



**Board of Education of Howard County
Testimony Submitted to the Maryland Senate,
Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
March 1, 2023**

**Board of Education
of Howard County**

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**SB0609: FAVORABLE
Education - Early Childhood Education Teachers – Qualifications**

The Board of Education of Howard County (the Board) supports **SB0609 Education - Early Childhood Education Teachers - Qualifications** as a tool to expand the prekindergarten workforce in Maryland.

SB0609 allows for the establishment of alternative teacher preparation programs leading to state certification by a county board, an institution of higher education, a nonprofit organization, or the Maryland State Department of Education specific to early childhood educators. Differing from existing requirements for educators to complete a practicum in order to graduate from a program, SB0609 also allows early childhood educators to receive credit for prior experience in their field. Criteria for the application of prior learning would be set by the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE).

While a key component of early childhood expansion under the Blueprint for Maryland's Future includes the use of local nonpublic prekindergarten providers, this past year only one Howard County provider (a nonprofit that supports family providers in Maryland) in addition to the existing Head Start program applied for and received state funds to participate. Beyond the requirement to be full-day, participation in the extensive requirements of the early childhood education pillar of Blueprint include achieving EXCELS ratings, mandated student to teacher ratios, educational background minimums for teacher and classroom assistants, and other provisions to be equivalent to that of the local school system such as teacher salary. Current certification requirements are one such barrier for nonpublic provider participation.

The Board and Howard County Public School System (HCPSS) staff supports SB0609 for the hope that allowance of alternative preparation programs and prior learning experience would increase nonpublic participation. Nonpublic colleagues in the early childhood field have shared that a requirement for student teaching to take place somewhere other than their current place of employment is also a barrier. The addition of a separate pathway specific to early childhood educators, while not addressed in this bill, would presumably also alleviate this challenge.

An additional provision of SB0609 adds the ability for an educator pursuing a certificate through an alternative preparation program as added to the law above to be

an eligible early childhood provider. Under existing Blueprint requirements starting in SY2025-2026, eligible providers must hold certification for teaching in early childhood education or have a bachelor's degree in any field and are pursuing residency through the Maryland Approved Alternative Preparation Program. Similar to the above provision, this would be a benefit to nonpublic staff who do not currently hold certificates but are interested in pursuing in order to become eligible for funding. It may also give HCPSS more flexibility for staffing a classroom as the school system would have the ability to hire or keep a person in a position when pursuing the alternative preparation program.

For these reasons, we urge a FAVORABLE report of SB0609 from this Committee.