

Statewide Needs Assessment



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This Statewide Needs Assessment for Ohio project was completed by Scott Siegfried, former Chief Innovation Officer at the Miami Valley Child Development Centers, Inc.- Retired, in partnership with Lori Jones-Perkins, Ohio Head Start Collaboration Office Director and the Ohio Head Start Association, Inc. (OHSAI)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Olivia is one of 11,885 children under the age of five living in Delaware County in the center of Ohio. On the east side of the state, Asher is one of 3,226 children under five residing in Jefferson County on the border with West Virginia. Olivia, like Asher, lives below the federal poverty line. Although their ages may be similar, the conditions in these environments present different lived experiences and different opportunities.

Delaware County has a population of 243,200 and a child poverty rate of 4.5% meaning that there are 534 preschoolers potentially eligible for Head Start services. Contrast that with Jefferson County where only 63,684 reside but there is a 30% child poverty rate. This suggests that 968 children may be eligible for Head Start services.

Consider further that Delaware ranks as the healthiest county in Ohio compared to Jefferson which ranks 81st of 88 counties according to the County Health Rankings & Roadmap.¹ In Delaware County, the infant mortality rate is 4 deaths of children less than 1 year of age per 1,000 live births whereas Jefferson County has a rate of 9. For perspective, the infant mortality rate in Ohio is 7. Three counties in the state have rates as high as 10: Guernsey, Scioto and Lucas. The rates of physical distress, diabetes, teen births, obesity, suicide, adult smoking and physical inactivity are all higher in Jefferson, at times, significantly. All these data illustrate the overlapping nature of environmental conditions known as Social Determinants of Health (SDoH). These are so impactful that they influence life expectancy with Delaware County at 81.1 whereas residents of Jefferson County can expect to live to 71.6.

This report has been developed using quantitative and qualitative data relying on demographic research tools, surveys, interviews, listening sessions and focus group questions. Data have been reported by Ohio's 12 Service Delivery Areas (SDA) when possible, to shine a light on opportunities where collaboration with key actors in the community could alter the trajectory of these data. The objective is to provide a clear picture of the current conditions across the state impacting children and families and gauging the alignment, coordination and collaboration of state systems, data sharing and workforce development central to the National Head Start Collaboration Office priorities. Optimizing the integration of state systems will in turn,

¹ County Health Rankings & Roadmap-2025

favorably impact the Department of Children and Youth's (DCY) goals of reducing the infant mortality rate and children entering foster care while increasing the rate of children demonstrating readiness on the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment (KRA).

Like an ecosystem in nature, the Early Childhood Education ecosystem is a complex network of actors, policies, and practices that form a symbiotic relationship with the children, families and staff in a community. To optimize human development, these contributors need to work relentlessly in harmony.

The Workforce and Program Analysis Platform (WPAP) generated by the Ohio Child Care Resource and Referral Association (OCCRRA) has generated some valuable insight into the depth of the Early Childhood Education workforce crisis in the state. Additionally, the recent government shutdown shined a light on some Head Start programs and exposed a vulnerability that should be considered.

Suggestions emerging from this assessment include increasing the wages and retention of Head Start staff, improved networking with school districts, elected officials, Job and Family Services, and other community leaders. Moreover, Grantees and Delegates that rely solely on federal funding should consider diversifying with other funding sources.

HEALTH

Health is more than being free from disease and pain; health is the ability to thrive. Well-being covers both quality of life and the ability of people and communities to contribute to the world. Population health involves optimal physical, mental, spiritual and social well-being.

According to the United Health Foundation's 2024 Annual Report, Ohio is ranked 34th in the country for health outcomes.² Key findings found an increase in homicides from 4.9 to 8.3 deaths per 100,000 population between 2008-2009 and 2021-2022 which represents a 69% increase. Chronic kidney disease increased 62% from 2.9% to 4.7% of adults between 2016 and 2023. Encouragingly, the HPV vaccination rate increased from 41.8% to 63.4% of adolescents ages 13-17 between 2016 and 2023 and lastly, severe housing issues dropped 15.1% to 12.7% from 2007 to 2021.

² United Health Foundation-2024 Annual Report

Years of Potential Life Lost (YPLL) is a public health metric that measures the total number of years not lived by individuals who die before 75 years. While the United States has a rate of 8,100 YPLL, recent Ohio data from the County Health Rankings & Roadmap report 9,400.³ Ohioans report a lower Quality of Life than the nation when Poor Physical Health Days are measured, 4.3 compared to 3.9. Additionally, Ohioans report 6.1 Poor Mental Health Days compared to the nation's 5.1 rate. Low birth rates in Ohio (9%) also exceed the state average of 8%. Lastly, 18% of Ohioans report poor or fair health compared to 17% across the country.

Social Determinants of Health (SDoH) are the conditions in the environments where people are born, live, learn, work, play, worship, and age that affect a wide range of health, functioning, and quality-of-life outcomes and risks.⁴ To best understand the lived experiences of children and families in poverty, it is critical to assess the degree to which certain social and economic hardships overlap with each other. At best, examining child poverty rates alone provides a narrow lens to examine the quality of life. Contrast that with a review of poverty rates in the context of the environments in which children and families live, and the story becomes clearer.

While it is critical to deeply examine the multidimensional factors that influence the quality of life for children and families, it is equally important to understand these factors in the context of the workforce charged with caring for these children and families. The interconnection and interdependence of county, census tract and zip code develop over time and as this ecosystem itself responds and shapes itself, it becomes an integral part of the bigger picture.

The aforementioned Jefferson County, for example, provides a better perspective to understand these patterns and relationships. Clearly the health disparities impact the quality of life for children and families. The caring staff dedicated to improving these lives are themselves immersed in the systems that govern daily life in Jefferson County. As products of this environment, they are subject to the exact same health disparities as the children and families they serve. With rates of physical distress, diabetes, teen births, obesity, suicide, adult smoking and physical inactivity all higher than other counties in the state, one can expect higher health claims from employees in such counties. With increased health insurance renewal rates, a subject addressed in a recent Head Start Community of Learners (COL) Human Resource event,

³ County Health Rankings & Roadmaps

⁴ Healthy People 2030

funds to pay staff a living wage get squeezed. This, in turn, results in higher turnover rates which further negates the mission of these well-intentioned agencies. The system then gets reinforced in a feedback loop that is less than conducive for optimizing human development.

In early December, the Ohio Head Start Association, Inc. (OHSAI) hosted a Community of Learners event with Head Start Human Resource leaders across the state. Insurance renewals were the first and most urgent issue. One grantee reported an 80% initial increase that was negotiated down to 65% but remained unaffordable. No other companies made a bid on the plan so at this time, there's no clear solution to offer the employees. In a second example, the initial proposal included a 62% increase that was reduced to 32% after negotiations. A third grantee was offered a 38% increase which was again untenable. Reportedly, some grantees have shifted to SideCar Health Care as an affordable option.⁵ These plans provide a tailored strategy, shifting the responsibility of staff advocacy from the Human Resource Director to the employees themselves. There are no networks or deductibles and employees pay a fixed cost for services. It is feasible that every employee on payroll could have a different plan and managing such plans would fall squarely on employees. There was a recommendation regarding OHSAI pooling resources with Grantees and Delegates to provide more buying power for an affordable plan.

Maintaining a healthy workforce is critical to the sustenance of the program. Research from the University of California, Berkely found that the ECE workforce faces significant challenges with obesity, chronic diseases and mental health issues.⁶ Consequently, claims across the state are higher, further escalating costs. In many cases, additional costs are passed along to staff that are already burdened by wages insufficient to meet even basic needs. The ecosystem of ECE is in crisis and desperately needs a holistic coordinated approach to connect all the actors in each community that touch the lives of young children and their families.

