

Ethnographic investigation regarding the findings in childcare systems

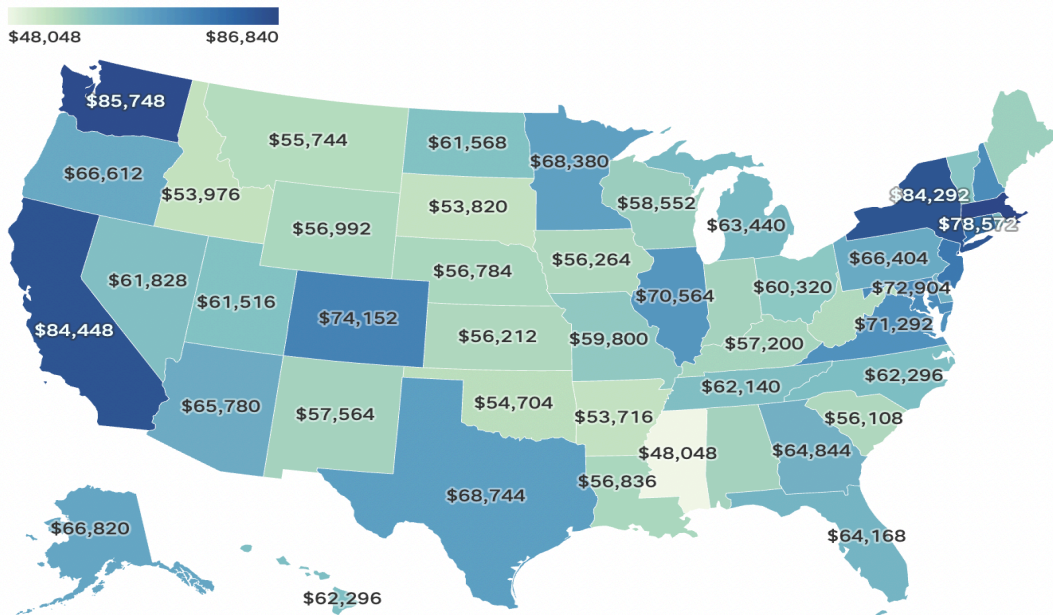
Audrey Carrico

Underfunded and Overcharged

A study and showcase regarding the findings within childcare and its financial variables, structure and resources.

Envision a single parent. Assume they work a full time job that pays them just enough to earn Ohio’s current state average salary. Now, imagine dedicating 39% of that income to childcare services. Is it worth it?

Average annual salary by state



Data breakdown of Ohio’s average salary per year. Data provided | [USA Today Blueprint via Bureau of Labor Statistics](#)

In 2023, the hashtag #TeacherQuitTok sparked national debate after teachers around the country shared their stories of burnout and their decisions to leave the field on Tik Tok. “I teach 7th grade and my kids are still performing on a 4th grade level,” says Marquis Bryant, a teacher in Atlanta. In another video, a daycare teacher shares that she left her lead position to take on

nannying full time, expressing that she would earn up to \$20 an hour in comparison to her previous wage of \$13.50. While both complaints are valid, there is a glaring denominator. The system needs fixing.

In a state that requires and mandates K-12 education, questions loom as Ohio has seen a continuous decline in both enrollment and overall student growth. Coincidence? Not likely. Between the continuous rise of prices and inflation, a ripple effect may be taking place within the state's education system. Wanting what's best for your kid and what makes sense for your family realistically should coincide with each other. Unfortunately, the harsh reality is that the expenses of childcare and early childhood education are rising while household incomes are struggling to keep up.

While there are a few options "available" for families, it's becoming increasingly more difficult to find care that is both safe and cost effective.

Full Time Nannies- provide families with one on one attention for their child. The daily rate for this care ranges between \$15 to \$20 an hour on average in Ohio

Daycare/Childcare Facilities- introduce students to classroom environments and expand their social and emotional growth. Currently in Ohio, families are paying on average anywhere between \$6,000 to \$10,000 a year to use fulltime services

Built in care (grandparents)- while cheap and reliable, the guarantee that each family has immediate family in the area is hard to come by

As a result, there is a growing concern that children are falling more and more behind in the basic areas of reading, comprehension and overall developmental growth. Within the guidelines of the Ohio Department of Education, experts assess that students should obtain the ability to read and write their own name, count to ten, understand the difference between

uppercase and lowercase, and comprehend that pages and words run left to write (Preparing for Kindergarten Success 2-8). Latest statistics show otherwise as the ODE’s 2022-2023 data showcased that over 30% of Ohio’s kindergarten students were unable to meet “classroom ready” standards. In addition to concern, a 2024 study constructed by the Thomas B. Fordham Institute revealed that 14 of Ohio’s 25 largest cities have seen a decrease in student enrollment since the pre-pandemic era.

