



The Judith P. Hoyer Early Care and Education Enhancement Program Report School Year 2020-2021

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CONTENTS

Introduction	4
Principle Number One: Judy Center Early Learning Hubs	6
Judy Center Standards	7
Community Partnerships	8
Population Served	10
Measuring Success	11
Judy Center Impact	13
Challenges	17
Next Steps	18
Principle Number Two: Kindergarten Assessment	19
Ready for Kindergarten (R4K) System	19
Kindergarten Readiness Assessment (KRA) Results	20
Principle Number Three: Program Accreditation and Prekindergarten Expansion	21
Prekindergarten Expansion	21
High Quality Prekindergarten Program	22
Appendix A: FY 2021 Program Budget	24
Appendix B: Acronym Glossary	29

The information contained in this annual report reflects the fiscal year period spanning July 1, 2020 to June 30, 2021.

INTRODUCTION

As the early education coordinator for Prince George's County Public Schools, Judith P. Hoyer lamented the gaps in available services for low-income families. In the 1990s, she created a central location in Adelphi, Maryland for early childhood services, thus fostering cooperation of governmental and private agencies around the needs of local families with young children. After an untimely death in 1997, her husband, Congressman Steny Hoyer (D-MD), in partnership with then Governor Parris N. Glendening, led a successful movement to bring her model of collaboration to other communities in Maryland. The Maryland State Legislature enacted the Judith P. Hoyer Early Child Care and Education Enhancement Program in May of 2000 to address three important principles in Maryland's early childhood care and education programs:

1. **Judy Centers** - The need for greater coordination among the providers of early childhood education and support services was essential in focusing the services and resources of the various programs and providers on families with high needs in designated Title I school zones. This type of collaboration provides a greater opportunity for positive outcomes for children and greater school readiness.
2. **Kindergarten Readiness Assessment (KRA)** - The need for a uniform assessment of success in early childhood education. This allows the State to better measure progress with some definition of success, and a means to assess that success.
3. **Program Accreditation and Preschool for All** - The need to ensure that all preschool age children receive quality care and education by promoting professional development for the early education workforce and accreditation for childcare providers.

The preamble of the legislation remains today a concise and relevant statement on the national consensus around early childhood care and education:

- "WHEREAS, recent brain research confirms that the most rapid brain growth occurs in the first three years of life; and
- WHEREAS, a stimulating environment is essential to brain development and has a major impact on a child's language and cognitive and emotional development; and
- WHEREAS, the overwhelming evidence suggests that it is best to capitalize on the brain's elasticity before age five, the age at which public education is guaranteed; and
- WHEREAS, high-quality early care and education programs make a significant contribution to the development of skills required by young children to succeed in school; and

- WHEREAS, not all Maryland children have access to quality early care and education programs...”

Two decades after that landmark legislation was passed, these three principles continue to be all-important in Maryland’s early childhood education system.

In fact, in 2011, the grant funding awarded to the state under the Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge (RTT-ELC) supported the expansion of Judy Center Early Learning Hubs and a new system for assessing school readiness. Maryland developed and implemented Ready for Kindergarten (R4K) – Maryland’s Early Childhood Comprehensive Assessment System. R4K aligns with the Maryland College and Career Readiness standards for PreK-12 and provides a single coordinated system for recognizing the needs and measuring the learning progress of all children from thirty-six to seventy-two months.

This report provides a current review of accomplishments and challenges that took place during State Fiscal Year (FY) 2021.

PRINCLIPLE NUMBER ONE JUDY CENTER EARLY LEARNING HUBS (JUDY CENTERS)

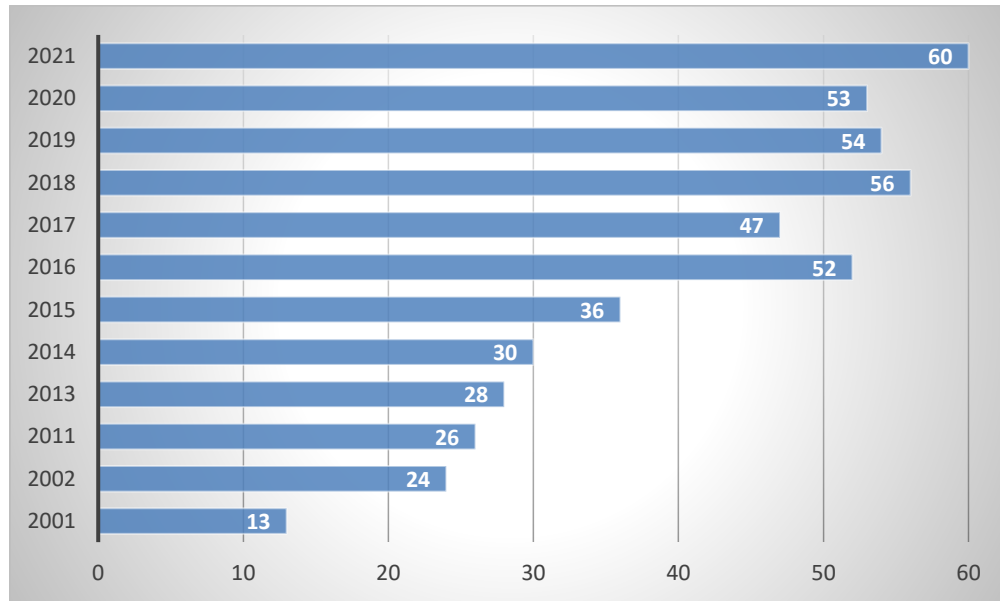
HISTORY

The first Judith P. Hoyer Family Learning Center, which began operations in Prince George's County, served as the model for the rest of the state. Dedicated to the needs of low-income families in the local elementary school catchment area, this first Judy Center (although not named as such until after Ms. Hoyer's death) quickly demonstrated the true value of such coordination.

Maryland's legislation took Judy Hoyer's model and financed an expansion across the state, offering comprehensive, integrated, full-day and full-year early care and education services. The year 2001, the first year of operation, saw the establishment of thirteen Judy Centers in Allegany, Calvert, Caroline, Charles, Dorchester, Frederick, Kent, Montgomery, Prince George's, Queen Anne's, St. Mary's and Washington counties, and Baltimore City. The following year, eleven more centers were funded in Baltimore, Carroll, Cecil, Charles, Garrett, Howard, Montgomery, Talbot, Wicomico and Worcester counties, and Baltimore City. The number of locations remained unchanged until 2011 when the Judy Center in Anne Arundel County and a third one in Baltimore City opened. In FY13, the RTT-ELC Grant also provided funding for a second Judy Center in Prince George's County and a fourth site in Baltimore City. FY14 resulted in the growth of more Judy Centers through a diversity of funding streams. First, a Judy Center in Harford County opened with state funding. Secondly, through a collaboration of the Baltimore Community Foundation, Baltimore City Public Schools and the MSDE, the first Judy Center funded by a public-private partnership in Baltimore City was established.

