CASE WESTERN RESERVE UNIVERSITY
Schubert Center for Child Studies

2025 - 2026 Annual Report



Advancing Child Well-Being Through Evidence, Partnership and Policy

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Letter from the Director

Anastasia Dimitropoulos

Dear colleagues and friends of the Schubert Center,

As we reflect on another successful year at the Schubert Center for Child Studies, I am proud of what we have accomplished together and grateful for the many faculty, students, alumni, community partners, and friends who make this work possible. The work of the Center is rooted in the belief that bringing together research, education, policy, and community perspectives can improve the lives of children and youth, and this past year provided many opportunities to do just that.

Over the past year, we expanded our educational outreach through the continued growth of our academic minor, strengthened our social media presence, and brought many of you together for conversations on timely issues affecting children, youth, and families. We also continued to support undergraduate and graduate student research through mentorship, travel awards, and research funding, helping students develop as scholars while advancing research that matters.

We also strengthened our work at the intersection of research and policy by convening important conversations, producing timely policy reports and resource guides, and translating research into practical resources for policymakers, practitioners, and communities.

These efforts reflect the Center's commitment to connecting evidence with action in ways that support child and youth well-being.

I am grateful to everyone who attended our events, mentored students, collaborated on research and policy initiatives, and supported the Center throughout the year. Your partnership and generosity make our work stronger and our impact possible.

As we look ahead, we remain committed to fostering meaningful collaborations, supporting the next generation of researchers and leaders, and advancing research that informs policy and improves the lives of children and families. Thank you for being part of the Schubert Center community. I look forward to another year of learning, collaborating, and working together to improve outcomes for children and youth.

Sincerely,

Anastasia Dimitropoulos
Director, Schubert Center for Child Studies

Highlights

2025 to 2026 Academic Year

The Schubert Center for Child Studies continues to serve as a vital bridge between rigorous academic research, civic practice, and community policy. This past academic year, the Center convened diverse audiences to tackle pressing issues impacting child well-being, community care, and equity.

- **Community engagement:** 500+ event participants across community & academic engagement
- **Active academic network growth:** 100 total associates — Faculty, Research, and Child Associates representing 8 distinct schools across Case Western Reserve University as well as hospital affiliates
- **Student experiential learning footprint:** 67 students enrolled in Childhood Studies Minor, many of whom pursue immersive policy field placements. Three advanced child policy students spent spring break in Washington, D.C., as part of an experiential learning child policy course.
- **Community research & programming impact:** Evaluated Open Doors Academy out-of-school time programming serving 500+ Cleveland-area youth across multiple site locations.
- **Student research support:** The graduate students who were awarded the Freedheim Graduate Student Fellowship include **Rachel Gordon** and **Rachel McClaine,** who are advancing child-focused dissertation research. And the new Research and Academic Program Award (RAP) supports graduate students engaged in child- and youth-focused research; it went to **John Whesu,** a PhD in Sociology, and **Hind Al Sabti,** a PhD in Nursing.
- **New Schubert Center Associates:** The Schubert Center welcomed 11 new associates this academic year: **Megan Alder Wenzell, Kristina Bowdrie, Haoming Song, Jennifer King, Wilson Brown, Elizabeth Capps, Elizabeth Ritz, Stacy Ran-Pettes, Alexis Block, Molly McVoy** and **Melissa Libertus**
- **Retired Schubert Center Associates:** The Schubert Center said goodbye to **Mark Singer and Mary Erdmans** upon their retirement.
- **Elizabeth (Betsy) Short,** Co-Director and Advisor for the Childhood Studies Program, also retired.

2025-26

NEW THIS YEAR AT THE CENTER

This past academic year marked a pivotal expansion in how the Schubert Center bridges empirical investigation and frontline advocacy. By shifting public outreach to high-dialogue formats and creating formal structural pipelines for advanced student leadership, the Center has established a more collaborative blueprint for regional child policy translation.

