



REALITY CHECK

Transforming Education Today, Empowering Talent Tomorrow

Reality Check is a new tool created by **Ohio Excels** to gauge Ohio's progress in unleashing learning potential, creating economic mobility, and preparing and empowering tomorrow's talent.

It highlights essential information across the state's education and workforce system, from early learning to K-12 and postsecondary education. Using these data, *Reality Check* examines the system's effectiveness in preparing learners to earn critical credentials and degrees necessary for success in careers today and tomorrow.

The *Reality-Checked* data points indicate how Ohio's education system supports foundational academic success among all learners. Such an academic foundation fosters learner engagement at a young age, cultivates constant curiosity, enables lifelong learning, and supports the continuous upskilling of learners throughout their careers. As a result, these data points are vital for elected officials and policymakers to understand. They reflect the overall health of the state's education and workforce system. **They also uncover a troubling reality:**

Students who enter their formal education experience behind their peers, for reasons beyond their control, struggle to recover from setbacks early in their education journeys. These children then become entangled in a pattern of low performance that is challenging to escape.

The bottom line is that Ohio's education system must become more agile, relevant, and responsive to individual learners to ensure that no student becomes trapped in a pattern of low performance. The *Reality Check* tool sets the conversation by ensuring that all stakeholders work from the same data playbook to inform state-level policy and advocacy actions that drive toward an improved and transformed education system. Such a system will better support all learners' needs and success, producing an abundant supply of homegrown, highly skilled talent ready to lead productive, fulfilling lives and seize tomorrow's jobs. Ohio, its students, and its families deserve nothing less.

When students succeed, Ohio Excels.

Ohio Excels was founded in 2018 by Ohio business leaders for one reason—to help improve and transform Ohio’s education system to better prepare students for success. The non-profit, non-partisan organization embodies the business community’s investment in Ohio’s most precious resource: Students. They are today’s learners and tomorrow’s leaders, scientists, artists, skilled workers, and job creators. They are the problem solvers who will ensure Ohio remains on the cutting edge of future careers in advanced manufacturing, agriculture, biological sciences, information technology, telecommunications, the arts, and fields that cannot even be imagined today.

Reality Check reflects Ohio Excels’ commitment to elevating system-level indicators to drive policy, advocacy, and outcomes. The goal is to improve education and workforce opportunities for every learner—no matter where they live or attend school. We believe education is everyone’s business. We invite stakeholders to use *Reality Check* to inform their thinking and ensure the best supports and opportunities are available to help all students thrive in the future.

Transforming Education Today, Empowering Talent Tomorrow

Reality Check begins by examining today’s open jobs paying more than \$50,000 annually. It then considers jobs forecasted in 2031 and the expected education levels necessary to secure those jobs. To offer a snapshot, it compares the expected education levels associated with the forecasted jobs and the education and training outcomes of the Class of 2017, the latest available high school graduate outcome data.¹

To put the numbers in context, *Reality Check* identifies three “Essentials for Career Success” that affect learners in secondary education and four “Predictors of Future Success” that matter most for learners in their earliest years. *Reality Check* considers these the most significant levers to transform and improve Ohio’s education system.

These levers inform *Reality Check*, promising to position learners to reach their full potential, ensure individual economic mobility, and empower tomorrow’s talent.

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¹ 2017 is the most recent high school class that can be analyzed because six years represents the customary window to understand what happens to learners after graduation.

Open Jobs Paying Over \$50K Annually



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This is Ohio's moment. Major corporations like Amgen, AWS, Google, Honda-LG, Intel, and others are joining longstanding employers in the state to launch significant new, high-tech investments. Sectors such as retail trade, advanced manufacturing, battery technology, information technology, renewable energy, telecommunications, and biological sciences are rapidly growing.

The number of jobs open for job seekers reflects Ohio's boom. More reflective is the number of jobs that pay more than \$50,000 annually.



As of October 2024, Ohio has **109,657** open jobs that pay over **\$50,000** annually.²

164,744

total jobs are open to job seekers.



Ohio has more open jobs than the population of the city of Dayton (136,000).

TODAY'S TOP 10 fastest-growing jobs

in Ohio that pay a salary of \$50,000 or more

Job	Actual Median Salary	Education Requirements ³
1 Registered nurses	\$77,000	Bachelor's degree
2 Software developers	\$103,000	Bachelor's degree
3 Tractor-trailer drivers	\$50,000	Postsecondary non-degree certificates
4 Nurse practitioners	\$113,000	Master's degree
5 Market research analysts & specialists	\$63,000	Bachelor's degree
6 Industrial machinery mechanics	\$60,000	High school diploma
7 Medical and health service managers	\$100,000	Bachelor's degree
8 General operations managers	\$88,000	Bachelor's degree
9 Farmers and agriculture managers	\$65,000	High school diploma
10 Financial managers	\$129,000	Bachelor's degree

² Jobs paying over \$50,000 are specifically highlighted by OhioMeansJobs.com: <https://ohiomeansjobs.ohio.gov/>.

