



# **GUIDELINES FOR PRACTICE YEAR 1 OF THE EARLY CHILDHOOD UNIFIED MEASUREMENT AND IMPROVEMENT SYSTEM**

**VIRGINIA BOARD OF EDUCATION**



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# SECTION I - INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

## WHY SCHOOL READINESS MATTERS

The first five years of a child’s life are incredibly important for the developing brain. Many critical language, social/emotional and early cognition skills are formed during these early years and they lay the foundation for future success.<sup>1</sup> Numerous studies show that children who enter school ready, with key early academic and social-emotional skills, are well poised to succeed in school and beyond. With many young children spending time in early childhood care and education outside of the home, much essential early learning takes place in child care, family day homes, Head Start or Early Head Start programs, and public schools. To maximize their potential, all of Virginia's young children need access to early childhood experiences that support them to grow, learn and thrive.

Virginia’s current birth-to-five system does *not* provide all children the early learning experiences they need to thrive. Recent data from the 2020 Virginia Kindergarten Readiness Program (VKRP) shows that 45% of students enter kindergarten “not ready” in terms of demonstrating key school readiness skills. Kindergarten readiness results are especially concerning for children from economically disadvantaged families (55% unprepared at start of kindergarten) and children with special needs (66% unprepared at the start of kindergarten).<sup>2</sup> Equally concerning is the disproportionate percentage of Black and Hispanic children and English Learners who enter school without the opportunity to be ready in one or more critical school readiness areas. While it is well known that quality early childhood experiences prepare children for success, Virginia families and children lack equitable access to these experiences. These results indicate a systemic problem with Virginia’s current early learning system, further illustrated by the following:

- Virginia ranks 33rd nationally in preschool funding and child care funding is at the 70th percentile of the market; nearly 50,000 vulnerable three- and four-year-olds lack access to quality preschool.
- 75% of Virginia’s early childhood programs, including school based preschool, Head Start/Early Head Start and child care centers and family day homes, that receive public funding do not participate in the state’s voluntary quality measurement system, meaning there is little information known about the experiences children are receiving in these sites.

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<sup>1</sup> Harvard University. (n.d.). *Center on the Developing Child*. Science of Early Childhood.

<sup>2</sup> Virginia Kindergarten Readiness Program, University of Virginia. (2020). VKRP Fact Sheets.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated inequities in the early childhood system and led to many young children missing out on learning and development opportunities. In Virginia, preschool and kindergarten children have recorded less preparedness for kindergarten based on VKRP and PALS data than in prior years. The enrollment crisis has been most acute for early learners as well, with preschool enrollment dropping 18% and kindergarten enrollment dropping 13% in 2020-2021.<sup>3</sup> Child care programs and family day homes have struggled to stay open continuously, with constant adaptations to health and safety requirements and staff retention challenges. Many schools and Head Start programs have had to offer virtual options even though virtual preschool does not appear to have the full impact of in-person learning. These realities mean that the need for equitable access to quality teaching and learning experiences are more important than ever.

High-quality early learning and care provides the support children need to build a foundation for school and future success. Yet quality early childhood experiences can be prohibitively expensive; the average cost of infant care, for example, is more than in-state tuition at most Virginia colleges. Public funds can help cover the cost but only 30% of eligible children in Virginia are served by publicly-funded early learning programs (Pre-K, Head Start, and Child Care Assistance), meaning many children from low-income families are without access to high-quality early childhood programs that could dramatically improve their opportunities for a better future.<sup>4</sup> This lack of access often reinforces existing inequities and has a significant impact. Extensive research has identified many short- and long-term benefits of early learning experiences, including:

- Early childhood education reduces the percentage of children repeating a grade by 15%.
- Early childhood education lowers the rate of special education placement by 10%.<sup>5</sup>
- Children participating in high-quality early childhood education had increased college graduation rates and increased rates of employment at age 30.<sup>6</sup>
- Those participating children are more likely to be employed and less likely to be dependent on government assistance.

These positive effects are larger, and more likely to be sustained, when programs are high quality. Research has further shown that the impact of quality early childhood is larger for children from low-income families. With so much known about the power of quality early childhood, it is imperative that Virginia ensure all birth-to-five learners have access to early experiences that offer them equitable opportunity to thrive.

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<sup>3</sup> Virginia Department of Education. (2021). Quarterly Research Bulletin.

<sup>4</sup> First Five Years - (Why It Matters School Readiness)

<sup>5</sup> Karoly, L. A. (n.d.). *Informing Investments in Preschool Quality*. Research Reports.

<sup>6</sup> Heckman. (n.d.). *Research Summary: The Lifecycle Benefits of an Influential Early Childhood Program*. The Heckman Equation.

## MEASURING QUALITY IN EARLY CHILDHOOD

Supporting continuous quality improvement in early childhood programs of all types, including public schools, Head Start/Early Head Start, child care and family day homes, is essential to improving the short and long-term outcomes for Virginia's youngest learners. The most important aspects of quality in early childhood education are stimulating and supportive interactions between educators and children and effective use of curricula. Yet today, Virginia only measures and provides quality information that reflects these important indicators for 5% of publicly-funded programs.<sup>7</sup>

Using nearly \$400 million in state and federal funding annually, Virginia offers a diverse set of early childhood care and education programs to provide early care and learning to at-risk children ages birth to five. However, despite this investment, Virginia has limited information on how publicly-funded programs define, measure and support quality and continuous improvement. There is no uniform system that measures or supports improvement for all publicly-funded programs, limiting Virginia's efforts to systematically strengthen quality and improve school readiness outcomes.

### *Virginia's Current Quality Rating Approach - Virginia Quality*

Virginia Quality is the current system for measuring the quality of early childhood programs across the Commonwealth. Importantly, Virginia Quality is optional. While participation has increased over time, there are still only 25% of eligible programs participating, meaning Virginia lacks quality information about early childhood programs, cannot support continuous quality improvement at scale and has no way to prioritize programs that may need the most support.

Virginia Quality follows a building block approach, meaning all the standards within each level must be met for programs to move to the next level. The system begins with basic requirements, such as health and safety, and advances to measures that are connected to child-outcomes in later levels, such as measuring teacher-child interactions and child learning opportunities. Note, however, that very few educators receive feedback on an annual basis under this system. Moreover, the credential requirements of Virginia Quality limit the growth opportunity for the majority of family day home and child care programs as their staff do not have the required credentials to move up. While Virginia Quality and its predecessor programs have made great progress in raising expectations and highlighting quality measurement and improvement in the Commonwealth, they were not designed to ensure equity across the system; they do not include all publicly-funded programs and do not offer all educators, regardless of background or credential, equitable opportunity to be successful. (See Appendix A)

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<sup>7</sup> \*Note: 5% represents programs at levels 4 and 5 of Virginia Quality. Levels 1-3 do not require both. As of 2018, Virginia now requires both for all VPI programs but information is not available for families.

### *A New Approach for Measuring Quality*

To improve school readiness outcomes, Virginia should build a new, uniform quality measurement and improvement system that focuses on measurable indicators of teaching and learning. This system must:

- Focus on the measures that promote positive child outcomes;
- Empower educators with frequent, specific and individualized feedback to educators;
- Provide improvement pathways that are accessible to all programs so that all educators have equitable opportunity to strengthen their practice and support their children to thrive; and
- Empower and meaningfully engage parents and families in the co-creation of a system that fundamentally seeks to meet the unique needs of their children and families.

Studies on quality rating systems that include many measures have shown weak or inconsistent associations between quality ratings and children’s outcomes and development. By contrast, there is a large body of research that has linked targeted observational measures of teacher-child interactions to children’s learning gains, both academic and socio-emotional.<sup>8</sup> Virginia should embrace such an approach to measuring quality and supporting continuous quality improvement, being sure to prioritize those measures that are shown to support positive child outcomes.

## **BUILDING TOWARDS A UNIFIED EARLY CHILDHOOD SYSTEM**

Since the initial creation of the Virginia Preschool Initiative (VPI) in 1994, Virginia’s state and local leaders have worked in a collaborative, bipartisan manner to strengthen Virginia’s early childhood system. Through joint efforts across the general assembly, stakeholders, and local and state leaders, Virginia has taken many steps to build a more unified early childhood system. A few key milestones include:

***Launch of Smart Beginnings Network - 2005:*** Through the establishment of the Virginia Early Childhood Foundation (VECF) a regional network of Smart Beginnings coalitions are formed, improving readiness, conditions, and policies for children and families. Smart Beginnings continues to grow to include a network of 17 coalitions across the state, supporting early learning in all settings.

***Pilot a statewide kindergarten readiness assessment - 2013:*** The Virginia Kindergarten Readiness Program (VKRP) was initiated by Elevate Early Education (E3), a bipartisan, issue-advocacy organization. In partnership with UVA, a three-phase approach to create a statewide

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<sup>8</sup> Bassok, D., & Markowitz, A. (2020.). *The value of systemwide, high-quality data in early childhood education*. Brown Center Chalkboard.



comprehensive kindergarten readiness assessment was launched to facilitate research, trial, and expansion of the now statewide assessment.

***First Preschool Development Grant - 2014:*** Virginia received a three year federal grant to support improvements in preschool quality, access, and impact by integrating best practices in high-need communities. This grant established VPI+, a grant funded preschool program that included a greater focus on coaching, evidence-based curriculum, and family support.

***Establishment of the Joint Subcommittee on VPI - 2015:*** Formed to assist in the reform of VPI and consider strategies for increasing accountability and clarity in the state's role and policy relating to providing a preschool experience. This subcommittee assisted in recommendations for expanded mixed-delivery pilots, expanded VPI+, and the establishment of the School Readiness Committee.

***Establishment of School Readiness Committee Established - 2016:*** The School Readiness Committee was designated as the State Advisory Council (SAC) under the Head Start Act. Since its initiation, the committee has formed several workgroups to engage experts and develop recommendations, with a particular focus on the early childhood workforce. The School Readiness Committee has oversight of Virginia's Needs Assessment and Strategic plan, formed as a part of the Preschool Development Grant Birth-to-Five in 2018.

***JLARC report on Virginia's Early Childhood Development Programs - 2017:*** This report highlighted the need for additional investments and state alignment across early childhood initiatives. As a result, several key actions were taken during the 2018 session to improve school readiness outcomes in Virginia measuring kindergarten readiness through the Virginia Kindergarten Readiness Program and creating and monitoring a unified measure of quality in all Virginia Preschool Initiative classrooms.

***Preschool Development Grant Birth-to-Five and Virginia Needs Assessment and Renewal Grant - 2018 and 2019:*** Virginia was awarded both an initial and renewal Preschool Development Grant Birth-to-Five (PDG). The initial version of this grant (awarded in 2018) required the development of a Virginia Needs Assessment and a Preschool Development Grant Birth-to-Five Strategic Plan to set the goals for the grant, and for building a more unified system<sup>9</sup>. The Needs Assessment and Strategic Plan evaluated the status of all publicly-funded programs, including Head Start/Early Head Start, child care, family day homes, and public schools. Both the needs assessment and strategic plan were integral in calling for further investigation and study through Executive Directive Four. In 2019, Virginia was awarded the

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<sup>9</sup> PDG B5 Needs Assessment and Strategic Plan can be found in full here: <https://www.vecf.org/federal-preschool-development-grant-b-5/>

PDG Renewal Grant, which will be funded through 2022, and is supporting many of the goals outlined in the PDG Strategic Plan.

***Statewide Implementation of VKRP - 2019:*** The Virginia Kindergarten Readiness Program was implemented statewide in fall 2019 for all kindergarteners, at the direction of the Virginia General Assembly. This allowed the first ever comprehensive examination of kindergarten readiness, and provided important insight into the unmet needs of Virginia’s young children related to school readiness.

***Executive Directive Four - 2019:*** In July 2019, Governor Northam issued [Executive Directive Four](#) (ED4)<sup>10</sup>, stating that Virginia must focus on building a unified quality measurement and improvement system that evaluates and supports every publicly-funded program serving children five and under, including centers, family day homes, Head Start/Early Head Start and school settings. This unified measurement system would allow the Commonwealth to align supports and incentives to reach unified quality measurements.

***Early Childhood Legislation - Call for a Unified Early Childhood System - 2020:*** As part of the 2020 General Assembly, SB578/HB1021 was introduced with the aim of achieving three key goals:

- 1) Establish a unified public-private early care and education system that is administered by the VDOE and Board of Education
- 2) Create a unified quality measurement and improvement system for all early childhood programs that receive public funds
- 3) Move oversight and licensure of care and education entities to the VDOE and Board

This legislation was successfully passed and signed into law in July 2020, requiring all publicly funded providers to participate in the new unified measurement and improvement system starting in the fall of 2023.<sup>11</sup> Early childhood programs that do not receive any public funds will have the option to participate.

## **PURPOSE OF THIS DOCUMENT**

Virginia State Code directs the Board of Education to establish a unified quality rating and improvement system for all publicly funded providers. The Board of Education is directed to establish such a quality rating and improvement system by July 1, 2021. Ratings from the system

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<sup>10</sup> Executive Directive Four - <https://www.governor.virginia.gov/media/governorvirginiagov/executive-actions/ED-4-Establishing-The-Governors-Executive-Leadership-Team-on-School-Readiness.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> Code of Virginia (§ 22.1-289.03) - <https://law.lis.virginia.gov/vacode/title22.1/chapter14.1/section22.1-289.03/>

are not to be public until the fall of 2024 to allow for multiple practice years. Practice Year 1 will span school year 2021-2022, with Practice Year 2 taking place during school year 2022-2023. This document describes the guidelines and protocols for Practice Year 1 of the Unified Measurement and Improvement System. The document has been designed for review by the Virginia Board of Education and for review and implementation by publicly-funded programs.

# SECTION 2: VIRGINIA’S UNIFIED MEASUREMENT AND IMPROVEMENT SYSTEM

## THEORY OF CHANGE - UNIVERSAL IMPROVEMENT FROM A UNIFIED SYSTEM

*All of Virginia’s children deserve equitable access to quality early childhood experiences that enable them to thrive.*

Virginia’s current early childhood system does not prepare all of the Commonwealth’s children to succeed. As noted earlier, the inequities of the current system are reflected in kindergarten readiness results, which demonstrate that children who are Black, Hispanic, speak a language other than English at home, or have a diagnosed disability or developmental delay are more likely to begin school without the key readiness skills needed. Quite simply, the system fails to ensure that these children and families have equitable access to quality early childhood experiences that support them to develop these key skills.

Under the new state law, Virginia has the opportunity to drive quality and improvement in all publicly-funded early childhood programs, which generally prioritize underserved children, including children in low-income households, children with disabilities, children who are Dual Language Learners and children who face other challenges (e.g., homelessness) that may limit their ability to fulfil their potential. If Virginia can 1) strengthen the quality of teaching and learning experiences in existing publicly-funded programs and 2) increase the number of children who can access these publicly-funded early childhood experiences, then more children will enter school ready.

Simply put, through the Unified Measurement and Improvement System, Virginia will:

- **UNIFY** around shared and equitable expectations for quality.
- **MEASURE** and strengthen teacher-child interactions and curriculum in all publicly funded birth-to-five programs.
- **IMPROVE** supports for educators, prioritizing those who need it most.

## GUIDING PRINCIPLES

In response to the unification law, the VDOE worked with stakeholders and collaborators to establish a set of guiding principles for the uniform measurement and improvement system. The Guiding Principles below set forth the priorities and practical realities for building a statewide unified measurement and improvement system.

