

# News Release: PGCPS Announces New Early Start Program To Continue Head Start Services

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For Immediate Release

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*School system will fund and operate program with no disruption to students and families*

**UPPER MARLBORO, MD** – Today, Prince George's County Public Schools (PGCPS) Chief Executive Officer Dr. Kevin M. Maxwell announced that services will continue for all Head Start students, operated and funded by the school system through a new program called Early Start.

The Early Start program will serve 855 students with certified instructors and a high-quality curriculum at 35 program sites. Students will have the same instructors, program site, transportation services and school meals. Parents will have new mental health, nutrition and wellness resources. There will be increased monitoring and enhanced staff screening to address safety and disciplinary concerns.

"No services will be cut, no Head Start sites will be closed and all students will continue to be served. That was our goal from the beginning," said Dr. Maxwell. "We are pleased to provide continuity and stability for students and families, and enhance student safety at all sites."

PGCPS and the Prince George's County Board of Education received notice from the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) in August that the Head Start program grant would be terminated for the 2016-17 school year. The Board of Education voted late last month to relinquish the grant; negotiations with ACF over the transition process began soon afterwards.

During the negotiations, which concluded this week, ACF continued to fund the Head Start program. Remaining program costs for Early Start will be covered through a combination of hiring freezes on current and projected central office vacancies (\$2.9 million) and eliminating 19 central office-based Head Start positions (\$2.6 million).

Prince George's County Board of Education Chair Dr. Segun C. Eubanks said, "This outcome ensures that students and families will experience no disruption or reduction in services. We will continue to examine the circumstances that led to the grant termination, but this path forward expands early education services in our schools and throughout our communities."

All Early Start instructors and classroom aides will be screened to ensure expertise in teaching, supporting and providing a safe

learning environment for 3- and 4-year-old students and undergo CPS screening. Staff will receive more frequent professional development that reinforces standards of conduct for PGCPS employees and techniques on positive student discipline.

Stricter oversight will be provided by a 10-member Monitoring Board, consisting of three parent representatives, two external early childhood education experts, two Prince George's County social services representatives, two PGCPS central office staff members and one Board of Education representative. This group will meet biweekly with responsibility for monitoring instructional practices and reviewing parent concerns, safety issues, staff responsiveness, staff development and training. An upcoming performance audit by the Maryland State Department of Education related to the federal grant termination, which Dr. Maxwell announced last week, will also provide recommendations for Early Start.

Early Start students will be offered a slot in the school system's full-day prekindergarten or kindergarten programs for the 2017-18 school year. PGCPS will remain eligible for future Head Start funding as early as fall 2017.

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Prince George's County Public Schools (PGCPS), one of the nation's 20th largest school districts, has 201 schools and centers, more than 133,000 students and nearly 20,000 employees. The school system serves a diverse student population from urban, suburban and rural communities located in the Washington, DC suburbs. PGCPS is nationally recognized for college and career-readiness programs that provide students with unique learning opportunities, including dual enrollment and language immersion.

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