³ <https://topjobs.ohio.gov/top-jobs-list/ohios-top-jobs-list>



Forecasted Jobs in 2031

Looking forward through 2031, Ohio can expect to benefit from the creation of **645,000** job openings annually, both from new jobs and those that come open for other reasons, primarily through retirement.⁴



By 2031, only six years from now, Ohio can expect **5,576,000** total jobs.

Of those:

66% will require postsecondary education after high school.



34% will need a high school diploma or less.⁵

That's 295,000 MORE jobs than the state had in 2021.

As of 2022, only **52.5%** of working-age adults (between the ages of 25–64) have a postsecondary degree or credential, reflecting a skills gap.⁶

Why Does This Matter?

Ohio must better prepare and empower young people for jobs requiring postsecondary credentials and degrees.

Ohio's K-12 student population has decreased over the past two decades, reflecting broad demographic changes and migration trends.⁷ While improving, Ohio still experiences a "brain drain," or a net loss of its college graduates to other states.⁸ To remain competitive, Ohio must retain its graduates and attract new talent, ensuring that every Ohioan is prepared with the skills and opportunities to contribute to the state's future success.

Positive Momentum.

Ohio's "brain drain" is diminishing. A significant portion of college graduates who earn a bachelor's degree end up staying in Ohio after graduation.

For instance, one year after completing a bachelor's degree, 74% of alumni call Ohio home. This is higher than in neighboring states like Indiana (59%) and some southern states such as Virginia (62%). Initiatives like Choose Ohio First and the Governor's Merit Scholarships are vital to strengthening Ohio's ability to retain top talent and keep graduates contributing to the state's growth and innovation.⁹

⁴ https://cew.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/Projections_2031-State-Report.pdf

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ <https://www.luminafoundation.org/stronger-nation/report/#/progress/state/OH>

⁷ <https://education.ohio.gov/Topics/Data/Frequently-Requested-Data/Enrollment-Data>

⁸ <https://www.midstory.org/can-ohio-turn-the-tables-on-brain-drain/>

⁹ Census Bureau's Post-Secondary Employment Outcomes (PSEO) data using the latest cohorts available (Classes of 2016 through 2018)

Forecasted Jobs in 2031



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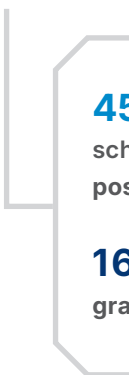
Preparing and Empowering Talent for Tomorrow's Jobs

By 2031, an estimated 66% of jobs will require postsecondary education. This tool provides a reality check to assess whether Ohio is on track to meet this demand based on current postsecondary education and training completion rates.

Let's consider what happened to individuals in the graduating **Class of 2017**, the latest high school class that can be fully analyzed because six years represents the customary window to understand what happens to learners after graduation.

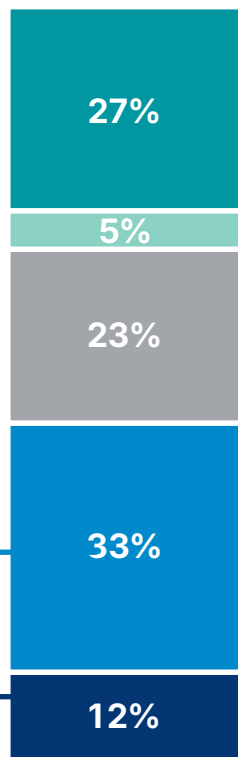


This means **62,536 (45%)** have only a high school diploma or did not graduate high school.



45,793 graduated high school but did NOT enroll in postsecondary education.

16,743 did NOT graduate high school.



36,467 attained a bachelor's degree or higher.

6,366 attained an associate's degree.

32,134 completed some college, but did not earn a degree.¹⁰

This means **74,967 (55%)** attained a postsecondary degree, earned a credential, or started their postsecondary education.

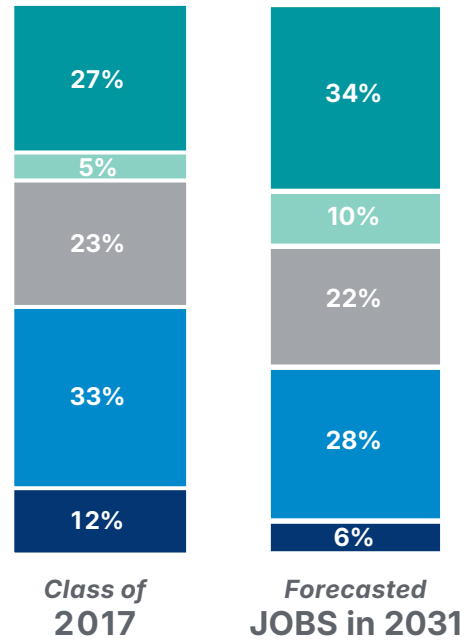
¹⁰ "Some college, no degree" means individuals have attended some college but have not completed a degree. This includes those who may have completed some coursework, training programs, or certifications, but did not earn an associate's or bachelor's degree.