In FY14, the passage of the Maryland Prekindergarten Expansion Act of 2014 (Senate Bill 332) ensured the addition of three more Judy Centers in FY15 – an additional one in both Garrett and Caroline counties and a first-time Judy Center in Somerset County. This expansion completed the State's mission to have at least one Judy Center in all twenty-four jurisdictions. In FY 15, the public-private partnership with the Baltimore Community Foundation resulted in two more Judy Centers in Baltimore City. Since then, the Baltimore Community Foundation has helped to fund six additional Judy Centers in Baltimore.

Chart 1: Establishment of Judy Centers from 2001-2021.



JUDY CENTER STANDARDS

All Judy Centers are required to meet the following twelve (12) Component Standards deemed essential to the positive impact on children's school readiness.

1. Full Day/Full Year Services and Programming: Judy Centers collaborate with high quality early education agencies to ensure families receive care and services year-round.
2. Meals: Children and families are provided meals not only during the school day but during school breaks, weekends, and after school hours.
3. Case Management: Case management is a confidential process at the Judy Center that includes referrals to agencies, intakes with families, needs assessments, developmental screenings, follow up, and active case review.
4. Integration of Early Education Services: There are curriculum enhancement activities including transition strategies and activities for children and families across all programs, including prekindergarten, kindergarten, Head Start, and child care, as well as children entering formal programs for the first time.
5. Family Engagement: The Judy Center models a multigenerational approach in regard to family engagement centering on the family's ability to participate in and support their child's learning. This approach follows Maryland's Early Childhood Family Engagement Framework.

6. Early Identification and intervention: All children ages birth through five years, regardless of abilities, have access to all programs and services in least restrictive environments. There is an outreach plan in place to identify all children prenatal through five years of age who live in the designated Judy Center school zones. Once identified, the Judy Center implements many different levels of engagement to work with the family to meet their needs and ensure the child will enter school ready to learn.

7. Children with Disabilities: Children with disabilities and their families are fully included in all the services as part of the Individualized Education Program (IEP) and Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP), including family support and involvement, service coordination, full-day/full-year services, and prekindergarten.

8. Health Related Services: Judy Centers ensure that children are referred for dental, vision, and hearing screenings when appropriate; mental health assessments and referrals when appropriate; and physical growth and nutritional assessments, including referrals to the Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) and local health departments if warranted. Additionally, Judy Centers work to ensure that all families have access to health care insurance.

9. Professional Development: Professional development is offered to address needs and trends in the community with a current focus on early literacy and early math and it is offered to all early care providers.

10. Adult Education and Career Services: Adult family members are encouraged to pursue their own education. Judy Centers collaborate with local colleges and universities for a continuum of higher education opportunities including career planning, coursework, enrollment in trade programs, or transition plans for those entering or returning to college.

11. Accreditation: All early care and education programs for children in the Judy Center Partnerships must be accredited or pursuing accreditation. The Judy Center supports family providers, child care centers, and Head Starts to obtain/maintain accreditation and offer high quality care and education programs.

12. Partnerships: The Judy Center Partnership is actively engaged and is frequently involved in the school readiness mission of the Judy Center. As a recognizable member of the communities, they serve as well as a leader in early childhood development, Judy Centers are represented on the State and Local Early Childhood Advisory Councils and support the missions of its partners by participating in their work in the community.

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

Judy Centers are primarily located in Title I schools and support children birth through kindergarten and their families in the catchment area. Most of the work of the Judy Centers is accomplished through its participating partnerships. The partnerships reflect Judy Hoyer's vision of how professionals collaborate to deliver a wide spectrum of early childhood education programs and family support services for children and families.

Judy Centers are required to include the following in their partnership:

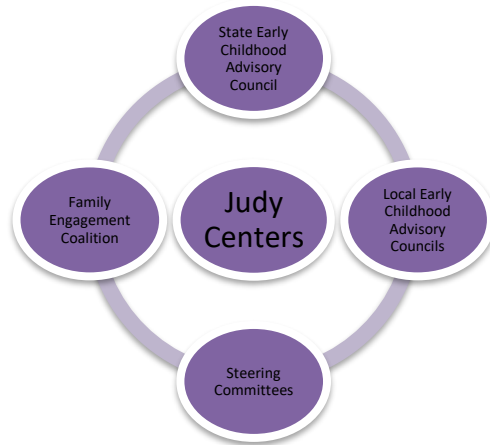
- All public prekindergarten programs in the school catchment area
- All kindergarten programs at the school
- Early Intervention and preschool special education programs in the school catchment area
- All Head Start/Early Head Start programs in the school catchment area
- A minimum of three licensed/registered MD EXCELS levels 4 or 5 child care providers, including faith-based child care, family child care, and center-based child care programs - if there are at least three providers in the school catchment area or providers that are serving catchment area children
- A Family Support Center (FSC) - if there is a FSC in the school catchment area

The Judy Center must include a minimum of five of the following participating partners and services:

- Local businesses
- Regional child care resource centers
- Community health programs
- Local public libraries
- An Institute of Higher Education/adult education program
- Family literacy programs
- Early childhood programs associated with institutions of higher education
- Local colleges and universities for higher education and job training programs
- Healthy Families and/or other home visiting programs (Healthy Start, PAT, HIPPPY, Nurse Family Partnership)

The number of participating partners varies across Judy Centers depending upon population density and the number of agencies, organizations, and businesses available in the area. Partnerships may include thirty or more agencies and organizations and with no set limit for participation per organization, it is not unusual to see large numbers of participants representing different departments within an organization involved with Judy Centers. Partnership meetings occur frequently to accomplish the work as quickly and as effectively as possible. Each partner plays a key role in decision-making and goal setting. Figure 1 below illustrates how the Judy Centers are an integral piece to Maryland's early childhood system and help to connect all major early childhood stakeholders at the state and local levels.

Figure 1: Judy Center Early Learning Hubs collaborate at all levels of the community and government.



POPULATION SERVED

In FY 21, there were 60 Judy Center Early Learning Hubs that served 13,827 children (ranging in age from birth through kindergarten) across Maryland. The chart below describes the demographic data of the families served by the Judy Centers.

Chart 2: Demographic data of the families and children served by the Judy Center.