Consider the often used "Babies in the River" parable - The parable begins with villagers noticing babies floating down the river. Initially they focus on rescuing the babies, organizing rescue efforts, and providing care for them. However, as the number of babies increased, some villagers began to question the source of the problem. One villager decided to go upstream to see

⁵ SideCare Healthplans

⁶ UC Berkely-The Early Care and Education Workforce

who was throwing the babies in the river, suggesting that understanding and addressing the root cause is essential to long term solutions.

The coordination, collaboration, and alignment goals central to the National Head Start Collaboration Office's priority areas underline the importance of considering and connecting the whole system that exists impacting the lives in each Ohio county.

Several resources have emerged that help to explain the convergence of the multidimensional factors of poverty with how many prospects one has. The Social Vulnerability Index (SVI), Opportunity Insights, and the Child Opportunity Index (COI), are such researched-based scales and systems designed to connect policy with data.

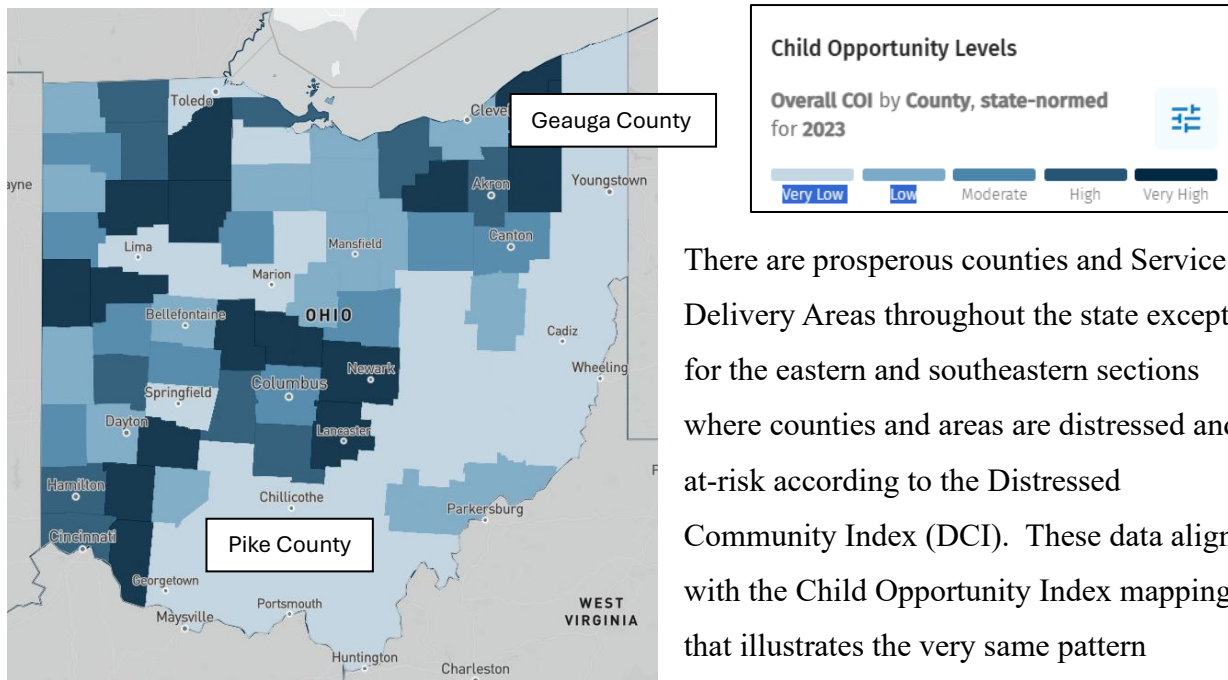
While child poverty exists in each Ohio county, the lived experience and long-term prospects vary considerably. Along with Delaware County, Geauga County in northeastern Ohio shows favorable life outcomes. There's a 5.5% child poverty, 16.9% of adults are not working and the average median income is 46.2% higher than the state average. In Pike County, the child poverty rate is 27.7%, 31.3% of adults are not working, and the average median income is 28.9% less than the state average.⁷

The goal of early childhood education is to develop the social/emotional, cognitive and physical wellbeing of children and establish a strong foundation for lifelong learning. In addition to addressing the current developmental stages of children's learning, early childhood programs like Head Start and state pre-k programs are designed for children's futures.

As the name implies, The Child Opportunity Index (COI) was designed to map the opportunities for children across various neighborhoods in the country. Therefore, it also considers children's futures. The COI combines data from 44 neighborhood-level indicators into a single composite measure with 100 being the top score.⁸ Geauga County has a Very High COI index compared to the state with Very High rankings in the Education and Social Economic domains and a High rating in the Health and Environment domains. Pike County, on the other hand, has a Very Low ranking overall with the Education and Social Economic domains rated as Very Low and the Health and Environment domain ranked as High.

⁷ Economic Innovation Group

⁸ Diversitydatakids.org



There are prosperous counties and Service Delivery Areas throughout the state except for the eastern and southeastern sections where counties and areas are distressed and at-risk according to the Distressed Community Index (DCI). These data align with the Child Opportunity Index mapping that illustrates the very same pattern

COMMUNITY DISTRESS & THE WORKFORCE

The Economic Innovation Group has created a Distressed Communities Index (DCI) that examines multiple facets of economic distress. A score of 100 indicates the highest distress score considering 7 key indicators: No High School Degree, Housing vacancy, Adults not working, Poverty, Median income relative to state, Change in employment and Change in Business Establishments. Ohio has 19.2% of its population living in a distressed zip code and 25.1% living in a prosperous zip code.

The DCI categorizes communities into five quintiles of wellbeing: *Prosperous*, *Comfortable*, *Mid-tier*, *At-Risk*, and *Distressed*. Distressed Community Index (DCI) scores have been calculated by Service Areas to provide context to the various needs that exist across the state and the coordination opportunities that are evident between Head Start and various state systems. Furthermore, DCI scores have been sorted from low to high to better illustrate the variability that exists between counties in the same Service Delivery Area.

The Ohio Child Care Resource and Referral Association (OCCRRA) has generated the Workforce and Program Analysis Platform (WPAP) resource that converts Ohio Professional

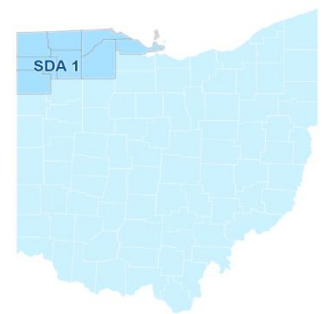
Registry (OPR) data and Ohio Department of Job and Family Services records into aggregated dashboards.

Users can review and analyze workforce trends including program turnover, churn, and retention in early childhood education (ECE) at an ecosystem level across multiple available variables. These data points have been organized by Ohio’s 12 Service Delivery Areas (SDA).

Across the state, ECE programs experience an average monthly turnover rate of 4.87%. Those that leave the field stay on average 3.99 years whereas those that stay in the field average 5.80 years. Wages for those that leave average \$14.77 while stayers earn \$16.55.

ECE employees in Ohio Department of Education Centers have the highest workload; meaning they have the greatest number of tasks, hours worked, and/or responsibilities to be managed.

Resource and referral agencies in Ohio are mapped to twelve Service Delivery Areas (SDA).



