
Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission



Virginia Preschool Initiative (VPI): Current Implementation and Potential Changes

Briefing to the Education Subcommittee
of Senate Finance
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JLARC

2007 General Assembly Required JLARC Review of VPI and Provided Funds to DOE for Pilot Program

■ HJR 729

- Directed JLARC to conduct study of Virginia Preschool Initiative (VPI) and “universal” preschool (making preschool available for all children)
- Noted that General Assembly has not previously evaluated VPI
- Report briefed to JLARC in November 2007

■ Appropriation Act provided \$2.56 million to DOE to develop agreements with divisions which will participate in pilot

- Divisions in pilot have existing partnerships with private and non-profit providers; funding is to expand availability of preschool programs for at-risk children not served
- Interim report Dec. 2007, final report Sept. 2008

In This Presentation

- Background
- VPI Authorization, Funding, Participation, and Implementation
- Assessment of VPI
- State Administrative Support Structures for VPI
- Universal Preschool
- Options for Expanding VPI



VPI Is a Preschool Program for “At-Risk” Four-Year-Olds



- Funded by the State and localities
- Serves children not served by Head Start
- Started in FY 1996

VPI in 2006-07

Filled FTE slots	Over 12,300
Schools or centers	466
Average class size	About 15
Average ratio, children to staff	7.4 to 1
Largest programs, filled FTE slots	Norfolk 1,487
	Newport News 1,031
	Richmond City 845
	Fairfax County 711
	Virginia Beach 704
	Portsmouth 563
	Hampton 490



Multiple Methods Used to Assess VPI, As Each Has Strengths and Weaknesses

	<u>Strength</u>	<u>Weakness</u>
Compliance with program requirements	Compliance can promote quality	Does not guarantee quality
Classroom observations	Good means of assessing quality	Limited number of visits
Pre-K and K test scores	Objectively assess skills/knowledge	Addresses literacy only, not social skills
K teacher and elementary principal surveys (response rates of 35% and 37%)	K teachers see academic & social preparedness for K; principals see subsequent performance	Subjective element; uncertainty about non-respondents