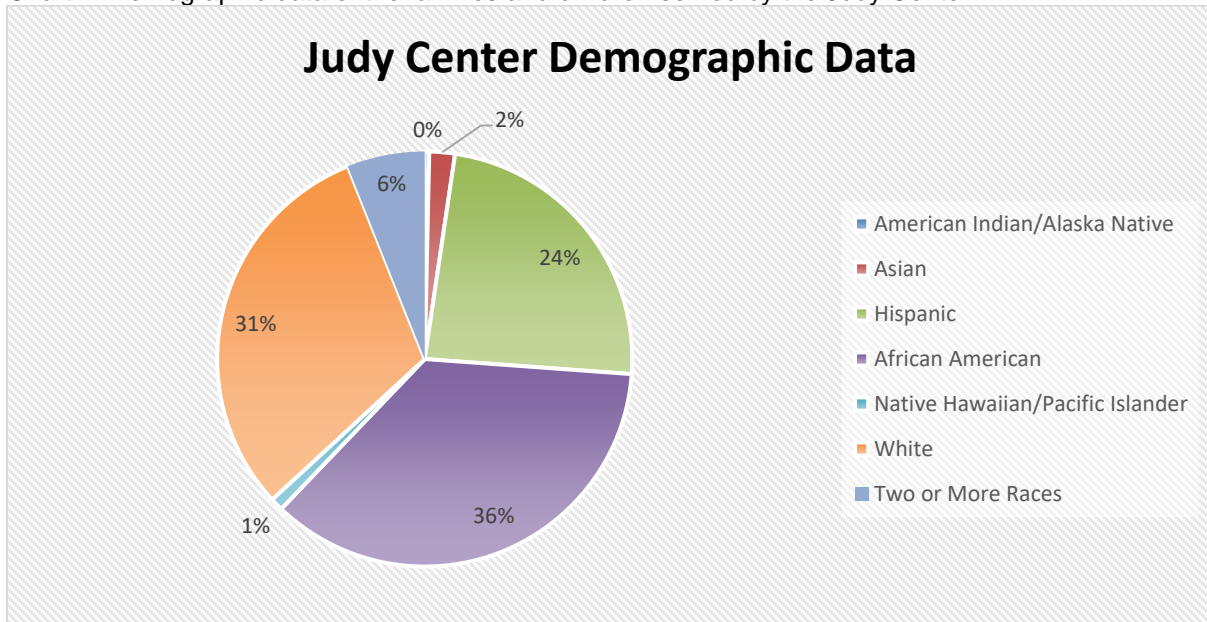
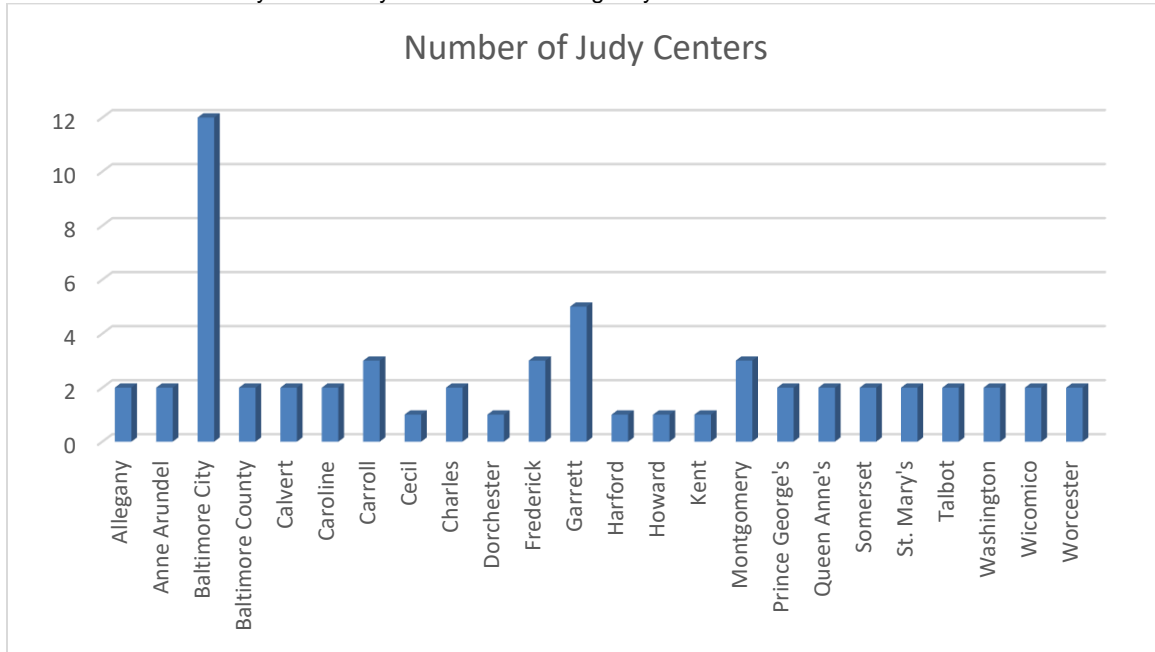


Chart 3: Number of Judy Centers by Local Education Agency



MEASURING SUCCESS

In Fall 2014, Maryland introduced R4K, Maryland’s Early Childhood Comprehensive Assessment System to align with the State’s more rigorous Maryland College and Career-Ready Standards (MCCRS). R4K is a developmentally appropriate assessment system for young children that builds upon the success of the Maryland Model for School Readiness (MMSR) which was the statewide assessment tool in use from 2001 to 2013. Fall 2019 was the sixth year the new readiness assessment component was used and it is referred to as the KRA. An overview of all Judy Centers’ data is compiled each year.

