



# Approaches to State Pre-K Eligibility Policy: Considerations for Virginia Policy Makers

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# Overview

- What is a High Quality Program
- Access, Equity & Sustainability
- Approaches to Eligibility Policy
- Research on Risk Factors
- Considerations for Virginia



# Critical Features of High Quality Programs

Investing in Our Future: The Evidence Base on Preschool Education  
(2013)

Developmentally Focused Instruction/Curricula

Intensive Job-embedded Professional Development

Regular Monitoring of Children's Progress to Inform Practice

**TEACHER QUALIFICATIONS, GROUP SIZE, ADULT-CHILD RATIO**



# VPI Meets 6 of 10 Quality Benchmarks

State of Preschool 2014, Virginia Profile, National Institute for Early Education Research

## QUALITY STANDARDS CHECKLIST

POLICY	STATE PRE-K REQUIREMENT	BENCHMARK	DOES REQUIREMENT MEET BENCHMARK?
Early learning standards	Comprehensive	Comprehensive	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Teacher degree	BA (public); HSD (nonpublic) <sup>2</sup>	BA	<input type="checkbox"/>
Teacher specialized training	Early Primary, Elem Ed, <sup>2</sup>	Specializing in pre-K	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Assistant teacher degree	HSD or equivalent (public); No minimum degree (nonpublic)	CDA or equivalent at least 1 support service	<input type="checkbox"/>
Teacher in-service	15 clock hours/years	At least 15 hours/year	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Maximum class size		20 or lower	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
3-year-olds	NA		
4-year-olds	18		
Staff-child ratio		1:10 or better	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
3-year-olds	NA		
4-year-olds	1:9		
Screening/referral and support services	Vision, hearing, immunizations <sup>3</sup>	Vision, hearing, health; and at least 1 support service	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Meals	No meal required <sup>4</sup>	At least 1/day	<input type="checkbox"/>
Monitoring	Other monitoring	Site visits	<input type="checkbox"/>

TOTAL BENCHMARKS MET

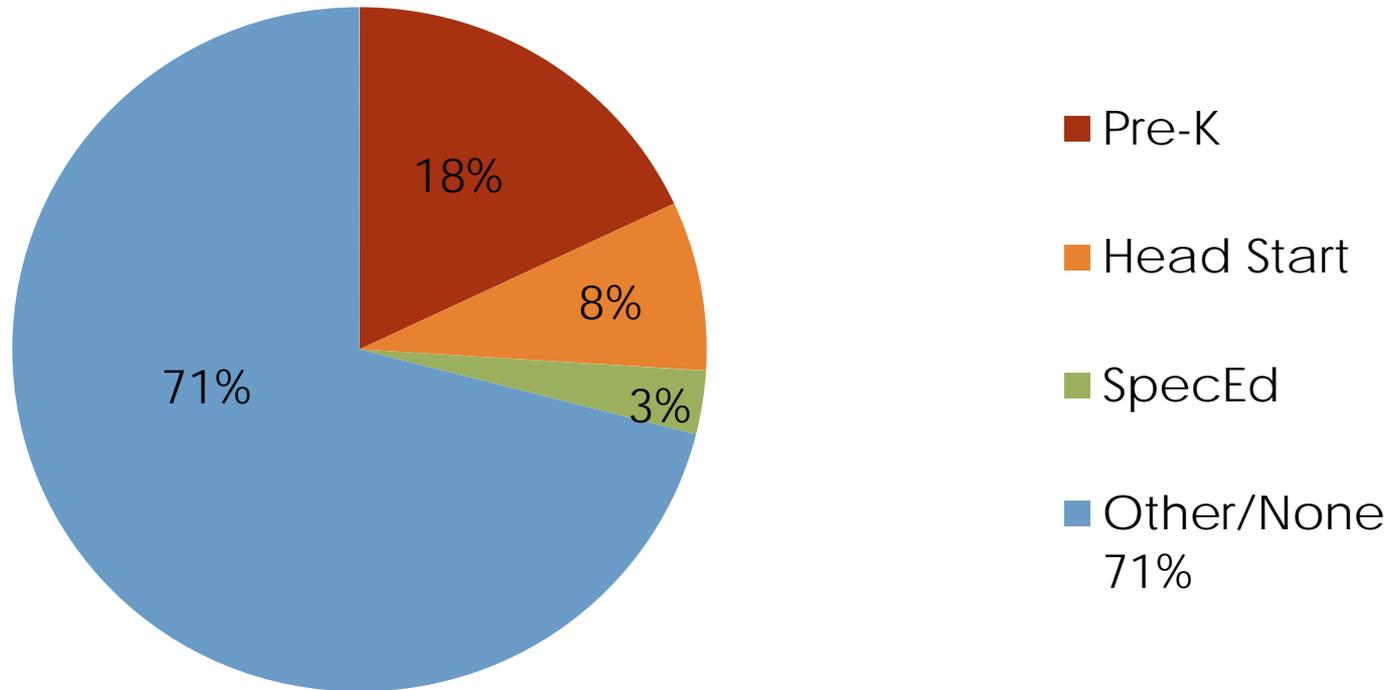
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# Access to Preschool in VA

