

Working Group 1

Early Childhood Education

Elements of the Preliminary Recommendations with a Fiscal Impact

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Policy Area:

Early Childhood Education: Expands high quality pre-K to all four-year-olds and three-year-olds from low-income families, and assesses all children to identify those who need supports to be ready to succeed in school.

Element Detail 1a

Element: Expand Pre-K to all four-year-olds and three-year-olds from families at 300% Federal Poverty Level (FPL) or less, and four-year olds from families above 300% FPL based on a sliding scale.

Design Assumptions:

1. Research shows that investing in the early childhood learning and development of disadvantaged children yields a high return to society, offsetting taxpayer costs for poor health, dropout rates, poverty, and crime. Other benefits include reductions in special education costs, grade retention rates, teacher turnover and absenteeism costs, and costs for tutoring and other supports.
2. Expanding high-quality pre-K for both four-year-olds and three-year-olds from low-income families is an ambitious first step towards the State's ultimate goal of making universal, publicly funded pre-K available for all four-year-olds and three-year-olds in the State regardless of income. Expansion efforts must be accomplished in partnership with, and with significant investment from, the local jurisdictions.
3. The State will expand access to public pre-K to all four-year-olds and three-year-olds from low-income families at 300% FPL on a 10 year phase-in timeline.
4. Family enrollment in pre-K will be voluntary.
5. All participating programs, whether based at public schools or community organizations, will follow State public pre-K standards set forth in the Code of Maryland Regulations (COMAR) and must attain at least a level 3 ranking on the applicable EXCELS quality scale with a plan to get to a level 5 within 5 years in order to receive public funding.
6. Although the time it will take for a provider to move up the EXCELS levels depends on individual circumstances, on average, it currently takes a provider one year to move from EXCELS level 1 to 2, up to two years to move from EXCELS level 2 to 3, two to three years to move from EXCELS level 3 to 4, and two to three years to move from EXCELS level 4 to 5.
7. Provision of publicly funded pre-K will include both public school-based pre-K programs and participating community-based pre-K programs.
8. Participating providers accepting public funds may not discriminate in student admissions on the basis of race, color, national origin, or sexual orientation. Any provider found to be in violation of this requirement must be required to return any public funds.
9. All publicly funded full-day pre-K programs will be a minimum of 6.5 hours and at least 180 school days.

10. Families will have access to extended day (before and after care) services through the State's child care subsidy program. Chapters 563 and 564 of 2018 require the State to increase the program's provider reimbursement rates for each region to the 60th percentile of child care provider rates by fiscal year 2022. Recently promulgated emergency regulations expand the number of families who will be eligible for subsidies by updating eligibility for the program to reflect 65% of the State median income.

Implementation Decisions:

1. Priority in expansion of pre-K will be focused on four-year-olds from low-income families (300% poverty or less), while gradually expanding to three-year-olds from low-income families (300% poverty or less). Expansion efforts in the early years will be focused on making pre-K available for all four-year-olds from low-income households in half-day slots, while half-day slots are being converted into full-day slots. Therefore, by year four, all four-year-olds from low-income families will be offered full-day pre-K.
2. Full-day pre-K for three-year-olds from low-income families (300% poverty or less) will be phased-in over the 10 year period by a minimum of 10% per year. Therefore, by year 10, all three-year-olds from low-income families will be offered full-day pre-K.
3. The State will require that a minimum percentage of pre-K slots are provided in participating community-based settings. This minimum requirement will be phased-in over the 10 year period in 10% per year increments in years one through four, and remain constant at 50% beginning in year 5.
4. Priority in expansion of pre-K for both four-year-olds and three-year-olds from low-income families will be given to: (a) special education students, regardless of income; and (b) students who are English Learners, regardless of income.
5. Priority in expansion of pre-K will be given to areas and regions where there are fewer providers and programs available to serve the four-year-old and three-year-old population in the area or region.
6. Year one of the implementation schedule will use 70% of low-income families as a starting target for the voluntary enrollment of four-year-olds in publicly funded pre-K, as some families will choose private providers or keep children at home until kindergarten. The target participation rate will increase to 80% in year five and continue at 80% through year 10 as more families take advantage of available publicly funded pre-K programs.