1. Launched Childhood Matters: Schubert Center Conversation Series

This ongoing, multidisciplinary speaker series hosted by the Schubert Center spotlights associates and community partners to explore timely topics affecting children and adolescents, ranging from immigrant youth in Ohio and youth mental health in the age of artificial intelligence to community-based arts and enrichment programs.

2. Enhanced Communications with New Staff

Expanded staff to include a dedicated Event and Communications position, driving an increased focus on strategic marketing and community relations.



On Feb. 27, Dr. Lisa Huisman Koops explored how libraries and families can partner to use everyday music to support young children's learning and well-being as part of the new Childhood Matters series.

This spring, three committed undergrads spent nearly a week of immersive learning in Washington, D.C., during its 250th celebration. Collectively, the students took a deep dive into their chosen policy area, meeting with federal agency officials, doing legislative visits on the Hill, and interviewing policy influencers at various think tanks, associations, and child advocacy groups. They concluded their course by presenting mock Congressional briefings with their final research papers.



(From left) Mariangel Arrieta, Rachel Bhagat and Vaishnavi Kuriti in Washington, D.C. The trip is a component of CHST 302.

2025-26

EDUCATION
AND STUDENT DEVELOPMENT

The Interdisciplinary Child Studies Minor

The Schubert Center proudly anchors the undergraduate Childhood Studies Minor at CWRU. This interdisciplinary minor allows undergraduate students across all majors to deeply examine childhood from historical, behavioral, cultural, and societal perspectives.

- **Current Enrollment:** 67 active minors this academic year, constituting the sixth-largest minor in the College of Arts and Sciences.

The Child Policy Pathway & Experiential Learning in Public Policy

For students looking to translate this academic foundation into systemic change, the Center provides a structured, immersive Child Policy Pathway consisting of specialized coursework and hands-on field experiences that build on the foundational course, CHST 305 Advanced Policy (DC experiential learning), and a Policy Externship under the supervision of our Policy Director.

CHST 301 (Public Policy in Child Development): This foundational course introduces undergraduates to the policy-making process across local, state, and federal levels. Students identify active legislative bills and leverage empirical research to evaluate real-world policy impacting child poverty and other systems related to child and adolescent development, including health care, public education, early childhood, child welfare, youth justice, and mental health care.

In 2025-26, Mann Child Policy Externs gained hands-on experience advancing policies that support children, youth and families through placements in local government and nonprofits, including public education, juvenile court, public health, child welfare and other community organizations. Working alongside community leaders, they contributed to policy research, advocacy, program development and outreach while creating meaningful resources and recommendations.

"Through these client interviews and exposure to statewide advocacy efforts, I learned how legal support can improve the health, financial and educational outcomes of children."

— Rachel Bhagat
2026 Mann Child Policy Extern

"This externship provided me with invaluable insight into the shaping of educational policy, especially at the District level. I hope to carry this experience with me as I go to law school and forge a career in educational policy."

— Sharese Lucas
2026 Mann Child Policy Extern

Learn more about the program



(From left) Mann Child Policy Externs Sharese Lucas, Rachel Bhagat, Roman Valine and Tyler Jones.

