



20 | OHIO  
25 | LEGISLATORS  
RETREAT

ISSUE BRIEF  
APRIL 2-3, 2025

## DINNER SESSION: SCHOOL CHOICE IN OHIO: BALANCING ACCESS, ACCOUNTABILITY, AND RESOURCES

School choice refers to policies that give power to families to make educational decisions for their students, including what school to attend. School choice is shown to increase [parent satisfaction](#), allowing them to make informed decisions about their children's education. However, the research is mixed regarding its influence on [student achievement](#). About [56 percent](#) of voters favor using taxpayer dollars for education savings accounts and 49 percent for vouchers, although intense support is low for each. School choice is often criticized for its impact on [public school funding](#) since the funds for school choice programs use the same budget allotment as public school funds. As Ohio assesses its school choice program, the state should consider ensuring that choice is equitable and accessible so all students have access to high-quality education.

### School Choice Options in Ohio

Ohio has a robust school choice program, offering [five](#) school choice options for parents and students: traditional [public](#) schools, [home education](#), [community](#) (charter) schools, [private](#) schools, and religious [non-chartered non-public](#) (NCNP) schools. To offset the price of private and home education, Ohio provides [vouchers](#), tax credit scholarships, and individual tax credits. The state offers public school choice options through [open enrollment](#) and public community schools.

In [2024](#), Ohio provided \$963,818,689 in vouchers for 150,983 students. Ohio lawmakers recently expanded the [Education Choice Expansion Scholarship](#), also known as the EdChoice scholarship, extending eligibility to 450 percent of the poverty line. The Education Choice Expansion Scholarship is Ohio's [largest scholarship](#). It has more than [tripled](#) from 2023 to 2024, becoming nearly universally accessible for all families. Private schools

in Ohio are [required](#) to accept voucher money as tuition for families at or below 200 percent of the Federal Poverty Level. The average voucher is [\\$6,036](#), with precise amounts varying based on family income. The average voucher amount equates to 40 percent of the per-pupil spending for public school students. Since implementation, nonpublic school enrollment has grown by [two percent](#), and public school enrollment has declined by 6,000 students. Most students who access the Education Choice Expansion Scholarship are those [already enrolled](#) in private schools. A Cleveland Metropolitan School District study found that enrollment losses to private schools from the voucher program led to a \$364 to \$927 loss in per-pupil spending in the district.



**Table 1: School Choice Options in Ohio**

School Choice Program	Description
Vouchers	<p><u>Vouchers</u> are public funds that students can use to pay for home education or part or all of their private school tuition. Ohio currently provides five voucher scholarships: the Educational Choice Expansion Scholarship, the Jon Peterson Special Needs Scholarship, the Educational Choice Scholarship, the Autism Scholarship Program, and the <u>Cleveland Scholarship Program</u>.</p>
Tax Credit Scholarships	<p>Taxpayers can receive full or partial tax credit scholarships when they donate to nonprofits that provide school scholarships. Ohio currently offers the Ohio Tax Credit Scholarship Program, which gives dollar-for-dollar credits up to \$750.</p>
Individual Tax Credit	<p>Parents can receive <u>tax relief</u> for educational expenses, including private school tuition. Ohio currently provides two individual tax credits: the <u>K-12 Home Tax Credit</u> and the <u>K-12 Home Education Tax Credit</u>.</p>
Open Enrollment	<p>Ohio allows students to <u>enroll</u> in another school or school district for free. This includes Intra-district Transfer (students enrolling in another school in their district) and Interdistrict Transfer (students enrolling in another district).</p>
Community Schools/Charter Schools	<p><u>Community schools</u>, referred to as charter schools in other states, are nontraditional schools that receive public funding. The Ohio Department of Education and Workforce sponsors a specific group of these schools called <u>commUNITY schools</u>.</p>

## Accountability Standards

Ohio has [minimum education standards](#) for private schools that include reporting enrollment and attendance, teacher credentials, curriculum standards, and building requirements, and they are [required](#) to file this in a report each year to the Ohio Department of Education and the Workforce. Voucher students are [required](#) to either administer a college admissions test such as the ACT or SAT and standardized end-of-course exams or a non-voucher alternative exam. Still, non-voucher students have no such testing requirement. [House Bill 407](#) was introduced in 2024 to create more accountability for private schools. The bill included requiring private schools to administer the same standardized tests as public schools, but it was removed from the Bill in committee.

