

# **Working Group 1**

## **Early Childhood Education**

### **Elements of the Preliminary Recommendations with a Fiscal Impact**

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#### **Policy Area:**

**Early Childhood Education:** Expands high-quality pre-K to four-year-olds based on a sliding scale and three-year-olds from low-income families; assesses all children to identify those who need supports to be ready to succeed in school; and expands Judy Centers, Family Support Centers, and the Maryland Infants and Toddlers Program for children ages 0-5 and their families

**Element 1a: Expand full-day Pre-K** at no cost for four-year-olds and three-year-olds from families with incomes up to 300% of the federal poverty level (FPL) (approximately \$75,000 for a family of four), and for four-year-olds from families with incomes between 300% and 600% FPL (approximately \$75,000 to \$150,000 for a family of four) using a sliding scale.

**Design Assumptions:**

1. Research shows that investing in the early childhood learning and development of disadvantaged children yields a high return to society, offsetting taxpayer costs for poor health, dropout rates, poverty, and crime. Other benefits include reductions in special education costs, grade retention rates, teacher turnover and absenteeism costs, and costs for tutoring and other supports.
2. Expansion efforts must be accomplished in partnership with, and with significant investment from, the local jurisdictions and community-based providers.
3. The State, local jurisdictions, and local education agencies will expand access to publicly funded full-day pre-K for four-year-olds so that there will be no charge for low-income families (a family with an income up to 300% FPL/\$75,000 based on a family of four). Full funding will be made available no later than the year in which the full-day pre-K requirement takes effect (e.g. year 4 for four-year-olds). Public funding will be provided to assist with the cost of pre-K for families with incomes between 300–600% FPL/\$75,000–\$150,000 based on a family of four, however, these families will still be expected to pay a portion of the cost using a sliding scale. Families with incomes above \$150,000 will pay the full cost to attend a four-year-old pre-K program. This will be phased-in on a 10 year timeline.
4. The State, local jurisdictions, and local education agencies will expand access to publicly funded full-day pre-K for all three-year-olds from low-income families (a family with an income up to 300% FPL/\$75,000 based on a family of four). This will be phased-in on a 10 year timeline with full funding made available no later than the year in which the requirement takes effect (e.g. year 10 for three-year-olds from low-income families).
5. Family enrollment in pre-K will be voluntary.
6. All publicly funded full-day pre-K programs will be a minimum of 6.5 hours and at least 180 school days.
7. Provision of publicly funded pre-K will include both public school-based pre-K programs and participating community-based pre-K programs. In order to participate in publicly funded pre-K, a provider may not charge more tuition for any student who receives public funding for the 6.5 hour school day than the total amount of public funding provided for the school year for a student from a low-income family (i.e. “cost of quality” amount).
8. A participating provider may not engage in explicitly religious activities during the portion of the day supported by publicly funded pre-K (6.5 hours), consistent with federal regulations governing use of funds. Any such activities must be offered separately in time or location, and participation must be voluntary.

