Council of the Great City Schools, a member organization representing the 66 large urban districts across the United States, and serves as the co-chair for the Council's Student Achievement Taskforce.

In 2012, CEO Gordon was a Finalist for the Council of the Great City Schools' Richard R. Greene Award, recognizing him as one of the nation's Top Ten Leaders in Urban Education.

### *Dedicated PRE4CLE Staff*

#### **Katie Kelly**

**PRE4CLE Executive Director, Educational Service Center of Northeast Ohio**

Katie Kelly serves as the Executive Director of PRE4CLE. Previously, Katie served as the Executive Director of Groundwork Ohio, a statewide advocacy organization focused on making early learning and development a top priority for Ohio. Under her leadership, the organization became a leading advocate for high-quality early learning in Ohio by working with partners to increase state investments in early learning by more than \$700 million, improve the quality of Ohio's early learning system, and provide research and advocacy resources to Ohio's policymakers, community leaders, and advocates.

Ms. Kelly also served concurrently for seven years as a Public Policy Fellow at The Center for Community Solutions.

Katie was appointed by the Governor to the Early Childhood Advisory Council, and served in leadership roles on The Ohio Partnership to Build Stronger Families Steering Committee and Advocates for Ohio's Future Steering Committee. Ms. Kelly currently serves as a Co-Chair of Invest in Children's Children Prepared for School Committee and Partnership Committee.

A life-long Cleveland resident, Katie grew up in Cleveland's West Park neighborhood and served in Cleveland's inaugural City Year corps before going on to graduate from John Carroll University. Katie lives in Lakewood with her husband Nathan and their three children Jack, Emma, and Nora.

**Michelle Connavino**  
**PRE4CLE Director of Communication and Special Initiatives,**  
**Educational Service Center of Northeast Ohio**

Michelle Connavino leads PRE4CLE's communication efforts—including coordinating its year-round, multi-media marketing campaign—and supports its advocacy efforts.

Michelle also serves as the chair of the Education Programming Committee at the City Club of Cleveland, is a member of the Ohio University Patton College of Education Dean's Circle of Engagement, and is a member of the Advisory Board of the Euclid Public Schools Alumni Association.

Previously, Michelle was the Liaison for the Center for Educational Leadership at Cleveland State University, which offers a number of school leadership licensure and professional development programs. She also served as co-coordinator for the Ohio Education Policy Fellowship Program, a national leadership professional development program out of the Institute for Educational Leadership in Washington, D.C. that focuses on leadership, policy, and networking. Michelle was a middle school teacher in the Cleveland Metropolitan School District and the North Olmsted City School District and also has teaching experience in rural and international settings.

Michelle holds a Bachelor's degree in Middle Childhood Education from Ohio University and a Master's degree in Leadership, Policy, and Politics from Teachers College, Columbia University.

**Michelle Bledsoe**  
**PRE4CLE Director of Evaluation and Outreach, Starting Point**

Michelle Bledsoe has worked within the early childhood mental health and early care and education field for the past 25 years. She acquired her bachelor's degree in social work from Cleveland State University and received a Master of Science in Social Administration degree from Case Western Reserve University- Mandel School of Applied Social Sciences.

As an advocate for the prevention of mental health concerns in young children, she previously coordinated a multi-county prevention effort to promote resiliency in young children within early care and education programs. Ms. Bledsoe has contributed to positive developmental outcomes for children and families through a multitude of

approaches which includes: advocacy in domestic violence; crisis intervention for child witnesses of violence; service coordination for children residing in foster care; early intervention; coordinating mental health services for children within early childhood programs; training and technical assistance to early childhood professionals and system development and coordination. Ms. Bledsoe has served on several early childhood committees to ensure access and delivery of early intervention services to young children by advocating for appropriate policies and services to meet those needs.

Ms. Bledsoe began demonstrating her commitment to the care and education of young children as an educator within a community-based early care and education program. She is deeply rooted in the early childhood community and continuously strives to improve access to quality services for children and families. She mostly recently assumed the role of a Program Manager within a Head Start program managing the social services, parent involvement, disabilities and mental health services areas. She currently is the PRE4CLE Coordinator at Starting Point responsible for the coordination of activities related to rapidly and efficiently expanding high-quality preschool opportunities for children in the city of Cleveland.

### **Alyse Mitcham**

**PRE4CLE Outreach and Engagement Specialist, Starting Point**

Alyse Mitcham co-leads the implementation of PRE4CLE's recruitment strategy. Alyse has extensive work experience in various roles in the nonprofit sector. Prior to joining PRE4CLE Alyse managed and supervised three \$1.1 million workforce grants through the Department of Labor from initial concept to completion. Her experience includes training at-risk youth in the areas of life skills and work readiness, leadership development, financial literacy and connecting them with supportive services, continuing education, career counseling assistance and case management. She also has experience in program management and development.

Alyse holds a bachelor's degree from Cleveland State University in Sociology and a Master of Science degree in Criminal Justice/Criminal Behavior from Tiffin University.

**Britton Hill**

**PRE4CLE Outreach and Engagement Specialist, Starting Point**

Britton “Britt” Hill is a native of Cleveland and Shaw High graduate. Brit co-leads PRE4CLE’s recruitment strategy, and brings two decades of experience in education settings.

Prior to PRE4CLE, Brit worked in the City of Shaker Heights as a Special Education Teacher’s Aide and School Age Child Care Administrator and Counselor. Brit has also worked as a Therapeutic Program Worker. In these roles, Brit provided outreach and engagement to families and children of all abilities.

Brit is a graduate of Notre Dame College with a degree in Pre-K to 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade Education.

*Leadership Staff*

**Billie Osborne Fears**

**Director, Starting Point**

Billie Osborne-Fears is the founding Executive Director of Starting Point for Child Care and Early Education founded in 1990, which is the Community Based Child Care/Early Education Resource and Referral Agency, serving four counties in Ohio (Cuyahoga, Ashtabula, Geauga and Lake). She received a Master of Social Science Administration Degree from Case Western Reserve University’s School of Applied Social Sciences and a Bachelor’s of Science in Child/Family and Community Services from Bowling Green State University.

