

# IMPLEMENTING 15 ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS FOR HIGH-QUALITY PRE-K: Maryland

In 1980, Maryland created the Extended Elementary Education Program (EEEP), a pilot preschool program in Baltimore City and Prince George’s County. The program eventually expanded throughout the state and by 2002, served 25% of the state’s 4-year-olds. In 2002, finance reform legislation passed, requiring all local boards of education to offer pre-K in public schools to all economically underprivileged 4-year-olds by the 2007-2008 school year and the program became known as the Prekindergarten Program. Maryland has 25 early learning centers of distinction, known as Judy Centers (established in legislation in 2000). The Judy Centers work collaboratively with selected elementary schools to offer comprehensive year-round services for children from birth to age six. Judy Center Partnerships during the 2014-2015 school year provided enhanced, continuous learning opportunities to 15,205 young children and their families, including 6,070 children younger than 3 years old.

### Essential Elements

Fifteen Essential Elements clustered in three categories—Enabling Environment, Support for Educators and Young Learners, and High-Quality Instruction—have been identified among exemplary pre-K programs (Minervino, 2014). Note that practice in the field may vary so as to be either better or worse than might be expected based on specific policy or guidance. Consistency or quality of practice across large-scale programs is more difficult to assess than policy.

Enabling Environment		Rigorous, Articulated Early Learning Policies								Strong Program Practices				
Political Will	Strong Leaders	BA + comp	Class size	Two Adults	Hours/ Dosage	EL Standards	Effective Curriculum	Special Ed	DLL support	HQ Teaching	PD	Child Assessments	Data Driven	Integrated System
●	●	○	●	●	—	●	○	●	—	ND	—	○	○	—

Key: ● Fully Met    ○ Partially Met    — Not Met    ND Not determined

**Political will.** Governor Larry Hogan (R) began his “Governor’s Young Readers” program in 2015 with every child from infancy to age five in Baltimore City eligible to enroll in a book-delivery program. Every month, each enrolled child will receive a new book, supported by the Family League of Baltimore. Other than this project, the Governor’s education priorities are focused on K-12 students. In 2017, the Maryland legislature passed HB 516 which required a workgroup formed to study and make recommendations to the Kirwan Commission on Innovation and Excellence on expanding access for 4-year-olds. In February 2018, the Kirwan Commission, named after the former University of Maryland System Chancellor William E. “Brit” Kirwan, unveiled school funding legislation to provide more money for high-poverty schools and establish a mandate for universal pre-kindergarten. In April, five workgroups were formed, one addressing how to expand high-quality pre-K to all 4-year-olds and all 3-year-olds in low-income households.



In 2016-2017, Maryland enrolled 31,382 children. Even though all state school districts offer pre-K, only 37% of the state's 4-year-old population was enrolled in 2016-2017. Funding for the Prekindergarten Program is based on the K-12 per pupil amount, prorated for the percent of children attending half- and full-day programs. In an effort to expand pre-K to children above 185% FPL, the state enacted the Prekindergarten Expansion Act (2014), adding an additional \$4.3 million per year to increase access to half-day and full-day public pre-K for 4-year-olds from families with household incomes at or below 300% FPL.

Maryland has been able to use several sources for pre-k funding including State Pre-K Expansion Grants (currently approximately \$4.3 million per year), and the federal Preschool Expansion Grants (approximately \$14.3 million per year). Along with these funding streams, other state funds, including state Head Start supplemental funding, put total pre-k spending at more than \$250 million in 2016-2017.

**Compelling vision and strong leadership.** The Division of Early Childhood Development (DECD) housed in the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) is responsible for early care and education in the state. The Division is comprised of the Office of Child Care, the Early Learning Branch and the Collaboration and Program Improvement Branch. The Early Learning Branch is responsible for pre-K and kindergarten policy and programs as well as the child assessment system, early childhood curriculum, and the early childhood alternative pathway preparation. Three FTEs are assigned to oversee the program at the state level. The Collaborative and Program Improvement Branch manages the Judy Centers and the Head Start State Collaborative project. Three FTEs are responsible for overseeing pre-K efforts. In the past few years there have been some leadership changes within DECD.

