Guidelines for the Virginia Preschool Initiative (VPI) 2024-2025

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Virginia Preschool Initiative

Issued to:
Commonwealth of Virginia City Managers, County Administrators and Superintendents

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Direct program inquiries to:
Tiffanie Meehling, EdS
Associate Director of PreK Programs
Telephone: (804) 225-3665
tiffanie.meehling@doe.virginia.gov

Direct budget inquiries to:
Office of Budgeting
Telephone: (804) 225-2025
doebudgetoffice@doe.virginia.gov

The School Superintendent must certify electronically that the data is correct by May 15, 2024.

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An investment in the early years of life is one of the best investments society can make. Quality early learning experiences are an essential element to preparing children to succeed in kindergarten and beyond. This return is life-long, children who experience effective early childhood programs are more likely to finish college, get high-paying jobs, and be healthier and happier later in life. Yet access does not equal quality and quality does not happen by chance. If the quality of early childhood education experiences is not high there will be little or no return on investment.

One in four children in Virginia enter kindergarten without key literacy, math, and social emotional skills. Statewide results show a significant drop in kindergarten literacy, a reality that has disproportionate effects on Black, Hispanic, economically disadvantaged, and Dual Language Learners. These data reveal the importance of expanding access to quality early learning to address these challenges.

The Virginia Preschool Initiative (VPI) provides high-quality preschool education for children that have been identified as at-risk. Through a focus on advancing effective interaction and instruction, VPI programs help ensure all Virginia children enter school fully prepared for success. VPI programs are called to make continuous quality improvements in 1) use of integrated, evidence-based curriculum, 2) assessing teacher-child interactions, and 3) providing individualized professional development.

The following guidelines outline the expectations for meeting the goals for VPI programs, as provided in the state budget approved by the General Assembly. The guidelines outline the minimum expectations for localities offering the VPI program in 2024-2025. **Sections with important additions and clarifications for this year are marked with a diamond ♦.**

2024-2025 SPRING WEBINAR SERIES

This webinar series provided a variety of resources and information for programs interested in expanding and improving their local programs.
- [Review of Eligibility Guidelines, March 6, 2024](#)
- [Review of VPI Guidelines, March 20, 2024](#)

SCOPE OF SERVICES FOR VPI PROGRAMS

The purpose of the program is to reduce disparities among young children entering kindergarten and to reduce or eliminate risk factors that lead to early academic failure.

To obtain state funding, localities must develop and submit a written local plan for programs that includes:
1. Provision of a quality preschool education that helps prepare children for school;
2. Working with the community to provide health services and facilitate comprehensive services;
3. Family engagement;
4. Quality preschool for all children; and
5. Program operations and transportation.

Information regarding the minimum expectations, as well as additional expectations for programmatic operations, are included in this document.

Section 1: Providing a Quality Preschool Education

To improve kindergarten readiness in Virginia, all publicly funded children need access to high-quality classroom interactions and instruction. In VPI programs, all teachers should:

- Participate in VQB5, Virginia's Unified Measurement and Improvement System.
- Be supported to use a vetted, evidence-based curriculum that is aligned with state standards.
- Use assessments to individualize their instruction to meet the needs of their students.
- Receive frequent feedback on the effectiveness of their interactions with children, based on observations using the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS™) tool.
- Participate in professional development that is:
  1. Individualized based on the classroom data (e.g., CLASS™ scores or children's assessment data);
  2. Focused on standards, curriculum and/or improving teacher-child interactions; and
  3. Delivered with fidelity with the necessary leadership and organizational support.

Providing frequent feedback through CLASS™ observations is an essential element of the VPI program. CLASS™ observations provide critical guidance on creating a warm and welcoming learning environment that provides engaging learning opportunities for young children. Through both local and external observations, pre-K classrooms are better prepared to support child learning and development.

This section includes information on:

- Defining the Virginia Preschool Program
- VQB5 - Virginia's Unified Measurement and Improvement System
  - o Assessing Teacher-Child Interactions with CLASS™
  - o VQB5 Local and External CLASS™ observation requirements for VPI in 2024-2025
- Use of a High-Quality Curriculum
  - o Supporting Effective Curriculum Implementation
- Providing Individualized Professional Development
- Virginia's Birth-to-Five Early Learning and Development Standards
- Child Assessment with VKRP and PALS for Pre-K

DEFINING THE VIRGINIA PRESCHOOL PROGRAM

The legislative intent of the initiative is to establish a high-quality preschool education program for at-risk 3-year-olds, 4-year-olds, and for at-risk 5-year-olds who are not eligible to attend kindergarten, or who did not have access to a sufficient preschool experience and whose families request preschool as the most appropriate placement. For the purpose of this initiative, a qualifying program is one that is supported through local dollars and meets, or can meet, the criteria for a VPI preschool program for at-risk children in the 2024-2025 school year as described in these guidelines.

For children with IEPs, localities may have policies in place indicating the age of transition from early childhood special education to kindergarten. If no policy is in place, child placement is based on the IEP team's decision and what constitutes an appropriate education.

VQB5 - VIRGINIA'S UNIFIED MEASUREMENT AND IMPROVEMENT SYSTEM – REQUIREMENT TO PARTICIPATE

The Unified Virginia Quality Birth to Five System (VQB5) is a measurement and improvement system that focuses on the quality of all publicly-funded birth-to-five classrooms and supports families to choose quality programming across different program types. VQB5 sets shared expectations for measuring quality and supporting teachers for all birth-to-five programs. Through VQB5, teachers and leaders will receive the feedback and support they need to help young children learn.

As of fall 2023, all publicly-funded programs, including VPI, are required to participate in VQB5. Beginning in fall 2024, VQB5 Quality profiles will be posted online annually.

VQB5 measures the quality of infant, toddler, and preschool teaching and learning based on two nationally recognized quality indicators: 1) Teacher-Child Interactions as measured with CLASS™ and 2) Use of an approved quality curriculum.

To meet the legislative requirement of participating in VQB5, VPI sites must:
1. Sites must complete the registration process between August 15-October 1 in LinkB5, the VQB5 data portal. This includes completing site profiles, site administrator profiles, teacher profiles, and classroom profiles. Every eligible classroom must enter information about their optional use of a VDOE-approved curriculum, as a part of the classroom profile registration, by October 1.
2. Every eligible classroom must complete two local CLASS observations, one in the fall and one in the spring, with scores entered in LinkB5.
   a. The fall local observation window occurs from August 15 to December 22
   b. The spring local observation window occurs from January 20 to May 31
3. In addition to the two local CLASS observations coordinated by Ready Regions, all participating sites must participate in external CLASS observations for each age-level served, between August 15 and May 31.

Where is the most up-to-date information on VQB5? For more information and resources visit the Quality Measurement and Improvement (VQB5) website for VQB5 Guidelines and implementation support.

Assessing Teacher-Child Interactions with CLASS Observations for all VPI Classrooms

CLASS observations provide essential feedback to teachers and site leaders on the quality of the teacher-child interactions taking place within a classroom. These observations provide insights that can inform professional development plans. Through both local and external observations, preschool classrooms are better prepared to support child learning and development. All VPI classrooms must have two local CLASS observations each year to meet the requirements for VQB5.

VQB5 Local and External CLASS observation requirements for VPI in 2024-2025

Two required local CLASS observations in every VPI classroom must be coordinated in partnership with Ready Regions (fall and spring). Scores must be entered in LinkB5 within 10 business days of the local observation, or by the end of the observation window, whichever comes first. Both Ready Regions and VPI are responsible for ensuring adequate local observer coverage based on program funding arrangements. Therefore, it will be important that there is a shared effort between Ready Regions and VPI programs to make sure local observations are completed and scores are recorded into LinkB5. The local CLASS observations coordinated

through VQB5 fully meet the VPI CLASS observation requirements. VPI classrooms will also receive an external CLASS observation coordinated by the Teachstone External Observation Team.

Throughout the fall and spring observation windows, the VDOE will compare all local and external observations that are completed in the same classroom during the same observation window to check for consistency. If inconsistencies are found, VQB5 will use a score replacement protocol to address comparable observations with significantly different scores. For more information on what all sites can expect in VQB5 (including VPI Programs) please visit the VQB5 Website. Questions about VQB5 can be sent to vqb5@doe.virginia.gov.

Programs should plan professional development for teachers related to the CLASS tool, as described in the professional development section below.

USE OF HIGH-QUALITY CURRICULUM

A research-based and integrated curriculum, when fully implemented, makes it easier and more efficient for teachers to engage in sensitive, responsive, and cognitively stimulating teacher-child interactions. All participating programs must be using a vetted curriculum in all VPI classrooms.

Effective July 2021 and as a part of VQB5, VDOE fully coordinates curriculum reviews. Information on VDOE's curriculum vetting process, including the baseline criteria for high-quality birth to five curriculum, the most up-to-date list of VDOE-approved curricula and resources to support choosing a curriculum can be found on the Early Childhood Curriculum webpage.

