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Early care and education need investment

Kasich budget underfunds childcare, preschool and kindergarten

Governor Kasich's proposed budget for 2018-2019 misses several opportunities to invest in Ohio's families and children. In two "Budget Bites" released today, Policy Matters Ohio examines the state's underinvestment in early education and childcare, and lack of investment in tuition-free all-day kindergarten.

Ohio doesn't do enough to provide quality childcare for families trying to make ends meet or to ensure all children get the benefits of preschool. Only families making no more than 130 percent of poverty – lower than the ceiling for eligibility in Medicaid – initially qualify for childcare assistance in Ohio. Just 5 percent of Ohio's low-income 4-year-olds are in preschool, compared to 29 percent nationally. Ohio relies heavily on the federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) block grant to fund these programs. With President Trump's proposed deep cuts to social service programs, their fate is unclear.

"The state does not do nearly enough to invest in our youngest Ohioans," Budget Bite author Wendy Patton said. "Ohio's investment in early care and education will remain below the need and below average unless lawmakers increase state funding substantially." The Ohio Department of Job and Family Services didn't respond to repeated requests for information about the amount of federal dollars set aside for childcare.

Due to a complete lack of state investment, Ohio school districts are on their own to fund tuition-free all-day kindergarten, which helps all young children, especially those at risk of falling behind.

"North Olmsted made the choice to fund tuition free all-day kindergarten for all students," Patton said. "They weighed the costs and benefits and found it would cost far less than having students at risk of falling behind, repeating third grade, or dropping out of school someday."

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*Policy Matters Ohio is a nonprofit, nonpartisan state policy research institute
with offices in Cleveland and Columbus.*