

INVESTING IN AFFORDABLE, ACCESSIBLE *Early Learning*



About SEI

Summit Education Initiative (SEI) is committed to increasing personal and regional prosperity through educational attainment. As a backbone organization, SEI brings together key stakeholders to advance a cradle-to-career approach, ensuring all Summit County children have access to high-quality early learning experiences that set the foundation for lifelong success. Through data-driven decision-making, strategic collaboration, and innovative policy recommendations, we aim to create lasting change in the community.

Context

Ohio ranks last in the nation for childcare provider reimbursement, making it difficult for providers to retain staff and for families to access consistent, quality care. The average family spends \$11,000 annually per child, and the limited eligibility for subsidies leaves many middle income families without affordable options. Providers are forced to raise fees or limit capacity, reducing access and increasing instability for working parents.

The lack of quality child care for children ages three and younger is costing our country \$122 billion a year in lost earnings, productivity, and revenue. **Ohio's economy alone loses an estimated \$3.9 billion per year due to child care issues.** U.S. Chamber of Commerce studies show that half of all workers and nearly 60% of parents cite lack of child care as their reason for leaving the workforce, and one in three unemployed women are not returning to the workforce because they must provide care for a family member.

Kindergarten readiness is a critical indicator of future academic success. According to **SEI's KRA dashboard**, only 48% of Summit County children are considered proficient in language and literacy upon entering kindergarten, well below the goal of 80%. High-quality universal prekindergarten (HQUP) programs have been shown to positively impact learning and development, build socio-emotional skills, reduce school dropout rates, improve workforce preparedness, and increase economic earnings in adulthood. Local support for HQUP programs is strong—Akron's Mayor, Shammias Malik, endorsed their development during his campaign, and SEI's First Things First Collaborative Action Network has found widespread support among over a dozen local early childhood learning agencies.



Policy Priorities

EXPAND ACCESS TO AFFORDABLE CHILDCARE:

- **Increase publicly funded childcare eligibility from 145% to 200% of the federal poverty level (FPL)** (\$55,000 for a family of four) and cap family co-pays at 7% of their income with a \$300 million allocation. This will provide relief to middle-income families who currently struggle to afford care but do not qualify for subsidies. Expanding access will allow more parents to participate in the workforce, reducing their reliance on other forms of public assistance, and filling critical employment gaps.
- **Ensure adequate provider reimbursement** by increasing state funding to competitive levels, enabling providers to retain skilled staff and expand capacity to serve more families.
- **Increase access to Child Care Choice Vouchers** to families earning between 161% and 200% of the FPL.
- **Support a refundable income tax credit of \$1,000** to alleviate the financial burden on families and enhance access to early learning opportunities.
- **Identify and determine level of support for legislation outside of the operating budget** (i.e.: HB 7, HB 2)
- **Support Early Literacy & Intervention**

MODERNIZE OHIO'S CHILDCARE FUNDING INFRASTRUCTURE:

- **Allocate \$100 million to update the reimbursement system and align payments with the actual cost of care.** Currently, Ohio ranks last in the nation for childcare provider reimbursement. By creating a funding model that reflects true costs, Ohio can reduce financial instability for providers, increase capacity, and improve access for families.
- **Streamline the application and renewal processes across state programs will reduce the administrative burdens on families and providers.** Consolidation can create efficiencies that ensure families receive support without delays, allowing parents to remain in the workforce.

SUPPORT EARLY LITERACY & INTERVENTION:

- **Increase funding for early intervention services** to ensure timely support for children experiencing developmental delays or literacy challenges.
- **Streamline the referral process for early childhood intervention** to improve family access to critical resources and support services.

How We Advocate

SEI collaborates with local, state, and national partners to advance policies that support student success. Through data-informed recommendations, community engagement, and coalition building, we ensure that policies reflect the needs of students, families, and educators.

PARTNERS & COALITIONS

Our Collaborative Action Networks are groups that join forces to solve specific community problems. They work together, share ideas, and use data for more significant impact than individual efforts.

- **First Things First Collaborative Action Network**
- **Cradle to Career Steering Committee**