Ms. Osborne-Fears’ background consists of forty years of employment in the early care and education, and social service arena, ranging from Head Start, Child Care to Youth Services. She was formerly the Associate Director of Early Childhood and Youth Services, for the Greater Cleveland Neighborhood Centers Association.

She serves on numerous boards and committees such as Cuyahoga County’s Family and Children First Council as Co-Chair and Executive Committee; MyCom Steering Committee and Lead Agencies Committee; the Ohio Child Care Resource and Referral Association’s Board of Directors, Finance and Sustainability Committees; Cuyahoga



County's Invest in Children's Goal 3 Committee; Cleveland Early Childhood Compact; 2000 Days Campaign Committee; Defending Childhood Advisory Board; Cuyahoga County's ADAMH Early Childhood Mental Health Systems Committee; United Way of Greater Cleveland's Council of Agency Executives; United Way of Lake County's Council of Agency Executives; and Voices for Ohio's Children Public Policy Partners Advisory Committee.

**Dr. Robert A. Mengerink**  
**Superintendent, Educational Service Center of Cuyahoga County**

Dr. Robert A. Mengerink is the Superintendent of the Educational Service Center (ESC) of Cuyahoga County. Prior to joining the ESC, Dr. Mengerink was the Superintendent of Kettering City Schools near Dayton. He has worked in several school districts in the State of Ohio, including serving for 21 years as Superintendent of the Kettering and Northmont City Schools, and Associate Superintendent for Business of the Willoughby-Eastlake City Schools. He also served as Director of Elementary Education and Principal for Willoughby- Eastlake City Schools. Dr. Mengerink was Principal of Village Complex for Aurora City Schools and a Middle School teacher at Mayfield City Schools.

Dr. Mengerink was also an adjunct professor at the University of Dayton and Wright State University. He is a Certified Facilitator of The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People. A recipient of numerous awards during his career, his most recent recognition was being the recipient of the Buckeye Association of School Administrators (BASA) and the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) "Ohio Superintendent of the Year" in 2008. He also received the Excellence in Educational Leadership Award from the University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA) in 2008. He is a recipient of the Exemplary Educational Leadership Award from BASA in both 2004 and 2008. In 1997, Dr. Mengerink received the Rotary Club's prestigious Service Beyond Self Award.

Dr. Mengerink has given numerous professional presentations to such organizations as BASA, Vanderbilt University, Ohio School Board Association (OSBA), and Montgomery County Educational Service Center, as well as the Rotary Club, Optimists, Junior Women's League, Chamber of Commerce, and district events.

**Jennifer Dodd**

**Director of Operations, Educational Service Center of Cuyahoga County**

Jennifer Dodd is the Director of Grants, Research and Development at the Educational Service Center (ESC) of Cuyahoga County. Prior to working at the ESC, Jennifer worked as a special education teacher in Independence Schools. Jennifer has a Bachelor's in Psychology and a Master's in Early Childhood Special Education from Cleveland State University and currently holds an Early Intervention license and K-9 Principal's license. She completed her Ph.D. in Urban Education at Cleveland State University with a dissertation on the laws and policies around the education of students in foster care.

Jennifer's primary responsibilities include: operations and facility management; fiscal planning; services development; regional expansion through shared services; P-16 cross-system efforts with early childhood, higher education and social agencies; grant/project coordination; data collection and research; and educational budget and policy review

## PRE4CLE MEDIA COVERAGE

### HOW CLEVELAND REVAMPED ITS PRESCHOOL PROGRAMS IN JUST FIVE YEARS: ENROLLMENT IN HIGH-QUALITY PRESCHOOL IS UP AFTER DRAMATIC COMMUNITY- LED EFFORT

*The Hechinger Report* | October 31, 2019

Three years ago, Chalfonte Smith's childcare center in north Cleveland, Ohio, was struggling academically. The problem was not for a lack of trying. Smith couldn't afford a curriculum, which can cost thousands of dollars. Her teachers did not have enough training. And classrooms needed more books and educational materials.

In September 2016, that all changed abruptly. Smith's center, A Jubilee Academy, was chosen to participate in an improvement program by PRE4CLE, a city initiative with the goal of expanding access to high-quality preschool across Cleveland. Program officials purchased books, science materials, blocks and musical instruments for the center. They paid for a curriculum. And they underwrote the cost of intensive trainings for teachers to learn about instruction, social emotional learning and how to assess children's progress. Smith's teachers were also sponsored to complete the courses required to earn their Child Development Associate Credential, a badge of expertise for early childhood educators. "They just gave us everything so we could give our inner-city kids the same as other high-quality preschool programs," Smith said.

In just 90 days, the center went from a rating of two out of five on the state's quality scale, to a five. Three years later, the center boasts assets many parents can only dream of: teachers who have bachelor's degrees, Mandarin classes twice a week, cooking and yoga lessons and seminars for parents on topics like financial literacy and how to extend learning at home. Literacy scores for children have increased and kindergarten teachers have started to report back to Smith that her graduates are "kindergarten ready." With a higher quality rating, Smith's center has become eligible for more grants and funding, which has allowed her to open an additional preschool classroom and offer free seats for some students.

This focus on access to high-quality preschool was born out of a larger city-wide plan to transform schools, introduced in Cleveland in 2012. That plan identified preschool as an important first step to improve K-12 education. PRE4CLE, a private-public partnership, was established by a group of community leaders who wanted to boost access to quality preschool programs in Ohio's second largest city. At the time, only 25 percent of Cleveland's 3 to 5-year-olds were enrolled in high-quality preschool, as defined by the state's quality rating system. In several neighborhoods, there were virtually no high-quality options. This was having

an impact on kindergarten readiness: Less than 20 percent of students entering Cleveland Public Schools were testing as fully prepared to start school.

Funded by more than \$14 million in public and private money, the initiative has seen wild success in just five years and offers a model for other cities that are looking to expand preschool options and boost preschool quality but don't have the public funds to do so. The efforts have been supported by the Cleveland Metropolitan School District, Cuyahoga County, PNC Bank, and several foundations, including The George Gund Foundation and The Cleveland Foundation. PRE4CLE has poured thousands of dollars of this money into centers depending on their needs and the funding available during a given year. Rather than handing over money with little to no guidance, the initiative has provided intensive, targeted and ongoing support to each center in areas like staff education and educational materials, which are proven to impact preschool quality. As a result, the number of high-quality preschool programs has increased, with a 32 percent increase between July 2018 and June 2019. Enrollment in these programs has increased by 72 percent and an estimated 4,903 children were served in 2019, up from 2,857 in 2013. Sixty-five percent of PRE4CLE students are testing as approaching or demonstrating school readiness when they start kindergarten.