A grace period to replace already vetted, yet retired curriculum: Opening the World of Learning (OWL) and Big Day for PreK is extended to impacted programs through at least fall 2025 (proposed date). Important Note: Access to curriculum materials, resources, and professional development is critical to effective implementation. Programs should consider whether they have the internal capacity to train and provide support in implementing a retired curriculum in their planning and decision-making process for investing in a new, VDOE-approved curriculum choice.

Supporting Effective Curriculum Implementation

While securing a curriculum is essential, simply providing the materials is not enough to support their implementation. Teachers and their leaders need training and ongoing support to implement all the components of a curriculum with high fidelity. For example,
- Teachers need access to all curriculum materials and introductory trainings,
- Program leaders should be fully versed in the curriculum, and
- Programs need curriculum experts who can provide ongoing training and support.

PROVIDING INDIVIDUALIZED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Teachers and instructional assistants must attend at least 15 clock hours per year of professional development (PD) that supports their knowledge, skills, and practice to facilitate effective teacher-child interactions and instruction that promotes children's learning and development towards kindergarten readiness. Documentation of teachers and instructional assistants' annual participation in professional development must be kept on file and available for monitoring purposes.

Professional development should:
1. Be individualized based on the classroom data (e.g., *CLASS* scores or children's assessment data).

2. Focus on: 1) curriculum, 2) assessment, 3) teacher-child interactions, and 4) individualizing learning based on the unique needs of students.
3. Be delivered with fidelity with the necessary leadership and organizational support.

VIRGINIA'S BIRTH-TO-FIVE EARLY LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT STANDARDS

Virginia's Birth-to-Five Early Learning and Development Standards, approved by the Virginia Board of Education in March 2021, replace the Foundation Blocks for Learning and the Virginia Department of Social Service (VDSS) document *Virginia Milestones of Early Childhood Development*.

Virginia's Birth-to-Five Early Learning and Development Standards describe behavior indicators across five areas of development, *Approaches to Play and Learning*, S*ocial and Emotional Development*, *Communication, Language and Literacy Development*, *Health and Physical Development,* and *Cognitive Development*, including science, social science, mathematics and fine arts. For each domain of learning, these guidelines reflect typical development patterns for young children across six overlapping age bands. While not intended to be used in place of a curriculum, early learning guidelines are a critical tool for teachers in childcare, family day homes, and preschool programs to support progression across the critical skills outlined in this document.

In VPI, teachers and administrators can use the ELDS to inform classroom learning opportunities, reflect on individual needs for children, and apply knowledge of child development and teacher-child interactions into everyday activities for classroom learning and family partnership. The locality must certify that the VPI program follows the established *Birth-to-Five Early Learning and Development Standards* in order to receive funding for quality preschool education. To learn more about the ELDS and aligned resources, visit the Early Childhood Standards & Instructional Supports webpage.

CHILD ASSESSMENT WITH VKRP & VALLS: PRE-K

A child's readiness for school includes both academic and social-emotional skills developed at home, school, and in their community. The Virginia Kindergarten Readiness Program (VKRP) and the Virginia Literacy Partnerships' Virginia Language & Literacy Screening System (VALLSS) are complementary assessments designed to measure school readiness and provide academic information to teachers to inform instruction. All VPI 3- and 4-year-olds are required to be screened in the fall and in the spring using VKRP and VALLS: Pre-K. These screening tools place equal emphasis on academic and social skills, providing actionable information and a more comprehensive understanding of each child's readiness for school to inform classroom instruction. Beginning in the 2024-2025 school year, an optional VKRP mid-year screener is available statewide, complementing the literacy mid-year screener. VPI programs are encouraged, but not required, to use mid-year assessments.

The VKRP and VALLSS are aligned with the Early Learning and Development Standards and assess preschoolers' school readiness skills in mathematics, self-regulation, social skills, and literacy. See Appendix B for more information on preschool assessments.

Section 2: Working with the Community to Provide Health Services and Facilitate Comprehensive Services

VPI serves as many children's first entry into the school system. It is critical that children receive health services that evaluate the needs of all students that enter the VPI program in close consultation with families.

To support the facilitation of comprehensive services and connections to community resources, a steering committee should be formed and convened regularly to support the VPI program.

This section includes information on:
- Health Services and Facilitation of Comprehensive Services
  - Toilet Training
- Local VPI Steering Committee
  - Required Members
  - Guiding Questions for the VPI Steering Committee
- Head Start Collaboration
  - Memoranda of Understanding/Agreement (MOU/A)

HEALTH SERVICES AND FACILITATION OF COMPREHENSIVE SERVICES

VPI programs work to meet children's needs across all domains of development that support school readiness including health, mental health, and nutrition. Staff work with families to build bridges to resources and community-based services by facilitating linkages for obtaining needed resources for children.

At a minimum, all children need a physical, hearing screening, vision screening, and current immunizations (see below). Behavioral and mental health screenings should be coordinated if needed. VPI programs are not required to provide these services. They are required to ensure every student has all of them each year, and refer

- See the *Code of Virginia 12VAC5-110-80* regarding exemptions from immunizations requirements.
- The Virginia Department of Health provides the requirements for school and day care minimum immunization.

Toilet Training

Some VPI students may not be fully toilet trained when they start attending VPI in the fall. Toilet training is like any other self-care skill that children need to learn. Program should consider how they may schedule toilet training into the day and give the child the opportunity to practice and become more independent with the task. As an example, provide children who are learning to become toilet trained with frequent opportunities to visit the bathroom individually and in small groups and teach them a step-by-step process. Place visuals in the bathroom as reminders for children.

Children who are not toilet trained cannot be excluded from VPI enrollment. Programs may not add a requirement that eligible children be toilet trained prior to entrance into a VPI program. This applies to both VPI 3-year-olds and VPI 4-year-olds.

For guidance on appropriate diapering and handwashing procedures, please refer to the local county health department. This *Changing Diapers the Safe Way* (Spanish version also available) graphic from the Virginia Department of Health also provides helpful guidance.

Additional resources related to toilet training:
- *General toilet training guidance* and *toilet training guidelines for day care providers* from the American Academy of Pediatrics.
- *Tips for creating a safe environment for preschoolers, including diapering and toileting*
- *Tips for Toilet Training* for families to support toilet training at home.

LOCAL VPI STEERING COMMITTEE

A local VPI Steering Committee must be established to ensure the following:
1. Broad stakeholder support for the implementation of the VPI program within the community;
2. Coordination of services and resources to provide available comprehensive services to children and their families; and
3. Federal and state funds are maximized to preserve existing slots for 3- and 4-year-olds already being implemented in the community (supplementing, not supplanting, increase access for more at-risk children) existing slots.
   a. The state Appropriation Act addresses the importance of ensuring federally-funded Head Start slots are a priority for localities to fill: "*It shall be the policy of the Commonwealth that state funds and required local matching funds for the Virginia Preschool Initiative not be used for capital outlay, not be used to supplant any Head Start federal funds provided for local early education programs, and not be used until the local Head Start grantee certifies that all local Head Start slots are filled. Programs must provide full-day or half-day and, at least, school-year services.*"

VPI Steering Committee members should collaborate to establish coordinated enrollment procedures across early childhood programs to address these expectations. Recruitment and enrollment of eligible students to fill available Head Start slots should be a topic of each Steering Committee meeting.

Required Members

Members of the VPI Steering Committee must include representatives from the school division, child care providers, local social services agency, Head Start, local health department, VECF Mixed Delivery Grant Program (if in your community), and other groups identified by the lead agency.

The VPI Steering Committee is required to meet at least quarterly, with the minutes of meeting events and decisions kept on file.

The VPI Steering Committee does not have to be a separate stand-alone committee; existing committees can serve this purpose (for example, Ready Regions committees or another community-wide early childhood committee). However, the committee must meet all VPI Steering Committee requirements. This includes meeting at least quarterly with the required members and having an agenda targeted specifically at VPI topics.

Guiding Questions for the VPI Steering Committee

- How will VPI program leaders maximize federal and state funds to preserve existing 3- and 4-year-old slots?
- How will Steering Committee Members collaborate among each other and programs accepting childcare subsidy payments, private childcare, and early childhood special education and early intervention programs?
- How can we work collaboratively with Ready Region staff to participate in community-driven coordinated enrollment processes?

- How can we engage the community, including families and other early childhood providers, to understand the approach that will best support 3- and 4-year-old access?
- How can we all coordinate across local partners, such as childcare, Head Start, family day homes, to ensure our enrollment practices are supportive of other ongoing initiatives?
- How will we avoid the VPI funding and program being used to supplant Head Start federal funds provided for local early education programs, and not be used until the Head Start grantee certifies that all local Head Start slots are filled?
- How will we initiate ongoing processes to review and when necessary, revise existing MOU with local Head Start agencies?
- How can we accurately measure the need for 3- and 4-year-olds that are not currently being served through other publicly funded programs in our community?
- How can we include the vital expertise and knowledge from each of these key partners to build a strong 3- and 4-year-old program?
- What can we do to ensure the coordination of comprehensive services for all children within our community? How can other community coalitions, such as Ready Regions, be included in developing this plan?

