# Guidelines for the Virginia Preschool Initiative (VPI) Application 2019-2020

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Virginia Preschool Initiative

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Commonwealth of Virginia City Managers, County Administrators and Division Superintendents

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[The guidelines](http://www.doe.virginia.gov/early-childhood/preschool/vpi/guidelines.pdf) may be downloaded from the [VDOE website.](http://www.doe.virginia.gov)

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**The School Superintendent must certify electronically that the data is correct by May 15, 2019.**

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# The Virginia Preschool Initiative (VPI) - Guidelines for 2019-2020

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.

In response to the 2018 General Assembly, the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) created [*A Plan to Ensure High-Quality Instruction in All Virginia Preschool Initiative (VPI) Classrooms*.](https://rga.lis.virginia.gov/Published/2018/RD433)  The plan aggregates lessons learned from the[JLARC study](http://jlarc.virginia.gov/2017-early-childhood-programs.asp), Virginia Preschool Initiative Plus implementation, and University of Virginia (UVA) – Center for Advanced Study of Teaching and Learning (CASTL) as well as feedback from stakeholders.

[The *Plan*](https://rga.lis.virginia.gov/Published/2018/RD433/PDF)describes how Virginia will work to ensure that VPI provides a high-quality preschool experience, including the same components for Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) classrooms, in order to prepare all participating children for kindergarten. The VPI Plan calls for quality improvements in three areas: 1) use of integrated, evidence-based curriculum, 2) assessing teacher-child interactions, and 3) providing individualized professional development. Implementation of the three quality components outlined in the Plan is encouraged in all early childhood classrooms. The following guidelines outline the expectations for meeting the goals included in *The Plan* for 2019-2020, with the expectation that programs will take additional steps to strengthen quality annually.

The VPI Program is the largest public provider of pre-K education to children in Virginia. The guidelines that follow outline the minimum expectations for divisions offering the VPI program to the four-year-olds that meet eligibility criteria within their community for 2019-2020.

## Scope of Services for VPI Programs

The purpose of the grant is to reduce disparities among young children upon formal school entry and to reduce or eliminate those 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. Equity 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:*

* *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 is providing engaging learning opportunities for young children.*

*Through both local and external observations, pre-K classrooms are better prepared to support child learning and development. In 2019-2020, VPI programs are strongly encouraged to grow their capacity to support the use of the CLASS® tool.*

## Defining the Virginia Preschool Program

The legislative intent of the initiative is to establish a high-quality preschool education program for at-risk four-year-olds. 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 four-year-old children in the 2019-2020 school year as described in these guidelines.

## Integrated and Evidence-Based Curriculum

An evidenced-based, integrated, and comprehensive curriculum, when fully implemented, makes it easier and more efficient for teachers to engage in sensitive, responsive, and cognitively stimulating teacher-child interactions. Starting in 2019-2020, all participating divisions or communities must either be:

* Using a vetted curriculum in all classrooms or
* In the process of having their curricular materials reviewed or
* Planning for using a vetted curriculum no later than the start of 2020-2021 school year.

As requested and submitted to the 2018 General Assembly, the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) created *A Plan to Ensure High-Quality Instruction in All Virginia Preschool Initiative (VPI) Classroom*. In this plan, the VDOE committed to working with the Center for Advanced Study of Teaching and Learning (CASTL) at UVA to develop a process for curriculum vetting and a list of comprehensive curriculums currently being used in VPI classrooms. An overview of the research-based, three-step vetting process is described in the plan.

* ***The curricula that have been vetted for use in VPI classrooms as of April 2019 include:*** Big Day for PreK, Creative Curriculum, Frog Street, HighScope, Opening the World of Learning, Tools of the Mind, Fairfax County Public Schools Pre-K curriculum, and Virginia Beach Locally Developed PreK Curriculum.
* ***The curricula currently being vetted as of April 2019 include:*** Kindercare, Starfall, STREAMin3, and We Can Early Learning.

School divisions may contact Cheryl Strobel ([Cheryl.Strobel@doe.virginia.gov](mailto:Cheryl.Strobel@doe.virginia.gov)) and request a vetting of a comprehensive curriculum.

