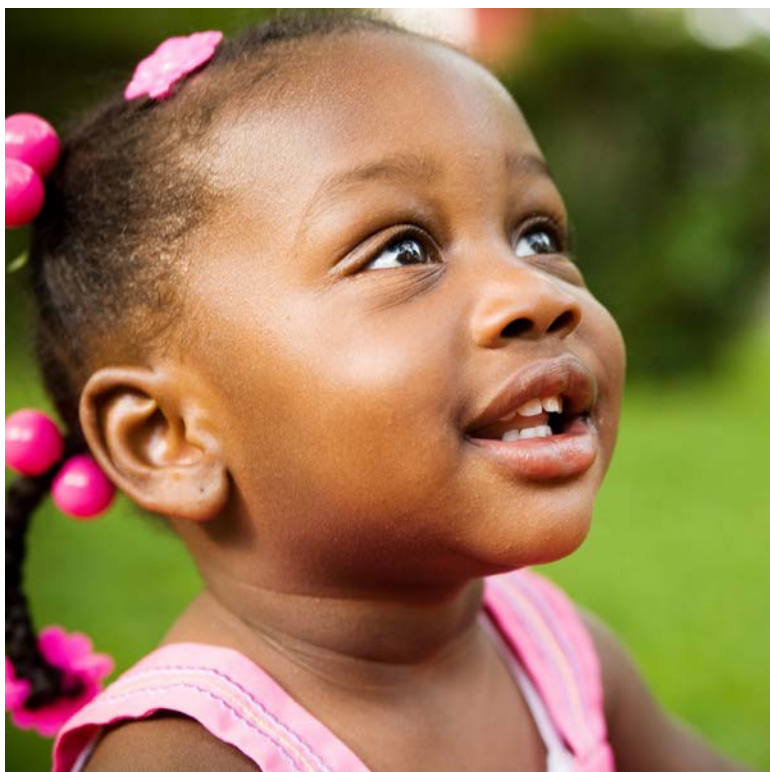


# Montgomery County Early Care and Education Strategic Plan 2017

*Investments in Our Future*



Prepared for  
The Montgomery County  
Department of Health and  
Human Services

December 2016



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Our special thanks to the Montgomery County Council for its leadership and foresight on such an important issue for our community.

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We are grateful to the members of the 2015 and 2016 Early Childhood Coordinating Council (ECCC) for their expertise, input, and contributions.

Finally, but most importantly, we would like to express a special thank you to the many families, providers, and community partners who through their participation in focus groups, community meetings, interviews, and by providing meeting space contributed to the successful completion of this plan. You are helping to fulfill the mission of DHHS.

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## MESSAGE FROM

*Uma S. Ahluwalia*

*Director | Department of Health and Human Services*



It is with pleasure that I present the Strategic Plan for Early Care and Education. This plan identifies the moral and economic imperative for making investments in early childhood. This report outlines key issue areas combined with goals and strategies aimed at achieving progress in all areas of early childhood development.

Montgomery County has been making steady investments in areas of early care and education for years. This is not solely the work of public agencies, nor just of our private providers, nor philanthropy, nor business in isolation. It must be a community imperative. Montgomery Moving Forward has now embraced this work as critical to the economic wellbeing of our community and is moving this issue forward through a collective impact process.

Child care is a universal issue regardless of economic status. All parents want their children to be safe, to be well cared for, and to enter Kindergarten ready to learn. Accessibility, affordability, quality child care, and a competent workforce are all critical issues to parents across the economic spectrum. The Child Care Expansion and Quality Enhancement Initiative is the most recent effort to enhance capacity, accessibility, and quality of care. We also want to increase the number of family providers who offer affordable, regulated, care as opposed to unregulated care. Supporting a competent, qualified, and well compensated child care workforce is a key issue for policy deliberations, but at the same time, affordability and accessibility are high value issue areas with significant cost implications.

This report begins to identify a comprehensive plan to address a system of early care and education and to provide a blueprint that is intentional, deliberate, and thoughtful. We hope you will find this report useful as we begin to move into the implementation phase. Many stakeholders provided input towards the development of the report and I hope you see many of your thoughts reflected in this document. I would also like to take a moment to thank the wonderful staff within the Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services' Early Childhood Services Team and our new Early Care and Education Policy Officer.

The Otero Consulting Group was instrumental in managing the process from start to finish and submitting to us this very useful report. I want to extend my sincere appreciation for their work.

Now the hard work begins as we work together to incrementally move the needle on early care and education. Thank you for your support and we look forward to working with you closely as we work to make gains on this important policy issue.

# The Need for a Strategic Plan for Early Care and Education in Montgomery County

Montgomery County is well positioned to join many other local communities across the country in making early care and education a centerpiece of a broader strategy to bring about increased prosperity and opportunity to its residents, particularly to those most in need. The plan included herein, outlines goals and strategies that will allow Montgomery County to create an integrated continuum of policies, services, and programs backed by a cohesive financing structure for its early care and education system. Montgomery County must also ensure alignment and coordination with other systems that are essential for addressing young children's developmental needs, and closing the opportunity gaps.

