

GREATER OWENSBORO

# Partnership for Early Development

## Igniting Owensboro's Can-Do Spirit: An Action Plan for Community-Driven Early Childhood Education

A Report by the Greater Owensboro Partnership for Early Development

January 20, 2022



Photo by Lonnie Harp



**The  
Prichard  
Committee**

Building a Groundswell  
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**PUBLIC LIFE  
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Greater Owensboro has a strong heritage of joining together to solve challenges and build better lives for our citizens. We are a community rich in opportunity, poised for growth in the years and decades ahead because of our can-do spirit.

The time is right to build upon these successes and take the next steps to make Greater Owensboro the best place to learn, live, work, and play. The research is clear - the path to opportunity for all begins with the start we provide to our youngest children ages 0-8.

Access to early childhood education is critical to the success of Greater Owensboro. Exposure to high quality early childhood education has shown to close gaps in achievement for all children throughout their educational and life experiences. Children who participate in early learning arrive at kindergarten prepared, ultimately increasing their likelihood of securing proficiency in reading and math by the close of the third grade. Such gains in early learning mean that these same children are 40% less likely to drop out of high school.<sup>1</sup>

Providing early childhood education access builds the future workforce of the community, while supporting Greater Owensboro's current workforce. The lack of available early childhood education has substantial annual costs in lost earnings, business productivity, and tax revenue. In Kentucky, the lack of high quality and affordable early childhood education for working families accounts for \$573 million in lost earnings, business productivity, and tax revenue.<sup>2</sup>



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<sup>1</sup> "Progress and Next Steps for Early Childhood in Kentucky: Birth Through 3rd Grade. The Prichard Committee: Early Childhood Education Study Group, 2015. <http://prichardcommittee.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/ECE-Study-Group-Report-2015.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> Bishop-Josef, S., Beakey, C., Watson, S., & Garrett, T. (2021, June 2). Want to Fix the Economy? Fix the Child Care Crisis: Workers and Employers Feel Pain in Pocketbooks and Productivity. The Infant-Toddler Child Care Crisis Inflicts Economic Damage Across the Nation. <https://strongnation.s3.amazonaws.com/documents/602/83bb2275-ce07-4d74-bcee-ff6178daf6bd.pdf?1547054862&inline;%20filename=%22Want%20to%20Grow%20the%20Economy?%20Fix%20the%20Child%20Care%20Crisis.pdf%22>

Investments in high-quality early childhood education result in higher rates of educational attainment, a reduction in health costs, a reduction in the incidence of crime, less demand for social welfare services, and a more competitive local economy for Greater Owensboro.

All in the community stand to gain from this work. Nobel Laureate economist James Heckman released research in 2016 that found: Every dollar spent on high-quality, birth-to-five programs for disadvantaged children delivers a 13% annual return on investment. Children are not the only beneficiaries – the economic benefits of the additional wages earned by parents with access to high-quality care are capable of paying for any costs associated with developing a high quality early childhood education system.<sup>3</sup>

In response to this data, The Public Life Foundation of Owensboro asked a broad array of local stakeholders to join the Greater Owensboro Partnership for Early Development, which over an eight-month period:

- Met seven times for in-depth discussion and review of early childhood education (ECE) research.
- Examined Greater Owensboro's ECE landscape and access to ECE programs for children from birth to age 5.
- Considered opportunities, challenges, and costs to re-imagine the early childhood ecosystem of Greater Owensboro.
- Discussed lessons learned from other communities with innovative ECE models; and
- Developed recommendations to significantly expand access to ECE programs over the next 5 years, creating a pathway forward for all Greater Owensboro children to have the opportunity for quality early learning to thrive in school and life.