While securing a comprehensive 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 of 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
* Divisions need curriculum experts who can provide ongoing training and support.

*Beginning in 2020-2021: All school divisions must implement a vetted, comprehensive and evidence-based curriculum, and describe their plan for providing curriculum aligned training and professional development for teachers.*

## Assessing Teacher-Child Interactions with *CLASS®* Observations

*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, pre-K classrooms are better prepared to support child learning and development.

There are multiple providers for *CLASS®* observations in 2019-2020, each of which includes feedback for teacher growth:

* **External Observations**- Beginning in 2018-2019, and continuing in the 2019-2020 school year, all VPI classrooms will have the quality of their teacher-child interactions assessed at least once every two years using the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (*CLASS®*) by external observers. All external observations will include a feedback summary provided to the site leaders that are expected to be shared with the teacher. This feedback is an essential component of classroom improvement. External observations will be completed by reliable observers from the Center for Advanced Study of Teaching and Learning (CASTL) at the University of Virginia (UVA).
  + The external *CLASS®* observations completed by CASTL are legislatively required for all VPI classrooms, at least once every two years.
  + As required by the legislature, CASTL has established the statewide minimum acceptable thresholds for Pre-K *CLASS®* Scores at the domain level:
    - Emotional Support = 5
    - Classroom Organization = 5
    - Instructional Support = 3.25
  + There are no required action steps for programs based on the external *CLASS®* observation scores they receive for 2019-2020
* **Local Observations-** To help ensure all classrooms meet or exceed statewide minimum acceptable thresholds, VPI programs are strongly encouraged to have teachers observed at least two times each year by local *CLASS®* observers who have been trained to reliability on the tool. School divisions should work with their local early childhood community to develop a plan for training local observers to reliability on the *CLASS®* tool. All local observations should include feedback and debrief for teachers based on their scores and areas for improvement. All divisions that conduct local *CLASS®* observations should keep a record of the observations completed and share collected data with the VDOE.

Providing local observations results in frequent feedback for teachers, which ultimately leads to improved learning experiences for children. Encouraging site and division leaders to be trained in the *CLASS®* tool enables them to bring the *CLASS®* lens to every aspect of their work, reinforcing the important feedback and goals teachers will receive as a result of their observations.

Divisions participating in Virginia Quality or the Preschool Development Birth-5 Grant may receive additional *CLASS®* observations to support further teacher development. The data from *CLASS®* observations will be shared with the VDOE. More information about the *CLASS®* observations being completed across program types in Virginia can be found in the [Field Guide *on CLASS* Observations in 2019-2020.](https://curry.virginia.edu/faculty-research/centers-labs-projects/castl/class-observations-and-individualized-professional)

Divisions are encouraged to consider professional development for teachers related to the *CLASS®* tool, as described in the professional development section below.

## Providing Individualized Professional Development

Teachers and instructional assistants must attend at least 15 clock hours per year of professional development 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 and assessment, 2) assessment, 3) teacher-child interactions, and 4) supporting students with individualized needs.
3. Be delivered with fidelity with the necessary leadership and organizational support.

When planning professional development, divisions should seek to develop a plan that includes the following key features:

1. Specific, articulated objectives that delineate the precise knowledge and skills.
2. Data-driven practices for focusing individualized professional development and track intended outcomes.
3. Determining dosage through evaluating what level of intensity, duration, and follow-up are necessary to ensure that the participants gain relevant knowledge and are able to apply any new skills in the classroom.
4. Practice-focused approaches for linking new knowledge to practice in the classroom.
5. Feedback-analysis loops that provide teachers the opportunity to adopt and implement a new practice and receive feedback about their success.

Additionally, VPI programs in 2019-2020 are encouraged to participate in training on the Virginia Kindergarten Readiness Program (VKRP) to understand how kindergarten readiness is measured in kindergarten.

In 2019, the VDOE will release the *Virginia Early Childhood Professional Development Guide.* This guide will assist divisions in identifying and planning quality professional growth opportunities.

