



#200-21

**Commonwealth of Virginia
Virginia Department of Education
Superintendent's Memo #200-21**

DATE: July 30, 2021
TO: Division Superintendents
FROM: James F. Lane, Ed.D., Superintendent of Public Instruction
SUBJECT: **Maximizing Enrollment across Early Childhood Programs**

The impact of COVID 19 on Virginia's youngest learners has been significant. In the 2020-2021 school year, enrollment—in school-based preschool, kindergarten, Head Start and Child Care Subsidy—dropped significantly. Young learners are also experiencing unfinished learning. As an example, Fall 2020 [Virginia Kindergarten Readiness Program \(VKRP\)](#) assessment data reveal that 52% of kindergarteners finished the school year without the foundational literacy, math, and social-emotional skills needed to be successful. The percentage of children with unfinished learning is higher for children from economically-disadvantaged backgrounds (67%), English Language Learners (70%), and children identified as having a disability (75%). Preschoolers may face even more challenges as so many children were not able to participate in quality preschool in schools, Head Start or child care this year. Working in partnership with Head Start and child care, including the Virginia Early Childhood Foundation (VECF) Mixed Delivery program, to expand access to quality early learning experiences will be critical to address the COVID 19 challenges. This memo provides important reminders for school divisions to consider as they complete preschool enrollment and plan for future years.

As part of the recovery effort, Virginia's communities will need to ensure the maximization of enrollment slots across all early childhood programs, enabling families to access the early childhood option of their choice and help prepare their child for school. State law charges local communities with implementing coordinated approaches to enroll children and leverage funding opportunities across all programs. Coordinating across Head Start, Virginia Preschool

Initiative (VPI), and Mixed Delivery options is critical to ensuring that all children have the opportunity to start school ready.

Coordination Strategies Outlined in the Appropriations Act - VPI and Head Start

All communities are expected to coordinate across preschool programs to make decisions regarding enrollment and assessing the local need for preschool programming. Historically, the Appropriations Act has required VPI and Head Start Programs to demonstrate coordination with all parties necessary for the successful delivery of comprehensive services, including the schools, child care providers (including VECF Mixed Delivery grantees), local social services agency, Head Start, local health department, and other groups identified by the lead agency.

Developing a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with programs receiving federal funds. VPI programs continue to be required to develop and maintain a MOU with Head Start Programs and other early learning programs receiving federal funds to coordinate services, and preserve and maintain the maximization of federal funds locally. This MOU based on the early childhood requirements updated in the [Every Student Succeeds Act \(ESSA\)](#) and the [Head Start Act of 2007](#) specifies provisions for this partnership that can include joint recruitment strategies, joint preschool applications, participation in Community Needs Assessments, coordinated staff training, and Head Start representation on the VPI Steering Committee. The purpose of the MOU is to model strong partnerships promoting coordination and linkages at the local level. It should address the needs of both parties and outline the level of commitment to continue to meet the needs of children and families in the communities it serves. This is described in [House Bill 5005 Item 145 C.14.b.2](#):

The proposal must demonstrate coordination with all parties necessary for the successful delivery of comprehensive services, including the schools, child care providers, local social services agency, Head Start, local health department, and other groups identified by the lead agency. The proposal must identify which entities were consulted and how the locality will ensure that federal funds are preserved and maximized including demonstrating compliance with Title I of the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act to ensure that a Local Educational Agency receiving Title I funding coordinates with Head Start

programs and other early learning programs receiving federal funds by developing Memorandums of Understanding with such agencies to coordinate services. The proposal must also demonstrate a plan for supporting inclusive practices for children with identified special needs.

Prioritizing Head Start Slots for Enrollment

VPI programs must continue to coordinate and collaborate with Head Start programs on enrollment activities. As required by law, the VPI formula accounts for the number of four-year-old children served by Head Start to ensure that communities do not receive more slots than can be served. Specifically, the language states:

It is the intent of the General Assembly that [VPI funding]...shall be disbursed by the Department of Education to schools and community-based organizations to provide quality preschool programs for at-risk four-year-olds who are residents of Virginia and unserved by Head Start program funding.

In the 2020-2022 Appropriation Act, the following language was added to describe this coordination in [House Bill 5005 Item 145 14.a.2](#):

These state funds and required local matching funds shall be used to provide programs for at-risk four-year-old children, which include quality preschool education, health services, social services, parental involvement and transportation. It shall be the policy of the Commonwealth that state funds and required local matching funds for the Virginia Preschool Initiative not be used for capital outlay, not be used to supplant any Head Start federal funds provided for local early education programs, and not be used until the local Head Start grantee certifies that all local Head Start slots are filled. Programs must provide full-day or half-day and, at least, school-year services.

VDOE Oversight: Application Process and Monitoring

To receive funding each year, VPI lead agencies must describe how they will maximize funding and collaborate with local partners. As part of the [VPI application process](#), lead agencies must indicate how they will maximize federal and state funds to preserve existing

birth to five slots already being implemented in the community. Lead agencies must also demonstrate how they will collaborate among the local department of social services, programs accepting child subsidy payments, and providers for Head Start, private child care, and early childhood special education and early intervention programs.

As relates to monitoring, VDOE has received funds since the 2018-2019 Biennial Budget to conduct VPI site visits to ensure compliance with state guidelines and to provide technical assistance. VDOE typically uses a rotating, desk and in-person model for monitoring. In 2020-2021 all monitoring was virtual due to the pandemic but the VDOE will return to in-person monitoring this year. As part of the monitoring process, the VDOE evaluates compliance with the Appropriations Act as well as all program guidelines.

Coordinating with VECF Mixed Delivery

Communities that receive funding through the VECF Mixed Delivery program to provide quality preschool in private child care settings are subject to similar coordination requirements. To apply, localities “must demonstrate: (i) coordination with all parties necessary for the successful delivery of comprehensive services, including schools, child care providers, local social services agencies, Head Start, local health departments, and other groups identified by the lead agency, (ii) a plan for supporting inclusive practices for children with identified special needs...” The VDOE also has oversight for the VECF Mixed Delivery program and coordinates very closely with VECF to ensure compliance with the Appropriations Act as well as all program guidelines.

Assessing Local Need and Increasing the Number of Children Who May Be Served

As a reminder, communities can increase the number of children who may be eligible for VPI or VECF Mixed Delivery, thus ensuring that more children can be served across programs. Both VPI and VECF Mixed Delivery allow communities to define eligibility criteria for up to 15% of slots. In addition, localities that can demonstrate that more than 15 percent of VPI slots are needed to meet the needs of children and families in their community may apply for a VPI Local Criteria Waiver. VPI programs with an approved waiver may fill a larger percentage of their slots using local at-risk criteria rather than income-based criteria. School divisions may

complete an application through the VDOE's [Single Sign-On Web System](#) during the following application window.

- Fall application timeframe: September 1, 2021- October 15, 2021

For more information

If you need additional information or have questions about the Head Start Program, please contact, Taundwa Jeffries, Director of the Head Start State Collaboration Office via email at Taundwa.Jeffries@doe.virginia.gov or by telephone at (804) 726-7468. Any questions regarding the VPI or VECF Mixed Delivery, please contact Mark Allan, Associate Director of PreK Programs, Office of Early Childhood, by email at Mark.Allan@doe.virginia.gov or by telephone at (804) 225-3665.

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