9. A participating provider will not be required to adopt any rule, regulation or policy that conflicts with its religious or moral teachings. However, participating providers accepting public funds must agree not to discriminate, and may not discriminate, in either student admissions *or retention* on the basis of race, color, disability, national origin, or sexual orientation of the student or the student's parent or guardian. Any provider found to be in violation of this requirement will be required to return any public funds and may not participate in the program. The placement of a student with a disability will be made based on an individualized assessment about where the student may be best served in accordance with federal and State laws and whether the provider can meet the particular needs of the student with reasonable accommodations without fundamentally altering its program or posing an undue burden.
10. In order to receive public funding, all participating programs, whether based at public schools or in community settings, will be immediately required to follow State pre-K standards, which will require some changes to the Code of Maryland Regulations (COMAR). These will include requiring publicly funded pre-K teachers (for three-year-olds and four-year-olds) to have a BA with ECE certification. Pre-K classrooms must have an average staff to student ratio of 1 to 10 with a *maximum* of 20 students per classroom, including one pre-K teacher and one assistant teacher or aide per classroom. Assistant teachers/aides must have at least a Child Development Associate (CDA) certificate or an associate's degree. In addition, community providers must publish at least at a level 3 ranking on the EXCELS quality scale with a plan approved by MSDE to achieve level 5 within five years. Public school-based pre-K programs must publish in EXCELS at least at a level 4 with a plan approved by MSDE to achieve level 5 within five years.
11. Although the time it will take for a provider to move up the EXCELS levels depends on individual circumstances, on average, it currently takes a provider one year to move from EXCELS level 1 to 2, up to two years to move from EXCELS level 2 to 3, two to three years to move from EXCELS level 3 to 4, and two to three years to move from EXCELS level 4 to 5.
12. The costing out process should reflect the "cost of quality" funding levels recommended by APA in its Pre-K Report that incorporate the requirements detailed above in Item #10.
13. Income-eligible families will have access to extended day (before and after care) services through the State's child care subsidy program. Chapters 563 and 564 of 2018 require the State to increase the program's provider reimbursement rates for each region to the 60<sup>th</sup> percentile of child care provider rates by fiscal year 2022. Recently promulgated regulations expand the number of families who will be eligible for child care subsidies by updating eligibility for the program to reflect 65% of the State median income.

**Implementation Decisions:**

1. Expansion of pre-K will be focused on making pre-K available for all four-year-olds from low-income families in half-day slots, while half-day slots are being converted into full-day slots. By year four, all four-year-olds from low-income families will be offered high-quality, full-day pre-K. This will occur at the same time as full-day pre-K is expanded gradually for three-year-olds from low-income families.
2. Full-day pre-K for three-year-olds from low-income families will be phased-in over the 10 year period by a minimum of 10% per year. Therefore, by year 10, all three-year-olds from low-income families will be offered full-day pre-K.
3. The State will require that a minimum percentage of full-day pre-K slots in each local education agency be provided in participating community-based settings. This minimum requirement will be phased-in over the 10 year period in 10% per year increments in years one through four, and remain constant at 50% beginning in year five. It may be met by serving three-year-olds from low-income families and/or four-year-olds. Local education agencies will be given flexibility through waiver provisions if the local education agency annually demonstrates to the State: (i) that the agency already provides full-day pre-K to all four-year olds who enroll in public pre-K or (ii) that not enough community-based providers exist in the jurisdiction to meet the minimum percentage, even after reasonable cross-jurisdiction or regional efforts. A local education agency may receive an annual waiver until the applicable requirement takes effect (e.g. year 4 for full-day pre-K for four-year-olds, year 10 for full-day pre-K for three-year-olds from low-income families).
4. Priority in expansion of high quality pre-K for four-year-olds and three-year-olds will be given to: (a) students from families with the lowest incomes; (b) students with special education needs, regardless of income; and (c) students who are English Learners, regardless of income. Public funding to support special education students and English Learners will follow the student and go to the provider that is serving the student.
5. Local education agencies will enter into agreements with community-based providers to provide publicly-funded pre-K programs to four-year-olds and three-year-olds, including the provision of services for students with special needs, in accordance with federal education laws. The agreements may also include a process for parents to register four-year-olds and three-year-olds for pre-K and to indicate a preference for the program setting, if any (e.g. Denver allows a parent to rank his or her top 3 program choices).
6. Priority in expansion of high-quality pre-K programs through technical assistance, coaching, and workforce capacity building efforts (Element 1b) will be given to areas and regions where there are fewer providers and programs available to serve the four-year-old and three-year-old populations in the area or region. The State and local education agencies must prioritize these areas as part of accountability requirements. The State and local education agencies will be encouraged to collaborate to explore and possibly replicate innovative ways that