Photo by Lonnie Harp

***Creating a pathway  
forward for all Greater  
Owensboro children to  
have the opportunity  
for quality early  
learning to thrive in  
school and life.***

<sup>3</sup> Heckman, J., Garcia, J., Leaf, D., Prados, M., Center for the Economics of Human Development at the University of Chicago. The Life Cycle Benefits of an Influential Early Childhood Program. Working Paper 2016-035. (Dec. 2016). [https://heckmanequation.org/assets/2017/01/Garcia\\_Heckman\\_Leaf\\_etal\\_2016\\_life-cycle-benefits-ecp\\_r1-p.pdf](https://heckmanequation.org/assets/2017/01/Garcia_Heckman_Leaf_etal_2016_life-cycle-benefits-ecp_r1-p.pdf)





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## Current ECE Landscape

To gauge the current accessibility of high quality early childhood education throughout Greater Owensboro, the committee consulted with The Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence and The Martin School of Public Policy at the University of Kentucky. The Greater Owensboro ECE landscape analysis found:

### 1. Significant gaps exist in Kindergarten-readiness for children throughout Greater Owensboro.

- On average, approximately 49% of Greater Owensboro students arrived at Kindergarten unprepared as reported by the Brigance screener in 2019-2020.
- On average, approximately 59% of economically disadvantaged students, 76% of students with disabilities, and 75% of English learning students arrived at kindergarten unprepared in Greater Owensboro.

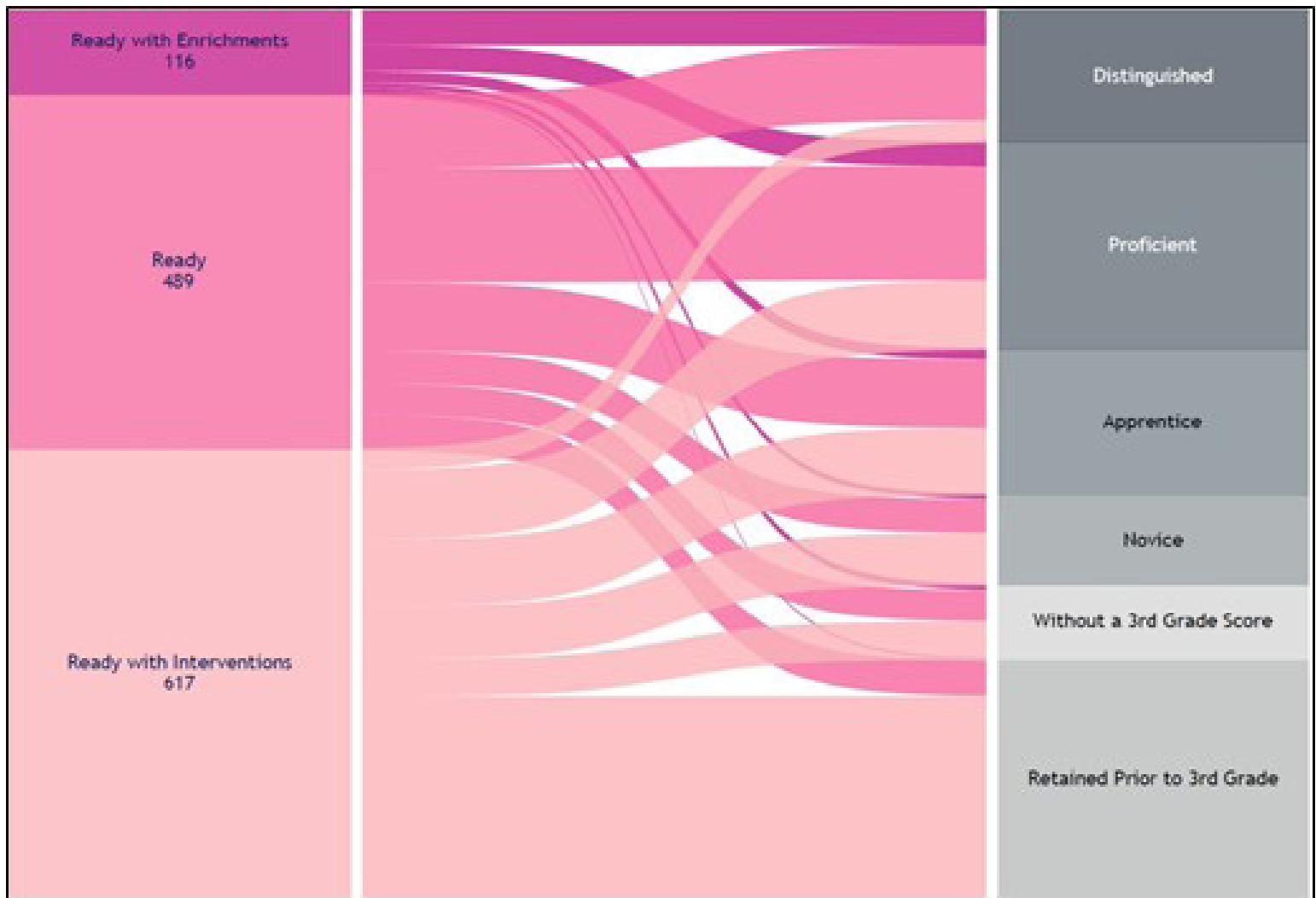
Source: 2019-20 Kentucky School Report Card

