

# **Montgomery County Early Childhood Advisory Council**

## **Report 2014-2015**



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## MEMORANDUM

**October 1, 2015**

**TO:** The Honorable Isiah Leggett, Montgomery County Executive  
The Honorable George Leventhal, President, Montgomery County Council

**FROM:** Barbara Andrews, Ph.D., Co-Chair, Administrator, Early Childhood Services  
Claudia Simmons, Co-Chair, Supervisor, MCPS Pre-K/Head Start Unit

**SUBJECT:** The Early Childhood Advisory Council 2014-2015 Report and 2015-2016  
Priorities

The Early Childhood Advisory Council (ECAC) is pleased to submit its 2014-2015 report and 2015-2016 priorities. The role of the ECAC is to monitor, advocate, and make policy recommendations for developing a comprehensive, coordinated early care and education system that supports school readiness, provides support to state and local initiatives, and builds on the existing efforts to improve the system of early care and education in Montgomery County.

The ECAC is comprised of a variety of stakeholders and professionals with expertise in the early childhood field including: County parents, business and foundation representatives, child care providers, Montgomery County Public School staff, Maryland State Department of Education staff, Montgomery County Libraries and County Government representatives. Our collective knowledge and expertise about the early care and education system, the importance of school readiness, and children and families in Montgomery County allows the ECAC to examine, discuss, problem solve, and provide a complete perspective to County officials.

The second year of this council has been an important one as the ECAC focused on identifying priorities that will help to create a system of early care and education in the County and forward the goals of eliminating readiness gaps and reaching full readiness for Kindergarten for all children. This report contains a summary of our work this past year.

We wish to recognize and thank those who participate in our meetings for their commitment and perseverance in doing this work. We look forward to continuing the important work of this council and continuing our relationship with public officials at the County and State.

## **Early Childhood Advisory Council**

The Montgomery County Early Childhood Advisory Council (ECAC) was formed in April of 2013. The ECAC holds five meetings per year including a half day retreat in April each year. Subcommittees meet as needed between full advisory council meetings to do much of the work of the ECAC. The overall goal for the ECAC's in each jurisdiction in Maryland is to reach 100% of children entering school "ready to learn" as measured by the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) readiness assessment and statistics, and to eliminate the readiness gaps for children from low income homes, English language learners and children with disabilities.

In the last year the ECAC worked on broad issues and also on the implementation of a grant from The MSDE (February 2014-June 2015 for \$142,000). Subcommittees were formed based on research and grant needs: Media and Outreach Committee, Literacy and Pediatric Outreach Committee and the Family Engagement Committee.

The ECAC spent the bulk of it's time this year on grant work related to four interrelated grant projects:

Project #1: Full development of the ECAC and work on priorities addressing the creation of a comprehensive system of early childhood education.

Project #2: Development of a public outreach and media campaign related to ChildLink and aimed at parents, child care providers and pediatricians; development of focus groups on school readiness with parents, child care providers and MCPS early childhood teachers.

Project#3 : A community project in the Gaithersburg Elementary School community that includes Professional Development for child care programs (training, technical assistance and mentoring), a breakthrough center specific to collaboration with the elementary school and mentoring with family child care programs, and parent engagement activities.

Project #4: A new demographics report - related to families in the County with children under age six.

## **Mission**

To monitor, advocate, and make policy recommendations for developing a comprehensive, coordinated system of early childhood education that supports school readiness, provides support for state and local initiatives, and builds on the existing work of early childhood education in Montgomery County.

## **Purpose**

Developed out of a requirement of the Maryland's Race-to-the-Top: Early Learning Challenge Fund, the Early Childhood Advisory Council was established by a County Council Resolution. The purpose of the ECAC is to work collaboratively to plan, implement and assess activities focused on ensuring that all young children (birth through age 5) in Montgomery County enter school fully ready to learn. The ECAC builds on the longstanding work of Early Childhood groups and stakeholders in Montgomery County.

## **Meetings**

This year the full Council met on the second Thursday of each month, typically at Johns Hopkins University, Rockville Campus at 9:00 a.m. All meetings are open to the general public.

A significant portion of the Council's work is accomplished through Committees. Committee meetings take place at various times throughout the year. All meetings are open to the public.

Please call 240-777-1019 or visit

**MCPS website**

<http://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/departments/earlychildhood/ecac.aspx> or

**DHHS website**

[www.montgomerycountymd.gov/ECAC](http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/ECAC)

## **Membership 2014-2015**

Barbara Andrews, Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services  
Jennifer Arnaíz, Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services  
Rosalba Bonilla-Acosta, Maryland CentroNía Preschool  
Jody Burghardt, Montgomery County Public Schools  
April Kaplan, Montgomery County Collaboration Council  
Amy Cropp, Montgomery County Public Schools  
Carl Eggleston, Maryland State Department of Education  
Patsy Evans, Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services  
Natasha Ramberg, Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services  
Kim Grant, Montgomery County Family Child Care Association  
Stephanie Grant, Montgomery County Public Schools  
Michelle Green, Montgomery Child Care Association  
Carol Legaretta, Montgomery County Public Libraries  
Barbara Marshall, Montgomery College  
Meredith Myers, Family Services, Inc.  
Lauren Moskowitz, Montgomery County Public Schools  
Bernadine Occhiuzzo, Montgomery County Commission on Child Care  
Linda Owen, Organization of Child Care Directors  
Tobi Printz-Platnick, Morris & Gwendolyn Cafritz Foundation  
Hilda Richards, Department of Health and Human Services  
Claudia Simmons, Montgomery County Public Schools  
Portia Willis, Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services  
Vivian Yao, Legislative Analyst, Montgomery County Council

