

MEMORANDUM

October 31, 2023

TO: Health and Human Services Committee
Education and Culture Committee

FROM: Vivian Yao, Legislative Analyst

SUBJECT: Early Childhood Education Initiatives

PURPOSE: Receive an update on the Early Care and Education Initiative, Children’s Opportunity Alliance, and Pillar I of the Blueprint for Maryland’s Future

Expected Participants include:

County Government

- BB Otero, Special Assistant to County Executive
- Dira Treadance, Chief, Children, Youth and Family Services, DHHS
- Jennifer Arnaiz, Administrator, Early Childhood Services, DHHS
- Deborah Lambert, Fiscal Policy Analyst, Office of Management and Budget

Children’s Opportunity Alliance

- Kimberly Rusnak, Executive Director
- Kevin Beverly, Board Chair

Montgomery County Public Schools

- Nichelle Owens, Director, Division of Early Childhood and Title I Programs, and Recovery Funds
- Amy Cropp, Director, Division of Prekindergarten, Special Programs, and Related Services
- Peggy Pugh, Chief Academic Officer
- Niki Hazel, Associate Superintendent, Office of Curriculum and Instructional Programs
- Jessica Blasic, Supervisor, Early Childhood Programs

I. EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION INITIATIVE

Background

The Council has long recognized the importance of expanding access to quality early childhood services, and invested in local child care subsidy supports and expansion of full-day pre-kindergarten programs in public and community-based settings. Recognizing the increasing

needs for these services to address the opportunity gap, support Kindergarten readiness and set young children on path of lifelong success, then-Council President Navarro and the County Executive, in partnership with MCPS and Montgomery College, announced the Early Care and Education Initiative (ECEI) four-year action plan in March 2019. The Initiative has been focused on:

- expanding the number of quality ECE seats in a mixed delivery system,
- ensuring the sustainability of family and center-based programs,
- increasing resources to providers and families,
- identifying existing unused or underutilized classrooms in high need areas,
- increasing utilization of local child care subsidies, and
- supporting recovery work during the COVID pandemic.

Fiscal Year 2023 was the final year of the initial four-year action plan, and Fiscal Year 2024 is the first year in the second four-year action plan.

Update

ECEI Update Presentation to the Joint Committee is attached at ©1-10, and the FY24-27 ECE Action Plan is provided at ©11-22. The ECEI is focused on identifying barriers, designing administrative and programmatic solutions, and implementing policies with a focus on alignment, sustainability, access and affordability, and expansion of early childhood services. In developing the action plan, the ECEI stakeholder workgroups and steering committee received information solicited from early childhood educators, families, partners, residents and early care and education organizations, and workgroups.

Some of the key points from the plan and presentation are summarized as follows:

- **Alignment:** Includes the creation of partnerships and alignment of services to improve access for families of young children, early educators, and the public. ECEI brings key stakeholders with expertise, knowledge and experience into workgroups and study expert teams to coalesce perspectives and approaches.

Ongoing work that underpins the development of a comprehensive ECE system includes:

- Develop Shared Services Process – December 2023, estimated completion;
- Develop a Facilities Fund in partnership with a Community Development Financial Institution – January 2024, estimated completion;
- Perform a Study on Supply and Demand of Child Care – August 2024, estimated completion;
- Perform a Study on Cost of Quality Child Care – October 2024, estimated completion;
- Perform a Study on Early Care and Education Compensation and Workforce – December 2024, estimated completion; and
- Complete an Evaluation of Family Involvement Center – July 2024, estimated completion.

- **Sustainability:** Involves identifying new and ongoing resources to sustain partnerships and high-quality ECE across settings. Efforts and services supported through the initiative include:
 - ***Post pandemic supports to sustain child care:*** \$10.1 million in sustainability grants, \$1 million in personal protective equipment, \$2.3 million for child care for essential workers, \$670,000 for rent relief for child care in public space programs, \$1.2 Million for playground and building renovations and business consultations services for family child care businesses.
 - ***Family & Community Supports:***
 - Family Involvement Centers in Rockville, Gaithersburg, and Silver Spring offering free play-based programming for caregiver and child.
 - LENA Start evidence-based program to enhance communication development in young children in collaboration with Family Services.
 - The Basics community-level initiative to promote awareness of early childhood development in partnership with Montgomery Moving Forward and Montgomery County Collaboration Council with extensive outreach in the 20877 zip code area.
 - Training and Education: \$500,000 in Montgomery College Scholarships and \$250,000 DHHS training for licensing and credentialing.
- **Access & Affordability:** Expanding eligibility for Working Parents Assistance and State Child Care Scholarship supplements, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program during summer months; Early Screening engagement with pediatricians and families, Community Connect portal to simplify access to comprehensive services with focus on rental assistance, health insurance, and child care subsidy.
- **Expansion:** Increasing supply and options for high quality ECE programs:
 - GOFCC: recruitment of registered family child care providers.
 - 3's Project: Seats to ensure continuation of services for children between Early Head Start and Head Start.
 - Community-based Child Care Expansion in Wheaton and Gaithersburg.
 - EquiCare Grant (Jan 2024): for 100 high quality infant and toddler seats for families who do not qualify for existing ECE public program.
 - PreK Contract Expansion (July 2024): Increase number of preschool children served and vendors used.
 - Reopen Emory Grove Early Learning Center (Fall 2023).
- **ECEI Budget:** The total appropriation available for the ECEI is approximately \$27 millions in FY24, with project expenditures in the range of \$17-20 million, leaving a remaining balance of \$7-10 million. These funds have been allocated; however, there may be timing differences with the start and implementation of initiatives and the start

and end of the fiscal year. Council staff notes that the ECEI expenditures are anticipated to increase in FY24 leaving a lower carryover than the previous year.

The ECEI workgroups include Finance, Workforce & Training, Access & Affordability (Early Intervention and Inclusion), Access & Affordability (Friend, Family, and Neighbor Care), Facilities, and Public Education and Community-Based ECE Partnership. The Chairs, members, goals, outcomes and resources for the groups are detailed on ©11-17. Data Metrics need to be developed for each group.

II. CHILDREN'S OPPORTUNITY ALLIANCE

Background

Recognizing that ECE is an essential service and economic imperative for the well-being of the County's children, families, employers, and the greater community, the Council enacted Bill 42-21, which requires the Council to designate a single nonprofit corporation as the County's Early Care and Education Coordinating Entity and establishes the role of the Coordinating Entity in convening stakeholders, developing priorities, and supporting the development of an equitable, robust system of high quality, accessible and sustainable ECE focused on children from birth to 5 years old. On July 12, 2022, the Council designated the nonprofit Montgomery County Children's Opportunity Alliance Incorporated as the County's ECE Coordinating Entity by resolution and the Executive approved the resolution.

Update

The report and presentation slides for this update provided by COA is attached at © 23-33, and the FY23 COA Annual Report is attached at ©34-62. COA reports that it has worked this year to stand up the organization's infrastructure and focus on its mission. Some of the highlights from the COA materials includes the following:

- **Mission:** To bring together community leaders across all sectors who are driven by a common purpose: to create an equitable, comprehensive high-quality accessible, sustainable early childhood system.
- **Vision:** We believe that when every young child in Montgomery County can reach their greatest potential it will create a stronger future for all of us. A thriving Montgomery County will put young children first.
- **Goals:** Access, Quality, Workforce Supports, and Family Engagement.
- **Accomplishments:**
 - Board and Staffing: COA brought on Board members, elected officers, hired its Executive Director and filled five staff positions. **The Joint Committee may be interested in understanding the status of hiring for the ECE expert role.**

- COA has engaged in relationship building, soliciting community feedback, data collection and fiscal mapping and concluded that there are not enough affordable seats; businesses are challenged to recruit and retain qualified employees; and vulnerable populations in the County are underserved.
 - COA commissioned a report on the well-being of Montgomery County’s Young Children, which amassed publicly available data on well-being measures for young children, include maternal and child health, school readiness, and early school success. The report can be accessed at <https://mocochildren.org/data>.
 - COA secures and administers private-sector funding. In FY23, COA raised \$95,000 and in FY24 has raised \$100,000 out of a targeted \$165,000. COA reports that it engages in grantmaking to spur innovation in the field and awarded four grants totaling \$105,000 in grants for FY23. **Additional information on how COA assesses potential innovation in the field of ECE would be informative For example, what is the nexxus between efforts of the Montgomery County Food Council to promote SNAP program awareness and complete applications for children 0-15 to innovatively improving the ECE system?**
- **Ongoing Work:**
 - COA needs to raise awareness in the community and at the state level about the importance of early care and education and the need for greater investment.
 - Continued partnership with public agencies and the community to improve access to data to inform decision-making and tracking progress.
 - Completing strategic planning process that includes key strategies, organizational and County-wide goals to address the challenges in the ECE landscape and road maps for achieving goals.
 - Completing efforts to refresh and realign the Early Childhood Coordinating Council, and potentially other advisory groups engaged in ECE.
 - Pulling together a workgroup to create the organization’s Racial Equity and Social Justice policies and procedures, as required by legislation.

III. BLUEPRINT FOR MARYLAND’S FUTURE, PILLAR I: EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

Background

The Blueprint for Maryland’s Future (Blueprint) is the State’s legislative framework to enable “Maryland’s Pre-K-12 [education] system to perform at the level of the best-performing school systems in the world.” It provides approximately \$3.8 billion of funding for a 10-year period to support specific policy recommendations in five key areas: high quality early childhood education and expansion; high-quality and diverse teachers and leaders; college and career readiness pathways; more resources to ensure all students are successful; and governance and accountability. In 2021, the General Assembly overturned Governor Hogan’s original 2020 veto on the legislation and passed revisions to the Blueprint to account for both the delay in implementation and COVID 19 related impacts. Fiscal Year 2023 was the first year in the 10-year Blueprint implementation period.

The Blueprint for Maryland’s Future Accountability and Implementation Board timeline for implementing Pillar 1 is attached at ©64 and includes the following goals:

- Increase the number of high-quality private pre-K providers and staff;
- Expand access to free full-day pre-K for low income 3 and 4 year-old children (up to 300% of the federal poverty level)
- Have private providers serve a minimum proportion of pre-K slots;
- Expand pre-K access to 4 year-old children between 300-600% of FPL on a sliding scale;
- Administer unbiased Kindergarten Readiness Assessment to all incoming Kindergarten students;
- Create 30 new Family Support (Patty) Centers by FY29;
- Create 135 new Judy Centers by FY30; and
- Expand the Maryland Infants and Toddlers Program.

Council staff notes that the focus of the ECEI encompasses the whole system of early care and education from 0- 5, of which the Blueprint pre-kindergarten efforts are a limited subset. The work of the ECEI in strengthening the sustainability of early care programs and increasing access to services in high needs areas contributes to the County’s ability to implement Blueprint requirements.

Update

The slides provided by MCPS are attached at ©63-74. Council staff highlights the following from the information provided:

- The number of expansion grant programs remains the same in FY23-24 as the previous year. There is an increase of five expansion grant classrooms (19 from 14), though only an increase of one expansion grant seat (208 from 207).
- Slide five indicates that MCPS has converted part-day Pre-K programs to full-day in 10 Title I schools and created new full-day and new part-day Pre-K classrooms.
- The school system is awaiting official guidance on Pre-Kindergarten sliding scale cost modeling.

- MCPS has been administering the KRA to all kindergarten students. The readiness data for the last school is reported on slide 10 at ©72. This school year’s data has not been reported.

Council staff notes that the enrollment numbers on slide 7 at © 69 report only 608 Head Start Seats filled out of a total 648. The Joint Committee may want to seek clarification about the most current data available, including the number of budgeted seats compared to the number of enrolled seats for the current and previous school year for Head Start and Pre-K part day and full- day for 3s and 4s.

The Joint Committee may also want to request information on the newly converted and new full-day and part-day classrooms and enrollment by school would also be of interest.

DISCUSSION

The Joint Committee may be interested in exploring the issue of coordination of efforts with participants. It appears that there is overlap in areas of interest and work of COA, public agencies, private partners, etc. How do stakeholders ensure that resources are being used efficiently to achieve a comprehensive, coordinated, equitable ECE system? Is there consensus on the roles that each entity can assume? Have all parties agreed to an overarching definition of the ECE system, identification and prioritization of efforts to improve the system, and metrics to demonstrate success? How can stakeholders ensure that there is no duplication of efforts?

For example, COA has indicated an interest in investigating options for conducting cost modeling. Has there been any effort to determine the extent to which other agencies/stakeholders have done this work to date and what queries could build on previous efforts/findings rather than duplicating them?

The packet contains the following attachments:

	<u>Circle #</u>
FY24 ECEI Update to the Council Presentation	1-10
FY24-27 ECEI Action Plan	11-22
11/2/23 COA Report to Council and presentation	23-33
10/1/23 FY23 Montgomery County COA Report	34-62
MCPS Presentation on Blueprint for Maryland’s Future Pillar I	63-74



Early Care and Education Initiative

FY24 Council Update, November 2023

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Initiative Overview

In response to the growing need and systemic coordination of the early care and education services in Montgomery County, the County Executive in partnership with County Council, Montgomery College, and Montgomery County Public Schools launched the ECEI in 2019.

Through the ECEI, Montgomery County identifies barriers, designs administrative and programmatic solutions, and implements policies with a focus on **alignment, sustainability, access and affordability**, and **expansion** of early childhood services.

This work is co-designed by lived experiences of educators and families.

DHHS FY24

Consensus Building

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Framework

- **Engage** with childhood educators, families, partners, residents and early care and education organizations through townhalls, forums, stakeholder meetings, advisory boards, social media, and surveys.
- **Workgroups** led by steering members, made up of stakeholders and programmatic pieces to ensure work aligns with overall ECEI goals, elevating recommendation to steering for consideration
- **Steering Committee** representation from public agency members who are executing programmatic pieces at agency level

DHHS FY24
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ALIGNMENT

- Create partnerships and alignment of services for ease of access for families of young children, early educators, and the public.

DHHS FY24

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Building A Foundation Towards A Comprehensive System



DHHS FY24

- Develop Shared Services Process – December 2023, *estimated completion*
- Develop a Facilities Fund in partnership with a Community Development Financial Institution – January 2024, *estimated completion*
- Study on Supply and Demand of Child Care – August 2024, *estimated completion*
- Study on Cost of Quality Child Care – October 2024, *estimated completion*
- Study on Early Care and Education Compensation and Workforce – December 2024, *estimated completion*
- Evaluation of Family Involvement Center – July 2024, *estimated completion*

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Ongoing alignment with existing structures and organizations

We continue to cultivate and forge partnerships with State and local agencies, boards and commissions, the Children's Opportunity Alliance, and community-based organizations:

- by inclusion and leadership in workgroups.
- by inclusion into study expert teams.
- by coalescing perspectives and approaches.
- by accessing expertise, knowledge, and experience.



DHHS FY24

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SUSTAINABILITY:

- Provide new and ongoing resources to sustain partnerships and high-quality early childhood education across settings.

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DHHS FY24
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Solutions in a Post-Pandemic Era

The following resources were extended to safeguard the ongoing operation of our child care programs and prevent the county from experiencing a loss of child care services, which directly impacts our local economy.

Sustainability Grants \$10.1 M	PPE \$1 M	Child Care for Essential Workers \$2.3 M
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After the pandemic, the ECEI placed a priority on enhancing structural supports to secure the sustained operation of our child care programs.