- may currently exist to address child care deserts, including regional cross-jurisdiction programming and reciprocity with border states.
7. Year one of the implementation schedule will use 70% of families as a starting target for the voluntary enrollment of four-year-olds in publicly funded pre-K, as some families will make other child care arrangements or keep children at home until kindergarten. The target participation rate will increase to 80% in year five and continue at 80% through year 10 as more families take advantage of available publicly funded pre-K programs.
  8. The implementation schedule will use 80% of families as the target for the voluntary enrollment of three-year-olds from low-income families in publicly funded pre-K, as some families will make other child care arrangements or keep children at home.
  9. Publicly funded pre-K for four-year-olds will be available at no charge for families with incomes up to 300% FPL/\$75,000 based on a family of four. Beginning in year five, public funding will be provided to assist with the costs of pre-K for families with incomes between 300–600% FPL/\$75,000–\$150,000 based on a family of four. Even with this public support, these families will still be expected to pay a portion of the cost to attend a pre-K program so that as a family’s income increases, the amount of public support decreases (sliding scale). Families with incomes above 600% FPL/\$150,000 based on a family of four will pay the full cost. Income levels will be adjusted for family size. There will be administrative costs associated with implementing the sliding scale.
  10. The State will prioritize public school construction funding requests for high-quality pre-K classrooms.
  11. Local jurisdictions will be encouraged to partner with the State to develop innovative ways to meet physical space constraints during the phase-in period, such as utilizing available space at senior or community centers for early education programs, while meeting the standards of a high-quality pre-K program.
  12. For K–12 students, all school systems are currently required to provide transportation to and from school for all public school students, including disabled students. State aid for K–12 students is currently distributed according to a formula that is adjusted for enrollment. It is assumed that pre-K students will be included in a transportation formula. The State, local education agencies, and community-based providers will partner to address transportation needs for pre-K students. As the State transitions to full-day pre-K that better aligns with parents’ working schedules, there may be a reduced need for transportation. In addition, child care subsidy funds will be available for eligible families to use for before and after care, which may include transportation services to and from a pre-K program.

### **Phase-in Timeline Decisions**

1. EXCELS: To receive public funding, all participating programs will be immediately required to follow State pre-K standards. In addition, a community

