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Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission



# Virginia Preschool Initiative (VPI): Current Implementation and Potential Changes

Commission Briefing

November 13, 2007



JLARC

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## 2007 General Assembly Required JLARC Review of VPI and Provided Funds to DOE for Pilot Program

### ■ HJR 729

- Directs JLARC to conduct study of Virginia Preschool Initiative (VPI) and “universal” preschool (making preschool available for all children)
- Notes General Assembly has not previously evaluated VPI

### ■ Appropriation Act provides \$2.56 million to DOE to develop agreements with divisions which will participate in pilot

- Divisions in pilot have existing partnerships with private and non-profit providers; funding is to expand availability of preschool programs for at-risk children not served
- Interim report Dec. 2007, final report Sept. 2008

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# In This Presentation

- Background
- VPI Authorization, Funding, Participation, and Implementation
- Assessment of VPI
- State Administrative Support Structures for VPI
- Universal Preschool
- Options for Expanding VPI



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# Preschool as a National Policy Option

- Project Head Start, May 1965
- Education reform and school readiness concerns
  - 23 state programs began in 1980s
  - 21 states started or revamped programs in 1990s
- 38 states have a state-funded pre-K program (2006)

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# National Research Suggests Quality Pre-K Has Positive Impacts on At-Risk Children

- Major studies
  - High/Scope Perry Preschool Initiative
  - Abecedarian Project
  - Chicago Child-Parent Centers Program
- Other programs providing evidence of positive impacts
  - Syracuse Family Development Research Program
  - Infant Health and Development Program
  - Early Training Project
  - Head Start

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# VPI Is a Preschool Program for “At-Risk” Four-Year-Olds



- Funded by the State and localities
- Serves children not served by Head Start
- Started in FY 1996

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## VPI in 2006-07

Filled VPI slots	Over 12,200
Schools or centers	466
Average class size	About 15
Average ratio, children to staff	7.4 to 1
Largest programs, filled slots	Norfolk 1,487
	Newport News 972
	Richmond City 845
	Fairfax County 711
	Virginia Beach 704
	Portsmouth 563
	Hampton 490



# Multiple Methods Used to Assess VPI, As Each Has Strengths and Weaknesses

	<u>Strength</u>	<u>Weakness</u>
Compliance with program requirements	Compliance can promote quality	Does not guarantee quality
Classroom observations	Good means of assessing quality	Limited number of visits
Pre-K and K test scores	Objectively assess skills/knowledge	Addresses literacy only, not social skills
Surveys of K teachers and elementary principals (response rates of 98, 37, and 35%)	K teachers see academic & social preparedness; principals see subsequent performance	Subjective element; uncertainty about non-respondents

