

## PROJECT BRIEF

<p style="text-align: center;"><b><i>VIRGIN ISLANDS PARTNERS FOR EARLY SUCCESS:</i></b> <b>A Child Care Research Partnership including the Virgin Islands Department of Human Services, the Eastern Caribbean Research Center of the University of the Virgin Islands (UVI), the Virgin Island Department of Education and the VI Early Childhood Advisory Committee</b></p>
<p>Project Team:</p> <p>Elizabeth Jaeger, Ph.D. Virgin Islands Department of Human Services Frank Mills, Ph.D. University of the Virgin Islands, Eastern Caribbean Center</p>
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### **Project Description**

The overall objective of the *Virgin Islands Partners for Success* partnership is to conduct research to inform programs and policies that will improve the quality of early care and education in the Virgin Islands, and to build the Territory's capacity to conduct such research well into the future. The Partnership will conduct the following three studies:

1. The *VI QRIS Virtual Pilot Project* will examine the validity of the VI QRIS by assessing the psychometric properties of the indicators of quality specified in the QRIS using an IRT framework, and how the measures are related to child outcomes.

### **Research Questions**

1. What are the most reliable and valid measures of program quality in the VI?
2. How can these be combined to produce valid and meaningful distinctions in levels of quality?
3. How do these measures relate to school readiness outcomes for VI children?

### **Data Sources and Sampling Plan**

Researchers will visit all child care programs serving preschoolers that are licensed by the Department of Human Services

(N = 110) to conduct interviews with staff and classroom observations. School readiness outcomes in a sample of children in participating classrooms will also be assessed, and data from their school district assessments at kindergarten entry will be obtained.

2. The *Pathways to Early Success Study* will employ mixed-methods to examine the developmental trajectories of children who are succeeding in the early school years, particularly in the areas of language, literacy, and cognition, to determine if there might be unique predictors of such outcomes in the VI that should inform quality learning standards.

### **Research Questions**

1. What is the context for early literacy instruction and support including opportunities for oral language development (e.g. teacher and parent conceptualizations of reading readiness; oral language exposure at home and early learning setting)?
2. What are the childcare/school-based predictors and home-based predictors of early language and literacy skills including alphabetic principle, phonological awareness, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension skills in elementary school?

### ***Data Sources and Sampling Plan***

The sample will be comprised of randomly selected children from the programs participating in the VI Virtual Pilot Project (n=100). Brief assessments of literacy and language development conducted in first grade using the DIBELS and PPVT, and assessments available from the VI Virtual Pilot Project will be used to identify subgroups of children: those continually successful, those who continually struggle from Pre-K on, those who become more successful upon school entry, and those who become less successful upon school entry. Qualitative interviews with teachers and parents of the focal child will be conducted to identify early learning, school, community, and family factors associated with various trajectories.

3. The *Charting Change Study* will examine whether the introduction of the QRIS and new licensing regulations are associated with changes in the supply and quality of early care and education in the VI.

### ***Research Questions:***

1. Has the overall level of quality in preschool classrooms improved significantly over time?
2. What program characteristics are associated with improvements in quality?
3. Did programs that participated in the VI's pilot of its QRIS increase in quality?
4. Has the number of programs in compliance with the new licensing standards increased, particularly in regards to staff qualifications, ratios and group sizes, and allowable square feet per child of indoor space increased?

### **Data Sources and Sampling Plan**

Half of the programs that participated in the VI S2Q Virtual Pilot Project will be recruited to participate in the Charting Change Study (N =50). We will attempt to visit the same classroom assessed as part of the VI S2Q Virtual Pilot Project.

### **Implications for policy/practice**

The information gathered as part of these studies will help VI DHS develop policies and programs that enable children, particularly those at risk, to have early learning experiences that promote their success in school and beyond. Such information will also support other community planning efforts, such as those of the Early Childhood Advisory Committee and the Virgin Islands Department of Education, to develop coordinated, sustainable systems to promote the long-term success of all VI children.

### **Implications for research**

Results of this study will inform other states and territories on the development of quality rating improvement systems that are culturally and contextually relevant.

Contact:  
Elizabeth Jaeger, Ph.D.  
Research Analyst  
Department of Human Services  
Knud Hansen Complex, Bldg. A.  
1303 Hospital Ground  
St. Thomas, VI 00802  
Telephone: 340-774-0930  
Fax: 340-774-3466

Federal Project Officer: Ann C. Rivera  
Office of Planning Research and Evaluation  
Administration for Children and Families  
Email: Ann.Rivera@acf.hhs.gov