Learning in Extended Academic Programs (LEAP) Grant Program: Annual Report

Division of Student Support, Academic Enrichment, and Educational Policy

December 2022 Legislative Report

MARYLAND STATE DEPARTMENT OF
EDUCATION
EQUITY AND EXCELLENCE

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Introduction

The Learning in Extended Academic Programs (LEAP) Section §-7001 through 7-2006 of the Education Article of the Annotated Code of Maryland was introduced during the 2018 legislative session of the Maryland General Assembly. This legislation required the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) to establish a grant program to provide extended academic enrichment programming that has a positive measurable impact or enriches the academic performance and overall well-being of students who are at risk of falling behind academic requirements.

The initial award for the 2018 – 2019 school year was $4,500,000, and remained the same for the 2019 - 2020, 2020 – 2021, and the 2021 – 2022 school year. In the 2021 - 2022 school year, per Section § 7-2005 of the Education Article of the Annotated Code of Maryland, the MSDE utilized three percent of the $4,500,000.00 appropriation to retain an Extended Learning Specialist for the LEAP program. The LEAP specialist monitors and provides technical assistance to LEAP program grantees. A total of $3,889,625.69 was awarded to seven local education agencies (LEAs) to execute grant programs. The MSDE made awards available to eligible public schools in which at least 80 percent of the students qualify for the free and reduced-price meals program.

The following LEAs continued to receive LEAP funding in the 2021 - 2022 school year:

- Anne Arundel County
- Baltimore City
- Baltimore County
- Cecil County
- Montgomery County
- St. Mary's County
- Wicomico County

Implementation

Award notifications were made in September 2021, and programming was eligible to begin upon receipt of the Notice of Grant Award (NOGA) from the MSDE. In SY 2022, the LEAP subgrantees focused on the following focus areas: language arts (3 percent); mathematics (64%); science (22%); social studies (7%); art integration (7%); and social emotional learning (7%). The majority of the programs operated Monday – Thursday for two hours between 3:30 p.m. and 6:00 p.m. and predominantly provided in-person synchronous learning activities with minimal asynchronous offerings.

Programs that resumed in-person learning were expected to adhere to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), as well as Maryland Department of Health guidance to prevent the spread of COVID-19. This guidance included: (1) increased student: teacher ratio, (2) enhanced hygiene and cleaning protocols, (3) increased staffing to include nurse and mental health practitioners, and (4) utilization of personnel protective equipment (PPE). For programs returning to in-person learning, the MSDE allowed grant budget modifications for the purchase of supplies to maintain public health protocols to ensure the health and safety of students. These supplies included PPE, cleaning and sanitizing materials, portable air purifiers, and emergency supplies.

One LEAP program was closed temporarily during the 2021-2022 school year as a result of COVID 19 safety protocols. The closed program was able to maintain virtual operations and was required to submit Program Weekly Closure Forms that described the activities that were being implemented to include: (1) curriculum work, (2) lesson plan development, (3) online/distance learning, (4) staff and professional development, (5) Out of School Time (OST) program data collection, and (6) systems planning work that included summer programs, evaluation, and sustainability efforts. Grant managers in the OST prgrams worked closely with their partners and service providers to convert lessons and activities to online formats. By the close of the 2021-2022 school year, all LEAP programs implemented face-to-face offerings.

The extended academic programs were required to include before or after school programs targeted to students who are at the risk of falling behind on academic requirements. The data collected through grant monitoring procedures reported that 80% of LEAP programs met the number of days specifed in the grant application, or as amended for the 2021-2022 school year.

Grantees

Eligible jurisdictions in Maryland received a LEAP award and the total funding for each LEA is detailed below (Table 1).

Table 1: Local Education Agency LEAP Programs and Award Amounts

Program Name	Local Education Agency	Award Amount
Learning in Extended Academic Programs	Anne Arundel County	$245,143.83
Young Audiences	Baltimore City	$905,816.49
Summer Arts and Learning	Baltimore City	$541,613.74
Center for Talented Youth (CTY) Baltimore Emerging Scholars	Baltimore City	$1,099,764.61
The Learning in Extended Academic Program	Baltimore County	$105,180.00
Gilpin Manor Summer Enrichment	Cecil County	$52,009.48
Enrichment Extended Learning Opportunities	Montgomery County	$425,623.38
LEAP Program	St. Mary's County	$148,314.00
STARS: LEAP After School and Summer Learning Center	Wicomico County	$366,160.16
Total Award Amount:		$3,889,625.69

Table 2 indicates the eligible schools and students served in the fourth year of implementation of the LEAP grant.

Table 2: Local Education Agency Total Number of Schools Served and Proposed Number of Students Served

Local Education Agency	Number of Schools Served	Proposed Number of Students Served
Anne Arundel County Public Schools	8	440
Baltimore City Public Schools	33	1,330
Baltimore County Public Schools	4	240
Cecil County Public Schools	1	175
Montgomery County Public Schools	12	250
St. Mary's County Public Schools	1	50
Wicomico County Public Schools	3	140
Total	62	2,625

Technical Assistance

Technical assistance included providing support and training to grantees through webinars and in - person trainings that meet quality standards and content-specific topic areas such as: national OST programming and online professional learning resources, additional guidance in support of safety planning, synchronous learning practices, strategic partnerships, organizational culture, contracted services documentation, and accountability practices, grants fiscal management protocols, evaluation effectiveness and budgetary amendment trainings. The MSDE also utilized the Out-of-School Time Reflection survey to identify future technical assistance needs.

