
**COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA
Department of Education**

DATE: September 27, 2019

TO: Division Superintendents

FROM: James F. Lane, Ed.D., Superintendent of Public Instruction

## SUBJECT: Virginia’s Initiative to Advance Effective Instruction and Interactions in Virginia Preschool Initiative (VPI) Classrooms

Virginia Preschool Initiative (VPI) Classrooms are increasing their focus on providing high-quality instruction and teacher child interactions. The Virginia General Assembly appropriated funds for the University of Virginia’s Center for Advanced Study of Teaching and Learning (CASTL) and the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) to support Virginia’s Initiative to Advance Effective Instruction and Interactions in VPI classrooms. This memo provides a brief update on the key activities, goals, and expectations for VPI Programs in 2019-2020.

Evidenced-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. In 2019-2020, VPI programs must 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 reported by VPI school divisions in spring 2019, 93% are using a vetted curriculum. The VDOE and CASTL have a process for vetting curriculum that are not on the list of comprehensive curriculums currently used in VPI classrooms. All VPI programs using a non-vetted curriculum in 2019-2020 have initiated the process of requesting a review, which will take place this year. Additional information is available in the [VPI Guidelines for 2019-2020](http://www.doe.virginia.gov/early-childhood/preschool/vpi/index.shtml).

Teacher-Child Interactions

Effective, engaging interactions serve as the foundation for learning in early childhood classrooms. As such, measuring these interactions consistently and using them to provide feedback to teachers lies at the heart of high-quality early childhood instruction.

**External Observations**: The General Assembly has established the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS™) as the standard observation tool for measuring the quality of teacher-child interactions in VPI classrooms by an external observer at least once every two years. As required by the General Assembly, VDOE and CASTL have set minimum score thresholds for VPI classrooms in all three CLASS™ domains (Emotional Support, Classroom Organization, and Instructional Support).

During the 2018-2019 school year, 50 school divisions volunteered to be in the first half of VPI classrooms observed. During the 2019-2020 school year, the remaining school divisions will participate in external CLASS™ observations. VPI programs receive a detailed feedback report following each external CLASS™ observation.

**Local Observations:** VPI programs are strongly encouraged to coordinate local CLASS™ observations at least two times each year. School divisions should work with their local early childhood community to develop a plan for training local observers to reliability on the CLASS™ tool. Providing local observations results in frequent feedback for teachers, which ultimately leads to improved learning experiences for children.

Starting in 2019-2020, all VPI participating divisions must be building capacity for using CLASS™ observations twice a year. By 2020-2021 all VPI participating divisions will be prepared to provide local CLASS™ observations in order to drive continuous improvement and ensure all classrooms meet or exceed statewide minimum thresholds. Additional information about statewide minimum CLASS™ thresholds is available in the [VPI Guidelines for 2019-2020](http://www.doe.virginia.gov/early-childhood/preschool/vpi/index.shtml)

Professional Development

Effective professional development (PD) improves the quality of curriculum implementation, interactions between teachers and students, and instructional practices. In 2019-2020, CASTL and the VDOE will provide ongoing assistance to school division’s VPI leaders in implementing effective professional development.

In order to better understand and support the PD that divisions provide VPI teachers, CASTL will ask VPI Coordinators to answer questions regarding their PD plans for the 2019-2020 school year. CASTL will use this information to complete a PD rubric to share with division leadership and work in consultation to improve one or more areas of PD.

**Professional Development Consultation and Guidance.** Each participating VPI division has been assigned a CASTL consultant who will partner with leaders to support the planning and enactment of effective PD.  CASTL consultants will hold a series of consultation calls with VPI coordinators and their designated leadership teams, with topics to include:

* Discussing feedback on completion of a PD Questionnaire
* Reviewing CLASS® data and planning for intensified individualized supports to teachers, focusing on teachers in classrooms demonstrated to be highest need
* Reviewing pathways and options for improving quality interactions and instruction division-wide

Later this year CASTL will share a PD Guide to support PD plans in future years.

VPI Coordinators were sent an email invitation to attend a September 19, 2019 VPI PD Planning Webinar where additional information on each of the supports was explained in detail.

If you have additional questions or concerns regarding Virginia’s Initiative to Advance Effective Instruction and Interactions in VPI Classrooms, please contact Dr. Mark Allan, Early Childhood Project Manager by phone at (804) 225-3665 or by email at Mark.Allan@doe.virginia.gov. If you have specific questions regarding external CLASS™ observations or PD planning, please contact Grace Funk, CASTL Research Scientist, by phone at (434) 466-8469 or by email at Funk@virginia.edu.

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