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Push to Pre-K: Meeting Licensing and Maryland EXCELS Requirements

Division of Early Childhood

October 1, 2025

PRESENTED BY

Licensing Branch and Maryland EXCELS

Presentation Outline

1. Push to Pre-K Overview

2. Prekindergarten Expansion Grant

3. Meeting Licensing Requirements

4. Meeting Maryland EXCELS Requirements

5. Questions

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Purpose

Push to Pre-K to empower child care providers with the tools they need to tap into State prekindergarten grants.

- Push to Pre-K is **not** the grant.

- It is a voluntary support program from the Division of Early Childhood.

- The **Prekindergarten (Pre-K) Expansion Grant** is the funding opportunity. Push to Pre-K helps providers apply for it.

- MSDE Pre-K Specialists give step-by-step guidance to make the grant application process easier.

- Participants receive technical assistance, coaching, and resources to understand and meet grant requirements.

- The goal: reduce barriers so more providers can secure grant funding and offer high-quality prekindergarten and school readiness services.

- Supports Maryland's Blueprint for the Future by expanding early learning opportunities for children and families.

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Who is eligible to participate in Push to Pre-K?

Local Education Agencies (LEAs) and child care programs that are licensed or registered through MSDE.

Prekindergarten Expansion Grant

Pre-K Expansion Grant

The Prekindergarten Expansion Grant and the Maryland State Prekindergarten Grant are **competitive grant** programs administered by the Division of Early Childhood at the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE).

These grants provide funding for local education agencies (LEAs) and private providers to administer high-quality prekindergarten and school readiness services throughout the State for 3- and 4-year-old children and their families in alignment with the Blueprint for Maryland's Future.

Mixed Delivery System

The Blueprint for Maryland's Future aims to increase the number of three- and four-year-old children enrolled in full-day, high-quality Pre-K by growing the capacity of public schools and private providers. Known as the Pre-K Mixed Delivery System, it allows public and private providers to work together to offer high-quality Pre-K education. This system gives families the choice to select the best program for their children, whether it is a public or private provider.

Private Providers

- Child care centers

- Family child care homes

- Head Start programs

- Montessori schools

- Faith-based programs

Meeting Licensing Requirements

Pre-K Grant Licensing Requirements

This funding opportunity is designed for those who will deliver Prekindergarten services, including Local School Systems (LSSs) or qualified vendors (as defined in COMAR 13a.06.02) and/or private providers who:

✓ hold a valid license or registration.

✓ no serious health and safety violations

✓ are Head Start programs.

Serious Health and Safety Regulations

A non-compliance in the following areas on two or more inspections in a 12-month period will result in a Maryland EXCELS quality rating to be lowered to 1:

- 13A.16.04.01 Capacity

- 13A.16.07 Child Protection

- 13A.16.07.01 Prohibition of Injurious Treatment

- 13A.16.08 Supervision

- 13A.18.08.03 Group Size and Staffing

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Capacity

Programs must not exceed the number of children allowed on their license.

Capacity limits are based on:

- The size of the facility

- The number of staff available

- Age of children served

Common Violations:

- Caring for age groups that are not approved on your license

- Exceeding capacity during peak hours (arrival/departure)

- Failing to maintain staff/child ratios with qualified staff

- Failing to maintain accurate attendance records

Child Protection

- Providers must take steps to protect children from harm or neglect.

- Includes screening staff, training in recognizing abuse/neglect, and reporting concerns.

Common Issues:

- Expired background checks

- Failure to report suspected abuse

- Incomplete staff clearance documentation

- Not following reporting procedures

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Injurious Treatment

- Children must be treated with respect at all times.

- Injurious treatment is prohibited, including:

  - Physical punishment

  - Verbal abuse, ridicule, or threats

  - Denial of food, rest, or bathroom use

  - Confining children (closets, locked rooms)

Supervision

- Children must be actively supervised at all times.

Common Violations:

- Children out of sight/hearing range

- Staff distracted by phones or personal conversations

- Insufficient staffing during transitions

- Children wandering unsupervised

- Inadequate playground supervision

Group Size and Staffing

- Group sizes and staffing levels must meet state ratios.

- Ratios vary by children's age group (infants, toddlers, preschoolers).

Common Issues:

- Staff leaving rooms without substitute coverage

- Combining age groups incorrectly

- Not counting all children present

- Staff taking breaks without replacements

Enforcement Actions

- Warning letters - a written letter to notify a provider of the seriousness of non-compliance

- Compliance agreement - an agreement to ensure compliance with Code of Maryland Regulations (COMAR)

- Intermediate Sanction - a limitation or reduction of a provider's operating conditions

- Suspension - the closing of a provider of up to 60 days for regulatory non-compliances

- Emergency Suspension - the immediate closing of a provider on an emergency basis when children are at imminent risk

- Revocation - the withdrawal of approval to operate

Employment Exclusions - the determination that an employee is precluded from employment

- Mandatory - the mandated exclusion based on a pending charge or conviction one of twelve crimes

- Discretionary - an exclusion based on several specific factors

Meeting Maryland EXCELS Requirements

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What is Maryland EXCELS?