Family Child Care Business consultation • FY23: 124 programs • FY24, to date: 95 programs	\$670 K FY23 Rent relief for 29 Child Care in Public Space	\$1.2 M FY24 Playground and Building Renovations
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Family & Community Supports

Family Involvement Center

- A free parent-child, play-based program in an early childhood classroom welcoming children of all abilities, from birth to age 5
- 3 locations:
 - 1401 Rockville Pike, Rockville (*HHS Building*)
 - Upcounty Early Learning Center, Gaithersburg (*partnership with MCPS*)
 - NEW: Gwendolyn E. Coffield Community Recreation Center, Silver Spring (*partnership with Dept. of Recreation*)
- Children and Families Served
 - FY23: 278 children from 254 families
 - FY24, to date: 132 children from 117 families



DHHS FY24

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Family & Community Supports

LENA Start

- Collaborating with Family Services, Inc, we offered an evidence-based community program in Rockville at the Family Support Center, to enhance communication development in young children.
- Results: Enhanced language development progress and improved parent-child interactions by 47%.
- Families Served FY23: 81

The Basics

- In partnership with Montgomery Moving Forward and Montgomery County Collaboration Council, we spearheaded a community-level initiative to promote awareness of early childhood development and enhance early childhood outcomes.
- Results: Extensive outreach in the 20877 area, encompassing bus stop advertisements, community events, and successful collaborations with local community partners.



DHHS FY24

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\$500K Toward Montgomery College Scholarships

	Enrollment	Graduated
Child Development Associate	22	7
1-Year Certificate (30 credits)	31	4
Early Childhood Education Associate of Applied Science	30	6
Early Childhood Education Associate of Arts in Teaching	36	3

\$250K DHHS Sponsored Free Training To Meet Licensing And Credential Requirements

	Attendees	Classes
FY23	4,413	227
FY24, Quarter 1	1,564	72



Workforce

DHHS FY24 11

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ACCESS & AFFORDABILITY

- Provide ease of access and affordable options for families with children infants through age five.

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DHHS FY24 12

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In the aftermath of the pandemic, the need to prioritize children's well-being and ensure access to services is clearer than ever. The ECEI has placed a priority on expanding supports to include more families and raising eligibility requirements to meet this critical need.

Working Parents Assistance

- Supplement State Child Care Scholarship for families at 450% FPL or below
 - FY23: 931 children served
 - FY24: 1751 children projected
- Community Outreach and Awareness Campaign
 - FY23: 32 community events, 21 virtual events, 89 partners promoting WPA

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program

- Provide nutritious meals during summer months through SNAP
 - FY23: 7,813 children served
 - FY24: 15,359 children served

Expanding Access

Innovations in Technology



Early Screening Project

- Engaging with pediatricians and families to enhance the volume of referrals for early intervention.
- Platform in development with State.

Community Connect

- An online portal aimed at simplifying access to comprehensive services by reducing the barriers, complexities, and redundancies.
- Modernize how programs in DHHS receive, process, and manage applications for county services.
- Allow cross agency data sharing where the community intersects with services.
- Start with where children live (*rental assistance*), health and wellness of children (*health insurance*), and **educational supports** (*child care subsidy*)
- Phase 2 Timeline:
 - November/December: public test
 - November: marketing
 - January: soft launch

EXPANSION

- Expand the supply and options for high quality early education programs in multiple settings.

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GOFCC

- National and State recognized recruitment efforts to increase registered family child care
- Status:
 - FY20-Fy23: 143 registered, resulting in 1,076 seats
 - FY24, to date: 10 registered, resulting in 82 seats

3's Project

- 75 seats to fill the gap between Early Head Start and Head Start
- Status: 30 seats filled

Community-Based Child Care Expansion

- Opening of Gaithersburg Site: State bond match
- Opening Wheaton Site : Local investment

EquiCare Grant, estimated January 2024

- Grants directly to child care programs to support 100 high-quality infant toddler child care seats for families who do not qualify for existing early childhood public programs
- Status: working with OGM

PreK Contract Expansion, July 2024

- Expand increase the number of preschool children served from 100 to 150 and expand to multiple vendors
- Status: RFP to be released for rebid early part of 2024

Emory Grove Early Learning Center:

- Reopened Fall 2023

DHHS FY24



Expansion of Child Care Seats

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Historical Budget Overview

Since the inception of this initiative, the County Executive and Council have consistently committed substantial annual funding to early care and education, effectively addressing the critical issues discussed in this presentation. Furthermore, additional investments were made to support child care programs during the pandemic.

- \$10M Child Care Assistance (Recovery Fund)
- \$7.687M COVID School-Age Child Care During Distance Learning

	FY23	FY24, estimated
Beginning Balance	\$10,951,622.85	\$12,404,297.62
PY Carryforward Amount	\$1,747,978.63	\$3,494,541.30
Approved Budget	\$10,992,589.00	\$11,178,526.00
Total Appropriation	\$23,692,190.48	\$27,077,364.92
Expenses	\$7,783,213.42	
Encumbrances	\$3,504,679.44	
Expenditures	\$11,287,892.86	Range \$17M-\$20M
Remaining Balance	\$12,404,297.62	Range \$7M-\$10M

DHHS FY24

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FY23 Analysis

INVESTMENT	IMPACT
Wheaton Child Care, \$1.5M encumbered	100-150 seats for infants-preschool in the Wheaton district
Family Involvement Centers, \$500K	278 children participated in high quality social interactions
WPA and State Supplement, \$3.3M	931 children attended high quality programming
Montgomery College, \$500k	119 early childhood educators receive scholarship to pursue a professional pathway
CCIPS Rental Assistance, \$700K	29 child care programs continued to operate
PPE Supplies, \$300K	800+ programs received free supplies to maintain healthy and safe environments
LENA, \$36K	81 families improved parent-child interactions
Community Portal, \$1.3M	Designed and built an online portal to simplify access to comprehensive services

DHHS FY24

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FY24 Forecast

The investments in the Early Care and Education Initiative serve as the bedrock of our mission, anchoring our commitment to addressing systemic issues. By focusing on these root causes, we pave the way for effective, lasting solutions that benefit both current and future generations.

ECEI Priorities	FY24 Appropriations
Access & Affordability	\$ 13,771,742
Expansion	\$ 10,090,860
Sustainability	\$ 3,214,763
Total	\$ 27,077,365

- Expect \$17M - \$20M in encumbrances/spending
- Other initiatives under way, but with timing differences from the budget
 - EquiGrant
 - Community-based Head Start
 - Scholarships
 - Child Care Facility Fund
 - RFP Community Development Financial Institution

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Thank you!

DHHS FY24
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FY24-27 Early Care and Education Action Plan Recommendations for Structure

Overall Charge of the ECEI: Expansion, access, and sustainability of quality child care from the perspective of provider/family, as it relates gaps in school readiness - English language learners, children with disabilities and low-income families; discussion and recommendations related to barriers, administrative solutions, and policy solutions.

Steering Committee: agency and stakeholder representatives define the initiative's goals and objectives and provide direction for workgroups; will meet bi-monthly.

- Nadia Ashourian, Management and Budget Specialist III, DHHS-Early Childhood Services
- Janine Bacquie, Blueprint Coordinator, Montgomery County Public Schools
- Amy Cropp, Director, MCPS- Office of Special Education
- Yvonne Iscandari, Administrator, DHHS-Office Eligibility and Support Services (OESS)
- Deborah Lambert, Senior Fiscal and Policy Analyst, Montgomery County Office of Management and Budget
- Charlene Muhammad, Acting Executive Director/Program Manager, DHHS-Community Action Agency/Head Start
- Richon Nembhard, Manager, DHHS- Planning, Analytics, & Customer Service (PACS)
- Kimberly Rusnak, Executive Director, Children's Opportunity Alliance (COA)
- Jessica Blasic, Supervisor, MCPS, Division of Early Childhood and Title I Programs
- Cassandra Malik, Program Manager, Montgomery County Public Libraries
- Robin Riley, Director, Montgomery County Department of Recreation
- Ramona Bell-Pearson, Director, Montgomery County Community Use of Public Facilities (CUPF)
- Sonia Mora, Assistant County Administrator Office, Montgomery County Government (MCG)
- Becky Smith, Administrator, DHHS Maternal Child Health Programs

Workgroups: subset of steering members along with community partners and experts formed to ensure projects align with overall ECEI purpose; will meet bimonthly (*between steering*)

Ad hoc Committees:

1. Data Metrics: Richon Nembhard
2. Communication: Jennifer Arnaiz

1. FINANCE WORKGROUP: Create an ECE System Financing Strategy		
<p>Chairs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Deborah Lambert BB Otero <p><i>Staff Support: Michelle Gallipoli</i></p>	<p>Deborah.lambert@montgomerycountymd.gov bb.otero@montgomerycountymd.gov</p> <p>michelle.gallipoli@montgomerycountymd.gov</p>	<p>Goal</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Secure a long-term, stable revenue stream to support the ongoing ECE system.
<p>Members</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Brittany Anuszkiewicz, COA Nadia Ashourian, DHHS ECS Vivian Yao, MCG County Council Kathleen Boucher, MCG Intergovernmental Relations (IGR) Mary Casciotti, MCG Finance Leslie Frey, DHHS IGR Janine Bacquie, MCPS Sonia Mora, MCG Asst. County Administrator Jason Rundell, DHHS Chief Operating Officer Dira Treadvance, DHHS CYF Jennifer Wiedel, DHHS ECS Jennifer Arnaiz, DHHS ECS Sara Morningstar, MCG IGR Kimberly Rusnak, COA CEO 	<p>brittany@mocochildren.org Nadia.ashourian@montgomerycountymd.gov Vivian.yao@montgomerycountymd.gov Kathleen.boucher@montgomerycountymd.gov</p> <p>Mary.casciotti@montgomerycountymd.gov Leslie.frey@montgomerycountymd.gov janine_g_bacquie@mcpsmd.org Sonia.mora@montgomerycountymd.gov</p> <p>Jason.rundell@montgomerycountymd.gov</p> <p>Dira.treadvance@montgomerycountymd.gov Jennifer.wiedel@montgomerycountymd.gov Jennifer.arnaiz@montgomerycountymd.gov Sara.morningstar@montgomerycountymd.gov kimberly@mocochildren.org</p>	<p>Outcome</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create strategies for securing a revenue stream. Confirm political support for recommended revenue stream. Develop community support for a stable financing strategy in collaboration with the Children’s Opportunity Alliance. Secure long term public financing for a robust ECE system. Develop policy (<i>system Richon follow up</i>) recommendations in workgroup areas.
<p>Key Resource</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cost of Quality Child Care Study Shared Services Study 		<p>Data Metrics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> TBD

2. WORKFORCE & TRAINING WORKGROUP: Build and Strengthen the ECE Workforce		
<p>Chairs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sonia Pruneda-Hernandez Henry Caballero • Jennifer Arnaiz <p><i>Staff Support: Liran Laor</i></p>	<p>Goal</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In partnership with Montgomery College and four-year colleges, increase professional opportunities in the ECE Workforce. • Increase retention and recruitment opportunities. • Achieve compensation parity with public schools for the ECE community based. 	
<p>Members: Association Members (8):</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Jacqueline Grant (Alliance) 2. Debbie Moore (Alliance) 3. Sobia Qureshi (FCCA – Mont Co.), 4. Sharon Sherry (Jewish Federation of Greater Wash – Early Childhood Ed Council), 5. Charo Torres (Latino Child Care Association of MD) 6. Anabela Rodas de Dohler (Latino Child Care Association of MD) 7. Carrie Meyers (Organization of Child Care Directors) 8. Alicia Cross (MD AEYC– MoCo Chapter) 9. Jan Wilson (MSCCA) 10. Tracey Clay (MSCCA) 11. Eleni Bokas (Montessori Schools of MD) 12. (James) Scott Mitchell (Potomac Association of Cooperative Teachers, Inc.) 13. Bernadine Occhuizzo (Potomac Association of Cooperative Teachers, Inc.) 14. Adriane Clutter, Recreation 15. Jaime Flores, MCPL 16. Jessica Blasic, MCPS - PreK 17. Laura Jahromi, COA 18. Endrias Afework, Sheppard Pratt 19. Ruth Rivas, Sheppard Pratt 20. Nelida Andres, Montgomery College 21. Marjory Mayenvelasquez, Sheppard Pratt 	<p>Outcome:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase options for higher education. • Fully implement recruitment and retention strategies. • Create a compensation framework that ensures a strong ECE workforce. • Develop policy recommendations in workgroup areas. 	
<p>Key Resource</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workforce & Compensation Study 	<p>Data Metrics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TBD 	

3. ACCESS & AFFORDABILITY WORKGROUP: Strengthen and Expand Early Intervention Services and Enhance Inclusion in ECE Programs		
<p>Chairs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Amy Cropp • Charlene Muhammad <p><i>Staff Support: Erin Stillwell</i></p>	<p>Goal</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure equal access and inclusion for all children to early screening and early intervention support services. • Develop and increase training and staffing support for inclusive practices in early childhood settings. 	
<p>Members</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wendy Baber, DHHS ECS – Infants & Toddlers (ITP) • Jill Lyons, DHHS ECS - ITP • Tara Phillips, Easter Seals • Daria Cervantes (The Arc) • Portia Willis, DHHS ECS • Minority Health Initiatives: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Mairana Serrani, Salud y Bienestar ○ African American Health Program (Contractor with DHHS – McFarland & Associates, Inc.) ○ Sanjana Quasem (Asian Health) • Jessica Blasic, MCPS • Michelle Esema, MCPS • Faith Fischel, MCPS • Geraldine Duff, COA 	<p>Outcome</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide access and inclusion to early intervention programming for all families seeking support. • Provide multiple access points for families seeking early intervention services. • Strengthen partnerships with community nonprofits providing early intervention services. • Maximize outreach to the medical community to increase appropriate referrals to early intervention services. • Develop new strategies and networking for child development resources for newborns and their families in hospitals, with midwives, doulas, etc. • Develop policy recommendations in workgroup areas. 	
<p>Key Resource:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 		<p>Data Metrics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TBD

4. ACCESS & AFFORDABILITY WORKGROUP: Strengthen Friend, Family, Neighbor Care		
<p>Chairs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Jennifer Arnaiz Kimberly Rusnak <p><i>Staff Support: Jennifer Wiedel</i></p>	<p>Goal</p> <p>Provide support to children and caregivers in all settings.</p>	
<p>Members</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Liana Vega, DHHS ECS Yvonne Iscandari, DHHS OESS Richon Nembhard, DHHS PACS Rosalba Bonilla, CentroNia Mara Anthony, Sheppard Pratt Meredith Bowers (Collaboration Council) Roberto Garza Rodriguez, Identity Mariana Serrani, Latino Health Initiative Jennifer Ferreira, DHHS ECS Cassandra Malik, MCPL Shari Waddy, Patty Center, Family Support Center Aprielle Anderson Tenaeya Rankin, Judy Center – Silver Spring Monica Martin, Linkages to Learning Robin Riley, MC Recc Jessica Blasic, MCPS Sobia Quereshi, FCC provider 	<p>Outcome</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop strong partnerships across organizations to support young children and caregivers. Develop a strong network in the county for families to engage with ECE learning opportunities (e.g., Parent Cafes, Learning Parties, The Basics, LENA, Family Support Programs, Library Programs). Connect Family, Friend, and Neighbor Care (FFN) to existing professional development and ECE networking and learning opportunities. Expanding child care opportunities for vulnerable populations precluded from existing programs (<i>ex. migrant populations, early head start 3's</i>) Contracted subsidy seats, alternative to WPA Develop policy recommendations in workgroup areas. 	
<p>Key Resource:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supply & Demand study 		<p>Data Metrics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> TBD

