



Virginia Preschool Initiative – Plus (VPI+)

CASTL Year 1 Implementation Report

Prepared for:

Virginia Department of Education, Office of Humanities and Early Childhood &
VPI+ Implementation Team Members

Prepared by:



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report provides an overview of important elements of VPI+ implementation in year 1 and clear recommendations to guide work in year 2 and beyond. Elements of the program that were a focus for CASTL supports are reviewed, drawing from observations made during division site visits, communications with VPI+ division leadership and coaches, and formative and summative VPI+ reports produced by SRI.

VPI+ Classrooms: Curriculum selection, assessment strategies, and the quality of interactions and environments are all integral parts of VPI+ classrooms. Eight of the 11 divisions adopted Creative Curriculum[®]; three divisions retained their existing curricula that met best-practice standards. The ongoing work of ensuring effective use of these curricula is well underway. VPI+ teachers are using PALS-Pre-K[®] and Teaching Strategies GOLD[®] assessments to support them in individualizing instruction. Most children in VPI+ classrooms are experiencing positive relationships with teachers and peers and classroom settings that promote positive behavior and engagement. Some goals for VPI+ classrooms in year 2 include engaging in increasingly enriching and cognitively stimulating interactions with children; providing more time in child-directed learning and play/less time in whole group and transitions; building the frequency and quality of instruction in a variety of content areas; and increasing utilization of GOLD data to individualize instruction.

Professional Development: VPI+ teachers received professional development focused on a range of content areas, instructional strategies, and the classroom environment, and reported moderate to high satisfaction with this professional development. Shared or collaborative professional development experiences were regarded as a strength; individualized professional development objectives were met overall and became more focused across the year. Some goals for professional development in year 2 include providing sufficient focus and intensity to support changes in practice and to objectively measure the nature of those changes.

Coaching: Across divisions, 14 coaches were trained and supported in engaging in Practice Based Coaching, and provided approximately 11 hours of coaching per teacher in the spring of the school year. Coaches frequently modeled, provided resources, and reviewed data. They often used data to help them focus their support on teachers' areas of greatest need and gave teachers timely feedback and support. In year 2, coaches will continue to select specific, data-driven areas of focus for their work with individual teachers and will work with teachers with sufficient intensity to promote meaningful (and observable) changes in practice.

Data Use: In year 1, divisions had access to rich data sources and were enthusiastic about the usefulness of data collected. Divisions increased their knowledge of the data sources and are growing in capacity to interpret data in ways that translate into actionable plans. Entering into

year 2, objectives for data use include supporting a clear understanding among divisions regarding which data is being used for what purpose, how to best interpret data from different sources, and refining plans for evaluations and ways of sharing findings to meet division needs.

Leadership: VPI+ teams are working together to set ambitious goals for School Readiness, Transitions, and Sustainability; create detailed plans for achieving those goals, and identify clear metrics to evaluate successes. Moving forward, VPI+ will work to build strong partnerships with building administrators and engage in dialogue regarding the latest science on effective instruction and developmentally appropriate alignment across pre-k to third grade in order to support a sustainable pre-k program after the conclusion of federal funding.

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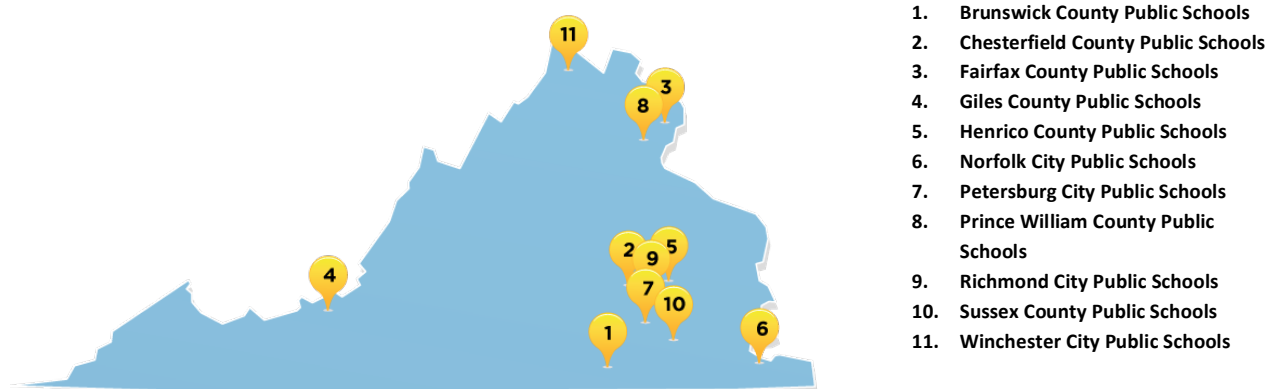
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OVERVIEW

