



# Early Childhood Education

# A Coordinated Approach to Early Education



## Dear Colleague:

In 2000, the Maryland State Department of Education made school readiness a key piece of its strategic plan for improving student achievement. The Department's emphasis on high-quality and standards-based early childhood education was driven, in large part, by three developments:

- Research on brain development in the 1990s confirmed the tremendous growth and pliability of young children's minds, suggesting a great—and largely untapped—potential for accelerated early learning.
- The State government moved to outcomes-based decision-making, whereby accountability for results began driving policy and budget decisions for all public sectors.
- The concept of the “cost of doing nothing” entered into the public discourse and positioned the lack of a strong early care and education system as the precursor for increased costs in other public sectors, such as K–12 education, workforce development, and child welfare.

In responding to these issues, Maryland became a leader in early childhood education and executed that leadership through three key actions:

1. Developing a detailed plan for improving the number of children entering kindergarten ready to learn.
2. Housing all early childhood education programs in one agency and holding that agency accountable for results.
3. Committing to adequate funding for early childhood initiatives.

## An Action Plan for Progress

In collaboration with early childhood stakeholders and with guidance from the 40-member Maryland Early Care and Education Committee, MSDE is implementing the Five-Year School Readiness Action Agenda. The Action Agenda was developed through collaboration among MSDE, child-serving agencies, the private sector, the Children's Cabinet, and the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

The Action Agenda consists of six goals and 25 strategies to increase the number of children entering school ready to learn. With the support of the Governor's Office and the General Assembly, the Action Agenda has been adopted by the Children's Cabinet and is now the official plan for early care and education in Maryland.



## One Designated Agency

In 2005, the Governor of Maryland designated MSDE to provide leadership, support, and accountability for an effective system of early care and education, and to ensure that Maryland's children and families have access to it. That means, for the first time, all of Maryland's early childhood education programs and initiatives are in one agency, aligned with the rest of the State's education goals and accountable as a component of the educational continuum.

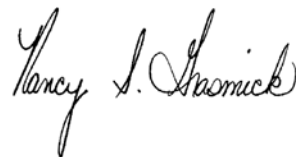
MSDE now licenses and monitors child care centers and family child care providers, issues contracts and grants to providers to improve early-care quality, and administers the State's Child Care Credentialing System. The move is designed to help MSDE provide a single governance structure for early education programs, better coordinate programs and resources, and offer more training and support for child care providers.

## Adequate Early Education Funding

Maryland is committed to adequately funding early care and education programs. Recent state budgets have provided money to expand the Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation Model; increased funding for family support centers and Resource and Referral Centers; funded a pilot autism-screening program for young children; and provided leadership and support to Countdown to Kindergarten, Maryland's statewide early care and education public-engagement campaign.

I appreciate the support of Maryland's early education community, the guidance of the Maryland Early Care and Education Committee, and the faith of the Governor and the General Assembly as MSDE strives to build an exceptional system of early care and education and to ensure that all of Maryland's children benefit from it.

Sincerely,



Nancy S. Grasmick  
State Superintendent of Schools





# Learning Begins Before Kindergarten

## Maryland's Plan for Early Childhood Education

### Achieving School Readiness:

#### A Five-Year School Readiness Action Agenda

- All children, birth through age 5, will have access to quality early care and education programs that meet the needs of families, including full-day options.
- Parents of young children will succeed in their role as their child's first teacher.
- Children, birth through age 5, and their families, will receive necessary income-support benefits and health and mental health care to ensure they arrive at school with healthy minds and bodies.
- All early care and education staff will be appropriately trained in promoting and understanding school readiness.
- All Maryland citizens will understand the value of quality early care and education as the means to achieve school readiness.
- Maryland will have an infrastructure that promotes, sufficiently funds, and holds accountable its school readiness efforts.