## Best Practices

### Louisiana | Private School Accountability

Louisiana [requires](#) private schools to be registered or approved by the Department of Education. Private schools are [approved](#) if their curriculum at least meets the basic public school curriculum. If private schools opt not to undergo approval, they must periodically [register](#) and provide information about the school and enrollment numbers. Furthermore, private schools have an annual evaluation based on standards and are categorized as either approved, provisionally approved, probationally approved, or unapproved. This evaluation creates accountability and transparency for parents exploring school options.

### Indiana | School Scholarship Tax Credits

The [Indiana School Scholarship Tax Credit](#) provides a 50 percent tax credit for individuals and corporations that donate to nonprofits that offer scholarships for private schools, also called Scholarship-Granting Organizations (SGOs). The tax credit scholarship is universal, with 98 percent of students eligible for the scholarship. Indiana does not have a minimum or maximum award amount

for [SGO Scholarships](#). This program allows for additional funding streams for school choice models that do not take money from the budget designated for public schools.

## Policy Considerations

- ❓ How can increased standards for private schools ensure that all students have access to high-quality education and that parents have the information necessary to make informed decisions about their children's schooling?
- ❓ How can school choice funding be used to support target student groups and close opportunity gaps?
- ❓ How can expanding tax credit scholarships to businesses increase the amount of tax credit scholarships available for students, expanding school choice for students?

## EXPANDING ACCESS TO HIGH-QUALITY EARLY LEARNING

Access to high-quality early education is [critical](#) to children's development, parental workforce participation, and the state's economic productivity. [Ohio](#) is a family-friendly state that is home to 812,056 children aged five and under. Approximately 67 percent of these children have all parents working and are cared for in [varied settings](#), including child care centers, Family Child Care homes, preschools, Early Head Start, and Head Start programs. Public early education programs serve only about [40 percent](#) of eligible children. The state [unified](#) early childhood governance in 2023 and is committed to strengthening access to high-quality early education.

Figure 1 illustrates the importance of early care and education access for children's development, parental workforce participation, and the state's economic productivity.

Optimal early development: High-quality early care and education can [ensure](#) exposure to language-rich environments. These are essential for young

**Figure 1: The Critical Importance of Early Care and Learning**



children to develop robust networks of neural connectivity that support their academic and life success for decades to come. The absence of stimulating early experiences can have adverse results. Disparities in cognitive development, health, and social-emotional development are evident at nine months and increase by 24 months. Public investment in early education can minimize adverse childhood experiences and enhance the potential of an individual to contribute positively to their families, societies, and the economy. Studies show that savings associated with investing early are reaped across education and social service systems.

Parental workforce participation: Child care shortages restrict parental participation in the workforce, which can strain family finances, decrease tax paying ability, and increase the need for public support.

Economic productivity: An analysis of the impact of insufficient infant and toddler care shows that the national economy loses about \$122 billion annually.

For Ohio, the annual economic impact of the infant and toddler child care deficit is estimated at \$3.9 million.

## Access to Early Education in Ohio

The data snapshot below illustrates key indicators related to access to early care and learning in Ohio.

Governance: Unified governance is a foundation upon which states can build strong early childhood systems that ensure access to high-quality early education. Ohio is one of only 11 states in the country with a “created” or unified system of governance. The Ohio Department of Children and Youth, created in 2023, oversees multiple early childhood programs. Governor DeWine’s Bold Beginning Initiative streamlines and expands access to critical health, educational, and economic services for families with young children. This initiative can substantially improve Ohio’s early education landscape with continued funding and support.

Access: Ohio currently has about 6,000 licensed child care centers and almost 2,300 Family Child Care (FCC) homes. The estimated child care deficit (the difference between the demand for child care and the supply of care) in Ohio is 12 percent, and the economic impact of the infant-toddler child care gap is estimated at \$3.9 million. As stated, about 40 percent of children eligible for public early education programs have access to Early Head Start and Head Start. Only seven percent of three- and four-year-olds are currently served by state-funded Pre-K. Efforts to stabilize cost models of child care programs and expand the reach of high-quality public programs like Head Start can help shrink the childcare gap.