VPI+ Overview

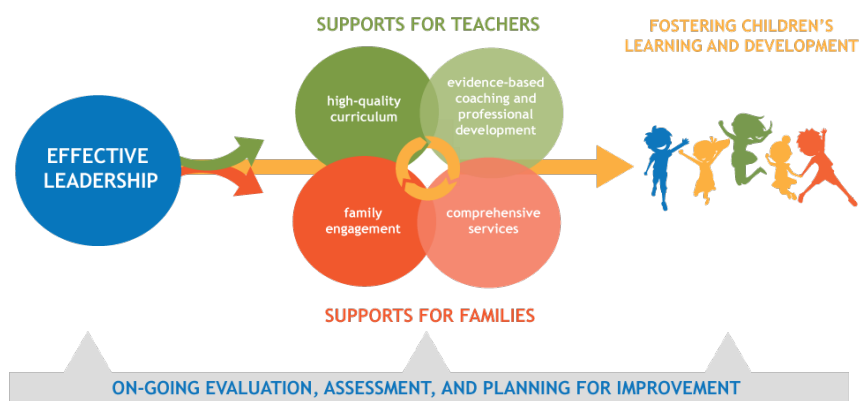
As part of the federal Preschool Development Grant, the US Department of Education awarded the Commonwealth of Virginia with a grant to expand and enhance the quality of its existing state preschool program, the Virginia Preschool Initiative (VPI). The new project is an extension of VPI, a state- and local-funded program that currently supports quality preschool programs for approximately 18,000 underprivileged four-year-olds annually. The grant provides \$17.5 million a year for four years to the Virginia Department of Education and participating divisions and state partners. Eleven school divisions across the Commonwealth (Figure 1) were selected to participate in this expansion and improvement project, entitled Virginia Preschool Initiative Plus, or VPI+. By the end of the grant, over 13,000 at-risk four-year-olds will be served in VPI+ or VPI improved high-quality preschool slots.

Figure 1. VPI+ Participating School Divisions



The mission of VPI+ is to transform its existing state preschool program (VPI) into a national exemplar through adoption of effective best practices to improve quality, access, and impact in high need communities. Children attending VPI+ classrooms are expected to demonstrate strong learning and growth across multiple domains as the result of enhanced supports provided to teachers and families (Figure 2). VPI+ places a strong emphasis on enhancing the quality of children's classroom experiences, through the use of high-quality, developmentally appropriate curriculum,

Figure 2. How VPI+ Works



formative assessments, and extensive professional development and coaching for teachers. Families receive enhanced supports from programs, including enriched family engagement opportunities and access to comprehensive services to promote their children's healthy development. The grant also supports ongoing evaluation and assessment with a focus on building stronger data infrastructure and providing valuable information for ongoing improvements of the program. Ultimately, the success of VPI+ depends in large part on strong leadership and the engagement of the broader community as Virginia seeks to sustain effective early childhood education experiences for preschool children throughout the Commonwealth.

The Virginia Department of Education is the lead agency supporting the implementation of VPI+ across the Commonwealth. The Center for Advanced Study of Teaching and Learning (CASTL), at the University of Virginia's Curry School of Education is part of an implementation team working to ensure the success of the VPI+ initiative. Other partners include: Virginia Early Childhood Foundation (VECF), Virginia Department of Social Services (VDSS), Virginia Department of Health (VDH), SRI International, and staff in each of the 11 school divisions.

CASTL's Role in VPI+ Implementation

VPI+ implementation involves the coordination of many "moving parts," from finding space and hiring/training staff, to recruiting students, to planning comprehensive services. Within the context of this complexity, CASTL's responsibility is to assist divisions in making decisions that will help ensure that children's daily experiences in classrooms will best support their development and early learning in ways that will prepare them for kindergarten and beyond. To that end, CASTL is supporting each division through a process of continuous quality improvement— including setting goals, planning (with a focus on professional development plans), and using data to inform changes at the program-, teacher-, and classroom-levels. CASTL staff also provides intensive training and support to coaches as well as ongoing consultation with VPI+ coordinators and other administrative staff.

Report Goals and Organization

The goal of this report is to provide an overview of key elements of VPI+ implementation in Year 1 and clear recommendations for the remaining years of the grant. We draw from multiple sources of data throughout the report, including observations made during site visits to each school division, ongoing communications with VPI+ division leadership and coaches, as well as the formative and summative VPI+ reports produced by SRI. This report is organized around program elements that were a focus for CASTL supports, including: VPI+ classrooms, professional development, coaching, data use, and leadership. Within each report section, we summarize CASTL's role, notable VPI+ successes, areas for growth, and our recommendations and suggestions for continued support from CASTL and other VPI+ Implementation members.

VPI+ CLASSROOMS

Year 1 Activities

The ultimate impact of VPI+ depends, in large part, on the daily experiences young children have in VPI+ classrooms. Children who attend preschool classrooms that offer warm, supportive, well-organized, and cognitively stimulating interactions among teachers and children are much more likely to develop the social and early academic skills that will help prepare them for school (Hamre, 2014). Effective classrooms also provide children with developmentally appropriate learning experiences across a variety of content areas, including early literacy, math, and science (Yoshikawa et al., 2013). Throughout the day, children in these classrooms are provided with opportunities to practice and get feedback on their emerging skills in forming relationships with peers, and practice regulating their behavior and attention in ways that help them get the most out of each day.