♦ HEAD START COLLABORATION

It is the intent of the General Assembly budget language that VPI programs supplement Head Start programs. Budget language explicitly states that VPI may not supplant Head Start funds. This means that VPI programs may not enroll Head Start eligible families (any family under 130% of the Federal Poverty Line) prior to Head Start certifying. This could mean a blanket certification that the Head Start program is full, or an individual certification based on family choice. Until a blanket certification is in place, unless otherwise noted in a Memorandum of Understanding/Agreement (MOU/A), VPI programs must refer all Head Start eligible families to their partner Head Start program. All VPI programs are required to collaborate with Head Start and have a MOU/A between the programs. These MOU/As will be uploaded annually into SSWS as part of VPI Fall Verification.

♦ Memoranda of Understanding/Agreement (MOU/A)

MOU/As between VPI Programs and local Head Start grant recipients must be dated and valid for one year, as well as signed by a representative from each agency. They should include, at minimum, the following items:
- **Coordinated Enrollment**
  - Describe opportunities for coordinated enrollment to support family choice
  - May include information about coordination with Ready Regions, recruitment strategies, and joint recruitment events
  - Outline each program's process for referrals, including points of contact and timelines for follow-ups
- **Data Sharing**
  - Describe methods and forums for sharing enrollment data, such as steering committee meetings
  - Note any data sharing protocols
- **Providing Services**
  - Outline the services each agency is responsible for providing, for children with and without disabilities
  - Describe any required screenings and evaluations
  - Note any parental consents or authorizations needed
  - Describe timelines for completion
  - Review processes for sharing screening results with families and other programs
  - Outline process for referrals for evaluation, including timelines for follow-up
- **Individualized Education Program (IEP) Process and Implementation**

- o Review roles of each program in developing and implementing IEPs
- o Establish lines of communication between program staff for IEP meetings
- o Note any parental consent forms needed to share student information
- o Describe each program's requirements for inclusion and providing services in the least restrictive environment
- **Transitions**
  - o Describe how programs will facilitate transitions to kindergarten/elementary schools
  - o May include steps for outreach to families and teachers, meetings to discuss student needs, and specific topics to review with parents
- **Discuss supports for families of children with limited English proficiency**
- **Program Representation**
  - o Review how staff will learn about the regulations and program philosophies of each agency
  - o Describe how representatives from each program will participate in steering committee or council meetings
  - o Note opportunities for staff visitation and information sharing
- **Other Topics**
  - o Describe processes for dispute resolution
  - o Acknowledge shared responsibilities, such as student confidentiality outlined in the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)
  - o Note timelines for reviewing and revising the MOU
  - o Describe procedures for terminating the agreement
- **Optional Sections on Shared Resources (may not apply to all programs)**
  - o Describe any shared training or professional development activities
  - o Describe any shared facilities and transportation resources
  - o Describe any coordination of curricular and instructional resources
  - o May include supports for English learners

Section 3: Family Engagement

Families of VPI students should be included in every step of their child's school experience. A plan for intentional family engagement should include building relationships between school personnel and family members early in the year, maintaining communication in the months following, and conclude with clear communication regarding a plan for transition to kindergarten.

This section includes information on:
- Family Engagement
- Transition Strategies

FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

VPI programs should have an intentional plan for implementing meaningful parental involvement and family engagement strategies in the areas of 1) building a community of respect that considers the various cultural, racial, and linguistic backgrounds of parents and caregivers, 2) promoting parenting skills and coaching parents as their children's first teacher, and 3) listening to parents' feedback and building partnerships with them.

At minimum, VPI programs should schedule parent-teacher conferences at least twice a year, as well as consider strategies for ongoing routine communication, such as newsletters, family engagement apps, or recurring family-school activities. Conferences should be used as an opportunity to share VKRP (EMAS and CBRS) and VALLS-PreK reports and share individualized resources to support at home learning. A set of resources highlighting best practices for family engagement in early learning programs has been compiled by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC).

Collaboration with Ready Regions leadership on family engagement efforts within your program's local and regional community is encouraged. Ready Regions are tasked with continuing to develop plans to engage families in all birth-to-five programs.

TRANSITION STRATEGIES

Transition to kindergarten is a process that is most successful when it is carefully planned out well in advance. VPI programs should implement transition strategies that include a selection of the following strategies:
- Collaborative meetings between preschool and kindergarten teachers to discuss students' progress in meeting standards for learning and school-wide results on the VKRP assessment. These collaborations present opportunities to include families.
- Student visits to kindergarten classrooms, parent meetings to communicate kindergarten expectations.
- Transitioning to kindergarten toolkits for parents in their primary language.
- Providing engaging kindergarten registration/orientation meetings for parents taking into consideration their cultural, racial, and linguistic backgrounds.

A set of helpful resources to help families gain a understanding of the kindergarten transition process has been compiled by Head Start.

Section 4: Quality Preschool Opportunities for All Learners

All children must be provided the same high-quality learning experience regardless of background, home cultures, language, or abilities and skills. VPI programs must ensure practices and policies encourage inclusion and advancement of all children who qualify for the program.

This section includes information on:
- Inclusion of Students with Disabilities
  - Eligibility for Children with Disabilities
  - Ten Percent Target Inclusion Rate
- Support for Dual Language Learners
  - Resources to Better Support the Language Development of Multilingual/English Language Learners
- Services for Preschoolers Experiencing Homelessness
- Exclusionary Discipline/Suspension/Expulsion

♦ INCLUSION OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

VPI program leaders must ensure practices and policies encourage inclusion and advancement of all children who are eligible for the program. State funding to support VPI programs is intended for at-risk 3-year-olds, 4-year-olds, and at-risk 5-year-olds who are not eligible to attend kindergarten, including those who have an Individualized Education Program (IEP) or those who may later be identified as a child with a disability requiring special education and related services.

Eligibility for Children with Disabilities

Children with disabilities or delays who are eligible for special education services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act are eligible for VPI, regardless of income. This eligibility applies to students aged 3- or 4-years-old on September 30, 2024 (5-year-olds are permitted under certain conditions). Students may be placed in any of the following VPI classroom settings:
- Regular early childhood education program – classrooms that include 50 percent or more students who do not have disabilities.
- Early childhood special education (ECSE) classroom – classrooms that include more than 50 percent students with disabilities. This is considered a self-contained classroom.
- Reverse inclusion – this is an ECSE classroom that enrolls typically developing peers, can include more or less than 50 percent students with a disability, lead by a teacher without a General Education license.
- Community-provider setting - includes any VPI classroom in the community.

Any classroom with at least one VPI funded student is a VPI classroom and is held to all VPI requirements outlined within these guidelines. This includes:
- All VQB5 expectations must be met.
- VKRP is to be implemented. There are, however, limited reasons for exemptions. For students with IEPs, the program should discuss and establish what constitutes sufficient evidence for an exemption. If an exemption is being considered, it should be discussed and documented in the child's IEP.
- Localities will be expected to track outcomes over time for participating children and share data with the VDOE.
- Localities should use Virginia's *Birth-to-Five Early Learning and Development Standards*.

Additionally, the *Regulations Governing Special Education Programs for Children with Disabilities in Virginia* must be met for those children with IEPs. This includes programmatic expectations such as caseload allowances, teacher certification, and transportation requirements. Further, the child's IEP is to be implemented with the placement and services of the child being based on the IEP team's decisions.

♦ Ten Percent Target Inclusion Rate

The General Assembly established a 10 percent inclusion target for VPI programs. An inclusive VPI classroom is one that includes at least 50 percent of children without disabilities regardless of funding source. This means that in an inclusive VPI program at least 10 percent of students should have established IEPs, regardless of funding sources for those students.

This inclusion target is measured using end of year data, including End of Year SRC and End of Year Master Schedule. The program's VPI inclusion rate will be determined by dividing the number of students with IEPs placed in inclusive VPI classrooms by the total number of students placed in VPI classrooms:
- "VPI classroom" is defined as any classroom with at least one VPI-funded student.
- "Inclusive VPI classroom" is defined as any VPI classroom with at least 50 percent of students who do not have disabilities.
- Any student placed in a VPI classroom is included in this count, regardless of the student's funding source.
- Inclusion percentages are calculated for each school year at the end of the year. Program may view their VPI Inclusion Target Report in SSWS each August.

Programs not meeting the 10 percent inclusion rate for VPI at the End of Year SRC for the 2023-2024 school year will be required to provide an action plan in the 2024 Fall VPI Verification.

The purpose of the 10 percent target inclusion rate is to support children with disabilities in reaching their full potential. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) require that all early childhood programs make reasonable accommodations to provide access for children with disabilities or developmental delays. Research indicates that inclusion benefits all children, regardless of disability status, as well as families, and communities. Inclusion involves holding high expectations and promoting participation in all learning and social activities, facilitated by individualized accommodations and using evidence-based services and supports to foster their development, friendships with peers, and sense of belonging.

