



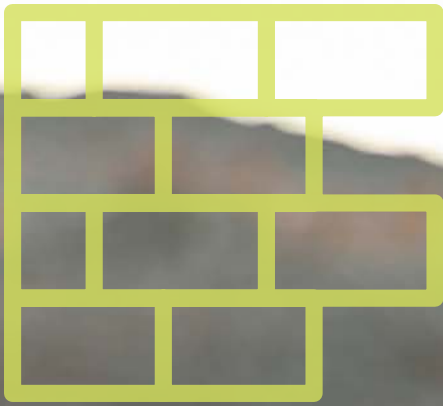
# Build Back Stronger

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



**PRE4CLE**







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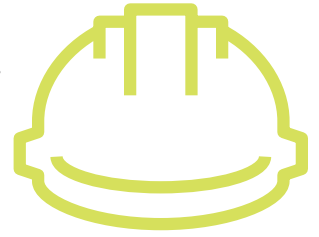
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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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.



## 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

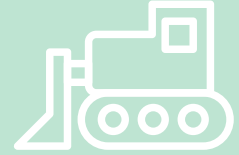
The COVID-19 crisis has pushed the already fragile child care and early education industry to the brink of collapse. Child care and early education providers need to be funded at a level that, at minimum, ensures they can afford to stay open, and ideally recognizes their importance to our economic system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

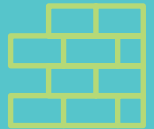


*of Ohio's pre-COVID seats could disappear in the wake of the crisis without serious intervention<sup>1</sup>*

*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:

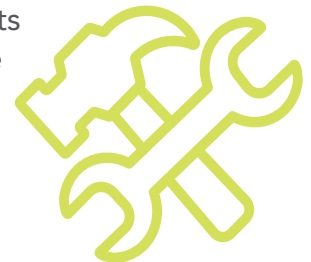
- Support fair compensation commensurate with the level of risk and essential nature of early care and education work during the COVID-19 crisis and into the future.
- Create inclusive state advisory committees on recovery that represent child care partners from professional organizations and communities 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:**

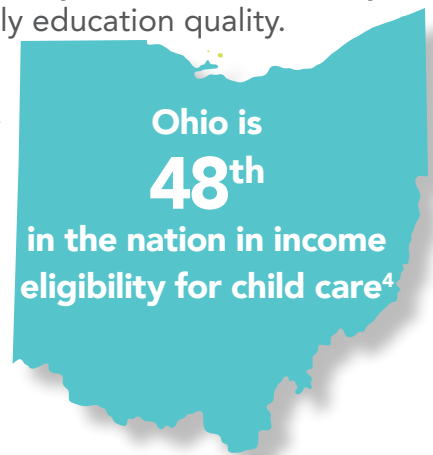
- Maintain Ohio's Step Up To Quality goals, deadlines, and funding.
- Identify long-term, stable funding sources for Step Up To Quality.

### 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.



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



### 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.



## INTRODUCTION

Child care and early education, like most industries, have been hit hard by the COVID-19 crisis. As businesses across the country closed to prevent the spread of the virus, many child care and early education programs also closed to protect the safety of their staff and the children and families they serve and many parents opted to keep their children at home. Still other providers remained open, operating with smaller group sizes, to try to safely serve the children of essential workers during the pandemic.



**Child care and education providers have always operated on slim margins** with their business models dependent on their available seats and

enrollment in those seats. Now both parts of that equation have been eliminated and providers are at risk of closing without significant support from state and federal governments. According to a recent study by the Center for American Progress using data from a national poll of child care providers done by NAEYC, **45 percent of Ohio's pre-pandemic child care slots could disappear without intervention.**<sup>6</sup> A July survey of providers found that **53% of programs expect to close within six months, if they don't receive additional public support.**<sup>7</sup>

While the federal government provided some relief in the CARES Act, it is not nearly enough to ensure the child care and early education industry can recover from the COVID-19 crisis. A recent estimate from CLASP and the National Women's Law Center estimates that **the child care**

**industry will need 9.6 billion dollars every month the pandemic stretches on to guarantee providers can get back on their feet.**<sup>8</sup>

Meanwhile, 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.**

However, child care has never been affordable and accessible for many families and this has always put a strain on our workforce and economy. **In 2016, nearly 76,000 Ohio parents of children age 5 and younger had to quit a job, not take a job, or greatly change their job because of problems with child care.**<sup>9</sup>

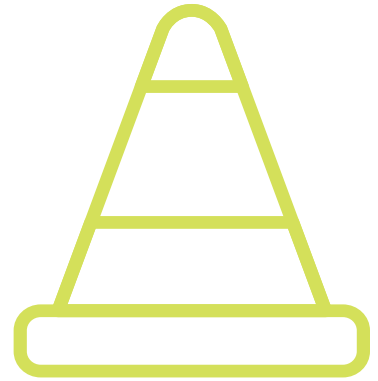
As we turn to the future, we first think about the near-term recovery of the child care and early education system. What do providers need to reopen? How can we support providers who choose not to reopen immediately? How do we support families and young children at home to ensure they are ready for kindergarten?



