

The Blueprint for Maryland's Future: Effects on County Child Care Providers

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Elli Nikolopoulos, 2022 Summer Fellow
ellini83@gmail.com | [LinkedIn](#)



About the Fellow & Acknowledgements

Elli Nikolopoulos is a Master of Public Policy candidate at the University of Maryland (UMD) from Ellicott City, MD. She is passionate about researching policy that aims to address the causes of child poverty and its effects on education and health outcomes, and hopes to use data-based and intersectional policy analysis approaches in her future work. Elli graduated from UMD with a B.A. in Government and Politics, a B.A. in Public Policy, and a minor in Statistics. She is thrilled to have this opportunity to learn about local policymaking.



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Executive Summary

Access to high-quality early childhood education and care has been linked to positive academic and social outcomes for all children, especially those from low-income families. However, these same families tend to lack access to such care. The Blueprint for Maryland's Future (Blueprint) aims to address these equity gaps in early care and education among low-income families throughout the state. While existing state and local policies, in addition to the Blueprint, offer substantial funding for low-income families to access care, the Blueprint also implements several new requirements for providers receiving these funds around quality of care and teacher educational attainment.

This report considers 1) broader child care trends in the County, and 2) providers' challenges with the Blueprint requirements to draw conclusions about how the law may affect providers' ability to serve low-income families. It concludes that the Blueprint quality requirements may limit the supply of child care that is available to low-income families seeking care under the Blueprint funding mechanism. These conclusions arose based on interviews with child care providers in the County and maps from the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS). Specific highlights include:

- The most generous estimate places the supply of Montgomery County child care providers who are eligible for funding at 25% out of all providers, but the true proportion is likely much lower, with additional considerations around capacity and open seat availability.
- Providers are not well-informed about the specifics of these requirements, nor do they feel that the State or County are providing sufficient incentive towards their fulfillment.

As a result of these findings, the County should consider efforts to 1) conduct additional outreach to providers around these requirements; 2) target funding for providers who seek to serve low-income families; 3) provide general funding to expand the supply of child care more broadly; and 4) advocate for the State to adjust requirements so they meet the needs of providers.

High-quality early education and care is vital for all children, especially those from low-income backgrounds, but it should not come at the cost of accessibility to these families.

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Background

The Importance of Child Care

Substantial research indicates that children who receive formal early childhood education, especially that which is high quality, tend to be more prepared for kindergarten, have stronger educational outcomes throughout their academic careers, and experience additional positive outcomes into adulthood.

Young children experience significant cognitive development, with the greatest brain development occurring by the age of three. Child care that promotes positive adult-child interaction and contains varied learning opportunities helps to engage children in a way that supports cognitive, emotional, social, and physical development, all of which better prepare children for kindergarten. The higher the quality of this care, the greater the outcomes and the more success children are likely to have when entering elementary school.

These positive outcomes early on in a child's life are also associated with lower drop-out rates, greater school involvement, higher rates of high school completion, and generally better academic outcomes into high school. Additionally, some studies link attendance of a high-quality early childhood education program to lower rates of smoking and improved cardiovascular health in adulthood, as well as lower rates of incarceration and higher rates of employment. Access to child care is also considered a social determinant of health, which underscores its long-term importance.

These outcomes are stronger for low-income children. Low-income children are less likely to attend formal early childhood education programs, and if they do, those programs are less likely to be of high-quality. Families who are at or near the poverty threshold experience higher rates of food insecurity, are more likely to be exposed to stressful environments, and are less likely to have parents who can engage with their children in an educational capacity, all of which may impede cognitive development from an early age. In [randomized controlled trials](#), low-income children who gained access to high-quality early care and education showed much higher attainment of the aforementioned outcomes, indicating that child care is especially important to closing the income achievement gap.

This conclusion is supported by analyses that aim to monetize these benefits. Not only do the outcomes examined here improve the lives of the children who experience them, but they also provide a social benefit in less spending for the carceral system or health care treatments, and higher government revenue in the form of income tax. As such, researchers estimate the following returns-on-investment for every \$1 spent on high-quality pre-kindergarten programs:

- \$8 for children with family incomes below the Federal Poverty Level (FPL);
- \$6 for children with family incomes between 100% and 200% of the FPL; and
- \$4 for children with family incomes above 200% of the FPL.

This comes out to an estimated \$84,000 in benefits per child below the FPL ([OLO Report 2016-3](#)).

The Economic Impact

Beyond helping children develop necessary skills, child care also provides parents with the opportunity to enter the workforce when they otherwise would have had to stay home. According to a [recent survey](#), 73.9% of parents in Montgomery County indicated their primary reason for needing child care is because of their work demands. Without access to consistent and safe child care, parents may have to reduce hours at work, take unexpected time off, or leave their jobs completely, which costs them income and their employers worker productivity. It is [estimated](#) that across the country, businesses lose about \$12.7 billion annually because of issues with child care. Women tend to be more acutely impacted by child care challenges, as they are typically the default caregiver of a family, so access to child care may also increase workforce participation for women who would otherwise stay home. As such, accessible child care is an economic issue as much as a social one, and policies that govern child care must be compatible with working families, as they are the ones who are most likely to rely on child care.

Types of Child Care in Montgomery County

Maryland has established a goal of a “mixed-delivery system” for child care and early childhood education that includes public and private providers in a variety of settings. In Montgomery County, community early care programs include public pre-kindergarten and Head Start programs, Child Care Centers, and Family Child Care (FCC) homes. Pre-K and Head Start programs offer services for up to 6.5 hours a day during the academic calendar at elementary school locations throughout the County, while Child

Care Centers and Family Child Care homes may have more flexible hours. All providers must be licensed with the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE).

Child Care Centers involve group care that takes place outside of a personal residence, while **Family Child Care** homes are located in the provider's personal residence. Care given by a child's relatives or any care that takes place at the child's residence does not fall under the definition of child care and is not regulated by the State. Child Care Centers and FCC homes are also governed by different capacity and child-to-staff ratio requirements, as summarized by the following chart:

Summary of Capacity Standards for Maryland Child Care Providers

Provider category	Maximum child capacity		Child to staff ratio by age			
	Total	Under 2	Under 2	2 years	3-4 years	5 and up
Child care center	NA	NA	3 to 1	6 to 1	10 to 1	15 to 1
Family child care home	8	4*	2 to 1			
Large family child care home	12		3 to 1	6 to 1	10 to 1	12 to 1

Source: COMAR 13A.16.08.03, 13A.15.04.03, 13A.18.04.02 and 13A.18.08.03

*To serve more than two children under the age of two, a family child care home must have an additional adult.

Table from OLO Report 2016-3, "Child Care in Montgomery County," pg. 9

In Montgomery County, Family Child Care homes and Child Care Centers both play vital roles in increasing the capacity of care that families can receive. As such, public providers serve a smaller share of families.

Montgomery County Child Care Programs by Type with Capacity Information

	# of Programs	Capacity ¹
Family Child Care Providers	743	5,874
8-12 Hour Child Care Centers	259	21,120

Source: Maryland Family Network, Child Care Demographics 2022 Montgomery County Report

¹ Some providers may still be closed due to COVID-19 considerations

Changes to Maryland Child Care Policy: The Blueprint for Maryland’s Future

In 2021, the Maryland General Assembly enacted the Blueprint for Maryland’s Future (Blueprint), which offered significant reforms to early childhood education and public schools throughout the state. The Blueprint establishes a State funding mechanism on a per-pupil basis to provide free full-day pre-kindergarten to 3- and 4-year-olds with disabilities, who are English learners, or whose families have incomes at or below 300% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL). Funding will be available for both public and private providers who meet the established quality requirements and will be given directly to providers, minimizing the burden on families. The State aims to have half of all pre-kindergarten seats provided by private entities by FY 2027. By FY 2025, MSDE will implement a phase-out subsidy policy, in which 4-year-olds whose families have incomes of 301-600% of the FPL will receive partial State funding.

