

# Strategic Plan Overview



## **Maryland Ready:**

Maryland's Path  
to School Readiness  
and Success

**Prenatal to Age 8**

**Strategic Plan 2020-2025**

### Vision

Maryland's vision is that all young children and their families will thrive.

### Mission

Maryland promotes a well-coordinated and integrated system of programs, supports and services where each child has equitable access to high-quality early childhood experiences to develop a healthy body, healthy mind, and the foundational knowledge and skills needed to succeed, and where every family has access to the resources needed to be effective as their child's first and most important teacher and advocate.

### Guiding Principles

We believe children and families across Maryland thrive when we work across sectors according to these ten principles:

1. Expand on the successes that Maryland has already created with its mixed-delivery system and strong state and local infrastructure that empowers both systemic and community driven strategies.
2. Adopt a child- and family-centered approach to program and service delivery that emphasizes prevention and the importance of starting early, including during the prenatal period.
3. Ensure access to affordable early childhood education (ECE) services for all young children throughout the state.
4. Provide high-quality care and education programming for all young children and their families that supports all developmental domains, including foundational skills for demonstrating school readiness, including physical, social-emotional, mental, and behavioral health.
5. Prioritize the needs of families experiencing adversity or disadvantage, or who are otherwise vulnerable.
6. Engage communities and families through equitable, culturally and linguistically responsive, and two-generational approaches grounded in evidence-based models.
7. Invest in systems building coordination and collaboration, leveraging federal, state, and local funding, as well as public-private partnerships.
8. Provide regular and ongoing public forums and feedback loops, transparent communication channels, and consistent messaging.
9. Maximize data systems capacity and use, including application to policy and program decision-making.
10. Continually evaluate state progress based on metrics and measures of success that reflect stakeholder input and systemic collaboration and revise as needed.



## Six goals that will move Maryland forward

1. Strengthen availability and access
2. Improve and support program quality
3. Deepen family engagement
4. Ensure successful transition experiences
5. Expand and enhance workforce development
6. Improve systems for infrastructure, data and resource management

# Strategies and actions to achieve our goals

## GOAL 1

Strengthen availability and access by increasing availability and choice for all families and especially vulnerable families, decreasing barriers, serving more children with special needs in inclusive settings, and improving coordination between ECE and health services.

STRATEGY	ACTION
<b>Increasing Availability and Choice</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase the number of slots in prenatal programs for expectant parents.</li> <li>• Increase the number of slots in ECE programs for children from birth through age 2.</li> <li>• Increase the number of slots in ECE programs for children ages 3 to 5 across Maryland's mixed-delivery system, including in family child care programs.</li> <li>• Increase enrollment in public prekindergarten, particularly for 3 and 4 year-olds from low-income families.</li> <li>• Provide programs and services with support for Multi-Language Learners.</li> <li>• Increase the number of slots in home visiting programs, including in rural areas.</li> <li>• Expand the number of slots in Judy Center Early Learning Hubs and Family Support Centers.</li> </ul>
<b>Decreasing Barriers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduce families' ECE-related costs by increasing the eligibility threshold for child care scholarships, supporting tax credits, and implementing other financial supports for low- and middle-income families.</li> <li>• Increase public awareness of available services and eligibility requirements by conducting a communications campaign and implementing parent navigator programs statewide.</li> <li>• Ensure access to transportation to ECE programs in partnership with the Maryland State Department of Transportation.</li> <li>• Expand access to services and enrollment in programs by reducing administrative hurdles for families.</li> </ul>
<b>Serving More Children with Special Needs in Inclusive Settings</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase access to programs leading professionals to become certified inclusion specialists in ECE programs.</li> <li>• Improve systems coordination so that increased numbers of children with special needs are connected with and enrolled in available programs and services.</li> <li>• Ensure all programs and services are supported in meeting screening, referral, and access needs for children with special needs.</li> </ul>
<b>Improving Coordination between ECE and Health Services</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Partner with healthcare providers to provide information to families on local ECE programs, including by providing families with hospital kits with early childhood materials and developmental milestone calendars.</li> <li>• Convene a task force to identify strategies and integrate Medicaid, public health programs, including home visiting, and ECE programs.</li> <li>• Expand access to prenatal services and medical homes for young children.</li> <li>• Increase access to therapeutic nurseries and programs for medically fragile children.</li> <li>• Expand program use of healthy food and nutritional support programs.</li> </ul>



## GOAL 2

Improve and support program quality by increasing quality across sectors, focusing on equity, increasing kindergarten readiness for all children, and improving capacity to meet infants' and children's mental health needs.

