



Chara Fisher Jackson
Executive Director & CEO

cjackson@cincy-promise.org
Mobile: (513) 394-3777

2400 Reading Road, Suite 220
Cincinnati, Ohio 45202

**Ohio General Assembly's Publicly Funded Child Care
and Step Up to Quality Study Committee
Chara Fisher Jackson
Executive Director & CEO
Cincinnati Preschool Promise
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Good Morning, Co-Chairs Senator Cirino, and Representative White, and committee members, my name is Chara Fisher Jackson. I am the Executive Director and CEO of Cincinnati Preschool Promise. Cincinnati Preschool Promise is governed by a strong board of managers, including leadership from Cincinnati Public Schools and non-profits, education, medicine, and business. These individuals have assisted in our growth and impact in the Cincinnati community.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide interested party testimony on the current needs of children, parents and Providers who benefit from publicly funded childcare. We provide access for families and support for Providers in achieving high-quality preschools. Through our testimony, we have summarized the impact of quality learning on children, families and the Providers in our region.

Cincinnati Preschool Promise is possible thanks to a significant financial investment from taxpayers. In 2016, and again in 2020, a five-year Cincinnati Public Schools levy was approved with overwhelming community support. The levy allocated \$33 million per year to strengthen K-12 education and \$15 million per year to expand children's access to high-quality preschool. The dollars allocated reinforce the importance of our partnership with the Cincinnati Public Schools in providing access to a high-quality education beginning with preschool and ongoing engagement through high school graduation. The 2020 levy renewal demonstrates ongoing support, especially during the most difficult financial time of navigating through a COVID-19 pandemic.

The Cincinnati community values preschool as an integral part of a child's education and as an important support for working families and is willing to invest millions of dollars to be a partner in making access to high-quality preschool education a success. Now in our fourth year, Cincinnati Preschool Promise has provided tuition

assistance to over 6,100 children and over time, thousands more will be able to access a high-quality preschool education.

Our vision is to give children the best start possible on their educational journey by preparing them for kindergarten and beyond. Their success will produce a more qualified workforce and a community in which all residents have an opportunity to thrive.

Our mission is to ensure equitable access to high-quality preschool so that every Cincinnati child is prepared for kindergarten.

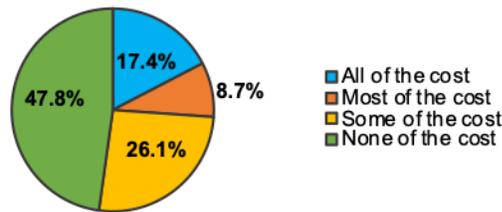
Our focus is as simple as A-B-C. We expand **ACCESS** to affordable high-quality preschool for Cincinnati children and their families. We **BUILD** partnership with Providers to increase high-quality programming and we **CONTRIBUTE** financially to an equitable early childhood community to sustain high-quality programs and results. The implementation of Cincinnati Preschool Promise's A-B-C system results in preschoolers who are ready for kindergarten.

Kindergarten readiness and third grade reading are short-term benefits of increased participation in preschool. The longer-term benefits, from middle school through high school, will produce a more qualified workforce and community in which all residents have an opportunity to thrive.

We have found that all parents want to give their children the best education, including preschool. INNOVATIONS in Community Research and Program Evaluation at Cincinnati Children's Hospital and Medical Center conducted an annual systemwide evaluation on the impact of access to a high-quality preschool education. The top three reasons parents enrolled their children at a preschool were: preparation for kindergarten, a safe environment, and the preschool is a 3-4-5 star rated provider.

Tuition assistance provided by Cincinnati Preschool Promise removes a financial barrier families have in accessing and affording preschool beyond support from other sources. Of those parents receiving tuition assistance, 47.8% could not have afforded the cost of preschool and 26.1% could only have afforded some of the cost without tuition assistance. "Affordability" was also identified as a top barrier to preschool enrollment by parents and Providers. Overall, preschool would not have been possible for 73.9% of families without the financial support provided by CPP.

Percentage of Parents who could afford preschool without tuition assistance



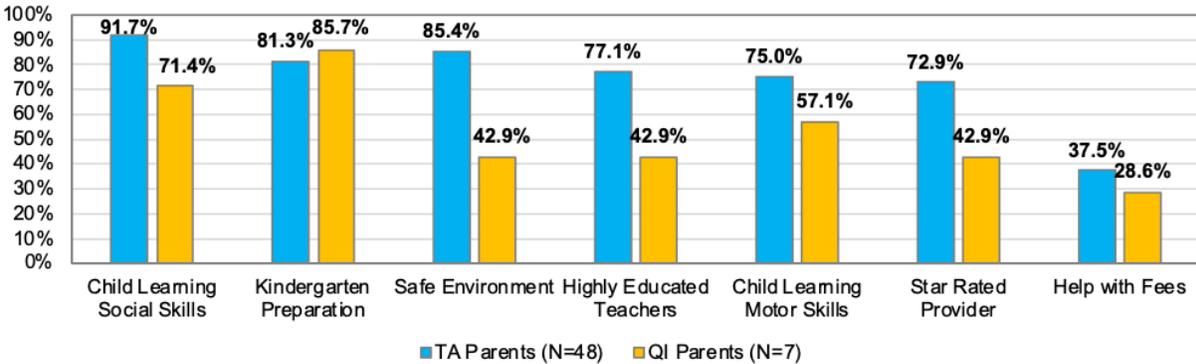
Many Providers agreed that tuition assistance played a critical role in recruiting and retaining children at their preschools. Providers invest in building quality every day, but it can take significant time to gain or increase a quality rating. That's why additional funding is essential to ensure the accessibility and availability of high-quality preschool seats for every child.

