



Maryland Classroom

A Publication from The Maryland State Department of Education

The Case for Early Childhood Education

For years, early childhood education attracted little attention from the public and policymakers alike — even as remediation and accountability increasingly resonated with both. Fortunately, neurological studies showing that newborns are biologically primed for learning and new research documenting the long-term benefits of early care and education ultimately made the case for high-quality early childhood programs hard to ignore.

with a fixed intellectual capacity, neurological studies indicate that early experiences have a dramatic and specific impact on subsequent

development — not merely influencing the *general direction* of cognitive development, but actually affecting how the intricate circuitry of the brain is wired. In fact, it is in the very first year of life that children acquire the phonemic elements that evolve into language and during the first three years that the majority of brain synapses is produced. By age 2, an infant's brain has twice as

— Sharon Kagan & Nancy Cohen, *Not By Chance: Creating an Early Care and Education System for America's Children*

Science Will Out

Soundly refuting long-held assumptions that children are born



"Learning begins long before formal schooling does, and a failure to engage children in appropriate learning activities early in life can very well diminish their future potential," says Dr. Grasmick.

many synapses as an adult's; those activated often by repeated early experiences will likely be permanent, and those used less frequently, eliminated. Moreover, the brain's greatest capacity to change and compensate occurs during the first three years of life. In short, brain development is much more vulnerable to environmental influences than formerly suspected, especially in the earliest years.

The Payoff

It's not surprising, then, that studies show high-quality early education programs have a statistically significant effect on skill development and scholastic success. Researchers from UCLA, Yale, the University of Colorado, and the University of North Carolina have been following more than 800 preschoolers since 1993. Now in the second grade, the children who attended high-quality child care centers continue to score higher on cognitive and social skill measures. Additionally, researchers found that children traditionally at risk of academic failure are more sensitive both to the negative effects of poor-quality child care and to the positive effects of high-quality care.

What is marginally more surprising, perhaps, is newer evidence pointing to the *long-term* effects of early education. The Carolina Abecedarian Project, a carefully controlled study released in February, shows that its early education participants, now 21 years old, are *still* reaping the program's benefits. Sixteen years later, participants who received full-time educational intervention (from infancy through

(See "Early Education" on page 4)

SUPERINTENDENT'S MESSAGE



An Ounce of Prevention

By design, early care and education occupies just the periphery of public education's purview. Maryland doesn't guarantee children a free and appropriate education until age 5. So why dedicate this edition of *Maryland Classroom* to early childhood education? Why tackle a topic over which public schools have limited control? Because, more than we ever thought possible, the quality of a child's experiences *before school* determines the quality of his or her *school* experiences. Because everyone working in public schools has a vested interest in what happens to children *before* they become students.

The importance of early education was first recognized nearly a decade ago, when the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching surveyed more than 7,000 kindergarten teachers, who reported that 35% of their students enter school unprepared to learn. Nine years later, Maryland's early educators tell me these numbers *aren't* inflated. Kindergarten teachers across the state say that many of their children lack the skills required to meet our kindergarten curricular expectations, and that many students don't fully benefit from rigorous

instructional programs because foundational linguistic, cognitive, and early literacy skills aren't cultivated before children reach their classrooms.

We've discovered a lot about the science of learning in recent years. We know that future capacity to learn is most plastic in the first years of life. We know that early education can prevent and reverse learning difficulties more efficiently and effectively than remediation. So we know, too, that promoting school readiness among Maryland's preschool population demands that we continue to reevaluate and revamp some of our most fundamental practices.

There is — quite obviously — an imperative need to make a public investment in early childhood education; to resolve access and quality disparities between public and non-public early care and education programs; and to take on this challenge in close partnership with the full spectrum of early childhood providers.

Children are learners — prolific learners — long before they enter school. If we fail to grasp the implications of this, we risk doing irreparable harm to children whose real potential we may never know.

Nancy S. Grasmick
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State Superintendent of Schools

Inside the Classroom...

- ✓ Early Childhood Education Initiatives
- ✓ The Cost of Early Care and Education

Who's Minding the Children?

