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School Readiness: Providing Quality Early Care and Education

Child & Family Issue Brief

Every child is born ready to learn but not ready for school. School readiness refers to the degree to which Ohio's young children reach school age developmentally ready to enter school. Children who start behind in school are much more likely to experience a range of academic and personal problems that also represent challenges for society. Many studies have shown that failure to meet young children's developmental needs results in substantial later costs (both economic and social) for communities and states. While Ohio has worked to elevate its commitment to early child care and learning, many Ohio families still do not have access to early learning opportunities that would benefit their children.

Effective early care and learning systems build on four key dimensions ⁽¹⁾:

- Parents and families who are involved in raising their children and communities that support them in doing so.
- High quality early learning settings and highly skilled early learning professionals.
- Effective governance and strong connections among child-serving and family-serving programs.
- Reliable financing with accountability for results.

(1) School Readiness Solutions Group (2006). From the Beginning: Firm Footing for Children, Families and Schools.

Key Facts about Ohio's Young Children:

- 734,592 children are under age 5 (6.4%)¹
- 18.1% of children under age 5 live in poverty²
- 62% of children under age 6 live in households with adults in the workforce³
- 20.5% of 2-year-olds are not fully immunized⁴
- \$5,621 is the average annual fee for center-based child care for preschoolers⁵
- 43% of children attend full-day kindergarten⁶
- 65% of fourth-grade children read below grade level⁴
- 57% of fourth-grade children perform below grade level in math⁴

School Readiness Includes:

- Physical Well-Being
- Motor Development
- Social and Emotional Development
- Approaches to Learning
- Language Development
- Cognition and General Knowledge

(National School Readiness Indicators Initiative)

References: 1) U.S. Census Bureau 2006 State and County QuickFacts; 2) Children's Defense Fund, Supplementary Survey: Poverty Status During Previous 12 Months, by Age, 2007; 3) Economic Impact Report, Ohio, 2004; 4) Children's Defense Fund, Ohio, 2006; 5) Ohio Child Care Resource and Referral Agency, Average Rates, 2006; 6) Ohio Department of Education, EMIS, 2004; 7) Ohio Department of Education, Report Card, 2004; 8) Ohio Department of Education, Report Card, 2004

A wide range of early care and education programs are in place in Ohio. They include:

- **Federal Head Start:** serving over 36,000 poor children aged 3-5.
- **Early Head Start:** serves nearly 1,400 pregnant women and children birth to age 3 living in poverty.
- **Early Learning Initiative:** provides part-day and full-day care to children aged 3-5 in TANF-eligible families.
- **Public Preschool:** provides access to part-day public preschool programs to over 9,600 income-eligible children aged 3 to 5.
- **Help Me Grow:** promotes family-centered programs for expectant parents, newborns, infants, toddlers, and their families. Over 52,000 Ohio families annually utilize services.
- **Even Start:** provides comprehensive family literacy services to families of over 1,900 children birth to age 7.
- **MR/DD Board Early Intervention Services:** County Boards of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disability provide a range of early intervention services to client children and their families. Over 9,000 children and their families are served each year.
- **Preschool Special Education:** serves children aged 3 to 5 who are identified with disabilities. Programs are offered to over 19,000 children through various center-based and itinerant delivery options.
- **Subsidized Child Care:** is available to working families with incomes below 185 percent of the federal poverty level. Families with children aged 6 weeks to 13 years are eligible for this service.

Statewide Initiatives Should be Driven by:

1. A whole child approach that addresses children's social, emotional, physical and intellectual development.
2. State licensing of teachers and other personnel to ensure that the adults in Ohio's early care and education system are prepared to facilitate children's development and readiness for school.
3. Involved families at home and in the early learning system that are committed to achieving the best learning experiences for their children.
4. Funding levels, both public and private, that are greater in constant dollars than they are today.
5. Local officials and community leaders who support the early learning system and are committed to its success.

School Readiness Solutions Group (2006). From the Beginning: Firm Footing for Children, Families and Schools.



The Economic Benefits of School Readiness:

- A \$1,000 investment in quality pre-kindergarten returns over \$19,000 in 20 years.¹
- Several long-term research studies show that the positive outcomes of quality ECE programs can save the state from \$7 to \$17 in future public expenditures for every \$1 invested.²

References: 1) Preventing Crime with Pre-Kindergarten: A Critical Investment in Ohio's Safety, 2006 2) High-Quality Pre-Kindergarten: The Key to Crime Prevention and School Success in Ohio. Fight Crime_ Invest in Kids. Washington, D.C. July 2004.



Recommendations for Ohio:

Improve the quality of all early learning settings to assure that they have a sufficient number of highly qualified early learning professionals

- Create a teacher license focusing on education and child development of children birth to age 8
- Establish expectations/requirements for ongoing professional development for those who work with young children
- Develop full day kindergarten as an option in all districts



Provide effective governance and strong connections among child-serving and family-serving systems

- Establish a Board of Early Care and Education to govern early learning programs and services
- Establish shared data collection systems across all state agencies focusing on children
- Develop statewide policies and processes that ensure that children and families can access a continuum of services to support school readiness.

Enhance families' ability to early child development and school readiness

- Expand access to parent and family education resources and materials to families and caregivers.
- Provide parents with opportunities to participate in early childhood program guidance and decision-making.
- Implement family life education programs to increase parenting capacity

Create a reliable financing system of early learning services and strengthen accountability for public and private investments in early care

- Develop a statewide financing model that ensures the availability of high-quality early learning services accessible to all children from birth through kindergarten.

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