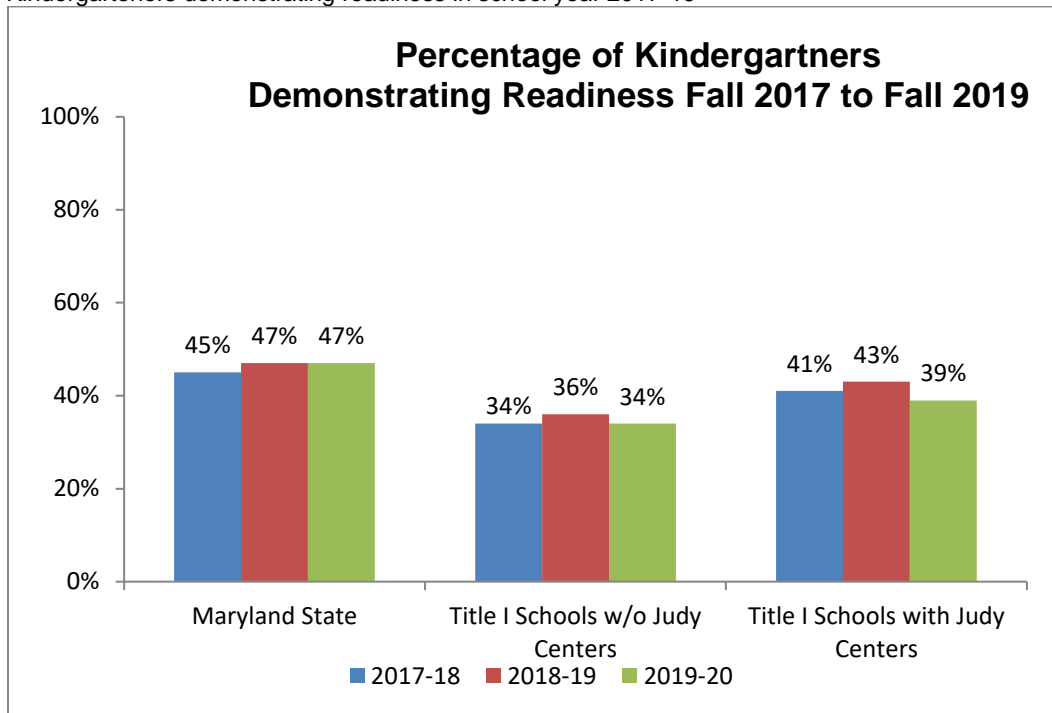
Fall 2014 KRA data demonstrated impressive results when comparing the school readiness results of entering kindergartners who had at least one year of Judy Center experience with their kindergarten peers who did not have the advantage of the Judy Center experience. Fall 2014 data showed that 41% of children with Judy Center experience prior to entering kindergarten were Demonstrating Readiness for school compared to 36% of the children who entered kindergarten at Judy Center schools without prior experience. Forty-seven percent of the state’s kindergartners were Demonstrating Readiness. Interestingly, in Fall 2015, the percentage of children demonstrating readiness for kindergarten who had prior Judy Center experience slightly decreased as did the percentage of Maryland’s kindergartners at large while the percentage of children demonstrating readiness who did not have Judy Center experience increased. Forty percent of both Judy Center groups were Demonstrating Readiness while 45% of the state’s kindergartners were Demonstrating Readiness. However, fall 2016 and 2017 showed impressive results again as the data illustrates

that children with Judy Center experience made gains in school readiness scores, increasing from 42% to 45% Demonstrating Readiness. Maryland kindergartners overall also made gains moving from 41% in 2016 to 45% in 2017, while children without Judy Center experience demonstrated 33% in 2016 and 34% in 2017. Gains were demonstrated again in the fall of 2018 when 49% of children with Judy Center experience were ready for kindergarten compared to only 34% of children without Judy Center experience.

Statewide, 47% of children were ready for kindergarten in the fall of 2019. In Judy Center schools the percent of children demonstrating readiness decreased by 4 percentage points (to 45%), while the kindergarten readiness without Judy Center experience decreased by 5 percentage points (to 29%). This in line with the overall 4 percentage point decrease in readiness for students in Title I schools with Judy Centers from fall 2018 to fall 2019.

In school year 2020-21, due to the Covid pandemic creating virtual learning for students, the KRA could not be administered virtually and there is no data for this year.

Chart 4: Kindergarteners demonstrating readiness in school year 2017-19



Kindergarteners demonstrating readiness in school year 2017-19 comparing Maryland State kindergartners, kindergartners in Title I schools without a Judy Center, and kindergartners in Title 1 schools with a Judy Center. Data is weighted due to administering of KRA as sampling in some schools.

JUDY CENTER IMPACT

Statistics are not the only way to measure outcomes. Family engagement and support is at the heart of the Judy Center mission. When programs and families work in partnership together, the impact of the Judy Centers is immeasurable. Below are a few examples from select Judy Centers.

BALTIMORE CITY EUTAW MARSHBURN

The Eutaw Marshburn Judy Center serves approximately 300 families in the 21217 West Baltimore community. During the pandemic, beginning immediately in March 2020, the Eutaw Marshburn Judy Center provided masks, hand sanitizer, and disinfectant wipes to families in need. The support continued throughout the year by offering online parent workshops and learning opportunities for toddlers and Pre-K/K students. These included interactive story times, playgroups, movement classes, cooking classes and summer enrichment for incoming prekindergarten and kindergarten students. The Judy Center hosted grab and go events that allowed families to obtain diapers, wipes, and other essential items such as cleaning supplies and laundry detergent. Food deliveries were made to families unable to attend grab and go lunches.

As restrictions lessened due to the decline in COVID-19 cases, the Eutaw Marshburn Judy Center began hosting socially distanced playgroups for children 0-3, on the front lawn of the school. These weekly events became a highlight for families, giving everyone a chance to be social and resume a sense of normalcy, even if just for an hour or two. In addition to listening to a read aloud, watching a puppet show, and participating in gross motor activities for toddlers, families were provided an opportunity to speak with the mental health consultant in regard to any concerns.

Parent workshops resumed and many included information for stress management and ways to become an entrepreneur. At the beginning of the school year, a goal setting workshop was offered to help guide next steps through this year. Fatherhood workshops continued to help male caregivers learn how to be involved in their child's growth and education and most importantly, Judy Center staff remained a constant in the lives of all families.

CALVERT COUNTY

The 2020-21 school year was a time of change and growth for the Calvert County Judy Center with a new Judy Center serving Calvert Elementary School. This new Judy Center site allowed the opportunity to collaborate with the Maryland Diaper Bank. In addition, the Judy Center was able to revamp Judy Center services in the virtual environment. The work started with a question; how can we continue to serve families while taking into consideration the factors of social distancing and no large gatherings? Judy Center staff reached out to families to find out what their needs were and to other Judy Centers statewide for insight into their successes.

The Patuxent Appeal Campus (PAC) Judy Center began delivering activity packets for parents of children not enrolled in school. Feedback from the families was very positive. Judy Center staff delivered 1,443 at home activity packets to 30 families and 37 kids ages two to four years old from September through mid-June.

To address the need for parent workshops, the Judy Center collaborated with University of Maryland Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Education (SNAP ED) educators for “*Cooking with Kara*” virtual cooking demonstrations where parents learned to cook healthy dishes like Sweet Potato Black Bean Chili, Garden Stir Fry, and Chicken and Kale Casserole. Parents who participated were given a bag of ingredients and tuned in to cook by video.

The Judy Center began a collaboration with the Maryland Diaper Bank to open the Calvert Diaper Bank. The first delivery of diapers arrived in November 2020. The diaper bank has now served 84 families. The Judy Center Early Learning Hub at Calvert Elementary began serving the Calvert Elementary school community in March 2021 with bi-weekly activity kits which include a book, craft, food items, and an activity plan for the book. The Calvert staff have delivered a total of 432 packets since March and held outside playgroups with the Calvert Library and the Jefferson Patterson Park this summer.