Division leaders, coaches, teachers and other staff across the 11 school divisions are working hard to ensure that children in their programs have access to the most effective classroom experiences. This is not an easy task, especially given the short amount of time divisions had to get their new classrooms up and running. Many divisions had to hire new teachers for their classrooms. Over 50% of VPI+ teachers are either brand new to teaching preschool or have only taught 1-2 years of preschool in the past. Eight of the 11 divisions adopted a new curriculum and all adopted new methods for formative assessment of students' skills. Data from the first year suggest many successes, as well as highlight areas for future focus as VPI+ divisions and the VPI+ Implementation team work together to achieve the ambitious goals set forth in the grant.

CASTL's Role

As divisions have worked to get their new classrooms in place and support their teachers during Year 1, CASTL's role has been to support effective classroom practice, including helping to ensure that teachers:

- Provide quality interactions and environments
- Implement curricula/evidence-based strategies with fidelity
- Individualize instruction for special needs students and Dual Language Learners
- Use effective family engagement practices, and
- Use formative assessment data to inform their practice

CASTL has supported each of these critical pieces of effective classroom practice by helping divisions with their curriculum adoption, linking divisions to key resources that will support their teachers, and working to ensure divisions have tools to evaluate the success of their efforts. As described in later sections, CASTL also supports divisions in their approaches to professional development and coaching which should have a direct impact on children's experiences in the classroom.

VPI+ Successes

Curriculum adoption and implementation was initiated.

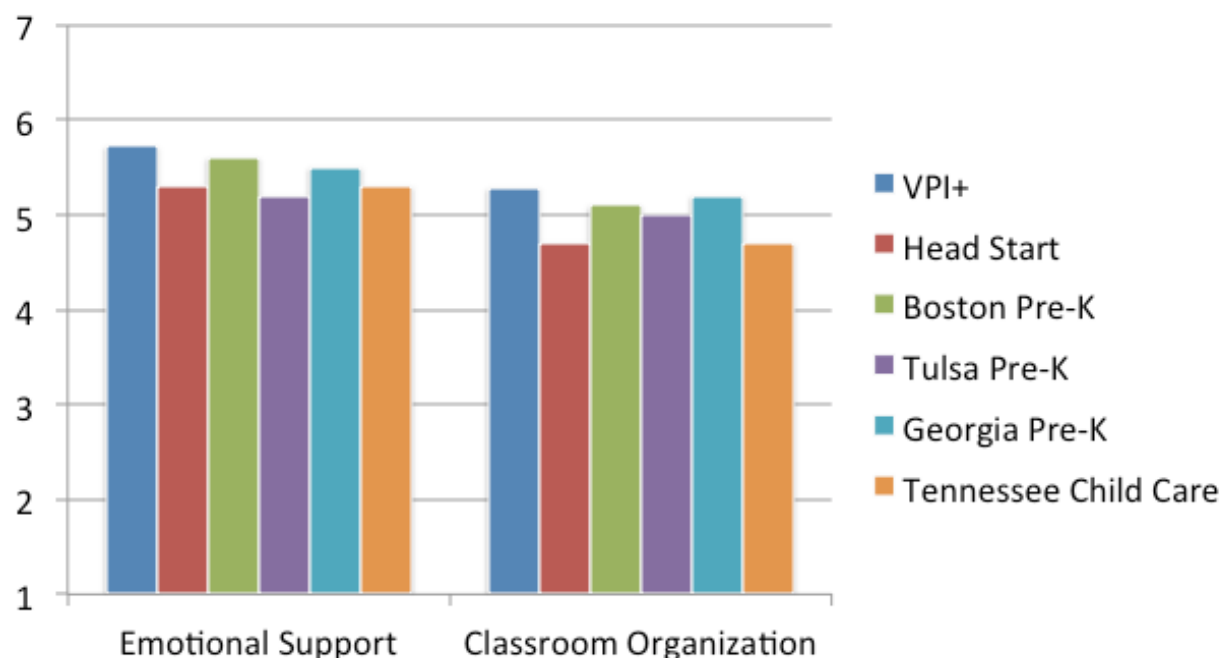
Eight of the 11 divisions adopted a state-procured new curriculum, Creative Curriculum[®]. The other three divisions retained their existing curricula after submitting applications that went through intensive review by both CASTL and VDOE staff to ensure that the curricula met best-practice standards. Conversations with VPI+ coordinators, coaches, and teachers, suggest that personnel around the Commonwealth are working to ensure that teachers are using curricular materials in ways to best support young students' learning. Successful implementation of curricula is not a one-year process, and this will be an area of focus in Year 2.

Most children in VPI+ classrooms experienced positive relationships with teachers and peers and classroom settings that promoted positive behavior and engagement.

The Virginia Early Childhood Foundation (VECF) conducted classroom observations in all VPI+ classrooms as a part of the Virginia Quality Rating and Improvement System. Data from these observations suggest that VPI+ classrooms were doing well on several important areas assessed in these observations. Particularly notable were strong scores on the *Emotional Support* and *Classroom Organization* domains of the Classroom Assessment Scoring System[®] (CLASS: Pianta et al., 2008). Appendix A (p.40) provides a detailed summary of what is measured in the CLASS.