But we are also thinking about the lessons we've learned from the COVID-19 crisis and how we can move forward to **rebuild a stronger child care and early education system that offers a high-quality education experience to children, reliable child care to parents, and fair compensation for childcare and early education professionals.**

# PHASE 1: 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.** Ohio has led the nation in its response to COVID-19, and we have the opportunity to again lead the nation in child care and early education recovery efforts. During the recovery phase, we believe the following recommendations will lead to a healthy child care and early education industry that would allow working parents to quickly reenter the workforce, support small businesses, sustain industries, stimulate future spending, and continue to support our frontline workers.



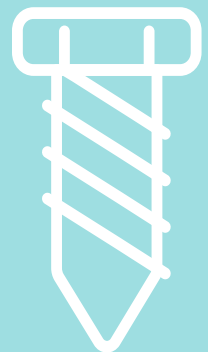
## 1. Prioritize health and safety



**As child care and early education programs reopen in the coming weeks and months, the health and safety of staff and the children must be the top priority.** While the CDC guidelines provide a good map to navigate these uncertain times, there are ways our state can support child care and early education providers to implement CDC and other health and safety guidelines efficiently and effectively. 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.

## Reduced Ratios and Group Sizes

**While social distancing and masking are currently regarded as the leading protective measures for preventing the spread of the virus, both of these strategies are difficult if not impossible in child care settings.** The state has appropriately reduced ratios and group sizes based on health authority recommendations and infection rates and **maintaining these smaller class sizes and teacher-child ratios is the next best option to provide as much protection as possible for children and staff.** Ohio must continue this practice during times of elevated infection rates and as recommended by leading health authorities to offer the maximum amount of safety as child care and early learning sites reopen.





## Access to Supplies

During this initial pandemic period, finding safety supplies has been incredibly challenging for providers across Ohio. As child care sites can reopen, more support is needed from the state to ensure providers have access to PPE, especially masks and gloves, as well as other necessary health supplies including thermometers, sanitizer, and cleaning supplies. Child care and early education providers may also need to make changes to their facilities to meet health and safety standards, including adding hand-washing stations and barriers or partitions, and complete a deep cleaning and disinfecting process in their sites. **The state should provide support for all of these items and use their bulk purchasing power to ensure providers have access to the supplies and services they need.**

## Access to Testing

**Child care and early education centers and homes should be on the state's priority list for COVID-19 testing**, with contact tracing and isolation supports following the testing. Additionally, the state should work with local communities to implement proactive testing for child care staff as programs reopen, especially in areas the state has designated as COVID-19 hot zones. This important step will help ensure that providers can quickly identify and isolate infected individuals and avoid infecting everyone within the site and having to close completely.

## Clear Guidelines and Training

Child care and early education providers are most concerned about the safety of their staff and families as centers reopen. While the initial guidelines have helped providers make decisions about how and when to reopen, there will be a great deal of learning along the way that will likely result in changes and improvements to health and safety recommendations. **These changes need to be clearly communicated through ongoing, online, mandatory training on the COVID-19 safety procedures to ensure consistency across the state.**

## Tracking Closures

As COVID-19 stretches on, it is highly likely we will continue to have child care and early education providers fully or partially shutting down temporarily due to infections. In order to assess the impact this virus is having on providers, staff, families, and children, we need **centralized data about how frequently these temporary closures are happening and how many children and staff are being infected.**

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

**Child care and early education programs have long operated on razor-thin margins**, with their business models dependent on their available seats and enrollment in those seats. To meet health and safety standards, providers are running their programs with smaller group sizes, reducing their overall capacity while maintaining the same overhead costs. According to a July survey of Ohio early care and education providers, 93% of programs are paying more for cleaning supplies; 66% for staff; and 84% for personal protective equipment.<sup>10</sup> At the same time, many parents are choosing to keep their children home out of concern for their health or because parents are working from home or not yet back to work, resulting in lower enrollment in many programs. 89% of Ohio early care and education providers that are currently open are serving fewer children now than they were prior to the pandemic. Overall, average enrollment is down by 61%.<sup>11</sup>

