
TO: Members of the Strategy and Operations Committee

FROM: Carey M. Wright, Ed.D., State Superintendent of Schools

DATE: September 16, 2026

SUBJECT: Joint Implementation Policy #3: Pre-K Mixed Delivery Presentation

STRATEGIC PLAN ALIGNMENT:

Pillar 1: Early Childhood Education

Goal: Every child has access to a high-quality early childhood program.

Outcome:

- 1.A Increase student readiness for kindergarten annually as measured by the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment (KRA).
 - 1.B Increase kindergarten readiness rates for each student group.
 - 1.C Decrease gaps in kindergarten readiness between student groups.
 - 1.D Increase the count of 3-year-olds and 4-year-olds from Tier 1 households (low-income, children with disabilities, homeless, or children from homes in which English is not the primary spoken language) who are enrolled in high-quality (EXCELS rating of 3+) full-day pre-K.
 - 1.E Increase the count of 4-year-olds who are enrolled in high-quality (EXCELS rating of 3+) full-day pre-K.
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Purpose

This presentation will provide an update on Maryland's implementation of the Pre-K Mixed Delivery System with a focus on how it aligns with the MSDE/AIB Joint Implementation Policy #3.

Background

In January 2025, MSDE and the AIB collaborated to publish Joint Implementation Policy #3 as a way of defining focuses for public and private Pre-K programs and implementation of the sliding scale. This policy was intended to 1) ensure all children in all tiers are served through a network of high-quality options to families across the state, and 2) outline family shares by tiers.

Under the policy, public Pre-K programs inside Local Education Agencies (LEAs) would be primarily responsible for serving Tier I four-year-olds while private Pre-K programs would focus on serving Tier I three-year-olds and three- and four-year-olds in Tiers II and III.

Executive Summary

- Policy Background
 - The rollout of the mixed-delivery system has been through many changes since the Blueprint passed in 2021, including the creation of the sliding scale, limiting enrollment to Tier I in 2024, and reducing Tier II eligibility in 2025. Tier Definitions and Income Ranges
 - Tier I is a status available to 3- and 4-year-old children whose household income is between 100-300% FPL.
 - Tier II household income ranges have fluctuated due to the Budget Reconciliation and Financing Act of 2026.
 - For FY 2027, this is a status available to 4-year-old children whose household income is 301-450% FPL.
 - In FY 2028 and beyond, the household income range will return to 301-600%.
 - Tier III is a status available to 4-year-old children whose household income is more than 600% FPL.
- Pre-K Enrollment
 - In private Pre-K programs, we see the highest enrollment for Tier I three-year-olds, which aligns with the policy. We also see almost equal enrollment for Tier four-year-olds, which is allowable under the policy.
 - In public Pre-K, we see the highest enrollment for Tier I four-year-olds, which aligns with the policy.
 - Across tiers and age groups, a total of 25,622 children are enrolled in a public Pre-K program through the mixed delivery system.
 - Only 7% of eligible three-year-olds are being served through the mixed delivery, but 71% of eligible four-year-olds are being served, mostly through LEAs.
- Pre-K Expansion Grant
 - Through efforts to improve the grant application process and support for grantees, the Office of Early Childhood almost doubled the applications received.
 - Conditional awards and additional support for grantees also increased the number of awards.
 - A total of 1,850 slots will be added this year, with the largest share going to private Pre-K programs and child care centers.
 - Grantees across program types are required to meet the highest standards for quality in early learning.
 - This year, most grantees have a Maryland EXCELS Quality Rating 5, which is the highest rating, indicating that their program uses a high-quality curriculum, offers developmental and family support for school readiness, and is accredited through an MSDE-recognized organization.

Action

No action is required; this information is for discussion only.

Attachments

[SOC-Pre-K Mixed Delivery Policy 3.pptx](#)



Pre-K Mixed Delivery System Update

Division of Early Childhood

Presented By | Sarah Neville-Morgan, Chief of Early Childhood
Jena Smith, Executive Director of Early Learning and Quality Improvement
Initiatives

September 16, 2026



MSDE Strategic Plan Goals

1

Every child has access to a high-quality early childhood program.

PILLAR 1: EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION



Every student is matched with the resources they need to ensure their success.

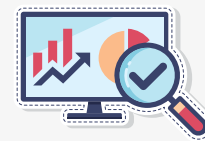
PILLAR 4: MORE RESOURCES FOR STUDENT SUCCESS

4

2

Every school has high-quality and diverse teachers and leaders.

