



**Groundwork
OHIO**

Early Childhood Data Dashboard

February 2025



Key Takeaways

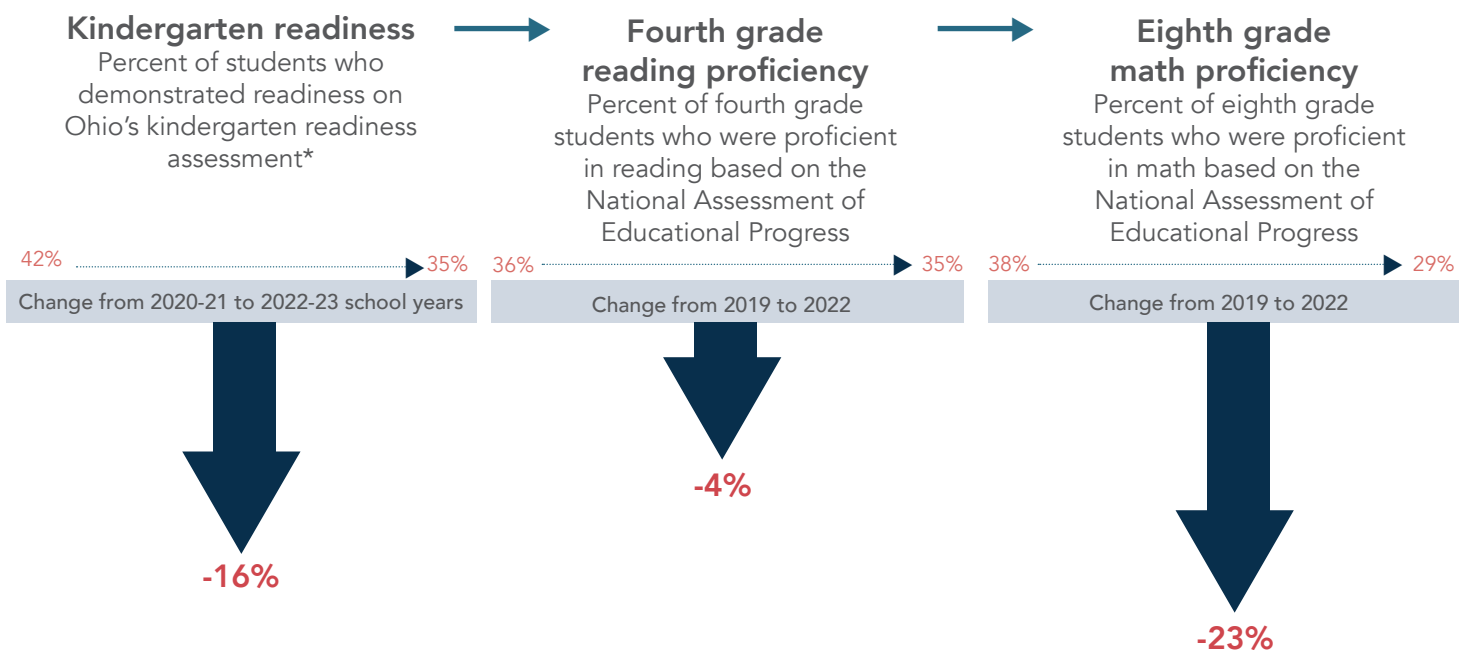
Ohio's youngest children need our support to reach their full potential.

What does the data tell us?

1 Too many Ohio kids are falling behind before they even set foot in a kindergarten classroom—and the gap only widens from there.

Kindergarten readiness offers valuable insight into a child's strengths, needs, and early experiences before entering the classroom. Research shows that kindergarten readiness strongly predicts future math and reading success. Early investment not only improves school readiness but also lays the foundation for lifelong achievement, setting Ohio kids on a path to academic and personal success.

Over the last two school years, kindergarten readiness for all Ohio children has dropped by 16%—an indication that more of our youngest aren't having the necessary enriching experiences in the first five years of life to be successful in Kindergarten and beyond. In fact, 65% of all kindergarteners in Ohio entered the classroom not ready to learn and this increases to 79% of economically disadvantaged students.