The YWCA of Northwest Ohio covers the counties of Williams, Defiance, Paulding, Fulton, Henry, Lucas, Wood and Ottawa in Northwest, Ohio identified as SDA 1. The distressed scores of each county are reflected here.

Distressed Community Index (DCI)								
SDA 1	Distress Score	No HS Diploma	Poverty Rate	Adults not Working	Housing Vacancy Rate	Median Income Ratio	Change in Employment	Change in Establishments
Wood	6.8	5.2%	12.9%	15.4%	4.9%	114.5%	9.0%	2.4%
Ottawa	11	6.9%	8.8%	16.6%	4.4%	112.8%	1.0%	0.3%
Fulton	11.9	6.1%	8.5%	18.2%	4.0%	116.0%	0.3%	-0.5%
Defiance	16.3	8.0%	10.5%	15.9%	7.5%	103.5%	3.8%	2.0%
Henry	20.6	7.0%	9.5%	16.9%	6.7%	106.9%	-3.7%	0.9%
Paulding	20.7	10.1%	9.4%	22.1%	9.2%	97.5%	10.2%	7.0%
Williams	41.1	8.9%	11.2%	20.2%	6.2%	90.5%	-1.4%	-2.5%
Lucas	61	9.1%	17.8%	22.2%	9.0%	92.9%	-4.9%	-0.6%

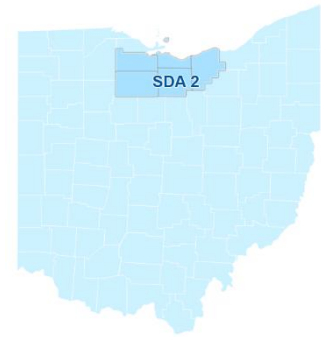
Lucas County has the highest DCI score at 61 and represents the only county in SDA 1 ranked as *At-Risk*. Wood County, on the other hand, has a DCI of 6.8 and is ranked as *Prosperous*. While coordinating services with community providers and resources is important in every county, it is imperative in counties that are ranked *At-Risk* and *Distressed*. The average DCI score in SDA 1 is 3.6.

The Workforce and Program Analysis Platform (WPAP) report from OCCRRA shows Service Delivery 1 with the following early childhood education workforce data:

- Average monthly turnover-4.00%
- Floater-7.48%
- Substitute-5.27%
- Assistant Teacher-4.34%
- Lead Teacher-3.29%
 - Paulding County has highest rate-9.03%
 - Henry County has lowest rate-1.44%
- Mean salary for those that leave-\$14.59
- Mean salary for those that stay-\$16.49
- Average duration for those that leave-3.89 years
- Average duration for those that stay-5.71 years

Although the DCI for SDA 1 shows Paulding County at 22.1% for Adults not Working, there is a positive variance for Change of Employment (10.2%) and Change of Establishments (7.0%) suggesting there are additional employment opportunities emerging in the county. This may help to explain the high turnover rate found in the WPAP report.

The Child Care Resource Center (CCRC), Inc. operates the resource and referral department in Service Delivery Area 2 in northern Ohio. Counties include Sandusky, Seneca, Erie, Huron and Loraine.



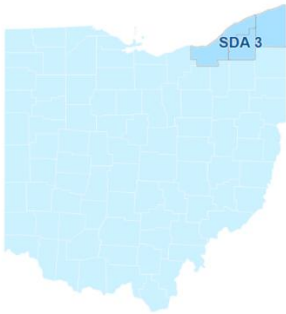
While Sandusky County has the highest distressed rate at 52.7, it is identified as *Mid-tier* with a state ranking of 54 out of 88 counties. The average DCI score in SDA 2 is 35.9.

Distressed Community Index (DCI)								
SDA 2	Distress Score	No HS Diploma	Poverty Rate	Adults not Working	Housing Vacancy Rate	Median Income Ratio	Change in Employment	Change in Establishments
Lorain	29	8.8%	13.5%	21.8%	7.0%	101.2%	3.3%	2.0%
Huron	29.7	9.8%	11.0%	20.1%	8.9%	95.8%	7.6%	0.8%
Erie	32.3	8.1%	11.5%	18.3%	8.2%	97.3%	1.3%	-1.3%
Seneca	36.1	6.6%	11.6%	19.4%	8.0%	93.3%	-3.7%	0.1%
Sandusky	52.7	6.8%	13.0%	21.5%	8.4%	90.8%	-6.5%	-4.0%

The WPAP report for SDA 2 revealed the following data:

- Average monthly turnover-4.75%
- Floater-8.20%
- Substitute-5.68%
- Assistant Teacher-5.76%
- Lead Teacher-4.52%
 - Seneca County has highest rate-7.24%
 - Erie County has lowest rate-3.10%
- Mean salary for those that leave-\$14.94
- Mean salary for those that stay-\$16.38
- Average duration for those that leave-8.52 years
- Average duration for those that stay-9.54 years

Seneca County in SDA 2 is the only county in the DCI area analysis to demonstrate a negative variance in Change of Employment at -3.7%. This rate corresponds to the high turnover rate reflected in the WPAP report.



Starting Point Inc. manages Service Delivery Area 3 serving Ashtabula, Cuyahoga, Geauga and Lake Counties.

Two of the four counties in Service Delivery Area 3 are ranked as *Prosperous* with Geauga County ranked 11th out of 88 counties. Ashtabula County, however, has a DCI of 77 and ranks 80th out of 88 counties. The average DCI score in SDA 3 is 39.6.

Distressed Community Index (DCI)								
SDA 3	Distress Score	No HS Diploma	Poverty Rate	Adults not Working	Housing Vacancy Rate	Median Income Ratio	Change in Employment	Change in Establishments
Geauga	8.1	8.9%	5.8%	16.9%	5.3%	146.2%	2.4%	2.6%
Lake	16.6	6.4%	7.6%	14.8%	5.0%	115.6%	-1.4%	-7.0%
Cuyahoga	56.7	9.1%	16.5%	21.3%	9.8%	90.4%	-0.7%	1.6%
Ashtabula	78.2	13.4%	18.0%	30.0%	8.8%	80.1%	0.1%	-2.2%

Service Delivery Area 3 demonstrated the following early childhood education turnover data according to the WPAP report.

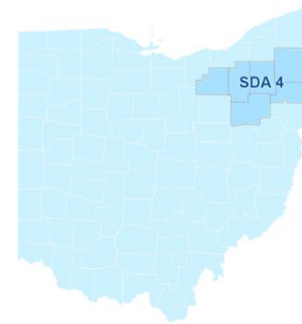
- Average monthly turnover-5.29%
- Floater-7.36%
- Substitute-9.29%
- Assistant Teacher-6.21%
- Lead Teacher-3.97%
 - Cuyahoga County has highest rate-5.49%

➤ Ashtabula County has lowest rate-2.59%

- Mean salary for those that leave-\$15.09
- Mean salary for those that stay-\$16.53
- Average duration for those that leave-4.50 years
- Average duration for those that stay-6.30 years

Ashtabula County has the highest DCI score in SDA 3 at 78.2. While the county is identified as *At-Risk* according to this metric, the low turnover in the ECE field is promising news and promotes the continuity of care so critical for child development.

The Early Childhood Resource Center serves Service Area 4 including Mahoning, Medina, Portage, Stark, Summit and Trumbull Counties in northeast Ohio.



