

LAWRENCE COUNTY DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

Frequently Asked Questions

1. What is Lawrence County Developmental Disabilities (LCDD) and what does it do?

Established in all 88 counties by the Ohio General Assembly in 1967, County Boards of Developmental Disabilities (DD) are required to serve all county residents with developmental disabilities who are eligible for board services. These services often last from birth throughout a person's entire life. While all counties are required by state law to offer certain types of services, each county often develops programs and services that support the unique needs of people with developmental disabilities in their communities. In Lawrence County, we provide the following services and supports:

- **Determine Eligibility for Services:** Lawrence County DD is the only agency permitted under state law to establish eligibility for DD services, which must happen before a person can access services funded by local, state, and federal resources.
- **Fund DD Services for All Eligible Residents:** Lawrence County DD uses local property tax money approved by voters to more than double the amount of available resources for people in Lawrence County through the Medicaid program. Services funded by this mix of local and federal resources include daily personal care services, community employment, nursing services, and home modifications, to name a few. In short, this funding allows people with developmental disabilities to remain in their homes and avoid more costly and restrictive care in institutions.
- **Provide Early Intervention Services for Infants and Toddlers (Age Birth to 3):** Early Intervention (EI) is a statewide system that provides coordinated early intervention services to parents of eligible children under the age of three with developmental delays or disabilities. EI is grounded in the philosophy that young children learn best from family members and other familiar people in a home-like setting. Early Intervention is evidence-based and has a significant positive impact on future outcomes for children who have delays—even eliminating some children's developmental delays entirely.
- **Provide Service and Support Administration (SSA):** From the time a person enrolls in Lawrence County DD services until they either move or pass away, county board case managers will conduct assessments, develop Individual Support Plans (ISPs), and authorize services under the Medicaid waiver program to meet their needs. Waiver services include homemaker and personal care, nursing, adult day support services and employment services, vocational habilitation, and transportation. Case managers are also responsible for monitoring services received by providers and offering 24/7 crisis intervention support.
- **Offer K-12 Education at Open Door School:** Open Door provides small classrooms with individualized education, speech therapy, therapeutic, and behavioral support. The school is an alternative for students throughout the county that need a more intensive and supportive educational environment than what available at their local school district.
- **Protect Health and Safety of People with Developmental Disabilities:** Lawrence County DD is responsible for overseeing a host of preventative measures that help keep people with DD healthy and safe. In instances where allegations of abuse, neglect and/or misappropriation of funds are raised, the county board will conduct a thorough investigation and remove people with DD from harm's way. To date in 2019, there have been 132 investigations completed involving physical abuse, verbal abuse, neglect, financial misappropriation, and missing persons in Lawrence County.

2. How is Open Door School paid for?

Lawrence County DD receives funding directly from the Ohio Department of Education to provide services to students at Open Door School. Any one-on-one personal aides that are required are hired by and paid for by the local school district.



3. Where did the money come from to move Open Door School to its new location?

Lawrence County DD sold a building it owned and no longer had a use for to county government in 2018. Additionally, funds in a reserve account were moved to a capital projects account, thus depleting that reserve account. All those funds together (approximately \$515,000) were put back for the renovation of the former Tristate Industries building. The renovations were able to be made within that budget due to the utilization of volunteers, using a staff member as the general contractor, donations and grants. Additionally, Lawrence County DD owns the current building that now houses Open Door School, and part of it is already being utilized by the Service and Support Administration Department.

4. Why did Open Door School move to a new location?

The move was made first and foremost due to safety concerns. The former building was not accessible and the elevator was not working consistently. Secondly, the board did not want to put any more funding into the building. Several costly repairs were looming when the building was relinquished to the county, including the elevator, boiler system, and roof. These repairs would not have been a wise use of levy dollars reserved for DD services.

5. What other buildings has Lawrence County DD sold?

Lawrence County DD sold a building at 715 Lane St. in Coal Grove that was originally purchased as an annex for Tristate Industries (a nonprofit board operating adult services). Revenue from this sale was set aside and used for the renovations at the former Tristate Industries building (606 Carlton Davidson Lane in Coal Grove) so the Open Door School could be moved to that location.