An assigned Extended Learning Specialist administers ongoing technical assistance. Targeted specialized technical assistance was provided to grantees that required additional guidance based upon the MSDE risk indicators. The risk indicators include: (1) open grant lines, (2) total funding, (3) complexity, (4) documentation, (5) implementation, (6) unallowable actions, (7) late reporting, (8) low spenddown, (9) reimbursement invoices, (10) external complaints, (11) audit findings, (12) MSDE monitoring, (13) programmatic change requests, (14) program deliverables, (15) grant management amendments, (16) contractors, (17) illegal activity, and (18) student enrollment.

The MSDE provided, and will continue to provide , ongoing technical assistance to grantees to ensure that programs address the following eight State education agency (SEA) performance goals:

1. Assist every student to realize his or her potential
2. Develop and support a strong accountability system to increase academic success for all students
3. Promote a safe, healthy, and orderly environment for teaching and learning
4. Ensure educator and administrative effectiveness
5. Promote students' physical, mental, social, and emotional well-being
6. Expand high-quality educational opportunities for students and parents
7. Work with districts to strengthen program effectiveness
8. Increase communication and partnerships with stakeholders statewide

Evaluation and Effectiveness

Each LEAP grantee was required to submit a plan for an evaluation of the program. The plan enabled project leaders to assess progress toward objectives, indicators, and performance measures, and enable project managers to determine which strategies and activities have been successful, and those that need to be revised. This evaluation must be conducted annually, culminating in a summative evaluation reflecting the entire three -year project. Grantees were required to identify the individual and/or organization that was selected to serve as the evaluator for the program and describe his/her qualifications. In selecting the evaluator, grantees considered the following criteria :

- Experience evaluating educational initiatives
- Capacity to collect, manage, analyze, and interpret program and individual student data
- Time availability (evaluation and reporting for this program may take a considerable amount of time); and
- Knowledge of and compliance with data confidentiality requirements.

In the 2021 – 2022 school year, the MSDE monitored implementation of programs utilizing a Critical Elements Monitoring Tool that listed program indicators and the evidence needed to support each indicator. Additional program monitoring elements included the Continuation of Funds and End-of-Year Reports that were submitted in July 2022. All of the LEAP programs were scheduled to end the three-year grant period in June 2021. However, the MSDE was informed in spring 2021, that there was LEAP funding for one additional year which would end programs in June 2022. Two LEAP programs declined the extension and successfully ended the grant in June 2021, and the remaining programs requested extensions to provide services through the 2021 - 2022 school year. In July 2021, the grantees that ended programs in June 2021, submitted an End-of-Year report, and the grantees that extended services to June 2022, provided a Continuation of Funds Report. The review of both reports determined that all of the LEAP grantees effectively addressed the SEA performance goals identified earlier in this report.

Additionally, subgrantees were required to identify three additional self - defined performance objectives. The self - defined performance objectives varied by program and focused on areas such as measuring progress on local benchmark assessments and improvement in core subject grades. The findings demonstrated that overall grantees met or demonstrated progress towards the three objectives. The data reported that 72% of grantees had met or were progressing towards their first self-defined objective, 72% of grantees had met or were progressing towards their second self - defined objective, and 79% of grantees had met or were progressing towards their third self - defined objective. 2% of subgrantees reported that one self - defined performance objective was unable to be measured due to the low attendance in the program.

Accomplishments of the LEAP programs include, but are not limited to:

1. 20% of students in St. Mary's County Public Schools demonstrated improvement in academic performance and/or the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) scores by one level compared to baseline assessments.
2. 100% of students demonstrated positive educational and academic benefits in Wicomico County Public Schools.
3. 100% of students demonstrated an increase in their attitudes toward and perception of their own language and literacy abilities, as measured by a pre/post survey instrument in Anne Arundel County Public Schools.

The MSDE will validate the self-defined performance objectives and outstanding performance data upon review of the external evaluator report in fall 2023.

Summary

The MSDE is implementing the LEAP grant that was enacted under Sections § 7-2001 through 7-2006 of the Education Article of the Annotated Code of Maryland. This legislation requires the MSDE to submit an annual report on the effectiveness of the LEAP program, as well as an evaluation of LEAP programs. The MSDE is submitting this report to provide the Governor and the Maryland General Assembly the required information in § 7-2006 of the Education Article.

The grant award for the 2021 - 2022 school year was $4,365,000 which excludes the three percent administrative appropriation for the hiring of the MSDE Extended Learning Specialist.

The MSDE will continue to assist grantees during implementation of extended day enhancement programs for Maryland students. The MSDE understands the importance of offering quality extended day programs to assist students with academic and social skills to avoid regression in learning.