MARYLAND STATE DEPARTMENT OF
EDUCATION
PREPARING WORLD CLASS STUDENTS

Jack R. Smith, Ph.D.
Interim State Superintendent of Schools

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December 1, 2015

The Honorable Larry Hogan
State House
100 State Circle
Annapolis, Maryland 21401-1925

The Honorable Thomas V. Mike Miller
H-107 State House
100 State Circle
Annapolis, Maryland 21401-1925

The Honorable Michael E. Busch
H-101 State House
100 State Circle
Annapolis, Maryland 21401-1925

Re: Early Childhood Advisory Council Report (MSAR #10106)

Dear Governor Hogan, President Miller and Speaker Busch:

Early Childhood Development continues to be a top priority for the State of Maryland. It is this critical stage in life that gives us the opportunity to leave a positive and meaningful impact on a child. The State Early Childhood Advisory Council recognizes this critical period and is committed to improving early childhood education and care in the State of Maryland.

The Council is currently overseeing and advising the implementation of several projects designed to improve the quality and increase the capacity of early care and education in Maryland, as well as focus on narrowing the school readiness achievement gap for high needs children, including those with disabilities. With Pre-Kindergarten State and Federal funding, Maryland has also been able to serve more low income and at-risk children who were not previously attending education programs. To improve the quality and capacity of early learning programs the State Early Childhood Advisory Council has looked at various barriers such as health, access to quality care for children with disabilities, and the effectiveness of early childhood educators. Additionally, the Council has considered recommendations for professional development and advancement and a unified data collection system.

The State Early Childhood Advisory Council's report reviews the strategies currently in place and also provides recommendations to continue to support the development and improvement of high quality early education programs and Pre-Kindergarten programs in Maryland.

Thank you for your continued support of early childhood education. Should you have questions or need additional information, please contact Cyndi La Marca Lessner, Early Childhood Coordinator, at (410) 767-0337 or by email at cynthia.lessner@maryland.gov.

Sincerely,

Jack R. Smith, Ph.D.
Interim State Superintendent of Schools

State Early Childhood Advisory Council Report

Report authorized in 2-1246 of the State Government Article, the General Assembly MSAR #10106
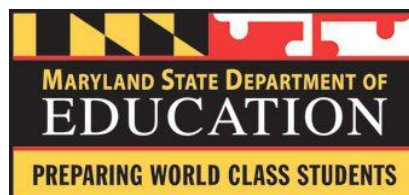
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Division of Early Childhood Development

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State Early Childhood Advisory Council

House Bill 461 (Ch.232, Section 3, 2014)

For the purpose of establishing the State Early Childhood Advisory Council; providing for the composition, chair, and staffing of the Council; prohibiting a member of the Council from receiving certain compensation, but authorizing the reimbursement of certain expenses; providing for the purposes of the Council; requiring the Council to hold certain meetings at least a certain number of times per year and to maintain minutes of meetings; authorizing the Council to adopt certain procedures and bylaws; providing for the automatic resignation of a Council member, subject to a certain waiver, under certain circumstances; requiring the Council to take certain actions, including developing a strategic plan to improve the school readiness skills of young children and generally providing an infrastructure of continuous program improvement for the State's early learning and development programs; requiring the Council to provide a certain statewide strategic report to the Governor and the General Assembly on or before a certain date; requiring the Council to meet periodically after a certain report is submitted to review implementation of the report's recommendations and any changes in State and local need; defining a certain term; and generally relating to the State Early Childhood Advisory Council.

Section 14 (b) (1) On or Before December 1, 2015, the Council shall submit to the Governor, the State Superintendent of Schools and in accordance with 2-1246 of the State Government Article, the General Assembly, a statewide strategic report on the activities described in subsection (a)(1) through (4) of this section.

<u>**Overview**</u>

The State Early Childhood Advisory Council, formed in 2008, continues the commitment to early childhood education begun by the Maryland Leadership in Action Program (M-LAP) in 2001. Its successor, the Maryland Early Care and Education Committee was formed in 2003 as a permanent subcommittee of the Governor's Children Cabinet and was chaired by the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) Superintendent of Schools. In 2005/2006, the General Assembly passed legislation to transfer the Child Care Administration to MSDE, which had established the Division of Early Childhood Development. In 2008, the Governor signed the Executive Order to establish the State Early Childhood Advisory Council (ECAC), which would be chaired by the Superintendent. The Council, charged with facilitating a steady and strong improvement in early care and education, had reviewed Maryland's entire history of progress and used this carefully-considered knowledge to develop a Three-year Action plan for 2009-2012 for the result area of Children Entering School Ready to Learn. In 2011, Maryland was awarded $50 million for the Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge Grant (RTT ELC). The Council advised the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) on the development of the grant's ten school readiness projects focusing on quality improvement systems, early childhood standards, kindergarten readiness assessment, family engagement, and capacity building, all designed to focus on school readiness and narrowing the achievement gap for high needs children, including those with disabilities. Additionally, the Council was identified to oversee the implementation of the grant for the Maryland State Board of Education.

The State ECAC, active and in statue, adheres to its approved Bylaws as well as serves as the advisory body, per their request, for the Department of Mental Health and Hygiene (DHMH), Maternal and Child Health and their Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems (ECCS) Grant. With the 2014 reauthorization of the Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) the State ECAC is required to be consulted in the development of the 2016-2018 CCDF State Plan that is due to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services on March 1, 2016. The Council will work with the Office of Child Care as the plan progresses.

To improve the quality and increase the capacity of early care and education in Maryland, the Council is currently overseeing and advising the implementation of RTT ELC projects including, Ready for Kindergarten (R4K), which was implemented in 2014/2015; the Longitudinal Data System; Maryland EXCELS, which is exceeding expectations for enrolling early care and education programs; and 24 local early childhood advisory councils. These councils were created and funded so that each local council could develop action plans that targeted improving school readiness. Additionally, the Maryland Family Engagement Coalition was established, which created the Maryland Family Engagement Framework.

As noted above, this report reviews the activities conducted to improve school readiness skills in our youngest learners and provide an infrastructure of continuous improvements for the State's early education and development programs. The ECAC advises on projects to improve the school readiness skills of our youngest learners and for quality improvement in early care and education programs. With prekindergarten State and Federal funding, Maryland has been able to reach an increased number of low-income and at risk children who were not previously attending education programs. To improve the quality of these programs, the State ECAC has looked at various barriers such as health, access to quality care for children with disabilities, and the effectiveness of early childhood educators. Recommendations that have been considered: increasing the overall participation of children in federal state and local early childhood education programs; improving the professional development and advancement system, and; creating a unified data collection system. Other activities include improvements for the state early learning standards and the expansion of early childhood inclusion practices. This report will review the strategies and activities in place and also provide recommendations to continue the growth and improvement of high-quality early care and education programs and prekindergarten programs in the state of Maryland.