State of Preschool 2014, Virginia Profile, National Institute for Early Education Research

## VPI & Head Start Enrollment of 4 Yr Olds In VA



# Access, Equity, and Sustainability

Eligibility + Recruitment + Selection + Enrollment + Attendance

- Low income children are less likely to participate in high quality PK and when they do, they benefit greatly
- However, low income children learn more in programs/classrooms that are economically diverse
- Eligibility Policy must work in tandem with program guidance to avoid unintended consequences



# National Overview of State Pre-K Eligibility Policy

Of the 53 programs profiled:

- 17 (32%) have no eligibility requirements beyond age
- 28 programs (58%) use low-income status to determine eligibility
- 21 programs (40 %) report that age is the only enrollment factor
- Five (9%) programs reported that income was the only risk factor used for eligibility.



# Income And Other Risk Factors

35 programs identify other risk factors, plus income.

- In 9 programs, children must meet a designated number of risk factors *in addition* to income
- In 19 programs, income counts as 1 risk factor
- The average program considers 5 risk factors
- 3 risk factors were used by more than half of the programs:
  - homelessness or unstable housing;
  - disability or developmental delay of the child; and
  - non-English speaking family.



# State Approaches to Eligibility Policy

- ***Individual Family Risk Factors*** - eligibility for the program is based on individual characteristics of the family/ child.
- ***Geographic Risk Factors*** - based on specific risk factors of residents in that jurisdiction
- ***Hybrid Model***- Certain % served must meet income eligibility; other risks considered



