



OVERVIEW

**VIRGINIA PRESCHOOL
INITIATIVE (VPI):
PROGRAM INFORMATION**

**PRESENTATION TO THE JOINT SUBCOMMITTEE ON
THE VIRGINIA PRESCHOOL INITIATIVE**

AUGUST 25, 2015

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

PURPOSE OF THE VIRGINIA PRESCHOOL INITIATIVE

- The purpose of the Virginia Preschool Initiative (VPI) is to provide quality preschool programs for at-risk four-year-olds who are unserved by Head Start programs.

PROGRAM COMPONENTS

- Children are to receive a quality preschool education, which includes:
 - A curriculum aligned with Virginia's *Foundation Blocks for Early Learning* and designed to address the learning needs of young children;
 - A group size limit of 18 and a child/staff ratio of 9:1;
 - A minimum of half day program for the entire school year;
 - Qualified staff; and
 - Assessment procedures.
- Parents are partners in the Virginia Preschool Initiative programs as evidenced by:
 - Their inclusion in program planning and program activities to the extent possible;
 - The planning for regular, frequent communication with individual parents and parents as a group; and
 - The availability of resource materials to them on topics such as parent-child relationships or child behavior.
- Health services for participating children required at the time of entry or during the program year include:
 - Full immunizations;
 - Vision, hearing, and dental screenings;
 - Complete physical health evaluations;
 - Periodic check-ups; and
 - Eyeglasses, hearing aids, or other assistive devices when necessary.

- Social services for the program year for families of participating children include the identification of services available from sources other than government sources that may be utilized to support families.
- Transportation services are provided as needed to receive necessary support services.

LEGISLATIVE HISTORY/ACTIONS

- The 1993 *Acts of Assembly*, Chapter 994, Item 126, required the Board of Education, the Department of Education, and the Virginia Council on Child Day Care and Early Childhood Programs to conduct a study of current early childhood programs provided for at-risk children in Virginia. The results of the study were presented to the Chairmen of the Senate Finance and House Appropriations Committees on November 1, 1993.
- In 1994, the Legislative Commission on Equity in Public Education recommended the establishment of state-funded, quality preschool programs for unserved at-risk four-year-olds. Research culminating from this legislative study defined the criteria for quality programs.
- The 1995 General Assembly appropriated \$9.3 million for the At-Risk Four-Year-Old Program (i.e., Virginia Preschool Initiative) to begin in FY 1996. The passage of the Omnibus Education Act (HB 2542) and the *Appropriation Act* reinforced all components of the 1994 package, and determined a need for an initiative for at-risk four-year-olds. The legislative intent of the initiative was designed to establish a quality preschool education program for at-risk four-year-olds.
- Funding for the Virginia Preschool Initiative gradually increased as the program grew to support more at-risk children. By FY 2006, 100 percent of eligible at-risk four-year-olds were included in the funding formula.
- The 2006 General Assembly added new language to the *Appropriation Act* that authorized the Department of Education to use unexpended balances of state VPI funding each year to provide grants to qualifying divisions/localities for one-time expenses, other than capital, related to the start-up or expansion of their VPI programs. This provision was modified by the 2015 General Assembly for FY 2016 to give priority

for such grants to VPI programs expanding the use of private partnerships.

- The 2006 General Assembly funded an increase in the per pupil rate from \$5,400 to \$5,700, effective in FY 2007.
- The 2008 General Assembly funded an increase in the per pupil rate from \$5,700 to \$6,000 in FY 2009 and capped the local match requirement at 0.5000, effective in FY 2010.
- For the 2012-2014 budget, the number of unserved at-risk four-year-olds in each locality for FY 2013 and FY 2014 was based on the projected number of kindergarten students updated once each biennium. For FY 2013 and FY 2014 only, as a hold harmless provision, the number of slots funded in each school division was the higher of 1) the calculated slots based on projected kindergarten enrollments or 2) the lesser of either the calculated slots using projections of four-year-olds from the Virginia Employment Commission, or the actual number of slots utilized in FY 2012. The number of slots and funding for FY 2013 and FY 2014 exceeded slots and funding provided in FY 2012.
- For FY 2015 and beyond, the number of unserved at-risk four-year-olds in each division will be based on the projected number of kindergarten students. The division level free lunch eligibility percentage is used as the at-risk criterion in the funding formula.
- For FY 2015 and 2016 only, funding is provided on a prorated basis to hold divisions harmless against a reduction in the number of slots provided below the number actually utilized in FY 2014.

APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS AND ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

- The Appropriation Act requires the chief administrator (city manager or county administrator), in conjunction with the school division superintendent, to identify a lead agency within the division/locality as part of the VPI grant application for funds on or before May 15 each year.

- Complete an application and submit it to the Department of Education by May 15 each year and complete a verification report by October 1 each year.
- The amended 2014-2016 budget (Chapter 665) adopted at the 2015 General Assembly includes new eligibility criteria for students participating in the VPI program and reporting requirements as outlined below.
- Item 136 C.14.d.1 of Chapter 665:
“d.1) Local plans must indicate the number of at-risk four-year-old children to be served, and the eligibility criteria for participation in this program shall be consistent with the economic and educational risk factors stated in the 2014-2015 programs guidelines that are specific to: (i) family income at or below 200 percent of poverty, (ii) homelessness, (iii) student's parents or guardians are school dropouts, or (iv) family income is less than 350 percent of federal poverty guidelines in the case of students with special needs or disabilities.”
- Item 136 C.14 d.2 of Chapter 665:
“The Department of Education is directed to compile from each school division the aggregated information as to the number of enrolled students whose families are (i) at or below 130 percent of poverty, and (ii) above 130 percent but below 200 percent of poverty. The Department shall report this information annually, after the application and fall participation reports are submitted to the Department from the school divisions, to the Chairmen of House Appropriations and Senate Finance Committees. In addition, the Department will post and maintain the summary information by division on the Department's website in keeping with current student privacy policies.”
- Guidance from the chairmen of the House Appropriations and Senate Finance Committees allows flexibility in the implementation of the new student eligibility language for school year 2015-2016 only to allow a one-year transition from the existing eligibility criteria language to the newly adopted criteria.
 - For school year 2015-2016, students meeting one of the four new criteria must be given priority for enrollment in approved VPI slots.

- For school year 2015-2016 only, school divisions may continue to use locally selected at-risk criteria as a transition to the new eligibility criteria adopted at the 2015 General Assembly.
- Beginning with the 2016-2017 school year, school divisions must use the new eligibility criteria.
- Required data collection for 2015-2016 includes:
 - Income at or below 200% of poverty
 - Homelessness
 - Student's parents or guardians are high school dropouts
 - Family income is less than 350% of federal poverty guidelines in the case of students with special needs or disabilities
 - Local criteria (SY 2015-2016 only)
- School divisions will also provide the total number of VPI slots used in each of the following income brackets:
 - at or below 130% of federal poverty level
 - 131%-200%
 - 201%-350%
 - 351% and above (SY 2015-2016 only)
- Local criteria will be identified by the divisions in the following categories (SY 2015-2016 only):
 - Parent(s) did not complete high school
 - Physical abuse/neglect, family abuse, substance abuse
 - Single parent household
 - Foster care
 - English Language Learners (ELL)
 - Parent incarcerated
 - Military deployment
 - Student raised by relatives other than parents
 - Other (this will be a text box limited to 30 characters)

FREE AND REDUCED LUNCH STATUS OF VPI STUDENTS

- For the 2014-2015 school year, school divisions reported overall that 80 percent of all VPI students were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch (185 percent or below of federal poverty level)
 - 20 percent of divisions reported 100 percent of their VPI students were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch; and

- 52 percent of divisions reported that 80 to 100 percent of their VPI students were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch

FEDERAL POVERTY LEVEL/NEW VPI INCOME CRITERIA

- The official federal poverty guidelines are listed in the table below and are updated annually for inflation. The income values are based on money income before taxes and do not include capital gains or noncash benefits (such as public housing, Medicaid, and food stamps). These guidelines will be used in implementing the new income eligibility criteria and reporting requirements established at the 2015 Session.