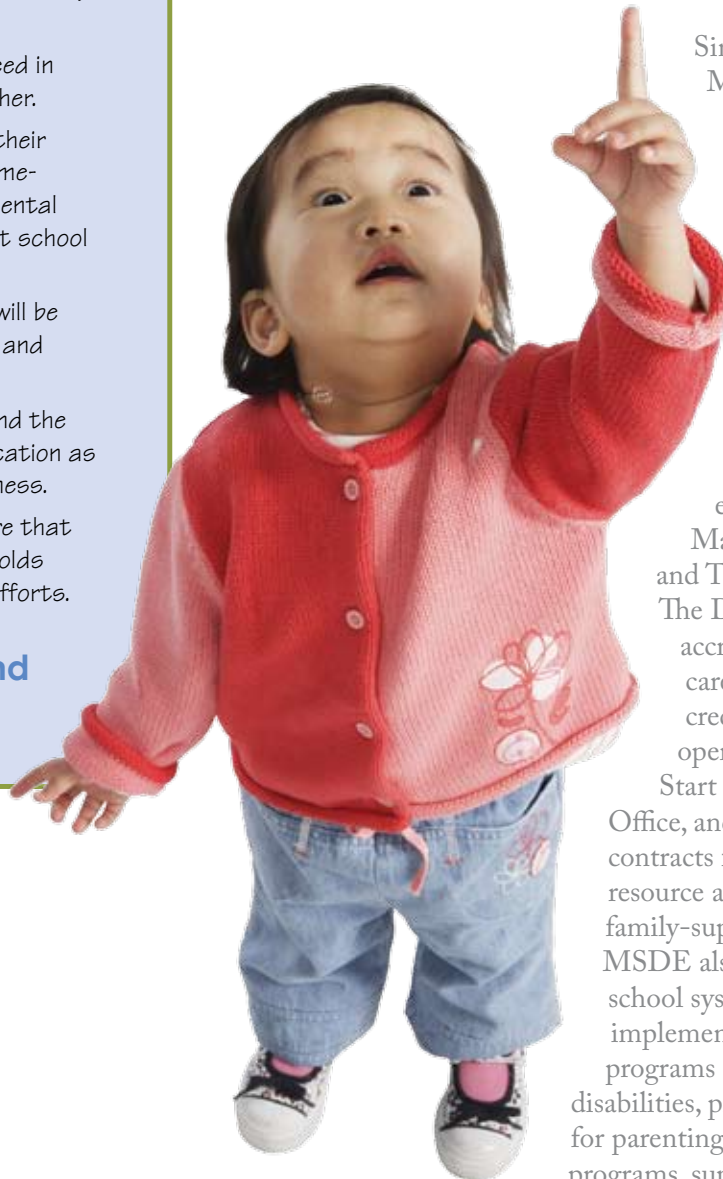
### Maryland Early Care and Education Committee

Maryland well understands that the path to school success begins long before a child enters school. Maryland also understands that a high-quality system of early childhood education depends upon tight coordination of early learning programs, services, and resources. In fact, it's these principles that prompted Maryland to locate all of its early care and education programs at the state department of education. And it's still the only state to have done so.

Since July 2005, the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) has overseen child care programs in addition to public school

prekindergarten and kindergarten, preschool special education, and Maryland's Infants and Toddlers Program.

The Department accredits child care programs and credentials providers, operates the Head Start Collaboration Office, and administers contracts for child care resource and referral and family-support programs. MSDE also guides local school systems as they implement early childhood programs for children with disabilities, provides funding for parenting education programs, supports story



time for young children at Maryland's public libraries, and coordinates food and nutrition programs for schools and child care facilities.

The coordination of these programs and services has a singular goal: to improve school readiness skills among all children—for school readiness is the foundation of school success. Program coordination is also a critical part of *Achieving School Readiness: A Five-Year School Readiness Action Agenda* ([http://www.MdK12.org/instruction/ensure/readiness/pdfs/lap\\_report.pdf](http://www.MdK12.org/instruction/ensure/readiness/pdfs/lap_report.pdf)), a comprehensive early education plan that identifies six goals—with associated strategies and action steps—for providing incoming kindergarteners essential school readiness skills (see box on page 4).

The Action Agenda is the work of the Early Care and Education Committee, chaired by State Superintendent of Schools Nancy S. Grasmick. Through its membership, the Committee brings together State agencies, nonprofit organizations, advocacy groups, higher education, and local entities.

The Action Agenda emphasizes universal access to high-quality early childhood programs, family literacy and support services, sound child health, and well-qualified early childhood staff who are fully prepared to help children develop, grow, and learn. (To read the Committee's March 2006 progress report, go to [http://www.aecf.org/publications/data/maryland\\_ace\\_progress\\_report.pdf](http://www.aecf.org/publications/data/maryland_ace_progress_report.pdf).)

To help achieve these goals, MSDE has developed a curricular framework for early childhood education, professional development programs for early care and education providers, and an assessment system that gauges whether young children are meeting established academic and social expectations.

Each year, MSDE reports Maryland's progress in providing its youngest citizens the skills, abilities, and eagerness for learning they'll need to meet



the academic and social challenges in elementary and secondary school. *Children Entering School Ready to Learn* details the number of children who have acquired those skills and the number who need targeted or intensive support to do so ([http://www.MarylandPublicSchools.org/MSDE/newsroom/publications/school\\_readiness.htm](http://www.MarylandPublicSchools.org/MSDE/newsroom/publications/school_readiness.htm)).