Our community's investment has produced astonishing results: Pre-pandemic, **78.4%** of preschoolers who attended high-quality preschools with tuition assistance from Cincinnati Preschool Promise entered kindergarten ready to learn. It is vitally important to make sure access to a high-quality education supports children and families with the greatest need. This access is only possible through ongoing support in a complex system that is dependent upon providing funding for parents and Providers to promote high-quality.

Investing in quality child care provides critical support for today's workforce. Families with young children have to choose between spending a significant portion of their income on child care. For many, this choice makes it more critical that we invest in early childhood education so families do not have to settle for less than optimal choices. The loss to children and their families is incalculable if we do not address this need for ongoing funding.

Parents Perspectives on Quality Preschool

. Parents, Providers, and teachers representing **89 unique preschool locations** participated in focus groups, key informant interviews, or surveys. **All parents (100%)** reported that a "high-quality" early educational experience was either "important" or "very important" for them and their preschoolers. They identified kindergarten-readiness and social skill development as the top two aspects of quality preschool that were also important to them.



Community Providers Commitment to Striving for Quality

Providers in the CPP network who are either unrated or have a 1 or 2 Step Up to Quality star rating received tangible support and coaching to improve quality and increase the number of quality preschool seats available.

The number of providers in the CPP network achieving and maintaining 3 to 5 SUTQ stars, termed Tuition Assistance (TA) Providers increased. The number of providers with 0 to 2 SUTQ stars participating in CPPs Quality Improvement grew from **one to 175 in just four years**. These Providers put in the hard work and investment necessary to achieve high-quality ratings and at this critical juncture and their continued success is dependent upon ongoing support from the State-funded early learning system

Learnings from the Pandemic

During the Pandemic, many providers in the CPP network remained open with pandemic licenses to continue educating children and supporting families. Providers demonstrated their commitment to making high-quality seats accessible for families, especially those receiving tuition support through CPP and publically funded childcare.

Complying with evolving COVID-19-related health and safety requirements to protect children, families, and staff made the already daunting task of achieving a high-quality rating even more difficult. Yet, despite the challenges, **119 Community Providers** continued to advance by participating in the Quality improvement program and creating more than **350 new high-quality** preschool seats in the Cincinnati Public Schools district.

Considering the interruptions in learning over the past two years, this education crisis is becoming more dire. As validated by our data and outcomes, high-quality preschool is a proven solution to this crisis. Furthermore, attendance at a high-quality program increases kindergarten readiness. Cincinnati Preschool Promise kindergarten readiness trends are consistent over three years of assessment analyses from 2019 to 2021 as a result of gaining access to a high-quality preschool. Cincinnati Preschool Promise tuition-assisted preschoolers consistently show stronger academic readiness in kindergarten than non-participating peers. These programs have improved school readiness, especially for students living in lower social economic neighborhoods.

Impact of consistent support & investments

Cincinnati Preschool Promise asks for your continued support of all programs serving publicly funded children, **100%** of which are participating in the Step Up to Quality system and nearly half of whom are highly rated (3-5 star) in the system at this time. Cincinnati Preschool Promise only works because we are the 'last dollar in' and help close the funding gap for those who otherwise could not afford preschool.

Cincinnati Preschool Promise is asking this committee to continue to look at the data, consider what children needs, what parents want, and the opportunity that presents itself. Your recommendations could create a success model in Ohio that is unlike any we've had before by making more investments in early childhood education that increases access to high quality.

A longitudinal evaluation of kindergarten readiness's impact of outcomes for children, along with 4 years of evaluation of CPP outcomes have demonstrate the following prepared by INNOVATIONS in Community Research and Program Evaluation.

Enrollment and Regular Attendance in a High-Quality Preschool Matters

- An important step to ensuring that children are ready for kindergarten is to enroll them in a high-quality preschool.
- Low income children and children who attend preschool regularly benefit from preschool as they are more likely to show the benefits of preschool compared to their peers who did not go to preschool especially through 3rd grade.

Readiness for Kindergarten is Fundamental for Academic Success

- Students who attended preschool were more ready for kindergarten.
- Kindergarten readiness is linked to a number of academic outcomes including better performance on 3rd and 8th grade State Math and Reading tests, higher ACT scores, more high school credits earned, and four-year graduation.
- Low income and African-American/Black students especially benefit from being ready for kindergarten.

Supporting Every Student is Important to Closing Performance Gaps

- Performance gaps exist for some students. Educational support and opportunities can provide enrichment opportunities and resources for students and families when needed.
- Data-driven strategies are important to implementing best practices and applying these approaches to real world classroom settings.
- Planning among teachers, staff and leadership can ensure that supporting every student from preschool through high school graduation continues to be a priority.

The benefits of a high-quality education makes a difference for children, especially those with fewer economic resources. Parents want their children to have access to the best education possible AND it is what Providers are ready to implement as demonstrated by their work and progress during the pandemic. Our fragile education systems need more financial support to build upon the current investments made to ensure children are ready to thrive.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. Please reach out to me directly if you have questions or concerns about the content of our testimony.