2015 Federal Poverty Guidelines for the 48 Contiguous States and the District of Columbia (Source: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services)	
Persons in Family/Household:	100% of Poverty Guideline:
1	\$11,770
2	15,930
3	20,090
4	24,250
5	28,410
6	32,570
7	36,730
8	40,890

For families/households with more than 8 persons, add \$4,160 for each additional person.
 Source: <http://aspe.hhs.gov/poverty/15poverty.cfm>

- The table below displays the various federal poverty thresholds that correspond to the new VPI income eligibility/reporting criteria.

2015 Federal Poverty Guidelines Percentage Thresholds Used for Family Income Eligibility Criteria and Reporting Requirements for VPI as Stated in the 2015 Appropriation Act			
Household Size	130% of Poverty	200% of Poverty	350% of Poverty
1	\$15,301	\$23,540	\$41,195
2	20,709	31,860	55,755
3	26,117	40,180	70,315
4	31,525	48,500	84,875
5	36,933	56,820	99,435
6	42,341	65,140	113,995
7	47,749	73,460	128,555
8	53,157	81,780	143,115

- VDOE is developing guidelines for division implementation of the new income eligibility/reporting criteria. Draft definition of “family income” (used as the income measure against the new income eligibility criteria) is income of all family members (both immediate and extended) living full-time in the household.

PROGRAM UTILIZATION INFORMATION

SLOT UTILIZATION

- Table 1 summarizes the budgeted and actual utilization of VPI slots since fiscal year 2007.

TABLE 1. Virginia Preschool Initiative Slot Utilization

Year	Calculated Number of VPI Slots in Formula ¹	Actual Number of VPI Slots Used	Percentage of VPI Slots Used	Total Actual State Share of VPI Cost (in millions) ²
FY 2007	18,730	12,501	67%	\$46.2 ³
FY 2008	18,929	13,125	69%	\$48.3 ⁴
FY 2009	20,705	14,585 / 15,639 ⁵	70% / 75% ⁵	\$58.5 ⁵
FY 2010	21,072	14,944 / 15,901 ⁶	71% / 75% ⁶	\$63.1 ⁶
FY 2011	23,177	15,881 ⁷	69% ⁷	\$60.5 ⁷
FY 2012	23,443	16,618 ⁷	71% ⁷	\$62.9 ⁷
FY 2013	24,483	17,313 ⁷	71% ⁷	\$64.9 ⁷
FY 2014	24,629	18,021 ⁷	73% ⁷	\$67.4 ⁷
FY 2015	25,746	18,250 ⁷	70% ⁷	\$68.3 ⁷

¹ In FY 1996, the budgeted number of Virginia Preschool Initiative slots was prorated at 30 percent. From FY 1997 to FY 2004, the budgeted number of slots was prorated at 60 percent. For FY 2005, the budgeted number of Virginia Preschool Initiative slots was prorated at 90 percent. Beginning in FY 2006, all eligible unserved at-risk four-year-olds were included in the budget formula.

² The state share of payments to divisions/localities is based on the actual number of children being served as certified on the Virginia Preschool Initiative interim report that is due in October of each year. Total funding for each program is derived from the division/locality’s composite index plus the required local matching funds.

³ In FY 2007, the state share included \$1.35 million in undistributed Virginia Preschool Initiative funding that was used for start-up grants to school divisions not operating a Virginia Preschool Initiative program in FY 2007 but wishing to operate in FY 2008, or for expansion grants to divisions wishing to expand their Virginia Preschool Initiative program in FY 2008.

⁴ In FY 2008, the state share included \$1.75 million in undistributed Virginia Preschool Initiative funding that was used for start-up or expansion grants. This funding does not include the \$1.7 million appropriated in FY 2008 for the Preschool Pilot grants summarized later in this document.

