

Groundwork Ohio

FAMILY VOICES

Project Report



Who is Groundwork?

Groundwork Ohio focuses on the time when children's experiences and environments most influence their health, development, and life trajectory: from birth to age 5. We work to ensure that every baby, toddler, and young child in Ohio has the resources and opportunities for a strong start. Groundwork advances quality early childhood systems in Ohio by engaging, educating, and mobilizing diverse stakeholders and strategic partners to promote data-driven and evidence based early

childhood policies. We elevate the voices of families and professionals who are impacted by our child-serving systems and seek to advance system-level changes that improve outcomes for Ohio's youngest children and their families. The Groundwork Ohio vision, shared by a breadth of diverse partners across the state, is to make Ohio the best place to be a young child so that every child can reach their full potential.

Who is RAPID?

The RAPID Survey Project is a program of ongoing national, state, and local surveys of caregivers of children under age 6. RAPID surveys are designed to better understand the experiences, needs, and well-being of young children and the important adults in their lives. Since its launch in April 2020, RAPID has been a powerful resource for uplifting the voices of parents/caregivers and early childhood educators. RAPID is now collaborating with Groundwork Ohio to implement an ongoing survey of families with young children in Ohio to promote the development of

data- and parent-informed programs and policies in the state. Together, we will field multiple surveys in Ohio to hear directly from parents on topics like their economic circumstances, well-being, and child care to better understand families' experiences. Forming collaborative, community-driven partnerships is core to RAPID's work. RAPID works alongside local organizations to amplify parent voices and enhance existing, community-led efforts that support families and children.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to all our local and statewide partners who recruited parents and caregivers to participate in this survey.

Thank you to the many parents and caregivers who generously provided us with their time and expertise.

RAPID

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Introduction

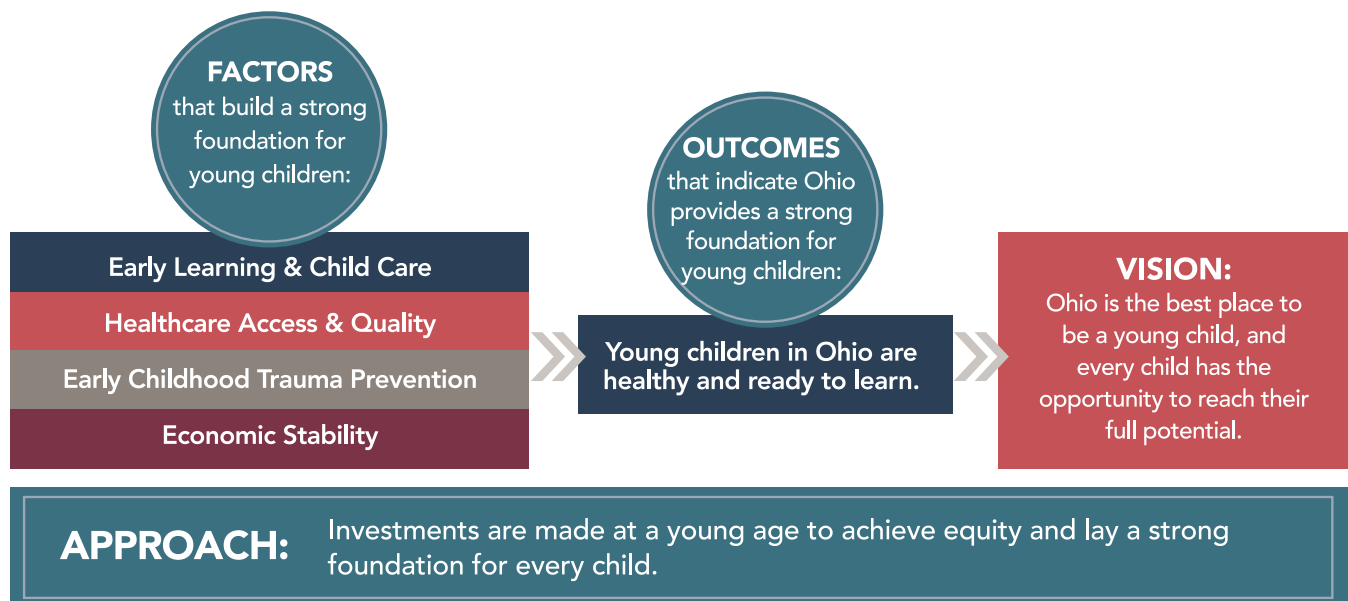
Groundwork Ohio is committed to amplifying the voices of families. The Ohio Family Voices Project reflects that commitment. This initiative—a collaboration between Groundwork Ohio and RAPID Survey Project based at the Stanford Center on Early Childhood—surveyed families with children under the age of six across Ohio. The goal of this project was to provide actionable insights to inform policies and programs that support Ohio’s youngest children and their families.