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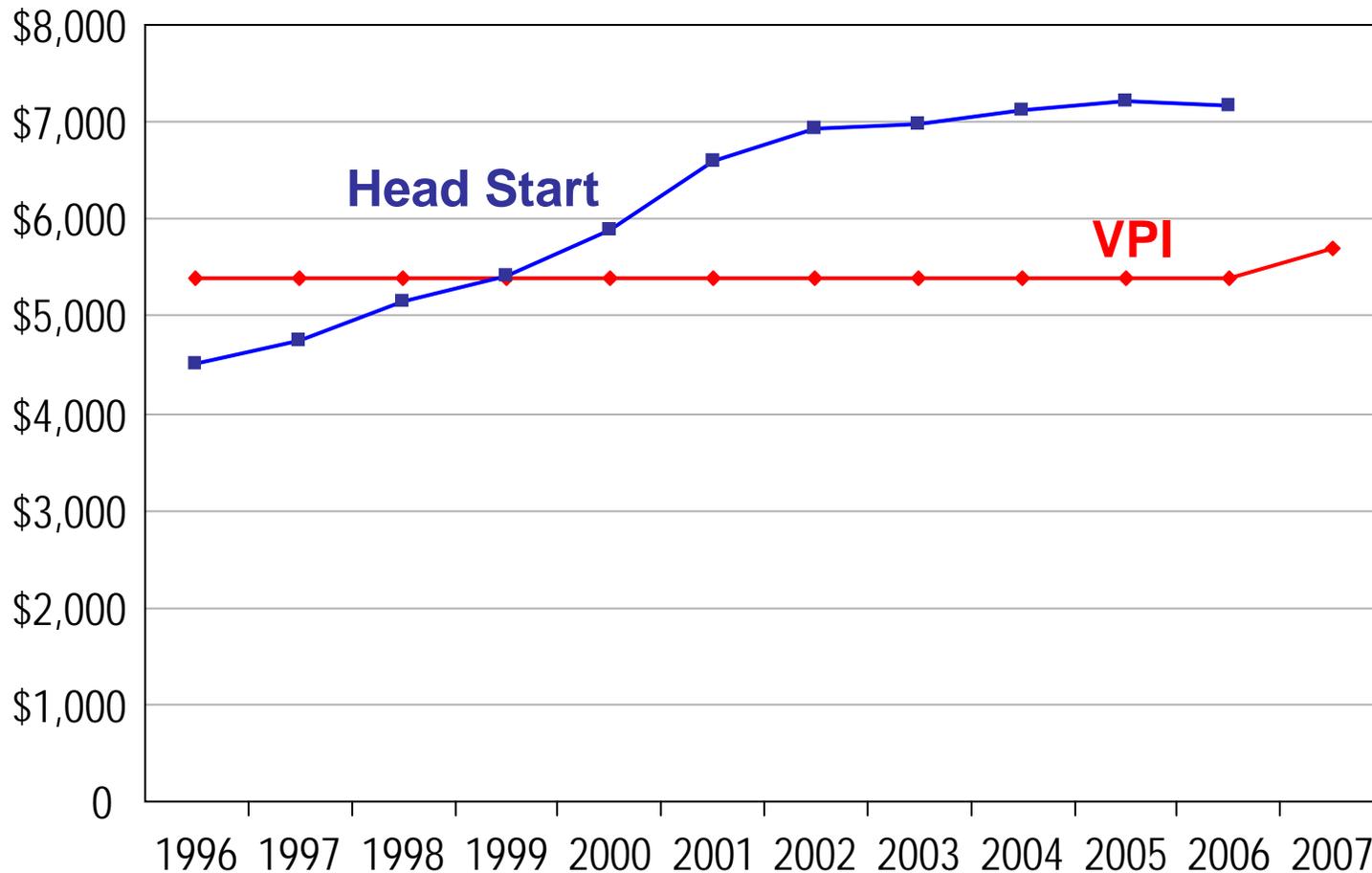
Since Inception of VPI, State and Localities Have Spent an Estimated \$570 to \$607 Million

- State costs \$269 million
- Local match costs \$178 million
- Local costs above match \$123 to \$160 million

Note: All costs are estimates.



Per-Pupil Amounts for VPI and Head Start in Virginia



VPI Program Is Shaped at State and Local Level

■ State

- Authorizes program (Section 22.1-199.1 of *Code*)
- Determines how many slots it will help fund
- Sets minimum requirements, including curriculum standards

■ Localities / local program staff

- May choose to participate in VPI or decline
- Define at-risk eligibility factors and weights
- Determine extent to which allocated slots are filled
- Make other key program decisions

State and Local Proportional Contributions to VPI Vary Based on VPI Costs and Local Wealth

Per-Pupil Program Cost	Local Ability to Pay*	State Pays	Locality Pays
\$5,700	Low	80%	20%
\$9,800	High	20% of \$5,700	80% of \$5,700 100% of <u>\$4,100</u> \$9,800

* Based on composite index.



Participation in VPI by Localities Varies

- 36 non-participating localities in 2006-07
 - 14 not eligible
 - 22 chose not to participate
- Participating localities did not use 5,265 slots
- 12 localities account for over half of the unfilled slots
- Differing participation levels raises questions about equity of access for at-risk children

VPI Implementation: Instructional Settings

■ Whole Group →

■ Small Group

■ Individual Work Time

■ Center Time →



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DOE Site Visits Show Local Programs Comply With State VPI Requirements

- 18 “structural standards” intended to promote
 - Compliance with State law
 - Appropriate use of funding
 - Program effectiveness
- Divisions certify that requirements will be met
- DOE consultant reviews indicate VPI programs are meeting requirements

Requiring or Addressing Additional Standards May Help Ensure Quality

7 of 10 NIEER Quality Benchmarks Are Met, 3 Unmet

VPI Compliance

Comprehensive early learning benchmarks

Expected in near future

Teacher degree (B.A.)

