

# Cincinnati schools credit Preschool Promise for highest kindergarten readiness rate since 2004

[Max Londberg](#), Cincinnati Enquirer Published 9:30 p.m. ET Dec. 19, 2019



Temika Upshaw spends time with her daughter, Bria Davis, at an after-school program in Cincinnati. Upshaw received tuition assistance through Preschool Promise. (Photo: Max Londberg)

Cincinnati Preschool Promise didn't just help Temika Upshaw enroll her daughter in a high-quality preschool, it helped her to pay for food, to teach her daughter to swim and to take her to the zoo.

Upshaw's daughter, 5-year-old Bria Davis, is now in kindergarten after two years of preschool at New Horizons Child Care Center in Evanston. She's one of thousands of children who benefited from the program, and a new report shows those children are scoring better than their peers on kindergarten readiness tests.

In fact, last year kindergartners in Cincinnati Public Schools were the most prepared group in the district's history of tracking kindergarten readiness, which began in the 2004-05 school year, said Monica Mitchell, a professor of clinical psychology and behavioral medicine at Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center.

More than 61% of CPS kindergartners passed a readiness test in 2018-19. The district never had a readiness rate above 60%, said Mitchell, who is the lead author of a study on readiness that was released last month.

Lauren Worley, a CPS spokeswoman, credited Preschool Promise for fueling the growth.

"The growth in kindergarten readiness is due in no small part to the expansion of preschool to provide more access to CPS preschool to more three- and four-year-olds, made possible by taxpayer support of Cincinnati Preschool Promise," Worley wrote by email. She also credited CPS teachers and curriculum teams.

Worley added that the Cincinnati Children's study found that kindergartners who previously attended a district preschool are "153% more likely to be on track on the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment in literacy."

Preschool Promise launched in 2016 after voters approved a five-year levy for \$15 million annually. The program aims to enhance learning in preschools and to broaden access for families who may otherwise struggle to afford it. Quality preschool has been shown to benefit learning and behavioral development.

Chara Fisher Jackson, the executive director and CEO of Preschool Promise, called preschool education a "vital part of educational success."

"We clearly see the value of making an investment in early childhood education," she said in a statement. "Cincinnati Preschool Promise continues to expand access to more high quality preschools. This is especially true for the children in our community with the greatest need."

In the first two years, more than 3,000 students received tuition assistance through Preschool Promise. Community-based and CPS preschools both participate.

For Upshaw, the program helped defray the cost of preschool for Bria, paying \$59 a week in tuition – money that Upshaw could then use for swimming lessons and groceries and other extracurricular activities, including a trip to the zoo for her daughter.

"Preschool Promise enhanced it all for us," Upshaw said on a recent day while at New Horizons, where Bria now attends an after-school program.

Upshaw said that some days after preschool, Bria came home with paint on her feet after art lessons. Other days she worked on learning numbers and small words.

"Preschool is very important," Upshaw said. "That's basically where you start learning."

The numbers back her up. According to the Cincinnati Children's study, 68% of CPS kindergartners who received tuition assistance through Preschool Promise were on track in language and literacy during the last school year, about 15% higher than a peer group lacking preschool experience. The Preschool Promise students also exhibited higher overall readiness for kindergarten.

The groups were controlled using gender, race and social and economic backgrounds. About three in four of the participants are African American. The study also found that students from lower-income neighborhoods with more risk factors particularly benefited from Preschool Promise.

Preschool Promise also provides support to preschools to improve quality. In the 2017-18 school year, 27 preschool providers benefited from quality improvement programs. That number grew to 111 during 2018-19. More than 270 students were enrolled in schools that improved enough to be deemed high quality with the help of the program.

Last year, Preschool Promise awarded \$2,000 teacher grants to 57 teachers who agreed to remain teaching in a community preschool, according to the program's annual report released earlier this month.

One teacher, Jennifer Allen, said the grant "enabled me to enrich my preschoolers' classroom learning without negatively impacting my family financially," according to the annual report.

Terri England, the director of New Horizons, called for expanding Preschool Promise funding in the future, "especially if we're trying to get centers up to a high quality."

"We have quality deserts, which means there are some neighborhoods that don't have a quality rated center at all," England added.

Cincinnati Councilman Greg Landsman, the former executive director of StrivePartnership, which launched Preschool Promise, lauded the results.

"More students are showing up to school better prepared, and they and their schools will only get better as a result," he said by email. "We have to continue to make sure this is a game changer for our children and families, preschool teachers and providers, and our schools and neighborhoods."

*Check out this story on cincinnati.com: <https://www.cincinnati.com/story/news/2019/12/19/cincinnati-schools-credit-preschool-promise-high-kindergarten-readiness-rate/2574969001/>*