**This combination has pushed the already fragile child care and early education industry to the brink of collapse.** One recent evaluation of early care and education survey data estimates that 45 percent of Ohio's pre-COVID seats could disappear in the wake of the crisis, without serious intervention.<sup>12</sup> A July survey found that 48% of Ohio child care programs are certain that, without additional public assistance, they will close permanently, while 53% of programs expect to close within six months if lower enrollment continues and no additional public funding is available.<sup>13</sup> Many child care and early education programs are small businesses, including a large number owned by women and people of color. This crisis threatens to permanently wipe many of these small business off the map. **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.**

### Ongoing Federal Advocacy

**State and local leaders should include child care funding in their requests to federal lawmakers.** With the breadth of the COVID-19 crisis, we recognize that the state's finances are already spread thin. A crisis of this magnitude requires action at the federal level. **Estimates suggest that the child care and early education industry in the US will need approximately 9.6 billion dollars per month that the crisis stretches on. The next federal relief bill must include at least 50 billion dollars for child care and Ohio must be out front advocating for that relief.**<sup>14</sup>

### Continued Relief Payments

Ohio has appropriately reduced group sizes and teacher-student ratios for reopened child care and early education programs to protect the health and safety of children and staff. **During periods where it is necessary to have reduced ratios and group sizes, child care programs must receive relief payments to afford to remain open and continue to serve children.**

Furthermore, it has become clear that many parents are still choosing to keep their children at home and enrollment in child care and early education programs remains low. Once providers return to regular group sizes and ratios, it is likely many will not be able to stay open without **continued relief payments based on capacity, rather than attendance or enrollment, to ensure programs can remain solvent to meet the needs of families and children.**

## Flexible Relief Funding

**Once federal funding comes through, in any amount, providers need flexibility in how they can use those dollars so that they can stay open in the long run.** This includes allowing closed providers to retain their staff at full pay, cover other fixed costs such as rent and utilities, and prepare to reopen at the appropriate time. Open providers should be able to use the funds to offer safe, comprehensive, high-quality care and education.

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

**For too long, the child care and early education workforce has been undervalued and underpaid.** It has become increasingly clear that child care and early education and the professionals who work in early care and education are the backbone of the U.S. economy. **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. During the pandemic, 65% of Ohio programs have engaged in furlough, pay cuts, or layoffs.**<sup>15</sup> Those employed in the industry provide an essential service to countless American families. We need to be sure these jobs remain secure when the pandemic is over. 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.

## Fair Compensation

**Child care and early education professionals have been working throughout the COVID-19 pandemic in close contact with young children whose parents are working on the front lines of this crisis.** They have put themselves and their own families at risk of infection to keep our healthcare system running and other essential workers on the job. As our state and nation begin to return to work, their ability to do so lies in part in the availability of child care. However, we know 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. **This sacrifice should be adequately compensated with premium pay commensurate with the level of risk and essential nature of early care and education work during the COVID-19 crisis and into the future.\***

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\*Several other states, including Kentucky, New Mexico, and Wisconsin are using their new federal CCDBG funds to provide incentives or premium pay to child care and early education teachers during the crisis.<sup>16</sup>





The child care and early education professionals who are not providing care in their sites because their centers are closed or because they are in a high-risk group need to have their pre-pandemic pay continue while they are out of work so that they can return to work ready to care for children when the pandemic is over. **The state should offer clear guidelines on how to handle staff in high-risk groups for COVID-19 infection that includes continued pay. Child care and early education operators should not be pitted against their teachers by making them choose to return to work and risk their health or stay home if they feel unsafe and lose their job.**

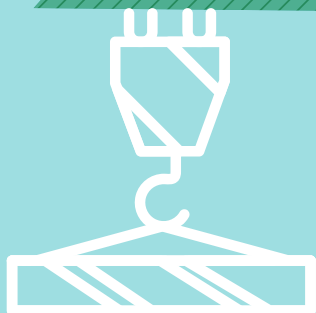
## Professional Expertise

**Child care and early education teachers and operators are professionals and experts in their field and should be an active voice in conversations about rebuilding.** To implement a successful transition that addresses the complex issues involved in reopening child care and early education programs, we recommend **creating a larger working group of early care and education industry leaders** who can provide feedback on their sites and regions, offer lessons learned from sites open during the pandemic phase, and provide a feedback loop as needed through the transition. Furthermore, **early care and education experts should be included in all working groups and task forces, and in other efforts to restart and recover the economy to ensure those efforts are examined through a lens of how it will impact children and working parents.**

Additionally, **as K-12 districts determine their plans for learning in the fall, child care professionals should be included in the discussions** to ensure they are able to adequately plan to support students who will need care during the school day.



