

BUILDING GREATER AKRON'S UNIFIED EARLY LEARNING SYSTEM

The Case for Action

In our community, we share a bold vision: every family should have access to **high-quality early learning**, and every child should **start kindergarten ready to learn and thrive** because kindergarten readiness forms the cornerstone of lifelong success. However, children in Summit County too often begin their educational journey without the support they need. Last school year, **only 47%** of children across the county entered kindergarten demonstrating readiness in language and literacy—**far below the 80% goal** set by local nonprofit Summit Education Initiative.

We also know from research that quality goes beyond State regulations and ratings. A **truly strong early learning system supports families, ensures sustainability for providers, builds a stable and well-supported workforce, and creates real opportunities for growth** across every type of program.

Investing in early childhood isn't just the right thing to do for children; it's a smart **economic development strategy**. It helps parents stay in the **workforce, strengthens small businesses, and creates quality, stable jobs** that fuel our local economy.

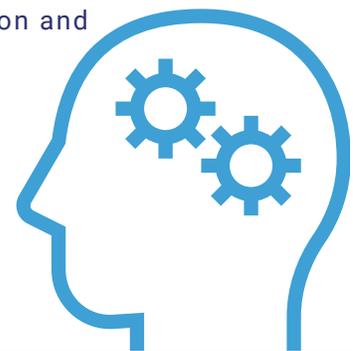
Our Starting Point

Phase 1 represents an intentional investment in expanding a shared definition of "quality" to reflect the full range of **supports needed for children, families, and providers to thrive**. This first step tests how a **mixed-delivery system**—including centers, family child care homes, Head Start, and the school district—can deliver high-quality care, equitable early learning in Akron and Barberton.

The design is **grounded in best practices** from around the nation and **informed by Summit County's early childhood experts**.

“*Launching this first step in our long-term strategy for early learning is key to my administration's **Growing Together** pillar.*”

— Akron Mayor Malik 2025



12 Months, Beginning Fall 2025

- Mixed-delivery approach with seven providers in **Akron** and one in **Barberton**
- Focused on **ages 0-5**, whole-family supports, provider sustainability, and workforce development



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Phase 1 Components



BUSINESS SUPPORT

Strengthens the business and leadership infrastructure of early learning providers, addressing sustainability, workforce retention, and quality improvement.

Business Development



Supporting the Many Hats of Owners & Operators

WHY?

Child care owners wear many hats — teacher, director, bookkeeper, HR, and more — all while keeping classrooms running.

WHAT?

Expert support with finances, HR, compliance, and planning so providers can focus on children and families.

Leadership Development

Strong Leaders, Strong Programs

WHY?

Many child care directors are isolated and stretched thin, managing complex programs with little support.

WHAT?

Training, coaching, and peer learning to strengthen leadership, management, and advocacy skills.

Recruitment, Training & Placement

Finding the Right Staff

WHY?

Child care programs struggle to find and keep qualified staff, and turnover creates constant administrative burden on providers.

WHAT?

A coordinated system to recruit, prepare, and place candidates into open roles across providers.

Substitute Pool

Keeping Classrooms Open



WHY?

Without back-up staff, classrooms close and teachers miss out on training — disrupting children's learning, families' schedules, and workforce growth.

WHAT?

A shared pool of trained substitutes that keeps classrooms open and allows staff to participate in professional development.

Professional Development

Growing Educator Skills

WHY?

Educators often have limited access to ongoing, high-quality training to grow their skills.

WHAT?

Continuous learning opportunities to improve classroom practice and children's outcomes, including curriculum from University of Akron's Center for Structured Literacy.





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INTEGRATED WRAPAROUND SUPPORT

Invests in a coordinated wraparound supports, enabling families to thrive through strengthened access, navigation, and relationship-based services.

Navigation

Helping Families, Supporting Children

WHY?

Families often struggle to get their child's needs met early, which can delay learning until school entry.

WHAT?

Trusted guides who connect families to child care, financial aid, and developmental services so children are supported before kindergarten.

Behavioral Health Coach

Support for Challenging Behaviors

WHY?

Providers face growing mental health and behavior challenges in young children without enough support.

WHAT?

On-site coaching and strategies to help staff create supportive, stable classrooms.



EVALUATION / IMPACT

Research shows children in high-quality early learning are more prepared for kindergarten and beyond. Phase 1 focuses on strengthening providers so they're ready to serve more children in later phases.

Evaluation Rooted in Implementation Science

We will test critical elements to build the foundation for future phases.
The **four main goals** of this first phase are:



INCREASE CHILD ENROLLMENT



DECREASE WORKER ATTRITION



IMPROVE PROVIDER QUALITY



STREAMLINE FAMILY REFERRALS

- **Increase Enrollment** – More children in classrooms (today, only 65–70% of slots are filled).
- **Decrease Turnover** – Fewer teachers leaving, reducing closures and costs for providers.
- **Improve Quality** – Raising the number of providers rated high-quality by the state (currently fewer than half).
- **Streamline Referrals** – Connecting families to the right services early, before children reach kindergarten.



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MEET ALL THE HANDS INVOLVED



Implementation Teams

Participating Providers

- Akron Area YMCA
- Akron Public Schools
- Bright Hopes Community Childcare
- Circle of Life Child Enrichment Center
- Community Action Akron Summit / Head Start
- Empowered Early Learning Academy
- Our Future is Bright Child Care
- Wonder World Child Development Center

Supporting Organizations

- Akron Urban League
- Center for Immersive Leadership
- Child Guidance & Family Solutions
- Early Childhood Resource Center
- Summit Education Initiative
- University of Akron Center for Structured Literacy



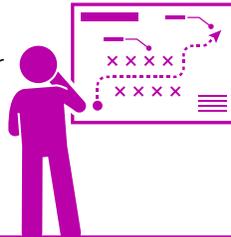
Planning Teams

Core Thought Partners

- City of Akron
- Early Childhood Resource Center
- GAR Foundation
- Summit Education Initiative
- United Way of Summit & Medina

Civic Leadership Group

- Akron Community Foundation
- Barberton Community Foundation
- County of Summit
- Greater Akron Chamber
- Illumine Integrated Solutions
- K.S. Toth Associates



Early Childhood Experts Team

- Akron Area YMCA
- Akron Metropolitan Housing Authority
- Akron Public Schools
- Child Guidance & Family Solutions
- Circle of Life Child Enrichment Center
- Community Action Akron Summit
- Empowered Early Learning Academy
- Start Early Consulting
- Summit County ADM Board
- Summit County Family and Children First Council
- Summit DD
- University of Akron
- Wonder World Child Development

Over **a dozen public and private partners are coming together** to fund the roughly \$950,000 pilot, with the largest early commitments from the City of Akron (nearly \$300,000), GAR Foundation (\$200,000), and the Akron Community Foundation (\$100,000). Funding will support **staffing, training, shared services, and evaluation.**