A STRONG START FOR THE FUTURE

School readiness – the ability to successfully do kindergarten work – is essential for all children. Children who enter school with high levels of readiness are more likely to succeed academically throughout their school careers, as well as later in life. Investments today pay rich dividends in the future.

A WATERSHED YEAR FOR EARLY LEARNING IN MARYLAND

Each year, more than 67,000 children enter Maryland’s kindergarten classrooms. In the 2013-2014 school year, 83% of kindergarteners were fully ready for school, up from 49% in 2001-2002 – a 69% improvement in readiness over the past 12 years.

Maryland recognizes that the skills children develop before age five are critical to later success, and we’ve made substantial investments over the past three decades in our early care and education system – developing policies, programs, interventions, and resources to benefit young children. These investments have yielded great results.

Our high-quality formal early care and education programs are effectively preparing young children for school.

- Children previously attending public 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).
- Children enrolled in public PreK programs the year before kindergarten – the majority of whom are from 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 (83% fully ready) are better prepared for school than their peers who were at home or in informal care (73% fully ready).

Source: Maryland State Department of Education.
Achievement gaps remain for many Maryland kindergarteners. Children from low-income families, those learning the English language (ELLs), or those who have a disability consistently have significantly lower school readiness than Maryland kindergarteners as a whole. What’s more, children from these subgroups comprise an increasing proportion of the kindergarten population.

AIMING HIGHER

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MEETING THE CHALLENGES HEAD ON

The Maryland State Department of Education recently took a huge step forward for all of us who have a stake in our children’s success. MSDE developed a comprehensive new assessment system that will replace the Maryland Model for School Readiness (MMSR) in 2014-2015. The new system, known as Ready for Kindergarten (R4K): Maryland’s Early Childhood Comprehensive Assessment System, aligns with the new State standards for K-12 instruction. R4K provides a single coordinated system for recognizing the needs and measuring the learning progress (knowledge, skills, and abilities) of all children from 36 to 72 months (3 to 6 years of age) in seven domains of child learning.

We have committed to further elevating school readiness by:

- Universal PreK, as envisioned, will ensure that all 4-year-old children have access to a high-quality, PreK experience – in public schools and in the community.
- A strengthened early care and education workforce is essential to further raise levels of school readiness.
- Early Head Start and child care partnerships, as well as the expansion of home visiting, can provide additional high-quality learning programs for children from birth to age three.
- Innovative early childhood investment strategies, such as public-private partnerships and self-sustaining community involvement, can stimulate action at the local and programmatic level.

STRENGTHENING SCHOOL READINESS REQUIRES BUSINESS LEADERSHIP

If we are to strengthen Maryland’s early care and education system and ensure that all children enter kindergarten fully ready to succeed, we need you. Here are some of the things you can do:

- **Invest.** Make early care and education a key part of your company’s and foundation’s philanthropy and corporate social responsibility efforts, as well as personal giving.
- **Act.** Adopt business practices that support children and employees with young children.
- **Lead.** Help statewide and local leaders develop investment strategies that will support and sustain the future of our early care and education system in Maryland.
- **Advocate.** Advocate for specific legislation and funding for early care and education. Encourage your elected officials to adopt policies that make early childhood education part of Maryland’s economic development agenda.

The time is now. We need your talent, your philanthropy, and your leadership to make a difference for Maryland’s young children.