

preschool PROMISE

What is the Montgomery County Preschool Promise?

Preschool Promise, Inc., is an initiative in Montgomery County, Ohio, designed to help children start Kindergarten on track and be ready to learn. It "promises" one year of affordable, high quality Preschool to families who choose to send their 4-year-old to a participating Preschool Promise provider in Dayton or the City of Kettering, a Dayton suburb.

In time, the goal is to make Preschool Promise available throughout Montgomery County. Our County has 500,000 residents, with an estimated 6,500 children turning 4 each year. The largest concentration of children lives in Dayton, the region's center city.

Preschool Promise is promoting Kindergarten readiness by:

- Educating our community about the positive impact of high quality Preschool on children's Kindergarten readiness.
- Increasing the quality of instruction at Preschools and expanding the number of high quality Preschool seats.
- Assisting families in finding and paying for high quality Preschool.



All families who have a child turning 4 by September 30 of the requisite school year and who live in Montgomery County are eligible to join Preschool Promise. They must enroll their child in one of more than 75 participating Preschool Promise programs. Their options include school district Preschools, Head Start programs, commercial child care providers and family child care providers.

To become a Preschool Promise provider, programs must be Star-Rated under Ohio's [Step Up to Quality](#) rating and Improvement initiative or in the process of earning a Star Rating. Tuition assistance is available only at programs that have actually earned a Star Rating distinction. Financial help is awarded based on need and also is designed to incentivize families to choose a highly rated Preschool. Family size, household income and the Star Rating of the program the family chooses are the three factors that determine the amount of tuition assistance a family receives.

All families, regardless of income, are eligible for some tuition assistance. That said, our tuition assistance schedule is weighted in favor of lower-middle income families who are not eligible for, or who are receiving very little, government childcare assistance.

Our financial model leverages all available state and federal funding first, before tapping local dollars to provide tuition assistance. Families who are just over the cut-off for programs such as Ohio's Publicly Funded Child Care system receive significant financial help. To see the tuition assistance table, click [here](#).

Because strong attendance is critical to getting children ready for Kindergarten, Preschool Promise is intensely focused on encouraging families to make sure their child is at Preschool every day and on time. With this goal in mind, Preschool Promise has adopted a Star Attendance reward program. Dayton families receive \$25 on a reloadable debit card for each month their child has a 90% or better attendance rate. At the end of the year, they receive \$100 if their child has had a 90% or better rate for the school year.

All Preschools that partner with Preschool Promise have a continuous improvement mindset and must adopt an approved Continuous Improvement Plan. In return, providers are eligible to receive stipends to advance their continuous improvement work; in addition, their teachers receive free individualized coaching and professional development.

- More than 75 programs in Dayton and Kettering joined Preschool Promise for the 2018-19 school year.
- More than 1,700 4-year-olds attended participating Preschools in 2017-18.

Who directs Preschool Promise?

Preschool Promise, Inc. is a 501(c)(3) and is led by a five-person Board of Directors. Debbie Feldman, President and CEO of Dayton Children's Hospital, is the 2017-18 Board Chair. Executive Director Robyn Lightcap leads Preschool Promise's dedicated staff.

What is the history of Preschool Promise?

Background: In 2007, Montgomery County's Family and Children First Council, with special support from Montgomery County Commissioner Debbie Lieberman, helped launch an early learning initiative. By 2009, the early learning initiative had a full-time staff person whose focus was determining how Montgomery County could improve children's Kindergarten readiness. (This early learning initiative became part of [Learn to Earn Dayton](#), the region's cradle-to-career effort focused on increasing the number of adults with a college degree or post-high school credential.)

Data was collected from all of Montgomery County's 16 school districts to understand how families were preparing their children for Kindergarten. Our research partner at the University of Dayton documented that children who had attended a high quality Preschool were scoring higher on Ohio's mandated Kindergarten Readiness Assessment. This data spurred our community to take up the challenge to systemically increase the number of children who attend a high quality Preschool.

