



Child Resource Connect

Linking Children,
Families, & Communities



HB 1441 Early Childhood Education – Publicly Funded Prekindergarten Programs – Alterations Bill Summary for the Joining Voices Community

Based on bill text available March 27, 2024

The Joining Voices team has been following the work on HB 1441 (Early Childhood Education – Publicly Funded Prekindergarten Programs – Alterations) this legislative session, as each provision directly impacts our programs, our families, and our whole neighborhoods.

Qualifications, paths for the profession, and funding

- The new career ladder is an important building block and opportunity for the profession. This would be new for Maryland, and is to be created by July 1, 2025. The idea is that a career ladder names and defines roles, with a way to move between levels as desired. In this case, the legislation spells out these levels for early childhood educators in private preK settings (in community-based child care centers and family child care):
 - Level 1: Early Childhood Teaching Assistant
 - Level 2: Prekindergarten Lead Teacher
 - Level 3: Early Childhood Consulting Teacher
- Maryland’s state leaders must embrace, build, and implement multiple paths to qualifying for the role of lead teacher and assistant teacher. We appreciate the updated timelines, scenarios and options presented in HB 1441.

Our message to legislators includes:

“Implementation has been challenging for school districts for a variety of reasons. Community-based early childhood educators know what it takes to participate as a true partner. We continue to see first-hand that it is right to evolve the thinking in the original Blueprint work. We can work together to strengthen the laws and the real options so that parents can choose what is best for their family, and the whole community benefits from partnering with early childhood educators in child care programs.”

Child Care Career and Professional Development Fund

We are thrilled to see the provisions of HB 600/SB 500 Education - Child Care Career and Professional Development Fund – Alterations included in HB 1441. Approval of these provisions will open much-needed opportunities for early childhood educators and the families counting on us.

This includes:

- updating the qualifications for an award from the Child Care Career and Professional Development Fund to include a service obligation to work in an approved child care setting for at least 20 hours per week.
- requiring the Office of Child Care at MSDE to prioritize grant awards to applicants who have not completed any college courses for credit.

- allowing an applicant to have attended or be accepted to an accredited college or university outside of Maryland and here is why that is especially important: there are schools from coast to coast *but not in Maryland* that offer native language or bilingual coursework in early childhood education or a related field. Ensuring Maryland’s educators can access education in their most confident language is a big step forward for equity, language justice, ensuring meaningful experiences for early childhood educators and families.

Our concern: ensuring access for all eligible private providers

We continue to be concerned that although family child care is named as a desired partner in mixed delivery preK, some Maryland leaders continue to put forward ideas that are really structured for the operations of a center and a center’s staff. In the Joining Voices community, child care center leaders and family child care leaders stand together as early childhood education should truly be. Not every licensed center and registered family child care home will want to partner with the school district; not every eligible private provider will be selected. But all eligible providers should have the option and opportunity, and not be blocked by intentional or unintended barriers.

Waivers on meeting mixed delivery expectations

Waivers in current policy and practice delay what needs to be done, without urgently ensuring the changes take place. The new benchmarks of 10% of preK slots in community-based providers called for in HB 1441 should make the mixed delivery waivers obsolete in our counties. Still, the school boards still need to be pressed to engage meaningfully at the same time as this work to improve statewide policy. The additional requirements of a memorandum of understanding can help, along with the support of the “model” that MSDE is directed to create in HB 1441.

Hubs

Many of us in our Joining Voices community have been talking about the value of “hubs” since the Blueprint was still at the Kirwan Commission table. This can be one of the keys to success. Hubs should be community-based organizations with relationships with the child care center and family child care program leaders, demonstrated competency in strengths-based approaches, and ready to co-design services with the field. The organization must be grounded in the values of equitable distribution of funds, tailored support appropriate to the settings, and meaningful opportunities.

Other initiatives addressed in HB 1441

- The bill calls for extending funding for the Maryland Child Care Credential Program through FY 2030
- The bill calls for the elimination of the Child Care Incentive Grant Program
- Current law calls for investment in Maryland EXCELS bonuses through FY 28 in amounts that increase 10% from the prior year; the bill calls for investment at least equal to the prior year for FY 2029 and FY 2030

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