Figure 3 compares VPI+ CLASS scores to those from several other large preschool programs, including Boston, Tulsa, and Tennessee preschool programs as well as national data from Head Start (Hamre, 2014). Average levels of *Emotional Support* and *Classroom Organization* in VPI+ classrooms either met or exceeded levels in all these other preschool programs. This is particularly impressive given that most of these data from other preschool programs were not collected in the very first year of implementation.

Figure 3. Quality of Teacher-Child Interactions in VPI+ and Other Early Childhood Programs (CLASS - Emotional Support and Classroom Organization) [Source for all data except VPI+ - Hamre, 2014]



The goal for Year 1 quality of Teacher-Child Interactions was that 50% of VPI+ classrooms would have a 5 or higher in the average of *Emotional Support* and *Classroom Organization* domains. VPI+ exceeded this goal with 84% (51 of 61) of classrooms scoring at a 5 or higher. These high quality emotional and organizational interactions will need to be continued in subsequent years to meet the Year 3 Goal of 75% of classrooms meeting these benchmarks.

Teachers collected formative data on children’s skills to individualize instruction.

As discussed in detail in the forthcoming Data Use section, teachers across all new VPI+ classrooms were trained to collect the Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening (PALS-Pre-K[®]) and Teaching Strategies GOLD[®] data. Teachers received professional development, including online learning modules (from Teaching Strategies), and follow-up professional development and coaching from their programs. GOLD documentation and ratings were successfully gathered for the vast majority of VPI+ children. Coaches reported variability in teachers’ use of the data to inform instruction and used many methods to support teachers, such as working with groups of teachers to do lesson planning based on GOLD and PALS data.

Areas for Growth

Many classrooms need to offer more enriching and cognitively stimulating interactions among teachers and children.

The area of teacher-child interactions most closely associated with supporting children's early academic development is *Instructional Support* (e.g. Mashburn et al., 2008).

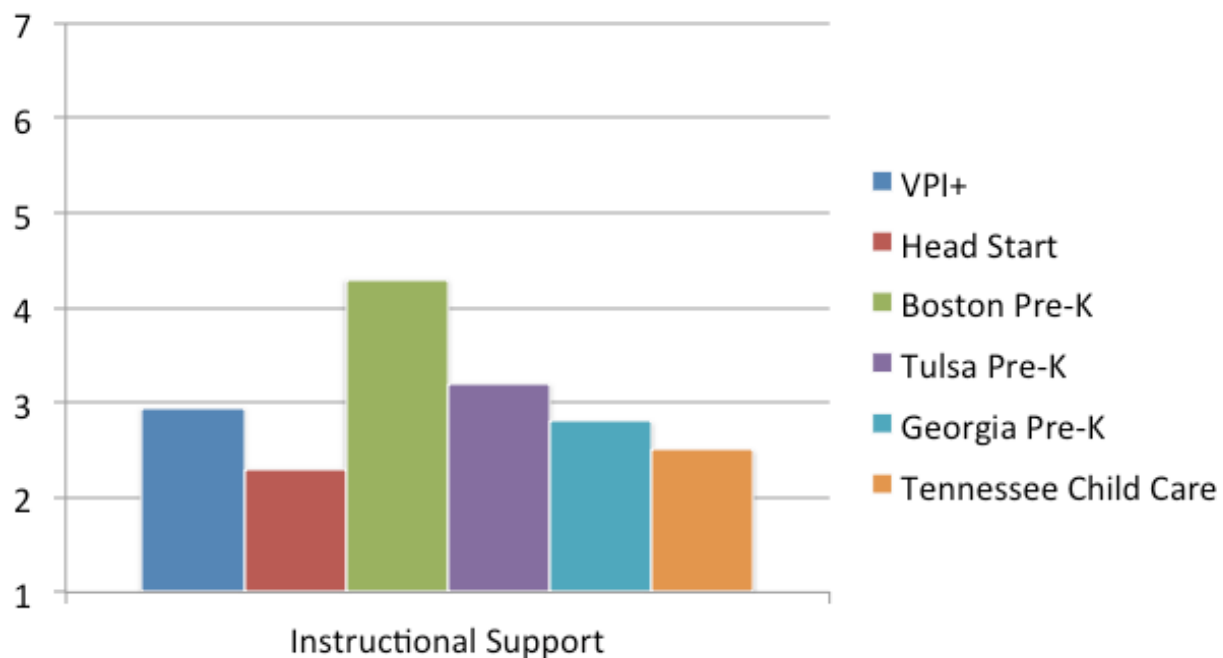
Instructional Support involves how teachers promote children's thinking and problem solving, use feedback to deepen understanding, and help children develop more complex language skills.

