

The Prekindergarten Expansion Act of 2014

Program Update



**Maryland State Department of Education
Division of Early Childhood Development**

Senate Bill 332 provided \$4.3 million to expand access to quality prekindergarten programs to families between 185% and 300% FPG. The following is a summary of the grant review, program selection, and implementation processes to date.

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Senate Bill 332

Purpose

The Prekindergarten Expansion Grant was made possible through the passing of the Prekindergarten Expansion Act of 2014 (Senate Bill 332).¹ This is a statewide initiative to expand the access to half-day and full-day public prekindergarten for four-year-olds from families with household incomes of between 185 and 300 percent of the Federal Poverty Guidelines (FPG)² for the school year 2014-2015. The grant also provided funding for the establishment of Judy Centers under the Judith P. Hoyer Early Childhood Education Enhancement Program in Maryland. Judy Centers serve children from birth through five years of age.

The grant provided \$4.3 million to fund the following “qualified vendors”: community-based programs that meet certain eligibility requirements (Priority I), local boards of education (Priority II), and local boards of education operating Judy Centers (Priority III). Programs that were awarded the grants could use the funds to:

- Establish or expand existing half-day (2½ hours) prekindergarten for additional eligible children;
- Establish or expand full-day (6½ hours) prekindergarten for eligible children;
- Establish or expand existing Judy Centers for the families of eligible children who are located in Title I school attendance areas; and
- Expand existing half-day prekindergarten programs into full-day prekindergarten programs for eligible children

The Prekindergarten Expansion Act also includes the provision to operate publicly funded prekindergarten at community-based programs (e.g. state regulated child care, Head Start, or nursery schools) certified by MSDE, and as long as they meet one of the following eligibility requirements:

- Currently accredited by MSDE and/or MSDE recognized accrediting organization;
- Published at Level 5 on Maryland EXCELS, or
- Certified by MSDE as a nonpublic nursery school

¹ http://marylandpublicschools.org/MSDE/divisions/child_care/docs/funding/SenateBill332_PK_Expansion.pdf

² Mandated income eligibility is 185% of Federal Poverty Guidelines (FPG) or \$44,122.50 for a family of four (2014 figures)

As a requirement of receiving the grant, community-based programs are held to the same quality standards that currently exist for prekindergarten in public schools. For instance, the law requires that teachers in all publicly funded prekindergarten hold a State teaching certificate in early childhood education.

Program Selection

Grant Review and Ranking

The “qualified vendors” responded to meet one of the three grant application priorities.

- **Priority I** – Half-day or full-day prekindergarten programs for twenty eligible four-year-olds at: State-licensed child care centers or family child care providers, or programs that are state or nationally accredited; centers that have published at Level 5 of Maryland EXCELS, Maryland's tiered quality-rating and improvement system operated by MSDE; or nonpublic schools that hold a certificate of approval from MSDE, in collaboration with a local board of education under a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU).
- **Priority II** – Expansion of a half-day and full-day prekindergarten program for twenty four-year-olds operated by a local board of education.
- **Priority III** - Establishment of a Judy Center or a satellite to an existing Judy Center at a Title I school operated by a local board of education.

Applications were reviewed by a committee with representation from the higher education community, and MSDE’s Special Education/Early Intervention Services and Early Childhood Education divisions. Each application was reviewed by three committee members who provided scores in the following areas:

- Proposal Cover Sheet
- Project Abstract
- Project Management, Key Personnel, and Collaborating Partners
- Maryland EXCELS Participation and Publishing
- Ten Benchmarks of High-Quality Preschool Education
- Implementation Plan
- Evaluation and Monitoring Learning
- Budget

Each component of the application was scored out of a total of 100 possible points. Once the review of each application was complete, the applications were ranked by score and geographical considerations.

Application Ranking³	
<i>Score</i>	<i>Rank</i>
100 - 88	1
87 – 75	2
74 and <	3

For instance, an applicant might receive three rankings of “1” which is an indication that all three reviewers considered the application to be of high-quality. Inversely, if all three reviewers gave an application the ranking of “3,” the application was considered as being inadequate. Applications for funding would only be included if at least two reviewers ranked the applications as “1.”