In an inclusive classroom, the student receives intentional teaching (either direct or embedded instruction) and promotion of interaction with students without disabilities. Provision of special education and related services in accordance with the child's IEP that are embedded into inclusive classroom time are considered part of the regular inclusive program. VPI staff work closely with the special education and related service providers to successfully include the child with a disability. For more information on including young children with disabilities, please see the Virginia Early Childhood Inclusion Guidance Document which is designed to assist Virginia's localities and early childhood communities in identifying, developing, and sustaining inclusive opportunities within high-quality early childhood programs for children with disabilities.

The ten percent inclusion target is a stated goal from the Appropriations Act and the Virginia General Assembly. The VDOE has been charged with monitoring divisions progress towards meeting this goal.

Any division that does not meet the ten percent goal for inclusion should expect the following:
- Divisions who miss the ten percent inclusion goal are required to report a plan to address increased inclusion in the Fall Verification Report.

- The VDOE reports inclusion percentages annually to the Virginia General Assembly. This report includes identifying divisions who have missed the ten percent goal and their plans for increasing inclusion, as reported in the Fall Verification Report.
- Each winter, a letter from the Deputy Superintendent of Early Childhood Care and Education will be sent to division superintendents in localities where the ten percent inclusion target has been missed. This letter will document the most recent inclusion percentage reported and Fall Verification plan to increase inclusion
- VDOE staff will follow up on plans to increase inclusion each spring to offer support and monitor progress in meeting goals.
- TTACs will connect with divisions to support the plans to increase inclusion throughout the academic year.
- Divisions who have missed the inclusion target repeatedly may have the frequency of VPI Monitoring increased

SUPPORT FOR DUAL LANGUAGE LEARNERS (DLLs)

Children who are Dual Language Learners (DLLs) are between the ages of 2.5- and 5.5-years-old and are learning two (or more) languages at the same time or learning a second language while continuing to develop their first language. Children who are DLLs come from homes where a language other than English is spoken or where their primary caregivers speak a language other than English. For some, both a language other than English *and* English may be spoken at home. It should be noted that formal assessment of DLL qualification may not take place in preschool in each locality. However, localities are encouraged to provide DLL support to students who have demonstrated a need for additional English language support.

VKRP offers optional Spanish-language screeners to assist teachers in capturing data on mathematics for multilingual learners. VALLSS: Español is under development.

Early childhood programs must be prepared to optimize the early experiences of DLLs by holding high expectations, capitalizing on their strengths - including cultural and linguistic strengths - and providing them with the individualized developmental and learning supports necessary to succeed in school.

Important Note: VDOE uses the terminology "multilingual" across many of the Division of Early Childhood Care and Education's resources, and oftentimes "multilingual" is paired with "English Language Learners" or ELLs (i.e., Multilingual/English Language Learners). The ELLs descriptor is commonly used in federal, state and local level policies and guidelines (as is DLLs); therefore, usage will vary depending on the authoring source.

Resources to Better Support the Language Development of Multilingual/English Language Learners:

- WIDA Early Years Can Do Descriptors - For ideas on specific kinds of activities DLLs can do at various stages of language development.
- Making Connections (Virginia) - A comprehensive resource that offers suggestions, tools and sample plans for educators who use VA's ELDS.
- Promising Practices Implementation Kit (free access for Virginia educators)- Includes resources such as guidelines for supporting multilingual children and families, practical suggestions and tools for the support of data-informed decision making.
- WIDA™ Resource Library - Includes additional tools and resources, including the 2020 Edition of the English Language Development (ELD) Standards Framework and supporting materials.

Additional items can be bought at a discounted rate by using the Virginia state code at the WIDA™ Store.

SERVICES FOR PRESCHOOLERS EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS

Programs must provide required services for VPI children experiencing homelessness according to the Education for Homeless Children and Youth (EHCY) Program of Title IX, in the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, Title IX, Part A of the Every Student Succeeds Act.

Programs must identify children experiencing homelessness through outreach and coordination activities with outside agencies. This includes the option to remain in the school of origin with transportation if it is in the best interest of the student when the family moves during a period of homelessness or to the end of the academic year in which permanent housing is obtained. For additional information visit the Project Hope-Virginia website at or contact homeless@wm.edu.

EXCLUSIONARY DISCIPLINE/SUSPENSION/EXPULSION

Suspensions and expulsions of young children deprive them of enriching learning experiences and have a negative impact that extends into grade school and beyond. Yet, recent data indicate that suspension and expulsion occur regularly in early childhood settings serving children birth to age five.

The Virginia Board of Education's approved Virginia Guidelines for the Prevention of Suspension and Expulsion of Young Children: Supporting Children with Challenging Behaviors in Early Childhood Settings serve as the guide for VPI programs on preventing suspension and expulsion of young children. The document provides guidance regarding policies and best practices in implementing developmentally appropriate experiences for children in early care and education programs (0-5 years), that can prevent suspension and expulsion. Recommended research-based practices promote collaboration between family and professionals, as well as focus on effective classroom management and social-emotional skill development to support young children's healthy development. Recommendations are for teachers and administrators supporting children in early care and education programs.

Section 5: Program Operations and Transportation

A successful VPI program relies on designing effective program operations that meet the requirements from the state. This includes providing a manageable class size, following instructional time regulations, monitoring student attendance and securing a plan for student transportation.

This section includes information on:
- Student Eligibility
    - Age Eligibility
    - Residency Eligibility
    - State Eligibility Criteria
    - Local Eligibility Criteria and Local Eligibility Criteria Waiver
- Staffing Ratio
- Teacher Qualifications
- Instructional Time and Unstructured Recreational Time
- Operating as a Full- or Half-Day Program
- Student Attendance
- Community Provider Settings
- Transportation
    - Best Practices for Transporting Preschoolers
- Monitoring

STUDENT ELIGIBILITY

When verifying eligibility of children for VPI programs based on the families' income levels or locally established at-risk criteria, it is critical to establish a clear systematic process, guide families through completion of the process, and annually train local staff to determine eligibility consistently. The *Guidelines For Determining Student Eligibility for The State-Funded Virginia Preschool Initiative (VPI) and Best Practices for Implementing a Local Eligibility Process (PDF)* provides best practices for implementing a local eligibility process. This document provides assistance with implementing and meeting the income-based and locally established at-risk student eligibility criteria and reporting requirements for the state-funded VPI.

Age Eligibility

4-year-old slots: Eligible VPI 4-year-old children are 4-years-of-age on or before September 30 and are not eligible to attend kindergarten. Continuing in the 2024-2025 school year, students who are 5-years-of-age by September 30 may be eligible if they did not have access to sufficient preschool experience and parents believe VPI is the most appropriate placement. In this scenario, a 5-year-old would use a 4-year-old slot.

Note: The definition of a "sufficient preschool experience" should be locally defined and consistently applied. It is reasonable that a year of participation in programs such as VPI, Head Start, VECF Mixed Delivery, and other similar programs would be considered sufficient preschool experience. However, issues such as late enrollment and inconsistent attendance could impact the sufficiency of that experience. A child having no prior preschool experience may reasonably be considered to have insufficient preschool experience.

3-year-old slots: For localities that have requested and received 3-year-old slots, eligible children for the VPI 3-year-old slots are 3-years-of-age on or before September 30. All students must meet the eligibility criteria outlined above. Please be reminded that 3-year-old slots may ONLY be used for 3-year-olds, they are considered to be above and beyond any 4-year-old allocations.

♦ Residency Eligibility

Per Appropriation Act language, children must be residents of Virginia to participate in VPI. VPI slots are allocated to localities based on a funding formula specific to each locality and are funded based on funding levels specific to each locality. Therefore, children must also be residents of the locality in which they will receive VPI funding.

Programs should have a system for verifying residency and maintaining confidentiality of student information. Localities may enter into cooperative agreements with neighboring localities to enroll out of locality students. Students must be reported to the state by the locality in which they reside. VDOE will then fund the locality of residency and that locality should forward funds to the serving locality based on their agreement. These agreements are at the discretion of each locality and are not regulated by VDOE. This does mean that the student will take up one of the allocated slots for the locality of residency. The locality of residency is also responsible for all data reporting and ensuring appropriate local match is provided.

State Eligibility Criteria

According to the Appropriation Act, statewide eligibility criteria for participation in the VPI program are:
- family income at or below 200 percent of federal poverty guidelines,
- homelessness,
- student's parents or guardians are school dropouts, or
- children with disabilities or delays who are eligible for special education services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, regardless of household income.

See Guidelines For Determining Student Eligibility for The State-Funded Virginia Preschool Initiative (VPI) and Best Practices for Implementing a Local Eligibility Process for details on the definition of each category.

Local Eligibility Criteria and Local Eligibility Criteria Waiver

Up to 15 percent of a program's slots may be filled based on locally established eligibility criteria so as to meet the unique needs of at-risk children in the community.