6. Why can't Lawrence County DD operate off of other forms of funding and grants?

Lawrence County DD does apply for grants and has received several in recent years. The largest grant funded program is Help Me Grow/Early Intervention Service Coordination grant. Additionally, the new kitchen equipment at Open Door School was paid for in large part by a grant from the Ohio Department of Education. The agency has also received several grants from the Ohio Bureau of Worker's Compensation. Lawrence County DD maximizes all other sources of available state or federal funds to reduce the burden on local taxpayers.

However, the agency's primary source of revenue, like all DD programs in Ohio, is from local tax dollars. Lawrence County DD's levy millage is among the lowest in the state. In 2020, LCDD will be ranked at number 84 out of 88 counties for millage, despite being ranked at number 42 in the state for size of people served. The county board operates off of a 2.5 mill levy that was originally passed in 1991 and replaced in 2006.

7. Why have expenses outgrown revenue since the last levy replacement in 2006?

The first reason is inflation. Since levy dollars are the primary source of revenue for DD programs, and no new dollars have been obtained since 2006, expenses have outgrown revenue. For instance, Lawrence County DD is providing more services than it was in 2006. In 2006, there were 47 people receiving Medicaid Waivers, and today that number is 236. The Service and Support Administration Department has since doubled in size to keep up with the workload.

Additionally, since that time, the Lawrence County DD lost state revenue sources such as tax equity and other subsidies from the Ohio Department of DD. These funds are now allocated to Medicaid match for waiver services. Over the last 3 years this change has resulted in a loss of approximately \$2 million.

8. Wasn't Tristate Industries privatized? Why didn't that save money?

Yes, the adult programs at Tristate Industries were privatized. This means that private organizations, such as Person-Centered Services (PCS) and Easterseals, now provide these services instead of Lawrence County DD. The decision was based on a federal mandate from the Centers for Medicaid Services (CMS) to come into compliance with federal law and was not intended to serve as a cost-saving measure. In fact, the resulting loss of Medicaid funding did not produce any cost savings for the board.

LAWRENCE COUNTY DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES: FAQ

9. Why is the board currently being sued? What is the outcome of these lawsuits?

There have been two lawsuits filed against Lawrence County DD in the last two years. One case has already been dismissed (in favor of the board) in 2018, and one is ongoing. We cannot discuss pending litigation, however, the filings are public record at the Clerk of Courts Office in the Courthouse or at their website below.

10. What about past financial mismanagement? Why should I trust the county board with my taxpayer dollars?

In the summer of 2017, the board became aware of concerns regarding the misallocation of funds. There were also concerns expressed about a lack of transparency. In response, the board took immediate action to address these concerns.

- In 2018, the Lawrence County DD hired a new superintendent to lead the program.
- Financial oversight by the board was increased through regular and rigorous review of expenditures and revenues, and internal controls around financial practices were increased. This included the establishment of a finance committee to review the budget regularly.
- The board now holds its meetings in the evenings to encourage more public participation, and board minutes are posted on the agency's web site.

11. What has Lawrence County DD done to save money and cut costs before asking the taxpayers for another levy?

Since 2018, Lawrence County DD cut nearly \$2 million from the budget through the following actions:

- Downsized buildings (refer to #5);
- Moved out of the old ODS building and relocated to a more cost efficient and safe location already owned by LCDD;
- Over the past two years, 2017 – 2019, LCDD abolished positions through attrition, reorganized duties and left positions vacant thus reducing salaries and benefits by approximately 16% from 2017 to 2019 resulting in \$1 million dollar savings over those two years.
- Partnered with other agencies to achieve similar results at a lower cost, such as the partnership with South Point Local Schools to provide special education preschool services at the Early Childhood Center in South Point; and
- Maximized revenue from state and federal sources.

12. Why does Lawrence County DD need additional funding when there is a carryover of funds?

The board generally ends every year with a cash balance amount in its general fund. However, this money is already accounted for. Since local funds from property taxes are not received until after the first quarter of each year, an absolute minimum cash balance of 25% of the total budget is needed just to open up the next year and pay for expenses. Best practices for County Boards of DD is to end the year with a 40% cash balance of the total budget to cover any unforeseen or emergency costs. Considering the mandated responsibilities that County Boards of DD are charged with, and the impact services have on the daily lives of Lawrence Countians with developmental disabilities, the Lawrence County DD strives to assure responsible financial practices. The cash balance at the end of 2018 was 36.4% of projected 2019 expenses. The final ending cash balance for 2019 won't be known until after the year closes out, but due to cutbacks that were made in 2019, we are projecting the cash balance will remain around 40%. Even if additional funding is obtained through the levy, no funds will be obtained until the spring of 2021. So, this 40% cash balance is extremely important to maintain services over the next year.

