



Chair Anne R. Kaiser, Vice Chair Alonzo T. Washington, and members of the House Ways and Means Committee,
 The Ways and Means Committee of the Maryland House of Delegates
 Room 131 House Office Building
 Annapolis, Maryland 21401

February 5th, 2021

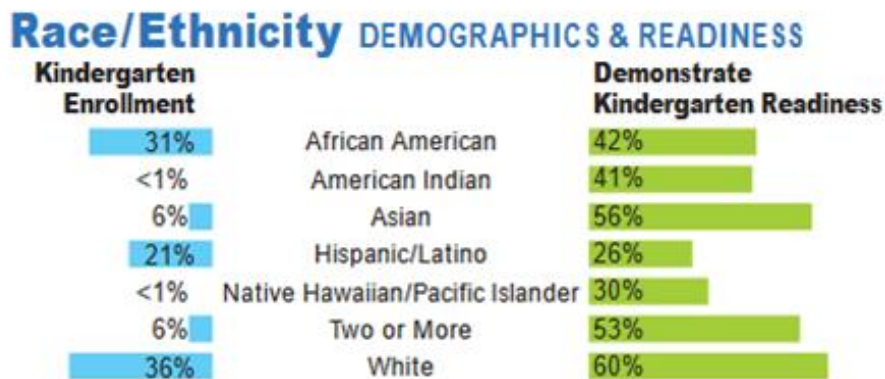
House Bill 608: Early Childhood Education - Child Care Provider Support Grant Program (The Child Care Provider Support Act) Favorable

Summary

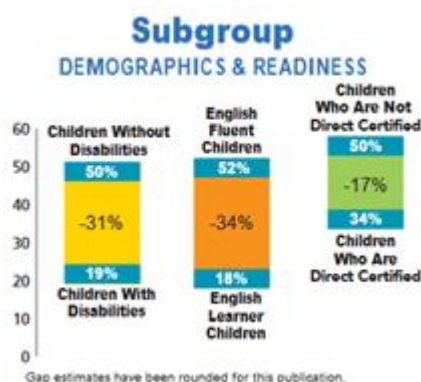
The Maryland Alliance for Racial Equity in Education, a coalition of education advocacy, civil rights, and community-based organizations that are committed to eliminating racial disparities in Maryland's education system, asks the committee to ensure that every young child – especially children of color, dual language learners, children from low-income families, and children with disabilities – has access to high-quality early care and education (ECE). 51% of Maryland's population lives in a childcare desert (that is, an area where there are more than three children under age five for each licensed childcare seat)ⁱ. Of the families that can access childcare, the average annual tuition for a family with two children is \$24,980, or 26% of an average family's income.ⁱⁱ Maryland's public preschool program meets only 7 of 10 quality benchmarks according to the National Institute for Early Education Research, and it serves only 27% of Latino children and 28% of Black children.ⁱⁱⁱ Inequitable access to quality ECE contributes to large disparities in academic preparedness before students enter kindergarten. The COVID19 pandemic is widening these disparities by closing ECE centers and increasing the costs of childcare for families. House Bill 608 provides critical funds to support ECE centers in low-income communities, and MAREE urges the committee to give the bill a favorable report and override the veto of the Blueprint for Maryland's Future.

Racial disparities in academic preparation begin before kindergarten.

Data from 2019-2020 Kindergarten Readiness Assessment Report shows profound racial and socio-economic inequities.^{iv} There is a 34-point gap in readiness scores between Latino and White kindergarten students and an 18-point gap between Black and White students. There is also a 34% gap in readiness scores between English fluent kindergarten students and students who are English learners. These are bigger gaps than the sizable gap between children from low-income families and children from higher-income families (17 points). These gaps impact students throughout their academic careers and are unsustainable for the state. (See graph X for data for Black, American Indian, Asian, Latino, and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander children, and children of two more race/ethnicities. See Graph Y for data on other demographic categories)



Graph X. From 2019-2020 KINDERGARTEN READINESS ASSESSMENT REPORT



Graph Y. From 2019-2020 KINDERGARTEN READINESS ASSESSMENT REPORT

Why additional resources are needed due to COVID19 to prevent gaps from widening.