Data Drives Groundwork Ohio’s Policy Framework

One of the tools we use to hold ourselves accountable to our mission and vision is our Policy Framework. This is a framework for what policies are within the scope of our mission, based on data and evidence. Our vision is to make Ohio the best place to be a young child. To achieve that goal, we need to ensure that children are healthy and ready to learn. We have found that a child’s health and readiness to learn is largely influenced by four key factors: early learning and child care, healthcare access and quality, early childhood trauma prevention, and economic stability. Our policy work seeks to improve these factors to ensure that all children have a strong foundation.

We are committed to using quantitative and qualitative data to inform our work. In 2025, we will be releasing an update of our [Early Childhood Data Dashboard](#) that includes performance data for a number of metrics that enable us to track improvement over time and compare Ohio’s performance to that of other states. Each data point represents the experiences of real Ohio children and families. Family voices and storytelling play a central role in our work as parents are the experts of their own lives. The Groundwork Ohio Family Voices Project helps provide additional insight into the current experiences of Ohio families with young children.

Our Policy Framework



Ohio Survey

The survey was conducted between April 17, 2024, and May 9, 2024, with 755 parents who had at least one child under the age of six. Groundwork worked with our stakeholder network to ensure that the survey reached parents across the state and from all walks of life. Participants were asked to complete a 15-minute electronic survey and received a \$5 gift card for their participation. The survey gathered valuable information on various aspects of family life, including child and parent well-being.

This survey is the first in a series designed to gather direct input from parents and caregivers of young children and offers a comprehensive look at the challenges they face. The data collected from this survey will be used to help shape effective policies and programs.

The survey engaged:

755 parents & caregivers

who provided insights based on their experiences with

932 children

The survey captured the views of a variety of parents and caregivers across diverse demographics and socio-economic backgrounds.

This report presents our findings across our four key policy pillars:



Early Learning & Child Care: examining the availability, affordability, and quality of child care options.



Health Care Access & Quality: assessing the accessibility and quality of health care services for young children.

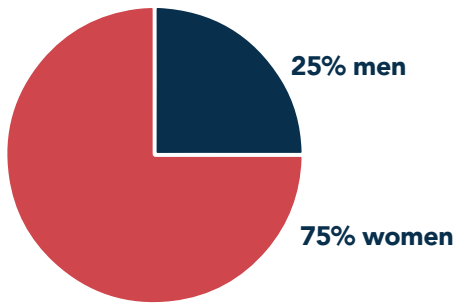


Early Childhood Trauma Prevention: identifying factors contributing to childhood trauma and strategies for prevention.



Economic Stability: understanding the financial challenges faced by families and their impact on children's well-being.

