

Response to Questions on the FY 2019 Budget

Request By: Supervisor Hudgins

Question: What is the status of the current waiting list for Head Start/Early Head Start? Also, please project the wait list for the next 5 years.

Response:

Head Start and Early Head Start provide services to children and their families that promote children's school readiness and family well-being through early care and education, and comprehensive family services for income eligible families with children ages birth to five years. The Early Head Start program also serves expectant parents.

There are currently 481 children on the waiting list for services which includes 134 children eligible for Early Head Start and 347 children eligible for Head Start. The waiting list includes children whose application processing has been completed and have been determined to meet the program eligibility requirements. It should be noted that the wait list is a point in time and fluctuates based on need and when existing slots open.

Staff reached out to the County's Economic, Demographic and Statistical Research (EDSR) Unit for guidance on projecting estimates for the number of families in the community that would be eligible for the Head Start and Early Head Start programs over the next five years. The EDSR Unit advised that due to the narrow age and family income parameters, and the small subset of children that would fall into this categorization, establishing a reliable data set and projecting these numbers would be difficult. However, based on the fairly stable size of the waiting list over the last several years and the continued steady flow of applications from new families, staff does not initially expect a significant change in the size of the waiting list. As the County begins implementation of the Equitable School Readiness Strategic Plan, which has been endorsed by the Successful Children and Youth Policy Team (SCYPT), it is anticipated that the waiting list will begin to decrease over time as early childhood programs are further expanded to serve additional families. Where appropriate, children from the Head Start and Early Head Start waiting list are offered services in other available early childhood programs.

The FY 2019 Advertised Budget Plan includes funding to provide comprehensive early childhood education services for 36 at-risk preschoolers in community-based early childhood programs. Additionally, the proposed FY 2019 Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS) budget reflects an expansion of the FCPS PreK program by approximately 95 children. In FY 2020 the Department of Family Services' Office for Children will request funding to serve 86 additional children (32 children ages birth to three and 54 children ages four to five) at an early childhood program at the redeveloped Original Mount Vernon High School.