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2014-15 and 2015-16 Pilot Years: In 2014, Kettering City Schools offered to pilot Preschool Promise. The district's school superintendent secured financial support from the Kettering City School Board, the City of Kettering and Montgomery County; each entity committed \$80,000 annually for three years. This initial effort was a small pilot focused only on offering part-day Preschool and providing tuition assistance only to the lowest-income families. We learned quickly that part-day Preschool does not

meet the needs of working families, and that our low-middle income families struggle the most to afford to send their child to a quality Preschool.

2015: The Montgomery County Commission created a task force to develop recommendations for expanding the pilot Preschool Promise beyond Kettering. Composed of 25 business, community and early childhood leaders, the task force was led by Debbie Feldman, the CEO of Dayton Children's Hospital (and previously the Montgomery County Administrator) and Dave Melin, Dayton Regional President for PNC.

The group met monthly over nearly eight months to review national and local research and universal Preschool models in other cities such as Denver, San Francisco and San Antonio. It then presented recommendations to the County Commission in November 2015.

The report emphasized a 3-pillar approach that included marketing the importance of sending children to a high-quality Preschool; improving the quality of Preschools in our community; and offering tuition assistance to make quality Preschool more affordable. Click [here](#) to read the task force's full report; a 1-page summary is [here](#).



2016-17 Demonstration Year: At the task force's urging, Montgomery County invested \$1.2 million to expand Preschool Promise beyond Kettering and offer the program in Northwest Dayton. An additional \$1.1 million was raised from private and public funders to support the expansion. Contributors included the City of Dayton, the City of Kettering, Kettering City Schools, Dayton Public Schools, The Dayton Foundation, CareSource Foundation and other private donors.

In this expansion year, we served 800 children, who were enrolled at 35 Preschool Promise providers. To meet this target, we launched an aggressive marketing campaign and developed a family-friendly application process. To drive up program quality, we provided robust coaching and substantive professional development. We also instituted a data-driven evaluation system.

Our evaluation component is critical. We want to know: What efforts aimed at improving instruction have the most positive impact on children's skills and readiness for Kindergarten?



We collected child outcome data using nationally recognized assessments (Bracken, Head Toes Knees Shoulders/HTKS), and we did CLASS assessments of all Preschool Promise classrooms. We also collected attendance and Family Engagement self-assessment data. Our outcomes report, with findings from the 2016-17 School Year, can be found [here](#); a 1- page summary is [here](#).

Fall of 2016: Dayton Mayor Nan Whaley, a champion of Preschool Promise, took up the challenge of identifying sustained funding to offer Preschool Promise citywide. Mayor Whaley and her four fellow city commissioners asked Dayton voters to approve a 0.25% earned income tax increase to support Preschool Promise; to improve police and fire protection; for street repairs. The 8-year levy passed overwhelmingly in November 2016 with 54% of the vote. Today Preschool Promise has \$4.3 million in dedicated annual funding to support Dayton's young learners.



2017-18 School Year: Because of Dayton voters, Preschool Promise expanded across the City of Dayton in 2017-18. It also continues in Kettering, thanks to continued investment from Montgomery County, the City of Kettering and the Kettering City Schools. Our 2017-18 goal was to reach at least 1,200 4-year-olds. Just over 1,700 children joined Preschool Promise, and their families had a choice of 74 Preschool Promise sites.

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Our 2017-18 evaluation efforts are underway. We again collected Bracken assessments and began using the Minnesota Executive Function Scale assessment (instead of Head Toes Knees Shoulders/HTKS). For a second year, we conducted CLASS to measure the quality of teacher-child interactions.

[Here's](#) a PowerPoint presentation that includes data about the 2016-17 School Year and what we learned, as well as initial data for the 2017-18 school year.

How is Preschool Promise funded?

In addition to the dedicated proceeds from the City of Dayton's earned income tax increase that provides \$4.3 million in annual support for Dayton's Preschool Promise, Montgomery County continues to provide anchor funding for Preschool Promise in Kettering and in Dayton, with additional support from the Kettering City School District, the City of Kettering and private funders. Preschool Promise's budget for Fiscal Year 2018 is \$5.6 million.



For more information, visit preschoolpromise.org or contact Robyn Lightcap at Robyn.Lightcap@learntoearndayton.org.