



August 8, 2017

Mr. Andrew R. Smarick, President
Maryland State Board of Education
200 West Baltimore Street
Baltimore, MD 21201

Dear Mr. Smarick:

Thank you very much for the opportunity to comment on the State's Draft #2 of Maryland's Consolidated Plan to implement the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 (ESSA).

Maryland Family Network provided input following presentation of an outline of Maryland's ESSA plan following a meeting of the Early Childhood Advisory Council, and we heard the formal presentation of the current draft at the July 26 meeting of the Commission on Innovation and Excellence in Education.

From our viewpoint, that is, looking at Maryland's education system from the vantage point of children and their families before children enter the formal, mandatory education system at age five (kindergarten), we think the ESSA plan does not do justice to the Maryland State Department of Education's (MSDE's) accomplishments and systems, nor to our state's current activities designed to reach early care and education goals.

MSDE and its partners spend considerable time and effort preparing children for school before they arrive there, and throughout the ESSA Consolidated Plan, there are opportunities not only to recognize our collective work but also to highlight the systems that have been built here in Maryland over decades and enhanced, most recently, with Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge funds.

Among Marylanders generally there is growing awareness that what happens before children arrive at school drives a good deal of what happens throughout their public education experience. We leverage a lot more learning if children are fully prepared for kindergarten. The majority of Maryland's children age four and younger is not in school – they are in a variety of mostly private settings. And MSDE has done a great deal to improve conditions in those settings. That work specifically should be noted in the ESSA Consolidated State Plan with a clear commitment to continue on the trajectory.

We have identified a number of areas throughout the report where there are opportunities to explicitly mention Maryland work with parents, children, and child care professionals. Please see the brief notes attached. We would be delighted to provide draft amendment language for your consideration.



Thank you again for giving us an opportunity to have input into this monumental plan. Although we represent a literally and figuratively "little" group in the system, we know that their early years are the most important for success not only in the academic realm, but also in forming long-term relationships, finding and keeping good jobs, and contributing as taxpaying citizens.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Margaret E. Williams". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping initial "M" and a long, horizontal flourish at the end.

Margaret E. Williams
Executive Director



MARYLAND FAMILY NETWORK ESSA DRAFT #2 COMMENTS

P. 7. Regarding assessments in a native language, currently the Early Learning Assessment, ELA, is only in English. Throughout, there could be much more mention of ELA and KRA, not just mention by reference to the Appendices.

P. 11, focusing on the learning trajectory for all students. There is substantial progress to be made for students in the categories of Hispanic, Native American, and African-American. Not only are the goals (p. 12) needed, but also a strategy to achieve the goals, including working with all preschool programs (child care, etc.).

P. 12. The time frame and trajectory begin at kindergarten. We realize that 2029-2030 was the end point to the time frame, which, counting backwards, ends at kindergarten in the 2017-18 school year, pre-K, at the least, should also be included. The concerted effort under the previous assessment (MMSR) that resulted in a growth from 49% of children ready for kindergarten to 83% of children ready for kindergarten shows the efficacy of such an approach. The outcome of this approach has been borne out by 3rd grade reading scores that are higher for children who scored well in the previous assessment at kindergarten entry. Simply stated, the gaps in children's school readiness begin before kindergarten, and more substantial efforts need to be made to address this if we want all children to succeed.

P. 16. Here's another opportunity to note the pre-k and kindergarten assessment measures as a means to better identify root causes.

P. 21. More substantial professional development for those working with children in the preschool years, both within LEAs and in the private sector, including training and technical assistance, particularly in the areas of social studies, fine arts, physical education and health for those working with children in the preschool years will improve the outcomes identified here. Under the substantial professional development under the MMSR assessment, gains in all domains were achieved.

P. 30. The strategies for underperforming schools (on this page identified for comprehensive support and improvement) should include strategies dealing with programs feeding into underperforming schools. During the Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge grant period, funding that increased training and technical

assistance to child care centers and family child care programs in Title 1 school areas (or feeding into those schools) showed such an approach had a marked increase in the quality of those programs (as measured by MSDE's MD EXCELS program). A comprehensive approach would not only target specific schools but also the programs that have served children before they arrived at kindergarten.

P. 33 addresses underperforming schools and interventions. As mentioned above, we should mention how MSDE and others address student needs prior to entering kindergarten/elementary school. Later in the section, MSDE describes a team comprised of central office staff, school administration, and other stakeholder groups to conduct monthly on-site school visits to monitor progress toward meeting established goals. Such groups should include stakeholders from the local early care and education community.