STRATEGY	ACTION
<b>Increasing Quality Across Sectors</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase provider participation in quality-improvement initiatives and apply information gathered to inform program-improvement strategies.</li> <li>• Increase the number of MSDE Quality Assurance Specialists (QAS) to provide technical assistance to service providers, program directors, school administrators, healthcare workers and other relevant professionals serving children and families.</li> <li>• Expand public and family awareness of Maryland EXCELS, program accreditation, professional credentialing, and other quality assurance initiatives.</li> </ul>
<b>Focusing on Equity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Launch a messaging campaign to support a strategic, statewide focus on equity.</li> <li>• Strengthen equity-focused collaboration across state and local agencies.</li> <li>• Continue to provide equity training for state-level staff across agencies.</li> <li>• Ensure that grants supporting children and families address equity.</li> <li>• Disaggregate state and local jurisdiction data to identify and address equity and diversity trends across programs and services.</li> <li>• Examine quality across geographic settings and program types to understand whether families have equitable access to high-quality programs.</li> </ul>
<b>Increasing Kindergarten Readiness for All Children</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expand and improve the application and alignment of standards, curricula, assessment, instruction, and coaching across the birth to age 8 range.</li> <li>• Develop and implement curricula for 3 year-olds and birth to age 3 that align with curricula for 4 year-olds.</li> <li>• Ensure that programs and classrooms use a census approach to assessment data collection and that all children enrolled in ECE and kindergarten programs benefit from the use of the Early Learning Assessment and Kindergarten Readiness Assessment to experience individualized instruction.</li> <li>• Enhance supports for Multi-Language Learners, including by developing and piloting an early identification Dual Language Learner assessment tool and providing training on strategies to teach and assess Multi-Language Learners.</li> </ul>
<b>Enhancing Capacity to Meet Infants' and Children's Mental Health Needs</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop a statewide Infants and Early Childhood Mental Health (IECMH) Framework that provides definitions, state goals and a guide to local resources and providing feedback loops to allow for ongoing feedback about resources and services.</li> <li>• Increase the number of licensed early childhood mental health consultants statewide.</li> <li>• Expand use of the Pyramid Model for Promoting Social Emotional Competence in Infants and Young Children to improve providers' skills with infants and toddlers.</li> <li>• Strengthen the IECMH professional development system and provider engagement with supports and resources.</li> <li>• Embed IECMH goals and measures within Maryland EXCELS standards and practices.</li> </ul>

## GOAL 3

Deepen family engagement by increasing families' awareness of high-quality programs, expanding 2-generational programming, and enhancing families' opportunities to engage.

STRATEGY	ACTION
<b>Increasing Families' Awareness of High-Quality Programs</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conduct a communications campaign for families about the importance of ECE program quality and how to recognize high-quality ECE programs.</li> <li>• Produce materials, information and announcements, in multiple languages, on how to promote healthy child development through play and learning at home.</li> <li>• Strengthen capacity among staff at MSDE Regional Child Care Offices, Family Support Centers, Judy Center Early Learning Hubs and other agencies serving families and children to be family oriented and designed to connect families with comprehensive programs, services and resources.</li> <li>• Improve employers' capacity to connect families with ECE programs.</li> </ul>
<b>Expanding Two-Generational Programming</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish a statewide parent navigator system to connect families with 2-generational programs, including for teen parents, grandparents, incarcerated parents and foster care families.</li> <li>• Partner with programs to increase engagement among fathers.</li> <li>• Enhance the Maryland child.gov consumer website to include links to 2-generational programs and services.</li> <li>• Produce and promote materials that show a variety of family types and compositions, including those showcasing grandparents and great-grandparents, foster parents, teenage parents and families of various racial and sexual orientation backgrounds.</li> </ul>
<b>Enhancing Families' Opportunities to Engage</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide technical assistance to educators, healthcare workers and other professionals to enhance families' understanding of how to best support children's development and learning.</li> <li>• Provide professional development opportunities for educators and other professionals to learn from and engage with families, including hosting an annual statewide Family Engagement Summit.</li> <li>• Create leadership and advocacy opportunities for families and community members, including ensuring family representation on governing bodies such as the statewide Early Childhood Advisory Council, local advisory councils and the Family Engagement Coalition.</li> </ul>

## GOAL 4

Ensure successful transition experiences by strengthening institutional support for transitions, supporting families through transitions, and improving transition-focused professional development opportunities.