Localities that can demonstrate more than 15 percent of slots are needed to meet the needs of at-risk children in their community may apply for a waiver may apply for a waiver from the Superintendent of Public Instruction to use a larger percentage of their slots. Localities must demonstrate that increasing eligibility will enable the maximization of federal funds and will not have a negative impact on access for other individuals currently being served.

Programs may apply for a waiver to serve more than 15 percent of slots through local at-risk criteria to meet the needs of more at-risk children in the community. The VDOE will accept applications via SSWS during three submission window periods. Each waiver will be reviewed by the State Superintendent of Public Instruction.
- Projection 1: March 1 – May 15
- Projection 2: July 1 – August 15
- Projection 3: September 1 – October 15

See Appendix D for more information.

STAFFING RATIO

The program will comply with the staffing standards required by the *Code of Virginia*. There are different staffing ratio requirements permitted for programs that exceed benchmarks set by the Board of Education. No VPI program is required to operate at the maximum staffing ratio, operating below the maximum ratio allowable is always permitted. For 2024-2025, all programs that are meeting the requirements for the 2024-2025 VPI guidelines will be considered to be meeting and exceeding the benchmarks set by the Board of Education.

VPI classrooms that exceed benchmarks set by the Board of Education should be staffed as follows:
- At least one teacher must be provided for any classroom with 10 or fewer students.
- If average class size is greater than 10 students (but does not exceed 20) there must be at least one full-time teacher's aide assigned to the classroom.
- No class size can exceed 20 students.

VPI classrooms that do NOT exceed the benchmarks set by the Board of Education should be staffed as follows:
- At least one teacher must be provided for any classroom with 9 or fewer students.
- If average class size is greater than 9 students (but does not exceed 18) there must be at least one full-time teacher's aide assigned to the classroom.
- No class size can exceed 18 students.

Note: For students with IEPs, it is important to also follow caseload allotments in the Regulations Governing Special Education Programs for the Early Childhood Special Education teachers.

TEACHER QUALIFICATIONS

The state Appropriation Act language does not specify requirements for teacher licensure for VPI classrooms. However, the *[Code of Virginia (22.1-299)](#)* requires that all teachers paid with public funds must have a teacher's license issued by the Board of Education. VPI state funds cannot be used to pay a teacher who does not hold a teaching license. Compensation for non-licensed VPI teachers can be paid from private funding sources.

An appropriate endorsement on a teaching license issued by the Virginia Board of Education for a VPI teacher includes any of the following:
- Inclusive classrooms
  - PreK-3
  - PreK-6
  - Early Childhood Special Education with 3-and 4-year-old endorsement
- Self contained/reverse inclusion classrooms
  - Early Childhood Special Education
    - Note: if a teacher this this license only leads a reverse inclusion classroom the families must be notified that the classroom is not a general education classroom. It is a special education only classroom.
  - Early Childhood Special Education with 3-and 4-year-old endorsement
    - Note: if a teacher with this licensure leads a reverse inclusion classroom, it can be considered a general education classroom (though it is only inclusive if there are more than 50% students without disabilities)

Exception for Community Provider VPI Settings: State Budget language allows an exemption from this requirement for teachers in a VPI community provider setting. This enables teachers to be paid with VPI funds regardless of licensure status (see Appendix E).

Instructional Time and Unstructured Recreational Time

As stated in the Appropriation Act bill, VPI programs may include unstructured recreational time that is intended to develop teamwork, social skills, and overall physical fitness in any calculation of total instructional time, provided that such unstructured recreational time does not exceed 15 percent of total instructional time or teaching hours.

Operating as a Full- or Half-Day Program

Programs must provide full-day or half-day and at least school-year services (180 days or 990 hours). Programs must operate on a full-day or half-day basis for the entire school year to receive the full state allocation. Programs should operate five days a week and in alignment with the school year calendar. Virtual and/or Asynchronous instructional days do not count for VPI days/hours. Full-day programs shall operate for a minimum of five and one-half instructional hours, excluding breaks for meals, and half-day programs shall operate for a minimum of three hours of classroom instructional time per day, excluding breaks for meals. For a new program, in the first year of implementation, a program operating less than a full school year will receive state funds on a fractional basis determined by the prorated portion of a school year program.

Student Attendance

Students in regular attendance in high-quality early education programs will have an opportunity to benefit from the services offered. By collecting VPI attendance data, developing strategies for improving attendance, and reaching out to VPI students and their families, VPI leaders and teachers have the ability to improve student attendance at their VPI programs. Clear attendance and communication policies along with collaboration with families, are crucial to improving VPI student attendance and increasing outcomes for students.

All students enrolled and funded by the VPI program in a public or community-provider setting must have a State Testing Identification (STI) number and be reported in three VDOE Student Record Collection (SRC) reporting cycles: fall, spring, and end of the year.

For additional information and resources, please see the Virginia Department of Education's Attendance and School Engagement Webpage.

Community Provider Settings

A *community provider setting* means that VPI Programs, licensed childcare programs, and other community provider settings are eligible to partner and work together to provide VPI services. VPI classrooms can be supported in community-provider settings in both public and private sectors.

VPI slots in community provider settings follow the same rules and expectations as slots in traditional school settings. VPI slots may only be served in licensed nonfaith based community provider settings. Localities receive the funding for VPI slots offered in community-provider settings as part of their overall VPI electronic payments from the VDOE. Where there is a difference between the regional estimated cost of quality and the VPI per pupil amount, add on funds may be available to mitigate this gap. State Budget language allows an exemption from the teacher licensure requirement for VPI teachers working in a community provider setting.

Localities that are looking to increase access for at-risk 3- and 4-year-olds should consider collaborating with community providers to maximize impact.

See Appendix E for more information on requirements for community-providers as VPI partners.

♦ TRANSPORTATION

VPI programs must have a plan for ensuring that VPI eligible students have access to a safe method of transportation to and from the home setting and the VPI program site. Transportation must never be a barrier for recruiting eligible children for the VPI program and for providing full VPI services to eligible children and their families. All students should have at least one VPI location with transportation available to them, this could be considered a "home" or "zoned" location similar to elementary school students. However, VPI students are not guaranteed a spot at this location due to space limitations. When a spot is not available at the location with transportation, a family can choose to remain on that location's waitlist or attend a location with openings and self-transport.

Best Practices for Transporting Preschoolers

When preschool age children are transported in a school bus, the National Highway Transportation Safety Administration (NHTSA) recommends that preschool age children should be transported in a Child Safety Restraint System (CSRS) that is suitable for the child's weight and age and meets applicable Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standards (FMVSS). Each child should be properly secured in the CSRS and the CSRS should be properly secured to the school bus seat, using anchorages that meet FMVSS specifications. A written plan on evacuating preschool age children and other passengers in CSRSs in the event of an emergency must be developed. This written plan should be provided to drivers, monitors, and emergency response personnel. The plan should explicitly state how children (both in and out of the CSRS) should be evacuated from the school bus. CSRSs should not be placed in school bus seats adjacent to emergency exits.

For questions regarding transporting preschool children, please contact the Virginia Department of Education's Office of Support Services Director of Pupil Transportation, Kerry Miller: kerry.miller@doe.virginia.gov 804-750-8640.

♦ MONITORING

VPI programs will participate in monitoring, at minimum, once every 4 years. Monitoring is a one-year process that takes place over a 12-month period. This process is focused on program compliance with the VPI Guidelines. Monitoring will consist of the following activities:
- Document Collection: Programs will be provided a list of all documentation that will be reviewed during the monitoring process. They will be given several months to collect all documentation. Documentation can be provided in hard copy or digital copy.
- Meeting with Monitor: Programs will have an opportunity to meet with their monitor to review the process and ask any questions.
- Program Overview Document: to be completed by the coordinator and given to the monitor prior to the onsite visit.
- Onsite Visit: Monitor will visit programs to complete the following:
  - Classroom visits
  - Staff Interviews (these can be scheduled in person on the day of the visit, or virtually prior to the visit)
  - Document review
- Draft Protocol Review: Programs will be given an opportunity to review the protocol prior to submission to VDOE, this is an opportunity to provide any additional information. Any areas of non-compliance will be noted on the protocol.

- Completion of a Corrective Action Plan (CAP, if needed) and Continuous Improvement Plan (CIP): All programs will complete a CIP and programs with areas of non-compliance must complete a CAP for those areas.
- Final Protocol Submission to VDOE
- Results Sent to Program Leadership
- Follow Up on Any Areas of Non-Compliance

Section 6: Submitting the VPI Application

Localities must submit an application and develop a plan for funding to offer the VPI program each year.