Summary of Available Blueprint Funding

Up to 300% FPL (< \$83,250) ²	Full State funding
301-600% FPL (\$83,251 - \$166,500)	Partial State funding on sliding scale, TBD
Over 600% FPL (\$166,501+)	No State funding
Median Household Income in Montgomery County for a Family of 4: \$127,111	

Source: Blueprint information taken from MSDE report; median income data from Montgomery County Early Care & Education Initiative Action Plan 2020

² FPL income calculations based on 2022 numbers for a family of 4

In order to be eligible for State funding, child care providers must meet newly established quality and certification requirements:

- Teachers must have a Bachelor’s degree and have completed a Maryland Approved Alternative Preparation Program (MAAPP), or have a State PreK-3 teaching certification by FY 2026
- Teaching assistants must have a Child Development Associate (CDA) certificate or an Associate’s degree by FY 2026
- Staff must participate in professional development
- There can be no more than a 10:1 student-to-staff ratio
- There can be no more than 20 students per classroom
- Students with disabilities must be able to fully participate in programming
- Providers must participate in Maryland EXCELS, a state quality rating and improvement system based on nationally recognized standards
 - Private providers must hold at least an EXCELS Level 3 and public providers must hold at least a Level 4 to receive funding initially
 - All providers must have a plan to reach EXCELS Level 5 within five years, and must successfully achieve this by FY 2027, in order to continue to receive funding

Additionally, providers are directed to “offer instructional staff salaries and benefits comparable to those of instructional staff employed by the County board of the County in which the program is located” ([1.1.5\(d\)](#)).

Child Care Challenges: Blueprint Reforms

The Blueprint aims to establish a higher-quality early education system in Maryland, guaranteeing that low-income children have access to care that may help close the achievement gap. Allocating State funds for providers serving low-income children can make child care more accessible and affordable, and may increase the number of children receiving some kind of formal care. Additionally, parents who currently take on a caregiver role may opt for subsidized child care and enter the workforce, which can have positive economic effects for the County and State.

Despite these gains, the requirements that providers must meet to receive State funding may be prohibitive. If providers cannot or do not feel it is worth their time to meet these requirements, they will no longer be options for low-income families who will rely on State funding to pay for their children's pre-kindergarten enrollment. As such, stringent requirements may reduce the number of child care options available, countering the mission of providing high-quality, affordable, **and** accessible child care in the County.

Certification and Education Requirements

The Blueprint establishes several requirements for educational attainment of early education teachers and teaching assistants. By FY 2026, teachers must hold a State PreK-3 teaching certificate or have a Bachelor's degree and have completed a Maryland Approved Alternative Preparation Program (MAAPP). Teaching assistants must hold a Child Development Associate (CDA) certificate or have an Associate's degree.

There is currently no workforce registry at either the State or County level to track the education and certification level that child care providers and pre-kindergarten teachers and assistants have achieved. Thus, it is unclear how many providers in the County will have to seek additional education or training to fulfill the requirements set forth by the Blueprint, but the proportion is likely quite high.

While the County's community college, Montgomery College, currently offers coursework that may be applied to earning a CDA, an influx of providers taking these classes to fulfill the new CDA requirement may overwhelm the College. This

coursework also imposes a cost on the child care provider, and though scholarships and grants are available, it is unclear if child care workers know about these forms of assistance. Due to a lack of data about child care worker education and certification level, there is no way of knowing how many more students Montgomery College would see as a result of these requirements.

The PreK-3 certificate and Bachelor's degree/MAAPP requirements pose even more barriers. In addition to significant coursework requirements, the PreK-3 certificate also has an experiential learning component, which requires either “a supervised experience (student teaching) in public/private school at the prekindergarten/kindergarten level, or one year of full-time teaching experience in a public/private school at the prekindergarten/kindergarten age level” ([COMAR 13A.12.02.03](#)). This is especially difficult for FCC providers, who cannot apply all the time spent as a caregiver in their own home to fulfilling these requirements, and instead would have to seek out additional experience. Providers may have to close their own business to work elsewhere, which can have a significant financial impact on the provider and a greater impact on the supply of child care in the County.

Additionally, providers seeking to pay for their degrees through the Statewide Child Care Career and Professional Development Fund – a tuition assistance program for current child care workers – are required to be employed full-time in licensed child care, which may not include this teaching experience. The certificate also requires that providers take Praxis exams, which are designed to test teaching skills, with no financial support for the cost of these exams or compensation for the time spent studying.

Bachelor's degrees can be similarly cost- and time-prohibitive, especially for established child care providers who will most likely enroll part-time while continuing to work. It may take up to 10 years to complete a degree part-time, which does not comport with the new State-mandated educational attainment deadline of FY 2026. As for the MAAPP requirement, the County does not currently offer an Early Childhood Education program, with only four such programs throughout the State. Providers may find it prohibitive to leave the County to fulfill this requirement. Moreover, it is unclear how many providers would pursue the MAAPP under the Blueprint, and whether there will be enough program seats to meet the increase in demand.

Teachers who have both a PreK-3 certificate and a Bachelor's degree become eligible to work in the public school system, which provides higher pay, more benefits, and a more flexible schedule than child care. There is concern that implementing these educational requirements will lead to higher turnover in the child care field and fewer new teachers who wish to work in child care, exacerbating an already significant child care worker shortage.

Summary of Challenges Associated with Blueprint Education Requirements

Requirement	Potential Challenges
Child Development Associate (CDA) Credential	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unclear how many providers currently have a CDA and how many more would seek one because of the Blueprint • May lead to higher demand from Montgomery College than available seats in classes
PreK-3 Certificate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extensive experiential learning component • FCC workers cannot apply full time spent providing care in a home to experience requirement • Praxis exams are costly and time-consuming, with no financial support available • Eligible to work in higher-paying public school system; may exacerbate already high turnover in child care field
Bachelor's Degree	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can impose a very high cost on workers • Completion on part-time basis may take up to 10 years; Blueprint allows for at most 5 years
Maryland Approved Alternative Preparation Program (MAAPP) Completion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No Early Childhood Education MAAPP in Montgomery County • Only four Early Childhood Education MAAPPs in all of Maryland; may not meet increase in demand

Maryland EXCELS Requirements

Maryland EXCELS is a statewide quality rating and improvement system that rates child care and early education programs according to nationally recognized quality standards. Providers may earn a Level 1 through 5, with more rigorous requirements associated with higher ratings; the specific standards used for each EXCELS Level are available in the [Appendix](#). Maryland EXCELS was established to assist families in making informed decisions about child care and the quality of care they pursue.

At the moment, participation in Maryland EXCELS is voluntary for all child care providers except those accepting Maryland Child Care Scholarship reimbursements or other State funds. As such, only about **63%** of all providers in the County participate in EXCELS as of May 2022. Providers who do not participate do not necessarily offer lower-quality care; they may simply choose not to go through the rating process. It is unclear if the Blueprint grants will offer enough incentive for providers who do not currently participate in EXCELS to pursue a rating. Assuming this is not the case – as the grant serves to cover the cost of tuition for low-income children, with no additional incentive for providers – 37% of all County providers will automatically be ineligible for the Blueprint grants.

Maryland EXCELS Rates in Montgomery County, by Provider Type

	Child Care Centers	Family Child Care	All Providers
Level 1	36% ³	71%	53%
Level 2	9%	8%	8%
Level 3	42%	9%	25%
Level 4	4%	1%	3%
Level 5	9%	11%	11%
Overall Participation Rate: 63%			

Source: Maryland EXCELS, as of May 2022

With the requirement that private providers have at least a Level 3 rating to begin receiving Blueprint funding, only about **25%**⁴ of all County providers are currently eligible to participate. This means that low-income families who need the free pre-kindergarten offered by the Blueprint are already limited to a smaller number of providers, some of whom may not have open seats. Though providers have five years to reach a Level 5, the corresponding requirements may be difficult for providers to achieve, and some may not wish to go through the process of attempting to “level up.” The supply of providers who are eligible for Blueprint funding may not meet the demand of low-income families who wish to take advantage of the grants, and who may not otherwise be able to afford child care. The outcome of this may be that high-quality

³ Percentages calculated based on total number of providers participating in EXCELS, not total number of providers of that type in the County

⁴ 39% of providers participating in EXCELS are at a Level 3+, multiplied by 63% of providers who participate in EXCELS

child care is **no more accessible** to low-income families after Blueprint implementation than before, due to the diminished supply of providers by whom families can be served.

The table below outlines the current State financial incentives for providers at each EXCELS level. Providers are eligible for a bonus when they 1) initially receive a quality rating; 2) receive a higher quality rating than their last published rating; or 3) maintain a Level 5 rating annually. While these amounts may provide some support to counteract the greater cost borne by providers to make the necessary quality improvements in reaching each higher level, it is unlikely that they cover the full cost. Thus, the State may not be offering a sufficient incentive either for general participation in EXCELS or for achieving a Level 5, as outlined by the requirements in the Blueprint.