Since MSDE first reported school readiness data in 2001–02, the proportion of Maryland children rated fully ready for kindergarten has risen significantly. It appears Maryland's coordinated approach to early learning is beginning to bear fruit.

**Consolidating early care and education with K-to-12 education is a move supported by research, logic, and economics, creating a continuum of development from birth through high school. It remains to be seen whether other states will muster [Maryland's] political will.**

— Sandra J. Skolnik, Executive Director, Maryland Committee for Children, in the *Baltimore Sun*, August 4, 2006

# Early Care and Education

## A History of Policy and Action

Maryland has a strong reputation for promoting high-quality early childhood programs. Its public school preK program has been touted as one of the best in terms of rigorous standards. For several years, *Working Mother* magazine gave Maryland's child care system its "Ten Best Award." And Maryland's family support centers were recognized nationally as an exceptional model of family preservation.

### Every Child Achieving

Despite this early leadership, however, a systemic approach to early learning was not broached until the late 1990s when MSDE, for the first time, articulated the importance of school readiness as an essential component of school success. In its report, *Every Child Achieving: A Plan for Meeting the Needs of the Individual Learner*, MSDE outlined several recommendations for improving school readiness among all children.

### Judith P. Hoyer Early Care and Education Enhancement Program

With the enactment of the Judith P. Hoyer Early Care and Education Enhancement Program (named after the late early childhood advocate, Judith P. Hoyer) in 2000, early education

stakeholders were charged with establishing an early childhood accountability system designed to improve school readiness among Maryland's youngest children. The Hoyer program and other quality-improvement initiatives built an infrastructure that included a standards-based early education system. Shortly thereafter, the Judith P. Hoyer Blue Ribbon Commission on the Financing of Early Care and Education developed recommendations to redress structural deficiencies in the child care system, such as the career advancement opportunities, professional development, and compensation offered to providers.

### Bridge to Excellence in Public Schools Act

In 2002, Maryland made a commitment to ensure adequacy and equity in its public schools. That commitment, enacted into legislation as the Bridge to Excellence in Public Schools Act, resulted in an enormous increase in State aid to education. Tied to that money, however, was the requirement that school systems establish by 2007–08 full-day kindergarten for all children and preK for all economically disadvantaged children.

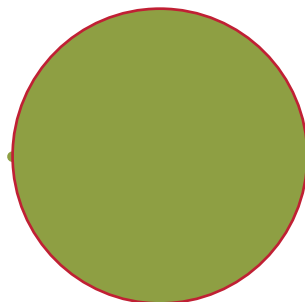
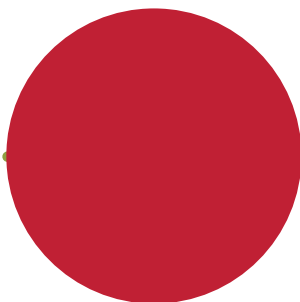


## Maryland Early Care and Education Committee

In October 2002, a group of 40 leaders from Maryland's State and local governments and other advocacy and service organizations presented a comprehensive strategic plan to increase the number of children—from all demographic groups and from all Maryland regions—entering school ready to learn. Supported by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the Maryland Early Care and Education Committee (formerly the Leadership in Action Program) developed recommendations for statewide action, which are now being replicated in each local school system.

## MSDE's Division of Early Childhood Development

In 2005, the Maryland General Assembly and former Governor Robert L. Ehrlich, Jr., joined forces to pass a law resolving the governance of early care and education. Child care responsibilities, Maryland's child care resource and referral agencies, and the State's family support centers were transferred from the Maryland Department of Human Resources to MSDE and housed in a newly established Division of Early Childhood Development. The Division was charged with coordinating policies, funding, and programs within MSDE and other State and local agencies to advance the Maryland Early Care and Education Committee's school readiness action agenda.