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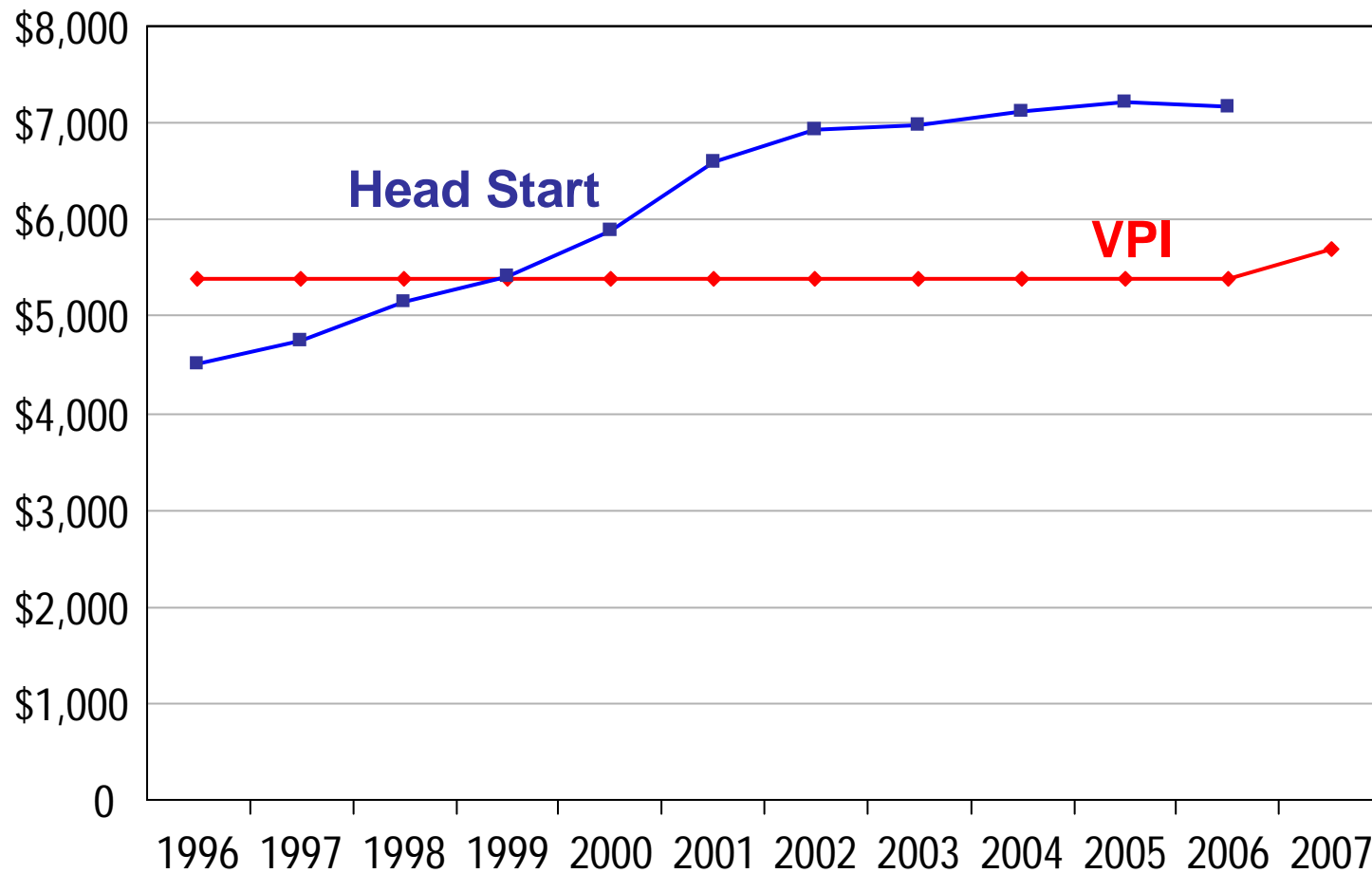
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## Since Inception of VPI, State and Localities Have Spent an Estimated \$570 to \$606 Million

- State costs \$269 million
- Local match costs \$178 million
- Local costs above match \$123 to \$159 million

Note: All costs are estimates.

# Per-Pupil Amounts for VPI and Head Start in Virginia



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## VPI Program Is Shaped at State and Local Level

### ■ State

- Authorizes program (Section 22.1-199.1 of *Code*)
- Determines how many slots it will help fund
- Sets minimum requirements, including curriculum standards

### ■ Localities / local program staff

- May choose to participate in VPI or decline
- Define at-risk eligibility factors and weights
- Determine extent to which allocated slots are filled
- Make other key program decisions

## State and Local Proportional Contributions to VPI Vary Based on VPI Costs and Local Wealth

Per-Pupil Program Cost	Local Ability to Pay*	State Pays	Locality Pays
\$5,700	Low	80%	20%
\$9,800	High	20% of \$5,700	80% of \$5,700 100% of <u>\$4,100</u> \$9,800

\* Based on composite index.



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## Participation in VPI by Localities Varies

- 36 non-participating localities in 2006-07
  - 14 not eligible
  - 22 chose not to participate
- Participating localities did not use 5,265 slots
- 12 localities account for over half of the unfilled slots
- Differing participation levels raises questions about equity of access for at-risk children

# VPI Implementation: Instructional Settings

■ Whole Group →



■ Small Group

■ Individual Work Time

■ Center Time →



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# DOE Site Visits Show Local Programs Comply With State VPI Requirements

- 18 “structural standards” intended to promote
  - Compliance with State law
  - Appropriate use of funding
  - Program effectiveness
- Divisions certify that requirements will be met
- DOE consultant reviews indicate VPI programs are meeting requirements

# Requiring or Addressing Additional Standards May Help Ensure Quality

## 7 of 10 NIEER Quality Benchmarks Are Met, 3 Unmet

## VPI Compliance

Comprehensive early learning benchmarks

Expected in near future

Teacher degree (B.A.)