Calvert Judy Centers are excited to move forward with new partnerships with the Sheriff’s Department, the Health Department and School Resources in the coming year.

GARRETT COUNTY

The Garrett County Judy Center Early Learning Hub pronounced during the early stages of the pandemic that programming and collaborating would continue with high quality. In addition, the program would support families, teachers, and the community to thrive during this unprecedented time.

With a population of children birth to age five quarantined to their homes, it was decided that family engagement activities would be the forefront of programming. In order to eliminate transportation and transmission barriers, a drop off and pick up system was implemented.

Beep and Greet events were held during the 2020-2021 school year. During these events, school readiness activities were packaged and delivered. These activities were designed to be completed during the day to break up the mundane routine that settled with quarantine. Community partners would provide resources to include in the Beep and Greet bags. The themes for these events included Arts and Crafts, Boo, Thankful, Giving, Snowy Day, Caring, and Meet the Author.

Parent feedback was positive for the Judy Center programming and one parent noted, “During the pandemic, when we were unable to leave our homes, these activities helped provide my children with guided educational activities. I felt they were very beneficial to my child’s learning as I find it difficult to always provide educational activities.”

Another successful component added to programming during the pandemic was Family Engagement Fun Nights. The goal of this addition was to create an evening activity that would bring families together to create memories and learn. Build a Snowman, Family Game Night, and Picnic and Explore were the three themes selected for the Judy Center family engagement nights. Each supply bag included a dinner kit, activity, and books. Not only did families thoroughly enjoy these evenings, it also served as an excellent outreach opportunity since many new families were identified.

“These nights made us all stop what we were doing to make dinner together and do a fun activity as a family” stated parent Kelsey Friend. As the pandemic continued, so did the efforts of the Judy Center. Surveys were distributed frequently to provide an opportunity for families to request assistance in all areas. The surveys provided information for the Judy Center team to create virtual events and supply drops to stay in contact with families. A mother in the program summarized the program additions perfectly when she stated, “The Judy Center events and activities were a way to escape the stresses of day-to-day life during the pandemic. We always looked forward to the activities with so much excitement. They really enhanced our time together as a family and showed our children that learning together as a family is fun.”

PRINCE GEORGE’S COUNTY

Prince George’s Public Schools is pleased to have three Judy Centers in the district serving the Cool Spring Elementary School, Capital Heights at Carmody Hills Elementary School, and Temple Hills at Hillcrest Heights Elementary School communities. The sites are strategically located in the upper, middle, and lower parts of the county in the second largest public school district in Maryland. The newest site in Temple Hills opened in 2021 to serve families living in the attendance area of Hillcrest Heights Elementary School.

All the Prince George’s County Public Schools Judy Centers have made it a priority to address the comprehensive needs of families living in poverty-impacted communities where the Judy Centers are located. An ongoing partnership with Brighter Bite and the Capitol Area Food Bank has allowed the sites at Carmody Hills and Cool Spring Elementary Schools to provide a weekly distribution of food to families. The Carmody Hills Judy Center Early Learning Hub partnered with the Capitol Area Food Bank throughout the 2019-20 year to deliver 2,735 boxes of fresh produce and dry goods food items to serve over 90 families with approximately 415 household members.

The Brighter Bites fresh fruits and vegetables program served families at Cool Spring Elementary School throughout the school year and during the summer months it particularly focused on families in the Judy Center summer program. During the summer program of 2021, over 111 families, received approximately 1,200 boxes of produce food at Cool Spring Elementary School, while educators received lessons to share with students on the produce the families received each week.

A partnership with the University of Maryland Extension-SNAP-ED also educates parents, students, and educators on the importance of making cost saving healthy food choices. All sites also have small pantries to assist families who have emergency needs for food. Families are also referred to partnering agencies in their community to support ongoing needs for food.

The Adelphi Judy Center has partnered with the Greater DC Diaper Bank for the past three years and in 2020-21 distributed over 32,432 diapers to 118 children of families ages birth to four living in the attendance area. The Carmody Hills Judy Center established a partnership with the Maryland Diaper Bank to host a community diaper bank site for families who reside in that community. In the first grant year of the program, the site distributed approximately 1,000 diapers to 32 families of children ages birth to four. A partnership agreement is in process to extend the partnership with the Maryland Diaper Bank to families in the Hillcrest Heights Judy Center community.

TALBOT COUNTY

Since March of 2020, when the first wave of COVID19 hit the eastern shore of Maryland, Talbot County Judy Center staff have worked tirelessly to assist teachers and schools, children and families, and partners and the community at large to deal with all the issues and changes caused by this deadly pandemic. Since child care centers in the State of Maryland closed their doors in March 2020, the first hurdle was to create some type of child care services for the children of essential personnel (ages 6 weeks to 13 years). Unless this issue was resolved, many of the essential personnel at the hospitals, law enforcement officers, correctional facility staff, first responders, and emergency management would be unable to work.

Kelly Griffith E.D.d., Superintendent of Talbot County Public Schools, appointed Mary Adkins, Judy Center Coordinator for Talbot County, to lead the team in addressing this issue. Through incredible community partnerships, the team was able to create free child care services for essential personnel, which were located at the YMCA and Early Head Start, as well as with one of our accredited childcare partners, Critchlow Adkins Children's Centers. The Judy Center and YMCA were able to donate materials for the children, create a system to have free meals and supplies delivered, and developed a website with all enrollment forms allowing families to register online and ensure the health and safety of the children. All of this was developed and in place within one week!

When schools in Talbot County had to change to virtual classes, the Judy Center staff worked with the school system and child care centers to develop hybrid and virtual programs in response to COVID-19. In addition, the Judy Center provided all children enrolled in the prekindergarten 3 program, prekindergarten, and kindergarten program with backpacks and all school supplies. If those students participated in childcare during school closings, the childcare center or family provider also received an identical pack for the child, so they would always have the correct supplies needed during virtual or hybrid classes. Each child received an IPAD and headphones as well.

Since Covid-19 restrictions did not allow families to enter the school buildings, Judy Center staff were unable to provide in person family trainings and parent/child activities. On a weekly basis, during the FY 20-21 school year and during summer school, Judy Center staff visited classrooms to provide extension activities to prekindergarten, kindergarten, and childcare classrooms. Monthly, the Judy Center sent home a book and activities for the child and family to complete at home. An example of a take home activity included the book, "Growing a Rainbow" as well as a flowerpot, dirt, and flower seeds to plant. Families were also given lots of ideas to create learning activities with items that are typically found in a home. In addition, Facebook was used by the Judy Center staff to show short example videos of the activities that families could follow along.

