

**Testimony of the
Baltimore City Board of School Commissioners
Support with Amendments
House Bill 1441 – Early Childhood Education
Publicly Funded Prekindergarten Programs – Alterations**

March 27, 2024

The Baltimore City Board of School Commissioners supports with amendments House Bill 1441. The Board incorporates by reference amendments provided by the Maryland Association of Boards of Education and the Public School Superintendent's Association, but also would like to commend the sponsor for recognizing that there are many concerns about the public/private provider requirements in the current law.

The Board shares with the sponsor is that the current law requires that prekindergarten teaching assistants must have hold a Child Development Associate certificate or an Associate's degree by June 30, 2027 or show progress toward the CDA or AA. At present, approximately 75% of City School's paraprofessionals do not meet the qualification of having a CDA or AA, although more than 60% have at least 15 years' experience. In order to ensure individuals with significant experience successfully working in these roles are not displaced from their positions if they are unable to meet these new requirements, the sponsor has modified the Blueprint law to include alternative approaches for pre-K teaching assistants, which the Board agrees with wholeheartedly.

However, there still is some concern about removing the language that private providers must be given 50% of pre-k students. Baltimore City Schools has been serving the majority of 4 year olds in the City, well before the passage of the Blueprint. The language that has been amended on requires us to enter into an MOU and show a good faith effort to provide a mixed delivery system is troubling and would require that City Schools remove eligible prek students from open City Schools seats to move to a private provider setting. Removing eligible public school students to move to a private provider setting seems to be unreasonable. We would suggest that the original language in the bill stand and read:

7-1A-03

It is the goal of the State that at least 50% of the prekindergarten slots provided in each county be provided by eligible private providers beginning in the 2027-2028 school year and is not a mandatory requirement and should not require removing existing public students in public school prekindergarten seats to fulfill the goal.

Baltimore City School students in prek outperform the State. Below is an article from the newspaper demonstrating how well our prek program is supporting students.

STUDENTS ATTENDING CITY SCHOOLS PRE-KINDERGARTEN PROGRAMS OUTPERFORM THE STATE OVERALL

City Schools

MAR 08, 2024

<https://www.baltimorecityschools.org/article/1498843>

BALTIMORE – Baltimore City Public Schools (City Schools) is outperforming Maryland overall in kindergarten readiness, according to the latest results from state education officials.

District leaders attribute that success to the system's investments in early learning.

Forty-six percent of City Schools students who attended a [City School' PreK or Judy Center](#) demonstrated readiness on the state's Kindergarten Readiness Assessment (KRA) in the 2023-24 school year compared to 44 percent for Maryland overall.

City Schools' Black/African American, Hispanic/Latino, White, economically disadvantaged, and Multilingual learner students all outperformed the state in the same categories.

Students with disabilities in City Schools performed at the same level as their peers in the state. These gains occurred while Baltimore City experienced a sharp increase in the number of pre-kindergarten students and students that require specialized services.

Students attending a City Schools Pre-K or Judy Center also had higher rates of readiness than students attending other prior care settings like private care or in-home options. The results show that pre-kindergarten students in Baltimore City are better prepared for kindergarten than at any time since the onset of the COVID pandemic in 2020. These positive results are an indication that pre-K-focused learning programs are paying dividends for students.

"We know that young people who enter kindergarten at or above grade level will be more equipped to experience success throughout their educational careers. These latest results verify that our long-term and consistent investments in the education of our youngest learners are continuing to pay off, as larger numbers of our youngest learners are ready to thrive from day one," said [Sonja Brookins Santelises, chief executive officer of City Schools](#). "As importantly, our pre-kindergarten students are performing better than their peers across Maryland. We are committed to even higher levels of performance in the future."

The Kindergarten Readiness Assessment (KRA) is part of Maryland's broader Ready for Kindergarten (R4K) program. The KRA is administered to all kindergarten students in the first quarter of a school year. It allows teachers to measure each child's school readiness across multiple domains.

Key takeaways include:

- **Locally, our Judy Centers and pre-kindergarten programs continue to be the best way to prepare students for kindergarten.**
- **Among KRA test takers that attended City Schools' programs the prior year, all student groups have equal or higher readiness as the same groups at the state level.**

- **Black/African American students** increased readiness by 6 percentage points, from 40 percent to 46 percent, surpassing the state which is at 40 percent.
- **Hispanic/Latino students** increased readiness by 5 percentage points, from 27 percent to 32 percent, surpassing the state's readiness of 24 percent.
- **White students** increased readiness by 9 percentage points, from 63 percent to 72 percent, outperforming the state's readiness of 59 percent.
- **Economically disadvantaged students** increased readiness by 6 percentage points, from 36 percent to 42 percent, outperforming the state's readiness by 10 percentage points.
- **Multilingual learner students** increased readiness by 9 percentage points, from 15 percent to 24 percent, doubling the state's readiness of 12 percentage points.
- **Students with disabilities** increased readiness by 7 percentage points, from 11 percent to 18 percent, equaling the state's readiness of 18 percent.

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