

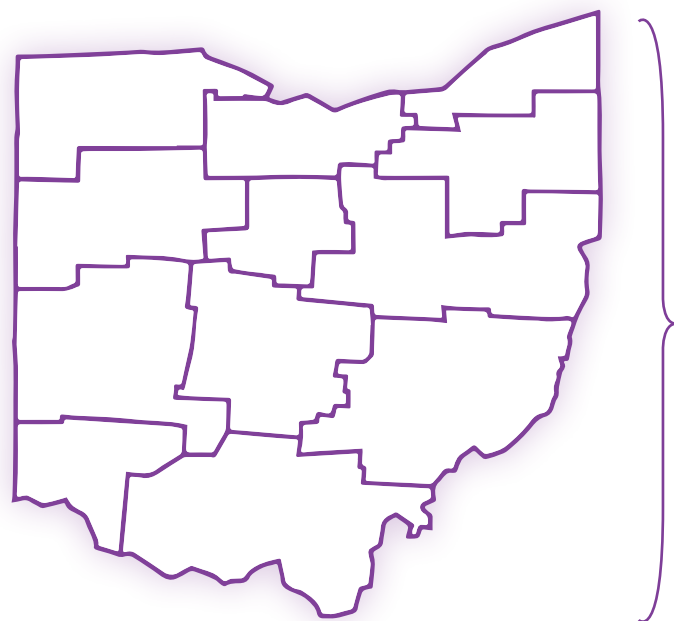


How OCCRRRA scaled their LENA Grow® quality initiative statewide in Ohio

OCCRRRA: Creating high quality outcomes for families and children

Since 1989, the Ohio Child Care Resource & Referral Association (OCCRRRA) has been the central coordinating entity for the state's seven nonprofit CCR&R agencies. Together, these CCR&Rs serve a total of 12 Service Delivery Areas (SDAs), providing

professional development and technical assistance to early childhood, child-serving, and school-age program professionals, reaching approximately 30,000 children and 25,000 families annually. A public-private partnership, OCCRRRA implements and manages statewide quality initiatives, in addition to ensuring consistency across the CCR&Rs' professional development and technical assistance offerings.



Conversational turns are simple back-and-forth alternations between a child and an adult. LENA technology counts a turn when an adult speaks and a child follows, or vice versa, with no more than five seconds in between.

Why measure conversational turns?

A rapidly growing body of peer-reviewed research reveals important links between conversational turns early in life and both short- and long-term child outcomes, including brain structure and function, executive functioning, vocabulary skills, IQ scores in adolescence, and social-emotional development. In short, interaction early in life is linked to academic success throughout school!

How LENA Grow uses conversational turns for impact

LENA Grow, an evidence-based professional development program for early childhood educators, puts data on a child's language experience directly in the hands of educators. Teachers use this data to increase conversational turns equitably for the children in their classrooms. In turn, LENA Grow has been shown to increase CLASS®, GOLD®, DECA, and LAP™ B-K assessment scores, as well as teacher job satisfaction and retention.

The broader early childhood and K-12 landscape in Ohio

"[L]et us start with our children."

— Governor Mike DeWine, 2023 State of the State address

The Ohio Department of Children and Youth (DCY) was created in 2023 to support the governor's Bold Beginning Initiative. The department is tasked with increasing public awareness of child and youth services and increasing access to those services.

DCY combines the functions of six previously independent agencies and administers the Step Up To Quality program, Ohio's Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS). Through the Ohio Professional Registry, now serving more than 150,000 early childhood professionals, OCCRRA supports participation in Step Up To Quality.

OCCRRA also operates alongside the K-12 education landscape. Recently, the state has experienced falling education rankings in such categories as kindergarten readiness and teacher recruitment and retention, among others.

A 2023 report published by Policy Matters Ohio describes a "legacy of neglect" within Ohio's schools. Among the report's findings are these sobering data points:

- **Over the last decade, the number of newly licensed pre-K-12 teachers has fallen by approximately 33 percent.**
- According to Kindergarten Readiness Assessment (KRA) scores, **only 35 percent of children in Ohio are categorized as "demonstrating readiness" for kindergarten-level instruction.**

OCCRRA wants to see Ohio's children start school strong, learning from skilled, motivated early childhood education professionals and gaining the language, social-emotional, and cognitive skills they need to thrive.



Tia Brooks, an infant teacher at Generation Hope Childcare and Preschool in Cincinnati, participated in LENA Grow in early 2023 through 4C for Children, a CCR&R that provides services in two Ohio SDAs.

