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| **Virginia Board of Education Agenda Item** | **Seal of the Commonwealth of Virginia** |

# Agenda Item: L

## Date: November 19, 2020

### Title: First 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

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## Purpose of Presentation:

Review/action required by Board of Education bylaws.

**Executive Summary:**As a result of recent legislation, 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. To support this effort, the VDOE, in partnership with experts and stakeholders, has produced comprehensive, up-to-date early learning and development standards for children birth to five.

The proposed item for first review will replace the current *Foundation Blocks for Learning* with the new learning guidelines: *Virginia’s Birth-to-Five Early Learning and Development Standards* last revised in 2013*.* This new document will also replace the Virginia Department of Social Service (VDSS) document *Virginia Milestones of Early Childhood Development*.

Early learning guidelines are distinct in that they provide guidance across a range of developmental and learning areas, focusing on describing a set of behaviors across a continuum. *Virginia’s Birth-to-Five Early Learning and Development Standards* describe behavior indicators across six areas of development, *Approaches to Play and Learning*, S*ocial and Emotional Development*, *Communication, Language and Literacy Development*, *Health and Physical Development,* and *Cognitive Development*, including science, social science, mathematics and fine arts. For each domain of learning, these guidelines reflect typical development patterns for young children across six overlapping age bands. While not intended to be used in place of a curriculum, early learning guidelines are a critical tool for teachers in child care, family day homes, and preschool programs to support progression across the critical skills outlined in this document.

A focus on equity for all learners is central to *Virginia’s Birth-to-Five Early Learning and Development Standards,* both in terms of process and content*.* The VDOE led a lengthy and inclusive process, including:

* Ensuring a diverse set of stakeholders participating in the workgroup and feedback processes;
* Establishing a workgroup at the outset that focused on equity when constructing the draft; and
* Conducting a second public comment period in fall 2020 to collect additional feedback on 1) cultural competency and responsiveness, 2) inclusivity and 3) how pragmatic and accessible the document is to diverse audiences.

Establishing a culturally-responsive and inclusive set of foundational standards is critical to ensuring their use and applicability to all early learners and their caretakers. By this design, these standards will help eradicate inequities and disparities in child outcomes by equipping teachers and caregivers to provide individualized care and instruction that addresses the needs of all learners.

The development of *Virginia’s Birth-to-Five Early Learning and Development Standards* began in August 2019 with leadership from a diverse team of content experts and researchers from Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) and James Madison University (JMU). VCU coordinated 7 workgroups with over 75 collaborators who helped develop the structure and the content for the document. VCU completed their leadership of the document with a public comment posting in spring 2020, where over 250 individuals or groups read and provided feedback on the draft document. Overall, when including the fall 2020 public comment, VDOE was able to incorporate input from more than 300 experts and stakeholders.

The VDOE received and incorporated additional feedback from interdisciplinary representatives (STEM, ECSE, Literacy/ELL, and Social Science disciplines) within the agency and expert guidance regarding literacy, mathematics self-regulation and social skills from the Virginia Kindergarten Readiness Program (VKRP) team. These reviews were initiated to ensure alignment 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).

Early childhood programs will begin using the proposed *Virginia’s Birth-to-Five Early Learning and Development Standards* during the 2021-2022 academic year. The Office of Early Childhood will continue to work to develop tools and resources that support the diverse universe of early childhood educators with implementation, and especially how to best serve Virginia’s most vulnerable children.

## Action Requested:

Action will be requested at a future meeting. Specify anticipated date below:

January 23, 2020

S**uperintendent’s Recommendation:**

The Superintendent of Public Instruction recommends the Board of Education receive for first review the revised Virginia Early Learning and Development Standards.

## Previous Review or Action:

No previous review or action.

**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:**

The Board will have an opportunity for final review in January 2021. Upon Board approval, *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.