⁵ In FY 2009, the state share included \$4.1 million in undistributed Virginia Preschool Initiative funding that was used for one-time expansion grants to serve additional at-risk four-year-olds in divisions that met one of three criteria: 1) needed additional slots/funds to hold them harmless for their FY 2008 share; 2) needed additional slots/funds to serve a minimum of nine students as a base classroom; and/or 3) needed additional slots/funds to serve additional at-risk students with preschool services if they were already receiving their full allocation.

⁶ In FY 2010, the state share included \$4.1 million in undistributed Virginia Preschool Initiative funding that was used for one-time expansion grants to serve additional at-risk four-year-olds in divisions that met one of three

criteria: 1) needed additional slots/funds to hold them harmless for their FY 2008 share; 2) needed additional slots/funds to serve a minimum of nine students as a base classroom; and/or 3) needed additional slots/funds to serve additional at-risk students with preschool services if they were already receiving their full allocation.

⁷ No funds were used for expansion grants in FY 2011 through FY 2015.

DIVISION PARTICIPATION

- The number of school divisions participating in the Virginia Preschool Initiative has increased steadily since its inception.
- For the 2014-2015 school year, 121 of 132 eligible divisions participated. Three of the 135 divisions are not eligible for funding under the formula.
- Of the 121 divisions participating in VPI in 2014-2015:
 - 56 divisions (46 percent of those participating) used 100 percent of their slot allocation.
 - 25 divisions (21 percent of participating divisions) used 76-99 percent of their slot allocation.
 - 24 divisions (20 percent of participating divisions) used 50-75 percent of their slot allocation.
 - 16 divisions (13 percent of participating divisions) used less than fifty percent of their slot allocation.

TABLE 2. Virginia Preschool Initiative Division Participation¹

	2008-2009	2009-2010	2010-2011	2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-2015
Number of divisions/localities in the Commonwealth	136	136	136	136	136	135	135
Number of divisions/localities eligible for funding	124	125	127	127	131	131	132
Number of participating divisions/localities	112	112	113	114	119	119	121
Number of eligible, nonparticipating divisions/localities	12	13	14	13	12	12	11
Number of divisions/localities not eligible	12	11	9	9	5	4	3
Number of eligible children	20,705	21,072	23,177	23,443	24,483	24,629	25,746
Number of eligible children served	14,585	14,944	15,881	16,618	17,313	18,021	18,250

¹This table does not include participation of divisions receiving one-time funds through the FY 2009 and FY 2010 redistribution of unallocated funds.

- 46 percent of divisions/localities used their full slot allocation in FY 2015. Many use a portion. Many divisions from each of these categories report wait lists. Several divisions choose not to participate.
- Reasons for partial use of slots or nonparticipation include:
 - Divisions/localities express difficulty or inability to meet the required local match;
 - Divisions/localities have insufficient space to house additional preschool classrooms in school facilities; and/or
 - In some divisions/localities there are a minimal number of students eligible for the program by state allocation formula, resulting in a program that may not be cost effective.
- 13 localities have 100 or more unused slots as shown in Table 3.

TABLE 3. Divisions with 100 or More Slots Unutilized in Fiscal Year 2015

Locality	Unused Slots/ Available Slots	Composite Index	Self-Reported Reasons for Not Using Full Allocation
Prince William County	1,549 /1,585	.3822	Local match
Fairfax County	1,038 / 2,622	.6807	Local match
Chesterfield County	790/908	.3496	Local match and space
Henrico County	573/1,082	.4059	Local match and space
Loudoun County	440/588	.5618	Space
Virginia Beach City	439/1,129	.4034	Local match
Richmond City	322/1,204	.4636	Local match and space
Chesapeake City	297/601	.3610	Local match and space
Spotsylvania County	250/340	.3555	Local match
Stafford County	145/207	.3412	Local match and space
Winchester City	134/170	.4376	Space
Manassas City	131/239	.3662	Local match
Alexandria City	109/523	.8000	Local match and space

- In the VPI formula, the number of children being served by Head Start is subtracted from the estimated number of at-risk four-year-olds (enrollment X free lunch %) to determine the number of VPI student slots to be funded. In some divisions/localities, the resulting number is zero; therefore, the division/locality is not eligible to participate (three divisions in 2014-2015 as listed in Table 4 on the next page).