Here are some of the key strategies PRE4CLE officials say have been the most effective:

- **Helping good centers grow:** Executive Director Katie Kelly says the initiative was able to rapidly open up new seats by providing grants of up to \$30,000 to centers that were already high-quality to establish new classrooms. The grants helped with some of the up-front costs of light renovations, classroom supplies and teacher salaries for the new classrooms.
- **Helping weaker centers get better:** This year, 27 child care centers and 24 family child care homes are working with PRE4CLE to improve. Program officials have visited each center, determined what is standing in the way of these centers improving in quality, and are providing tailored "intensive" professional development, technical assistance, and materials as needed. "It's really just flooding them with support," Kelly said.
- **Educating families:** The initiative hosts open houses, sets up tables at community events, and has published advertisements across television, radio and social media outlets to help families learn about available high-quality seats in their neighborhoods. They also developed a scholarship calculator to help families quickly find out which preschool programs they are eligible for based on income and then locate those programs nearby.
- **Educating officials:** PRE4CLE has prioritized advocacy at all levels of the government, according to Kelly. By doing so, they have secured \$57 million in new state funding for local early learning programs in Cleveland.

You can read more about PRE4CLE's work in their five-year report, [available here](#).

INSIDE THE CUYAHOGA COUNTY EARLY CHILDHOOD EQUITY FORUM—AND WHY IT MATTERS SO MUCH

*Freshwater Cleveland* | April 18, 2019

From its perch atop a hill in Shaker Square-Buckeye, the Benjamin Rose Institute for Aging boasts an expansive view of Cleveland and its skyline that makes it easy to feel like anything is possible—and that was exactly the vibe at the conclusion of the Early Childhood Equity Forum, held there last Friday, April 12.

Hosted by PRE4CLE, Groundwork Ohio, Starting Point, and Invest in Children, the event convened close to 100 educators, nonprofit leaders, and others with a stake in Cleveland's early childhood education landscape to discuss not only the 2018 Groundwork Ohio report "From the Ground Up," but also how to create new and different equitable outcomes based on its findings.

"We're focused on having every child enter kindergarten ready to succeed," says Michelle Connavino, Operations and Outreach Specialist for PRE4CLE. "What we saw in the Groundwork Ohio data was that that wasn't happening equitably for children in Cleveland. This was something we already knew, but this was the first time we'd seen the data presented in this way."

Among the report's more striking findings: 61 percent of black children in the U.S. have experienced trauma through adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), and Ohio currently ranks 46th in the nation at supporting kids with three or more ACEs—putting them at higher risk for long-lasting negative effects. Additionally, here in Cuyahoga County, just 22 percent of black children and 19 percent of Hispanic children demonstrate kindergarten readiness (as opposed to 52 percent of white children locally).

"Kids who start behind often stay behind, and some kids get left behind more often than others," said Lynanne Gutierrez, Policy Director and Legal Counsel for Groundwork Ohio, while presenting the report's findings.

The Early Childhood Equity Forum was geared at starting conversations around shifting that reality. To that end, TransSpire LLC president Maureen Joseph came to Cleveland from New Orleans to facilitate the event and help add more context around the historic challenges that contribute to ongoing inequity via her presentation, "The Impact of Historical Trauma on Racial Disparities."

Joseph's talk covered a wide berth of historical ground—from the country's founding to slavery to segregation—designed to illustrate the deep roots of why inequity still exists on



such a deep level today.

"I'm positive that what we're not paying attention to is history and its impact on inequity," Joseph shared. "Debating what diversity means, and who has power and who doesn't, has been a conversation since the beginning. Because this has never been settled, that's why we're looking at disparity information like we have now."

Joseph also explored themes of cultural identity, race, and the impact of whiteness as a culture and a construct. She likened the modern movement toward racial equity as a new dawning of Reconstruction. "We're reconstructing who 'we the people' are," she said.

PRE4CLE Executive Director Katie Kelly welcomed Joseph's insights and observations. "This is not an easy conversation, but it may be the most important issue that we can tackle to create better outcomes for Cleveland's children," said Kelly. "The data show that we have not closed the gap for children of color in our community, and we can't keep doing the same things and expect that to change. We're encouraged by the response to today's event, especially the open and honest dialogue, thoughtful ideas, and optimism in the room related to working toward true change—in ourselves and in our community."

Along with her talk, Joseph also facilitated breakout conversations in which each table of attendees brainstormed ways to create more equity within their own organizations, classrooms, and daily lives. Ideas ranged from reimagining history curriculums in schools to providing trauma training for teachers to funding black-led nonprofits and businesses. After the brainstorming sessions, the ideas were displayed during a gallery walk where attendees could see and affirm the other tables' suggestions.

For attendee Charesha Barrett, the day was an important step forward in furthering the work she and other diversity and inclusion professionals do every day.

"Children in Solon versus children in Cleveland don't have the same starting point—how can we ensure they have the same opportunities?" said Barrett, who runs Chapp Education Consulting. "There are systems historically in place in order to prevent [non-white] individuals from excelling. People have to be willing to have crucial conversations about these tough issues so we can move our city forward."

PRE4CLE's Connavino agreed that all hands will be needed on deck to move the needle in creating more equity, saying that a "whole-systems approach" is necessary. "What are all of the different parts of early childhood systems—and other systems that touch early childhood—affecting these data? It's important to think about this critically and [analyze] the different ways that systemic racism plays out in our community," says Connavino. "It took hundreds of years

to create these systems, and it will take a long time to break them down, but I think this is a really important step.”

Another key part of moving forward will be to convince the state of Ohio to dedicate more funding to early childhood education, as the Groundwork Ohio report revealed that state spending on early childhood currently comprises only 6.3 percent of the education budget (as opposed to 93.7 percent for grades K-12).

