

FY 2007 QUESTION NUMBER: 16

QUESTION:

Regarding the testimony of the Maryland Community Association for the Education of Young Children, why are we having a problem in enrolling eligible students in prekindergarten programs and what can be done to address this issue?

BUDGET PAGE REFERENCE: 3-66

ANSWER:

As of January 9, 2006, there are 1,874 filled seats in the prekindergarten program, 31 less than the 1,905 budgeted. The Head Start program has 649 children, 1 more than the 648 budgeted. Due to the high prekindergarten mobility rate of 21 percent, the number of unfilled seats varies from 15 to 35 students each month. A wait list of eligible students is maintained, but the location of the available seats may not accommodate the needs of these children. The Prekindergarten/Head Start staff continually work to recruit, register, and enroll income-eligible children throughout the school year.

In FY 2005-2006, an extensive recruitment plan was implemented in collaboration with county partners that involves community agencies; TV, radio, and print media; outreach to ethnic service organizations and media; outreach to faith-based community partners; outreach to county agencies serving low-income families; and direct mailings and outreach to families who participate in state and county programs such as the Maryland Children's Health Insurance program; childcare subsidy programs; and the Women, Infants, and Children program (WIC).

For the 2005–2006 school year, approximately 6,000 families visited the Prekindergarten/Head Start Unit offices or off-site registration locations to request information about the program. Over 5,400 families completed screening applications for the 2,553 seats available between the two programs—Head Start (648) and the prekindergarten programs (1,905). The enrollment effort is impacted as many parents who enroll their children in the spring are often no longer in residence when school opens.

For the coming school year, the recruitment efforts will continue to focus on outreach to ethnic communities and consultation with our community partners such as the Infants and Toddlers Program and the Community Action Agency. Collaboration with the Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services, other government entities, and community organizations and representatives also will continue to improve the recruitment and registration process.