What Does the Future Hold?

Let's compare the Class of 2017 with the specific education levels associated with jobs forecasted for 2031.

- Bachelor's degree and higher
- Associate's degree
- Some college, no degree¹¹
- High school diploma
- Less than high school diploma



Why Does This Matter?

Ohio has significant work ahead to ensure its students are ready for the education levels required for success in the future economy. The most recent data show high school graduates are not on track to meet the education levels associated with forecasted jobs. The following facts compound this:

- The state's preK-12 student population—our future workforce—has been shrinking over the past two decades.
- The state has too many high school dropouts and an insufficient number of learners completing associate and bachelor's degrees.
- While the state has decreased its "brain drain," it is not a net importer of talent from other states. This means Ohio's thriving regions pull talent from other parts of the state, rather than from outside the state.

These points reinforce why Ohio must be committed to improving and transforming its education and workforce systems.

Positive Momentum.

Ohio's remediation rate for first-time public college and university students has improved.

The overall remediation rate, including students taking remedial mathematics or English courses, has decreased by 27.6 percentage points since 2012, from 41% to 13.4% in 2022. This decrease is largely due to many colleges moving from remedial to credit-bearing corequisite courses. This also reflects the state's ongoing efforts to reduce the need for remediation by improving college readiness among high school graduates.¹²

¹¹ "Some college, no degree" means individuals have attended some college but have not completed a degree. This includes those who may have completed some coursework, training programs, or certifications, but did not earn an associate's or bachelor's degree.

¹² <https://www.lsc.ohio.gov/assets/organizations/legislative-service-commission/monthly-agency-reports/agency-reports/files/odhere-mediationreport2023.pdf>

Career-Connected Learning



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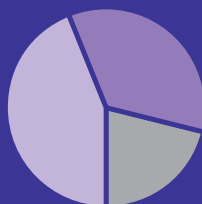
Career-connected learning in middle and high school increases relevancy and understanding of academic content and awareness of current and future career opportunities. Career-connected learning experiences include integrated career pathways, work-based learning experiences, career exploration opportunities, and real-world, hands-on learning similar to that offered in STEM schools, career technical education (CTE) centers, and other programs. Despite what many believe, research shows that career-connected learning better ensures high school graduates are prepared to advance into a career and postsecondary education.¹³

Compelling career-connected learning opportunities reflect the following attributes:

- Align with industry skill needs;
- Prepare learners to be successful in postsecondary education options, including apprenticeships;
- Include counseling and career exposure to help learners reach career goals;
- Include education offered with workforce preparation activities;
- Organize education, training, and other services to meet the particular needs of a learner;
- Enable a learner to attain a secondary school diploma and at least one recognized postsecondary credential; and
- Help individual learners enter or advance within a specific occupation or related group of occupations.¹⁴

A poll conducted by Ohio Excels found that most Ohio adults do not think high school graduates in their community are well prepared to start a career or enroll in college.

44%
"Students are NOT ready"



35% "Students are ready"

21% "Not sure"

¹³ Adapted from Advance CTE, Jobs for the Future, National Center for Education Statistics, and U.S. Department of Education

¹⁴ Derived from a definition advanced by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA).



Ohio's most precise measure of understanding learner exposure to career-connected learning is through **career technical education (CTE)** learning opportunities.



ONLY 18%, or **136,691**, of Ohio's 7–12 grade students participated in a **career technical education program** during the 2022-2023 school year.¹⁵

That is a relatively low percentage of students, especially considering the number of available jobs today that require training in a highly skilled industry.

How might Ohio make career-connected learning more attractive?

A poll conducted by Ohio Excels found that **68%** of parents believed their students would be more likely to participate in career technical education opportunities if programs were offered in their high school.

This finding reinforces the importance of traditional high schools providing experiences that expose students to career options and work-based learning opportunities while in high school.

Why Does This Matter?

Career-connected learning transforms the middle and high school experience by making learning more relevant to students and helping them identify potential jobs and careers that align with their interests and aptitudes. This results in greater motivation, promotes workforce readiness and economic development, and reduces high school dropout rates. It also offers students economic mobility and provides a solid foundation for learners to pursue higher education. This takes on increased importance when 66% of future jobs will require some postsecondary credential or degree.