## NEUROSCIENCE AND ECONOMICS UNDERGIRD THE CASE FOR EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION

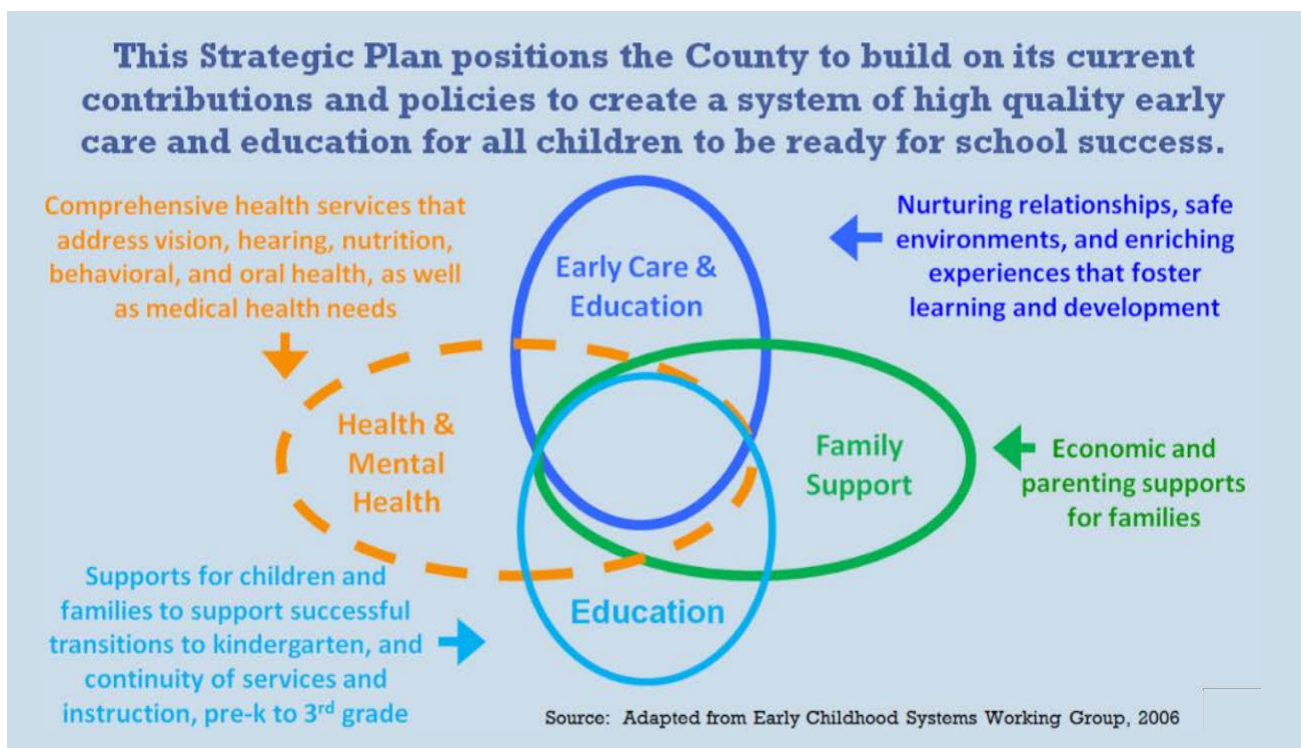
Early childhood is the first critical phase of human development, beginning before birth, continuing through the infant and toddler years, and culminating in the preschool years and transitioning into the early grades. Economists, psychologists, neuroscientists, and

educators all have contributed to seminal research demonstrating the importance of this time period. Neuroscience shows that babies are born learning, and that their early experiences and interactions with the adults in their lives literally shape the architecture of their developing brains. Economists, joined by education and psychology researchers, have studied the impact of high-quality early childhood services on a broad range of child and family outcomes. These studies have concluded that participation in high quality programs, particularly for children in families that experience adversity, produces better education, employment, and health outcomes later in life.

The benefits of early care and education have a two-generation impact, strengthening families, and improving their own economic contributions. When parents can access quality early care and education that also meet the needs of their work schedules, they are more likely to enter and remain in the workforce. This in turn creates a stronger local tax base and reduces the need for other social supports.

A strong early care and education system can have a positive and significant economic and educational impact in our local community, generating substantial cost savings for society with a rate of return as high as \$8 for every dollar invested and improving school and life success for our children.<sup>1</sup>

Figure 1



1. White House Invest in US Fact Sheet, 2014

# MORE YOUNG CHILDREN AND MORE YOUNG CHILDREN AT RISK IN MONTGOMERY COUNTY<sup>2</sup>

Montgomery County's changing demographics and growing share of young children also point to the need to prioritize early care and education. Montgomery County is home to 76,498 children under the age of six, accounting for 7% of the total County population. Nearly half of these children are non-white (see Figure 2) and an estimated 28% have at least one parent or guardian who speaks a language other than English at home. Within the next five years, the share of children under the age of six in the County is expected to increase by 8% and children of color will drive much of this growth, as has occurred over the last several decades (see Figure 3).

By 2040, it is estimated that 77% (57,629 children) of the County population under age five will be non-White. Access to early care and education programs that focus intentionally on services and opportunities for both the parent and the child can be particularly beneficial for these families.<sup>3</sup>

Children under age six make up 7% of the total County population. Nearly half of these children under six are non-white.

About 28% have at least one parent or guardian who speaks a language other than English at home and 34.3% of Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) kindergarteners are dual language learners. Over 11% of MCPS kindergarteners have identified special needs.

Almost 7,000 children under six are in poverty and 39.7% of MCPS kindergarteners are eligible for free and reduced price meals (FARMS)

Source: US Census, 2016 and Maryland State Department of Education, 2016

Although generally considered a wealthy County, four out of ten of Montgomery County's young children are economically vulnerable, living below 300% of the federal poverty level (or below \$71,550 for a family of 4). And almost 7,000 children under the age of six are living below the federal poverty level (below \$23,850 for a family of 4)<sup>4</sup>. Growing up in poverty can have an adverse impact on development, leading to family and community conditions that negatively impact children's preparedness for kindergarten. Montgomery County's own data on kindergarten readiness bear this out - only three out of ten from low-income Free and Reduced Price School Meals eligible households were ready for kindergarten, compared with six out of ten children from mid- to high-income households: a 32-point achievement gap<sup>5</sup>. Furthermore, slightly more than three out of ten dual language learners<sup>6</sup> and two out of ten children with disabilities were ready for kindergarten, (see Figure 4). These gaps in school readiness will only grow costlier and more difficult to remediate as children grow older.

Figure 2: Child Population Under Age 6 by Race & Ethnicity (US Census, 2010)

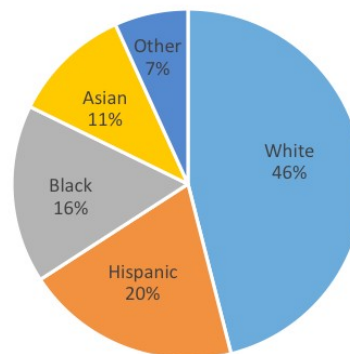


Figure 3: Projected Growth of Children Under 5 by Race, Ethnicity, and Year (US Census, 2016)

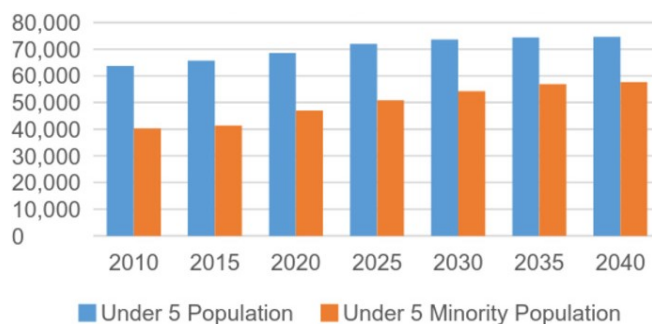
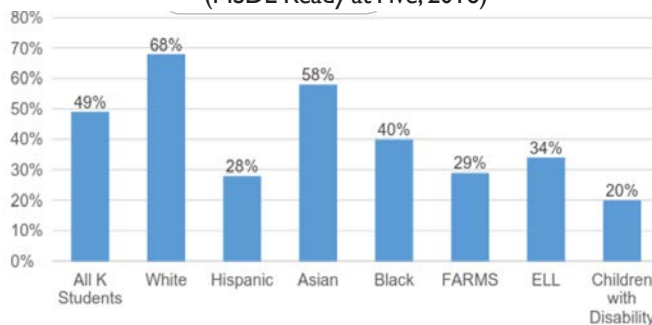