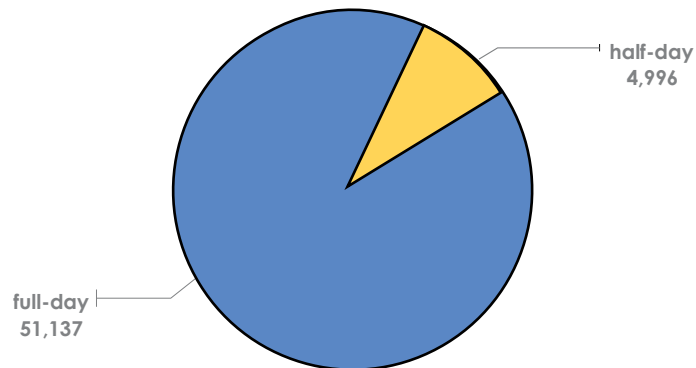




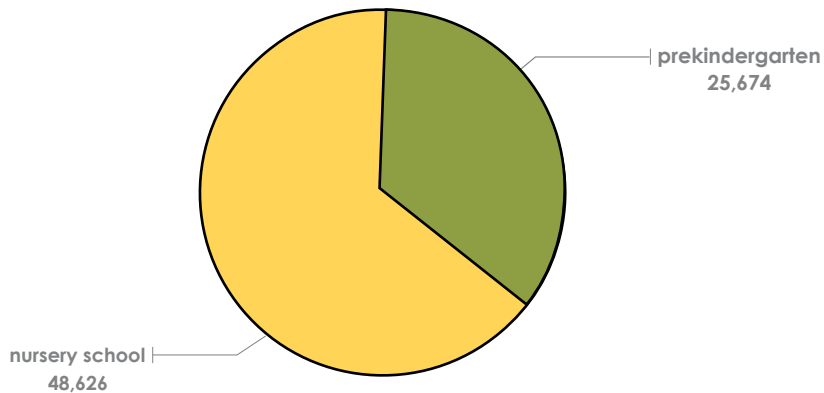
# Where are the Children?

Maryland has a rich landscape of early care and education. The State has one of the nation's lowest unemployment rates, one of the highest median household incomes, a highly educated workforce, and an expanding economy. As such, nearly 70 percent of Maryland's children under age 5 are in some kind of State-regulated early childhood program for at least a portion of the day. That is, most 5-year-olds enter school with considerable early childhood education experience.