3 dimensions comprise the Instructional Support domain:

- **Concept Development** is the degree to which instructional discussions and activities promote students' higher-order thinking skills versus rote learning.
- **Quality of Feedback** involves how teachers provide feedback focused on expanding children's learning and understanding versus correctness.
- **Language Modeling** involves teachers using language-facilitation techniques including: self-and parallel talk, open-ended questions, repetition and extension, and use of advanced vocabulary.

In contrast to VPI+ successes in the CLASS *Emotional Support* and *Classroom Organization* domains, *Instructional Support* data from Year 1 suggest a need to focus on supporting teachers to offer more cognitively stimulating interactions. The Goal for Year 1 was that 50% of VPI+ classrooms score at 3.25 or above on *Instructional Support*. VPI+ fell a bit short of this goal with 41% scoring above a 3.25. This is not surprising given national data suggesting *Instructional Support* is an area of weakness in many early childhood programs. For example, as displayed in Figure 2, it is clear that the average *Instructional Support* score in VPI+ classrooms was similar to that in several other preschool programs and somewhat higher than that observed nationally in Head Start or in the Tennessee preschool program. Nevertheless, given research on the importance of these cognitively stimulating interactions, improvements in teachers' *Instructional Support* will be an important focus in Year 2 and beyond.

Figure 4. Quality of Teacher-Child Interactions in VPI+ and Other Early Childhood Programs (CLASS – Instructional Support) (Source for all data except VPI+ - Hamre, 2014)



Many classrooms need to provide children with more time in child-directed learning and play, and less time in whole group and transitions.

VECF raters also observed classrooms using the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale-Revised (ECERS-R[®]) to provide information on the materials, interactions, and time use in VPI+ Classrooms. Appendix B (p.41) provides a detailed summary of what is measured in the ECERS-R. Notable findings across most divisions were low scores on the *Activities* and *Program Structure Scales*. Challenges in the area of *Activities* included children having limited access to materials, defined as a minimum proportion of the day (e.g. minimum of 45 minutes in a 6-hour program). Programs were well resourced to buy classroom materials, so in most cases these materials were in the classroom, but children were not provided with adequate time to actually use these materials. *Program Structure* challenges included the daily schedule allotting too much time for whole group and transition time without a “substantial portion of the day” (1/3 of the school day) for small group or play activities (centers, outside play). Most programs expressed challenges with meeting the “substantial portion of the day” criteria, given the constraints of school-based settings, in which scheduling for cafeteria meals, “specials” which did not take place in the classroom, and limited outdoor time are typically school-based decisions versus decisions that individual classroom teachers make.

Classrooms need to provide children sufficient time and quality of instruction in academic content areas to promote school readiness and we currently do not have sufficient data on this element of the program.

None of the *observational* measures used in the evaluation of VPI+ provide data on the fidelity of implementation of the curricula, or on the amount or quality of time students spent in particular content areas (e.g. literacy, math, science). Teachers did report on the typical frequency with which they taught subject areas and the typical amount of time allotted to subjects on a daily basis (see SRI Spring Formative Report for more information). These *teacher-reported data* suggest that, among the academic content areas, the majority of teachers spent the most time teaching early literacy (30 minutes to 1 hour daily), with regular time on Math (1-30 minutes daily) and the arts (1-30 minutes daily). Less frequent time was reportedly spent teaching science or social studies (1-2 times weekly for up to 30 minutes).

Informal observations and discussions with VPI+ staff across the state suggested that increasing the frequency and quality of instruction should be an area of improvement in Year 2. Many VPI+ staff reported that most teachers have had extensive training in early literacy but less training in effective teaching practice in the other academic domains. Additionally, even teachers with extensive experience teaching literacy may not have specific training in supporting learning for 4-year olds. It is important for children to spend enough time in these early academic areas across the day and that teachers are equipped with the latest evidence on content-specific teaching practices.

Teachers need additional supports to ensure that they are using GOLD data to individualize instruction for all children.

In Year 1, coaches reported that teachers needed a great deal of support to collect documentation and enter GOLD ratings into the online system. Much time was spent with basic technical and logistical problems. Despite heavy time investments by many teachers in training (online and in-person) coaches reported that many teachers needed additional support to learn to run GOLD reports and interpret data to inform their instruction at the classroom level. Additionally, analysis of Year 1 GOLD data conducted by CASTL and staff in many divisions suggested that some teachers need additional support to make reliable observations of students' skills.

Recommendations and VPI+ Implementation Team Supports

- **Select two School Readiness Domains on which to focus classroom improvement efforts in Year 2.** As a part of the Continuous Improvement Plans (CIPs) discussed in greater detail below, CASTL asked each school division to select two school readiness domains on which to focus in Year 2. This will help ensure greater intensity and

coordination across all program elements. It will be important for teachers to be aware of these areas of focus and for divisions to continue to collect information to assess the success of their efforts. Divisions will continue to ensure children are learning across domains; however, we anticipate greater success with a deeper focus on two key areas.

Table 1 provides a summary of the learning domains of focus within each division. The majority of divisions are focusing in the areas of Language, Social-Emotional, and/or Math. Most divisions decided not to focus on literacy due to relatively strong student data in this area (PALS) as well as a long history of professional development focused on literacy instruction. Fairfax and Henrico are focusing on Approaches to Learning.

