



Workgroup 1: Early Childhood Education

To: Mr. Craig Rice, Moderator, and Members of Workgroup One
From: Strong Schools Maryland
Date: September 14, 2018

First, we applaud your recommendations re: prekindergarten for both three and four year olds. These have been decades in the making and it looks like this time the stars may align to make these critical supports available, especially for the state's low-income children.

Also, in the three and four year old context, you recognize that school success depends significantly on the non-academic conditions of a child's life and the life of his/her family and community. As a result you have aspirationally recommended the expansion of Judy Centers from 54 to as many as there are Title I elementary schools (over 300).

Second, we applaud your recognizing that the first two years of life are deeply connected to whether Maryland children graduate on time with the requisite skills for higher education and/or high skills/high wage training for careers. Dr. Sharon Lynn Kagan laid out for the Commission months ago the research that makes clear that 80% of a child's brain is developed by age 3 and 90% by age four. You have responded by aspirationally recommending the expansion of Family Support Centers to every underserved neighborhood (surely this would include at least those neighborhoods served by Title I schools or whatever other definition of concentrated poverty the Commission determines).

The problem, of course, is that the actual recommendations fall far short of the need you define. In the case of Judy Centers, you recommend meeting less than 40% of the need ten years from now. In the case of Family Support Centers, assuming that every neighborhood needing a Title I elementary school is an underserved neighborhood, you propose meeting only 18% of the need ten years from now.

The aspirational goals are worthy. The actual recommendations are deeply troubling. Your Judy Center and Family Support Center recommendations will make

your prekindergarten recommendations and the recommendations of all of the Commission's other Work Groups more expensive and less effective.

There are three reasons we can discern for the recommendations falling so far short of need. One is that meeting the need will cost too much. The second is that we don't have the staff capacity and facilities to expand Judy Centers and Family Support Centers more rapidly. The third reason is that some believe that addressing the 0-2 years is outside of the Commission's charge

With respect to the cost, your charge is to define adequacy and then have the Commission and, later the legislature, address cost in the context of the whole Commission report. It is not possible for each individual work group to make cost accommodations separate from considering all the costs of Commission recommendations and apart from all the cost savings and cost avoidance and a calculated return on investment for the whole Commission report.

A second response to the idea that the cost of meeting need is too great is that, in fact, NOT meeting the need is the costly alternative.

With respect to capacity, if you and the Commission based your recommendations on current implementation capacity, the most significant recommendations would have to be abandoned. There is not current capacity for prekindergarten; there is not current capacity for the recommendations to produce enough quality teachers and school leadership, etc. When the capacity does not currently exist, the answer is, of course, to have recommendation to build capacity. In the case of Judy Centers and Family Support Centers, the knowledge and experience exist to build the capacity. We simply need to harness that knowledge and experience and build the capacity that results in meeting the need of the children instead of adjusting need to current capacity (and dollars).

With respect to the notion that the 0-2 years are outside the Commission's charge, you have, with the less expansive recommendations, already recognized that is not true. We applaud you for that. If you accept the research about brain development and that normative brain development is necessary to success prek through on-time graduation, then satisfactorily providing for children between ages 0-2 is directly connected to on-time graduation. Further, if we exclude hundreds of thousands of kids from normative brain development, the disabilities will fall most heavily on African-Americans, English Language Learners and low-income children deepening the achievement gap, especially when white, English-speaking and non-low income kids whose brain development will not be impeded, will be able to accelerate achievement as a consequence of the Commission's other recommendations.

We urge you to simply identify the need and recommend:

1. the number of Judy Centers meet the need in ten years,
2. the number of Family Support Centers meet the need in ten years,

3. that mechanisms be created and/or engaged to ensure that staff and facility capacity is available in a timely way to support the expansion of Judy Centers and Family Support Centers.