PILLAR 2: HIGH-QUALITY & DIVERSE TEACHERS AND LEADERS



Every school and district receives a rating of ____ or higher.

PILLAR 5: GOVERNANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY

5

3

Every student graduates high school college and career ready.

PILLAR 3: COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS



Visit the Maryland State Department of Education website to learn more about the Strategic Plan!

strategicplan.marylandpublicschools.org



STRATEGIC PLAN ALIGNMENT



GOAL

Every child has access to a high-quality early childhood program.

1.A

Increase student readiness for kindergarten annually as measured by the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment (KRA.)

1.B

Increase kindergarten readiness proficiency rates for each student group.

1.C

Decrease gaps in kindergarten readiness between student groups.

1.D

Increase the count of 3-year-olds and 4-year-olds from Tier 1 households (low-income, children with disabilities, homeless, or children from homes in which English is not the primary spoken language) who are enrolled in high-quality (EXCELS rating of 3+) full-day Pre-K.

1.E

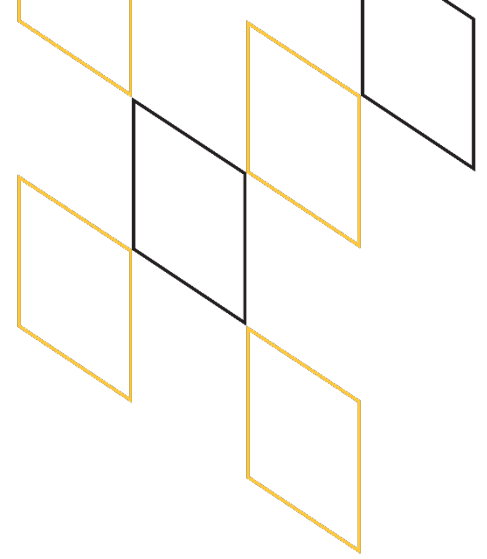
Increase the count of 4-year-olds who are enrolled in high quality (EXCELS rating of 3+) full-day Pre-K.



Presentation Outline

1. Policy Background
2. Pre-K Mixed Delivery System Data and Trends
3. Looking Forward to School Year 2026-2027

Policy Background



Policy Background

In January 2025, the policy was adopted by MSDE and the AIB to strengthen the rollout of the Blueprint for Maryland's Future by outlining focuses and sliding scale implementation for each tier.

2021: Blueprint for Maryland's Future passes, requiring access to Pre-K for all Maryland children through a mixed-delivery system.

2024: SBOE approves original sliding scale, making the mixed-delivery system financially sustainable.

The Budget Reconciliation and Financing Act of 2024 limits Pre-K enrollment to Tier I children only for SY 2024-2025.

2025: The Budget Reconciliation and Financing Act of 2025 reduces income eligibility for Tier II from 301-600% to 301-450% FPL for FY27.

Tier Definitions and Income Ranges

3- and 4-year-olds		4-year-olds only		
	Tier I* Up to 300% FPL	Tier II (301-600% FPL)	Tier II for FY27 (301-450% FPL)	Tier III (>600% FPL)
Family of 2	≤ \$64,920	\$129,840	\$97,380	\$129,840 +
Family of 3	≤ \$81,960	\$163,920	\$122,940	\$163,920 +
Family of 4	≤ \$99,000	\$198,000	\$148,500	\$198,000 +
Cost to families:	No cost	Subsidized		Full cost

*Children who are Tier II AND Multilingual Learners or children with disabilities were counted as Tier I in FY 25 and FY 26 only.

Joint Implementation Policy #3 Policy Statements

Public Providers

- Primarily serve **Tier I four-year-olds**.
- May choose to serve Tier I three-year-olds, and Tier II and III four-year-olds.

Private Providers (including Head Start)

- Primarily serve **Tier I three-year-olds** and **Tier II and III four-year-olds**.
- May choose to serve Tier I four-year-olds.



Any providers that serve Tier II and III four-year-olds may choose to collect the family share, but are not required to do so.

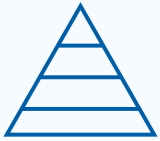


[AIB/MSDE Joint Implementation Policy # 3: Implementation of the Pre-K Mixed Delivery System](#)

What Does This Look Like for Families?



