

# ACLU of Maryland Education Advocate

## Spotlight on Pre-Kindergarten

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### City Schools Roll Out Biggest Pre-K Expansion Yet

In the upcoming school year 2009-10, City Schools will add an unprecedented 42 full day pre-K classes to their current program. [Click here for a link to new Pre-K sites](#)

In the 2010-11 school year, City Schools plans to add another 25 classes, a total of sixty classes and 1200 new slots for 4 year olds. The Baltimore City Board of School Commissioners and CEO Alonso have made pre-K expansion a top priority for the next school year, with help from the influx of American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) stimulus funds.

The Bridge to Excellence in Public Schools law mandates that every homeless and Free and Reduced Meals (FARMS)-eligible student be provided at least 1/2 day pre-K class. The ACLU has worked for more than four years to promote the expansion of pre-Kindergarten programs and to ensure that the law is fulfilled. The ACLU conducted an intensive school-by-school survey of waiting lists in Baltimore City over the past four years. This survey helped document a need for additional pre-K seats and the ACLU advocated that City Schools expand their pre-K program. City Schools responded positively by expanding their program by sixteen classes each year from 2006 to 2008. In the 2008-09 school year, they expanded by 19 classes. City Schools leaders also have shown a remarkable commitment to the needs of children and parents by providing full-day programs, beyond the legally-mandated one-half day programs.

It has been well documented that students who attend Pre-Kindergarten are better prepared for school, and graduate from high school and attend college at higher rates. City Schools has recognized this need and taken the charge to meet the needs of the next generation of students. From the 2006 to 2009 school year, school readiness increased from 35% to 64.9% in City Schools programs as determined by the Maryland Model for School Readiness program.

### State Progress on Pre-K

During the 2008-09 school year, the ACLU-MD called upon the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) to address waiting lists of pre-K eligible children that the ACLU had documented after surveying a number of Maryland school systems. MSDE agreed to begin collecting waiting list data from the school systems to evaluate how many eligible students were placed on waiting lists. Their data revealed that several systems had waiting lists of eligible children, contrary to the requirements of the Bridge to Excellence law. This validated ACLU data concerning waiting lists, and MSDE took action to develop a statewide system for tracking waiting lists for low-income pre-K students.

After subsequent meetings with MSDE, they agreed to continue to monitor waiting lists three times throughout the year and to also set up special monitors at five districts with the highest waiting lists. After increased advertising and better data collection, the State has greatly improved the monitoring process and waiting lists for schools were reduced or eliminated. The ACLU then launched a pre-K campaign for parents and through education, advocacy and public outreach, in conjunction with the state NAACP, to reach families across Maryland in order to ensure that homeless and low income children were being served.

### Lack of Funding Still A Core Concern

While the Bridge to Excellence in Public Schools Act mandates that pre-K be provided for all FARMS-eligible and homeless 4 year olds, the state does not provide a per pupil amount of funding support for pre-K children, as it does

for K-12 children. Some funding is identified in the state funding formula, but districts do not receive additional aid for each child added.

Baltimore City and Prince George's County should be commended for best addressing the needs of parents and offering full day classes to their students. In order to meet the funding challenges of pre-K, the state, districts, and education advocates must work together to create a fair funding model for one-half and full day pre-K programs. With the many benefits of pre-K, it is more important than ever to gain funding to educate students early in order for them to be better prepared for college and the global workforce.

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