Judith P. Hoyer Care & Education Centers

Senate Bill 793, passed by the General Assembly this session, provides \$4 million in FY 2001 funds to expand school-based or -linked early care and education centers focused on student readiness. The centers will not only provide young children full-day educational programs but will provide their families the support they need to help children enter school ready to learn. Established through grants to local school systems, "Judith Centers" will bring together:

- public prekindergarten and kindergarten,
- child care centers and family day care homes,
- Head Start,
- family literacy programs (including special services for ESOL children),
- local Infants and Toddlers programs,
- Healthy Family sites,
- parenting education,
- early childhood programs affiliated with colleges and universities,
- child care resource and referral agencies, and
- a variety of homevisiting, community health, and family support services.

Legislators appropriated an additional \$3 million to ensure quality in the programs offered through the centers. All center-based prekindergarten, kindergarten, and child care programs will have to meet voluntary state accreditation standards in teacher training, curriculum, instruction, and parent involvement. (Grant money may be used to help providers achieve accreditation and to reward them once they do.)

To help legislators judge the centers' effectiveness and guide future funding for this and other early childhood initiatives, MSDE will work with local school systems to assess and document children's skills upon entrance into kindergarten using established social, linguistic, cognitive, and physical performance indicators.

The Prototype: Prince George's County

The early care and education centers provided for under SB 793 will be modeled after the Judith P. Hoyer Center in Prince George's County. Named for the early childhood educa-


tor and center founder, the campus houses preK-3 classes, Head Start, the Even Start Family Literacy Program, a licensed child care center, before and after care for elementary-aged children, and a support center for families with children, birth-age 3.

Because the University of Maryland has offices on site and sponsors an internship program for its students, the center doubles as a Professional Development School. The Preschool Assessment Team evaluates children whose families are concerned about potential developmental delays, and the Governor's Well Mobile — providing preventive care and referral services — visits the campus once a week.

Of particular help to the Adelphi community — 80% of whom speak a language other than English in the home — are the International Student Guidance Office, which registers all of the county's international and language-minority students, and the ESOL Language-Minority Program, which provides services to all limited English proficient students, grades K-12.

"It's not one-stop shopping," says Dottie Giersch, Prince George's County Director of Student Support Programs. "It's collaborated services, case management, and a sharing of resources, both human and financial, for the betterment of children."

While Ms. Giersch admits that the first year was difficult — with little interaction between families and staff — by 1996, she says, parents "knew that we were here for them." Children who had completed the center's preK and Head Start programs started excelling in school and serving as classroom leaders. Families began to understand the importance of sending children to school on a regular basis and were more apt to ask questions of teachers and administrators. Parents even suggested courses *they* would be interested in taking. The resulting computer literacy and cultural norm classes — staffed entirely by volunteers — were a big community draw.

Ms. Giersch knows the centers made possible by the FY 2001 funding won't be identical to their prototype, nor does she think they should be. "Beyond the common services required by the legislation, you have to look closely at the needs of the community," she says, "and model your services on what will most benefit children aged 0-5." 

Maryland Model for

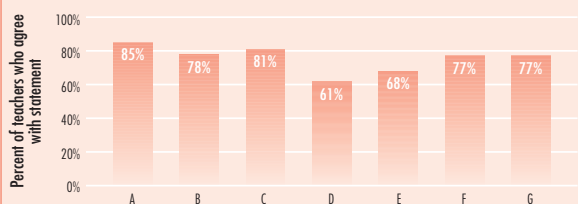
Associated with the Judith Centers' appropriation is \$1.3 million for statewide implementation of the Maryland Model for School Readiness (MMSR), a preK/ kindergarten educational model. MMSR is predicated upon:

- ongoing staff development to improve teacher competence;
- instructional practices that foster student readiness;
- performance-based assessment of students' work;
- communication with families to evaluate and support student learning;
- and program coordination, especially among the primary grades, school-based interven-

tion services, and school improvement teams.

Half of Maryland's 24 local school systems have already implemented the 3-year-old program systemwide, and eight more have done so in selected schools. This school year, 506 public school teachers (working with 13,000 children) will implement MMSR. And a pilot program sponsored by the Maryland Committee for Children expands the model to 50 child care and Head Start providers working with an additional 900 children. Teachers receive continuing professional development credits required for recertification, and eligible early care providers may receive up to four college credits.