5. FACILITIES WORKGROUP: Increase ECE Program Expansion		
<p>Chairs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BB Otero • Jennifer Arnaiz <p><i>Staff Support: Tamiaka Thomasson</i></p>	<p>Goal</p> <p>Implement a Facilities Fund</p>	
<p>Members</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kimberly Rusnak, COA • Jennifer Wiedel, DHHS ECS • Carrie Meyers/Astrid Crookshank - OCCD • Patsy Warnick, MCG Permitting • Ramona Bell-Pearson, CUPF • Tara Phillips, Commission on Child Care • Brittany Anuszkiewicz , COA 	<p>Outcome</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use financing strategies to create a facilities fund. • Increase ECE program facility expansion through access to a facilities fund. • Contract with a Community Development Financial Institution (CDFI) to manage a facility's fund and support ECE program expansion. • Develop policy recommendations in workgroup areas. 	
<p>Key Resource:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supply & Demand Study • Existing & New Expansion Grants • Facilities Fund Study 		<p>Data Metrics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TBD

6. PUBLIC EDUCATION AND COMMUNITY BASED ECE PARTNERSHIP WORKGROUP: Increase Community-Based Pre-K Seats to Meet the Maryland Blueprint		
<p>Chairs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nichelle Owens Janine Bacquie <p><i>Staff Support: Michelle Gallipoli</i></p>	<p>Goal</p> <p>In partnership with MCPS, grow community based PreK seats to meet Maryland Blueprint requirements.</p>	
<p>Members</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Charlene Mohammad, DHHS CAA Rena Dubensky, DHHS CCSS Vivian Yao, MCG County Council Tamieka Thomasson, DHHS CCSS Jennifer Arnaiz, DHHS ECS Michelle Esema, MCPS Shona Weaver, MCPS Laura Jahromi, COA 	<p>Outcome</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide a comprehensive support system for Blueprint PreK applications. Develop a communications plan with MCPS and ECS for outreach to ECE programs. Implement support for Blueprint PreK applications through MCPS. Develop policy recommendations in workgroup areas 	
<p>Key Resource:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supply and Demand Study Cost of Quality Child Care Study 		<p>Data Metrics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> TBD

Family Services, Inc. LENA Start

LENA Start is an evidence-based community program designed to engage families and help them learn how to increase conversations with their children during the first few years of life. Interactive talk — specifically back-and-forth conversation — has been proven to be a key factor in healthy early brain development. During LENA Start, families use LENA’s patented “talk pedometer” technology to measure their child’s language environment. Over the course of 10 weekly sessions that can be delivered virtually or in person, families explore this data in the form of personalized, actionable feedback reports, discussing research-based strategies with their peers to increase the quality and quantity of talk at home.

Families Served by LENA:

Family Services, Inc. offered the first 10-week LENA Start session in January 2022 starting with 11 families. Since the inaugural class in January 2022, they have served over 81 families. Family Services, Inc. initially provided the LENA Start program to those families already engaged in the Family Discover Center. As the program has gained momentum, FSI is recruiting families outside the Family Discovery Center to participate in the program.

Highlights of Data Captured on LENA Start:

- Evidence of Accelerated Child Language Development: Data shows that children whose parents participated in the LENA program are gaining over 2 months developmental skills (receptive and expressive language development) every month.
- Evidence of Improved Parent Perceptions and Interactive Behaviors: Pre and Post Parent Surveys report positive change in a number of domains, including: reading, talking about past and future, awareness of child development, parenting self-efficacy, confidence in future school, community engagement and parental stress.
- Evidence of Significant Adult Behavior Change: Data shows that upon completion of the program, graduates showed significant increases in adult words and conversational turns. Shared reading is also emphasized in the program, and parents reported reading 47% more with their children at graduation compared to the start of the program.

Montgomery County Collaboration Council for Children, Youth and Families: The Basics

The Basics is a community level initiative to raise awareness about early childhood development and improve early childhood outcomes, including kindergarten readiness. The Basics program is founded on five science-based parenting and caregiving “pillars” that support social, emotional and cognitive development of children birth to age three. The five pillars of Basics are: 1) Maximize love and manage stress, 2) Talk, sign and point, 3) Count, group and compare, 4) Explore through movement and play, and 5) Read and discuss stories. Through community engagement, known as socioecological saturation, the Basics becomes part of the fabric of the community.

Montgomery County Collaboration Council

In January 2022, the Montgomery County Collaboration Council developed a plan to implement the Basics in the 20877-zip code community. The highlight of their initial implementation included a marketing and communications plan that established “play, pray and pay” hubs. These hubs were designed to host Basics multi-lingual materials and saturate the community with as much information about the Basics. These hubs also shared information about the ***Basics Insights***, an interactive texting program that sends parents/caregivers messages with facts and activities to do with their children. The Collaboration Council, in cooperative with the City of Gaithersburg, also developed a plan to build an interactive art installation in Walder Park to help spread as well as memorialize the 5 pillars of the Basics (estimated date of completion, Spring 2024).

Highlights of Collaboration Council’s work with the Basics

- Engaged representatives from Early Head Start, the Judy Center, MC Infants and Toddler, Children’s Opportunity Alliance, MC Public Libraries, Imagination Library, Cross Community Church, Epworth Preschool, The Casey Center, Nexus Connect, HOC and others to serve as implementation partners.
- Created bus stop ads throughout 20877 zip code to spread the word about the Basics and Basics Insights
- Highlights of community events attended to engage families and share information on the Basics:
 - Gaithersburg Book Fair, May 2022
 - Casey Community Luncheon, May 2022
 - Summer of Peace 2022
 - Open House Summit Hall ES, August 2022
 - Gaithersburg Principals’ and Counselor’s Breakfast, September 2022
 - MCPS/Head Start Providers’ Forum, October 2022
 - Gaithersburg Cluster & Community Festival, October 2022
 - Harriet Tubman Elementary School Movie Night, November 2022
 - Cross Community Church/Equity Center’s Family Holiday Festival, December 2022

- Outreach Event with HOC early childhood staff, April 2023
- Casey Center's "Be Your Best Fest" community outreach event, May 2023
- Harriet Tubman ES' "Tiger Prowl Family Health & Fitness" event, May 2023
- Gaithersburg Book Festival, May 2023
- Cross Community Church's after-school community event, June 2023

FIC Attendance

FY23 (July 1, 2022-June 30, 2023)

- 278 Children served in total
- 254 Families served in total

Children served by location:

- Rockville- 209 children
- Watkins Mill (Closed 6/13 to 9/4/23)- 43 children
- Silver Spring (Opened on 6/6/23)- 26 children

Families served by location:

- Rockville- 196 families
- Watkins Mill (Closed 6/13 to 9/5/23)- 35 families
- Silver Spring (Opened on 6/6/23)- 23 families

FY24 (July 1, 2023-September 30, 2023):

- 132 Children served in total
- 117 Families served in total

Children served by location:

- Rockville- 87 children
- Watkins Mill (Opened 9/5/23)- 14 children
- Silver Spring (Opened on 6/6/23)- 31 children

Families served by location:

- Rockville- 78 families
- Watkins Mill (Opened on 9/5/23)- 11 families
- Silver Spring (Opened on 6/6/23)- 28 families

GO FCC PHASE 1 TRACKING

	Interested/contact (1)	GoFCC Training Participants (2)	GOFCC participants (3)	Obtained Registration (4)	Total #seats (capacity)	Maryland EXCELS Published (5)
FY20	<i>Not Collected</i>	83	59	47	354	<i>No Collected</i>
FY 21	<i>Not Collected</i>	143	53	35	260	11
FY22	198	112	50	39	286	22
FY 23	441	137	55	22	176	9
FY24	210	59	47	10	82	2
	849	534	264	153	1,158	44



November 2, 2023 - County Council Report

The Montgomery County Children's Opportunity Alliance (the Alliance), as the designated Early Care and Education Coordinating Entity for Montgomery County, since its official designation on July 12, 2022, has worked tirelessly to build the foundation and infrastructure required to ensure high-quality early care and education for every child in Montgomery County. The Montgomery County Children's Opportunity Alliance grew out of a simple premise: together, we can create a Montgomery County in which all children can thrive.

Our legislative mandate is to advance our County's system of early care and education (ECE). To achieve our mandate, the Alliance has worked this year to both stand up our infrastructure and focus on our mission. The Alliance convenes and solicits input from all early childhood education stakeholders, identifying unmet needs and barriers to accessing quality services for all young children. Together, we are making progress in developing common goals and priorities for system expansion and improvement, fostering stakeholder collaboration and coordination. We continue to collaborate regularly with a variety of stakeholders, such as DHHS, MCPS, County Council, MMF, ECEI, childcare providers, and nonprofit partners.

The mission of the Alliance is to bring together community leaders across all sectors who are driven by a common purpose: to create an equitable, comprehensive, high-quality, accessible, sustainable early childhood system. We believe that when every young child in Montgomery County can reach their greatest potential it will create a stronger future for all of us. A thriving Montgomery County will put young children first. Evidence indicates that early investment in a child's life impacts their future learning success, builds stronger families, creates a more robust workforce, and drives a flourishing society for generations. We know that children learn and develop at an exponential rate during their first five years. By providing access to quality early learning opportunities, we can assist parents, caregivers, early educators, and community members to enrich the lives of our youngest residents so that they reach their full potential.

Our First Year

In that vein, in our first year as a nonprofit, we took critical steps to build the infrastructure and foundation for the Alliance.

- Built our Board and staff – we now have a staff team of 5.
- Relationship building and listening to our community.
- Data collection from multiple key partners to understand our community baseline.
- Fiscal mapping has begun for FY22 & FY23 so our community can be more transparent about how and where funds are spent from different sources.

- Developing our strategic plan and action plan for the Alliance. The Board has narrowed in on four key goals: access, quality, workforce supports, and family engagement.

There are many stakeholders and perspectives to keep in mind as we take a 360-degree view of our County's early childhood sector. This is demonstrated in a comment from a community partner at our listening session:

- *“Break down the silos... we have a lot of folks in their own sandboxes that should play together.”*

We believe that children and families need to be front and center in the decision-making process. Only by establishing trust and rapport with all major stakeholders, can we develop an accurate 360-degree view of the County's early childhood sector, and use lived experiences as a lens through which to interpret the data.

What We Have Learned

In our first year, we have learned a lot. Child care is a sector in crisis – there have been many national articles to this effect, research has demonstrated this and we hear it from our own child care sector. It is built upon a broken business model that assumes low-wage labor (traditionally Black and Latina women, who are not paid sufficiently for the work they are doing). The Covid pandemic demonstrated the challenges in child care – parents could not go to work unless their children were in a safe environment (school or child care). For a moment, childcare was seen as a critical public good. However, as we have moved away from pandemic mode, we have fallen into our usual habits believing that it is a parent's responsibility to shoulder the full and high cost of quality early learning and child care opportunities.

We have heard from families in Montgomery County that they do not know how to find, access, and afford quality care that meets their needs. Here are comments from parents who attended our listening sessions:

- *“When you're a parent, all you think of is the cost... I was paying more for child care than my mortgage and bills all combined... how is this possible?...”*
- *“I was working because it's the only way I could survive with my two kids in Montgomery County... I wasn't able to apply for the County programs because my income was a little higher.”*

Early findings confirm that there are not enough seats, they are too expensive, and that there are too many barriers to accessing vouchers and subsidies. Providers tell us that it is challenging to have enough seats because the workforce is unstable due to low compensation, challenges related to qualifications and credentialing, and child care businesses are struggling to recruit and retain employees. In the recent words of one childcare director,

- *“Our programs are hurting. We aren't fully enrolled and barely making it with staff leaving all the time. I spend most of my time in the classroom and we are all exhausted. [We are] totally tired and stressed out... we need support in every single area of operating a program.”*

Blueprint PreK Expansion

One of the other big influencers on the child care sector is the Blueprint for Maryland's Future – Pillar 1, PreK Expansion. The Blueprint requires communities to implement a mixed-delivery system and the requirement for year one was for jurisdictions to have 35% of the PreK seats be in community-based settings. In a letter dated July 28, 2023 to the Board of the Alliance, Superintendent McKnight offered several opportunities for partnered action in order to meet Pillar 1 BluePrint goals. For Montgomery County, only 11% of available full-day seats were in community-based providers. Still, this only represents around 2,200 seats; current estimates of the number of seats we will need to serve Tier 1 three- and four-year-olds (from families under 300% of the Federal Poverty Level) is closer to 9,000 seats.

There are multiple different perspectives on the Blueprint Expansion work:

Parents want affordable, accessible, quality PreK that meets their needs as working parents AND aligns with their cultural preferences for their family.

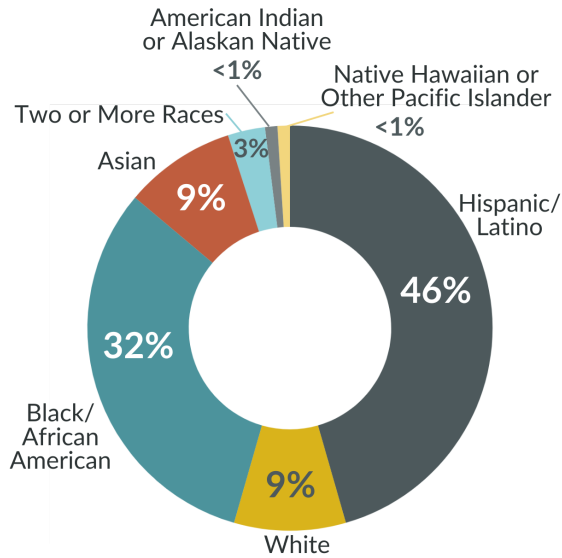
For child care providers, the Blueprint is controversial – only 8 total private providers have received grant funding during the first two years. Many other providers don't feel included or valued and do not see how participating in the Blueprint PreK expansion would benefit them. More providers don't know about the Blueprint opportunity or aren't interested in learning more – they already have too many things to handle and cannot take on one more thing.

Advocates in our community believe that we are not moving fast enough to expand PreK access for vulnerable families. Our kindergarten readiness and third grade reading scores have declined and PreK is a good solution to increase early education and child development opportunities.

As a convener in this space, it is our role to convene all stakeholders to explain what are the intentions of Blueprint expansion, how does it impact all the different stakeholders, discuss how we can make it work for Montgomery County, include all the various perspectives – and listen, emphasize and problem solve together on how do we implement PreK expansion in a way that meets the needs of children and families in our community. Below is data regarding the demographics and the number of children enrolled in Public PreK in Montgomery County.

Based on data we received through a request to MCPS, during SY 2022-23, the largest subgroup of students enrolled in Prekindergarten and Head Start, including special education students, identified as Hispanic/Latino (46%), followed by students identifying as Black (32%).

Prekindergarten Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity, 2022-23

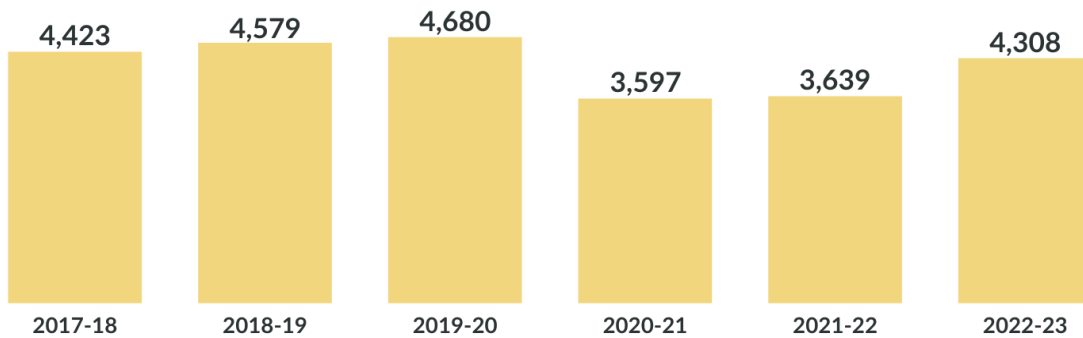


Source: MCPS

Public Prekindergarten enrollment includes three- and four-year-old students enrolled in part-time or full-time Head Start, Prekindergarten, and special education. Enrollment in public PreK notably decreased between SY 2019-20 and SY 2020-21. Enrollment numbers have increased but have not yet met pre-Covid numbers.