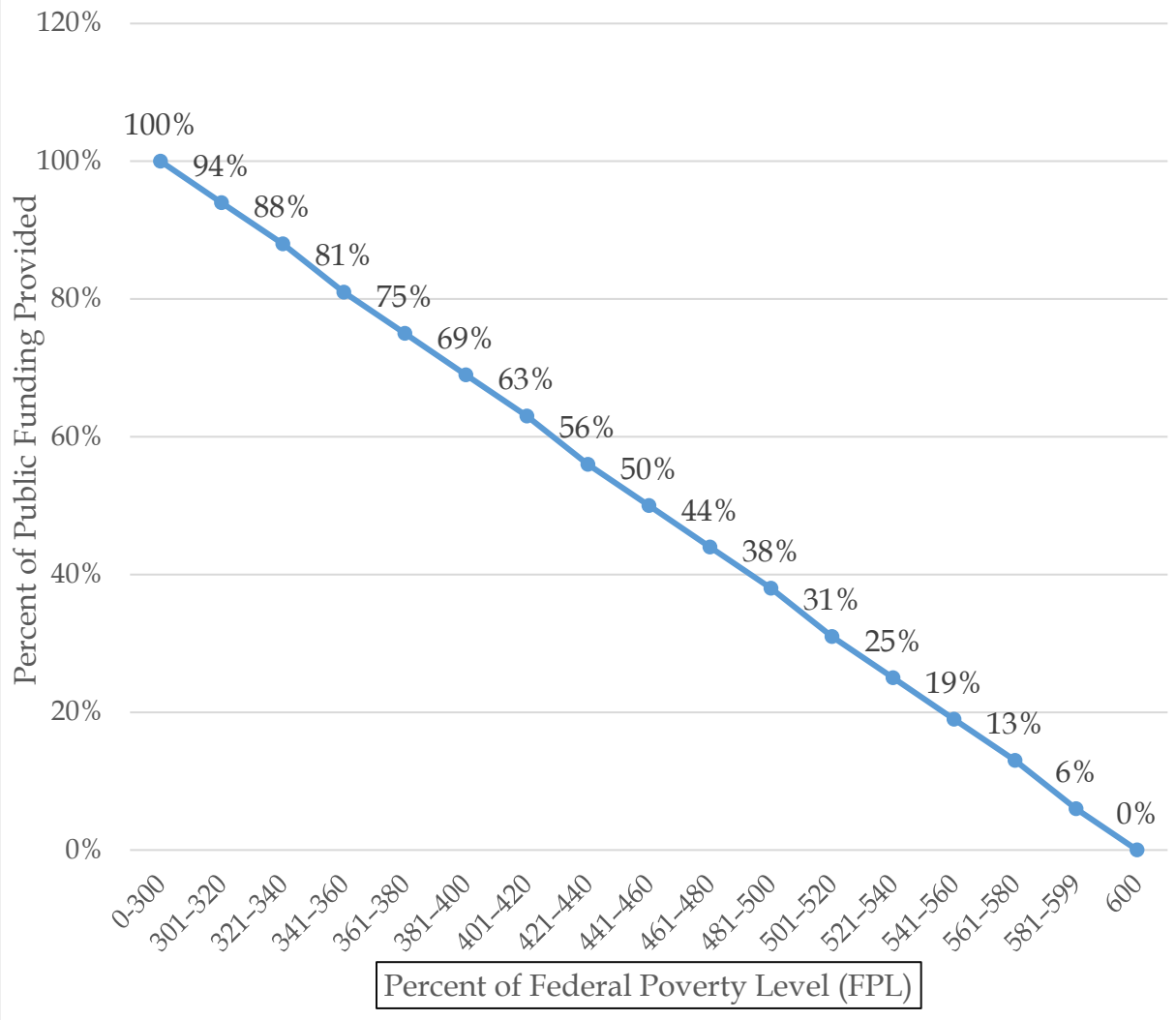
- provider must achieve at least a level 3 with a plan approved by MSDE to achieve level 5 within five years. Public school-based pre-K programs must achieve at least a level 4 with a plan approved by MSDE to achieve level 5 within five years.
2. Minimum Percentage of Pre-K Slots in Community-based Settings: Starting in year 1, there will a requirement that a percentage of pre-K slots (for four-year olds and/or three-year-olds) are provided in community-based settings. This minimum requirement will be phased-in over the 10 year period in 10% per year increments in years one through four, and remain constant at 50% beginning in year five. A local education agency may be able to receive an annual waiver from this minimum requirement in specified circumstances.
  3. Expansion of slots for four-year-olds and three-year-olds from low-income families (Family income below 300% FPL/\$75,000 for a family of four) will be phased-in over a 10-year period. One potential phase-in schedule is shown in the exhibit below. Pre-K will be available at no charge for four-year-olds and three-year-olds from low-income families. The following will be required in the year it takes effect:
    - In year four, all four-year-olds from low-income families will have access to full-day pre-K.
    - In year 10, all four-year-olds from low-income families will continue to have access to full-day pre-K. 100% of three-year-olds from low-income families will have access to full-day pre-K.
  4. Sliding Scale for Four-Year-Olds (Family income between 300–600% FPL/\$75,000–\$150,000 for a family of four): Beginning in year five, public funding will be provided to assist with the cost of pre-K for families with incomes between 300–600% FPL/\$75,000 and \$150,000 for a family of four. Even with this public support, these families will still be expected to pay a portion of the cost to attend a pre-K program so that as a family’s income increases, the amount of public support decreases (sliding scale). To avoid a cliff effect whereby a small increase in income results in a significant loss of public support, there will be approximately 15 steps, with a 6–7 percentage point difference between each step. Families with incomes above 600% FPL/\$150,000 for a family of four will pay the full cost for four-year-old pre-K.
  5. Workforce building for ECE: As the number of slots and students increase, additional capacity building of the early childhood workforce system, including credentialing, recruitment, and retention of educators and staff, will be needed to meet increased workforce demand (Element 1b).