However, Invest in Children director Rebekah Dorman is encouraged by the fact that Cuyahoga County’s Universal Pre-Kindergarten model—considered a “gold standard” for preschool education—is helping to close the gap in terms of kindergarten readiness for children of all backgrounds.

“Last year, 61 percent of [Cleveland] children in UPK were African American,” said Dorman. “For those children who attend UPK, we are hopeful that the program is helping to achieve equity. Working with PRE4CLE, Groundwork Ohio, and Starting Point, we are striving to have enough resources and take UPK to scale so every child will have access. The work is not done, but the work has begun.”

PRE4CLE’s Kelly closed the day by inviting attendees to stay tuned as PRE4CLE and its partners work to provide more opportunities for dialogue and action around equity for Cleveland’s young children: “We need to do this work today, so that hopefully 20 years from now we can look at this data and see that a child’s success was not determined by their skin color or their zip code. Only then will every child in Cleveland have a fair chance to succeed.”

*To get more information about this effort and receive notices about future opportunities, please email Michelle Connavino at [info@pre4cle.org](mailto:info@pre4cle.org). To read the full “From the Ground Up” report, click [here](#).*

## [PRE4CLE'S ANNUAL REPORT SHOWS KINDERGARTEN READINESS ON THE RISE](#)

*Freshwater Cleveland* | August 23, 2018

If PRE4CLE's annual report is any indication, the road to kindergarten readiness for Cleveland youth is getting a lot smoother. Released yesterday, the report touted a 110 percent increase in the number of high-quality preschool programs in Cleveland since July 2016—a big jump from the organization's original goal of a 30 percent increase during that time period.

"We didn't anticipate that big of a leap, but so many programs put in the hard work it takes to become a high-quality provider," says Katie Kelly, Executive Director of [PRE4CLE](#). "There are a great deal of preschool programs in this community who really want to provide the best possible early learning experience for our children, and there's been an outpouring over the past few years to step up and make that happen."

### Reaching for the (SUTQ) stars

The increase is due in large part to efforts like the [Accelerated Quality Improvement Model](#)—a three-month intensive program designed to help lower-quality private providers achieve a [Step Up to Quality](#) rating of three stars or higher. In tandem, two-thirds of [Cleveland Metropolitan School District](#) programs have now achieved five-star ratings, and CMSD CEO Eric Gordon says they "hope to get the last third rated this year. We've been working really aggressively with the state of Ohio to get all [CMSD] programs rated quickly."

Along with increasing the number of high-quality seats in Cleveland, one of PRE4CLE's areas of focus has been filling those seats. According to the annual report, PRE4CLE's ongoing goal is that high-quality preschools will operate at 85 percent capacity, and at the end of the 2017-2018 school year, 87 percent of high-quality seats in Cleveland were full.

Kelly attributes much of that success to a targeted enrollment campaign that focused on direct outreach to families via various channels—from phone consultations to media campaigns to community events. Over the course of the campaign, 455 children were provided individual referrals, and 34 open house events resulted in 237 enrollments.

"We started really trying to understand the needs of families in Cleveland, whom they look to for advice about preschool, and what barriers they might face to enrollment," says Kelly. "Our goal was to help them identify high-quality [providers] and make it easier to enroll in the preschool of their choice."

On the whole, 42 percent of Cleveland's preschool-aged children are currently enrolled in high-quality preschools (which exceeds the benchmark goal of 40 percent by June 2018). The areas with the highest enrollment in high-quality preschools are Lee-Harvard, Euclid-Green,

Tremont, and University, while Brooklyn Centre currently has the lowest number of children enrolled in high-quality preschools (less than 10 percent). Communities such as Jefferson, Clark-Fulton, Broadway-Slavic Village, Old Brooklyn, Kinsman, Buckeye-Woodhill, Mount Pleasant, and North Shore Collinwood also show room for improvement, with 10 to 29 percent of children enrolled in high-quality preschools.

"The news is good that we're getting more and more kids into high-quality seats, but we are still far from where we want to be," says Gordon, who also serves as chair of the Cleveland Early Childhood Compact. "We need this [progress] citywide, and though we haven't yet met our goals, we're well on our way."

### Furthering kindergarten readiness

Of course, the primary goal that drives PRE4CLE is increased kindergarten readiness for local youth, and the annual report shows positive progress toward that benchmark. Fall 2017 marked the third year of collecting kindergarten readiness results for children enrolled in PRE4CLE provider programs, with data showing growth in readiness both on the language/literacy subscale and overall scores on the state's [Kindergarten Readiness Assessment](#) (KRA) since PRE4CLE launched in 2014.

Currently, 26.8 percent of children who attended a PRE4CLE preschool are demonstrating school readiness, while 69 percent are demonstrating or approaching school readiness. In the language and literacy category, 50 percent of kids who attended PRE4CLE preschools are on track as of fall 2018.

"The biggest challenge has been moving the needle on kindergarten readiness," shares Kelly. "That's our ultimate goal and what all of this effort is geared toward. This is the first year we have multi-year data on the KRA, and we're really happy to see those numbers continue to climb."

As of the 2016-2017 school year (data is still being collected for last year), just 16.7 percent of students entering CMSD passed the demonstrating readiness indicator on all four measures of the KRA, so there is still work to be done. Gordon believes a key approach will be encouraging more three-year-olds to enter high-quality preschools: "One year of a 4-year-old going to preschool may not close the gap on its own," says Gordon. "This is a two-year intervention, and very largely right now, we're [primarily] reaching 4-year-olds [in CMSD preschool programs]."

To that end, PRE4CLE has done advocacy work to encourage state legislators to include 3-year-olds in the Ohio Public Preschool Program, as well as advocating for continued funding for early learning in the 2018-2019 state budget and the preservation of the KRA after its proposed elimination.

"We worked with partners across the state to advocate and keep the KRA [intact]," says Kelly. "Without that measure, not only would we lose our main way of gauging readiness of children,

but we would also lose our ability to compare how children are doing in Cleveland compared to the rest of the state.”