Positive Momentum.

More and more middle and high schools across Ohio emphasize career-connected learning opportunities to transform traditional learning experiences. Business Advisory Councils (BACs) are emerging as catalysts for driving career-connected learning opportunities in their schools and districts. BACs are collaborative groups that bring together local business and school leaders to ensure that education aligns with the local economy's needs. Specifically, Building Bridges to Careers, Montgomery County ESC, Noble County Schools BAC, and North Point ESC each received four stars in 2024 for their exceptional work in developing professional skills, building partnerships, and coordinating meaningful student experiences. Visit <https://education.ohio.gov/Topics/Career-Tech/Career-Connections/Business-Advisory-Councils> to learn more about Ohio's Business Advisory Councils.

¹⁵ <https://education.ohio.gov/getattachment/Topics/Career-Tech/Contacts-and-Resources/Outcomes-and-Insights-Fact-Sheets/CTE-22-23-Fact-Sheet.pdf.aspx?lang=en-US>

College Credit in High School



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Providing students the opportunity to earn college credit in high school gives them an edge in attaining postsecondary degrees and credentials. This enables learners to accelerate degree completion, which is critical given the certificates, credentials, and degrees needed to fill Ohio's jobs over the next six to 10 years. Students benefit from accelerated learning opportunities that enhance their readiness and academic rigor, while families see significant cost savings. Ohio has several early college credit opportunities, including College Credit Plus, Advanced Placement (AP), International Baccalaureate (IB), and the College Level Examination Program (CLEP). If Ohio is to meet its future job needs, it must promote and encourage more students to maximize the use of all available options.



29%, or **38,873** students in the Class of 2023 earned college credit in high school.



Of those, only **8%** of students were Black, **4%** were Hispanic, and **24%** were economically disadvantaged.

Why Does This Matter?

Students who accumulate college credit in high school are **more likely to continue their education** because they are academically ready and well-positioned to reduce their time and cost to a degree.

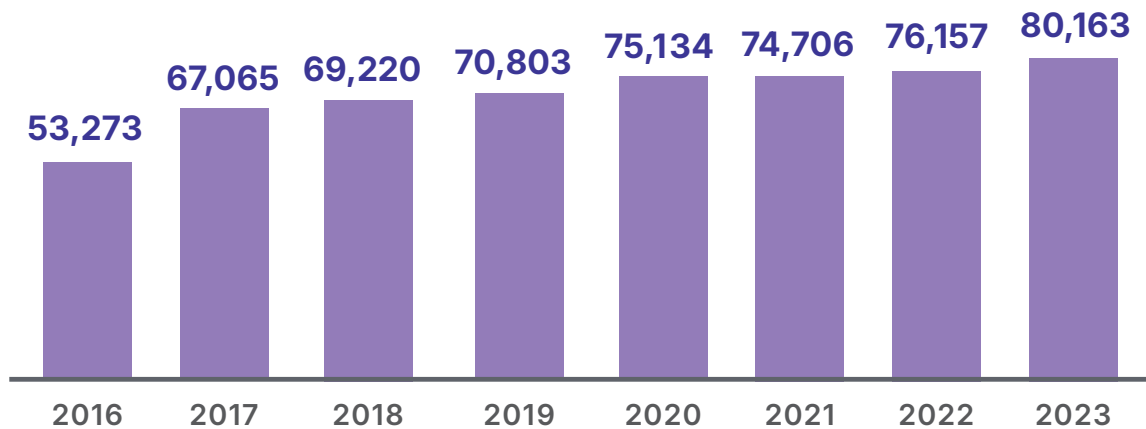
Moreover, taking college-level courses in high school is a crucial strategy in helping Ohio meet the 3.7 million jobs coming over the next decade that require postsecondary education. During the 2022-23 school year, College Credit Plus saved Ohio families about \$194 million in tuition.¹⁶ For these reasons, Ohio must ensure its most underrepresented learners can access and take advantage of dual-enrollment opportunities like College Credit Plus while in high school.



Positive Momentum.

Participation in **College Credit Plus** has grown significantly since the program was created. In the 2022–2023 academic year, more than 80,000 high school students participated, marking a steady increase in enrollment each year. This growth reflects the program’s popularity and value to students and families. The chart below demonstrates College Credit Plus annual enrollment since 2016. Despite this growth, the program has yet to fully reflect the diversity of Ohio’s student population.¹⁷

Total College Credit Plus Enrollment



¹⁷ https://highered.ohio.gov/wps/wcm/connect/gov/00edc338-cd3c-45cb-9edb-5015d8585f7a/2023-College-Credit-Plus-Annual-Report_FINAL2_011724.pdf?MOD=AJPERES&CONVERT_TO=url&CACHEID=ROOTWORKSPACE.Z18_79GCH8013H-MOA06A2E16IV2082-00edc338-cd3c-45cb-9edb-5015d8585f7a-oQnOdR1

Postsecondary Affordability & Completion



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Ohio's future jobs will require skills that demand education beyond high school, and most will require an associate's degree, bachelor's degree, or higher. The state's higher education options must be affordable, structured to ensure completion, and aligned with employer needs.



