

## Funding Aspirations Anew

By Nelson Hernandez  
Washington Post Staff Writer  
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The Maryland General Assembly's legislative session started yesterday with high hopes that the new administration of Gov. *Martin O'Malley* (D) will be able to deliver funding for education despite a projected \$500 million state budget shortfall.

*David Merkowitz*, the executive director of the Prince George's Business-Education Alliance, announced at a news conference Tuesday that the group would seek more than \$900 million in funding for the county's public schools during the three-month session.

The county is slated to receive approximately \$865 million under the state's Bridge to Excellence Act. Merkowitz is also seeking \$29.7 million under the Geographic Cost of Education Index (GCEI), a measure that would give additional funds to school systems in areas with higher operating costs, as well as the amendment of a tax formula that would give the county roughly \$14 million more in state aid. Finally, Merkowitz and the alliance are seeking approval of a \$400 million package for statewide school construction, a chunk of which would go to Prince George's.

The geographic index is part of the Bridge to Excellence Act, but it is not considered mandatory and has not been funded before. But O'Malley has said he will support the index.

Superintendent *John E. Deasy*, who submitted a \$1.66 billion budget proposal to the school board last month, said the funding of the index is essential.

"Our budget is predicated on" the index, he said. "In order to do this work well, in order to do this work robustly, this funding is needed."

Merkowitz said he was optimistic about the county's chances of getting the money despite the deficit projection, given the elected politicians' campaign promises.

### Montessori Milestone

As schools across the country celebrate the 100th anniversary of the Montessori education movement, parents and staff at Robert Goddard Montessori, a public school in Seabrook, celebrated a smaller milestone last week: the 20th year of this method of education in Prince George's County.

Goddard's program is different from most of the county's schools. Its classes run from pre-kindergarten to eighth grade, and the school is split between its French immersion program, where students are taught in

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that language, and the Montessori program, which operates in English under the philosophy of education developed by *Maria Montessori* in 1907.

The style emphasizes giving students the freedom to interact physically with their environment and to decide for themselves what they would like to learn. While middle school-level education resembles that of an ordinary school, the primary school classes seek to take advantage of what Montessori described as "the absorbent mind" -- allowing young children to learn things almost effortlessly.

"I just want to say that even though that does not sound like state standards, we still meet AYP," Principal *Sherra Chappelle* told a group of visitors, using the abbreviation for "adequate yearly progress." Chappelle took the visitors, who included County Council member *Ingrid M. Turner* (D-Bowie) and Board of Education member *Rosalind A. Johnson* (District 1), on a tour of her school.

In one primary classroom, the students were sitting in small groups on a blue rug, working on white mats. Two girls were arranging letters into a sentence, "aligatrs swim in the wodr," and two boys were playing with a stethoscope, putting it on each other's foreheads. "I don't think they're supposed to be doing that," *Shibani Chettri*, a 12-year-old from Laurel, said of the boys.

Sometimes Montessori-style education isn't what you might expect, but Chettri turned out all right: She is applying this year to the science and tech program at Eleanor Roosevelt High School, the top school in the county as measured by scores on state tests. She wants to be a geneticist.

## Scholars of the Week

*Elisha Boston*, a senior at Crossland High School, is the Prince George's Scholar of the Week. Boston, who sports a 3.76 grade-point average, won the Japanese Honor Society's Outstanding Academic Achievement Award and is a member of Future Business Leaders of America. Her goal is to attend a four-year college of her choice.

She follows *Hardikummar D. Patel*, a senior at Surrattsville High School, who won the award the week before. Patel takes Advanced Placement classes in chemistry and calculus and has a perfect 4.0 GPA. Patel wants to study computer engineering or electrical engineering.

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