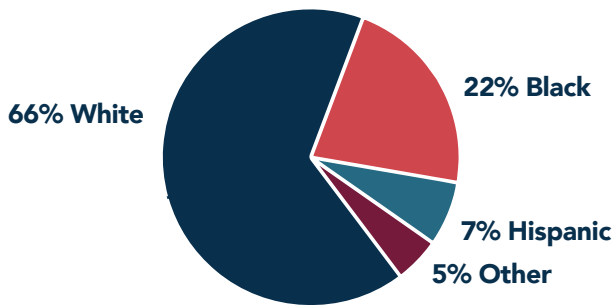
Demographics of Survey Respondents



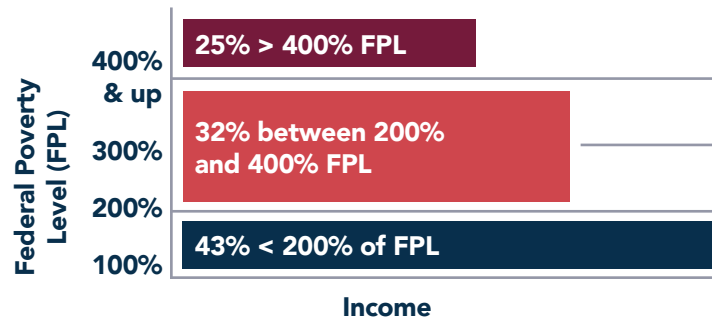
Family Structure



RACE AND ETHNICITY



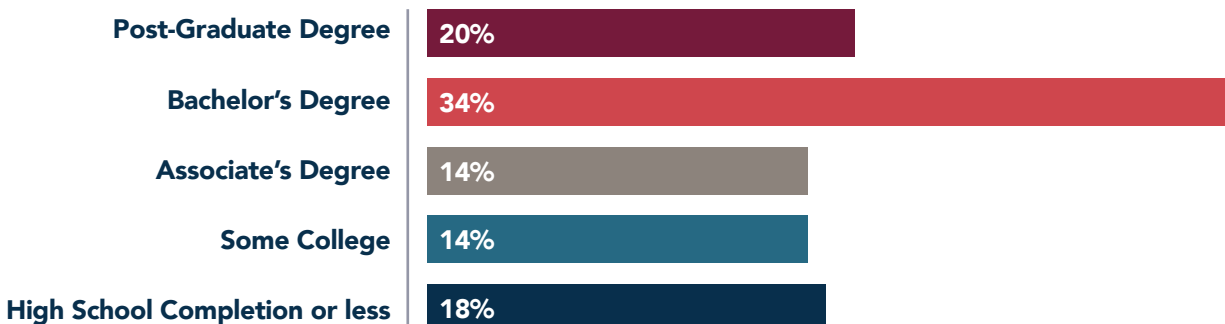
SOCIO-ECONOMIC



NUMBER OF CHILDREN IN THE HOUSEHOLD



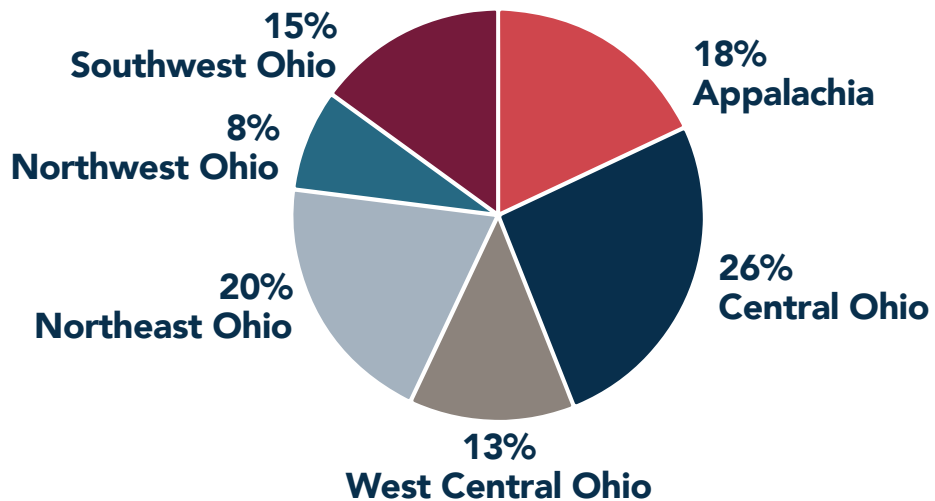
PARENT EDUCATION LEVEL



GEOGRAPHIC REGION



RESPONDENT REGION



Survey Highlights¹

Parenting is difficult and Ohio's families are experiencing stress as they navigate many barriers to support their children and themselves. These barriers limit access to quality health care and early learning experiences for their children, who have increasing unmet behavioral and developmental needs. Financial hardships create additional challenges for parents to access the services they need for their children to thrive.



Early Learning and Care

Child Care Subsidies are a Critical Support for Working Families, but Access is Limited.

