

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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COLUMBUS, OHIO – Ohio Department of Job and Family Services Director Matt Damschroder today announced improvements to Ohio's Step Up To Quality program (SUTQ). SUTQ is Ohio's quality rating and improvement system for child care. In vetoing a temporary suspension of SUTQ in Amended Sub. House Bill 169 last month, Governor Mike DeWine directed ODJFS to reduce bureaucracy associated with the program.

"Step Up To Quality maintains clear standards and guidance to ensure all children, no matter their circumstances, have access to quality early and school-age care, along with educational programs that exceed minimum licensing health and safety regulations," said DeWine. "These actions will help reduce bureaucracy and ensure all working families have access to quality child care and, as a result, will assist in helping our children be ready for kindergarten."

Director Damschroder indicated that the department has been working on improvements to the program, which include engaging with 30 child care and early childhood education providers. Early work with that group helped ODJFS develop the following program adjustments:

- 1) Reducing paperwork: The Ohio Department of Job and Families Services and Ohio Department of Education worked together to review all documents necessary to achieve a one- through five-star SUTQ rating. They identified ways to eliminate redundancy and reduce the amount of paperwork, without diminishing the integrity of the program.
- 2) Continuous Rating: Currently, programs are required to reapply for their rating yearly. ODJFS will make annual renewal of a provider's star rating easier by allowing them to retain that rating unless it is determined that they no longer meet the qualifications, or they would like to request another rating.
- 3) Pre-Star: New providers that agree to serve children receiving publicly funded care will be paid at the base rate for one year before having to be SUTQ-rated.

"We know Ohio's Step Up To Quality program is effective and has a positive impact on kindergarten readiness and third grade reading proficiency, both indicators of future success," said Damschroder. "In addition to the changes announced today, we'll continue to work with the legislature to ensure the program meets its goal of making quality child care available to all those who need it."

Quality child care plays a dual role as a foundation of Ohio's economy. Working families can go to work knowing their children are being cared for in a safe and nurturing environment. Quality child care also ensures children receive the developmental and educational support necessary to become successful students who will become productive contributors to Ohio's economy.

ODJFS will be implementing these changes in the coming months and will provide updates to SUTQ providers as the changes go into effect.

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The Ohio Department of Job and Family Services manages vital programs that strengthen Ohio families. These include job training and employment services, unemployment insurance, cash and food assistance, child care, child and adult protective services, adoption, and child support services.