<b>Guiding Principle:</b> <i>Virginia's new system must:</i>	<b>Explanation:</b>
1. Impact quality and result in improved school readiness for children.	The ultimate purpose of the unified measurement and improvement system is to improve school readiness for all Virginia's children through continuous quality improvement. Research shows that impacting school preparedness has long-term positive effects on child and societal outcomes. The system should be designed using research on what has a meaningful impact on child learning and school readiness.
2. Use measures that can distinguish levels of quality and demonstrate growth over time.	Teachers and program leaders benefit from feedback on strengths and opportunities. Classroom level change can be motivated by specific information that spotlights areas for growth, and identifies the behaviors that are needed to drive improved experiences for children. The measurement and improvement system must clearly articulate levels of quality and present a clear path for improvement.
3. Provide clear, actionable information, resources and incentives for improvement.	The measurement and improvement system must inspire action and offer coordinated resources and supports for improvement. The state should also consider formal and informal incentives that motivate community stakeholders, site leaders and educators. Diverse stakeholders should find the information useful and meaningful and can understand why these things matter for young learners and their families.
4. Be affordable for providers and the state.	The unified measures must support measurement and improvement, without placing an undue burden on either the programs or the State. The unified measurements must be cost efficient and able to be used year over year.
5. Scale for use in over 6,000 programs and 10,000 classrooms.	The measurement and improvement system needs to reliably and validly measure quality in <u>every</u> publicly funded infant, toddler and preschool classroom, including family day homes. This must be achieved in a method that provides reliable and current information to every participating provider across the state.

<p>6. Increase equity in 1) the outcomes that are measured, and 2) the process for making and using the system.</p>	<p>Virginia’s measurement and improvement system must include equitable measurement standards and provide targeted funding to support programs in meeting such standards, especially programs serving historically marginalized communities and programs that have historically had less access to systemic resources, including family child care. Including the voices and perspectives of underrepresented groups is essential to making sure the unified system serves all of Virginia’s children.</p>
<p>7. Serve as a resource for families</p>	<p>Families are children’s first and most important educators. Virginia’s new measurement and improvement system should:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Leverage the valuable insight of parents, guardians and families regarding the care and education their children need;</li> <li>2. Ensure families can access quality options that provide culturally and linguistically responsive programming;</li> <li>3. Enable deeper engagement in their child’s teaching and learning; and</li> <li>4. Be designed to inform and support family choice.</li> </ol>

# UNIFIED PROGRAM QUALITY STANDARDS FOR PRACTICE YEAR 1

Based on Virginia’s guiding principles and the Commonwealth's recent investments in quality measurement and improvement, Virginia has selected two nationally recognized quality standard measurements for Practice Year 1 of the Unified Measurement and Improvement System. The Unified Measurement and Improvement System will use Interactions and Curriculum to measure quality and inform improvement.

- **Interactions** - This standard measures the quality of teacher-child interactions and instruction in a developmentally-appropriate way, as measured by the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS). All children benefit socially and academically from being in classrooms with high quality teacher-child interactions, including children from diverse settings, dual language learners (DLLs) and children with special needs.<sup>12</sup> As the CLASS tool is used more broadly to measure quality in every publicly-funded classroom and family day home in Virginia, VDOE will also work to ensure the equitable use of the CLASS tool in the new system.

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<sup>12</sup> Teachstone Training, LLC. (2020). *Research Validating CLASS® with Child Outcomes across Diverse Populations of Children.*

- **Curriculum** - This standard measures the use of a comprehensive curriculum in alignment with Virginia’s early learning and development standards to ensure that all areas of learning and development are being covered in developmentally appropriate ways. This standard will also help ensure that early childhood programs have curricula that support cultural and linguistic diversity, and provide guidance on how to individualize instruction based on needs, including children with disabilities, suspected delays, or other special needs.

## RATIONALE FOR INTERACTIONS AND CURRICULUM

Interactions and Curriculum have been selected for Practice Year 1 of the Unified Measurement and Improvement System based on their close alignment to the Guiding Principles mentioned in the prior section. By focusing on teaching and learning in a simple, clear, and measurable way in every infant, toddler and preschool classroom, Virginia can motivate meaningful improvement in all publicly-funded birth-to-five early learning settings.<sup>13</sup>

The intent of the unified system is to strengthen teaching and learning across all early childhood settings - regardless of program type, program resources or educator background. These two measures will provide the clear and consistent information needed to understand the experiences occurring in every infant, toddler and preschool classroom. Practice Year 1 is a starting point; Virginia will focus first on strengthening interactions in every classroom and increasing the number of classrooms that are using a quality curriculum.

Teacher-child interactions form the foundation for all social and cognitive learning. Studies have shown that quality teacher-child interactions result in improved school readiness for all children. Over 200 research studies have demonstrated the connection between teacher-child interactions and academic and social outcomes.<sup>14</sup> All children benefit from improved teacher-child interactions, including children who are dual language learners and children with special needs. A focus on measuring teacher-child interactions translates into actionable feedback that educators in all early learning settings can implement, presenting opportunities for incremental improvement that motivates educators at every level of the system.

Along with interactions, the Unified Measurement and Improvement System will support quality teaching and learning by promoting curriculum use in all settings. Using approved and effective

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<sup>13</sup> Yoshikawa, H., Weiland, C., Brooks-Gunn, J., Burchinal, M. R., Espinosa, L. M., Gormley, W. T., Ludwig, J., Magnuson, K. A., Phillips, D., & Zaslow, M. J. (2013, October). Investing in Our Future: The Evidence Base on Preschool Education.

<sup>14</sup> Teachstone. (2020). *Proving CLASS® Effectiveness— A Research Summary*.

curricula helps teachers support learning and development of critical learning skills in all early childhood programs and setting.<sup>15</sup> Identifying curriculum that is aligned with Virginia’s Early Learning and Development Standards helps ensure that all areas of children’s learning and development is addressed.

## PARTICIPATION REQUIREMENTS

According to Code of Virginia (§ 22.1-289.03), “Publicly funded provider” means any educational program provided by a school division or local government to children between birth and age five or child day program that receives state or federal funds in support of its operations that serves three or more unrelated children.

The definition is intended to capture funding sources that support direct early childhood care and educational services for young children. These funding sources include:

- Virginia Preschool Initiative (VPI)
- Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE or IDEA Part B, Section 619 preschool)
- Title I Preschool
- Head Start/Early Head Start<sup>16</sup>
- Virginia’s Child Care Subsidy Program
- Local child care assistance, such as Fairfax’s Child Care Assistance and Referral (CCAR) program
- Federal Child Care Access Means Parents in School (CCAMPIS)
- Virginia Early Childhood Foundation (VECF) Mixed Delivery
- Federal Department of Defense military child care fee assistance

“Publicly funded provider” does not include any program for which the sole source of public funding is the federal Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service. Therefore, if a program receives CACFP but does not receive any other source of public funds in support of its operations, then they are not required to participate. Similarly programs that receive COVID-related relief funding that is not related to serving children directly (e.g., slots) are not required to participate. Programs that do not receive any public funds will have the option to participate.

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<sup>15</sup> US Administration for Children & Families. (2020). *Criteria for Effective Curricula*. Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center.

<sup>16</sup> Head Start Programs have until Sept. 30, 2021 to comply with the state or local quality rating and improvement systems according to Head Start program guidelines.



# SECTION 3: IMPLEMENTING THE UNIFIED MEASUREMENT AND IMPROVEMENT SYSTEM

The Unified Measurement and Improvement System will be implemented through two practice years that provide every publicly-funded program (school-based preschool, Head Start/Early Head Start, and child care subsidy participating child care and family day home) the opportunity to practice being measured before results are shared publicly. The VDOE will continue extensive stakeholder engagement, including targeted outreach to diverse and representative populations of parents/families and providers, and data analysis to evolve the system as needed based on findings from the practice years.

## TIMELINE AND PROCESS FOR BUILDING THE UNIFIED MEASUREMENT AND IMPROVEMENT SYSTEM

Starting with Executive Directive 4, the VDOE has conducted extensive stakeholder engagement regarding the unified system. Over the next three years, the VDOE will continue to work with the ECAC, parents/families of young children ages 0-5, birth to five providers, and other critical stakeholders in the field to develop and scale the new system. This will include two years of practice with the new system, with all programs having an opportunity to participate in at least one practice year.

Below is timeline overview, including activities to be completed prior to Practice Year 1.

ITEMS COMPLETED
Fall 2020 <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Developed proposals based on national research and current Virginia landscape.</li><li>• Reviewed and modeled current quality data from Virginia.</li><li>• Conducted stakeholder engagement webinars and presentations.</li><li>• Hosted listening sessions and phone calls.</li></ul>

- Conducted a statewide survey for input from the field.

#### Winter 2021

- Finalized proposed set of measures
- Used data from fall 2019-2020 to test the proposed set of measures
- Developed policy proposal based on feedback and data modeling
- Finalized Virginia Quality transition plan
- Launched VDOE [Building a Unified Early Childhood System](#) website to share information about the new measurement and improvement system.

### IN PROCESS

#### Spring 2021

- Share policy with the Early Childhood Advisory Committee (ECAC) and the Board of Education by July 2021.
- Continue stakeholder engagement through webinars, presentations and listening sessions.
- Seek input on the proposal through the ECAC.
- Work with Preschool Development Grant (PDG) communities (cohorts 1-3) to prepare for Practice Year 1.

### WHAT'S TO COME

#### 2021-2022

- Begin Practice Year 1 with PDG Pilot Communities.
- Review data from Practice Year 1 to inform needed revisions and gather feedback on the unified system.
- Bring any necessary revisions to the ECAC and Board of Education by July 2022 and prepare for Practice Year 2.
- Share routine updates on progress of Practice Year 1 with the ECAC and other stakeholders.
- Work with PDG communities (cohorts 1-4) to prepare for Practice Year 2.

#### 2022-2023

- Begin Practice Year 2 with PDG Communities.
- Review data from Practice Year 2 to inform needed revisions and gather feedback on the unified system.
- Bring any necessary revisions to the ECAC and Board of Education by July 2023 and prepare for full implementation of the new system.

- Share routine updates on progress of the second practice year with the ECAC and other stakeholders.
- Work with all publicly funded providers to prepare for the first full year of implementation.

2023-2024

- All publicly funded programs are required to participate.
- VDOE uses data from 2023-2024 year to calculate quality ratings

2024-2025

- Quality ratings are shared publicly in the fall of 2024
- Second year of full implementation

## PURPOSE OF THE PRACTICE YEARS

The purpose of the practice year ratings are twofold. First, having multiple practice years will allow every publicly-funded early childhood program in Virginia to have an opportunity to participate in the measurement system. This will allow teachers and program leaders to learn about the measurement process and identify areas where targeted improvements can be most useful. Program-Specific practice year ratings will be provided to the program for informational use only. Please note that there will not be any public sharing of results. Programs have also inquired about consequences; there are *no* incentives or consequences attached to performance in the Practice Year 1. The document later details incentives for participation (not performance) for certain programs and educators.

Second, the practice years will allow the VDOE and Board of Education to evaluate and refine the system. The VDOE and Board of Education will conduct frequent and in-depth analysis of the results and feedback regarding the unified measurement system, ensuring equity and accuracy at all levels. Data and information gathered during the practice year will help enable the alignment of teacher preparation and professional development resources that are directed under the VDOE. Lessons learned from the practice ratings will guide the development of future guidelines and procedures for the full implementation of the unified measurement and improvement system in the fall of 2023.

Practice Year 1 will take place from July 2021 through June 2022, with practice results shared privately with sites in fall 2022. Information from Practice Year 1 will inform any potential revisions for the second practice year.

Practice Year 2 will take place from July 2022 through June 2023, with practice results shared privately with sites in fall 2023. Again following practice year 2, the VDOE and Board of Education will consider any revisions or adjustments necessary to best meet the needs of all programs, teachers, and families.

Note that in the initial legislation there was only one practice year proposed. A revision to the timeline has added a second practice year in response to COVID-19, and the acknowledgement that the early childhood system will be in recovery during Practice Year 1.

By fall 2023, all publicly-funded programs will be required to participate with results shared publicly in fall 2024.

## **ROLE OF THE PRESCHOOL DEVELOPMENT GRANT COMMUNITIES DURING THE PRACTICE YEARS**

The Practice Years of the Unified Measurement and Improvement System will be implemented through the Preschool Development Grant Birth to Five (PDG).

The PDG is a multi-year federal grant awarded to the VDOE to accelerate Virginia's development of an equitable early childhood system that delivers stable, affordable and quality early care and education to prepare more children for kindergarten. The PDG effort is supported by the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE), Virginia Early Childhood Foundation (VECF) and the University of Virginia (UVA).

The PDG funds local community networks to complete essential activities, including those that will support the implementation of the measurement and improvement system. PDG Community Networks are led by a lead agency that is responsible for working across all publicly-funded birth-to-five programs within their region, including Virginia Preschool Initiative (VPI), Early Childhood Special Education, Head Start/Early Head Start, Child Care Programs participating in the subsidy program, and Family Day homes participating in the subsidy programs. Programs not receiving public funds may opt to participate in the PDG Community Network activities as well.<sup>17</sup>

The essential activities of the [PDG Community Networks](#) relate to four key goals:

1. Build relationships across programs
2. Increase access for families and children
3. Strengthen quality of programs
4. Support family engagement

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<sup>17</sup> Information about PDG can be found at <https://www.vecf.org/federal-preschool-development-grant-b-5/>

There are currently two cohorts of PDG Community Networks, representing approximately 60% of the state. The application for the third PDG cohort is in process and new communities will be announced in May 2021.

## **PDG - COMMUNITY NETWORKS LEADING THE WAY IN THE PRACTICE YEARS**

Since 2019, PDG Community Networks have laid the groundwork for collecting information on program quality and supporting improvements. PDG communities have already helped programs prepare for the unified measurement and improvement system and will continue to do so by:

- Gathering accurate counts of children birth-5 served across programs;
- Conducting classroom observations and coaching educators;
- Collecting data via a new unified data portal (LinkB5);
- Assessing effective methods to engage families; and
- Promoting teacher retention through an educator incentive program.

PDG Community Networks have committed to ensuring that a broad range of programs will fully participate in Practice Year 1, enabling the state to understand how the system works on the ground with a diverse representation of participants and providing critical data and feedback as the state seeks to analyze equity impact and improve the system. The state provides PDG communities with weekly technical assistance and quarterly intensive trainings to support implementation and statewide collaboration. Evaluation of PDG efforts are conducted in partnership with UVA, and allows the VDOE to evaluate the impact of the PDG community efforts on an ongoing basis.

## **PDG - BUILDING AN EARLY CHILDHOOD DATA SYSTEM THROUGH LINKB5**

In order to measure quality and drive improvement at scale and in an equitable manner, Virginia has developed a data strategy and uniform data system (LinkB5) for collecting and analyzing measurement and improvement data across early childhood programs.

Through its PDG B5 Community Networks, Virginia is well positioned to meet the challenge of data collection across diverse early childhood settings. Virginia has designed, piloted and implemented an early childhood data system known as LinkB5. Working closely with the field and partners at UVA, Virginia engaged in multiple rounds of iterative system development, incorporating lessons and feedback from partnering with the PDG B5 communities at all stages of the work. All PDG B5 Communities use LinkB5 in a consistent manner to capture information about communities, programs, sites, classrooms, and educators. In 2020-2021, consistent

information about 1,046 sites, 3,039 classrooms, and 5,139 educators was entered into LinkB5. Information entered includes all information on classroom quality needed for the Practice Year 1 for the uniform measurement and improvement system. In addition, LinkB5 captures key access and enrollment characteristics, including information about publicly-funded children enrolled in PDG sites, enabling Virginia to use this information to develop resources for communities and families in the future.