- More than 1 in 3 respondents reported difficulty finding child care.
- Almost 60% of respondents felt that their current child care was not affordable.
- Almost 60% of respondents reported relying on Publicly Funded Child Care (PFCC) subsidies.
- More than 40% of parents reported difficulty finding a provider who accepts PFCC.

Health Care Access and Quality

Too Many Children are Missing Well-Child Visits.

- Almost 20% of parents reported missing a well-child check-up in the past year.
- Top barriers include the inability to get time off work (48%) and cost (41%).

Early Childhood Trauma Prevention

Many Parents Report Challenging Behaviors in Children.

- More than 70% of respondents reported concerns that their child was showing signs of emotional distress.
- More than 40% of respondents reported that they had concerns about their child's development and almost 50% expressed concerns with their child's behavior.

Caregivers Report High Levels of Stress and Could Use Additional Help.

- Almost 1 in 3 of respondents reported high levels of stress and 65% could benefit from additional resources and support for parenting.
- More than 1 in 3 parents reported that they were currently receiving support from a mental health professional.

Most Parents Have a Social Support System.

- More than 95% of parents reported having a social support system. Partners, friends, and parents were the most commonly cited sources of support.

Economic Stability

Most Parents are Working.

- More than 95% of respondents reported working and 20% reported working at more than one job.
- More single parents reported working more than one job—27% compared to 17% of two-parent households.

Many Parents Rely on Public Assistance Programs.

- Enrollment in Medicaid (27%), SNAP (16%), and WIC (13%) were most frequently reported.

¹ It is important to note that the proportions and percentages are calculated based on item-level response rates, not the total sample size. Additionally, the data for these analyses are not weighted, meaning they reflect raw counts and percentages without adjustments for population representation.

Early Learning & Child Care



The survey asked families about their child care needs and experiences to better understand early learning and child care across the state.

Key Findings

All Respondents

- **More than 1 in 3 respondents reported difficulty finding child care.**
- Almost 2 in 3 respondents who had a child with a disability experienced difficulty finding a child care provider who could meet the needs of their child.
- 71% of respondents reported using non-parental care in the past month and over half used center-based care.
- Over half of the respondents reported needing full-time care.
- **Almost 60% of the respondents felt that their current child care was not affordable.**
- Over half of respondents whose children were not enrolled in child care cited the expense of child care as the reason.
- 26% of respondents reported that their child care does not always align with their work schedule.
- 35% of respondents reported having to change their work schedule and 24% had to cut back their working hours in the past year due to disruptions in their child care arrangement.
- 15% of respondents reported that their child care was unreliable.

Respondents Receiving Publicly Funded Child Care

- 60% of respondents reported receiving Publicly Funded Child Care and 38% reported difficulty in maintaining subsidy once they had one.
- **40% of respondents receiving Publicly Funded Child Care reported difficulty in trying to find a provider that accepted it.**
- 24% of respondents reported it took more than three months from the time of application to start receiving Publicly Funded Child Care.
- 1 in 4 respondents receiving a child care subsidy reported that their copayment was not affordable.

“Shift work alternates between day and night, making it hard to find a single child care solution. Last-minute changes to the work schedule cannot be accommodated by child care providers.”

– Parent from Southwest Ohio

“I haven’t been able to return to work because I cannot find suitable child care.”

– Parent from West Central Ohio



Health Care Access & Quality



The survey asked respondents several questions to assess access to health care, particularly for preventive care. Preventive care, known as well-child visits for young children, is needed not only to prevent serious illness, but to track a child's growth and development. Children are developing rapidly from age 0 to 5 years old, and many issues can be more easily ameliorated if they are caught early.