Completing the **Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)** form is the first step to an affordable postsecondary experience.

As of September 2024, only **52%** of seniors completed the FAFSA form, ranking Ohio **20th** in the nation.¹⁸

For many families, FAFSA completion opens the doors to grants and scholarships that can considerably offset the price of a college education, which is significant in Ohio compared to other states.

Consider the following:



Ohio's national ranking in tuition and fee affordability¹⁹

\$10,049

Average cost of tuition and fees at an Ohio public college or university (does not include room and board and other costs of attendance)²⁰

\$34,025

Average student loan debt in Ohio²¹

\$120,000,000 in financial federal aid is left on the table every year by Ohio students who do not complete the FAFSA form.²²

Postsecondary affordability and completion go hand-in-hand. Many students in good standing academically drop out of college due to their inability to meet ongoing costs.

¹⁸ <https://www.ncan.org/page/FAFSATracker>

¹⁹ <https://www.usnews.com/news/best-states/rankings/education/higher-education/tuition-fees>

²⁰ <https://educationdata.org/average-cost-of-college-by-state>

²¹ <https://educationdata.org/student-loan-debt-by-state#ohio>

²² <https://www.ncan.org/news/662266/NCAN-Report-In-2023-High-School-Seniors-Left-Over-4-Billion-on-the-Table-in-Pell-Grants>



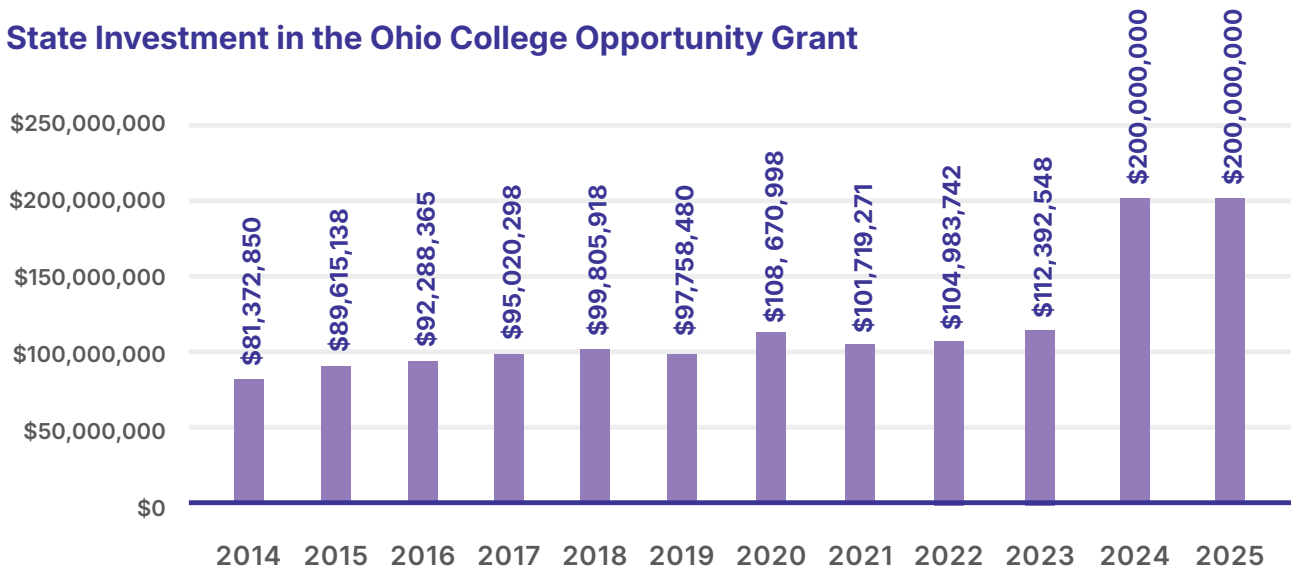
Why Does This Matter?

Higher education is and will remain a significant training component necessary to meet job requirements, especially when 66% of Ohio’s jobs in 2031 require some postsecondary education. Roughly 34% of those jobs require a bachelor’s degree at a minimum. Many students indicate the reason they do not pursue postsecondary education is cost. FAFSA financial awards can make postsecondary education more affordable for many more students and families.

Positive Momentum.