### **Priming families and children for success**

Another effort highlighted in PRE4CLE’s annual report is the Preschool Prescription—a unique partnership between PRE4CLE, The Literacy Cooperative, and 24 pediatric and family medicine practices. The aim of the partnership was to train pediatricians to use routine checkups as a method of discussing the value of preschool for furthering early child development and equip them with resources they could share with families. The findings were that high-quality preschool enrollment rose an average of 17 percent in neighborhoods where the Preschool Prescription was piloted.

“Most families don’t tend to think of school until kindergarten, but they think of a pediatrician naturally from birth,” says Gordon. “We wanted to work with pediatricians to create that bridge and reach families in places they already are.”

Looking at the big picture, Gordon believes that a large part of PRE4CLE’s success in reaching its benchmarks to date has been the cooperation between various providers across sectors—from public to private to home-based. “All of the players have agreed not to compete with each other for kids, but instead to coordinate with each other,” says Gordon. “That’s why this community is so remarkable, and that unnatural alliance is the secret sauce behind PRE4CLE. It’s different from what I’ve seen anywhere else in the country.”

Kelly sees the organization’s work as foundational for children’s success as they progress up the education ladder in Cleveland. “If they start kindergarten prepared to succeed—not just with an academic foundation, but also with social and emotional skills—then all of the other components of the [Cleveland Plan](#) will be that much more successful,” she says. “We want to start off in a way that allows all the other wonderful parts of the Cleveland Plan to reach their full potential.”



CLEVELAND PRE4CLE PROGRAM AIMS TO GET MORE KIDS INTO AFFORDABLE, HIGH-QUALITY PRESCHOOL

*News 5 Cleveland* | June 26, 2017

Preschool enrollment is underway in Cleveland, and if you think you can't afford a "high quality" early start, think again. There are options you may not know about.

Amiyah Baskin, of Cleveland, is ready for kindergarten this fall. Her mother cannot believe it's already time to send her five-year-old off to school.

"I'm so nervous," smiled Quiana Baskin. "I know I'll cry, but she's so prepared and she's so ready."

Kindergarten readiness is the name of the game for PRE4CLE, a public-private partnership designed to increase the availability of "high-quality" preschool across Cleveland. It also works to increase the quality of programs already in place.

PRE4CLE began in 2014, and the executive director says it's working.

"Since we started, 50 percent more children are enrolled in high-quality preschool," said Katie Kelly, PRE4CLE Executive Director. "We also have more preschools in 22 of our 33 Cleveland neighborhoods."

Outreach is a huge part of PRE4CLE to make more parents aware that there are open seats at high-quality preschools across the city.

"I think a lot of families don't realize that there are free opportunities, opportunities that are very reduced in cost, and lots of different hours and lots of different locations," said Kelly.

Head Start is a PRE4CLE provider. Amiyah attended for two years. There's no charge for families of a certain income level.

"I don't have to work two jobs to be able to pay for childcare, which a lot of people do in this city," said Baskins. "So, it's free! I wish I could yell it from the mountain top!"

"It just makes me so happy and proud that she's learning and having fun while doing it and bringing this stuff home," said Baskins. "It's beautiful!"

## HIGH-QUALITY PRESCHOOL SEATS ON THE RISE, SAYS PRE4CLE ANNUAL REPORT

*Crain's Cleveland Business* | June 12, 2017

The number of high-quality preschool seats in Cleveland has grown significantly since 2013, following the creation of PRE4CLE, according to the organization's 2016 [annual report](#), released Monday, June 12.

[PRE4CLE](#) grew out of Cleveland's Plan for Transforming Schools, the effort to improve academic performance of the city's educational institutions. PRE4CLE addresses the portion focused on expanding access to high-quality preschool for Cleveland's 3 and 4 year olds and was launched in 2014.

PRE4CLE defines a "high-quality preschool" as one that has earned three to five stars in Ohio's five-star Step Up To Quality rating system. PRE4CLE also has its own program schools, which have to adhere to some more quality elements, like a certain student-teacher ratio, said Katie Kelly, executive director of PRE4CLE.

In 2013, the year PRE4CLE uses as a baseline, there were 2,857 children enrolled in a high-quality preschool, including 1,477 seats in the Cleveland Metropolitan School District, Kelly said in an email. As of December 2016, there were 3,411, plus another 866 Cleveland Metropolitan School District seats that were pending a high-quality rating, for a total of 4,277. The report automatically counts CMSD schools as "high-quality." Kelly said that when PRE4CLE was created, the district schools weren't eligible for Step Up To Quality ratings, but the task force that created PRE4CLE felt the district schools were of a high enough quality to include.

This year's numbers mean that 36% of preschool-aged children in Cleveland were enrolled in a high-quality preschool, the report stated. When the report just looks at children who were actually enrolled in preschool, the majority were in high-quality ones.

Since 2013, 997 new high-quality preschool seats were created, the report stated. Another 1,361 were improved enough to become high-quality.

PRE4CLE also set specific benchmarks to track child-level and system-level success. One, for children, was that it wanted to see two-thirds of children in PRE4CLE programs score above the county mean on Ohio's kindergarten readiness measure by 2018.

Kelly said the kindergarten readiness test has changed since the baseline was set in 2013. That test measured literacy, while the test in the fall of 2015 measured a variety of factors. Looking just at literacy, 32% of PRE4CLE students scored above the county mean in 2013; 38% did in 2015.

A system-level goal that fell a bit short was a goal of getting an additional 2,000 children enrolled in a high-quality preschool by 2016; 1,420 more children were enrolled in a high-quality preschool in 2015-2016 than when PRE4CLE began.

The report outlined some new benchmarks the group was aiming to meet by 2018, including enrolling 40% of preschool-aged children in high-quality preschool by June of 2018, with increasing percentage goals after that, and ensuring that 50% of children who attended a PRE4CLE preschool would test as "on track" for language and literacy on the Ohio Kindergarten Readiness Assessment in fall 2018.

PBS NEWSHOUR HOSTS EARLY-CHILDHOOD PANEL IN CLEVELAND

*Education Week* | July 20, 2016

There's been little discussion about early-childhood education so far on the floor of the Republican National Convention in Cleveland this week, but the PBS NewsHour filled the gap with a panel discussion Wednesday.