This section includes information on:
- Submitting the VPI Application
  - General Questions
  - Local Plan Questions
  - Application Requirements
- Funding a Qualifying Program
  - Local Funds
    - Cash Contributions
    - In-Kind Contributions
  - Coordination of Funds
- Wait Lists and Reallocation of Slots
- Late Enrollment of VPI Students

SUBMITTING THE VPI APPLICATION

Access to the application for program personnel should be requested through the locality's SSWS account manager. In order to submit this application, localities must meet the application requirements outlined in the following section and provide answers to the following questions:

General Questions

Programs should be prepared to answer questions on the following:
- VPI for 3-year-olds participation
- Number of slots requested (for 3-and 4-year-olds separately)
- Community Provider Settings
- Waitlist slots
- Teacher Qualifications
- Curriculum

Local Plan Questions

1. Describe how the program ensures the Virginia Birth-to-Five Early Learning and Development Standards will be implemented and how the five areas will be assessed (Approaches to Play & Learning; Social & Emotional Development; Communication, Language, & Literacy; Health & Physical Development; and Cognitive Development).
2. Describe the intentional plan for implementing meaningful parental involvement and family engagement strategies throughout the school year.
3. Describe how teachers and teaching assistants are provided with ongoing training and professional development to implement the vetted curriculum.
4. In alignment with VQB5, provide information on who will serve as certified, local CLASS™ observers. Describe how teachers and teacher assistants will be supported in improving practice as a result of scores from observations completed.

5. Describe how the program will facilitate linkages to obtain comprehensive services and resources for children and families (i.e., health physical, hearing and vision screenings, and behavioral and mental health screenings).
6. Describe the VPI Steering Committee. List members, organizations, and frequency of meetings. Describe how members are consulted to ensure federal funds are preserved and maximized for serving preschoolers.
7. Describe how leaders representing VPI and Early Childhood Special Education programs work together as a team to support inclusive practices of children with special needs in VPI classrooms and ensure the 10 percent inclusion target is met or exceeded.
8. Describe the transportation plan that is in place to ensure eligible VPI children have access to a safe method of transportation to and from the home setting and the VPI program site. Transportation should not present a barrier to access for any child.
9. Programs must upload a copy of the Local VPI Income Eligibility Verification Form (includes staff/parent signature and lists documents used for income verification).

Application Requirements

Authorizing legislation requires the chief administrator (city manager or county administrator), in conjunction with the division superintendent, to identify a lead agency within the locality prior to submitting a proposal application.

Applicants must:
1. Demonstrate willingness to provide a quality preschool education program that conforms to the guidelines and criteria outlined in Appendices A-H
2. Demonstrate collaboration and coordination with community agencies and groups identified by the lead agency as necessary for the successful delivery of comprehensive services to the children and their families
3. Develop and utilize selection criteria based on the definition of at-risk. (Appendix C provides information on risk factors)
4. Complete a grant application and submit it to the Department of Education.

♦ FUNDING A QUALIFYING PROGRAM

VPI full day slots will be funded as follows:
- Loudoun, Prince William, Fairfax (City and County), Arlington, Alexandria, Manassas, Manassas Park., Falls Church (Planning District 8): $10,701
- Stafford, Fauquier, Spotsylvania, Clarke, Warren, Frederick, Culpeper, Fredericksburg, Winchester: $10,151
- All other localities: $9,968
- Half day slots will receive 50% funding

VPI slot counts will be collected twice annually. Full funding will be given to all slots reported as active via Fall Student Record Collection (SRC) on September 30, confirmed via SSWS VPI Fall Verification. Prorated funding will be paid to any slot filled for the first time on December 31, pending available funds, this data will be collected via the SSWS VPI Late Enrollment Application.

VPI funding will be distributed to programs via twice monthly electronic transfers starting in mid February continuing through the end of June. VPI funding for four-year-old slots may separated into two funding categories by VDOE staff: "Budget Formula Spending" and "Flexible Spending". Both categories add up to the

VPI per pupil amount. Funding for VPI three-year-old slots and VPI Community Provider Add-On are categorized as "Flexible Spending".

Funds will be disbursed by the Department of Education to localities to:
1. Establish or expand quality, comprehensive preschool programs in public schools or community-provider sites;
2. Purchase quality preschool education programs and services for at-risk 3- and 4-year-old children from existing providers;
3. Expand existing quality programs to serve more children; and
4. Upgrade existing programs to meet criteria for comprehensive, quality preschool programs to include new, unserved children.

State dollars may be used to:
1. Upgrade, complement, or expand an existing locally funded program to meet quality criteria;
2. Complement or expand a Title I or Head Start program to serve additional children; or
3. Establish a new program to serve additional children.

Programs must provide full-day or half-day and at least school-year services (180 days or 990 hours). Programs must operate on a full-day or half-day basis for the entire school year to receive the full state allocation. Programs should operate five days a week, in alignment with the school year calendar. Full-day programs shall operate for a minimum of five and one-half instructional hours, excluding breaks for meals, and half-day programs shall operate for a minimum of three hours of classroom instructional time per day, excluding breaks for lunch. For a new program, including VPI for 3-Year-Olds, in the first year of implementation, a program operating less than a full school year will receive state funds on a fractional basis determined by the prorated portion of a school year program provided.

The Appropriations Act states that a local match of funds, based on the composite index of local ability-to-pay, is required to receive state funds for this program.

The school division or local government shall retain all financial and programmatic records relative to the VPI grant funding ultimately provided for five (5) years after final payment by VDOE, or until audited by the Commonwealth of Virginia, whichever is sooner. The agency, its authorized agents, and/or state auditors shall have full access to and the right to examine any of said records during said period.

Local Funds

A local match, based on the composite index of local ability-to-pay is required.

Cash Contributions

Cash contributions are defined as local dollars that are:
1. In a program that meets, or can meet the criteria for a quality preschool program for at-risk 3- or 4-year-old children in school year 2024-2025;
2. New local dollars, which are used to implement a program in the 2024-2025 school year that meets the criteria for a quality preschool program for at-risk 3 and 4-year-old children.

State funds and local matching funds cannot be used for capital outlay.

In-Kind Contributions

In-kind contributions are defined as cash outlays that are made by the locality that benefit the program, but are not directly charged to the program. The value of fixed assets cannot be considered as an in-kind contribution. Local matching funds cannot be used for any expenditure that would be classified as a capital expenditure. In-kind contributions are:

1. Limited to no more than 50 percent of the total local match requirement;
2. Justified in the program plan as necessary and reasonable for proper and efficient implementation of the program;
3. Verifiable from the recipient's records;
4. Not included as contributions for any other federally-assisted or state-assisted project or program; and
5. Not paid by the federal government or state government under another award.

For additional information on local and in-kind matching requirements, see Appendix E.

♦ Coordination of Funds

Localities should coordinate other funding sources in planning programs for 3- and 4-year-old children. Some sources of funds include federal funds for Title I, Head Start programs, and child-care subsidy programs (federal, state, local), and tuition. However, only one funding source can be in place for any part of the day. Funding sources cannot overlap for an individual student. For example, a student can be funded by VPI for the school day (9:00am-3:30pm) and by child-care subsidy for wrap around care (7:00am-8:59am and 3:31pm-6:00pm). A student cannot be fully funded by child-care subsidy (7:00am-6:00pm) and VPI (9:00am-3:30pm) at the same time.

Local plans must provide clear methods of service coordination for the purpose of reducing the cost per child for the service, increasing the number of at-risk children served and/or extending services for the entire year. Examples of these include, but are not limited to:

1. *Wrap around services* combine funds such as child-care subsidy dollars, administered by local social service agencies, with dollars for quality preschool education programs. (See Appendix H)
2. *Wrap out services* use grant funds to provide health, social services, and transportation within a setting that currently provides quality preschool education (e.g., child-care settings or schools).
3. *Expansion of services* uses grant funds to purchase placements within existing programs, such as Head Start, which provide comprehensive services to at-risk 3- and 4-year-old children.

Ready Regions can be a key partner in this work.

WAIT LISTS AND REALLOCATION OF SLOTS

Localities who accept all their state allocated slots for 4-year-olds and anticipate having a waitlist beyond those slots, have the option to request additional slots for 4-year-olds during the Spring Application. After the May 15 application deadline, VDOE will review all requests for waitlist slots and award slots to localities based on available funds. No waitlist slots are guaranteed. If funding will not allow all requested slots to be awarded, VDOE will award a portion of the requested slots to all localities who applied for them. This portion will be based on a percentage of allocated slots. Final reallocations will be shared, along with 3-year-old and Community Provider Add-On slots, no later than July 1 each year.

LATE ENROLLMENT OF VPI STUDENTS

Late enrollment may be available for slots filled for the first time between October 1 and December 31, pending available funds. Localities who do not fill all their awarded slots by September 30 Student Record Collection (SRC), have the option to apply for Late Enrollment Slots. Localities can apply for slots over the SRC enrollment up to their total allocated slots, for both 3- and 4-year-old slots, on the Fall Verification Report. If

localities apply for Late Enrollment slots, they will be awarded prorated funding for slots filled for the first time on December 31, pending available funding.

Section 7: Appendices A-F to VPI Guidelines

Appendices A-G refers to information regarding the requirements of a quality preschool program and the Virginia Preschool Initiative.