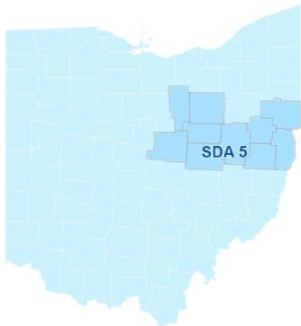
The range of DCI scores in Service Area 4 is significant with Medina County reported as 2.5 (*Prosperous*) and Trumbull at 67.2 (*At-Risk*). Trumbull County ranks 65th out of 88 counties regarding Distress Score. The average DCI score in SDA 4 is 39.4.

Distressed Community Index (DCI)								
SDA 4	Distress Score	No HS Diploma	Poverty Rate	Adults not Working	Housing Vacancy Rate	Median Income Ratio	Change in Employment	Change in Establishments
Medina	2.5	5.5%	5.8%	14.1%	3.3%	135.3%	4.9%	3.7%
Portage	17.6	7.1%	8.9%	17.6%	5.3%	102.1%	1.4%	1.7%
Summit	31.2	7.1%	11.6%	18.7%	6.8%	99.6%	0.4%	0.8%
Stark	35.8	7.2%	11.8%	19.3%	6.8%	100.1%	-5.2%	1.4%
Mahoning	55.4	8.4%	17.0%	23.6%	8.5%	100.4%	-2.1%	0.4%
Trumbull	67.2	10.0%	15.7%	25.1%	8.3%	99.5%	-0.5%	-2.5%

The WPAP report for SDA 4 revealed the following data:

- Average monthly turnover-4.93%
- Floater-8.42%
- Substitute-5.46%
- Assistant Teacher-7.08%
- Lead Teacher-4.09%
 - Stark County has highest rate-6.67%
 - Trumbull County has lowest rate-2.84%
- Mean salary for those that leave-\$13.50
- Mean salary for those that stay-\$15.00
- Average duration for those that leave-3.88 years
- Average duration for those that stay-5.71 years

Similarly to SDA 3, the most distressed county per the DCI in SDA 4 also has the lowest monthly turnover rate. Trumbull County is identified as *At-Risk* with a DCI score of 67.2 while experiencing the lowest turnover rate at 2.84%.



The Corporation for Appalachian Development (COAD) Child Care Resource Network covers 10 counties in the mid-eastern part of Ohio identified as SDA 5. These include Ashland, Carroll, Columbiana, Coshocton, Harrison, Holmes, Jefferson, Knox, Tuscarawas and Wayne Counties.

The clear anomaly in Service Area 5 comes from Holmes County where although 42.9% of the population do not have a high school diploma, the median income is higher than the state.

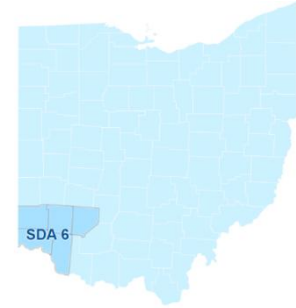
Distressed Community Index (DCI)								
SDA 5	Distress Score	No HS Diploma	Poverty Rate	Adults not Working	Housing Vacancy Rate	Median Income Ratio	Change in Employment	Change in Establishments
Wayne	31.3	13.7%	8.6%	20.8%	5.1%	103.0%	-0.4%	2.7%
Knox	33.3	8.9%	10.6%	19.5%	6.5%	106.2%	-3.9%	1.4%
Holmes	34	42.9%	8.8%	28.7%	6.6%	107.3%	6.3%	8.3%
Tuscarawas	44.4	11.1%	12.2%	21.4%	5.7%	92.6%	4.1%	-1.0%
Carroll	52.8	10.2%	11.7%	25.0%	9.4%	98.5%	-1.5%	2.4%
Ashland	53.9	9.0%	12.8%	20.4%	6.8%	93.3%	-5.6%	-1.6%
Jefferson	68.9	7.1%	15.8%	24.4%	11.5%	99.7%	-5.9%	-5.6%
Columbiana	74.5	10.3%	13.2%	24.7%	9.6%	83.9%	-6.7%	-2.5%
Coshocton	83.6	15.0%	17.9%	26.1%	6.7%	78.5%	-7.0%	-1.4%
Harrison	87.7	10.2%	14.0%	30.5%	12.5%	77.3%	-7.3%	-4.5%

Turnover data for SDA 5 includes:

- Average monthly turnover-3.56%
- Floater-7.01%
- Substitute-4.55
- Assistant Teacher-5.00%
- Lead Teacher-3.30%
 - Holmes County has highest rate-7.93%
 - Harrison County has lowest rate-0.00%
- Mean salary for those that leave-\$13.00
- Mean salary for those that stay-\$14.85
- Average duration for those that leave- 3.55 years
- Average duration for those that stay- 6.17 years

As with previous two reviews, the county with the lowest turnover rate is also the most distressed in the area. Harrison County is identified as Distressed with a DCI score of 87.7 however, the average monthly turnover rate per the WPAP report is 0.00%.

Service Delivery Area 6 covers Butler, Clermont, Clinton, Hamilton and Warren Counties in the southwest corner of the state and is managed by 4C for children.



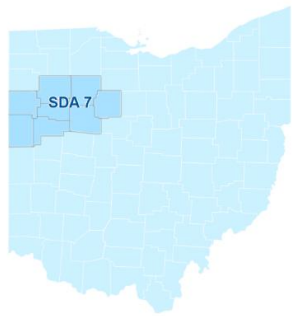
The average DCI score in this area is 19.4 Warren County has the lowest score at 3.8 and is listed as *Prosperous* while Clinton County is *Comfortable* with a DCI score of 35.2.

Distressed Community Index (DCI)								
SDA 6	Distress Score	No HS Diploma	Poverty Rate	Adults not Working	Housing Vacancy Rate	Median Income Ratio	Change in Employment	Change in Establishments
Warren	3.8	5.0%	5.2%	18.4%	4.4%	135.7%	0.2%	9.2%
Clermont	8.5	8.1%	8.3%	18.0%	3.5%	104.6%	6.1%	4.7%
Butler	18.4	8.8%	9.6%	19.2%	5.6%	102.1%	4.3%	3.8%
Hamilton	31.5	7.5%	12.7%	17.7%	7.0%	89.1%	6.2%	0.8%
Clinton	35.2	8.4%	13.6%	21.9%	6.9%	97.8%	14.9%	-1.7%

Data produced for OCCRRA’s WAPA report for SDA 6 showed the following results:

- Average monthly turnover-5.47%
- Floater-7.73%
- Substitute-10.18%
- Assistant Teacher-6.76%
- Lead Teacher-4.52%
 - Butler County has highest rate-6.25%
 - Clinton County has lowest rate-1.33%
- Mean salary for those that leave-\$15.00
- Mean salary for those that stay-\$15.50
- Average duration for those that leave-3.61 years
- Average duration for those that stay-5.71 years

When considering turnover data alongside DCI scores, there is alignment between lower turnover rates and higher DCI scores. In the case of SDA 6, Clinton County shows a DCI score of 35.2 and has the lowest ECE turnover rate at 1.33%. All the counties in this area demonstrate a positive variance with Change of Employment and Change in Establishments, meaning more employment opportunities are moving into the area versus out of it.



The YWCA of Northwest Ohio covers the counties of Allen, Auglaize, Hancock, Hardin, Mercer, Putnam, Van Wert and Wyandot included in Service Delivery Area 7.

This Area illustrates the disparities that are evident across the state.

With *Prosperous* Mercer County with a DCI score of 4.1 to *At-Risk* Hardin County with a score of 71.4, the lived experiences of these counties may be wildly different. The adjacent counties of Auglaize and Hardin further demonstrate these findings. While Auglaize County ranks 8th in the state with a DCI score of 5.1, Hardin ranks 73rd yet they share a county line. The poverty rate in Hardin County is more than doubled and the median income differs by 26.5%. The change in employment is remarkable as well with Auglaize seeing a positive gain of 11.9% while Hardin County has experienced a loss of 7.7%.