Sponsored by the Save the Children Action Network and moderated by Lisa Stark of Education Week, the panel included Ohio state Sen. Peggy Lehner, the Republican chairwoman of the Senate's education committee; Paul Clark, the regional vice president of PNC Bank; Sandra Russ, a professor of psychology at Case Western Reserve University who specializes in children's pretend play; and Katie Kelly, the director of PRE4CLE, a public-private partnership that is supporting high-quality preschool in Cleveland.

While the GOP convention has been primarily focused on spelling out the differences between the two parties, this discussion showed that quality early-childhood programs could be an issue of agreement, not just between the parties, but also between the public and private sectors.

A few key quotes:

Lehner: "We have got to move away from the idea of thinking that, well, if we can afford early childhood we'll pay for it for a small section of kids, to an attitude that school in this modern age starts earlier."

Clark: "It shouldn't matter what your ZIP code is when you're born, and it shouldn't matter if you're in a low and moderate-income environment. We want to make sure there's complete access for everybody into an early, high-quality, childhood-education seat. And that's not the case today."

Russ: "It's really important to have playtime in the classroom, to have guided play in the classroom for these 4, 5, 6-year-olds ... this has to be fun for children. We can get so focused on developing these programs—children have to have fun. They have to like coming to school, because it's setting the stage for all of those years that come next."

Kelly: "If we're building a foundation, we have to build it in those first five years. Everything that we build on top of that cannot be strong if that child is entering the kindergarten door, as some of our children in Cleveland do, without ever having opened a book."

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CLEVELAND PRESCHOOL QUALITY-IMPROVEMENT EFFORT REPORTS EARLY GAINS

*Education Week* | December 17, 2015

Cleveland, one of the more recent cities to get into the prekindergarten game, released its first report on its new quality improvement program on Dec. 15. And though the report is not an effectiveness study, it does indicate that Cleveland's model—called PRE4CLE—is another one that's worth watching.

Unlike some city programs, PRE4CLE works directly with existing preschools and it is not focused on free tuition for every child. The organization's staff (it's a public-private partnership) has raised money to increase enrollment through tuition assistance for families and business-side investments for partners.

Quality rating is a big part of the program, and PRE4CLE only works with programs it considers to be of high quality. Starting last year, Ohio state's new rating system kicked in, and all the PRE4CLE programs that were rated counted as "high quality," though that could mean a rating of three, four or five stars.

In 2014-15, the program's first year, PRE4CLE schools enrolled 4,080 children,\* ages 3 to 5. That was a 10 percent gain over the citywide enrollment in 2013-14. Still, the report says there are 12,400 preschool-aged children in the city and that 67 percent of them are not yet enrolled in a high-quality preschool program.

Children in the program were assessed by outside consultants using the Bracken School Readiness exam in the fall and spring. Thirty-one percent of children made meaningful improvement in three areas of the exam over the course of the school year, and 57 percent showed such progress in two categories. Eighty percent of children tested in the "average," "advanced," or "very advanced," categories, indicating that they are ready to start kindergarten.

It will be interesting to watch the progress PRE4CLE makes during its second year of expansion and to see if it can improve school readiness numbers through efforts to improve quality. I'm not aware of a long-term study having been launched to look at the effects of PRE4CLE on students as they progress through their school years, but I'll be keeping my eyes open for outside evaluations of the program.



QUALITY PRESCHOOLS ADD SEATS IN BUCKEYE, GLENVILLE  
AND UNION-MILES WITH PRE4CLE BOOST

*The Plain Dealer* | July 24, 2015

CLEVELAND, Ohio - Three preschools in high-need neighborhoods will receive a boost with startup needs like desks, computers, books and teacher training from PRE4CLE, the city's preschool expansion partnership.

Grants totaling \$120,000 will help four classrooms in three East Side locations with startup costs for serving up to 80 kids with full-day preschool, mainly Head Start programs.

"This is the beginning of really focusing on neighborhoods that are underserved," said PRE4CLE Director Katie Kelly. "Though four classrooms may not seem like a lot, they contain 80 children in high quality sites and it's a good step to making sure those kids are kindergarten ready."

They are:

- The Council for Economic Opportunities in Greater Cleveland (CEOGC) will open two new classrooms this fall serving a total of 40 children at the Oakfield Child Development Center, 9250 Miles Park Avenue.
- The Centers for Families and Children will start a preschool with a single classroom for 20 children at the Citizen's Academy charter school in Glenville, 10118 Hampden Avenue.
- Fundamentals Early Childhood Development Academy will add 20 seats at the Buckeye-Shaker Fundamentals Academy, 12500 Buckeye Road.

"This grant is a great help," said Lisa Ogletree, the director at Fundamentals. "We'll be purchasing everything from tables to chairs to computers for the children."

Ogletree said her center has been looking to expand, but hadn't been able to find the right staff and buy all the materials without help from PRE4CLE.

"We would have done it, but not right now," she said. "It wouldn't be this fast."

Lyman Millard, spokesman for the Breakthrough charter school network that Citizens Academy is part of, said the school has wanted to add preschool, but needed an operator and the materials to do it.

The Centers runs programs at other Breakthrough schools in the city.

"We're really good at K-8 and they're really good at preschool, so this makes sense," he said.

And having a strong preschool right at a high-performing elementary school allows for an easy transition and for kids to build on their successes.

"It just creates a really nice pathway," Millard said.

Details for enrolling in all three were not immediately available.

Parents can contact the schools themselves. (For the Citizens Academy location, call The Centers at 325-9678).

Or parents can contact the aptly-named Starting Point - a non-profit that Ashtabula, Cuyahoga, Geauga and Lake counties have picked to help families to find child care near them.

Call them at 800-880-0971 or visit their website to find information about any child care centers in your area, basic information about them and details on how to find financial aid for preschool costs.

PRE4CLE, a partnership between the Cleveland school district and more than 30 area non-profits, aims to more than double the number of preschool seats in Cleveland.

It wants kids in quality schools rated three stars and above through Ohio's preschool rating system, Step Up To Quality, so all of the new classrooms will have that rating.

That rating system is designed to separate real preschools, where educating children is a priority, from day care centers that just keep kids safe and occupied until parents pick them up after work.

Centers earn progressively-higher ratings based on the strength of curriculum, qualifications of teachers and even whether a center measures a child's progress to find their strengths and weaknesses.

