



# CONNECTING YOUTH TO OPPORTUNITY

*early learning building academic  
success in prince george's county*

THE COMMUNITY FOUNDATION FOR THE NATIONAL CAPITAL REGION



# introduction

The problem of disconnected youth in Prince George's County is well-documented. With just over 7,000 young adults between the ages of 16-24 unemployed or not holding a high school diploma, philanthropists, businesses, parents, school leaders, policymakers, community members, and even students are tasked with finding a solution.<sup>1</sup> A large part of the answer to the problem of disconnected youth is that we are not connecting children with opportunity from the very beginning.

Prince George's County is committed to graduating 100% of its students "college and career ready." This means all students should graduate from Prince George's County Public Schools with the knowledge and skills to be able to enter the college or career of their choice and succeed. But when should preparation for this goal begin? It may be difficult to begin planning for the future when children are as young as three or four years old, but the foundation our children need in order to be successful in school, work, and life can be learned that early. Setting goals for our children's future and the future of Prince George's County requires investment now.

Many of us can still sing the alphabet song from preschool, or remember our first playground fight. Some of our most special relationships began in preschool, and we still long for the days when naptime was part of our daily schedule. This period provides a foundation for learning and social development resulting in lifelong benefits for all children, especially those from low-income families.

The term "early childhood services" refers to programs offered to children ages birth through four, and these programs are an important part of a child's development. Services include structured learning, social development, and character education. The academic achievement gap in elementary, middle, and high school affects low-income children the most, but high-quality early childhood services can offset the effects of poverty and close the gap. The benefits of early childhood services are clear:

- High quality early education investments can offer a benefits ratio of \$7 for every \$1 spent.<sup>2</sup> Additionally, investment in early childhood education programs can prevent the future expense of academic remediation and dropouts.
- High-quality pre-kindergarten programs yield a 10:1 return to society because of boosts in low-income children's cognitive, social, and emotional skills and readiness.<sup>3</sup>
- According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 90% of a child's brain development occurs in the first three years of a child's life.<sup>4</sup> Early childhood education programs provide the most beneficial and stimulating environment for that development.
- According to the World Health Organization, many challenges faced by adults like mental health issues, heart disease, obesity, and criminality (likelihood of committing a crime) can be traced back to poor early childhood development.<sup>5</sup>

- Preschool and Pre-kindergarten programs (education for children ages three and four) have been shown to increase student achievement in reading and math during later elementary years.
- In addition to long-term, sustained academic benefits, early education programs help children develop social and cognitive skills – how to interact with others and how to think critically.
- Early childhood programs have also been shown to combat the effects that poverty can have on a student's academic success.<sup>6</sup>

For these reasons, access to and enrollment in programs that promote healthy early childhood development and create pathways to success for all children are essential in Prince George's County.

## 4 THE *problem*

With so many proven benefits of early education, why aren't all of Prince George's County children enrolled in these programs? The answer is three-fold – 1) Families lack knowledge of and access to existing quality programs; 2) Families are not mandated to enroll their child in an educational program until age five; and 3) A lack of coordination between early education programs and service providers – groups are working with the same population, towards the same goals, but in isolation of each other.

Families in need of early childhood education services often have difficulty accessing resources and programs. For low-income families, educational options for children are limited, even when their children are as young as three years old. These families are afflicted by what observers call “time poverty” – parents lack the money, knowledge, and time to be able to enroll their child in a full-day or half-day early childhood services program. Even less documented are the struggles middle-income families have accessing or paying for early childhood education programs. They often exceed the income qualifications for low-income programs, but do not earn enough income to pay for early childhood service programs on their own.

Children ages birth to four whose parents both work need a safe, nurturing environment where they can stay during working hours. Prince George's County is not lacking in the number of childcare facilities and daycare service providers for children ages birth to four. Unfortunately, some of these “childcare” facilities offer just that – minimum basic care and nothing more. Further, they lack

credentialed teachers and employees, or are not certified by an accredited early childhood education agency. Consequently, children receive lower quality or poor services. Although there has recently been an increased effort to promote early childhood education programs, there is a lack of consensus about what constitutes a quality program, and even who gets to decide. Legislators, administrative agencies like the Department of Education and the Department of Health and Human Services, and private advocacy groups have all designed programs that are different and sometimes confusing for parents to discern the best choice for their child. Families must be informed about the types of early childhood facilities within Prince George's County, specifically what constitutes a “quality” provider.