Table 1. School Readiness Domains of Focus in Division Continuous Improvement Plans

	Language	Social-Emotional	Math	Approaches to Learning	Literacy
Brunswick	X		X		
Chesterfield	X		X		
Fairfax				X	X
Giles	X		X		
Henrico		X		X	
Norfolk City	X	X			
Petersburg City		X	X		
Prince William	X	X			
Richmond City		X	X		
Sussex		X	X		
Winchester City	X	X			

➔ *Implementation Team Recommendations:* CASTL will provide support to the divisions in this area through continued implementation of their CIPs.

- **Find ways to assess the quantity and quality of instruction provided in the domain areas of focus.** As divisions focus on particular learning domains, it is important that they are able to assess how much time teachers are spending on these areas, as well as the extent to which teachers are using evidence-based strategies to teach. Making sure that teachers are effectively using curricular materials is an important part of this work.

Some divisions have found success supporting curricular implementation through regular teacher workshops/meetings in which teachers collaboratively plan for upcoming units/studies.

➔ *Implementation Team Recommendations:* CASTL is developing resources to support these data collection and improvement efforts in Year 2. These resources will include simple 1-pagers that provide an overview of effective strategies for teaching specific content, as well as observational tools for coaches to use when observing teachers in these domains. Coaches using Creative Curriculum will also receive additional training on the ways in which they can use the Teaching Strategies Fidelity Tool to help accomplish this goal.

- **Consider CLASS observations in Year 2 for all VPI+ and improved classrooms.** The VPI+ grant provides resources for CLASS ratings for VPI+ classrooms in Years 1 and 3.

➔ *Implementation Team Recommendations:* CASTL has encouraged divisions to find ways to obtain these ratings in Year 2 for all classrooms, including VPI+ and improved classrooms. These data will be invaluable in demonstrating the successes and areas in need of continued focus for professional development and coaching. Staff members in many divisions are now CLASS trained and able to conduct CLASS observations in their own classrooms. To help ensure high levels of reliability of these data, all people conducting CLASS ratings must have attended a CLASS observer training and passed the reliability test to achieve CLASS observer certification. CASTL also recommends that, if possible, coaches should not rate teachers with whom they are working. In divisions with multiple coaches, they may assess each other's teachers. In divisions with only one coach, coaches may partner across divisions to obtain more objective ratings. CASTL will continue to be available for consultation in this area.

- **Focus division-wide professional development on areas of weakness noted at division level, and focus coaching on areas of weakness at teacher level.** Year 1 CLASS data provided clear targets for focus of professional development and coaching. All divisions need to have a clear plan for supporting teachers' use of effective Instructional Interactions. Most divisions also need to ensure they are individualizing supports for teachers such that those who need more support in the areas of *Emotional Support* and *Classroom Organization* are receiving it.

➔ *Implementation Team Recommendations:* CASTL recently launched a website which includes a searchable database of high-quality professional development resources

and classroom videos that can help support divisions' work in this area. CASTL is also available for consultation to divisions looking to enhance the impact of their professional development efforts. Finally, as detailed below, CASTL will continue to provide intensive training and support to coaches in Year 2.

- **Administrators and coaches may want to review daily schedules with an eye towards increasing time for child-directed activities and reducing time spent in whole group and transitions.** Many divisions, with support from VECF, have already started to do this. In particular, divisions are working to reduce the morning meeting time, that many noted often exceeds young children's ability to attend (e.g., 30+ minutes), and better use this time to engage in child-directed learning or very short, targeted instructional time. Divisions are also working to reduce the number of times children need to leave the classroom (e.g., having teachers delivering "specials" come to the classroom for the instruction, eating lunch in the classroom setting). Many divisions are also working to encourage family style meals in the classroom or in the cafeteria, in which children can engage in enriching conversations with adults.
 - ➔ *Implementation Team Recommendations:* CASTL will share resources from divisions that have taken on this challenge with other divisions who are interested. Specifically CASTL will provide examples of Year 1 and Year 2 schedules, highlighting changes made to address challenges highlighted in the ECERS data. CASTL and VECF are also collaborating on writing 1-pagers that describe developmentally appropriate practices across the parts of the daily schedule (e.g., whole group, small group, free play, transitions). These resources are designed to be shared with coaches, at the coach training, and for broader dissemination across teachers, principals, etc..
- **Support additional training for teachers in using GOLD data to inform instruction.** Although teachers used GOLD in the first year, implementation was variable and most divisions reported that they did not feel most teachers were using it effectively to support instruction.
 - ➔ *Implementation Team Recommendations:* When school divisions request, Teaching Strategies is providing additional customized training for divisions, and this may be an area on which to focus that training. CASTL also recommends that all teachers complete the online GOLD training and interrater reliability assessments. Some divisions are focusing local professional development time to help teachers collect and use GOLD data most effectively. CASTL will share effective approaches to supporting GOLD use across divisions.