Ratings of three stars and higher mean that a school has a solid curriculum and is using it.

PRE4CLE EXPANDING ACCESS TO HIGH-QUALITY  
PRESCHOOL PROGRAMS IN CLEVELAND

*The Plain Dealer* | November 17, 2014

Investing in pre-kindergarten education pays off for everyone.

Cleveland's PRE4CLE pre-K expansion initiative was lauded recently as a national model by [U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Secretary Julián Castro](#) and by Roberto J. Rodríguez, deputy assistant for education to President Barack Obama as a member of the White House Domestic Policy Council.

Castro has been traveling the country to gain a better understanding of housing and urban development issues facing communities across the country and because quality early education is one of the best investments we can make in our kids and our country.

He chose to stop in Cleveland because of the great work that's already happening. As he said, "Progress is achieved from the ground up, not the top down."

While they were here, Secretary Castro and Mr. Rodriguez met with Ohio leaders in philanthropy, business and the public sector to discuss the importance of collective investment in early education initiatives that ensure all children and families have the opportunity to succeed in school and life.

Giving children the right start to their education has never been more relevant. A ManpowerGroup [study showed](#) that 49 percent of employers struggle to fill jobs because too many job-seekers lack the right skills. In a world economy increasingly fueled by a knowledge-based workforce, the solution is to help prepare at-risk children for the challenges ahead so they enter kindergarten on par with their more economically secure peers.

PRE4CLE is one way to do that. [PRE4CLE is our community's plan](#) to expand access to high-quality preschool programs to children in the city of Cleveland by increasing the number of high-quality preschool spaces available for 3- and 4-year-olds whose families want them to attend high-quality preschool.

This groundbreaking model for partnership shows that when corporations, foundations, social service agencies, private preschool providers and the public schools work together, they can move the needle on academic achievement for our children. We

know that tremendous results can be achieved when children have high-quality preschool experiences.

PNC has been an early supporter in bringing the PRE4CLE initiative to life. At PNC, early-childhood education is the unwavering focus of Grow Up Great, our \$350 million multiyear bilingual initiative in early-childhood education. Through it, we have provided more than \$6 million in local grants to help expand access to high-quality early learning to those most in need, and to raise awareness of this critical economic development issue.

Knowing of early education's positive impact, [we worked recently to set the Guinness World Record for largest vocabulary lesson](#). Locally, 136 students took part in a simultaneous lesson with 4,000 children across 37 cities to raise awareness of the critical role vocabulary has in a child's early development.

To prepare children for the challenges ahead, we must work to connect the billions of dollars of catalytic capital investments currently underway to high-quality early education that will help set all of our children on a path to the jobs of the future.

And further, indisputable research indicates that the return on investment in high-quality education and school readiness are significant and long-lasting. That's an investment that we at PNC and many of our corporate and foundation partners believe is a wise one.

The state of Ohio submitted a federal grant application earlier this month, and specifically named Cleveland, and PRE4CLE, as one of the communities that is ready to expand high-quality early education to its children.

Public-private partnership is a key to our success. As we look to the future for Cleveland's children, we know it will be brighter if we all invest to make high-quality pre-K a reality for all of Cleveland's children.

*Paul Clark is the regional president of PNC Bank.*

## CLEVELAND SCHOOL DISTRICT ADDS 260 PRESCHOOL SEATS

*Ideastream* | August 23, 2014

*The Cleveland Metropolitan School District has added 260 preschool seats this year as part of PRE4CLE—a new program aimed at helping Cleveland families find high-quality preschool services from both public schools and private providers. ideastream's David C. Barnett reports.*

Director Katie Kelly said PRE4CLE isn't just about adding new seats, but also raising standards in existing classrooms so they can receive state certification as high-quality.

"The ongoing professional development and technical assistance, and other supports that we'll be providing to those providers are going to help get us towards not just adding new spaces, but also making the spaces that are currently available high-quality and higher-impact," she said.

PRE4CLE's goal for the next two years is to have enough high-quality preschool seats throughout the city to accommodate 70 percent of Cleveland's more than 5,000 four-year-olds, matching the national attendance rate for families with preschool-age children.



CLEVELAND PARTNERSHIPS AIMS TO MORE THAN  
DOUBLE THE CHILDREN IN PRESCHOOL WITHIN TWO YEARS

*The Plain Dealer* | March 11, 2014

CLEVELAND, Ohio - The Cleveland school district, Cuyahoga County and more than 30 area agencies have joined in a partnership to more than double the number of Cleveland children attending a quality preschool within the next two years.

The goal of placing 2,000 more four-year-olds in Cleveland into quality preschool – up from 1,200 in Cleveland today – is the most dramatic and immediate target of the PRE4CLE plan that the newly-formed Cleveland Pre-K Task Force announced this morning.

The broader aim of the task force, which formed between the Cleveland school district and the agencies in the fall, is to make quality preschool accessible and affordable to more children as fast as possible, starting with four-year-olds and later expanding it to three-year-olds.

The plan will include a mix of school district pre-schools, federal Head Start programs, private preschool centers and home-based providers. It will likely involve using portable classrooms to create temporary preschools in under-served neighborhoods, providing transportation to children and making the pay for qualified preschool teachers more competitive.

Along with helping existing quality preschool programs grow, the plan calls for starting new ones, increasing the number of qualified preschool teachers in the city and encouraging other existing programs that have not been rated by the state to go through the rating process.

"This is our collective strategy to ensure that every child in the City of Cleveland that enters kindergarten is ready to succeed," district Chief Executive Officer Eric Gordon told The Plain Dealer.

Though exact details for parents who want to enroll children in preschool aren't available yet, the task force will have those soon. Basics are on a new PRE4CLE page on the school district website.

Task force co-chair Marcia Egbert of the George Gund Foundation said she hopes the program will soon be able to reach parents and help them find the best programs to help their children.

"Your child matters and your community feels your child deserves the best early learning experience," she said. "We're here to help you access it."

If the task force can meet its goals, say members of the partnership, Cleveland children will be in better position to learn reading, math and other subjects, and will start developing the social skills to succeed in life.