(1) Conduct a periodic statewide needs assessment concerning the quality and availability of Early Childhood Education and development programs and services for children from birth to school entry, including:

** (I) the availability of high-quality prekindergarten services for low-income children in the state;**

Maryland's prekindergarten program (Pre-K) is a state-funded program for four-year-old children who are from families that are economically disadvantaged or homeless. The over-all goal of the Pre-K program is to provide learning experiences that help children develop and maintain the basic skills necessary to be successful in school. A child's environment can dramatically influence the degree and pace of learning and a high-quality learning environment affords children the opportunity for school, workplace, and life

success. [1] Young children who participate in formal early learning environments the year prior to kindergarten are more likely to exhibit higher readiness for school, stronger cognitive skills, and better language development.[2] The Bridge to Excellence in Public Schools Act in Maryland was designed to increase the number of children from low socio-economic families attending prekindergarten. This act has significantly increased funding to all local school systems requiring each to provide voluntary prekindergarten access to four-year-olds at whose family income is at or below 185% of Federal Poverty Guidelines. In the 2014-2015 school year, the total prekindergarten enrollment was 26, 631 (8, 932 full-time and 17, 699 part-time).

The Prekindergarten Expansion Act of 2014 (SB 332) provided $4.3 million to expand access to prekindergarten and support three or four-year-olds at or below 300% of federal poverty guidelines. These prekindergarten programs could be partial day or full day classes in high-quality community-based programs or provided by local school systems. In 2014, an additional 1,023 slots for children were created.

Maryland was awarded the Federal Preschool Development Expansion Grant in 2015 which provides $15 million per year for four years to expand access to four-year-old children whose families are at or below 200% of Federal Poverty Guidelines. Eligible programs are full day classes in high-quality community-based programs or provided by local school systems. It is expected that this funding will add another 3,000 slots.

The scope of Maryland's plan is statewide, herby including many high-need communities in all regions of the state, but with a special emphasis on high-need communities in Baltimore City; especially by expanding the highly effective Judy Center comprehensive services model.

The plan uses communities with schools that have a 65% Free and Reduced Meals (FARM) rate as the cut-off for determining prioritized needs, but it also intends to recruit income eligible four-year-olds into high-quality prekindergarten by using four additional needs assessment criteria:

- Elementary schools in school improvement (e.g. Focus or Priority schools);
- Subgrantees in jurisdictions with the highest number of income eligible four-year-olds who are not enrolled in prekindergarten;
- Subgrantees in jurisdictions with high numbers of low-income and Hispanic four-year-olds enrolled in informal care arrangements; and
- Subgrantees that provide specialized services for income-eligible four-year-olds who are medically fragile or need therapeutic nursery services.

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[1] Maryland State Department of Education. *readiness matters!* Baltimore: Ready at Five, 2015.
http://www.readyatfive.org/school-readiness-data/readiness-matters-2015/1058-full-report-maryland-s-2014-2015-kindergarten-readiness-assessment-report/file.html
[2] "Why Do the Early Years Matter? | Smart Beginnings MHC." Smart Beginnings MHC. March 2, 2015. Accessed November 16, 2015. http://www.smartbeginningsmhc.org/Why-do-the-early-years-matter-.html.

Additionally, all Preschool Development Grant subgrantees are required to meet the high-quality definition that requires:

- Inclusion of children with disabilities to ensure access to and full participation in all opportunities.

- Developmentally appropriate, culturally, and linguistically responsive instruction, and evidence-based curricula and learning environments that are aligned with the State Early Learning and Development Standards, for at least the year prior to kindergarten entry.
- Individualized accommodations and supports so that all children can access and participate fully in learning activities.

Maryland specifically requires that community-based subgrantees and the local school system establish Memorandum of Understandings (MOUs) to address how each would support one another regarding professional development, preschool special education services, and English Language Learner resources or services.

Maryland identified community-based subgrantees that specifically work with students with special needs in inclusive environments and received permission from the U.S. Department of Education to provide a higher per student cost allocation to those specialized programs for students receiving onsite comprehensive services (such as speech/language services, occupational therapy, behavioral supports, etc.).

(II) health-related barriers to school readiness and early childhood educational success;

Maryland State Department of Education, Division of Special Education/Early Intervention Services has responsibility for administering a home visiting grant program since 2006. The focus of the grant program is for services for families identified as at-risk, with children under the age of five, as well as pregnant and parenting teens.

Through the MSDE home visiting grant program, over $4.6 million in state general funds have been awarded annually to 17 local management boards. This funding has remained level since the program was transferred to MSDE in 2006.[3] MSDE provides $50,000 in additional IDEA discretionary funding to support the Home Visiting Consortium and the annual statewide conference.

In 2013, the Department of Mental Health and Hygiene (DHMH) received $13.7 million in Maternal, Infant, Early Childhood and Home Visiting (MIECHV) federal funds to improve home visiting accessibility, service quality, and coordination, including a statewide data collection system to streamline home visiting and a training certificate program to support the workforce beyond the life of this project. DHMH contracted with the University of Maryland and Johns Hopkins University to evaluate the use of these funds.

The evaluation had three focal areas:

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[3] "Defining Shared Outcomes for State-Funded Home Visiting Programs in Maryland." Governor's Office for Children. Last modified August 4, 2014. https://goc.maryland.gov/wp-content/uploads/sites/8/2014/04/Defining-Shared-Outcomes-for-State-Funded-Home-Visiting-Programs-in-Maryland.pdf.

- Family recruitment and enrollment
- Communication with families about sensitive issues
- Referrals and coordination with primary care providers

For all three areas, a web-based survey was completed with program managers, in-person interviews with MIECHV program managers were completed, and site policies and procedures were collected.

The program managers survey was completed by 100% of MIECHV home visiting sites (n=18) and 78% of sites note receiving MIECHV funds (n=43). In total, the survey covers 84% of all home visiting programs across Maryland (n=61).

Among all home visiting sites responding to the program manager survey, 89% reported screening for parental emotional well-being, depression, or stress. Seventy-two percent screen for maternal substance abuse while 43% screen for domestic violence. Among the 18 MIECHV sites, 89% were linked to the prenatal care provider, 67% were linked to the mother's primary care provider, and 83% were linked to the child's primary care provider.

