

Chapter 618

(House Bill 748)

AN ACT concerning

**Publicly Funded Prekindergarten – Early Childhood Educator Career Ladder
for Private Providers – ~~Repeal of Deadlines~~ New Pathways**

FOR the purpose of ~~repealing the requirements that certain experiential and educational qualifications in~~ adding new pathways to the early childhood educator career ladder for eligible private prekindergarten providers ~~must be met on or before certain dates that allow educators to meet certain experiential and educational qualifications within certain periods of time~~; and generally relating to the requirements for eligible private providers in publicly funded prekindergarten.

BY repealing and reenacting, with amendments,
 Article – Education
 Section 7–1A–08
 Annotated Code of Maryland
 (2025 Replacement Volume and 2025 Supplement)

SECTION 1. BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF MARYLAND,
 That the Laws of Maryland read as follows:

Article – Education

7–1A–08.

(a) (1) On or before July 1, 2025, the Department shall establish an early childhood educator career ladder for eligible private providers.

(2) The early childhood educator career ladder is for teachers and assistant teachers employed by eligible private providers.

(3) The purpose of the early childhood educator career ladder is to:

(i) Transform early childhood education teaching into a high–status profession in the State;

(ii) Attract high–performing students to pursue the high–status early childhood education teaching profession; and

(iii) Retain high–quality early childhood education teachers who gain additional responsibility, authority, status, and compensation as they gain additional expertise.

(b) The early childhood educator career ladder shall:

- (1) Adequately compensate early childhood educators for their work;
- (2) Provide early childhood educators with the opportunity to identify and work with prekindergarten teachers and teaching assistants;
- (3) Provide early childhood educators the opportunity to develop their skills and knowledge by participating in job-embedded professional development; and
- (4) Compensate early childhood educators at greater rates as they advance to the next level of the career ladder.

(c) (1) The levels of the career ladder are as follows:

- (i) Level one is an early childhood teaching assistant;
- (ii) Level two is a prekindergarten lead teacher; and
- (iii) Level three is an early childhood consulting teacher.

(2) In order to qualify as an early childhood teaching assistant, an educator shall:

(i) 1. Hold a high school diploma; and

2. ~~On or before July 1, 2027, within 3 years after being hired as an early childhood teaching assistant;~~

A. Earn and maintain a Child Development Associate (CDA) with a preschool designation; or

B. Hold an associate degree in early childhood education or child development; ~~or~~

(ii) [On July 1, 2024, have] **HAVE** documented experience of actively providing services in early childhood education for a minimum of 15 years for at least:

1. 20 hours per week; and

2. 180 days per year; **OR**

(iii) 1. HOLD A HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA; AND

2. WITHIN 3 MONTHS AFTER BEING HIRED AS AN EARLY CHILDHOOD TEACHING ASSISTANT:

A. EARN AND MAINTAIN A CHILD DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATE (CDA) WITH A PRESCHOOL DESIGNATION; OR

B. HOLD AN ASSOCIATE DEGREE IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION OR CHILD DEVELOPMENT.

(3) (i) Subject to subparagraph (ii) of this paragraph, in order to qualify as a prekindergarten lead teacher, an educator shall:

1. Hold at least a bachelor's degree in early childhood education, child development, or a related field from an institution of higher education accredited by an institutional accrediting association recognized by the U.S. Department of Education;

2. A. Hold at least a bachelor's degree in early childhood education, child development, or a related field from an institution of higher education in another country; and

B. Have the degree under item A of this item verified as comparable to a bachelor's degree granted by an accredited institution of higher education in the United States by an independent agency authorized to analyze foreign credentials selected by the Department;

3. Hold a bachelor's degree in a field unrelated to early childhood education from an institution of higher education accredited by an institutional accrediting association approved by the U.S. Department of Education; or

4. Subject to subparagraph (iii) of this paragraph, [on July 1, 2024,] have documented experience of actively providing services in early childhood education for a minimum of 10 years for at least:

A. 20 hours per week; and

B. 180 days per year.

(ii) In order to qualify as a prekindergarten lead teacher through any pathway other than the pathway described under subparagraph (i)1 of this paragraph, an educator must achieve a minimum score on the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) assessment as set by the Department in addition to the requirements listed under subparagraph (i) of this paragraph.

(iii) 1. [On or before July 1, 2030] ~~WITHIN 6 YEARS AFTER QUALIFYING AS A LEAD TEACHER,~~ a A prekindergarten lead teacher who qualifies

through the pathway described under subparagraph (i)4 of this paragraph shall earn an associate degree in early childhood education;

A. ON OR BEFORE JULY 1, 2030, IF THE TEACHER QUALIFIED THROUGH THE PATHWAY ON OR BEFORE JULY 1, 2024; OR

B. WITHIN 6 MONTHS AFTER QUALIFYING AS A LEAD TEACHER, IF THE TEACHER QUALIFIED THROUGH THE PATHWAY AFTER JULY 1, 2024.

2. Teachers from level three of the career ladder shall mentor and provide professional support to a prekindergarten lead teacher described under this subparagraph to ensure that the teacher earns a degree within the required amount of time.

(iv) In order to maintain status as a prekindergarten lead teacher, each year a lead teacher shall complete at least 20 working hours of professional learning and development in:

1. Early childhood instruction;
2. Developmentally appropriate practice; and
3. Any other professional skill areas the Department determines are valuable.

(4) In order to qualify as an early childhood consulting teacher, an educator shall:

- (i) Be a prekindergarten lead teacher in good standing;
- (ii) Beginning in the 2027–2028 school year, hold early childhood education certification or be pursuing certification;
- (iii) Be able to lead other early childhood educators in an effective and disciplined way to improve the curriculum and instruction of prekindergarten students;
- (iv) Demonstrate the skills and knowledge to mentor early childhood assistant teachers and new prekindergarten lead teachers, including by helping them to meet the educational and certification qualifications necessary to qualify for and maintain status on the career ladder; and
- (v) Supervise and support prekindergarten lead teachers, if practicable through prekindergarten provider hubs, in one or more sites in order to improve developmentally appropriate instructional practices for prekindergarten students.

SECTION 2. AND BE IT FURTHER ENACTED, That this Act shall take effect July 1, 2026.

Approved by the Governor, May 26, 2026.