The LinkB5 system provides a secure environment for entering and storing data, as well as security protocols allowing end users to access their own data based on their user roles and credentials (e.g., a teacher can access his or her own data; a site director can access information on all teachers and classrooms at the site). The hosting environment that UVA uses for LinkB5 adheres to protocols in place from the Information Technology System department UVA for sensitive data and is at the same level of security as the PALS and VKRP systems, which house child-level sensitive data. The use of the data by stakeholders, including UVA collaborators, is guided by VDOE-UVA data sharing agreements, as well as the guidance of UVA's Institutional Review Board (IRB), designed to establish data-use protocols in service of protecting confidentiality of data and individual's anonymity.

With its strong buy-in, extensive field testing and state-approved security features, LinkB5 will be used as the data collection and reporting tool for the Unified Measurement and Improvement System.

# SECTION 4: MEASURING THE QUALITY OF TEACHER-CHILD INTERACTIONS

## RATIONALE FOR USING THE CLASSROOM ASSESSMENT SCORING SYSTEM (CLASS)

The quality of interactions between teachers and children will be measured in Virginia’s new system using the nationally recognized CLASS tool. CLASS stands for **CL**assroom **A**ssessment **S**coring **S**ystem. The CLASS is a tool for observing and assessing the characteristics of interactions among teachers and children in classrooms developed at the University of Virginia's Center for Advanced Study of Teaching and Learning (CASTL).

The CLASS tool was chosen for use in Virginia’s measurement system because it provides a rigorous and consistent approach to observing and measuring teacher-child interactions during critical developmental periods, while still providing a context-specific and developmentally sensitive metric for each age group. In addition,

- The CLASS is the most researched and validated observation measure of early childhood teaching and classroom quality. Over 200 published studies show that students who attend classrooms with higher CLASS scores have better social and academic outcomes than their peers in classrooms with less effective interactions.<sup>18</sup>
- All children, including dual language learners (DLLs), benefit socially and academically from being in classrooms with high quality teacher-child interactions as measured by CLASS.<sup>19</sup>
- Interactions, when measured by CLASS, promote incremental improvement that motivates educators at every level in the system. CLASS provides actionable feedback for every classroom and can be used with all educators, regardless of background, setting or credential.
- Virginia has a strong basis in using CLASS and is well prepared to ensure that every publicly-funded infant, toddler and classroom receives CLASS observations and has equitable opportunity to demonstrate strengths and make improvements.

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<sup>18</sup> Teachstone. (2020). *Proving CLASS® Effectiveness— A Research Summary*.

<sup>19</sup> Teachstone®. (2021). *Research*. Teachstone® Every student deserves life-changing teachers.

In Virginia, many educators are familiar with CLASS as it is currently utilized in the following publicly-funded settings.

- **Head Start:** Pre-K CLASS is used as a part of the federal Head Start monitoring process and as part of the system to determine whether Head Start programs qualify for continued funding, known as “designation renewal.”
- **School-Based preschool (Virginia Preschool Initiative, Early Childhood Special Education, and others):** All preschool classrooms are legislatively required to receive an external CLASS observation, conducted once every two years by UVA through the Advancing Effective Interactions initiative (AEII). School divisions are also required to complete local observations in Virginia Preschool Initiative classrooms twice each year. Most school-based preschool classrooms in Virginia have had exposure to CLASS previously.
- **Virginia Quality:** Programs that chose to apply for the highest levels are observed with CLASS in a selection of infant, toddler and preschool classrooms every three years. This includes participating Head Start/Early Head Start, VPI, Private Child Care Centers and Family Day Homes.
- **Preschool Development Grant (PDG):** Programs participating in PDG receive a local CLASS observation twice a year in every infant, toddler and preschool classroom, including family day homes.

## USING CLASS TO PROMOTE EQUITY

Using CLASS provides equitable opportunities for educators to improve their practice, regardless of background, educational preparation or setting in which they work. The CLASS has been used in classrooms and family day homes with diverse populations: Dual Language Learners (DLL), children from migrant families, tribal communities, children with special needs and children from diverse cultural backgrounds. Below is a summary of the research and recommendations from Teachstone related to Virginia’s population and needs;<sup>20</sup>

- **Culturally and Linguistically diverse settings** - Researchers found that the CLASS applies equally well across preschool classrooms with different Latinx and multilingual learner compositions. Although the studies noted that there may be additional learner-specific teaching strategies that could benefit Latinx and multilingual children, these findings, underscore that warm, sensitive, well-organized, and cognitively stimulating interactions are a set of core practices that early childhood teachers can use to support the positive development of culturally and linguistically diverse children.<sup>21</sup> Teachstone recommends that CLASS observers must be able to understand the languages being

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<sup>20</sup> Hamre, B., Goffin, S., & Kraft-Sayre, M. (n.d.). Classroom Assessment Scoring System Implementation Guide. Teachstone.

<sup>21</sup> Downer, J., Lopez, M., Grimm, K., Hamagami, A., Pianta, R., & Howes, C. (n.d.). Measuring Teacher-Child Interactions in Linguistically Diverse Pre-K Classrooms. University of Virginia Center of Advanced Study of Teaching and Learning.



spoken in the classroom, in order to be able to interpret and code the interactions accurately.

- **Classrooms serving children with special needs** - The types of teacher-child interactions measured by the CLASS are critical for all children. The CLASS describes what effective special education teachers routinely do in their classrooms. Data from classrooms with 50% or more of the children on an IEP/IFSP, found that the CLASS tool accurately captured classroom interactions at or above the levels of classrooms with a majority of typically developing children.<sup>22</sup> Teachstone recommends that an observer who is collecting data in a classroom that serves a large percentage of children with disabilities have a background in special education in order to understand the context in which the interactions take place.
- **Family Day Homes** - All CLASS age levels are predicated on the assumption that there is continuity in effective teacher child-interactions across age levels. While specific examples may vary based on children’s ages, there is an underlying similarity in the kinds of interactions that promote growth and development. The dimensions used in CLASS to define and assess effective teacher-child interactions are similar across the infant, toddler, and preschool periods. This allows for the use of CLASS in mixed-age settings, such as family day homes serving infants, toddlers, and preschoolers. Recent efforts from other states have had promising outcomes after implementing professional development focused on CLASS in family day homes, with scores that were above national averages.<sup>23</sup> Teachstone recommends that an observer who is collecting data in a family day home have a background in working with family day home providers in order to understand the context in which the interactions take place.

### ***Continued Efforts to Evaluate the Equity Implications of Using CLASS in Virginia***

In line with its guiding principles regarding equity, the VDOE has and will continue to consider the equity implications of using the CLASS tool in the uniform measurement and improvement system. Although CLASS has repeatedly shown the importance of the quality of teacher-child interactions for all children, the tool does not explicitly measure bias and is broadly focused on the average experience of children in the classroom, meaning that disparities in how individual children are treated may not be fully captured. In addition, who completes the observation and provides the feedback can also affect whether all educators perceive the tool to be fair and equitable across different programs and backgrounds.

Given its focus on ensuring that Black and Hispanic children, DLLs and children with disabilities have equitable access to high quality teacher-child interactions and ensuring all educators feel equitably supported, the VDOE will continue to work closely with Teachstone to

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<sup>22</sup> Teachstone. (n.d.). Recommendations for Using the CLASS in Inclusive Early Childhood Programs, Birth–Age 8.

<sup>23</sup> Teachstone. (n.d.). Family Child Care and CLASS.

engage educators and families to fully analyze the how the CLASS tool is used in Virginia in Practice Year 1 to foster strong partnerships and to ensure that any concerns about disparate treatment or inequities are addressed.

## **INFANT, TODDLER AND PRE-K CLASS**

Virginia’s unified measurement system will use the Infant, Toddler and Pre-K CLASS observation tools. Each tool is developed specifically to evaluate the classroom characteristics and teacher-child interactions needed to promote child learning and development within each specific age range. In Virginia’s system, family day homes are considered as classrooms as they are places where children are supported to develop and learn (family day homes typically have one classroom).

- Infant CLASS is used to observe classrooms that serve birth-18 months
- Toddler CLASS is used to observe classrooms that serve 15-36 months
- Pre-K CLASS is used to observe classrooms that serve 3-5 year olds
- Mixed Age Settings, such as family day homes, use the CLASS tool that aligns with the age of the majority of children served.

In addition to using the appropriate age-level CLASS manual, Teachstone provides specific guidance for conducting observations in the following settings:

- Family Day Homes - [Guidance for Observing in Family Day Homes](#)
- Early Childhood Special Education - [Recommendations for Using the CLASS in Inclusive Early Childhood Programs, Birth–Age 8](#)
- Classrooms with Dual Language Learners - [The CLASS Tool and Dual Language Learners](#)

For each age-level, the CLASS tool organizes effective classroom interactions into broad categories or domains, which are further subdivided into dimensions. CLASS dimensions give common definitions of effective teaching across ages and content areas. These dimensions are based solely on observed interactions between teachers and children in classrooms; this system does not evaluate the presence of materials, the physical environment or safety, or the adoption of a specific curriculum. Observers using the CLASS tool must be trained and found reliable in each version of the tool prior to completing an observation.

In the charts below, each CLASS tool is broken down into the specific domains, dimensions and indicators that measure effective interactions for each age group in a developmentally appropriate way.

- Domains describe the broad categories of classroom experiences that best measure effective interactions.
- Dimensions describe the important aspects and features of effective interactions between

teachers and children within each domain.

- Indicators describe observable behaviors within classrooms. Trained and certified CLASS observers use the CLASS to capture lower-quality and higher-quality behavior indicators that are demonstrated in the classroom for each dimension.

**Overview of Infant CLASS Domain Dimensions and Indicators:**

The Infant CLASS tool has one domain, Responsive Caregiving.

Infant Domain	Infant Dimension	Infant Indicators
<b>Responsive Caregiving</b>	<b>Relational Climate:</b> Reflects the connections, emotions, and respect conveyed by teachers as well as the infants’ responses to these interactions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Relational behaviors</li> <li>● Emotion expression</li> <li>● Respect for infants’ state</li> <li>● Lack of adult negativity</li> </ul>
	<b>Teacher Sensitivity:</b> Encompasses teachers’ awareness of and responsiveness to infants’ verbal and nonverbal cues, including availability to provide comfort, skill in resolving distress, and timeliness and contingency of responses.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Awareness and cue detection</li> <li>● Responsiveness</li> <li>● Infant comfort</li> </ul>
	<b>Facilitated Exploration:</b> Considers teachers’ facilitation of experiences and interactions in routine care and playtime to support infants’ engagement and development.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Involvement</li> <li>● Infant focused</li> <li>● Expansion of infants’ experience</li> </ul>
	<b>Early Language Support:</b> Captures the amount and effectiveness of teachers’ use of language-stimulation and language facilitation techniques to encourage infants’ early language development.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Teacher Talk</li> <li>● Communication Support</li> <li>● Communication Extension</li> </ul>

**Overview of Toddler CLASS Domains, Dimensions and Indicators:**

The Toddler CLASS has two domains, Emotional and Behavioral Support and Engaged Support for Learning.

Toddler Domain	Toddler Dimension	Toddler Indicators
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<b>Emotional and Behavioral Support</b>	<b>Positive Climate:</b> Reflects the connection between the teacher and children and the warmth, respect, and enjoyment communicated by verbal and nonverbal interactions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Relationships</li> <li>● Positive affect</li> <li>● Respect</li> </ul>
	<b>Negative Climate:</b> Reflects the overall level of expressed negativity in the classroom. The frequency, quality, and intensity of teacher and child negativity are the key to this scale.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Negative affect</li> <li>● Punitive control</li> <li>● Teacher negativity</li> <li>● Child negativity</li> </ul>
	<b>Teacher Sensitivity:</b> Encompasses the teacher’s responsiveness to and awareness of children’s individual needs and emotional functioning. The extent to which the teacher is available as a secure base (being there to provide comfort, reassurance, and encouragement) is included in this rating.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Awareness</li> <li>● Responsiveness</li> <li>● Child comfort</li> </ul>
	<b>Regard for Child Perspectives:</b> Captures the degree to which the teacher’s interactions with children and classroom activities emphasize children’s interests, motivations, and points of view and encourage children’s responsibility and independence.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Child Focus</li> <li>● Flexibility</li> <li>● Support of Independence</li> </ul>
	<b>Behavior Guidance:</b> Encompasses the teacher’s ability to promote behavioral self-regulation in children by using proactive approaches, supporting positive behavior, and guiding and minimizing problem behavior.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Proactive</li> <li>● Supporting Positive Behavior</li> <li>● Problem Behavior</li> </ul>
<b>Engaged Support for Learning</b>	<b>Facilitation for Learning and Development:</b> Considers how well the teacher facilitates activities to support children’s learning and developmental opportunities. How the teacher connects and integrates learning into activities and tasks should be included in this rating.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Active facilitation</li> <li>● Expansion of cognition</li> <li>● Children’s active engagement</li> </ul>
	<b>Quality of Feedback:</b> Assesses the degree to which the teacher provides feedback (in response to what children say and/or do) that promotes learning and understanding and expands children’s participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Scaffolding</li> <li>● Providing Information</li> <li>● Encouragement and Affirmation</li> </ul>

	<b>Language Modeling:</b> Captures the quality and amount of the teacher’s use of language-stimulation and language-facilitation techniques to encourage children’s language development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supporting Language Use</li> <li>• Repetition and Extension</li> <li>• Self and Parallel Talk</li> <li>• Advanced Language</li> </ul>
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**Overview of Pre-K CLASS Domains, Dimensions, & Indicators:**

The Pre-K CLASS tool has three domains, Emotional Support, Classroom Organization and Instructional Support.

Pre-K Domain	Pre-K Dimension	Pre-K Indicators
<b>Emotional Support</b>	<b>Positive Climate:</b> Reflects the emotional connection between the teacher and students and among students, as well as the warmth, respect, and enjoyment communicated by verbal and nonverbal interactions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relationships</li> <li>• Positive Affect</li> <li>• Positive Communication</li> <li>• Respect</li> </ul>
	<b>Negative Climate:</b> Reflects the overall level of expressed negativity in the classroom; the frequency, quality, and intensity of teacher and peer negativity are key to this scale.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Negative Affect</li> <li>• Punitive Control</li> <li>• Sarcasm/Disrespect</li> <li>• Severe Negativity</li> </ul>
	<b>Teacher Sensitivity:</b> Encompasses the teacher’s awareness of and responsivity to students’ academic and emotional needs; high levels of sensitivity facilitate students’ ability to actively explore and learn because the teacher consistently provides comfort, reassurance, and encouragement.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Awareness</li> <li>• Responsiveness</li> <li>• Addresses Problems</li> <li>• Student Comfort</li> </ul>
	<b>Regard for Student Perspectives:</b> Captures the degree to which the teacher’s interactions with students and classroom activities place an emphasis on students’ interests, motivations, and points of view and encourage student responsibility and autonomy.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Flexibility and Student Focus</li> <li>• Support for Autonomy and Leadership</li> <li>• Student Expression</li> <li>• Restriction of Movement</li> </ul>

<b>Classroom Organization</b>	<b>Behavior Management:</b> Encompasses the teacher’s ability to provide clear behavioral expectations and use effective methods to prevent and redirect misbehavior.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clear Behavior Expectations</li> <li>• Proactive</li> <li>• Redirection of Misbehavior</li> <li>• Student Behavior</li> </ul>
	<b>Productivity:</b> Considers how well the teacher manages instructional time and routines and provides activities for students so that they have the opportunity to be involved in learning activities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maximizing Learning Time</li> <li>• Routines</li> <li>• Transitions</li> <li>• Preparation</li> </ul>
	<b>Instructional Learning Formats:</b> Focuses on the ways in which the teacher maximizes students’ interest, engagement, and ability to learn from lessons and activities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Effective Facilitation</li> <li>• Variety of Modalities and Materials</li> <li>• Student Interest</li> <li>• Clarity of Learning Objectives</li> </ul>
<b>Instructional Support</b>	<b>Concept Development:</b> Measures the teacher’s use of instructional discussions and activities to promote students’ higher-order thinking skills and cognition and the teacher’s focus on understanding rather than on role instruction.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Analysis and Reasoning</li> <li>• Creating</li> <li>• Integration</li> <li>• Connections to the Real World</li> </ul>
	<b>Quality of Feedback:</b> Assesses the degree to which the teacher provides feedback that expands learning and understanding and encourages continued participation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Scaffolding</li> <li>• Feedback Loops</li> <li>• Prompting Thought Processes</li> <li>• Providing Information</li> <li>• Encouragement and Affirmation</li> </ul>
	<b>Language Modeling:</b> Captures the quality and amount of the teacher’s use of language-stimulation and language-facilitation techniques.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Frequent Conversation</li> <li>• Open-Ended Questions</li> <li>• Repetition and Extension</li> <li>• Self- and Parallel Talk</li> <li>• Advanced Language</li> </ul>

**USING THE CLASS TOOL**

CLASS provides specific directions for observing classrooms, including family day homes as outlined in the manual for each age-level tool. Each cycle of observation consists of a 20 minute period during which the observer watches classroom interaction (mostly focused on the teachers)

and takes notes followed by a 10 minute period for recording scores. (Observation cycles are only 15 minutes in Infant CLASS).