Figure 4: Kindergarten Readiness Assessment by Sub-Group (MSDE Ready at Five, 2016)



2. US Census, 2014

3. Park, Maki and Margie McHugh, 2014. Immigrant Parents and Early Childhood Programs: Addressing Barriers of Literacy, Culture, and Systems Knowledge. Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute

4. US Census, 2014

5. Ready at Five: <http://www.readyatfive.org/school-readiness-data/jurisdictional-readiness-data-2016/montgomery/1245-powerpoint-deck-printer-friendly-version-24/file.html>

6. The federal Office of Head Start defines dual language learners as children who are learning two (or more) languages at the same time, as well as those learning a second language while continuing to develop their first (or home) language. The term encompasses Limited English Proficient (LEP), bilingual, English language learners (ELL), English learners, and children who speak a language other than English.



## TUITION FOR QUALITY EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION PLACES BURDENS ON FAMILIES

Far too many of the County's families struggle to afford high-quality care and education and need assistance with paying for child care. Montgomery County families are hardworking— Nearly three-quarters of our families (72%) with children under six have both parents in the workforce.<sup>7</sup> But they are not earning enough to afford high quality services for their young children. Families must pay at least \$13,500 a year to purchase early care and education for a preschooler in Montgomery County, and much more if they have more than one child. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services recommends that families invest no more than 7% of their income on child care. Envision a family with two young children – this family would need to earn almost \$375,000 to meet the 7% mark. In the County, only 24% of families have an income above \$200,000 per year.

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### Average annual price of child care in Montgomery County:

Infant: \$13,007 (\$1,084/month)

Pre-schooler: \$13,595 (\$1,133/month)

Maryland is ranked 5th out of 50 states and the District of Columbia for most expensive infant care.

Child care costs in Montgomery County are the highest in the state

Source: *Maryland Family Network, 2016.*

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## SUPPLY OF HIGH QUALITY IS LIMITED

Publicly funded programs are designed to promote quality and affordability. The limited supply of such early care and education programs in the County exacerbates the affordability challenge for families. This leads to conditions in which children simply cannot attend high-quality programs because their parents cannot afford it. Locally, Montgomery County is home to several strong quality early care and learning programs. For example, Head Start and Early Head Start serve youngsters from birth through age five in poverty but the program currently has mostly half day spaces for 648 preschool-aged children, and less than 400 funded slots for infants and toddlers, out of an estimated 7,000 children who qualify in the County.

Targeted Pre-k (not including Head Start), funded through a mix of local, state, and federal funds, reaches another 2,285 children in the County but still is insufficient to reach all the eligible children

in poverty (or \$23,850 for a family of 4). Additionally, the state Child Care Subsidy (CCS) and local Working Parents Assistance (WPA) programs serve less than 1,800 children under the age of six, out of an estimated 30,599 children that would qualify with incomes below 300% of federal poverty (or \$71,550 for a family of 4). While Early Intervention Services for infants and toddlers are generally rated positively, many child care providers lack the training for appropriate inclusion of children with disabilities in their child care classrooms.

Beyond the affordability gap for families, more work is needed to assure that high quality characterizes all the programs available to the County's children and their families. Maryland's EXCELS – (Excellence Counts in Early Learning and School-Age Care)<sup>8</sup> creates a common framework for improving, assessing and rating the quality of early care and education programs, and gives a great opportunity to communicate this information to families. In 2016 there were 1,417 licensed and registered programs in the County (940 family child care and 477 centers), of these a mere 459 participate in EXCELS. Only 35 providers, or 7% of the providers participating in EXCELS, currently rate in the top two tiers of EXCELS. Supporting improvement and promoting EXCELS programs to families is necessary.

Montgomery County is well poised to expand its many successful local strategies and deepen its public and private partnership and coordination with the state so that the community's children and families garner all the benefits of a robust early care and education system. Over many years, Montgomery County has leveraged its own resources to expand access to and improve the quality of early care and education in its boundaries. There are notable successes, such as the Lourie Center, CentroNía, WPA, the Family Discovery Center, Montgomery County Public School's (MCPS) commitment to pre-k, the Infants and Toddlers Program for children with disabilities, and a much-respected Montgomery County Child Care Resource Referral Center (MCCCRRC). This is an opportune time for Montgomery County to examine its current investments and programs, and ensure that future investments in early care and education work better together with state resources so that there is a cohesive approach to strengthening the early care and education system for the benefit of Montgomery County's young children and families.

In the section that follows, five goals with eighteen implementing strategies reflect a vision for the future that is, at once, forward thinking, achievable, and recognizes the important contribution that quality early care and education makes to the children and families of Montgomery County and to the overall regional economic prosperity.

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7. US Census 2016

8. Maryland EXCELS is the State's voluntary Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS). It evaluates programs and rates them on a scale of 1-5, with 5 as the highest rating of quality. Maryland EXCELS is used to help families understand and choose quality providers and to provide coaching and assistance to providers to meet higher levels of quality.



## Approach to Developing the Plan

The development of this Strategic Plan was informed by some sixty-five interviews with State and County administrators, elected officials, national and local experts, providers, and parents. Additionally, the team held conversations with relevant associations, conducted seven focus groups in both English and Spanish with over 102 parents, child care center directors, family child care providers and early childhood teachers representing all Election Districts in the County. A review and analysis of local policy, data, and reports provided the current landscape of early care and education in Montgomery County. The Early Childhood

Coordinating Council (ECCC)<sup>9</sup> and Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) reviewed findings and developed recommendations emanating from the interviews, focus groups, and local policy, data, and reports. Findings and recommendations were discussed during two County wide community meetings bringing together over 100 people. This process, along with reviews of best practices from jurisdictions across the country, form the base on which the goals and strategies detailed in the plan were formulated.

## Goals and Strategies

Montgomery County invests nearly \$6 million annually in its early care and education system in the areas of workforce, access, quality, and affordability. These investments establish a platform on which to construct the implementation of this plan in five goal areas, each with strategies and next steps. The outcome of this Strategic Plan is a cohesive, well-financed system of early care and education, using a mixed delivery system,<sup>10</sup> for all the County's children.