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**Education and compensation.** Each pre-K classroom has a lead teacher with a BA plus an early learning credential. Maryland also requires salary parity for pre-K teachers in public schools. Teachers in private programs funded through the expansion legislation or Judy Centers are not required to have the same salary as public school pre-K programs.

**Adult-child ratio and two adults in the classroom.** State policy stipulates an average of 20 students per classroom. Exceptions may occur where individual classrooms exceed this number, provided an overall program average of 20 is maintained. In rare cases, if a classroom goes over 20, additional staff are added, thus maintaining the ratio requirement of 1:10.

**Learning time.** Children attend the Prekindergarten Program for a minimum of 2.5 hours per day. Programs operate five days per week as a full school-day program or four days per week as a part-day program with the fifth day used for home visits and teacher planning. In 2016-2017, 43% of preschool children were enrolled in full-day programs.

**Age-appropriate learning standards.** Supporting Every Young Learner: Maryland's Guide to Early Childhood Pedagogy (2015) are Maryland's ELDS. They are comprehensive and aligned with the state's K-3 and college- and career-ready standards. The state provides professional development opportunities and additional resources to programs to support the use of the ELDS.

**System that ensures effective curriculum.** Maryland recommends curricula for all pre-K programs; but only requires adoption of specific curricula for programs at levels 4 or 5 in the QRIS system, including those with PDG funding. Currently there are eight options on the approved list. The state provides sponsored training, supporting materials (manuals, videos, websites, etc.), on-going technical assistance, and funding to support curriculum implementation. DECD is currently working with University of Maryland on developing a curriculum aligned with the state's ELDS. Training for implementation of the curriculum and other supports will be available to all pre-K programs.

**Support for students with special needs.** In 2016-2017, 16.5% of pre-K students received special education services. Professional development is required for preschool teachers who serve children with special needs and programs are required to follow the Division for Early Childhood's (DEC) best practices for working with young children who have or are at risk for developmental delays or disabilities.

**Support for dual (English) language learners (DLL).** Maryland is not able to report the number of DLLs enrolled in pre-K programs nor does it have specific policies to regulate services to support this population. Services for Dual or English Language Learners are locally determined.

**High quality teaching.** ECERS and CLASS assessments were not available for review.

**Professional development.** Pre-K teachers are expected to complete six credit hours of professional development every five years. State policy does not require ongoing classroom-embedded support to be provided to teachers. For the programs that participate in QRIS, PD and targeted technical assistance, both online and face-to-face, is available.

**Child Assessments.** Pre-K child assessments are required to be aligned with the state's ELDS, but programs can choose the assessment. The state developed the Early Learning Assessment, a formative observation tool, which is aligned with the kindergarten readiness assessment. The state provides training on the tool and encourages its use.

**Data-driven decision-making.** PDG funded classrooms are observed annually using a monitoring tool that combines components of ECERS and CLASS. Non-PDG-funded classes are also monitored annually; but use either the CLASS or a locally developed observation tool. In order to ensure the validity of the assessments, qualified non-classroom staff conducts periodic observational assessments to verify the reliability of the assessors. Both the programs and state receive the results of the observations. All prekindergarten programs that receive PDG funds are required to participate in EXCEL, the state's QRIS. Although not required, other pre-K programs are encouraged to participate in EXCEL.

The University of Maryland is currently conducting an external evaluation on pre-K expansion for the state PDG grant.



**Integrated System.** There are components that are aligned within Maryland’s prekindergarten system including the new child assessment, curriculum and training that is being created, and the state’s ELDS. However, there is not a policy that requires the implementation of these elements, therefore making it difficult for the state to integrate the system.