* Ohio Kindergarten Readiness Assessment Revised (KRA-R)

Source: Ohio Department of Education and Workforce, School Report Card data (2020-2021 school year, 2022-2023 school year)

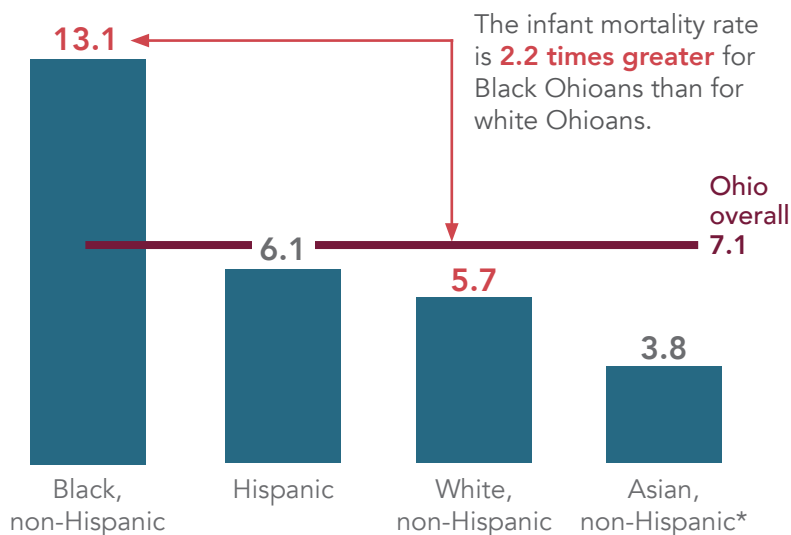
Source: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) Data Explorer (2019, 2022)

Key Takeaways

2 Ohio's moms and babies are facing a crisis with alarmingly high mortality rates.

Ohio's infant mortality rate remains significantly higher than the national average of 5.6 deaths per 1,000 births,³¹ **with a large and appalling racial disparity**. While Ohio has seen an overall decline in infant mortality since 2012, this progress is largely due to reductions in deaths among white infants while Black infants continue to face disproportionately high mortality rates.³² At the same time, maternal mortality in Ohio increased by 17% between 2011 and 2017, with research indicating that 80% of these pregnancy-related deaths were preventable.³³

Number of infant deaths, under age 1, per 1,000 live births (2019)



*Small sample size, interpret with caution.

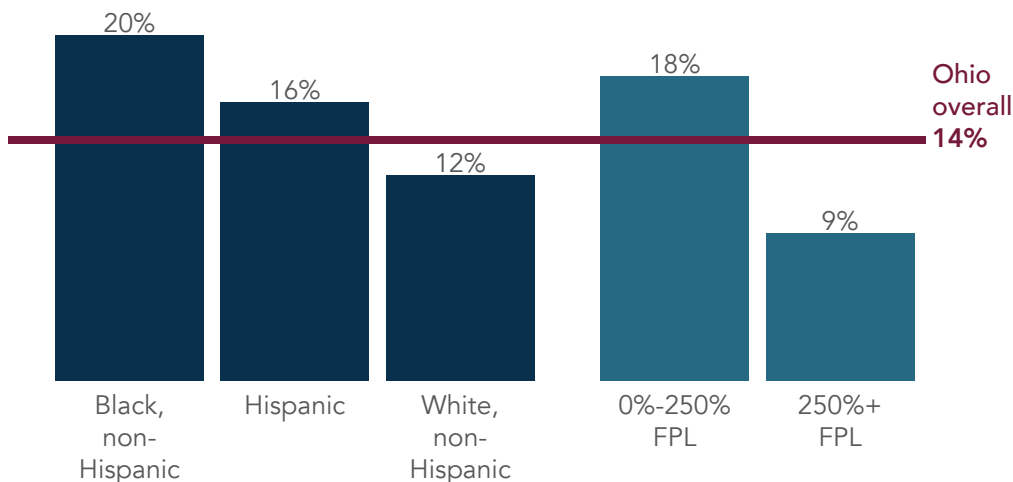
Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Wide-ranging Online Data for Epidemiologic Research (WONDER) (2022).