**Table 2: Access to Early Education in Ohio (2024)**

Governance	Child Care Gap	Average Early Educator Wage	Annual impact of the infant-toddler care deficit
Created (2024)	12%	\$13.44	\$3.9 million



Workforce: About 58,600 early educators in Ohio are the “workforce behind the workforce.” They allow parents to work, even as they support early development of the future workforce. Yet, they are one of the lowest-paid professionals in the nation. Early educators in Ohio are paid \$13.44 per hour on average, well below the individual living wage for the state of \$20.38. Current data on attrition are not available, but data from 2022 show that attrition in early education outpaced that in other fields by 65 percent. Attrition exacerbates the child care gap, as child care programs can expand capacity only with adequate staffing. Ohio has offered the T.E.A.C.H Early Childhood® program since 2003 to improve credentialing and compensation for early educators.

## Best Practices

Like Ohio, states across the country are seeking to improve access to care through a variety of approaches:

North Dakota launched the Child Care Initiative in 2023 and increased child care subsidy reimbursement rates for infant and toddler care programs. This has improved the economic viability of child care programs and made child care more affordable for families. The state also provides infrastructure grants and loans to child care programs that have helped them expand their capacity by 3,200 slots.

Kentucky was the first state (in 2022) to make child care professionals automatically eligible for child care subsidies for their children, regardless of their income. This policy was successful in incentivizing early educators to return to or remain in the field. Almost a dozen states have subsequently adopted this successful policy.

New Mexico created the Early Childhood Education and Care Department in 2020. Three measures the state adopted to promote improved access are: 1) expanded income eligibility for child care assistance; 2) contracted slots for infant and toddler care; and 3) expanded Early Pre-K and Pre-K access.

## Policy Considerations

- ❓ Could infrastructure investments through grants to child care programs and increases to the child care subsidy help stabilize the sector?
- ❓ Are there opportunities to expand access to programs that support credentialing and compensation of early educators while providing subsidized or cost-free care for their children?
- ❓ Are there opportunities to sustain recent significant investments in early education and continue prioritizing high-quality care for infants and toddlers?

## HIGH-QUALITY MATH INSTRUCTION

Over a 19-year period from 1990 to 2009, the national [average](#) for fourth-grade and eighth-grade mathematics proficiency trended upward. However, in 2024, only 41 percent of Ohio’s fourth graders and 35 percent of eighth graders demonstrated [proficiency](#) in math. Early math proficiency is a [predictor](#) of future success including meaningful employment opportunities and economic independence. Math proficiency can also predict students who complete more advanced math courses and who are [more likely](#) to enroll and stay enrolled in college, especially among students of

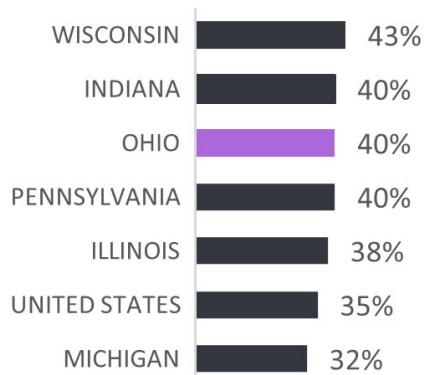
color. High-quality math instruction focusing on the development of essential math concepts and skills is critical to achieving math proficiency. Additionally, higher math proficiency has been a [strong indicator](#) of the likelihood of earning a higher wage on average as an adult.

## Math Instruction in Ohio

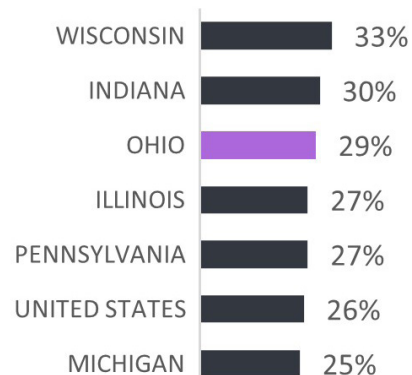
Ohio implemented its [Learning Standards for Mathematics](#) in 2015, with the State Board of Education officially adopting them in February 2017. Mathematical concepts are cumulative, meaning gaps in foundational knowledge can prevent students from mastering new material and achieving proficiency. For this reason, carefully aligning standards across grade levels is essential to create meaningful and effective mathematics instruction.

