

Afterschool Child Enrichment Educational Savings Program



December 2023



**Department of
Education &
Workforce**

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Executive Summary and Program Overview

The Ohio Afterschool Child Enrichment (ACE) Educational Savings Account program was created in House Bill 110 of the 134th General Assembly (biennial budget bill) in 2021. Funded by federal American Rescue Plan (ARP) and Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funds, the ACE program was established to improve student engagement and help accelerate student learning. The program initially provided educational savings accounts to eligible children ages 6-18 in households with an income of less than 300% of the federal poverty level (FPL). The ACE program award was originally \$500 per year.

State law requires the Department of Education and Workforce to partner with a vendor to help administer the program. The vendor was selected through a competitive bidding process. The selected vendor, Merit International, and the Department work together closely. Merit's duties include recruiting and vetting service providers and administering the payment process, while the Department administers the application process.

House Bill 45 of the 134th General Assembly, which passed in December 2022, included several changes to the ACE program that became effective April 2023. Program changes included an increase in the maximum value of savings accounts to \$1,000 and revised eligibility criteria. Program eligibility was expanded to 400% FPL and included students ages 6-18, regardless of income, residing in the Cleveland Metropolitan School District, districts with EdChoice-eligible schools and districts with chronic absenteeism rates among the highest 10% of all school districts.

Parents can choose from allowable activities based on their children's needs. Allowable uses for ACE funds are specified in [Ohio Revised Code 3310.70](#) and include:

1. Before- or after-school educational programs;
2. Day camps, including camps for academics, music, and arts;
3. Tuition at learning extension centers;
4. Tuition for learning pods;
5. If the student has been excused from the compulsory attendance law for the purpose of home [education](#), purchase of curriculum and materials;
6. Educational, learning, or study skills services;
7. Field trips to historical landmarks, museums, science centers, and theaters, including admission, exhibit, and program fees;
8. Language classes;
9. Instrument lessons;
10. Tutoring.

In 2021, the State Board of Education adopted administrative rule [Ohio Administrative Code 3301-107-01](#), which outlines the process for applying for an ACE account.

Program Administration

As the ACE program engages Ohio parents directly, and capitalizes on each parent’s understanding of their child’s unique needs, the Department of Education and Workforce worked to provide an accessible and customer-friendly process for families. The ACE team worked directly with stakeholders to identify barriers that impacted families’ ability to access the program.

In April 2023, the Department launched a new application platform designed to provide a more streamlined, customer-friendly experience. The new application process was also mobile friendly.

To better support applicants, the Department updated all parent materials and began offering “Ask ACE” virtual information sessions multiple times a week.

The Department implemented a communications plan that included outreach to other public agencies (state and local), nonprofit organizations, libraries, museums, schools, and districts to publicize the ACE program and recruit providers. Marketing channels included social media, television, streaming services, and radio advertising.