CLASS requires the observer to derive one score for each dimension per observation cycle based on the degree to which certain behavioral markers characterize the classroom during that cycle. A score from 1 (minimally characteristic) to 7 (highly characteristic) is given for each dimension and represents the extent to which that dimension is characteristic of that classroom.

Virginia will require four observation cycles for all CLASS observations, resulting in a total of 80 minutes of observed teacher-child interactions in preschool and toddler classrooms (60 minutes of observed interactions in infant classrooms).

In accordance with the manual, CLASS observers capture lower quality and higher quality behaviors that are demonstrated in classrooms. Scores are assigned using the following scale for each dimension.

- **Low scores (1-2)** are assigned when behaviors associated with a dimension were demonstrated in a low-quality manner, were lacking, or were rarely present in the classroom interactions.
- **Mid scores (3-5)** are assigned when the classroom interactions associated with a dimension were somewhat present during the classroom observation or a part of some children's experience.
- **High scores (6-7)** are assigned when the classroom interactions were highly characteristic of a dimension during the observation. High-range behaviors are those that are meaningful, consistent, sustained, and reflective of everyone's experience in the classroom.

To get composite scores across cycles, individual cycle scores for each dimension are averaged across the four observation cycles for a dimension level score. Once all of the average dimension scores are obtained, the composite domain scores can be calculated.

## MEASURING INTERACTIONS WITH THE CLASS TOOL IN PRACTICE YEAR 1

Virginia's unified measurement and improvement system will use CLASS observations to measure the quality of teacher-child interactions in infant, toddler and preschool classrooms, including family day homes, twice a year. CLASS observation data will be reported via the LinkB5 data portal.

- The fall observation window will be from October 4, 2021 - December 15, 2021

- The spring observation window will be from January 11, 2022 - May 31, 2022

Fall and spring observations will be coordinated, scheduled, and recorded by the PDG Community Network assigned for the region. These will be considered local CLASS observations. In a local CLASS observation, certified observers from the local community (such as principals, site directors, early childhood coordinators or instructional specialists) conduct observations of the early childhood classrooms within their community.

## **PROCEDURES FOR LOCAL CLASS OBSERVATIONS**

In order to complete a CLASS observation, an individual must participate in a rigorous observer training and test to become “reliable” through Teachstone. Observers must maintain their certification each year by taking an online recertification test. If more than a year has lapsed, observers need to take the CLASS Observer Training and certification again. Individual observers must become reliable for each version of the tool they observe with (Pre-K, Toddler, Infant). While the CLASS reliability training is time-intensive and in depth, Virginia has already demonstrated a strong commitment to building a broad set of local observers. As of early 2021, Virginia already has nearly 1,300 certified CLASS observers.

When building a plan to train and schedule local CLASS observations, PDG community networks are expected to keep the following assurances in mind:

- Develop a deep bench of CLASS trainers and observers, with emphasis on building a racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse group of trainers and observers across all three relevant age groups: infant, toddler, and Pre-K.
- Be mindful of experience needed to observe certain program environments, such as inclusive settings or children with disabilities and Family Child Care.
- Ensure that observers speak the language(s) of both children and teachers in order to fully understand interactions and conversations.

Local observers must successfully complete observer training and pass the reliability test to receive an official observer card and certificate from Teachstone for each age group tool they will use. Certifications must be kept up-to-date.

The following procedures are to be followed for all local CLASS observations.

### **BEFORE THE OBSERVATION**



<p><b>Determining Which Tool to Use</b></p>	<p>Local observations will be conducted in all infant, toddler and preschool classrooms in programs participating in PDG using the following developmentally appropriate tools:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Infant CLASS should be used to observe classrooms/programs that serve birth-18 months</li> <li>● Toddler CLASS should be used to observe classrooms/programs that serve 15-36 months</li> <li>● Pre-K CLASS should be used to observe classrooms/programs that serve 3-5 year olds.</li> </ul> <p>For observations in mixed-age classrooms and family day homes, the following guidelines are to be used to determine the appropriate age-group tool.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● If the classroom contains a mix of infants, toddlers, and Pre-K aged children, use the tool that matches the majority of the children. For instance, if a classroom includes 1 infant, 1 toddler, and 5 Pre-K children, use the Pre-K CLASS tool.</li> <li>● If there are an equal number of children across age groups, use the Toddler tool. For instance, if a classroom includes 3 toddlers and 3 Pre-K children, use the Toddler CLASS tool.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Scheduling Observations and Notifying Teachers</b></p>	<p>PDG communities must create a schedule to ensure all classrooms will be observed at least twice a year.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● The fall observation window will be from October 4th, 2021 - December 15th, 2021</li> <li>● The spring observation window will be from January 11th, 2022 - May 31st, 2022</li> </ul> <p>PDG communities are not required to notify teachers when observations are taking place. PDG communities may provide teachers with a predetermined window of time during which unannounced observations may take place or they may decide to tell teachers the exact time and date.</p>
<p><b>Health &amp; Safety Procedures</b></p>	<p>Local setting (e.g., school-based, community-based) procedures and requirements for volunteers and visitors should always be followed (e.g., health &amp; safety; background check, identification presented). Observers should ask about these procedures prior to the observation.</p> <p>Additional health and safety guidance during COVID-19.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Observers need to verify the date and time of the observation and learn what procedures the program has in place to mitigate the impact of COVID-19.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Observers need to understand additional health and safety COVID-19 requirements for being onsite and obtain appropriate personal protective equipment.</li> <li>• Observers need to follow the required mask-wearing and sanitizing procedures upon entering the classroom and maintain the suggested or required physical distance from others, both adults and children, at all times.</li> </ul>
<b>DURING THE OBSERVATION</b>	
<b>Length of Observations</b>	<p>Pre-K and Toddler Observations include four 20-minute observation cycles with a 10-minute coding session following each cycle (approximately 2 hours total).</p> <p>Infant CLASS observations include four 15-minute cycles with a 10-minute coding session following each cycle.</p>
<b>Activities to Observe</b>	<p>Observers should ask about the typical classroom schedule prior to the observation to ensure that both structured and unstructured times of the day can be observed.</p> <p>Activities, transitions and routines in the morning or afternoon may be observed (mornings are typically preferred).</p> <p>Time periods that should not be observed include: when the whole group leaves the classroom for “specials” (such as PE, music, art), or when the whole group visits the restroom.</p> <p>Observation of outdoor activities varies by age-level. Observers should follow the guidance in each age-level manual to determine whether or not outdoor activities should be included in the observation cycle.</p>
<b>Teacher and Assistants (Classrooms with more than one adult)</b>	<p>The lead teacher should be present. Short-term substitutes for the lead teacher should not be observed. Long-term substitutes may be observed (e.g., typically any lead teacher present in the classroom for 10 consecutive days).</p> <p>CLASS observations provide a classroom-level score that includes overall teacher-child interactions including children’s interactions with the lead teacher and any other adults (e.g., instructional assistant). Observers should follow the CLASS manual, which states that observers watch children’s interactions with all teachers/adults in the room/area.</p>

<p><b>Observer Interactions</b></p>	<p>Observers should use a gaze that appears to float over the teacher, child or group rather than directly staring at individuals for long periods of time.</p> <p>If children approach the observer, observers should only acknowledge their presence with a warm smile or a nod. More engagement than this may cause the observer to distract from classroom processes being observed, and potentially disrupt the classroom and observation results.</p>
<p><b>Scoring Cycles</b></p>	<p>For the 10-minute coding sessions following each 20-minute observation cycle, observers may select to remain in the classroom or leave the classroom to complete coding.</p> <p>Observers do not conduct observations during the 10-minute coding sessions.</p> <p>Observers do not conduct more than four cycles of observations.</p>
<p><b>AFTER THE OBSERVATION</b></p>	
<p><b>Calculating Scores</b></p>	<p>When calculating CLASS scores, observers follow the guidelines on the CLASS Scoring Summary Sheet and appropriate pages of the CLASS manual.</p>
<p><b>Submitting Scores</b></p>	<p>Local observation scores are entered into the <a href="#">LinkB5</a> data portal following the procedures outlined in the Link B5 User Manual.</p>
<p><b>Record Keeping</b></p>	<p>After the observation and feedback form has been completed, observers send their CLASS score sheets to the PDG community lead agency. PDG lead agencies should keep score sheets on file as back-up documentation for at least 2 years.</p>
<p><b>ADDITIONAL OBSERVATION GUIDANCE</b></p>	
<p><b>Observation Guidance during COVID-19</b></p>	<p>Observers are to use the following dimension level COVID-19 guidance provided by Teachstone when conducting in-person observations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <a href="#">Pre-K COVID in-person observation guidance</a></li> <li>● <a href="#">Toddler COVID in-person observation guidance</a></li> <li>● <a href="#">Infant COVID in-person observation guidance</a></li> </ul>

<b>Resources and Information</b>	Additional observation resources, COVID related information, as well as answers to frequently asked questions are provided in the <a href="#">VDOE Local Observation Guidebook</a> .
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## ENSURING OBSERVER ACCURACY IN THE PRACTICE YEARS

Reliable CLASS observers must participate in routine practice to maintain accuracy in their scoring. PDG Community Networks are responsible for assisting the selected local CLASS observers in maintaining accuracy. There are several important strategies that may be employed to maintain accuracy:

- Annual recertification through Teachstone helps ensure continued accurate use of the CLASS observational measure.
- Double coding, also referred to as shadow scoring, occurs when two reliable CLASS observers conduct a CLASS observation at the same time to compare scores and practice their skills. Observations conducted for double-coding would not be used for the official fall or spring observation.
- Teachstone’s online CLASS calibrations provide an avenue for observers to check themselves between annual recertification tests. Participants practice coding classroom videos online and receive immediate feedback on their scoring.

The practice of double coding or calibrations are encouraged for new observers, as well as for more practiced observers, at least once every six months to remain consistent.

### *External CLASS Observations - Evaluation during the Practice Year*

External classroom observations are conducted by a certified CLASS observer who is not employed by the program and has no relationship to the school or classroom. This reduces the risk of actual or perceived observer bias. In addition, external observers participate in regular training to maintain their observation skills. These requirements ensure external classroom observations are standardized and conducted with the utmost data integrity.

For Practice Year 1, the VDOE will work with contracted partners to conduct external observations on a selection of classrooms that are participating in PDG.

- Some classrooms will receive *external CLASS observations*, coordinated through the VDOE and contracted partners. These are in addition to the two local observations.
- External observations will provide additional feedback to teachers.
- External observations will be used to evaluate the local observation scores, instances of

particularly high or low local scores may be prioritized for an external observation.

This information will help ensure observation accuracy and will be used to guide the development of future guidelines and protocols for CLASS observation quality. Scores from external CLASS observations will be shared with program site leaders for informational purposes only, and will not count towards the practice year ratings.

## **PREPARING FOR CLASS OBSERVATIONS**

Before classroom observations are conducted, teachers and program leaders need to understand what is being measured and why. PDG communities will be responsible for ensuring that all teachers and leaders are provided with foundational CLASS training. During foundational training, teachers and program leaders will view videos from real classrooms to view effective teaching practices in action in alignment with the domains and dimensions in CLASS. Foundational CLASS training also provides information about what teachers can expect when an observer comes to their classroom as well as an overview of the types of information they'll receive after an observation.

Foundational CLASS training for teachers focuses on the CLASS tool that covers the age level of the children in their classroom, including how the CLASS tool organizes interactions by domains and dimensions, for a specific age level. Foundational CLASS training for program leaders focuses on CLASS tools for different age levels in the program. Foundational CLASS training is different from reliable observer training in that it is much shorter and accessible via online and in-person options.

### *Providing Feedback to Support Improvement*

Providing teachers with quality feedback regarding their local CLASS observation is a critical component of the improvement practice. One of the largest benefits of local CLASS observations is that teachers can receive more frequent feedback on their practice, often from a local individual who already supports their practice (such as when the observer is a site leader or coach).

[UVA's feedback protocols](#) may be used to prepare for and guide effective feedback sessions, which include:

- Starting with a general conversation and work to make the teachers feel comfortable.
- Orienting the teachers to the structure of the local feedback form.
- Reviewing domain level scores, calling attention to general trends.
- Highlighting areas of strength (focus on the positive) and then one area for growth by domain, unpacking specific examples.
- Working with the teachers to determine a dimension or one aspect of a dimension to be an area of focus.

- Discussing how the teachers can focus on this area of interactions in the coming weeks in his/her daily classroom interactions with children.
- Identifying specific strategies or action steps so that the teachers can practice teacher interactions in a targeted manner.

## **CLASS SUPPORT FOR ONGOING IMPROVEMENT**

Results from local observations administered twice a year through PDG communities will be used by instructional leaders to inform ongoing professional development and assess growth in teacher-child interactions over time. Increasing capacity and knowledge of quality interactions at the local level promotes shared understandings of the strong principles of high-quality teaching in early childhood settings that are highlighted in the CLASS tool. Having program or school division leaders trained to reliability in CLASS enables them to bring the CLASS lens to every aspect of their work.

Feedback providers and other professional development providers must ensure that teachers receive ongoing support to grow in areas of need through individualized professional development. This may include activities such as:

- Practice-focused professional development (in whole/small group sessions or online module formats) that introduce key knowledge pieces and then help teachers plan for and practice improvements.
- Action planning (in coaching or peer-learning communities) followed by regular feedback/analysis loops with colleagues (coach/admin/peer teachers) where teachers reflect on what worked in their classrooms and how to incrementally improve.
- Informal “walk-throughs” or “focused observations” targeted to specific Action Plan areas (e.g., one CLASS dimension) so that teachers can focus on improving one practice at a time and receive frequent feedback on that practice.
- Using CLASS data alongside other data sources (curriculum use, environment, child outcomes) to identify common needs. Research suggests that children benefit the most when interactions and instruction, guided by a strong curriculum, are maximized.

Additional information about continuous quality improvement for improving teacher-child interactions is provided in section 7.

