



U.S. Department of Education PDG Annual Performance Report Executive Summary

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Grantee State: VA

PR/Award #: S419B150010

You are required to submit an Executive Summary of up to 3000 words with your Annual Performance Report. This summary should relate to your approved application and summarize the goals and objectives that have been achieved under your grant, what you learned, and any evaluation results. Describe any unanticipated outcomes or benefits from your project and any barriers that you may have encountered. If there have been any changes to the project from the approved application, those should be explained as well.

Overview of Progress

Virginia's receipt of the Preschool Development Grant (PDG) has been highly publicized, generating much excitement and discussion across sectors about the value of preschool services. Governor Terry McAuliffe released a [press release announcing the grant award](#), which aligned well with his Executive Orders to create the [Virginia Children's Cabinet](#) and the [Commonwealth Council on Childhood Success](#). Among the priority areas of the Cabinet and the Council is the improvement of early childhood care and education. Additionally, the 2015 General Assembly established a joint subcommittee on the Virginia Preschool Initiative to consider increasing accountability, flexibility, and innovation related to providing preschool for economically disadvantaged children, and to further develop partnerships between school divisions and private providers for the Virginia Preschool Initiative. Legislation has been introduced in the 2016 General Assembly related to improving the skills of the early education work force and to expanding opportunities for mixed-delivery preschool services in the Commonwealth. The Virginia Secretary of Education and the state Superintendent of Public Instruction also continue to make preschool education a priority and participate frequently in meetings and press events to maintain visibility of early learning, especially for at-risk children.

- Increase in the Number of VPI+ Combined New and Improved Slots

As a result of the PDG, Virginia has been successful in increasing the number of eligible children served in high-quality preschool programs. Since VPI+ (Virginia Preschool Initiative Plus, the name Virginia gave to its Preschool Expansion Grant) augments the already existing state-funded Virginia Preschool Initiative (VPI), the number of additional slots available for at-risk four-year-olds in a preschool setting has increased by 1,230 *new* slots across 65 newly-opened high-quality preschool classrooms for Year 1 of the grant (2015-2016). One hundred thirty-five (135) Virginia Preschool Initiative (VPI) classrooms with 1,574 eligible children have been *improved* by providing additional comprehensive services to children and families and by providing high-quality professional development to teachers and assistants. The total 2,804 new and improved preschool slots served by PDG funds represents an increase of 5 percent over Virginia's original goal of 2,683 new and improved preschool slots. As of December 2015, the following data are of interest:

Enrollment Totals

Goal at point of grant proposal submission (October 2014) - 2,683 new and improved slots

Actual Enrollment as of December 2015 - 2,804 new and improved slots

Percentage of new and improved slots filled as of December 2015 - 105%

Gender

Male - 49%

Female - 49%

Gender Not Specified - 1%

Race/Ethnicity

Hispanic children - 18%

Black or African American children - 63%

White children - 11%

Asian/Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander children - 3%

American Indian/Alaska Native children - Too small to report

Children from two or more races - 2%

Children with race not specified - 3%

Home Language

English - 80%

Spanish - 14%

Arabic - 1%

Other language - 3%

Language not specified - 1%

Other Demographic Data

Children in public programs - 98%

Children in private programs - 2%

Children with disabilities - 4%

Children from military families - 1%

Children from migrant families - Too small to report

Children from homeless families - 2%

Children from foster families - 1%

Detailed enrollment data are available in the Annual Performance Report Excel workbook that accompanies this report.

- Development of a Statewide Infrastructure for Early Childhood Education in Virginia

In addition to the focus on increasing preschool enrollment, the most significant efforts and accomplishments in the implementation of VPI+ occurred largely in the development of a statewide infrastructure that will ensure implementation of a high-quality preschool program in Virginia's VPI+ classrooms, with options for school divisions to use many of the features (professional development, curriculum, assessments, etc.) in their non-VPI+ preschool programs as well. Thus the stage is set for enhancing the quality of all early childhood programs in the Commonwealth. Significant elements of this infrastructure are described below.

- Development of the VPI+ Implementation Team

An integrated management team to oversee Virginia's preschool program has been established. The VPI+ Implementation Team consists of agency partners, both public and private and state and local, to intentionally integrate the components of high-quality preschool programs to provide supports and services for Virginia's at-risk children.