The Morales family is multilingual and has two parents and two children, ages four and seven. Their annual household income is \$58,000 (37% SMI).



Their income is below 300% FPL (\$99,000) so they are eligible for Tier I.



Tier I four-year-olds are primarily served by public Pre-K programs.

The Morales family will work with their LEA to enroll in the same public school their older child attends.

What Does This Look Like for Families?



The Johnson family has one parent and one three-year-old child. Their annual household income is \$36,000 (34% SMI).



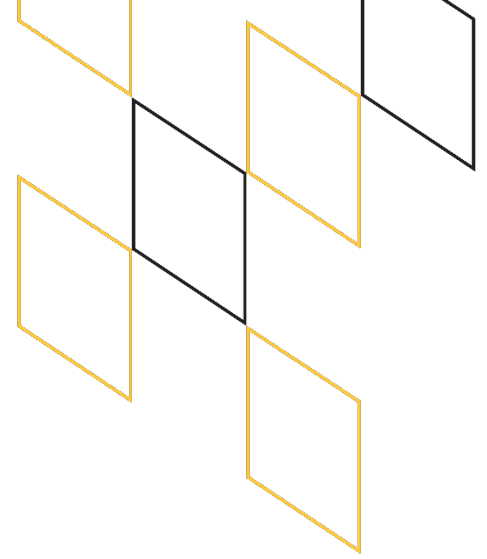
Their income is below 300% FPL (\$64,920) and makes them eligible for Tier I.



- Tier I three-year-olds are primarily served by private Pre-K programs.
- The Johnson family can choose to enroll in a participating Pre-K program that best fits their needs.



- The Johnsons' current child care provider, a family child care provider who accepts their Child Care Scholarship, also provides Pre-K services.
- They choose to stay enrolled in their current program for continuity of care.



Pre-K Mixed Delivery System Data and Trends

Pre-K Enrollment Overview

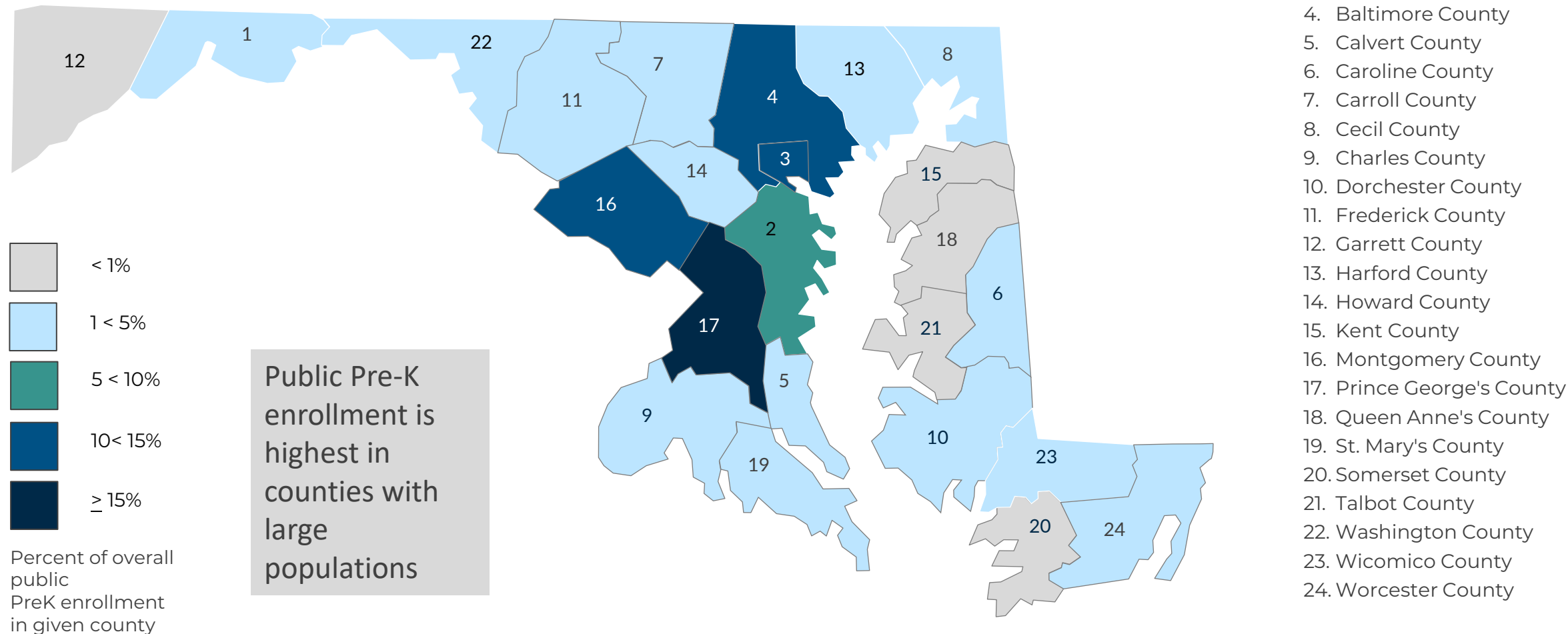
	Private Pre-K		Public Pre-K		Total Pre-K Enrollment		
	3-year-olds	4-year-olds	3-year-olds	4-year-olds	3-year-olds	4-year-olds	All ages
Tier I	1,199	1,056	932	18,758	2,131	19,814	21,945
Tier II	103	129	30	2,649	133	2,778	2,911
Tier III	20	22	0	724	20	746	766
No Tier*	-	-	3,579	3,653	3,579	3,653	7,232
Total	1,322	1,207	4,541	25,784	5,863	26,991	32,854
	2,529		30,325		32,854		