# SECTION 5: MEASURING USE OF QUALITY OF CURRICULUM

## BACKGROUND ON EARLY CHILDHOOD QUALITY CURRICULUM

Curriculum will be measured in Practice Year 1 by evaluating whether or not an early childhood program is using curricula which have been reviewed and determined to be of quality in at least one classroom. Curricular materials used in early learning programs must be in alignment with the Early Learning and Development Standards, and must provide educators with the information and supportive guidance they need to be successful in the classroom.

Use of curricula in an early learning program is a critical first step to supporting learning in every birth-to-five classroom. Professional support and ongoing training on using curricula effectively with diverse learners is essential for successful implementation. For Practice Year 1, the VDOE will support classrooms in obtaining and implementing this foundational resource, with the goal of strengthening the implementation of curricular materials and content in future years.

## VIRGINIA'S BIRTH TO FIVE EARLY LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT STANDARDS - FOUNDATION FOR QUALITY INSTRUCTIONAL TOOLS

A core component of a high-quality early education experience is that children are provided opportunities, experiences, and materials that allow them to engage deeply within developmental/early learning domains to build their school readiness skills. In 2020, a new set of unified birth to five early learning standards were created to replace the previous VDOE Foundation Blocks and VDSS Milestones of Child Development. [Virginia's New Unified Early Learning and Development Standards](#) (ELDS) provide all early childhood providers, inclusive of parents/families, teachers and program leaders, a resource for understanding what children should know and be able to do as they grow and change from birth until they enter kindergarten. All programs are expected to fully implement the new standards by the start of the 2021-2022 school year.

The ELDS are designed for adults who care for and teach young children in a variety of settings including home-based child care, center-based child care, Head Start classrooms, early intervention programs, private preschools, public early childhood programs, and Virginia Preschool Initiative (VPI) classes. The ELDSs are a reference to help caregivers and educators understand what most children are able to know and do, across different areas of development,

by a given age. **The ELDS are not intended to serve as a developmental checklist, an assessment, or a curriculum.**

These ELDSs organize information into five Areas of Development. While not reflective of the true, integrated nature of development, this organization aims to help educators know what to encourage and what to look for as they support and keep watch over a child’s development and learning. The Areas of Development include:

- Approaches to Play and Learning
- Social and Emotional Development
- Communication, Language, and Literacy Development
- Health and Physical Development
- Cognitive Development (including Science, Social Science, Mathematics and Fine Arts)

Each Area of Development is organized further into Sub Areas and Focus Areas. Each Focus Area, in turn, details Indicators that describe a developmental progression of how we expect a child to change across six overlapping age-bands, from birth to age 5. When Focus Areas include skills that develop during the later years, the developmental progression will start at the appropriate age range leaving earlier columns blank. This organization aims to underscore the reality that, while development occurs along a general, expected trajectory, an individual child will not necessarily conform to an exact timeline for achieving milestones. Each child will also, by virtue of individual, environmental, and cultural differences, demonstrate a milestone in varied ways. The ELDS can be used by individual educators and early childhood programs to understand how children build skills and understanding, in different areas of development, from birth to five and discern whether a particular child is learning and growing according to general expectations.

## **DEFINING CURRICULUM FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD**

According to the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), “curriculum” is the organized framework that delineates the content children are to learn, the processes through which children will use to achieve the identified curricular goals, what teachers will do to help children achieve these goals, and the context in which teaching and learning occur.<sup>24</sup> Essentially, a curriculum identifies the “what” and “how” of the learning experiences children will have.

Curriculum, or the content of what children learn, is central to supporting and strengthening young children’s learning and development. According to NAEYC, educators and other stakeholders in young children’s lives have a shared responsibility to implement a curriculum that is thoughtfully planned, challenging, engaging, developmentally appropriate, culturally and

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<sup>24</sup> Marjorie, K., Anne, S., Alice, W., & Michelle, R. (2018). Developmentally Appropriate Curriculum: Best Practices in Early Childhood Education.



linguistically responsive, comprehensive, and likely to promote positive outcomes for all young children<sup>25</sup>.

### *Infant Toddler Curriculum and Individualization*

The development that occurs from birth to three, lays the foundation for all later learning.<sup>26</sup> To ensure an effective foundation for later development and success, infant/toddler experiences should be designed to meet the individual needs of each child. Because the developmental foundation built during this period has lifelong implications, the responsibility for children's learning while in out-of-home care is too significant to be left to chance. An individualized curriculum provides a way for teachers to be intentional about the way they support development and learning with children under three and ensures that all aspects of development are being monitored and appropriately supported in a variety of ways.

### *Curricula to Support Cultural Competency*

Cultural responsiveness is a strengths-based approach to teaching rooted in respect and appreciation for the role of culture in children's learning and development. A culturally responsive curriculum prompts teachers to learn about each child's strengths, abilities, experiences, and interests as developed within the child's family and culture.<sup>27</sup> The following are key aspects of a culturally responsive curriculum for early childhood:

- **Interactions:** The curriculum supports culturally responsive ways of interacting with diverse children and families.
- **Learning experiences:** The curriculum encourages learning experiences for children that build on their families' traditions, culture, values, and beliefs
- **Learning materials:** The curriculum suggests how to use learning materials that authentically represent the cultures and ethnicities of children and families.

Establishing an expectation for using curricula that support culturally responsive practices among Virginia's early childhood workforce is a critical part of supporting the effective delivery of care and instruction to Virginia's diverse early learner population. Culture strongly influences the attitudes, values, and behaviors that young children and educators bring to the instructional setting making culturally responsive educators necessary for the equitable achievement of today's increasingly diverse population of children in early childhood learning spaces. Culturally responsive educators see the diversity in their classrooms or learning spaces as an asset and use their knowledge on children's backgrounds to enrich care and education experiences. Educators form a thorough understanding of the specific cultures of the children they teach and care for,

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<sup>25</sup> National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and the National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education (NAECS/SDE). (2003).

<sup>26</sup> National Infant & Toddler Child Care Initiative @ ZERO TO THREE. (2010). *Infant/Toddler Curriculum and Individualization*.

<sup>27</sup> US Administration of Children and Families. (n.d.). *Curriculum Consumer Report*. Head Start Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center.

how that culture affects children’s learning behaviors, and how they can change interactions and instruction to embrace the differences.

### **Culturally Responsive Educators:**

- See cultural differences as assets;
- Validate the inequities impacting children’s lives;
- Cultivate relationships beyond the classroom or learning space, anchored in affirmation, mutual respect, and validation;
- Believe that ALL children can succeed and communicate high expectations for all children;
- Engage in reflection of their beliefs, behaviors, and practices; Utilize children’s cultures as vehicles for learning;
- Challenge racial and cultural stereotypes, prejudices, racism, and other forms of intolerance, injustice, and oppression;
- Mediate power imbalances in classrooms and learning spaces based on race, culture, ethnicity, and class;
- Communicate in linguistically and culturally responsive ways; and Collaborate with families and the local community

Achieving education equity- that is eliminating the predictability of student outcomes based on race, gender, zip code, ability, socioeconomic status or languages spoken at home- indeed requires that caregivers and educators engage in culturally responsive practice. It also requires that caregivers and educators are culturally competent, exhibit cultural proficiency and are fully cognizant of what culturally relevant pedagogy and culturally relevant/responsive teaching entails (see [“Key Terms” related to cultural competency](#) that have been adopted by the Virginia Department of Education on the [Virginia is for Learners website](#)).

### **Using Curriculum to Increase Equity**

As an initial step to using curriculum to increase equity, Virginia must ensure that more educators have access to and are supported to use a quality curriculum. Currently, access and familiarity with quality curriculum tools is inequitable across program types in Virginia. Nearly all school-based and Head Start programs already use an approved preschool curriculum. By contrast, family day homes and small child care centers are significantly less likely to have a curriculum in place, or to be participating in ongoing training and assistance in implementing this important resource.<sup>28</sup> This is a disparity in the existing supports available to varied program types. In Practice Year 1, the VDOE will address this disparity by ensuring resources to purchase and support quality curriculum implementation are available. These resources will be targeted at those site types who need it most during Practice Year 1, specifically focusing on family day homes and child care. Once all publicly-funded classrooms have affordable access, Virginia will

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<sup>28</sup> Based on 2019-2020 data from PDG and Virginia Quality

consider any necessary adjustments for measuring and supporting effective use of quality curriculum.

## MEASURING CURRICULUM IN PRACTICE YEAR 1

### OVERVIEW OF CRITERIA OF EFFECTIVE BIRTH TO FIVE CURRICULA BIRTH TO FIVE

The following criteria from the National Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center’s [Curriculum Consumer Report](#) measure the quality of preschool, infant-toddler and family day home curricula. These criteria are based on early childhood education research, the Head Start Program Performance Standards (HSPPS), and other standards for high-quality curricula (e.g., National Association for the Education of Young Children, Division for Early Childhood).

In Practice Year 1, the following criteria will be considered when reviewing birth to five curricula for quality.

Criteria	Definition	Description
Evidence Base for Child Outcomes	Evidence from research demonstrates that the curriculum has been associated with children's positive learning outcomes.	The curriculum has been implemented and directly studied in early childhood programs, and the research showed significant, positive effects on children's developmental outcomes. Evidence of effectiveness has been obtained in rigorous research studies, such as randomized controlled trials or regression discontinuity designs. Research studies on the curriculum have optimally included multiple, diverse groups of children and teachers.
Research Based Curriculum	The curriculum provides research-based content and teaching practices to support children's development and learning	A research-based curriculum is consistent with research on how children develop and learn. Specifically, it provides rich content, teaching practices, and learning experiences that research has shown to be effective in supporting children's development and learning. A research-based curriculum focuses on domain-specific, developmentally appropriate content and skills that contribute to children's long-range development in each domain.
Scope and Sequence	The curriculum includes an organized	A scope and sequence outlines what the curriculum focuses on and how the plans and materials support children at different levels of development. The

	developmental scope and sequence to support children's development and learning	scope refers to the areas of development addressed by the curriculum; the sequence includes plans and materials for learning experiences that progressively build from less to more complex, with the goal of supporting children as they move through the developmental progressions. A content-rich curriculum ensures that sequences of learning experiences include multiple, related opportunities for children to explore a concept or skill with increasing depth. Sequences of learning experiences should be flexible to respond to individual children's interests, strengths, and needs.
Alignment with Applicable Early Learning and Development Standards	The curriculum, or curricula, covers all areas of children's learning and development	Aligning curriculum with early learning and development standards, such as Virginia's Early Learning Standards or the Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework <sup>29</sup> , identifies the extent to which key areas of development are addressed in the curriculum. A curriculum that is fully aligned with early learning standards is comprehensive and covers all areas of children's learning and development. Combining curricula that address specific domains may also be considered if tools meet other criteria.
Learning Goals for Children	The curriculum specifies learning goals for children.	The curriculum's learning goals are objectives for children's development and learning across domains. Learning goals should be measurable and developmentally appropriate. Measurable learning goals focus on skills, behaviors, and knowledge that are observable; developmentally appropriate learning goals are consistent with well-established developmental progressions. Teachers should be able to use a curriculum's learning goals to individualize learning experiences for all children, such as children from diverse cultures, children who are dual language learners (DLLs), children who are learning tribal languages, and children with disabilities or other special needs.
Ongoing Child Assessment	The curriculum provides guidance on ongoing child assessment.	Ongoing child assessment is a process of gathering information to understand and support children's development over time. Information gathered through observation and documentation helps inform

<sup>29</sup> Virginia's Birth to Five Early Learning Standards have been aligned with the Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework

		curriculum planning, teaching, and individualizing for all children. Ongoing child assessment can also be used to periodically complete standardized and structured assessment instruments to evaluate children's developmental progress.
Parent and Family Engagement	The curriculum promotes parent and family engagement.	Parent and family engagement is a collaborative and strengths-based process through which early childhood teachers, families, and children build positive and goal-oriented relationships. It is a shared responsibility of families and staff that is built on mutual respect for the roles and strengths each has to offer. The curriculum provides culturally and linguistically responsive strategies to communicate with families and to engage families in children's learning.
Professional Development Materials to Support Implementation	The curriculum offers professional development and materials to support implementation and continuous improvement.	Professional development includes gaining the knowledge and skills required for effective implementation of a curriculum. Standardized training procedures include initial and ongoing training to support education staff as they learn to implement a curriculum with fidelity. Standardized training procedures provide consistent content and delivery methods across training sessions. Curriculum materials to support implementation include resources that come with a curriculum to help education staff understand how to use it. The materials may also include resources to help education managers and coaches support education staff to implement the curriculum effectively.
Learning Experiences and Interactions	The curriculum promotes rich learning experiences and interactions to support development across domains.	Rich learning experiences support and extend children's knowledge, understanding of concepts, and skills across domains. As children actively explore their learning environment by manipulating objects and investigating concepts, teachers interact with them to extend their exploration, thinking, and communication. The curriculum offers children ample opportunities to engage in hands-on exploration and provides teachers with guidance on how to extend children's exploration, thinking, and communication. (This also reinforces higher quality teacher-child interactions.) Rich learning experiences should be culturally and linguistically responsive and inclusive of children with disabilities,

		suspected delays, or other special needs.
Learning Environments and Routines	The curriculum provides guidance on how to set up rich learning environments and developmentally appropriate routines.	Rich learning environments are nurturing spaces that support the development of all young children. The curriculum provides guidance on how to design developmentally appropriate schedules, routines, and indoor and outdoor opportunities for choice, play, exploration, and experimentation. (This also reinforces higher quality teacher-child interactions.) Learning environments include age-appropriate equipment, materials, and supplies. They also reflect home cultures and are flexible to support the changing ages, interests, and characteristics of a group of children over time.
Cultural Responsiveness	The curriculum supports cultural responsiveness.	Cultural responsiveness is a strengths-based approach to teaching and caregiving rooted in respect and appreciation for the role of culture in children's learning and development. A culturally responsive curriculum prompts teachers to learn about each child's strengths, abilities, experiences, and interests as developed within the child's family and culture. The curriculum provides guidance on how to modify and enhance curriculum plans and materials to build on these strengths, abilities, experiences, and interests with the goal of incorporating each child's culture into the classroom.
Linguistic Responsiveness	The curriculum supports linguistic responsiveness.	Linguistic responsiveness refers to teaching practices that support the learning, development, and engagement of children from diverse linguistic backgrounds. It includes supports for continued development of children's home or tribal languages by authentically incorporating children's languages into the learning environment. Furthermore, linguistically responsive practices can facilitate English acquisition. The curriculum provides scaffolding strategies to support children at any level of English knowledge to fully participate in the curriculum's learning experiences.
Individualization for Children with Disabilities, Suspected Delays or Other	The curriculum provides guidance on how to individualize for children with	Individualization for children with disabilities, suspected delays, or other special needs includes providing more specialized supports for children to access and participate in learning, social experiences, and activities. The curriculum's guidance for

Special Needs	disabilities, suspected delays, or other special needs.	specialized supports includes specific teaching practices and ways of interacting with children, as well as adaptations to daily schedules, learning activities, and the learning environment. Individualizing for children with disabilities, suspected delays, or other special needs enables all children to access, participate, and thrive in early learning settings.
Individualization Based on Interests, Strengths and Needs	The curriculum offers guidance on how to individualize based on children's interests, strengths, and needs.	Individualization is a process of planning and implementing learning experiences that are responsive to each child's interests, strengths, and needs. Teachers reflect on their observations of each child and then plan the most effective ways to support each child's learning and development. When learning experiences are tailored to children's interests, they are more engaging and meaningful to children. Because children may vary in their developmental progressions, it is also important that the curriculum supports teachers in planning learning experiences that are responsive to individual children's strengths and needs. (This also reinforces higher quality teacher-child interactions.)