Ohio’s primary need-based financial aid program, the Ohio College Opportunity Grant (OCOG), supports Ohio residents with financial needs and other educational expenses at public, private, and nonprofit colleges and universities across the state. OCOG is a critical resource for many students in Ohio, helping them access higher education by reducing the financial barriers to degree completion. The chart below shows the state’s annual investment in the program, which made college more affordable for nearly 45,500 students in FY 2023.²³

State Investment in the Ohio College Opportunity Grant



23 <https://dam.assets.ohio.gov/image/upload/highered.ohio.gov/sqs/expenditures/EXPEND2023.pdf>

Early Learning Opportunities



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The first years of life are critical for brain and cognitive development, stimulated by high-quality early learning experiences. This is when children cultivate social skills, learn to manage their emotions, form foundational literacy skills, and develop resilience. These cornerstone skills pave the way for kindergarten readiness, elementary and middle school proficiency, and long-term academic success. The return on investment in early learning is significant: every dollar spent yields four to nine times that amount.²⁴ Children who attend high-quality early learning programs perform better academically throughout their school years, enabling them to excel in reading, math, and other core subjects later in their education careers—often despite living in low-income households. To benefit, all families must have access and be able to afford quality early learning opportunities. This is NOT the case in Ohio right now.



Let's do the math.

The average annual cost of childcare for a family with two children in 2023²⁵ is **\$22,600**.

Families with two children pay more than **\$1,883** per month for childcare.



This is **\$860** more than the average rent in Ohio, which is currently around **\$1,023** per month.

The state's median household income is **\$65,720**.



Based on that, families must dedicate more than **34%** of their annual income to childcare.

²⁴ <https://www.groundworkohio.org/post/groundwork-ohio-and-early-childhood-experts-provide-testimony-on-house-bill-33>

²⁵ <https://emanuals.jfs.ohio.gov/ChildCare/ChildCareCenter/CCCMPL/CCCMPL-46.stm>





Ohio's Commitment to Affordable Child Care.

- Before the April 2024 enactment of the temporary **Child Care Choice Voucher Program**, poised to assist many — but not all Ohio families — who earn up to **200%** of the federal poverty level, Ohio ranked **50th**, or **dead last nationally**, in subsidizing childcare up to age five for all families (at **145%** of the federal poverty level). This hurts families who do not qualify for subsidies yet struggle to afford childcare.
- Neighboring states like Kentucky, Michigan, and Pennsylvania provide publicly funded childcare to families at **200% of the federal poverty level**. Families in these states qualify if they make \$51,640 for a family of three. Indiana and West Virginia are at **150%**.²⁶

Why Does This Matter?

High-quality early learning opportunities—often unaffordable for Ohio families—carry even more importance given the state's other alarming numbers for babies and infants. Consider the following:

	 <p>1 in 5 Ohio babies are living in families with low incomes.²⁷</p>	<p>ONLY 12% of eligible children, ages 0-2, have access to Head Start.²⁸</p>	<p>Just 2% of 3-year-olds are enrolled in early learning.²⁹</p>	<p>ONLY 20% of 4-year-olds are enrolled in early learning.³⁰</p>
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An estimated **76,660** Ohio children cannot access early care and education due to a gap in available slots.³¹

Ohio suffers from a lack of available and affordable childcare, particularly in rural areas. However, even in more populated urban and suburban areas, there are pockets where the demand for childcare exceeds supply. High costs and limited support for low- and middle-income families exacerbate this.

Childcare costs impact workforce participation, particularly for women, who may be unable to return to the workforce. This deprives Ohio's employers of skilled talent and has an even more significant impact on the state's near-term economy.

Positive Momentum.

The recent creation of the Ohio Department of Children and Youth represents a positive development. It is the state's first stand-alone agency dedicated to holistic child and youth supports, enabling an enhanced focus on vulnerable populations. The agency leads the implementation of Ohio's new Child Care Choice Voucher Program for families that make up to 200% of the federal poverty level or \$60,00 for a family of four. This program, launched in April 2024, will provide financial support for 8,000 more Ohio children to benefit from quality childcare services.³² Temporary federal funds currently support the Child Care Choice Voucher Program. Once expired, without additional state funding, Ohio's threshold for supporting publicly funded childcare will return to 145% of the Federal Poverty Level.