## Foundation Blocks for Early Learning - Learning Standards

The [*Foundation Blocks for Early Learning*](http://www.doe.virginia.gov/early-childhood/curriculum/foundation-blocks-ada.docx)establish a measurable range of skills and knowledge essential for four-year-olds to be successful in kindergarten. The purpose of the *Foundation Blocks* is to provide early childhood educators a set of comprehensive standards with indicators of success for entering kindergarten derived from scientifically based research. They reflect a consensus of children’s conceptual learning, acquisition of basic knowledge, and participation in meaningful and relevant learning experiences.

The recommended evidence-based curricula listed in the previous section align with the *Foundation Blocks* standards.

## Child Assessment with PALS-PreK

Localities are required to use the Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening instruments for pre-kindergarten students (PALS-PreK) for literacy screening during the fall and spring of each school year. The results of PALS-PreK assessments, both fall and spring, must be reported to the PALS office (see Appendix B).

Students are required to be evaluated in the fall and in the spring by each participating school division. The division must certify that the VPI program follows the established standards in order to receive funding for quality preschool education. Divisions must use the PALS literacy assessment. Additional assessments may be found within selected comprehensive and evidence-based curricula.

# 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 four-year-olds that enter into 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.*

## 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 works 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 must have a physical, hearing, vision, and current immunizations. Behavioral and mental health screenings should be coordinated if needed.

## Local VPI Steering Committee

A local VPI Steering Committee must be established to ensure coordination of services and resources to provide available comprehensive services to children and their families.

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, and other groups identified by the lead agency. The VPI Steering Committee is encouraged to meet at least quarterly, with the minutes of meeting events and decisions kept on file.

# Section 3: Family Engagement

*Families of VPI children should be included in every step of their four-year-olds’ 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.*

## 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 seek to 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. A set of resources highlighting [best practices for family engagement](https://www.naeyc.org/resources/topics/family-engagement) in early learning programs has been compiled by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC).

## Transition Strategies

Transition to kindergarten is a process that is most successful when it is carefully planned out well in advance. VPI programs implement transition strategies that should include a selection of the following strategies:

* Collaborative meetings between preschool and kindergarten teachers to discuss students’ progress in meeting the Foundation Blocks for Early Learning and school 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.

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# Section 4: Equity 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 focus on equity by ensuring practices and policies encourage inclusion and advancement of all children who qualify for the program. Instituting best practices of inclusion has been shown to have benefits for all children enrolled in preschool education programs, their families, and the community.*

## Inclusion of Students with Disabilities

Children with disabilities should be included in VPI classrooms along with their peers without disabilities. State funding to support VPI programs is intended for all at-risk four-year-old children, 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. While it is not a requirement of VPI, nor are minimum thresholds set, it is an expectation that children with disabilities will be included in VPI classrooms.

Children with IEPs may be eligible for a VPI program in one of three ways:

1. The child with an IEP meets the eligibility criteria for VPI;
2. Family income is less than 350 percent of federal poverty guidelines; or
3. Up to 15 percent of a division’s slots may be filled based on locally established criteria so as to meet the unique needs of at-risk children in the community and having a disability is considered a locally established criteria.

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 can support children with disabilities in reaching their full potential and also benefits children with and without disabilities, families, and communities.

Inclusion includes 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. This will include the provision of special education and related services in accordance with the child’s IEP or accommodations, supports, or services in the child’s 504 plan. 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](http://doe.virginia.gov/early-childhood/curriculum/inclusion/) which is designed to assist Virginia’s school divisions and early childhood communities in identifying, developing, and sustaining inclusive opportunities within high-quality early childhood programs for children with disabilities.

## Support for Dual Language Learners

Children who are Dual Language Learners (DLLs) are between the ages of 2.5 and 5.5 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. 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 division. However, divisions are encouraged to provide DLL support to students who have demonstrated a need for additional English language support.

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.

Further information on how to support the language development of DLLs can be found in thewithin the [English Language Development Standards](https://wida.wisc.edu/resources/early-english-language-development-standards-2014-edition). Specifically, on pages 10 and 11, you can find the Performance Definitions organized by age ranges. These explicitly describe the language trajectory students can experience through modeling and instruction. In addition, practitioners can use the [WIDA Early Years Can Do Descriptors](https://wida.wisc.edu/resources/can-do-descriptors-early-years) for ideas for specific kinds of activities DLLs can do at various stages of language development.