Virtual playgroups were developed to support families as their child's first teacher and to provide birth to four-year-olds with playgroups. Judy Center staff created activities and assembled materials to be picked up or delivered to families prior to the playgroup. Since the spring of 2021, playgroups have been held outside at local community parks for families participating at the Easton and St Michael's sites. This allowed staff to safely provide activities in person and for children to have a chance to socialize. As a new school year begins in Talbot County, Judy Center staff look forward to continuing to work with the children, families, and community partners. Despite the challenges of the pandemic, Talbot County Judy Centers- Early Learning Hubs, at Easton Elementary School and St. Michael's Elementary School staff will continue to work with families and community partners to provide the necessary services, activities, and support needed to ensure all children enter school ready to learn and be successful.

CHALLENGES

FY21 was an especially challenging year due to the COVID-19 pandemic. While schools closed their physical doors, the Judy Center work carried on. Judy Centers found ways to serve their communities in creative ways such as implementing virtual playgroups, social distancing food and diaper giveaways, no contact drop offs to homes for supplies, and providing protective equipment to families. Preparing for the uncertainty is challenging. Prior to the pandemic, the challenges facing the Judy Centers were increasing in complexity, such as addressing mental health concerns, suspension and expulsion rates, and early identification for special needs. These factors make outreach efforts even more important so that vulnerable children and families are identified earlier and receive an intense level of services over a longer period to increase school readiness. These challenges will continue and will likely become greater as the effects of the pandemic become clearer.

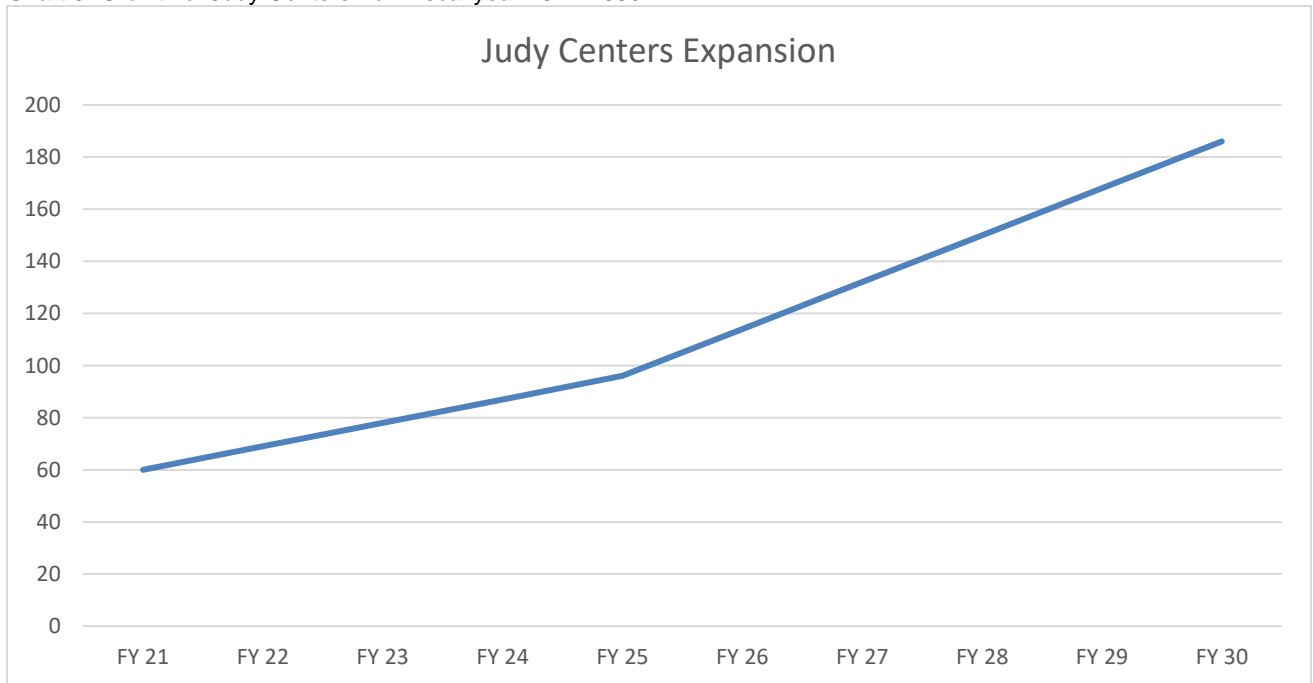
Judy Center partnerships have become an important and effective support to Title I schools that receive supplemental federal funds to provide additional services in a school district's highest poverty communities. However, while children make early gains and progress during their preschool years, such positive early results are hard to sustain unless the support structure for the family and the individual child's needs are maintained throughout their education in the subsequent years.

NEXT STEPS

In FY21, Governor Hogan’s budget allotted for the growth of Judy Centers by seven sites (Baltimore City, Calvert, Frederick, Prince George’s, Queen Anne’s, Talbot, and Washington). In June of 2021, the Commission on Innovation and Excellence in Education Blueprint for Maryland was approved by Maryland legislation. The Blueprint for Maryland’s Future includes the expansion of Judy Centers by nine sites until FY 25 then 18 sites per year until FY 30 for a combined total of existing and expansion sites of 186 Judy Centers statewide.

The expansion of the Judy Centers and its services helps to ensure that all children enter school ready to succeed. A high level of training and technical assistance provided by MSDE is required to ensure that all sites operate with fidelity to the model and continue to deliver high-quality programming.

Chart 5: Growth of Judy Centers from fiscal year 2022-2030.



PRINCIPLE NUMBER TWO KINDERGARTEN ASSESSEMENT

With the recognition of the importance in providing quality early care and education to our nation's children, the issue of how to assess the quality of that care and instruction in educational terms continues to be addressed by many states. To promote the development and use of such assessments, the U.S. Departments of Education and Health and Human Services provided federal support through the RTT-ELC grant. Maryland was one of the beneficiaries of this grant and used these funds to provide a variety of projects and initiatives that improved the quality of early childhood care and education. Thanks to the Judith P. Hoyer legislation, Maryland was required to implement a kindergarten readiness assessment for all public-school kindergartners since 2004.

Beginning in 2014, Maryland used the RTT-ELC funds to develop R4K: Maryland's Early Childhood Comprehensive Assessment that includes the KRA and the Early Learning Assessment (ELA). All public-school kindergarten teachers begin administering the KRA at the start of the school year. The ELA is a formative assessment that is available at no cost. The ELA has been developed for children aged thirty-six to seventy-two months. It is available for use by early educators who work in all community-based settings as well as in public school prekindergarten and kindergarten classrooms. In contrast to the KRA, the use of the ELA is optional for schools and early childhood programs. MSDE engaged local school system leaders and teachers throughout the process of developing R4K and informed them about the necessary steps for implementation. The assessment system is supported by a statewide technology infrastructure and a professional development program with the intent to prepare teachers and administrators in the effective use of R4K data. Since the spring of 2014, state approved trainers provide yearly KRA professional development to all kindergarten teachers, school administrators, and data managers and ELA professional development to all ELA users.