LENA Grow: “A really energizing initiative”

In Ohio, LENA Grow fits into a wide-ranging ecosystem of investments that OCCRRA has made to address early childhood education and out-of-school quality, capacity, and workforce development. Speaking on how well LENA Grow fits into the governor’s focus on early literacy, OCCRRA’s then-CEO, Todd Barnhouse, called the program “an opportunity to bring niche expertise to strengthen our coaches that are working on the learning and development” of early childhood educators throughout the state.

In the first year of its LENA Grow contract, OCCRRA purchased LENA Grow for use in 240 classrooms using one-time COVID-relief funds from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA). Infant, toddler, and preschool classrooms were all included in the initial implementation. Centers that had earned three, four, or five stars on the Step Up To Quality QRIS were recruited to participate.

Moving forward, the state will use Preschool Development Grant (PDG) funds and is working on sustaining and scaling the program with a more stable funding source.



“This was a really energizing initiative to roll out. ... They have an amazing team that provides great training and technical assistance and support. ... The data that comes about with the tool is huge, and almost instantaneous.”

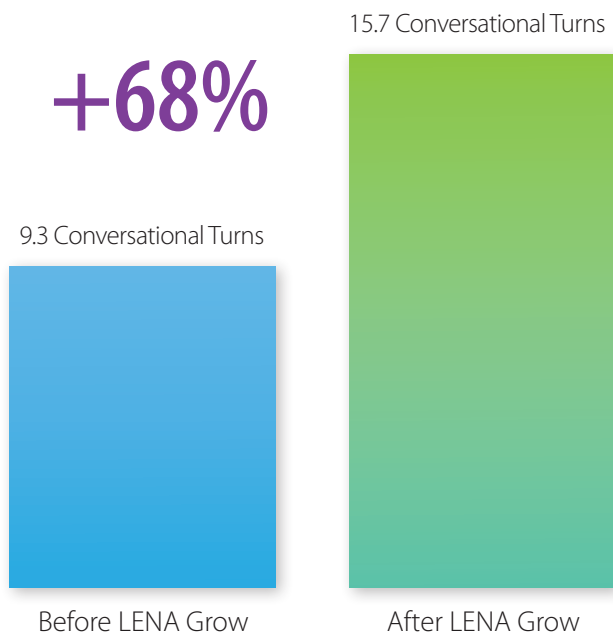
— Todd Barnhouse, Chief Executive Officer with OCCRRA

OCCRRA’s rollout:

- **Spring, 2022:** OCCRRA meets with LENA, learning more about the LENA Grow program and discussing a possible statewide implementation.
- **July 1, 2022:** OCCRRA signs on to launch the program in 240 classrooms in all 12 of the SDAs across the state through ARPA funding.
- **August, 2022:** LENA’s statewide implementations team meets with OCCRRA’s lead to plan at the systems level.
 - ↳ Later that month, leads from all regional agencies meet to kick things off.
- **September, 2022:** LENA’s Partner Success team leads individual implementation meetings with coaches from each CCR&R, providing guidance on training and recruiting.
- **October 31, 2022:** The program’s first LENA Day takes place in two preschool classrooms.
- **December, 2022:** LENA is included in Ohio’s Preschool Development Grant funding.
- **October 31, 2022–September 30, 2023:** 346 early educators and 2,085 children participate in LENA Grow through OCCRRA.
- **October 1, 2023–September 30, 2025:** A projected 7,600 additional children across an additional 864 classrooms participate in LENA Grow. Teachers who completed LENA Grow in year one have the opportunity to participate in LENA Grow 2: Insights.

Fostering equitable language environments

Across the U.S., LENA Grow has proved effective at increasing teacher-child interactions and creating effective language environments in early education classrooms. In Ohio, children who started the program experiencing the least interactive talk saw a 68 percent increase in conversational turns, bringing them above the national median of 15 conversational turns per hour.



Children who started out experiencing the least talk rose above the national median by the end of the program.

How do Ohio's teachers feel about the program?

After completing the program, teachers have the opportunity to share their feedback and report on their overall experience. Of those teachers who participated through OCCRRA:



"[Teachers] had those 'a-ha' moments. ... When they see this real-time data, it opens their eyes to the potential for what could be happening and the kinds of conversations, interactions, and attachment that could be happening with those children."

— Kelly Slade, Professional Development Coordinator with OCCRRA