Maryland EXCELS Program Bonuses Funded in the Blueprint

Programs with a published rating of 1, 2, 3, 4, or 5 are eligible for Maryland EXCELS bonuses

Quality Rating Level	Center Licensed Capacity 1-50	Center Licensed Capacity 51-100	Center Licensed Capacity 100+	Family Child Care Home	Large Family Child Care Home
1	\$50	\$100	\$150	\$50	\$50
2	\$250	\$500	\$750	\$150	\$200
3	\$400	\$800	\$1,200	\$300	\$400
4	\$1,000	\$2,000	\$3,000	\$500	\$800
5	\$1,500	\$3,000	\$4,500	\$800	\$1,000

Source: Maryland State Board of Education

“Full-Day” Pre-Kindergarten and Grant Amounts

“Full-day” pre-kindergarten programs typically last for 6.5 hours a day. Hours that extend beyond this timeframe – referred to as “wraparound care” – are covered by child care rather than pre-kindergarten providers. However, since child care providers will be eligible for Blueprint funding, and many providers offer wraparound hours, the grant will only *effectively* cover the cost of 6.5 hours of care a day, rather than the full hours offered by the provider. Moreover, for families in which both parents work full-time jobs, funding that only covers 6.5 hours of care does not align with an 8-hour working day, commute times, and additional time that parents may need their children to be cared for. This will leave families needing to cover the remaining wraparound hours, the cost of which may remain prohibitive, even with the State funding.

This also means that the funding allocation for the per-student grant may not necessarily cover the **full cost** of child care at all providers. It is not clear how the funding amount was chosen, but based on the average cost of child care in the County (see below), grants will not cover the full cost of childcare for several years, leaving low-income families to incur additional costs they may not be able to afford. Moreover, some [research](#) suggests that when a substantial number of families use child care subsidies, the subsidy may be viewed by providers as a price floor and be associated with price increases so providers can make a larger profit.

Maryland Pre-Kindergarten Program: Progression of Funding per Pupil

Fiscal Year	Amount Per Pupil
FY 2023	\$10,094
FY 2024	\$11,594
FY 2025	\$13,003
FY 2026	\$14,473
FY 2027	\$15,598
FY 2028	\$16,811
FY 2029	\$18,118
FY 2030	\$19,526
Subsequent Years	The prior fiscal year increased by the inflation adjustment

Source: Maryland State Board of Education

As seen with these two tables, the grant amount will not cover the average cost of care in FCC homes until FY 2026 and in Centers until FY 2030, without accounting for inflation or other price increases that may occur on the providers' ends.

Average Weekly and (Yearly) Cost of Full-Time Child Care in Montgomery County

Ages Served	Family Child Care Programs	Child Care Centers
0-23 months ⁵	\$304.46 (\$15,831.92) ⁶	\$448.69 (\$23,331.88)
2-4 years	\$276.94 (\$14,400.88)	\$383.34 (\$19,933.68)

Source: Maryland Family Network, Child Care Demographics 2022 Montgomery County Report, Based on 2021 Data

⁵ Note that no Blueprint grant funding was allocated to infant and toddler care

⁶ Yearly cost calculated assuming 52 weeks of care

Salary Requirements

The Blueprint also requires that early education staff have comparable salaries and benefits to those of public school teachers in the same county (see Supply Issues for a discussion of current pay disparities). However, the State has not appropriated funding specifically for the purpose of salary or benefits parity. For example, Montgomery County Public Schools' teacher benefits are substantial and would be difficult to replicate among private providers, especially small FCCs, as is mandated by the Blueprint. The State has argued that the increase in funding through the Blueprint grants, EXCELS bonuses, and other miscellaneous funding mechanisms would help to raise the salaries of early educators and care providers, but the grant amount does not cover the *current* cost of care, let alone that of providers with higher salaries and therefore higher tuitions.

Though this report focuses on the quality requirements under the Blueprint and how they may limit the supply of child care available to low-income families, this salary and benefits requirement poses yet another barrier for providers who wish to accept Blueprint funding and serve these families. The issue of child care worker compensation is significant, but the Blueprint takes few actions to address it effectively.

Current Actions at the County Level

The County already has several programs in place to alleviate the aforementioned and other challenges associated with the Blueprint's requirements, and with child care generally.

Education

Montgomery College has courses that providers may use to fulfill requirements for the CDA certificate, an Early Childhood Education Certificate program, and two Associate's degrees in early childhood education. They also offer a scholarship program through the Early Care & Education Initiative (ECEI) to support child care workers who are seeking a CDA certificate or Associate's degree. Similarly, the Child Care Career and Professional Development Fund Grant allocates federal dollars through MSDE to Montgomery College to assist qualifying students seeking an Associate's degree.

Local Subsidies

The ECEI also developed a comprehensive [Action Plan](#) in 2020 that seeks to increase the number of high-quality, affordable and accessible child care programs in the County and raise awareness of the countywide Working Parents Assistance Program (WPA) for parents who do not qualify for the State Child Care Scholarship (CCS). The WPA is a per-child voucher for families whose incomes exceed the CCS thresholds, up to 450% of the FPL, that can help to subsidize the cost of child care. However, providers may charge more than the voucher amount, with the additional cost borne by families.

Early Care and Education Coordinating Entity

More recently, the County Council enacted Bill 42-21, which allowed for the establishment of a Countywide Early Care and Education Coordinating Entity. This Entity will be especially important for conducting outreach to child care providers and targeting low-income and other underrepresented families.

Overall Outcomes

While the work by the ECEI established a strong baseline for Countywide efforts designed to increase access to affordable and quality child care, the requirements of the Blueprint necessitate further action. Even with the resources already provided, an influx of providers needing to fulfill the Blueprint's education requirement may exhaust the availability of education assistance, and it is unclear how such resources will overlap with those provided by the Blueprint and whether there will continue to be lapses in assistance for providers or families. The salary and benefits requirement poses further concerns about the ability of providers to meet Blueprint standards and serve low-income families.

Assuming a status quo, Blueprint funding implementation will likely **not be effective** in significantly increasing the **availability** of low-to-no-cost child care for low-income families, continuing previous equity concerns that low-income children are not afforded the same access to high-quality early education and care.

Child Care Challenges: Broad Issues

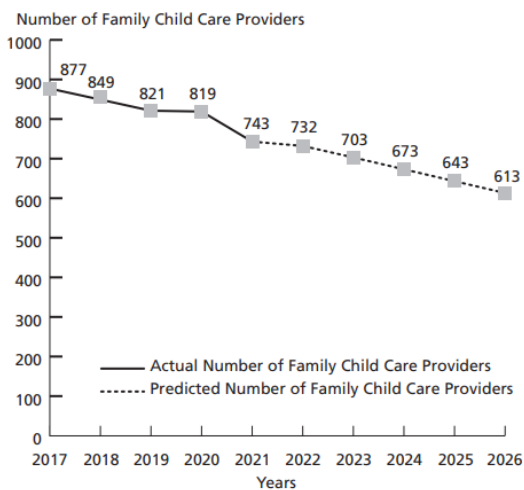
Beyond the challenges specific to the Blueprint’s requirements and implementation, the child care industry as a whole has faced other challenges that must be considered and addressed to make a more equitable, affordable, and accessible system.

Supply Issues

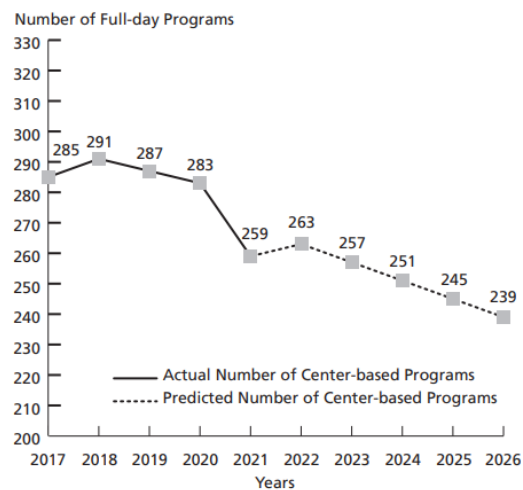
In Montgomery County and throughout the country, there has been a decline in the already low supply of child care providers. Though certainly exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, there has long been a mismatch between supply and demand for child care. Importantly, regulations surrounding teacher-to-student ratios and classroom sizes, as well as differences between requirements for infant-and-toddler care versus pre-kindergarten care, mean that the child care industry does not follow normal market standards. Economies of scale are rarely achieved, and even for-profit providers see very small profits. The higher cost of providing infant-and-toddler care because of the smaller teacher-to-student ratio also can deter providers from serving children under two, despite high demand from families.