- **Use data to identify differences in learning across subgroups and target needs for groups of learners, including Dual Language Learners and students with disabilities.**
During the first year, most divisions were focused on overall implementation and acknowledge that they have more to do to ensure that all students have the classroom supports they need to succeed. Year 1 summative data from SRI provided important information for divisions related to the success of their program for subgroups, and these data should be carefully analyzed and plans put in place to address any gaps.
- ➔ *Implementation Team Recommendations:* CASTL helped divisions analyze Year 1 data for this purpose, and the new website will provide resources and videos to support best practice in working with Dual Language Learners and students with disabilities.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Year 1 Activities

Given that the success of VPI+ depends largely on what teachers provide children in classrooms, it is essential that teachers are provided with the professional development and support they need. Data from national studies suggest that although most teachers spend a lot of time in professional development, little of it is effective in changing classroom practice or supporting more positive outcomes for students. Zaslow and colleagues (2010) identified key components of effective professional development for early childhood educators:

Core features of high quality Early Childhood Educator Professional Development

- Provides specific, well-articulated learning objectives.
- Practice is an explicit focus (i.e., emphasis on knowledge-to-practice link).
- Offers a shared experience with colleagues (i.e., joint participation).
- Intensity and duration of PD are appropriate for objectives.
- Integrate an emphasis on formative assessments.
- Is aligned with ECE standards for practice.

There are many different formats for professional development: including trainings, workshops, online learning modules, webinars, conferences, coursework, mentoring, and coaching. A common approach for VPI+ divisions has been pairing traditional forms of group professional development (e.g., workshops) with follow-up coaching for individual teachers. The addition of coaching increases the *intensity and duration* of professional development and also helps ensure that it is focused on classroom practice. This section of the report will focus on professional development planning and the delivery of division-wide professional development. The next section provides an in-depth look at coaching.

VPI+ divisions spent a great deal of time across Year 1 planning and implementing varied professional development activities division-wide (i.e., for groups of teachers). Professional development covered a wide range of subject areas, including curriculum, formative assessment, specific content areas, and instructional strategies. More detailed information is available in the *SRI Spring 2016*



CASTL's Role

Across Year 1, CASTL has provided consultation focused on professional development planning and implementation to divisions through individual conversations with division administrators, coaches, and the leadership academies that were held in the winter and spring. Zaslow's elements of quality early childhood PD and research on evidence-based PD were shared as models for selecting/planning effective professional development and were contrasted with lower quality PD that lacks evidence of impact.

A key theme of the leadership academies and follow-up consultations was planning PD intentionally—using the data to assess needs for professional development. Another theme for PD was focus: that covering fewer objectives in more depth, through activities that are intense and ongoing, is more effective than a series of one-shot workshops/meetings that lack direct classroom applications or cover teacher practices in shallow depth.

Early in Year 1, CASTL developed a document for divisions to use highlighting free professional development resources that was organized into various topics to enable coaches and division administration to easily search for what they needed. Resource types included briefs, e-books, webinars, videos, learning modules, and templates.

Formative Report.

Divisions also planned and implemented individualized professional development, led by coaches. Each coach worked with their VPI+ teachers to create individualized professional development plans, in which they identified areas of need (based on formative classroom and child data), planned professional development activities aligned to those needs, and outlined the objectives or desired outcomes of the professional development. At the end of the year, coaches assessed whether objectives were met for their teachers and provided supporting evidence.

VPI+ Successes

Teachers received frequent professional development and reported moderate to high satisfaction.

The *SRI Spring 2016 Formative Report* collected teacher-report data about experiences with professional development across several focus areas: curriculum, formative assessment, specific content areas, and instructional strategies. Teachers found it particularly helpful when more time was focused on professional development related to both curriculum and formative assessment. The *SRI Spring Formative Report* indicated that teachers received professional development on a wide range of specific content areas, most frequently literacy and language (91%), social-emotional (79%) and math (75%). Teachers also frequently received professional development for instructional strategies related to teacher-child interactions (81%) and environments (80%). Overall, most teachers reported perceiving that the professional development was Moderately to Very Useful.

Professional development frequently provided teachers shared experiences with colleagues.

Coaches and coordinators commonly reported shared experiences with colleagues as a strength of local professional development. For example, some divisions intentionally

provided small group experiences that involved teachers and teaching assistants to promote communities of learning. These small groups were facilitated by coaches, which allowed for greater ease of explicitly linking to teacher practice. Additionally, some divisions sent administrators, coaches, and teachers to CLASS trainings offered by VECF. For these divisions, shared experiences across school staff may have helped promote capacity to sustain improvements as well as vertical alignment to promote improved classroom interactions across PK-3 or PK-5 settings.

Individualized professional development objectives were met overall and became more focused across the year.