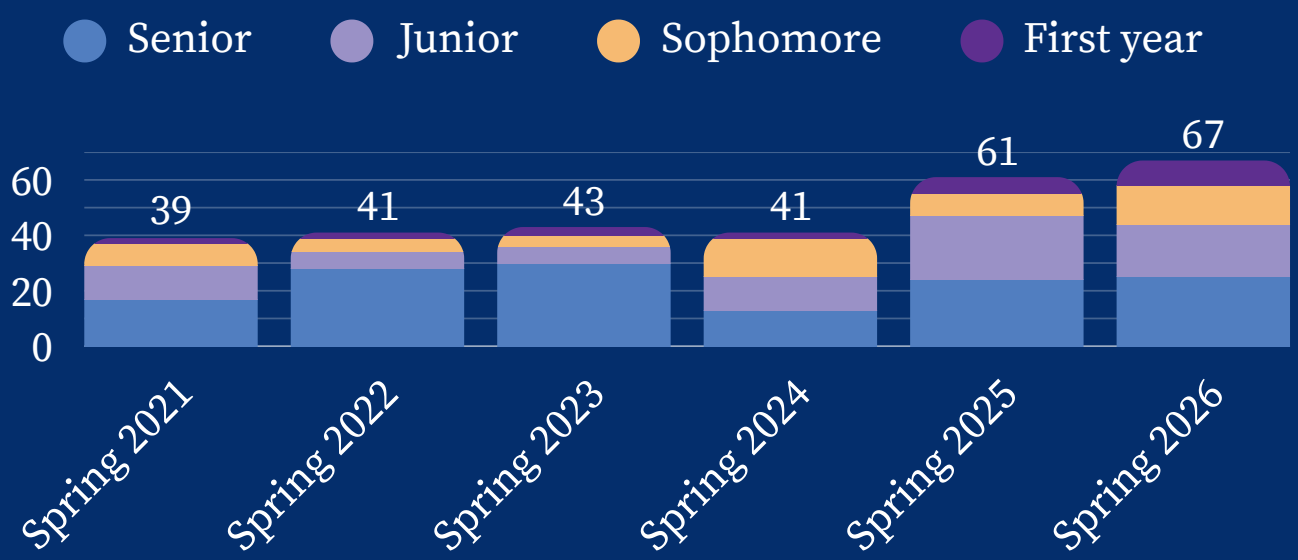
The year

BY THE NUMBERS

In the 2025–26 academic year, our undergraduate Childhood Studies minor reached a milestone of 67 enrolled students, serving as a launchpad for deeper community integration.
Beyond the classroom, student placements connected passionate undergraduates with vital research, policy, and advocacy roles across Greater Cleveland's child-serving organizations.

72%
Growth of minor in 5 years

557+
hours dedicated to local community by child policy externs



Beyond enrollment growth: the 2025–26 academic year reflected the Center's continued commitment to translating research into action and strengthening connections between scholarship, policy, and practice. Through its policy initiatives, the Center examined how local media shapes public understanding of justice-involved youth, providing insights to help reform public narratives around youth and justice. The Center also launched a visual mapping tool to better understand Ohio's youth detention landscape and released a statewide immigrant child support guide designed to help practitioners navigate resources and better support children and families.
Together, these efforts demonstrate the Center's ongoing commitment to advancing informed, collaborative approaches to improve outcomes for children and youth.


CASE WESTERN RESERVE UNIVERSITY
Schubert Center for Child Studies

Supporting Immigrant Children:
Ohio Child Providers and Practiti

Introduction:
Current Climate & the Harmful Impact on Children & Families

Contents

Early Childhood & Child Care
Education in K-12 Schools
Health Care & Mental Health in Pediatric Settings
Child Welfare & Family Court Supports for Children
Additional Ohio Specific Agencies & Resources
Encouragement & Guidance from Immigrant Families
Acknowledgements & References

Immigrant families across the United States—particularly those of mixed immigration status—have often overcome many difficult circumstances to survive and thrive in the United States.

While resilient, they face growing vulnerability to policy changes that compromise their safety, well-being, and access to fundamental rights. Children in these families, many of whom are U.S. citizens, are disproportionately harmed by federal rollbacks and expanded enforcement measures that instill fear within essential institutions such as schools, hospitals, and childcare centers (Muñoz & McLean, 2025).

Recent federal actions—such as the termination of the Department of Homeland Security's "sensitive locations" policy in early 2025, which had previously limited immigration enforcement in places like schools, hospitals, and places of worship—have heightened fear within essential community institutions (McTiernan, 2025) and the termination of deferred action for children under special immigrant juvenile status (SIJS) (Costa, 2025) have intensified confusion and uncertainty. Increased immigration enforcement and deportation through U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and U.S. Customs and Border

SCHUBERT CENTER FOR CHILD STUDIES in the College of Arts and Sciences
bridges research, practice, policy and education for the well-being

The Schubert Center for Child Studies equipped teachers and child providers with local resources to protect kids' safety, well-being, and access to care amid changing immigration policies.

