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State Superintendent of Schools

MARYLAND STATE DEPARTMENT OF
EDUCATION
PREPARING WORLD CLASS STUDENTS

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TO: Members of the Maryland State Board of Education

FROM: Lillian M. Lowery, Ed.D.   *Lillian M. Lowery*

DATE: July 28, 2015

SUBJECT: Early Learning Update

PURPOSE:

The purpose of this item is to provide follow-up information on Maryland EXCELS and the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment (KRA).

BACKGROUND:

On May 19, 2015, the Board received an update on two projects of the Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge (RTT-ELC) grant. At that meeting, Board members requested additional information on Maryland EXCELS and the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment (KRA) which is part of Ready for Kindergarten (R4K) – Maryland's Early Childhood Comprehensive Assessment System. Both projects are funded by the Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge (RTT-ELC) grant. Board members wanted information about the number of child care programs that are accepting child care subsidy vouchers and are currently not participating in Maryland EXCELS (ATTACHMENT A). In addition, the Board requested a mock sample of the KRA student report (ATTACHMENT B).

Maryland EXCELS is the State's Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS), designed to establish a continuous program quality improvement process with five distinctly separate quality levels – one being the lowest and aligned with the child care licensing standards and five being the highest. EXCELS was launched in July 2013 and over the past two years, more than 5,000 child care providers, Head Start, private preschool, and public prekindergarten programs have registered and, in varying stages, got published at any of the five levels. This represents 52% of all licensed child care programs that are participating in EXCELS. Participating programs have 12 months to publish, i.e., being officially rated, at any of the five levels depending on validated documentation of meeting the quality criteria established for the levels. Of all the participating programs, 39% are currently published on www.MarylandEXCELS.org. In addition, 96% of all licensed child care programs receiving child care subsidy vouchers are registered with EXCELS. The benefits of EXCELS are two twofold:

- Continuous quality improvement of early childhood programs, namely licensed child care;

- Improved consumer education for families searching for quality child care or early learning programs.

By volume of programs participating, Maryland is now the largest voluntary QRIS in the nation. At current growth projections, when Maryland has 8,000 programs participating, the cost of operating the QRIS will be $712 per program – the second least expensive system in the nation. Johns Hopkins University – Center for Technology in Education (JHU-CTE) has been solicited to conduct a validation study on EXCELS which will be published in the summer of 2016.

Ready for Kindergarten (R4K): Maryland's early childhood assessment system has two components: the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment (KRA), which was administered for the first time in the fall of 2014 to all public school kindergarteners, and the Early Learning Assessment (ELA). The ELA measures the progress of learning in children, 36 to 72 months, along 32 learning progressions in seven domains. A teacher survey conducted after the KRA administration provided valuable feedback in how MSDE can improve on the assessment and coordinate its implementation with the 24 local school systems. The biggest issue for teachers was the time it took to administer the new assessment. In addition, technology capacity for the assessment varied among local school systems and impacted the experience for teachers when administering the KRA. Since then, several improvements have been put in place to create an enhanced version of the KRA –KRA v1.5 - for the administration in the fall of 2015-16. They are:

- The number of assessment items have been reduced by 20% to create a shorter KRA;
- Most local school systems have established a coordinated schedule regarding the KRA with locally required assessments;
- Some local school systems use the staggered opening to either begin assessing items or provide more time for students to learn classroom routines;
- Uploading statewide student identifiers will occur by the beginning of the assessment window on August 17, which will extend the time available to teachers to assess the students;
- Teachers will be able to download an app with more virtual performance items which accelerates the administration of those items;
- Teachers will have direct access to the KRA Help Desk for technical assistance;
- Professional development will include a refresher module for all teachers who had administered the KRA last fall and technologically integrated modules for new teachers;
- Local school systems will provide instructional guides and training in embedding assessment items in their local school systems' curricula.

MSDE will work closely with the local accountability coordinators and early learning supervisors when administering the KRA this fall. The KRA administration window will be from August 17 to November 1, 2015. Individual Student Reports (IRS) for the families of kindergarten students will be available by November 15. State, local, and school reports will be released after the data verification process by the end of February 2016.

At the last Board meeting, there were questions about the authority to promulgate child care regulations. Under the current statute, authority resides with the State Superintendent. We will discuss this issue further in Executive Session.

SUMMARY:

Using RTT-ELC funding, MSDE has been engaged in creating two major accountability systems to improve the learning opportunities for young children. Maryland EXCELS holds early childhood programs accountable to meeting quality standards that are higher than those promulgated by licensing regulations, and Ready for Kindergarten, a comprehensive early childhood assessment system, that monitors young children's learning progress and measures incoming kindergarteners' readiness skills for Maryland's College and Career-Ready Standards. Both systems intend to boost young children's learning, narrow the achievement gaps, and set the foundation for college and career readiness.