Kindergarten teachers can use the student level KRA data to help plan instruction and to address the needs of individual students. Programs, public schools, Judy Centers, school systems, and local Early Childhood Advisory Councils can also use the disaggregated data to plan programmatic or policy changes that can address the data and promote positive outcomes for Maryland children.

A legislative change to the KRA in 2016 allowed school systems to administer the assessment to either a representative sample of kindergarten students in each classroom or to all kindergartners. Beginning in 2022, The Maryland Blueprint requires that all kindergarteners be assessed.

READY FOR KINDERGARTEN (R4K) SYSTEM

The R4K System is composed of the KRA and the ELA. The ELA is a formative assessment system for children, 36 to 72 months (three to six years of age). It examines the learning progressions (knowledge, skills, and abilities) of children over

time. The ELA also defines specific learning progressions at various intervals for each developmental domain. These learning progressions describe the pathway that children typically follow as they learn, or the sequence in which knowledge and skills develop.

The ELA uses observations and evidence of children's work, while the KRA incorporates a combination of selected response items, performance-based items, and observational items. The KRA includes child-friendly technologies, such as a touch screen technology App, to make a sub-set of activities appealing to young children. The key areas of learning in the ELA measure a child's learning progressions in seven domains. They are:

- Social Foundations
- Physical Well-Being and Motor Development
- Language and Literacy
- Mathematics
- Science
- Social Studies
- Fine Arts

While all seven domains are available in the ELA, the KRA reports student information across four domains: Social Foundations, Language and Literacy, Mathematics, and Physical Well-Being and Motor Development. The reporting format of the KRA assessment information each year includes individual student reports for parents of assessed students. Interactive data reports and data displays are also available at the classroom, school, school system, and state level.

KINDERGARTEN READINESS ASSESSMENT RESULTS

In school year 2020-21, due to the Covid-19 pandemic creating virtual learning for students, the KRA could not be administered virtually and there is no data for this year.

In previous years, annual reports summarizing the statewide results of the KRA were released each January. Results for school year 2021-22 will be made available in January. The results provide data on the level of readiness of incoming kindergartners to engage in the kindergarten curriculum. Since the assessment measures the essential skills, knowledge, and behaviors against the Maryland College and Career-Ready Standards for end of year prekindergarten students, the data is a starting point in tracking the annual school readiness results in terms of outcomes for all kindergarten students, as well as subgroups of kindergartners. The outcomes are reported as a composite and by the four domains. The composite score data is reported by performance levels: demonstrating readiness, approaching readiness, and emerging readiness. The domain score data is reported as scale scores. This assessment information should be used to assist kindergarten teachers with their instructional program, determine the strengths and needs of all kindergarten students, and provide appropriate interventions and resources to close any achievement gaps that were identified.

PRINCIPLE NUMBER THREE

PROGRAM ACCREDITATION AND PREKINDERGARTEN EXPANSION

Maryland Accreditation recognizes public prekindergarten programs and licensed child care centers that meet the highest standards of quality to benefit children, families, staff, and the community.

Maryland Accreditation is a voluntary process in which public prekindergarten and child care centers participate in self-appraisal, program improvement, and external program review. Maryland accredited programs achieve and publicly confirm that they meet high quality state standards.

The Maryland Accreditation standards define nationally accepted best practice for policies and procedures in three areas:

- Program Administration
- Program Operation
- Home and Community Partnerships

Maryland Accreditation is beneficial to families to identify high quality programs for their children. Families are included in the self-appraisal process as part of achieving and maintaining accreditation.

In Maryland's current early care and education system, the elements of quality are manifested differently among the various types of providers. Early childhood programs located in public schools are governed by state regulations and operated by local boards of education. Head Start programs for children birth to five are governed by the federal government and operated by local organizations, generally non-profit agencies. Child care and nursery programs are operated privately and either licensed by the MSDE and/or approved by the MSDE in accordance with the non-public school regulations.

Professional development of the child care workforce was one of the major tenets of the original legislation, and thus through the years, Hoyer grant funds have been used to train those directly caring for young children.

PREKINDERGARTEN EXPANSION

The Prekindergarten Expansion Grant, previously funded for four years through a combination of federal preschool grant funds and funds provided by the Maryland Prekindergarten Expansion Act of 2014, is now sustained through state funding because of HB 1415 - Commission on Innovation and Excellence in Education passed in 2018. This Bill provided funds beginning in FY2020 for the Prekindergarten Expansion Grant at the FY2019 funding level when the federal grant expired.

The Prekindergarten Expansion Grant, a competitive grant program administered by the Division of Early Childhood at MSDE, funds local school systems and community-based

providers to improve the quality of existing half-day slots to full-day or establish new, full-day prekindergarten slots. MSDE awarded \$26.7 million in prekindergarten expansion grant funds for FY2021.

The Prekindergarten Expansion Grant provides the foundation for a collaborative approach across a mixed delivery system to serve 3- and 4-year-olds throughout the state. This grant has been awarded to public schools, Head Start, community-based childcare, Montessori programs, public charter schools, and family childcare. The scope of Maryland's plan is statewide, thereby including many high-need communities in all regions of the state.

The grant expands access to public prekindergarten for three-year-olds and four-year-olds for (a) students from families with household incomes up to 300 percent of Federal Poverty Guidelines (FPG) and (b) students with special education needs, regardless of income and (c) homeless students.

Eligible programs must serve three- and four-year-old children at or below 300 percent of federal poverty guidelines in a full-day setting, be published at Level 5 in Maryland EXCELS, be currently accredited by MSDE or an MSDE recognized national accrediting organization and meet the definition of a "High-Quality Prekindergarten Program." (See Appendix A)

Definition of a High Quality Prekindergarten Program

High-Quality Preschool Program means an early learning program that includes structural elements that are evidence-based and nationally recognized as important for ensuring program quality, including at a minimum—

- (a) High staff qualifications, including a teacher holding a State certification for teaching in early childhood education or a bachelor's degree in any field while pursuing residency through a State-approved alternate pathway, which includes coursework, clinical practice, and evidence of knowledge of content and pedagogy relating to early childhood, as well as a teacher assistant with an Associate's degree, a CDA, or is enrolled in a program to obtain these credentials;
- (b) High-quality professional development for all staff;
- (c) A child-to-instructional staff ratio of no more than 10 to 1;
- (d) A class size of no more than 20 with, at a minimum, one teacher with high staff qualifications as outlined in paragraph (a) of this definition;
- (e) A full-day program (6.5 hour instructional day);
- (f) Inclusion of children with disabilities to ensure access to and full participation in all opportunities;
- (g) Developmentally appropriate, culturally and linguistically responsive instruction and evidence-based curricula, and learning environments that are aligned with the Maryland

Early Learning and Development Standards, for at least the year prior to kindergarten entry;

(h) Individualized accommodations and supports so that all children can access and participate fully in learning activities;

(i) Instructional staff salaries that are commensurate with the salaries and benefits of local K-12 instructional staff;

(j) Program evaluation to ensure continuous improvement;

(k) On-site or accessible comprehensive services for children and community partnerships that promote families' access to services that support their children's learning and development; and

(l) Evidence-based health and safety standards.