Appendix A:
Serving 3-Year-Olds

Appendix B:
Use of Preschool Assessments

Appendix C:
Student Eligibility Criteria (General Eligibility Criteria and Local Eligibility Criteria Waiver)

Appendix D:
Local In-Kind Match

Appendix E:
Slots in Community Provider Settings

Appendix F:
Wrap Around Service

Appendix A - Serving 3-Year-Olds

The Appropriation Act includes funding for serving 3-year-olds in VPI. All VPI programs are eligible to apply to serve 3-year-olds, even those who are not serving 4-year-olds. Localities must submit an application as a part of the annual VPI Spring Application in SSWS and receive approval to serve 3-year-olds with VPI funds.

Children are eligible for services through VPI for 3-Year-Olds if they are residents of Virginia, unserved by Head Start, turn 3-years-old by September 30 of the school year and meet either at-risk local eligibility criteria or state VPI eligibility criteria.

FUNDING AND REPORTING FOR VPI 3-YEAR-OLDS

- 3-year-olds will *not* be added to the VPI state allocation formula. Any 3-year-olds requested via the Spring Application, and awarded, are in *addition* to the allocated VPI slots a program receives.
- Available funds may be distributed to selected localities based on an allocation formula providing the state share of a VPI slot for each 3-year-old. If available, 3-year-old slots will be funded at the same rate as typical VPI.
- A local match, based on the composite index of local ability-to-pay, will be required. VPI rules related to local match will apply.
- 3-year-olds will be reported in the fall Student Record Collection (SRC) in the same manner as 4-year-olds.
- Available state funds for VPI slots for 3-year-olds will be distributed via electronic payments to programs on a recurring basis.

SERVING 3-YEAR-OLDS IN VPI CLASSROOMS

- 3-year-olds may be served in single-age (3-year-old only) or mixed-age (3- and 4-year-old) classrooms.
- The VPI 3-year-old slots will follow the same rules and expectations as slots in traditional school settings as outlined in these guidelines.
  - o Quality expectations for classroom observation, curriculum and professional development must be met.
  - o Programmatic expectations such as ratio, teacher certification, and transportation must also be met.
- 3-year-old slots may be in a school-based or community-provider setting.
- Similar to typical VPI, localities will be expected to track outcomes over time for participating children and share that data with the VDOE. Continuing in 2024-2025, VKRP will be required for VPI 3-year-olds.
- Localities should use *Virginia's Birth-to-Five Early Learning and Development Standards* to determine learning standards for three-year-olds.

REQUIREMENTS FOR INTERESTED APPLICANTS FOR VPI 3-YEAR-OLDS

Localities participating in VPI for 3-Year-Olds are required to:
1. Demonstrate broad stakeholder support
1. Confirm the support of Local Head Start Agency
2. Confirm support of Ready Region
2. Track outcomes for participating children

3. Demonstrate how they will maximize federal and state funds to preserve existing birth through five slots
4. Support inclusive practices of children with identified disabilities
5. Collaborate among the school division, local department of social services, programs accepting childcare subsidy payments, and providers for Head Start, private childcare and early childhood special education and early intervention programs.

Appendix B - Use of Preschool Assessments

Early assessments are useful tools to support data-informed instruction to individualize academic approaches to support school readiness. VPI programs are required to assess 3- and 4-year-olds each fall and spring using the VKRP and VALLS: Pre-K (formally known as PALS:Pre-K). VKRP and VALLS:Pre-K are a set of coordinated assessments measuring mathematics, self-regulation, social skills, and literacy. Combined, the data provide early childhood educators and leaders with a more comprehensive picture of students' skills at the beginning and end of the VPI year.

VKRP was developed in partnership with the University of Virginia (UVA). Additional information about the mathematics, self-regulation, and social skills components of the preschool VKRP is available on the [VKRP website](). VPI Coordinators/ Division Contacts are encouraged to contact VKRP forthe most up-to-date information on available training and resources to support the completion of VKRP screeners and data use.

Virginia Literacy Partnerships at the University of Virginia developed the Virginia Language & Literacy Screening System (VALLSS) which includes the Virginia Language & Literacy Screener: Pre-K (VALLS: Pre-K). The Virginia Literacy Partnerships [website]() houses assessment guides and training for teachers, assessment tools, individualized reports, suggested resources for classroom instruction, and family partnership activities. Comprehensive information on the tools and aligned resources may be found on the Virginia Literacy Partnerships [website](). VALLS: Pre-K for both 3- and 4-year-olds is required in VPI classrooms and should be administered within the required timeframes in fall and spring to complement the VKRP assessment windows.

Virginia Literacy Partnerships	Virginia Kindergarten Readiness Program
888-882-7257	866-301-8278
[Literacy@virginia,.edu](mailto:Literacy@virginia.edu)	Vkrp@virginia.edu
https://literacy.virginia.edu	https://vkrponline.org

Appendix C - Student Eligibility Criteria (General Eligibility Criteria and Local Eligibility Criteria Waiver)

Each year the General Assembly approves an annual Appropriations Act, which sets forth requirements for the VPI program. Localities can enroll students using general eligibility criteria or by using local eligibility criteria, which is typically capped at 15 percent of enrolled students. The Appropriations Act adds the ability for localities to submit a waiver to increase their local eligibility criteria to be greater than 15 percent.

GENERAL ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

Local plans must indicate the number of at-risk 4-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 that are specific to:
- family income at or below 200 percent of federal poverty guidelines,
- homelessness,
- student's parents or guardians are school dropouts, or
- children with disabilities or delays who are eligible for special education services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, regardless of household income.

If a locality is participating in VPI for 3-Year-Olds, local plans must also indicate the number of at-risk 3-year-old children to be served using the same eligibility criteria listed above.

♦ LOCALLY ESTABLISHED AT-RISK ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

Up to 15 percent of a program's slots may be filled based on locally established eligibility criteria so as to meet the unique needs of at-risk children in the community.

Localities that can demonstrate that more than 15 percent of slots are needed to meet the needs of at-risk children in their community may apply for a waiver from the Superintendent of Public Instruction to use a larger percentage of their slots. Localities must demonstrate that increasing eligibility will enable the maximization of federal funds and will not have a negative impact on access for other individuals currently being served.

Programs may apply for a waiver to serve more than 15 percent of slots through local at-risk criteria to meet the needs of more at-risk children in the community. The Office of Early Childhood will accept applications via SSWS during three submission window periods. Each waiver will be reviewed by the State Superintendent of Public Instruction.
- Projection 1: March 1 – May 15
- Projection 2: July 1 – August 15
- Projection 3: September 1 – October 15

The key question to consider in determining local eligibility criterion is "What other factors in our community are contributing to children's readiness for kindergarten?" Historically, some programs have reported the following local at-risk criteria to the VDOE.

- Abuse/Trauma: A family member suffers/suffered from abuse including all forms of trauma.
- Single Parent: A child for which one parent or guardian has sole responsibility for financial support and parenting of children (this would not include divorced or never married parents, where both parents still provide financial and parenting support).
- Foster/Welfare: Child is in foster care or child welfare system.
- English Language Learner (ELL): Child's home language is not English
- Incarceration: Parent is currently incarcerated
- Military Deployment: A parent is currently deployed for military service
- In Loco Parentis: Child is raised by family other than parents (regardless of custody)
- Child Developmental Concern: based on medical documentation or standardized screening tool
- No access to affordable childcare: *available* is a site with open slots, *affordable* is a site that accepts Childcare Subsidy

If incorporating local criteria related to the COVID-19 pandemic, programs are encouraged to consider the specific impacts of the pandemic on their community. Impacts of the pandemic that could be risk factors include but are not limited to: a parent or caregiver's job loss, chronic health conditions, or death of a close family member.

When determining local eligibility criteria, programs should consider how each criterion puts a child at risk. As an example, "child of a division employee" would not be an acceptable local eligibility criterion because it is not a factor that puts a child at greater risk for not entering kindergarten ready. Children of division employees may be eligible via other criterion, but not solely for this reason. Criteria should also be specific to an individual, not characteristics of a community. For example, "There is a lack of adequate childcare in our community" describes the general situation in the community and not a risk factor used to determine eligibility for a specific child. This criterion could be rephrased to be specific to the child; for example, "No affordable childcare within 10 miles of the child's home." Where applicable, programs should be specific about time frames and screening tools used to determine eligibility.

In the Fall Verification Report, each program must identify the total number of VPI slots used in each of the following criteria. If a student meets the requirements based on multiple criteria, select the one that made the student most eligible by General Assembly requirements first. If the student does not meet one of the four mandated General Assembly criteria, then select the local criteria that made the student most eligible.
  i.   At or below 200 percent of poverty
  ii.   Homelessness
  iii. Student's parents or guardians are school dropouts
  iv.   Students with disability (IEP)
  v.   Local criteria

ELIGIBILITY REPORTING REQUIREMENTS FOR PROGRAMS

The Department of Education is directed to compile from each program the aggregated information as to the number of enrolled students whose families are 1) at or below 130 percent of poverty, 2) above 130 percent but at or below 200 percent of poverty, 3) above 200 percent but at or below 350 percent of poverty, and 4) above 350 percent of poverty. This includes reporting income levels of families of VPI students found eligible using local criteria. The Department shall report this information annually, after the application and fall participation reports are submitted to the Department from the program to the Chairman of House Appropriations and Senate Finance Committees.