Key Findings

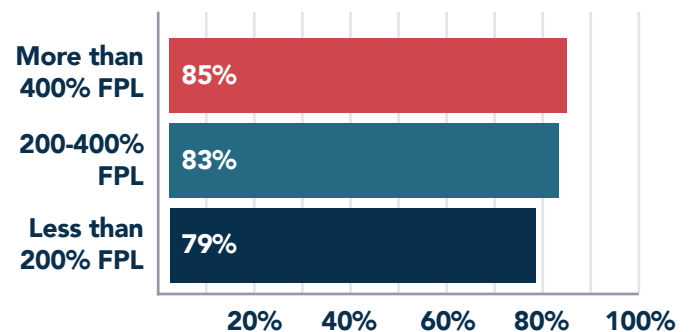
- **Nearly 1 in 5 parents reported missing a well-child check-up in the past year.**
- Children in households with lower incomes and those in single-parent households were more likely to miss well-child care visits.
- **The most common reasons parents were unable to get children to well-child visits were the inability to get time off of work (48%) and the cost of care (41%).**
- Almost 20% of parents reported that their child was not able to access timely care when sick and 22% reported not having timely access to a specialist.
- Parents with higher incomes (above 400% FPL) had fewer access issues; however, 15% reported not being able to access timely care for a sick child and 18% reported challenges with timely access to a specialist.
- One in 10 young children did not have a regular source of care, either from a pediatrician or primary care provider.
- Children in families with incomes between 200% and 400% FPL were least likely to have a regular source of care.

“Having health insurance and good medical resources to ensure that family members can receive timely treatment and care when they face health problems is helping me and my family the most right now.”

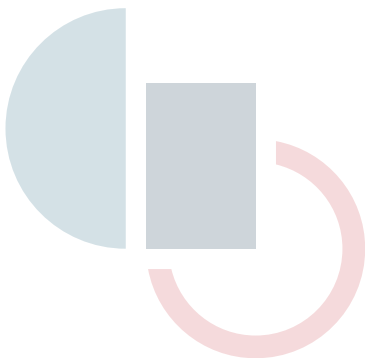
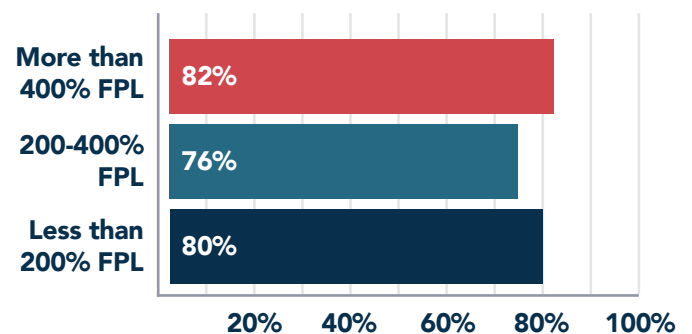
– Parent from Appalachia

CHILD HAD ACCESS TO TIMELY HEALTH CARE

When Sick



When Needed to See a Specialist



Early Childhood Trauma Prevention



The survey asked respondents questions to assess both parent and child well-being. Respondents were asked about concerns with their child's behavior and development and about signs of emotional distress in their children. Parents were also asked about stress levels related to parenting and their own emotional distress.

Key Findings

Child Well-being

- **Nearly 3 in 4 respondents expressed concerns about internal or external signs of emotional distress in their child.**
- 37% of respondents reported that their child had external signs (fussiness/defiance) of emotional distress in the past month while 26% reported internal signs (fearfulness/anxiety) over the same period.
- Fewer higher-income respondents expressed concern with signs of emotional distress in their child.
- More than 40% of respondents reported that they had concerns about their child's development and almost 50% expressed concerns with their child's behavior.

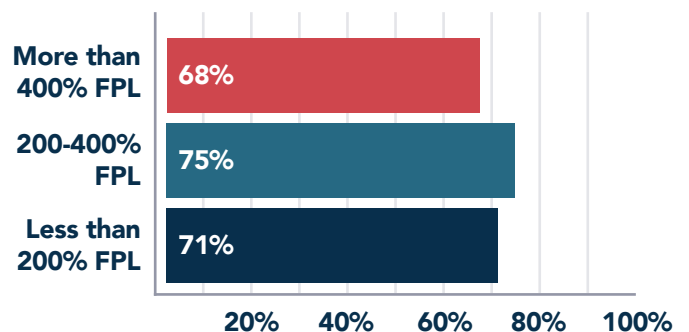
Parent Well-being

- **Nearly 1 in 3 respondents reported experiencing high stress related to parenting.**
- Fewer higher-income respondents reported experiencing high levels of stress related to parenting.
- More than 1 in 3 respondents reported that they were currently receiving help from a mental health professional.
- Most respondents (65%) said that they could benefit from additional resources on parenting and supporting their child's development.