98% of program teachers have it

Assistant teacher degree (CDA or equivalent)

40% have CDA or higher

Key Unmet NAEYC Criteria

Annual teacher evaluations

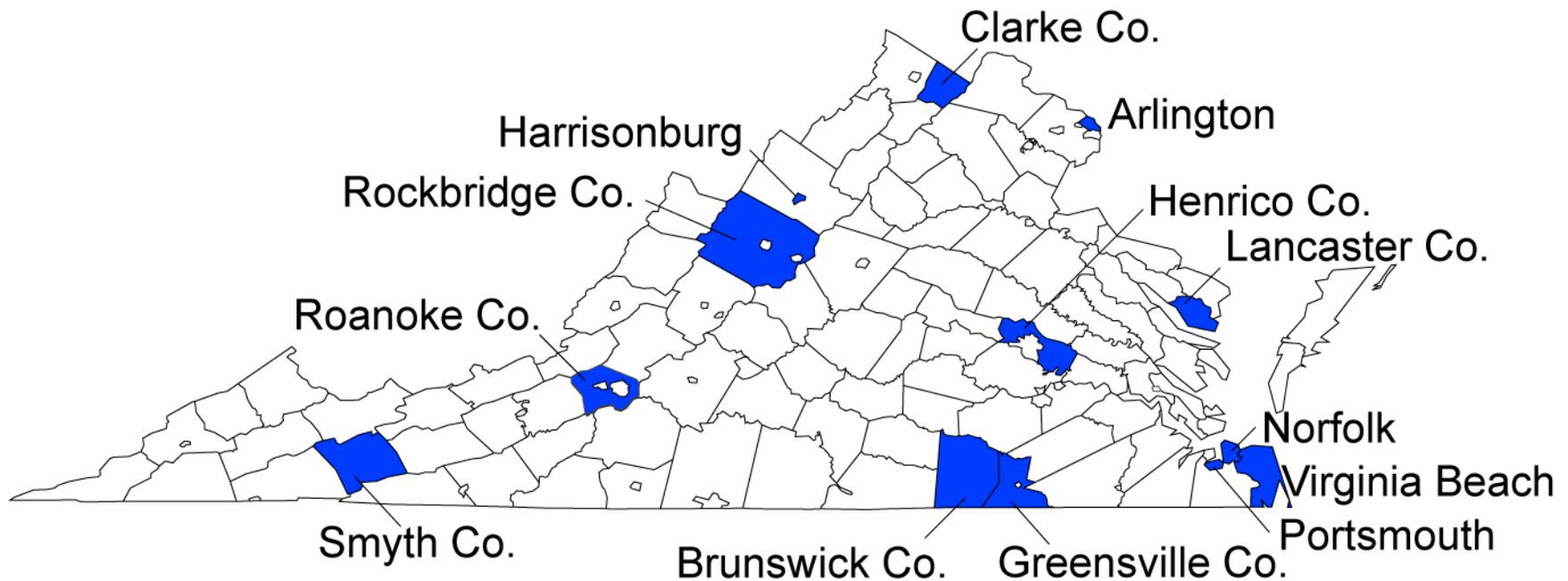
93% of divisions surveyed

Developmental assessments for all children

77% of divisions surveyed



VPI Classrooms Were Observed in 13 Localities



Scores on Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) Mostly Medium to High Quality

CLASS Category	Mean Score*
Emotional support	5.29
Classroom climate	
Teacher responsiveness to student needs	
Classroom organization	5.40
Behavior management	
Productivity	
Teacher maximization of learning	
Instructional support	3.78
Promotion of higher thinking skills	
Quality of teacher feedback to children	
Teacher stimulation of children's language use	
Student Engagement	5.60

*Possible scores from 1 to 7 (low 1,2; mid-level 3,4,5; high 6, 7).



To More Consistently Achieve High Quality in VPI Classrooms . . .