It should also be noted that some aspects of a quality curriculum help reinforce some of the quality measures and behaviors that are included in the CLASS tool, such as a curriculum that offers children ample opportunities to engage in hands-on exploration and provides teachers with guidance on how to extend children's exploration. A curriculum that offers guidance on how to individualize will help teachers be more responsive to individual children's strengths and needs. High quality teacher-child interactions are also supported by curricula that provide guidance on how to design developmentally appropriate schedules, routines, and opportunities for choice, play, exploration, and experimentation.

## **CURRICULUM REVIEW PROCESS**

Virginia has been supporting curricula review for several years, most recently as a result of the recommendations from the 2018 JLARC study on quality preschool. With many curricula products to select from, the review process has been made available to assist sites of all types in identifying comprehensive preschool curricula that will best support the learning of their young students.

The initial review of early childhood curricula has taken place when requested by localities, most of which at this time have been schools. The primary process for reviewing curricula thus far has followed these steps:

- **Step 1:** The requested curriculum is reviewed to determine if it is 1) fully-integrated/comprehensive; 2) evidence-based; and 3) entirely original content. If so, the curriculum is eligible for a full review.
- **Step 2:** If all criteria outlined in Step 1 are met, a full curriculum audit is conducted by a consultant trained in curriculum vetting. For this level of review reviewers require full digital access (if an available option) to all curricular materials teachers use and all PD materials provided to teachers. The rubric used for full curriculum reviews is similar to the tool developed by the National Center on Quality Teaching (now the National Center on Early Childhood Development, Teaching, and Learning or NCECDTL).

Beginning July 1, the curricula review process will be available to all birth-to-five programs. The VDOE will update the curriculum review process as needed throughout Practice Year 1.

## **PROCEDURES FOR GATHERING PROGRAM CURRICULUM INFORMATION AND ASSURING ACCURACY**

Curricula use will be reported at the classroom level for every site. This data will be reported via the LinkB5 data portal. In the fall of Practice Year 1, programs will first be asked to enter the curriculum information via LinkB5 site classroom profiles to document curriculum use as part of their annual LinkB5 program profile. Please note, however, that sites will have the opportunity to update the curricula used as of May 31, 2022. This allows additional time for the VDOE to review existing curriculum and to ensure access to resources for sites that may not currently have an approved curricula.

The VDOE may conduct a program audit by requesting documentation to support the validity of the curriculum information submitted.

## **PROVIDING SUPPORT FOR CURRICULUM USE**

As noted above, an effective curriculum includes professional development resources and materials to support implementation and continuous improvement. Professional development includes gaining the knowledge and skills required for effective implementation of a curriculum to meet the unique needs of diverse learners. The professional development materials that come with the curriculum should be used by education leaders, trainers and coaches to provide both initial training and ongoing support for teachers to implement the curriculum effectively. Training on curricula is an iterative process that also requires program leaders' fostering of collaboration between experienced and new teachers around curriculum development to orient new teachers to their curriculum, helping them figure out what to teach and how to teach it.



Additional information about continuous quality improvement to support effective curriculum implementation is provided in section 7.

# SECTION 6: SETTING PROGRAM QUALITY MEASURES

At the end of Practice Year 1, programs will receive an overall practice year rating. Overall program scores will range from 100-800 based on CLASS scores and the use of curriculum and correspond to one of three levels on the rating scale, ranging from Needs Support to Exceeds Practice Year Expectations.

For the Unified Measurement and Improvement System, a program is defined as one site or location. Each program (e.g., each public school location, each child care center, etc.) will receive one rating based on the measures obtained during the practice year. This means each school site, each Head Start site, and each child care or family day home will receive a program measurement specific to their physical location.

During the practice year, program level results will be private and there will not be any incentives or consequences based on the results. Rather, program leaders will use the practice year results to understand the close connection between teacher-child interactions, instruction and child outcomes as they work with local leaders and teachers to prioritize pressing needs. State level results will be used to ensure the system is equitable for all program types, and improve the system for future years.

## DEFINITIONS OF PROGRAM LEVELS FOR PRACTICE YEAR 1

The following scale describes how well programs are meeting the quality standards during Practice Year 1.

- **Exceeds Practice Year Expectations** - The program performing at this level demonstrates performance that consistently and considerably surpasses the established standard. This rating is reserved for performance that is truly exemplary and done in a manner that exemplifies the state's mission and goals for Practice Year 1.
- **Meets Practice Year Expectations** - The program meets the standard in a manner that is consistent with the state's mission and goals for Practice Year 1.
- **Needs Support** - The program is performing below the established standard or in a manner that is inconsistent with the state's mission and goals for the practice year. Programs that fall into this category within Practice Year 1 will be a priority for improvement support.

## **DETERMINING THE PROGRAM RESULTS (PRACTICE YEAR 1 RATING)**

The program quality level is calculated at the end of the data collection cycle (i.e. end of the academic year). The program results are based on measurement data collected from fall and spring Local CLASS observations entered into the LinkB5 system, and from classroom curriculum information collected from the Link B5 program profile.

### **CALCULATING INTERACTION POINTS - USING THE PROGRAM AVERAGE CLASS SCORE**

The program average CLASS score is calculated using average scores from every classroom including both fall and spring results. All classrooms are weighted equally and scores are averaged at the dimension level to provide a reflection of what is happening in the classroom.

Using a program average scores allows for consistent quality measurement across the Infant, Toddler and Pre-K CLASS tools. In addition, using average program scores rewards incremental improvements as well as offers the most overall transparency and fairness in terms of ratings.

VDOE will use the following steps to calculate the overall program average at the end of the academic year, after both the fall and spring observations are completed.

1. Determine average CLASS score for each classroom in the fall and then again in the spring
  - a. Calculate average CLASS score for each classroom by summing the scores for each dimension and dividing by the number of dimensions for the specific age-level tool.
2. Determine average CLASS score for each age-level in the fall and then again in the spring
  - a. Calculate the average CLASS scores for each age-level (Infant, Toddler, Pre-K), by summing the average scores for each classroom within the same age level and then dividing by the number of classrooms within the same age level.
3. Determine the overall average CLASS score for the program.
  - a. Calculate an overall average CLASS score for each age level by summing the fall and spring average scores and dividing by 2.
  - b. Calculate the overall average CLASS score by summing the age level average scores and dividing by the number of age levels served

All scores are rounded to two decimal places. If the digit in the thousandths place is greater or equal to 5, the hundredths digit is increased by one unit. For example, 4.6378 is rounded to 4.64

The average CLASS score for a site will be multiplied by 100 for the final Practice Year 1 Rating, resulting in a maximum score of 700 points from the CLASS observation portion of the measurement.

## CALCULATING CURRICULUM POINTS

The program curriculum score is calculated using the classroom curriculum information entered each year. For Practice Year 1, this will include the following:

- Programs who are using an approved curriculum in at least one classroom are awarded 100 points for the Practice Year 1 rating.
- Programs who are not using an approved curriculum receive 0 points for curriculum.
- The VDOE will be partnering with programs participating in Practice Year 1 to provide support in obtaining and implementing a curriculum, with the goal being that all programs have pathways to obtaining this valuable learning resource.
  - In order to fairly measure curriculum use in Practice Year 1, this measure will be reflective of what is in place on May 31, 2022. In future years, it is expected this will be moved up to require the fall timeline.
  - Use of curricula in an early learning program is only a first step in ensuring appropriate learning and scaffolding is taking place in every birth-to-five classroom. Professional support and ongoing training on curricula use is just as essential for successful implementation. For Practice Year 1, the VDOE will support classrooms in obtaining and implementing this essential and foundational resource, with the goal of increasing the importance of quality implementation of curricular materials and content in future years.

## COMPUTING THE OVERALL PROGRAM SCORE FOR THE PRACTICE YEAR

The overall program score for Practice Year 1 will be calculated by adding the interaction points and the curriculum points together. The total score will be out of a maximum of 800 points.

Practice Year 1 quality ratings will be broken down by the following ranges:

- A score between 700 and 800 points will result in an Exceeds Practice Year Expectations
- A score between 400 and 699 points will result in a Meets Practice Year Expectations
- A score between 100 and 399 points will result in a Needs Support rating

<b>Interactions Points</b> (700 pts total)	Average of all CLASS scores ( <i>all classrooms</i> at a site) x 100 points
<b>Curriculum Points</b>	Programs using an approved curriculum in <i>at least one classroom</i> will receive 100 points.

(100 pts total)	
<b>TOTAL POINTS</b>	Interactions Points + Curriculum Points = Total Points
<b>QUALITY RATING (Practice Year 1 Rating)</b>	Exceeds Practice Year Expectations = 700 - 800 points Meets Practice Year Expectations = 400 - 699 points Needs Support = 100 - 399 points

*Practice Year Rating Example 1*

ABC Child Care Center	Fall CLASS Avg	Spring CLASS Avg	Overall Avg	Approved Curriculum Used?
1 Infant Classroom	4.25	4.75	4.5	No
1 Toddler Classroom	4.10	4.17	4.14	Yes
1 Pre-K Classroom	3.82	4.35	4.09	Yes
<b>Site Total</b>	----	----	<b>4.24</b>	<b>Yes</b>

*Overall Practice Year 1 Rating*

Interactions Points =  $4.24 \times 100 = 424$  points

Curriculum Points = 100

Total Points = 524 (Meets Practice Year Expectations)

# SECTION 7: SUPPORTING CONTINUOUS QUALITY IMPROVEMENT

## QUALITY MEASUREMENT SUPPORTS IMPROVEMENT

As a result of the unified measurement system, Virginia will be primed to support ongoing quality improvement in all birth-to-five early learning classrooms.

All programs benefit from a shared vision for quality early teaching and learning. Identifying the core components of quality, culturally and linguistically responsive teaching and learning and aligning all improvement resources to these core components helps organize the system. Doing so helps ensure that each level of the system can create aligned targets for improvement and measure success in similar ways. Research has shown systems that focus on simple and consistent measures of quality can provide a feeling of control for educators, and can result in significant gains across all program types.<sup>30</sup>

Quality Improvement takes place on multiple levels within Virginia’s system: state, regional and local implementation partners, program leaders and classroom educators. Systems-level work to improve effectiveness and outcomes impacts—and is impacted by—change on the program and implementing partners’ levels.<sup>31</sup>

To improve child outcomes, Virginia’s system must continually improve supports for educators, prioritizing those who need it most. It should ensure that:

- **Educators**, including those in family day homes, centers, and school sites, receive frequent feedback on their teaching practice. Professional support and coaching will respond to what is known about their specific needs. Educators will have a foundational knowledge of quality, culturally and linguistically responsive teaching practices, and be provided assistance in making ongoing progress. Their commitment to improvement will be observable, and they will be confident that site leaders and improvement leaders will recognize their progress in measurable and consistent ways.
- **Program leaders**, such as child care directors, principals, or early childhood coordinators, receive frequent information about the strengths and areas for growth within their program(s). They will have access to culturally and linguistically appropriate

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<sup>30</sup> Bassok, D., & Markowitz, A. (n.d.). *The value of systemwide, high-quality data in early childhood education*. Brown Center Chalkboard.

<sup>31</sup> Billie, Y., & BUILD initiative. (2017). *Continuous Quality Improvement in Early Childhood and School Age Programs: An Update from the Field*.

improvement supports and professional development that are responsive to the specific behaviors or strategies identified by the consistent measures of teacher-child interactions and use of instructional tools. Progress resulting from commitments to quality improvement efforts will be reinforced through sustained measurement and feedback.

- **Improvement partners**, such as organizations that are contracted to provide technical assistance (coaching, mentoring, and consultation), training, professional development and other supports to early childhood programs involved in quality rating systems, state Pre-K or other state initiatives which seek to improve program quality; have accurate and current data to inform their work with each site and more specifically, each classroom. They will know that each educator and site leader has an understanding of the importance of equity focused teacher-child interactions and curriculum, and can begin from a place of a shared language and goals. Improvements can be designed to be responsive to the detailed information known about each community, site, and teacher, including being responsive to the racial diversity of the community and the linguistic preferences. The success of professional development intervention or initiative will be observable through the continual measurement and improvement process. Finally it will be easier to collaborate as everyone is working on similar efforts with a shared language and focus.

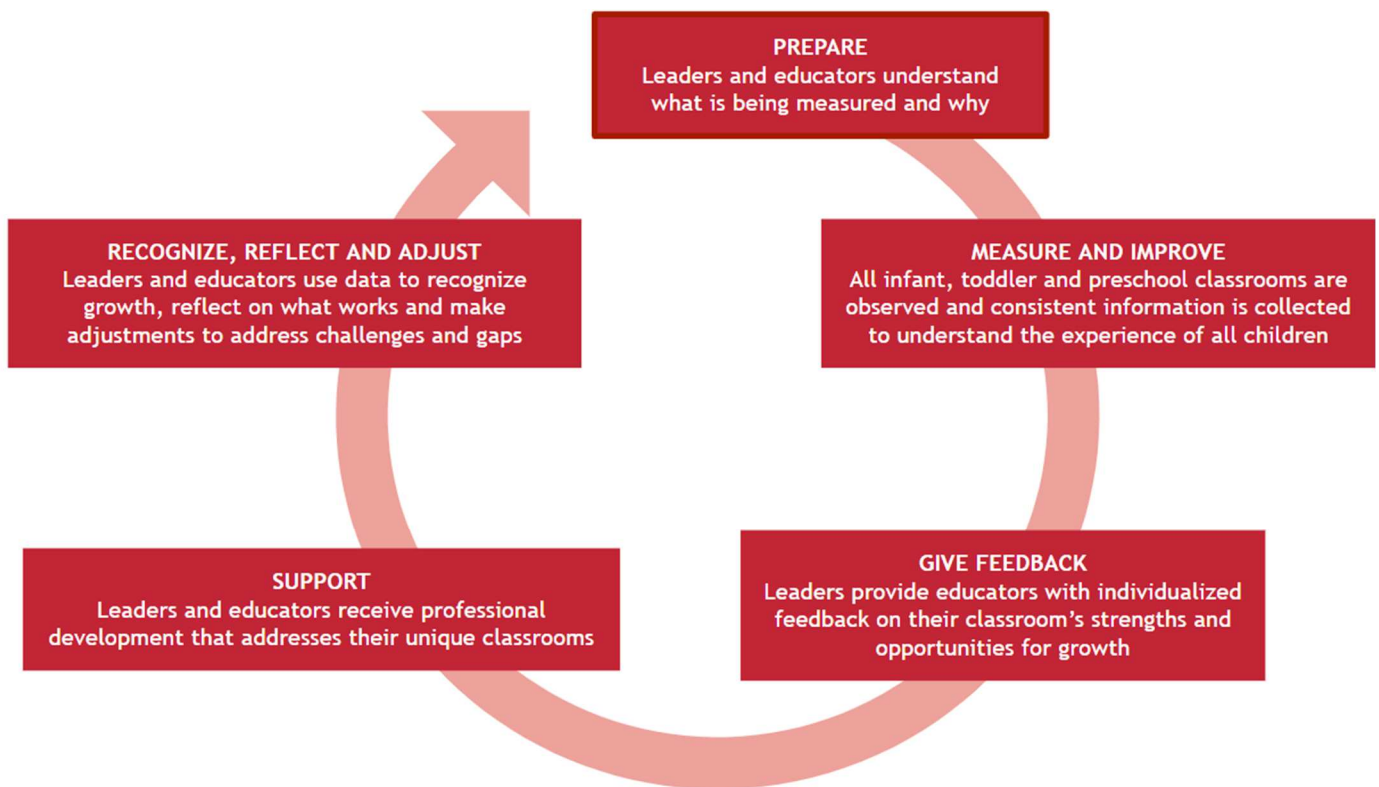
While the Unified Measurement and Improvement System results in benefits for all programs and teachers, there will be a significant level of attention provided to those who most need improvement. Virginia’s Unified Measurement and Improvement system aims to ensure every child is receiving a quality early learning experience, and will intentionally focus on providing support to the educators who care for and teach children who are underserved or placed at the greatest risk of not fulfilling their potential (e.g., Black, Hispanic and other historically marginalized populations of children; multilingual/English Learners; children who are from low-income backgrounds or those who have an identified disability or developmental delay).

