| **Virginia Board of Education Agenda Item** | **Seal of the Commonwealth of Virginia** |
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# Agenda Item: G

## Date: March 18, 2021

### Title: Final Review of Revised *Foundation Blocks for Learning (*retitled, *Virginia’s Birth-to-Five Early Learning and Development Standards)*

#### Presenter: Ms. Jenna Conway, Chief School Readiness Officer

#### Email: Jenna.Conway@governor.virginia.gov Phone: 804-774-9564

## Purpose of Presentation:

Action required by state or federal law or regulation.

Executive Summary:
The proposed revisions to the *Foundation Blocks for Learning* (retitled *Virginia’s Birth-to-Five Early Learning and Development Standards)* are in response torecent legislation wherein the Virginia Board of Education (VBOE) and Department of Education (VDOE) are now charged with ensuring that all Virginia children have equitable opportunity to enter kindergarten ready. These new learning guidelines will replace the *Foundation Blocks for Learning*, last revised in 2013, and the Virginia Department of Social Service (VDSS) *Virginia Milestones of Early Childhood Development* documents. In partnership with VDOE, over 300 early childhood experts and diverse stakeholders (by race/ethnicity, geography, expertise, provider type, etc.) collaborated on the development of the new standards and have produced a comprehensive, up-to-date set of early learning guidelines for children birth to five. An intentional and persistent focus on equity for all learners, culturally responsiveness, inclusiveness and accessibility were integral to the process and final content.

The Board’s first review of the proposed revisions to the *Foundation Blocks for Learning* occurred on November 19, 2020, with a second review occurring on January 28, 2021. Stakeholders from across the birth to five continuum were invited to provide feedback and recommendations during two public comment periods (Spring and Fall 2020) and stakeholders with infant/toddler expertise were specifically targeted for workgroup representation. Further, the VDOE ensured that a careful crosswalk of the new standards to the Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework was conducted, and also aligned the standards with Virginia’s kindergarten readiness assessments (the Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening or PALS for literacy; the Early Mathematics Assessment or EMAS for mathematics; and the Child Behavior Rating Scale of CBRS for self-regulation and social skills) and kindergarten standards of learning (SOLs).

In response to feedback offered by the Board following second review, changes were made in the introduction of the standards document and include: the reordering of presented content; modified/added language emphasizing the equivalent value of early childhood *care* to *education* and the nuances of infant and toddler development and use of a more inclusive definition of early childhood providers (noted examples include parents/families, caregivers, and educators). The later descriptive changes for provider groups, specifically caregiver and educator terminology, were also applied throughout the remainder of the standards document (i.e., section introductions).

Overall, the proposed revisions to the *Foundation Blocks for Learning* support the goals and priorities of the Board of Education and specifically align to Priority 1, “provide high-quality, effective learning environments for all students,” of the [Board of Education Comprehensive Plan: 2018-2023](http://www.doe.virginia.gov/boe/plan/comprehensive-plan.pdf).

**Action Requested:**

Final review: Action requested at this meeting.

## Superintendent’s Recommendation: The Superintendent of Public Instruction recommends the Board of Education approve the proposed revisions to the *Foundation Blocks for Learning*.

## Rationale for Action:

In July 2020, Governor Northam signed early childhood legislation ([SB578/HB1012](https://law.lis.virginia.gov/vacodefull/title22.1/chapter14.1/)) that transitions oversight of the birth-five early childhood care and education system to the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE). The proposed revisions will provide an up-to-date, unified set of early learning standards for all birth to five programs.

## Previous Review or Action:

Previous review and action. Specify date and action taken below:

**Date:** January 28, 2021

**Action:** Second review

**Date:** November 19, 2020

**Action:** First Review

Background Information and Statutory Authority:
The Virginia Department of Education committed to revising and unifying the existing early learning standards and guidelines across state agencies as part of the initial Preschool Development Grant Birth-Five. The initial Preschool Development Grant Birth-Five was received in December 2018 from the US Administration of Children and Families.

Virginia has since been awarded the Renewal Preschool Development Grant Birth-Five, in which the VDOE committed to finalizing, posting, and supporting the usage of the revised unified birth-five early learning standards. The unified standards will be an essential component of the centralized oversight of the birth-five early learning programs in Virginia. There are no specific statutory requirements related to early learning standards in Virginia.

Timetable for Further Review/Action:
Upon Board approval, and any graphic design, technical or editorial edits by Department staff, *Virginia’s Early Learning and Development Standards* will be submitted to Town Hall pursuant to the Administrative Process Act, shared via the Virginia Department of Education website, related newsletters, and via webinar or training series.

## Impact on Fiscal and Human Resources:

Any costs associated with the dissemination or training related to the guidelines will be supported through federal Preschool Development Grant Birth-Five funding, as has the costs incurred thus far.