

Pre-kindergarten program expanded in Garrett County

FOR THE WEEKENDER

OAKLAND — On July 28, Lt. Gov. Anthony Brown announced the Prekindergarten Expansion Act of 2014 (SB 332) had been signed into law which builds on the state's existing Pre-K system and expands the number of Pre-K slots available to include Maryland children whose families make up to 300 percent of the Federal Poverty Guidelines.

The bill represents the first step toward expanding Pre-K to all Maryland children by establishing a competitive Pre-Kindergarten Expansion Grant Program. Local school systems and local providers are able to apply for grant funds to establish, expand, or enhance existing Pre-K programs and highly effective Judy Centers.

With this act, under Absolute Priority III, the establishment of either a Judy Center, or a satellite to an existing Judy Center at a Title I school operated by a local board of education, the Garrett County Public Schools system will take a more active role in the program implementation of the Judy Center Grant.

"This Prekindergarten Expansion Grant builds upon

the existing public prekindergarten system and moves us even closer to the target goal of providing universal access to high-quality prekindergarten for Maryland children of all income levels," said Dr. Lillian M. Lowery, State Superintendent of Schools.

The Pre-Kindergarten Initiative goal is to create a universal, high quality and voluntary Pre-Kindergarten program in all schools across Maryland. By 2018, every Maryland family will have the option of sending their 4-year-old to a quality Pre-K program where they can learn and grow.

Recent studies have confirmed the importance of Pre-K, noting that "it multiplies the effects of later reforms by narrowing early achievement gaps and ensuring that children are fully prepared to learn and thrive academically, physically, socially, and emotionally." (Chicago Longitude Study, 2001).

Vocabulary and language comprehension are the foundational skills children need to become proficient readers. These skills also determine whether children will become proficient learners. Studies by Hart and Risley (2013) found that children whose parents were considered to be profes-

sionals heard 382 words in an hour, while children from low socioeconomic backgrounds heard an average of 167 words in an hour. A major factor in the school failure, and/or poor performance, of "disadvantaged" children is inadequate vocabulary knowledge.

In 2013-14, Garrett County had five schools providing full-day Pre-Kindergarten programs. There was one Pre-K classroom in each school at Accident, Broad Ford, Friendsville, Route 40, and Yough Glades. The Pre-K classes at Friendsville and Yough Glades were established Judy Center programs.

The Pre-Kindergarten Expansion Act allows three more additional Judy Center classrooms, with 20 students each, added to Title I schools.

Grantsville Elementary School, in 2014-15, will have a Judy Center Pre-K program for the first time, while Yough Glades will add a second Pre-K class to its program. Broad Ford Elementary School, new to Title I this year, has added a second Pre-K classroom. Thus, all county elementary schools, with the exception of Crellin and Swan Meadow, will provide Pre-K programs.

"Every child in Maryland deserves to be able to climb the ladder of opportunity towards success, and expanding access to quality early