(III) an assessment of the availability of high-quality early childhood education and development programs that serve children with and without disabilities together;

Maryland has demonstrated commitment to and investment in high-quality, accessible Early Learning and Development Programs and services for children with high needs, including children with disabilities as evidenced by the state's increasing numbers of children with disabilities participating in Early Learning and Development programs. In 2014, 7,545 children were served under IDEA Part C in natural environments and 13,105 children age 3-5 were served under IDEA Part B, in the least restrictive environment.

The Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge Grant allowed the state to build upon a series of programs already in place to fulfill its vision for a model early learning and development system to increase the number of children with disabilities participating in quality early learning and development programs. Prior to the RTT ELC in 2009, MSDE's Division of Special Education/Early Intervention Services received an American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) incentive grant to implement the IDEA Part C Extended Option statewide. Families of children currently receiving early intervention services under an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) could choose to continue their child's participation in the Local Infants and Toddlers Program beyond age three up until kindergarten age. Through the Extended IFSP Option, families could continue to receive service coordination with children participating in continuous year round services. This process allows for children with disabilities and or developmental delays to have services delivered in natural environments including early learning and development programs. Additionally, Maryland created public-private partnerships at Title 1 school attendance areas, named Judy Center Partnerships, to improve the school readiness of children with high needs. Formal commitments are made under agreements between local school systems and early childhood partners, which include child care programs, Head Start, local infant and toddler programs under IDEA Part C, Preschool Special Education, under IDEA Part B 619, Family Support Centers and health-related services.

With RTT ELC funding, *Making Access Happen*, collaboration between the Maryland State Department of Education and Johns Hopkins University School of Education was designed to continue to increase the participation of three to five-year-old children with disabilities in public and private community-based early care and education programs. *Making Access Happen* works by providing teachers and service providers with job-embedded professional learning opportunities, including reflective coaching.[4]

In the early intervention process, parents are part of the Individualized Education Process or Individualized Family Service Plan team and work together with teachers and special educators to form the goals and objectives for their child. Teachers and providers have the opportunity to increase their knowledge and develop skills for implementation of inclusive practices and gain a broader understanding of early intervention and special education. To further support inclusive practices, Maryland EXCELS includes a quality criterion for inclusive environments in child care programs (See Maryland EXCELS section, p.13). The criteria also calls for improving family engagement practices , leading to programs increasing their outreach activities and improving parent communication; thus ensuring positive school readiness outcomes for children.

Currently, Local School Systems report children ages three and four with disabilities are being served in 695 early childhood settings throughout Maryland. These programs are both school based and community based public and private programs and children are receiving the majority of their IEP services in their program setting. Local School Systems report that a total of 498 programs are participating in *Making Access Happen* throughout Maryland in 13 jurisdictions. In addition, the Maryland School for the Blind is also participating and has established a high-quality early childhood program on site to create an inclusive environment for children who are blind/visually impaired.

Due to the success of the program, *Making Access Happen* will continue through the Department of Special Education/Early Intervention as the RTT ELC will be ending December 31, 2015.

(2) Identify opportunities for, and barriers to collaboration and coordination among federally funded and state-funded child development, child care and early childhood education programs.

The State funded Prekindergarten Expansion Act and Federal Preschool Development Expansion grant allow for prekindergarten services to be delivered in a mixed delivery system that includes public schools (including Charter Schools) and licensed high-quality community-based programs (e.g., child care, Head Start, parochial schools) helping to reach more disadvantaged families. These expansion slots will be provided across an approximate 128 schools or programs across the State of Maryland. Currently, there are four program managers monitoring and providing supports to prekindergarten expansion programs. One of their main responsibilities is to help these programs build collaborative relationships with the elementary school program they feed into through shared professional development opportunities, transition activities and other shared communication and coordination activities.

The State and Federal funds can also be blended to allow for expanded prekindergarten services by expanding half-day to full-day slots to add comprehensive services to students and providing funding for a certified teacher or professional development for staff. Through full-day attendance, children will

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[4] Maryland State Department of Education. "Making Access Happen." Maryland Learning Links. Last modified 2015. http://marylandlearninglinks.org/363438.

benefit from more instruction time and more services. Families will benefit through the reduction of work-day or school-day interruptions to transport children in the middle of the day.

To continue collaboration among programs and school systems, for the past three years, the Maryland State Department of Education has organized one-day Early Learning Leadership Academies across the state. These academies are shared professional development opportunities geared towards Maryland's elementary schools. Principals are encouraged to create teams that include school staff members and early learning programs in the community such as child care programs, Head Start, and other early childhood education programs whose children feed into their elementary schools. These teams, led by their principals, are provided opportunities to think more deeply about creating quality instruction and learning as an intervention for closing their school's achievement gap. Additionally, these leadership academies provide a keynote speaker and concurrent breakout sessions, which provide the teams with opportunities to meet with other schools in their county and their Early Childhood Advisory Council to ensure smoother transitions from early education to 2nd grade.

The first of these academies was held the summer of 2013 with just one location and 150 participants and has grown to 400 participants at three different locations in 2015.

Funding is still a barrier to universal access to publicly funded prekindergarten. The U.S. Census population estimate for four-year-olds in Maryland is 75, 455. It is estimated that 31,000 of prekindergarten students are being served this school year. This means that 59% of prekindergarten students in Maryland will not have access to publicly funded prekindergarten. Additionally, according to kindergarten assessment reports, two times more English Language Learners (ELL) children are attending kindergarten than prekindergarten. This means that 50% of ELL children do not have access to prekindergarten. This is also concerning as the ELL group is the lowest performing group with school readiness scores.[5]

(3) Assess the capacity and effectiveness of two-year and four-year public and private institutions of higher education in the state toward supporting the development of early childhood educators, including the extent to which the institutions have articulation agreements, professional development and career advancement plans and practice or internships for students to spend time in a Head Start or prekindergarten program.

Under the Race to the Top- Early Learning Challenge, states were required to implement strategies to improve the quality of early childhood programs and to enhance the qualifications of the workforce in early care and education. An integral part of the four-year Early Learning Challenge grant plan was to examine Maryland's system of teacher education with respect to those prepared for early childhood education. As a part of the grant strategies, The State Superintendent's Task Force on Teacher Education in Early Childhood Education was formed and began its work in September 2013.

