



EASTERN OHIO EDUCATION PARTNERSHIP

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Mahoning Valley needs more affordable, quality preschool and childcare

Quality preschool and childcare is expensive. In Mahoning Valley, cash strapped centers struggle to deliver good programs, while parents struggle to afford them. To bridge the gap, the Valley needs deeper state investments, according to a report released today by Policy Matters Ohio and the Eastern Ohio Education Partnership.

The report examines early childhood programs in Mahoning and Trumbull counties, including public preschools, childcare centers and home childcare providers. Only about half of centers in each county are rated by the Step-Up-To-Quality program, and about a quarter are rated highly, with three to five stars. While the Valley has enough programs to serve all 3- and 4-year-olds, many families still cannot access them - especially top rated programs.

Families often turn instead to programs with extended hours while parents work. High costs coupled with the need for wraparound childcare lock many children out of preschool and keep their parents out of the workforce. The median center based preschool costs \$7,550 per child in Mahoning County and \$9,370 in Trumbull - one-fifth of the typical family budget. Even at those rates, programs struggle to meet the costs of top quality benchmarks.

“Providers want to deliver the best early education to the children they serve,” said Stephanie Shaw, executive director of Eastern Ohio Education Partnership. “Meeting Step-Up-To-Quality standards is expensive, and our strategy is to get the state to reimburse programs at a level where they can remain competitive.”

Staff plays the largest role in determining the quality of a preschool or childcare program. Yet Ohio childcare teachers earn less than 97 percent of all the state’s workers. Turnover is high and disruptive.

The state should invest more resources in early childhood programs, starting by restoring the initial eligibility ceiling for publicly funded childcare to 200 percent of the poverty line and raising reimbursement rates to let families choose from three quarters of all programs.

“Good preschool with wraparound childcare is both an investment in children and a vital work support for families” said Michael Shields, Policy Matters researcher and

report coauthor, “We need deeper state investments to make quality programs available to all Mahoning Valley families.”

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