Distressed Community Index (DCI)								
SDA 7	Distress Score	No HS Diploma	Poverty Rate	Adults not Working	Housing Vacancy Rate	Median Income Ratio	Change in Employment	Change in Establishments
Mercer	4.1	5.3%	6.0%	11.4%	4.6%	112.0%	4.6%	2.1%
Auglaize	5.1	6.4%	6.8%	11.7%	5.2%	109.7%	11.9%	0.3%
Putnam	6.4	5.3%	6.5%	10.8%	4.6%	118.8%	3.7%	-0.3%
Wyandot	14.8	5.2%	7.2%	15.6%	8.0%	103.2%	-1.2%	3.1%
Hancock	21.4	5.1%	9.2%	16.3%	5.3%	100.0%	-6.8%	1.7%
Van Wert	27.3	6.4%	9.0%	15.5%	6.7%	93.8%	2.4%	-4.7%
Allen	54.8	7.6%	12.2%	23.4%	8.1%	100.0%	-4.1%	-4.5%
Hardin	71.4	8.3%	16.0%	21.5%	8.6%	83.2%	-7.7%	-3.7%

The following results summarize the WPAP findings for SDA 7:

- Average monthly turnover-4.20%
- Floater-6.88%
- Substitute-3.85%
- Assistant Teacher-5.21%
- Lead Teacher-3.40%
 - Hancock County has highest rate-5.07%
 - Hardin County has lowest rate-2.42%
- Mean salary for those that leave-\$13.67
- Mean salary for those that stay-\$15.31
- Average duration for those that leave-4.06 years
- Average duration for those that stay-5.61 years

Hardin County reports the highest distress score at 71.4 according to the DCI yet reflects the lowest average monthly turnover rate at 2.42%. This is consistent with previous findings from other Service Delivery Areas.

Service Delivery Area 8 covers ten counties in mid and southwest Ohio including Champaign, Clark, Darke, Fayette, Greene, Logan, Miami, Montgomery, Preble and Shelby Counties.



The average score in this Service Delivery Area is 35.2 with a range again from a **Prosperous** grouping in Miami, Greene and Preble Counties to **At-Risk** in Fayette County ranking it 68th in the state. In this county, 14.2% of adults do not have a high school diploma and 26.3% are not working.

Distressed Community Index (DCI)								
SDA 8	Distress Score	No HS Diploma	Poverty Rate	Adults not Working	Housing Vacancy Rate	Median Income Ratio	Change in Employment	Change in Establishments
Miami	11.3	7.2%	7.9%	18.4%	4.9%	106.3%	3.0%	3.6%
Greene	14.7	5.5%	8.2%	19.9%	5.7%	122.2%	2.5%	0.2%
Preble	17.6	7.4%	10.8%	18.4%	6.9%	102.2%	10.3%	1.7%
Logan	24.2	7.1%	10.6%	19.5%	7.6%	99.3%	1.8%	5.2%
Shelby	26.2	8.6%	10.3%	16.0%	5.8%	104.5%	-5.4%	2.5%
Champaign	38.9	8.2%	8.1%	18.6%	7.8%	106.5%	-10.3%	-3.1%
Montgomery	49.9	7.9%	13.5%	20.4%	8.4%	92.3%	0.1%	-1.0%
Darke	50	9.3%	10.8%	19.9%	5.0%	92.8%	-7.4%	-3.8%
Clark	50.5	10.7%	14.5%	24.1%	9.3%	100.0%	7.8%	-0.1%
Fayette	69	14.2%	15.9%	26.3%	8.0%	86.2%	1.5%	0.8%

Data produced for OCCRRA's WAPA report for SDA 8 showed the following results:

- Average monthly turnover-3.93%
- Floater-5.61%
- Substitute-5.75%
- Assistant Teacher-5.66%
- Lead Teacher-3.20%
 - Montgomery County has highest rate-4.53%
 - Preble County has lowest rate-1.85%
- Mean salary for those that leave-\$14.77
- Mean salary for those that stay-\$16.65
- Average duration for those that leave-4.28 years
- Average duration for those that stay-5.96 years

Fayette County reports the highest distress score at 69 according to the DCI and a fairly low turnover rate of 2.92%. However, Preble County has the lowest average monthly turnover rate at 1.85%.



Action for Children operates SDA 9 in the middle of the state including Delaware, Fairfield, Franklin, Licking, Madison, Pickaway, and Union Counties.

Service Delivery Area 9 manages the least distressed counties in the state according to the Distressed Community Index. Delaware and Union Counties rank 1 and 2 respectively while the average positive changes in employment and establishments are 19.0% and 8.5%. Proximity to the state capital of Columbus appears not only to benefit county seat of Franklin, but also the adjacent counties.

Distressed Community Index (DCI)								
SDA 9	Distress Score	No HS Diploma	Poverty Rate	Adults not Working	Housing Vacancy Rate	Median Income Ratio	Change in Employment	Change in Establishments
Delaware	0.2	2.9%	4.6%	13.4%	3.4%	162.9%	10.0%	11.5%
Union	0.5	4.8%	4.6%	18.9%	2.3%	137.1%	16.6%	16.1%
Fairfield	3.4	6.0%	7.7%	17.4%	4.7%	109.0%	11.1%	5.9%
Licking	5.3	6.9%	8.0%	18.6%	5.3%	101.5%	38.7%	7.7%
Madison	22	11.1%	9.2%	33.2%	5.6%	104.2%	25.7%	6.5%
Franklin	26	8.0%	12.5%	17.1%	6.4%	92.4%	3.8%	5.2%
Pickaway	28.4	11.6%	11.5%	27.5%	4.9%	91.3%	26.9%	6.5%

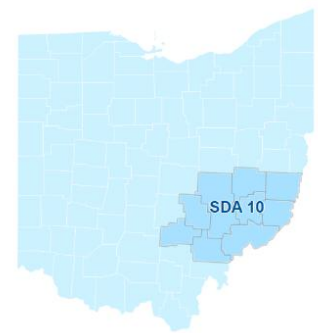
SDA 9 showed the following results from OCCRRA’s WPAP report:

- Average monthly turnover-5.52%
- Floater-7.15%
- Substitute-7.46%

- Assistant Teacher-6.51%
- Lead Teacher-4.32%
 - Union County has highest rate-7.70%
 - Madison County has lowest rate-2.81%
- Mean salary for those that leave-\$15.51
- Mean salary for those that stay-\$16.94
- Average duration for those that leave-4.07 years
- Average duration for those that stay-5.27 years

While SDA 9 is the least distressed service area in the state with a DCI average of 12.2, it has the highest monthly turnover rate of all the areas in the state at 5.52%.

The Corporation for Appalachian Development (COAD) Child Care Resource Network serves SDA 10 including Athens, Belmont, Guernsey, Hocking, Monroe, Morgan, Muskingum, Noble, Perry and Washington Counties.



DCI scores in this area range from 46.5 in Washington County to 80.9 in Guernsey County. Contrast the average DCI score in this Area of 65.9 with SDA 9 at 12.2, and the picture becomes clearer. While Guernsey County is grouped as ***Distressed***, Belmont, Athens, Perry, Morgan, Noble and Monroe Counties are grouped as ***At-Risk***.

Noble County reports 55.9% of adults as not working yet the change in employment and establishments demonstrates a positive variance.