The purpose of the Task Force was to develop a framework to increase access to teacher training in early childhood education and improve the quality of teacher education in early childhood learning programs.

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[5] "Early Care and Education Experiences for Children of Hispanic Origin in Maryland." Maryland State Department of Education. Last modified July 1, 2012. http://www.marylandpublicschools.org/NR/rdonlyres/50E778B3-88E6-4276-8CA4-981A50B7F31D/33834/HispanChildrenECERpt.pdf.

The Task Force was charged with developing strategies to expand the number of colleges and universities offering teacher education programs in early childhood education; strengthen alternative pathways to obtaining a post-secondary degree in early childhood development education; consider the development of a new degree program, Birth to age five, that would be a blended curriculum of early childhood special education and general early childhood education; propose incentives and reward programs for practitioners in early childhood education to pursue and complete a post-secondary degree in early childhood education.

Maryland has established structures to support early childhood educators and provide pathways for early childcare educators to increase their skills in offering high-quality care.

- The Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework, which was established in 1992 to meet minimum state child care licensing requirements and revised in 2001, to reflect the establishment of "core of knowledge" for the early childhood workforce and the Maryland Child Care Credentialing Program (MCCP). In 2011, with RTT ELC funds, the Workforce Competencies were revised and updated to align with Maryland's College and Career Ready standards and other national child care credentialing standards.
- The Maryland Child Care Credentialing Program, which established required pre-service training and levels of knowledge gained through professional development and on-the-job experience; with each level attained a monetary incentive is earned. Participants in the Credential Program have access to training funds up to $400 annually.
- Maryland Community Colleges offer the Associates of Arts Degree (AA) in Teaching in Early Childhood Education (AAT-ECE). These programs, along with Maryland's four-year colleges, developed outcomes-based standards that are aligned with those of national early childhood organizations, to ensure transition of course credits from the AA to the Bachelors of Arts in Early Childhood Education.
- The Maryland Approved Alternative Preparation programs (MAAPP) offers an alternative pathway for teacher certification in early childhood education for those who have earned a Bachelor's degree and are interested in teaching early childhood education.
- The Child Care Career and Professional development Fund (CCPDF), which consists of scholarships available to participants in the Credentialing Program to pursue either an Associate's or Bachelor's degree from an accredited college or university in early childhood education, child development, family studies, and or related disciplines.

These current structures were reviewed and recommendations were made to strengthen them, including recommendations for new college and career pathways to assist early childhood educators in improving the quality of early childhood education.

MSDE is working with the Maryland Consortium of Early Childhood Faculty and Administrators to continue to (1) promote the inclusion of the Core of Knowledge Competencies, the Family Engagement Framework and the Ready for Kindergarten framework into early childhood education course curricula; (2) encourage that practicum and student teaching experiences be embedded at different points during the program and in settings with special needs and English Language learners; (3) facilitate PRAXIS I and II test preparation for students; and (4) develop an exam to replace challenge tests statewide and facilitate college credits. The Division of Early Childhood Development will develop a guide to provide those

interested in early childhood education careers a clear understanding of the career paths and the necessary skills and education for various positions; implement a new Maryland Child Care Credential for those that pass the new exam; continue to investigate online professional development; promote and financially support the dissemination of state recommended curricula to early learning programs; and continue to support The Maryland Approved Alternative Preparation Program in Early Childhood (MAPP). With the release of Preschool for All and Prekindergarten Expansion legislation, MSDE must ensure an increase in the availability of high-quality early care and education for four year olds. Participating programs must engage a highly qualified teacher. Additionally, The New Teacher Program Academy Maryland (TNTP) has supported the state to expand access to quality childcare and early education over the past three years. Through TNTP, The Maryland Approved Alternative Preparation Program in Early Childhood (MAPP), which provides an alternative program for teachers in child care who hold at least a Bachelor's degree to obtain ECE state certification to fill the state's expanding needs, was developed. Their main goal is to increase the number of qualified, effective ECE teachers statewide by providing intensive and practical training to ensure teacher effectiveness; offering real-world training and feedback through classroom internships supervised and coached by experienced teachers; and recommending certification based on demonstrated effectiveness.

The TNTP Academy includes three learning stages which are critical to improving outcomes.

1. Seminar Content

    -   Teaching for Student Achievement
    -   Core Literacy Concepts
    -   Teaching for Results
    -   Expanded Knowledge of Early Literacy
2. Classroom Practice Internship

    -   Participants are assigned to a K-3 classroom for three weeks and take on the responsibilities of a lead teacher.
    -   While working with an experienced teacher, participants implement the instructional strategies from the seminars and receive feedback.
3. Videotaped Observations with Feedback

    -   Upon completion of the internships, participants will receive quarterly feedback via video observations and a normed TNTP instructional expert.

As of now, there have been three cohorts, with the third cohort starting in January 2015. For the first two cohorts, 20 teachers were recommended for certification. For the third and current cohort, out of 22 eligible participants, 18 teachers are now enrolled. Ninety-four percent of teachers felt the MAPP program supported their work as a teacher while 87.5% of teachers felt the program was an excellent pathway to certification.

To continue the success of MAPP and recruit a fourth cohort in 2017, TNTP is looking to improve their curriculum to help teachers address academic rigor and social and emotional needs. Additionally, the program is looking to expand instructional support with coaching for participants and their schools.[6]

Additionally, the Child Care Career Professional Development Fund (CCPDF) offers a scholarship program for those participating in the Maryland Credentialing Program. Participants may pursue an Associates or Bachelor's degree from an accredited college in Early Childhood Education or related discipline. Currently, there are 303 participants for FY16, with 54 participants pursuing a Bachelor's degree and 249 participants pursuing an Associate's degree.

(4) Make recommendations

(I) For increasing the overall participation of children in existing federal state and local child care and early childhood education programs, including outreach to underrepresented and special populations;

As previously noted, through the Prekindergarten Expansion Act of 2014 and the Federal Preschool Development Expansion Grant in 2015, the participation of children from low-income families has increased by approximately 4,000. Additionally, Making *Access Happen* has increased opportunities for children with disabilities to participate in early childhood education programs by influencing the expansion of inclusive opportunities.

Under the Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge Grant, ten projects were developed and implemented to improve the quality of early childhood programs. Projects 1 (Local Early Childhood Advisory Councils), 2 (Maryland EXCELS) 3 (Coaching and Mentoring) and 8 (Family Engagement) focus on not only increasing the participation of children in early childhood programs but specifically focus on underrepresented and special populations.