Currently, the mandatory age of attendance for children in Maryland is five. This means that parents and guardians in Prince George's County do not have to enroll their child in school until they are five years old, or can prove with a birth certificate that their child will turn five by September 1st of that school year. Because the mandatory age of attendance is set at five, many parents and families wait to enroll their child in an educational program until they turn five. This creates a population of children between the ages of birth to four who are not engaged in learning and development. When these children are enrolled in school at age five, they often display lower literacy rates, more health problems, and more behavioral problems than their peers.

There are many reasons for the problems related to early childhood education that affect whether a young person is successful in school, work and life:

- 24.5% of children under the age of five in the United States are living in poverty. Low socio-economic status has been linked to malnutrition, behavioral problems, and lower academic achievement.
- The Federal budget devoted to all education for children has shrunk - from 9.2% in 2010 to 8.4% in 2011 – and is continuing to decrease.
- According to the Children's Defense Fund, there were 7.3 million uninsured children in the United States in 2010. Additionally, more than 800,000 pregnant women were uninsured. Pre-natal care and early infant care are important parts of a continuum of early childhood services.
- In Maryland, 70% of children under the age of six live in families whose parent(s) participate in the workforce full-time. This means that there must be someone to provide structured, productive care for them during daytime working hours.
- In Prince George's County, for every 1,000 teenage girls (ages 15-17) in Prince George's County, approximately 28 are mothers. In addition to attempting to finish their own education, teenage mothers must also locate early care options that are affordable and provide care during school hours. If child care cannot be found, dropping out of school to care for their child is their only option.

# Recommended Timeline for Early Childhood Development and Care



**BIRTH:** Families receive pre-natal and post-natal care through partnerships with health service providers. Time spent building the family unit is important.

**9.6% of births** in Prince George's County occur with late or no pre-natal care.



**AGE 1-2:** Children's development is increasingly focused on cognitive skills in addition to promoting physical health and emotional well-being. "Play time" provides stimulating opportunities for children to learn individually and in groups.

A family with one 1-2 year old is expected to have **\$9,476 in child care expenses**, 10.7% of the current median family income in Prince George's County.



**Age 3:** Children should be enrolled in a formalized learning environment. Activities should allow children to "learn through doing".

There are over **100 public and private pre-kindergarten** providers in Prince George's County.



**AGE 4:** Children should be enrolled in a Pre-Kindergarten Program that introduces them to academic, social, and behavioral skills.

Only **10% of early childhood programs** in the U.S. are licensed to teach early learning standards. There are **88** licensed, public pre-kindergarten programs in Prince George's County.



**AGE 5:** Children are enrolled in Kindergarten literate, healthy, and supported by parents and community.

**63% of five-year olds** in Prince George's County were ready for kindergarten in 2012. This represents a decrease from 2011 (67%) and 2010 (72%).



# 6 THE *data*

Educators, policymakers, and researchers have long been interested in the potential benefits of early childhood education programs. Beginning in the 1970s when Federal and state governments started funding early education programs, several long-term studies were conducted to assess the characteristics and benefits of these programs.

## RESEARCH

The three most-cited studies involving early childhood education are *The High Scope Perry Preschool Study*, *The Chicago Longitudinal Study* and the *North Carolina Abecedarian Project*. In each study, researchers monitored groups of low-income, minority (predominately African-American) children who were enrolled in early education programs to conclude if there were any long-term benefits. As they surveyed participants over the course of 20 years, they came to the following conclusions<sup>12</sup>:

- Participation in early childhood education programs decreased the likelihood of dropping out of school later, or being retained during the course of a student's education.
- Children who participated in early childhood education programs benefited from better health in their adult lives.
- Children who were enrolled in early childhood education programs had increased IQ's, measured at ages 3, 7, and 15.
- Participation in early childhood education programs is correlated with higher employment rates during adulthood for participants.
- Children who participated in early childhood education programs were less likely to commit a crime as an adult.