## Services for Preschoolers Experiencing Homelessness

Divisions are required to 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.

School divisions 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](Link:www.wm.edu) at or contact [homeless@wm.edu](mailto: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 occurs 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*](http://www.doe.virginia.gov/early-childhood/professional-dev/index.shtml) 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.*

## Student Eligibility

VPI students must be from a family that meets the following requirements: (i) family income at or below 200 percent of poverty, (ii) homelessness, (iii) student's parents or guardians are school dropouts, or (iv) family income is less than 350 percent of federal poverty guidelines in the case of students with special needs or disabilities.

In addition, up to 15 percent of a division's VPI slots may be filled based on locally established eligibility criteria to meet the unique needs of at-risk children in the community. This allows school divisions and localities to fill up to 15 percent of the VPI slots used each year based on locally established at-risk criteria, in addition to the four criteria listed in the paragraph above.

## Verifying Family Income for Student Eligibility

Each spring the VDOE distributes *Guidelines for Using Family Income Criteria in Determining Student Eligibility for the State-funded VPI.* These guidelines are provided to assist with implementing and meeting the income-based student eligibility criteria and reporting requirements for the state-funded VPI program by: 1) establishing a poverty level of income with which to apply the income eligibility criteria; 2) establishing a definition of family income and what to include as family income; and 3) establishing processes for verification of family income based on source documents in qualifying students to attend state-funded VPI programs.

Income verification is the process of verifying family income at the time of application based on review and approval of original source documentation demonstrating income. School division personnel and the parent/guardian must certify by their signatures on the application form which specific document(s) were provided and reviewed in making the VPI income eligibility determination and that the information on the documents met the income eligibility requirements.

## Staffing Ratio

The program will comply with the staffing standards required by Section 22.1-199.1C, *Code of Virginia*. The maximum class size will be 18 students. One teacher will be employed for any class of nine students or less. If the average daily membership in any class exceeds nine students but does not exceed 18, a full-time teacher’s aide will be assigned to the class.

## Instructional Time and Unstructured Recreational Time

As stated in the 2019 Appropriation Acts bill, the 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. In the event the 2019-2020 final Appropriation Act language changes from this due to final state budget actions affecting fiscal year 2020, updated information will be provided to VPI coordinators when it becomes available.

## 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. 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 pro-rata portion of a school year program provided.

## 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 your VPI programs. Clear attendance and communication policies along with collaboration with families, are crucial to improving VPI student attendance and increasing outcomes for students.

Every eligible four-year-old enrolled and funded by the VPI program in a public or private 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 Truancy Webpage](http://www.doe.virginia.gov/support/prevention/attendance-truancy/index.shtml).

## 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 and for providing full VPI services to eligible children and their families. The [United States Department of Transportation](https://one.nhtsa.gov/people/injury/buses/busseatbelt/index.html) provides information on safely transporting young children on school buses.

# Section 6: Submitting the VPI Application

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

## Submitting the VPI Application with Local VPI Plan

Access to the application for school division personnel should be requested through the school division’s SSWS account manager. In order to submit this application, divisions must meet the application requirements, outlined in the following section and provide answers to the following questions as evidence of their local plan for VPI:

1. Indicate the curriculum that will be used in 2019-2020. If not a vetted curriculum, explain the plan for submitting current tool for review or preparing to transition to a vetted tool in 2020-2021.
2. Describe the professional development and training teachers and teacher assistants will receive on using a vetted curriculum. If the division plans to make any changes to the selected curriculum either this year or next, explain the process for transition here.
3. Describe how teachers and teacher assistants will be supported to understand the *CLASS®* tool and any resulting scores from observations completed, either through external observers or local observers. Include any information about plans for local *CLASS®* observations here.
4. Describe the program’s staff development plan for providing at least 15 hours in early childhood topics. Explain how the professional development will: 1) be individualized based on classroom data, 2) focus on standards, curriculum and or/improving teacher-child interactions, and 3) be delivered with fidelity with necessary leadership and organizational support.
5. Describe how students are assessed in literacy, mathematics, science, history and social science, physical and motor development, and personal and social development.
6. Describe how the program will provide comprehensive services to support all domains of school readiness, including health and nutrition services, and social services.
7. Describe the VPI Steering Committee for the program. Explain how often the team will meet, and who will be recruited to participate. Please list each organization represented on the committee.
8. Describe the plan for transporting children to and from the VPI program site.
9. Describe the family involvement and engagement component. Identify the strategies the VPI program will use to engage families throughout the year.