3 Ohio's youngest children experience profound trauma during their most critical years of brain development.

Exposure to adversity and trauma in childhood has both immediate and long-term negative impacts on health and well-being. Among Ohio's youngest children, 14% have experienced two or more Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) including abuse, household challenges, and neglect.

Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs)

Percent of children, ages 0-5, who experienced two or more ACEs



Ohio is ranked 30th of 50 states and D.C. for infant maltreatment, with over 3,000 children under the age of one being victims of maltreatment in 2022.³⁴ which is abuse and neglect under the In 2024, 5,963 children ages 0-6 were in Public Children Services Agency (PCSA) custody. This accounts for 42% of the total population of children in custody.³⁵

While programs exist to support the prevention of early childhood trauma, state-funded home visiting programs only reached 12,436 young children in the past year.

Source: Ohio Medicaid Assessment Survey (2021)

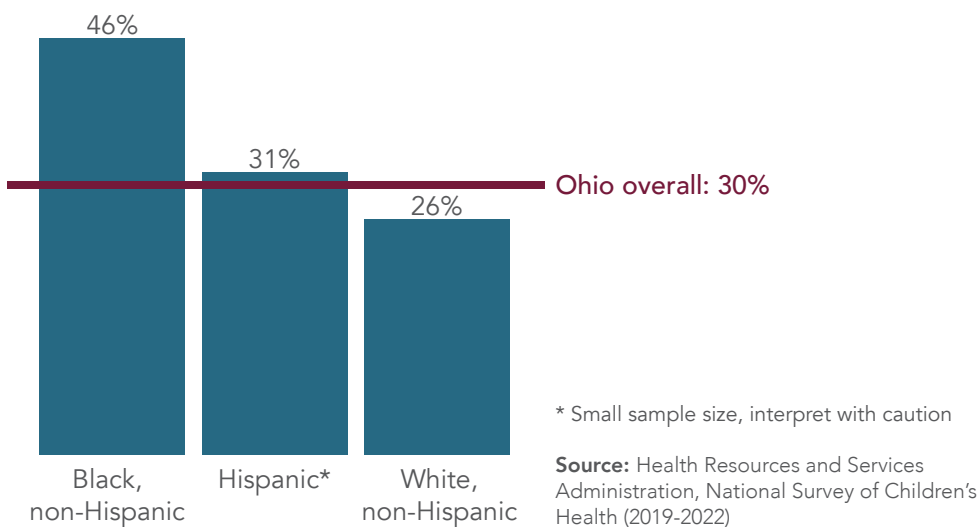
Key Takeaways

4 Ohio families with young children struggle to cover the basics.

Nearly 1 in 5 young children in Ohio live in poverty. While there has been some improvement in poverty rates since the 2023 *Dashboard* was published, which can be in part attributed to the federal Child Tax Credit expansion alongside other pandemic era relief, costs of basic needs have increased. One of those basic needs includes access to good, nutritious meals. Nearly 30% of children ages 0-5 were living in households that could not always afford to eat good, nutritious meals in the last 12 months. According to Prenatal-to-3 Policy Impact Center, Ohio ranks 44th in the U.S. for children experiencing food insecurity.³⁶

Food insecurity

Percent of children, ages 0-5, whose household could not always afford to eat good, nutritious meals in the past 12 months



5 There are family voices behind the data that are the experts of their own experiences and the solutions to their greatest challenges.

Behind every number, there is a real Ohio family with a story that deserves to be heard. Too often, their voices are missing from the narrative, leaving the numbers without the necessary context or meaning.

Ohio parents and caregivers want stronger connections with the systems they depend on and a say in shaping their children's futures. Research shows that amplifying family voices in policymaking delivers significant benefits—not just for individual children and families, but for the systems designed to support them. Listening to parents and caregivers is the key to turning stubborn trends and improving outcomes for Ohio's youngest children.