### 2. Greater Owensboro students who score below the kindergarten readiness level have a strong likelihood of failing to reach proficiency on the 3rd grade reading test.

- On average, 46.9% of Greater Owensboro students failed to reach reading proficiency by the close of 3rd grade as reported by 2018-2019 K-PREP scores.
- On average, approximately 55% of economically disadvantaged students, 69% of students with disabilities, and 63.5% of English learning students failed to reach reading proficiency by the close of 3rd grade in Greater Owensboro.
- Students who do not score Ready on the kindergarten readiness screener have a weaker likelihood of scoring proficient or distinguished on the 3rd grade reading test.

Source: 2018-19 Kentucky School Report Card





Source: Kentucky Center for Statistics, 2020  
Early Childhood Profile, follows individual  
students from kindergarten readiness screener  
to 3rd grade state KPREP assessment

*Students who scored below the readiness threshold in 2016 were highly likely to be retained before 3rd grade or to score novice or apprentice on the 3rd grade reading assessment. Meanwhile, students who met the kindergarten readiness standard were more likely to meet proficiency.*



Photo by Lonnie Harp



### 3. Only about 20% of Greater Owensboro children under age 5 have access to ECE services.

- The U.S. Census estimates that 6,773 children under the age of 5 reside in Greater Owensboro.
- Kentucky's 2020 Early Childhood Profile estimates that across Greater Owensboro:
  - 267 children receive care in self-contained Head Start or Early Head Start programs.
  - 383 children are served through Head Start and Public Preschool or in blended programs.
  - 700 children are served in a self-contained Public Preschool program.
  - Of 6,773 children in Greater Owensboro, only 1,350 are enrolled in the above ECE services.
- Additionally, there are 39 licensed child care centers that serve children under the age of 5, as well as one certified family child care home in Greater Owensboro.
- While collectively these providers are permitted to enroll no more than 3,787 children, it is likely that actual enrollment is below this capacity limit.
- The Early Childhood Profile indicates that 613 Greater Owensboro children received support through the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) in 2021. These data are our only indicator of private child care enrollment.

#### Public Preschool

- Daviess County Public Schools has Public Preschool classrooms in 12 elementary schools. Owensboro Public Schools operates the program in partnership with Head Start in the Hager Preschool and Seven Hills Preschool.
- The standard state model includes a half-day program four days a week, with the fifth day reserved for teachers to meet with families, prepare curriculum materials, and evaluate data.
- Prior to March 2020, Daviess County used the standard half-day, 4 day a week model, Owensboro has been able to operate a full-day, 5-day-a-week model through its partnership with Head Start.
- The 2019-20 Kentucky School Report Card shows that a total of 720 children attended preschool in Daviess County and 218 attended preschool in Owensboro Public Schools.





