

Investing in Maryland's Young Children Our Early Childhood System

I firmly believe that we can close the school readiness gap and prepare our children for world-class achievement through high-quality early learning experiences.

– Lillian M. Lowery, Ed.D., State Superintendent of Schools, Maryland State Department of Education

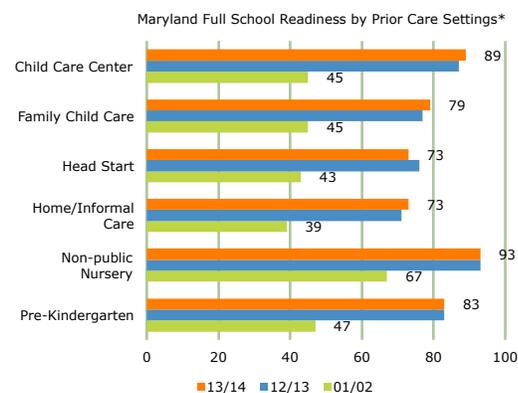
Meeting Rigorous Standards

School readiness – the ability to do kindergarten work successfully – is essential for all children. It is one of the most important factors in, and has a powerful impact on, the educational and life success of every young child. Extraordinary numbers of Maryland children are entering school fully ready to succeed and, as a result, meeting our rigorous state standards. In school year 2013-14, 83% of entering kindergarteners are fully school-ready, up from 49% in 2001-2002.¹

Early Learning Environments Work

When young children have access to high quality early learning experiences, such as Pre-Kindergarten (PreK), they are well prepared for school. In 2013-2014:²

- Children previously attending PreK programs are on par with the statewide readiness average and show greater long-term improvements (a 36-point gain from 2001-2002, compared with the 34-point statewide gain). Because public PreK programs serve a high percentage of children with academic challenges, including low income, ELLs, and children with disabilities, the data are significant for addressing achievement gaps.
- Children enrolled in public PreK programs – the majority of whom live in low-income households – outperform their peers at the same income level (83% of children previously enrolled in PreK are fully ready compared with 77% of kindergarteners from low-income households).
- Children attending public PreK programs are better prepared for school than their peers who were at home or received informal care (73% fully ready).



* Both Head Start and Pre K have enrollment criteria, and almost exclusively serve low-income children or children with disabilities.

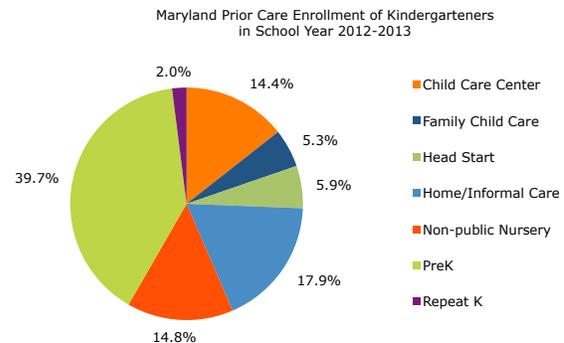
The amount of time a child spends per day in a high-quality early learning environment (such as child care, Head Start, PreK, or non-public nursery school) and the consistency of attendance, are also highly correlated with school readiness.

¹ The Maryland State Department of Education's Maryland Model for School Readiness 2013/2014 Report.

² The Maryland State Department of Education's Maryland Model for School Readiness 2013/2014 Report.

A Diverse Delivery System

About 77% of Maryland's young children attend a formal early learning setting. Maryland features a diverse delivery system comprised of a patchwork of providers and environments, including:



- **Child Care Centers.** Childcare provided in a facility, usually non-residential, for part or all of the day, in the absence of a parent. Centers licensed by the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) currently serve 14.4% of Maryland's four-year-olds.
 - **Judy Centers** or Judith P. Hoyer Early Child Care and Family Education Centers provide comprehensive educational and family support services (10–12 hours a day, year round) for children birth through kindergarten. These public-private partnerships serve nearly 13,000 children in 43 Title I elementary school zones.
- **Family Child Care.** Regulated care given to a child younger than 13-years old, in place of parental care for less than 24 hours a day, in a residence other than the child's home and for which the provider is paid. Licensed family child-care providers are regulated by the MSDE and serve approximately 5.3% of four-year-old children.
- **Head Start.** A federal pre-school program for 2 to 5 year olds from low-income families; funded by the US Department of Health & Human Services and licensed by MSDE and/or local boards of education. Maryland's Head Start programs serve approximately 5.9% of 4-year-olds.
- **PreK.** Public Pre-Kindergarten education for 4-year old children administered by local boards of education and regulated by the MSDE. Public PreK programs serve the vast majority of 4-year-old children participating in early learning (39.7% or 26,500 children). In 2013-2014, 31% of PreK children participated in full-day programs (14 jurisdictions currently offer a full-day option for some or all PreK children).
- **Non-Public Nursery School.** Pre-school programs with an "education" focus for 3 and 4-year olds; approved or exempted by MSDE; usually part-day, nine months a year.
- **Home/Informal Care.** Care by parent(s) or a relative. This remains the second largest source of childcare for children (17.9% of young children).

