

# MARYLAND FORWARD

## Governor's Forum on Early Childhood Development



February 15, 2011  
Anne Arundel County Board of Education

## Purpose of the Forum

Maryland has experienced steady growth in the number of children entering school ready to learn. The number of children entering school ready to learn increased from 58% in 2004-2005 to 78% in 2009-2010, demonstrating measurable progress toward the Governor's strategic goal of fostering and tracking the development of Maryland's preschool children. This success has been supported through the utilization of the Kindergarten Assessment and the Maryland Model for School Readiness, as well as increases in the number and quality of certified providers and accredited early childhood education programs.



Governor O'Malley convened the Maryland Forward Forum on Early Childhood Development and Education to gauge progress in early childhood care over the past four years and to develop strategies for continued growth and progress. The Forum was designed to elicit feedback and ideas from leaders in the early childhood care and education community, committed stakeholders, business representatives, cabinet secretaries, and child serving agency employees. Recommendations from the participants centered on how the State can continue to improve and enhance our early

childhood care and education system; promote communication among families, providers, programs, and the Council; and support families and their young children through a comprehensive system of services.

Discussion at the Forum was largely focused on building a comprehensive system for early childhood care and education, providing high quality early childhood programs and services, promoting children entering school ready to learn, and supporting healthy families and healthy children. Participants also discussed the availability of resources at the Federal, State, and local levels.

## Key Recommendations

### **Session I: High Quality Early Childhood Programs and Services: Children Entering School Ready to Learn**

Facilitator: Jennifer A. Nizer, Director, Child Development Center, Johns Hopkins Bayview Medical Center

#### **Background**

The Head Start Reauthorization Act of 2007 required each governor to establish or designate a state advisory council on early childhood education and care to assure collaboration and coordination among all early childhood programs in the State through a strategic plan. In response, Governor O'Malley issued an executive order establishing the State Advisory Council on Early Childhood Education and Care in 2008 and appointed Dr. Nancy Grasmick as Chair. The new Council reports to Maryland's Children's Cabinet and is chaired by the State Superintendent of Schools.

With the guidance of the Council, Maryland is strengthening its collaborative interagency approach to early care and education, combining manpower and funding to both maintain our level of support and

improve school readiness through specific targeted strategies. Maryland's approach in today's environment is not to simply hold the line on progress to date, but to further advance school readiness results for future kindergarteners. A strategic plan has been developed to achieve the following three goals:

- **Goal #1:** *All children, birth through age five, will have access to adequate and equitably-funded quality early care and education programs that meet the diverse needs of families.*
- **Goal #2:** *Families of all young children will have access to the resources needed to be their child's first teacher.*
- **Goal #3:** *The Early Childhood Advisory Council will pursue opportunities to more effectively address the health and mental health needs of young children.*

The Council's Plan was utilized to frame the Forum's three sessions and general discussion.

### **Recommendations**

The participants in Session I focused their discussion and recommendations on collaboration and coordination among programs, providers, and families. An overarching agreement by the participants was that coordination and collaboration were directly related to program quality. Their recommendations are as follows:

- 1. Improve collaboration throughout the early care and education system:** The Governor should charge the Early Care and Education Advisory Council with developing and implementing a collaboration plan to be added to the existing Three Year Plan. This plan should include strategies and action steps to facilitate collaboration around shared early care and education issues. The Council should review existing advisory boards and councils for early care and education programs and services and include steps to increase collaboration. They should also create a structure among local entities that parallels the Governor's Advisory Council on Early Care and Education (ECAC) and ensures a continuous flow of information among the ECAC and local providers, families, and stakeholders. This would assist in ensuring seamless transitions for the children and families participating in these programs.
- 2. Increase participation in the *State Early Childhood Program Accreditation Program*:** MSDE, the Child Care Associations, and professional organizations for early care and education providers should collaborate to increase child care program participation in this accreditation program. MSDE should ensure that information, training, and professional development include opportunities and strategies to improve collaboration, coordination and implementation of early childhood programs and services.
- 3. Increase the number of child care providers/homes/and centers who utilize the Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS):** Once completed and available, MSDE should consider requiring that in order to receive child care reimbursement, a child care provider must utilize and meet the requirement of the QRIS. This would provide for high quality providers and programs, to ensure that families and their children receive high quality child care. Providing a variety of incentives for participation in QRIS would encourage participation, increase quality of care, and prepare a well trained workforce for our young children and their families.