2025-26

POLICY REPORTS AND RESOURCE GUIDES

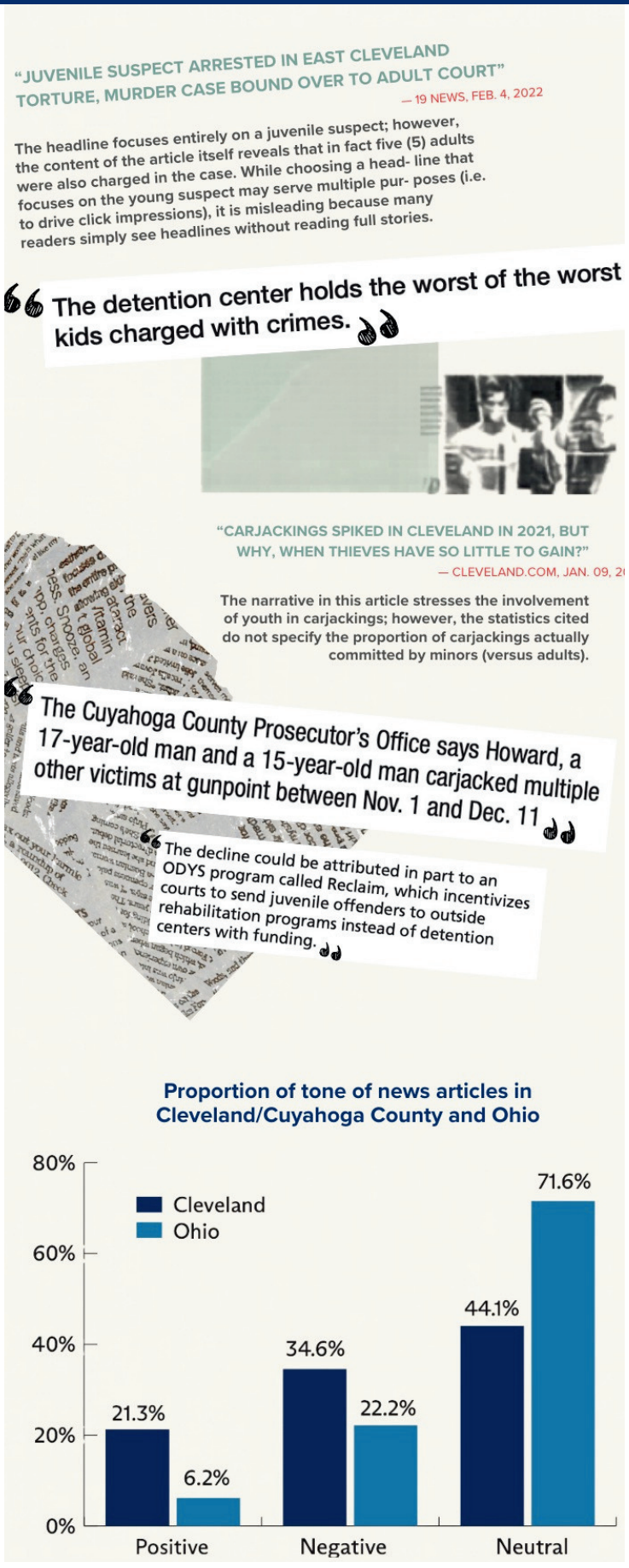
This year, the policy team released two major reports and presented findings via webinars to help inform the field and advance effective policy and practice for child wellness.

- **Supporting Immigrant Children Resource Guide:** Recognizing the potentially harmful impacts on children with recent changes in immigration policy, such as the termination of the federal "sensitive locations" policy that had limited immigration enforcement in schools, daycare, hospitals, and places of worship, the Center researched and published "Supporting Immigrant Children: Resources for Ohio Child Providers and Practitioners." This comprehensive manual for adult providers in child-caring spaces offers Ohio-specific data and clear, concise guidance to better understand how to protect children in their care. The guide curates tactical, trauma-informed resources and guidelines across four critical sectors: Early Childhood & Child Care, K-12 School Systems, Pediatric Healthcare/Mental Health, and Family Court/Child Welfare systems. Thanks to Graduate Student **Madison Surmacz** and Volunteer Policy Researcher **George Bukenya,** who provided primary data collection and initial drafting of the guide.