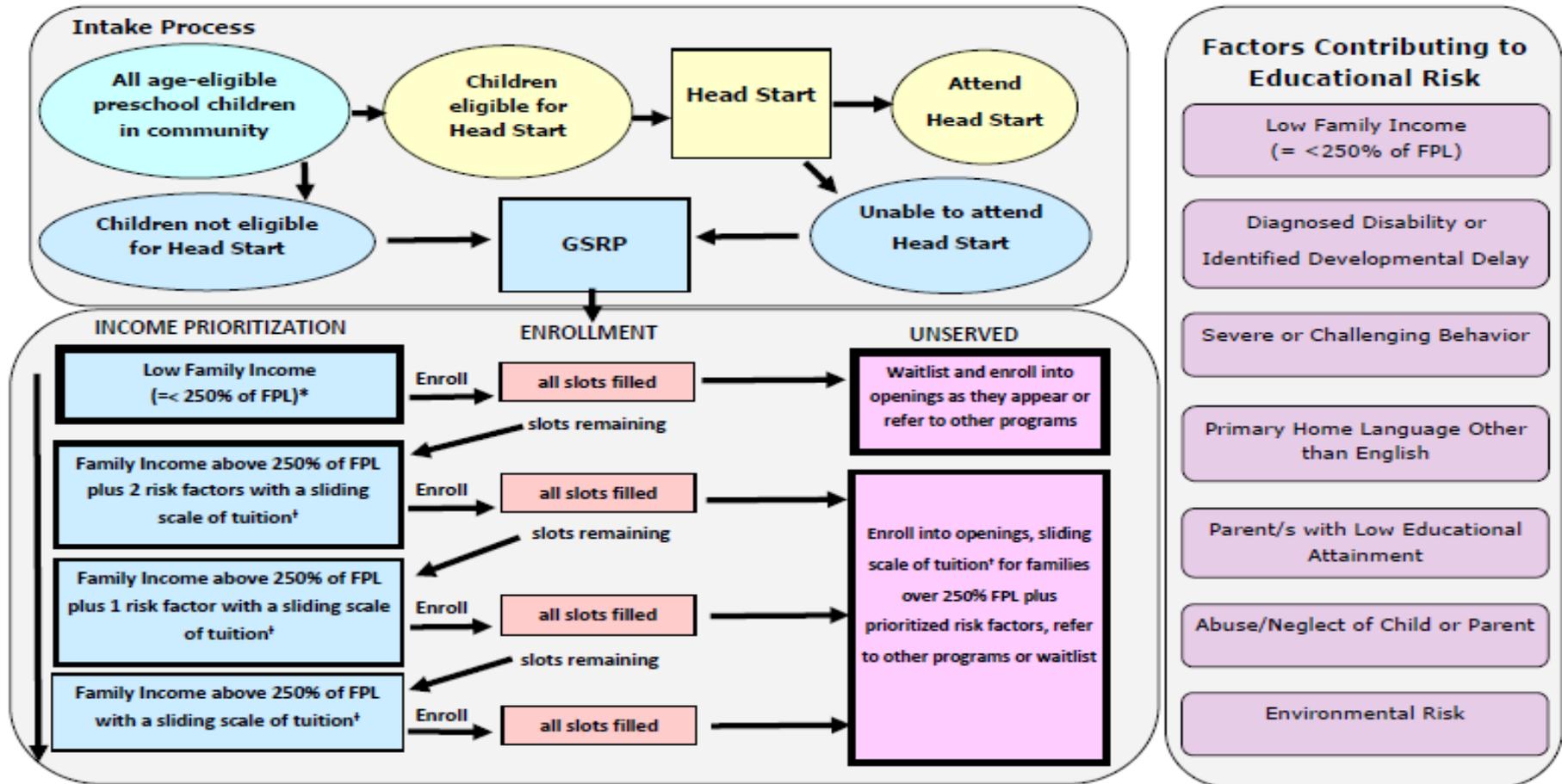
# Tennessee: Individual Risk Factors

- Income eligibility is first priority; other risk factors are considered when space is available.
- Tier 1: Economically disadvantaged, as based on income levels set annually by the Department of Health and Human Services.
- Tier 2: “Students with disabilities, students identified as English Language Learners (ELL), students in state custody, or those identified as educationally at-risk due to abuse or neglect.”
- Tier 3: If space is still available after serving children in Tiers 1 and 2, children who meet age and eligibility requirements set by the respective Community Pre-K Advisory Council (C-PAC) may be enrolled.



# Michigan: Individual Risk Factors

## Eligibility and Enrollment



\*Each child's household income is ranked from lowest to highest and divided into quintiles based on how far child's household income is below 250% of FPL, and then enrolling children in the quintile with lowest household income before enrolling children in the quintile with the next lowest household income.

†A maximum of 10% of enrolled children may be from families above 250% of FPL. These families must pay tuition calculated on a sliding scale based on family income. November 2013



# North Carolina: Hybrid Approach

- 80% of children in a program must meet income and age requirements
- 20% of *county's* "slots" can be above income if they have one of the following risk factors:
  - Child disability or developmental delay;
  - Non-English speaking family members;
  - Risk that child will not be ready for kindergarten;
  - Parental active military duty;
  - Chronic health condition and/or child has as IEP



# Geographic Risk Factors

- Often driven by court orders:
- New Jersey Former Abbott Preschool Program - only certain districts eligible
- Texas -- based on numbers of eligible children in a district
- South Carolina - based on percent of FRL in a county and rural counties