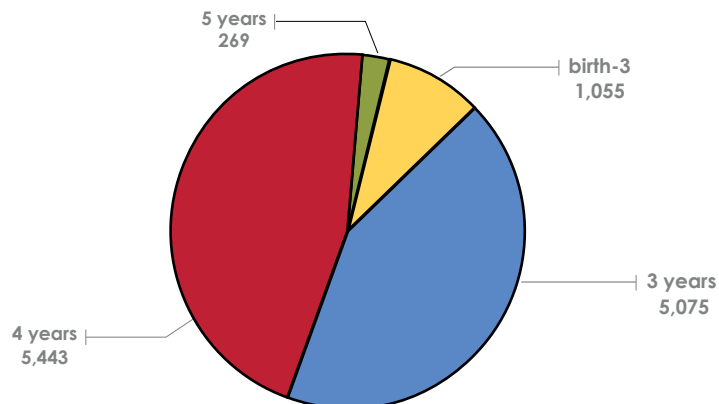
## Kindergarten Enrollment, 2006-2007



## PreK and Nursery School Enrollment, 2006-2007

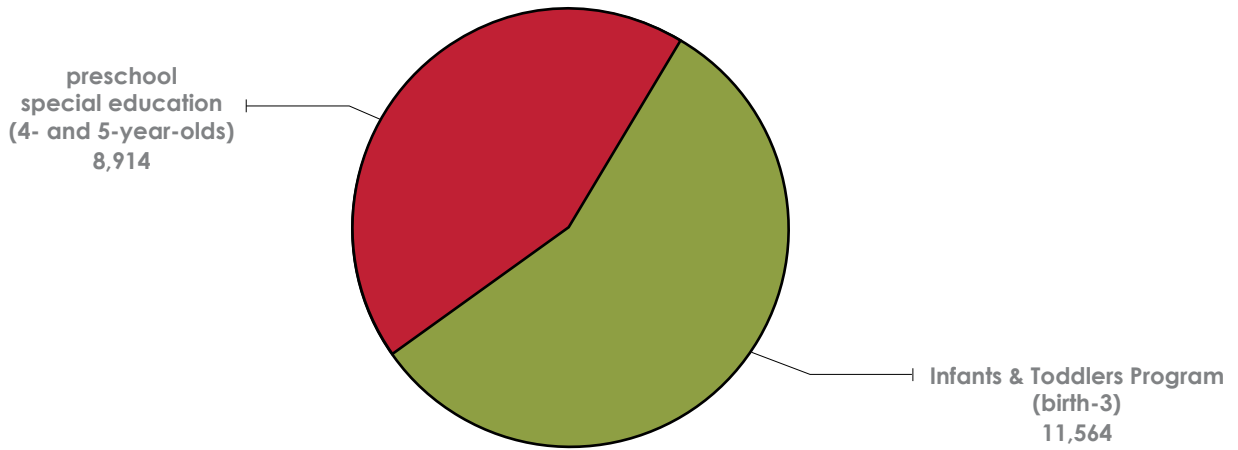


## Head Start Enrollment, 2006-2007

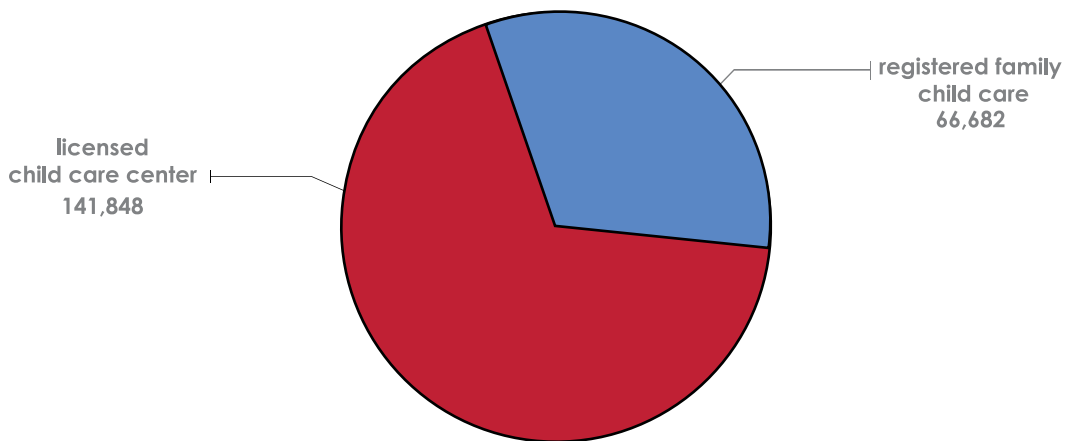




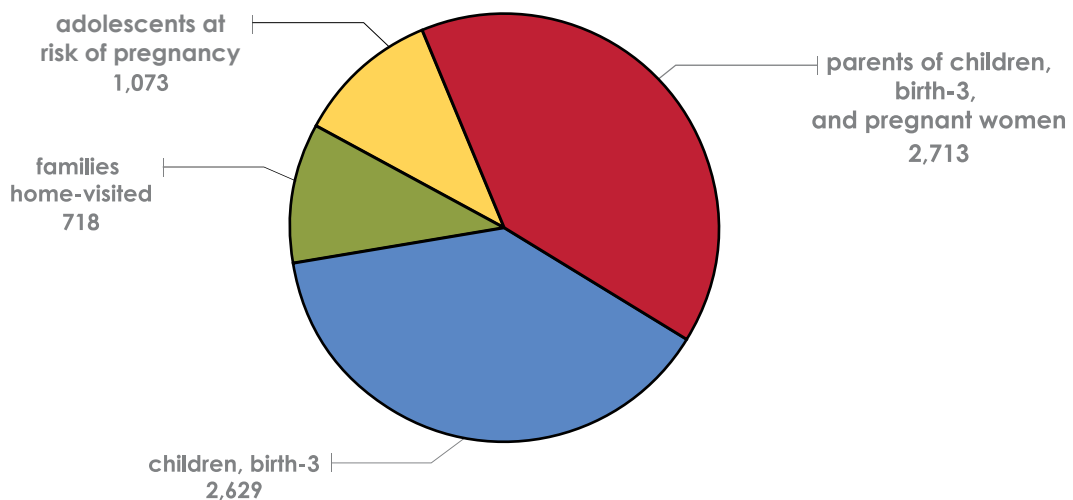
## Enrollment Among Children with Disabilities, 2006-2007



## Family Child Care and Child Care Center Capacity, 2006-2007



## Family Support Centers, People Served, 2005-2006



# Program Improvement Initiatives



Maryland has used its broad policy guidelines and growing collection of data to develop a series of program-improvement initiatives designed to strengthen educational programs for young children.

## Maryland Child Care Credentialing System and Tiered Reimbursement Program

Maryland's credentialing system outlines the education and experience required of individuals working at each level of child care. As each level is achieved, child care providers receive recognition, monetary incentives, and tuition support.

Maryland's tiered reimbursement program recognizes child care programs that go beyond State licensing regulations. Child care facilities can qualify for tiered reimbursement—up to 44 percent over the amount provided by child care subsidy vouchers—for improving the quality of their programs and for ultimately meeting State or national accreditation standards.

## Maryland Model for School Readiness and Guidelines for Healthy Child Development

The Maryland Model for School Readiness (MMSR) defines what children should know and able to do by the time they start formal education. That is, it defines early learning standards, which are, in turn, incorporated into Maryland's Voluntary State Curriculum. By defining sequential expectations, MMSR allows all early care and education programs to work toward the same desired outcomes.

