



HB206 EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION – PREKINDERGARTEN PROGRAMS – MONTESSORI SCHOOLS AND PROGRAMS

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COMMITTEE

SUPPORT

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Anne Arundel County Public Schools (AACPS) supports **HB206 Early Childhood Education – Prekindergarten Programs – Montessori Schools and Programs**. This bill alters the requirements for the Prekindergarten Expansion Grant Program to include operational requirements, staff certification requirements, and student-to-staff ratios for Montessori schools and programs. To be eligible for the grant, Montessori schools and programs for prekindergarten services will need to: (1) meet existing program requirements; (2) maintain a student to staff ratio of no more than 10 to one for a classroom if all of the students are younger than age five, and no more than 15 to one for a classroom if some of the students are at least age five; and (3) require classroom teachers to hold a bachelor's degree and be certified by the Association Montessori Internationale, the American Montessori Society, or the Montessori Accreditation Council for Teacher Education.

In 2021, the General Assembly overrode Governor Hogan's veto of the Blueprint for Maryland's Future (Blueprint) which significantly changes State education policy based on the recommendations of the Commission on Innovation and Excellence in Education. The Blueprint law proposes a long-term phase-in of mandated increases in State and local funding for public education, increases that represent the commitment Maryland must make to fully and equitably fund a world class public education for all of Maryland's nearly one million students.

The first pillar of the Blueprint for Maryland's Future (Blueprint) is investing in high-quality early childhood education so that all children have the opportunity to begin kindergarten ready to learn. To meet this goal, the Blueprint calls for a significant expansion of full-day prekindergarten, to be free to all low-income three- and four-year-old children and available to all other four-year-old children with fees set at a sliding scale. Additionally, the Blueprint calls for public funding for both public-school based and community-based prekindergarten programs, with all providers receiving public funding required to meet rigorous quality standards.

However, as AACPS has worked to implement this provision of the Blueprint, we have identified several barriers to a public-private delivery model of prekindergarten. These barriers include hiring qualified staff with the advanced credentials required in Blueprint, additional space in buildings (private providers are at 100% capacity in most locations with students paying tuition), the requirement to remove religious symbols, substantially increasing staff salaries, the inability of private providers to choose who to enroll, and purchasing supplies.

HB206 expands eligibility for the Prekindergarten Expansion Grant Program created by the Blueprint to Montessori schools and programs, thus increasing the number of private prekindergarten providers who are eligible to partner with AACPS to meet the goal of a public-private delivery model of prekindergarten services for Maryland's students. Additionally, AACPS appreciates the amendments to this bill that permit larger student to staff ratios and class sizes for Montessori programs and schools that are characteristic of and essential to the Montessori method. Accordingly, AACPS respectfully requests a **FAVORABLE** committee report on HB206.