	SCHOOL DISTRICT	COUNTY	2018-19 ENROLLMENT	2022-23 ENROLLMENT	ENROLLMENT CHANGE VS 2019
1	Columbus	Franklin	48,928	44,981	↓
2	Cincinnati	Hamilton	35,977	35,222	↓
3	Cleveland	Cuyahoga	37,701	34,928	↓
4	Olentangy	Delaware	20,819	22,429	↑
5	South-Western	Franklin	22,656	21,742	↓
6	Toledo	Lucas	23,160	21,163	↓
7	Akron	Summit	21,181	20,103	↓
8	Lakota	Butler	15,603	16,962	↑
9	Dublin	Franklin	15,709	15,939	↑
10	Hilliard	Franklin	15,998	15,889	—
11	Westerville	Franklin	14,822	14,231	↓
12	Ohio Virtual Academy	N/A	12,702	13,502	↑
13	Dayton	Montgomery	12,700	12,215	↓
14	Pickerington	Fairfield	10,403	11,014	↑
15	Worthington	Franklin	10,063	10,523	↑
16	Mason	Warren	10,096	9,887	↓
17	Parma	Cuyahoga	9,805	9,192	↓
18	Hamilton	Butler	9,898	8,934	↓
19	Fairfield	Butler	9,215	8,884	↓
20	Northwest	Hamilton	8,597	8,093	↓
21	Gahanna-Jefferson	Franklin	7,699	7,973	↑
22	Centerville	Montgomery	8,012	7,954	—
23	Beavercreek	Greene	7,857	7,804	—
24	Canton	Stark	8,402	7,733	↓
25	Kettering	Montgomery	7,598	7,732	↑

Display chart of Ohio’s largest school district enrollment. Data provided | Thomas B. Fordham Institute

Data aside, there’s a developing sense of guilt festering inside of Ohio households. “I struggled for months to find a childcare center that fit the needs of my two children,” says

Brittany Hicks, a mother of two from Delhi, Ohio. After a strenuous search, Hicks found it would be more beneficial to make the daily thirty-minute drive across the bridge where she enrolled her children into Skidaddles Child Care of Florence, Kentucky. “I tried an in-home center near my house,” says Hicks. “It turned out they were running a shoe business simultaneously just to make ends meet.” While her children Katiya (4) and Anya (3) are provided with balanced learning objectives and early childhood programs, it comes at a hefty price as Hicks and her husband pay nearly \$1,600 a month and up to \$19,000 a year for full time care.

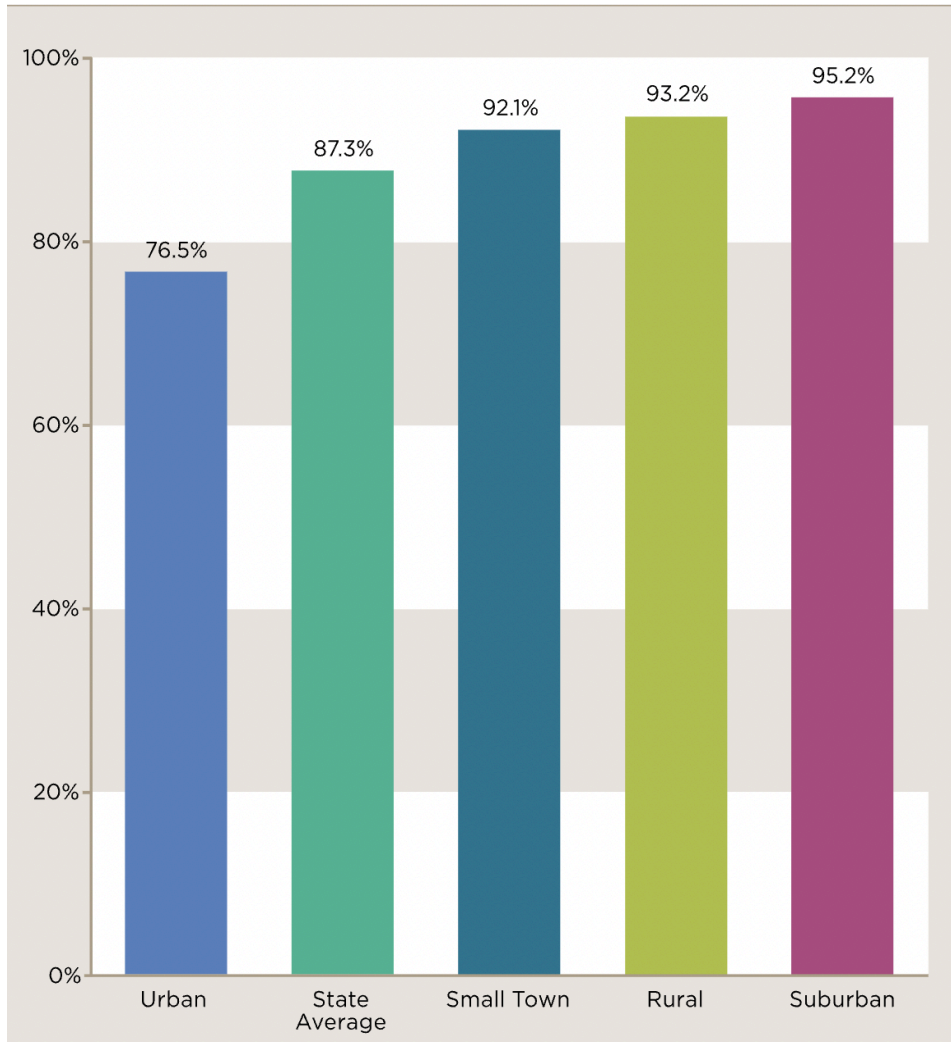
For Hicks and families statewide, there’s a double edged sword that’s forced middle to lower class households to choose between safe, effective care and affordable care. “It wasn’t an easy choice,” says Hicks. “My husband brings in most of our income right now while I’m finishing my degree. On the other hand, I have to prioritize Kat and Anya’s development, you know…” she pauses, “I can’t solely carry the weight of their education right now.” While Hicks acknowledges how lucky her family has been to both afford and find care that meets their needs, others aren’t as lucky.