Public Prekindergarten Enrollment Trends

Public Prekindergarten school enrollment, ages 3 and 4



Source: Maryland State Department of Education

Big Issues to Tackle

Advancing a comprehensive, equitable, high-quality early care and education system will require that we build upon our strengths, we work together across sectors to break down silos and we build a common agenda and metrics to help us collectively track our success. Here are the six things that are top of mind for us, and we need your support with to start working towards solutions:

- 1) We need to raise awareness in our community and at the state level that child care is a public good. The childcare sector needs greater investment so that economically we can thrive.
- 2) Our community is underserving our vulnerable populations. In order to overcome this issue, we need to ramp up enrollment in PreK and childcare subsidies (at the state and County level). Doing so will require greater outreach, communications, and community engagement, as well as continued structural changes to reduce administrative barriers.
- 3) There are four major workforce challenges: compensation, qualifications, and recruitment and retention. We need more early childhood teachers, assistants and directors, and clearer pathways and incentives for employees to work in community-based childcare.
- 4) In order for the Alliance to maintain a 360-degree perspective of the County's early care and education system, we need to be represented on all early learning workgroups in the County. This includes the ECEI Coordinating Committee – one of the ways we can understand, influence and maintain a 360-degree perspective is being included in all strategic conversations related to early care and education in our community.
- 5) To support a comprehensive diverse delivery system that allows for family choice and cultural inclusion, we must engage with and learn more about informal family, friend, and neighbor care.
- 6) Data that exists about this sector is limited, which makes it difficult to understand the true extent of the problem and to identify the areas of greatest need. We need to continue to partner with DHHS, MCPS, ECEI, Montgomery College, the community, and the state to clarify and improve our access to data and how to use it to inform decision making and track progress.



November 2, 2023

Report to County Council

Who We Are:

Mission: To bring together community leaders across all sectors who are driven by a common purpose: to create an equitable, comprehensive, high-quality, accessible, sustainable early childhood system.

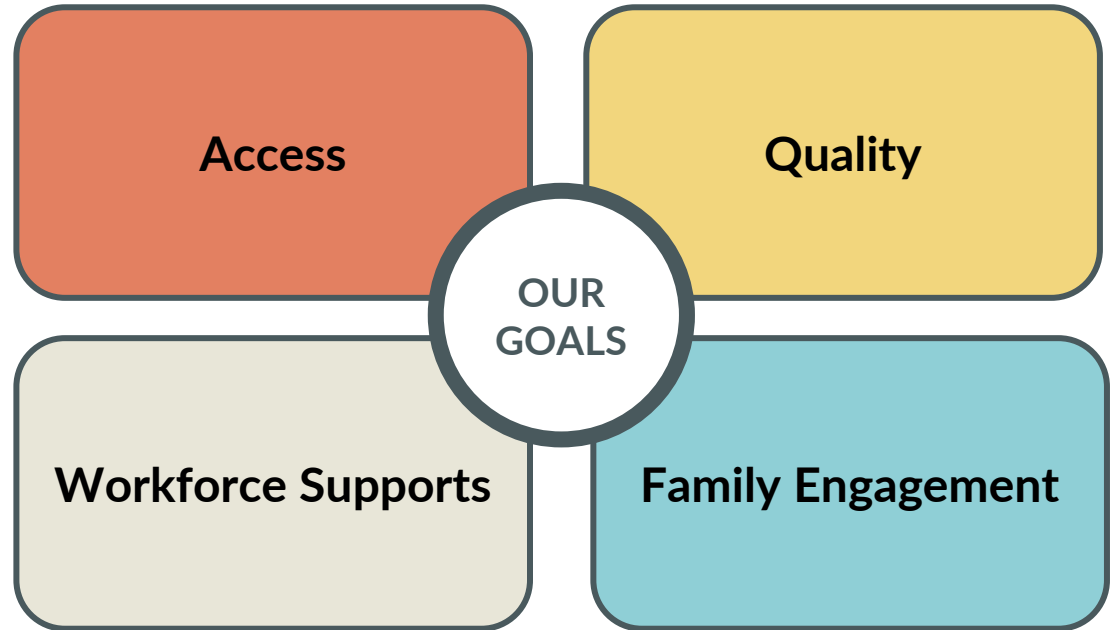
Vision: We believe that when every young child in Montgomery County can reach their greatest potential it will create a stronger future for all of us. A thriving Montgomery County will put young children first.

History: We were created as a result of Bill 42-21, creating the County's first Early Care and Education Coordinating Entity. We were named in July 2022.

Year One - Children's Opportunity Alliance

Accomplishments

- Built team and Board
- Relationship building
- Community listening
- Data collection
- Fiscal mapping
- Strategic planning



What we have learned

Learnings

- Childcare is in crisis
- Childcare and PreK is not affordable or accessible for many families
- Workforce challenges
- Blueprint influence
- Underserving our vulnerable populations
- Important to lead with data to make decisions



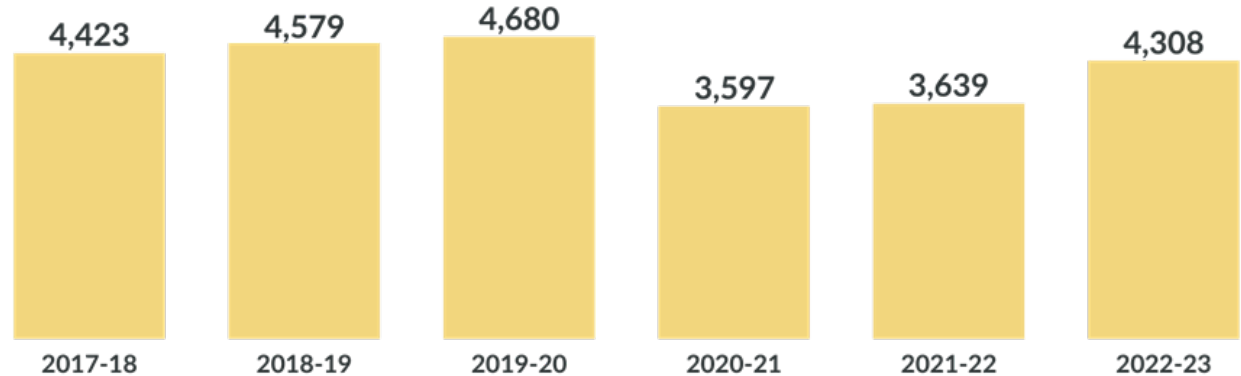
Public PreK in Montgomery County

Enrollment numbers have increased since the Covid decline but have not yet met pre-Covid enrollment trends.



Public Prekindergarten Enrollment Trends

Public Prekindergarten school enrollment, ages 3 and 4



Big Issues to Tackle

1. Raise awareness about child care as a public good.
2. We are undeserving our vulnerable populations
3. Workforce challenges
4. Coordination
5. Family, friend and neighbor care
6. Data informed decision making



MONTGOMERY COUNTY
CHILDREN'S
OPPORTUNITY
ALLIANCE

FY23 Montgomery County Children's Opportunity Alliance County Report

Oct. 1, 2023





October 1 County Council Report, 2023

Dear County Executive Elrich and Esteemed Members of the Council:

The Montgomery County Children's Opportunity Alliance (the Alliance), as the designated Early Care and Education Coordinating Entity for Montgomery County, is submitting our first annual report to the County for 2022-23, highlighting both accomplishments and a few of the challenges faced as we work with our partners to reimagine the early care and education space in our community.

The mission of the Alliance is to develop an equitable system of high-quality, accessible, sustainable early care and education for the children of Montgomery County, and to eliminate systemic racism and structures that create access barriers for vulnerable, racially and ethnically diverse populations. When the youngest members of our community thrive, we all succeed. Children learn and develop at an exponential rate during their first five years. By providing access to quality early learning opportunities, we can assist parents, caregivers, early educators, and community members to enrich the lives of our youngest residents so that they reach their full potential.

In our first year as a nonprofit, we took critical steps to build the infrastructure and foundation for the Alliance. We built our Board and staff, and we are focused on building relationships with members of the community. By establishing trust and rapport with all major stakeholders, we can develop a 360-degree view of the County's early childhood sector, and we can use lived experiences as a lens through which to view the data.

Our guiding principles over the past year include:

- We must keep racial equity front and center as we address access and quality.
- We must listen to our community, engage the many stakeholders in our diverse County, and value their lived experiences. The Alliance does not have all of the answers, but we trust the collective brilliance of our community to identify new ideas and solutions.
- We must use data to drive our decision-making process.
- We are a collective impact and systems-building organization. We must work with many stakeholders through the strategic planning process to determine what it means to be a member of the Alliance and how community members can co-create a unified vision of success with us.

In this report, we are laying the groundwork to create a common agenda that is inclusive of the variety of stakeholders who are connected to our County's system of early care and education. While we have accomplished much in this first year, we recognize that there is much work ahead of us. This will require your unwavering support so that all children, particularly those facing opportunity gaps and in special populations, are given the opportunity to thrive.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kimberly Rusnak".

Kimberly Rusnak, Executive Director

Executive Summary

Since its official designation on July 12, 2022, the Children’s Opportunity Alliance has worked tirelessly to build the foundation and infrastructure required to ensure high-quality early care and education for every child in Montgomery County. The Alliance has held 14 Board meetings, crafted the administrative foundation for this new organization, and, most importantly, built consensus around – and began to execute – our mission-related goals.

Our legislative mandate is to disrupt and advance our County’s system of early care and education (ECE). The current system was established in a time characterized by systemic racism, and it includes structures that have created barriers to reliable, affordable care for vulnerable, racially and ethnically diverse populations. The Alliance is committed to changing this system.

To achieve our mandate, the Alliance has worked this year to both stand up our infrastructure and focus on our mission. Some of our notable **infrastructure** accomplishments this year include:

- Electing officers of the Board and establishing committees following nonprofit best practices, as well as leading a Board retreat;
- Debating and ratifying by-laws and approving organizational budgets for FY23 and FY24;
- Hiring Kimberly Rusnak as our founding Executive Director after a national search, as well as hiring four additional highly qualified staff members;
- Negotiating and signing a contract with Montgomery County’s Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and beginning talks for a new agreement with Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS);
- Standing up a visual brand identity, [website](#), Board portal, and social media presence, and creating communication tools such as an overarching fact sheet; and
- Initiating the strategic planning process, which will include a shared mission, vision, and values; key strategies; organizational and County-wide goals to address the challenges in the ECE landscape; and roadmaps for achieving our goals.

Our notable **mission**-based accomplishments this year include:

- Beginning to identify and understand the extent to which different County populations are receiving ECE services by requesting and analyzing data from MCPS and DHHS – early analysis confirms that our community is underserving our vulnerable populations;
- Completing our due diligence review regarding next steps to refresh and realign the Early Childhood Coordinating Council (ECCC), which will most likely require legislative assistance;
- Convening community stakeholders, such as child care providers and educators, parents, nonprofit partners, business leaders, philanthropic partners, and other community stakeholders; and

- Launching an extensive fiscal mapping project of the ECE system in partnership with Children’s Funding Project and investigating options for conducting cost modeling to assist with scale and planning for the future of the ECE system.

Narrative of Activities

Our Story

The Montgomery County Children’s Opportunity Alliance grew out of a simple premise: together, we can create a Montgomery County in which all children can thrive.

As an Alliance made up of key stakeholders from every corner of the community, we are a community connector and convenor – we focus on building partnerships, letting data lead our decision-making, pooling financial and other resources to address needs, and acting innovatively to address complex community challenges.

In our first year as Montgomery County’s Early Care and Education Coordinating Entity, we laid the groundwork to achieve our ultimate goal: to create an early care and education system that prioritizes a systems-level approach, racial equity and inclusion, and guardian-provider accountability and transparency. This exciting moment gives us an opportunity to eliminate systemic structures that create access barriers for our most vulnerable populations. Working alongside and building consensus among key stakeholders, we will grow and nurture an equitable system of high-quality, accessible, and sustainable early childhood education for children from birth to age five and beyond.

2022-23 Activities

Building a Common Early Childhood Agenda

To further our mission, the Alliance convenes and solicits input from all early childhood education stakeholders, identifying unmet needs and barriers to accessing quality services for all young children. Together, we develop common goals and priorities for system expansion and improvement, fostering stakeholder collaboration and coordination.

Some of our accomplishments in our first year:

- The Alliance engaged a nationally recognized and locally based consultant, School Readiness Consulting, to facilitate our strategic planning efforts. [Phase 1](#) of the process, which included a landscape and document review and conversations with the Alliance Board and key community stakeholders, is complete. The flow of the remainder of our work is summarized in Appendix 1.
- The Alliance hosted its first major convening in partnership with Montgomery Moving Forward (MMF). We gathered over 35 representatives from 15 systems-building groups in February 2023 to discuss our collective work. Key recommended action steps include:

- Improving knowledge and understanding through data collection and landscape analyses;
- Creating a space for diverse voices through all aspects of the Alliance’s work; and
- Building trust and consensus toward a common unifying vision while reducing duplicative structures.
- We coordinated efforts with the Early Care and Education Initiative (ECEI). Alliance team members are serving on the project teams for both the Shared Services Alliance and Community Development Financial Institution projects issued by the ECEI and administered by DHHS.
- We supported the development of and planning for The Healthcare Initiative Foundation’s Community Summit: Navigating Safety-Net Resources, which took place in June 2023. It was an opportunity to engage and educate the broader community – both government and nonprofit service providers – in more effectively navigating resource continuums for public and private services.

Public and Private Funding Strategies

The Alliance is a public-private partnership, which blends public dollars with private philanthropic investments. To increase equitable access in our County’s ECE system, it will take both public and private investments to support growth, innovation, and scale. Our recently launched fiscal mapping work will help us track the amount and timing of investments made by all funding streams (i.e., Federal, State, County, and private philanthropy). Philanthropic individuals and organizations have expressed interest in investing in the ECE system and will do so if they believe they will get a return on their investment. As such, several entities have expressed interest in learning, alongside us, about how to strengthen our ECE system.

Through conversations with private philanthropic organizations, we’re conducting due diligence to imagine several potential new opportunities, such as a pooled fund of philanthropic dollars to support grants aligned to the common agenda, an early care and education business advisory group, and large-scale, community-wide awareness and fundraising events.

Research and Innovation

The Alliance’s grantmaking strategy puts funds in the hands of innovative organizations and partners in the field, which, in turn, adds to our understanding of the critical needs that stakeholder organizations are currently facing. In our first round of grant funding, the Alliance received 19 applications, requesting a total of \$736,504 to support early care and education programs and systems work in Montgomery County. In this initial grant cycle, the Alliance awarded \$105,000 to four organizations leading the charge in ECE innovation in the County. (See Appendix 1 for more information.)

Additionally, this past spring, the Alliance conducted a [landscape scan analysis of the early childhood workforce](#) in Montgomery County. This analysis is proving valuable in supporting our strategic planning efforts and in creating a common agenda. The resulting memo also analyzed trends and best practices in efforts to support the child care workforce across the County.