Project 1 – Local Early Childhood Advisory Councils

Project 1 created the Local Early Childhood Advisory Councils (LECAC) throughout the state. These local councils replicate the responsibilities of the State Early Childhood Advisory Council at the Baltimore City and county levels and assist in implementing the RTT-ELC State Plan by developing a local action agenda in each jurisdiction to support the goals of the plan.

The purpose of the Project 1 grant funds was to provide support for overcoming local school readiness achievement gaps for children with high needs, including children from low-income families, children with disabilities and English Language Learners. This local effort promotes participation in Maryland EXCELS, disseminating professional development in state's early learning standards and assessments and assists in coordinating services for children with high needs. Local Early Childhood Advisory Councils (LECACS) are comprised of relevant local early childhood stakeholders. Memberships includes the local Superintendent of Schools, local government representative(s), representatives of local education agencies early childhood general and special education (Infant and Toddlers Program and preschool Special

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[6] The New Teacher Program, 2015

Education), Head Start , family involvement providers, local departments of social services, child care licensing , early childhood non-profit agencies, and partners that are particular to the local jurisdiction.

Each LECAC created an infrastructure to ensure collaboration and coordination at the local level to oversee the initiatives and reforms of the RTT ELC grant under the advice of the State Early Childhood Advisory Council. Some local grants were directed toward RTT ELC projects (i.e. MD EXCELS, Judy Centers, Social and Emotional Foundation of Early Learning, Reach Out and Read, Raising a Reader, Learning Parties, other early literacy projects, and Family Engagement). Each local council has completed the activities proposed in their RTT ELC Implementation Grants according to their specific target populations.[7]

Additionally, the LECACs, using the Results Based Assessments format, are working with the new Kindergarten Readiness Assessment (KRA) data to strategically design next steps towards closing the achievement gap.

Project 2 – Maryland EXCELS

Maryland EXCELS (Excellence Counts in Early Learning and School –age Child Care) is a voluntary Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) that recognizes the accomplishments of early childhood and school-age only programs and providers through a set of standards with five levels that offer a pathway to high-quality. Maryland EXCELS provides information to families on choosing high-quality child care and education programs and articulates to the public the level of quality in early and school age only child care and education programs. High-quality programs provide inclusive environments and also ensure an infrastructure of system-level supports in place to reinforce the efforts of providers caring for and teaching children with a wide range of abilities. To ensure high-quality programs are accessible to all children, including children with disabilities, aspects of quality related to inclusion are directly incorporated in the Maryland EXCELS standards.

 High-quality programs, providing participation in Maryland EXCELS continues to increase with the additional 33 public prekindergarten programs and additional child care providers serving high-needs children. There are 5,238 programs participating in EXCELS, representing 55% of all licensed child care centers and registered family child care homes.

On June 29, 2015, the requirement for Child Care Subsidy providers to participate in Maryland EXCELS QRIS became effective. After nearly two years of outreach and support to programs and providers, there were 150-180 providers who had not yet submitted their application to participate by the deadline, out of approximately 2,800 providers who were paid Subsidy reimbursement. Providers may participate in the QRIS at any time, and providers continue to enroll after the deadline.

Outreach and support continues to be provided through the network of Quality Assurance Specialists, who hold regional sessions and workgroup meetings to assist providers with Maryland EXCELS. Collaboration with the Child Care Licensing Branch was strengthened during this period to ensure that communication to newly licensed programs and prospective licensees included the requirement for

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[7] "Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge Grant (RTT-ELC)." Maryland State Department of Education. Last modified September 2014. http://marylandpublicschools.org/MSDE/divisions/child_care/docs/LECACpartneroverview_Sep2014.pdf.

participation in the QRIS in order to accept Child Care Subsidy reimbursement. Collaboration with the Child Care Subsidy Branch continues to inform families and providers of the requirement to choose a QRIS participating program.

Project 3 – Coaching and Mentoring

Judy Centers

Judith P. Hoyer Early Childhood and Education Enhancement Programs (known as "Judy Centers") provide a local central location for early childhood education and support services for children birth through Kindergarten and their families who reside in specific Title I school districts across the state of Maryland. To achieve the goal of school readiness, Judy Center services and programs for young children and their families are typically available 10-12 hours a day, year round.

Judy Centers are unique because they promote school readiness through collaboration with community – based agencies, organizations, and businesses. This integrated approach promotes program and service delivery, ensuring that young children who may begin school at a deficit are given opportunities to start their formal education on a level playing field with their peers. In a 2015 study, a comparison was made on whether entering kindergartners who had received Judy Center services were better prepared for school compared to those who did not. [8] This study suggests that Judy Center Services are positively associated with students' performance and readiness.

In September 2014, there were 33 Judy Centers located throughout Maryland. Currently, there are 52 Judy Centers across Maryland with three of the sites that are part of the public-private partnerships with the Baltimore Community Foundation (BCF) that are located in Commodore John Rodgers Elementary School, Arundel Elementary School, and Liberty Elementary School in Baltimore City. BCF continues to fund Judy Centers in Baltimore City and will be adding five more in FY2016.

Community Hubs

Under the RTT ELC , two Community Hubs were established, providing and coordinating existing services in the community for families with children, birth-5, in two highly under-resourced communities in Baltimore City through the Maryland Family Network. Each Hub, located in the Park Heights and Cherry Hill neighborhoods, provided support for pregnant women, infants and toddlers and their families through referrals to various resources in the community, sharing parent education opportunities, and offering child development information through home visiting services. Additionally, Community Outreach Specialists worked with over 55 early care providers by providing training and technical assistance in the Hub communities to not only increase participation in the MD EXCELS program but to increase the quality of their early care and education programs. As of June 2015, over 20 providers were registered at a Level 1 and an additional 10 providers registered at a Level 2.

Through the work of the Hubs, school readiness was improved as a transition specialist developed contacts and relationships with the public schools and community agencies to ensure smooth transitions

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[8] "The Association between Judy Center Services and Kindergarten Readiness." Maryland State Department of Education. Last modified August 2015. http://www.marylandpublicschools.org/MSDe/newsroom/publications/docs/JudyCenterReport2015.pdf.

for families with children turning 3 and entering Head Start and community pre-school programs as well those children entering public and private prekindergarten programs.

These Hub sites will continue to work with families and children and support their well-being and education through Early Head Start funding received in July 2014. Additionally, the Maryland Child Care Resource Center (MCCRN) was funded to work with providers in areas of high risk to help them participate in Maryland EXCELS.