13. If the levy passes, what would the additional funding be used for?

The additional funding would prevent deficit spending, allow for the current services to remain in place (including reinstating services that were cut back), and to assist in meeting the needs of those currently waiting for services. The levy would help to maintain the services described in #1, as well as provide needed and required services which includes serving people in crisis to ensure their health and safety.

14. Why is such a large percentage of the budget designated for salaries?

Lawrence County DD is a service provider organization. From early intervention staff to teachers and classroom assistants to case managers and investigative agents, nearly every type of support offered by the board is delivered by a person—and these employees are all paid a salary to perform these tasks. Salary scales for county board employees are based on several factors including customary rates for similar positions at nearby county boards as well as level of education and certifications required for each position. The current salary scales are in line with education and certifications required for each position. The current salary scales are in line with average salaries across the region. Staff members who earn more are those with longevity to the agency and/or field of developmental disabilities.

15. What are contact services that the board employs?

The board contracts with several agencies and private contractors throughout the year to provide both direct services to children and adults and typical business services.

Direct services to children and adults are school transportation, occupational therapy, physical therapy, speech therapy, adult day services, adult transportation, residential supports, behavior support, provider compliance reviews and Medicaid waiver match.

Contracts for typical business services cover utilities, technology support, office systems (phones, copier repairs and service), and legal guidance.

16. Who oversees Lawrence County DD's finances?

The Lawrence County DD board has a finance committee that reviews budget projections in depth. Detailed financial statements are reviewed by the whole board monthly. The Lawrence County Auditor is the fiscal agent for the county board. In addition, the county board's finances are monitored by DODD through the annual cost report submitted to the State of Ohio. Furthermore, beginning April 2020, each county board must submit a five-year financial forecast to the State of Ohio, providing an additional layer of planning and accountability for local tax dollars.

17. What about lawsuits pertaining to a child?

There was a lawsuit in 2013 that involved the use of a behavioral intervention at our school. This case was closed and settled. A prior case was dismissed in favor of LCDD. To make sure our students have the safest environment possible, the LCDD places a heavy emphasis on assuring staff have professional training in an approved crisis intervention curriculum. All staff, including substitutes and personal aids, as well as our transportation providers, are trained before interacting with students. Despite this lawsuit, we are confident that our students have received and will continue to receive a quality education in a loving environment. This is apparent to anyone that visits our school.

There were two lawsuits filed in 2018 – neither involved with services to individuals. One was dismissed in favor of LCDD, and one is ongoing and pertains to a personnel issue. There are no other lawsuits that we are aware of.

18. There have been several concerns about the previous administration (financial mismanagement, inappropriate actions, etc.). How have those been addressed?

In 2017, the board of DD became aware of concerns regarding the administration. The board addressed the concerns swiftly. No one involved is currently employed by LCDD. New leadership was put into place immediately, and procedures and policies were updated to prevent further concerns.

It is unfortunate that there were issues with former leadership, however, this is not the reason the LCDD needs additional funding. LCDD is asking for additional funding so that we can make a positive difference in the lives of those with developmental disabilities. We are excited about the things we want to do, and know that with the help of the community, we can help those who need us live better lives.

Specifically, we are asking for additional funding to do the following:

1. Maintain the level and quality of services we currently provide to infants, children, and adults throughout the life span so they can have an improved quality of life
2. Serve the increasing number of infants and toddlers through our Help Me Grow Early Intervention Program so they can overcome delays and reach their fullest potential
3. Serve transition age youth ages 14-21 with developmental disabilities so they can become productive members of the community
4. Expand waiver services to those on waiting lists based upon need

19. What has happened to the surplus? How did forecasting affect LCDD's decisions?

Please refer to #7, #8, and #12.

The state passed a mandatory 5-year forecast in 2019. LCDD has always prepared a 5 to 10 year forecast. Several factors changed our financial situation recently (especially 2016 to present) and many are listed in our FAQ (#7).

In addition to loss of state revenue over recent years, the number of waivers for individuals increased from 220 to 236 since the end of 2016 resulting in the need for more staffing, and the needs of individuals with developmental disabilities along with the cost of services have increased. For example, Medicaid rates for services are increasing, which increase our local match responsibility. Therefore, the surplus began to decline due to these rises in costs.