



because the first 5 years matter

Recommendations from the Parent and Family Voices Committee 2022



There's power in trusting & listening to families

Something magical happens when families come together to share, listen and dream together. In Dayton, we have seen this magic up close with our **Parent and Family Voices Committee**.

“If you had a magic wand, what would you change?” This is the first question we asked a group of 22 families raising young children in Montgomery County, Ohio, in July 2021.

One-by-one, answers poured out. The participants had thoughtful, innovative ideas, many of which could fix how well-meaning governments and helping agencies too often fail in their support for families with young children. **This discussion was just the start of a year-long journey together to create an action plan by families and for families, outlining how to change systems to support caregivers and prepare children for success in Kindergarten and beyond.**

We came up with creative solutions to support families who might otherwise struggle to attend and be fully present during each session. We provided child care and hired a therapist to host a wellness hour before each meeting. We provided transportation when needed. And we helped families make connections to local helping agencies.

Each meeting prompted thoughtful conversation and a willingness of the participants to hear each other's voices.

To our committee — thank you for your openness, support, and willingness to foster change.



HOPE VUTO
Senior Manager
Parent & Family Voice
Preschool Promise

Recommendations

The following recommendations were developed by families for families and represent the work that will continue to be done by Preschool Promise and our partners for years to come.



ACCESS TO SERVICES

1. **Create a universal application system for local assistance programs** so people only have to enter information once.
2. **Change the way income-based cutoffs are calculated** to include more families experiencing poverty.
3. **Provide all families access to a trusted advocate** that will help them apply and problem solve around barriers to accessing services.
4. **Take steps to remove biases against fathers in assistance systems** and educate fathers about their rights.
5. **Improve customer service** experiences when applying for services.

CHILD CARE

1. **Increase number of teachers/specialists trained to help children with different developmental needs** and complex behavioral challenges.
2. **Increase teacher pay to a living wage** to improve teacher performance/effort/retention.
3. **Make child care free for working parents** or increase the amount of money you can make and stay on title 20.
4. **Increase individualized attention** in the classroom for every child.
5. **Create more safe spaces for children to talk about and process** what is going on at home or outside the classroom.

PRENATAL/POSTPARTUM SUPPORT

1. **Universal home visits available to every new parent** or kinship care provider between birth and first postpartum visit.
2. **Extend home visiting past age 2** so a family can keep their home visitor up to age 5.
3. **Provide all families access to a trusted advocate** that will help them apply and problem solve around barriers to accessing services.
4. **Provide wellness checks and mental health referrals** to every new parent or kinship provider.
5. **Create free community support groups for parents** to connect and talk about topics like feeling isolated, postpartum depression, miscarriages, etc.



FINANCES

1. **Change the way income-based cutoffs are calculated** to help more families **move beyond poverty** without losing benefits suddenly.
2. **Increase community and school-based financial literacy programs** to help families get ahead of the benefits cliff.
3. **Ease the burden of pre-existing debt through lower monthly payments** or **debt forgiveness** programs for families with young children 0-5.

"The recommendation I am most passionate about is providing wellness checks and mental health referrals to every new parent or kinship provider."

-Erinn Odon Committee member

MENTAL HEALTH

1. **Include regular mental health screenings for caregivers** during prenatal and well-child visits.
2. **Support free or affordable mental health services** for all primary caregivers.
3. **Provide more opportunities for caregivers** to connect with each other through community activities, parenting groups, mental health support groups, and/or peer support networks.
4. **Increase the requirements for cultural awareness and anti-bias trainings** to healthcare and assistance providers to improve customer service.
5. **Increase mental health services available for infants and toddlers** in childcare and early learning settings including classroom-based specialists and interventions.



A message from your co-hosts

Thanks to the 22 families on the Parent & Family Voices Committee, our group has an action plan of ways to change and improve systems that support families with children 0-5.

Due to the feedback from this team, we were able to narrow down this group to a steering committee that will advocate for change with local and state government and agencies. This group will be comprised of 5-10 families that will connect with community leaders and non-profits to influence change and form strategic relationships to work towards a common goal.

We look forward to continuing to work with this committee for years to come and can't wait for your voices to be heard. Thank you for supporting Preschool Promise and young children and families in our community.



HOPE VUTO
Co-host



QUIANA BICKHAM
Co-host

Meet the members of the Parent & Family Voices Committee



Janice Bowers

"As a Mom, Grandma and retired teacher I believe the best way to advocate for children is to SHOW UP!"

Kelsee Leigh Brown

"I want to advocate for young children because providing safe, positive spaces for children to develop and express themselves appropriately will change the world for generations to come."



Eugena Smith-Archie

"I want to make sure my children have everything they need to be successful citizens in our community. I want to be a voice for minority children in my community."



Raya Anderson

"I continue to advocate for kinship families to ensure we are equally served and supported with resources."



Ashley Dale

"I am here to advocate for affordable child care for all children. I also advocate for individualized learning plans for all children."



Dewayne Eslick Sr.

"I am most passionate about the recommendation that fathers should receive equal rights and the same treatment mothers get. I just want to be a voice from the male perspective."

Kimberly Lawson

"I am passionate about changing the cutoff limitations for working families to get assistance. I advocate for all children to have access to high-quality childcare regardless of income status."



Wilma Lawson

"I advocate for the recommendation that all families with young children should have access to a trusted advocate who can help them apply for services and get on the right track."



Dana Franks

"I am advocating for more mental health services within child cares and schools. Throughout the pandemic it became obvious that schools are far more than buildings where kids learn to read."



Damona Murdock

"I am passionate about mental health supports for families with young children. I believe that every young child and parent should have a place to go and talk."





preschool PROMISE

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2251 Timber Lane,
Dayton, OH 45414
(937) 329-2700

Continued from pg. 7



Erinn Odon

“The recommendation I am most passionate about is providing wellness checks and mental health referrals to every new parent or kinship provider.”



Brandy Davis

“I’m most passionate about the recommendation around teaching financial literacy early for our youth, as it’s not taught in publicly funded schools, which leaves our children at a disadvantage when they become young adults.”



Sasha Jackson

“The recommendation I am most passionate about is increasing individualized attention in the child care classroom. I choose this because a lot of children don’t get the one-on-one help and attention they need.”



Brittney Demma

“I am advocating because I struggled to find individualized care for my child with eating challenges. Now having found it has made an exponential impact and improvement on his overall physical, emotional and social health and has allowed him to flourish.”



Sheree Waldren-Watson

“I advocate for children because without them we’re nothing. We have no future to look forward to without our children.”



Hope Vuto

Co-chair



Quiana Bickham

Co-chair

Not pictured:

Jamie Taylor

Deborah Jean Garvin

Patricia Hall

Eun’Que Alston

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