## STATISTICS

When appropriately structured, early childhood education programs can have lasting positive effects on the academic, social, and health outcomes of their participants. Specifically, programs are found to have the greatest impact on minority children from low-income families. Consider the following statistics at the national, state, and local levels:

- The United States ranks 28th internationally in Early Learning Enrollment.<sup>13</sup>
- More than half of the population under age three in the United States are African-American and Hispanic.<sup>14</sup>
- Less than 1/3 of the nation's four-year olds are enrolled in an Early Learning program.
- According to the 2010 U.S. Census, there were 364,488 children between the ages of birth to five in Maryland. 28.5% of them are from low-income families, and more prone to academic and health-related problems.

- For every 1,000 teen girls in Prince George's County (15-17 years of age), 28 are mothers.<sup>15</sup>
- Prince George's County experiences a 9.5% infant mortality, 7.9% for Caucasians and 10.5% for African Americans.<sup>16</sup>
- 45.9% of women were without early pre-natal care in Prince George's County.

## ENROLLMENT

- There are 2.98 million four-year olds in the United States. 69% of four-year olds attend pre-kindergarten. The United States ranks 26th in the world in access for preschool to four-year olds.<sup>17</sup>
- More than 28,000, or 35% of all four-year olds, attend pre-kindergarten in 70% of all public elementary schools during the 2012-2013 school year.<sup>18</sup>
- In Prince George's County, 5,602 four-year olds were enrolled in a public school pre-kindergarten program during the 2012-2013 school year.<sup>19</sup>

## PER-PUPIL EXPENDITURE

At each level of early childhood education, funding is provided in part or in whole by a different level of government. A breakdown of per-pupil spending for early childhood education in Maryland and Prince George's County is provided in the chart on the next page.

## PROGRAM STANDARDS

The National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER), located at Rutgers University in New Jersey, conducts reviews each year of every state's early childhood education program. Considering factors like money spent on programs, qualifications of staff, and student enrollment, NIEER rates early education programs in each state. Highlights of Maryland's 2010-2011 school year rankings (the most recent data available) are:

- Maryland ranked 12th overall in the nation (out of all 50 states + DC) for ease of access to four-year old programs.
- Maryland ranks 23rd overall in the nation for dollars spent per-pupil on early childhood programs (\$3,609).<sup>20</sup>

## EARLY CHILDHOOD SITES

Maryland requires a number of "benchmarks", or standards, of early education providers within the state. In order to operate, sites must be approved by the state as a licensed early childhood education provider. The following are the characteristics of approved early childhood sites in the state of Maryland:

- Comprehensive Early Learning Standards – a "guidebook" for teachers that answers the questions, "What should children learn" and "How should they learn it?"
- Teachers must hold a Bachelor of Arts in a relevant field (i.e. Early Childhood education)

## *did you know...*

### PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY POPULATION

**Total residents:** 863,420

**Children:** 0 – 3 year olds: 35,408  
3 – 4 year olds: 23,156

**Families with Children under five below poverty level:** 7.2%

### EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE COSTS (ANNUAL)

**Child Care Center:** \$8,643.96 (0 – 23 months)  
\$11,555.96 (2 – 4 years old)

**Pre-Kindergarten:** \$8,599 (3- and 4-year olds)

**Family Child Care:** \$7,962.76 (0 – 23 months)  
\$9,476.48 (2 – 4 years old)

**Head Start:** \$7,601 (3- and 4-year olds)

### EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS BY TYPE WITH CAPACITY/ENROLLMENT

	# of Programs	Capacity
Family Child Care Providers	984	7,596
MD Office of Child Care Licensed Group Programs	400	23,222
8-12 Hour Child Care Centers	287	16,227
Infant/Toddler	138	1,430
Part-Day	44	N/A
Before/After School (School & Center-Based)	308	N/A
Employer-Sponsored Centers	10	778
Nursery Schools	23	N/A
Kindergarten	26	N/A
Head Start	35	872 (enrollment)
Public Pre-Kindergarten	88	N/A

- Maximum class size is less than 20.
- Staff: Student ratio is 1:20 or better, meaning each class contains one teacher and no more than 20 students.
- The site provides screening services including vision, hearing, and health. Some local sites provide dental and developmental screenings, and “head to toe” physicals are performed at all sites.
- Students are given at least one meal per day.
- Sites are subject to routine visits and monitoring from local and state accrediting boards.