MMSR is complemented by Maryland's Guidelines for Healthy Child Development and Care for Young Children (Birth to Three Years of Age), which outlines infant and toddler development in three- to six-month increments, and offers strategies that providers might use during those months to foster healthy cognitive and physical growth.

## MSDE Standards for Implementing Quality Early Childhood Programs

The complement to the early learning standards that define Maryland's desired outcomes for children are the program standards that define early childhood program quality. Maryland's preK, kindergarten, Head Start, and child care centers are using program-quality standards on a voluntary basis. Since the standards were finalized in 2000, 579 center-based early childhood programs have become accredited—a 370-percent increase over the baseline year.

*I have no worries because he has been learning something new every day in school, and I thank you for teaching him something new every day in order to prepare him for tomorrow.*

—Julia Garza de Castillo, Frederick County parent whose son attends prekindergarten at Hillcrest Elementary

## Maryland Child Care Subsidy Program

MSDE, in partnership with the Department of Human Resources and its local departments of social services, administers the Maryland Child Care Subsidy Program, which issues child care subsidy vouchers to low-income families.

From 2002 to 2005, the program was “frozen,” limiting low-income families’ access to child care subsidies. Since the freeze was lifted, the number of program participants has increased significantly. By November 2006, approximately 23,000 children had been served by the program.



*I’ve noticed that skills and student expectations are much greater. My son’s involvement in prekindergarten has prepared him for kindergarten’s rigorous demands.*

— Jacqui Welch, Allegany County parent



## Funding for Full-day Kindergarten and Prekindergarten

The Bridge to Excellence in Public Schools Act, passed in 2002, not only changed the way State aid is distributed to school systems; it also significantly increased it. The Act requires that school systems use some of that money to offer, by 2007–08, full-day kindergarten to all children and prekindergarten to all 4-year-olds from economically disadvantaged backgrounds or with special educational needs.

In 2002–03, just 35 percent of kindergarteners were enrolled in full-day programs but by 2006–07, 91 percent were enrolled. Given the Bridge to Excellence mandate, it’s anticipated that all kindergarteners will be enrolled in full-day programs by 2007–08.

Since the school year following the passage of the Bridge to Excellence Act (2002–03), prekindergarten enrollment in Maryland has increased 19 percent. Given the Bridge to Excellence mandate, about 35 percent of all 4-year-olds should be enrolled in prekindergarten by 2007–08.

# Program Improvement Initiatives, Cont.

## Judy Center Early Care and Family Education Centers

Judith P. Hoyer Early Care and Family Education Centers (Judy Centers) are designed to eliminate the achievement gap, specifically at Title I schools. Judy Centers, named for the late child advocate Judith P. Hoyer, are located throughout Maryland.

All 24 Judy Centers are either based at or linked to a public elementary school and consist of early care and education programs serving children, birth to age 6. These programs include public preschool, preschool special education, Infants and Toddlers programs, child care, Head Start, and family literacy and adult education services. In addition, all Judy Centers offer family-support services such as health care and emergency services either on-site or through home visits.

According to a two-year study conducted by MGT of America, local school systems are improving school readiness among all children and closing the skill gap between disadvantaged kindergarteners and their peers by developing this kind of community-wide approach to service delivery through formal partnerships and collaboration.

*I have witnessed the growth—both behaviorally and academically—of my son thanks to the hard work and dedication of the staff at Beall Elementary. The communication provided by the school has kept me involved every step of the way.*

— Kelly Guyton, Allegany County parent whose son attends the Judy Center at Beall Elementary School

## Head Start

While Head Start is a federally funded early childhood program, it is an integral part of Maryland's early learning infrastructure. To strengthen the partnership with Head Start, MSDE has signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the State's Head Start Association of Directors. The memorandum focuses on initiating joint planning and joint staff development, smoothing children's transition from Head Start to school programs, and improving family involvement in education. All 24 school systems have signed such agreements with their local Head Start partners.

## Early Education for Children with Disabilities

The Maryland Infants and Toddlers Program, serving nearly 12,000 infants and toddlers statewide, provides family-centered support and intervention for children under age 3 with disabilities. Services typically include audiology, physical therapy, speech and language therapy, and assistive technology.

Preschool special education provides special instruction and related services to children aged 3–5 with disabilities. Because these services are provided in the least restrictive learning environment, preschoolers with disabilities are frequently enrolled in regular preK or kindergarten programs, as well as Head Start or child care, as part of an inclusive approach to education.