The Ohio Department of Education and Workforce offers various resources on topics like supporting diverse learners, instructional technology, instructional strategies, and more. Notably, the department provides key resources related to the application of math beyond K-12 education called [Transitions from High School to College](#). In addition to providing resources for math instruction beyond Algebra 2, as required by the state for high school

**Figure 2: National NAEP 4th Grade Proficiency Rates, By Region (2024)**



**Figure 3: National NAEP 8th Grade Proficiency Rates, By Region (2024)**



Source

graduation, the Math Pathways option will enable students to engage in mathematical thinking in areas related to career fields like computer science and data science and to count these courses as alternative math credits towards graduation. This innovative approach to math allows students to prepare for career or college beyond high school and make concrete connections to applicable math that may not be available with less flexible graduation requirements.

## Evidence-Aligned Math Instruction

There is a growing body of [research](#) combining objective evidence from cognitive psychology, education theory, and neuroscience to inform how math concepts and skills are learned. Traditional math teaching strategies rely on rote memorization and procedural training; however, these strategies do not foster deep mathematical understanding and problem-solving skills. [Research](#) indicates that students benefit from evidence-aligned math instruction that encourages active problem-solving, conceptual discussion, and application of math in real-world contexts.

### Preparing Teachers to be Effective Mathematics Instructors

Teacher education programs are pivotal in preparing educators to teach mathematics effectively, especially in light of mathematics proficiency's role in educational success and future opportunities. Mathematics skills build upon one another, and research [suggests](#) many elementary teachers lack confidence in their fundamental math abilities. As a result, an increasing number of undergraduate programs nationwide are allocating additional time for mathematics, aiming not only to equip future educators with teaching skills but also to foster a deeper conceptual understanding of math. By integrating [evidence-aligned](#) math instruction methodologies, including conceptual comprehension, procedural fluency, and real-world application in their instructional approaches, these

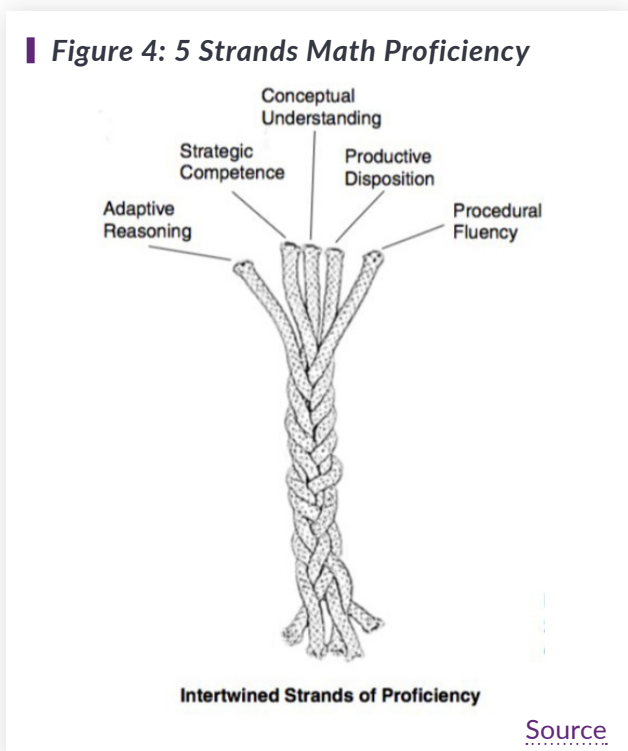




programs can equip educators with the knowledge and skills needed to facilitate meaningful learning experiences.

### Potential Outcomes of Effective Math Instructional Strategies

Evidence-aligned math instruction that encourages active problem-solving, conceptual discussion, and application math in real-world context prepares students to be adept thinkers. A deeper understanding of mathematical procedures enables students to approach new problems from a critical and creative lens and encourages using logic and reasoning to find solutions. Some states have begun visualizing the process required for math proficiency using a visual of braided competency areas. Additionally, real-world applications build transferable math skills, while prioritizing [active engagement](#) leads to better retention of knowledge. States have the opportunity to [effectively](#) measure comprehensive learning growth by developing or utilizing assessments that span standards across multiple grade levels.