Measurement and Reporting

The Alliance team, led by a staff Measurement and Impact Analyst, collects and analyzes data to track progress toward early childhood system improvements, creating space for continuous learning and accountability. In spring 2023, we commissioned a report to review all publicly available data, which paints a picture of the well-being of our County's youngest children, including maternal and child health, early education success, and more. This preliminary report, [*The Well-Being of Montgomery County's Young Children*](#), has helped inform the Alliance's inaugural strategic planning efforts.

Board Leadership

As a governing body overseeing the startup of a new nonprofit organization and Coordinating Entity, the Alliance Board is still in its formative stage of development. In accordance with best practices for nonprofit governance, we gathered baseline data about our 21-member Board's attendance and participation. We found that some members of our Board are more vocal and attend every meeting, while others are quiet and/or are not regular in their attendance. We recognize that underlying power dynamics among Board members can create equity issues, so we are partnering with our governance committee to address these challenges, build trust amongst the Board members, and encourage equity of voice.

Administration

As a new independent nonprofit, the Children's Opportunity Alliance was thrilled to receive official IRS designation as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit in January 2023. We focused on foundational start-up activities, including building a visual brand identity, launching a website, hiring founding staff members (and establishing human resources policies and procedures), adopting fiscal procedures, applying for philanthropic grants, navigating technical security policies, and related activities that support an organization's operations.

Outcomes Data that Measures the Progress of Early Care and Education System Investments and Improvements

Critical to the Alliance's mission and strategy is the collection and analysis of meaningful data on the ECE system in Montgomery County. Using the data we have collected so far, we have a growing understanding of the varying levels of availability and access in our community. Not surprisingly, it leads to more questions and few clear answers. Our early analysis confirms that our community is underserving our vulnerable populations. With more data and deeper analysis, we will be able to delve into the reasons and potential solutions to provide quality ECE where it is lacking.

Availability and Use of Seats

There is a wide variety in the types of formal early childhood education opportunities available in our community. The types of formal licensed provider care include child care centers, family child

care, Montessori programs, letters of compliance, and public school Prekindergarten classes. Each of these types of care has a limit on the number of seats available, based on licensed capacity and other regulations. The ECE landscape continues to evolve, which makes this data difficult to track. In this post-COVID era, licensed child care providers are struggling to stay afloat and maintain quality standards, public Prekindergarten and Head Start programs are adjusting and expanding in alignment with the sweeping changes of Maryland's Blueprint legislation, and families continue to struggle to access high-quality care in a way that meets their unique family context.

As we begin to analyze data about the availability and use of formal early education seats, we have taken note of the following important highlights:

- There are an estimated 74,000 children between the ages of zero and five in Montgomery County. From birth to age 12, there are approximately 100,000 children. While we know there are approximately 45,000 licensed seats available in family child care homes or licensed group centers, this includes care for children from birth up through age 12. At this time, data does not exist to tell us exactly how many of those seats are available for each age group – the data has not been disaggregated because it is complicated. There is duplication in the type of seats licensed, but emerging analysis shows families of our youngest children face inequitable access.
- Post-pandemic, far fewer licensed providers hold a quality rating of 3 in Maryland EXCELS, with only 19% of centers and 10% of family-based providers obtaining this level of quality. This is a substantial drop from a high of 53% of centers in 2020. The child care business model is based upon what parents can pay for care; but often, the true cost of providing quality care costs a child care setting more than what parents can pay. This means that determining the true cost of providing quality child care is challenging.
- Enrollment or usage data is not currently collected for licensed providers. This data is expensive and cumbersome to collect, but it yields a high return on investment in the ability to inform decision-making. Currently, DHHS is in the process of implementing a supply and demand analysis; however, this has already taken at least two years to implement. We are working on strategies to identify and implement efficient and sustainable ways for getting higher-quality data on a more regular basis.
- Public school Prekindergarten and Head Start are regaining enrollment after the slump of the last two school years, but they haven't yet met pre-COVID numbers. According to data from MCPS, Blueprint funding from the state dropped in year two, and MCPS is prioritizing converting half-day seats to full-day seats in response to family demand. MCPS is using a combination of Blueprint, Title 1, and local County funds to convert half-day seats into full-day seats.
- Data provided by MCPS on the enrolled Prekindergarten students marks over half of the students as "Income Tier 0" (as opposed to Tier 1, 2, or 3 as defined by the Blueprint). We are still working with MCPS to understand what this means.
- According to the Blueprint legislation, each county is required to implement a mixed delivery system, which means an integrated system of early childhood education services that are offered through a variety of programs and providers (e.g. Head Start, licensed

family child care, public schools, and licensed community-based providers). Currently, only 11% (approximately 200) of Prekindergarten Blueprint seats are available in community settings (licensed family child care and community providers), which means we have a lot of work ahead of us to reach a 50/50 mixed public/private delivery system, as mandated by the state by FY27. Community-based providers are struggling to understand and meet the requirements as stated in the Blueprint – they need more strategic and coordinated support to survive in the context of upcoming changes.

- As a result of the Blueprint implementation, the Alliance is speaking with a variety of child care providers (both family child care and center providers) to gather data on what barriers exist to participating in the Blueprint expansion. We will have information to share soon (Montgomery County Year 1 Blueprint Expansion Report) documenting what Year 1 (2022-23) looked like for the Blueprint in Montgomery County, sharing what we are hearing from child care providers, and offering recommendations on how to improve implementation in Montgomery County and at the state level.

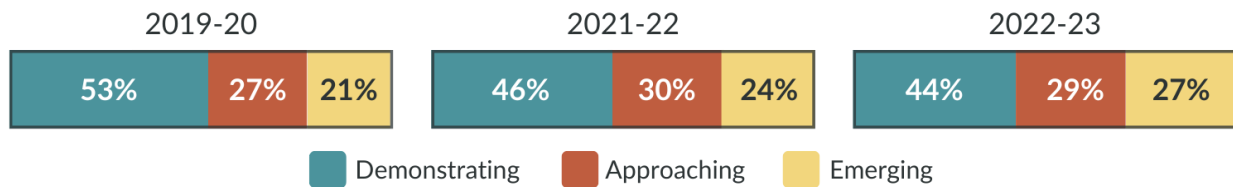
Access to affordable, high-quality, formal early care and education is essential to child, family, and community well-being. We continue to work with MCPS, DHHS, and others to improve the quality and quantity of data needed to understand the current realities faced by parents and providers. Data can help us make informed decisions and recommendations that will lead to high-quality approaches and solutions in the coming year.

Kindergarten Readiness

In the 2022-23 school year, 10,247 kindergarteners attended school in Montgomery County. While Montgomery County consistently outperforms the statewide average in readiness, the Alliance's data collection reveals a more nuanced truth. Kindergarten readiness varies greatly across demographic lines, and our most vulnerable populations consistently show lower levels of readiness than their peers. Kindergarten readiness is a critical metric to measure success in delivering on our mission and our promise to the community. (See Appendix 2 for more data.)

Levels of School Readiness in Montgomery County, Three-Year Trend

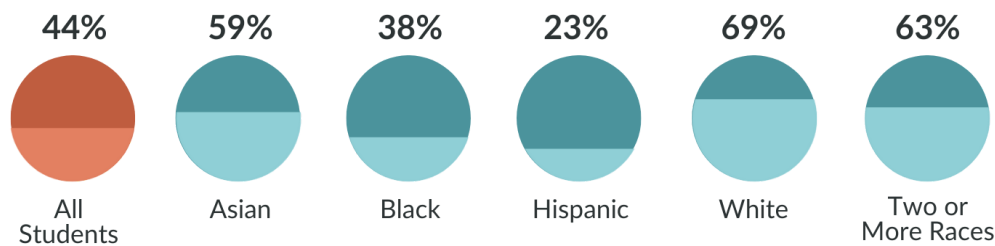
Percent of all students demonstrating various levels of readiness



Source: Maryland State Department of Education

School Readiness by Race/Ethnicity, 2022-23

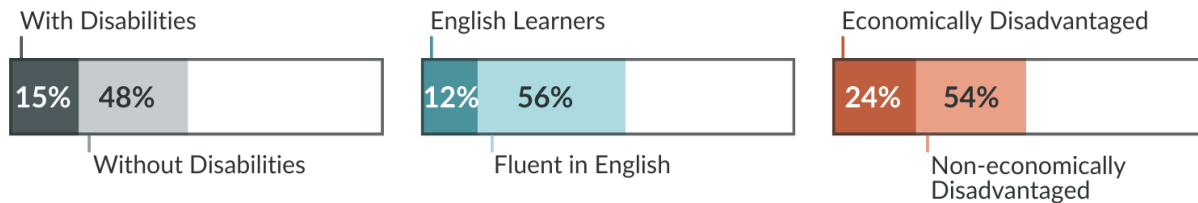
Percent of all students demonstrating readiness



Source: Maryland State Department of Education

School Readiness for Vulnerable Populations, 2022-23

Percent of all students demonstrating readiness



Source: Maryland State Department of Education

Looking Forward

As the Alliance moves into our second year and our strategic plan takes shape, we plan to prioritize the emerging needs that follow. We recognize the need to develop a strong data agenda and the importance of partnering with MCPS, community-based providers, and DHHS to meet our County's Blueprint obligations. At the same time, lessons learned from other communities around Prekindergarten expansion inform us that we cannot only focus on this expansion – we need to be aware of the child care business model, which relies on serving a wide range of ages, from infants and toddlers to Prekindergarten students, to make the full system financially viable. Addressing

these needs of all ages, from birth to five, will maximize the Alliance's ability to serve Montgomery County's children.

- We are continuing to gather data and working to understand who is being served and where they are being served in our community. Developing a data agenda that takes a 360-degree view of the full system is critical.
- The ECE system is made up of child care businesses, nonprofits, and advocates who want to work with the Alliance to build a stronger system. Innovation and risk-taking through grantmaking are critical tools and are essential to increasing impact in the community.
- To provide a holistic view of the ECE system, we need to be a part of the conversations in our community around ECE. Importantly, this requires us to join the ECEI's Coordinating Committee.
- We look forward to meeting with the County Executive and the Council to share our research findings once we complete the Montgomery County Year 1 Blueprint Expansion Report, FY23 and FY22 fiscal mapping, and our foundational strategic and action plan.

We look forward to working with the County Government, DHHS, MCPS, and the greater community to improve the quality of ECE for all our children.

Appendix 1: Duties

See Bill [41-21](#) for a full list of duties. Below is a summary of what the Alliance has accomplished related to the different duties of the legislation.

Building a Common Early Childhood Agenda

- The Alliance is working with a nationally reputed and locally based consultant, School Readiness Consulting, to facilitate the strategic planning process.
- Phase 1 was conducted over the spring and summer and included stakeholder interviews, Board engagement, and a document review ([Phase 1 report is located here](#)).
- Community conversations will take place in October 2023.
- Other intentional community conversations, surveys, and community feedback will be solicited at several points during the process.
- A foundational strategic plan, which will include our mission statement, vision, values, goals, outcomes, and racial equity and social justice statement will be completed by December 2023.
- A three-to-five-year action plan, fundraising plan, and implementation plan will be completed by summer 2024.
- The flow of the remainder of our work is summarized in the figure below:



- In partnership with the Early Childhood Coordinating Council (ECCC), Alliance team members have been attending and providing an update on the work of the Alliance at every monthly meeting.

- In spring 2023, we began conversations with previous and current members of the ECCC and our partners at DHHS to develop a recommendation regarding the duplication of duties between the ECCC and the Alliance, as flagged in the legislation.
- After a due diligence and stakeholder engagement process, the Alliance is working on a recommendation to refresh and amend the County's ECCC. Details and discussions are still taking place to determine the best next steps to move this work forward.
- In partnership with the Early Care and Education Initiative (ECEI), Alliance team members are serving on the Project Teams for both the Shared Services Alliance and Community Development Financial Institution projects issued by the ECEI and administered by DHHS.
- Alliance team members participate in the ECEI's Steering Committee meetings and will have representation across all of the ECEI's working groups, which will reconvene in October 2023, including a co-chair position for one working group.
- The Alliance team also prioritizes building relationships with a wide set of local and state-level ECE stakeholders. Team members hold regular meetings with child care associations, nonprofit organizations, businesses, and more.

Public and Private Funding Strategies

- The Alliance is responsible for securing and administering private-sector funding, and in FY23, raised \$95,000. In FY24, our budgetary goal is \$165,000. So far, we have \$100,000 in commitments from the private sector.
- The Alliance is responsible for managing and administering public funding that is directly appropriated to the Entity. In FY23, we received funds from both DHHS and MCPS. These funding streams will continue for FY24.

Research and Innovation

- The Alliance uses the tool of grantmaking to spur innovation in the field and to get a deeper understanding of the needs stakeholders are facing. In FY23, the Alliance provided grants to four community-based organizations. Here is a summary of the grants:
 - Action in Montgomery (AIM) is a broad-based community power organization rooted in Montgomery County's neighborhoods and congregations. They are a non-partisan, multi-faith, multi-racial organization dedicated to making Montgomery County and the State of Maryland a better place to live and thrive. This grant will support organizing teams of BIPOC parents to address structural barriers related to access to early childhood education [\$40,000].
 - CentroNía's mission for nearly 40 years has been to educate children and youth and strengthen families in a multicultural bilingual environment. This grant will allow CentroNía to prepare and deliver video trainings for Montgomery County educators on high-quality early instruction and care that is responsive to the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse children, including those exhibiting learning and developmental delays. [\$15,000]
 - Montgomery County Food Council (MCFC) builds an equitable, resilient, and sustainable local food system through collaboration, transformation, and cultivation. Feeding America estimates at least 33,840, or 14%, of children in

Montgomery County are food insecure, with an estimated 10,660 of those children being under the age of 6. This grant will support young children and families experiencing food insecurity by increasing SNAP program awareness and participation in Montgomery County. MCFC has a goal of completing SNAP applications for 300 children ages 0-15. [\$10,000]

- Montgomery Housing Partnership, Inc. (MHP) preserves and expands affordable housing, empowers families, strengthens neighborhoods, and provides support services to families in their housing units. This grant will support their Play and Learn program, which provides kindergarten readiness opportunities for low-income children and English Language Learners. [\$40,000]

Measurement and Reporting

- In Appendix 2, we have included a wide range of data points and analyses that we have completed related to data we have received from MCPS, DHHS, and other community partners. This data is not exhaustive but gives a glimpse into the data that is currently available.
- Reviewing and analyzing existing data will allow us to address current inequities and ask critical questions to help move the data agenda forward and improve long-term access and quality.

Racial Equity and Social Justice Policies

- The Alliance is pulling together a working group to create the policies, procedures, and statements related to the Racial Equity and Social Justice policy requirement.
- We are focusing on co-creating these items with staff, Board, and community members through debate and many conversations.
- Through the strategic planning process, as the Board discussed values, equity rose to the top. The data in our community, as in most communities in the US, demonstrates early opportunity gaps, which leads us to focus on racial equity and equal access to programs and supports in the early care and education space.

Board Leadership and Development

- Since July 2022, we have held regular Board meetings with a 21-member, County-appointed Board.
- The Board met 14 times between July 2022 and June 2023.
- Dr. Raymond Crowell stepped down as a Board member, and Jennifer Arnaiz was recently appointed.
- After one year of service, Nora Morales (from Identity) and Chandra Curtis (a parent) have stepped down.
- In accordance with the Maryland Open Meetings Act, all agendas, minutes, and recordings are posted on our website, mocochildren.org.
- Following nonprofit best practices, the Board has negotiated and amended organizational by-laws.
- The Board has collectively approved the organizational budgets for FY23 and FY24.