		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
	FY19	FY20	FY21	FY22	FY23	FY24	FY25	FY26	FY27	FY28	FY29
4 year olds	All below 185% FPL offered ½ day	All below 300% FPL offered ½ day	All below 300% FPL offered ½ day	All below 300% FPL offered ½ day	<b>All below 300% FPL offered full day</b>	All below 300% FPL offered full day. <b>Sliding scale for families between 300% and 600% FPL.</b>	All below 300% FPL offered full day. Sliding scale for families between 300% and 600% FPL.	All below 300% FPL offered full day. Sliding scale for families between 300% and 600% FPL.	All below 300% FPL offered full day. Sliding scale for families between 300% and 600% FPL.	All below 300% FPL offered full day. Sliding scale for families between 300% and 600% FPL.	All below 300% FPL offered full day. Sliding scale for families between 300% and 600% FPL.
3 year olds	None required	10% below 300% FPL offered full day	20% below 300% FPL offered full day	30% below 300% FPL offered full day	40% below 300% FPL offered full day	50% below 300% FPL offered full day	60% below 300% FPL offered full day	70% below 300% FPL offered full day	80% below 300% FPL offered full day	90% below 300% FPL offered full day	<b>All below 300% FPL offered full day</b>
Community-based (3 or 4 year olds)	None required	<b>Min 10% in Community-based settings</b>	<b>Min 20% in Community-based settings</b>	<b>Min 30% in Community-based settings</b>	<b>Min 40% in Community-based settings</b>	<b>Min 50% in Community-based settings</b>	Min 50% in Community-based settings	Min 50% in Community-based settings	Min 50% in Community-based settings	Min 50% in Community-based settings	Min 50% in Community-based settings

Footnote: This exhibit represents a potential phase-in for costing out purposes. The items in RED are the only requirements that will be recommended to be codified in law. A local education agency could choose to phase-in these requirements on a more aggressive timeframe.

Percent of Federal Poverty Level	Approximate Income Level for Family of Four	Number of Four-year-olds (Year 5)
0 - 200%	\$0 - \$49,999	24,531
201% - 300%	\$50,000 - \$74,999	12,653
301% - 400%	\$75,000 - \$99,999	9,923
401% - 500%	\$100,000 - \$124,999	7,785
501% - 599%	\$125,000 - \$149,999	5,430
600% and above	\$150,000 and above	13,402

### Level of ECE Public Funding for Increments of FPL between 300% and 600% (Based on 15 Steps)



Percent of Federal Poverty Level	Percent of Public Funding Provided
0-300	100%
301-320	94%
321-340	88%
341-360	81%
361-380	75%
381-400	69%
401-420	63%
421-440	56%
441-460	50%
461-480	44%
481-500	38%
501-520	31%
521-540	25%
541-560	19%
561-580	13%
581-599	6%
600 and above	0%



**Element 1b: Capacity building** for new and current programs (tuition assistance for prospective staff; training; support of peer networks; integration with career ladder)