MMSR Effect on Instructional Practices



- A. The MMSR makes me a more skilled observer.
- B. ... gives me better knowledge of students' strengths and needs.
- C. ... helps me assess students more effectively.
- D. ... helps me plan individualized instruction.
- E. ... helps me match local curriculum to MD's readiness expectations.
- F. ... helps me identify activities that allow students to meet readiness outcomes.
- G. ... has a positive impact on my teaching and students' learning.

Your Credentials, Pl

Like any system of education, the quality of an early childhood program is dependent upon the quality of its professionals. But with limited federal and virtually no state support for early care and education programs, compensation packages are rarely sufficient to attract and retain qualified staff.

Adding to this overarching quality problem is the fact that early care providers' skills and competencies are inconsistent across the state, educational pathways are not linked, and little incentive exists for providers to pursue professional development beyond regulatory requirements.

To ensure consistent knowledge and competencies among providers and to offer meaningful opportunities for advancement, the Department

Prekindergarten: A State Summary

Number of states that fund preK initiatives.....	42
Number of states that fund universal preK.....	1 (Georgia)
Total state money spent on preK, 1999.....	\$1.68 billion
Number of children served, 1999.....	724,610
Largest preK contribution.....	Texas (\$235 million)
Highest per pupil preK expenditure.....	Connecticut (\$7,800)
Highest per capita preK spending.....	Washington, DC, Georgia
Portion of total preK funding contributed by 5 highest spending states.....	One-half

Source: Children's Defense Fund, *Seeds of Success*, 1999

Early Education Initiatives

School Readiness

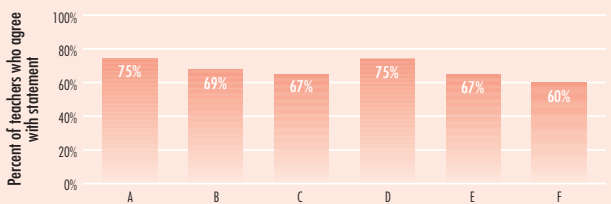
Over the 2-year MMSR training program, participants practice:

- differentiating instruction based on students' work samples and systematic student observation;
- communicating readiness expectations and students' learning profiles with parents so that they can support children's learning at home;
- articulating students' progress across grade levels and between the early care and public school environments; and
- planning early learning programs that link curriculum, instruction, and assessment to support readiness expectations and the Maryland Learning Outcomes.

Sally Cox, a kindergarten teacher at Charles County's Walter J. Mitchell Elementary School, says the MMSR has made her a more objective observer of students and has made planning for instruction much easier. Now that she knows each student's strengths and needs, she says, she can provide learning experiences that are responsive to them.

At the end of last school year, 177 preK and kindergarten teachers trained in the MMSR were surveyed on the model's effectiveness in a number of areas. Some of their responses are graphed below. 🍌

MMSR Effect on Communication & Program Coordination



- A. The MMSR helps me provide a better learner profile to parents.
- B. ...improves documentation for report cards.
- C. ...improves general communication with parents.
- D. ...provides good documentation on students referred for interdisciplinary review.
- E. ...helps me work with students who need instructional intervention.
- F. ...helps me report students' learning to next-grade teachers.

Maryland Committee for Children: A Modest Proposal

Last month, the Maryland Committee for Children proposed a systemic approach to early learning that supports existing high-quality programs and provides incentives for programs striving to improve. The proposal aligns well with student readiness recommendations MSDE forwarded to the State Board of Education last summer in its preK-12 academic intervention plan (see *Every Child Achieving*).

The proposal recommends that Maryland's early care community:

- establish a voluntary program accreditation/validation system with a tiered reimbursement system for qualified providers;
- develop a voluntary child care professional credentialing system (see *Your Credentials, Please*);
- fund other incentives for high-quality programs and providers, such as wage supplements and retention grants linked to educational attainment;
- develop a long-term plan for implementing universal prekindergarten, with before- and after-school programs that

comprise a full day (10-12 hours) of care and education (purchased from private child care and Head Start providers who achieve voluntary accreditation/credentialing and meet state standards);

- consider expanding school readiness programs to serve at-risk 3-year-olds and provide them the same full-day care and education programs;
- implement all-day kindergarten in every local school system with before- and after-school programs that comprise a full day of care and education; and
- establish a commission on financing early care and education that would examine an array of cost and funding issues.