Number Child Care Providers in the County Over Time, by Care Type

Family Child Care Providers in Montgomery 2017-2026



Center-based Programs in Montgomery 2017-2026
Full-day (8 to 12 hours)



These predictions were generated with the use of the Multiple Regression Analysis and Forecasting template. The predictions generated by the Model do not reflect the effects of current changes to social programs affecting child care.
Source: MFN/LOCATE: Child Care, 6/21.

Source: Maryland Family Network

One of the contributing factors to the low and declining supply of child care is the lower wages and lack of benefits that child care workers are given as compared to school teachers, disparities which remain even at the same worker education level. Not only does this make it difficult to recruit workers into the child care field, but providers also experience high staff turnover as workers seek more lucrative careers. Since the Blueprint significantly increased the salary of public school teachers who are National Board Certified, such discrepancies will likely be exacerbated in the future.

Average Salary Information for Education Jobs in Maryland

Job Title	Average Salary
Maryland Public School Teacher ⁷	\$63,849
Maryland Family Child Care Provider	\$41,177
Maryland Child Care Center Director	\$40,539
Maryland Center Senior Staff/Teacher	\$25,537
Maryland Center Aid	\$17,889

Source: Maryland Family Network

Cost

The high cost of child care poses a significant barrier to families, especially low-income families. The average family in the County is spending almost **25%** of their income just on child care, over three times the recommended “affordable” rate of 7% of family income. According to a 2016 Office of Legislative Oversight [report](#), “in order for full-time child care costs for two children (one infant and one preschooler) not to exceed 10% of income, which is the *maximum* recommended percentage of income to be spent on child care according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, a family would need to have an income of \$300,000 for center care or \$240,000 for care in a family child care home,” far greater than the median income level in the County.

This means that formal child care may place a significant financial burden on low-income families or those living paycheck-to-paycheck, and some may choose to forgo it in favor of informal care with relatives or with one parent exiting the workforce. Since

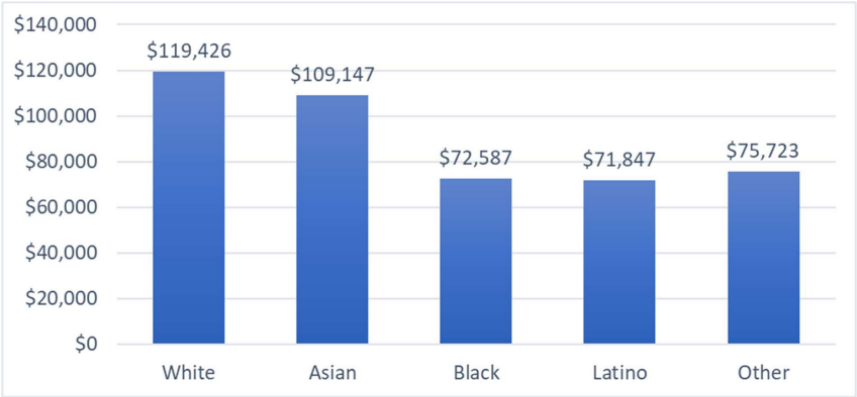
⁷ This represents State-level data. County-level data is not currently available

attendance of a formal early care and education program is most directly linked to the positive academic, economic, and social outcomes explored previously, low-income children whose parents cannot afford these programs may face more barriers to achieving these outcomes, once again posing significant equity concerns about access to quality and affordable child care and early education.

For low-income families who must rely on formal care, the cost of that care – much more than its quality – can be the most important deciding factor. Providers with higher quality ratings tend to see higher operating costs, which are then passed on to consumers in the form of higher prices. Additionally, with a decreasing supply of child care, there is an increase in competition for open slots, which may lead to even higher prices. Thus, families may be priced out of the higher-quality care providers, once again creating a gap in who will benefit from the positive outcomes of high-quality child care.

Moreover, income and race are highly correlated, with Black and Hispanic residents in the County having lower median household incomes than their white and Asian counterparts. As such, issues of child care costs more acutely impact the former, and it may be harder for Black and Hispanic families to afford quality child care.

Median Household Income in Montgomery County, by Race



Year	Disparity in Montgomery County
2017	Median household income for Asians was 91.4 percent of median household income for Whites.
	Median household income for Blacks was 60.8 percent of median household income for Whites.
	Median household income for Latinos was 60.2 percent of median household income for Whites.
	Median household income for Others was 63.4 percent of median household income for Whites.

Graph and Table from OLO Report 2019-7, “Racial Equity Profile Montgomery County,” pg. 13

Methodology

The background information for this report came from information provided by a workgroup with child care experts throughout the County and members of the ECEI, and internal and public-facing County and State reports. Maryland EXCELS data for the mapping was obtained through the Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS).

To better understand the challenges and barriers that child care providers will face with new Blueprint requirements, interviews were held with child care providers in the County. After conducting outreach to 10 providers, both FCC homes and Centers at all levels of EXCELS, three providers agreed to be interviewed. The information that follows resulted from interviews with a Family Child Care provider and Child Care Center each with a Maryland EXCELS Level 3 rating, and a Child Care Center at a Level 5. These should **not** be taken to be representative of all providers in the County, but are merely intended to gain a deeper understanding of the impact providers will see because of the Blueprint. They are also used to better understand what child care options will be available to low-income families once Blueprint implementation begins. Interview questions thus focused on general challenges that providers face as well as challenges they anticipate facing if they need to conform to the new EXCELS and education/certification requirements.

The goal of this report is to understand how new Blueprint requirements pose barriers to child care providers in serving low-income families and how they may reduce the supply of care available for these families. The Blueprint aims to address current equity gaps in access to high-quality early education and care, and the impact on subsequent educational and social outcomes, but this report establishes new equity concerns if low-income families cannot access child care because of limited supply due to these requirements. Moreover, given the intersection of race and income, it must be understood that Black and Hispanic families are overrepresented among low-income families, and so must be considered when developing policy solutions.

Limitations

Due to time and resource constraints, this report examined a narrow scope of Blueprint provisions and how they may affect some child care providers in the County. As such, there were many limitations in the resources used and conclusions drawn, including:

- Interviewing only three child care providers in the County. Interview findings should not be seen as representative of all providers
 - Future research should attempt to capture a larger sample of providers, including those who do not participate in Maryland EXCELS
- A lack of data surrounding the child care workforce, especially in terms of educational attainment. As such, many findings were the result of speculation based on the available information, and definitive conclusions could not always be drawn
- A focus mainly on child care supply. While the County is developing a supply and demand analysis, child care needs by families are assumed in this report based on general trends, rather than an understanding of the specific needs of various families

Findings and Implications: Child Care Provider Interviews

To better understand how child care providers currently stand in relation to Blueprint quality requirements and whether they see a path to meeting these requirements in the future, interview questions focused first on understanding the status quo and then on gauging reactions to these requirements. This section offers a summary of responses to each question from each of the three providers, an analysis of those responses, and then an exploration of key takeaways from the interviews overall.

Why do you participate in Maryland EXCELS?	Child Care Center, Level 5: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Level 5 makes them look attractive to families, but families don't always know the difference between levels • Some extra income for participation, but not a lot
	Child Care Center, Level 3: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Montgomery County HHS program requires participation • Wants to show parents that they provide quality care • Some extra income has helped, especially because Level 4 accreditation requirement has been time-consuming to pursue
	Family Child Care Home, Level 3: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wants to show that FCCs can be high quality • Some extra income which helped get to Level 3, but not enough to provide incentive to go higher in ratings • Paperwork requirements especially burdensome

Current EXCELS participation is motivated by a combination of a wish to appeal to families and the financial incentive provided by the State. This incentive can only go so far, however, since providers see a significant barrier in going from a Level 3 to a 4 in the accreditation requirement. Additionally, the process of leveling-up is intensive and requires extra time and effort on the part of providers, which the financial incentive does not appear to address. Providers also raise a recurring theme that while families do care about quality, families *do not* necessarily understand the differences between EXCELS Levels.