*The Infants and Toddlers Program is a soft place to land in a world that is uneducated and uncertain about children who are delayed. We learned to trust the therapists and realized that everyone in the program wanted to give our son the best chance to succeed.*

— Lori M. Morris, Frederick County parent, in the *Frederick Gazette*, March 23, 2006



## Child Care Resource and Referral Network

Under the leadership of MSDE, funds for Maryland's Child Care Resource and Referral Network have increased 152 percent from FY '06 to FY '07. The Maryland Committee for Children (MCC), a non-profit advocacy organization, is operating the network under contract with MSDE. MCC provides information to families searching for high-quality child care and for programs offering specialized services.

*My two daughters were enrolled at an outstanding child care center beginning at 4 months of age and continuing through kindergarten, allowing my husband and me to pursue our careers full-time. They emerged from those daycare years possessing tremendous confidence in their own abilities and ideas, enthusiastic about learning, and with strong interpersonal skills. The foundation laid at their daycare center continues to serve them well throughout all aspects of their lives.*

— Jean Schroeder, whose daughters received child care services at Downtown Baltimore Child Care, Inc.



## Family Support Centers

Twenty-six family support centers throughout Maryland provide comprehensive support services for families with children, birth to age 3. These services include parenting classes, job-skills training, adult education, and child care. Under MSDE's leadership, funding for family support centers increased 21 percent from FY '06 to FY '07. Family support centers are operated by Friends of the Family, Inc., a non-governmental agency, under contract with MSDE. The agency works closely with Judy Centers and local Head Start programs.

*Now I can picture how my future is going to be—bright and successful.*

— Precious Owa, who receives services through Baltimore County's Young Parent Support Center

## Inclusive Child and School-age Care

MSDE has developed a plan to improve child care accessibility for families of children with disabilities and to increase technical support for child care providers who serve children with disabilities. The plan has been integrated into the strategic plan of MSDE's Division of Early Childhood Development.

**For more information on any of these initiatives, go to:**




[www.MarylandPublicSchools.org/MSDE/divisions/child\\_care/](http://www.MarylandPublicSchools.org/MSDE/divisions/child_care/).

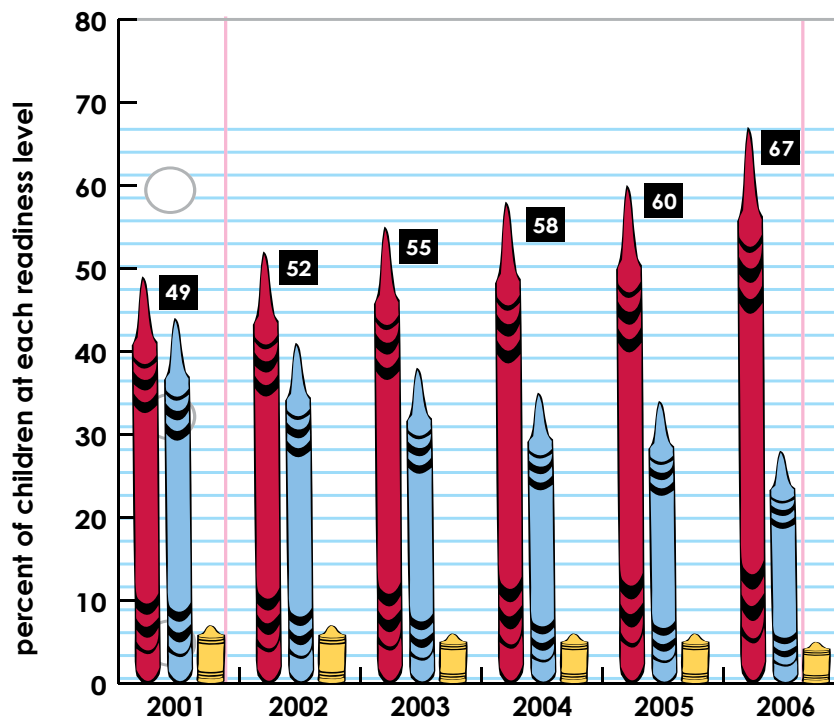
# What does it all mean for Maryland's children?

At the start of every school year, teachers assess the knowledge and skills of each of Maryland's 50,000+ incoming kindergarteners. MSDE sets standards for school readiness in seven key areas: physical development, language and literacy, social and personal development, mathematical thinking, scientific thinking, social studies, and the arts. Results are also tallied for the composite of all seven areas.

What Maryland has found is that children entering kindergarten each year are better prepared than those who entered the year before. In 2006–07, 67 percent of all entering kindergarteners were fully prepared for school, a 7-percentage-point increase over 2005–06 and an 18-percentage-point increase over 2001–02.