The last recommendation is already bearing fruit. The General Assembly has established the Judith P. Hoyer Blue Ribbon Commission on the Financing of Early Child Care and Education. The Commission, staffed by the Department of Legislative Services, will recommend a coherent funding structure for early childhood services in Maryland. The Governor will appoint its members before July 1. 🍌

Please

of Human Resources' Child Care Administration has requested \$650,000 in FY 2001 funds to build a staff credentialing model and a course work/credential tracking data base. The model would:

- allow for various credentialing levels (entry-level to advanced) that recognize upward and lateral mobility;
- operate from a defined set of professional educational requirements;
- recognize life experience, as well as non-credit and college training;
- provide consistency and accountability in training and for trainers; and
- include long-term incentives (scholarships, training reimbursement, higher salaries, professional recognition) for pursuing ongoing career development. 🍌

A Living Wage

Making, on average, just over \$15,000 a year, child care providers are among the poorest paid employees in the labor force. Center directors top the salary scale with an average annual wage of \$23,000. Home- and center-based child care providers earn less than half as much as comparably educated women in other professions and about one-third as much as comparably educated men. Still, because wages remain early care and education's biggest operating expense — comprising 60% or more of most programs' overhead — they are the first to be slashed when budgets need cutting. 🍌

Every Child Achieving: The Maryland PreK-12 Academic Intervention Initiative

Last October, the State Board of Education adopted *Every Child Achieving*, a comprehensive program of prevention and intervention assistance to begin early in each child's academic career. The last portion of the three-part plan, focusing on student readiness, calls for the state and local school systems (with support from early care and education agencies) to:

- establish joint professional development among child care and Head Start providers, public libraries, and public schools;
- expand professional development activities to address early literacy and the needs of at-risk and disabled students;
- link this training to academic credit;
- identify and develop research-based early care and preschool models that promote school readiness;

- create consistent standards for early care and education programs;
- support and promote a statewide career ladder for early childhood professionals;
- establish a credentialing process to document each provider's competencies and training;
- provide financial incentives to early care and education programs that achieve and maintain program standards, staff competencies, and tiered compensation; and
- provide access to adequate state-funded preK programs for at-risk 4-year-olds.

The full academic intervention plan comes with a \$49 million price tag. Of that, Governor Glendening has appropriated \$7 million for the school readiness initiatives discussed in this issue and another \$12 million in intervention assistance for 7th and 8th graders at risk of academic failure. 🍌

The True Cost of Early Care and Education: What Can We Afford?

As early care and education is a largely market-driven enterprise, children receive the services their parents can afford to provide them, making those children most in need of high-quality programs the least likely to get them.

With full-time early care costing more than in-state tuition at the University of Maryland (center-based care, \$102.70/week; family care, \$93.65/week), affordable early education is an obstacle for

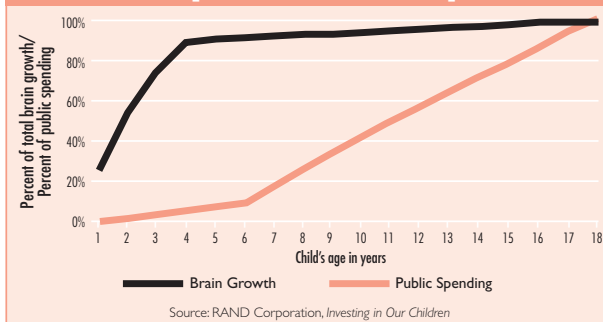
many families, one that looms even larger for low-income households. And with nearly 9% of all Maryland children under age 5 living in poverty, the problem is widespread, indeed. To buy child care for an infant and 4-year-old in Maryland, a two-income family — both salaries at minimum wage — would have to spend 60% of its take-home pay on child care alone. Already, child care accounts for the biggest household expense among Baltimore City families — over housing, food, and taxes.