## Application Requirements

Authorizing legislation requires the chief administrator (city manager or county administrator), in conjunction with the school 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-D
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 A provides information on risk factors)
4. Complete a grant application and submit it to the Department of Education.

## Funding a Qualifying Program

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 sites;
2. Purchase quality preschool education programs and services for at-risk four-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. First year programs operating less than a full school year will receive state funds on a fractional basis determined by the pro-rata portion of a school year program provided. Children enrolled in the program must be four years of age on or before September 30 of the school year.

The Appropriation 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. In FY 2016, the composite index value was capped at 0.5000 for purposes of calculating the estimated local match requirement for the VPI match.

## Local Funds

***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 four-year-old children in school year 2019-2020; and/or
2. New dollars, which are used to implement a program in the 2019-2020 school year that meets the criteria for a quality preschool program for at-risk four-year-old children.

***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. In-kind contributions are:

1. Limited to no more than 25 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.

***Coordination of Funds***

Localities should coordinate other funding sources in planning programs for four-year-old children. Some sources of funds include federal funds for Title I, Head Start programs, and child-care subsidy programs.

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. **Wraparound services** combine funds such as child-care subsidy dollars, administered by local social service agencies, with dollars for quality preschool education programs.
2. **Wrapout 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 four-year-old children.

***Mixed Delivery***

Mixed delivery means that school-based preschool program, Head Start programs, licensed child care programs, and community-based organization are eligible to partner and work together to provide services. Classrooms can be supported in public and private sectors.

Some participating eligible localities do not use all the available slots to due limited space and lack of local match. Please remember that partnerships with private providers is encouraged and permitted.

# Section 7: Using Appendices A-D to Complete the Application

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

**Appendix A:**

Student Eligibility Criteria

**Appendix B:**

PALS-PreK

**Appendix C:**

*Historical Information Regarding VPI*

**Appendix D:**

*Comparing Key Expectations for 2019-2020 and 2020-2021*

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## Appendix A - Student Eligibility Criteria

Guidance on 2015-2016 Implementation of Student Eligibility Criteria for the Virginia Preschool Initiative Enacted in Chapter 665 (2015 Appropriation Act)

The amended 2014-2016 budget adopted by the 2015 General Assembly (Chapter 665) was signed into law by Governor McAuliffe on March 26, 2015, without any proposed amendments or vetoes. The enacted budget contains new eligibility criteria for students participating in the Virginia Preschool Initiative (VPI). Item 136 C.14. d.1 of Chapter 665 states:

*“d.1) Local plans must indicate the number of at-risk four-year-old children to be served, and the eligibility criteria for participation in this program shall be consistent with the economic and educational risk factors stated in the 2014-2015 programs guidelines that are specific to: (i) family income at or below 200 percent of poverty, (ii) homelessness, (iii) student's parents or guardians are school dropouts, or (iv) family income is less than 350 percent of federal**poverty guidelines in the case of students with special needs or disabilities.”*

Further, the 2016 Appropriation Act enacted at the 2016 General Assembly Session included a budget language provision allowing “*up to 15 percent of a division’s [VPI] slots may be filled based on locally established criteria so as to meet the unique needs of at-risk children in the community*.” This provision is effective with fiscal year 2017 and allows school divisions and localities to fill up to 15 percent of the actual VPI slots used each year based on locally established at-risk criteria, in addition to the four criteria in d.1 above.

In the Fall Verification Report 2017 each school division must identify the total number of VPI slots used in each of the following income brackets.

