Ohio Insights Review

Published April 2021

Executive Summary

From June through August 2020, we surveyed and spoke with state and local policymakers across Ohio to understand private sector responses to the COVID-19 pandemic. This Review summarizes our findings on the top issues that have emerged during the COVID-19 pandemic, how the private sector has engaged with these issues throughout 2020, and what policymakers expect from the private sector moving forward.

STATE LEGISLATURE · EXECUTIVE BRANCH · POLICY PROFESSIONALS · MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT

314 online study participants

39 conversations with policymakers

Top Pressing Issues in Ohio

Education, Especially K-12

Public Health/ Healthcare

Economic Development

Education is a Bipartisan Top COVID-19 Recovery Priority for Policymakers

Policymakers overwhelmingly indicate that K-12 Education is an industry that requires financial support from the government in order to:

- Keep students safe in school
- Create effective and accessible remote learning environments

The Private Sector's Business Response to COVID-19

The majority of policymakers believe the private sector has been effective in their response to COVID-19 with efforts like:

- Increasing work flexibility for their employees
- Partnering with the public sector to produce essential PPE

Policymakers would like to continue seeing more of the following from the private sector:

✓ Promoting the safety of their employees and customers

✓ Supporting communities in which they operate by hiring local, supporting local policymaker priorities, considering long-term business impacts, and seeking feedback

Top Issues in Ohio: Education, Public Health & Healthcare, and Economy

A Bipartisan Majority of Ohio Policymakers See Education as One of the Most Pressing Issues

Most Pressing Issues in the State

52% Education
43% Public Health/Healthcare
35% Economic Development
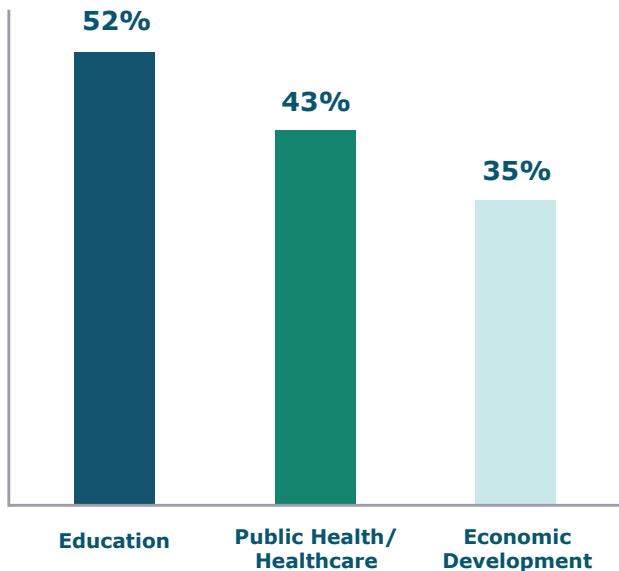
n = 248

"As Ohio looks to reopen communities and the economy, which of the following do you view as the most pressing issues facing the state: (select up to 3)"

*"In the spring, remote learning was one thing because kids already knew their teachers and had that relationship and rapport, so it was an easier gap to bridge. In the fall, a lot of times **students have new teachers or students are in school for the first time, and they do not necessarily know how to interact with these people, or who their classmates and teachers are, or what the situation is.** We want to make it as easy as possible for parents to send their kids to virtual school; that will be huge."*

-Policy Advisor, Ohio State Senate, D

Policymakers also identify public health/healthcare and economic development among the top three most pressing issues in the state.

Public Health/ Healthcare

"I think there needs to be more support locally especially through our County Board of Health because my school and my city government rely on what's coming forward through them. I think the county needs more financial support to do the things that the state is requiring us to do as far as testing and tracing and getting out very specific guidelines."

-Councilmember, D

Economic Development

"We need to do everything we can to keep our economy booming so that down the road we have the financial resources to provide vaccinations or protection equipment or whatever we need to help deal with the virus, which is going to cost money. We need substantial time to be able to pay for that."

-State Senator, R

Education During COVID-19

Ohio Policymakers Believe K-12 Education Requires Support Due to COVID-19 Challenges

Policymakers overwhelmingly indicate that K-12 Education is an industry that requires financial support from the government.