Note: The definition of a high-quality prekindergarten program is based on the description that was found in the Federal Preschool Development Grant.

APPENDIX A

FY 2021 Judy Center Early Learning Hubs Budget

The following tables show expenditures in Fiscal Year 2021 to support the Judy Center Early Learning Hubs using funding from Transitional Education Funding Program, Prekindergarten Expansion Grants and the Blueprint for Maryland’s Future Fund Early Childhood Expansion Program.

Vendor Name	School	Transitional Education Funding Program	Prekindergarten Expansion Grants	Blueprint for Maryland’s Future Fund Early Childhood Expansion Program	Total
ALLEGANY COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS	Beal Elementary School	250,000		80,000	330,000.00
	South Penn Elementary School	250,000		80,000	330,000.00
ANNE ARUNDEL COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS	Belle Grove Elementary		250,000	80,000	330,000.00
	Georgetown Elementary School		250,000	80,000	330,000.00
BALTIMORE CITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS	Curtis Bay Elementary School		250,000	80,000	330,000.00
	John Ruhrah Elementary School		250,000	80,000	330,000.00
	Harford Heights Elementary School		250,000	80,000	330,000.00
	Billie Holiday (formerly James Mosher) Elementary School			275,000	275,000.00

Vendor Name	School	Transitional Education Funding Program	Prekindergarten Expansion Grants	Blueprint for Maryland's Future Fund Early Childhood Expansion Program	Total
	Eutaw Marshburn Elementary School		250,000		250,000.00
	Arlington Elementary School		250,000	80,000	330,000.00
	Arundel Elementary School		250,000	80,000	330,000.00
BALTIMORE CITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS	Liberty Elementary School		250,000	80,000	330,000.00
	Commodore John Rodgers Elementary School		250,000	80,000	330,000.00
	Dorothy Height Elementary School		250,000	80,000	330,000.00
	Moravia Elementary School		250,000	80,000	330,000.00
	Lakeland Elementary School		250,000	80,000	330,000.00
BALTIMORE COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS	Hawthorne Elementary School		250,000	80,000	330,000.00
	Campfield Early Learning Center		250,000	80,000	330,000.00
CALVERT COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS	Patuxent Appeal Elementary Campus	250,000		80,000	330,000.00
	Calvert Elementary School			330,000	330,000.00

Vendor Name	School	Transitional Education Funding Program	Prekindergarten Expansion Grants	Blueprint for Maryland's Future Fund Early Childhood Expansion Program	Total
CAROLINE COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS	Federalsburg Elementary School		250,000	80,000	330,000.00
	Greensboro Elementary School		250,000	80,000	330,000.00
CARROLL COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS	Cranberry Station Elementary School	250,000			250,000.00
	Robert Moton Elementary School		250,000		250,000.00
	Elmer Wolfe Elementary School	250,000			250,000.00
CARROLL COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS	Taneytown Elementary School	200,000	50,000		250,000.00
DORCHESTER COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS	Sandy Hill Elementary School	250,000		79,997	329,997.00
FREDERICK COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS	Lincoln and Waverly Elementary Schools	250,000		66,964	316,964.00
	Butterfly Ridge Elementary School			313,703	313,703.00
GARRETT COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS	Friendsville / Grantsville Elementary Schools	250,000		80,000	330,000.00
	Crellin / Yough Glades/	250,000		80,000	330,000.00

Vendor Name	School	Transitional Education Funding Program	Prekindergarten Expansion Grants	Blueprint for Maryland's Future Fund Early Childhood Expansion Program	Total
	Broad Ford Elementary Schools				
HOWARD COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS	Cradlerock Elementary School	250,000		80,000	330,000.00
KENT COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS	Garnet Elementary School	250,000		80,000	330,000.00
MONTGOMERY COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS	Rolling Terrace Elementary School	250,000		80,000	330,000.00
	Summit Hall and Washington Grove Elementary Schools	250,000		80,000	330,000.00
PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS	Cool Spring Elementary School	250,000		80,000	330,000.00
	Carmody Hills Elementary School			330,000	330,000.00
QUEEN ANNE'S COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS	Sudlersville Elementary School	250,000		80,000	330,000.00
	Church Hill Elementary School			330,000	330,000.00
SOMERSET COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS	Woodson Elementary School	250,000		80,000	330,000.00

Vendor Name	School	Transitional Education Funding Program	Prekindergarten Expansion Grants	Blueprint for Maryland's Future Fund Early Childhood Expansion Program	Total
	Princess Anne Elementary School	250,000		80,000	330,000.00
ST MARY'S COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS	George Washington Carver Elementary School	250,000		80,000	330,000.00
	Green Holly Elementary School	250,000		80,000	330,000.00
TALBOT COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS	St. Michael's Elementary School			330,000	330,000.00
	Easton Elementary School	250,000		80,000	330,000.00
WASHINGTON COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS	Bester Elementary School			330,000	330,000.00
	Ruth Anne Monroe Primary School	250,000		80,000	330,000.00
WICOMICO COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS	Pemberton Elementary School	250,000		80,000	330,000.00
	Beaver Run Elementary School	250,000		80,000	330,000.00
WORCESTER COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS	Snow Hill & Pocomoke Elementary Schools	250,000			250,000.00
Grand Total		7,200,000	4,550,000.00	5,484,164.00	17,234,164.00

APPENDIX B

Acronym Key

The following acronyms appear throughout this report.

ECAC-	Early Childhood Advisory Council
ELA –	Early Learning Assessment
IEP –	Individualized Education Program
IFSP –	Individualized Family Service Plan
KRA –	Kindergarten Readiness Assessment
LEA –	Local Education Agency
MCCRS –	Maryland College and Career Ready Standards
MSDE –	Maryland State Department of Education
MOU –	Memoranda of Understanding
NECPA –	National Early Childhood Program Accreditation
PDG –	Preschool Development Grant