Through frequent measurement and feedback, the unified system will identify and intervene where needed, dedicating targeted culturally-responsive supports, intervention, and state resources for programs and classrooms where support is most critical. Public resources will be targeted toward programs in need of the most support or those with fewer resources which will likely include child care and family day home settings.

## **CYCLE OF CONTINUOUS QUALITY IMPROVEMENT**

An important feature of the Unified Measurement and Improvement System is that measurement, feedback, and supports are ongoing and frequent. Educators and leaders have opportunities to measure their progress multiple times a year. At the same time, reflection on data is embedded throughout the measurement cycle. This leads to continuous growth, year over year.

In the Unified Measurement and Improvement System, all educators and leaders begin by preparing for the annual cycle of measurement. This includes foundational training and guidance regarding the tools being used. Each classroom is measured throughout the year, with timely results shared with leaders and educators. Each time a classroom is measured, feedback is provided to the teacher(s) regarding the classrooms strengths and opportunities for growth. Leaders are able to identify professional development supports that respond to the unique needs of their program. Finally, as the measurement cycle for the year closes and results are shared, educators at all levels reflect on the successes and challenges of the past year, and begin to prepare for the next cycle based on their reflections.



## **COORDINATING VIRGINIA'S EXISTING NETWORK OF QUALITY SUPPORTS IN PRACTICE YEAR 1**

Through a strategic review and alignment of existing programmatic supports, the VDOE will maximize impact with available funds and quality partners. In Practice Year 1, the VDOE will continue to complete a systematic review and continued engagement with all existing quality improvement partners. Virginia is fortunate to have many quality improvement partners who are



already providing professional support to birth-to-five educators which is in alignment with the goals and measured objectives of the Unified Measurement and Improvement System.

In addition to PDG community networks, the following list includes the current quality improvement partners that the VDOE works with and provides funding arrangements for through either federal or state funding sources. These providers are responsible for working with birth-to-five programs to provide training, coaching, or coursework intended to improve the early childhood system. Coordination of professional development opportunities and resources between PDG and VDOE’s quality improvement partners will be a key focus of Practice Year 1.

<b>VDOE Quality Improvement Partners: <i>General Classroom and Program Support</i></b>	<b>Primary Purpose</b>	<b>Target Audience for Services</b>
<a href="#">Virginia Infant Toddler Specialist Network</a> ( ITSN)	Improve the quality of care and education that infants and toddlers receive in child day centers and family day homes, by increasing education and competency of infant and toddler caregivers, teachers, and directors.	Child care and family day home programs with children under 3.
<a href="#">Advancing Effective Instruction and Interactions</a> (AEII)	Assist school leaders in using data to improve the quality of teacher-child interactions, curriculum and professional development, focusing particularly on classrooms with demonstrated need.	All Publicly-funded early childhood programs.
<a href="#">Child Care Aware of Virginia</a> (CCA)	Provide resource and referral services to connect families to high quality child care that is available and accessible in Virginia (family services, provider services, community), and to provide professional development opportunities.	Child care and family day homes, focusing on those who take public funding.

<p><a href="#">Virginia Quality</a> State and Regional hubs (VQ)</p>	<p>VQ Regional hubs provide training and technical assistance to improve the quality of education and qualifications, curriculum and assessment, learning environment and interactions.</p> <p>VQ’s State hub team (Co-led by VDOE and VECF) provides technical assistance and quality assurance to Regional hubs.</p>	<p>Public and private early childhood programs that serve children birth to five, who have opted into Virginia Quality.</p>
<p><b>VDOE Quality Improvement Partners: <i>Special Education Support</i></b></p>	<p><b>Primary Purpose</b></p>	<p><b>Target Audience for Services</b></p>
<p><a href="#">Training and Technical Assistance Centers</a> (TTAC)</p>	<p>Provide professional development, technical assistance, and resources to school divisions to improve the outcomes of students with disabilities.</p>	<p>School divisions providing special education services to young children with disabilities</p>
<p><a href="#">VCU Autism Center for Excellence Early Childhood</a> (VCU-ACE)</p>	<p>Provide professional development, technical assistance, and resources to educators providing services to young children with Autism Spectrum Disorder and to families raising and supporting young children with Autism Spectrum Disorder.</p>	<p>School divisions providing special education services to young children Autism Spectrum Disorder and families with children with Autism Spectrum Disorder</p>
<p><a href="#">Early Childhood Special Education Consortium</a> (ECSE Consortium)</p>	<p>Partnership with Radford University and Lynchburg University to provide coursework to Virginia preservice and inservice teachers pursuing a license and/or endorsement in ECSE.</p>	<p>ECSE teachers with provisional licensure, and other educators seeking ECSE endorsement</p>
<p><b>VDOE Quality Improvement Partners: <i>Head Start Support</i></b></p>	<p><b>Primary Purpose</b></p>	<p><b>Target Audience for Services</b></p>

<a href="#">Virginia Head Start Association</a> (VHSA)	Provide training and advocacy support to enhance the growth of Head Start educators, agencies, partners and others who impact the lives of Head Start children and families.	Head Start and Early Head Start programs
<a href="#">Virginia Commonwealth University - Head Start Statewide Needs Assessment</a> (VCU)	VCU conducts an annual needs assessment for the Head Start Collaboration office that examines the relationships Head Start grantees have with state and community partners.	Head Start and Early Head Start programs
<b>VDOE Quality Improvement Partners: Workforce Support</b>	<b>Primary Purpose</b>	<b>Target Audience for Services</b>
Virginia <a href="#">Child Care Provider Scholarship Program</a> (VCCSP)	Assists child care staff in completing undergraduate college courses required for a certificate or degree in early childhood education.	Child care and family day home educators.
<a href="#">Community College Workforce Alliance</a> - Child Care Provider Training (CCWA)	Distance learning courses to support completion of the Infant-Toddler and Pre-K endorsement programs.	Child care and family day home educators.
<a href="#">Virginia Cross-Sector Professional Development Team</a> (VCPD)	Strengthen the skills of early childhood professional development providers to deliver high quality education, training, and technical assistance and to increase cross-sector coordination at the state, regional and local levels. .	Early childhood educators (all program types), professional development providers, and higher education staff.
Virginia's Early Childhood Professional Development Registry ( <a href="#">IMPACT</a> )	Used to document and recognize the professional achievements of practitioners and trainers who work in early childhood education within the Commonwealth of Virginia.	Early Childhood educators in all settings and professional development providers.

Training Information for Provider Success ( <a href="#">TIPS Calendar</a> )	Lists early childhood professional development opportunities in Virginia.	Early Childhood educators in all settings and professional development providers.
<b>VDOE Quality Improvement Partners: <i>Early Childhood Mental Health</i></b>	<b>Primary Purpose</b>	<b>Target Audience for Services</b>
<i>In Development: Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation for all ages</i>	Coordinated set of statewide quality providers that provide intervening services for classrooms or children demonstrating particularly intensive needs.	Piloted in all types of publicly-funded center-based and school-based birth-to-five programs.
<b>VDOE Quality Improvement Partners: <i>Focus on Principles of Early Learning and Development</i></b>	<b>Primary Purpose</b>	<b>Target Audience for Services</b>
<i>In Development: Early Learning Standards Microcredential</i>	Online series of training courses on the new learning guidelines for children ages birth to five, resulting in a microcredential	Pilot available to teachers in all birth-to-five settings.
<a href="#">Wolf Trap Early Childhood STEM Learning Through the Arts Initiative</a>	Provides on-site and online training in Early Childhood STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) and literacy.	Select school divisions, PK-1st grade
<b>VDOE Quality Improvement Partners: <i>Health and Safety Support</i></b>	<b>Primary Purpose</b>	<b>Target Audience for Services</b>
<a href="#">Better Kid Care</a> - Penn State Extension	Online courses used to meet licensing & subsidy health and safety requirements.	Child care centers & family day home providers

In addition to the many quality supports listed here, Virginia’s early childhood landscape has a history of working with various early childhood accreditation organizations. These include organizations such as NAEYC, NAC, NAFCC, NECPA and Cognia, to name a few. While the

function and requirements for each accreditation program varies, the primary purpose is to support professionalization and improvement. Accreditation organizations that provide improvement supports related to quality interactions and curriculum will also be a key support for programs who have selected to seek accreditation.

## **ACTIVITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT PARTNERS DURING PRACTICE YEAR 1**

The Quality Improvement Partners listed above are essential to the success of the Unified Measurement and Improvement System. With the most direct access into birth-to-five classrooms, ensuring ongoing support for quality interactions and curriculum through the coordination of these critical groups will be essential during the practice year.

Already the VDOE has begun to support increased coordination and partnership with Virginia’s quality improvement partners through quarterly quality contractor meetings and facilitated CLASS data-sharing and collaboration between improvement partners such as AEII, TTAC, VQ and PDG.

In the next year, the VDOE will increase the opportunities for collaboration across these supported quality supports and PDG communities. Quality improvement partners will receive regular opportunities to come together to better understand the most current data and information about the needs of Virginia’s early learning programs, and to continue their role as key partners in implementing and analyzing the learning from Practice Year 1. Quality improvement partners will be supported to build connections across professional supports and programming to ensure alignment and support best practices in interactions and curriculum. Through a review of existing contracts and funding sources, the VDOE will analyze any unmet needs or focus areas, and work with existing and new partners to design expanded services where needed.

## **VISION FOR ALIGNED SUPPORTS**

Through Practice Year 1 and into future years, the VDOE will align improvement supports and initiatives to support the unified vision of quality reflected in the Unified Measurement and Improvement System. Working closely with community leads, VDOE will help ensure that this process is reflective of the needs and preferences of all educators and leaders. Ultimately, Virginia will achieve a set of directed intervention and improvement initiatives that are responsive to real time needs of educators. The VDOE will work across improvement partners and data systems, such as LinkB5, to understand the effectiveness of various modes of intervention and support and practice a model of continuous reflection in dedicating resources towards targeted improvements.

While the areas for targeted support will evolve over time based on statewide data, the VDOE will begin in Practice Year 1 by ensuring that there is appropriate focus on improvement for programs who need particular interventions, improvement supports related to teacher-child interactions, and improvement supports related to curriculum.

## **TARGETED SUPPORTS FOR INTERACTIONS**

All programs in the Unified Measurement and Improvement system will benefit from support related to teacher-child interactions. Training on the behaviors reflected in the CLASS tool will be an essential focus of professional development. This includes both foundational training on the importance of teacher-child interactions as well as ongoing targeted professional development and coaching to improve teacher practice in specific domains and/or dimensions of the CLASS tools.

In Practice Year 1, some possible examples of supports related to interactions may include:

- Training on the CLASS tool, including foundational CLASS and specific training on identified domains and dimensions (as available for free through the [Head Start In-Service Suite](#))
- Financial assistance in obtaining CLASS materials, such as Dimension Guides, CLASS manuals, online courses in multiple languages where needed
- Coaching on CLASS domains and dimensions (using Practice Based Coaching or similar coaching model) through new and existing coaching programs
- Tools to support self-assessment and action planning based on feedback from CLASS observations, facilitated by local supports
- Expanded local observer training, calibrations and support for recertification
- Professional Learning Communities on CLASS

PDG community networks will work with current improvement partners, such as Virginia Quality state and regional hubs, AEII, Infant Toddler Specialist Network, Head Start Technical Assistance Centers, Virginia's Training and Technical Assistance Centers, and Virginia Cross-Sector Professional Development team to coordinate the implementation of interactions support activities.

## **TARGETED SUPPORTS FOR CURRICULUM**

Support in accessing and implementing an approved curriculum will be critical for Practice Year 1 of the Unified Measurement and Improvement System. Currently, access and familiarity with quality curricular materials is inequitable amongst program types. Family day homes and small child care centers are significantly less likely to have a curriculum in place, or to be participating in ongoing training and assistance in implementing this important resource. For this reason, support for curriculum will be targeted at those program types who need it most.

In Practice Year 1, some possible examples of supports related to curricula may include:

- Financial assistance in obtaining approved curricula materials
- Training on specific aspects of effective curriculum implementation (such as assessment, culturally responsive teaching, individualizing for children with special needs)
- Introductory training on implementing Virginia’s Early Learning and Development Standards (ELDs), Birth to Five Learning Guidelines and curriculum alignment. A pilot of an ELDS micro-credential program is also underway.
- Training on curricula that align with CLASS (Crosswalk examples - Conscious Discipline; Creative Curriculum)
- Professional Learning Communities on Curriculum
- Potential VDOE pilot of a no-cost educational resource that would meet the curricular needs of birth to five programs

PDG community networks will work with current improvement partners, such as Virginia Quality state and regional hubs, AEII, Infant Toddler Specialist Network, Head Start Technical Assistance Centers, Child Care Aware, and Virginia’s Training and Technical Assistance Centers to coordinate the implementation of curriculum support activities.

The VDOE will also be seeking additional curriculum improvement support through new funding sources to support increased access to high quality materials.

## **SUPPORTS FOR INTERVENTION**

Programs may demonstrate a need for intervention through a variety of means. This could include requesting assistance to manage a particularly challenging classroom, interpret concerning behaviors, or a response to particular CLASS or curriculum measures. Over time the VDOE will continue to evolve a robust set of targeted supports for classrooms needing interventions to assist with specific needs.

In Practice Year 1, some possible examples of targeted supports for intervention may include:

- Pilot of an Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation Model to address challenging behaviors
- Specific supports for teachers working with children that have identified special needs, including identifying needed resources and strategies to meet goals outlined in development plans
- Tiered Supports and coaching through state partners that respond to classrooms with identified low classroom interaction scores, or less developed professional development plans
- Funded interventions and trainings to focus specifically on infant toddler supports and the specific needs of teachers working with the youngest learners

PDG community networks will work with current improvement partners, such as AEII, Infant Toddler Specialist Network, Virginia’s Training and Technical Assistance Centers, and Virginia Commonwealth University Center for Autism, Professional Development to assist with the identification of programs who demonstrate a need for intervention support.

## **PRIORITIZING CHILD CARE AND FAMILY DAY HOMES**

Equitable opportunity and access to quality improvements is central to the unified measurement and improvement system. Recent studies on Virginia’s early childhood workforce demonstrate key differences between the dedicated educators who work in child care and family day homes as compared to those in settings such as public schools. Nearly 40% of child care teachers have an annual household income under \$25,000, while this is true for only 1% of school-based early childhood teachers<sup>32</sup>. Child care centers and family day homes educators are much more likely to be Black and Hispanic, and are much more likely to experience indicators of financial insecurity and frequent turnover. COVID-19 has highlighted the significance of many of these disparities<sup>33</sup>.

The unified measurement and improvement system must recognize the inequities that exist in the early childhood landscape. When comparing resources and opportunities for professional learning and development, there are stark inequities in what is traditionally available for private programs, such as child care centers and family day homes. These sites, which serve our most vulnerable and youngest learners, are often less resourced. Investments and efforts related to improvement must prioritize access for Virginia’s child care and family day homes.