### **Session II: Healthy Families: Parents, Supports, Parents as Their Child's First Teacher**

Facilitators: Louise Corwin, Executive Director, Ready at Five

Margaret Williams, Executive Director, Maryland Family Network

## **Background**

Ready at Five and the Maryland Family Network are partners in the early childhood care and education initiatives of the MSDE and local programs statewide. Both are members of the Governor's Early Care and Education Council. Ready at Five, an affiliate and designated program of the Maryland Business Roundtable, is committed to elevating school readiness for all Maryland children. Among the initiatives and partnerships supported by Ready at Five are strategies and activities for family engagement, quality early care and education experiences, and professional development opportunities, including learning parties, the Institute for Early Educators, School Readiness Symposia, and a curriculum for developing cultural and linguistic competencies among early childhood professionals.

Maryland Family Network has a long commitment to the children, families, and early childhood care and education professionals. As the largest Early Head Start grantee in Maryland, the Maryland Family Network funds 7 local partners to provide Early Head Start services to children and their families. The Network also provides funding technical assistance, monitoring, and other quality assurance services to the Early Head Start centers. Additionally, they fund Parent Support Centers that offer a wide variety of services to young parents and their children.

## **Recommendations**

The participants in Session II focused their discussion and recommendations on expanding the availability of home visiting programs and services, ensuring that Maryland has a comprehensive coordinated system of developmentally based early care and education services, the State child care subsidy, and the Maryland Infants and Toddlers Program, specifically the Extended Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) Option. Their recommendations were as follows:



- 1. Expand Home Visiting Programs:** Evidence-based home visiting programs have been proven to positively impact the health, well being, and success in school of the children who participate in these programs. Using the Evidence Based Home Visiting grant awarded to Maryland, build opportunities to provide universal evidence based home visiting programs to Maryland's young children and their families.
- 2. Ensure that Maryland has a comprehensive coordinated system of developmentally based early care and education services:** Maryland has many services and programs for young children and their families. Work to ensure that these services and programs are coordinated, comprehensive, and meet the developmental needs (economic, cultural, educational, and social/emotional) of our diverse population of young children and their families. Utilize the media, state agencies, professional organizations and associations to publicize the variety of programs and services available and to assist in parents locating the programs and services most appropriate for their children and families.
- 3. Support an Early Childhood Care and Education Comprehensive System of Care:** An infrastructure of vital early childhood subsidies and supports- including the Child Care Subsidy Program, Child Care Resource Centers, and Family Support Centers- makes it possible for parents to work and for their young children to arrive at Kindergarten ready to succeed. These programs are critical to economic recovery and school readiness and a loss to any one program is

detrimental to each of the others. Full funding for each of these resources should be restored as soon as the budget can possibly support it.

4. **State Child Care Subsidy Program:** Use political will to educate the public, policy makers, and funders on the need for the Child Care Subsidy to be kept safe through the budget process. This subsidy often makes the difference between a family's ability to afford high quality child care and a lesser child care experience. We know from the school readiness data and nearly 10 years worth of data analysis that the quality of a child's prior care experience is a strong indicator of school readiness in Kindergarten and correlates to school success. There should be no reductions to this program.
5. **Continue the Extended IFSP (Individualized Family Service Plan) Option:** This model focuses on coordinating services for children birth to five and their families. Maryland received a one-time federal grant to implement this option and is the only state to have done this. This option allows parents the choice for their child to remain with the Infants and Toddlers (I&T) program past the age of three. It also provides additional opportunities for developmentally-appropriate services to be provided in the child's natural environment, as well as additional time for transition between the I&T program and the school. There is no additional federal funding available at this time, and funding will be needed to continue this service. The State should seek additional federal funding.

### **Session III: Healthy Children: Health, Mental Health, Oral Health**

Facilitators: Albert Zachik, M.D., Director, Office of Child and Adolescent Services, Mental Hygiene Administration, DHMH; Mary LaCasse, Acting Chief, Early Childhood and Home Visiting Programs, Center For Maternal and Child Health, DHMH

#### **Background**

Although the indicators around health continue to require attention, during the O'Malley Administration's first term, measurable improvement has been noted in the health arena. Fewer women are smoking during pregnancy, and more women are initiating breastfeeding in the early postpartum period. Teen births, as well as child and adolescent death rates, continue to decline. More children are being screened for lead exposure and fewer are being found with elevated blood lead levels. There are also fewer uninsured children and more young children that are being fully immunized.

#### **Recommendations**

The participants in Session III focused their discussion and recommendations around the three specific health-related issues of health, mental health, and oral health. Their recommendations are as follows:

1. **Improve the Early Identification System:** Maryland has an early identification system for children from birth to five. This system needs improvement to ensure that children are not viewed in isolation, but rather as part of a family. The system must adopt a holistic approach to identifying the needs of young children, while also identifying and addressing the family's needs. Factors such as maternal depression, substance abuse, mental health issues, disability, and cultural and linguistic differences all impact the child as part of the family. As such, agencies that serve children and their families must share information and resources to ensure that the early identification system includes the child **and** the family.
2. **Improve Access to Health and Mental Health Services for Young Children and their Families:** Families in rural and urban settings are often limited in their access to these services because of a lack of affordable providers in their communities. Maryland should incentivize

providers through grants, reimbursement rates, and loans to be Medicaid providers. Regulations governing access, participation in, and reimbursement of these services should be streamlined. Programs such as CHADIS could be accessed as a linkage among programs, providers, and the families they serve.