The successful implementation of this Strategic Plan builds on a strong record of accomplishment: a well-developed Early Childhood Services division with a respected and skilled MCCCRRRC program; a subsidy program (WPA), that complements state supports; public space opportunities and tax credits; and contracts for model, high-quality, and comprehensive early childhood development programs.

9. Montgomery County Council Bill 13-15 established the Early Childhood Coordinating Council (ECCC). The County Executive appoints and invites members who are confirmed by the County Council. The ECCC works collaboratively to plan, implement and assess activities focused on ensuring that all young children (birth through age 5) of Montgomery County arrive at school fully ready to learn.

10. A mixed delivery system means that child care, Early Head Start, Head Start, and school settings are eligible to provide services for young children.



# GOAL I. HIGH QUALITY FROM BIRTH IN ALL SETTINGS

*All infants, toddlers, and preschoolers in Montgomery County experience high quality early care and education in formal and informal settings.*

Strategies 1 through 4 help expand the number of quality early care and education providers, particularly providers serving low-income families, children for whom English is not their first language, and children with disabilities. The strategies address the resources for and system capacity to deliver the necessary programmatic supports to increase quality offerings. In addition, Strategy 3 reflects the positive feedback from parents for two-generation, comprehensive models by calling for more grants and contracts for the expansion of these model programs. These comprehensive services models would be expanded with the specific purpose of reaching those families whose children are at greater risk of entering school behind their peers and whose parents benefit from supports that help them build the skills needed to engage in their children's education.

## **S1. Increase local investments in technical assistance for programs to improve and sustain quality aligned to state EXCELS.**

EXCELS is a framework for quality improvement that benchmarks a provider's progress in meeting and sustaining higher levels of quality. In 2016, of the 1,417 licensed providers in Montgomery County, 497 voluntarily participate in EXCELS. Of these who choose to participate, only 7%, (35 providers) currently rate in the top two tiers. As a quality improvement mechanism, the child care providers who have received technical assistance from the MCCCRRRC,<sup>11</sup> state that they value the support and that this assistance has helped them move up the EXCELS ratings. However, MCCCRRRC's capacity does not match the demand of the growing number of programs participating in EXCELS. It is also important to note that both the state subsidy system and WPA require providers who accept subsidy to participate in EXCELS.

**Next Steps:** In Fiscal Year 2018, the County should better understand the level of effort required to support providers in meeting quality standards and provide the necessary resources to DHHS Early Childhood Services and the MCCCRRRC, to provide additional training and technical assistance that will advance providers at the lowest levels of EXCELS to meet high quality standards.

## **S2. Expand the availability of approved trainers and coaches who speak multiple<sup>12</sup> languages certified to deliver state required trainings so that there is capacity to support providers in meeting new licensing requirements established by the federal Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF).<sup>13</sup>**

At present, trainers and trainings can only be certified by MSDE. Providers report difficulty in accessing certified trainers because there are simply too few of them and the approval process is cumbersome, thus limiting the number of approved trainers to support providers in meeting new requirements under CCDF. Maryland's fiscal years 2016-2018 CCDF Plan notes that it is substantially but not fully in compliance now with all the required areas for training.

**Next Steps:** Negotiate an agreement with the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) to allow the County, in conjunction with MCCCRRRC and Maryland Family Network, to approve a cadre of certified trainers and a catalogue of approved trainings that meet the approval criteria used by MSDE.

## **S3. Expand County investments to scale existing birth to 5 model programs and services that demonstrate success in increasing school readiness and narrowing opportunity gaps.**

The County has invested in promising comprehensive school readiness programs that use a two-generation approach and target specific subgroups of children with identified needs. These programs support children's readiness by holistically understanding and addressing the family and community strengths and risk factors, and use of best practices. Parents expressed positive experiences with these models, and shared their preference for this type of programming. By scaling up the number of model programs in areas with low-income families, families of color, families who are not native English speakers, and targeting services for children with disabilities, the County can reduce the school readiness gap.

**Next Steps:** In FY2018 begin to scale up the number of programs that use best practice models to deliver birth to age 5 school readiness and comprehensive services, and are currently operating in the County. Target dollars to sites in specific locations based on need, supply, and cost.

11. The Montgomery County Child Care Resource & Referral Center, a member of the Maryland Child Care Resource Network, helps parents locate licensed or regulated child care providers, provides technical assistance and training for child care providers, and collects data on the child care demand and supply.

12. Per DHHS Early Childhood Services, in 2015 providers self-reported their home language. There are 58 languages in addition to English spoken by center-based and family child care providers. The top languages other than English are Spanish, Hindi, French, Urdu and Farsi.

13. The Child Care and Development Block is the authorizing federal law for the Child Care and Development Fund which makes formula grants to states for child care assistance and quality. Public Law 113-186.

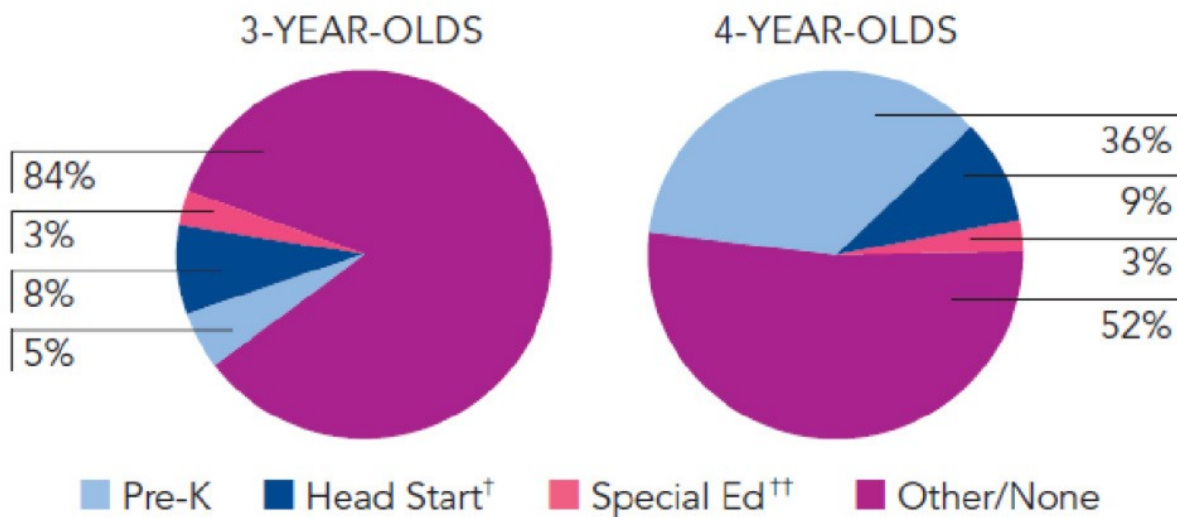
**S4. Work toward a guarantee of quality, affordable, full-day prekindergarten for all three and four-year old children in a mixed delivery system (e.g. services provided by both public schools and community-based programs).**

Research shows that for low-income children, two-years of high-quality preschool improves children’s early literacy and math readiness for school compared to one year of prekindergarten. The number of hours in school, also known as dosage, is also an opportunity to close the readiness gap and meet the needs of working families. The new Head Start Program Performance Standards<sup>14</sup> increase the number of hours a year Head Start programs must provide services. Early Head Start programs already operate for a full day.

