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**Study Committee on Ohio's Publicly Funded Child Care and Step Up to Quality Program**

**Case Western Reserve University, Center on Urban Poverty & Community Development  
Interested Party Testimony  
March 16, 2022**

Thank you, Co-Chairs Senator Cirino and Representative White, and Committee members for this opportunity.

My name is Rob Fischer and I am an associate professor at the Jack, Joseph and Morton Mandel School of Applied Social Sciences at Case Western Reserve University. I also co-direct the Center on Urban Poverty & Community Development, an academic research institute at the Mandel School. In my more than 20 years at the Mandel School, I have led a broad array of studies of early childhood education (ECE) in Cuyahoga County, including of the County's UPK program since its inception.

I wish to make two main points. First, investments in early care and education programs have led to meaningful changes in the quality of ECE programs as represented in the Step Up to Quality (SUTQ) star rating scale. Second, research demonstrates that children that emerge from higher quality ECE environments are better prepared for kindergarten and the challenges of the early grades of formal schooling. SUTQ provides a needed framework for understanding and advancing quality in these settings and also provides an important market signal for families as they seek the best care for their children.

Early on our work heavily focused on efforts to increase the quality in UPK settings in Cuyahoga County. Using an observational tool, the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale-Revised (ECERS-R), we found that over one year UPK settings showed an average increase of 18% in quality. The largest gains were found in the subdomains of personal care routines (30% increase) and activities (35% increase). These gains are substantial for a one year period of investment in these center-based programs and the quality gains observed map directly on to the areas of program capacity articulated in the Step Up to Quality tiers.

Our research has also included substantial work to investigate the outcomes for children in UPK settings. We tracked samples of children enrolled in UPK Settings and directly assessed them with tools such as the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (PPVT) and the Woodcock Johnson III: Letter/Word Recognition (WJ-LW) and Applied Problems (WJAP). The results showed that children's achievement improved especially for children who were most at-risk at baseline (started below the 50th percentile). The magnitude of the gains for the most at-risk children exceeded the gains expected from simply having a preschool experience, and were comparable to the

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gains found in larger-scale ECE quality initiatives around the country. Similarly, Children enrolled in the UPK showed statistically significant gains in school readiness as measured by the Bracken School Readiness Assessment over the course of the year. Statistically significant gains were found on all five subscales of the Bracken School Readiness Assessment, including colors, letters, numbers/counting, size/comparison, and shapes.

Our latest research has focused on measuring the effects of high quality ECE on children as compared to children enrolled settings of lesser quality. For this federally-funded research we tracked children using data from school districts in Cuyahoga County to observe their Kindergarten Readiness Assessment as measured at entry to kindergarten. Crucially, we used statistical techniques (Propensity score matching) to identify a comparison group of children who did not attend UPK, but were similar on a wide array of individual, family and neighborhood level covariates. Sixty-six percent of children who had sustained enrollment in UPK were 'On-track' for Language and Literacy at kindergarten entry, compared to 47% of similar children who had sustained enrollment in a non-UPK ECE site. This translates to 40% greater odds of a child being on-track for language and literacy at kindergarten entry due to UPK. Followed to 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade, this comparison also demonstrated a statistically significant advantage on the third grade reading assessment for the children who had sustained enrollment in UPK.

Taken together, our research shows that efforts to enhance quality preschool programs have paid off, and more importantly, children enrolled in these settings show measurable and statistically significant benefits when they enter kindergarten and on to third grade. Additionally, our findings reinforce the value of sustained enrollment in high quality settings including the benefits of getting two full years of preschool. The path to achieving and sustaining quality in ECE settings requires public investment and support. SUTQ provides an essential framework for providers to advance the quality of care they provide, so that children are best positioned to be successful as they enter school.

Thank you for your time and attention. I will be happy to answer any questions from the committee.



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