



# BLUEPRINT for Maryland's FUTURE

## EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

### Making School Success a Priority



**“With its commitment to high-quality early education programs, providers, and educators, the Blueprint makes good on its promise of equity for all. I’ve seen the difference a good pre-k program can make for a child’s language skills, social skills, and confidence. The Blueprint makes this great start possible for all children regardless of their family’s socio-economic status.”**

— SIMRAN KISHORE  
MONTGOMERY COUNTY

The Blueprint investment in early childhood education levels the playing field for our youngest learners beginning with those in the most economically challenged communities. The program begins as voluntary and free to all three- and four-year-olds whose families are experiencing poverty, then soon enrolls more students on a sliding scale fee. (See the enrollment tier structure on page 2.) In 10 years, it’s estimated that 80% of eligible children will be enrolled in publicly funded pre-k. Both the Blueprint and the Built to Learn Act ramp up pre-k by expanding programs and constructing more pre-k classrooms.

#### The Blueprint Expands Early Childhood and Family Supports

By prioritizing families and communities, the Blueprint expands programs to help families and their children for the important school years ahead.

Judy Centers provide full-day, comprehensive, accredited (or pursuing accreditation) early education programs for children ages birth through kindergarten and family support services. There are Judy Centers at Title I Schools in every county; the Blueprint expands the number of centers to serve more families with more services, including adult education, case management, childcare assistance, developmental, dental, vision, and hearing services, mental health care, nutritional assessments, family supports, parenting classes, and play groups. The Blueprint funds more Judy Centers with 126 new centers between FY 2022 and FY 2030—nine per year in FY 2022–2025 and 18 per year in FY 2026–2030.

Patty Centers, also called are Family Support Centers, provide parents and guardians of newborns through three-year-olds with supports to help them succeed in parenting, including fulfilling their goals of school, employment, and family well-being. The Blueprint adds three new Patty Centers per year in FY 2022–2029.

Private providers are expected to meet 30% of the demand for additional slots in the 2021–2022 school year and increase by 5% each year until private providers account for 50% of pre-k slots by the 2025–2026 school year. MSDE can issue a waiver from these requirements if there are too few eligible pre-k providers or all families in the county who want to enroll in pre-k are able to do so.



## Access to Pre-k Tier Structure

As more pre-k programs become available to students, the tier structure prioritizes eligibility based on student age and family income. In 10 years, it's estimated that 80% of eligible children will be enrolled in a publicly funded pre-k.

### TIER 1

A three- or four-year-old child whose family income is 300% or less of the federal poverty level and whose family chooses a full-day prekindergarten. The federal poverty level is \$26,200 for a family of four.

### TIER 2

A four-year-old child whose family income is 300%–600% of the federal poverty level and whose family chooses a full-day prekindergarten.

### TIER 3

A four-year-old child whose family income is more than 600% of the federal poverty level and whose family chooses a full-day prekindergarten.

## Blueprint Eligibility and Quality Checks Begin 2025–2026 School Year

Built into the Blueprint pre-k plan are rigorous standards required to be met by both public and private programs. Beginning in the 2025–2026 school year, all pre-k teachers must be state certified in early childhood education or hold a bachelor's degree and be pursuing residency through the Maryland Approved Alternative Preparation Program, which includes early childhood coursework, clinical practice, and evidence of pedagogical content knowledge. Paraeducators must hold a Child Development Associate (CDA) certificate or an associate degree. A high school degree is the current qualification for a pre-k aide.

### Pre-k programs must:

- Maintain a student-to-classroom personnel ratio of no more than 10:1
- Have a maximum of 20 children per classroom with at least one teacher certified in early childhood education and, beginning in 2025, a qualified paraeducator with a CDA certificate or an associate degree
- Operate five days a week, 180 days per year
- Achieve the required Maryland EXCELS Program quality rating of level 3 (private provider) or level 4—and achieve level 5 within five years (public provider). Providers/programs with a level 2 rating on or before June 30, 2022 are currently funded.

### NEW: As of July 1, 2021

- Pre-k providers may not suspend a student for more than five school days\*
- Pre-k providers may not engage in religious activities during school hours unless the activity takes place at a separate time and location

\*Unless school officials, including mental health professionals, determine there is an imminent threat of serious harm to others that cannot be reduced or eliminated through interventions and supports.

## Important Dates

**By December 1, 2021** (and annually after 2021) county boards of education must provide MSDE and the Accountability and Implementation Board (AIB):

- The number of public and private eligible pre-k providers in the county
- The number of eligible pre-k providers in the county that, in the past year, expanded to offer pre-k programs that serve students at least 6.5 hours each school day
- The Maryland EXCELS program quality rating level of each eligible pre-k program
- The participation rate of all county three- and four-year olds in eligible pre-k programs by age and tier
- The number and proportion of eligible private pre-k providers
- A measure of school readiness
- Proof that new pre-k programs prioritized children in areas with limited/no access to quality child care, regardless of family income; Tier I children; and students with disabilities, regardless of family income

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