



Cuyahoga County Universal Pre-Kindergarten

High quality pre-kindergarten gives children a firm foundation for educational success. Research indicates that children in high quality pre-k programs make gains in early literacy, pre-reading, and early math; have more positive interactions with peers and adults; and are better prepared for kindergarten.

In response to this compelling research, Invest in Children launched the Universal Pre-Kindergarten (UPK) program in August 2007. UPK in Cuyahoga County makes high quality early care and education accessible to families at selected sites by providing funding to enhance quality, as well as scholarship assistance to low and moderate income families. Although states and communities across the country are implementing similar programs, UPK in Cuyahoga County is the first such program in the state of Ohio. Currently we are serving up to 4,900 children in 67 sites throughout Cuyahoga County that were selected via a competitive Request for Proposal process.

UPK sites include public preschools, Head Start programs, community child care centers, and family child care homes. All UPK sites meet a series of standards, proven through research to be the hallmarks of quality that result in improved school readiness. These standards include increased teacher qualifications and commensurate compensation, lower staff to child ratios, use of approved curricula, engagement of families, and family linkages to necessary supportive services. Starting Point, the regional child care resource and referral agency, serves as lead agency on this effort, and partners with Invest in Children to provide technical assistance and training to all UPK sites.

All UPK teachers and staff have attained or are working towards an appropriate college degree. All programs utilize research-based curricula and all center-based programs maintain a one-to-ten staff to child ratio. Ongoing professional development is provided to all sites and each staff person must have a personalized professional development plan. In addition, each program prepares a parent engagement plan in collaboration with parents and also receives additional training and support to serve children with special needs.

In addition to providing resources to enhance the quality of programs, supplemental scholarships are provided to families at or below 400% of the federal poverty level to reduce the parent contribution and make UPK more affordable.

An independent evaluation conducted by Case Western Reserve University has found that our UPK model is successful at improving quality in sites, as well as preparing children for kindergarten. Children who enter the program with the lowest school readiness are the ones who have benefitted the most from the UPK experience.

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