- Implement strategies to improve teacher flexibility.
- Increase learning possibilities in play centers.
- Plan ways to give higher quality feedback to students.
- Increase sharing of information about activities and instructional tools that appear to highly engage students.
- Review schedules for effective use of time.
- Consider space needs in facility planning, and recognize on-going need to update preschool equipment.
- Increase use of teacher aides and consider compensation levels.

Analysis of Pre-K and K Literacy Test Scores

- Used PALS (Phonological Awareness and Literacy Screening) test results
- Examined literacy growth during pre-K
- Examined results at start of kindergarten to help assess kindergarten readiness

VPI Students Show Literacy Growth Over Course of Preschool Year

Test Time	Average PALS-PreK Score
Fall	32
Spring	60*

* Improvement of 28 points; age-adjusted improvement of 21 points

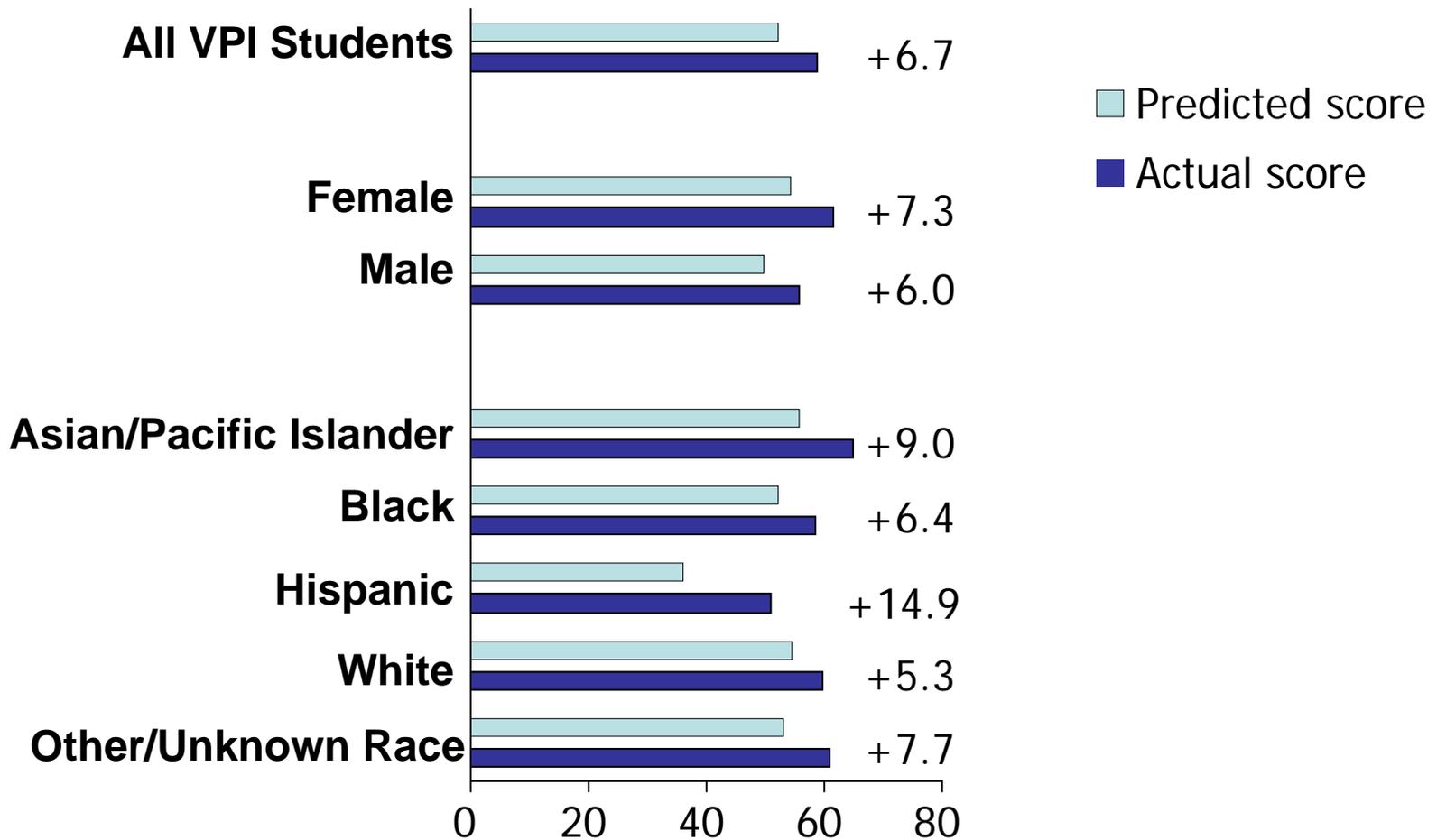
VPI Students Outperformed Other Kindergartners on Fall 2006 PALS-K Test