Distressed Community Index (DCI)								
SDA 10	Distress Score	No HS Diploma	Poverty Rate	Adults not Working	Housing Vacancy Rate	Median Income Ratio	Change in Employment	Change in Establishments
Washington	46.5	7.1%	12.1%	20.8%	9.5%	88.1%	-1.2%	1.7%
Hocking	50.7	11.9%	16.3%	23.0%	6.4%	76.9%	8.6%	4.6%
Muskingum	56.3	9.7%	14.8%	24.0%	9.7%	85.0%	5.3%	1.6%
Belmont	67.9	8.0%	13.4%	30.0%	13.5%	99.5%	-4.4%	0.3%
Athens	69.7	8.2%	12.3%	25.6%	11.7%	77.3%	-0.7%	-1.4%
Perry	69.9	11.7%	14.0%	26.4%	9.8%	81.1%	-9.8%	7.1%
Morgan	70	11.5%	13.9%	27.4%	9.2%	80.3%	-8.3%	6.3%
Noble	71.8	14.7%	11.8%	55.9%	10.1%	79.4%	3.3%	3.2%
Monroe	75.6	10.0%	14.8%	25.1%	16.0%	84.6%	4.6%	-5.8%
Guernsey	80.9	14.3%	14.9%	22.8%	9.2%	80.0%	-7.7%	-1.9%

Data produced for OCCRRA’s WAPA report for SDA 10 showed the following results:

- Average monthly turnover-4.61%
- Floater-8.30%
- Substitute-4.70%
- Assistant Teacher-8.02%
- Lead Teacher-3.29%
 - Athens County has highest rate-10.06%
 - Noble County has lowest rate-0.00%
- Mean salary for those that leave-\$13.03
- Mean salary for those that stay-\$16.02
- Average duration for those that leave-2.76 years
- Average duration for those that stay-5.54 years

While Athens County has the highest turnover rate of 10.16% according to the WPAP report, the DCI score in this county is 69.7 identifying it with an *At-Risk* status. This finding is inconsistent with the emerging pattern of highly distressed counties and lower turnover rates.

The Corporation for Appalachian Development (COAD) Child Care Resource Network also serves SDA 11 consisting of Adams, Brown, Gallia, Highland, Jackson, Lawrence, Meigs, Pike, Ross, Scioto and Vinton Counties.



This area in the southern part of the state experiences the highest DCI scores with Meigs County at 97.3 ranking it as the most distressed county in the state. There are almost 22,000 residents in the county, 1,267 under the age of 5, which has been a decline of 7.4% since 2010. According to Annie E. Casey’s Kids Count Data Center, the child poverty rate is 25% compared to the overall county rate of 20.8%.⁹

Distressed Community Index (DCI)								
SDA 11	Distress Score	No HS Diploma	Poverty Rate	Adults not Working	Housing Vacancy Rate	Median Income Ratio	Change in Employment	Change in Establishments
Highland	44.1	13.1%	13.6%	23.6%	9.0%	89.0%	8.1%	8.4%
Brown	60.2	12.2%	16.7%	26.9%	8.0%	88.0%	4.5%	2.9%
Ross	61.9	11.1%	15.8%	34.4%	7.4%	85.8%	7.6%	1.2%
Lawrence	69	10.0%	16.7%	27.3%	14.0%	93.8%	7.0%	-2.5%
Gallia	76.2	13.1%	13.9%	23.1%	13.0%	81.0%	-1.6%	0.2%
Adams	76.4	14.8%	19.4%	32.1%	16.8%	71.1%	12.7%	8.2%
Jackson	76.8	12.5%	16.6%	25.3%	10.8%	83.8%	2.6%	-3.7%
Vinton	83.3	16.9%	16.0%	24.0%	8.3%	77.2%	-3.1%	-2.1%
Pike	85.1	14.4%	19.5%	31.3%	8.5%	71.1%	-1.3%	1.2%
Scioto	87	11.3%	20.9%	36.3%	12.4%	71.1%	3.6%	-1.0%
Meigs	97.3	13.3%	20.8%	34.0%	14.8%	67.0%	-12.4%	-6.8%

⁹ Annie E. Casey Kids Foundation

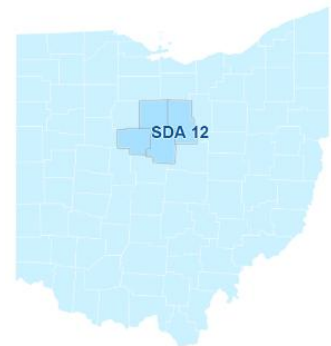
WPAP findings for SDA 11 describe the following:

- Average monthly turnover-3.68%
- Floater-9.23%
- Substitute-8.22%
- Assistant Teacher-4.47%
- Lead Teacher-2.14%
 - Meigs County has highest rate-6.43%
 - Gallia County has lowest rate-1.21%
- Mean salary for those that leave-\$13.71
- Mean salary for those that stay-\$16.68
- Average duration for those that leave-2.56 years
- Average duration for those that stay-6.23 years

Service Delivery Area 11 is the most distressed area of the state according to data reported through the Economic Innovation Group's DCI scoring. It has a slightly higher turnover rate (3.68%) than SDA 5 (3.56%) which is the lowest in the state. This lends further evidence suggesting that more distressed Service Delivery Areas have lower overall turnover rates.

The twelfth and final Service Delivery Area of the state is managed by The YWCA of Northwest Ohio and includes Crawford, Marion, Morrow and Richland Counties.

Again, the contrast of lived experiences is apparent within the adjacent counties of Marion and Morrow. While Morrow County is considered ***Prosperous*** with a DCI score of 18.1, Marion County is Distressed with an 85.6 DCI score ranking it 85th out of 88 counties.



Distressed Community Index (DCI)								
SDA 12	Distress Score	No HS Diploma	Poverty Rate	Adults not Working	Housing Vacancy Rate	Median Income Ratio	Change in Employment	Change in Establishments
Morrow	18.1	8.7%	10.7%	21.5%	6.8%	89.0%	16.7%	12.6%
Richland	62.5	10.5%	12.9%	28.9%	7.5%	100.0%	-2.9%	-1.6%
Crawford	64.8	9.5%	12.0%	21.0%	8.3%	79.6%	-12.6%	0.9%
Marion	85.6	10.9%	14.6%	35.4%	10.4%	82.2%	-5.8%	-3.4%

OCCRRA’s WAPA report for SDA 12 revealed the following results:

- Average monthly turnover-4.02%
- Floater-8.31%
- Substitute-3.22%
- Assistant Teacher-6.21%
- Lead Teacher-3.22%
 - Richland County has highest rate-5.09%
 - Morrow County has lowest rate-1.98%
- Mean salary for those that leave-\$12.63
- Mean salary for those that stay-\$16.09
- Average duration for those that leave-3.99 years
- Average duration for those that stay-5.51 years

Morrow County is the least distressed county in this SDA and also has the lowest turnover rate at 1.98%. They do, however, have the lowest number of workers in the ECE field in this area.

In summary, the Distressed Communities Index (DCI) is a valuable resource for understanding the geography of economic distress and opportunity in Ohio as well as the United States.¹⁰ The DCI draws from the U.S. Census Bureau’s American Community Survey (ACS) 5-Year Estimates and County and ZIP Code Business Patterns datasets.

¹⁰ Economic Innovation Group

Typically, data follow recognizable trends notable in research on the Social Determinants of Health (SDoH). Meaning, a high poverty rate is accompanied by a high rate of adults with a high school diploma, high rates of housing vacancy and so forth. It's the grouping of such suppressive variables that can make poverty such a persistent problem.