- Provision of Professional Development Opportunities

Virginia has provided broad technical assistance and professional development to VPI+ subgrantees in a number of ways. The Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) has conducted a series of webinars and meetings on numerous topics related to early childhood development and education. The Center for Advanced Study of Teaching and Learning (CASTL) at the University of Virginia has provided technical assistance to subgrantees in the development of an individualized professional development plan for each VPI+ teacher, and teachers will record the professional development they received in a professional development registry maintained by the Virginia Department of Social Services. Additionally, through a competitive Request for Proposals (RFP) process, Virginia established a menu of approved professional development opportunities on a number of topics related to early childhood education that subgrantees may purchase for use in the individualized professional development plans being developed for each VPI+ teacher.

- Selection of an Early Childhood Curriculum

Through a competitive RFP process, Virginia selected a curriculum and formative assessment system to be implemented in its VPI+ classrooms. *The Creative Curriculum for Preschool* is a comprehensive set of resources that assists teachers as they plan content-rich programs for children with diverse backgrounds and developmental levels. Accompanying *The Creative Curriculum for Preschool* is *Teaching Strategies GOLD*, an observation-based system for assessing the development and learning of children from birth through kindergarten.

- Procurement of a Rigorous Program Evaluation (Including Formative Measures, Summative Assessments, and Cost-Effectiveness)

- Integration of Early Childhood Data into the Virginia Longitudinal Data System

Through a competitive RFP process, Virginia selected SRI International (SRI) to provide evaluation services that will support the implementation of VPI+. SRI has subcontracted with School Readiness Consulting (SRC) to assist with this work. SRI and SRC will collect and use formative program measures, summative child assessments, cost-effectiveness data, and data from the Virginia Longitudinal Data System (VLDS) to provide feedback for continuous improvement of instruction and program implementation, administer predictive tests and analyze results to answer pressing questions, and communicate results with VDOE, school divisions, and teachers. Additionally, new VPI+ classrooms were rated with the Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) in fall 2015 as a baseline measure for future improvement.

- Additional Positive Outcomes of VPI+ Implementation

In addition to major organizational and procurement accomplishments associated with Virginia's PDG grant, other successes have occurred:

Increased Interest in and Use of Early Learning and Development Standards and High-Quality Preschool Program Standards - The focus on high-quality preschool resulting from implementation of VPI+ has encouraged renewed attention to [Virginia's Foundation Blocks for Early Learning: Comprehensive Standards for Four-Year-Olds](#) and [Milestones of Child Development](#). These two documents, developed respectively by the Virginia Department of Education and the Virginia Department of Social Services, serve as Virginia's early learning standards and preschool program standards. Both documents were revised in 2013.

Increased Interest in the Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) The implementation of VPI+ has expanded awareness and understanding of Virginia's QRIS with a variety of partners and stakeholders. For example, some subgrantees have asked to have their state VPI programs rated as participants in QRIS.

Expanded Comprehensive Services - Subgrantees are identifying more ways to provide services to children with disabilities, English learners, and others in need as they identify Family Engagement Coordinators and develop strategies for family engagement in their annual plans to serve these children and families.

Opportunities and Lessons Learned

Describe any broad setbacks, such as unanticipated delays or changes in scope. Explain the factors that contributed to the situation, your response and the net effect your efforts had on improving the situation.

- Recruiting Children for Participation in VPI+ and Accuracy in Enrollment Reporting by Subgrantees

Subgrantees reported VPI+ student enrollment numbers (new and improved slots) weekly to the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) beginning in October 2015, using an Excel spreadsheet. Subgrantees were required to report to the VDOE on a regular basis the number of filled VPI+ slots and how they were making progress in addressing the unfilled slots. Phone conferences and site visits by VDOE staff throughout fall 2015 provided the opportunity for discussions with each subgrantee on progress made in engaging at-risk families and children for the VPI+ program and strategizing ways to fill empty VPI+ slots.

As some subgrantees continued to struggle with filling their VPI+ slots, the VDOE conducted a webinar devoted specifically to recruitment of at-risk preschool children to offer school, division-level, and community strategies to identify and recruit children eligible for VPI+ into the program. VDOE staff also conducted targeted assistance in the development of recruitment plans for some subgrantees.

While the weekly enrollment reports showed increasing VPI+ enrollments in December 2015, subgrantees were required to submit detailed student demographic information for all enrolled children. During the data review, it became clear that there were challenges with some of the data submitted - data entry errors with birthdates of children, missing income levels, missing children as compared with enrollment numbers submitted via the weekly Excel spreadsheet, and other missing or unspecified data elements. The VDOE worked with subgrantees throughout January 2016 to correct entry errors and to submit missing data elements. These corrections revealed that the number of eligible (200 percent of poverty level, age requirement) children in new VPI+ classrooms was lower in some school divisions than had been submitted weekly through the first week of December.