* "No Tier" includes students enrolled in public-school PreK who did not provide income information to verify their tier status and were not eligible for Tier I or II.

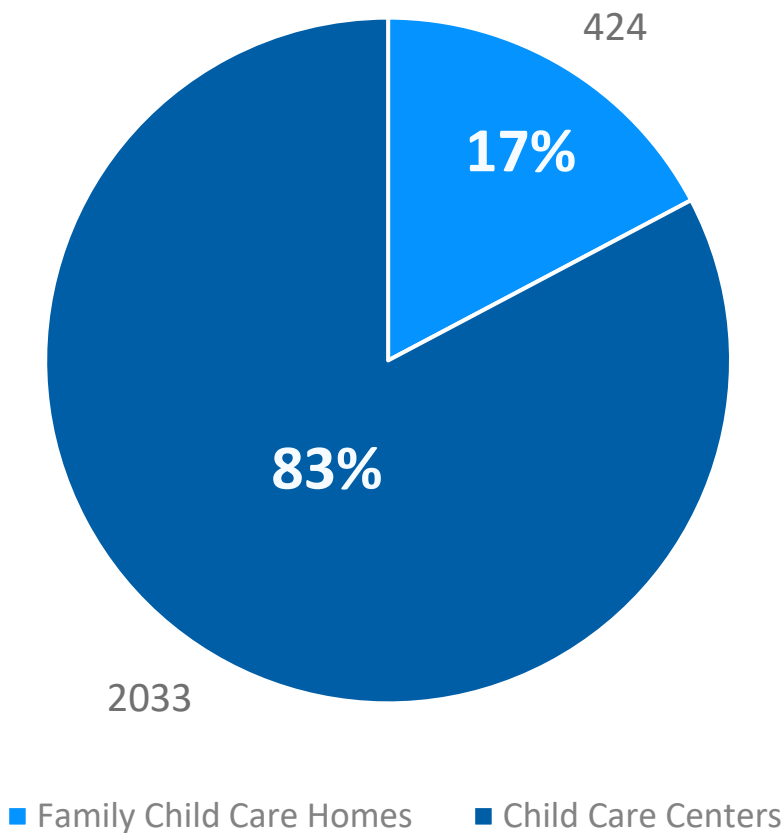
Note: These counts exclude 214 children enrolled in public school PreK aged five, or aged younger than 3 due to special circumstances.

Pre-K Enrollment Varies by County

Large counties have a higher share of overall Pre-K enrollment



Private Pre-K Enrollment by Program Type



Public Pre-K Data from SY25-26

3-
year-
olds

Tier	Eligible Children	Children Enrolled	Percent of Children Enrolled
Tier I	32,949	2,131	6.5%
Tier II	24,505	133	0.4%
Tier III	15,851	20	0.1%