In this analysis, anomalies were found in data from Holmes, Noble and Athens Counties. In Holmes County, 42.9% of the population do not have a high school diploma but the median income is higher than the state. To better understand this trend, I reached out to the Director of the Kno-Ho-Co Ashland Community Action Commission serving Head Start children and families in Holmes County. She informed me that although there are 38,000 people that reside in Holmes County, about 40-50% are Amish and attend school only to the 8th grade. She also mentioned that Amish families typically have 10-15 children who tend to work in the numerous family businesses in the county. This helps to explain the disparity between high school graduation rates and median income in the county. Additionally, the Director stated the Amish have purchased much of the land in the county to support their growing community reported to be the largest in the state and one of the largest in the world. According to Wikipedia, it is expected to be the first U.S. county with a majority Amish population by 2027.¹¹ So while they don't send their own children to Head Start, they do occasionally serve as foster care placement families for young children and may register them.

In SDA 10, Noble County reports 55.9% of adults as not working, yet the change in employment and establishments demonstrates a positive variance. The Director at GMN Tri-County Community Action Commission manages the program in the county serving Early Head Start and Head Start children and clarified the findings. While Noble County has a population of 14,193, nearly 2,500 are incarcerated at the Noble Correctional Institute and as a result, the data are skewed when analyzing rates of employment and the general population.

Also in SDA 10, Athens County has a DCI score of 69.7 placing them *At-Risk*. The notable trend was that more distressed counties and service areas had lower ECE turnover rates although Athens County has the highest monthly turnover rate in the state at 10.16%. According to the Director of Hocking Athens Perry Community Action Head Start program, turnover in her

¹¹ Wikipedia-Ohio Amish Country

program was terrible until a reduction request was approved and salaries were increased. She mentioned the extreme trauma in the county and impact of tech devices provided to young children at bedtime. The extreme behaviors of children have escalated since the pandemic and now she has a classroom where 7 of 16 children have been identified for special services. Employees are not willing to work for such low wages when children are being so physically aggressive towards them.

Analyzing the Ohio Child Care Resource and Referral Association (OCCRRA) Workforce and Program Analysis Platform (WPAP) report alongside the Distressed Community Index (DCI) has provided some reportable conclusions. It should be noted that Head Start wages are included in this report in addition to other ECE employees in the workforce. First and foremost, the average wage for ECE workers across the state is dismal. Those that left the field had wages ranging from \$12.63 to \$15.51. For those staying, the mean hourly wage ranged from \$14.85 to \$16.94. Aside from Substitutes and Floaters who leave at higher rates, Assistant Teachers leave at higher rates (6.24%) than Lead Teachers (3.96%).

MIT has developed a Living Wage Calculator to help individuals, communities, employers, and others estimate the local wage rate that a full-time worker requires to cover the costs of their family's basic needs where they live. ¹²The highest hourly wage for ECE employees (\$16.94) was found in SDA 9 including Pickaway, Madison, Fairfield, Franklin, Licking, Delaware and Union Counties. Living Wage data are reported as one adult or two and also with or without children.

In Pickaway County, for instance, the living wage for one adult and no children is \$21.69 an hour. If two adults are in the home and one is working, the rate goes to \$30.44. With one child, it jumps to \$36.03, two children to \$39.92 and three children to \$44.69 an hour. If both adults are working the minimum hourly wage is \$15.18 without children, \$20.54 with one child, \$24.77 with two children and with three children, the minimum is \$28.47.

Living wage in Franklin County starts at \$22.24 for one adult with no children. Just like Pickaway, the minimum hourly wage needs increase with children. If two adults are in the home and both work, the minimum wage needed to cover basic needs is \$33.22. In this example, even

¹² MIT-Living Wage Calculator

the highest hourly wage (\$16.94) for ECE employees staying reported in the WPAP report requires there to be two working adults in the home with no children in order to meet basic needs. While the minimum wage needed for basic living in a more distressed county such as Meigs is less, basic needs require one adult without children to make at least \$19.34 an hour and extends to as high as \$41.44 for one adult with three children.

When analyzed in conjunction with DCI data, it is clear that more *Prosperous* counties and Service Delivery Areas experience higher turnover although they pay slightly higher wages. For those *Distressed* and *At-Risk* counties, turnover in the ECE field is less suggesting that these workers play a critical, stabilizing role in counties and areas that face compounding hardships. In nearly every SDA review, the counties with the highest numbers of ECE workers experience the highest turnover rates.

ALIGNMENT, COORDINATION & COLLABORATION

A survey was launched in early November consisting of 20 questions grouped by the National Head Start Collaboration Office’s priority areas. Several questions were developed utilizing a 5-point Likert scale ranging from Poor to Excellent with others requiring a checkbox, Yes or No response as well as open-ended response. Although Head Start provides services in every county, at times a Grantee or Delegate serves just one county and in other cases they serve multiple counties. This is evident in the responses regarding the number of school districts they work with. Toledo Public Schools and Pickaway County serve one district while the eight-county operation at the Council on Rural Services Program, Inc. works with 55 separate school districts.

How would you rate your overall relationship with the Local Education Agencies (LEAs) in your service area? Consider an average if you have more than one.

Poor	Fair	Good	Very Good	Excellent
2.08%	12.50%	37.50%	41.67%	6.25%

Have the LEAs contributed to your program's school readiness goals?

YES	NO
57.45%	42.55%

How would you rate the responsiveness of the LEAs when referring a preschooler for evaluation? Consider an average if you have more than one.

Poor	Fair	Good	Very Good	Excellent
4.17%	22.92%	43.75%	22.92%	6.25%

How would you rate your relationship with the local Service Delivery Partners, aka Resource and Referral Agencies (e.g. 4 C for Children, Action for Children, etc.)

Poor	Fair	Good	Very Good	Excellent
2.17%	13.04%	36.96%	41.30%	6.52%

If you provide Early Head Start services, how would you rate the responsiveness of Early Intervention services when referring an infant or toddler for evaluation?

Poor	Fair	Good	Very Good	Excellent
0.00%	10.64%	23.40%	23.40%	27.66%

What additional funding sources do you use to sustain your program operations? (Check all that apply)

None	United Way	State ECE	Publicly Funded Child Care PFCC	Private Foundations	Community Grants	Other
42.55%	10.64%	40.43%	25.53%	12.77%	17.04%	4.26%

Other responses included USDA, CACFP and a private donor.

As the Executive Director, do you serve on local boards, advisory groups or committees?

YES	NO
80.85%	19.55%

Are you an active member of the Family and Children First Council (FCFC) or do you send a designee?

Member	Send Designee
83.33%	16.67%

The comment section for this question included responses that the President and CEO, or the Senior Leadership attend. In some cases, the Director will attend in one county and send a designee to others. One respondent asked what the Family and Children First Council was.

How regularly do you or your designee attend FCFC meetings?

Majority of meetings	Infrequently	Do not attend
80.00%	11.11%	8.89%

What specific types of support or resources could the Head Start Collaboration Office provide to better assist your program? (Check all that apply)

Making connections with other individuals and state agencies	34.04%
Providing answers to state initiatives and requirements	55.32%
HSCO program visit	4.26%
Professional development on alignment and networking	44.68%
Advocating for Head Start at the state level	76.60%
Providing resources	36.17%
Other	8.51%

Comments included in *Other* suggested support with school district regulations and collaboration as well as telling your Head Start story.

At the state level, how would you rate your relationship with the Congressional leader(s) representing your service area.