26 https://www.policymattersohio.org/research-policy/shared-prosperity-thriving-ohioans/basic-needs-unemployment-insurance/basic-needs/ohios-childcare-crisis#_ftn4

27 https://www.groundworkohio.org/_files/ugd/a395ee_32673d8c51f3460d9bde03f9a58a92eb.pdf

28 Ibid.

29 Ibid.

30 Ibid.

31 Ibid.

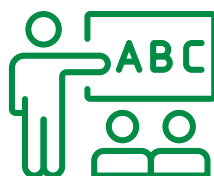
32 <https://emanuals.ifs.ohio.gov/ChildCare/ChildCareManual/CCMPL/CCMPL-176.stm>



Kindergarten Readiness



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Kindergarten readiness strongly predicts proficiency in future grades and is linked to ongoing academic success, graduation rates, higher income, employment stability, and lower reliance on social services, including incarceration.³³ Early reading skills are predictive of later academic success. Students who demonstrate kindergarten readiness are more likely to score proficient in third-grade reading as measured by Ohio's state test in English language arts. Becoming a proficient reader provides students with seven times a greater likelihood of graduating from high school.



At this moment, Ohio's kindergarten readiness indicators are **not good**.

64% of Ohio's students are **NOT ready for kindergarten** when they enter.

This means that 64% of kindergarten students lack critical skills in social foundations, mathematics, language and literacy, and physical well-being and motor development, as measured by the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment Revised (KRA-R).

Why Does This Matter?

Children who enter kindergarten behind all too often are not able to catch up, which creates a hard-to-break pattern for students and costs Ohio significantly more money in remediation, intervention, and additional supports. An analysis conducted by the Ohio Department of Education and Workforce and Ohio Department of Children and Youth found that students who demonstrated readiness upon entering kindergarten were:

- **8X more likely** to be proficient in **3rd-grade reading**³⁴ than students in the same class who did not demonstrate kindergarten readiness.
- **7X more likely** to be proficient in **4th-7th-grade reading** than their peers who were not demonstrating kindergarten readiness.
- **6X more likely** to be proficient in **8th-grade reading** than their peers who were not demonstrating readiness at the start of kindergarten.

³³ Adapted from the National Center for Education Statistics and publications from the American Academy of Pediatrics.

³⁴ Based on English language arts assessment, which measures a broader set of skills than only reading.

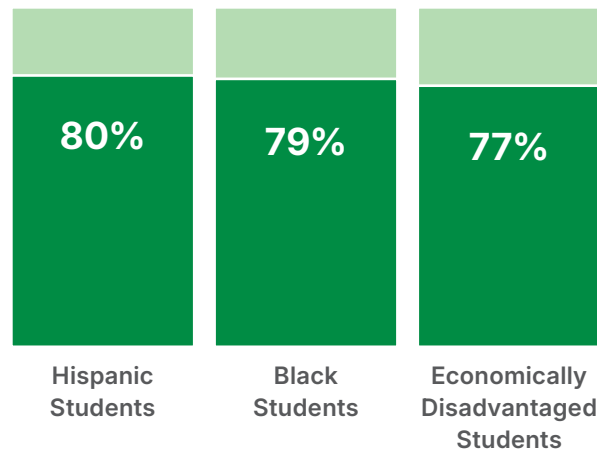


There is a strong connection between a child's readiness to enter kindergarten and math and reading scores throughout a student's academic career.

When children are prepared for kindergarten, they are ready for future academic success. When unprepared, they face hurdles that can be extremely difficult to overcome throughout their education journeys.

Digging deeper into kindergarten readiness reveals serious achievement gaps that separate students of color and low socioeconomic status from their peers.

Percent of Students Not Ready for Kindergarten



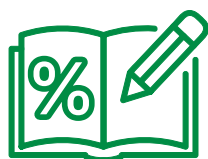
Positive Momentum.

Unique public-private partnerships are emerging across Ohio to improve early learning opportunities and kindergarten readiness. Noteworthy partnerships include Cleveland's PRE4CLE initiative, Cradle to Career Cincinnati, Future Ready Columbus, Learn to Earn Dayton, Summit Education Initiative, and the Appalachian Child Coalition. These initiatives expand access to early childhood education programs, increase support for behavioral services, and address the developmental needs of young children to promote kindergarten readiness.

3rd Grade Reading & Algebra I



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Third grade represents a critical transition point for children — from “learning to read” to “reading to learn.” Too many Ohio children who do not develop strong reading skills by third grade fall behind and do not catch up. The data show this consistency across grade levels. Like reading, algebraic concepts are foundational for student success in the later years. They are also cornerstone elements of the state’s most in-demand jobs in science, engineering, advanced manufacturing, IT, etc.



36% or **43,093** of all 3rd-graders are **NOT proficient in reading**,³⁵ and this trend continues through 8th grade and into high school.

The story is particularly sobering when it comes to 3rd-grade proficiency for students who are economically disadvantaged and students of color.