	Daviess County Public Schools	Owensboro Public Schools
African American	3%	19%
Asian	5%	<5
Hispanic or Latino	6%	11%
Two or more Races	6%	16%
White (not Hispanic)	79%	52%
Economically Disadvantaged	65%	85%
Students with Disabilities	41%	24%
English Learner	<5	<5
Foster Care	1%	<5
Migrant	1%	<5
Total	720	218

Source: 2019-20 Kentucky School Report Card "total student count"

## Child Care

- Data from the Cabinet for Health and Family Services as of July 2021 includes 39 licensed child care centers that serve students under the age of 5, as well as one certified family child care home.
- In total, these providers are permitted to enroll no more than 3,787 children.
- While Daviess County is not a child care desert, the data broken down by Census tract suggest that certain areas of the county may be child care deserts, most dramatically in the northwest part of the county.
- The Early Childhood Profile indicates that only 613 Daviess County children received support through the Child Care Assistance Program despite 3,434 children under age 6 living at or below 150% of the federal poverty level.
- On average Daviess County families pay about \$7,800/year for infants, \$7,670 for toddlers, and \$7,280/year for preschool children to attend private child care centers.







## Early Head Start and Head Start

- Audubon Area Community Services is one of 25 programs in the nation to receive national Program of Excellence designation by the National Head Start Association. It offers full-day, year-around services in 10 sites across the county, as well as a home-based visiting model.
- Gaps are most pronounced for infants and toddlers, with the number of eligible children well exceeding the availability of Early Head Start slots.
- According to Audubon's 2018 Needs Assessment for Daviess County, an estimated 822 infants and toddlers in Daviess County are eligible for Early Head Start, with funding for 120 slots.
- 551 young children in Daviess County are estimated to be eligible for Head Start, with 357 funded slots.

## 4. Access to Quality ECE Services is Not Universal

- A range of quality in licensed and certified ECE services exists in Daviess County as defined by programs participating in Kentucky's All STARS system.
- Daviess County has 8 child care providers at four or five stars (these include licensed Early Head Start and Head Start sites).
- 14 public preschool programs have reached five stars.

	Licensed Centers and Certified Homes	Public Preschool
	7	14
	1	0
	13	0
	1	0
	17	0

## 5. Disparities in Workforce Development & Professional Pay Create Gaps in Access to Quality ECE Services

- According to the Labor Market Information Report from the Kentucky Center for Statistics, across the Green River Local Workforce Area, an estimated 650 individuals are employed as child care workers.
- Their mean hourly wage is \$10.21 and median is \$9.77. In Kentucky, child care educators must have a high school diploma or equivalent, but they can access state-funded scholarships to receive a Certified Development Associate (CDA) credential.
- In Head Start and Early Head Start programs in Daviess County, all teachers have bachelor's degrees and all assistants must receive a CDA in their first year on the job.
- Preschool teachers in the public schools receive the same salaries and benefits of K-12 teachers according to each district's salary schedule and compensation package.
- They must have a bachelor's degree with an Interdisciplinary Early Childhood Education (IECE) teaching certificate, which prepares them in early childhood development and special education.



Photo by Lonnie Harp



## The Greater Owensboro Partnership for Early Development's 6-Point Plan ECE Services

**Recommendation 1:** Launch a public advocacy campaign to encourage community-wide support of quality Early Childhood Education.

Every community member in Daviess County - families, educators, business owners, and community leaders - must understand how access to quality ECE services benefits not only parents with young children, but the community as a whole.

**Recommendation 2:** Implement Early Childhood Education talent development and retention strategies to meet Early Childhood Education workforce needs.

The Governor's Office for Early Childhood developed an innovative apprenticeship program aimed at developing high quality ECE educators for students in their final two years of high school. Students can earn an ECE credential under the direction of an ECE mentor during a co-op experience. A similar program exists for adults interested in earning a child care director credential.

Individuals enrolled in either program are eligible to receive a full-tuition scholarship for an Associate's Bachelor's, and/or Master's degree in Early Childhood Education through Kentucky Higher Education Assistance Authority.

State resources currently exist to build a high quality ECE workforce in Daviess County.

**Recommendation 3:** Implement employee-based child care partnerships among employers and child care centers.

Small, midsize, and large businesses can be incentivized to offer child care employee-benefits to all employees. Public-private partnerships, federal tax incentives, and a matching grant available through the Kentucky Division of Child Care are each pathways to growing child care benefits for Greater Owensboro employers.