K-12 Education **70%**
Restaurants **52%**
Hospitals **41%**
Retailers **30%**
Higher Education **22%**
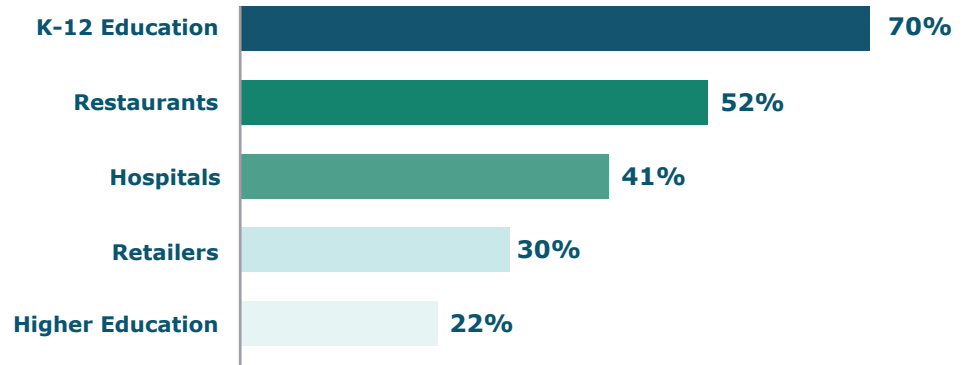
n = 240

"Which of the following impacted industries, if any, require financial support from the government right now? Please select up to three options."

During our conversations, policymakers grapple with questions about COVID-19's impact on education in the state. Policymakers' most pressing challenges in educating K-12 students during COVID-19 are **keeping students safe in school and creating effective and accessible remote learning environments.**

Maintaining Public Health During In-Person Learning

*"You've got our schools that are opening up. Does it mean mixed learning, **does it mean that they're going to be on staggered schedules, how do we disinfect the buses? How do we feed them, how do we get them to their lockers or their cubbies effectively?** Do we put masks on them, do we not? Who knows. All of these are circling around the COVID-19 crisis."*

-State Representative, D

Removing Barriers to Virtual Learning

*"Immediately we needed to change testing requirements and ensure educational resources being sent to students and their families. **We're still trying to direct resources and figure out what waivers we need from federal requirements and what testing requirements we can waive ourselves in order to make a virtual learning environment conducive for students, teachers, and administrators.**"*

-Policy Advisor, Ohio State Senate, D

Ensuring Internet Access for All Students

*"**It's going to be a push for every student that doesn't currently have it to gain broadband access, because that is not a quick fix usually.** I know it is actually regulated by the Federal Communications Commission [FCC], but we definitely try to do as much as we can for that."*

-Legislative Aide, Ohio House of Representatives

Strengthening Internet Infrastructure in Schools

*"Getting the fiber lines and high-speed internet to school buildings is going to be needed because **if teachers are doing lessons from inside their classrooms, and they are live-streaming it, you need to have good bandwidth going out.** And that's a problem, so I think it is going to be a priority."*

-State Senator, R

Business Response to COVID-19

Policymakers Believe Private Sector has Been Effective in Addressing COVID-19 Challenges

69% of Ohio policymakers say that the private sector has been somewhat or very effective in tackling challenges related to COVID-19.

Private Sector Effectiveness in Tackling COVID-19 Challenges

"In your view, how effective has the response of the private sector (e.g., businesses and associations) been in tackling COVID-19 challenges?"

n = 314

15%	54%	7%	16%	8%

- ■ Very Effective
- ■ Somewhat Effective
- ■ Neither Effective nor Ineffective
- ■ Somewhat Ineffective
- ■ Very Ineffective

In our conversations with policymakers, they note that the business sector response has been particularly effective through **increasing work flexibility for their employees** and **partnering with the public sector to produce essential PPE**.

Work Flexibility

"One of the things that a lot of businesses have been doing that is a step in the right direction is providing a little more work flexibility for employees to the extent that they are able because there are still a lot of questions about schools and child care, and that creates problems for people who have to work every day."

-State Representative, D

PPE Production

"A lot of our resources—from nitrile gloves and N92 or N100 or paper masks all the way to protective suits and face shields—none of that PPE is produced by the government. So it requires a lot of coordination, partnership, and effort [with the private sector]."

-Executive, Ohio Department of Health, I

Private Sector Reputation Increases Among Policymakers as Organizations Effectively Respond to COVID-19 Challenges

PBI* Score Improvement for Corporations and Associations in Ohio

Ohio Corporations
- 44.6 (2019)
- 53.4 (2020)

Ohio Associations
- 55.6 (2019)
- 64.9 (2020)

