

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2026 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
Third Reader - Revised

House Bill 748
Ways and Means

(Delegates Mireku-North and Palakovich Carr)

Education, Energy, and the Environment

Publicly Funded Prekindergarten - Early Childhood Educator Career Ladder
for Private Providers - New Pathways

This bill removes fixed statutory deadlines for meeting certain experiential and educational qualification requirements to qualify for the early childhood educator career ladder for *specified* eligible private prekindergarten providers and instead establishes relative and ongoing timeframes for meeting those requirements. Specifically, the bill creates a third pathway for early childhood teaching assistants to qualify by holding a high school diploma and earning required credentials within *three months* after being hired, rather than by July 1, 2027. For lead teachers who qualify through the 10-year experience pathway, there is a two-tiered deadline for earning a required associate degree in early childhood education. A teacher who qualified through the experience pathway on or before July 1, 2024, must earn the degree on or before July 1, 2030. A teacher who qualified through the experience pathway after July 1, 2024, must earn the degree within *six months* after qualifying as a lead teacher. **The bill takes effect July 1, 2026.**

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: None. The bill repeals specified qualification deadlines but does not alter funding formulas or require additional State resources. Oversight of the early childhood educator career ladder is supported with existing resources; thus, no material effect on State expenditures is anticipated. Revenues are not affected.

Local Effect: None. The bill does not alter funding formulas or impose new requirements on local school systems.

Small Business Effect: Potential meaningful.

Analysis

Current Law:

Early Childhood Educator Career Ladder for Private Providers

By July 1, 2025, the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) must establish an early childhood educator career ladder for eligible private providers. The early childhood educator career ladder is for teachers and assistant teachers employed by eligible private providers. The purpose of the early childhood educator career ladder is to (1) transform early childhood education teaching into a high-status profession in the State; (2) attract high-performing students to pursue the high-status early childhood education teaching profession; and (3) retain high-quality early childhood education teachers who gain additional responsibility, authority, status, and compensation as they gain additional expertise.

The early childhood educator career ladder must (1) adequately compensate early childhood educators for their work; (2) provide early childhood educators with the opportunity to identify and work with prekindergarten teachers and teaching assistants; (3) provide early childhood educators the opportunity to develop their skills and knowledge by participating in job-embedded professional development; and (4) compensate early childhood educators at greater rates as they advance to the next level of the career ladder.

The levels of the career ladder are:

- level one is an early childhood teaching assistant;
- level two is a prekindergarten lead teacher; and
- level three is an early childhood consulting teacher.

Early Childhood Teaching Assistant: Statute established two pathways to qualify as an early childhood teaching assistant. For the first pathway, an educator must have a high school diploma and, by July 1, 2027, earn and maintain a Child Development Associate with preschool designation or hold an associate degree in early childhood education or child development. For the second pathway, on July 1, 2024, an individual must have documented experience of actively providing services in early childhood education for a minimum of 15 years for at least 20 hours per week and 180 days per year.

Prekindergarten Lead Teacher: In order to qualify as a prekindergarten lead teacher, statute establishes four pathways. For three of the pathways, an educator must hold at least a bachelor's degree or equivalent, as specified, from a U.S. or foreign institution. For the fourth (experience) pathway, on July 1, 2024, an individual must have documented experience of actively providing services in early childhood education for a minimum of 10 years for at least 20 hours per week and 180 days per year.

Individuals who hold a bachelor’s degree in a field unrelated to early childhood education, child development or a related field or who qualify via the experience pathway must also achieve a minimum score on the Classroom Assessment Scoring System assessment as set by MSDE. By July 1, 2030, a prekindergarten lead teacher who qualifies through the experience pathway must earn an associate degree in early childhood education. Teachers from level three of the career ladder must mentor and provide professional support to a prekindergarten lead teacher seeking an associate degree to ensure that the teacher earns a degree within the required amount of time.

In order to maintain status as a prekindergarten lead teacher, each year a lead teacher must complete at least 20 working hours of professional learning and development.

Early Childhood Consulting Teacher: In order to qualify as an early childhood consulting teacher, an educator must (1) be a prekindergarten lead teacher in good standing; (2) beginning in the 2027-2028 school year, hold early childhood education certification or be pursuing certification; (3) be able to lead other early childhood educators in an effective and disciplined way to improve the curriculum and instruction of prekindergarten students; (4) demonstrate the skills and knowledge to mentor early childhood assistant teachers and new prekindergarten lead teachers, including by helping them to meet the educational and certification qualifications necessary to qualify for and maintain status on the career ladder; and (5) supervise and support prekindergarten lead teachers, if practicable through prekindergarten provider hubs, in one or more sites in order to improve developmentally appropriate instructional practices for prekindergarten students.

Associate’s Degree

The standards number of credits required to earn an associate’s degree is 60 credits. Full-time students typically take two years to complete an associate's degree.

Small Business Effect: Many private prekindergarten providers qualify as small businesses. By repealing specified qualification deadlines for early childhood educators, the bill may provide additional flexibility to providers in meeting staffing requirements under the publicly funded prekindergarten program. The net fiscal impact on individual providers may vary depending on staffing levels and credential attainment.

Additional Information

Recent Prior Introductions: Similar legislation has not been introduced within the last three years.

Designated Cross File: None.

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