ACTION:

For information only. No action required.

Attachments

Maryland EXCELS Quality Rating and Improvement System
Child Care Subsidy Program Requirement

Child Care Subsidy and Program Participation

As of July 7, 2015 there are **5,055** programs participating in Maryland EXCELS. This number represents **52%** of all licensed and registered child care centers and family child care homes in the state.

As of February, 2015 (the latest data available) **88.3%** of providers paid Child Care Subsidy reimbursement were participating in Maryland EXCELS.

As of June 26, 2015 the number of providers with active Child Care Subsidy vouchers who were **not** participating in Maryland EXCELS was **130**.

Outreach to families using Child Care Subsidy vouchers included simple instructions to find a participating program:
- Ask your provider if s/he participates
- Call or visit Maryland Family Network's LOCATE Child Care at www.marylandfamilynetwork.org or call toll-free 877-261-0060
- Select Find a Program on www.marylandexcels.org
- Download the free Maryland EXCELS mobile app and select Find a Program.

Families eligible for Child Care Subsidy do not lose their eligibility for assistance if the child is enrolled in a non-participating program after June 29th, 2015. If the family chooses a different child care program, they may take the re-issued voucher to the new provider.

Background

On July 1, 2013 Maryland EXCELS became available for statewide participation by licensed child care centers, registered family child care homes, and public prekindergarten programs. An extensive communication and outreach plan began two years prior to roll out and ongoing communication about the importance of choosing quality will continue. As part of the Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge grant, the state convened a workgroup to address how to ensure that children with high needs are enrolled in programs that are participating in the state's Quality Rating and Improvement System. Children whose families are eligible for Child Care Subsidy were identified, and a plan put in place for child care providers to participate in Maryland EXCELS by June 29, 2015 to receive Child Care Subsidy reimbursement.
Johns Hopkins University, Center for Technology in Education is a partner with MSDE's Division of Early Childhood Development, and is responsible for creating and maintaining the online

system and providing support to participating programs. Maryland EXCELS is a block rating system, consisting of five levels, 1 through 5, with Level 5 requiring program accreditation by a state or national organization recognized by MSDE. There are five content areas representing nationally accepted best practices to ensure quality experiences for young children. Programs may publish a quality rating on the Maryland EXCELS website and mobile app when all criteria for a specific level have been met and verified.

Rolling Registration and Child Care Subsidy Deadline
Programs that do not register to participate by June 29, 2015 may choose to participate in Maryland EXCELS at any time. Registration and participating is on-going; a program may simply create a user name and password and submit a brief online application in order to participate. After being accepted into Maryland EXCELS, a program works toward meeting the standards for a quality rating, and requests to publish their rating on the Maryland EXCELS website within 12 months of acceptance. As programs work through the quality standards, they may publish a higher rating when they meet all requirements for that level. A program's quality rating is updated every 12 months, and a new 12 month cycle begins each time the program publishes a new level or maintains their current level.

Incentives and Supports
Financial incentives are provided to programs that publish a quality rating. Program bonuses range from $50 to $4,500, depending on the licensed capacity of the program, the program type, and the quality rating achieved. For programs published at Levels 3, 4, and 5, an additional Child Care Subsidy payment is awarded and may be used to reduce the cost of care for families, and/or for program improvement activities.

Personal support and individualized technical assistance is provided by three groups of individuals working with Maryland EXCELS participants:
- Program Coordinators at Johns Hopkins University, Center for Technology in Education assist providers with the online system navigation and review documents uploaded by the program to meet the quality standards.
- MSDE Quality Assurance Specialists provide outreach, training, and technical assistance to programs and the community on Maryland EXCELS and the importance of quality early childhood programs. During April, May, and June 2015, 102 sign-up and support sessions were held throughout the state for providers to register for Maryland EXCELS.
- Maryland Family Network, through its Child Care Resource and Referral Centers, provides individualized technical assistance to programs requesting additional support to meet standards and improve ratings.

Regulations
A revision to the Child Care Subsidy regulations added the requirement for providers to participate in Maryland EXCELS to receive reimbursement. Maryland EXCELS regulations define the program requirements and incentives for participants.