The plan could cost more than \$15 million in the 2014-15 school year and more than \$20 million in 2016-16. It will use school district tax money, foundation grants, state aid and – the partners hope – other grants to expand preschool.

Since a high quality preschool program that's educational and not just babysitting can cost \$10,000 per student, Egbert said, the partners need to find many ways to lower costs or help families afford it.

"We'll really be blending a set of federal, state, local and private investment to bring down that cost to an affordable level for all families," she said.

About \$2.5 million will come from the school tax increase that voters passed in 2012. Cuyahoga County is also contributing \$1 million to the effort.

"It's not just smart education policy," County Executive Ed Fitzgerald said as the plan was announced. "It's smart economics. These are investments that are going to pay off."

Providing more preschool to city children is part of the Cleveland Plan for Transforming Schools, the city's school improvement plan that Gordon and Mayor Frank Jackson took to the governor and state legislature for support in 2012.

The plan, which calls for creation of a Cleveland Early Childhood Compact to guide the work, follows the same pattern as Jackson's earlier drives to join multiple agencies in a common goal – the Higher Education Compact of Greater Cleveland and the Cleveland Transformation Alliance. In each case, the partnerships try to have agencies work together, instead of duplicating efforts.

"It is essential that we start at Pre-k so that we can move children through the entire spectrum of K-12 so that they can have the kind of education they need to be competitive in today's environment," Jackson said.

Even if PRE4CLE meets its early goal of placing 2,000 more four-year-olds in quality preschool for the 2015-16 school year, it won't help all of Cleveland's four-year-olds - it would cut the number of unserved children in half.

According to research by the Center on Urban Poverty and Community Development at Case Western Reserve University, a partner in the task force, about 1,200 of Cleveland's 5,400 four-year-olds attend a quality pre-school program today.

The other 4,000 children, task force members say, have parents that aren't looking to place students in programs, don't have quality programs in their neighborhoods or are in low-quality or unrated programs now.

Key to the effort is making sure children attend quality educational programs, not just child care programs that don't teach students.

"This isn't about parking your child so you can go off and earn a low wage," said Rebekah Dorman, who helps oversee the county preschool program that Cleveland's will build on. "This is about child development, an early education program."

The task force is counting school district pre-school classrooms as quality programs, as well as any centers that rate as a three or above on the state's Step Up To Quality preschool rating system.

That five-star rating started statewide in 2006, but many centers are not rated. Some choose not to participate or the state hasn't been able to rate them yet.

The task force also counts home-based providers that have received a Gold Seal rating through a Cuyahoga County evaluation system created because home providers are not counted in Step Up To Quality. Starting in July, home providers can be rated in the state system and the county rating will be phased out, said Egbert, the Gund Foundation's program officer for human services. She said the ratings include several factors that members consider important to children.

Those are, she said: "Credentialed teachers with specific early childhood development degrees and rigorous professional development, low teacher: child ratios to allow plenty of direct interaction, a research-based curriculum that is fun and engaging but also supports all domains of child development (social, emotional, physical, behavioral as well as cognitive), plenty of high quality and age-appropriate materials (books, art supplies, manipulatives, etc), good indoor and outdoor play areas to help children play and develop their motor skills."

According to the task force's report, PRE4CLE will have several immediate strategies. The report lists those as:

- *Expand existing CMSD pre-K classrooms from 14 students to 20 students through the addition of a qualified, full-time teacher's aide, potentially adding approximately 250 high-quality pre-K slots.*
- *Expand integrated classrooms serving both special education and typically developing children. This will potentially add approximately 45 high-quality pre-K slots.*
- *Maximize the use of available Head Start funds for high-quality slots.*
- *Coordinate and leverage to the greatest extent possible all available funding sources.*
- *Identify existing sites with capacity to expand their current classrooms or add additional classrooms, providing 400 more children with access per year.*
- *Fill 385 currently unused classrooms/slots in high-quality sites in community settings.*
- *In partnership with highest quality (4-5 SUTQ star rated) providers, establish two modular annex units in two high-need neighborhoods in 2015. This will aid both access and capacity goals, serving an additional 80 children who may otherwise not have access to a high-quality pre-K experience. When enough permanent quality slots are built in a neighborhood to fill capacity, the modular facility will be transitioned to the next high need, low access neighborhood.*
- *Provide tuition assistance to highest-need families to the extent possible.*
- *Identify and develop transportation support options for families.*

Egbert said the task force has not yet identified the neighborhoods with highest need.

Gordon and task force members said that the district and foundations can use their money – an as-yet undetermined amount – to match grant dollars, as needed, so that it can bring more money to the effort.

And Gordon said that coordinating where families send children, based on financial need, can open up opportunities for more children. Many students could be in programs where they qualify for more state or federal aid, he said, freeing up slots in programs that the district or local agencies pay for.

A significant part of the plan is to both reduce the costs of training for preschool teachers and make pay more competitive. Gordon noted that preschool teachers in the district all meet normal state teaching standards, but many in private centers don't.

He said because pay at private centers can be low, teachers there aren't often willing to invest in college degrees or other training to improve their skill. Preschool teachers also often leave before becoming expert teachers, he said.

So the task force wants to help preschool teachers across the city find aid for coursework. And it wants to find ways to help quality centers that have better-credentialed staff receive more money so they can pay its staff more.

Task force member Mark Sniderman, who just retired as executive vice president and chief policy officer of the Federal Reserve Bank of Cleveland but has remained working on the task force, said helping teachers at private preschools be paid evenly with district teachers would reduce turnover and improve quality.

As Egbert added: "We want to close the gap."

Billie Osborne-Fears, executive director of Starting Point, the non-profit that Cuyahoga County and three other counties hires to coordinate services for children, said improving preschool pay will cost money.

"It's going to require additional dollars," she said. "We're willing to move forward and do some advocacy on the state level to get those dollars as well."

Task force members say that having a cohesive plan puts the city in much better position to seek grants and any new federal or state money becomes available. With early childhood education a priority for President Barack Obama, there could be opportunities, members said.

And the state is also increasing funding for early childhood programs, though slowly, and pressure for more is mounting.

*For immediate information on preschool opportunities, parents can contact Starting Point through its website or by calling (216) 575-0061.*