Do you have any certification or education requirements for staff?	Child Care Center, Level 5: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has a credentialing and licensing requirement for staff • Provides salary incentives for teachers to pursue additional education
	Child Care Center, Level 3: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prefers teachers with a 90-hour certificate and some kind of degree, but can't compete with public school system's wages so not all workers have degrees • If they could pay enough to match school system's salaries, tuition would be too high for most families • Difficult to retain teachers with these qualifications; most end up in school system within 5 years
	Family Child Care Home, Level 3: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provider is the only consistent worker and has a Master's degree • If hiring assistants, no education requirements because it's on a temporary and part-time basis

Differences in education requirements reveal providers' need to balance teacher education with salary and retainment. The Level 5 provider has a more rigorous education requirement because of the higher tuition they charge families, which means they can more fairly compensate staff who have higher levels of education. On the other hand, some providers find it difficult to retain more educated workers because they are unable to compete with the public school system in terms of wages and benefits. It was stated explicitly that paying workers more would make child care unaffordable for many families, which reveals the underlying issue in the Blueprint's salary parity requirement.

Are you familiar with the Blueprint for Maryland's Future?	Child Care Center, Level 5: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not very familiar
	Child Care Center, Level 3: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has heard of it generally but does not know the specifics
	Family Child Care Home, Level 3: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Familiar with some of the details around quality requirements

This points to a need for specific outreach to providers to inform them of Blueprint grants and requirements.

What is your reaction to the new EXCELS requirement for participation in Blueprint funding?	<p>Child Care Center, Level 5:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Already a Level 5, so no personal impact • For other providers, they will likely need support from the State, since requirements can be difficult to navigate • Has limited spots for pre-kindergarten children and a waiting list that parents join before their children are born, so no incentive to participate in Blueprint funding, especially since grant amount is less than tuition
	<p>Child Care Center, Level 3:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5 years <i>may</i> be enough time to get to a Level 5, as they are already working on getting to a Level 4 • Grant money doesn't cover full-year cost of care so additional incentive will be needed for providers to cover remaining cost • Financial incentive has been key component of participation in EXCELS; without additional incentive under Blueprint, doesn't see the point in seeking grant funds
	<p>Family Child Care Home, Level 3:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accreditation process is a strong barrier in moving from Level 3 to 4; takes a lot of time, and doesn't personally see the incentive to do so • Doesn't currently serve children in the income range eligible for Blueprint funding, so doesn't see the need to make time-consuming changes if they won't receive the grant funding or other compensation

These responses show the critical role that incentives play in motivating child care providers to meet State requirements. In many cases, financial bonuses helped **incentivize** providers to participate in EXCELS from the outset. Providers perceive Level 5 requirements as being stringent, and so see incentives as necessary for compensating the time and effort they spend in fulfilling those standards. Moreover, since the Blueprint grant amount does not currently cover their cost of care, they do not see the law as providing sufficient incentive to put in that time and effort, especially given that they don't serve the target population that the Blueprint is trying to assist.

As such, Level 3 providers did not express strong motivation to pursue a Level 5 unless they are able to see a sufficiently large incentive from the State. The grant itself does not provide this incentive, in large part because it does not exceed the cost of providing high-quality care.

What is your reaction to the new education/certification requirements for participation in Blueprint funding?	<p>Child Care Center, Level 5:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requirements are higher than those already used by the Center • It would be very difficult to find teachers who meet these requirements willing to work in child care as opposed to the public school system, which has higher pay • The teachers they already employ are unlikely to go back to school and earn these qualifications unless there was a significant salary boost • For teachers with many years' experience, doesn't see a reason why they would need a degree • Again, no incentive to implement these requirements among staff
	<p>Child Care Center, Level 3:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has a teacher with 15 years of experience and demonstrated positive outcomes among students; she has no incentive to get a degree, and experience is as valuable as a degree • If workers have to go to school part-time to meet these requirements, it may impact the Center's staffing • It would be helpful to have an alternative way to meet these requirements for workers with substantial experience in the field • 5-year turnaround for a 4-year degree part-time is unrealistic
	<p>Family Child Care Home, Level 3:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provider has a degree, but based on the needs of other providers – especially in non-English-speaking settings – degree requirement seems too difficult • The State is not offering better pay and benefits in exchange for the higher education level; again, there is no incentive to fulfill it • Based on past experience, full-time workers pursuing an Associate's degree on a part-time basis may take up to 6 years, so 5 year timeframe is unrealistic

A common theme among all interviewees was that State quality standards don't necessarily align with their experience of quality care. Degrees offer a standardized way of comparing quality, but stringent degree requirements do not account for experience gained through years of working in the field, which providers value significantly. Providers expressed a need for an alternative way to fulfill this requirement, perhaps through a demonstration of positive outcomes for workers with sufficient experience.

Additionally, concerns over the timing of the education requirements confirm the conclusion that they are unrealistic. Because of this tight timeframe, workers who may have otherwise pursued higher education could refrain from doing so for fear of not finishing within these expectations.

Once again, providers do not feel that the State is providing sufficient incentive for workers to pursue more education. While scholarships and grants are available, at best they will help workers break even in terms of cost. Without a corresponding pay increase – which providers cannot afford without large increases in tuition – workers will not be fairly compensated for their education or may seek employment in the public school system.

Do you have any other comments about the Blueprint?	<p>Child Care Center, Level 5:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is still unclear how providers with open seats who meet the Blueprint requirements can find low-income families to fill those seats, or vice versa • Without additional incentives, cannot see a scenario in which a high-quality classroom with no open seats would take on low-income students • Emphasizing that there is a shortage of qualified child care workers, which is contributing to child care supply issues
	<p>Child Care Center, Level 3:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The cost per child of grant funding must go up, because it doesn't cover the current cost of care, and certainly doesn't provide incentives for providers • Resources should be devoted to helping low-income families navigate funding and scholarship options so they can find care
	<p>Family Child Care Home, Level 3:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unless a provider currently serves low-income families, does not see how providers will feel the need to make quality changes in alignment with the Blueprint, due to the lack of incentives • It would be helpful to know how many providers who currently qualify under these new requirements actually serve low-income families

Overall Takeaways

The above interviews and accompanying analysis offer a qualitative examination of how providers anticipate being affected by the new Blueprint requirements around quality and staff education. Below are the key themes that will be addressed in the policy recommendations to follow.

Maryland EXCELS Requirements

The State places significant emphasis on EXCELS Levels as a proxy for quality. However, providers do not believe that parents fully understand the difference between quality levels, and may not prioritize the same factors as the State does.

Providers anticipate the need for strong incentives to push others to level-up, as current incentives do not appear to be sufficient in compensating the time, effort, and sometimes cost required in doing so. The Blueprint grant itself does not provide this incentive, as it does not cover the cost of care, let alone a bonus for high-quality care. While the State bonus amounts do help, and provided incentive for some providers to participate in EXCELS, they may not be sufficient for all providers.

A five-year timeline may be enough for some providers to move from a Level 3 to a 5, but they could need additional assistance from the State in navigating trickier requirements, such as accreditation. Since providers do not seem informed about the specifics of Blueprint requirements, there is an additional knowledge barrier to fulfilling them.

Current implementation guidelines do not seem to account for capacity. High-quality providers may also have fewer open seats and/or extensive waiting lists, making them inaccessible to low-income families. Moreover, since there is no additional incentive for taking on students under the Blueprint funding, these providers have no reason to make space for low-income children in their full classrooms. Similarly, the providers who do not currently serve students who are income eligible for Blueprint funding may not see an incentive in pursuing a higher EXCELS Level. In all, even if a provider is currently eligible for Blueprint funding under the EXCELS requirement, these capacity issues embody the broader supply problem in the child care industry.

Certification and Education Requirements

While formal education can benefit child care workers and lead to positive outcomes among children served, experience in the field is seen as equally valuable. Imposing a degree requirement will likely push experienced child care workers who do not wish to pursue formal education out of the field. It could also be difficult for providers to recruit new workers, as these requirements would make potential workers eligible for public school employment, which provides higher salaries and benefits, and current workers who achieve these educational goals may also leave the child care field. Though the Blueprint requires salary parity, providers expressed that achieving this would require raising tuition to an unaffordable rate, and it would make the Blueprint grant cover an even smaller portion of child care tuition.