7.7.15

R 4 Student Report
K KINDERGARTEN READINESS ASSESSMENT

Student Name: Jennifer Marlowe

Teacher Name: Peter Miller

School Name: K1 School

Administration: Fall 2014

OVERALL PERFORMANCE

EMERGING   APPROACHING   DEMONSTRATING

269

APPROACHING READINESS

Jennifer demonstrates some foundational skills and behaviors that prepare him/her for curriculum based on kindergarten standards.
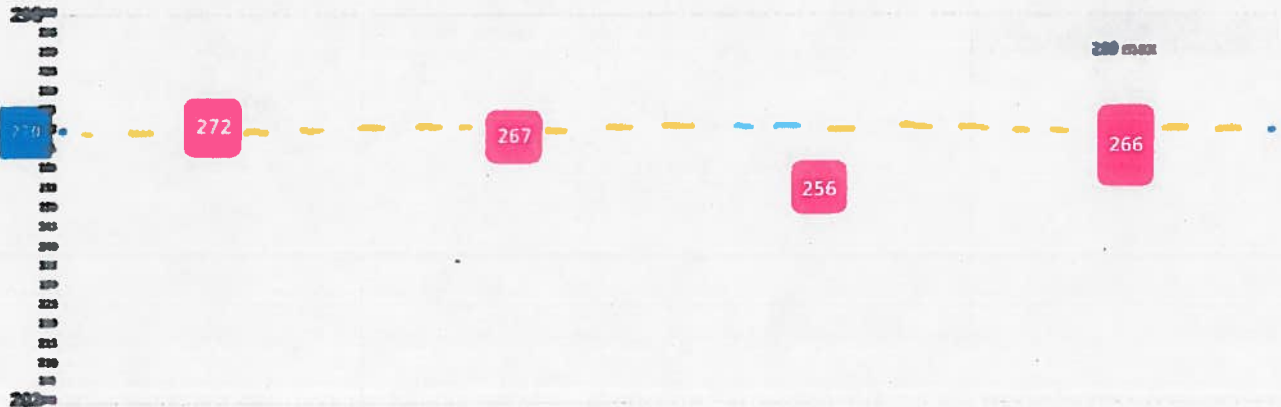
AREA PERFORMANCE

SOCIAL FOUNDATIONS	LANGUAGE AND LITERACY	MATHEMATICS	PHYSICAL WELL-BEING AND MOTOR DEVELOPMENT

270

272

267

256

266

- - Demonstrating Readiness

ready for
KINDERGARTEN

WHAT IS THE KINDERGARTEN READINESS ASSESSMENT?

The Kindergarten Readiness Assessment (KRA) is one part of the Ready for Kindergarten system in Maryland. The KRA is a kindergarten readiness tool that allows teachers to measure each child's school readiness across four domains: Social Foundations, Mathematics, Language and Literacy, and Physical Well-being and Motor Development.

Teachers administer the KRA to all children during the school day between the first day of school and November 1. More information about Ready for Kindergarten system and the KRA are available at http://pd.kready.org/r4kmaryland.

HOW IS THE KRA SCORED?

After the KRA is completed in November, scores are calculated for each domain and for overall performance. The overall score determines a performance level, which is based on criteria set by Maryland educators.

Demonstrating Readiness: A child demonstrates foundational skills and behaviors that prepare him/her for curriculum based on kindergarten standards.

Approaching Readiness: A child demonstrates some foundational skills and behaviors that prepare him/her for curriculum based on kindergarten standards.

Emerging Readiness: A child demonstrates minimal foundational skills and behaviors that prepare him/her for curriculum based on kindergarten standards.

Other: A child was not able to access one or more assessment items, resulting in a "Not Scorable" for those items, due to limited English proficiency, a disability, or other circumstances, such as a documented medical condition during assessment administration. Domains in which all items could be scored are reported. A "Not Scorable" will result in the student not receiving an overall performance score and a score in that domain (s).

Incomplete Assessment: A child had one or more items that were left blank. Domains in which all items could be scored are reported.

HOW IS THE KRA ADMINISTERED?

The KRA does not look like a test. Instead, it includes a variety of items, including teacher's observations of daily activities and age-appropriate performance tasks in which the teacher asks a child to respond to a question or complete an activity. Some items can be administered via a tablet or computer.

Most children enjoy working on these tasks, and appropriate supports were provided, when possible, to allow any child, including a child with disabilities or a child learning English, to demonstrate their skills and knowledge.

WHAT DO THE RESULTS MEAN?

The results of the KRA provide a measure of a child's mastery of content and skills that Maryland has identified as expectations for children entering kindergarten. Performance on the KRA does not prevent or prohibit a child from entering kindergarten. The performance level and domain scores are only one piece of information on a child's preparation for kindergarten. Score reports should be used with other data and information, including feedback from a child's teacher, to make instructional decisions.

Because there are fewer items within each domain, the domain scores include a bar that reflects the best estimate of performance within each domain.

ready for
KINDERGARTEN