### **PRINCE GEORGE’S COUNTY PRE-KINDERGARTEN PROGRAM**

Administered by the Prince George’s County Public School System, the pre-kindergarten for four-year olds in Prince George’s County shares the characteristics of programs in Maryland, including the following features:

- Staff: Student Ratio of 1:10, with an average group size of 20 students.
- Curriculum designed to introduce students to reading and math, and aligned with state standards.
- Transportation is provided.





# THE *solutions*

Recognizing the benefits of early childhood education programs, especially for low-income children, there is a need for increased connection to education among students in the pre-kindergarten years (birth to four years of age). Just as the problem is centered on two types of services – services to parents of young children, and services to young children themselves – the solution must also be focused on providing knowledge and quality resources to these two groups. Development among children in the early years requires program offerings through multiple providers. Specifically, health service providers, community-based programs, and schools should all provide a continuum of access for children ages birth to four and their families.

## *models*

Program models for early childhood education focus on providing a structured, safe, and educationally stimulating environment for children ages birth to four. Support for programs (for funding, teachers, and other resources) comes from a variety of sources at the national, state and local levels, both government and non-government. Because the goals of early childhood education are healthy development and reducing conditions that lead to academic achievement gaps, many programs are designed with low-income children and families in mind.

### HEAD START

The Federal initiative to promote early childhood education among low-income families, known as Head Start, began as part of the 1965 “Great Society” program. Approved by Congress and

implemented by the states, Head Start serves children age birth through five who meet certain criteria. Federally funded and run by a local service provider (usually a public school system), different localities offer the program to different age groups. Prince George’s County Head Start is for families whose income falls at or below the poverty income guidelines as outlined in the 2013 Poverty Guidelines chart.

### MARYLAND EXTENDED ELEMENTARY EDUCATION PROGRAM (EEEP)

For four-year-olds, most states fund a pre-kindergarten program. Because education is not mandatory until the age of five, a pre-kindergarten program requires an additional budget, and in many states is run through the Department of Health and Human Services. In Maryland, the Extended Elementary Education Program (EEEP) began in 1980 in two flagship locations – Baltimore City and Prince George’s County and is open to children who are four years of age by September 1st and who come from an economically disadvantaged family (i.e. qualify for Free and Reduced Meals (FARMS) or are classified as homeless).<sup>22</sup>

Head Start and Maryland’s EEEP differ in terms of funding and targeted enrollment. Head Start is a Federally-funded program, whereas revenue for EEEP is generated at the state level. Further, any child between the ages of three to five can enroll in Head Start in Prince George’s County as long as they meet the income requirements. Maryland EEEP is designed specifically for four-year olds.

## *did you know...*

There are currently 872 children enrolled in the Prince George’s County Head Start Program through the Prince George’s County Public School System. To be eligible, families who fall at or below the poverty income guidelines below:

### 2013 POVERTY GUIDELINES FOR THE 48 CONTIGUOUS STATES AND THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

Persons in family/ household	Poverty guideline
1	\$11,490
2	15,510
3	19,530
4	23,550
5	27,570
6	31,590
7	35,610
8	39,630

For families/households with more than 8 persons, add \$4,020 for each additional person.

### EARLY CHILDHOOD CENTERS

Modeled after the community-based centers studied in early research (the Abecedarian, Chicago, and Perry Preschool studies), early childhood education centers are characterized by several features:

- At least half-day educational programming – children are on-site for at least four hours.
- Services other than education are provided for students and parents, like health screenings and meal options.
- Low student-teacher ratio, usually no larger than 6:1.<sup>23</sup>
- Supported in different ways – government funds (Federal, state or local), a non-profit agency (like a church or privately-run group), a for-profit business, or an institution of higher education (college or university).

Center-based programs represent over half of early childhood services across the country and in Prince George's County. In Prince George's County, there are over 250 licensed early childhood centers serving anywhere from 10 to 200 students.<sup>25</sup> Examples include Goaddard Child Development Center (Greenbelt), Bowie Community Center, Kids in His Care Christian Day Care, Inc. (Beltsville), and SEED Learning Center (Riverdale).