For workers who do wish to pursue further education or certification, the timeline set by the Blueprint may be unrealistic. Workers will likely wish to continue with their current jobs, and part-time degrees may take more than the time allocated. Though grants and scholarships are available, some providers did not seem familiar with them, indicating that workers may be unaware of policies that could help make higher education more affordable.

As with the EXCELS requirement, high-quality providers may not wish to require that their staff pursue additional education, removing them from the pool of eligible providers under the Blueprint. Additionally, providers whose workers do meet these requirements likely do not have sufficient capacity to serve eligible low-income families. Once again, this requirement poses a significant supply issue, and may exacerbate the already substantial amount of turnover providers have seen in their field as workers take on more lucrative jobs in public school systems.

Incentives and Other Themes

Providers emphasized the importance of financial incentives in motivating their pursuit of higher quality standards. However, because the Blueprint grant amount does not surpass the cost of care, they do not see sufficient incentive in implementing the Blueprint quality requirements, especially as the education and certification requirement does not carry its own financial bonus, unlike the EXCELS Levels.

Based on past experiences in which families did not know they were eligible for State or County assistance, providers also questioned how low-income families would know which providers were eligible for Blueprint funding. They stressed that the County should conduct outreach targeting these families and informing them of their ability to access lower-cost care, without which families may not know to take advantage of the program.

Providers emphasized that turnover and low worker supply in the child care industry have only been growing worse, and they worry that it will further harm the already limited supply of child care in the County.

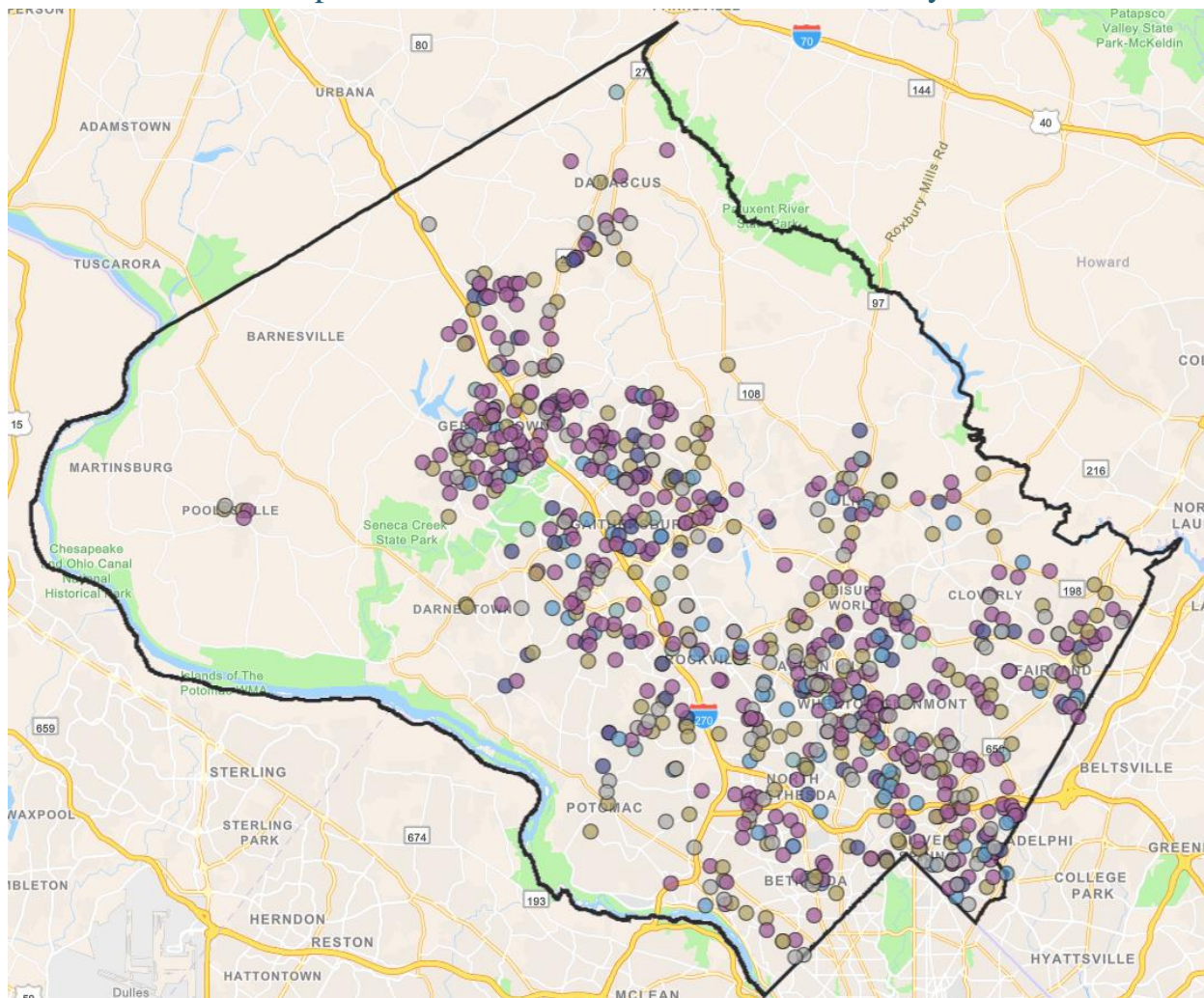
Conclusion

These interviews confirmed the previous conclusion that the supply of providers who meet or would be willing to meet all Blueprint requirements is likely much less than the demand that low-income families will have for low-cost child care. Without sufficient incentives, providers do not anticipate a willingness to fulfill these requirements, leading to a decline in the supply of child care eligible for Blueprint funding and thus limiting the accessibility of affordable and quality child care for low-income families.

Findings and Implications: Child Care Mapping

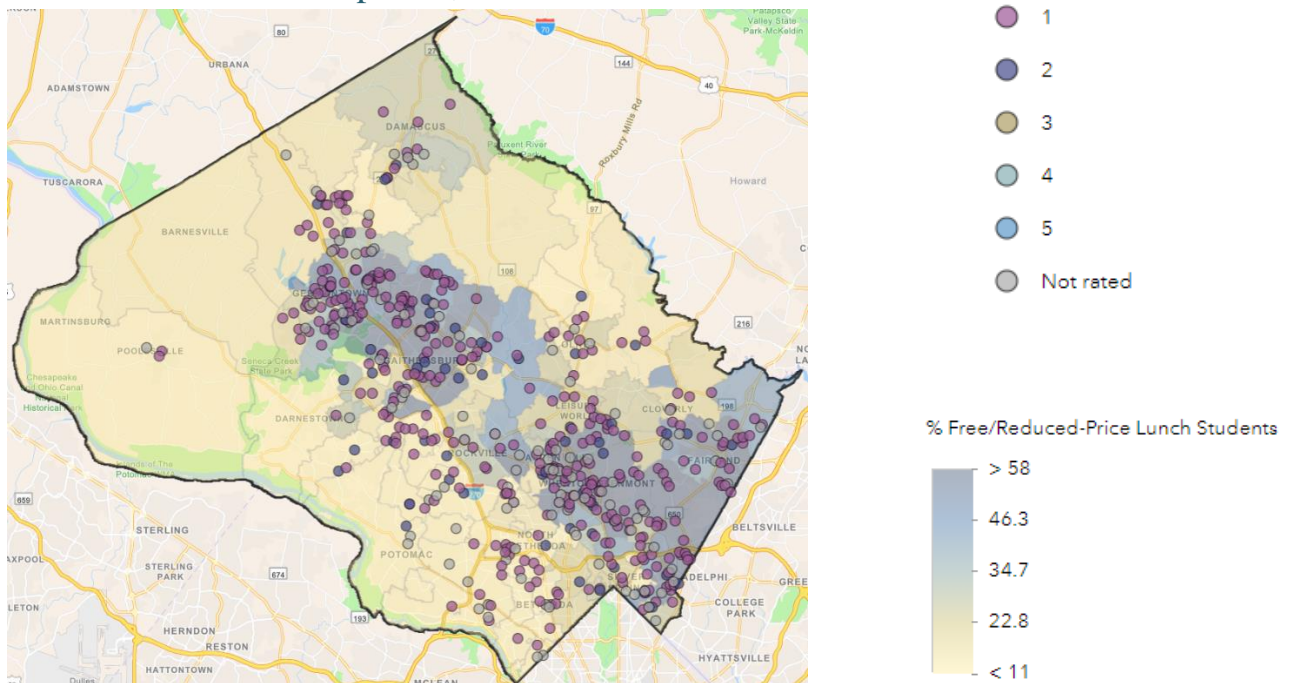
To further explore the equity implications of the new Blueprint requirements and understand where providers who meet these requirements are located in the County, the Montgomery County DHHS GIS system was used, with attention to EXCELS ratings. Since neither the County nor State collect data on teacher certifications and education, that requirement cannot be examined.