Funding Allocation

Funding for each priority was determined by identifying the total fund request and the percentage of the available funds requested. This percentage was used to ensure even distribution of funds based on the total amount being requested. The table below shows the percentage break out of the total fund requests which was applied to the \$4.3 million appropriated for this grant. Thus, each priority had its fund allocations which determined the fund range for the highest ranked applications.

Funding			
	Priority I	Priority II	Priority III
Total fund request:	\$3,071,893.00	\$2,232,320.00	\$1,980,000.00
% of total funding:	43%	30%	27%
Actual fund allocation:	\$1,849,000.00	\$1,290,000.00	\$1,161,000.00
# of Programs Funded:	17	4	3

³ Application Ranking criteria

As a result of this calculation, the number of programs and initial enrollment which are being funded is as follows:

Type of application	Number of programs	Full capacity enrollment ⁴
Priority I (community-based):	17	421
Priority II (local school systems):	4	536
Priority III (Judy Centers operated by local school systems):	3	125
Total	24	1082

Programs will be expected to maintain the standards of quality outlined in the grant proposal. Progress will be monitored in accordance with the Ten Benchmarks of High-Quality Prekindergarten programs (see Appendix A.) Programs must also remain in compliance with all licensing regulations and maintain state or national accreditation, or Level 5 on Maryland EXCELS.

⁴ Full capacity enrollment refers to ramping up enrollment for eligible families by December 31, 2014. By the end of the school year in June 2015, a total enrollment of 1,400 is anticipated due to additional enrollment and turnover.

Implementation

Technical Assistance

Grantees were required to attend an orientation session to learn about grant expectations, fiscal grant management, and reporting requirements. Questions were included in the Frequently Asked Question (FAQ) column which was added to the Prekindergarten Expansion Grant Administration Manual. In the fall of 2014, initial technical assistance visits were initiated to assess program implementation, enrollment, and any information critical for meeting the quality benchmarks under this grant.

Recruitment and Enrollment

Programs have provided recruitment plans that detail strategies and partnerships that will support the referral of eligible families. The partnerships include, but are not limited to:

- The Judy Center
- The Local Board of Education
- Child Care Resource and Referral Center
- Accredited Family Child Care programs
- Local Departments of Health and Human Services

Programs have been given until December 31, 2014 to reach full capacity.

Initial Start-up Issues

Several community-based programs struggled to locate and hire State-certified teachers. Programs found themselves with teachers on staff that were either in the process of becoming certified for the first time, or working towards reinstating those with expired licenses. Directors and owners were encouraged to reach out to the local boards of education, local colleges or universities, and to advertise online and in the local paper. To date, most programs have teachers who are fully certified. Grantees have been given one grant year to ensure that all teachers participating in the grant are fully certified.

Enrollment of eligible families (i.e. those with household incomes at or below 300% of poverty), has occurred at a time when most families made plans for enrollment in the 2014-15 school year. The timing was precipitated by the fact that FY15 funds could not be spent prior to July 1, 2014, or MSDE's standard approval process of grants. The timing created delays in recruitment, mostly for community-based programs which depend on the receipt of funding before they can enroll publicly funded four-year olds.

Next Steps

Annual monitoring of the grantees will begin in early spring of 2015. Monitoring will consist of site visits and the review of documentation that demonstrates:

- Use of a State-recommended curriculum and ongoing assessment of students' academic needs;
- Alignment with the Ten Benchmarks of High-Quality Preschool Education; and
- Implementation of family engagement strategies in accordance with the Maryland Early Childhood Family Engagement Framework⁵

Grants will be renewed annually for programs found to have met these quality benchmark criteria.

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http://www.marylandpublicschools.org/MSDE/divisions/child_care/docs/MdFamEngage_111213.pdf?id=238651&type=Movie

APPENDIX A

Ten Benchmarks of High-Quality Preschool Education

The applications to receive grant funding included the ten quality benchmark criteria which all applicants were required to respond to and were subsequently evaluated on. The initial technical assistance visit to the grant-funded prekindergarten program, in addition to all future monitoring visits, relies on this same criteria to determine areas of improvement and, potentially, defunding if only few or none of these benchmarks are met.