### NURSE FAMILY PARTNERSHIPS

Nurse Family Partnerships are programs designed to support low-income, first-time expectant mothers and parents. They provide an opportunity to serve multiple populations – newborn children, expectant parents, and teen mothers. Certified nurses travel to parents to offer training and guidance on topics including the birthing process, hygiene for young children, and the importance of early childhood education. The benefit of these partnerships is that they are conducted on a one-on-one basis, in the family's home. In some localities, Nurse Family Partnerships are subsidized by the government.

In Maryland, the non-profit Nurse Family Partnerships organization provides in-home services to expectant mothers and new families in two counties: Baltimore and Garrett. In Prince George's County, the Department of Health and Human Services received a \$300,000 Federal Grant to administer a Nurse-Family Partnership Program through the Division of Children, Youth and Families in Fiscal Year 2012.<sup>26</sup>

There is growing evidence to support the use of early childhood service programs – including Head Start, Pre-Kindergarten, Center-based care, and Nurse Family Partnerships. Mothers, families, and children in Prince George's County still face obstacles in accessing many of these services. The income requirements for programs like Head Start are favorable to low-income families, while middle-income families struggle to pay for preschool programs, especially high-quality programs. Although Nurse Family Partnership models are recommended by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Prince George's County has a small budget to administer a program that could benefit a large population of young, new, and low-income families within the county.

## OUTSTANDING PROGRAMS

### St. Ann's Center for Children, Youth, and Families

Dedicated to the mission of serving vulnerable women and children, St. Ann's has served the communities of Washington, D.C. and Prince George's County for over 150 years. St. Ann's provides transitional housing and comprehensive services to young and homeless mothers. Support services for mothers include accredited high school classes, parenting classes, life skills training, mental health services, employment counseling, financial literacy support, and child care. Approximately 45% of the families served at St. Ann's Child Care Center are residents of Prince George's County. St. Ann's licensed Child Care Center provides affordable and developmental child care for infants through four-year olds of resident mothers and families who live and/or work in the local community. Currently, the Center serves 30 children in the Infant/Toddler Program and 34 children in the Preschool Program. All teachers currently participate in the Maryland State Credentialing Program. St. Ann's Child Care Center focuses on developing a strong social and emotional foundation. When infants are enrolled in the program they remain with the same caregiver for the first two years to strengthen this foundation. This bond helps them develop a strong sense of self and prepares them for cognitive challenges as they move through the program and prepare for school. "I have enjoyed the unique experience of working with children for the first two years of their lives as an Infant Teacher for over 30 years. I love seeing smiling faces and helping them transition from cooing infants to walking and talking toddlers," says Catheleen

## *did you know...*

In partnership with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the U.S. Department of Education is sponsoring grants to states for the specific purpose of improving early childhood education systems. In 2012, the state of Maryland was awarded a Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge grant. As part of their application, Maryland received \$49.9 million to:

- Develop new pre-kindergarten curriculum, standards, and a Kindergarten Readiness Assessment.
  - *Maryland's goal is to achieve 92% Kindergarten Readiness by 2015.*
- Create a data system that links student information from pre-kindergarten to their elementary careers.
  - *Maryland EXCELS is the data system that will measure student's early childhood program with kindergarten readiness and elementary success.*
- Implement 24 local Early Education support networks that include educators, non-profit service providers, medical professionals, and community leaders.
  - *Maryland is especially focused on low-income and English language learners.*
- Support specialized professional development for early childhood teachers.<sup>21</sup>
  - *Maryland will support multiple pathways to pre-kindergarten teacher certification, as well as offering professional development opportunities.*

Williams, Child Care Teacher. St. Ann's follows the Maryland State Department of Education's Healthy Beginnings Guidelines (Birth – Three Years of Age) and the Maryland Common Core State Curriculum and Maryland Model for School Readiness Phase II for four-year old children. All areas of development, emotional, social, physical, cognitive, self-help skills, art, music, and nutrition and health are included in St. Ann's program."

