



THE FAMILY CHILD CARE
Alliance
OF MARYLAND

THE ALLIANCE AND THE ASPIRE PREK PROGRAM

Spring 2025



Contact: Bill Hudson,
Executive Director

bill.hudson@fccamd.org

www.aspireprek.org

For us, by us...

In 2018, a group of family child care (FCC) providers and advocates began a conversation about service gaps for FCC providers in Maryland. The group was well versed in the challenges facing FCC in Maryland. Most were either active FCC providers, or had been providers earlier in their careers. This group included: the former president of the Maryland State Family Child Association, the former president of the Family Child Care Association of Montgomery County, a former Vice President of the Howard County FCC association, the former CEO of the National Association for Family Child Care, the Senior Policy Analyst for the Maryland Family Network (MFN), the Chair of Early Childhood Education at Montgomery College, a senior executive from Teaching Strategies, a founding board member of the National Child Care Association, and the Marketing Director of the IDEALS Institute at Johns Hopkins University.

This passionate group of advocates wanted to address the fact that while the State, MFN and the Child Care Resource and Referral agencies provided a range of support services targeting FCC, there were still gaps that needed to be filled. The group decided to establish Maryland's first (and only) staffed family child care network. The Family Child Care Alliance of Maryland (the Alliance) was incorporated in October 2019. The goal of the group was to create a professionally led, nonprofit organization focused exclusively on addressing the unique technical assistance, operational, and professional learning needs of FCC providers in their multiple roles as educators, care providers, and independent small business operators. The active and former FCC providers in the group wanted an organization that was "created by us, for us and led by us." After incorporating as a 501(c3) in 2019, the Alliance began 2020 with a group of passionate board members, a dream...and \$600.00.

2020 turned out to be an eventful year for the Alliance and for Maryland. During the 2020 legislative session, the framework of the Blueprint for Maryland's Future began to take shape. It was clear to all stakeholders that Maryland needed a dramatic increase in the number of PreK seats in the State, and that a mixed-delivery system was key in achieving the ambitious goals of Pillar 1 of the Blueprint. However, in FY 2020, Maryland had *no* FCC homes participating in the PreK Expansion Grant program. In March 2020, the Alliance team pitched an idea for a pilot project to bring FCC providers into the PreK Expansion program. The team at MSDE embraced the idea of the pilot, and the Alliance team got to work. In less than six months, Alliance board members designed the pilot, wrote and won a PreK Expansion grant, recruited FCC providers to participate, and turned the program "on" in September.

Along the way, Bill Hudson, one of the founding board members, resigned from the board to assume the role of the part-time executive director, the Alliance's first paid staff member. One instructional coach was hired in October, and the program began to take shape, all during a global pandemic. That pilot became the Alliance's signature program and developed into what is now called the ASPIRE PreK program.

The ASPIRE PreK program is unlike any other in the nation. Modeled after the Induction program required for MD public school teachers, ASPIRE is designed to help FCC providers transition from a business focused predominately on custodial care to one focused on delivering a high-quality PreK program. The success of the program is evidenced by its ability to attract FCC to the mixed-delivery system. As noted earlier, in FY 2020, there were zero FCC providers offering publicly funded PreK. For FY 2025, 56 different programs, representing

over 95% of all FCC providers participating in public PreK, chose to be part of the ASPIRE PreK program. In addition, the program accounted for over 12% of all PreK seats in *all* private providers across the State. Those programs are spread through 16 of the State's counties plus the City of Baltimore.

The Alliance's FY 2026 grant proposal includes 100 programs located in 18 counties and the City of Baltimore. The program will provide seats for over 500 eligible Tier 1 children, plus hundreds more children aged birth to 5.

The key elements of the program's success are:

