

The Commonwealth Council on Childhood Success

VPI Related Recommendations

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The Commonwealth Council on Childhood Success

Executive Order 22 established the Council (CCCS) and directs them, in coordination with the Children's Cabinet, to serve as a central coordinating entity to identify opportunities and develop recommendations for improvement including, but not limited to:

- 1) funding for preschool;
- 2) kindergarten readiness;
- 3) strategies to close the achievement gap in early elementary years;
- 4) the quality and accountability of child care programs and providers; and
- 5) coordination of services for at-risk families

- Chair by Lt. Governor Northam
- Public council, composed of 28 stakeholders that include agency commissioners, legislators, service providers , business leaders, stakeholder groups, universities, and community colleges. Workgroups include broader group of stakeholders.
- Focus on earliest years and building strong foundations from birth to age 8

CCCS Workgroups

- I. School Readiness:** Ensure every child is academically ready for kindergarten, regardless of the setting they transition from; define measures of quality; overcoming barriers to expanded access
 - ▣ **Virginia Preschool Initiative** (Address formula and funding beyond 2015 session debate to expand access; facilitate coordination with VPI+)
 - ▣ **Quality and Access of Childcare and Preschool:** Looked at defining and measuring quality; promoting QRIS and other standards of quality; address changes in regulations and professional development
 - ▣ **Closing the Achievement Gap:** Coordinating services for at risk kids, kindergarten assessment tools
- II. Health and Well Being:** Health – early identification of issues and delays; Mental health; expanded home visiting services;
- III. Data and Governance :** Sustainable early childhood focus from state government, beyond 4 year term of Governors; improved data collection – how are we measuring success? What changes are needed to do that better?

CCCS June 2015 Recommendations

- Solicited **public comment and feedback** on preliminary workgroup recommendations. This process included town halls in Fredericksburg, Blacksburg and Richmond that were attended by more than 250 people.
- The Council adopted **16 major recommendations**, each with numerous strategies and policy options, which they believe are necessary improvements and investments the Commonwealth can make maximize our children's futures.
- **Priority Recommendations:**
 1. Modernize the Virginia Preschool Initiative funding and formula; promote mixed delivery system of programming; and ensure that children most in need can benefit in all communities.
 2. Better coordinate governance of early childhood programs in order to improve service delivery.
 3. Ensure the well being of our youngest and most vulnerable children and identify timely interventions.

CCCS VPI Workgroup Overview

Membership: Voices for Virginia's Children, Department of Education, Virginia Early Childhood Foundation, Virginia Municipal League, VPI and Early Childhood Program Administrators from Chesterfield, Arlington, Alexandria, Fairfax, Public Libraries, etc.

Scope of Work

- Presentations on the basics of VPI administration and the new VPI+ grant
- Examined private-public partnerships and heard presentations from Fairfax, Alleghany, Hampton about their programs.
- Discussed the details of the VPI formula and funding challenges with VDOE Budget Analysts
- Hosted and Participated in VPI- focused town hall in Fredericksburg with Program Administrators from surrounding localities

CCCS VPI Workgroup: Guiding Principles

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- High quality preschool programs are essential to help prepare children for success in school and kindergarten readiness.
- Virginia should sustain its targeted approach in serving at-risk four year-old students through the Virginia Preschool Initiative and work towards ensuring all at-risk students can be served, especially children from economically disadvantaged families (at or below 200% of the federal poverty line).
- Children, families and communities benefit from comprehensive services that public and private partners can offer through a mixed delivery system. Virginia should strengthen and enhance public-private partnerships and approaches to blending and braiding programs and funding.
- Adequate funding is needed to finance the true cost of VPI in all Virginia localities. High quality can be assured and implemented through adequate funding.
- The current policies and processes for VPI funding create challenges for localities' long term planning needs. Policy changes should enhance program stability and continuity.

Recommendations: Administration of VPI

#1: Provide VDOE additional capacity to offer administrative oversight, programmatic site visits, and technical assistance to VPI programs. Funding for oversight and site visits of VPI and FTE positions at VDOE were eliminated in recent years, while the needs have become more complex. This has hindered the ability of the department to provide assistance to local programs. Additional dedicated resources at VDOE would permit the department to provide technical assistance on how existing classrooms can improve quality; expand access to the program for eligible children by supporting and providing technical assistance for community based partnerships; and help programs blend and/or braid funding streams with other publicly funding streams.