TABLE 4. Fiscal Year 2015 Virginia Preschool Initiative Ineligibility

Divisions/Localities Not Eligible for FY 2015 Funding under the VPI Formula
Bath County
Lexington City
Sussex County
Total Count: 3

- The three divisions/localities that are not eligible for VPI funding are serving as many or more students through Head Start than are estimated at-risk through the VPI funding formula. Eligibility for Head Start is family income at or below 130 percent of the federal poverty level, with some allowance for serving at-risk children in families above that income range.
- Table 5 lists the 11 nonparticipating divisions in 2014-2015 and the reason for nonparticipation.

TABLE 5. FY 2015 Virginia Preschool Initiative Nonparticipation

Divisions/Localities Eligible, But Not Participating	Self-Reported Reasons for Nonparticipation
Colonial Beach	Local match and space
Craig County	Limited number of slots
Fairfax City	Local match
Frederick County	Local match and space
Goochland County	Local match
Lee County	Local match and space
Mathews County	Limited number of students
Middlesex County	Local match
New Kent County	Local match
Salem City	Space
West Point	Limited number of students
Total Count: 11	

- In 2014-2015, of the 18,250 students served, 1,713 (9.4%) were served in private settings (103 for-profit; 1,610 non-profit) and 16,537 (90.6%) in the public schools. There were 22 non-profit and six for-profit providers.

VPI PROGRAM IMPACT

PARTICIPATING STUDENT PRELITERACY SKILLS

- The impact of participation in the VPI program can be seen in results of the fall 2014 Phonological Literacy Awareness Screening (PALS) that was administered to kindergarten students. Table 6 shows that seven percent of the students entering kindergarten who participated in a VPI program needed intervention services in kindergarten the next school year. The statewide percentage for all kindergartners identified as needing intervention was 12.7 percent that year.

TABLE 6. Fall 2014 Kindergarten PALS – Students Identified for Intervention Services

Preschool Program in which Student Participated	Total Number of Students Screened	Students Identified as <u>Not</u> Needing Intervention Services		Students Identified as Needing Intervention Services	
		Number of Students	Percent of Total Number of Students	Number of Students	Percent of Total Number of Students
VPI	11,702	10,878	93%	824	7%
Coordinated Programs, VPI	5,531	5,069	91.6%	462	8.4%
Other PreK	32,655	29,800	91.3%	2,855	8.7%
Students' PreK Status Unknown	15,522	13,455	86.7%	2,067	13.3%
No PreK	13,622	9,775	71.8%	3,847	28.2%
Total	79,032	68,977	87.3%	10,055	12.7%

Data Source: University of Virginia, PALS Office, December 2014

VPI RESOURCES AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

- During FY 2015, multiple webinars were hosted by the VDOE to discuss the new eligibility criteria. In addition, one webinar was hosted by VDOE in collaboration with the Center on Enhancing Early Education Outcomes (CEELO) on working with private providers.
- In June 2015, the Associate Director of Early Childhood Education provided technical assistance to a statewide meeting of Head Start

directors on the new VPI eligibility criteria and offered support for expanding the collaboration efforts across the state.