STRATEGY	ACTION
<b>Strengthening Institutional Support for Transitions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support the development of collaborative transition frameworks and plans that engage schools, ECE providers, and families.</li> <li>Encourage communities to host ongoing gatherings to support all families and children before they enter kindergarten.</li> <li>Strengthen MOUs between local school systems and ECE programs to promote better transitions, including by addressing chronic absenteeism, transfer of records, and communication among ECE and school-based educators.</li> </ul>
<b>Supporting Families through Transitions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strengthen family engagement in preparing for transitions between ECE settings and into kindergarten and the early grades.</li> <li>Provide families with information, in multiple languages, about the importance of kindergarten readiness and their role in transitions.</li> <li>Ensure that children being cared for at home or in informal care receive transition and school-readiness information.</li> <li>Create culturally and linguistically responsive transition plans and activities for Multi-Language Learners and immigrant families.</li> <li>Ensure transition plans and activities are in place for children with special needs, disabilities, and developmental delays.</li> </ul>
<b>Improving Transition-Focused Professional Development Opportunities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Implement joint professional development opportunities such as Leadership Academies for child care directors and elementary school principals or child care teachers and kindergarten teachers that focus on coordinating transition planning.</li> <li>Provide targeted learning opportunities related to early childhood development and developmentally appropriate practices for early childhood, prekindergarten, and elementary educators and leaders.</li> <li>Ensure that pre-service and in-service activities enhance educators' knowledge of and skills in creating culturally responsive, family-centered transition plans to benefit all children.</li> </ul>

## GOAL 5

Expand and enhance workforce development by improving professional development opportunities, strengthening equity, coordination and alignment efforts, and improving compensation for ECE professionals.

STRATEGY	ACTION
<b>Improving Professional Development Opportunities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop a statewide professional development plan that includes a competency-based framework and articulated career lattice.</li> <li>Coordinate with higher education partners to increase access to ECE degrees at all levels, including by developing an online Bachelor's ECE degree program.</li> <li>Partner with the Council on Professional Development to increase the number of CDA training programs in high schools and the number of CDA-accredited teachers, including those accredited as bilingual teachers.</li> <li>Implement training on critical competencies related to infant and toddler services.</li> </ul>
<b>Strengthening Equity, Coordination and Alignment Efforts</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strengthen culturally responsive and equity-focused professional development opportunities focused on serving diverse populations, including children experiencing adversity.</li> <li>Implement innovative professional development experiences for ECE educators, including by increasing opportunities for coaching, peer-to-peer learning and leadership development.</li> <li>Support the portability of qualifications and credentials across states.</li> <li>Ensure the state's ECE workforce is representative of the children and families served.</li> </ul>
<b>Improving Compensation for ECE Professionals</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increase salary parity for ECE educators through direct increases and targeted incentives.</li> <li>Increase ECE educators' access to health and retirement benefits.</li> </ul>

## GOAL 6

Improve systems for infrastructure, data and resource management by improving coordination across agencies, modernizing the data system, using resources in ways that promote equity, and streamlining funding mechanisms.

STRATEGY	ACTION
<b>Improving Coordination across Agencies</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Using Maryland's existing statewide Early Childhood Advisory Council as the lead agency, strengthen and broaden effective governance structures that ensure equitable, inclusive membership across and within state and local agencies and partners, and maintain effective, ongoing communication.</li> <li>Encourage local coordination of strategic planning initiatives, supporting best practices for program integration, and create plans to achieve state and local priority goals.</li> <li>Strengthen ongoing, collaborative systems-building initiatives within and across agencies.</li> </ul>
<b>Modernizing the Data System</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Design and implement a system that assigns each child with a unique identifier to track participation in programs and services beginning at birth.</li> <li>Create a universal application process that allows families to apply for multiple services and programs across state agencies with a single application.</li> <li>Migrate data systems to the Maryland Total Human-services Integrated Network (MD THINK) platform to enhance data sharing, professional collaboration and services for families and to reduce redundancies and costs.</li> <li>Support user capability among educators and other professionals working with children and families through ongoing professional development opportunities that multiply the benefits of a cloud-based information system.</li> </ul>
<b>Using Resources in Ways that Promote Equity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conduct a statewide facilities study and use findings to apply targeted improvement strategies.</li> </ul>



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