Historically, child care services have catered to families of guaranteed wealth. According to Kathryn Poe of Policy Matters Ohio, a recent study from the Economic Policy Institute showed that child care is only affordable to the top 12% of family incomes (Poe, 4). To register at most facilities, families are required to pay anywhere between \$50-\$75 just to enter their child on a waitlist. “We are often notified of a mother’s pregnancy before they tell their own families,” says Barbara Herron, the Executive Director at the University of Cincinnati’s Empower Learn Create Child Care Center. “Children who start with us as infants often stay in our program until they graduate preschool, which often backs our waitlist up anywhere between 10 to 18 months,”

says Herron. With no guarantee of enrollment, many families don't have the luxury of spending money on multiple enrollment fees.

With long waitlists comes few options. Despite the negative label on teachers in America, educators have faced all-time lows in their salaries. Child care workers have been hit the hardest in Ohio as the median hourly wage sits at just \$13.15 –an hour (Poe, 7). Add in financial losses from the pandemic and facilities are left short staffed. The domino effect has led numerous centers to either shut down or increase their rates. As urban communities struggle with the financial burden, many rural areas in Ohio are left without an option. With 40% of Ohioans living in a child care desert, children are once again faced with educational disadvantages.

Unfortunately, families in child care deserts may already be reaping the effects. Another 2023 study led by the Thomas B. Fordham Institute showed urban areas in Ohio had a graduation rate of just 76.5% while suburban areas were listed at 95.2%. To break that down, suburban areas make up the most child care facilities while rural areas are provided with the least amount of early educational opportunities. Many experts around the country agree that stages from birth to age three can have the most impact on a child's development. If true, why does the price of such success come at a premium?



Graduation rates in the state of Ohio. Data provided | Thomas B. Fordham Institute

For starters, Ohio is yet to have conducted a cost of care study. These studies usually help show state officials and lawmakers where the social and economic disparities are. While federal and local governments stay on top of inflation increases and ever growing prices, child care studies haven't quite received the same attention. On the flipside, centers and facilities have raised their child care prices to meet profitable needs. "We're proud to say we've only adjusted our prices once within the last 10 years," says Herron. "That's a statistic that most places haven't had the luxury of discussing." Herron's statement rings true. According to Columbus, Ohio journalist Alissa Widman Neese, the cost of child care has increased up to

220% over the last 30 years. With rates not expected to diminish, families are turning to the local and federal lawmakers to reach their breaking points.

All these glaring statistics and stories lead many to one question. How can change be made? For starters, families and more importantly single-parent households would heavily benefit from an increase in state child care reimbursement. Currently, Ohio ranks in just the 35th percentile. In today's structure, most consumers wouldn't break even on that value without an increase to the 60th percentile. The Biden Administration recently released a mandate that could raise nationwide reimbursement to the 50th percentile.

In addition to funding, centers and educational programs are in dire need of funding. Allowing child care workers and teachers to make a liveable wage would likely slow staff turnover rate and draw emphasis to the position as a whole. Staff increases would bring in more financial stability and allow programs to accept more students which thus would lower waitlists for families in need. Finally, an increase in state assistance could provide low-income households with assurance and stability to provide their children with safe and affordable care. While each of these tasks may be easier said than done, the concern for Ohio's education system may have flown under the radar for far too long.

Sample Research

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