## School Readiness Levels for Kindergarten Students in the Fall of the School Year

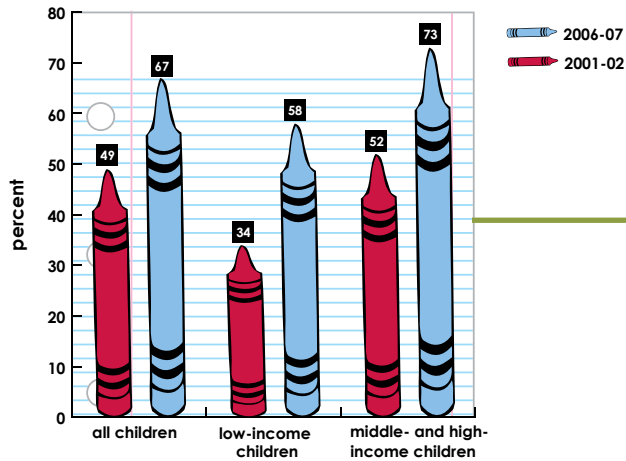
-  **full** (consistently demonstrates skills to meet kindergarten expectations)
-  **approaching** (inconsistently demonstrates skills to meet kindergarten expectations)
-  **developing** (does not demonstrate skills to meet kindergarten expectations)



In 2006–07, 67% of children entering kindergarten were rated by their teachers as “fully ready” for the kindergarten curriculum, an 18-percentage-point increase over 2001–02.

In 2002, the Maryland Early Care and Education Committee established a five-year school readiness target. The Committee said that, by 2006–07, 75 percent of all children should enter kindergarten fully prepared for the curriculum. Unfortunately, the State missed that goal. What is clear is that to reach the 75-percent threshold, Maryland must close the persistent skill gap that exists for some groups of children, such as those from low-income families and those learning English.

## School Readiness and Poverty



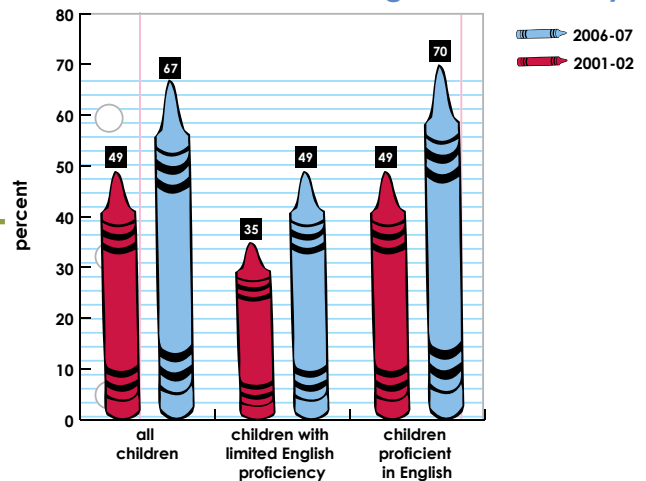
While students from low-income households continue to lag behind their middle- and high-income peers, school readiness among children in poverty has nevertheless improved.

In the last five years, the readiness gap between children from low-income and high-income households has shrunk from 18 percentage points to 15 points.

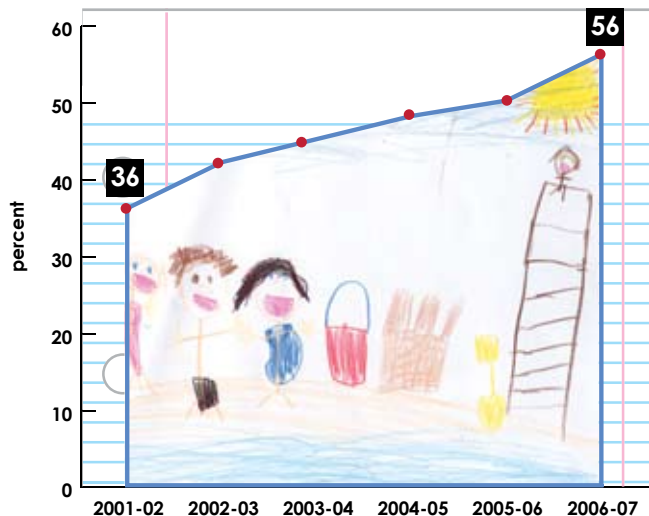
While children learning English have made substantial readiness gains, they still lag behind their native-speaking classmates.

In fact, the readiness gap between children learning English and children proficient in English has widened considerably. Since 2001-02, the gap has widened from 14 percentage points to 21.

## School Readiness and English Proficiency



## School Readiness: Language & Literacy



Readiness in language and literacy is especially important, for early literacy is one of the best predictors of school success.

The number of children rated fully ready for kindergarten in language and literacy has jumped 20 percentage points since 2001-02—from 36 to 56 percent.



**Nancy S. Grasmick**  
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