- 3. Evaluation and Outcomes Measures:** Encourage evaluation and coordination among agencies and providers to sustain and expand current data systems. Use data collection and analysis of results to identify effective and efficient program outcomes, determine what works, and drive funding and programmatic decisions.

## Conclusion



Governor Martin O'Malley's theme for the second term is *Maryland Forward*, a constant reminder of the Governor's commitment to advance the quality of life and life chances of all Maryland residents. The purpose of the Maryland Forward Forum on Early Childhood Development was to gauge progress in early childhood care over the past four years and to develop strategies for continued growth and progress. The event was a great success in analyzing the current challenges in early childhood development, in generating thoughtful recommendations, and in devising solutions for how the State should proceed.

The ideas generated at the forum will help the State tremendously in its approach to early childhood development policy. In fact, Governor O'Malley's administration has already achieved or is planning to undertake the following:

- **During the O'Malley Administration, the percentage of children entering school ready to learn has increased from 67% in 2006 to 78% in 2009.** For the 2009-2010 school year, 78% of kindergarten children were evaluated by their teachers as 'fully ready.' This represents a 5% increase over the previous school year; and a 30% increase since the 2001-2002 school year.
- **A Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) is in development for implementation by early childhood care and education providers and programs.** Maryland has focused attention on quality initiatives that support and recognize child care professionals and programs with the goal of improving early care and education outcomes for young children in our state. Among those initiatives are the Maryland Child Care Credential Program, Tiered Reimbursement for Child Care Subsidy, the MSDE Accreditation Project, the Program Administrator Scale, the MSDE Approved Curriculum Project, and the Maryland Model for School Readiness training. In an effort to bring these initiatives into one comprehensive quality improvement system and provide clear information to parents and the public, a Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) is being developed by the Governor's Early Child Care Advisory Council in cooperation with MSDE's Division of Early Childhood Development.
- **During his first term, Governor O'Malley raised reimbursement rates for the Child Care Subsidy Program twice: in October of 2007 and January of 2010.** At a time when many states

were unable to sustain or raise existing rates, the Governor's actions to raise reimbursement rates were applauded by the families as well as child care providers.

- **In the FY 2009 budget, the Governor included a \$7.6 million increase to the Maryland Infants and Toddlers Program (legislature cut this amount to \$4.6 million).** The Maryland Infants and Toddlers Program assists families of children with special needs during the first three years of the child's developmental journey. As families and children leave the early intervention system, the focus on the child's strengths and inclusion in community activities continues. Preschool special education services (and other community services for young children) assist preschoolers with special needs to develop skills that will be the foundation for school success.
- **In 2009, Maryland applied for and received a federal grant from the U.S. Department of Education to implement an Extended Option for eligible families and children.** This option affords families of eligible children the choice to remain on an IFSP after age three. Maryland is the only state implementing a comprehensive birth through five system of services that includes the family choice component. For this program, Maryland has been recognized by the U.S. Department of Education as a national exemplar.
- **Maryland applied for and received an Evidence Based Home Visiting Grant for over \$1,000,000, \$997,000 from HHS and an additional \$39,071 from the National Governor's Association.** In 2010, Governor O'Malley appointed the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DHMH), on behalf of the Children's Cabinet, to apply for the Evidence Based Home Visiting grant from the federal Health and Human Services. The grant was received and is being used to support infrastructure and increase the availability of Evidence Based Home Visiting programs in at risk communities. DHMH and the Children's Cabinet have completed a needs assessment and are currently meeting with prospective communities who may be eligible for funding from this grant.
- **In 2010, through the implementation of the Early Childhood Mental Health (ECMH) Consultation Model, child care providers of over 700 children ages birth through five, received consultation services.** Of those 700 plus children, 81% remained in their current early childhood program, while only 3% were expelled. The purpose of this program is to improve the capacity of early care and education program staff to address mental health and behavioral problems in children aged birth through five. The goal is to improve the child's behavior and maintain the child in his or her early childhood care and education program. A national survey of state subsidized preschool programs yielded an expulsion rate of 6 per 1,000 children. Since implementation of the ECMH model, Maryland's rate of expulsion is 1.2 per 1,000.
- **At the end of 2010, Maryland residents in every jurisdiction had access to a safety net or school linked dental clinic.** The general Assembly approved an appropriation of \$14,000,000 to increase Medicaid dental rates and annually to enhance the dental public health infrastructure and increase access to dental health services for low income children.