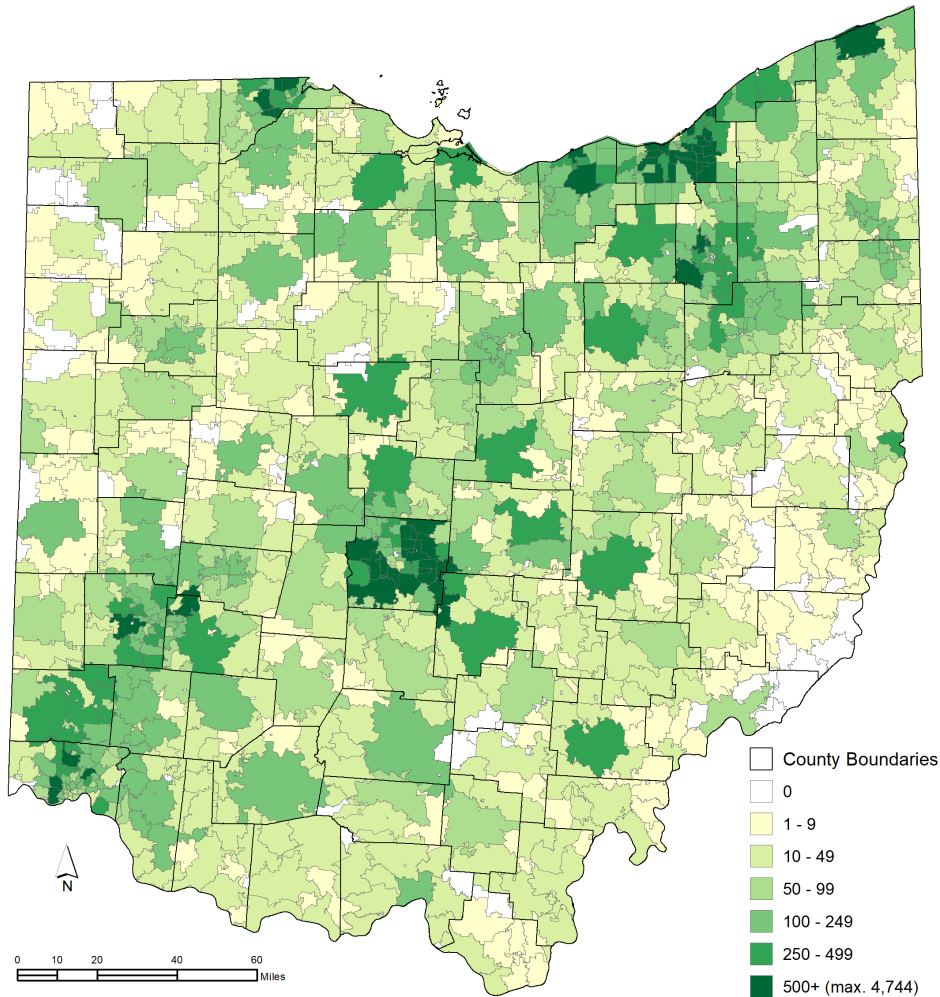
Once an application is reviewed and approved, account information is provided to the Department’s vendor. Merit assists families with activating their ACE accounts, processes claims, and recruits service providers.

Program Statistics

FY2024 ACE Program (As of Dec. 1, 2023)	Number of Students
Eligible	45,623
Not Eligible	1,313
In Process (Submitted)	3,350
Started Application (not submitted)	256
Resubmitted	877
Withdrawn or Expired	0
Total Student Applications (FY24)	51,419
Total Eligible Accounts (FY22-24)	120,954
Total Qualified Educational Service Providers	1,900

Where Participants Reside

The following map shows the number of accounts opened by zip code.

