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PREKINDERGARTEN

Fact Sheet
31

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What are prekindergarten programs?

Prekindergarten is a state-funded prekindergarten program for four-year-old children who are from families that are economically disadvantaged or homeless. The overall goal of prekindergarten is to provide learning experiences to help children develop and maintain the basic skills necessary to be successful in school. The prekindergarten program provides appropriate experiences that address the literacy, cognitive, social, emotional, and physical needs of young children.

Who operates prekindergarten programs?

Local school systems are required to develop local policies and procedures for implementing prekindergarten programs in accordance with state regulations. Under these regulations, a prekindergarten site typically operates a morning and afternoon session five days a week for a minimum of 2.5 hours daily per session consistent with the local school system calendar. Each session has an average of 20 students and is staffed with one state-certified early childhood teacher and a qualified full-time assistant. Local school systems are required to implement the prekindergarten content standards, and many local school systems use the MSDE prekindergarten quality standards that define program management, the quality of early education in the classroom, staff development, and procedures for communication with kindergarten teachers.

Who is eligible for prekindergarten?

A child admitted to the prekindergarten program in the public schools must be four years old or older on September 1 of the school year in which the child applies for entrance. Eligibility for enrollment is extended to four-year-old children who come from families with economically disadvantaged backgrounds or who are homeless. The Bridge to Excellence in Public Schools Act requires local school systems to enroll all income eligible four-year-old children whose parents or guardians seek to enroll them. After the initial enrollment of these children, local school systems may fill any remaining vacancies by enrolling children who exhibit a lack of readiness in personal and social development, language and literacy, mathematical thinking, scientific thinking, social studies, the arts, or physical development and health.

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***What are
the long-term
effects
of prekindergarten?***

The results of an analysis on the long-term effects of Maryland's public prekindergarten programs indicate that enrollment in the program has a positive effect on the participants' school performance through elementary and middle school. The findings also suggest that participation in prekindergarten programs significantly reduces the number of children who were identified as having disabilities or placement in special education.

***How is
prekindergarten
funded?***

The Bridge to Excellence in Public Schools Act in Maryland was fully phased in by FY08. This act significantly increased funding to all local school systems. Local school systems use their General Education dollars to fund the prekindergarten program.