## Best Practices

### West Virginia

In 2023, West Virginia passed House Bill 3035, known as the [Third Grade Success Act](#), which focused on developing a statewide holistic approach to early literacy and numeracy development. The Third Grade Success Act ensures teacher candidates receive preparation to implement math instruction using high-quality instructional materials, data-driven instruction, and understand the elements of dyscalculia. Additionally, the bill requires the completion of triannual assessments for kindergarten through third grade students in math, dyslexia, and English Language Arts to effectively gather data on student progress. Parents are then notified of the results of these assessments and engaged in the development of mathematics improvement plans if necessary. In-service teachers are also required to participate in extensive training on numeracy instruction to ensure their ability to implement the elements of the Third Grade Success Act and support student achievement.

### Washington, D.C.

At the start of the 2021 school year, the Office of the State Superintendent of Education in Washington, D.C. invested [\\$33 million](#) over three years to support the expansion of [High Impact Tutoring programs](#) across the District. The objective of the program is to deliver 90 minutes or more of small group tutoring, with a four to one student to teacher ratio, offered during or after the school day, to over one hundred school sites and impacting over ten thousand students. High Impact Tutoring gained traction nationwide as a pandemic recovery strategy and can be used to close opportunity gaps when implemented with fidelity.

## Policy Considerations

- How can policymakers prioritize the adoption of evidence-aligned instructional strategies in mathematics education?

- 📍 In what ways can policymakers support the state's teacher preparation programs at colleges and universities in preparing educators to teach mathematics effectively?

## ACCELERATING OHIO'S TALENT PIPELINE: STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS FOR WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Recent [findings](#) from Georgetown's Center on Education and the Workforce show that nationally, by 2031, 72 percent of jobs will require a postsecondary education. Similarly, in the state's [2020-2030 Labor Market Projections](#), the [Ohio Bureau of Labor Market Information](#) projected that [54 percent](#) of jobs in Ohio will require post-secondary education by the end of the decade, and [42 percent](#) of jobs are going to be in industries that require at least a bachelor's degree. These figures highlight the need for students to obtain credentials beyond high school and for states to create the programming infrastructure necessary to facilitate access to learning opportunities for students - inclusive of alternative pathways.

Partnerships between secondary schools, institutions of higher education (IHEs), and

businesses [can impact student career readiness](#) and development. Ohio encourages business and industry stakeholders to partner with school districts through [Business Advisory Councils](#). These councils support schools and districts by examining the local job market as they align curricula with observed workforce needs. Additionally, through these councils, partnering organizations and businesses engage directly with students through early exposure programming such as career fairs, mentoring, apprenticeships, and career advising. The initiatives outlined through the Business Advisory Councils and other state workforce initiatives have received continued financial support from the General Assembly to service the growing number of students who are engaged in early career programs. According to recent figures from [Career Tech](#), over [135,000](#), and another [110,000](#) students were enrolled in CTE coursework at the secondary and postsecondary level respectively.

Ohio operates its youth [apprenticeship](#) and [pre-apprenticeship](#) programs through the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services. Apprenticeships involve various models that integrate classroom learning with on-the-job experience, which allows students to develop skills that will increase their employability. Today, there



are 19,000 registered apprentices throughout the states that are integral in helping students gain valuable early exposure to careers, which could decrease students' likeliness to drop out whilst incentivizing them to reskill and upskill once they enter the workforce as full-time employees. With so many students engaged in early career exposure programs throughout the state, adequate funding for these programs is essential to ensure the requisite resources, training, and curricula are available to participants.

## Ohio Workforce Initiatives

Ohio's Department of Higher Education (ODHE) has created workforce development initiatives for adult learners to ensure that all people who live in the state have access to the requisite learning opportunities that could impact their employability once they graduate from secondary school. Through partnership with IHEs, business, and industry stakeholders, the state has built a robust system of programs available to those intent on entering the workforce. Table 3 below details several state workforce initiatives.