Project 8-Family Engagement

The Family Engagement Coalition

With the Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge grant, the ECAC, whose primary charge is to monitor a steady and strong improvement in early care and education, established a Family Engagement Initiative to promote positive outcomes for young children. According to Head Start and Early Head Start Parent and Family Engagement research, families play the most critical role in helping to prepare children for school and that meaningful and continued engagement of families in their children's early learning supports school readiness and later academic success; thus offsetting the risks of a low-income household.[9] These results reinforced a survey by the Family Engagement Coalition, which analyzed family engagement and family interactions with service providers. Based on this survey, best strategies were determined for reaching and engaging all families to provide continued support for children in their early care and education, ensuring all families and their young children are fully prepared for school.[10] As a result, best practices and specific goals were identified and included in the framework.

The Maryland Early Childhood Family Engagement Coalition was established in late 2012 by MSDE to bring together representatives of child and family serving organizations and agencies. Over the course of a year, in addition to the survey, the Coalition developed a framework outlining Maryland's guiding principles and strengths for parent engagement in early learning environments and based on best practices. *The Early Childhood Family Engagement Framework: Maryland's Vision for Engaging Families with Young Children* was released in October 2013. Early care and education programs receiving Prekindergarten Expansion and Preschool Development Grants are required to adopt principles and strategies from the *Framework.*

The W.K. Kellogg Foundation expressed an interest in Maryland's work with families and early childhood service providers and in September 2015, awarded the Maryland State Department of Education a $494, 390 grant for one year. With this grant opportunity, the Family Engagement Coalition will be able to further their work reaching more providers, children, and families.

Maryland Library Partnership

The Maryland Library Partnership embodies the three pillars of the Coalition's work – a focus on bringing stakeholders together to integrate family engagement efforts across the state; expanding the

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[9] National Center on Parent, Family, and Community Engagement. "Parent, Family and Community Engagement Resource Catalog." Accessed November 16, 2015. http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/family/docs/pfce-resource-catalog-2.pdf.
[10] Maryland State Department of Education. "Maryland's Early Childhood Family Engagement Framework." Accessed November, 2015. http://www.marylandpublicschools.org/MSDE/divisions/child_care/engage.html.

definition of learning environments in order to promote learning, anytime, anywhere; and building the capacity of providers to deliver more customer friendly, high-quality services to families. This partnership seeks to improve the quality of parent's interactions with library staff, increase the frequency of family's engagement with libraries, and encourage families to take greater advantage of other social services in their community. In order to meet these goals, libraries engaged in the library partnership to promote a customer friendly atmosphere conducive to learning and target their services to the learning needs of individual families. These libraries in Title I school areas encourage families to spread the word not only about the library, but other resources in the community including GED programs, Head Start, addiction recovery programs, and child care agencies. The library partnership represents a fundamental rethinking of the role of the library – from providing occasional opportunities for children to engage with reading to serving as a central point of connection linking families to all the resources they need to promote their child's literacy.[11]

Library Partnerships include library cafés, which are held twice a year for families. The library café model involves carefully facilitated training for families along with relationship and community building exercises. Under the leadership of the Maryland Public Library Association, resources are being identified for new parent information centers, and recruitment of parents for the library cafés is underway. Eighteen public library systems in Title I school areas have parent information centers and library cafés.

Community Café's (Parent Café's)

Community Cafés, hosted by the Maryland Family Network, work within the goals of the Early Childhood Family Engagement Framework. Community Cafés are guided conversations designed to share the collective knowledge of parents, caregivers and service providers to build a network of community support for families. These community-building events, based on the national ―Strengthening Families‖ model, promote family well-being and connect families to their peers and to the community by providing concrete support in times of need and fostering social connections and parental resilience. Furthermore, Community Cafés can support the development of families as leaders and child advocates by engaging parents, early care professionals, and community members in conversations about their needs, priorities and concerns regarding their communities.

Currently, Maryland Family Network staff and other trained facilitators, such as parents and home visitors, have worked to support the RTT-ELC project and to establish connections in the communities linking these projects without duplicating efforts. For example, through a grant agreement with Abilities Network, MFN provided table hosts to facilitate a Community Café for parents and community representatives. Cherry Hill Community Hub staff served as the community resource experts to parents participating at the Café. For 2015, 37 Community Cafés were hosted, supporting over 500 participants.

 Raising a Reader

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[11] Harvard Graduate School of Education. "Libraries Helping to Close the Opportunity Gap: Maryland Library Partnership / Browse Our Publications / Publications & Resources / HFRP - Harvard Family Research Project." Harvard Family Research Project. Last modified June 9, 2014. http://www.hfrp.org/publications-resources/browse-our-publications/libraries-helping-to-close-the-opportunity-gap-maryland-library-partnership.

The Raising a Reader (RAR) program is a family engagement and early literacy initiative with a track record of improving early literacy school readiness scores of children, helping to ease their transition into kindergarten by preparing them for school. RAR helps families to develop, practice and sustain the habit of reading to their children, supporting families in developing skills as their child's first teacher. The components of this program include regular workshops, a connection with the community library, and weekly book rotations.

Currently, there are 49 schools in 9 Title I school districts participating in Raising a Reader and it is projected that an additional 5 schools will be participating in the next few months, totaling 54 schools.

Learning Parties

Built on the idea that learning can be fun, Learning Parties (created by Ready at Five) are interactive, hands-on, parent/child ―parties that promote the development of school readiness skills of young children. They are designed to improve the abilities of parents/families, and early care and education professionals to support young children's development and foster family engagement. Learning Parties promote positive parenting and enhance the ability of parents to be their young child's first teacher and to help parents recognize learning opportunities and teachable moments in everyday activities. Also, Learning Parties offer parents opportunities to cultivate a social network by connecting them with their peers and community, enabling them to talk and learn from one another. Learning Parties often assist families with young children in transition as they are often held in the local schools and pre-school children get school experiences prior to enrolling in kindergarten.

Many early childhood programs view Learning Parties as an excellent family engagement strategy and are using the Learning Parties to reach out to families and build their capacity to support the development of their child's school readiness skills. Attendance and enthusiasm are high among program staff, families and children with the most popular Learning Party domain being language and literacy, followed by science and math.

In addition to the RTT ELC projects and outreach strategies, the Bridge to Excellence Act, the Prekindergarten Expansion Act of 2014, and the Federal Preschool Expansion Act of 2015 are providing 30,654 additional slots for disadvantaged children. Through these programs, we are ensuring that these children receive high quality early care and education and enter Kindergarten ready to learn, helping to close the achievement gap.