	Mean PALS-K Score	% Scoring Below 28*
VPI participants	58.7	11%
Other kindergartners	55.7	18%

* Identifies student as needing additional instruction



VPI Participants Performed Better than Predicted on Fall 2006 PALS-K Assessment



Source: Analysis of data provided by PALS office of the Curry School of Education, University of Virginia.



Better Student Tracking Is Needed to Determine Longer-Term Impact of VPI

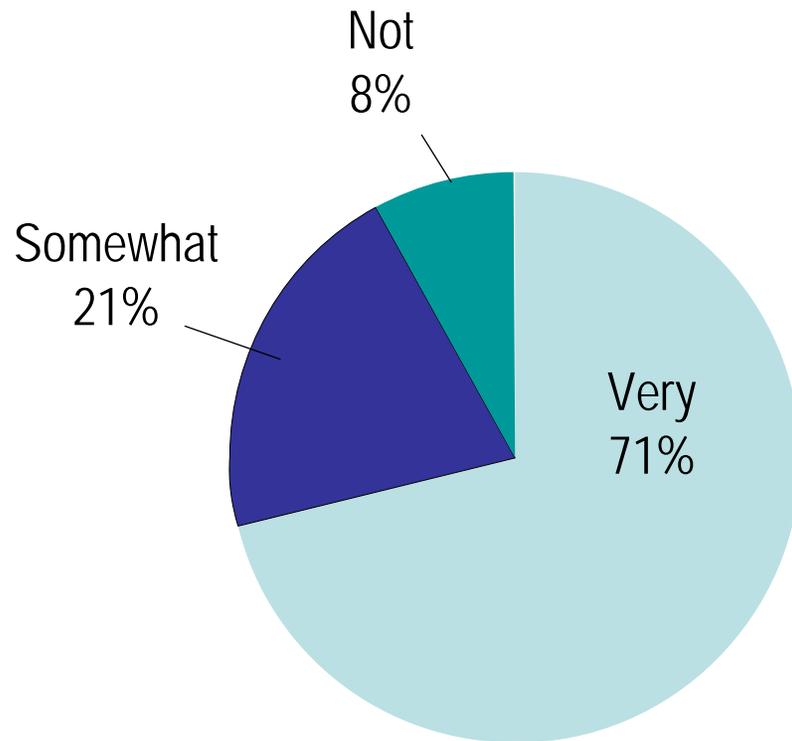
- Data were not available during the review for a student-level analysis of test results of VPI program graduates in later years
- New pre-K experience code now required for kindergartners and preschoolers
 - Pre-K students can now be tracked from 2006-07
 - Student outcomes can be compared between various preschool programs
- A full student-level analysis of 3rd grade SOL scores will be possible in 2010-11