Maryland Early Care and Education Programs

Program	Characteristics	Number of Programs	Capacity/Enrollment	Source
Child care centers	Full-time programs (10-12 hrs/day) for children, birth-age 6.	1,258	74,588*	a
Family child care homes	Full-time programs (10-12 hrs/day) in provider's home, birth-age 6	12,122	80,816*	a
PreK/preschool programs in public schools	Half-day program (2-3 hrs/day) for at-risk 4-year-olds. Includes the Extended Elementary Education Program (EEEP), programs for children with disabilities, and Head Start programs in public schools.	477	20,013**	b c
Head Start	Comprehensive half-day (2-3 hrs/day) and full-day (6 hrs/day) programs for 3- and 4-year-old low-income preschoolers.	216	9,447**	a
Non-public preschool, including nursery school	Half-day (3-4 hrs/day) and full-day (6 hrs/day) programs for children aged 2-5.	386	41,200**	a b
Number of children in Maryland, birth-age 5				343,000
Percentage of children served				.66%

Sources:
a. Maryland Committee for Children, *Child Care Demographics 1999*
b. Maryland State Department of Education, *1998-99 Factbook*
c. Maryland State Department of Education, *Annual Report of Four-Year-Olds in Public Schools*

Child Development & Public Expenditures



Maryland Classroom

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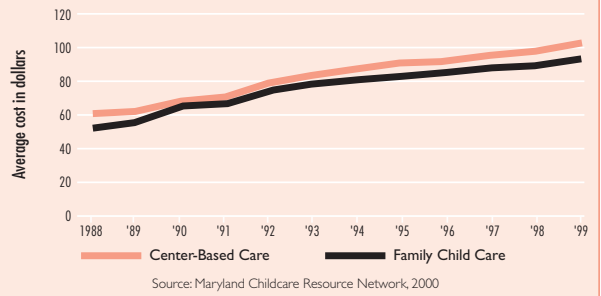
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Maryland Classroom welcomes comments and suggestions from readers. Write to the Editors, Maryland State Department of Education, at the above address, or call 410-767-0475.

Weekly Child Care Costs Full-time Care for Children Aged 2-5



Not surprisingly, then, children from low-income families are the least likely to attend early care and education programs. Just 50% of children living in households with annual incomes of \$10,000 or less regularly attend early care and education, compared with more than 75% of children in households with incomes in excess of \$75,000.

That's why programs for at-risk preschoolers are so very important. More than 11,000 4-year-olds from primarily disadvantaged communities are enrolled this year in the Extended Elementary Education Program (EEEP), a state-fund-

ed preschool program that operates at least 2.5 hours a day, five days a week. The program is based in 277 sites — 28 more than 1998 — which serve 40 children apiece. Each site is staffed by a state-certified early childhood teacher and one full-time assistant. Enrollment has increased 10% over 1997-98 thanks to an additional \$4.4 million available through the School Accountability Fund for Excellence. COMAR regulations published last year require that at-risk students be given preferential admission to the limited-capacity EEEP. 🏠

Improving Student Performance: A New Video from MSDE

By now, your school should have received a copy of *Improving Student Performance*, a new video from MSDE designed to help target staff development, school improvement, and classroom instruction on improving student performance and boosting MSPAP achievement.

The video features interviews with staff from Pimlico Elementary (Baltimore City), Timonium Elementary (Baltimore County), and Cabin John Middle (Montgomery County) — schools improving and maintaining their MSPAP scores. *Improving Student Performance* is accompanied by an instructional guide to help principals plan professional development. If you have any questions, or need additional information, please call MSDE's toll-free hotline at 1.888.246.0016. 🏠

Early Education (from page 1)

age 5) scored higher on cognitive tests than the project's control group (who received no intervention); posted higher reading and math achievement scores; were 2½ times more likely to attend four-year colleges; and were, on average, older when their first child was born.

The doctors and researchers have made a compelling case, and policymakers, it seems, are listening. This legislative session, lawmakers committed \$7 million in FY 2001 funds to expand compre-

hensive early child care and education programs and family support services and to improve the instruction provided the state's 4- and 5-year-olds. Unprecedented collaboration among the public schools and child care providers, agencies, and advocates is supplementing these efforts. This issue of *Maryland Classroom* chronicles current initiatives designed to ensure that all children start school ready to learn. 🏠

“Every dollar invested in the preschool program returned seven dollars that otherwise would have gone for remediation such as welfare, unemployment costs, or other compensatory services.”

— Carnegie Corporation of New York, *Years of Promise: A Comprehensive Learning Strategy for America's Children*, on The Perry Preschool Project