98% of program teachers have it

Assistant teacher degree (CDA or equivalent)

40% have CDA or higher

## Key Unmet NAEYC Criteria

Annual teacher evaluations

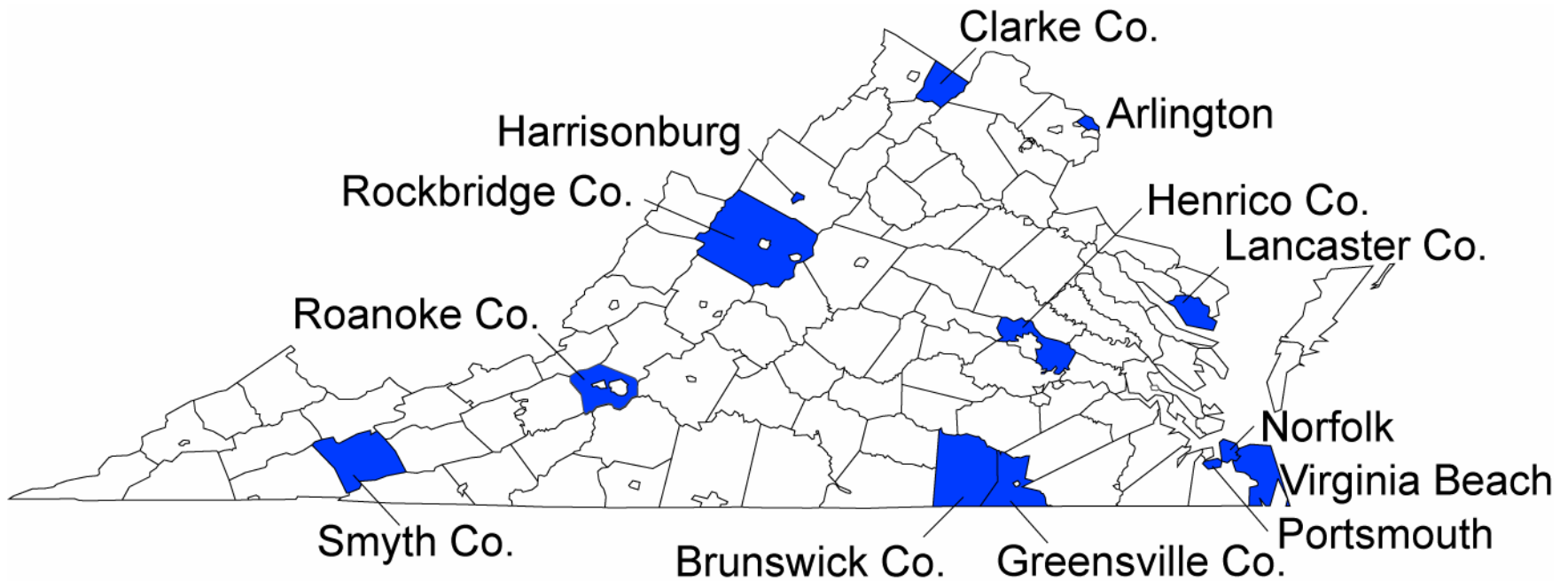
93% of divisions surveyed

Developmental assessments for all children

77% of divisions surveyed



# VPI Classrooms Were Observed in 13 Localities



# Scores on Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) Mostly Medium to High Quality

CLASS Category	Mean Score*
Emotional support Classroom climate Teacher responsiveness to student needs	5.29
Classroom organization Behavior management Productivity Teacher maximization of learning	5.40
Instructional support Promotion of higher thinking skills Quality of teacher feedback to children Teacher stimulation of children's language use	3.78
Student Engagement	5.60

\*Possible scores from 1 to 7 (low 1,2; mid-level 3,4,5; high 6, 7).



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## To More Consistently Achieve High Quality in VPI Classrooms . . .

- Implement strategies to improve teacher flexibility.
- Increase learning possibilities in play centers.
- Plan ways to give higher quality feedback to students.
- Increase sharing of information about activities and instructional tools that appear to highly engage students.
- Review schedules for effective use of time.
- Consider space needs in facility planning, and recognize on-going need to update preschool equipment.
- Increase use of teacher aides and consider compensation levels.