Appendix D - Local In-Kind Match

The Appropriations Act modified the maximum amount of local match that may come from *in-kind* (vs. cash) resources from 25 percent to 50 percent, beginning in Fiscal Year 2021.

This modification provides flexibility to localities to achieve the local matching requirements with utilization of in-kind resources rather than cash.

In-kind contributions are defined as cash outlays that are made by the locality that benefit the program but are not directly charged to the program. The value of fixed assets cannot be considered as an in-kind contribution. Local matching funds cannot be used for any expenditures that would be classified as a capital expenditure (e.g., purchase of a trailer).

In-Kind Contributions are:
1. Limited to no more than 50 percent of the total local match requirement;
2. Justified in the program plan as necessary and reasonable for proper and efficient implementation of the program and allocated to the program on a reasonable basis;
3. Verifiable from locality records;
4. Not included as contributions for any other federally-assisted or state-assisted project or program; and
5. Not paid by the federal government or state government under another award.

First priority should be using all funds, including the required local match, to meet the state Early Learning and Development Standards and VPI guidelines, such as the required staffing standards and provisions of your local plan. If all direct program requirements have been met first, then local match may be deemed to go to non-direct service components, such as custodial services or utilities. The overall emphasis on the use of state and local funds for VPI should be direct services to at-risk 3- and 4-year-olds.

EXAMPLES

- An example might include a custodian who is paid by the locality and cleans three buildings. One of the buildings is a VPI preschool, but no VPI cash funds are used to pay the salary. This locality would be able to count 1/3 of the custodian's salary and benefits toward the amount required for local match without using a time log or prorated situation.
- It is important to note, however, the *Code of Virginia* and Appropriation Act state that the intent of the state and local funds for VPI are for *direct* preschool services to at-risk 3- and 4-year-olds; the emphasis on use of funds should be there.

Private funds contributed for use in the program do qualify as local funds toward meeting the required local match. The applicant must certify the amount and source of any private funds. They must be appropriated in the locality's budget.

Federal sources of preschool funding (Title I, Head Start, or ECSE) cannot be used to meet the local match requirement. Other state funds or local match from other programs may not be used as VPI local match.

Appendix E – Slots in Community Providers

Programs are encouraged to partner with community providers to increase access to VPI services for at-risk children and their families.

Community Provider Slots encourage the placement of VPI slots in community-based settings.
- Where there is a difference between the regional estimated cost of quality and the VPI per pupil amount, add on funds may be available to mitigate this gap.
- Localities are encouraged to use slots in community providers to support inclusive practices for children with special needs.
- Localities that are a part of VPI for 3-Year-Olds may place 3-year-olds in community provider settings, along with 4-year-olds.

GENERAL GUIDELINES FOR OFFERING SLOTS IN A COMMUNITY PROVIDER SETTING

- VPI slots in community provider settings follow the same rules and expectations as slots in traditional school settings as outlined in the VPI Guidelines.
- Community Provider slots are part of the regular VPI slot allocation for a locality.
- Community providers can be community-based or private provider options within your locality.
- The entity receiving the VPI funds is fully responsible for meeting applicable procurement policies and compliance with VPI expectations.
- The lead governmental agency (e.g., school division, county government) is responsible for oversight of the partnership and the lead for state monitoring of the VPI program.
- Community providers must follow health and safety standards by the agency licensing the program (i.e., VDOE).
- Community providers participate in VQB5.
- Community providers may not be faith-based programs. Virginia's constitution dictates that state funds in the form of grants for the purpose of education services (such as preschool) may not be directed to faith-based organizations.
- Community providers must be licensed.
- Teachers in community provider setting are exempt from the licensing requirements for use of public funds. This means that teacher in a community provider setting can be paid with VPI funds regardless of licensure.
- Community Providers should have defined VPI program hours of the day and VPI days. These VPI hours do not have to match the school division hours but should be at least the minimum 5.5 hours for full day. VPI hours must be specific hours (9:00am-3:00pm or 8:00am-2:00pm, etc.). VPI days should align with the school division calendar. This will allow providers to have clear communication with families regarding financial responsibilities for care outside VPI hours. (see Submitting the VPI Application, Coordination of Funds for more details on combining funding sources for full day full year care).

♦ FUNDING FOR SLOTS IN COMMUNITY-PROVIDERS

- Localities receive the funding for VPI slots offered in community-provider settings as part of their overall VPI electronic payments from the VDOE. Localities are fully responsible for handling the payment and coordination with the community provider.

- VPI slots in Community Providers receive the same per pupil amount as all other VPI slots in that locality
  - Localities *do* pay a local match on the base VPI slot funding, as with any other slot.
- Where there is a difference between the Ready Region estimated cost of quality for the Childcare Subsidy Program and the VPI per pupil amount, add on funds may be available, pending available funds, to mitigate this gap.
  - For FY25, there is no gap in the following Ready Regions:
    - Ready Region 1: Southwest
    - Ready Region 2: West
    - Ready Region 3: Southside
    - Ready Region 4: Central
    - Ready Region 5: Southeastern
    - Ready Region 6: Chesapeake Bay
    - Ready Region 8: North Central
    - Ready Region 8: Blue Ridge
    - These regions will not have an add on in FY25.
  - For FY25, there is a gap in the follow Ready Region:
    - Ready Region 7: Capital Area
    - This region may have an add-on amount of $2,500 per slot available, pending available funds.
  - Localities *do not* pay a local match on the add-on.
- Budget language does not dictate what portion of VPI state funds or add-on funds must be shared with the community provider. Localities are strongly encouraged to ensure that these resources are used to increase pay parity for early childhood educators in private settings. Localities are required to use funds to support the same level of quality in community-provider settings as school-based settings. Localities will be required to report what percentage of VPI funds went to the community-provider settings, including both the per-pupil rate and any add-on.
- There are various ways to coordinate and share resources with community providers that are offering VPI classrooms. Localities are strongly encouraged to use these funds to support pay parity for early educators in private settings.
- Funds may be used to purchase items and services that benefit all children in the community provider.
- Funds may not be used for capital outlay.

MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING (MOU) OR MEMORANDUM OF AGREEMENT (MOA)

Localities are required to have MOU/As with all community providers supporting VPI slots. These MOU/As should outline the items listed below (and any other items deemed necessary by the programs) in order to ensure clarity in program expectations and the implementation of high quality VPI programming. It is important to note that neither the Appropriations Act nor the Guidelines specify what percentage of per pupil funding should pass through to community providers. This is a local decision that could vary between providers based on the needs of each entity. However, all per pupil funding should be accounted for as serving the VPI students and classrooms. Both parties should sign the MOU/A

MOU/As should include, at minimum, the following:
- Obligations of the community provider
- Obligations of the grantee
- Amount paid to the community provider per slot (actual dollar amount) *
- In-kind services provided by the grantee to make up any difference between the payment and the per pupil funding (actual dollar amount per pupil per service, ex: $300 per pupil for Enrollment and Administrative support) *

- Define VPI hours and days for the Community Provider (Specific hours and day, ex: 8:00am-2:00pm following local school division calendar)
- Clear processes for placement of students and reporting requirements

*These two items should add up to full per pupil funding plus any applicable community provider add on

Appendix F - Wrap Around Services

While VPI programs are not expected to provide wraparound services for students, the Appropriations Act charges VPI programs to have service coordination:

"c. Local plans must provide clear methods of service coordination for the purpose of reducing the per child cost for the service, increasing the number of at-risk children served and/or extending services for the entire year. Examples of these include:
1) "Wraparound Services" - methods for combining funds such as child care subsidy dollars administered by local social service agencies with dollars for quality preschool education programs."

There are two key public funding sources for wraparound services; *Child Care Subsidy Program* (available in all localities) and *Mixed Delivery Wrap-around Program* (available in some localities). There may also be locally funded services available. Localities should coordinate with any and all programs in their community.

CHILD CARE SUBSIDY

Localities can:
- Coordinate with local DSS agencies to support families in registering for child care subsidy.
  - Most families who qualify for VPI will qualify for subsidy.
  - Depending on the family's situation, they can be approved for hours outside the school day/year to support wrap-around services.
- Work with local childcare providers who accept subsidy to provide transportation to/from the VPI site during the school year.
- Provide families with local providers who accept subsidy.
- Prioritize community partnerships with providers who accept subsidy.

MIXED DELIVERY

- Partial Mixed Delivery funding is available for wrap-around services
  - Full Rate-(VPI Rate + CP Add On)
- Only available for VPI slots in a Community Provider setting
- Wrap-around would include at least:
  - 3.5 hours of additional care on school days
  - 10 hours of care on non school days
  - 240 total days a year
- Programs can prioritize community partnerships with providers who also offer Mixed Delivery