



SB 311: Education - The Blueprint for Maryland's Future – Revisions

February 18, 2026

Position: Favorable with Amendments

The Maryland Down Syndrome Advocacy Coalition (MDAC) is a coalition of the five Down syndrome organizations in Maryland as well as individuals with Down syndrome and their family members who have come together to advocate for improved quality of life for all individuals with Down syndrome throughout the state of Maryland.

MDAC strongly supports the Blueprint for Maryland's Future: its transformational potential for Maryland's schools, its focus on equity, and its goals of improving outcomes for students with disabilities and closing achievement gaps so that all students can leave school prepared for postsecondary education, careers, and life in our communities. And MDAC supports SB311 which provides for necessary revisions to the Blueprint, including needed flexibility for the Concentration of Poverty Grant Program, an expanded definition of wraparound services in Community Schools, and an extension of the currently used approaches for calculating compensatory education enrollment.

In addition to these important changes, **MDAC proposes an amendment to permanently expand the Tier I definition for pre-Kindergarten to include students with disabilities and multilingual learners, regardless of income.** Without legislative action, a provision that extends Tier I status to students with disabilities and multilingual learners from families with income levels between 300% and 600% of federal poverty will expire at the end of the 2025-2026 school year. A permanent change in the Tier I definition was a key recommendation of both the Blueprint Special Education Workgroup and the Workgroup on English Learners in Public Schools.¹

Tier 1 expansion is consistent with the intent of federal law and state regulations, and reflective of the recommendations of the *Workgroup to Study the Implementation of Universal Access to Prekindergarten for 4-Year-Olds* that submitted its findings and recommendations to the Kirwan Commission in 2017. That workgroup noted that:

"...four-year-old children with IEPs...should be considered a priority regardless of income. The IDEA requires the free appropriate public education of all students with IEPs at no cost to the families; therefore, they should have priority for full day slots regardless of the eligibility phase-in plan. The provision of special education and related services for eligible preschool children with

¹MSDE, *Special Education Workgroup Addendum to the Final Report*, (2025), p. 29. "The General Assembly should expand Tier 1 to include all 3- and 4-year-old children with disabilities, regardless of family income, for prioritization seats and for full funding." <https://blueprint.marylandpublicschools.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/20/2025/07/SEW-Report-Addendum-5.30.2025-A.pdf>

MSDE, *Final Report: Workgroup on English Learners in Public Schools*, (2022), p. 98, "MSDE should amend statute to enable English learner students, students experiencing homelessness, and students with disabilities to count towards PreK Tier 1 Funding." <https://blueprint.marylandpublicschools.org/wp%2Dcontent/uploads/sites/20/2022/11/WorkgroupEnglishLearnersPublicSchoolsFinalReport.pdf>

disabilities, ages three through five, has been required by the IDEA since 1990 and in State COMAR regulations since 1985.”²

The Kirwan Commission adopted this stance as well, recommending “priority in expansion of high-quality pre-K...be given to...students with special education needs, regardless of income.”³

Failure to permanently expand the Tier I definition threatens the expected outcome of Blueprint Pillar 1 that “all students enter kindergarten ready to learn.” Students with disabilities and multilingual learners are the student groups that are the least ready for kindergarten. In fact, **income-level is less predicative of kindergarten readiness than having a disability or coming from a family with limited English proficiency.**

- In 2023-24, the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment (KRA) found that “children with disabilities are less ready than their peers without a disability”—with a gap of 29 points in readiness (18% vs. 47%).
- The readiness gap for multilingual learners is even greater—38 points (12% vs. 50%).
- Family income also has a significant impact on readiness (with a gap of 20 points between “direct-certified” and not direct-certified students).
- It is worth noting, however, that the data indicates that direct-certified⁴ students without disabilities are more likely to be ready for kindergarten (35%) than non-direct-certified students with disabilities (23%).
- KRA data consistently show that attending a formal early learning program increases readiness in comparison to being at home or in informal care. In 2023-2024, “50% of children who attended any formal early learning program demonstrated readiness compared with only 25% of children who were in informal care.”

Maryland KRA Results, SY24, by Student Subgroup⁵

	2023-2024
All Kindergarten Students	44
Students with disabilities	18
Students without disabilities	47
Multilingual Learners	12
Non-Multilingual Learners	50
Direct-Certified	32
Not Direct-Certified	52
Direct-certified – Students with disabilities	12
Direct-certified – Students without disabilities	35
Not direct-certified – Students with disabilities	23
Not direct-certified – Students without disabilities	55

² <https://msa.maryland.gov/megafile/msa/speccol/sc5300/sc5339/000113/022400/022473/20180026e.pdf>

³ Maryland Commission on Innovation & Excellence in Education, Interim Report, January 2019, p. 36, <https://dls.maryland.gov/pubs/prod/NoPblTabMtg/CmsInnovEduc/2019-Interim-Report-of-the-Commission.pdf>

⁴ Direct certification refers to the process used by jurisdictions to identify children who are living in poverty based on a household’s use of other services, including Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), or if a child is experiencing homelessness, is in foster care, or is a migrant or runaway.

⁵ MSDE, [Readiness Matters: Kindergarten Readiness Assessment Report](#), 2023-24.

The road to closing achievement gaps and achieving equitable outcomes for all students begins with the intentional prioritization and funding of students with disabilities and multilingual learners for high-quality, publicly funded, inclusive prekindergarten programs. **For these reasons, MDAC strongly urges the inclusion of an amendment to SB311 permanently expanding the Tier I definition to include these students.**

Respectfully submitted,

Amanda Mummert
Executive Director, Down Syndrome Association of Maryland (DSAMD)
On behalf of the Maryland Down Syndrome Advocacy Coalition
director@dsamd.org