

Last week, Ohio Gov. DeWine [signed](#) the state's \$69.8 billion biennial operating budget (HB 166) into law. He vetoed 25 provisions (listed [here](#)) but otherwise accepted the budget allocations and policy changes agreed to by the General Assembly's conference committee.

Early childhood learning

Home visiting

Investments in the state's home visiting program, Help Me Grow, grew substantially. The program is funded at \$30.3 million for FY 20 and \$39.3 million for FY 21 (up from \$20.3 million and \$19.6 million for each year of this current biennium).

Preschool

The state's **early childhood education (ECE) grant was flat funded** across the biennium, at \$68.1 million for each year.

Child care

Changes related to child care and early learning include:

- A requirement that the Ohio Department of Education (in consultation with the Ohio Department of Jobs and Family Services as well as "stakeholder groups,") **review all early childhood initiatives in Ohio**. This review will include preschool, Head Start, and other early learning opportunities, and must culminate in a report of findings for members of the legislature, State Board of Education, and state superintendent by December 2020.
- A requirement for family daycare providers, providers, day camps, and their employees that explicitly **prohibits discrimination when enrolling children** on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, or national origin. A prohibition against discrimination on the basis of disability was also added – for the above groups as well as child care licensees, administrators, and staff.
- **Funding for quality and infrastructure**, in the form of a one-time \$10 million grant to help providers become rated in the state's Step Up to Quality system and meet the state's quality mandate (to become rated by July 2020). These grants can be used for quality workforce supports (e.g., wage incentives, assistance in attaining certification, professional development, curriculum/assessment, or facilities improvement). Also earmarked is \$20 million each fiscal year, to be used to support early learning programs operating in "smaller communities."
- **Step Up to Quality exemptions** related to the 2020 quality mandate (for example, for certified in-home aides and approved day camps) and many other provisions streamlining requirements related to provision of Publicly Funded Child Care (PFCC) - all of which can be viewed starting on [p. 17](#) of the JFS budget document
- **Maintenance of current reimbursement rates** for publicly funded child care providers. Specifically, reimbursement rates must be at least as much as what providers were receiving in January 2019, based on quality rating tiers (one through five stars via the Step Up to Quality program).

- **Partial property tax reduction** for child care centers that serve children from households that receive public assistance, limited to those centers that are licensed by Ohio Jobs and Family Services and are not the administrator's main residence (so, no home providers).

Literacy

The Governor's "**Imagination Library**" program was created and funded at \$5 million per year. The initiative aims to provide all Ohio children with monthly books for the first five years of life, as part of a broader effort to improve kindergarten readiness.

Child welfare, safety, and well-being

A wide range of changes and investments were made to improve overall child well-being, including:

Children's services and supports

- A doubling of the state's investment in **children's services**. The additional \$220 million in funding includes \$70 million in additional funds for the State Child Protective Allocation.
- An additional \$25 million to prevent custody relinquishment for Ohio's highest-need children.
- \$5 million for **foster and kinship family recruitment** and engagement efforts.
- \$8.5 million to establish a **Kinship Navigator Program** in Ohio.
- An additional **\$24.4 million for early intervention programs** through the Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities, over the biennium, to expand eligibility to increase the number of children served by intervention services and care coordination (e.g., those with toxic lead exposure or those born with neonatal abstinence syndrome).
- \$28 million in additional services for individuals with **autism spectrum disorder**. The newly-funded services will work to keep children with their families and prevent the need for out-of-home care.
- \$4 million to provide individualized services and supports to children with **multi-system needs and their families**.
- \$18 million for **multi-system youth innovation**, to serve children with complex needs who may be at risk of custody relinquishment.
- More flexibility regarding which individuals can serve as kinship caregivers to include any nonrelative adult having a familiar and longstanding relationship or bond with the child or family, which will ensure the child's social ties.
- A requirement that foster caregivers are mandatory reporters of abuse or neglect.

Infant safety

- A vetoed provision which in effect retains the **prohibition on the sale of mesh crib liners** (in alignment with the American Academy of Pediatrics' views on safe sleep).

Lead abatement

- An investment of \$25 million over the biennium to **make Ohio homes lead-safe**. Included in this area are annual investments of \$4.8 million to advertise lead-free homes to families; abate and remediate lead contamination; and demolish lead-blighted homes; \$225,000 to increase the supply of lead hazard control workers; and \$5 million per year to provide a lead abatement tax credit, allowing eligible individuals to receive an income tax credit worth up to \$10,000 for costs related to home lead abatement.

Nutrition

- An additional \$60 million (from federal funds) to improve the nutrition of Ohio's children (and adults) via expansion of Ohio's Federal School Lunch, Federal School Breakfast, and Child and Adult Food Programs.

School funding

While most school funding decisions were tabled for now (recall that Reps. Patterson and Cupp [introduced](#) their K-12 school funding formula overhaul via [separate legislation](#)) there were a handful of items in the budget related to funding.