Recommendation: As the RTT ELC grant ends December 31, 2015, the State Early Childhood Advisory Council will continue to advise the Family Engagement Coalition on its work with the Kellogg Foundation Grant to expand the activities and outreach strategies of the Family Engagement Project. Additionally, the Council will continue to advise on Maryland EXCELS as it is used to support early childhood education programs, including outreach to special populations.

(II) The establishment of a unified data collection system for public early childhood education and development programs and services throughout the state;

The Early Childhood Data Warehouse (ECDW) focuses on six main policy questions:

1. Are children, birth to age 5 on track to succeed in K-12?

2. Which children have access to high-quality ECE programs?

3. Is the quality of Maryland's early care programs improving?

4. What are the characteristics of effective programs?

5. How prepared is the ECE workforce to provide effective education and care for all children?

To best address these questions, it is key that information from all of the early childhood data be housed within a single agency, MSDE. It is also crucial to develop and maintain partnerships for data gathering. For example, the Maryland EXCELS/Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) data is administered by Hopkins, who provides MSDE with data on an as requested basis. Another factor of note is that the ECDW has two intended sets of users. First are state agencies and program administrators. The second set includes policy makers, researchers, and advocates.

Data in the ECDW is pulled from a variety of sources, including the internal Child Care Administrative Tracking System (CCATS) system, Maryland EXCELS, Early Childhood Mental Health, electronic licensing inspections, Expanded Public Pre-K, Kindergarten Readiness Assessment results, Geographic Information Systems (GIS) mapping, Head Start, and Judy Centers. The Enrollment and Attendance Record System (EARS) will soon be added a resource. A wide range of data is collected and is available for analysis. This data includes:

- Program Standards and early childhood accreditation
- Early learning standards (Pre-K – 8 State curriculum and *Health Beginnings: Birth-3*) and early childhood curriculum project
- Child Care Credentialing (Career ladder, bonus, training, and scholarships)
- Tiered reimbursement (Quality Rating System)
- Resource and Referral
- Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation
- Head Start Collaboration
- Kindergarten Readiness Assessment (KRA)
- Judy Center Partnerships
- Maryland Longitudinal Data System (ECE component)
- Extended Individualized Family Service Plan (ISFP)

Project 6 – Comprehensive Assessment System

The new system, known as Ready for Kindergarten (R4K): Maryland's Early Childhood Comprehensive Assessment System, aligns with the new State Standards for K-12 instruction. Developed in partnership with the Ohio Department of Education, the R4K provides one system for recognizing the needs and

measuring the learning progress of all children from 3 to 6 years of age in four domains of child learning.[12]

The R4K has two components:

1. Early Learning Assessment (ELA) (i.e., formative assessment) gauges the progress of learning in young children, 36 to 72 months, for seven developmental domains. They describe the pathway that children typically follow as they learn or the sequence in which knowledge and skills develop. Each child's progress is monitored along a continuum and tracked over time. In this way, early educators, working with 3 and 4-year-olds can create individualized learning opportunities and plan interventions, if needed, to ensure that children are on the path if kindergarten readiness.

2. Kindergarten Readiness Assessment (KRA) is administered to kindergartners, measuring school readiness in four developmental domains. The KRA provides a snapshot of school readiness levels for all incoming kindergartners. The readiness assessment makes it possible to confidently determine if entering students have the skills and abilities needed for kindergarten. The KRA also identifies the individual needs of children, enabling teachers to make informed instructional decisions.

The foundation for the R4K is a set of common language standards (CLS) that were developed based on an alignment study of Maryland and Ohio's standards for prekindergarten and kindergarten. The alignment study informed the drafting of the CLS, which are based on a hierarchical structure and contain four levels: domain, strand, standard, and essential skills and knowledge (ESKs). The ESKs provide the most specific content descriptions, and item content and KRA assessment items were mapped to this level. The CLS covers essential domains for kindergarten readiness, which include Social Foundations (including approaches to learning and executive functioning), Language and Literacy, Mathematics, and Physical Well-Being and Motor Development.[13]

The R4K, which includes the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment (KRA), provides a framework to assess what students should know and be able to do when they enter kindergarten to ensure they are ready to learn. The KRA will provide data that teachers can use to identify learning gaps and ensure quality early learning opportunities for children by building on the strengths of every child. Specifically, the KRA will support and advance children's early learning and academic achievement by:

- Informing prior education and care stakeholders of early learning standards and experiences that promote kindergarten readiness;
- Identifying individual children's needs and providing necessary supports to children and teachers;
- Assisting teachers in data-driven instructional decision-making at the child and classroom level; and
- Providing families with information about their children's learning and development.

Development of the KRA, administering it to all kindergartners scoring it, and reporting the results required multiple active partnerships. It was developed in partnership with the Ohio Department of

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[12] Both states are supported by a unique partnership with Johns Hopkins University – Center for Technology in Education (JHU-CTE) and WestED

[13] An earlier version included the domains Science and Social Studies, which were eliminated based on an item review analysis and reduction process.

Education, administered by teachers, scored by a team at WestEd, and analyzed by MSDE. This represents only a few of the partnerships built and maintained during FY2015 with regards to the KRA. The KRA is just one of many rich data sources available through the ECDW.

Recommendation: The Maryland Early Childhood Research Advisory Group was started in 2012 to support the work of the Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge in early childhood research development and offer recommendations in the areas of data collection, warehousing, and data analysis. The Division of Early Childhood Development (DECD) and members of the ECAC participate in the Research Advisory Group. The ECAC serves in an advisory capacity. The Group will continue to inform the Council on research resources and how to use research data to continue the work of the ECAC.

(III) Regarding statewide professional development and career advancement plans for early childhood educators in the state;

With the passage of the Maryland Prekindergarten Expansion Act and the increased need for State certified teachers in early childhood education, Maryland is designing an infrastructure to produce more qualified/certified prekindergarten teachers for public schools and licensed child care facilities. From the work of the Task Force for Teacher Education in Early Childhood, three key recommendations were made.