P. 34 and beyond present approaches to determine root causes and assess needs. Addressing inequities and gaps that occur even prior to kindergarten is critical. Root causes can be identified prior to kindergarten in many instances, and strategies/interventions in the early years, before children begin school, should be identified and adequately resourced. MSDE and its partners are doing this. MSDE describes Four Domains of Rapid School Improvement, including "cultural shift." We recommend that such a culture shift include the recognition of what students coming into the elementary schools have or do not have as a result of preschool programming.

P. 37 addresses bullying and harassment. Research indicates that such patterns of behavior start early in a child's development. MSDE has supported SEFEL and PBIS and other problem solving and social emotional growth approaches among very young children through the child care community and in other early care and education settings. Effective interventions include not only children and schools (including staff and administrators) but also families, who are brought into the process and supported.

P. 39. The focus on transitions into kindergarten/elementary school and the inclusion of a transition resource guide are important. Community-based organizations and local schools that are referenced later in the description (for implementation) should be included at the beginning of the process, i.e. in the development of the resource guide and strategies for implementation. Such strategies should also take into account the programming that occurs in programs prior to kindergarten entrance.

P. 41. Family engagement for transitions ideally begins well before pre-K and kindergarten. MSDE and others currently provide support to early care and education caregivers, particularly those outside of the public school system. And more needs to be done.

PP. 41, 55. English learners constitute an important percentage of children in early care and education prior to kindergarten. Data from the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics show that in the 2014-2015 school year 16.7 percent of kindergarten students were ELs yet only 4.1 percent of 12th graders were ELs. Addressing the English language acquisition skills of preschool children could accelerate the proficiency of these students and prepare them to be better learners in K-12. Attention to programs outside of public schools that provide services to EL children and their families should be a part of MSDE's strategies. Even now, family engagement for transitions begins well before kindergarten in both public and nonpublic pre-k programs. More should be done, but we should take the opportunity to acknowledge that we're aware of the importance and have taken beginning steps, and we intend to stay the course.

P. 42. Children from birth through preschool in migrant families should be a focus of the state's efforts. The report states, "The MSDE's Internal Family Engagement Team will develop and implement a Family and Community Engagement Outreach Plan." Especially when it comes to children before they arrive at school, the MSDE Team should include community-based program providers, including those outside of public schools, in the development of materials and strategies for implementing.

P. 45. This section addresses approaches for children and youth who are neglected, delinquent, or at-risk. The current draft's emphasis seems to focus on older youth; it would be good to describe approaches for children in preschool and during the elementary years who may have experienced abuse and neglect. Training and support need to be provided to public preschool, elementary school, and early care and education teachers outside of the public school setting. Organizations that provide services for families with children in the younger age ranges could be referenced, especially because they are currently active in providing professional development for teaching staff throughout the state and would be very helpful in the development of new strategies for professional development for teaching staff.

P. 49. The first cell indicates that "state Kindergarten Readiness data show that the gaps that exist for students entering kindergarten are the same gaps that exist on State assessments in Grade Three." MSDE is funding important work designed to narrow and eventually eliminate gaps that originate prior to kindergarten, offering through community-based partners a variety of supports to both the private and public sectors. More needs to be done; current and future efforts should be mentioned.

P. 53. With support from MSDE, MFN and others have been involved for a number of years in preparing those working in early care and education settings outside of public

schools for advancement in their professions. This history should be mentioned, promoted, and continued.

P. 58 addresses improving communication between home and schools. Those working with young children outside of the public school also need assistance to improve communication. Especially as communication modes have changed in the past decade, assistance in how best to communicate with families is urgently needed by the child care provider population.

P. 66 mentions, "LEAs, Head Start, Judy Centers, Office of Child Care, and the State Pre-K programs." The majority of children in Maryland age four and below are in early care and education settings outside of those listed. The child care community should be mentioned here, especially as MSDE (and the federal government) have invested considerable resources in improving the practice in private settings..

PP. 94-97, family engagement. Direct service providers (e.g. Head Start) and many other organizations that provide support to early care and education providers are not included, specifically or generically in implementation strategies. These groups work on the frontline with families and providers and, especially given their long-time involvement with parent and family engagement, should be used to strengthen the ESSA Plan.