

Working Group 1

Early Childhood Education

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Policy Area:

Early Childhood Education: Expands high quality pre-K to all four-year-olds and all low-income three-year-olds, and assesses all children before they come to kindergarten to identify those who need supports to be ready to learn

Element Detail 1a

Element: Expand Pre-K to all four-year-olds and low-income three-year-olds, with a sliding payment scale for four-year-olds

Design Assumptions:

1. Expand access to public pre-K to all four-year-olds based on a sliding payment scale and all low-income three-year-olds in the State
2. Participation in pre-K is voluntary
3. All programs, whether based at public schools or community organizations, should follow State pre-K standards and attain a level 5 ranking on the EXCELS quality scale in order to receive public funding
4. Provision will include both public school-based pre-K programs and community-based pre-K programs
5. Pre-K programs should be at a minimum 6.5 hours

Implementation Considerations:

1. Priority in expansion of pre-K for three-year-olds should be given to:
(a) low-income children (300 percent poverty or less) and (b) special education students, regardless of income.
2. Eventually, all four-year-olds should have access to pre-K. But priority in expansion of pre-K for four-year-olds should be given to: (a) low-income children (300 percent poverty or less) and (b) special education students, regardless of income.
3. 70-80 percent of families will choose public pre-K for four-year-olds (private pre-K programs will still serve a percent of children and some parents will keep children at home until kindergarten)
4. 80-90 percent of low-income families will choose public pre-K for three-year-olds
5. Need to discuss a timeline for phasing in the requirement for attaining level 5 on EXCELS to receive public funding
6. Need to discuss a timeline for expansion of slots
7. The timelines will be tied to increased credentialing and capacity building of early childhood educators (Element 1b)

Other Options:

1. Coordinate with child care subsidy programs so children have access to extended day services that align with parents' working schedules (SB 379/HB 430, which were passed by the General Assembly and are awaiting the Governor's signature, increase State child care subsidies to the 60th percentile of child care provider rates by fiscal 2022)

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. Maryland will continue to require lead pre-K teachers (for three- and four-year-olds) to have a BA.
2. The State should encourage pre-K programs to invest in teachers to become certified in early childhood education.
3. Maryland should support coaching for private/community providers to improve the quality of their programs to first meet level 3 on the EXCELS scale, and then level 5.
4. Maryland should support cohorts of ECE staff in attaining CDA credentials to serve as aides and assistant teachers in these programs. This support should be both financial and through coaching by mentor teachers.
5. Pre-K teachers should be part of the Maryland teacher career ladder. Mentor pre-K teachers should be a rung on the career ladder.
6. Maryland should expand tuition assistance for new candidates for pre-K teacher to get BA degrees with specialized training in ECE, as part of its effort to increase the pool of qualified teachers.

Implementation Considerations:

1. Expansion of staffing will need to match the pace for the expansion of pre-K slots
2. Maryland can use the coaching infrastructure/model developed by the Child Care Resource Center Network to provide training for private providers of expanded pre-K.
3. Maryland should set targets over time to increase the percentage of programs reaching EXCELS level 5.
4. The State should set targets so that the percentage of teachers certified in ECE increases in a certain number of years.

Other Options:

1. Maryland could consider adding an incentive (salary bonus) for pre-K teachers to teach in high-need schools/programs

Element Detail 1c

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

Design Assumptions:

1. This assessment would be given to all incoming kindergarteners by kindergarten teachers.
2. The tool should provide information for kindergarten teachers to use to plan their lessons and also to enable teachers to identify students who may need additional assistance
3. The tool will not be cumbersome for teachers to administer; and teachers will be given dedicated time to administer the assessment
4. A protocol will be put in place for what will be done with the information on the assessment tool, in terms of referring students for case management or in-class or out-of-class supports

Implementation Considerations:

1. A survey of kindergarten teachers should be conducted to get feedback on the usefulness and usability of the KRA and results should be reviewed by the working group
2. The working group should review the KRA for usefulness and usability and make any recommendations for changes, if needed.
3. The assessment should be implemented statewide by 2019-2020.

Element Detail 1d

Element: Expand **Judy Centers and Family Support Centers** to provide and coordinate access to education and support services for at-risk young children ages 0-5 and their families

Design Assumptions:

1. Maryland will expand the number of Judy Centers over time to match the number of Title I elementary schools
2. Maryland 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.

Implementation Considerations:

1. The expansion of Judy Centers will be phased in over time (timeline to be determined by working group), with priority going to the neediest communities. There are currently 56 centers and more than 300 Title I elementary schools (a Judy Center costs about \$320,000 annually).
2. The expansion of Family Support Centers will be phased in over time, with priority on the most underserved communities. There are currently 26 Family Support Centers (a Family Support Center costs about \$250,000 annually).