- The Board has four committees: Executive, Finance, Resource Development, and Governance, which follow nonprofit best practices for Board governance.
- As part of the Racial Equity and Social Justice policy, we are drafting policies and procedures to actively recruit members from diverse backgrounds and outreach to communities of color.

Appendix 2: Data

Outcomes Data that Measures the Progress of Early Care and Education System Improvements

Financial Investments

To understand changes in public and private investments in Montgomery County’s Early Care and Education system over the last year, the Alliance is building upon foundational knowledge generated by Montgomery Moving Forward (MMF). In 2018, MMF contracted the Children’s Funding Project (CFP), a national thought leader and social impact organization that helps communities expand equitable opportunities for children through strategic public financing, to conduct a fiscal map of the ECE sector to understand the level of Federal, state, local, and private philanthropic and parent resources invested in the system. CFP’s report, *Fiscal Map Findings and Recommended Financing Strategies*, can be accessed [here](#). For FY18, CFP found the following investment levels by funding source:

Source	Percent of ECE system investment	Amount
Parent Cost	81.4%	\$620,613,927
State Funds	8.4%	\$64,054,891
Local Funds	7.0%	\$53,590,313
Federal Funds	2.9%	\$22,225,187
Private Funds	0.2%	\$1,525,622
Total		\$762,009,940

Since the first fiscal map was conducted in 2018, there has been growing attention to improving resources, programs, and services within Montgomery County’s ECE system. Following the commissioning of the fiscal map and report, MMF held strategic conversations that resulted in the overwhelming realization of the need for increased and sustainable funding, leveraging funding to enhance quality, leveling the playing field between the Pre-K and child care systems, and improving family supports and connections.

The Alliance is working in partnership with the CFP to hire, train, and support a local expert on the Alliance staff team. The Alliance hired a Strategic Public Financing Coordinator, who will use expertise in fiscal mapping, cost modeling, public financing mechanism research, and movement-building to understand and analyze the multiple sources that fund ECE services. They

will also seek opportunities to align existing funds with a common early childhood agenda and develop customized financing solutions that will cover gaps in services to vulnerable populations and improve outcomes for all children. As part of the Alliance’s work plan for our Strategic Public Financing Coordinator, we plan to complete a fiscal map for FY22 and FY23. A fiscal map is a detailed and complicated procedure that takes several months to complete accurately; we are planning to have a completed fiscal map to share in June 2024.

Over the past five years, notable changes have occurred in the County’s ECE landscape, including new or different uses of funds in the space, the creation of the County Executive’s Early Care and Education Initiative (ECEI) and its accompanying non-departmental account, the expansion of Prekindergarten seats and the initiation of the state-level Blueprint for Maryland’s Future (Blueprint), and funding through the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA).

Early Care and Education Initiative

In early 2019, after County Executive Marc Elrich announced that early care and education was one of his top priorities, the County Executive – along with Council Member Nancy Navarro, MCPS, and Montgomery College – launched the ECEI with an initial investment of just under \$6 million in a non-departmental account. An executive committee, along with a steering committee and ad hoc working groups, have been implementing changes according to an action plan, as well as guiding the use of the funds in the non-departmental account since FY20.

The approved/recommended funding, expenditures, and unspent/carryover funding for the initiative from FY20 through FY24 are as follows¹:

¹ As discussed in the [April 21, 2023](#) Joint HHS/E&C County Council Work Session document, page 7 and amended by Deborah Lambert, Sr. OMB Analyst to include the \$1.5 encumbrance added in March 2023 for FY23 for WPA Portal Development and provided to COA in August 2023.

*Negative PY Carryforward amount due to FY21 expenses that were moved to the CRF in FY22.

	FY20	FY21	FY22	FY23	FY24
Beginning Balance	-	3,195,131	4,070,250	10,951,622	12,306,975
PY Carryforward Amount			(802,172)	1,913,690	
Approved Budget	5,992,589	5,992,589	10,992,589	10,992,589	11,178,526
Latest Budget	5,992,589	9,187,720	14,260,667	23,857,901	23,485,501
Expenditures (expenses/encumbrances)	2,797,458	5,117,470	3,309,045	11,550,926	
Remaining Balance	3,195,131	4,070,250	10,951,622	12,306,975	23,485,501

\$1,500,000 encumbrance added in March 2023 for WPA Portal development.

The total expenditures in the ECE system via the ECEI over FY20-FY23 totaled **\$22,774,899**.

Expanding Prekindergarten Seats

The Blueprint for Maryland’s Future, landmark legislation passed in 2021, includes changes to nearly every aspect of Maryland’s public education system. Increasing annual education funding by over \$3.8 billion over the next 10 years, early childhood education is one of the five pillars of focus. It includes providing Prekindergarten at no- or reduced cost for more families through a mixed delivery system, expanding wraparound services for students and families through Judy Centers and Patty Centers, increased funding for the Maryland Infants and Toddlers Program to support students with special needs, and more funding dedicated to elevating the quality of student experiences in early childhood education.²

MCPS has received new funding from the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) through its Blueprint funding and its Pre-K Expansion Grant funding. The overall Blueprint aid from the State for MCPS decreased by \$4.7 million from FY23. The largest decrease was in Prekindergarten instruction funding. Community-based providers have also received Pre-K Expansion Grants directly from MSDE to operate Prekindergarten classrooms in their private settings. As a point of comparison, funding through the federal Head Start program has remained relatively stable, with the exception of a one-time rescue fund grant noted in the next section.

² <https://blueprint.marylandpublicschools.org/ece/>

	FY22	FY23	FY24
Blueprint Funding to MCPS for Pre-K (Pillar 1)	-	\$12,549,473	\$5,595,704
MSDE Pre-K Expansion Grant Funding for Community-based Providers (7 grantees)	-	\$6,783,431	TBD
Federal Head Start Funding	\$4,807,949	\$4,766,440	\$4,896,061

Notable New Funding Streams

There has been a surge of new funding into many areas of the ECE system as a result of various grants and funding streams made available in the state, such as those through the use of American Rescue Plan Act dollars. While we are unable to account for a comprehensive list of all of the relief funding in this County’s ECE system, a few notable new grants or loans are listed below.

Fund	Year	Amount
ARPA Head Start	FY21-FY23	\$970,360
Child Care Capital Support Revolving Loan Fund (13 child care providers in Montgomery County)	FY23	\$1,221,955
Maryland Rebuilds – Montgomery College grant	FY23	\$1,531,837
MSDE Grant – Montgomery College	FY23	\$1,452,964

The Maryland State Department of Education received one round of \$155 million in Child Care Stabilization grants in October 2021 and child care programs were slated to receive \$15,000 as a base award and \$500 for each licensed program slot. We are unable to determine how much of that award went to Montgomery County-based providers. In FY21, DHHS disbursed \$10 million in grants to help child care providers cover reopening expenses.

As the Alliance begins to have a more complete understanding of the public and private investments in the County’s ECE system, we will be better suited to support strategic financing plans to grow and sustain these investments during the next decade and beyond.

Availability and Use of Seats

Access to quality early care and education programs is important to ensure children are ready for kindergarten. The landscape of formal early care includes family child care providers, licensed group programs, Head Start, and public Prekindergarten. What we know about capacity is as follows:

Regulated Early Care and Education Capacity, 2022

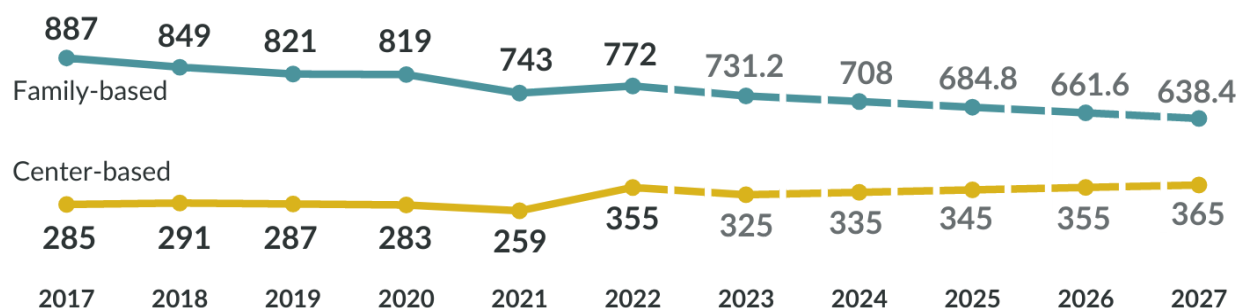
Regulated Care	Sites	Capacity
Licensed Group Programs	497	38,830
Family Child Care Providers	772	6,121
Total	1,269	44,951

Capacity is across all ages 0-12. Licensed Group Programs include 8-12 Hour centers, Infant/Toddler, Part Day, Before and After school, Employer Sponsored Centers, Nursery Schools, and Private Kindergarten. Source: Maryland Family Network and the Maryland Child Care Resource Network.

The ECE landscape in Montgomery County is evolving. Family-based providers, historically the majority of regulated ECE programs, have been on a gradual decline since 2017. Projections from the Maryland Family Network (MFN) indicate that this trend is expected to continue through 2027. However, in Montgomery County, according to DHHS, the number of family-based providers has remained relatively consistent. In contrast, center-based providers have seen steady growth since 2017, a trend anticipated to continue through 2027. Most programs are located in Silver Spring and Gaithersburg, with other areas of the County having much fewer programs. Areas that lack sufficient providers to meet the needs of families are often referred to as "child care deserts." A report by the Office of Legislative Oversight (OLO) in 2015 identified three areas in the County – Gaithersburg and Montgomery Village (District 9), Silver Spring and Wheaton (District 13), and Burtonsville (District 5) – as child care deserts for infants and toddlers³. However, more recent data, using a definition from the MFN⁴, looking at slots for children from birth through age five as a whole without separating out infant and toddler slots, suggests that there are no child care deserts in the county.

Trends in the Number of Licensed Child Care Providers

Number of full-day center and family-based providers in Montgomery County, 2017 to 2027



Projections by Maryland Family Network using a Forecasting template and do not necessarily reflect the effects of current changes to social programs affecting child care.

Source: Maryland Family Network and the Maryland Child Care Resource Network

³ The OLO report defines Child Care Deserts as areas where the number of children under age two exceed slots available by more than 2,000 children.

⁴ The MFN defines Child Care Deserts as areas where there are 50 children under age five AND greater than a 3:1 ratio of children to spots available.

Data regarding enrollment in available regulated care sites is not currently collected on a regular basis in Maryland. The ECEI, via DHHS, is undergoing a supply and demand study to better analyze true capacity and enrollment in the child care sector. This report should be completed during this fiscal year and will represent data from one point in time. The Alliance is coordinating with DHHS and its project team on the implementation of this project. The Alliance is collaborating with partners across the state to understand options for more regular and recurring collection of these data. Data on which program sites consistently have openings or those that regularly reach capacity is crucial in directing initiatives aimed at improving the accessibility of child care services.

Head Start and Prekindergarten are offered for three- and four-year-olds in full-day and part-day seats through MCPS.

Pre-K and Head Start Capacity, 2022-23

	Half Day	Full Day	Total Capacity
Head Start	77	571	648
Pre-K	1,460	1,140	2,600
Special Education	-	-	-
Total	1,537	1,711	3,248

Source: MCPS

At its peak, 3,016 children were enrolled in the available 3,248 Head Start and Pre-K seats. An additional 1,466 children were served in special education Prekindergarten, which does not have the same eligibility requirements and, thus, are not included in the capacity chart above. Because the County is mandated to serve all special education students identified as needing services, there is no set capacity data for this population. These special education students are included in the 4,308 enrollment figure below.

As part of the Blueprint’s goal to offer Prekindergarten in a mixed delivery system, seven community-based providers, representing both child care centers and family child care, received Pre-K expansion grants from the State of Maryland in 2022-23; these seven providers collectively served 180 children⁵. These 180 children are not included in either of the above or below charts.

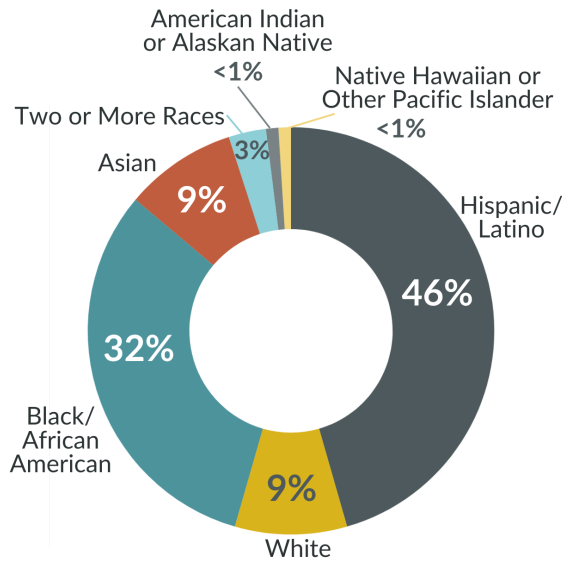
MCPS offers streamlined access to public Prekindergarten and Head Start through a single application process. Eligible children who apply are assigned to a classroom at one of 65 elementary schools in the County. In 2021-22, 41% of the over 1,300 children who applied and

⁵ MCPS BOE Presentation, September 20, 2023
[https://go.boarddocs.com/mab/mcpsmd/Board.nsf/files/CVNT497582DC/\\$file/Prekindergarten%20Expansion%20-%20Blueprint%20Pillar%201%20230921.pdf](https://go.boarddocs.com/mab/mcpsmd/Board.nsf/files/CVNT497582DC/$file/Prekindergarten%20Expansion%20-%20Blueprint%20Pillar%201%20230921.pdf)

were deemed eligible for Head Start were served in a Head Start classroom, and the remaining 59% of applicants were offered a seat in a Prekindergarten classroom.

Based on data we received through a request to MCPS, during SY 2022-23, the largest subgroup of students enrolled in Prekindergarten and Head Start, including special education students, identified as Hispanic/Latino (46%), followed by students identifying as Black (32%).

Prekindergarten Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity, 2022-23

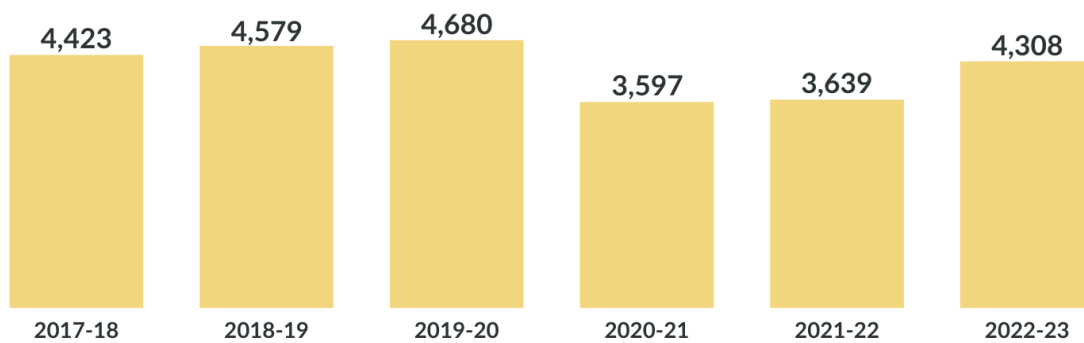


Source: MCPS

Public Prekindergarten enrollment includes three- and four-year-old students enrolled in part-time or full-time Head Start, Prekindergarten, and special education. Enrollment in public Pre-K notably decreased between SY 2019-20 and SY 2020-21. However, since then, enrollment numbers have increased, reaching 4,308 in SY 2022-23.

