

CINCINNATI OHIO

PROGRAM

Cincinnati Preschool Promise

FUNDING MECHANISM

Renewed Property Tax Referendum

OPPORTUNITY

In 2013, the *New York Times* ranked Cincinnati as one of the least economically mobile cities in the nation. Of the city's approximately 9,200 three- and four-year-old children, nearly 67 percent live in families with income levels of less than 200 percent of the Federal Poverty Level. A 2016 RAND Corporation report found that more than four in 10 children in Cincinnati enter kindergarten unprepared. This is especially true for low-income children and children with no preschool experience. In response, Cincinnati Public Schools (CPS) expanded quality preschool programs through the Cincinnati Preschool Promise (CPP).

In 2020, voters approved Issue 17, a renewal of 2016's Issue 44, which was commonly known as Preschool Promise.

SUMMARY

In November 2020, Cincinnati voters approved Issue 17, a renewal of Issue 44, with 69 percent of the vote. Issue 44 will continue funding CPP through a property tax. The tax leverages a rate of \$734 per \$100,000 of assessed property value. Estimated revenue raised from the passage of Issue 17 is \$48 million—the same as the first levy.

Issue 44, commonly known as Preschool Promise, passed in November 2016 with a 62 percent majority. Issue 44 is estimated to generate \$48 million each year, \$15 million of which is earmarked to expand quality preschool through CPP programs.

The remaining \$33 million generated each year goes to CPS to support K-12 learning programs. The tax revenue provides tuition assistance for low-income children, improves quality ratings for preschool centers and recruits, retains, and offers wage parity for early childhood educators.

CHALLENGES

COVID-19 // The COVID-19 pandemic made indoor events impossible and door-to-door canvassing and parent involvement difficult. The campaign shifted to mostly online community events, and phone banks shifted to volunteers calling from home with no software for rapid calling.

Voter Confusion // Since 2017, there have been three CPS renewal levy campaigns. This caused confusion among voters and an assumption that all campaigns were for the same purpose, which was not the case.

Competition for Fundraising // The CPP renewal was on the ballot in a presidential election year, so fundraising was competitive. However, the renewal only cost one-third of the initial campaign (\$400,000 vs \$1.2 million).

GETTING TO ACTION

Aug 2016

The School Board votes to include Issue 44 on the ballot.

United Way of Greater Cincinnati signs on as the agency to manage Cincinnati Preschool Promise (CPP).

Nov 2016

Issue 44 wins approval with 62 percent of the vote, authorizing the expansion of preschool through a partnership with Cincinnati Public Schools and the CPP. The program is funded for five years.

Sep 2018

CPP's first annual report for 2017-2018 shows the program reached 1,341 students and increased the quality ratings of five preschool providers.

2019-2020

A local political action committee, Cincinnatians Active to Support Education, directs the renewal campaign, as CPS is a public entity and CPP is a nonprofit without lobbying status.

Nov 2020

Issue 17 wins approval with just over 69 percent of the vote.



HOW DOES PROPERTY TAX WORK IN NORTH CAROLINA?

Local governments in North Carolina have the authority to raise property taxes for specific purposes designated by the North Carolina General Assembly. Within the area of “community development programs and activities” child care, health and education are listed explicitly. However, in consulting with several NC local government experts, it remains unclear if a broader set of early childhood programs or initiatives could qualify as a specified purpose.

Alternatively, local governments can adopt a resolution that affirms a desire to provide early childhood services with a portion of the property tax.

RESULT

- Has helped nearly 7,000 families with preschool tuition assistance
- Offers both public and community-based access to two years of high-quality preschool for three- and four-year-olds. Qualifying families may apply for tuition assistance for the CPP program or a CPS preschool of their choice.
- Eligibility has increased from families with income less than 200 percent of the federal poverty line—equal to \$50,200 per year for a family of four—to families with incomes less than 300 percent of the federal poverty line.
- Network of high-quality tuition assistance providers grew 29 percent in 2019 when CPP provided quality improvement coaching services for 200 providers.
- Number of preschoolers served grew by 53 percent the same year.
- An independent evaluation found children in CPP outperformed peers on the 2019-2020 Ohio Department of Education Kindergarten Readiness Assessment by 10 percentage points.

KEYS TO SUCCESS

► **Build Robust Coalitions**

Collaboration between CPP and CPS and support from community leaders, business leaders, providers, Democratic and Republican leaders and voters was crucial. CPP staff and board played a key role in bringing champions forward.

► **Personal Stories Matter**

When engaging with voters, face-to-face conversations and personal stories (with supporting data) of how community members had benefited from the CPP program changed minds.

► **Well-Organized Canvassing**

Canvassing targeted voters opposing the levy and those that lacked knowledge about the initiative. CPS led with the message that the renewal “won’t raise taxes” to address a concern relevant to the COVID-19 economic downturn.

► **Highlight Concrete Outcomes**

CPP helped voters understand the value of their tax dollars. One example impact point: nearly 200 providers used CPP resources to improve their quality rating.

LEARN MORE

[Read more about the Cincinnati Preschool Promise](#)