
R00A99

Early Childhood Development

Maryland State Department of Education

Response to the Analyst's Review and Recommendations

Senate Education, Business, and Administration Subcommittee –
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Maryland Public Schools: ***#1 in the Nation Four Years in a Row***

The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) welcomes this opportunity to share with the Committee some of its success stories and to address questions raised by the analyst.

OPERATING BUDGET ANALYSIS

Kindergarten Readiness

MSDE should discuss why children enrolled in Head Start are only marginally better prepared for kindergarten than children in home or informal care.

In addressing this question, it is first important to understand that the types of students served by the programs differ significantly. The kindergarten cohorts of children who have been in Head Start as four-year olds represent almost exclusively a group of disadvantaged children. This is not the case for children in the “Home/Informal Care” category.

Therefore, in reviewing the Maryland Model for School Readiness (MMSR) results, one must be very careful not to infer the relative quality of the programs. The MMSR Kindergarten Assessment was not designed for that purpose, and causality as to why children in Head Start are performing about the same level as children in the Home/Informal Care category cannot be drawn from the MMSR data.

The annual report and dissemination of the assessment results is designed to inform policymakers and program administrators and to initiate continuous program improvement efforts, such as implementation of a preschool curriculum with high fidelity or improving the qualifications of teachers.

The MMSR results reflect performance measures for large populations and are designed to serve as a gauge for programs to design ways to improve their trend lines. The Composite results of children coming from Head Start into Kindergarten improved from 43% being “fully ready” in 2001 to 72% being “fully ready” – a 29 percentage point increase.

While the federal government is ultimately accountable for Head Start programs, MSDE has initiated a number of projects to improve the overall quality of Head Start services. This Department:

- continues to monitor and facilitate the implementation of the local Memoranda of Understanding (MOU) between the local Head Start grantees and the local school systems (such a MOU, established in Maryland in 2009, is a federal requirement);
- facilitates the use of the MMSR Prekindergarten Assessment data, which serves as one of several planning tools in improving the learning opportunities for Head Start children before they transition into public schools;
- established grant requirements to effectively use the State’s supplemental funds for increasing access for Head Start children to summer programs operated by Head Start; and,
- established a targeted effort to increase the number of Head Start programs pursuing national or State program accreditation.

Furthermore, starting in 2012, MSDE will work more directly with Head Start programs as part of the Race to the Top implementation on initiatives such as including Head Start programs in Maryland EXCELS.

Waitlist Instituted for Child Care Subsidy Program (CCSP)

The fiscal picture portrayed by the analyst exposes a critical challenge to Maryland's reform agenda. With regard to the state of early childhood education, the analysis reflects two key points:

- Children are better prepared for school; but also,
- Working families have less access to child care subsidies than before.

If not effectively addressed within the next few years, these two issues will intersect and the latter will jeopardize the State's continued success. One of the drivers for skills and behaviors that define school readiness is access to high-quality early learning opportunities. Due to economic and other disadvantages, children whose families are eligible for the CCSP are less likely to come to school prepared. Without the CCSP, their working families will no longer be able to enroll these children in regulated child care programs, risking placements with ad-hoc, informal care arrangements. With further increases in the waitlist, Maryland runs the risk of eroding the gains it made during the last decade in terms of improved school readiness results. Furthermore, the Race to the Top goal of narrowing the school readiness gap for at-risk children will be in jeopardy if fewer poor children have access to basic child care because of the freeze on child care subsidy.

With the limitations on State support for early education, especially the costly child care subsidies, this Department continues to look for ways to operate these programs more efficiently. For instance, MSDE plans to reallocate Federal Child Care Development Funds to support the child care resource and referral agencies. They are critical partners in improving the quality of early childhood programs as they move up the tiers of Maryland EXCELS, the State's quality rating and improvement system.

ISSUES

1: Federal Funding for the Child Care Subsidy Program Overestimated in Fiscal 2012, Declines in Fiscal 2013

MSDE should comment on whether the Child Care Subsidy Program will be able to provide subsidies to those currently enrolled in the program within the \$87.8 million available portion of the fiscal 2012 appropriation.

Based on the effects of the waitlist, MSDE's current estimates of the CCSP indicate that the Agency will be able to provide child care subsidies for those currently enrolled within the \$87.6 million funding available in the FY 2012 appropriation. The projections for FY 2012 conservatively are \$86.1 million as shown in Table 1 on the following page.