Resolution: The VDOE will continue to provide assistance with recruitment, and Smart Beginnings, a community network committed to ensuring school readiness, will assist in providing ideas for the recruitment plans and in making phone calls to engage support. In terms of enrollment reporting, two large subgrantees are taking steps to automate the VPI+ registration and enrollment process to improve communication between the schools and central office. All subgrantees will be required to verify that weekly enrollment data submitted from July 2016 to December 2016 are only for children who are eligible for PDG services. Any subgrantees with 2015-2016 student enrollments falling below their revised Statement of Work (SOW) target enrollment numbers will be required to provide a plan for reaching their enrollment targets in the 2016-2017 school year.

- Meeting the Goal for Inclusion of Eligible Children with Disabilities

The current national average of eligible children with disabilities served by part B, Section 619 of IDEA is 6.4 percent. This target for VPI+ participation is higher than the average of 5.4 percent in Virginia, and considerably higher than that found in some of the VPI+ subgrantees. All subgrantees indicate they are working toward meeting the target for inclusion of children with disabilities in their VPI+ programs. School divisions indicate that children are being screened and observed for possible disabilities. It is reported that there are children going through the formal identification process but eligibility for special education services had not been determined by early December. In addition, due to the timing of this first year of grant implementation there were classroom placements made for some children with disabilities in advance of VPI+ classrooms opening.

Resolution: Subgrantees and the VDOE will continue to collaborate on ways to recruit more children with disabilities into the VPI+ program. With the enrollment and family engagement supports already in place for the 2016-2017 school year, subgrantees will be able to start the identification process earlier. Also, there will be a continued focus on including children with disabilities in VPI+ classrooms in professional development offerings.

- Recruiting Private Providers

The complexity of cost allocation and keeping funding streams separate has been one barrier to the ability to recruit private providers to serve at-risk preschool children in Virginia. Private providers may find it difficult to fill an entire classroom of children with VPI+ eligible children (200 percent of the poverty level or below and

four years old). In order to add children served by other programs or who are funded through tuition payments into the same classroom, they must be able to cost-allocate funds for all expenditures, and private providers may not have the back-office fiscal staff to keep tight records of this nature.

Resolution: The VDOE, the Virginia Early Childhood Foundation, and other grant partners have provided technical assistance on ways to blend classrooms and braid funding to support a mixed delivery of preschool services to maximize the number of children served. Recent legislation introduced in the 2016 General Assembly, if approved, would provide incentives to field-test innovative strategies and evidence-based practices that support a system of mixed-delivery preschool services in Virginia.

Conclusion

The work resulting from Year 1 of Virginia's Preschool Development Grant serves as a strong foundation for improved and expanded preschool services in Virginia. The VPI+ Cross-Organizational Data Team has begun to address issues such as increased collection and reporting of data on preschool children, teachers, and programs. Increased availability of data on preschool participants and programs will inform decisions about program development and offerings, professional development for teachers, and the effectiveness of preschool for all children. Data-driven professional development plans developed for VPI+ teachers will serve as a model for future professional development and upskilling of preschool teachers. The high-quality preschool curriculum, summative assessments, and professional development selected for use in the VPI+ program can also be used by other preschool programs statewide, thus contributing to improved program quality. The results of summative assessments administered to children in the VPI+ program will help to inform work around standards or thresholds for kindergarten readiness. The increased use of the Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) to evaluate preschool program effectiveness will offer information and data that can be used on a broader scale for general statewide program improvement. Greater connections with local partners stand to identify local funding sources, such as educational foundations and business partnerships, to provide additional funding as needed to support programs, comprehensive services, and family engagement activities.

Lessons learned include the importance of clear and constant communication among all grant partners, but especially with subgrantees around issues such as recruitment of eligible children, data collection and reporting and fidelity of program implementation. With so many partners and so many moving parts among the required grant activities, it has been useful to establish timelines and deadlines and to designate a primary point of contact for each component to ensure that success is being made and measured for each activity.

Virginia looks forward to receiving the results of the summative assessments for its VPI+ children, which will serve as the baseline measure for progress in Years 2 through 4. With most of the start-up effort now completed, subgrantees and the state partners can turn their attention to effective program implementation, and they are already making plans for recruitment and training for the 2016-2017 school year.