Legend: ▢ 2019 ▮ 2020
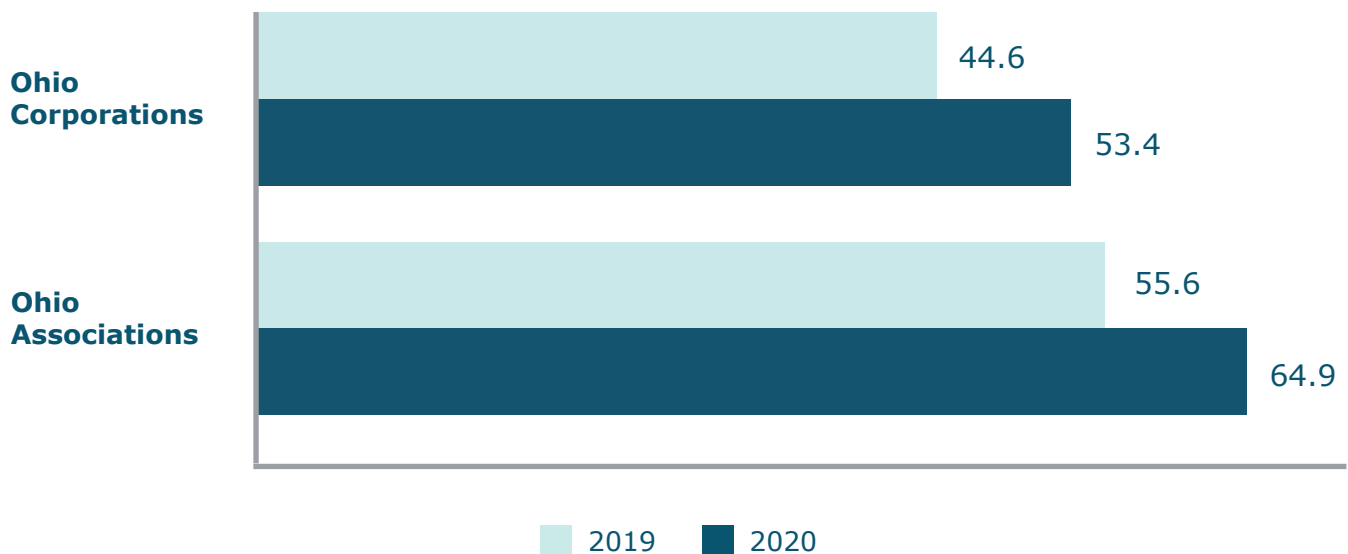
Between last year and this year, ***Policy Brand Index*** Scores—Ballast Research's quantitative measure of reputation among policymakers—have risen for Ohio corporations and associations. This increase in 2020 may be attributed to policymakers' assessment of the overall effectiveness of COVID-19 response efforts by the business community.

*The Policy Brand Index (PBI) is a combination of factors based on the four distinct measures of policy brand: **Respect, Consideration, Influence,** and **Sharing.**

1. How much do you generally respect the organization's role in the public debate?
2. How likely are you to genuinely consider the organization's positions on issues?
3. How likely are your views to be favorably influenced by the organization's views?
4. How likely are you to seek out or share the organization's policy perspectives?

Policymakers Describe How Businesses Can Support Ohio's Recovery

What to Focus on to Support State Recovery

#1 Policymaker Priority
#2 Policymaker Priority

Category	#1 Priority	#2 Priority
Safety of Employees and Customers	80%	12%
Support for Communities in Which They Operate	5%	41%
Performance of Their Business	9%	25%
Innovation of Their Products and Services	5%	21%

n = 230

"To support your state's recovery, what should businesses focus on? Please click and drag options to rank your highest priority focus (1) to lowest priority focus (5)."

Policymakers want to see private sector organizations focus on **promoting the safety of their employees and customers** and **supporting communities in which they operate.**

Customer and Employee Safety

*"One large private sector organization told us they were implementing a number of policies, including **requiring masks for customers and employees and creating handwashing stations, pick-up lanes, and one-way aisles to limit the amount of interaction.**"*

-State Representative, D

Supporting Communities

*"I've seen private sector organizations pledge to work with my Senator firsthand and try to assess all of our constituent needs. **I've definitely seen how a lot of people are willing to change their policies or accommodate the needs of the community when legislators step up and vocalize issues that are affecting their constituents.**"*

-Legislative Aide, Ohio State Senate, D

Policymakers Want Continued Engagement From the Private Sector Moving Forward

Policymakers want private sector organizations to be champions for the communities in which they operate during COVID-19 and beyond. Policymakers provide many examples of how the private sector can engage with Ohio communities moving forward.

Invest in Community Workforce by Hiring Local

"Private sector organizations have an obligation to their customers, communities, and governments that support them. That can come through simply hiring people and providing education for employees so that they have the educated workforce they need to be successful.

-State Representative, D

Support and Advance Local Policymaker Priorities

Businesses should also help back some of the measures that policymakers are talking about. The nonprofits and community organizations do really hard work, such as investing in a clean environment. They've got tremendous resources that they can use to be an ally and a friend."