### Staff to the ECAC

Verna Washington, Montgomery County Public Schools  
Sarah Wilch-Spamer, Montgomery County DHHS

## **Council Activities 2014-2015**

- Formed subcommittees (Literacy and Pediatric Outreach, Parent/Family Engagement, and Public Outreach/Media Campaign)
- Completed all four projects in the ECAC Implementation Grant (from the MSDE-\$142,000, February 2014-June 2015) including:
  - Full Development of the ECAC with strategic work on creating a comprehensive system of early childhood education
  - Development of a public media and outreach campaign related to ChildLink and aimed at parents, providers and pediatricians/full implementation of a bus campaign for ChildLink in strategic areas of the County
  - A community project in the Gaithersburg Elementary School community including outreach and professional development for child care programs (all types) and parent engagement activities
  - A demographics report focused on families in Montgomery County with children under age six (funded by a grant from the Montgomery County Collaboration Council for Children, Youth and Families)
- Engaged parents, child care providers and MCPS teachers in eleven focus groups throughout the County focused on school readiness and published an ECAC Focus Group Report in July 2015 so as to inform work going forward
- Used research from a variety of sources, including the ECAC Focus Group Report and the Demographics Report and worked with a strategic planning consultant to create priorities and strategies for increasing school readiness, eliminating readiness gaps and for creating a system of early childhood education

## ECAC Recommendations

The ECAC is cognizant of the large deficit that Montgomery County is facing now and for the next several years. In an effort to plan strategically for early childhood in the future and to work toward a system of early education and care it is important that programs that assist families with young children and the development of young children and their readiness for school take precedence in County priorities and strategic planning. Too often funding from State grants that support many of the early care and education work in jurisdictions is too small for the growing needs and costs and the grants are threatened with cuts or elimination on a yearly basis. **The ECAC recommends that the County place a priority on young children and their families even in the face of large deficits.**

- **The ECAC recommends** that the County examine the WPA 2014 Workgroup recommendations and, at a minimum, revise the WPA Income Guidelines and simplify the WPA Subsidy Tables. In the absence of additional funding, these changes will result in making the subsidy payment provided to eligible families more reflective of the average cost of child care in Montgomery County and lower the out of pocket expenses for participants. High quality child care programs provide safe and educational experiences for young children while their parents work. Assisting families in paying for child care creates a stronger workforce.
- **The ECAC recommends** that the County examine the costs and funding required to create full day publicly funded **Pre-K programs** throughout the County. With the Federal and State commitment to expanding Pre-K through a diverse delivery system that includes public school collaboration with child care programs there is recognition that Universal Pre-K will take collaboration between systems, programs and funding sources. The current funding of two and a half hours per day Pre-K programs does not meet the needs of the low-income families and children public Pre-K is intended to serve. Utilizing child care programs as part of a public Pre-K delivery system improves the quality of Pre-K throughout the County and research shows that high quality Pre-K experiences for children improve their readiness for Kindergarten.
- **The ECAC recommends** that the County Council fully fund the development and creation of a regional system of **Family Involvement Centers** based on best practice and research to meet the needs of young children and families from diverse cultural and economic backgrounds. These programs should provide **play-based, inclusive** early childhood experiences in **classroom settings** for children and families with a curriculum focused on a **Family Coaching Model** and on the *Social Emotional Foundations of Early Learning (SEFEL)* model for social and emotional development.



Through the **Focus Group Research** implemented by the ECAC, it is clear that a primary concern for school readiness is a lack of appropriate social/emotional experiences and development before a child reaches kindergarten. The 2014 *Demographics Report: Families and Children Birth to Six Montgomery County, Maryland* reports large increases in cultural diversity and in low-income families in the County. Providing families with programs that give their children teacher facilitated social experiences in groups is essential to their readiness for Kindergarten.

## **ECAC Priorities 2015-2016**

- Create a Birth-3<sup>rd</sup> grade system of early childhood education via a dialogue between Birth-5 and K-3<sup>rd</sup> grade professionals that also includes improved communication with parents
- Align programmatic priorities to maximize support to families provided by programs and services beginning with an identification of stakeholders and strategies
- Create family engagement and other opportunities with an emphasis on social/emotional development and kindergarten readiness
- Complete the work of ECAC Committees (Media and Outreach, Literacy and Pediatric Outreach and Family Engagement) with recommendations and strategies that support the first three ECAC priorities for 2015-2016

**Isiah Leggett, County Executive**  
**Uma S. Ahluwalia, Director**  
**JoAnn Barnes, Chief Children, Youth and Families**  
**Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services**  
**Early Childhood Advisory Council**  
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Language translation and alternative formats of this report are available upon request. For additional information on the Commission, please call or write at the address and telephone numbers listed above.

*Montgomery County does not discriminate on the basis of disability in employment or in the admission or access to its programs or services.*