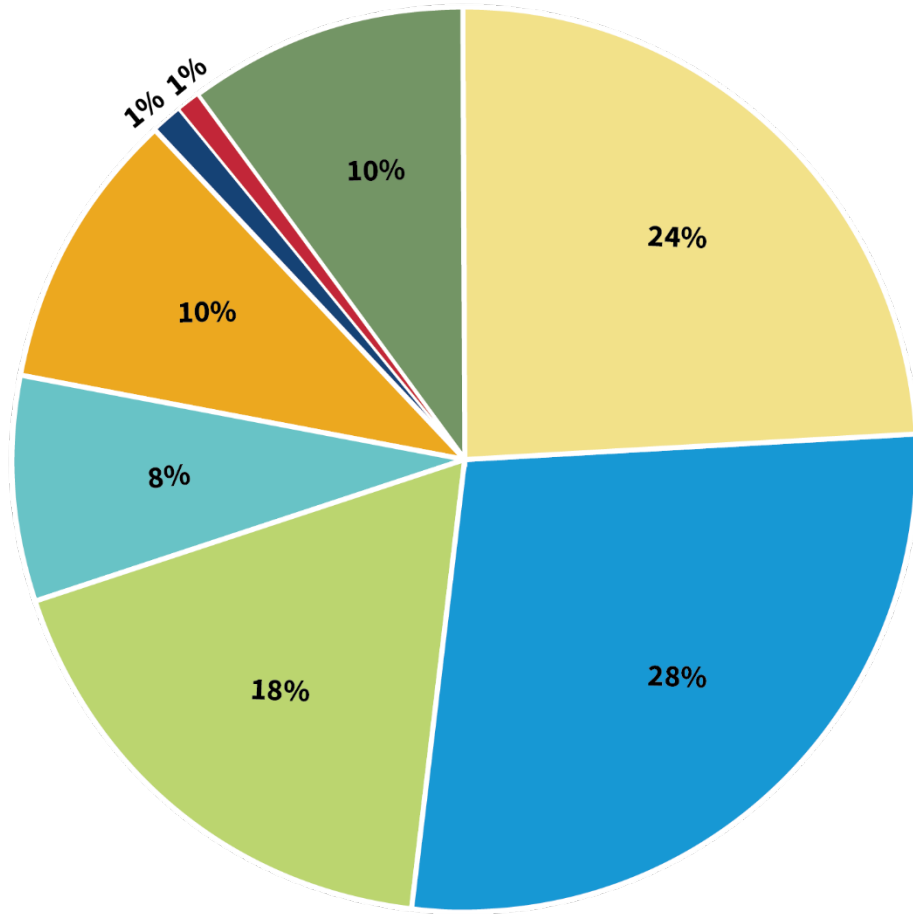


The 10 zip codes with the highest numbers of accounts opened:

44118 (Cuyahoga County)	4,744 accounts
43229 (Franklin County)	1,665 accounts
43232 (Franklin County)	1,521 accounts
43228 (Franklin County)	1,456 accounts
43224 (Franklin County)	1,343 accounts
43219 (Franklin County)	1,298 accounts
44035 (Lorain County)	1,138 accounts
43211 (Franklin County)	1,087 accounts
44125 (Cuyahoga County)	1,051 accounts
44105 (Cuyahoga County)	1,050 accounts

Use of Funds

FY 2022-2024 ACE CLAIMS PAID



- Before/After School Educational Programs
- Day Camps
- Instrument Lessons
- Study Skill Services
- Curriculum and Materials
- Field Trips
- Other Services
- Tutoring

Funds Allocated and Expended

The Ohio General Assembly appropriated \$125,000,000 to fund the ACE program. Funds are allocated as accounts are awarded and expended as claims are submitted.

Funds allocated through Dec. 1, 2023:	\$123,503,000
Funds expended through Dec. 1, 2023:	\$25,203,846

In conjunction with Merit, the Department has designed a program that provides monthly updates to parents about the remaining funds available in their children's accounts and options for activities for which the funds can be used.

Customer Survey Results

In October 2022, Merit surveyed ACE participants about their experiences with the ACE program. Key findings from the survey include:

- 83% of parents and guardians say they are very satisfied or satisfied with the program in its first six months.
- 87% of respondents say they would recommend the Ohio ACE program to others.
- 75% of respondents say they are very satisfied or satisfied with the Ohio ACE email and phone support services.

When the new application platform was launched in April 2023, the Department posted an ACE customer service survey and invited participants in the program to share their opinions. Overall participants viewed the ACE program positively.

DEPARTMENT SURVEY QUESTIONS AND RESPONSES

- 1. *The ACE program has had a positive effect on my child's overall education.***
80% of respondents Agree or Strongly Agree
7% of respondents Disagree or Strongly Disagree
13% of respondents were Neutral or did not respond
- 2. *I would recommend the ACE program to a friend or family member.***
81% of respondents Agree or Strongly Agree
10% of respondents Disagree or Strongly Disagree
9% of respondents were Neutral or did not respond
- 3. *The process to apply for the ACE program was user-friendly and easy to complete.***
60% of respondents Agree or Strongly Agree
21% of respondents Disagree or Strongly Disagree
19% of respondents were Neutral or did not respond

4. I received excellent customer service during the application period.

47% of respondents Agree or Strongly Agree
35% of respondents Disagree or Strongly Disagree
18% of respondents were Neutral or did not respond

5. I feel that I have sufficient service provider options in my area.

50% of respondents Agree or Strongly Agree
32% of respondents Disagree or Strongly Disagree
18% of respondents were Neutral or did not respond