#### **Judy Hoyer Family Learning Center**

The "Judy Centers" provide access to early childhood education and family support programs located at or near Title I schools. Judy Centers serve approximately 12,000 children birth through Kindergarten and their families who live in 39 elementary schools school zones in Maryland. In Prince George's County, two Judy Centers are based at Cool Spring Elementary School and Carmody Elementary School to serve families in the Adelphi, Cool Springs, and Langley Park McCormick communities. Efforts are underway to open a third Judy Center site at Samuel Chase Elementary School. "The Judy Center is special because it offers an integrated services approach to enable over 500 children and their families served annually to visit a single location to access educational and family engagement programs and receive a broad array of social and health services," confirms Lisa Sampson, Instructional Supervisor, Prince George's County Public Schools. This is made possible through the close collaboration of Prince George's County Public Schools, Prince

George's Child Resource Center, Prince George's Community College, and Mary's Center, to name a few of the ten partner organizations that ensure the provision of effective and efficient service delivery. The effectiveness of the partnership is rooted in the commitment of partner organizations to collectively discuss the impact of service delivery on school readiness. Collectively, using school readiness data, the partnership jointly determine goals, objectives, milestones and strategies to employ to increase the number of children entering school ready to learn.

#### **Mary's Center**

Mary's Center, founded in 1988, is a Federally Qualified Health Center that provides health care, family literacy and social services to individuals whose needs too often go unmet by the public and private systems. Mary's Center recognizes the complex needs of the community and has developed a holistic, multi-pronged approach to helping individuals and families. Their social change model integrates health care, education, and social services to put residents on the path toward good health, stable families, and economic independence. Mary's Center has been serving underserved residents in the Greater Washington region since inception while growing its services over 25 years. In January 2012, Mary's Center opened a full-service facility in Prince George's County. In 2012, 5,500 participants accessed care in the County and 251 babies were born. 75% of participants served through this facility were uninsured totaling more than \$2.3 million in free services provided in Prince George' County.

Because Mary's Center has a holistic approach, the children they serve receive more than just medical services. Mary's Center conducts a full-assessment before providing health services to understand a family's needs. Not only does Mary's Center provide full pre-natal care to pregnant women, but they continue to serve a mother and her child after birth to ensure school readiness and independence for a family. The pediatric center provides children with complete well-baby and well-child care emphasizing prevention and management of chronic conditions by immunizing all children according to the Centers for Disease Control's standardized schedule. Mary's Center is unique because it serves as one-stop shop for participants to understand the importance of receiving education, social and medical services as a preventative measure for future needs. As Lyda Vanegas, Director of Advocacy and Communications emphasizes "Parents get the holistic support they need to advocate for their children and be independent later in life."



# CALL to action

Early childhood education is about more than learning. It is about investing in children, youth, and the Prince George's County community. In order to achieve long-term, sustained, and lasting results that will change a child's life and invigorate a community over time, investment in early childhood services is needed. More than simply generating new programs, quality investment requires leveraging existing resources towards a common goal.<sup>27</sup> Philanthropists, businesses, parents, school leaders, policy makers, and the community should consider action steps around investment in early childhood services in Prince George's County.

## PHILANTHROPY

- *Consider Investment in Scaling Up Successful Early Childhood Models* – Early Childhood Centers and Nurse-Home Visits are successful model programs, but do not enjoy the sustained support of governmental assistance that Head Start and Maryland's Extended Elementary Education Program (EEEP) do. Invest in programs that assist young children, expectant mothers, and low-income families in Prince George's County.
- *Fund New Parent Education Programs* – Expectant and new parents in Prince George's County can benefit from education and resources that will support them and their children in the early years of development. Philanthropists should consider investment that supports these programs and helps create new ones, especially for high-need groups like teenage mothers, Spanish-speaking families, and low-income families.

## BUSINESSES

- *Recognize the Long-Term Benefits of Early Childhood Development* – Investment in the youth and workforce of Prince George's County begins in the early years, ages birth to four. Businesses can play a crucial role in that investment by committing funding, expertise and time to support the sustainability and scale of the outstanding models identified on pages 11 and 12. In addition, working in partnership with schools leaders, policy makers, philanthropists and the community to ensure access to quality early childhood services for all families in Prince George's County can have a long-term community benefit. Contact the Community Foundation to identify the best partnership opportunity that aligns with your business goals.
- *Promote Work/Life Balance for Employees* – Businesses can encourage healthy children and families by providing flexible work schedules for employees, on-site childcare facilities, and sponsored support groups for working parents. Other incentives like daycare subsidies and paid leave to coincide with school events can increase employee satisfaction and productivity.

