

# Maryland

## Background

### Public Pre-K

Maryland requires that all school districts provide at least half-day pre-K for four-year-olds from families with incomes at or below 185 percent of the federal poverty level. The state enacted this requirement in 2002, at the same time that it overhauled the school-finance system and increased state funding to schools by \$1.3 billion over six years.

The new school-finance system awarded the biggest funding increases to the districts with the most low-income students. Additionally, each school district received a base amount and additional funds based on the number of students who receive special education services, who have limited English proficiency, and who qualify for free and reduced-price meals. Districts had flexibility in determining how to spend the additional funding, as long as they offered full-day kindergarten to all students and at least part-day pre-K to all at-risk students by FY08.<sup>1</sup> As this increase in annual funding levels was intended to cover the cost of providing pre-K, Maryland does not provide districts per-pupil pre-K funding.

In 2014 the state passed the Preschool Expansion Act, a \$4.3 million competitive grant program to offer pre-K to children up to 300 percent of the federal poverty guideline.

### Charter schools in Maryland

Maryland permits start-up and conversion charter schools. Currently, only local school boards authorize charter schools in Maryland, but under limited circumstances, the state board of education may authorize the restructuring of an existing public school as a charter.<sup>2</sup>

## Process for Accessing Pre-K Funds

In general, charter schools in Maryland may serve pre-K students if the local district that authorizes them decides to use the charter school as a pre-K site.

For example, in Baltimore City, where most of the state's charter schools are located, charter and traditional public schools that are interested in offering pre-K do so through the district's annual evaluation process, conducted by the Early Learning Programs office. Through this process, the Early Learning Programs office assesses the current and projected pre-K enrollment in the city, determines how many additional pre-K slots are needed, and allocates pre-K slots to providers throughout the city. A school that wants to offer pre-K can request to be included as a pre-K host site in this annual evaluation process.



TOTAL SCORE

33/50

Maryland's climate for charter schools to offer pre-K is **somewhat hospitable**


- + There are no state statutory or regulatory barriers to charter schools accessing state funding for pre-K.
- Compared to K-12 funding levels, low pre-K program funding makes offering pre-K less attractive to charters.
- + The size of the pre-K program does not limit charter access to funding.
- The funding, application, or approval process creates a barrier to charter access.
- + Automatic enrollment from charter pre-K to kindergarten is not prohibited in legislation or practice.



The Early Learning Programs office may accept a school as a host site and allocate pre-K slots to them if the school has the capacity to serve students. It will not allocate pre-K slots if it determines there are no additional slots needed in the community that the school serves.


## Barriers

### Are there any statutory or regulatory barriers to charter schools accessing state funding for pre-K?


 **No.** Neither the state charter school legislation nor the preschool legislation address whether charter schools are permitted to offer pre-K. In Baltimore City, where most of the state's charter schools are located, the school district includes charter schools as sites that are able to serve pre-K students and uses charter pre-K classrooms as part of its strategy to meet the state mandate to provide pre-K to all low-income children.

In the 2012–13 school year, 468 students were enrolled in pre-K programs at eleven charter schools.<sup>3</sup>


### Is the funding level of the state pre-K program a barrier to charter access?

 **Yes.** There is no per-pupil funding amount or dedicated funding stream from the state for pre-K. Districts are unlikely to approve new charter school pre-K slots above those needed to meet state requirements because they wouldn't receive additional funding from the state to do so.


### Is the size of the state pre-K program a barrier to charter access?

 **No.** The size of the program is not a barrier to charters accessing state pre-K funds. Thirty-five percent of Maryland's four-year-olds attend publicly funded pre-K.

### Is the application, approval, and/or funding process a barrier to charter access?

 **Yes.** Where districts have chosen to embrace chartering as a strategy for expanding children's access to high-quality educational options, as in Baltimore, these districts have also worked with charter schools to offer pre-K in charter settings. Other Maryland districts are more hostile to charter schools, however. Because Maryland charter schools can only offer pre-K by receiving funding from their district, this restricts their ability to offer pre-K. As of May 2015, only seven of Maryland's twenty-four school districts have approved public charter schools.