- One of the following prekindergarten curriculum options must be implemented in the prekindergarten program:
 - State recommended comprehensive curriculum
 - A local school system curriculum that aligns with the Maryland College and Career-Ready Standards
- Lead teachers in both public and private settings must have specialized training in early childhood education, and meet State certification standards for early childhood education. Please indicate the qualifications of the lead classroom teacher.
- Assistant teachers must hold a minimum of a high school diploma, but preferably a Child Development Associate (CDA) Credential™ or equivalent training (i.e. Level 4 in MSDE Credentialing Program). Please indicate the qualifications of the classroom assistant.
- Lead teacher and classroom assistant will participate in yearly professional development activities.
- Salary levels of grant-funded prekindergarten teachers in community-based programs will be compatible with entry level salaries of teachers of the school system in which the program is located.
- Income eligible families whose children attend a 2½ hour session must receive a 20 percent discount on center tuition rates; those attending a 6½ hour program must receive a 40 percent discount on tuition rates.
- Class sizes must be limited to no more than twenty children for four-year-olds, with a staff to student ration of 10:1 for 4's.
- Programs must provide both screening and referral services covering at least vision, hearing speech and language, health and physical development. Programs must also offer, either directly or through coordination with local school systems or local departments of health and social services, additional support services for participants. (These services may include English as a Second or Other Language (ESOL), parenting support or training, physical and mental health and wellness services such as Maryland's Social

Emotional Foundation for Early Learning (SEFEL), and early intervention for children with disabilities and/or special health care needs.)

- Community-based programs must enter into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with their local school systems to address the support for children with disabilities and English Language Learners (ELL) who are enrolled in grant-funded prekindergarten.
- Judy Centers, operated by local school systems and funded by this grant, must comply with the twelve Judy Center Component Standards.

Note: The high-quality benchmarks are based on the National Preschool Standards published by the National Institute of Early Education Research (NIEER) and COMAR 13A.06.02 (Prekindergarten)

APPENDIX B

Prekindergarten Expansion Funding Allocations by Priority

COUNTY/CITY	PROGRAM NAME	AWARD
	Priority I – Accredited Community-Based Child Care Programs	
Baltimore City	Episcopal Community Service of Maryland (ECSM) – The Ark Preschool	\$112,000
Baltimore	Excellent Start Learning Center LLC	\$112,000
Baltimore	Play and Learn at Hunt Valley	\$111,840
Baltimore	Successful Children Learning Center	\$112,000
Baltimore	White Marsh Child Care Center	\$112,000
Carroll	New Beginnings Christian Learning Center	\$111,403
Frederick	Carl and Norma Miller Children’s Center at Frederick Community College	\$55,644
Frederick	Monocacy Montessori Communities, Inc.	\$126,000
Frederick	The Learning Bee	\$112,000
Garrett	Garrett County Community Action Committee, Inc.	\$112,000
Howard	Howard Community College – Children’s Learning Center	\$56,000
Howard	Community Action Council of Howard County, MD Inc.	\$212,800
Howard	The Young School	\$56,000
Montgomery	Academy Child Development Center	\$112,000
Montgomery	Alef Bet Montessori School	\$112,000

Montgomery	CentroNia	\$112,000
Queen Anne's	Vasuma LLC/DBA Kiddie Academy of Kent Island	\$112,000
	TOTAL PRIORITY I	\$1,849,687.00

SYSTEM NAME	AWARD
Priority II – Local Boards of Education	
Baltimore County Public Schools	\$272,692
Prince George's County Public Schools	\$571,621
Washington County Public Schools	\$336,000
Wicomico County Board of Education	\$280,000
TOTAL PRIORITY II	\$1,460,313.00

SYSTEM NAME	AWARD
Priority III – Judy Centers	
Caroline County Public Schools	\$330,000
Garrett County Public Schools	\$330,000
Somerset County Public Schools	\$330,000
TOTAL PRIORITY III	\$990,000.00