**Next Steps:** In FY2018 and succeeding years, expand targeted assistance for low-income three and four-year-old children to have full-day prekindergarten in a mixed delivery system and increase the local contribution for full-day Head Start.

Although Maryland is serving more than 30,000 four-year old children in its state-funded prekindergarten program, the program is available only to children eligible for free or reduced price lunch (185 percent of the federal poverty line, or \$44,863 for a family of 4). Title I, Head Start, and local County funds also fund preschool programs.<sup>15</sup> There is no guarantee, however, that all three and four-year-old children will receive preschool services.<sup>16</sup>

**STATE PRE-K AND HEAD START ENROLLMENT AS PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL POPULATION**



<sup>†</sup> Some Head Start children may also be counted in state pre-K.

<sup>††</sup> Estimates children in special education not also enrolled in state pre-K or Head Start.

14. The Head Start Program Performance Standards as revised in 2016 are available at <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/policy/presenting>  
 15. Funding sources include the federal Preschool Expansion grant serving children up to 200% of poverty in a mixed delivery system, including the Arc KFICCC, Optimal Learning, and St. Francis International School; the state prekindergarten expansion serving children up to 300% of poverty in a mixed delivery system, including Academy Child Development Center, Inc., Alef Bet Montessori, Crossway Community Montessori, CentroNia, and Peppertree Children’s Center. Head Start serves children under 100% of poverty; Title I serves low income children as well unless used in a schoolwide program.  
 16. Research (NIEER), a unit of the Graduate School of Education at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey. [http://nieer.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Maryland\\_2015\\_rev1.pdf](http://nieer.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Maryland_2015_rev1.pdf)



## GOAL 2. AFFORDABLE, ACCESSIBLE EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION FOR ALL CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

*Montgomery County provides adequate resources to ensure eligible families can afford early care and education that is high-quality, accessible, and meets their needs.*

Strategies 5 through 9 address the intertwined issues of accessibility to care (open slots, location, language barriers) and affordability, or price charged to parents, of early care and education. According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), child care is affordable if parents pay no more than 7% of a family's income. By this standard, only an estimated 24% of families in the County can afford infant care. In Montgomery County, where the median household income is \$98,704, the median price for full-time center-based child care for two young children exceeds 20% of incomes for most families in Montgomery County, and costs for one infant exceed 20% of incomes for most single parent families.<sup>17</sup>

Based on the 2016 Child Care Demographics report prepared by the Maryland Family Network,<sup>18</sup> it appears that affordability is the primary reason families could not secure space in a child care program. When asked to note the primary reason care could not be found, only 4% of parents of preschoolers and 12% of parents of infants reported a lack of vacancies. By comparison, 42% of parents said cost was the primary reason.

**S5. Conduct a provider cost of quality care study that models the cost of delivering services at each level of EXCELS that informs rate-setting for WPA and grants/contracts. The study will**

**identify funding gaps in programs that receive state and local child care subsidy, prekindergarten, Early Head Start and Head Start, or funds from other third parties. Finally, the study should also consider the discussions between MSDE and Service Employees International Union on alternative strategies to market rate surveys mentioned in the Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) plan that was submitted by the State to the Federal Office of Child Care.<sup>19</sup>**

Access to high quality early care and education is well beyond the budget of most families. Thus, in the mixed delivery system that we have, programs – especially those that serve infants and toddlers and children with disabilities – must establish prices that are below the cost of delivering quality services to maintain steady enrollment. Additionally, because the reimbursement rates established by the State for Child Care Subsidy are well below the market cost of quality, many children in the County are unable to attend a program that meets high quality standards and which will optimally prepare them for success in school. Cost modeling provides a well-regarded method to determine what investments are needed to produce the quality that we know benefits children, families, and community.

17. US Census, 2014

18. Child Care Demographics 2016. Maryland Child Care Resource Network.

19. Maryland Child Care and Development Fund Plan Fiscal Years 2016-2018 retrieved at [https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/oc/m/maryland\\_stplan\\_pdf\\_2016.pdf](https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/oc/m/maryland_stplan_pdf_2016.pdf)



**Next Steps:** Include in the FY 2018 budget funds to conduct a provider cost of quality care study, using the cost modeling methodology.

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### Lessons from Cost Modeling in the District of Columbia

The gap between costs and revenue is largest for programs that serve infants, toddlers, and children with special needs.

The gap between costs and revenues is greatest in the highest rated programs due to increased requirements for credentialed staff and the need for more staff to cover planning and professional development time.

Many child care centers and most family child care homes are not fully enrolled resulting in significant revenue losses.

Larger centers (or network of centers linked by a shared administration) are more financially stable depending on the age distribution of children served and the quality level.

Subsidy rates do not currently align with licensing ratios, but should. Rates for children 12 to 24 months old are lower than for children birth to 12 months old, but the ratios are the same.

Source: <http://osse.dc.gov/publication/modeling-cost-child-care-district-columbia-2016>

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## S6. Expand the WPA program to reach all eligible children.

Parents reported significant barriers to accessing WPA ranging from cumbersome requirements to demeaning comments questioning the veracity of their documentation or assertions that they were gaming the system. Consequently, while on a waiting list or unable to access assistance, families may make choices for their young children's early care and education that are far below the standards of licensed care, or they are forced to abandon work or other basic family needs.

**Next Steps:** In FY2018, the County should ensure sufficient funds are budgeted to eliminate its current WPA waiting list; and for FY2019, provide a rate that aligns with the provider cost of quality care study recommendations.

## S7. Conduct an outreach campaign in multiple languages and using multiple media to inform parents and providers about the WPA program, including its relation to State child care subsidies, child eligibility, and provider participation.