### Is automatic enrollment from pre-K to kindergarten prohibited in legislation or practice?

 **No.** State law does not explicitly prohibit charter schools from granting enrollment preference to pre-K students who are entering the school's kindergarten program.

## Recommendations

To address these barriers to charter access, the state should:

- Strengthen the state's charter school law to allow nondistrict authorizers.
- Ensure that charter schools authorized by nondistrict authorizers have equitable access to local pre-K funds, as well as state and local funds for K–12 students.
- Revise the charter law to explicitly permit charter schools to offer pre-K.
- Enact statute or regulation allowing charter schools that offer pre-K to low-income children to enroll those children in kindergarten without requiring them to go through an additional lottery.



	Public pre-K	Charter schools in Maryland
Year created	Launched in 1980 <sup>4</sup>	Charter law enacted in 2003 <sup>5</sup>
Children in state	150,659 three- and four-year-olds in Maryland <sup>6</sup>	1,132,246 school-age children in Maryland <sup>7</sup>
Children served	29,407 children served 4 percent of three-year-olds 35 percent of four-year-olds <sup>8</sup>	21,397 students served 1.9 percent of school-age population Fifty-two charter schools <sup>9</sup>
Charters offering pre-K	Eleven charter schools in Maryland offer pre-K. <sup>10</sup>	Thirty-four charter schools in Maryland offer elementary school programs. <sup>11</sup>
Funding	Districts do not receive per-pupil state funding to offer pre-K.	Charter schools receive \$11,754 per pupil to serve K–12 students. <sup>12</sup>

## Endnotes

1 “Bridge to Excellence in Public Schools Act: Fact Sheet,” Maryland State Department of Education, January 2012, [http://www.marylandpublicschools.org/NR/rdonlyres/841ABD3D-FC95-47AB-BB74-BD3C85A1EFB8/31364/FS\\_63\\_2012\\_.pdf](http://www.marylandpublicschools.org/NR/rdonlyres/841ABD3D-FC95-47AB-BB74-BD3C85A1EFB8/31364/FS_63_2012_.pdf).

2 National Alliance for Public Charter Schools (NAPCS), “Measuring Up: Maryland,” <http://www.publiccharters.org/get-the-facts/law-database/states/MD/>.

3 National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, data dashboard, 2013, <http://www.napcs.org>.

4 W. Steven Barnett et al., “The State of Preschool 2013: State Preschool Yearbook” (New Brunswick, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research, 2013), <http://nieer.org/sites/nieer/files/yearbook2013.pdf>.

5 NAPCS, “Measuring Up: Maryland.”

6 State population data calculated using ACS 2012 five-year estimates; U.S. Census Bureau, “American Community Survey,” [www.census.gov/acs](http://www.census.gov/acs).

7 Ibid., all children in households, three to seventeen years old.

8 W. Steven Barnett et al., “The State of Preschool 2013.”

9 NAPCS, “Measuring Up: Maryland.”

10 “Charter Schools in Maryland,” Maryland Charter School Network, [http://www.mdcharternetwork.org/csi\\_md\\_charterschools.html](http://www.mdcharternetwork.org/csi_md_charterschools.html).

11 The Center for Education Reform, [https://www.edreform.com/in-the-states/know-your-choices/find-a-charter-school/?filter%5Bname%5D=&filter%5Bcity%5D=&filter%5Bstate%5D=MD&filter%5Bgrade%5D=&filter%5Bgrades\\_categories%5D=&filter%5Bspecialty%5D=](https://www.edreform.com/in-the-states/know-your-choices/find-a-charter-school/?filter%5Bname%5D=&filter%5Bcity%5D=&filter%5Bstate%5D=MD&filter%5Bgrade%5D=&filter%5Bgrades_categories%5D=&filter%5Bspecialty%5D=)

12 Jay May et al., “Charter School Funding: Inequality Expands,” Maryland section (Fayetteville, AR: University of Arkansas Department of Education Reform, School Choice Demonstration Project, April 2014), <http://www.uaedreform.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/charter-funding-inequity-expands-dc.pdf>.