Public Prekindergarten Enrollment Trends

Public Prekindergarten school enrollment, ages 3 and 4

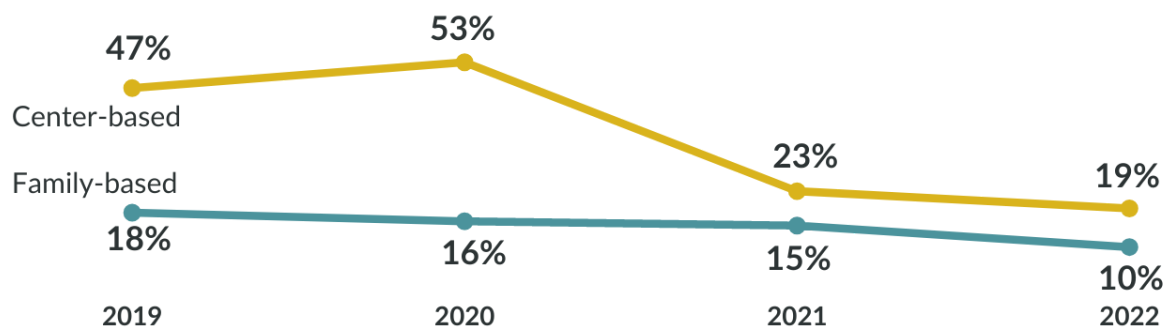


Source: Maryland State Department of Education

Quality: Maryland EXCELS, the state's quality rating and improvement program, has seen relatively stable participation rates since 2021. However, prior to the pandemic, a more significant proportion of center-based programs held quality ratings of 3 or higher in the EXCELS program compared to family-based programs. The pandemic led to declines in quality ratings for both center- and family-based programs, with the sharpest drop observed among center-based programs, decreasing from 53% in FY20 to 19% in FY22. Meanwhile, family-based programs declined from 16% in FY20 to 10% in FY22 in the County.

Percent of Programs with Quality Rating of 3 or Higher

Percent of *center-based* and *family-based* child care that hold a quality rating of 3 or higher in Maryland EXCELS, 2019-2022

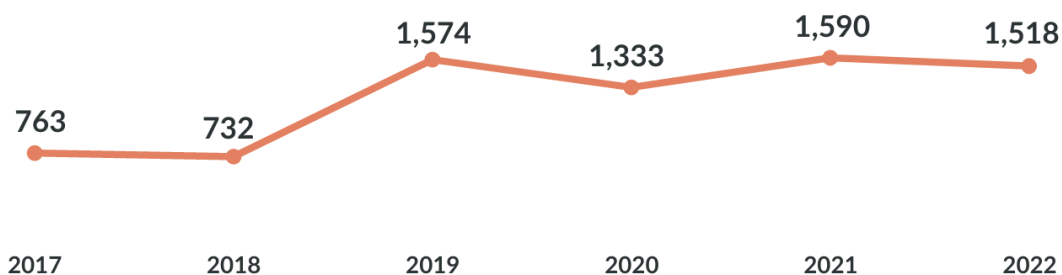


Source: Montgomery CountyStat

Access: In 2019, Montgomery County experienced a substantial increase in the number of families authorized to receive child care subsidies through the State Child Care Scholarship (CCS) Program and/or Working Parents Assistance Program (WPA). Since then, the number of eligible families has remained relatively stable, with a slight decrease from 1,590 families in 2021 to 1,518 in 2022. More recent data on the number of kids enrolled in subsidy programs shows 1,018 children ages 0-12 were served by WPA as of March 31, 2023 (663 ages five and younger) and 3,350 ages 0-12 enrolled in CCS as of June 30, 2023.

Families who Receive Child Care Subsidies

Number of families with children ages 0 to 12 authorized to receive either CCS and/or WPA



Source: Montgomery CountyStat

The number of children receiving early childhood intervention services briefly decreased between FY20 and FY21, before returning to numbers similar to previous years. Notably, the number of Prekindergarten students with disabilities has steadily decreased since the 2019-20 school year from 2650 to 1526 students in the 2021-22 school year.

Accessible and affordable high-quality formal early care and education are essential to child, family, and community well-being. Equitable access to ECE seats remains an issue in Montgomery County and across the country. Data that helps articulate the extent of the issue is hard to obtain, and it will be a priority of the Children’s Opportunity Alliance to work to improve the quality of available data that can be used for decision-making.

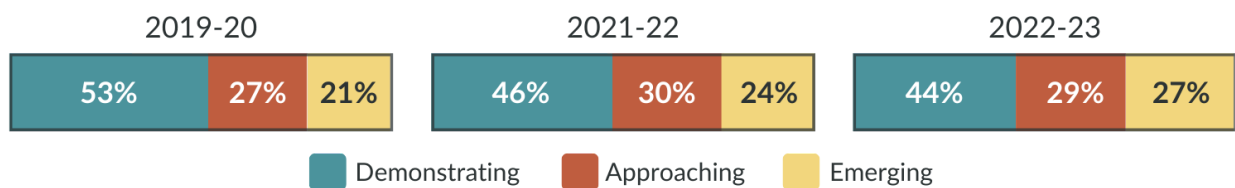
Kindergarten Readiness

In the 2022-23 school year, Montgomery County administered the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment (KRA) using a Census-based administration of all kindergarteners by their teachers, joining all other jurisdictions in Maryland. Historically, Montgomery County used a random sample approach. This change in process allows for higher-quality data. In the 2022-23 school year, 10,247 kindergarteners attended school in Montgomery County.

In the 2022-23 academic year, readiness scores declined compared to the previous 2021-22 school year across all domains. This decline marked a continuing trend, with readiness levels steadily decreasing since the 2019-20 school year. Specifically, in the 2022-23 school year, 44% of children demonstrated readiness, representing the lowest readiness percentage in eight years. Notably, all but five counties in Maryland reported lower readiness scores in the post-COVID-19 era. In Montgomery County, scores generally rose since 2014-25 when this assessment was first used in the state, hitting a peak in 2018-19, and then falling post-COVID. However, Montgomery County continues to consistently outperform the statewide average in readiness.

Levels of School Readiness in Montgomery County, Three-Year Trend

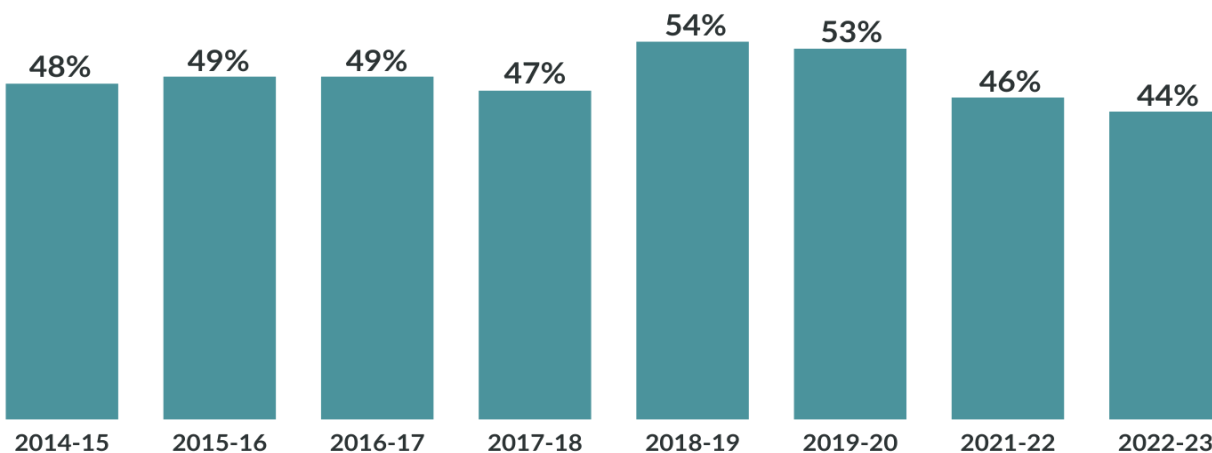
Percent of all students demonstrating various levels of readiness



Source: Maryland State Department of Education

School Readiness in Montgomery County Since 2015

Percent of all students demonstrating readiness



Sample data for years 2014-15 to 2021-22. There is no data for 2020-21 school year.

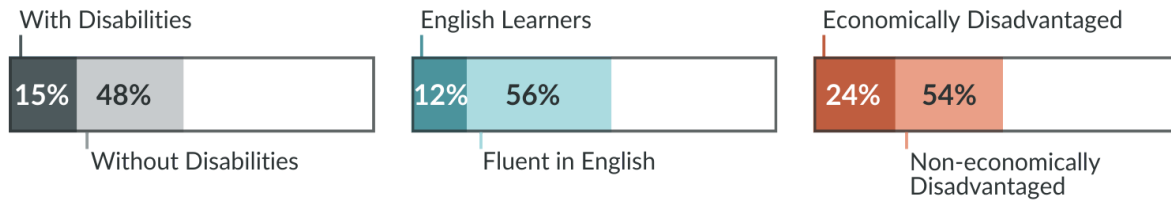
Source: Maryland State Department of Education

Examining KRA data among specific student populations can guide targeted interventions to address areas of greatest need. In the 2022-23 school year, readiness disparities among various student subgroups have endured. Progress in closing these gaps varies, with some gaps narrowing while others are widening.

- Students identifying as Asian, White, or belonging to two or more racial categories demonstrated readiness levels higher than the County average. However, readiness disparities persist among Hispanic and Black students, who exhibit lower levels of readiness compared to the countywide average. Hispanic and Black students represent more than half of the kindergarten class.
- Children with disabilities consistently demonstrate lower levels of readiness than their peers, 15% compared to 48% in the 2022-23 school year. Despite decreasing from the previous year, the share of students with disabilities in the 2022-23 school year was higher than in the 2019-20 school year.
- In the 2022-23 school year, 24% of economically disadvantaged children demonstrated readiness compared to 53% of their peers. Before the pandemic, there was a 22 percentage-point gap in 2019-20, which has since widened to 29% in 2022-23.
- English Learners' readiness decreased from 17% in the 2021-22 school year to 12% in the 2022-23 school year. The gap in readiness between English Language Learners and their peers has also grown, primarily due to a decrease in the readiness rate among English Language Learners. In 2019-20, there was a 38 percentage-point gap between English Language Learners and their peers. This gap closed slightly in 2021-22 to about 32 percentage points; however, in 2022-23, the gap widened to about 44 percentage points.

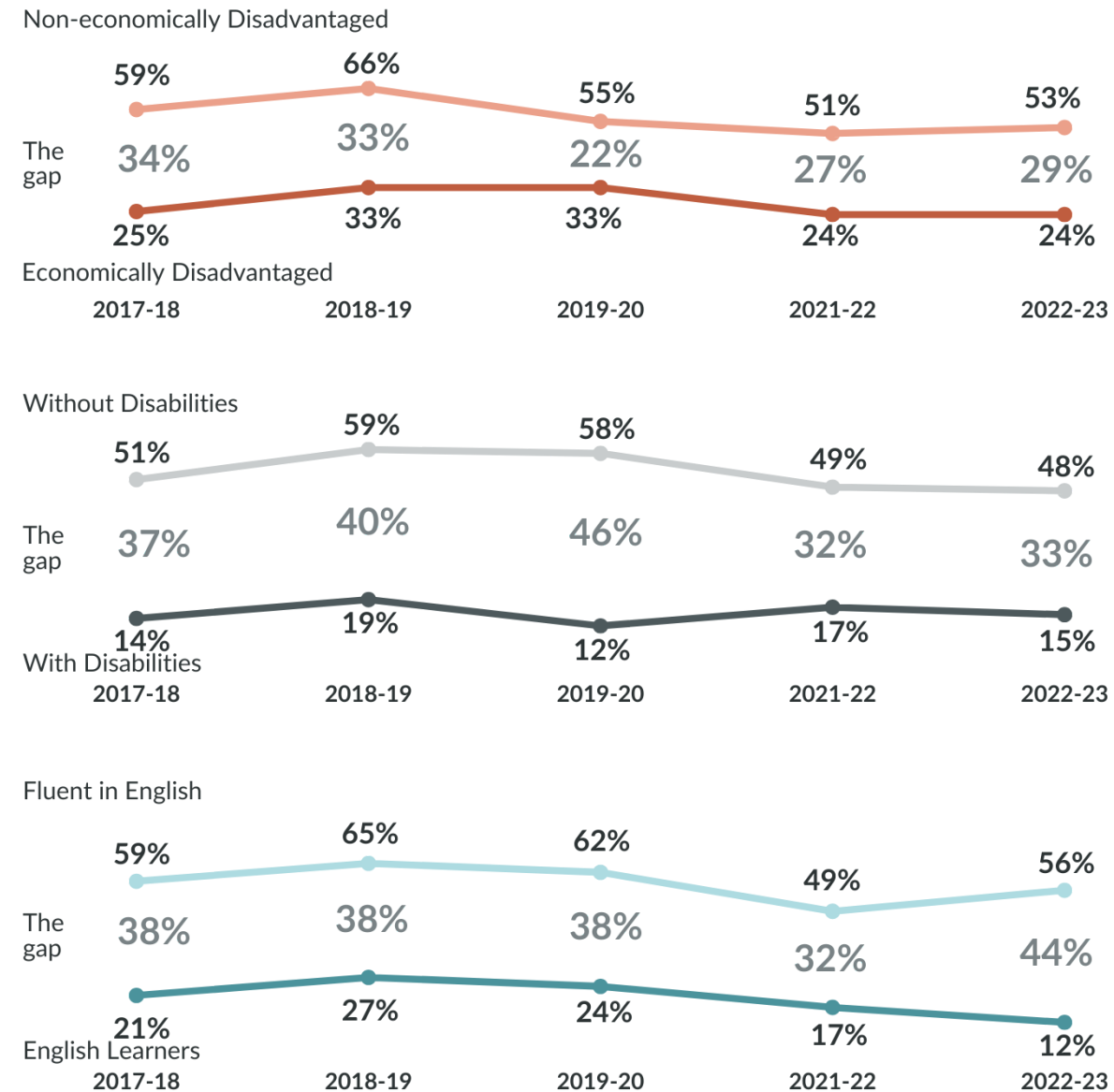
School Readiness for Vulnerable Populations, 2022-23

Percent of all students demonstrating readiness



Source: Maryland State Department of Education

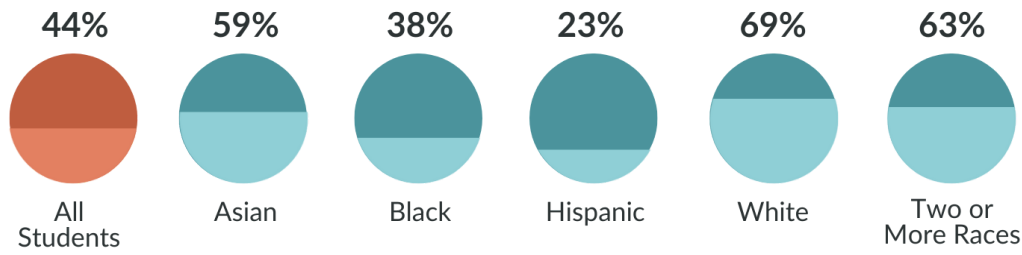
Percent of Students Demonstrating Readiness by Student Subgroup