Consider the following:



48% of economically disadvantaged students are **NOT proficient in 3rd-grade reading**

52% of Hispanic students are **NOT proficient in 3rd-grade reading**

58% of Black students are **NOT proficient in 3rd-grade reading**

2 schools reported **0%** proficiency in 3rd-grade reading



44%, or **58,811** of students are **NOT proficient in Algebra I**

60% of economically disadvantaged students are **NOT proficient in Algebra I**

61% of Hispanic students are **NOT proficient in Algebra I**

73% of Black students are **NOT proficient in Algebra I**

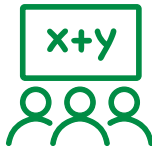
28 high schools reported **0%** proficiency in Algebra I



Why Does This Matter?



By third grade, students should have developed the basic **reading** skills to understand and learn from texts across all subject areas. Students who are not proficient in reading by the end of the third grade struggle to keep up with other subjects, resulting in a cascading and continuing effect of academic difficulties. Students who do not achieve reading proficiency by the end of third grade are four times more likely to drop out of high school than their peers who are proficient readers.³⁶



Proficiency in **Algebra I** predicts students' future academic and career success. It is often considered the "gateway" course to higher-level mathematics and is strongly linked to college and career readiness.³⁷ Research shows that students who complete Algebra I by 9th grade are more likely to graduate from high school, succeed in college, and experience better job prospects with higher earnings. Many growing industries—especially in technology, finance, and engineering—require strong mathematical skills, rooted in Algebra I. This high school course represents a critical steppingstone to future success in academics, the workforce, and life.

Positive Momentum.

Ohio educators and policymakers deserve credit for their focus and dedication to improving reading and mathematics performance, as evidenced by several initiatives underway at the Ohio Department of Education and Workforce.

Specific to reading, the state is focusing on the Science of Reading and has invested significantly to support professional learning, high-quality instructional materials, and other supports aimed at helping school leaders, teachers, and families effectively implement these reforms. On the mathematics front, the state is preparing a plan to increase mathematics performance and proficiency. This comes on the heels of access to state-funded high-quality tutoring programs and no-cost access to proven research-based mathematics programs.

³⁶ Annie E. Casey Foundation. *Double Jeopardy: How Third-Grade Reading Skills and Poverty Influence High School Graduation*.

³⁷ <https://www.educationtoworkforce.org/indicators/successful-completion-algebra-i-9th-grade>

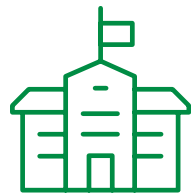
Student Attendance



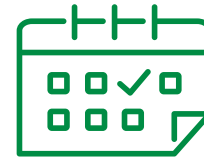
Reality Check reflects Ohio Excels' commitment to elevating system-level indicators to drive policy, advocacy, and outcomes. The goal is to improve education and workforce opportunities for every learner—no matter where they live or attend school. This is the ninth brief of a series of nine.



Attending school each day is the first, most basic step to student success. Consistent attendance is connected to social development, reading proficiency, academic performance, high school graduation, and preparation for a promising career. Unfortunately, too many of Ohio's students do not attend school regularly and are considered "chronically absent." Chronic absenteeism is defined in Ohio, and across most of the nation, as a student missing 10% or more of a school year for any reason — excused, medically excused, unexcused, or out-of-school suspensions. Studies show that not attending school — whether excused or not — negatively impacts students' performance.



25.6% of Ohio students miss at least **20 school days** (or **4 weeks**) per year.



Students who attend school regularly are:



6.7x more likely to read on grade level by the end of 3rd grade



9x more likely to graduate high school on time and go on to college and career³⁸

Why Does This Matter?

Every day of school matters. Research shows that missing just two days of school per month can leave kids trailing behind on foundational learning and social skills. Students who attend school regularly are more engaged in learning, have better mental health outcomes, and are prepared for future success.



Positive Momentum.

In 2019, the Cleveland Browns Foundation, Ohio Department of Education and Workforce, and Harvard's Proving Ground launched the **Stay in the Game! Attendance Network**, which works to dramatically improve attendance. Today, Battelle manages the Network, supporting 145 district partners representing more than 442,479 students across Ohio.



Districts engaged in the Network experienced a **2.9% decrease** in chronic absenteeism for 2024, building upon a **5.2% decrease** in 2023 and outperforming the state, which experienced **1.2%** and **3.4% decreases** over the same period.



41% of districts in the **Stay in the Game! Attendance Network** significantly outperformed the state, lowering chronic absenteeism between **8.5%** and **10.9%** in the 2022–23 school year.

Prevention and intervention approaches that are improving student attendance include setting expectations and deploying positive strategies to prioritize school attendance; analyzing data weekly and monthly to identify students who have missed one or two days in a month and intervening before a serious challenge emerges; building and using real-time local dashboards that consider attendance, academic progress, and student behavior data; and creating excitement for attendance across the school through shared goals and competitions that can be reset on a weekly or monthly basis to reward improved attendance.³⁹