6. The [Department] website is helpful in providing information about ACE.

47% of respondents Agree or Strongly Agree
24% of respondents Disagree or Strongly Disagree
29% of respondents were Neutral or did not respond

7. I received excellent customer service during the reimbursement process.

32% of respondents Agree or Strongly Agree
36% of respondents Disagree or Strongly Disagree
32% of respondents were Neutral or did not respond

Parent Testimonials

- 1) *This weekly group helped Micah learn to work with others, develop critical-thinking skills, and gain confidence. Activities included: building with wood, using recipes, building tents, carving, knife safety, trips to police station/fire station/parks, and lots more.*
- 2) *This camp is STEM-focused with hands-on activities in the physical and chemical sciences. These camps are excellent at making science relevant to everyday life as well as creating excitement toward science in general. Elliott loves learning here and it makes him more excited about his schoolwork because he has had great hands on learning.*
- 3) *My children were homeschooled during COVID and the Science Center provides opportunities to refresh the curriculum we taught on science topics during that year.*
- 4) *These funds were spent toward the fees charged and skills learnt for wonderful activities, such as educational field trips and for the great Hebrew language classes taught in Cincinnati Hebrew Day School, and the tutoring services it provides for students who need 1x1 time to learn the material.*
- 5) *She learned how to better play the viola, which helps her in the orchestra and aids in her overall development into a well-rounded person. Learning a musical instrument has shown to aid in brain function and learning.*

- 6) *My child expanded his knowledge of science. He's gotten the chances to go on many field trips, participate in many science experiments, and he's improved his grades tremendously.*
- 7) *This service has allowed my son to advance in reading and math while working on his social skills.*
- 8) *This camp will enable my daughter to socialize in a group setting and be able to learn how to work as a team. It will give her sportsmanship and the physical activity she needs per day that will also boost her confidence. The sports will give her hand and eye coordination and get her moving whether it be kickball, elimination or gaga. It will also allow her to practice discipline because every game has different rules, and each game has its own benefits. It will enable her to swim and give her additional physical activity during a regular swim session. (And give more opportunity for hand and eye coordination while swimming.) Arts and crafts will enable her creativity and imagination to come out and learn new and various arts. With all these skills, the camp summer experience will build her emotional and physical needs and give her the growth she needs to be productive in the summer.*
- 9) *Piano will help with my son's math skills, language skills, reading comprehension, and creativity. It will also help with his concentration and discipline. I'm hoping that piano will strengthen his hand and eye coordination and boost his self-esteem. Another important factor that made us choose piano is the studies that highlight piano as a great "unplugged" outlet to reduce stress and anxiety, which is something he has been struggling with since the pandemic.*
- 10) *Private tutoring lessons in the subjects of math and grammar. My child has already shown improvement on his end of the year test scores and tutoring will continue throughout the summer.*
- 11) *My child is learning about computer hardware, coding, circuitry, robotics and other STEM-related skills in preparation for future career advancements upon high school and college graduation.*
- 12) *We are thrilled to have the opportunity for our children to have in-person music lessons with this generous funding! Thank you! Molly is very musical and even during the shutdowns, she tried her best to learn instruments with virtual lessons! Being able to have in-person lessons now is wonderful! With these organ lessons, she is learning about the organ and is using her piano history to get a taste of this amazing instrument. Thank you! Music has long been known to help students' brains and thus positively impact other school subjects. :)*
- 13) *Help strengthen his reading and math skills so that he can be on his grade level when school starts. This service will help him tremendously after falling behind due to COVID.*
- 14) *Supplemental tutoring to help my child achieve grade-level academics due to falling behind during Covid 19 as evidenced by low test scores.*
- 15) *Since Covid, my child was unable to attend the theater and appreciate the arts of any kind in person. He is now able to take a field trip to experience this.*

16) *My daughter went to Camp Y-Noah where she spent the week socializing with other children. She got to enjoy the outdoors more than she did during Covid due to having to limit exposure to other people and places. She learned new skills and further developed old ones. She got to swim, horseback ride, and canoe with her friends as well as do art/craft activities.*