



# Build Back Stronger

## HELPING OHIO'S CHILD CARE AND EARLY EDUCATION SYSTEM RECOVER FROM THE COVID-19 CRISIS AND REBUILD STRONGER FOR THE FUTURE

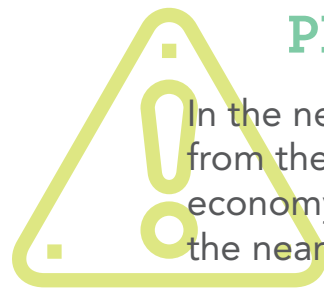
Child care and early education, like most industries, have been hit hard by the COVID-19 crisis. Our economy is struggling to restart after the shutdown caused by the pandemic and child care is essential to that restart. Families will not be able to return to work without safe, affordable, and accessible child care for their children. As we rebuild, we have the opportunity to create a better early care and education system that supports all kids and families and our economy. We can't afford to get this wrong.

The COVID-19 crisis has laid bare the weaknesses in the child care and early education system, but it also provides an opportunity to start fresh and build a newly resilient system that offers high-quality care and education to children, reliable and affordable care to families as they head back to work, and fair compensation for child care and early education professionals.

To accomplish the recommendations below, Ohio must call on our federal partners to provide emergency funding for early care and education at a level that supports the needs of providers and families throughout this period. Additionally, as Ohio considers how state funding will be prioritized, we call on our state leaders to hold the line on current funding while dedicating new, additional funding to meet the goals below.



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## PHASE 1 RECOMMENDATIONS: RECOVER

In the near term, child care and early learning providers need to recover from the COVID-19 crisis to be able to serve families safely and power our economy forward. The following recommendations will guide Ohio through the near-term recovery to maintain our early care and education system:

### 1. Prioritize health and safety

During this time, child care and early education providers are an important part of our public health infrastructure, tasked with keeping our kids safe so that parents can go to work. To operate a safe and healthy environment, they need priority access to personal protective equipment (PPE), cleaning and sanitizing supplies, and testing for their staff and the kids they serve.

#### The state should:

- Continue reduced ratio and group sizes in child care and preschool classrooms based on health authority recommendations and infection rates.
- Support centralized purchasing of PPE and sanitation supplies.
- Provide priority access to testing for all child care staff.
- Create clear guidelines and training to protect child care staff and children.
- Track full or partial closures caused by infections in centers.

### 2. Support the child care and early education industry

The COVID-19 crisis has pushed the already fragile child care and early education industry to the brink of collapse. Child care and early education providers need to be funded at a level that, at minimum, ensures they can afford to stay open, and ideally recognizes their importance to our economic system and the risk of operating during the pandemic.

#### The state should:

- Advocate for the next federal relief bill to include at least 50 billion dollars for child care.
- Provide relief payments to child care programs based on licensed capacity to support operations during periods of reduced ratio and group sizes and under-enrollment due to the pandemic.
- Provide flexibility for relief funding.

A recent evaluation of provider survey data estimates that

45%



of Ohio's pre-COVID seats could disappear in the wake of the crisis without serious intervention<sup>1</sup> and 53% of providers expect to close within six months without additional public support.<sup>2</sup>



Estimates suggest that the child care and early education industry in the US will need approximately

**\$9.6 BILLION PER MONTH<sup>3</sup>**

### 3. Support the child care and early education workforce

There are one-and-a-half million people directly employed in the child care and early education industry in the US – with another half million indirect jobs supported by the industry. Those employed in the industry provide an essential service to countless American families. The risk of the virus has not passed and **child care and early education professionals continue to be on the front lines—no working from home, no social distancing**. We need to be sure these jobs remain secure now and when the pandemic is over.

#### The state should:

- Support fair compensation commensurate with the level of risk and essential nature of early care and education work during the COVID-19 crisis and into the future.
- Create inclusive state advisory committees on recovery that represent child care partners from professional organizations and communities statewide and include child care partners in K-12 planning discussions for fall learning and beyond at the state and school district levels.
- Provide programs with the resources necessary for mental health and social-emotional support for professionals who have been negatively impacted by the crisis.

### 4. Support families and children

It's more important than ever that families can access affordable child care and early education so that working parents can reenter the workforce and restart our economy. Parents can get back into the workforce more quickly when they know their children are in a safe environment that supports their learning, growth, and development.

#### The state should:

- Increase access for struggling families through increased eligibility and relaxed work requirements for publicly funded child care.
- Provide programs with the resources necessary for academic and social-emotional support for children and families who have been negatively impacted by the crisis.
- Extend the window for school districts to complete the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment within 45 days of the start of in-person instruction.



## PHASE 2 RECOMMENDATIONS: REBUILD

Once we've stabilized the child care and early education industry during recovery, we should turn our attention to how we can build the industry back even stronger than it was before the COVID-19 crisis. The following recommendations provide a roadmap for long-term recovery and growth:

### 1. Prioritize quality

Quality early learning experiences support both academic and social-emotional development that research shows has long-term benefits. The need to quickly and effectively rebuild our economy after the pandemic cannot come at the expense of child care and early education quality.

#### The state should:

- Maintain Ohio's Step Up To Quality goals, deadlines, and funding.
- Identify long-term, stable funding sources for Step Up To Quality.

In 2016, an estimated **76,000** Ohio parents had to make career sacrifices because of child care problems.<sup>5</sup>



Ohio is **48<sup>th</sup>** in the nation in income eligibility for child care<sup>4</sup>

### 2. Improve access

High-quality child care is a critical component of Ohio's early learning system, but for many parents, the price puts child care out of reach.

#### The state should:

- Increase child care eligibility to 200 percent of the federal poverty level.



### 3. Increase compensation for professionals

On top of providing a safe place for children to be cared for, early childhood professionals are early learning educators and should be compensated fairly with wages and benefits that reflect their professionalism and the essential nature of their work and that will attract and retain talented professionals in the field.

#### The state should:

- Increase reimbursement rates to fully cover the cost of providing quality care and education, including fair wages.

### 4. Support providers to be more sustainable and resilient

We need to begin creating a framework for local, state, and federal budgets that prioritizes the early care and education system to support families and providers now and into the future. Ohio's long-term well-being depends on a child care and early education infrastructure that works for every family.

#### The state should:

- Identify long-term, stable revenue sources.
- Pay child care providers based on enrollment rather than attendance to align payment systems with public preschool and K-12.



#### References

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5. Schochet, L. & Malik, R. (2017, September 13). 2 Million Parents Forced to Make Career Sacrifices Due to Problems with Child Care. Center for American Progress. Retrieved from <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/early-childhood/news/2017/09/13/438838/2-million-parents-forced-make-career-sacrifices-due-problems-child-care/>.

VIEW THE FULL REPORT AT [PRE4CLE.ORG/BUILDBACKSTRONGER](https://pre4cle.org/buildbackstronger)



**PRE4CLE**

**PRE4CLE Is Cleveland's plan to expand access to high-quality preschool to all 3- and 4-year-old children in the city.**

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