A survey from the National Association for the Education of Young Children shows that the pandemic is decreasing access to ECE.^v Nationally, 70% of childcare centers have reported increased costs for staff, supplies, and personal protective equipment (PPE). Tuition increases to make up for these costs have left many families unable to afford ECE. According to NAEYC “for a household with two children in childcare, these tuition increases would result in families paying an additional \$2,112 to \$2,760 per year” and “for a family of four living at the poverty level, the tuition increase alone would amount to 8-11% of their annual income”.^{vi} Revenues are down 49% due to enrollment losses, and 86% of ECE providers are serving fewer students. Many providers have closed, and 40% of providers in NAEYC’s survey say they will close permanently. Moreover, providers families of color seem to be hurt most severely.^{vii}

Local reporting suggests that as of September 2020, 2,000 licensed childcare providers have shuttered in Maryland.^{viii} By passing HB608, Maryland can prevent further loss in access to ECE. Additional state support would reduce the need for tuition increases by helping providers cover operating costs, staff wages and benefits, rent, utilities, insurance, and PPE.^{ix} Moreover, HB608 specifically targets funds to low-income communities. It is critical the state conducts outreach to raise awareness about the grant. Smaller programs with less administrative capacity will also need technical assistance to have a fair chance of successfully applying. The General Assembly could further support ECE providers by connecting them to state-based business supports and relief funding throughout the pandemic.

The importance of the Blueprint to address long-term disparities.

HB608 is needed to address the short-term impacts of COVID19. However, the General Assembly must also ensure the Blueprint becomes law and is fully funded to address systemic inequities in access to high quality ECE. The Blueprint expands priority access to full-day pre-K slots to students from low-income backgrounds, students who are dual language learners, and students who qualify as having multiple needs. Additionally, the Blueprint develops a stronger pipeline for ECE educators of color and multilingual ECE educators. It requires that providers participate in ongoing, culturally and linguistically competent, evidence-based training in positive behavior support and developmentally appropriate discipline practices. These changes would improve the learning environment for all students.

There is a significant research base confirming the benefit of quality affordable ECE. Maryland has an opportunity and responsibility to address these inequities for both the short-term recovery and long-term success of Maryland's youngest learners and their families. MAREE strongly encourages the House Ways and Means Committee to give HB608 a favorable report and support efforts to override the veto of the Blueprint for Maryland's future.

Sincerely,

The Members of MAREE

The ACLU Of Maryland,
Advocates for Children and Youth,
Attendance Works,
Baltimore Corp,
The Black and Brown Coalition for
Educational Equity and Excellence,
Business Leaders United for Education in
Maryland
Casa de Maryland,
The Caucus of African American Leaders of
Anne Arundel County,
The Education Trust,

The Greater Baltimore Urban League,
Identity, Inc.,
The NAACP Maryland State Conference,
The NAACP Parent Council of Montgomery
County,
Prince George's County Advocates for Better
Schools,
Strong Schools Maryland
The 1977-II Action Group

ⁱ <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/early-childhood/reports/2019/09/16/474487/early-learning-united-states-2019/>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/early-childhood/reports/2019/09/16/474487/early-learning-united-states-2019/>

ⁱⁱⁱ https://nieer.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Maryland_YB2019.pdf

^{iv} https://earlychildhood.marylandpublicschools.org/system/files/filedepot/4/200178_ready5_book_web.pdf

^v https://www.naeyc.org/sites/default/files/globally-shared/downloads/PDFs/resources/blog/raise_tuition_or_close.naeyc.pdf

^{vi} https://www.naeyc.org/sites/default/files/globally-shared/downloads/PDFs/our-work/public-policy-advocacy/naeyc_policy_familiespaytheprice.pdf

^{vii} https://www.naeyc.org/sites/default/files/globally-shared/downloads/PDFs/our-work/public-policy-advocacy/naeyc_policy_crisis_coronavirus_december_survey_data.pdf

^{viii} <https://www.nbcwashington.com/investigations/thousands-of-local-child-care-centers-closed-due-to-covid-19/2406310/>

^{ix} https://www.naeyc.org/sites/default/files/globally-shared/downloads/PDFs/our-work/public-policy-advocacy/naeyc_policy_familiespaytheprice.pdf