- **Juvenile Justice News-Coverage Analysis:** Media attention has a significant impact on how the public and policy officials perceive children and teens who get caught up in the justice system, but too often sensationalized media contributes to misunderstanding and bias that disproportionately harms kids. With funding from the **George Gund Foundation,**

our policy team conducted a comprehensive, three-year study of Ohio and Cleveland news coverage, analyzing 887 unique articles. Our first-of-its-kind report “News-Coverage Analysis for Justice-Involved Children and Youth in Cleveland, Cuyahoga County and Ohio” found that there were significantly more negative than positive stories of justice-involved youth and that the sheer volume of reporting on these youth brings disproportionate attention to youth crime involvement, despite data showing that minors are responsible for a small percentage of overall crime, particularly violent crime. An infographic, along with the full report and our webinar, can be found on our website in the Policy section. Thanks to **Policy Research Associate Anu Ajibade,** who was primarily responsible for conducting the media scan, data analysis and initial drafting of this report.

This study found that local news disproportionately focuses on youth crime, amplifying negative narratives about justice-involved children in Cleveland and Ohio and overlooking more accurate, nuanced stories of young people’s lives.



2025-26

POLICY ACTIVITY HIGHLIGHTS

Policy engagement focused on continuing efforts to improve the well-being of particularly vulnerable children by focusing on systems change and improvements locally and at the state level. In addition to ongoing partnership activities with local and state agencies, examples of some of this work last year include:

Working with **the Ohioans for Youth Justice** and legislators to help draft legislation to **implement some of the key recommendations from the Governor's Juvenile Justice Working Group.** Senate Bill 270 (co-sponsored by Sen. Nathan Manning and Sen. Paula Hicks-Hudson) was introduced in late 2025 and is currently in committee.

Engagement with the **Ohio Lead-Free Kids Coalition** as part of the leadership team to **protect state funding** for child lead poisoning prevention efforts.

Collaborating with the Cuyahoga County Juvenile Court, Greater Cleveland Works, Youth Opportunities Unlimited, the Deaconess Foundation and others **to develop and begin prototyping a career pathways strategy** called “Dream Chasers” for local justice-involved youth as part of the Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative.

Public statement released on **the importance of juvenile confidentiality** in court proceedings to **protect child victims and justice-involved youth** and prevent potential lifelong harm.

Presentations to juvenile court, local public officials, and the public to share recent changes in Ohio’s youth justice-involved population, crime data, community programming and legal system reforms, including workshops on restorative justice, teen brain and adolescent development and evidence-based interventions.



The Schubert Associates Dinner convened faculty, researchers, and child associates to share child-focused work and spark new collaborations.

2025-26

RESEARCH FOCUS
SPOTLIGHTS & COLLABORATIONS

Purpose

At the Schubert Center, our research focus is dedicated to cultivating the next generation of child advocates and spotlighting child-focused research across the CWRU campus, supporting graduate scholars, funding undergraduate faculty mentorships, and evaluating community programs. Across CWRU, we elevate interdisciplinary faculty research and directly connect decision-makers and community leaders with those conducting this critical work.

Schubert Associates Dinner

Each year, the Center convenes its cross-disciplinary network of faculty, research, and child associates for the Schubert Associates Dinner. The event brings faculty, regional policymakers, and civic leaders into the same room to spotlight child-focused research throughout CWRU while providing valuable opportunities for networking and collaboration across disciplines. This year, we are proud to welcome new associates **Alexis E. Block, Kristina Bowdrie, Wilson Brown, Elizabeth Capps, Melissa Libertus, Molly McVoy, Elizabeth Ritz, Stacy Ryan-Pettes, Haoming Song,** and **Megan Wenzell,** whose diverse work expands our reach both locally and far beyond.

