



REPORT LAUDS MONTGOMERY COUNTY SCHOOLS' PRE-K-12 STRATEGY AS NATIONAL REFORM MODEL

District reshaped early learning programs with college readiness as target

WASHINGTON—Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) in Maryland has developed a successful pre-kindergarten-12th grade public education system that should serve as a model for other school districts and states, and for federal policy makers looking to narrow the achievement gap through education reform, according to a new report by the Foundation for Child Development and Pre-K Now, a campaign of the Pew Center on the States.

Lessons in Early Learning: Building an Integrated Pre-K-12 System in Montgomery County Public Schools provides an overview of how MCPS used local and federal dollars to craft, implement and improve a system-wide education reform strategy built on a foundation of providing high-quality pre-k education.

Aligning a high-quality pre-k experience with its overall education reform goals has helped MCPS achieve significant results: almost 90 percent of kindergarteners enter first grade with essential early literacy skills; nearly 88 percent of third graders read proficiently; achievement gaps between different racial and ethnic groups across all grade levels have declined by double digits; 90 percent of seniors graduate from high school and about 77 percent of them enroll in college.

“This report tells how MCPS narrowed the achievement gap, improving test scores among low-income African American and Hispanic/Latino students by extending efforts before kindergarten and integrating them closely with K-12 reform,” said **Ruby Takanishi, president of the Foundation for Child Development**. “As PreK-3rd approaches are designed and implemented throughout the country, policy makers and superintendents can turn to the lessons learned from MCPS to guide their own efforts.”

Over the last decade, MCPS set ambitious objectives for student achievement, provided more children with a critical early learning foundation and built upon the skills gained in pre-k with reforms in the later grades to significantly strengthen students’ college readiness. These gains were realized even as the district’s population of students learning English as a new language grew 103 percent and the number of students receiving a free or reduced-price lunch increased 44 percent.

“The innovative strategy of starting with pre-k and pointing all compasses toward college and career readiness is paying off for kids and families in Montgomery County,” said **Marci Young, project director of Pre-K Now**. “This report is a roadmap for turning around underperforming schools and setting kids from all backgrounds on a path to success.”

With the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) due for reauthorization, the federal government can help states and districts replicate MCPS’s success by:

- Including early learning in the reauthorization of the ESEA, and
- Dedicating funding specifically for three and four year olds that can leverage federal, state and local resources, provide incentives for greater investments and ensure that dollars are targeted to high-impact early learning programs.

“With MCPS as an effective model, Congress should encourage other districts to follow its lead by including pre-k in the ESEA as part of a comprehensive school-turnaround strategy,” **said Young**.

In pursuing this agenda, MCPS strategically blended existing local, state and federal dollars to maximize the reach of each of these flexible funding sources. To ensure its reform plan included a robust early education component, MCPS allocated federal Title I dollars, which can be used for early learning, to extend Head Start programs from a half day to a full day and to enhance their services through additional professional development and instructional materials.

According to the report, five key lessons emerge from the MCPS reform effort that other district leaders and policy makers can follow as they pursue a school improvement agenda:

1. Establish a clear and compelling district-wide goal that closely links K-12 to early learning.
2. Craft integrated district-wide and early learning strategies.
3. Align early learning programs and services to create a seamless pre-kindergarten-12th grade system.
4. Balance support and accountability to ensure effective and consistent implementation.
5. Innovate and monitor for continuous improvement.

Research shows that high-quality early learning from pre-kindergarten through the early grades of elementary school (PreK-3rd) is the foundation for all future learning.

The new MCPS report is available at www.preknow.org.

###

About the Foundation for Child Development

The Foundation for Child Development is a national private philanthropy dedicated to the principle that all families should have the social and material resources to raise their children to be healthy, educated, and productive members of their communities. www.fcd-us.org.

About the Pew Center on the States

The Pew Center on the States is a division of The Pew Charitable Trusts that identifies and advances effective solutions to critical issues facing states. Pew is a nonprofit organization that applies a rigorous, analytical approach to improve public policy, inform the public and stimulate civic life. www.pewcenteronthestates.org.