1. At or below 130%
2. Above 130% but at or below 200%
3. Above 200% but at or below 350%
4. Above 350%

In the Fall Verification Report 2017 each school division also 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.**

1. At or below 200% of poverty
2. Homelessness
3. Student’s parents or guardians are school dropouts
4. Family income is above 200% but at or below 350% of federal poverty guidelines in the case of students with special needs or disabilities
5. Local criteria

* Parent did not complete high school
* Physical abuse and neglect, family abuse, substance abuse
* Single family home
* Foster care
* English Language Learners (ELL)
* Parent that is incarcerated
* Military deployment
* Student raised by relatives other than parents
* Other than income or listed local criteria —(this would be a text box limited to 30 characters)

Additionally, Item 136 C.14 d.2 of Chapter 665 states:

*“d.2) The Department of Education is directed to compile from each school division the*

*aggregated information as to the number of enrolled students whose families are (i) at or*

*below 130 percent of poverty, (ii) above 130 percent but below 200 percent of poverty, (iii)above 200 percent but at or below 350 percent, and (iv) above 350 percent of poverty. The Department shall report this information annually, after the application and fall**participation reports are submitted to the Department from the school divisions, to the*

*Chairmen of House Appropriations and Senate Finance Committees. In addition, the*

*Department will post and maintain the summary information by division on the Department's**Web site in keeping with current student privacy policies.”*

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## Appendix B- Use of PALS-PreK

All Virginia Preschool Initiative (VPI) programs are required to screen children with the Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening instrument for pre-kindergarten students (PALS- PreK) in the fall and spring and submit scores to the PALS office. For more information, please visit the [PALS website](Link:http://pals.virginia.edu).

Early diagnostic assessments are a useful tool to ensure immediate intervention for children identified of being at-risk of reading failure.

With support from the VPI, the University of Virginia developed the PALS- PreK and established a Web site for preschool teachers that link the results of the assessment with suggested ideas for classroom activities and instruction.

The PALS-PreK instrument assesses rhyme awareness, upper and lower case alphabet knowledge, beginning sound, verbal memory, print knowledge, concept of word, and name writing. Descriptions of each of the PALS-PreK tasks are available on the Web site.

## Appendix C- Historical Context for the VPI Program

In January 1994, the Commission on Equity in Public Education adopted and endorsed four major programs as the core elements in their recommendations to the 1994 General Assembly. The recommendations, subsequently adopted by the General Assembly, focused on programs that had been shown to improve educational achievement. A preschool program for at-risk four-year-olds was one of those recommendations.

The 1995 General Assembly, through passage of the Omnibus Education Act (HB2542) and the Appropriation Act, reinforced all components of the 1994 package and provided for expansion of the Virginia Preschool Initiative (VPI). As of 2005-2006, state funds are available to provide comprehensive preschool programs to 100 percent of Virginia’s at-risk four-year-olds, as defined by VPI funding eligibility, and who are not being served by Head Start. Children at or below 100% of the poverty level should receive priority for Head Start enrollment. VPI should focus on children above that poverty level. Parental choice must be honored.

In FY 2012, the composite index value was capped at 0.5000 for purposes of calculating the estimated local match requirement for the VPI match. The 2016 General Assembly approved funding, subject to final approval by the Governor, calculated at an estimated $6,125 per eligible child, with program costs shared by the state and local governments based on the composite index of local ability-to-pay. The 2018 General Assembly funded the per pupil rate at $6,326.

**Appendix D - Comparing Key Expectations for 2019-2020 and 2020-2021**

| *Key Changes in VPI Guidelines* | *2019-2020* | *2020-2021* |
| --- | --- | --- |
| *Curriculum* | All school divisions will use or plan for for using a vetted evidence-based, integrated, and comprehensive curriculum. | All school divisions will have implemented a vetted curriculum and will be providing aligned professional development. |
| *CLASS® (Classroom Assessment Scoring System)* | All school divisions will participate in external observations of all classrooms every other year. All school divisions will build capacity for local *CLASS®* observations twice a year. | All school divisions will participate in external observations of all classrooms every other year.  All school divisions will be prepared to provide local observations in order to drive continuous improvement and ensure all classrooms meet or exceed statewide minimum thresholds. |
| *Professional Development* | Provide 15 clock hours of professional development in ECE related topics, with a goal to use professional development hours to build capacity that aligns with *CLASS®*. | Provide 15 clock hours of professional development in ECE related topics.  Provide individual professional development to teachers that aligns with Virginia’s Professional Development Guide, and is focused on *CLASS®*, curriculum, and providing ongoing and continuous feedback to teachers. |