# Superintendent’s Memo #237-20

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**COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA   
Department of Education**

DATE: September 11, 2020

TO: Division Superintendents

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

## SUBJECT: Virginia’s Initiative to Advance Effective Instruction and Interactions in Public School-based Pre-K

Supporting effective instruction and interactions in pre-K classrooms will be more essential than ever during the 2020-2021 school year. The Virginia General Assembly has 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 (AEII) in all public school-based pre-K classrooms. This will be a continuation and expansion of the AEII initiative, which has previously been available to Virginia Preschool Initiative (VPI) classrooms.

This year, AEII will support all public school-based pre-K classrooms, including VPI, Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) and Title I. As school divisions begin 2020-2021 in a variety of virtual, hybrid, and in-person configurations, the AEII initiative will work collaboratively with early childhood coordinators to determine how to best support pre-K teachers. This memo provides a brief update on the key activities, goals, and expectations for public school-based pre-K programs in 2020-2021 related to AEII. Additional information on expectations for early childhood programs in 2020-2021 can be found in the [Office of Early Childhood FAQs](http://www.doe.virginia.gov/early-childhood/preschool/vpi/oec-covid19-faq.docx).

Professional Development Consultation and Resources

All public school-based pre-K classrooms will receive professional development support from AEII. In 2020-2021, AEII and the VDOE will provide ongoing assistance to school division’s early childhood leaders in planning and implementing effective professional development. This will often require collaboration between various early childhood coordinators, such as the VPI and ECSE leads.

The AEII team will continue to provide individualized PD supports for divisions. The team will soon provide each division leadership team a tool to reflect on and plan effective PD this fall. AEII will then deliver differentiated consultation supports based on assessed needs for PD and CLASS™. Additionally, through the federal Governor’s Emergency Education Relief (GEER) Fund the AEII team will provide a suite of new Social-Emotional and Equity resources for all divisions to address increased needs with COVID-19. These resources will include tiered levels of PD support to leaders and teachers, such as in-depth consultation supports to leaders and coaching to select teachers with CLASS™ needs.

Measuring Teacher-Child Interactions through CLASS™ Observations

Beginning in 2020-2021, all public school-based pre-K classrooms will be included in external CLASS™ observations, conducted once every two years by AEII. 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.

Flexibility will be provided in scheduling and completing external CLASS™ observations based on the division's plan for offering in-person learning and according to all health and safety guidelines set forth by the division, locality, or state.

**External CLASS™** **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 public school-based pre-K classrooms. AEII will oversee external observations in select divisions that are providing in-person instruction. School divisions scheduled for external CLASS™ observations will be contacted by an AEII team member to determine the status of in-person school-based pre-K classrooms within the division.

Starting this fall, CASTL-AEII will offer virtual Introduction to Initiative training sessions and provide online resources to leaders and teachers new to AEII. The session is designed to briefly orient teachers and leaders to effective teacher-child interactions and what to expect with CLASS™ observations. The AEII team will reach out to eligible divisions in the next few weeks to begin coordinating observations and training sessions.

*Note on Local CLASS™ Observations:* VPI programs that are meeting in-person during 2020-2021 must provide at least one local CLASS™ observations during the school year, when local health and safety protocols permits. Note that the expectation for local CLASS™ observations has been reduced in response to COVID-19 concerns. [Local CLASS™observations](https://aeiionline.org/local-class-observation-best-practices-guidebook_2020-2021/) are coordinated, scheduled, and recorded by the local school division. VPI programs that are fully virtual should use the *Local Observation Tool for Virtual Pre-K Instruction* in place of a local CLASS™ observation.Divisions will receive more information about this tool shortly.

Evidence-Based Curriculum

All VPI classrooms are required to use a vetted evidence-based curriculum in 2020-2021. All other public school-based pre-K classrooms are strongly encouraged to do so. While modifications may be necessary to accommodate the 2020-2021 model of instruction and schedule, using an evidenced-based and comprehensive curriculum will make it easier for teachers to engage in sensitive, responsive, and cognitively stimulating teacher-child interactions.

A list of curriculum that have been vetted for pre-K classrooms can be found on the [AEII website](https://aeiionline.org/advancing-effective-interactions-and-instruction-2/how-does-it-work/measuring-quality-curricula/). Divisions are able to request a review of comprehensive curricula that are not currently included on the vetted list.

All VPI and ECSE Coordinators will receive an email from AEII with next steps in the coming week. 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, Associate Director of Pre-K Programs by phone at (804) 225-3665 or by email at [Mark.Allan@doe.virginia.gov](mailto:Mark.Allan@doe.virginia.gov). If you have specific questions regarding external CLASS™ observations or PD planning, please contact the AEII team at [aeii@virginia.edu](mailto:aeii@virginia.edu).