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## Analysis of Pre-K and K Literacy Test Scores

- Used PALS (Phonological Awareness and Literacy Screening) test results
- Examined literacy growth during pre-K
- Examined results at start of kindergarten to help assess kindergarten readiness

# VPI Students Show Literacy Growth Over Course of Preschool Year

Test Time	Average PALS-PreK Score
Fall	32
Spring	60*

\* Improvement of 28 points; age-adjusted improvement of 21 points

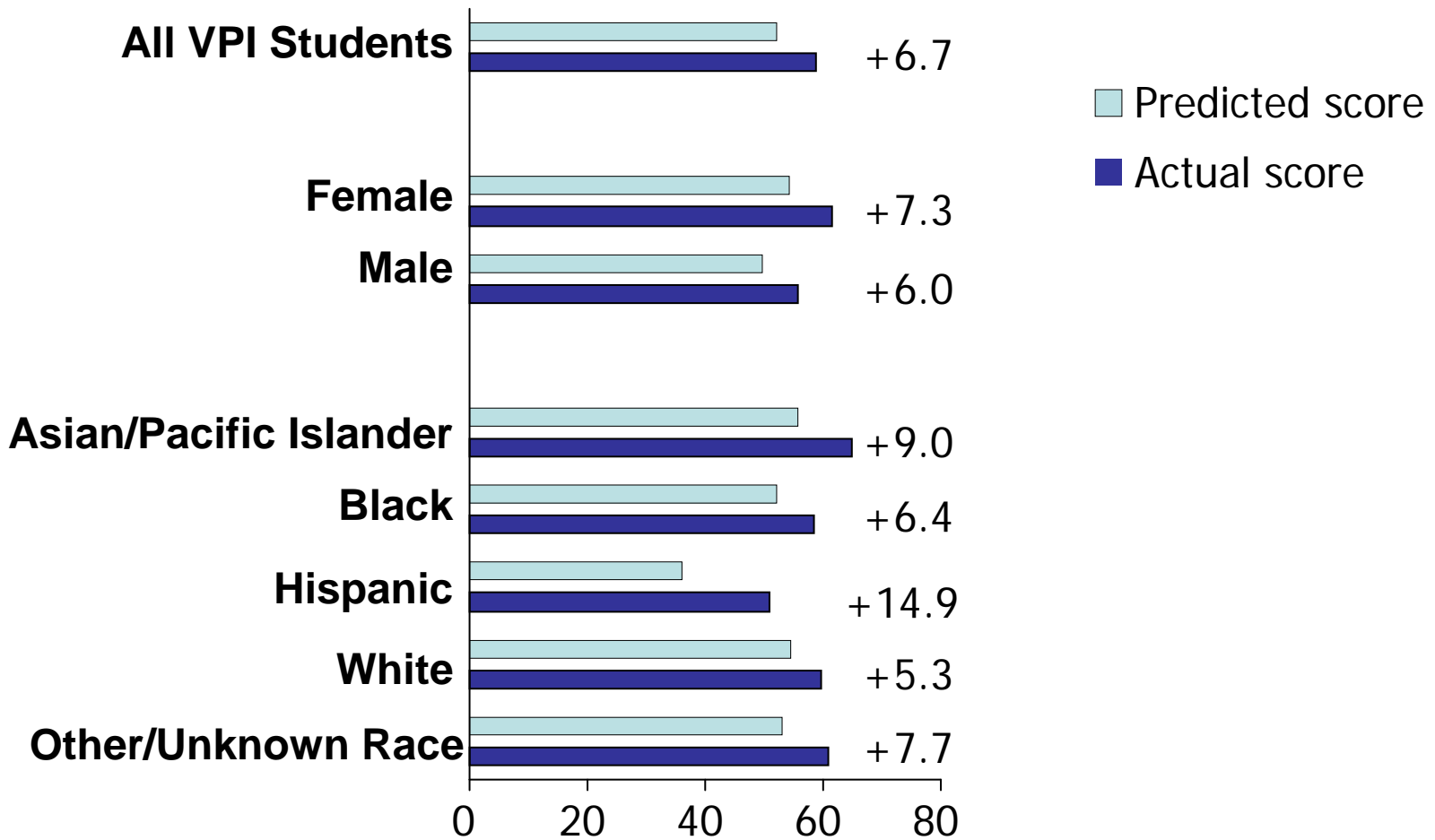
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## VPI Students Outperformed Other Kindergartners on Fall 2006 PALS-K Test

	Mean PALS-K Score	% Scoring Below 28*
VPI participants	58.7	11%
Other kindergartners	55.7	18%

\* Identifies student as needing additional instruction

# VPI Participants Performed Better than Predicted on Fall 2006 PALS-K Assessment



Source: Analysis of data provided by PALS office of the Curry School of Education, University of Virginia.