Finding affordable child care is time-consuming and complex. Many parents reported that they were not aware that there is assistance available to them and subsequently made less than desirable choices for the care of their children. Parents and providers expressed confusion about the State versus the County subsidy systems, sometimes unaware of one or the other or the relation between them. The County needs to make a concerted effort to reach out to all families where they are, with materials in multiple languages.

**Next Steps:** In FY 2018, begin a communication and outreach campaign using the MCCCRRRC, local job training centers, schools, libraries, recreation and other community centers to educate parents on their subsidy options.

## S8. Simplify access to WPA vouchers by allowing on-site applications at the child care centers performing at the highest level of EXCELS.

Both parents and providers find the current system for determining eligibility to be overly burdensome and complex. The process itself is a barrier to families who could be accessing WPA subsidies. Several providers reported welcoming the opportunity to assist families in applying for vouchers to their center. This strategy would reduce family's anxiety with the process and the paperwork burden on County program administrators.

**Next Steps:** Include in the FY 2018 budget funds to pilot a provider-based access strategy to determine feasibility, understand infrastructure needed to scale the project, and develop regulations for administration.

## S9. Establish a unified strategy that identifies available public and private space for child care and uses a common application that aligns criteria and program requirements for Community Use of Public Space (CUPF), Child Care in Public Space (DHHS/CCIPS), and MCPS public space programs.

In a jurisdiction where real estate is often at a premium, the cost of facilities represents a significant part of center-based provider budgets, often reaching as high as \$3000 per child per year in commercial space.<sup>20</sup> The County has been proactive in prioritizing child care for the use of available public facilities as well as for the inclusion of such facilities in new public construction. Nevertheless, the current process managed by three different County entities lacks cohesion and often does not place quality as the highest criteria for awarding space to a provider. Each entity has a distinct application process and criteria for selection and approval varies significantly. Additionally, once occupying a public facility, providers often carry the burden of renovation costs and find that the responsibility of who maintains the space is unclear.

**Next Steps:** In FY2017 develop (1) an inventory of existing and potentially available public or private space that could be used for childcare, (2) a schedule of projected public facility construction in the next ten years that could include child care space and (3) develop a strategy of unified requirements, criteria, and application for use by providers.



## GOAL 3. AN EDUCATED, DIVERSE, WELL-COMPENSATED EARLY CHILDHOOD WORKFORCE

*The Montgomery County early childhood workforce is diverse, professionalized, well-compensated, and has access to on-going professional learning supports.*

Strategies 10 through 13 focus on the quality and compensation of the child care workforce. The key to quality services is the competency and compensation of the teachers and program directors. Providers voiced frustration with the lack of a transparent, easy-to-understand career development strategy. They consistently stated that trainings required for state child care licensing and those for credentialing and EXCELS are not well-aligned and access is often limited. Additionally, providers report that the amount of training focused on inclusive learning for children with disabilities is totally insufficient. Moreover, early childhood providers feel torn between the costs of professional development to meet licensing requirements and the costs of professional development tied to higher levels of EXCELS and higher credentials. Consequently, only 12% of the child care workforce in Montgomery County currently participate in the Maryland Child Care Credential program.<sup>21</sup> The MCCCRC has done exemplary work to train providers, but its capacity is constrained by limited infrastructure, funding, and staffing. With rising standards for education and training, early childhood educators have not received commensurate increases in compensation. Many child care workers are themselves eligible for public benefits. As Montgomery County addresses a shortage of high-quality teachers, it is imperative that compensation improvements be embedded in all professional development strategies.

### **SI0. Provide additional resources to increase the number of staff available to support teachers and administrators to meet higher levels in the Maryland credential.**

The Maryland Early Childhood Credential is a pathway with multiple levels for teachers and administrators to reach for and mark increasing levels of knowledge and competency. Many providers, both in centers and family child care, are building their professional knowledge. But professional development can be costly, especially college degrees for low-wage child care teachers. In providing additional resources, there must be focused attention on ensuring that ethnically, linguistically, and racially diverse providers are supported to meet higher level Credentials, which in turn would allow them to move into higher levels in EXCELS.

**Next Steps:** Early Childhood Services, with input from the Early Childhood Coordinating Council, will establish and track annual targets for the number of family child care and center-based providers who advance on the Maryland Early Childhood Credential and provide financial assistance to defray the cost of professional development and higher education.

21. The Maryland Child Care Credential Program has six staff credential levels and four administrator levels offering various recognition of achievement based on a child care provider's professional development/ education, years of experience, and professional activities. The program is voluntary.

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## SPOTLIGHT PROGRAM

The San Francisco County program C-WAGES (Compensation and Wage Augmentation Grants for Economic Success) is a local initiative jointly funded through the Office of Early Care and Education and the Department of Children, Youth and Their Families. C-WAGES supplements wages and contributes to health and retirement benefits for early childhood teachers employed in licensed child care centers and family child care homes. To be eligible, at least 25 percent of enrolled children are in families living below 75 percent of the state median income. The program must agree to set standardized salary schedules, differentiated by job and education, and to participate in quality rating and improvement activities.

Source: <http://www.sfhsa.org/4031.htm>

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### SI 1. Early care and education teachers and directors will receive compensation (wages and benefits) that reflect their education, training, and experience, working toward parity with public school teachers.

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the average wage of a child care teacher in Maryland qualified that teacher for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)<sup>22</sup> benefits<sup>23</sup>. As shown on the state profile prepared by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Head Start teachers fare somewhat better, but they are not on par with public school teachers.<sup>24</sup> There is little financial incentive to remain working in an early care and education program after gaining advanced credentials when the compensation is not commensurate with the qualification. Although EXCELS requires a program to have pay differentials, there are no State or local guidelines for a salary schedule and benefits.

**Next Steps:** Along with the provider cost of quality care study, the County should develop guidelines for the appropriate compensation (wages and benefits) by role, education, and experience to reflect increasing levels of quality on the Credential with parity to public school colleagues/peers.

### SI 2. As part of a career pathway for teachers, sustain a workforce that reflects the diversity of languages and cultures of families in Montgomery County.

Sustaining a linguistically and culturally diverse early care and education workforce is especially important due to the current and growing diversity of the County's families. Of the approximately 1,400 licensed and regulated centers and family child care providers, roughly a third speak Spanish as their primary language. There are another 57 languages other than English or Spanish represented in the provider community. For these early childhood practitioners to advance on the career pathway, coursework and other professional

development must be offered in these additional languages. Resources need to be dedicated to both supporting the individuals moving along the pathway and for the system of professional development to be able to meet the growing demand for training, counselors, and coursework to diverse educators.

**Next Steps:** In FY 2018, develop a cohort of providers whose native language is not English and provide them with scholarships, bilingual career and academic advisors, training and college coursework in multiple languages that align with Maryland Early Childhood Credential.