7. The implementation schedule will use 80% of low-income families as the target for the voluntary enrollment of three-year-olds in publicly funded pre-K, as some families will choose private providers or keep children at home.
8. Public school-based pre-K programs will be required to publish in EXCELS. Public school-based pre-K programs can begin publishing at a level 4 or level 5 when they enter EXCELS if they meet the requirements.
9. Publicly funded pre-K will be available at no cost for a family of four in the State with incomes at or below 300% of poverty. Beginning in year five, there will be a linear sliding scale for a family of four with incomes between \$75,000 and \$100,000 (approximately 300% to 400% of poverty) whereby for every 1% above \$75,000, the family will receive 1% less in public funding.
10. The State will prioritize public school construction funding, if available, for additional pre-K classrooms.
11. Local jurisdictions will be encouraged to develop innovative ways to meet physical space constraints during the phase-in period such as utilizing available space at senior or community centers for early education programs.
12. Local education agencies will partner with the State to develop systems to provide transportation for prekindergarten students. As the State transitions to full-day pre-K that better aligns with parents' working schedules, any transportation costs are likely reduced. In addition, child care subsidy funds will still be available for eligible families to use for before and after care, which may include transportation services to and from a pre-K program.

Phase-in Timeline Decisions

1. EXCELS: To receive public funding, a provider must publish at a level 3 with a plan to get to level 5 within 5 years.
2. Minimum Percentage of Pre-K Slots in Community-based Settings: Starting in year 1, there will a requirement that a percentage of pre-K slots (either for four-year olds or three-year-olds) are provided in community-based settings. This minimum requirement will be phased-in over the 10 year period in 10% per year increments in years one through four, and remain constant at 50% beginning in year 5.
3. Expansion of slots (minimum requirements):
 - In year one, all four-year-olds from families at or below 300% poverty will have access to half-day pre-K. 10% of three-year-olds from families at or below 300% poverty will have access to full-day pre-K.

- In year four, all four-year-olds from families at or below 300% poverty will have access to full-day pre-K. 40% of three-year-olds from families at or below 300% poverty will have access to full-day pre-K.
 - In year 10, all four-year-olds from families at or below 300% poverty will have access to full-day pre-K. 100% of three-year-olds from families at or below 300% poverty will have access to full-day pre-K.
4. Sliding Scale for Four-Year-Olds: There will be no family contribution for a family of four with an income below \$75,000 (approximately 300% poverty). Beginning in year 5, for a family of four with an income between \$75,000 to \$100,000 (approximately 300–400% of poverty), there will be a linear sliding scale within the income bracket.

		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
	FY19	FY20	FY21	FY22	FY23	FY24	FY25	FY26	FY27	FY28	FY29
4 year olds	All below 185% FPL offered ½ day	All below 300% FPL offered ½ day	All below 300% FPL offered ½ day	All below 300% FPL offered ½ day	All below 300% FPL offered full day	All below 300% FPL offered full day. Sliding scale for families between 300 and 400%FPL	All below 300% FPL offered full day. Sliding scale for families between 300 and 400%FPL	All below 300% FPL offered full day. Sliding scale for families between 300 and 400%FPL	All below 300% FPL offered full day. Sliding scale for families between 300 and 400%FPL	All below 300% FPL offered full day. Sliding scale for families between 300 and 400%FPL	All below 300% FPL offered full day. Sliding scale for families between 300 and 400%FPL
3 year olds	None required	10% below 300% FPL offered full day	20% below 300% FPL offered full day	30% below 300% FPL offered full day	40% below 300% FPL offered full day	50% below 300% FPL offered full day	60% below 300% FPL offered full day	70% below 300% FPL offered full day	80% below 300% FPL offered full day	90% below 300% FPL offered full day	All below 300% FPL offered full day
Community-based (3 or 4 year olds)	No requirement	Min 10% in Community-based	Min 20% in Community-based	Min 30% in Community-based	Min 40% in Community-based	Min 50% in Community-based	Min 50% in Community-based	Min 50% in Community-based	Min 50% in Community-based	Min 50% in Community-based	Min 50% in Community-based

5. Workforce building for ECE: As the number of slots and students increase, additional capacity building of the early childhood workforce system, including credentialing, recruitment, and retention of educators and staff, will be needed to meet increased workforce demand (Element 1b).