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## Better Student Tracking Is Needed to Determine Longer-Term Impact of VPI

- Data were not available during the review for a student-level analysis of test results of VPI program graduates in later years
- New pre-K experience code now required for kindergartners and preschoolers
  - Pre-K students can now be tracked from 2006-07
  - Student outcomes can be compared between various preschool programs
- A full student-level analysis of 3rd grade SOL scores will be possible in 2010-11

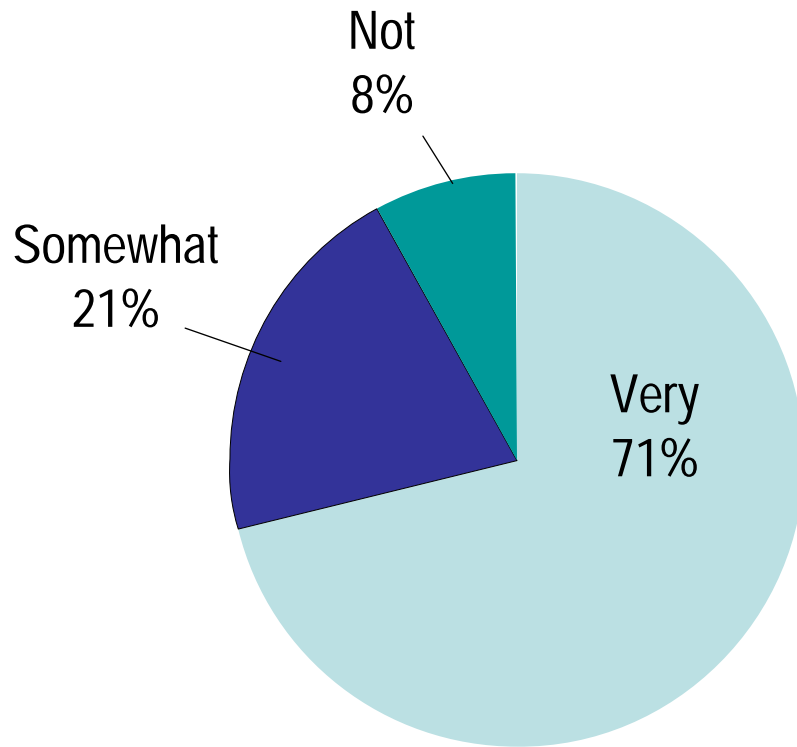
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## Recommendation

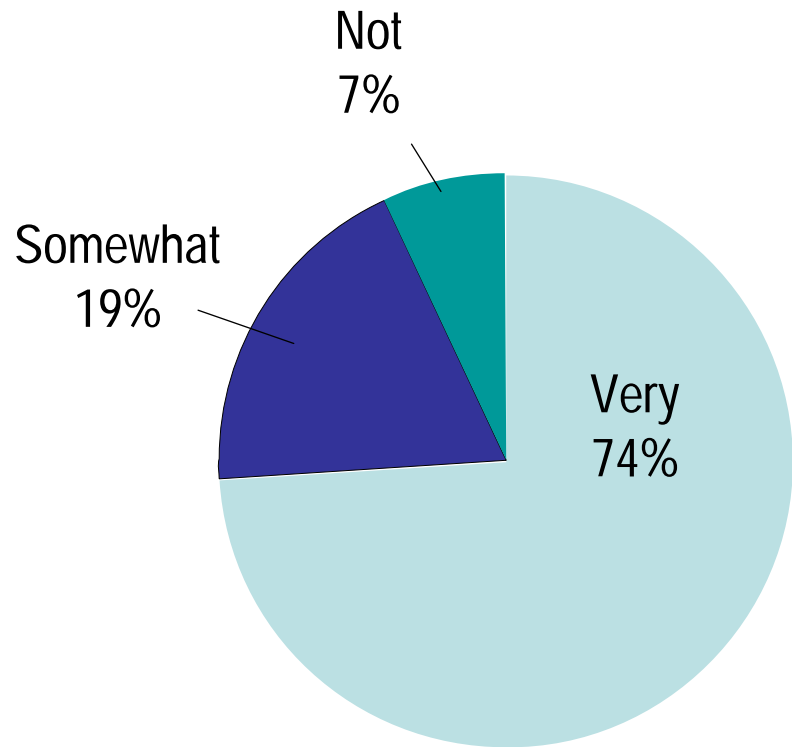
- DOE should conduct a longitudinal study of students who completed VPI and other preschool programs to determine long-term performance on SOL tests.