# Risk Factors With Strongest Research

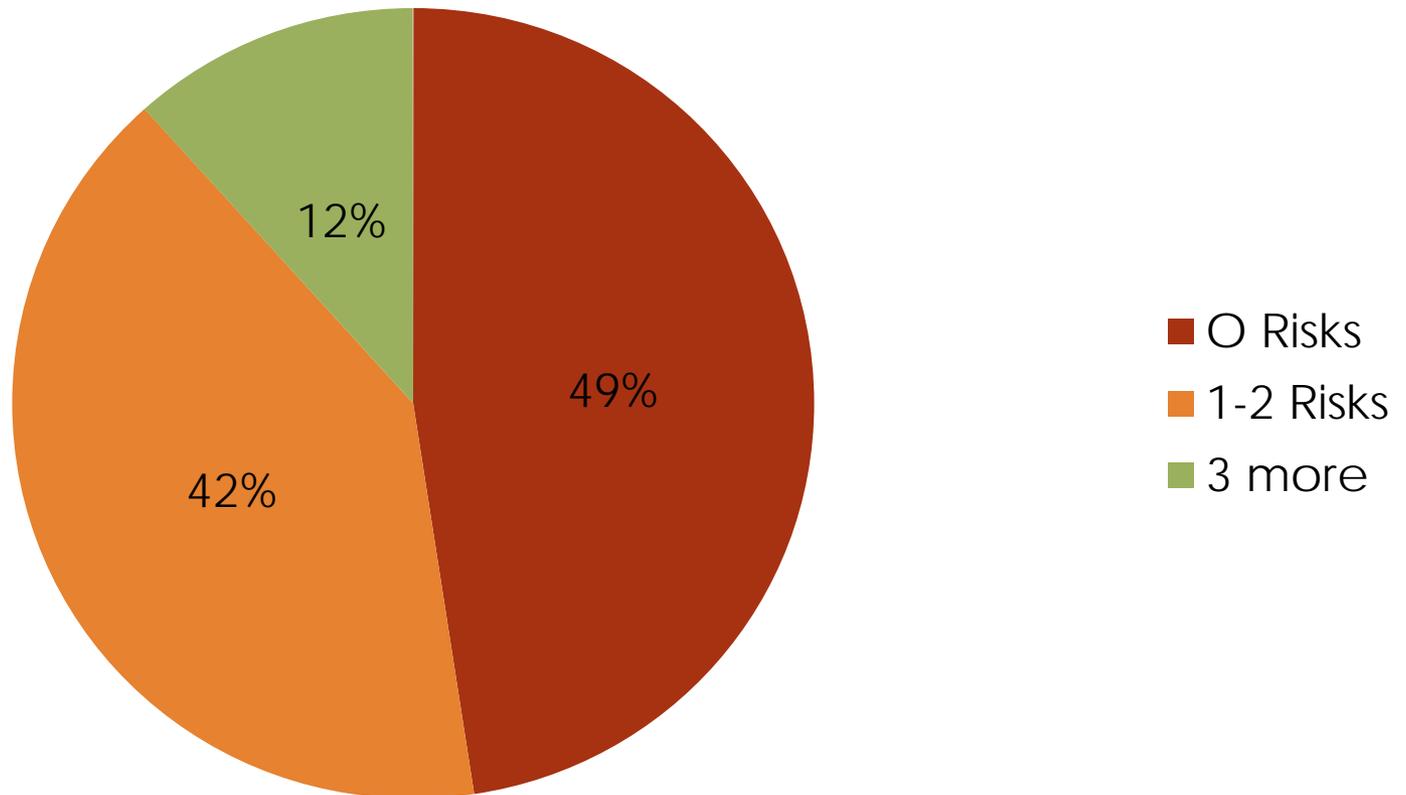
- children of teen parents
- living in poverty or deep poverty
- low maternal education
- homelessness or housing instability
- involvement with child welfare
- child with disabilities
- limited-English-speaking households
- migrant or seasonal families



# VA's Preschool Children & Risk

Improving the Odds for Young Children, National Center for Children in Poverty (2013)