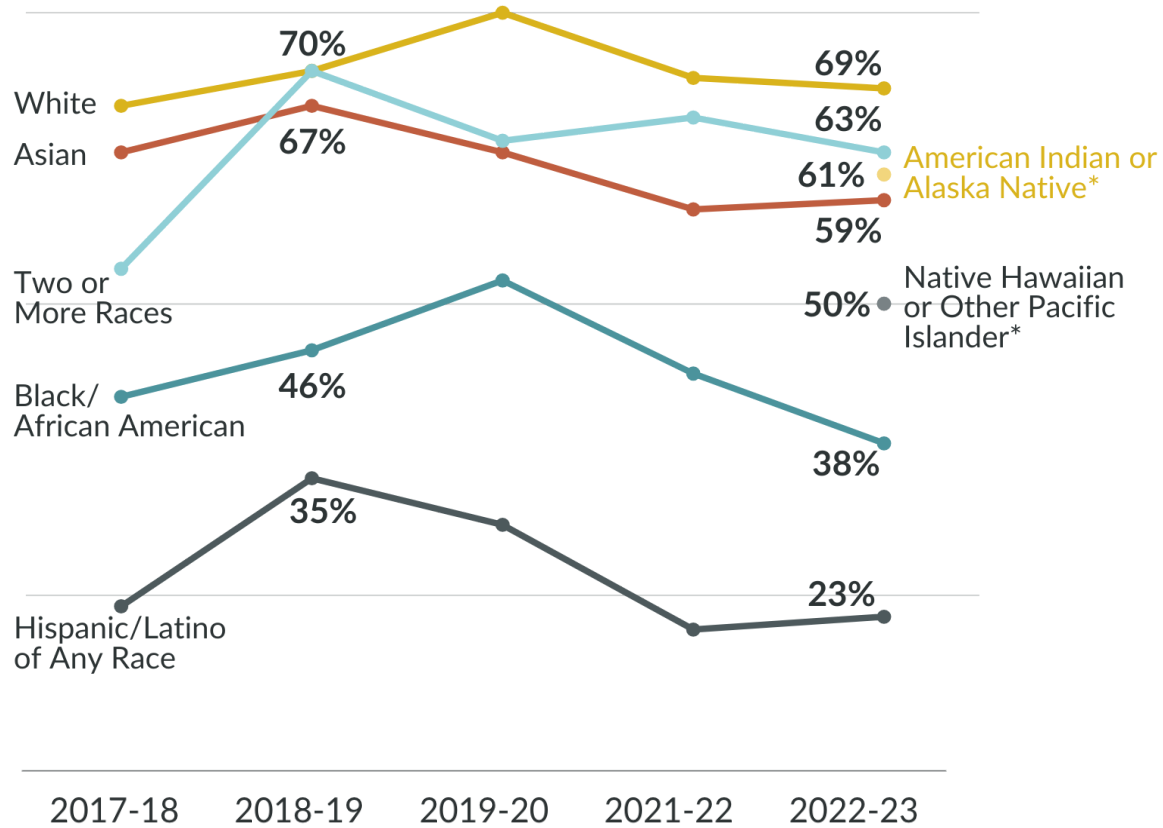
Source: Maryland State Department of Education

School Readiness by Race/Ethnicity, 2022-23

Percent of all students demonstrating readiness



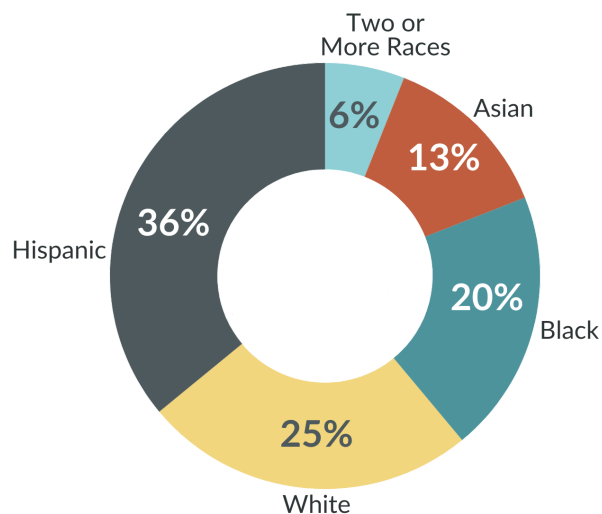
Source: Maryland State Department of Education



*Estimates based on groups of fewer than 10 students are not reported.

Source: Maryland State Department of Education

Kindergarten Enrollment, 2022-23



Source: Maryland State Department of Education

While annual reporting of KRA data offers valuable insights into readiness trends, the Alliance is tracking its limitations as we consider systems-level improvements. For instance, it would be valuable to interpret readiness scores based on a student's prior care setting, yet available prior care data only reflects where a child received care in the year before kindergarten based on parent reports, even though children can experience multiple early care and education environments. Community stakeholders have also expressed concerns about the Spanish translation of the prior care reporting form. Moreover, public KRA data mainly highlights the percentage of children showing readiness, but broadening the published data to encompass students who are approaching and emerging readiness could provide a more comprehensive view of readiness.

Not all young children in Montgomery County attend MCPS. There are 55 sites of private kindergarten in Montgomery County, according to the Maryland Family Network's most recent demographics report. These sites are not required to administer the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment and, thus, the readiness of these young children is not currently easily known.

Appendix 3: Financials

In FY23, the Alliance received \$715,836.98 from the County Executive and County Council, through DHHS. The funds were to support the transition from the Children’s Opportunity Fund to the Children’s Opportunity Alliance, under the fiscal sponsorship of the Greater Washington Community Foundation. There was also \$125,000 in the MCPS budget for FY23, and we received these funds in June 2023. The majority of these funds were used to support our grantmaking portfolio. As of Sept. 2023, all FY24 DHHS funds were expended or allocated to Alliance expenses. See the table below for the breakdown of how DHHS and MCPS funds were expended for FY23.

	FY23 Total DHHS + MCPS	FY24 Budget
Salary & Benefits	\$398,219.56	\$804,550.00
Community Fdtn. Mtg. Fee (8%)	\$58,100.29	\$0
Administrative Fees (rent incl)	\$0	\$45,000.00
Communications		\$15,500.00
Consultant Support	\$78,687.35	\$20,000.00
Strategic Planning	\$75,000.00	\$150,000.00
Travel & Transport	\$21.50	\$0
Continuing Education	\$3,910.59	\$5,000.00
Insurance	\$3,093.00	\$6,000.00
IT Supports	\$13,958.54	\$13,000.00
Conference	\$0	\$2,500.00
Meetings	\$3,721.95	\$15,000.00
Supplies	\$1,534.74	\$8,600.00
Legal Fees	\$2,879.82	\$5,000.00
HR Support	\$27,542.97	\$0
Grants	\$155,000.00	\$125,000.00
Total	\$821,670.31	\$1,215,150


For FY24, the Alliance will have a staff of six: an Executive Director, a Manager of Strategic Initiatives, a Manager of Early Care and Education, a Measurement and Impact Analyst, a Strategic Public Financing Coordinator, and an Office Manager. All positions have been filled except the Manager of Early Care and Education. We have struggled to find the right fit, so we are continuing to search for the best candidate. Above is a basic breakdown of our FY24 budget, based on our Board-approved budget. The work plan for FY24 centers around developing our strategic plan; however, at the same time, we are working on fundraising, basic operations implementation, making data requests of community partners, data analysis, starting a fiscal map project, facilitating an ECE advocacy coalition, and convening and engaging stakeholders and partners such as parents and child care providers as we move forward with our work.

In the FY24 Board-approved budget, 13% of the budget comes from charitable donations, such as foundations and individuals, meaning we need to raise, at the very least, the budgeted \$161,763 from private sources. We have made progress in securing private sources of funding from individual philanthropists and family foundations, and this private support in our start-up phase is critical to our success and our goal to improve outcomes for the youngest members of our community. Currently, we have open proposals with three foundations, we have plans to submit at least two more proposals this fall, and we are planning a Friendraiser event, which will raise awareness and funds for the Children's Opportunity Alliance. In FY23, the Alliance raised \$95,000 in private funding. So far in FY24, we have commitments that total \$100,000.

Blueprint Update: Pillar 1

County Council
Education and Culture Committee
Thursday, November 2, 2023

Blueprint: Pillar 1

 Blueprint for Maryland's Future Accountability & Implementation Board														
Legend		✦	Start and/or end date included in Blueprint statute											
		●	Start and/or end date not included in Blueprint statute; dates in table are estimated based on Kirwan Commission final timeline											
Pillar 1 Early Childhood Education			FY22	FY23	FY24	FY25	FY26	FY27	FY28	FY29	FY30	FY31	FY32	
1.1 Expand publicly funded full-day Pre-K														
1.1.1	Increase the number of high-quality private pre-K providers and staff		← →											
1.1.2	Expand access to free full-day pre-K for low-income 3- and 4-year-old children (up to 300% of the federal poverty level)		← → ✦											
1.1.3	Private providers serve minimum proportion of pre-K slots (waiver available)			✦				✦						
1.1.4	Expand pre-K access to 4-year-old children between 300-600% of the federal poverty level on a sliding scale					✦	← →							
1.2 Kindergarten Readiness Assessment														
1.2.1	Administer unbiased Kindergarten Readiness Assessment to all incoming kindergarten students			✦	← →									
1.3 Expand family supports														
1.3.1	Create 30 new Family Support (Patty) Centers by FY29		← → ✦											
1.3.2	Create 135 new Judy Centers by FY30		← → ✦											
1.3.3	Expand the Maryland Infants and Toddlers Program		← → ✦											

Expand Publicly Funded Full Day PreK

1.1.1 -Increase the number of high-quality private PreK providers and staff.

High-Quality Private PreK Enrollment Data

	Number of Expansion Grant Programs	Number of Expansion Grant Classrooms	Number of Expansion Grant Seats
FY23	7	14	207
FY24	7	19	208

Data gathered by MCPS Early Childhood Unit, October 20, 2023

Expand Publicly Funded Full Day PreK

1.1.1 -Increase the number of high-quality private PreK providers and staff.

- Memorandum of Understanding
- Monthly Partnership Meetings
- Customized monthly consultation topics
- Challenges
 - Program requirements (i.e. certification, awareness, MD EXCELS)
- Solutions
 - Partnerships to level 3+
 - Connect programs with alternative pathways
 - Explore programs with Title I relationships
 - ECEI committee workgroup

Expand Publicly Funded Full Day PreK

1.1.2 -Expand access to free full-day pre-K for 3- and 4- year old children (up to 300% federal poverty level).

SY23-24 Expansion

- Converted part-day Pre-K programs in 10 Title I schools to full day
- Created new full-day Pre-K classrooms
- Created new part-day Pre-K classrooms

SY24-25 Expansion

- Convert part-day Pre-K programs in Title I schools to full day
- Create new full-day Pre-K classrooms

Expand Publicly Funded Full Day PreK

1.1.2 -Expand access to free full-day pre-K for 3- and 4- year old children (up to 300% federal poverty level).

Inclusive Practices

- Three and four-year old pre-K students receiving special education services attend classes in nearly 60 schools throughout all clusters, and two Early Childhood Centers
- Students attend inclusive or self-contained classrooms, determined by Individualized Education Program (IEP) teams, regardless of income
- General and special education pre-K teachers are provided with joint professional learning and coaching opportunities, on topics including social-emotional development and high-quality inclusive practices

Expand Publicly Funded Full Day PreK

1.1.2 -Expand access to free full-day pre-K for 3- and 4- year old children (up to 300% federal poverty level).

Enrollment Data

as of October 15, 2023

Age	Head Start		Pre-K		Special Education Pre-K	Not sectioned	Total
	Full Day	Part Day	Full Day	Part Day	Full and Part Day		
3	15	62	19	39	903	22	1060
4	519	12	1225	855	921	45	3577

Data prepared by MCPS Office of Shared Accountability

Expand Publicly Funded Full Day PreK

1.1.3 -Private providers serve minimum proportion of pre-k slots (waiver available).

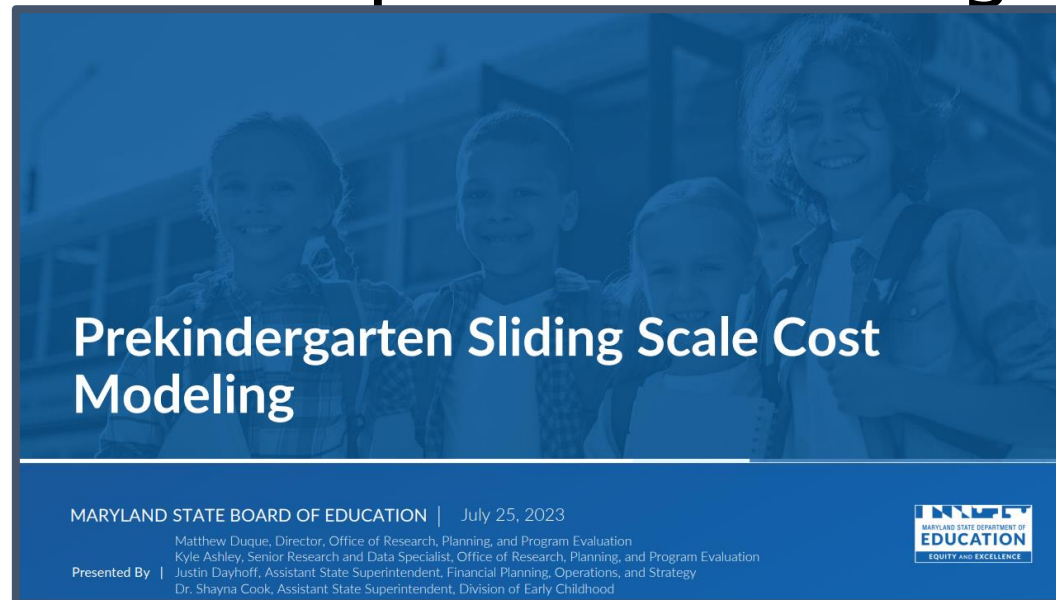
Proportion of Tier 1 PreK Seats

Funding Source	MCPS Pre-K/Head Start Full-Day Tier 1 Seats	Pre-K Private Providers (Pre-K Expansion Grant recipients)	Ratio
All Funding	1,951 seats	208 seats	89:11
Head Start	571	0	100:0
Pre-K Local	900	0	100:0
Title I	200	0	100:0
Pre-K Expansion and Blueprint	280	208	57:43

Expand Publicly Funded Full Day PreK

1.1.4 -Expand pre-k access to 4-year old children between 300% and 600% on a sliding scale.

- State Board of Education Presentation in July
- Awaiting official implementation guidance



Kindergarten Readiness Assessment

1.2.1 - Administer unbiased Kindergarten Readiness Assessment to all incoming kindergarteners.

Kindergarten Readiness Assessment Data by Readiness Level September 2022

Readiness Levels	Emerging Readiness	Approaching Readiness	Demonstrating Readiness
Percent of students	27%	29%	44%

Source: Maryland State Department of Education, & Ready at Five. (2022). *Readiness Matters: 2022-23 kindergarten readiness assessment report*.

https://marylandpublicschools.org/Documents/reports/MSDE_ReadyAtFive_ReadinessMatters2023.pdf

Expand Family Supports

1.3.1 - Create 30 new Family Support (Patty) Centers by FY29

1.3.2 - Create 135 new Judy Centers by FY30

1.3.3 - Expand Maryland's Infants and Toddlers Program

Judy Centers

- Located at Rolling Terrace ES and Summit Hall ES
- Serving families and their children aged birth-3 years, as well as expectant mothers.
 - Parent workshops
 - Play groups
 - Case management
 - Connecting families with educational and health-related services

Infants and Toddlers Program

- Department of Health and Human Services serves as lead agency, in collaboration with MCPS
- Specialized instruction and related services are provided in a family/caregiver coaching model
- Serves children and families from Birth-Age 4

Collaborative Partnerships

- Department of Health and Human Services
 - Early Childhood Services
 - Community Action Agency
 - Early Care and Education Initiatives Steering Committee and Workgroups
- Children's Opportunity Alliance