Challenges of Current System

For all of the documented successes of the early care and education system, challenges remain:

- **Affordability.** A recent public opinion poll commissioned by the First Five Years Fund found that 89% of parents say it is important to make early education and childcare more affordable for working families to give their children a strong start. A similar number want the federal government to help states build better preschools and make them more accessible to low- and middle-income children.
- **Access.** There are approximately 70,000 four-year-olds in Maryland, but 12,100 children (18%) are not enrolled in a formal early learning setting, despite the proven benefits.
- **Quality.** While many children attend Maryland's high-quality programs, numerous young children are enrolled in center-based or family-care programs that do not employ highly educated providers, offer competitive salaries and benefits, or use proven curriculum.
- **Infrastructure.** Unlike the formal PreK-12 public school system, Maryland's early care and education system is complex and multi-faceted. This diverse delivery system can result in lack of alignment, curriculum integration, effective transitions, communication, and collaboration.
- **Funding.** The nation's current economic obstacles, including federal budget cuts and sequestration, impacted our children. While Maryland was able to restore funding levels for early care and education priorities (such as Early Head Start and Head Start) in 2013, this is neither a long-term solution nor a viable option in the near future. Maryland's \$50 million federal Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge (RTT-ELC) grant, which is making comprehensive improvements to PreK and kindergarten curricula, assessments, and systems, does not support direct services to young children, nor will this important work be completed at the conclusion of funding in 2015. Additional funding is essential to continue momentum and progress to date.

Strategic Investments

Maryland is committed to creating a world-class education system that prepares students for college and career success in the 21st century. Early education is an integral part of this vision, and we've made substantial investments over the past three decades in the early care and education system to benefit young children:

- **The Maryland Model for School Readiness (MMSR).** This nationally-recognized early learning framework included a kindergarten assessment system, K-12 instruction, professional development, and family communications. Maryland is one of the few states that assess 100% of kindergarteners attending its public schools. The data are used by a variety of stakeholders to track outcomes for young children; guide programs and policies, shape curricula, inform teachers and families; and, most importantly, support individualized classroom instruction.
- **Full Day Kindergarten.** Today, all Maryland children (over 67,000 students attend full-day kindergarten, obtaining important foundational skills that are essential for school success.
- **PreK** for all children with significant risk factors. Since 2001-2002, the number of children served in PreK programs grew by 30%. This year, 26,503 four- and five-year-olds are enrolled in state-funded PreK programs (about 36% of all 4-year-olds).

Our initial success was validated with the award of a federal Race to the Top grant in 2010 and the Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge (RTT-ELC) grant in 2012. These grants enabled Maryland to create a strong and dynamic statewide system from birth to 12th grade

These are just some of the investments targeting early care and education and improving school readiness in Maryland.

What's Next in Maryland?

Maryland is once again at the forefront of strengthening school readiness. As part of the \$50 million RTT-ELC grant, the Maryland State Department of Education, in partnership with the Ohio Department of Education, developed a new comprehensive assessment system that advances the continuous improvement of early care and education programs, and most importantly, helps early childhood educators improve learning opportunities for young children.³

The new Ready for Kindergarten (R4K): Maryland's Early Childhood Comprehensive Assessment System:

- Builds on the success of the MMSR, aligns with the more rigorous Maryland College and Career-Ready Standards for K-12 instruction.
- Enhances the birth-to-grade 12 learning continuum.
- Monitors children's learning progress and gauges the school readiness of incoming kindergarteners through computer-based assessment.
- Connects to the state longitudinal data systems to allow for consistent and meaningful reporting at the student, class, school, district, and state levels.

On the Horizon

In his State of the Union Address, President Obama proposed several initiatives supporting the youngest Americans. Specifically, the President urged the funding of "Preschool for All" – ensuring that all 4-year-old children have access to high quality public pre-kindergarten, as well as Early Head Start-Child Care partnerships and an expansion of the Home Visiting program, which will provide additional high-quality programs for children from birth to age three.

Let's do what works and make sure none of our children start the race of life already behind. Let's give our kids that chance.

—President Obama, State of the Union, January 2013



About Issue Insights

Ready At Five's *Issue Insights* series educates and informs the business community and provides a context and framework for business leadership, act, and investment.

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