  (II) Pre-Service early childhood teacher preparation

  - All teacher preparation programs will include in their curricula the Maryland Early Learning Standards and core competencies, and practicum experiences in environments that include English Language Learners and students with special needs.
  - The alternative pathways to obtaining a post-secondary degree in early childhood development education will be strengthened through full articulation of credits from the community colleges to the four-year colleges regarding the Associate of Arts Degree in Teaching –Early Childhood Education (AAT)ECE); increased access for professionals with bachelor degrees to the Maryland Approved Alternative Perpetration Program (MAPP); and alignment of high school Career and Technology Education (CTE) programs in Early Childhood Education/Childcare with the requirements of the Child Development Associate (CDA) credential and its articulation to community colleges.
  - MSDE will collaboratively plan and develop degree programs with colleges that provide dual certification in special and general education to support the achievement of children from birth through primary grades in early childhood education.

2. Professional development

  - The Task Force learned that there are 28 early childhood teacher education programs in Maryland's community colleges. Through Maryland's four-year colleges, there are 13 bachelors of Arts in teacher education programs. In addition to these programs, the Task Force recommends that MSDE pursue examination of online professional development (including job-embedded for LEA EC teachers), especially those that include mentoring support.

3. Continuous Improvement

- MSDE will continue with current credential incentives and professional development rewards programs for practitioners in early childhood education, and work to expand the Maryland Career and Child Care Development Scholarship Fund to encourage practitioners to pursue and complete a post-secondary degree in early childhood education.

The Maryland Consortium of Early Childhood Faculty and Administrators was formed by request from the Professional Standards and Teacher Education Board (PSTEB) after the task force presented to the PSTEB on the recommendation regarding the development of degree programs with colleges that provide dual certification in special and general education to support the achievement of children from birth through primary grades in early childhood education. PSTEB requested this workgroup examine the development of such degree programs and the ramifications on teacher preparation. This workgroup is chaired by Ms. Marcella Franczkowski, Assistant State Superintendent for Special Education and Early Intervention, Dr. Rolf Grafwallner, Assistant State Superintendent for Early Childhood Development, and Ms. Sara Spross, Chief of Nonpublic School Approval, Division of Educator Effectiveness.

The Consortium is currently working on a Professional Development for Teachers and Providers of Early Childhood Education Master Plan that addresses statewide professional development and career advancement plans for early childhood educators. The activities of the plan look to advance the field by creating an understanding of the needed skills to work in the field and identify pathways to grow and improve professionals in the field. This plan will be completed by December 1 and implementation has already begun. Additionally, the Maryland Guide to Careers in Early Childhood Education is in the development stage and new workforce competencies are being utilized in the development of new training and alignment to progressing pre-service requirements.

Recommendation: The State Early Childhood Advisory Council will continue to work with and advise the Consortium in their activities to improve professional development and career advancement for early childhood educators.

(IV) For improvements to state early learning standards and how to undertake efforts to develop high-quality comprehensive early learning standards as appropriate;

Early Learning standards as content standards have been updated and will continue to be revised. In 2015, MSDE released *Supporting Every Young Learner; Maryland's Guide to Pedagogy Birth to Age 8*. This guide sets forth best practices and ideas for creating rich and meaningful early learning experiences for every child. Informed by research and crafted by educators across Maryland, it is intended to be an essential resource for early childhood educators in all settings. It links the important work that early care providers, Head Start programs, child care centers and schools do to help our young learners. The Guide to Pedagogy's Appendix contains an alignment of early learning standards spanning the ages of Birth to Age 8. In addition, a professional development module for the various domains of standards through the partnership of the University of Maryland and Early Childhood Center is being developed.

 For early childhood programs in Maryland, expectations are defined by a set of early learning standards that come from two sources: *Healthy Beginnings: Supporting Development and Learning from Birth through Three Years of Age* and *The Maryland College and Career Ready Standards for prekindergarten-12*. These standards outline the expectations for what children should know and be able to do at different

ages of early childhood. These standards represent the developmental goals and learning goals that early childhood administrators and educators strive to meet for the children they serve.

Recommendation: The State Early Childhood Advisory Council will continue to advise on the development of high-quality comprehensive state early learning standards as they continue to be revised as well as all professional development for the domains of the early learning standards.

Public Hearing

A Public Hearing was held on October 26th, 2015 and again on October 30th, 2015. The purpose of the Public Hearing was to provide an opportunity for public comment on the activities of the Council as described in this report. The comments were as follows:

October 26th, 2015

Recommendations from Maryland Association of the Education of Young Children (MDAEYC) and Maryland State Child Care Association (MSCCA) include concerns that there needs to be more collaboration between the public schools and community child care providers. Child Care providers need to be included in the professional development that is provided to public schools and this is even more important now that child care is involved with the preschool expansion.

October 30th, 2015

Regarding section (1) Conduct a periodic statewide needs assessment concerning the quality and availability of Early Childhood Education and development programs and services for children from birth to school entry, including:

(I) the availability of high-quality prekindergarten services for low-income children in the state;

The Maryland Home Visiting Alliance had questions regarding how prekindergarten slots are distributed geographically throughout the state and if there was a specific formula.

Information regarding how slots are determined was added to the report.

(II) health-related barriers to school readiness and early childhood educational success:

The Maryland Home Visiting Alliance had concerns regarding the language describing the results from the program manager survey. It was asked that the wording be changed to more accurately describe the results. It was determined that Home Visitors do not contact primary care providers but instead link parents to primary care providers.

This wording was changed to clarify the results of the survey.

Regarding section (4) Make Recommendations

(III) Regarding statewide professional development and career advancement plans for early childhood educators in the state;

It was suggested to add Ms. Sara Spross as chairing the Maryland Consortium of Early Childhood Faculty and Administrators as Ms. Jean Satterfield had retired.

This change was made.

Written Comments

The Maryland Developmental Disabilities Council made three recommendations:

1. Include information in the report how Maryland plans to narrow the school readiness gap for children with disabilities and reduce barriers to access to high-quality early childhood programs.

   The wording was changed in the overview section to reflect the RTT ELC projects that the Early Childhood Advisory Council advises on, which were reviewed for the purpose of this report, are designed to improve school readiness and narrow the achievement gap for high needs children, including children with disabilities.

2. Include information in the report about how Maryland plans to ensure children with disabilities are included as the Preschool Development Grant is implemented. Including evidence of policies on collaboration, enrollment requirements and types of technical assistance.

   Specific information regarding the requirements of the Preschool Development Grant and children with disabilities was added to the report.

3. In order to ensure children with disabilities have the opportunity to participate in all high-quality inclusive programs with their non-disabled peers, an accurate assessment of availability must be completed. The report should include information about how the State plans to fulfill this requirement.

   Information regarding an assessment of availability was added to the report.