## SCHOOL LEADERS

- *Align K-12 Curriculum with Early Childhood Programs* – While the benefits of early childhood education are solid, they are only useful if they are reinforced in a child's later academic years. Coordinating curriculum, sharing data, and aligning support services from early childhood education through elementary school will benefit students and send a clear message about the importance

of early childhood education. The development, implementation, and sharing of data systems that track student progress from pre-kindergarten through elementary school is essential to this effort, as well as communication between early childhood education providers and public and private K-12 leaders.

- *Learn from Best Practices in the Region* – The District of Columbia is on par with France in that almost 100 percent of three and four-year olds attend pre-school. The District of Columbia ensures access to high-quality early childhood programming across community-based programs, public schools and public charter schools. Prince George's County leaders should connect with its neighboring leaders to understand the cross-sector strategy used to legislate the Pre-K Enhancement and Expansion Act of 2008 in the District. To learn more, you can read [A Case Study of the Pre-K for All Campaign](#).

## POLICYMAKERS

- *Expand Services* – More families from low-income and middle-income background need to participate and receive the benefits of early childhood programs. Current income requirements are beneficial to families who fall below the poverty line, but exclude middle-income families who would not otherwise be able to afford an early education program. Policymakers should research alternative requirements to improve access to early childhood services.
- *Create a Task Force on Early Childhood Issues* – Recognizing the role early childhood services play in the educational continuum, policymakers

## *did you know...*

In San Antonio, Texas, Mayor Julian Castro introduced a Universal Pre-kindergarten plan that won the approval of voters. Named “Pre-K for SA”, all four-year olds within the city are anticipated to begin receiving services to early childhood programs by fall, 2013. It is being paid for with additional tax revenue.



In partnership with the Federal Government’s Center for Faith-Based and Neighborhood Initiatives, the Johnson & Johnson Corporation sponsors an informational texting service to expectant mothers and fathers. Visit [www.text4baby.org](http://www.text4baby.org) to learn more about it.

should convene a task force to study the services offered in Prince George’s County and make recommendations for improvement.

- *Adjust the Compulsory Minimum Age of Enrollment* – As lawmakers have raised the mandatory age of attendance for older youth in the state to 17, leaders should also be mindful of the other end of the enrollment spectrum. The current mandatory age of attendance in Maryland begins at age five, which sends a message that efforts to develop children as learners do not have to start until the age of five. But early education before age five creates long-lasting, sustained benefits that have been shown to prevent retention, remediation, dropout, and academic failure. Investment in a child’s early years will pay dividends for the student and the community in later years.
- *Participate in Early Childhood Education Grants* – Initiatives at the Federal and state levels to bring more attention to the issue of early childhood education are gaining momentum. Policy makers in Prince George’s County should support these efforts in the following priorities: 1) Quality standards development, and 2) Data collection and usage.

### **PARENTS/COMMUNITY**

- *Monitor the Implementation of Common Core within Pre-K* – The Maryland Common Core State Frameworks include standards for pre-kindergarten in Reading and Language Arts and Mathematics. Prince George’s County began implementation of Common Core in 2013. The degree to which Prince George’s County Public Schools effectively

implements Common Core will define the number of children who enter Kindergarten ready to learn. You can monitor Prince George’s County’s progress at [Common Core](#).

- *Learn About Your Child* – Children are born with unique character traits that will influence their personality as they grow. Their development is also heavily dependent upon how their caregivers (parents) react to their behavior. Learning about your child’s expected behaviors and knowing how to respond will influence his or her development into the teenage years. Seek out programs and services that help you learn about and respond to your developing child.
- *Enroll your Child* – Children are not required to be enrolled in school in the state of Maryland until age five. The immediate and long-term benefits of early childhood education are well-documented though, and parents should find the best alternative for their child. The [Prince George’s County Public Schools Office of Early Childhood Programs](#) has information about public programs in Prince George’s County and can assist with the enrollment process.
- *Advocate for Early Childhood Education* – Citizens can be the best source of information for other parents who wish to learn more about a program. Share the positive experience you had in an early childhood education program, and give constructive feedback to improve the quality of existing models.<sup>28</sup>

# ENDnotes

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Written by: Erin Russ, former Education Fellow, The Community Foundation for the National Capital Region

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