## Staff Social-Emotional Needs



Early childhood educators have been on the front lines of the COVID-19 pandemic for months and will continue to put themselves at risk as the crisis stretches on. This has undoubtedly caused a great deal of stress. As programs reopen, these professionals will be charged with supporting children and families who have been and will continue to be dealing with immense stress of their own. **Early care and education providers will need to have the resources necessary to provide mental health support to their staff.** As these needs become more

clear, mental health and related professionals and experts should be consulted to determine the interventions, partnerships, and resources necessary to ensure early childhood staff receive the support they need to be able to serve children and families.

## 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.** Child care and early education should be even more accessible to more families now than it has been in the past to support families that have faced job loss and other financial hardship during the pandemic and need an extra boost to reenter the workforce. Early care and education are a catalyst for Ohio's economic recovery. **More 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.**

### Increased Access

Families with parents that have been out of work for several months may need extra support to be able to afford child care as they reenter the workforce. Even families that may have been able to pay for child care out of pocket before the pandemic may now find themselves in a very different financial situation that could keep them at home. Traditionally, child care duties have fallen to women and trends are already showing this crisis could lead to more women leaving the workforce, more families with single-income households, and even greater and longer-lasting economic need.<sup>17</sup> **Increasing eligibility for publicly funded child care to 200 percent of the federal poverty level (FPL) would allow more parents to get back to work more quickly.** Additionally, the **work requirement for child care eligibility should be relaxed while unemployment rates are still high** to ensure children have access to early learning and other resources to address the academic and social emotional needs of children in the aftermath of the COVID-19 crisis.



### Support for Kids

**Early childhood experts are concerned about the impact this crisis has had on young children.** With early care and education programs closed, there is likely to be a substantial loss of learning and an increase in the social-emotional needs of children. **When programs reopen, they will need to have the resources necessary to provide both academic and social-emotional support to children and families that have been negatively impacted by the crisis.** As these needs become more clear, early childhood development, mental health, and related professionals and experts should be consulted to determine the interventions, partnerships, and resources necessary to ensure children and families can recover from the crisis.



## Expanded KRA Window

With many school districts moving to a fully virtual model for the fall and an unclear future for the rest of the school year, districts may miss the window of time during which they are permitted to complete the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment (KRA). **This window should be extended to meet the needs of individual districts to allow for the KRA to be completed within 45 days of in-person instruction beginning.** With the anticipated learning losses caused by the closure of early learning programs during the COVID-19 crisis, it will be important that the state has a measure to be able to measure this loss to plan for future interventions.





## PHASE 2: 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.**

Child care and early education providers have long operated on razor-thin margins, families have had trouble accessing affordable, high-quality child care and early education, and early care and education professionals have been undervalued and underpaid. Child care and early education is the backbone of our economy, and it cannot continue to operate on the brink of collapse.

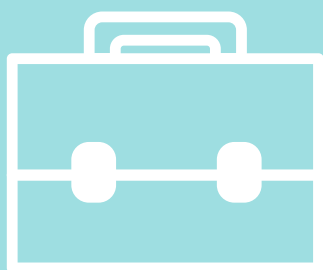
The COVID-19 crisis has laid bare the weaknesses in the child care and early education system, but it also provides an opportunity to rebuild a system that truly works for families, providers, early care and education professionals, and our economy. The following recommendations provide a roadmap to rebuild the child care and early education system better than it was before this crisis and strong enough to support kids and families long into the future.



### 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. It provides us an opportunity to build the system back even stronger than it was before the pandemic.

#### Step Up To Quality



Ohio's Step Up To Quality rating system has been built over the last twenty years to ensure our children are receiving quality early care and education experiences, with proven results. Currently, more than 90 percent of early care and education programs serving children receiving publicly funded child care have already invested time and resources to be a part of the system and receive a rating. **As we build back a stronger early care and education system in Ohio, the goals**

**and deadlines of Step Up To Quality should remain in place, with even greater investment to help all providers become high-quality by 2025.**

### 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 US Department of Health and Human Services considers ten percent of a family's income to be affordable, but for many families, the cost of child care eats up a much larger proportion of their income.