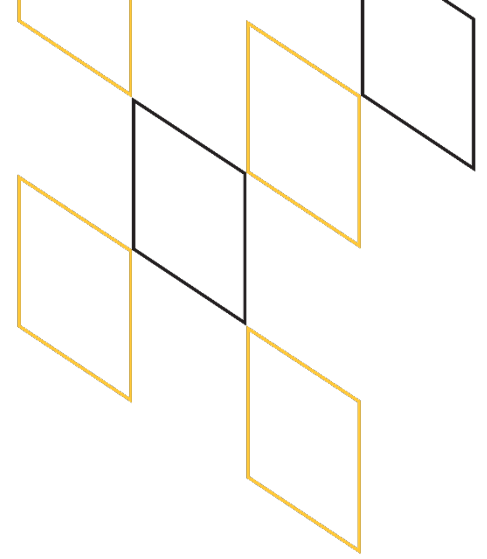
4-
year-
olds

Tier	Eligible Children	Children Enrolled	Percent of Children Enrolled
Tier I	32,615	19,814	60.1%
Tier II	25,653	2,778	8.4%
Tier III	17,406	746	2.3%
Total	148,979	25,622	

Number of Eligible Children based on 2024 Maryland population as recorded in the American Community Survey. Eligibility counted from this population based on 2025 FPL guidelines.

Note enrollment counts do not include students listed as 'No Tier' in public schools, who are not categorized into any tier due to missing income information. Tier II children with disabilities and multilingual learners are not recategorized into Tier I for this breakdown.

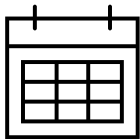
Looking Forward to School Year 2026-2027



2026 – 2027 Pre-K Expansion Grant Applications

School Year	Applications	Awards	Slots Added
SY 2024-2025	108	74	1,626
SY 2025-2026	105	50	1,837
SY 2026-2027	208	90	1,850

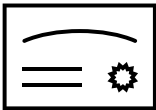
Improved applications and increased awards:



Application and GIG released in January 2026 to align with LEA planning requirements.



Improved application and offered technical assistance for multilingual applicants.



Conditional awards allowed revisions and increased successful applications.

2026 – 2027 Pre-K Expansion Grant Awards



MSDE awarded **\$36,376,625** through the Pre-K Expansion Grant.

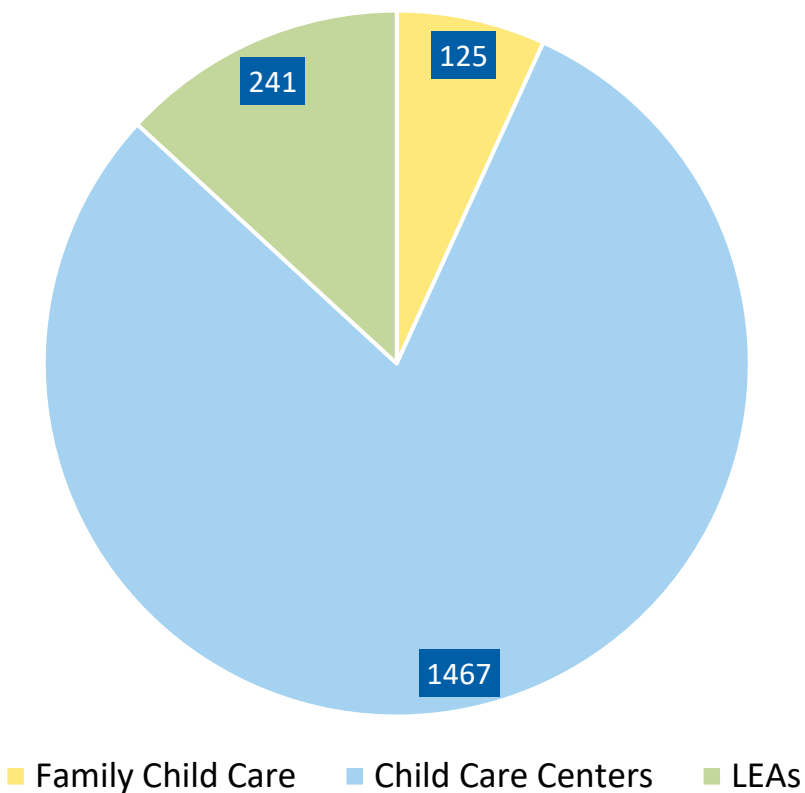


90 applicants received grants, including **7 LEAs** and **83 private providers**.