- **New funding for “wraparound supports” for schools**, totaling \$675 million across the biennium and determined based on poverty measures (specifically, by how many students reside in each district whose family incomes are at 185% of the Federal Poverty Level). You'll recall that Gov. DeWine proposed an initial \$550 million for this effort; the House upped the amount and the conference committee agreed to the higher amount. These funds are meant to support student wellness and success, and can be spent on mental health services, after-school programs, mentoring services for homeless youth, nutrition, physical health care and wellness, professional development related to trauma informed care, professional development related to cultural competence, or family engagement. Each district and school must submit annual reports to the Ohio Department of Education that describe how these funds were spent.
- A funding guarantee that **was vetoed by DeWine**. The provision, which was proposed by the Senate, would have benefited a few dozen districts by ensuring they receive at least the same per-pupil amount as what chartered nonpublic schools (i.e., private schools with a “charter” - not the same as public charter) receive in Auxiliary Services funds. This comes out to about \$1,305 per pupil. Most of these districts are wealthy ones whose primary funding source is their local tax base.
- \$38.5 million in **additional funds for high-growth districts** currently restricted by the formula's “cap.”
- A requirement that the Ohio Department of Education conduct a study to **review the criteria used for defining economically disadvantaged** students in the current school funding formula. The review must include research on how other states define this, and ODE must submit a report on its findings by December 2020.

Overall state investment in public education is \$9.3 billion and \$9.4 billion, respectively (FY 20 and 21).

Teachers

There were several provisions passed that would affect K-12 public school teachers, including:

- **A statewide teacher salary minimum** of \$30,000. Most collective bargaining agreements already establish a floor for teachers, which differs by district. The Legislative Service Commission reports that in FY 18, salaries for teachers employed by traditional districts averaged \$58,266 statewide.
- New investments for the **alternative teacher certification program**, Teach for America (of \$2 million).
- A vetoed item that would have eliminated the requirement for district and STEM teachers to be **properly licensed** to teach their grade and subject (a provision that had been added by the Senate).
- Permission for a licensed educator (with a teaching license to teach any grade 7 through 12) to teach a **computer science course** for school years 2019-20 and 2020-21. The teacher must first complete professional development to acquire necessary content knowledge.
- \$1 million for each fiscal year to support **professional development grants** to educational services centers, specifically for training educators in models of prevention of risky/harmful behaviors.

K-12 education

Several budget provisions impact schools in other ways – beyond funding or teaching. Below are some takeaways (not meant to be comprehensive).

School improvement/state takeovers

- **Temporary (one year) moratorium** on the creation of new academic distress commissions.

Charters & choice

- Requirement that the Ohio Department of Education study and make recommendations on **how to fund e-schools**.
- Expanded **voucher eligibility** to grades K-12 (rather than enabling eligibility to grow by one grade per year, with the program currently at K-5). Also, a new mechanism by which to raise the limit on the number of vouchers available, if the program is highly subscribed.
- **Changes to closure standards** for charter schools (to occur after three years of poor performance, instead of two of three consecutive years).
- Additional **funding for high-performing charter schools**, which translates to \$1,750 for economically disadvantaged students and \$1,000 for non-disadvantaged students.
- Creation of a **committee to study dropout prevention** and recovery programs, which will be required to submit recommendations to the General Assembly.

Graduation standards & high school

- **New graduation requirements**, starting with the class of 2023. Students must pass two end-of-course exams or meet targets related to career-technical education or military readiness, as well as two diploma “seals.”
- Allowance for a student's participation in **show choir** to fulfill high school physical education requirements.
- Permission for **computer coding** to fulfill foreign language requirement.

Report cards and testing

- **Creation of a study committee** to examine how various report card components are calculated and weighted. The committee must include the state superintendent, key members of the General Assembly, and three superintendents (with rural, urban, and suburban representation).
- Changes to the **calculation of the value-added growth** measure (specifically, an index score of one or above will be an “A”, instead of two and above). This effectively will result in more schools receiving an A on this metric. The House’s attempt to change the calculation of this score - to base it on one year of data, rather than three - was overridden.

Other

- \$20 million investment to provide free, evidence-based programming related to **drug prevention**. \$18 million of this is allocated for FY 20 to purchase the prevention curricula; \$2 million will go towards Ohio’s educational service centers (ESCs) to conduct professional development.
- A requirement (starting with the 2019-20 school year) that each school district, STEM school, and charter school annually report the types of behavioral prevention programs, services, and supports are used to promote healthy student behavior.
- A requirement that school districts **sell off their unused facilities** (to charters or STEM schools) faster than under current law – within one year instead of two.
- **Dissolution of the Joint Education Oversight Committee** (JEOC), a group whose purpose was to provide nonpartisan analysis & research to lawmakers.
- Specifications regarding competitive **“school climate” grants** meant to help districts implement positive behavior intervention and support or evidence-based social and emotional learning initiatives.

Concluding thoughts

There were many other changes made through the budget process that impact families and young children that are not covered here. These includes changes or investments in the areas of health, housing, water quality, hunger assistance, and tax policy.

It’s worth remembering that child-focused policy is not limited to child care or preschool. Virtually every aspect of how a state spends its revenue and provides services or programs to families has a significant impact on our youngest and most vulnerable citizens – babies, toddlers, children, and adolescents who can’t yet vote and who rely on adults to advocate for them.

Through much of the months-long budget debate and process in Ohio, a child-centric lens was applied by many [lawmakers](#), [advocates](#), and the [media](#), and support for children offered rare ground for bipartisanship. This was at least partially a product of Gov. DeWine's early focus on children (and a trend that can be observed [nationally](#)), as well as the growing [consensus](#) that a child's early years have a critical impact on their life trajectory.

Links

To view the Legislative Service Commission's appropriations spreadsheet, go [here](#). The budget comparison document, which shows what was initially pitched by the executive budget, as well as accepted by each chamber and finally conference committee, go [here](#).