# Kindergarten Teachers Report That Most Pre-K Students Are Prepared Academically and Socially

Academically Well Prepared



Socially Well Prepared



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## Principals Think Pre-K Substantially Increases At-Risk Student Social and Academic Abilities

- More than 80% said pre-K “substantially increased” social and academic ability
- 91% say positive effects continue through at least 1<sup>st</sup> grade
- 59% say positive effects continue through to completion of elementary school

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## Most Principals Say VPI Students Typically Do As Well or Better in Elementary School Than Other Students

“They do better than other students”	11%
“They do equally well”	68%
“They do not do as well, but rarely need to be held back or placed in special education”	18%
“They do not do as well and it is not unusual for them to be held back or placed in special education”	3%



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## State Administrative Support Appears Largely Adequate for Existing Program

- Virginia provides less administrative support than many other states
  - Two part-time consultants conducting site visits
  - One DOE staff member providing technical support
- Most VPI programs administered through public school divisions, which may reduce need for State administrative support
- Approximately two-thirds of school divisions indicate satisfaction with State administrative support

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## To Improve Administrative Support . . .

- Request additional funding for consultants to visit all VPI programs once a biennium
- Devise a method to track data on classroom quality
- Require local programs to identify schools with VPI classrooms and number of classrooms per school
- Facilitate exchange of information between local VPI programs

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## If VPI Expands, Increased Levels of Administrative Support Likely Needed

- Maintain program quality with more private and non-profit providers
  - Pilot initiative is looking at increasing public-private partnerships
- If VPI expands, focus of increased support could be in
  - Increased classroom observations and teacher mentoring
  - Increased professional development for teachers

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# Recommendations

- The General Assembly may wish to
  - direct DOE and provide resources to facilitate sharing of information across local programs
  - increase the State’s capacity to facilitate classroom observations of local VPI programs and provision of technical assistance and mentoring
  - direct Secretary of Education’s Office and DOE to develop a proposed professional development plan for the State to support the VPI program

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# “Universal” Preschool Is Available to All Four-Year-Olds

## ■ Adopted in

- Georgia
- Oklahoma
- New York
- District of Columbia
- Florida
- West Virginia
- New Jersey
- Illinois
- Los Angeles County

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## Formal Evaluations of Universal Pre-K in Other States Show All Children Benefit

- Georgia's program

- Reduced initial gaps in verbal and cognitive skills between public pre-K students and private preschool students and national norms
- Did not have different effects on children from lower- or upper-income families

- Oklahoma's program

- Strong positive effects on test scores for children of all races and both lower- and upper-incomes

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## Studies of Middle- and Upper-Income Children Indicate Pre-K Boosts Test Scores

- Children from middle- and upper-income families experienced modest gains in test scores
- In some studies more disadvantaged children showed stronger gains
- Some studies suggest that children who spent more time in child care had higher “problem behavior” ratings later in elementary school

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## Governor Proposes to Increase Number of At-Risk Children Served by VPI

- The Governor states:
  - “By partnering with private providers, remove barriers to serve an additional 17,000 at-risk students, who are not currently served”
  - “Serve total of 30,000 four-year-olds in VPI by FY 2012”

# JLARC Staff Analysis of Proposal to Serve 17,000 More Students

	4-Year-Old Students	Explanation	Annual State Cost * (in Millions)
<b>Assumes Existing (2007-08) Vacant Slots Will Be Filled</b>	+ ~5,864	Localities not filling all VPI free lunch slots available (family of 4 with income < \$26,845)	~\$21
<b>Projects More Free Lunch Slots</b>	+ ~2,730	More free lunch students anticipated by DOE based on projected growth in number of 4-year-olds	~\$10
<b>Policy Change</b>	+ ~8,175	Add reduced-price lunch students (family of 4 with income < \$38,203)	~\$29
<b>TOTAL</b>			<b>~\$60</b>

\* Based on DOE spreadsheets and assumed per-pupil cost of \$5,700 and average State share of about 63%.