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## SPOTLIGHT PROGRAM

The Arizona Kith and Kin Project provides a 14-week, two-hour support group training series for Spanish and English speaking and refugee caregivers, with most training-support sessions offered in Spanish. The training-support sessions are held at various community partner locations that are embedded in the daily lives and neighborhoods where FFN providers live and work. On-site child care is provided by teachers, most of whom hold college degrees, who implement a language and literacy curriculum known as Leaps and Bounds (Arizona State University).

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### SI 3. Increase the availability of licensed providers by expanding the MCCRRC's support to family, friend, and neighbor (FFN)<sup>25</sup> providers to meet state health, safety, and child development requirements and increase the number of FFN providers that become licensed.

A recurring theme during interviews and conversations was the concern that young children of less affluent parents are often cared for by caregivers that are not connected to the formal child care system, either a neighbor or family member who may take turns caring for children while others go to work. While many families find this an optimal child care arrangement for several reasons, ideally these providers should have knowledge of best practices in health, safety, and child development. One interviewee noted that during a home visit to a young mother, the mother was unable to tell her the full name and phone number of the caregiver. She stated "My baby is with a babysitter down the street." The caregiver did not have emergency contacts for the mother or any way to reach her while the child was in her care.

**Next Steps:** In FY 2018, fund the MCCRRC to implement an outreach and capacity-building strategy to FFN providers and to produce additional training materials in multiple languages so that these providers can meet, at a minimum, the requirements to become part of the regulated child care system.

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22. Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, formerly known as Food Stamps. Households must meet income tests unless all members are receiving TANF, SSI, or in some places general assistance. From October 1, 2016 through September 30, 2017, a family of 3 people is eligible if gross monthly income is less than \$2,184 or a net of \$1,680 monthly.

23. Maryland early childhood workforce wage profiles, prepared by the Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2016) retrieved at [https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/occ/maryland\\_wage\\_profile.pdf](https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/occ/maryland_wage_profile.pdf)

24. Ibid.

25. Maryland's Comprehensive Early Childhood Assessment System is called Ready for Kindergarten (R4K). It consists of three components: (1) the Kindergarten Readiness assessment used early in the kindergarten year to measure school readiness in four domains; (2) Early Learning Assessment of children ages 36 months to 72 months in seven domains; and (3) a developmental screening.





## GOAL 4. TRANSITIONS AND CONTINUITY ACROSS AGES AND SETTINGS

*All infants, toddlers, and preschoolers in Montgomery County experience continuity in transitions as children develop and continuity across settings and sectors.*

Strategies I4 and I5 address the need for coordinated and effective transitions that acknowledge children's experiences prior to entering school. One type of transition is from community-based providers to schools. Children and families experience multiple transitions: changes in care and learning settings such as moving from community-based providers to formal school settings, and the normal transitions in development and learning that happen more rapidly in the early years. Parents and providers requested that schools be more open to receiving information about children's preschool experiences. Ongoing communication between the providers, schools, and families should address how children are preparing for school success, the transition to new expectations and environments, and how families can be partners in learning in each setting and in the process.

### **S14. Develop and implement kindergarten transition plans that support children and families as they move from community-based to school-based programs.**

**Next Steps:** The ECCC, in coordination with MCPS, early care and education providers, and parents, should establish a "Transition to K Workgroup" to implement this strategy and determine time and resources needed to implement County wide.

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### **SPOTLIGHT PROGRAM**

The Howard County Transition to Kindergarten Workgroup offers workshops for parents of incoming kindergarten students. The Road to Kindergarten helps prepare parents for entering their child into the school system and getting them ready for kindergarten. Attendees learn expectations for school readiness; details about the kindergarten program; information on kindergarten registration; and ways that families and children can be supported during the transition to kindergarten.

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### **S15. Create and implement a family-oriented, summer program for incoming kindergartners to support family engagement, and children's successful transition to school.**

The summer "fadeout" effect happens for many children, but low-income children do not have the same enrichment opportunities over the summer as their more affluent peers. Children with developmental delays and disabilities require continuity of services as they exit from preschool and move forward into kindergarten, yet most public prekindergarten programs and Head Start programs do not operate in the summer months. Thus, these children may lose ground on what they gained in the prekindergarten year in terms of literacy

and math, social and emotional skills, as well as nutrition and physical health. By having early exposure to kindergarten, with a developmentally appropriate curricula and continuity of comprehensive and special needs services, children will transition more easily to the expectations for kindergarten.<sup>26</sup>

**Next Steps:** The ECCC, in coordination with MCPS, should design a pilot summer program in selected schools where data show significant gaps in kindergarten readiness, and implement in FY18.

## GOAL 5. LEADERSHIP AND FINANCING

*Montgomery County has the necessary infrastructure and funding to support a high-quality, affordable, accessible early care and education system.*

Strategies 16 through 18 are the “glue” to successful implementation of the goals and strategies within this strategic plan. For this plan to succeed, a few key elements are critical including: 1) clearly defined partnerships between the State and the County and across County agencies that can invigorate and sustain the plan; 2) strong leadership within the County’s Department of Health and Human Services, so that the agency has adequate capacity to implement the plan; and, 3) a sustainable approach to expanding financing for services and related elements of the plan.

The overall goal is quality services for young children but the infrastructure elements described in this section are essential. With public funding and oversight occurring at the federal, state and local levels, and with so many different players involved, strong partnerships are needed to maximize impact and avoid poor use of resources. Given that Montgomery County invests significant local resources, its own capacity to carry out the work is critical. Finally, it is important to underscore that while using existing financing most efficiently is an important step, it will not generate enough money to meet local needs: more financing is necessary to realize the vision and do well by the children and families of Montgomery County.

### **SI 16. Ensure and sustain a strong and effective Early Childhood Coordinating Council (ECCC), made up of decision makers representing government, business, for-profit and non-profit sectors.**

Montgomery County’s Early Childhood Coordinating Council (ECCC) is a critical player in realizing the strategic vision of this plan. One key role for the ECCC relates to ongoing partnership with the Maryland State Department of Education. As noted throughout the plan, the state’s funding and policy are critical to the Montgomery County system. The state and County must work together to achieve a shared perspective on policy and program. Working with the County’s policy officer, the ECCC should bring information and perspective to the state. Locally, the ECCC is a vehicle for experts to shape Montgomery County policy, program, and financing. The ECCC

should regularly reflect and gather feedback from families, providers and other key stakeholders offering or using early learning programs throughout the County so that policy and program can be refined based on this information. Surveys, focus groups, and quantitative data all are part of the feedback loop, a crucial practice in assuring sound implementation. Finally, the ECCC, constituted with an engaged group of stakeholders with decision-making authority, is important to the implementation and sustainability of the strategic plan, providing ongoing engagement, expertise, and enthusiasm to the vision and its realization.