Graduate Funding Spotlights

To highlight the work of the Center in anchoring advanced child-centered scholarship, we proudly fund dedicated graduate research awards:

- **Schubert Research and Presentation Award (RAP) Awards:** Funded by the Bondy Endowment and the Mann Endowment, RAP supports graduate students conducting child- and youth-focused research. The award provides graduate students with resources to deepen their scholarship, collaborate with community partners, and disseminate their work.

SchubertCenter@Intersections:

At Intersections, the annual undergraduate research showcase, the Schubert Center recognizes outstanding undergraduate research that addresses current issues facing children, adolescents, and their families in our community. This year's award recipients were:

- **First Place: Valentina La Marca** (Biology), "Hybrid Machine Learning Approach for Personalized Photoplethysmography Monitoring in Neonates with Congenital Heart Disease," mentored by Dr. Colin Drummond.
- **Second Place: Joo Young Kim** (Psychology), "Exploring the Impact of Autism-Related Stigma on Caregiver Mental Health, Unmet Needs, and Help-Seeking: A Qualitative Study," mentored by Dr. Rita Obeid.
- **Third Place (Tie): Ayati Lala** (Neuroscience), "Re-Evaluating TAPS-3: A Neurocognitive Analysis of Predictors of Persistent Speech Sound Disorders," mentored by Dr. Catherine Stein; and **Kala Mitcham** (Biology), "Building Health Literacy Early: Interactive Strategies for Teaching Children Health Science Concepts," mentored by James Bader.

Community Partnership & Evaluation — Open Doors Academy (ODA):

Moving beyond theoretical advocacy, the Schubert Center maintains a direct, data-driven program evaluation partnership with Open Doors Academy (ODA). Spearheaded by Program & Evaluation Manager Rachel Perovsek, MPH, the Center provided rigorous program evaluations, data verification support, and collaborative framework designs to objectively measure, validate, and optimize out-of-school and enrichment environments for Cleveland youth.

Research Mentorship:

The Schubert Research Fellows Program, initially established in partnership with the Emerging Scholars Program, pairs students with Schubert Center faculty and associate mentors for paid, semester-long research experiences. Fellows contribute to active child and adolescent research through literature reviews, data collection, coding, research material preparation, and analysis, strengthening both their analytical skills and pathways to graduate study.

This year's program featured several standout student-faculty collaborations:

- **Amaya Dennis,** mentored by Schubert Associate Stephanie Pike-Moore, contributed evidence toward evaluating the public health implications of emergent psychoactive substances available in local retailers.
- **Ava Lipinski,** mentored by Schubert Associate Lisa Koops, evaluated parental perceptions of incorporating music activities at home and in the library as part of "The Storytime Music Project" (SMP2).
- **Alexandra Puerto,** mentored by Schubert Associate Lauren Calandruccio, investigated children's capacity to perceive and process novel accented speech in noisy environments.
- **Ashley Perez,** mentored by Schubert Associate Kristina Bowdrie, analyzed the mechanisms through which child temperament and caregiver contributions influence developmental outcomes in deaf or hard-of-hearing children.

Open Doors Academy provides comprehensive out-of-school time (OST) enrichment programs for K-12 students.

What's ahead?

In the coming academic year, the Schubert Center for Child Studies will host a dynamic series of events bridging child policy, research, and practice to foster community engagement and student research.

Fall 2026 Highlights: The Fall semester opened with our Schubert Associate Dinner and Open House, followed by research presentations from leading scholars on maternal exposures, trauma-informed youth care, and infant social development.

Spring 2027 Highlights: Spring programming features several of our premier signature events. We are proud to host our flagship Kessler Freedheim Lecture with Jason Nagata and to partner on the Cleveland Humanities Festival lecture. The season also features a Childhood Matters conversation with acclaimed author and clinical psychologist Dr. Lisa Damour.

For full event details, confirmed dates, and registration information, please visit our website.

Looking to make an impact?

Consider making a donation to the Schubert Center for Child Studies at Case Western Reserve University.

Your tax-deductible gift helps support our mission to bridge child research, education, and policy to create meaningful community impact for children and young people. Gifts can be directed toward key initiatives.

Scan the QR code to learn more about supporting the Center.

Or visit us online.