- **Umbrella Grant Management Structure:** The Alliance acts as the primary grantee with MSDE, relieving FCC providers of the complex PreK grant application and administrative duties. This allows these sole proprietors to spend more time educating our children and less time on management overhead. This also reduces the workload for MSDE and each of the school districts by having one single point of contact. For FY 2026, that means the Montgomery County LEA will have at least 20 ASPIRE PreK programs in FCC homes, but only one MOU with the Alliance rather than 20 individual MOUs. In addition, each of the 100 programs in the ASPIRE program projected for FY 2026 would require separate grant management processes for MSDE were they to apply individually.
- **Comprehensive Coaching and Support Elements:** The Alliance worked with the national research firm Child Trends, to develop the research-informed coaching framework that serves as the foundation of the ASPIRE coaching program. Each FCC educator is assigned an instructional coach whose role is to partner with the educator during the three-year training program. In the first year, the coach visits the educator weekly, either onsite or virtually. The role of the coach is to help the educator understand and aspire to the program benchmarks designed by the Alliance. The Alliance also provides each educator with the PreK edition of Creative Curriculum, Teaching Strategies Gold, and Brightwheel, the child care management software. In the second year, the coaching visits drop to every two weeks, and every three weeks in the educator's third year.
- **PreK Community of Practice:** Once ASPIRE educators complete their three-year training program, they join our professional Community of Practice (CoP). The ASPIRE CoP is being designed to serve two purposes. First, unlike PreK teachers in schools and centers, FCC providers work alone, much like teachers in the one-room schoolhouse from years past. Our CoP provides ASPIRE educators with a network of like-minded colleagues committed to delivering high-quality PreK programs and continual professional growth. In addition, as long as providers work under the Alliance grant umbrella, they are expected to maintain professional standards, be engaged in cohort meetings, and work on requirements for continual professional development.
- **A School District Mindset:** Every parent should have the same high expectations for kindergarten readiness, no matter where their child attends PreK—public school, charter school, child care center, or family child care home. We shouldn't accept lower standards for family child care settings. The Alliance has proven that PreK educators working out of their homes can deliver outcomes as strong as public school teachers. ASPIRE educators' aggregate scores in CLASS are higher than the national averages. But we have to be realistic. To deliver those outcomes consistently, family child care providers need the same level of training, resources, and support services that public school teachers already have.

On top of that, we have to acknowledge the reality that family child care providers are already stretched thin, typically working over 60 hours a week. To make sure they're able to focus on teaching, we need to

lighten their load by removing or reducing some administrative and logistical tasks. That's how we'll ensure every child, in every setting, has the best chance at success. To that end, the Alliance is building the equivalent of a statewide, virtual school district to ensure ASPIRE educators have the support they need to deliver on the promise to the children in their programs. In addition, through our performance benchmarks, we are replicating the accountability found in the public schools. After all, by 2030, a FCC educator with eight Tier 1 children will gross \$159,600. We expect legislators and taxpayers will eventually demand accountability for that level of taxpayer support beyond the current EXCELS and IQR processes.

In addition to developing the ASPIRE PreK program, the Alliance has also:

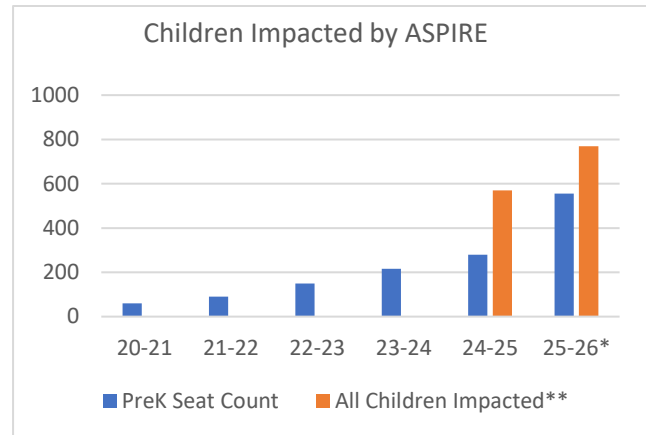
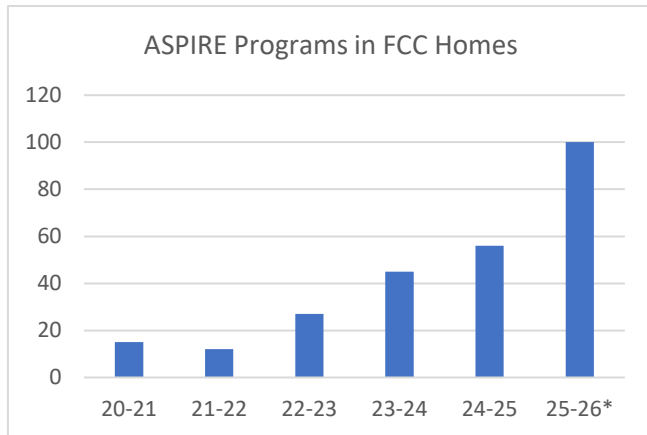
- Completed a comprehensive qualitative and quantitative analysis of the barriers to FCC providers' participation in PreK, as well as a deep dive into the financial models needed for successful participation. The report was co-led by Dr. Chris Swanson, formerly the founder and Executive Director of the IDEALS Institute, part of the Johns Hopkins School of Education, and Dr. Sondeania Johnson, an ASPIRE instructional coach. The executive brief can be found [here](#).
- In partnership with a team from Johns Hopkins, we developed the State's first and only apprenticeship for FCC registered with the MD Department of Labor. That apprenticeship attracted the attention of the Early Childhood Workforce Connector (ECWC), a US Department of Labor Intermediary. We are currently working with the ECWC to transform the three-year ASPIRE program into an apprenticeship. This change requires changes at the federal level, and the ECWC is leading that effort.
- Completed a program evaluation of ASPIRE by the Johns Hopkins School of Education. That report can be found [here](#).
- We recently won a grant from the Children's Opportunity Alliance in Montgomery County to build a series of interlocking pieces of a system designed to help get more FCC providers in the county ready for PreK.
- We have been selected as one of five finalists for a grant from the Stranahan Foundation. Our proposal is for a project to evaluate the impact of the ASPIRE coaching program on child outcomes. [Update: We won a three year grant from the foundation to fund this project.](#)
- We are actively seeking grant funding to support the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) into FCC operations, and we are aggressively integrating AI into Alliance operations to maximize efficiency and expand capabilities.