Map of All Child Care Providers in the County

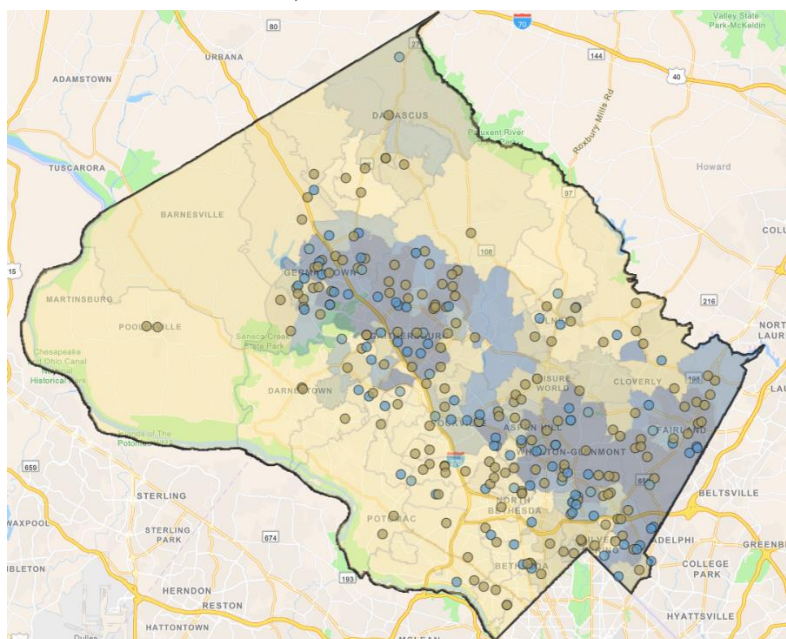


Map Obtained from Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services

Map 1: Child Care Providers at EXCELS Levels 1 and 2, or No EXCELS Participation, with FARMS⁸ Rate



Map 2: Child Care Providers at EXCELS Levels 3, 4, and 5, with FARMS Rate



⁸ Elementary school Free-and-Reduced Meals rates for the area; for a family of 4, an income of \$51,338 or less

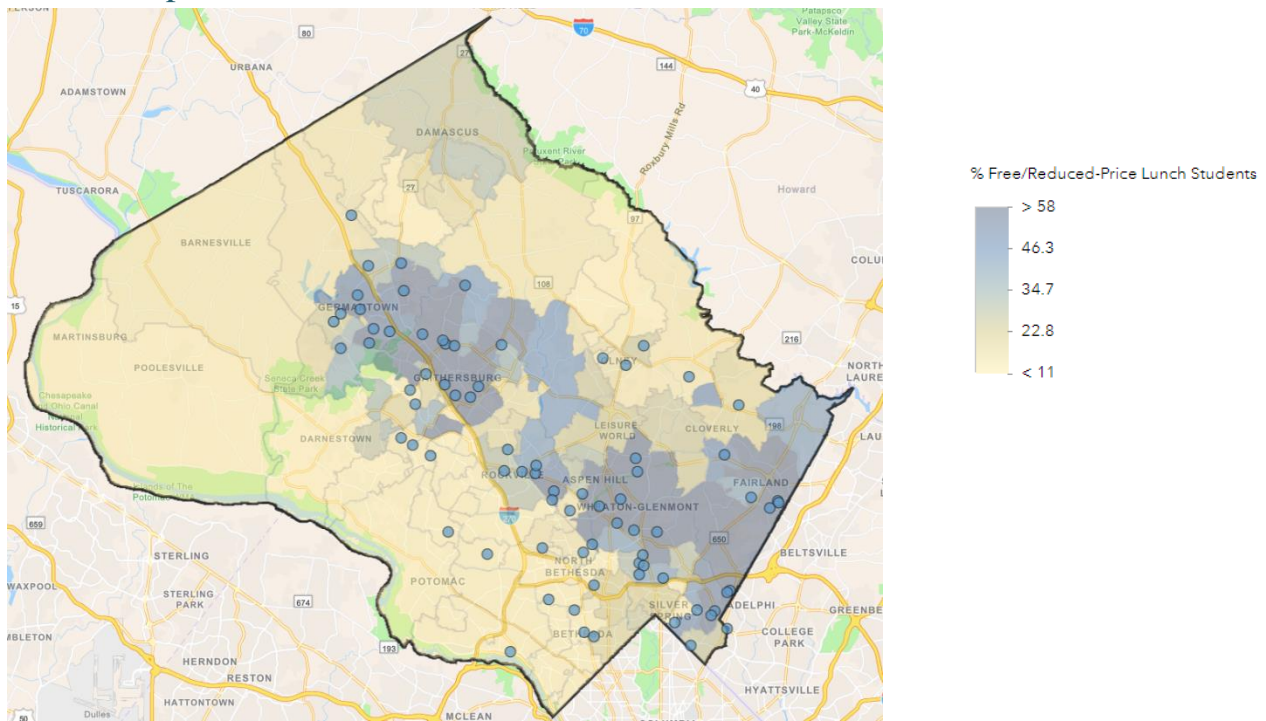
A comparison of these two maps clearly shows the stark difference in the *number* of providers who, as of their current status, would not (Map 1) and would (Map 2) qualify for Blueprint funding under this requirement⁹. This means that families seeking child care under a Blueprint grant have a significantly limited choice, not including the concerns raised by providers that there may not be open seats to accommodate an influx of families seeking care. It cannot be overstated that the mere presence of a provider who meets the Blueprint requirements is not enough; they must also have **open seats** for low-income children who qualify under the Blueprint.

Moreover, Map 2 poses concerns about the accessibility and location of child care providers who may serve low-income families under the Blueprint. While there are providers at the higher levels of EXCELS in higher FARMS rate areas, there are not as many as those at lower levels or non-EXCELS participants. If the providers located in higher FARMS rate areas reach capacity, parents may have to travel further to get to a provider with open seats, incurring travel costs or additional commute times to get to work.

When examining the number of providers who are only at an EXCELS Level 5 (Map 3, below) this becomes even more concerning. Though providers who begin at a Level 3 or 4 have five years to reach a Level 5, the latter's requirements are very stringent, and some providers did not anticipate ever reaching that level. This means that, after five years, the County could see an even further decrease in the supply of providers who may serve low-income families under the Blueprint, once again preventing families from accessing the care they need.

⁹ It is unlikely that these maps are fully illustrative of the providers that fully qualify for Blueprint funding; even those currently at an EXCELS Level 5 may not meet the teacher/teaching assistant education and certification requirements. Thus, these maps act as a "best case scenario," with the reality likely being even fewer providers meeting all requirements. Because of data limitations, a more thorough understanding of eligible providers is impossible.

Map 3: Child Care Providers at EXCELS Level 5, with FARMS Rate



These maps assume a status quo in which providers do not attempt to make changes to their EXCELS ratings in response to the Blueprint changes. This assumption may or may not be correct, but it is helpful for a point-in-time comparison, especially since interviews with providers revealed that they feel little incentive to make changes and attempt to earn a higher rating in response to the Blueprint. In all, simply based on the EXCELS requirement, there is a **significant supply problem** in the number of providers that are accessible to low-income families who seek funding support under the Blueprint.