**Next Steps:** Initial funding for the ECCC has been provided by the Race-to-the-Top Early Learning Challenge Grant, which is ending.<sup>27</sup> In FY 2017 and beyond, a budget for local resources for the ECCC is required for the work to continue.

### **SI 17. Ensure that the policy and program offices are adequately staffed and have sufficient authority to operationalize the full plan. Full implementation of the plan includes significant operational work, strong partnerships (both locally and at the state level), and ongoing planning and resource development.**

The diffuse nature of early learning requires that Montgomery County focus on how its own government planning and execution is best done. The Early Care and Education Policy Officer is charged with maintaining the vision for the work, but vision alone cannot produce the strong implementation envisioned. Assuring that the Policy Officer and ECS Administrator have sufficient scope and authority to support the work is essential.

**Next Steps:** Assess the policy and program offices’ capacity and identify gaps. And in conjunction with the ECCC, identify various agreements that may be needed across local agencies to help assure that the work is accomplished in a unified, efficient manner.

26. The American Federation of Teachers developed “Kindergarten Plus” as part of a system of high-quality universally available, voluntary preschool. For more on the proposal, please see Giving Kids a K+ by New America at <http://preview.staging.newamerica.org/education-policy/giving-kids-a-k/>

27. The Race To The Top Early Learning Challenge grant focused on systems building at the state level. The state used a portion of the grant funds to establish and sustain local coordinating councils. The grant had a four-year term, which has now ended.

**SI 8. Leverage Montgomery Moving Forward’s (MMF) Early Care and Education Collective Impact initiative to educate and build awareness of Montgomery County’s early childhood system through engagement of local leaders, the public, businesses, and philanthropies in order to garner support. This includes identifying potential roles for each stakeholder group, advocating for systems realignment, and identifying sustainable revenue sources.**

Young children and their families experience significant gaps in accessing quality early learning opportunities. As demonstrated throughout the report, more resources are needed to realize the

ambitious plan. Identifying revenue streams and securing them to support the plan is an essential part of the “glue” for the effort. A sustainable financing strategy that results in equitable opportunity for the County’s young children and their families is a must.

**Next Steps:** Urge MMF to align its early childhood work to the findings and recommendations of this plan.

## Conclusion

The economic and social imperative for a cohesive, well-financed system of early care and education for the children and families of Montgomery County is clear. Montgomery County has an impressive track record of local leadership in early care and education. Disparities in access, affordability and quality can be closed while maintaining a diverse service delivery system. The system partners -- County agencies, the school system, parents, and providers – can, by working together, make Montgomery County a shining star in closing the school readiness gap for children of all incomes, races, and home language and culture.



# Relationship Between the Four Pillars and the Plan Strategies

Goals and Strategies	Policy	Practice	Human Capital	Infra-structure
<b>Goal 1. High quality from birth in all settings</b>				
S1. Increase local investments in technical assistance for programs to improve and sustain quality aligned to State EXCELS.	●	●	●	●
S2. Expand the availability of approved trainers and coaches who speak multiple languages certified to provide state required trainings so that there is capacity to support providers in meeting new licensing requirements established by the Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF).	●	●	●	●
S3. Expand County investments to scale existing birth to 5 model programs and services that demonstrate success in increasing school readiness and narrowing opportunity gaps.	●	●		●
S4. Work toward a guarantee of quality, affordable full-day prekindergarten for all three and four-year old children in a mixed delivery system (e.g. services provided by both public schools and community-based programs).	●	●		●
<b>Goal 2. Affordable, accessible early care and education for all children and families</b>				
S5. Conduct a cost of care study that models the cost of delivering services at each level of EXCELS that informs rate-setting for WPA and grants/contracts. The study will identify funding gaps in programs that receive state prekindergarten, Early Head Start and Head Start, or funds from other third parties. Finally, the study should also consider the discussions between MSDE and Service Employees International Union on alternative strategies to market rate surveys mentioned in the State's child care plan to the federal Office of Child Care.	●		●	●
S6. Expand the WPA program to reach all eligible children.	●		●	
S7. Conduct an outreach campaign in multiple languages and using multiple media to inform parents and providers about the WPA program, including its relation to State child care subsidies, child eligibility, and provider participation.	●	●		●
S8. Simplify access to WPA vouchers by allowing on site applications at child care centers performing at the highest level of EXCELS.	●			●
S9. Establish a unified strategy that identifies available public and private space for child care and uses a common application that aligns criteria and program requirements for Community Use of Public Space (CUPF), Child Care in Public Space (HHS/CCIPS), and MCPS public space programs.	●			●

Goals and Strategies	Policy	Practice	Human Capital	Infra-structure
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**Goal 3. An educated, diverse, well-compensated early childhood workforce**

S10. Provide additional resources to increase the number of staff available to support teachers and administrators to meet higher levels in the Maryland credential.

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S11. Early care and education teachers and directors will receive compensation (wages and benefits) that reflect their education, training, and experience, working toward parity with public school teachers.

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S12. As part of a career pathway for teachers, sustain a workforce that reflects the diversity of languages and cultures of families in Montgomery County.

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S13. Increase the availability of licensed providers by expanding MC-CCRRC's support to family, friend, and neighbor (FFN) providers to meet health, safety and child development requirements and increase the number of FFN providers that become licensed.

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**Goal 4. Transitions and continuity across ages and settings**

S14. Develop and implement kindergarten transition plans that support children and families as they move from community-based to school-based programs.

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S15. Create and implement a family-oriented, summer program for incoming kindergartners to support family engagement, and children's successful transition to school.

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**Goal 5. Leadership and financing**

S16. Ensure and sustain a strong and effective ECCC, made up of decision makers representing government, business, for-profit and non-profit sectors.

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S17. Ensure that the policy and program offices are adequately staffed and have sufficient authority to operationalize the full plan. Full implementation of the plan includes significant operational work, strong partnerships (both locally and at the state level), and ongoing planning and resource development.

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S18. Leverage Montgomery Moving Forward's (MMF) Early Care and Education Collective Impact initiative to educate and build awareness of Montgomery County's early childhood system through engagement of local leaders, the public, businesses and philanthropies in order to garner support. This includes identifying potential roles for each stakeholder group, advocating for systems realignment, and identifying sustainable revenue sources.

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## Montgomery County Early Care and Education Strategic Plan 2017



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