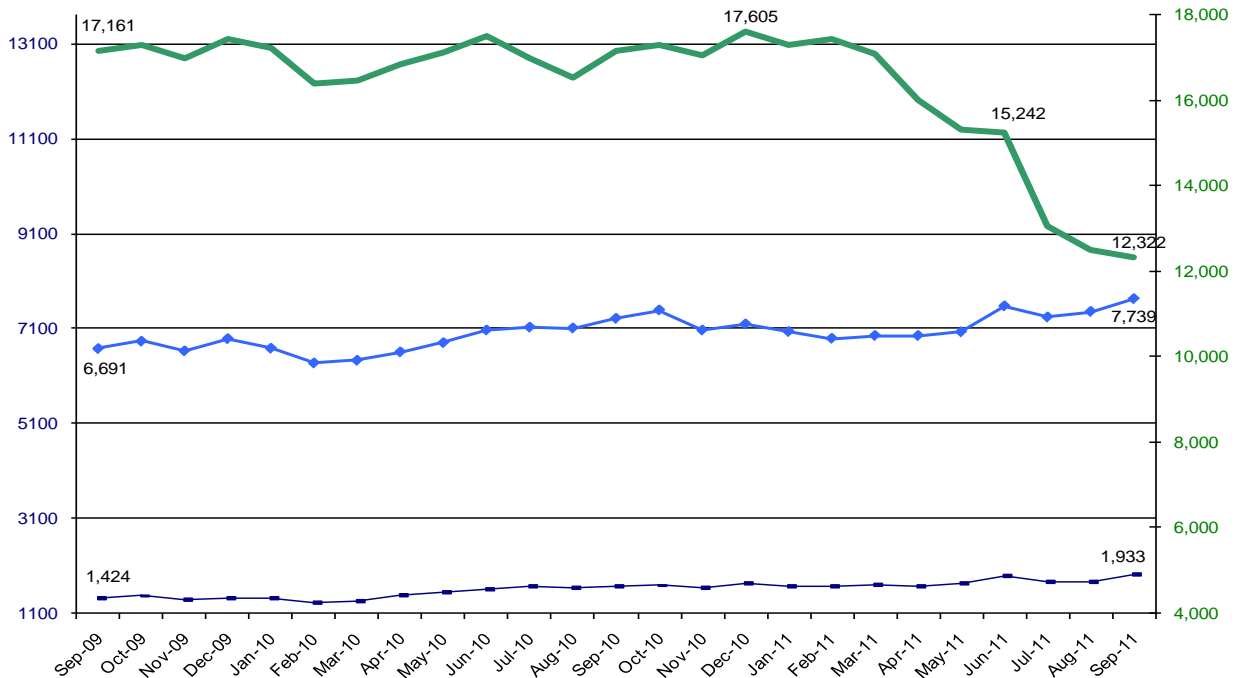
Table 1: Projected Costs for Child Care Subsidy Program for Non-TCA, TCA, and TCC groups (most conservative estimate).

	Actual 2011	Projected 2012
Non-TCA Projected Expense	\$ 63,342,592	\$ 39,812,932
<i>Avg Child Enrollment</i>	16,750	10,554
Avg cost per child	\$ 3,782	\$ 3,772
TCA Projected Expense	\$ 37,341,513	\$ 38,450,248
<i>Avg Child Enrollment</i>	7,158	7,447
Avg cost per child	\$ 5,217	\$ 5,163
TCC Projected Expense	\$ 7,061,437	\$ 7,824,393
<i>Avg Child Enrollment</i>	1,709	1,926
Avg cost per child	\$ 4,131	\$ 4,062
Grand Total	\$ 107,745,542	\$ 86,087,573
<i>Grand Total Children</i>	25,617	19,927
Overall Average Cost per Child	\$ 4,206	\$ 4,320

TCA: Temporary Cash Assistance
 Non-TCA: Non-Temporary Cash Assistance
 TCC: Transitional Child Care

The reduced funding for the CCSP is a direct function of the enrollment trend of non-TCA families. The following table shows the downward trend of non-TCA families who are no longer enrolled in the Program:

Table 2: Most recent enrollment trends of children from Sept. 2009 to Sept. 2011 for non-TCA (top line), TCA (center line), and TCC (bottom line)



The table indicates a decline of 30 percent from the date the waitlist was established to September 2011 which is the most recent data available. At the same time, the number of TCA clients has increased by 9 percent.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. Concur with Governor's allowance.
MSDE concurs.**

UPDATES

Race To The Top – Early Learning Challenge Grant (RTTT-ELC)

Maryland can be justifiably proud of having received another Race to the Top grant. The Early Learning Challenge Grant will afford MSDE and its partners an opportunity to strengthen Maryland's already robust early education infrastructure. The analyst keenly pointed out the strategic linkage of early education and K-12 education through the Division of Early Childhood Development (DECD). The new Race to the Top grant reinforces this strategic linkage. Education reform in Maryland starts at birth and ends with college and career readiness.

The analysis accurately reflects the RTTT-ELC goals and projects. The grant is designed to enhance the infrastructure of early childhood education in Maryland. Notably, the RTTT-ELC grant funding is not available to offset state budget reductions.

The main grant project (42% of the total grant amount) is the implementation of Maryland EXCELS, a quality rating and improvement system that is designed as a continuous improvement strategy of early childhood programs with a focus on recognizing their progress through a series of quality tiers. It is Maryland's goal to see a large number of programs in the top tiers that serve children with high needs. This approach is designed to narrow the school readiness gap, and ultimately the achievement gap, for these at-risk children.

Quality capacity building is related to the success of Maryland EXCELS. The child care resource and referral agencies are being charged to redesign their main function and focus on the coaching and mentoring of programs, to pursue higher ranking in the quality tiers of Maryland EXCELS. This approach, called the Early Childhood Breakthrough Center, will be applied to early childhood programs in Title 1 attendance areas, especially those Title 1 schools in school improvement.

Another major project within this grant is devoted to revising the existing kindergarten assessment to align it with the more rigorous Common Core Standards. This project received national attention since Ohio joined Maryland in developing the assessment collaboratively. The new Kindergarten Entry Assessment will be launched for all kindergarteners in 2014-15.