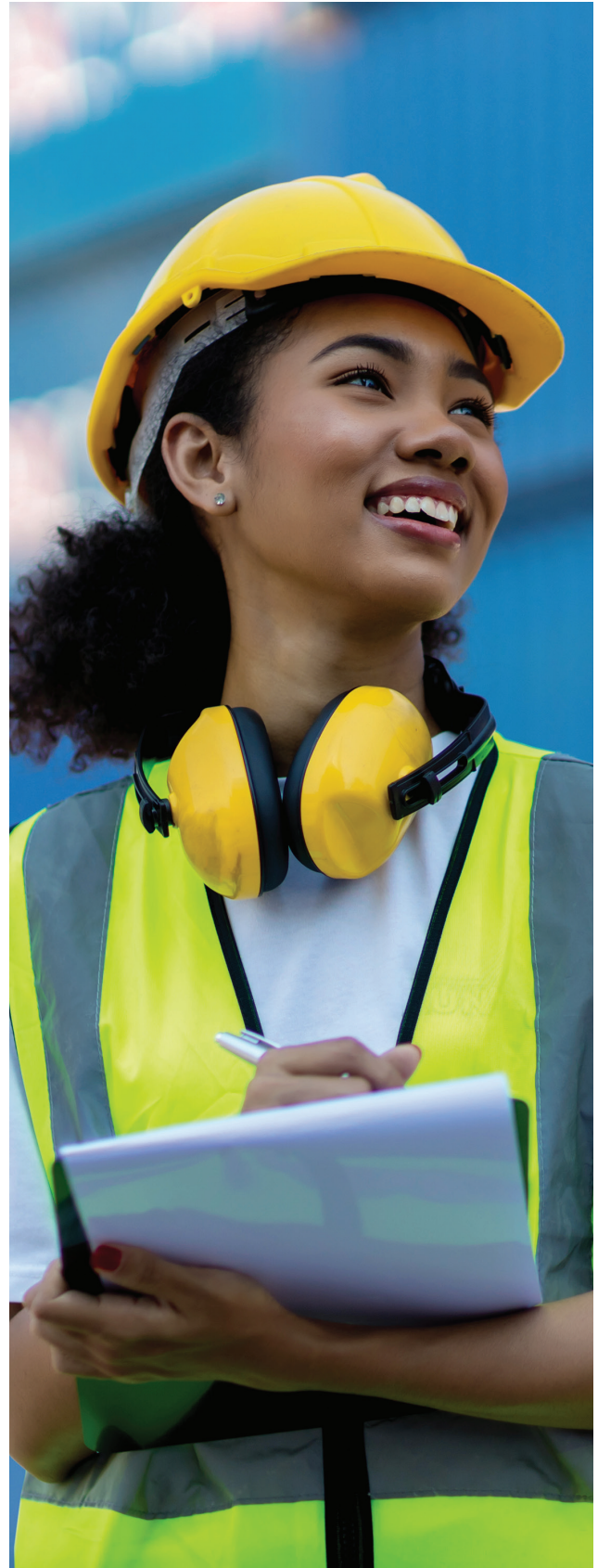
**Table 3: Workforce Initiatives in Ohio**

Initiative	Description
<u>Commercial Truck Driver Student Aid Program</u>	This initiative, which aims to grow Ohio's commercial driver workforce, provides grants and loans to students enrolled in commercial driving license programs with participating IHEs.
<u>TechCred</u>	Ohio's TechCred Program funds employers who are seeking to upskill their employees' technology fluency. Through TechCred, employers apply for funding and if approved can sponsor employees to complete their technology credentials. Employers are then reimbursed up to \$2000 for employees who earn their credentials.
<u>Teach Computer Science (CS) Grant Program</u>	The 135th Ohio General Assembly appropriated \$8 million over two fiscal years to increase the number of current teachers who are qualified to teach computer science in the state. ODHE partnered with 11 IHEs strategically located throughout the state so selected participants can utilize the grants to cover expenses related to upskilling.
<u>Great Minds Fellowship Workforce Commitment Incentive Program</u>	The Great Minds Fellowship Program was instituted to fill the state's unmet need for behavioral health professionals. The program offers loan repayment options to new graduates who work for one full year at one of Ohio's Community Behavioral Health Centers.

The initiatives highlighted in Table 3 reflect a few of the workforce partnership programs offered through ODHE. These opportunities, in conjunction with other CTE programs available at the secondary schooling level could impact employment outcomes while providing continuing education opportunities for students and decreasing the incidence of student stop-out, as [figures](#) from the Bureau of Labor Statistics show that workers aged 25 and over with less than a high school education have the lowest employment rate and weekly median incomes when compared with those with more education credentials.

## Policy Considerations

- ❓ In what ways can policymakers support and highlight innovative college and career preparation in classrooms across the K-12 continuum in the state of Ohio?
- ❓ How can Ohio make concerted efforts to support equitable access to early exposure to postsecondary and career pathways for politically marginalized students?
- ❓ How can Ohio strengthen early exposure programming throughout the state through increased state funding?





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