Lessons Learned and Recommendations

The Blueprint requirements explored here may have a myriad of effects on child care providers and the supply of child care in the County that is eligible for Blueprint funding, including:

- Making child care providers undergo time-consuming and potentially costly processes to achieve higher levels of Maryland EXCELS
 - Though the State does provide financial **incentives**, they are likely **not enough** to offset these time and cost concerns
 - Parents don't always use EXCELS to judge quality, so there may be misalignment between quality standards as established by the State and perceptions of child care quality
 - Providers may view "leveling-up" as a waste of time and resources, especially if they do not currently serve a population that would be eligible for Blueprint funding
- Making child care workers pursue time-consuming and costly degrees or certifications within a limited timeframe with **no additional financial incentives**
 - There is currently no registry tracking this information at the County- or State-level, making it difficult to know how many workers meet this qualification and how many workers will seek education as a result of this legislation
 - Though there are some scholarships available for workers seeking additional education, it is unclear whether child care workers are aware of these scholarships or whether they will cover an influx of enrollees
 - It would be **very difficult to complete a four-year degree part-time** in the five-year timeframe laid out by the Blueprint
 - Certification requirements are especially limiting for FCC workers, as the experiential learning component does not allow them to apply their work in FCC to completing all the required hours. Workers may have to quit their positions or shut down their business and seek employment elsewhere if they wish to earn their certification, which may reduce the already declining number of FCC providers in the County
 - Providers do not see formal education as a perfect measurement of quality or experience, and the requirement may **push out workers** who have been in the field for many years and have demonstrated positive outcomes among students

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- Since child care providers cannot compete with MCPS in terms of salary and benefits, workers with higher levels of education are more likely to leave the child care industry in favor of the public school system, leading to even higher turnover than already exists

Other findings include:

- Child care providers may **lack knowledge or awareness** of these new requirements and if or how they will be affected in the future
- Families may not understand the discrepancy between Blueprint funding coverage levels and the cost of child care at a given provider, which may require an out-of-pocket copayment or additional State or County assistance
- The **supply** of child care providers eligible for Blueprint funding will likely be **limited**, as providers may not meet all the requirements and may not deem it worth their time or effort to fulfill them
 - This is exacerbated by the **lack of additional incentives** for enrolling low-income students through the Blueprint, as the grant amount is most likely less than the tuition cost. Providers may not see a reason to spend money to meet the requirements only to receive the same amount of money in tuition
- **Capacity** for low-income student enrollment depends not only on a sufficient supply of providers, but also on those providers having enough open seats, which does not appear to be the case
- Providers who do meet all the current requirements may be at-capacity or have a waiting list for open seats, and so may not be able to take on more students
- Providers who do meet all the current requirements may not be located in low-income communities. Even if they have open seats, families may have to travel longer distances to obtain care, which may be difficult for them

County-Level Recommendations

To address these concerns and ensure a smoother implementation process, the County may consider taking the following actions.

Short Term Recommendations

- Use the newly established Early Care and Education Coordinating Entity to raise awareness of Blueprint quality requirements among child care providers and assist providers in fulfilling these requirements
- Examine whether the County can enact a workaround for the education requirement for child care workers who have many years of experience and/or measurable positive outcomes (ex. Kindergarten readiness, reading levels) among children in their care
- Advocate for State-level changes to Blueprint requirements and implementation guidelines (see below)

Long Term Recommendations

- Conduct additional outreach to providers to gather information about incentives or assistance for achieving the Blueprint's requirements
- Adopt additional incentives or financial assistance programs for providers seeking higher levels of Maryland EXCELS and for child care workers seeking further education and certifications, especially for providers that serve children who are eligible for Blueprint funding
- Provide additional funding for child care providers who enroll low-income students under the Blueprint as an incentive
- Create a workforce registry for child care workers in the County to collect data on education levels and certifications of child care workers, as well as pertinent workforce data such as salaries, benefits, etc.

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- Develop a directory of child care providers who meet all Blueprint requirements so low-income families can easily search and find providers who are eligible for funding
 - Expand the supply of child care in the County, which may include:
 - Subsidizing the establishment of new child care facilities
 - Subsidizing the expansion of current child care facilities
 - Providing assistance to child care providers who closed during the pandemic so they may reopen
 - Work with Montgomery College to consider establishing an Early Childhood Education MAAPP

State-Level Recommendations

On request from the child care policy expert workgroup, there are also actions that may be taken at the State level and advocated for by the County.

- Expand the timeline for providers to meet the education requirement so it is reflective of the amount of time it takes to earn a degree as a part-time student
- Change regulations governing the PreK-3 certification so that FCC providers may apply all of their time working in an FCC setting to the experiential learning component
- Create an alternative pathway to fulfilling the education/certification requirement for child care workers who have many years of experience and/or measurable positive outcomes (ex. Kindergarten readiness, reading levels) among children in their care
- Increase the Maryland EXCELS bonus amounts to further incentivize child care providers to participate and achieve higher levels
- Create a workforce registry for child care in the State to collect data on education levels and certifications of child care workers, as well as pertinent workforce data such as salaries, benefits, etc.

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- Link the Blueprint grant amount to the cost of high-quality early care and education to minimize the need for family co-payments, especially for high cost of living areas in the State
 - Allocate funding to child care providers with workers at higher education levels to promote salaries that are reflective of these education levels and minimize turnover
 - Invest in expanding the child care supply throughout the State
 - Examine how the Blueprint may incentivize providers to decrease the number of infants and toddlers served, and consider additional policies that will provide infant-and-toddler care

Future Questions and Conclusion

Additional research and questions that should be examined in the future include:

- Conducting interviews with families who are eligible for subsidized care under the Blueprint, to better understand:
 - Past experiences with and barriers to looking for child care
 - Priorities in terms of quality of care and proximity of care to their homes
 - Any anticipated difficulties in finding child care providers who qualify under Blueprint requirements
- Examining how much additional funding may be needed to incentivize providers to participate in EXCELS, seek additional education, and receive Blueprint funds
- Considering additional funding mechanisms to achieve salary parity between child care providers and public educators, in accordance with the State's goals
- Understanding how the Blueprint may impact the supply of infant-and-toddler care in the State
- Exploring how to address concerns that subsidies will lead to providers increasing their prices and thus leave child care equally as unaffordable

Concluding Remarks

The Blueprint offers a significant opportunity to address equity issues around access to high-quality and affordable child care for low-income families throughout the State. The long-term positive outcomes associated with quality early education reinforce that such action is impactful not only for the families affected by the Blueprint, but for all Marylanders. Though child care quality is important, it should not be prioritized above accessibility, and the findings in this report indicate that the Blueprint's quality requirements may limit the number of providers who can receive Blueprint funding. With additional incentives and adjusted regulations, the County and State alike may increase the supply of high-quality child care available to low-income families through the Blueprint, achieving the goals of accessibility, quality, **and** affordability.

Appendix

Maryland EXCELS: Summary of Standards

EXCELS Level	Summary of Required Standards
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Licensed and inspected to determine safety, cleanliness, proper supervision of children, and staff qualifications• Activities to support each and every child's individual needs• Family-teacher conferences
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Licensed and inspected to determine safety, cleanliness, proper supervision of children, and staff qualifications• Activities to support each and every child's individual needs• Family-teacher conferences held at least once a year• Children's developmental progress observed• 2+ opportunities for families to engage in the program• Activities informed by early learning guidelines
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Licensed and inspected to determine safety, cleanliness, proper supervision of children, and staff qualifications• Activities to support each and every child's individual needs• Family-teacher conferences held at least once a year• Children's developmental progress measured• 3+ opportunities for families to engage in the program• Activities informed by early learning guidelines• Staff have increased training and experience
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Licensed and inspected to determine safety, cleanliness, proper supervision of children, and staff qualifications• Activities to support each and every child's individual needs• Family-teacher conferences held at least twice per year• Children's developmental progress measured and linked to curriculum• 4+ opportunities for families to engage in the program• Activities aligned with a state-recommended curriculum• Staff have higher levels of training and experience• Continuous quality improvement process informed by independent assessors

5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Licensed and inspected to determine safety, cleanliness, proper supervision of children, and staff qualifications • Activities to support each and every child's individual needs • Family-teacher conferences held at least twice per year • Children's developmental progress assessed with multiple measures and linked to curriculum • 5+ opportunities for families to engage in the program • State recommended curriculum used • Staff meet highest levels of training and experience • Continuous quality improvement process informed by independent assessors • State or national accreditation achieved
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Maryland EXCELS also offers a more precise explanation of standards and standards that vary between [Family Child Care homes](#) and [Child Care Centers](#). The above chart is the [simplified version](#) provided by Maryland EXCELS but provides sufficient information for the purposes of this report.