Element Detail 1b

Element: Capacity building for new and current programs (tuition assistance for prospective staff; training; support of peer networks; integration with career ladder)

Design Assumptions:

1. The State will continue to require lead pre-K teachers (for three-year-olds and four-year-olds) to have a BA with ECE certification. The State will require assistant teachers/aides to have a Child Development Associate (CDA) certificate or an AA degree.
2. The State will encourage pre-K programs to invest in helping teachers to become certified in early childhood education.
3. The State will offer increased coaching and technical assistance through EXCELS to support the efforts of community providers in improving the quality of their programs. The State will prioritize supporting providers in high-need communities in meeting EXCELS level 5.
4. The State will support ECE staff in attaining CDA credentials and AA degrees to serve as aides and assistant teachers in publicly funded pre-K programs. This support will include financial support to help cover course and exam fees and coaching by mentor teachers.
5. Additional credentialing and professional development of ECE staff will be needed to match the pace of the expansion of pre-K slots. The State will continue to require an average staff to student ratio of 1 to 10 with an average of 20 students per classroom, and will continue to require classroom staffing of one pre-K teacher and an assistant teacher or aide.
6. Students should be provided with a consistent environment in terms of class size and ratios as the student transitions from prekindergarten to kindergarten.
7. Public pre-K teachers will be part of the Maryland K-12 teacher career ladder. Master pre-K teachers will be a level on the career ladder. In order to become a master teacher on the career ladder, the teacher must earn National Board Certification.
8. As part of its effort to increase the pool of qualified teachers and assistants, the State will significantly expand tuition assistance for individuals to earn BA and AA degrees with specialized training in ECE, as part of its effort to increase the pool of qualified teachers and assistants.

Implementation Decisions:

1. The State will implement initiatives developed under MSDE's Master Plan on Professional Development for Teachers and Providers of Early Childhood Education, such as aligning high school early childhood CTE program standards with CDA credential requirements and community college ECE programs; expanding online professional development courses with job-embedded coaching; requiring coursework and clinical work in ECE programs to include training in diverse child care environments and working with special needs children; creating pathways that accept prior learning experience; creating an ECE bachelor's degree program and dual certification programs; and creating a public awareness campaign for recruiting ECE teaching staff and promoting quality child care.
2. The State will set targets so that the percentage of teachers certified in ECE and staff with CDA credentials increases and keeps pace with the 10 year implementation period. At full implementation of pre-K for low-income four-year-olds and three-year-olds, the State will need 7,400 pre-K teachers and assistants (3,700 each).
3. The State will expand and increase the amount of training vouchers and credentialing bonuses to encourage providers to continue professional development. The amounts of the vouchers and bonuses will be tiered with the credentialing levels to incentivize movement towards higher quality.
4. The State will provide financial assistance for students who complete the high school early childhood CTE program to take the CDA assessment so the student can work as an aide or assistant teacher. To promote a more diverse workforce, the State will also expand access to ECE CTE programs, focusing on jurisdictions where the greatest disparities exist between student demographics and ECE staff.
5. The State will increase MSDE's capacity to provide technical assistance to publicly funded pre-K programs through EXCELS quality assurance specialists, regional offices, and onsite monitoring and licensing staff to keep pace with the increase in participating providers. It is assumed that this additional support will expedite the abilities of providers to move from level 3 to level 5 in EXCELS.
6. The State also will expand the coaching infrastructure/model developed by the Child Care Resource Center Network to provide training for community providers to meet EXCELS requirements.
7. The State will identify ECE teachers as a workforce shortage area to enable tuition assistance through the Workforce Shortage Student Assistance Grant Program.

8. The State will create a full tuition scholarship program for students who become lead pre-K teachers and commit to work in high-needs schools for a certain number of years.
9. The State will significantly increase funding for the Child Care Center and Professional Development Fund to support ECE staff in obtaining associate's degrees, bachelor's degrees, and CDA credentials.
10. The State will focus outreach and recruitment efforts so that the ECE teachers and staff mirror the diversity of the community.
11. The State will require that all pre-K teachers have cultural competency training through teacher preparation programs or professional development programs.
12. Public pre-K teachers must meet teacher certification requirements as required of K-12 teachers. Therefore, public pre-K teachers will be incorporated into the State K-12 teacher career ladder developed by Working Group 2.