Recommendation

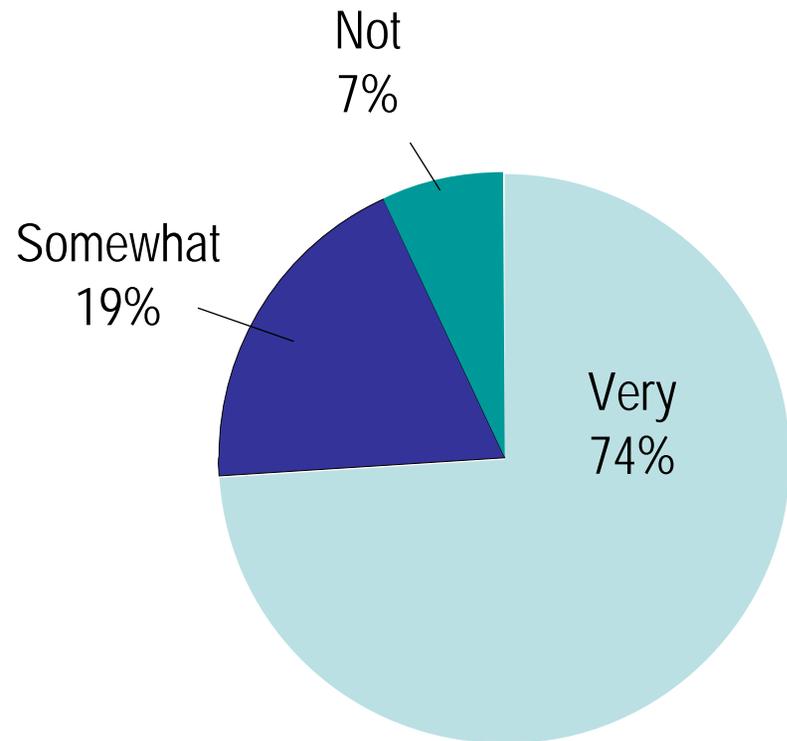
- DOE should conduct a longitudinal study of students who completed VPI and other preschool programs to determine long-term performance on SOL tests.

Kindergarten Teachers Report That Most Pre-K Students Are Prepared Academically and Socially

Academically Well Prepared



Socially Well Prepared



Principals Think Pre-K Substantially Increases At-Risk Student Social and Academic Abilities

- More than 80% said pre-K “substantially increased” social and academic ability
- 91% say positive effects continue through at least 1st grade
- 59% say positive effects continue through to completion of elementary school

Most Principals Say VPI Students Typically Do As Well or Better in Elementary School Than Other Students

“They do better than other students”	11%
“They do equally well”	68%
“They do not do as well, but rarely need to be held back or placed in special education”	18%
“They do not do as well and it is not unusual for them to be held back or placed in special education”	3%

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State Administrative Support Appears Largely Adequate for Existing Program

- Virginia provides less administrative support than many other states
 - Two part-time consultants conducting site visits
 - One DOE staff member providing technical support
- Most VPI programs administered through public school divisions, which may reduce need for State administrative support
- Approximately two-thirds of school divisions indicate satisfaction with State administrative support

To Improve Administrative Support . . .

- Request additional funding for consultants to visit all VPI programs once a biennium
- Devise a method to track data on classroom quality
- Require local programs to identify schools with VPI classrooms and number of classrooms per school
- Facilitate exchange of information between local VPI programs

If VPI Expands, Increased Levels of Administrative Support Likely Needed

- Maintain program quality with more private and non-profit providers
 - Pilot initiative is looking at increasing public-private partnerships
- If VPI expands, focus of increased support could be in
 - Increased classroom observations and teacher mentoring
 - Increased professional development for teachers

Recommendations

- The General Assembly may wish to
 - direct DOE and provide resources to facilitate sharing of information across local programs
 - increase the State’s capacity to facilitate classroom observations of local VPI programs and provision of technical assistance and mentoring
 - direct Secretary of Education’s Office and DOE to develop a proposed professional development plan for the State to support the VPI program

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“Universal” Preschool Is Available to All Four-Year-Olds

■ Adopted in

- Georgia
- Oklahoma
- New York
- District of Columbia
- Florida
- West Virginia
- New Jersey
- Illinois
- Los Angeles County

Studies of Universal Pre-K

- Formal evaluations in other States (Georgia, Oklahoma) indicate that all children benefit from pre-K
- Studies of middle- and upper-income children indicate pre-K boosts test scores
 - Children from middle- and upper-income families experienced modest gains in test scores
 - However, in some studies, more disadvantaged children showed stronger gains
 - Some studies suggest that children who spent more time in child care had higher “problem behavior” ratings later in elementary school