## Child Care Eligibility

The major contributing factor to the high price of child care for families is Ohio's low income eligibility for child care assistance at 130 percent of the federal poverty level. **In 2019, only two states had income limits to qualify for assistance that were lower than Ohio's income limits, as a percentage of poverty.**<sup>18</sup> For some families, the high price of child care is too much to overcome. In fact, **in 2016, an estimated 75,669 Ohio parents quit a job, did not take a job, or greatly changed their job because of child care problems.**<sup>19</sup> **Increasing income eligibility to 200 percent of the federal poverty level supports parents to participate in the workforce** and puts Ohio on the path to compete with neighboring states.

### 3. Increase compensation for professionals

**Child care and early education professionals are the most important part of a quality early care and education system.** Research shows the relationships and interactions between children and caring adults are at the heart of early brain development and the professionals working in early care and education are highly skilled in ensuring these interactions are meaningful. These professionals have certifications and degrees in early childhood education and are required to participate in ongoing training and professional development. On top of providing a safe place for children to be cared for, early childhood professionals in high-quality programs plan and implement lessons from a research-based curriculum, support children's social-emotional development, administer assessments, and provide feedback to families about their child's learning. However, for too long, they have been underpaid. **As of 2016, the median income of child care teachers in Ohio was \$19,860, just 36% of Ohio's median household income.**<sup>20, 21</sup> **These professionals 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 professionals in the field.**



## Reimbursement Rates

The primary way early care and education providers are funded is through reimbursement rates paid by the state for children who receive publicly funded child care. In Cuyahoga County, it costs approximately \$12,000 per child per year to provide a high-quality early childhood education experience, but that doesn't include adequate pay and benefits for teachers and other staff, which is already the costliest part of program delivery. **To provide equitable compensation that reflects early childhood educators' education and training levels, professionalism, and the essential nature of their work, the state must increase reimbursement rates to providers.**

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



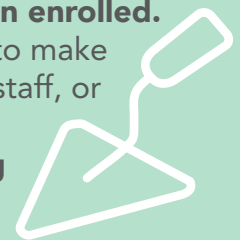
While the COVID-19 crisis has highlighted the weaknesses of the child care and early education system and pushed it to the brink of collapse, the truth is **early care and education providers have always been facing an unsustainable and untenable financing equation.** We need to begin creating a framework 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.**

### Long-Term Stable Revenue Stream

The early care and education system has long been funded by a patchwork of local, state, federal, and private funding sources that are often temporary. Though the COVID-19 crisis is the most recent threat to the industry, it certainly won't be the last. To ensure the child care and early education system can withstand future economic turmoil, **all levels of government need to identify long-term, stable revenue sources for the child care and early education system,** such as the general revenue fund or a dedicated revenue stream. This will allow the system to begin to have a more predictable and secure future.

### Payment for Enrollment

**Currently, child care providers are paid based on the attendance of children enrolled.** This creates an unpredictable budget and leaves providers without the ability to make long-term plans such as hiring additional staff, providing raises or benefits for staff, or making needed renovations. **Paying providers for their enrollment creates a more consistent revenue stream and allows providers a bit more breathing room in their budgets to continue to increase their quality and feel their businesses are stable.**



NOTE: While this document contains our recommendations based on the best possible information at this time, we know that the COVID-19 crisis will continue to evolve and that these recommendations will evolve with it.



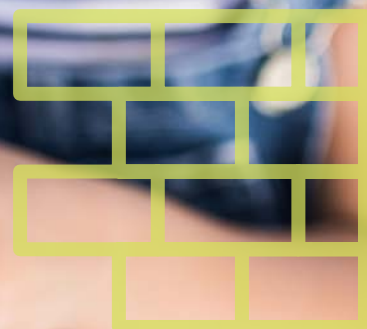
## CONCLUSION

The COVID-19 crisis has exacerbated many of challenges that the child care and early education industry have faced for many years. Families have long struggled to access affordable, high-quality options, and providers have faced slim margins and precarious financial situations. **The child care and early education system is the backbone of the U.S. economy.** As our economy rebuilds after the COVID-19 pandemic, we have the opportunity to create a stronger early care and education system that supports all kids and families and our economy. **We can't afford to get this wrong.**

**Early care and education are a catalyst for Ohio's economic recovery.** More 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. During the recovery phase, we believe child care and early education providers should be supported to ensure they

remain solvent and safe and 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. This includes fairly compensating child care and early education professionals with wages and benefits that reflect their professionalism and the essential nature of their work.

The need to quickly and effectively rebuild our economy after the pandemic cannot come at the expense of child care and early education quality. It provides us an opportunity to build the system back even stronger than it was before the pandemic. **This crisis gives us the opportunity to start fresh and build a newly resilient child care and early education system that offers high-quality care and education to children, reliable and affordable care to families, and fair compensation for child care and early education professionals.**



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