



#048-21

Commonwealth of Virginia
Virginia Department of Education
Superintendent's Memo #048-21

DATE: February 26, 2021
TO: Division Superintendents
FROM: James F. Lane, Ed.D., Superintendent of Public Instruction
SUBJECT: **Virginia Preschool Initiative New and Sustained Strategies for Expanding Access to Quality Early Learning: Planning for 2021-2022**

The impact of COVID 19 on Virginia's youngest learners has been significant. Fall 2020 enrollment data reveals that approximately 6,400 fewer preschoolers and 12,000 fewer kindergarteners are enrolled this year. Preschool drops are four times larger among children from economically disadvantaged families, and larger among Black and Hispanic children.

This fall, 45 percent of kindergarteners started school without the key literacy, math, and social-emotional skills needed to be successful - an increase from past years. Statewide results show a significant drop in kindergarten literacy, a reality that is having a disproportionate effect 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.

Governor Northam has continued to indicate the importance of expanded quality early childhood experiences through his proposed amended 2020-2022 budget. As outlined below, the Governor's budget restores funding for expanded VPI programming and strategies, including increased VPI rate per slot and additional focus on three-year-olds, and sustaining enhancement programs from 2020-2021. School divisions are strongly encouraged to review the approaches below and begin planning for expanded VPI programs in 2021-2022.

New Strategies (Pending General Assembly Approval)

The following strategies were included in the Governor's introduced budget, and are proposed to increase overall funding and support for VPI programs.

- **Proposed Increased Funds for all VPI Slots:** Increase the funded VPI full-day per-pupil amount from \$6,326 to \$7,655 and the half-day per pupil amount from \$3,163 to \$3,827.50 in FY 2022.
- **Increased Inclusion of Students Identified with Disabilities:** For 2021-2022, a target inclusion rate of 10 percent of all children enrolled in local VPI programs are children with Individualized Education Plans. VPI programs falling below 10 percent will provide reasons the target was not achieved and actions to meet or exceed the target in the next school year.
- **Preschool Version of Virginia Kindergarten Readiness Program (VKRP):** Educators will gain a better understanding of children's needs through the implementation of a preschool version of VKRP. A preschool version of the VKRP will be implemented in all publicly-funded preschool classrooms during the 2021-2022 school year.

In addition to the Governor's budget initiatives, several administrative changes are proposed for VPI, including enrollment of eligible VPI students beyond the October 1 cutoff date at a prorated amount. There is also consideration of permitting VPI enrollment for five-year-olds who are eligible for kindergarten, and otherwise qualify for VPI. If approved, five-year-old enrollment would be specifically for 2021-2022 as a response to COVID 19, with some families potentially preferring to enroll their child in preK even when age eligible for kindergarten.

Sustained and Expanded Strategies - Serving Three-Year-Olds in VPI

The VPI Three-Year-Old Pilot began in 2020-2021. This pilot is proposed to be expanded for next year. School divisions are strongly encouraged to consider participating.

- **Expanded Pilot for Serving Three-Year-Olds:** The VPI pilot for serving three-year-olds will be expanded in 2021-2022. This pilot provides selected school divisions with the opportunity to serve their communities most vulnerable children for two consecutive years in VPI classrooms. Three-year-olds served in this pilot are in addition to the number of VPI slots a division is allocated. The Office of Early Childhood will accept

applications for the pilot as a part of the May 15, 2021 VPI Application through the Single Sign-on for Web Systems (SSWS).

Sustained Strategies

The following strategies were in place for the 2020-2021 school year, and are expected to be continued next year.

- **Reduced Waitlists through Slot Reallocation:** Divisions projecting to fill all of their allocated VPI slots and projecting a waitlist on their May 15, 2021 VPI Application may have additional VPI slots reallocated to them. Divisions that do not project to use of their allocated slots may have them reallocated to other divisions. Divisions will learn the results of reallocation by July 1, 2021.
- **Waiver for Increased Local Criteria:** Divisions 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 the 2021 spring, summer, and fall submission windows.
- **Additional Funds for Community-Provider Settings:** VPI slots in a community-provider setting may receive add-on grant funds for each VPI slot (all ages). The add-on amount varies by region (\$3,500, \$2,500, \$1,500) as indicated in Attachment A (linked below). Divisions projecting serving VPI students in community-provider settings on their May 15, 2021 VPI Application may be eligible for these additional funds. Divisions will learn results of community-provider add-on funding by July 1, 2021.
- **Increase Amount of In-Kind Contributions:** Up to 50 percent of required local match, based on composite index, may come from in-kind contributions.

The Office of Early Childhood is hosting a series of webinars to provide specific details on the new, expanded, and sustained VPI strategies for expanding access to quality early childhood program services. In addition, weekly VPI Office Hours will be held with Office of Early Childhood staff to assist with planning for 2021-2022 and to answer questions.

Increasing School Readiness by Increasing Access to Preschool in Your Community Webinars Office Hours

Webinars: The first in this three-part webinar series was provided and [recorded on January 27](#). A second webinar was presented on February 24. A recording of the webinar will be provided in the March [Readiness Connections Newsletter](#). [Participants must register for the third webinar](#) to be held on March 24 starting at 1 p.m.

VPI Planning & Questions Office Hours: Office of Early Childhood staff are hosting weekly office hours each Thursday until May 13, 2021 (alternating weeks at 11 a.m. and 2 p.m.) [Participants must register once to attend](#) any or all of the office hours.

For more information

If you need additional information or have questions about the VPI strategies, please contact, Dr. Mark R. Allan, Associate Director of PreK Programs, Office of Early Childhood, by email at Mark.Allan@doe.virginia.gov or by telephone at (804) 225-3665, or Tiffanie Meehling, Early Childhood Specialist, Office of Early Childhood, by email at Tiffanie.Meehling@doe.virginia.gov or by telephone at (804) 225-3665.

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- A. Attachment: [Virginia Preschool Initiative Slot Add-On Table FY21](#) (XLSX)