Poor	Fair	Good	Very Good	Excellent
23.40%	31.91%	31.91%	8.51%	4.26%

At the federal level, how would you rate your relationship with the Congressional leader(s) representing your service area.

Poor	Fair	Good	Very Good	Excellent
21.28%	40.43%	23.40%	8.51%	6.38%

Do you have a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Local Education Agencies that allows you to receive Kindergarten Readiness Assessment (KRA) data for children previously enrolled in your program?

YES	NO
57.58%	42.22%

If you answered YES to the previous question, please rank how active the local entity is when collaborating on the agreement. If you have multiple LEA's, consider the average.

Poor	Fair	Good	Very Good	Excellent
3.85%	19.23%	50.00%	26.92%	0.00%

Do you have an MOU with your local Jobs and Family Services agency that supports the sharing of family goals and accomplishments?

YES	NO
23.40%	76.60%

Do you currently partner with local high schools or career and technical education programs that offer an early childhood education track?

YES	NO
59.57%	40.43%

Some responses to this question reported that their CTC no longer had an ECE track. Others had collaboration plans in process.

If you answered yes to the previous question, please select all that apply.

Students complete observation hours in my classrooms	92.59%
Students receive a CDA when completing the program	62.96%
Our model has provided a pipeline for employment	70.37%

Please add any comments that you think would add to the collaborative efforts between the Head Start Collaboration Office and the Ohio Head Start community.

Right now the crisis in ECE is hiring qualified staff. Any strategies, advocacy or innovative efforts would be of great assistance to programs.
We do partner with local University for students to complete practicum hours in classrooms.
Appreciate the hard work that the Head Start Collaboration Office Director is doing. She has brought new life to the role and her support is appreciated and felt!
I love the direction the Head Start Collaboration office is taking and the support and communication they are providing. This is wonderful.
Not sure at this time. Thank you for what you do to support us.

SURVEY SUMMARY

In summary, responses from the survey suggest that there is a need to improve the relationships with the school districts for the purpose of referring children for evaluation, data sharing with KRA results and collaboration on school readiness goals. A recent state level Office of Head Start - Program Information Report (PIR) Summary Report-2025, confirms the need to improve the efficiency of the referral process.¹³ Of the 2,225 preschoolers referred for an evaluation, only 1,432 (65%) were diagnosed with a disability. Regarding the 793 children who did not receive an evaluation, 60 (7.5%) were assigned to Response to Intervention (RTI), 230 (29%) were reported as not yet completed by the responsible agency, 206 (26%) were reported as Other and the remaining 212 (27%) were identified as parent refusal.

Additionally, improved collaboration with Career Technical Centers and High Schools could help to support the ECE workforce pipeline. Relationships with Congressional leaders at the state

¹³ Office of Head Start - Program Information Report (PIR) Summary Report-2025

and federal levels could also be enhanced. Furthermore, improved collaboration with Jobs and Family Services could lead to shared family goals and accomplishments. Lastly, twenty respondents (42.55%) do not have another funding source other than federal Head Start funds.

Prior to the survey, two additional questions were asked during a virtual Director's call.

How many hours a week do you spend networking in the community?

Mean score was 3.4 hours

On a scale of 1-5 with 1 being the highest, rate your connection with the pediatricians in your service area(s).

Mean score was 2.86

* Results of this question may be skewed because typically 5 would be presented as the highest score. This question should be re-visited in the near future.

CONCLUSION

Wide disparities exist across the state regarding current social and economic conditions as well as the future prospects of the children residing there. Service Delivery Areas 1, 6, and 9 are the most prosperous with SDA 9 at the top. These include Delaware, Union, Fairfield, Licking, Madison, Franklin and Pickaway Counties. Service Delivery Areas 5, 10 and 11 are the most distressed with SDA 11 considered the most distressed according to the Economic Innovation Group's Distressed Community Index (DCI).¹⁴ SDA 11 consists of Highland, Brown, Ross, Lawrence, Gallia, Adams, Jackson, Vinton, Pike, Scioto and Meigs Counties. According to data obtained through the Department of Children and Youth, there are 6,670 children under age 5 in licensed care across this 11-county area.¹⁵ This represents just 27% of the total population under 5 (24,362) in SDA 11.¹⁶ Of this population, Head Start currently serves 1,522 preschoolers and 537 infants and toddlers representing only 8.4% of the age eligible population. The benefits of Head Start in such counties are two-fold. Despite low hourly wages, employment in the ECE workforce appears to provide a reliable income with lower turnover rates in otherwise

¹⁴ Economic Innovation Group

¹⁵ DCY Data Expanded Report-12/24/25

¹⁶ American Community Survey (ACS)-Census.gov

economically challenged communities. Secondly, Head Start services provided to children and families can disrupt the pernicious influence of compounding adverse conditions. Complex problems such as these require urgent attention to the matters at hand and a commitment to looking upstream to identify the true root of the problems.

The national priorities established by the Head Start Collaboration Office clearly convey that in order for the ECE ecosystem to truly thrive, there must be alignment, coordination and collaboration while sharing data and supporting the workforce.

Currently, the ECE workforce is in crisis as reinforced by the Ohio Child Care Resource and Referral Association (OCCRRA) Workforce and Program Analysis Platform (WPAP) report. Low statewide wages drive high turnover and weaken the profession's credibility. Contributing to this grim reality is the fact that children's behaviors have skyrocketed since the pandemic and the pipeline supporting the ECE workforce has nearly dried up. A fact corroborated in a fall 2025 survey where 66% of Directors said their top workforce development issue was too few qualified applicants. Aside from Floaters and Substitutes, Assistant Teachers have the highest monthly turnover rate in the state at 6.24%. Compounding the high turnover rate is the fact that 34% of all preschool assistant teachers lack even the minimum qualifications for the position according to the recent Office of Head Start's-Program Information Report (PIR) Staff Qualifications Report-2025-State Level report.¹⁷

Head Start programs have often been left with no other means to attract and sustain employees other than reducing the number of children served as they attempt to offer a living wage. Since 2023, Ohio's Program Information Report (PIR) has seen an enrollment drop of 25%, 19% of which occurred last year. Couple this with flat funding, an astronomical spike in health premiums and a higher cost of living, and the situation becomes even more dire. It is beyond time to address this crisis.

Implementing a coordinated approach with community actors who touch the lives of children and families requires a commitment to relationship building. Networking with community and school leaders, elected officials and pediatricians should be paramount for any Head Start leader. This should begin in the spirit of deepening the relationship as opposed to simply the

¹⁷ Office of Head Start - Program Information Report (PIR) Staff Qualifications Report-2025-State Level report

transactional notion of sharing information about Head Start. The latter should be woven in as the relationship matures.

Lastly, the government shutdown that began on October 1, 2025, and lasted 43 days highlighted both the challenges and resilience of Head Start Grantees and Delegates with October and November annual funding periods. Although Ohio programs were initially unaffected, seven programs with November funding periods were impacted as the shutdown continued.

Encouragingly, several programs were able to remain open through strong community partnerships and proactive support from governing boards. While delayed funding following the reopening resulted in temporary classroom closures, the experience underscored valuable lessons for future preparedness. The survey found that 20 programs (42.55%) currently rely solely on federal funding; however, exploring diversified funding sources—while not intended to replace federal support—may offer a meaningful safety net and help sustain operations during any future disruptions.

Rebuilding the workforce, networking and diversifying funding streams must occur simultaneously to best fortify a crumbling ecosystem. Only then will the feedback loop present in such systems positively reinforce itself and bring it back to life.