**Design Assumptions:**

1. The State will encourage pre-K programs to invest in helping teachers to become certified in early childhood education.
2. The State will offer increased coaching and technical assistance through EXCELS and Child Care Resource Centers to support the efforts of community providers in improving the quality of their programs. The State will prioritize supporting providers in high-need communities in meeting EXCELS level 5.
3. The State will support ECE staff in attaining CDA credentials and associate's degrees to serve as aides and assistant teachers in publicly funded pre-K programs. This support will include financial support to help cover course and exam fees and coaching by mentor teachers.
4. Additional credentialing and professional development of ECE staff will be needed to match the pace of the expansion of pre-K slots. The current MSDE Credentialing Program (6 staff levels and 4 administrator levels) serves as a career ladder for community provider staff. The levels are based on the education and experience of the individual, and the State awards monetary bonuses at each level to incentivize professional development.
5. Public pre-K teachers will be part of the Maryland K-12 teacher career ladder. Master public pre-K teachers will be a level on the career ladder. In order to become a master teacher on the career ladder, the teacher must earn National Board Certification.
6. A local education agency and a provider may both choose to enter into a Memorandum of Understanding to enable pre-K teachers in community-based settings to participate in the public pre-K teacher career ladder as employees of the local education agency. Such agreements currently exist under the State Pre-K Expansion Grant Program.
7. As part of its effort to increase the pool of qualified teachers and assistants, the State will significantly expand tuition assistance and financial support for individuals to earn CDA credentials, associate's degrees, and bachelor's degrees with specialized training in ECE.

**Implementation Decisions:**

1. The State will implement initiatives developed under MSDE's Master Plan on Professional Development for Teachers and Providers of Early Childhood Education, such as aligning high school early childhood CTE program standards with CDA credential requirements and community college ECE programs; expanding online professional development courses with job-embedded coaching; requiring coursework and clinical work in ECE programs to include training in diverse child care environments and working with children with

- special needs; creating pathways that accept prior learning experience; creating an ECE bachelor's degree program and dual certification programs; and creating a public awareness campaign for recruiting ECE teaching staff and promoting quality child care.
2. The State will set targets so that the percentage of teachers certified in ECE and staff with CDA credentials increases and keeps pace with the 10 year implementation period. At full implementation of pre-K for three-year-olds from low-income families and four-year-olds, the State will need 8,800 pre-K teachers and assistants (4,400 each).
  3. The State will expand and increase the amount of training vouchers and credentialing bonuses to encourage providers to continue professional development. The amounts of the vouchers and bonuses will be tiered with the credentialing levels to incentivize movement towards higher quality.
  4. The State will provide financial assistance for students who complete the high school early childhood CTE program to take the CDA assessment so the student can work as an aide or assistant teacher. To promote a more diverse workforce, the State will also expand access to ECE CTE programs, focusing on jurisdictions where the greatest disparities exist between student demographics and ECE staff.
  5. The State will increase MSDE's capacity to provide technical assistance to publicly funded pre-K programs through EXCELS quality assurance specialists, regional offices, and onsite monitoring and licensing staff to keep pace with the increase in participating providers. It is assumed that this additional support will expedite the abilities of providers to move from level 3 to level 5 in EXCELS.
  6. The State also will expand the coaching infrastructure/model developed by the Child Care Resource Center Network to provide training and mentoring for community providers to meet EXCELS requirements.
  7. The State will identify ECE teachers as a workforce shortage area to enable tuition assistance through the Workforce Shortage Student Assistance Grant Program.
  8. The State will create a full tuition scholarship program for students who become lead pre-K teachers and commit to work in high-needs schools for a certain number of years.
  9. The State will significantly increase funding for the Child Care Center and Professional Development Fund to support ECE staff who are already working in child care programs in obtaining associate's degrees, bachelor's degrees, and CDA credentials.
  10. The State will focus outreach and recruitment efforts so that the ECE teachers and staff mirror the diversity of the community.
  11. The State will require that all pre-K teachers have training on cultural competency and restorative practices through teacher preparation programs or professional development programs.

**Element 1c:** Implementation of a **school readiness assessment** for all students entering kindergarten

**Design Assumptions:**

1. This assessment or any successor assessment will be given to all kindergarteners as a census.
2. To minimize the amount of duplicative testing for our youngest learners, the State's goal should be for the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment (KRA) or any successor assessment to serve as the sole diagnostic assessment for kindergarten readiness.
3. The State will continue to provide every kindergarten teacher with training or a refresher course on administering the KRA or its successor assessment each year.
4. The State will continue to provide professional development funds for jurisdictions that administer the KRA or its successor assessment as a census assessment.
5. The assessment tool will provide information for kindergarten teachers to use for lesson planning and identifying students who may need additional assistance.
6. The assessment tool will not be cumbersome for teachers to administer and teachers will be given time to administer the assessment within the school day.
7. A protocol will be put in place to enable teachers to use and act on the information produced by the assessment tool, such as referring students for case management or in-class or out-of-class supports.

