

I am writing this letter to advocate for county wide free universal pre-kindergarten education.

As a mother of three children raised in Montgomery County, I have had firsthand experience with impact that early childhood education can have on child development and preparation for kindergarten. When my now 19-year-old was a toddler, my family could not afford preschool. I choose to stay home and took him to libraries for story time and to playgrounds until he was ready for kindergarten. Nine years later I had my second child. Thanks to a parent that I met at a park, I learned about the Judy Center. I started taking my son to the Silver Spring Judy Center Play and Learn groups when he was 11 months old and he continued there until he was ready for prekindergarten.

The difference between my two sons was remarkable. Through his experience at the Judy Center my second child was more socially adept and prepared for prekindergarten. Although I organized play dates for my first son, and worked hard to provide him with preschool activities, my second son had a high-quality early childhood experience at the Judy Center. Thanks to the wonderful staff at the Judy Center who told me about the prekindergarten and Head Start programs, when it was time for my second son to enter prekindergarten, he was very prepared - he recognized the letters of the alphabet, counted to 20 (in English and Spanish), knew his colors, shapes, and the seasons of the year. This and his social interactions at the Judy Center made him much more confident than my first child was when he started prekindergarten! My second child continues to be a confident, enthusiastic student - he is now in 4th grade and is above grade level in reading and math. I also learned a lot about strategies in childhood education by observing how the staff were engaging with the children. This also gave me the opportunity and desire to go back to school and further my education.

I strongly believe that by having free universal Pre-K in Montgomery County children who cannot afford a private preschool education will be more emotionally resilient and they will develop a love of learning at an early age. It will also give these children an opportunity for socialization that they would not otherwise have. In addition, it will allow the parents to be able to go to work to provide for their families and contribute to the economy. Investing in early childhood education will provide a boost for the community as a whole!

*Posted with permission from Ms. Ramata Diop, Parent, April 7, 2021*