**Recommendation 4:** Identify and enroll all families eligible for the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) subsidy and sustain CCAP eligibility to 200% of the federal poverty level and make all children within 200% of the federal poverty level eligible for public preschool.

Innovative community partnerships with organizations such as The Center of Owensboro, Audubon Area Community Services, and/or Owensboro Public Schools/Daviess County Schools can close gaps in access for enrollment in the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) for families at or below 200% of the federal poverty level.

Additionally, community groups such as the Greater Owensboro Chamber of Commerce can advocate for the Kentucky Legislature to make CCAP eligibility at 200% of the federal poverty level permanent and to raise public preschool eligibility to 200% of the federal poverty level to reduce barriers to ECE learning for low and middle income families.



Photo by Lonnie Harp



**Recommendation 5:** Raise the quality of all child care centers to 3 STARS or above and clear the Head Start, preschool, and child care waiting lists for all children under age 5.

The Daviess County Child Care Community Council can partner with entities such as Child Care Aware and/or Lakeshore Learning to coach child care centers rated below 3 STARS to raise their quality ratings.

Audubon Area Early Head Start and Head Start, Owensboro Public Schools, Daviess County Schools, and the Daviess County Child Care Community Council can be surveyed to compile a list of families currently on their waiting list. Local philanthropy can be utilized to minimize barriers to ECE entry and secure a funding source to clear waiting lists.

**Recommendation 6:** Utilize data to monitor for continuous improvement of educational outcomes for children enrolled in Early Childhood Education programs.

The research is clear that access to high quality ECE services for children under the age of 5 increases kindergarten-readiness and proficiency in literacy and numeracy by the close of the 3rd grade. Kindergarten-readiness and proficiency in literacy and numeracy by the close of the 3rd grade must be evaluated using the appropriate state mandated measures in the years following the implementation of the above recommendations.

## A Call to Action

Quality of life begins with the start we provide to our children. The community partners represented in this body of work stand united to develop an early childhood education system capable of preparing all children to thrive.

The Greater Owensboro Partnership for Early Development understands that the release of this report is only a first step. The change we seek is an investment in the community's most precious resource - its next generation.

We invite all to join us as we take the next steps together in creating a community in which all children have the opportunity for quality early learning to thrive in school and life. In doing so, we make Greater Owensboro the best place to learn, live, work, and play.



Photo by Lonnie Harp



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**Matthew Robbins**, Superintendent, Daviess County Public Schools  
**Dr. Scott Williams**, President, Owensboro Community and Technical College  
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**Amanda Epley**, Director of Child Care, Owensboro Family YMCA  
**Erica Wade**, Executive Director, The Center of Owensboro-Daviess County, Inc.  
**Sherry Baber**, Preschool Coordinator, Owensboro Public Schools  
**Chris Westerfield**, Preschool Coordinator, Daviess County Schools  
**Candance Castlen Brake**, President and CEO, Greater Owensboro Chamber of Commerce  
**Hannah Thurman**, Director of Talent Programs, Communications, and Events, Executive Director of Leadership Owensboro, Greater Owensboro Chamber of Commerce  
**Brandon Harley**, Deputy CEO, Audubon Area Community Services  
**Amanda Huff**, Director, Daviess County Early Childhood Community Council  
**Keith Cottoner**, Executive Director, The H.L. Neblett Community Center  
**Janet Land**, Preschool Director, Settle United Methodist Church  
**Linda Wahl**, Director (Retired), Building Stronger Families  
**DJ Johnson**, Representative, Kentucky House District 13  
**Suzanne Miles**, Majority Caucus Chair, Kentucky House District 7  
**Clay Ford**, Partner, EM Ford  
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**Stephanie Bertram**, Director of Resource Development and Marketing, Ohio Valley United Way  
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**Rosemary Conder**, Executive Director (Retired), CASA Ohio Valley  
**Candi Kamuf**, R.N. HANDS Program Manager, Green River District Health Department  
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### Partnership Staff:

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