As we look to the future, our goals include:

- Increase the supply of high-quality PreK programs in FCC homes with over five hundred programs in Maryland by 2031, with over 3,000 seats for publicly funded PreK seats. Our ten-year goal is to create 1,000 programs with over 6,000 seats as part of the ASPIRE PreK network.
- Expand our statewide support network and shared services (hub) model for educators in FCC PreK programs to provide the wrap-around professional support available to PreK teachers in the public school system.
- Maximize efficiencies within the system for FCC educators, MSDE, and the LEAs.

- Lead the effort to design and test systems to best support PreK in FCC and make those findings available across the field and the nation.

ASPIRE by the Numbers



*Projected if our FY 2026 grant request is fully funded. **We started collecting this data in FY2025.

Update: We won the state grant and will have 98 programs and a state grant of nearly \$8 million to fund the work.

Educator Ethnicity	Percentage	Educators by Age Group	Percentage
Black or African American	54%	20 - 29	1%
White	33%	30 - 39	22%
Hispanic Latino or Spanish origin	9%	40 - 49	27%
Asian	3%	50 - 59	39%
Multiple Ethnicities	1%	60 - 69	10%

What Our Educators Say About ASPIRE

- “I want to express my genuine appreciation for the support that Aspire has provided. It has truly become an invaluable resource that I didn’t realize I needed, and now I would be lost without it.”
- “I am a happier, confident and capable mother educator provider, and friend then I have been in a really long time in a lot of that has to do with my finding my Aspire family. For the first time in my life, I have support and acceptance, and that to me means more than anything.”
- “I absolutely adore (my coach)! I've been coached before in all my teaching roles but it was definitely more of a passive aggressive tone to the coaching. (My coach) allows you to learn through your experiences. She doesn't outright tell you to do something she questions and discusses things with you to see your thoughts. It's refreshing!”

- “I thoroughly benefit from the coaching aspect because it provides moral support, a team effort on difficult problems, and feedback to let me know how I am doing. I would be lost and frustrated without the ASPIRE coaching program.”
- “My gratitude that because of Aspire and my coach, I am a better educator, have a more qualified program, and am better meeting the needs of children and families.”
- “I love the aspire program. It has been great working with everyone and using the curriculum.”
- I really like the coach observations and cohort meetings. The support really makes a difference for me to continue with higher quality childcare. I especially like the curriculum!
- “Since I have been working with (my coach) and being apart of the program I have seen measurable growth in my students. Furthermore, I have seen tremendous growth within myself and my ability to present the lessons. My children are happier and learning more.”
- “(In our cohort) we are cohesive, supportive and actively engage in being a resource to each other. (Our coach) has facilitated a safe space where each of us can be vulnerable and ask for help from her and our fellow providers. At our cohort meetings - she engages each of us to present to our fellow providers what we are doing well.”
- Finally, Executive Director Bill Hudson keeps this quote on his whiteboard as a daily reminder of the importance of his work: “Bill, ASPIRE saved me.”

The Projected ASPIRE Footprint for Fall 2025

