

Implementation of the PreK Mixed Delivery System

Joint Implementation Policy #3
Blueprint for Maryland's Future

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Background

The Blueprint for Maryland's Future established a comprehensive framework to transform Maryland's education system, with Pillar 1 focusing on early childhood education. This pillar emphasizes expanding access to high-quality prekindergarten programs for three- and four-year-olds, prioritizing equitable access for low-income families, and leveraging a mixed-delivery system that includes both public schools and private providers.

Since the establishment of the Blueprint, several policy changes have been made to refine the prekindergarten sliding scale implementation and mixed delivery system. These include pushing back the implementation timeline and accelerating the increase of the per pupil rate to reach the full cost in FY 2027, instead of FY 2030.

Although the State Board of Education approved the original sliding scale in February 2024, its implementation was postponed by the General Assembly's actions in the spring 2024 Budget Reconciliation and Financing Act (BRFA), which limited prekindergarten in the 2024–2025 school year to Tier I students only and deferred the rollout to the 2025–2026 school year. As we prepare for the upcoming school year and the 2025 legislative session, it is important that we reassess the phased rollout strategy and align resources to effectively implement the sliding scale and mixed delivery model.

Discussion

The Accountability and Implementation Board (AIB) and State Board of Education (SBOE) are committed to expanding access to high-quality early childhood education through a mixed delivery system. As a design principle of the sliding scale, families in Tiers II and III (higher-income families compared to Tier I families) can be required to contribute a “family share” amount to cover all or part of the per-pupil cost of prekindergarten services. This approach aims to balance affordability for families while ensuring sufficient funding to sustain high-quality programming across the mixed delivery system.

Implementation concerns remain about the feasibility and practicality of local school systems regularly collecting payment for the family share. The current law allows for local school systems to waive the family share for prekindergarten if they choose to do so. Further provisions on the sliding scale and family share are outlined in State Board policy.

Changing eligibility for students with special needs, multilingual learners, and students experiencing homelessness as Tier I eligible for funding purposes within the Blueprint's prekindergarten framework requires a statutory change.

Continued efforts are needed to improve the operating conditions for private and public providers of prekindergarten. MSDE will engage in a careful examination of credentialing, quality standards, and prekindergarten requirements to maximize efficiencies, prioritize quality, and eliminate duplication. Both boards will look to partner with Head Start providers to increase the volume of eligible providers that can serve three- and four-year olds.

This joint policy provides implementation guidance for local school districts and partners in how to implement and accelerate the mixed delivery prekindergarten system. Specifically, we encourage public school systems to focus on delivering prekindergarten to Tier I four-year-olds, while private providers are encouraged to focus on serving Tier I three-year-olds and Tier II and Tier III four-year-olds. Both boards acknowledge that local context may drive differences in the mixed delivery model within specific school systems. Local school systems are encouraged to focus on maximizing the number of Tier I four-year-olds served, while MSDE will focus on increasing the number of private providers of prekindergarten across the state.

Policy Statements

The AIB and SBOE establish the following implementation direction to maximize the number of students served in Maryland’s mixed delivery prekindergarten system:

- 1. Public providers focus on ensuring all eligible Tier I four-year-olds are served.**
- 2. Private providers, including Head Start providers, focus on serving Tier I three-year-olds and Tier II and Tier III four-year-olds.**
- 3. Private providers may choose to serve Tier I four-year-olds. Public providers may choose to serve Tier II and III four-year-olds. Those providers that serve Tier II and III four-year-olds may choose to collect the family share, but are not required to do so.**

ADOPTED THIS 28TH DAY OF JANUARY:



**ISIAH LEGGETT, CHAIR
ACCOUNTABILITY AND IMPLEMENTATION BOARD**



**JOSHUA L. MICHAEL, PH.D., PRESIDENT
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