-State Representative, D

Consider Long-Term Business Impacts on the Community

*"**Corporations tend to work 2-5 years out. Not 20 or 30 years out.** But the government, in particular the policymakers, need to be looking 20-30 years out. It's hard for policymakers to do this as well because they're beholden to their own voters who don't want to hear, 'This is really good 30 years from now'. **So it takes somebody with a lot of goodwill capital to be able to make decisions that are being done for the future rather than for immediate results.**"*

-Executive, Ohio Department of Natural Resources, D

Seek Feedback from the Community to Understand its Needs

*"People are quick to tell us what they're doing, but not so much to tell us what we need to do better on. They'll send emails like, 'Well, we're doing this, and we're doing this,' and that doesn't equate it to them having all the answers. **Companies should be getting feedback from the people they serve, perhaps with a survey, so they can say, 'Well, based off of the 12 million customers that we have, 5,000 of them completed a survey, and this is what they're saying they need. What we're doing works for the people that we serve.'"***
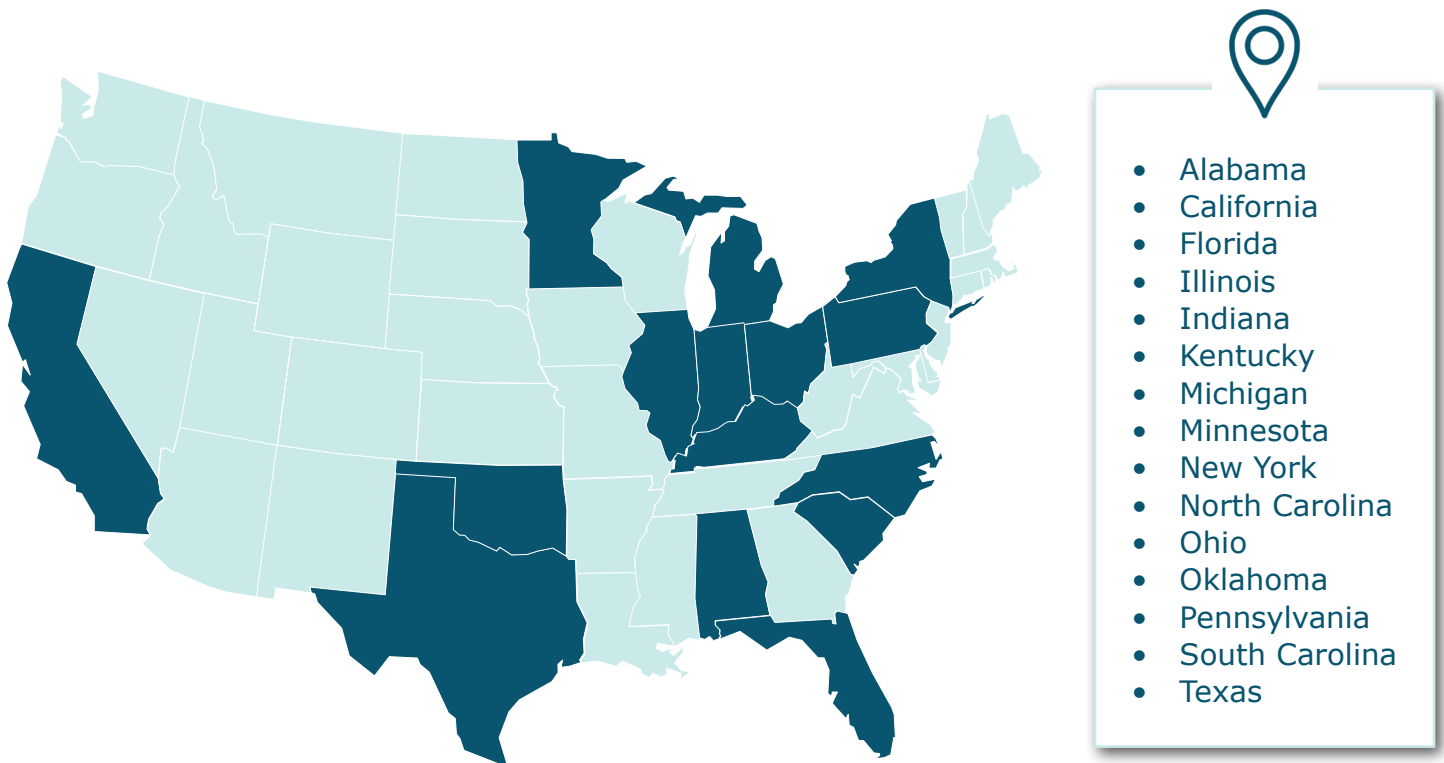
-State Representative, D

States Insights Review

Ballast Research provides direct feedback from senior policymakers to government relations professionals, helping advocates make better use of policymakers' time and provide the resources most useful to those in government.

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