



SB852 Blueprint for Maryland's Future – Alterations
Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
March 5, 2025
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 two provisions in SB852: (1) requiring the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) to conduct an adequacy study of Maryland's special education funding and (2) altering the definition of "Tier I" children to explicitly include children with disabilities with respect to eligibility for publicly funded prekindergarten. These two provisions reflect recommendations from the 50-member Blueprint Special Education Workgroup based on member feedback representing a wide range of perspectives including general and special educators, school and district administrators, parents, advocates, experts, related service providers, and others from across Maryland. MDAC co-chair Liz Zogby serves as co-chair of the Workgroup.

The adequacy study was a key recommendation based on unanimous feedback from Workgroup members that current Blueprint funding is not adequate to meet the needs of students with disabilities, and that such a study must consider the adequacy of the foundation program. Inadequate funding impacts the ability of schools to provide students with disabilities with a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) as required by federal and state law because it limits IEP decision-making and available resources, exacerbates staff shortages, and curtails student progress leading to challenging behaviors and more restrictive (and more expensive) placements. There was also unanimity from the Workgroup that multiple weights based on disability and/or intensity of support needs, rather than a single weight for all students with disabilities, is preferred. Other areas of significant concern for Workgroup members were: the feasibility of minimum school funding with a single-weight special education funding model; supplantation of Blueprint special education funding in some districts; the costs of transportation, nonpublic placements, and litigation; and issues like more fluidity in funding to account for enrollment changes, systemic investments and preventative services, and pay and support for paraprofessionals.¹

Given the urgency of these concerns and their impact on students with disabilities, the study timeline in SB852—to award the contract by July 1, 2026, and report on the results by December 1, 2027—should be accelerated. MDAC proposes amending the timeline described in Section 4(c)(2)

¹ See Feedback on Adequate Funding on pp. 13-14, and Recommendations 10-12 on p. 33 in MSDE, *Special Education Workgroup Final Report*, <https://blueprint.marylandpublicschools.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/20/2024/12/12.2024-SEW-Report-Final-A.pdf>

and 4(d) to the following: awarding the contract by January 1, 2026, and the reporting the findings and recommendations by December 15, 2026.

Students with disabilities regardless of income have been included along with Tier I students for prioritization and funding for prekindergarten seats, but are not included in the Blueprint's definition of Tier I. In 2023-24, the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment 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%). Gaps are evident between children with and without disabilities in all domains of the assessment: social foundations, language and literacy, mathematics, and physical well-being and motor development.² Prioritizing prekindergarten attendance for children with disabilities is critical to reaching the Blueprint's goals of eliminating these achievement gaps and ensuring all young children are ready for kindergarten. Thus, we strongly support altering the definition of Tier I.

On the other hand, MDAC opposes (1) allowing waivers for minimum school funding requirements for schools with 350 or fewer students, which may have a negative impact on students with disabilities and (2) aggregating the reporting of minimum school funding at the school level instead of by individual Blueprint category. The minimum school funding requirement, with the layers of funding following at-promise students to their school buildings, is the heart of the Blueprint funding model. Chipping away at this requirement reduces accountability for ensuring that adequate resources for students with disabilities and other at-promise students are available for the provision of FAPE. Therefore, MDAC urges amending SB852 by deleting the section related to 5-234 on minimum school funding (p. 2/line 28 through p. 4/line 6).

For these reasons, MDAC appreciates the introduction of this important bill and strongly supports the passage of the provisions related to the special education adequacy study (amending the timeline) and the inclusion of children with disabilities in Tier I for eligibility to publicly funded prekindergarten. Finally, MDAC opposes the changes to minimum school funding and suggests amending by deleting this provision.

Respectfully submitted,

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² MSDE, [Readiness Matters: Kindergarten Readiness Assessment Report](#), 2023-24.

N.B.: The KRA previously used by Maryland is being discontinued due to concerns of biased testing items. A new KRA will be implemented in SY 25-26. See: <https://news.maryland.gov/msde/msde-adopts-new-kra/>