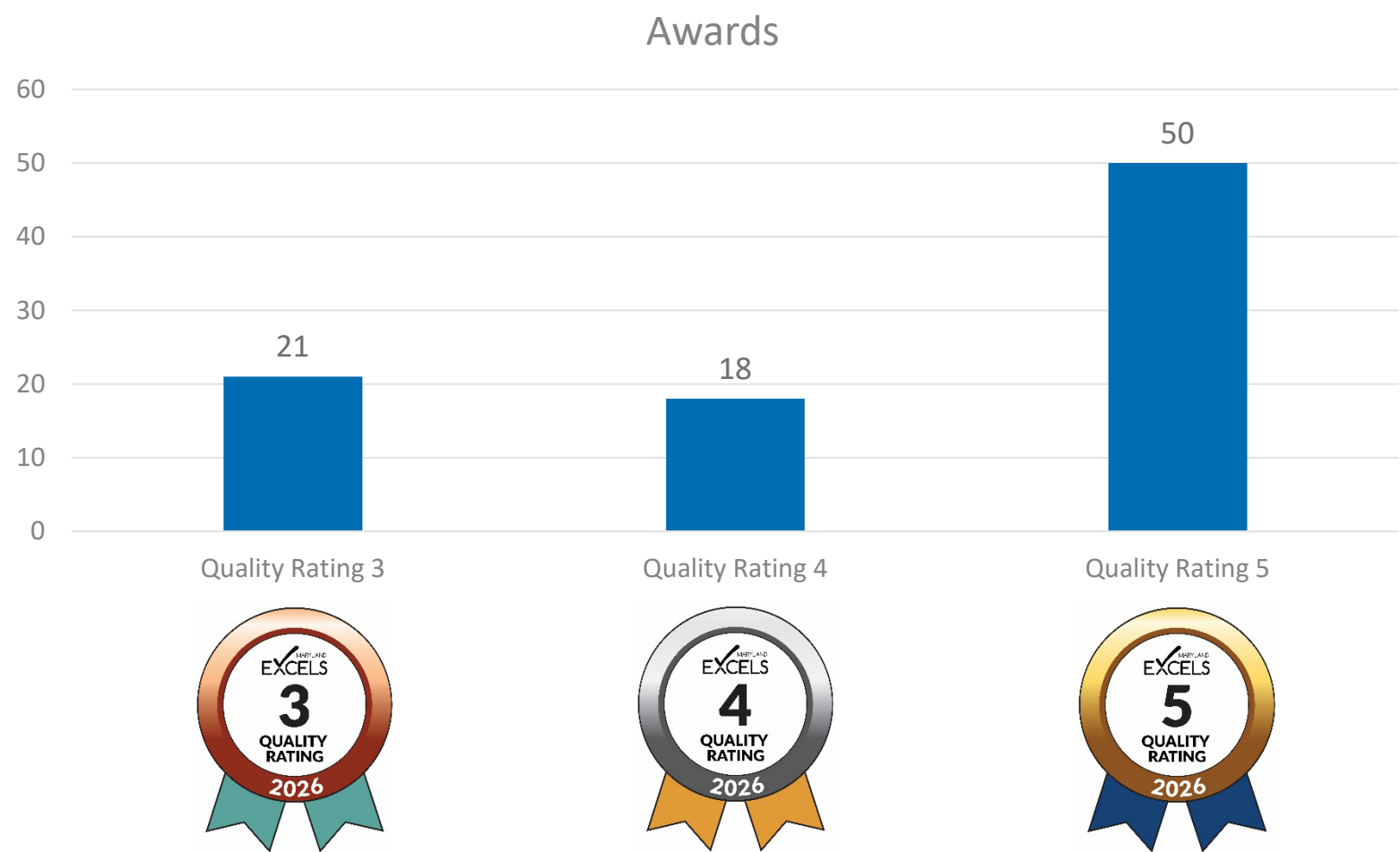


1,850 slots will be added.

New Pre-K Slots by Program Type



High-Quality Early Learning Across Program Types



What's Next?



Continued Growth of Mixed Delivery: Increasing private provider participation.

Building the Provider Pipeline: Intentional recruitment of prospective private providers in communities where mixed-delivery capacity remains limited.

Strengthening Quality Across Settings: Expanding the use of CLASS to support rich teacher-child interactions and instruction.

Using Data to Drive Expansion:

- Examining where seats are needed, families are enrolling, providers lack capacity, and barriers exist.
- Greater attention to whether expansion is sustainably producing high-quality programs, not simply adding seats.