## **SPECIFIC SUPPORTS FOR INCLUSIVE PRACTICES**

Early childhood classrooms that serve diverse learners may need additional supports, resources, and tools to ensure all early childhood classrooms nurture active engagement and provide high quality teacher-child interactions for all children. For classrooms operating an inclusive model for children with identified disabilities, specific supports and training are necessary for the teachers (early childhood and early childhood special education) to ensure all children can access and participate in meaningful learning opportunities. It is important for teachers to present information and engagement opportunities in multiple ways and for children to be provided different ways to show what they know and can do, and how they are growing and progressing. Importantly, teacher-child interactions and engagement is not one-size-fits all, teachers must be

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<sup>32</sup> Bassok, D., Doromal, J., Holland, A., & Michie, M. (2020). Who Teaches Virginia’s Youngest Children? Sector Differences in the Racial/Ethnic Composition of Early Educators. Study of Early Education through Partnerships.

<sup>33</sup> Bassok, D., Markowitz, A., & Michie, M. (2020). COVID-19 highlights inequities in how we treat early educators in child care vs. schools. *Brown Center Chalkboard*.



flexible and adaptable with their approach to communication and sustained interactions. Finally, the classroom must be designed to be intentionally safe and supporting all children in the classroom, providing positive social-emotional supports to meet each child with the care they need.

The CLASS tool has been successfully used in inclusive early childhood classrooms nationwide and yields critical foundational information to teachers and site leaders on the quality of the teacher-child interactions taking place within a classroom.<sup>34</sup> However, some early childhood and special education experts have recommended using additional tools to measure the quality of inclusive classrooms. The Inclusive Classroom Profile (ICP) is a comprehensive, field-tested observational tool for classrooms serving children ages 2–5. It assesses 12 key practices with the strongest research base for supporting the education and development of young children in inclusive programs. In Virginia, the ICP has been used in many inclusive classrooms. Much of the current use of the ICP is facilitated through Virginia’s Training and Technical Assistance Centers (TTAC). The ICP has been crosswalked to the CLASS tool and aligns to several of the practices examined by CLASS.

In order to further examine and understand the alignment between the ICP and the CLASS and determine how the ICP may inform the quality of daily classroom practices for children with disabilities in early childhood settings, in Practice Year 1 the ICP will be used in some inclusion classrooms. The ICP will continue to be administered by TTACs, and the VDOE will compare any findings from the ICP to the Practice Year 1 information collected through the CLASS tool and Curriculum Use to identify any potential learnings. The VDOE will use this collected information to continue considerations for inclusive classrooms in future years of the Unified Measurement and Improvement System.

## **INVESTMENTS IN IMPROVEMENT**

During Practice Year 1, the VDOE will increase funding to build the new unified system and support improvement, prioritizing those who need it most. This includes funding communities to build relationships, conduct local CLASS observations and support educators who are participating in the first practice year through expanding PDG Community Networks. Virginia will also increase funding to existing programs to meet higher expectations, including increasing the VPI rate by 21% with additional funding for private providers, increasing the Mixed Delivery Grant rate and increasing the child care subsidy rates with additional flexibility and benefits. Increasing the investment in each program's funding stream will be essential to support an continued investment in quality.

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<sup>34</sup> Teachstone. (n.d.). Recommendations for Using the CLASS in Inclusive Early Childhood Programs, Birth–Age 8

Programs that typically have fewer resources, such as child care and family day homes, will be a priority for investments in improvement in the unified system. Through the investment of state and federal dollars, the VDOE will expand current investments and initiate new projects where needed to support curriculum use, early childhood mental health, and coaching to programs who need it most.

As noted earlier, one of Virginia’s guiding principles calls for incentives for improvement within the new unified measurement and improvement system. More specifically, “the state should also consider formal and informal incentives that motivate community stakeholders, site leaders and educators.” In Practice Year 1, Virginia will focus on incentives for participation in the system such as access to resources such as foundational training or curriculum resources. Providing financial incentives directly to educators is another critically important part of Virginia’s plan to support improvement. During the 2019-2020 year, child care center and family day home teachers participating in PDG received up to \$1500 annually to encourage participation, reduce turnover and support improvement.<sup>35</sup> An initial study showed that this valuable incentive reduced turnover by half (30% to 15%).<sup>36</sup> Virginia plans to continue to implement the educator incentive program during Practice Year 1 for continued study and equity analysis. Virginia has committed to providing at least \$1500 annually to child care and family day home educators who work 30 or more hours a week with children and who participate in Practice Year 1.

Moving forward, Virginia will explore other formal and informal incentives to encourage participation and improvement over time. This may include expanding Virginia’s tiered reimbursement payments which offer additional funding for child care subsidy programs that have improved quality. This could also include non-monetary incentives such as honor rolls that recognize improvement or achievement in specific areas such as infant care or inclusion classrooms. Virginia will work closely with educators, families and stakeholders to determine which incentives could help meaningfully support improvement while being sure to analyze the equity impact of proposed incentives, noting that some incentives inadvertently exacerbate inequities. (See Appendix B)

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<sup>35</sup> Eligibility is generally limited to child care, FDH and Head Start educators who work 30 or more hours/week with children in publicly-funded programs and are not school system employees. Eligibility is subject to change.

<sup>36</sup> Harvard University Center for Education Policy and Research. (2020, November 17). *Daphna Bassok - Teacher Turnover in Early Childhood Education: New Findings from Research Policy Partnerships in Louisiana and Virginia*. PIER Public Seminar Series (Archived).

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## APPENDIX A: HISTORY OF QUALITY MEASUREMENT FOR EARLY LEARNING

A central challenge of early childhood accountability systems is that it is difficult as well as expensive to reliably and validly measure children’s growth and development at scale in a way that is developmentally appropriate for young children. Because assessing the academic growth and development of very young children is challenging, costly, time-consuming, and often unreliable, many states have increasingly turned to accountability systems known as Quality Rating and Improvement Systems (QRIS) to improve the quality of early childhood settings<sup>37</sup>.

Similar to rating systems for restaurants and hotels, QRIS awards quality ratings to early care and education programs that meet a set of defined program standards. By participating in their State’s QRIS, early care and education providers also engage in a continuous quality improvement process.

[QRIS](#) are composed of five common elements: (1) standards; (2) accountability measures; (3) program and practitioner outreach and support; (4) financial incentives; and (5) parent/consumer education efforts.

QRIS standards are used to assign ratings to programs that participate in QRIS, providing parents and the public with information about each program’s quality. States typically use licensing standards as the starting point, or base of the system, on which higher levels of quality standards are built. Every QRIS contains two or more levels of standards beyond licensing, with incremental progressions to the highest level of quality as defined by the State.

QRIS ratings typically combine both structural and process quality measures, but states vary widely in how they define and rate quality, as well as how quality indicators are combined into a single rating. The most commonly used quality indicators include staff qualifications, staff-child ratios, curriculum use, assessment/developmental screening use, observed measures of environment and/or interactions quality, business/administration practices and family engagement (BUILD).

Nearly all state QRIS systems are designed as “optional” systems, meaning programs may be incentivized or encouraged to participate, but there is no requirement if a program opts not to engage in the system, which is often the case. This means that quality information is not known for all programs, with an increased likelihood that those programs who are most disconnected and would most benefit from quality support are not opting in.

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<sup>37</sup> Bassok, D., & Markowitz, A. (2020.). *The value of systemwide, high-quality data in early childhood education*. Brown Center Chalkboard.

The first QRIS in the United States started in 1997, and as of 2019 forty-nine states either operate a QRIS or are in planning or pilot phases (BUILD). Virginia's first QRIS, the Virginia Star Quality Initiative (VSQI) launched in 2008 and was revised and renamed [Virginia Quality \(VQ\)](#) in 2015. Both versions of Virginia's QRIS have been voluntary.

- Virginia's first QRIS used a point-based system, which assigned a number of points to quality standards and then combined the points to determine the quality rating. In VSQI programs could earn points based on several quality indicators. 1) education 2) professional development, 3) staff-child ratios, 4) Kindergarten transition practices 5) environment and 6) teacher-child interactions.
- Virginia's current QRIS, Virginia Quality, uses a building block approach. In this approach, all the standards within each level must be met in order for programs to move to the next level, as follows
  - Level 1 - Basic Health and Safety
  - Level 2 - Education and Qualifications
  - Level 3 - Curriculum and Assessment
  - Levels 4 and 5 - Environment and Interactions (scores on observational measures for both environment and interactions determine the level awarded)

### ***Problems with traditional QRIS approaches***

With its increased focus on data collection, QRIS can be a powerful tool to transform early childhood education ([BUILD](#)), while also providing families and government with clear data about where to invest early care and education dollars. However, there have been several challenges with the traditional approach to QRIS.

QRIS was developed as a way to track quality over time and across sectors, however with most QRIS's being voluntary, the data collected is limited due to overall low participation rates. In Virginia, current data about publicly-funded programs – public school-based preschool, Early Head Start, Head Start and Child Care Assistance – is incomplete. Although Virginia Quality is open to all publically funded early learning programs, there is no mandate for participation and therefore no uniform way that quality is measured in Virginia.

- Between 2008-2015, approximately 10% of eligible programs participated in the Virginia Star Quality Initiative.
- Between 2016-2020, approximately 25% of eligible programs participated in Virginia Quality. As of February 2021, there were 1,289 quality rated programs in Virginia.

Research on the impacts of QRIS ratings has increased substantially since the earliest QRIS were planned and implemented. Findings from QRIS validation studies have largely shown weak or inconsistent associations between QRIS and children's development. By contrast, a large body of research has linked targeted observational measures of teacher-child interactions to children's learning gains, both academic and socio-emotional.



- In Virginia’s current QRIS, teacher-child interactions are only measured at the highest levels in a random selection of classrooms, every three years, meaning that at most a teacher is receiving feedback on their interactions once every three years via Virginia Quality. (i.e. between 2016-2020, 360 sites in Virginia Quality had an observation focused on the quality of teacher-child interactions).
- In contrast, the Virginia Preschool Initiative Plus (VPI+), provided by a federal grant in 2015-2019, required observations of teacher-child interactions in every VPI+ classroom every other year along with targeted professional development support for interactions and instruction. This grant eliminated the school readiness gap between economically disadvantaged children and their non-disadvantaged peers, according to analysis by [SRI International](#).

Including several aspects of quality has also presented challenges for QRIS. Rating multiple aspects are often time-consuming and costly to collect, and expensive rating systems leave fewer resources for quality improvement support, an essential QRIS component in most states. A QRIS that measures and incentivizes program characteristics that does not improve early learning experiences, particularly for our most vulnerable children, will not only fail to meet the system’s ultimate goal, but could lead to inefficient and inequitable use of already limited public resources.

Since programs tend to focus on the areas that will boost program QRIS scores, it is imperative that states consider what program improvement behaviors their QRIS incentivize, while also ensuring that early learning programs and their workforce (particularly those serving children from historically marginalized communities) get what they need to improve. Given the implications of QRIS on policy and practice, there have been recent calls from leaders and researchers for more streamlined and equitable approaches with fewer quality indicators that have been robustly linked to child development and equitable outcomes.

## APPENDIX B: DETAIL ON CURRENT EARLY CHILDHOOD INVESTMENTS

Amount	How Funding Supports Improvement
~\$107 million	Total Virginia Preschool Initiative funding for at-risk 3- and 4-year-olds, including a 21% increase in the per-pupil rate and nearly \$5 million to support community or private providers who offer VPI
\$5 million	Total Mixed Delivery Grant (MDG) funding for at-risk 3- and 4-year-old children at a higher per-child rate to support quality preschool in private settings
~\$177 million <i>estimated</i>	Federal funding through the Child Care and Development Block Grant for child care assistance to low income families and quality supports across the system
~\$8 million	Preschool Development Grant (PDG B-5) funding to support quality measurement and improvement efforts in PDG B-5 communities, including the educator incentive program
\$7 million	Governor’s Educational Emergency Relief Fund (GEER) funding to bolster early childhood mental health consultation (ECMHC) services in schools, increase the educator incentive program, expand developmental assessments for children in preschool, and develop a resource hub for educators
~\$204 million*	<i>Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2021</i> funding to expand eligibility for and strengthen the child care subsidy program, bolster ECMHC services, and strengthen improvement supports for child care
~\$794 million*	<i>American Rescue Plan Act</i> funding including direct grants to providers and expanding access to child care
~\$1.3 billion	<b>TOTAL</b>

## APPENDIX C: EARLY CHILDHOOD OVERVIEW

Child day centers and preschools	Family day homes (FDH)	Head Start/Early Head Start	VPI, Title I, and other school-based programs	Early childhood special education
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Roughly 3,500 licensed or regulated centers with total enrollment capacity of 354,000 children (all ages)</li> <li>• 1,024 subsidy vendors serving 12,118 children B-5 (as of Jan. 2020)</li> <li>• Subsidy-eligible children must meet income requirements, have parents that are working or in school</li> <li>• Qualifications and PD requirements set via licensing standards</li> <li>• 46 percent of child care educators</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nearly 1,800 licensed or regulated FDH with total enrollment capacity of over 80,000 children (all ages)</li> <li>• 558 subsidy vendors serving 1,554 children B-5 (as of Jan. 2020)</li> <li>• Subsidy-eligible children must meet income requirements, have parents that are working or in school</li> <li>• Qualifications and PD requirements set via licensing standards</li> <li>• Majority of FDH providers are women of color</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 425 HS/EHS sites in schools, centers, and FDH with total funded enrollment of 14,291</li> <li>• Children are generally eligible for HS/EHS if their income is at or below the poverty level</li> <li>• Services are comprehensive and free to participating families</li> <li>• Lead Teachers are required to have a B.A.</li> <li>• Compensation varies by setting</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 739 schools or centers served ~18,000 preschoolers in VPI</li> <li>• ~400 Title I or other school based program classrooms</li> <li>• VPI-eligible children have incomes at or below 200% FPG; are homeless; or have parents that did not complete high school</li> <li>• 15% of VPI slots may be filled based on locally established criteria</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nearly 20,000 children ages 2-5 receive ECSE services</li> <li>• Children are served in inclusive classroom settings as well as self-contained classrooms</li> </ul>

<p>are people of color</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Average hourly wages of \$12/hr; many lack employer-sponsored benefits</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Average hourly wages as low as \$11/hour</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lead teachers generally required to have a B.A.; salaries/benefits generally equivalent to K-12 teachers</li> <li>• 84% of lead teachers are white</li> </ul>	
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## **APPENDIX D: COMMON TERMS AND ABBREVIATIONS**

QRIS - Quality Rating and Improvement System  
ECAC - Early Childhood Advisory Committee  
PDG - Preschool Development Grant  
VPI+ Virginia Preschool Initiative Plus  
ED4 - Executive Directive Four  
IDEA - Individuals with Disabilities Education Act  
CCDBG - Child Care and Development Block Grant  
VDOE - Virginia Department of Education  
NCEDL - National Center for Early Development and Learning  
IEP/IFSP - Individual Education Plan/Individualized Family Service Plan  
VSQI - Virginia Star Quality Initiative  
VQ - Virginia Quality  
VA ITSN - Virginia Infant Toddler Specialist Network  
CQI - Continuous Quality Improvement  
UVA - University of Virginia  
CASTL - Center for Advanced Study of Teaching and Learning (at UVA)  
AEII - Advancing Effective Instruction and Interactions  
VECF - Virginia Early Childhood Foundation  
TTAC - Training and Technical Assistance Centers  
NAEYC - National Association for the Education of Young Children  
NAC - National Accreditation Commission for Early Care and Education Programs  
NECPA - National Early Childhood Program Accreditation  
NAFCC – National Association for Family Child Care