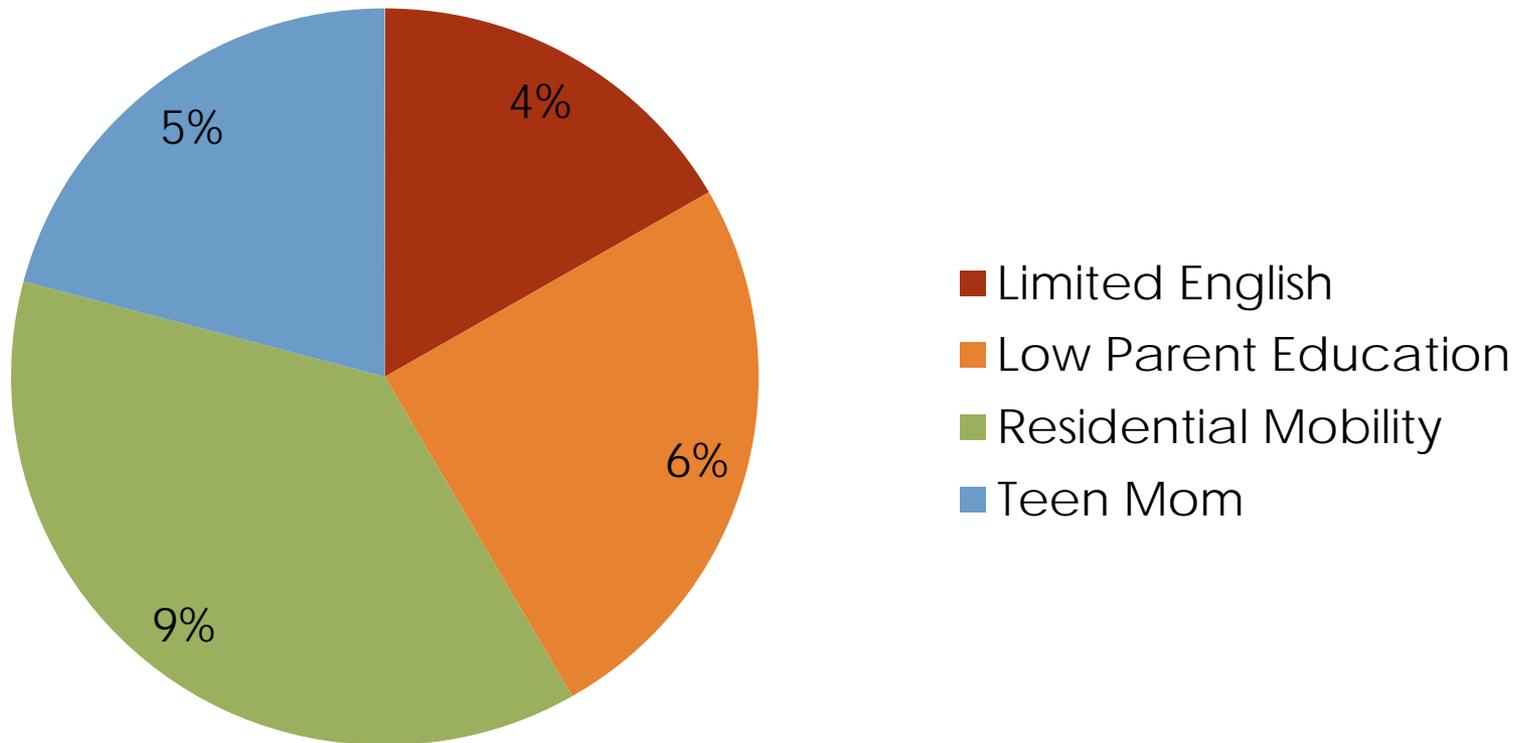
## Exposure to Multiple Risk Factors



# VA's Families with Preschool Children & Risk

Young Child Risk Calculator, National Center for Children in Poverty, 2013

## Preschool Children Experiencing Risk Factors and Low-Income



# Considerations for State Policy

- **What individual factors have the strongest research evidence for placing children at risk?**
  - Consider role of clustering of risk factors from child, family, community perspective
- **What are the options for weighting or ranking risk factors that represent the greatest needs of VA's children and families?**
  - Assigning greater weight (points) to factors that place children at greatest risk
- **What is the optimal "number" or combination of risk factors that would result in the greatest likelihood of serving the most vulnerable of VA's children?**
  - Consider the impact on program staff and families for documenting risk factor and utilize state/county data where possible



# Considerations, continued

- **Which approaches to eligibility balances the goals of serving the most vulnerable children while considering the peer effect on children in classrooms?**
  - Mixed income classrooms ameliorate impact of low resourced families or communities
- **How can VA balance statewide eligibility priorities with local flexibility?**
  - Hybrid models or weighting of some risk factors allow flexibility to meet local needs
- **What capacity is needed to implement eligibility policy effectively?**
  - Very critical to success of policy and to “do no harm” to children and families; staff and organizational capacity is impacted by the complexity of policy and level of proof required for income and other risk factors.





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