"I don't feel like I am a very good mom when I am in survival mode. I do the bare minimum such as feeding them or changing them...but I don't do the things I know will benefit them, like reading to them or working on writing practice. It makes me feel I'm failing them."

– Parent from Northeast Ohio

Parents report overwhelming concern of emotional distress in their child regardless of economic status



"When I am emotionally stable, I am better able to understand my children's needs and provide them with timely care and support."

– Parent from Northeast Ohio

Economic Stability



The survey asked respondents about their education and income level, employment status, and about reliance on public benefits. Since we know that many people have lost coverage for public benefits due to the restart of the eligibility redetermination process following the end of the public health emergency, respondents were also asked about whether their benefits have changed over the past year.

Key Findings

- **Most parents are working (95%) and 20% reported working at more than one job.**
- More single parents reported working more than one job—27% compared to 17% of two-parent households.
- Many parents reported relying on public assistance programs (refer to chart below).
- **32% of respondents with incomes below 200% FPL reported that their benefits have decreased in the past year.**

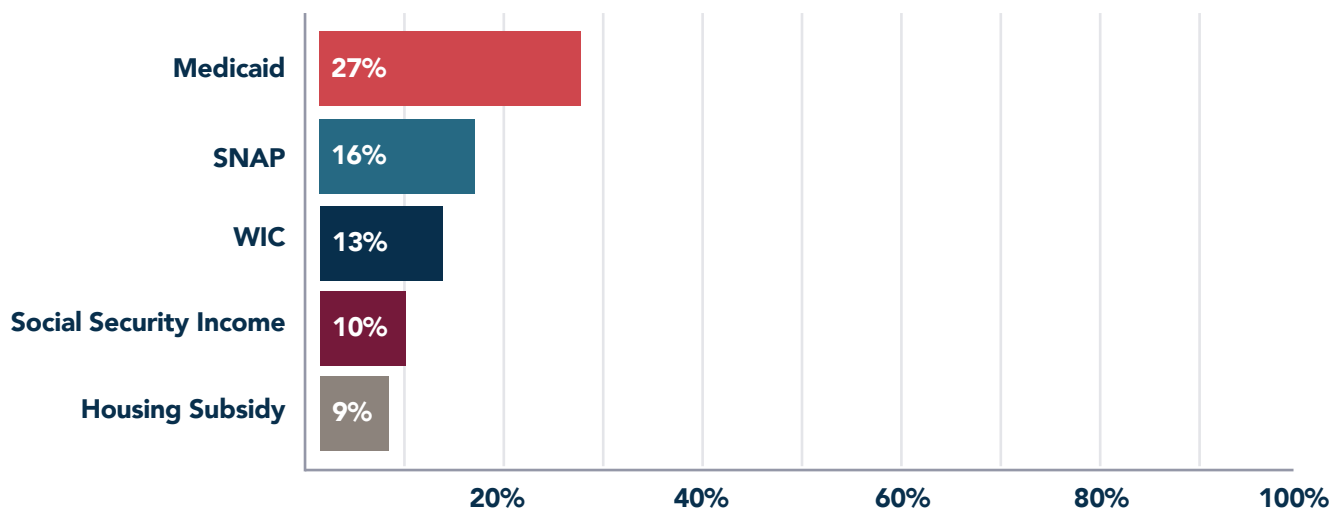
"I make too much to get assistance, but I don't make enough to pay the bills."

– Parent in Northwest Ohio

"Currently, one of the biggest challenges is managing the rising cost of living due to inflation. It can be tough to balance our budget and ensure we have enough for essentials like food, housing, and utilities as prices continue to rise."

–Parent in Central Ohio

Share of parents reporting use of public benefits



Next Steps

The Groundwork Ohio Family Voices Project highlights the multifaceted challenges faced by families with young children in Ohio. By addressing issues related to early learning and child care, health care access and quality, childhood trauma prevention, and economic stability, this report will inform effective policy and programmatic responses.

Groundwork Ohio will be releasing additional analyses of this data throughout the summer, and RAPID will be administering another survey in the winter of 2024 to provide additional insight into the needs and challenges of families with young children. The information collected in this survey will be used to help shape our policy agenda for the next state budget.



Learn more about the survey instrument. >>



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