- The University of Virginia, through the office of Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening (PALS) at the Curry School of Education, continues to provide the PALS-PreK instrument. This screening tool provides information about students' needs for additional assistance with literacy skills. The PALS office maintains a Web site at <http://pals.virginia.edu> to assist all preschool teachers in Virginia with instructional activities. The cost for PALS Online Score Entry and Reporting System became a local funding responsibility in 2011-2012. VDOE seeking on-going funding to support the PALS-PreK instrument.
- Virginia's *Foundation Blocks for Early Learning: Comprehensive Standards for Four-Year-Olds* outlines standards that establish a measurable range of skills and knowledge essential for four-year-olds to be successful in kindergarten. The standards assist early childhood educators in providing indicators for student success. These standards are aligned with the Virginia Kindergarten Standards of Learning and the Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening for Kindergarten (PALS-K) instrument. The *Foundation Blocks* were revised in 2007 to incorporate additional standards in the areas of physical/motor skills and personal/social skills. Music and the visual arts standards were added in 2013. The *Foundation Blocks* can be accessed on the Department of Education's Web site at: http://www.doe.virginia.gov/instruction/early_childhood/preschool_initiative/foundationblocks.pdf.
- Virginia's *Preschool Curriculum Review Rubric and Planning Tool* was updated to include music and visual arts in 2013. It serves as a valuable resource to assist curriculum specialists and practitioners in developing appropriate curricula and/or analyzing their current curricula to facilitate alignment with Virginia's *Foundation Blocks for Early Learning*. It can be accessed on the Virginia Department of Education's Web site at: http://www.doe.virginia.gov/instruction/early_childhood/preschool_initiative/preschool_rubric.pdf.

- Virginia's *Quality Indicators for Responsive Teaching* was created in 2013. It is a new technical assistance tool that complements the preschool standards and the rubric. The purpose of the indicators is to help teachers and parents design environments, materials, and interactions that support children's learning. Each section correlates with Virginia's *Foundation Blocks for Early Learning*. It can be accessed on the Department of Education's Web site at: http://www.doe.virginia.gov/instruction/early_childhood/preschool_initiative/preschool_quality_indicators.pdf.
- In 2014, the Department of Education developed a Web site to support teachers and young English Language Learners. Instructional tools, reports, assessments, and standards information can be accessed on the Web site at: http://www.doe.virginia.gov/instruction/early_childhood/esl/index.shtml.

POTENTIAL CHANGES/ACTIONS RELATED TO THE VPI PROGRAM FOR FUTURE CONSIDERATION

VPI Workforce Quality/Program Components

- Consider implementing the 13 recommendations from the Institute of Medicine (IOM) and the National Research Council (NRC) April 2015 report entitled Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth to Age Eight: A Unifying Foundation. The report provides strategies for improving early learning and for building a high-quality PreK workforce by increasing the education and training credentials of all segments of the PreK workforce.
- Continue to review the feasibility of various pathways and strategies to increasing the quality of the PreK workforce, emphasizing specialized knowledge and competencies. This aligns with recommendations from the IOM and NRC report. Consider multi-year, phase-in approaches when increasing standards or credentials and a continuum of credentials.
- Review the PreK-3 and PreK-6 teaching license endorsement competencies included in the *Regulations Governing the Review and Approval of Education Programs in Virginia* to include early childhood

competencies not already clearly defined. Use the competencies listed in the Early Childhood Add-on Endorsement as the guide.

- Amend the appropriation act program components to include serving children at least one meal a day at no charge. This is supported by national research on nutrition needs of young children and is a National Institute of Early Education Research (NIEER) quality benchmark. This may be an additional cost to some programs and may need to be considered in the funding formula.

VPI Funding Formula

- Amend the appropriation act language to increase the portion of the required local match that may be from in-kind resources above the current 25 percent limit, reducing the amount required from cash match.
- Modify the VPI formula so that additional slots can be provided within the formula (or by reallocation) for divisions that use 100 percent of their slots but still have eligible unserved students.
- Tie per pupil funding to the biennial rebenchmarking process, like other Direct Aid funding streams, to keep pace with inflation. Possible approaches are to increase the per pupil amount by a rate of inflation or increase it at the same rate that the SOQ Basic Aid formula per pupil amount increases each biennium.

VDOE Support

- Provide additional VDOE staffing dedicated to the VPI program (staff support in areas such as general technical assistance and professional development, the new income eligibility requirements, start-up/expansions grants, coordinating site visits, and increasing capacity of local programs to use private providers, etc.).
- Restore funding to support technical assistance visits to VPI program sites by VDOE staff or consultants.