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- Social Media
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Maryland Releases New Strategic Plan for Prenatal to Age 8 Early Childhood System

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Maryland Ready: A Path to School Readiness and Success Provides Map to Equitable and Comprehensive Early Childhood Development

Baltimore, MD – (December 16, 2020) – The State of Maryland today announced the release of ***Maryland Ready: A Path to School Readiness and Success***, a five-year strategic plan that will map a course to support all children and their families from the prenatal stage up through age 8 in growing up healthy and ready for school success. The development of the plan for Maryland's statewide, comprehensive early childhood system building, led by the Maryland Departments of Education, Health and Human Services, integrates input from a diverse range of stakeholders throughout the state, and is supported by Maryland's federal Preschool Development Birth through 5 (PDG-B-5) Grant.

With the vision that all young children and their families will thrive, the plan articulates the State's overall mission to promote a well-coordinated and integrated system of programs, supports and services for every child. *Maryland Ready: A Path to School Readiness and Success* outlines the State's overall approach to providing each Maryland child equitable access to a high-quality early childhood experience that promotes a healthy body and mind, as well as the foundational knowledge and skills necessary for success. The overall goal is to ensure that every family has access to the resources needed to be effective as their child's first and most important teacher and advocate.

"Maryland continues to serve as a national model in ensuring equitable opportunities for families and providing high-quality early care and learning experiences that prepare children for school and overall success," said Governor Larry Hogan. "As we continue to navigate the challenges of the COVID-19 crisis and its impact on families across the State, this strategic plan sets a path forward for our very youngest to recover and grow. I commend the Maryland Departments of Education, Health, and Human Services, as well as the parents, early childhood community leaders, and stakeholders for developing this guide and for the hard work they do every day to support our youngest Marylanders.

As a geographically and demographically diverse state, Maryland has a robust mixed-delivery system of early childhood programs and services to support families and their young children, empower parental choice and family engagement, and ensure successful transitions throughout a child's development, from before birth, the infant and toddler years and into early grades.

"With the early years as the most critical period for brain development, the investments we make to support our youngest learners now provide the foundation for lifelong learning and achievement," said State Superintendent of Education Karen B. Salmon, Ph.D. "This strategic plan provides the foundation to build upon and leverage Federal, State, local, and non-governmental resources to align and strengthen the equity and delivery of programs so that each child can flourish."

Maryland's six goals and key strategies in the strategic plan include:

- Strengthen availability and access by increasing availability and choice for all families and especially vulnerable families, decreasing barriers, serving more children with special needs in inclusive settings, and improving coordination between ECE and health services;
- Improve and support program quality by increasing quality across sectors, focusing on equity, increasing kindergarten readiness for all children, and improving capacity to meet infants' and children's mental health needs;
- Deepen family engagement by increasing families' awareness of high-quality programs, expanding 2-generational programming, and enhancing families' opportunities to engage;

- Ensure successful transition experiences by strengthening institutional support for transitions, supporting families through transitions, and improving transition-focused professional development opportunities;
- Expand and enhance workforce development by improving professional development opportunities, strengthening equity, coordination and alignment efforts, and improving compensation for ECE professionals; and
- Improve systems for infrastructure, data and resource management by improving coordination across agencies, modernizing the data system, using resources in ways that promote equity, and streamlining funding mechanisms.

Maryland's Path to School Readiness and Success provides clear and measurable guidance about how to enhance critical components of Maryland's early childhood system, while remaining anchored to the state's core principles of promoting equitable accessibility, affordability, and quality of comprehensive, two-generational services and supports for children from the prenatal period to age 8 and their families, particularly families experiencing adversity.

More information about ***Maryland Ready: A Path to School Readiness and Success*** and additional projects funded by the PDG B-5 grant may be found here: https://earlychildhood.marylandpublicschools.org/PDG.

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