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# Concerns Regarding Governor's Proposal

- Assumed per-pupil cost may be too low.
- It is unlikely that an additional 17,000 students will be served.

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## Assumed Per-Pupil Amount of \$5,700 May Be Too Low

- Estimated per-pupil cost of model programs
  - \$9,500 to \$18,248 in today's dollars
- Estimated per-pupil cost using Virginia data
  - \$6,790 — Prevailing division cost for pre-K
  - \$7,920 — Parity with SOQ per-pupil costs

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## Unlikely That an Additional 17,000 Students Will Be Served

- Does not acknowledge local role in deciding
  - whether to participate
  - how many slots they wish to establish and help fund
- Assumes 100% of available slots will be filled, even in currently non-participating localities
- Assumes 12 participating localities with the most unfilled slots now will more than triple number of students served

## Localities With Currently Unused VPI Slots Face Cost and/or Space Issues

Locality	Unfilled Slots	Per-Pupil Cost	Factors Cited
Fairfax	1,055	\$12,294	"lack of space and unavailable local matching funds"
Prince William	711	\$8,590	"lack of funds for local match"
Henrico	672	\$8,483	"lack of building space and local match"
Alexandria	579	\$9,800	"lack of 80% local match and cost of care"
Virginia Beach	502	\$6,600	"additional local match funds are not available in the budget"
Chesterfield	389	(New)	2007-08 first year in VPI, with "intent to expand"
Chesapeake	265	(Unknown)	"our service providers have indicated that more funding is needed for strong program with high-quality personnel."
Arlington	241	\$17,958	"limited financial resources to meet the 80% required match"
Loudoun	213	(Not in VPI)	considering VPI; has half-day pre-K. High composite index means low State funds.

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## Policy Options for Expanding Access to Pre-K for All Four-Year-Olds in Virginia

- Alternative revenue source: Sliding scale of parent fees, based on parents' income
- Half-day versus full-day program
- 5-week summer program versus full school year
- Requiring all school divisions to offer pre-K program

## Sliding Scale: Example Assumptions and Costs

- Full-day, full school year program offered to all 4-year-olds and all school divisions participate
- Per-pupil cost: \$6,800

Family Income	Sliding Scale (% of \$6,800)	Participation
\$15,000-\$75,000	1.64% for every \$1,000 above \$15,000	67%
\$75,000 or more	100%	33%

- Total cost: \$241 million
  - Parents' fees 146 million
  - Local governments 42 million
  - State 52 million



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## 5-Week Summer Pre-K Program

- “Ready to Start” program in California
  - Targets 4-year-olds with no preschool experience in summer before kindergarten (at-risk or not)
  - Average cost per pupil: \$350
  - Program is 3 hours a day, 5 days a week for 5 weeks
- Concerns
  - More disadvantaged students may have greater need for more extensive pre-K program
  - Pilot tests of different programs may be required to compare kindergartners
    - in shorter summer pre-K program
    - with no preschool experience, and
    - in full-day, full school year pre-K program

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## Illustrative Scenarios of Combining Policy Options for Expanding Pre-K Program

1. For students with no preschool experience, offer summer program with parent fees
2. Governor's proposal for expanding VPI, and offer summer program to students with no preschool experience (with parent fees)
3. Offer full-day, full school year pre-K program to everyone (with parent fees), and offer summer program to those with no preschool experience
4. Scenario 3, but with greater reliance on parent fees

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## Key Findings

- VPI appears to be a good program, with positive classroom learning environments, high student engagement levels, and favorable pre-K and K literacy test results.
- Some localities choose not to participate in VPI, and others do not fill all slots, raising questions about equitable access.
- DOE-developed tracking system should facilitate assessments in the future of longer-term outcomes for VPI graduates.
- Virginia's focus of effort on at-risk children appears appropriate, but options are presented for potentially expanding VPI to serve more children at relatively low State cost.
- The Governor's proposal would continue and expand the State's focus on at-risk children, but appears unlikely to serve as many additional children by 2012 as has been stated.

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