- Maryland's Quality Rating & Improvement System

  - Voluntary quality rating system for child care programs

  - Ratings from 1 to 5 (1 = initial requirements, 5 = highest quality)

Available to:

- Licensed child care centers
- Registered family child care homes (family and large)
- School-age only programs in LEAs
- Head Start programs

Key Focus Areas:

- Staffing and professional development
- Accreditation
- Developmentally appropriate practice
- Licensing compliance
- Administrative policies

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Eligibility Requirement

✓ Must be actively participating in Maryland EXCELS

✓ Minimum Rating of 3 required to apply

✗ Ratings of 1 or 2 will NOT be considered

PUSH to PRE-K   **Pre-K Grant Eligibility**   Maryland

This funding opportunity is designed for those who deliver prekindergarten services and are accredited and participate in the Maryland EXCELS program, including:

Local Education Agencies (LEAs) or qualified vendors (as defined in COMAR (13a.06.02) and private providers (**including, Head Start, Center Based, and Family Child Care programs**) who:

☐ hold a valid license.
☐ have not incurred any serious health or safety violations.
☐ rated at level 3, 4 or 5 in Maryland EXCELS. *(Help to meet this requirement for Push to Pre-K participants.)*

Priority will be given to programs with the following Maryland EXCELS ratings (in order of priority):

• Published at level 5 with a plan to maintain this level;
• Publish at level 4 with a plan to achieve level 5 within 5 years (if you fall into this criterion, you must include a plan to reach level 5 as part of your application); or
• Published at level 3 with a plan to achieve level 5 within five years (if you fall into this criterion, you must include a plan to reach level 5 as part of your application).

Priority will be given to high-quality programs that:

• are seeking renewal or expansion of existing programs with a demonstrable track record of success;
• are in areas of the State that have an unmet need for prekindergarten services; or
• include parental/guardian engagement and educational activities beyond the classroom.

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What Counts Toward Higher Ratings

- Accreditation status (Maryland Accreditation included)

- Strong staff qualifications & professional development

- Developmentally appropriate practices

- Compliance with licensing regulations

- Clear administrative policies and strong family engagement

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Priority Ratings for Grant Applicants

Funding Priority (in order):

1st Priority:

Level 5 Programs

- Published at Level 5

- Include plan to maintain this level

2nd Priority:

Level 4 Programs

- Published at Level 4

- Must submit plan to reach Level 5 by end of grant period

3rd Priority:

Level 3 Programs

- Published at Level 3

- Must submit MSDE-approved plan to achieve Level 5 within 5 years

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Higher ratings = stronger application position

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Your Path to Pre-K Eligibility

Step-by-Step Process:

Apply to Maryland EXCELS (if not already participating)

- Visit marylandexcels.org

- Complete online application

- Get assigned a Program Coordinator

Work Toward Level 3 (minimum requirement)

- Connect with your Quality Assurance Specialist

- Use Quick Guides and Toolkit resources

- Address licensing compliance issues

Create Your 5-Year Plan (required for grant application)

- Map pathway from Level 3 to Level 5

- Identify accreditation timeline

- Document professional development goals

Remember: Quality Assurance Specialists are here to walk you through the process

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Resources to Increase Your Rating

Quality Assurance Specialists

- Embedded in licensing offices statewide

- Provide application assistance and goal mapping

- Offer professional development and training

- Conduct work groups and cohorts

Program Coordinators (Johns Hopkins Partnership)

- Review and rate documentation

- Provide feedback on policies and procedures

- Assigned upon application acceptance

Self-Service Resources:

- Maryland EXCELS Toolkit (marylandexcelstoolkit.org)

- Rating checklists (available 24/7 in your online profile)

- Quick Guides (English/Spanish) - workbook format for Levels 1-3

- Video tutorials for common questions

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Serious Health and Safety Regulations - EXCELS

A non-compliance in the following areas on two or more inspections in a 12-month period will result in a Maryland EXCELS quality rating to be lowered to 1 which could impact a continuation grant the following year:

- 13A.16.04.01 Capacity

- 13A.16.07 Child Protection

- 13A.16.07.01 Prohibition of Injurious Treatment

- 13A.16.08 Supervision

- 13A.18.08.03 Group Size and Staffing

Questions

Next Sessions

- October 15, 2025 – Components of an Educational Program: Defining High-Quality Pre-K

- October 28, 2025 – Grant Writing (Goals and Outcomes)

- November 5, 2025 – Family Child Care Homes (Evening) 6:00 pm

- November 5, 2025 – Head Start Programs

- November 19, 2025 – Child Care Centers (Evening) 6:00 pm

- November 19, 2025 – Faith-based Programs

- December 4, 2025 – Spanish (Evening) 6:00 pm

- December 9, 2025 – Classroom Assessment Scoring System® (CLASS®)

- December 10, 2025 – Fiscal Overview (allowable expenses, capital improvements, indirect expenses)