**Implementation Decisions:**

1. Since a portion of the KRA requires the teacher to observe how the student interacts with other students in a classroom, the full KRA cannot be administered before students enter kindergarten. Therefore, local education agencies will have flexibility to administer a portion of the KRA or its successor assessment before students enter kindergarten and during the first two months of the school year.
2. The State will require the KRA or its successor assessment to be administered to every kindergarten student as a census and not as a random sample to ensure equity and accountability.
3. The State will extend the administration window from October 10 to October 30 to reduce the operational impact of conducting the KRA or its successor assessment as a census assessment.
4. A survey of kindergarten teachers who administered Version 2.0 of the KRA will be conducted after it is fully implemented in fall 2018 to get feedback on the usefulness and usability of the new version of the KRA.
5. The survey will include questions such as: (i) the usefulness of the KRA data to inform kindergarten instruction; (ii) whether the KRA data enhances a teacher's ability to identify challenges that a student may be experiencing, especially those indicating that a child may need special education services; and (iii) whether the

- teacher administers a separate, locally mandated kindergarten diagnostic assessment and if so, whether the KRA is duplicative of that assessment.
6. The State (entity to be determined) will review the results of the survey and review Version 2.0 for usefulness and usability and, in consultation with MSDE, make any recommendations for changes, if needed.
  7. The data collection system of the KRA or its successor assessment will include a standardized process for reporting a kindergartener's prior care setting.
  8. The KRA or its successor assessment will be implemented as a census statewide by school year 2020-2021.

**Element 1d: Expand Judy Centers, Family Support Centers, and the Maryland Infants and Toddlers Program** to provide and coordinate access to education and support services for at-risk children ages 0-5 and their families

**Design Assumptions:**

1. The State will expand the number of Judy Centers over time to match the number of Title I elementary schools.
2. The State will expand the number of Family Support Centers over time, with the goal of ensuring that every underserved neighborhood has a Family Support Center or similar set of programs and services.
3. The State will increase funding for the Maryland Infant and Toddlers Program that provides support to families with special needs children.

**Implementation Decisions:**

1.
  - a. The expansion of Judy Centers will be phased-in over 10 years, with a priority in opening new Judy Centers in the neediest communities. MSDE will be required to consider geographic diversity when selecting a Title I school within which to locate a new Judy Center. MSDE will be required to coordinate placement of new Judy Centers in order to serve multiple, closely located Title I schools in a high needs area or region.
  - b. There are currently 54 centers, with one or more located in each jurisdiction, and more than 300 Title I elementary schools. The State will significantly reduce this gap and increase the number of centers over time so that 42 new Judy Centers open in the first 5 years and 80 open in the next 5 years. By year 10, there will be 122 new Judy Centers.
2.
  - a. The expansion of Family Support Centers will be phased-in over 10 years, with a priority in opening new Family Support Centers in the neediest communities. MSDE will be required to consider geographic diversity when selecting regions to locate a new Family Support Center. MSDE will be required to coordinate placement of new Family Support Centers in order to serve multiple, closely located counties or areas in need of a Family Support Center. There are currently 9 counties (Calvert, Charles, Garrett, Harford, Howard, St. Mary's, Somerset, Wicomico, and Worcester) where there are no Family Support Centers.

- b. There are currently 25 Family Support Centers. The State's goal should be to open 3 new centers each year so that by year 10, there will be 30 new Family Support Centers.
- 3. The State will increase funding for the Maryland Infants and Toddlers Program to support the increase in the number of children eligible for these services.