Element Detail 1c

Element: Implementation of **school readiness assessment** for all students entering kindergarten

Design Assumptions:

1. This assessment will be given to all kindergarteners as a census.
2. The State will continue to provide every kindergarten teacher with training or a refresher course on administering the KRA each year.
3. The State will continue to provide professional development funds for jurisdictions that administer the KRA as a census assessment.
4. The assessment tool will provide information for kindergarten teachers to use for lesson planning and identifying students who may need additional assistance.
5. The assessment tool will not be cumbersome for teachers to administer and teachers will be given time to administer the assessment within the school day.
6. A protocol will be put in place to enable teachers to use and act on the information produced by the assessment tool, such as referring students for case management or in-class or out-of-class supports.

Implementation Decisions:

1. Local boards of education will have flexibility to administer a portion of the KRA before students enter kindergarten and during the first two months of the school year.
2. The State will require the KRA to be administered to every kindergarten student as a census and not as a random sample to ensure equity and accountability.
3. The State will extend the administration window from October 10 to October 30 to reduce the operational impact of conducting the KRA as a census assessment.
4. A survey of kindergarten teachers will be conducted after Version 2.0 of the KRA is fully implemented in fall 2018 to get feedback on the usefulness and usability of the new version of the KRA.
5. The survey will include questions such as the usefulness of the KRA data to inform kindergarten instruction and whether the KRA data enhances a teacher's ability to identify challenges that a student may be experiencing, especially those indicating that a child may need special education services.
6. The oversight body will review the results of the survey and review Version 2.0 for usefulness and usability and, in consultation with MSDE, make any recommendations for changes, if needed.
7. The KRA data collection system will include a standardized process for reporting a kindergartener's prior care setting.

8. The KRA will be implemented as a census statewide by school year 2020-2021.

Element Detail 1d

Element: Expand Judy Centers, Family Support Centers, and the Maryland Infants and Toddlers Program to provide and coordinate access to education and support services for at-risk children ages 0-5 and their families

Design Assumptions:

1. The State will expand the number of Judy Centers over time to match the number of Title I elementary schools.
2. The State will expand the number of Family Support Centers over time, with the goal of ensuring that every underserved neighborhood has a Family Support Center or similar set of programs and services.
3. The State will increase funding for the current Maryland Infant and Toddlers Program that provides support to families with special needs children.

Implementation Decisions:

1.
 - a. The expansion of Judy Centers will be phased-in over 10 years, with priority in opening new Judy Centers going to the neediest communities. MSDE will be required to consider geographic diversity when selecting a Title I school within which to locate a new Judy Center. MSDE will be required to coordinate placement of new Judy Centers in order to serve multiple, closely located Title I schools in a high needs area or region.
 - b. There are currently 54 centers, with one or more located in each jurisdiction, and more than 300 Title I elementary schools (one Judy Center costs \$330,000 annually). The State will reduce this gap and increase the number of centers over time so that 42 new Judy Centers open in the first 5 years and 80 open in the next 5 years. By year 10, there will be 122 new Judy Centers.
2.
 - a. The expansion of Family Support Centers will be phased-in over 10 years, with priority in opening new Family Support Centers going to the neediest communities. MSDE will be required to consider geographic diversity when selecting regions to locate a new Family Support Center. MSDE will be required to coordinate placement of new Family Support Centers in order to serve multiple, closely located counties or areas in need of a Family Support Center. There are currently 9 counties (Calvert, Charles, Garrett, Harford, Howard, St. Mary's, Somerset, Wicomico, and Worcester) where there are no Family Support Centers.

b. There are currently 25 Family Support Centers (the State contribution is \$330,000 annually). The State's goal should be to open 3 new centers a year so that by year 10, there will be 30 new Family Support Centers.

3. The State will increase funding for the Maryland Infants and Toddlers Program to support the increase in the number of children eligible for these services.