

# Ohio's Child Care System: Charting a Strong Course Forward



**Child care programs in Ohio have reopened their doors to a completely new normal with elevated expectations that prioritize the health and safety of children, families, and staff.**

Lower teacher-to-child ratios and classroom sizes, new health screenings, and increased sanitation requirements are all in place for programs who have chosen to reopen. But protecting Ohio's youngest children, families and child care professionals comes at a cost.





Child care programs have always operated on razor-thin margins to provide the highest quality care for kids, while keeping tuition costs as affordable as possible for parents. For many providers, whether they temporarily closed or stayed open to provide care for essential workers, the past two months have dealt programs a substantial financial blow.

As providers now re-open their doors to families, many have found that the numbers just don't add up. Without additional support, they will be operating in the red in a matter of weeks—and many will abandon ship, transitioning from a temporary to permanent closure.

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As a result, Ohio stands to lose 45%<sup>1</sup> of our state's child care supply, which translates to nearly 100,000 slots across the state.

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At a time when children are in greatest need of consistent and nurturing caregiving that our high-quality child care programs provide—and parents are in desperate need of safe options as they return to work—Ohio cannot afford this loss of child care supply.

While the current situation may seem dire—for children, families, providers, and our state's economy—we *can* weather this storm with the proper focus and smart investments in our system. As we consider how to stem the tide by prioritizing investments and policies at the local, state, and federal levels, we must resist the temptation to decide how to distribute life boats and instead, come around to the idea of building a stronger, more seaworthy ship—and we need all hands on deck to make that happen.

<sup>1</sup> Source: Center for American Progress



# All Hands on Deck for Child Care

Policymakers, business leaders, and private philanthropy must recognize child care as critical infrastructure and understand the disproportionate impact of challenges the system has on people of color, those living in poverty, and those residing in rural regions of our state. We all have an important role to play in helping Ohio's child care system survive the COVID-19 pandemic and reopen even stronger than before.



## Federal Policymakers

Adequate funding to support providers and minimize the loss of child care supply in our state will be crucial to supporting short- and long-term sustainability for Ohio's child care system.

***If we continue with current funding levels, Ohio stands to lose 45% of child care slots—a blow that children, working parents, and our state's economy simply cannot afford.***

Congress should support substantial federal investment in child care with dedicated, flexible funding of at least \$50 billion.



## State Policymakers

Ohio has made great progress over the past decade in establishing and improving a quality-focused child care system. As we navigate through the pandemic and recovery, state policymakers should:

- **Preserve and increase sustainability** of all state investments in high-quality child care.
- **Advocate for additional federal funds** and leverage all existing federal funds to support quality child care.
- **Explore ways to expand access** to high-quality child care for working families and those seeking employment.



## Local Policymakers

The impact of COVID-19 on families, child care programs, and economies is unique in each local community across Ohio. As we seek to respond to this unique impact and advance strategies that support all Ohioans, local policymakers play a critical role in advancing their communities' needs at every level of government. Local policymakers should:

- **Seek out sources of local data** (e.g. county JFS, resource and referral agencies, etc.) and connect with constituents to understand the challenges facing child care providers in their community.
- **Increase local investments** or dedicate federal recovery dollars to quality child care and preschool in a way that best meets the needs of families in their community.
- **Elevate local data and stories** to state and federal policymakers to help inform policy and investment decisions.

**We must resist the temptation to decide how to distribute life boats and instead, come around to the idea of building a stronger, more seaworthy ship.**





## Business Leaders

As businesses resume “normal” operations and employees are asked to return to work, the demand for affordable, quality child care will continue to increase—but as a result of the pandemic, the supply may not be there to meet it. Businesses should consider ways to support the child care industry, and in turn their employees, in increasing the availability of high-quality child care in their communities. This may include:

- **Adopting internal policies** that recognize the unique needs of families with young children.
- **Implementing a child care benefits program** to help families cover the cost of child care.
- **Establishing on-site** child care centers.
- **Working with an existing child care provider** to contract or prioritize slots for children of your employees.
- **Lending your voice in support** of public investments in Ohio’s child care system to local, state, and federal policymakers.



## Philanthropy

Philanthropy has long filled the gaps when public and private investments have fallen short. As foundations, businesses, and private donors contemplate how to best support Ohio’s child care system, they should consider:

- **Engaging in responsive grantmaking** by asking grantees and community partners what they need
- **Supporting organizations** advocating for strong public policies and investments because private philanthropy alone cannot close the vast gap we are facing now even temporarily
- **Offering flexibility** in funding guidelines
- **Recognizing that recovery takes time**—it will be a marathon, not a sprint

Without additional support, child care providers will be operating in the red in a matter of weeks—and many will abandon ship, transitioning from a temporary to permanent closure.

**GroundworkOhio.org**

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