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Governor in 2007 Proposed to Increase Number of At-Risk Children Served by VPI by 17,000

- During the time of the JLARC review, the Governor proposed to:
 - “remove barriers to serve an additional 17,000 at-risk students, who are not currently served,” by partnering with private providers
 - “Serve total of 30,000 four-year-olds in VPI by FY 2012”
- Costs for the proposal appeared to assume continued use of a \$5,700 per pupil amount
- JLARC staff reviewed this proposal, insofar as information about it was available by November 2007

Potential Addition of Nearly 17,000 More Students Stems from Assumed Increases in Three Categories

	4-Year-Old Students	Explanation
Assumes Existing (2007-08) Vacant Slots Will Be Filled	+ ~5,864	Localities not filling all VPI free lunch slots available (family of 4 with income < \$26,845)
Projects More Free Lunch Slots	+ ~2,730	More free lunch students anticipated by DOE based on projected growth in number of 4-year-olds
Policy Change	+ ~8,175	Add reduced-price lunch students (family of 4 with income < \$38,203)

* Approximate number of students in the three categories is based on a JLARC staff review of DOE spreadsheets provided in November 2007.



Concerns Regarding Practicality of Proposal to Serve 17,000 More Children at \$5,700 Per Pupil

- The \$5,700 per-pupil amount is low
 - Estimated cost of model pre-K programs is \$9,500 to \$18,248 in today's dollars
 - Estimated cost using Virginia data
 - \$6,790 — Prevailing division cost for pre-K
 - \$7,920 — Parity with SOQ per-pupil costs
- There is a need to acknowledge the local role in deciding
 - Whether to participate
 - How many slots they wish to establish and help fund
- Assumes 100% of available slots will be filled, even in currently non-participating localities
- Assumes 12 participating localities with the most unfilled slots now will more than triple number of students served

Localities With Currently Unused VPI Slots Face Cost and/or Space Issues

Locality	Unfilled Slots	Per-Pupil Cost	Factors Cited
Fairfax	1,055	\$12,294	"lack of space and unavailable local matching funds"
Prince William	711	\$8,590	"lack of funds for local match"
Henrico	672	\$8,483	"lack of building space and local match"
Alexandria	579	\$9,800	"lack of 80% local match and cost of care"
Virginia Beach	502	\$6,600	"additional local match funds are not available in the budget"
Chesterfield	389	(New)	2007-08 first year in VPI, with "intent to expand"
Chesapeake	265	(Unknown)	"our service providers have indicated that more funding is needed for strong program with high-quality personnel."
Arlington	241	\$17,958	"limited financial resources to meet the 80% required match"
Loudoun	213	(Not in VPI)	considering VPI; has half-day pre-K. High composite index means low State funds.

Other Policy Options for Expanding Access to Pre-K for All Four-Year-Olds in Virginia

- Alternative revenue source: Sliding scale of parent fees, based on parents' income
- Half-day versus full-day program
- 5-week summer program versus full school year
- Requiring all school divisions to offer pre-K program

Key Findings

- VPI appears to be a good program, with positive classroom learning environments, high student engagement levels, and favorable pre-K and K literacy test results.
- DOE-developed tracking system should facilitate assessments in the future of longer-term outcomes for VPI graduates.
- Some localities choose not to participate in VPI, and others do not fill all slots, raising questions about equitable access.
- Virginia's focus of effort on at-risk children appears appropriate.
- The Governor's pre-K proposal (as outlined in the fall of 2007) would expand the State's focus on at-risk children, but appears unlikely to serve as many additional children by 2012 as was stated.
- The current VPI per-pupil amount of \$5,700 falls short of what is needed to provide a high-quality preschool program in many divisions. *(Note: The Governor's budget bill says that funds will be provided for the "State share of per-pupil funding ranging from \$5,700 to \$6,790").*