Recommendations: Administration of VPI

#2: Develop and actively promote a mixed delivery system of VPI programming in all communities. Policies should encourage partnership with community providers (public, private, non-profit, faith based, military, special education) while maintaining quality standards, With increased capacity, VDOE should consider the follow strategies to increase mixed delivery:

- Provide additional resources so the Department can offer technical assistance to localities regarding a mixed delivery system, which often helps localities overcome the frequent challenge of finding appropriate space for VPI classrooms (per recommendation #1)
- Issue guidance on operating policies for community based partnerships and disseminate to all localities, not just those participating in VPI+.
- Create a learning community to share best practices and lessons learned to include, among others: VPI administrators, early childhood special education providers, Smart Beginnings coalitions and community leaders around encouraging partnerships.

Recommendations: Administration of VPI

#3: Continuously improve and refine VPI funding and policies. Given ongoing improvements to the state's collection on VPI program outcomes, and research on the benefits of preschool experiences on specific at-risk populations, careful consideration should be given to the following strategies:

- As the state implements VPI + and begins collecting data and outcomes on the innovative models and benefits of expanded access, Virginia should use that information to improve quality standards of all VPI programs and consider expanding access to additional at-risk students.
- As state and federal early childhood funding streams and policy requirements continue to evolve, blending and braiding best practices should be encouraged and broadly disseminated.
- In the fall of 2015, VDOE will have more information on the eligibility criteria from localities, and income levels of students. Analysis of these reports should help inform funding and policy decisions.

Recommendations: Funding of & Eligibility for VPI

#4: Modernize VPI funding levels and formula.

- Tie per pupil funding to the rebenchmarking process, as is already done for other educational funding streams, so as to keep pace with inflation and enrollment.
- Increase the percentage of in-kind contributions that constitute local match from 25%.
- Maintain the unique 50% cap on the local match.
- Fully fund the VPI formula based on need rather than participation.
- Throughout Virginia, high-poverty communities have begun participating in the community eligibility provision for school lunch and therefore individual students' income eligibility is no longer tracked in the same way. This change could impact the calculation of the VPI formula, so the Commonwealth should consider other factors to identify the at-risk population in each community, such as the American Community Survey poverty estimates.

Recommendations: Funding of & Eligibility for VPI

#5: Maintain flexible and research based eligibility criteria for high risk students. Research shows that economically disadvantaged young children (at or below 200% of poverty) are less likely to participate in preschool and are most at-risk of not being prepared for school. English language learners, children experiencing high levels of family stress (homelessness, incarceration, military deployment, foster care, etc.) and children with developmental delays benefit greatly from preschool experiences. Additionally, families participating in VPI programs benefit significantly from the comprehensive set of services and family engagement model the programs employ. Therefore, the group recommends that these factors continue to be reflected in eligibility for and funding of VPI. While the state may identify some common priority risk factors that determine eligibility for VPI, this workgroup recommends that localities maintain some flexibility to address local needs, and unique risk factors, through their eligibility criteria.

Recommendations: Funding of & Eligibility for VPI

#6: Develop a CCCS Workgroup to Address and Support the Professional Qualifications of the Early Childhood Workforce. Virginia lacks a comprehensive professional development framework for early childhood providers and educators across the early education field, including and beyond the VPI program. Given ongoing national research, particularly the recently released [Institute of Medicine report: Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth Through Age 8](#), Virginia should continue the conversation about improving early childhood educators' qualifications and ongoing professional development to reflect best practices. A CCCS workgroup of stakeholders, to include representatives from higher education, DOE, DSS, VCCS, private providers, localities and others, to review opportunities to strengthen the educational background of early childhood professionals and the processes and costs associated with establishing higher education criteria for early childhood professionals. This subgroup would support the Governance workgroup and/or the development of a new early childhood entity/collaborative; Virginia Cross-Sector Professional Development's (VCPD) ongoing work; and VDSS as it develops a state plan.

Additional Information

http://www.ltgov.virginia.gov/ini_childhoodsuccess.htm

Council and Workgroup meetings, materials and reports

Public comment can be submitted to:

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