In creating teachers' individualized professional development plans, coaches used data to assess needs and planned professional development activities aligned to those needs. The most common needs identified were classroom interactions and specific content areas (Literacy, Math, Social-Emotional). Many plans focused on data use (e.g., using PALS or GOLD data to individualize instruction). A smaller proportion focused on individualizing instruction for students with disabilities or Dual Language Learners. The first round of plans submitted tended to have many goals for each teacher, whereas by the end of the year these plans had greater focus on a few key areas. Coaches delivered workshops and trainings as well as provided one-on-one coaching for all VPI+ teachers. Some coaches also planned for teachers to complete other types of activities such as online learning modules and webinars. An analysis of end of year professional development plans suggested that these activities were largely completed as planned, and most teachers met or partially met most or all intended outcomes.

Areas for Growth

Ensure that professional development has the focus and intensity needed to support changes in classroom practice.

Because the first year of VPI+ involved rollout of so many new components (curriculum, assessment, foundational interactions and environments), professional development typically covered more breadth than depth. Individualized plans submitted to CASTL in the fall were often too broad and not always well aligned with data on the areas in need of greatest focus. There were positive exceptions; for instance, some divisions picked areas of CLASS *Instructional Support* to target through ongoing workshops. Other divisions covered curriculum implementation in depth. And most divisions showed improvement in the focus and intensity of professional development plans submitted to CASTL in the spring.

Make sure there are objective measures to assess the extent to which this professional development was successful.

There was limited data used as evidence of teachers meeting intended outcomes. More commonly individualized professional development plans provided general teacher or coach statements about improvements being made (e.g., "teacher improved language interactions"), which is potentially subjective. Some plans provided evidence of objectives being met through child outcome data (e.g., 92% of children met PALS benchmarks, 100% of children met GOLD widely held expectations for math). In one division CLASS data were provided by outside trained observers (after the initial data VECF collected in the fall) as evidence of the success of professional development. This is an idea that might be replicated in other divisions.

Recommendations and VPI+ Implementation Team Supports

Based on these observations, we suggest that divisions:

- **Focus their division-wide professional development primarily on areas of classroom practices aligned with school readiness goals.**
 - ➔ *Implementation Team Recommendations:* CASTL will support this focus through division consultation on the implementation and revision of divisions' Continuous Improvement Plans. As demonstrated above, many divisions are focusing on similar domains of school readiness (language, social-emotional, and math) and CASTL will facilitate sharing effective professional development experiences across these divisions.
- **Work to schedule and make the most of regularly scheduled group time for ongoing professional development that involves shared experiences among colleagues.**

Creating structures (like weekly, monthly, or quarterly trainings/meetings) allows for better opportunity for ongoing focus. By building on the Year 1 strength of shared experiences with colleagues and strengthening learning communities, there is great potential for maximizing teacher engagement in professional development and promoting alignment within and across programs. Some divisions are planning to strengthen professional learning communities as a key part of their professional development model. The state VPI+ Implementation Team Meeting in June of 2016 was well received by participating divisions as a model for promoting learning communities. Some coaches are considering holding "un-conference" formatted professional development in their divisions, commenting on how the format showed regard for adult learner perspectives and would be well received by teachers in their divisions.

- **Utilize high-quality, freely available professional development resources in division-wide and individualized professional development.**
 - ➔ *Implementation Team Recommendations:* CASTL recently published a new VPI+ website, a major component of which is a searchable database of free resources. This is an extension of the free professional development resources list that CASTL circulated early in Year 1. Teachers, coaches, division coordinators, family engagement coordinators, and families will find resources organized by type and audience, including a separate database focused entirely on professional development videos. The CASTL team has added a significant number of resources to the initial list, including many that are focused on effective family engagement, which has been an area of less detail and intensity in a number of divisions' Continuous Improvement Plans.
- **Encourage coaches to look closely at data to focus on a small set of assessed needs for individualized plans, and then use objective data to assess whether/how objectives are met.**
 - ➔ *Implementation Team Recommendations:* In CASTL summer visits and continued division support across the coming year, we will work with divisions to view and interpret all forms of data on hand. In this way, we hope that divisions and coaches will take all possible data sources into account when they consider professional development – both at the division level and for individual teachers. CASTL will consider how to support coaches/divisions to use more substantive data to assess whether professional development is really having the intended impact. Finally, CASTL will incorporate feedback from Year 1 to make the format and process of completion of individualized professional development plans easier in Year 2.

COACHING

Year 1 Activities

Effective coaching can be one of the most impactful forms of professional development (Zaslow et al., 2010), due to the fact that, when done well, it provides teachers with focused, ongoing, and individualized support.

During Year 1, VPI+ coaches were trained on a general approach to coaching called Practice-Based Coaching, developed by the National Center for Quality Teaching and Learning. Practice-Based Coaching is a cyclical process for supporting teachers' use of effective teaching practices. There are three main components in a Practice-Based Coaching Cycle: (1) planning goals and action steps, (2) engaging in focused observation, and (3) reflecting on and sharing feedback about teaching practices.

Importantly, Practice-Based Coaching – just like any effective form of coaching – is meant to occur within the context of a collaborative partnership, meaning that the coaching is not evaluative or judgmental, and the teacher-coach relationship is a safe place for teachers to ask questions and try new ideas.

Figure 5. Practice-Based Coaching – National Center for Quality Teaching and Learning

(Source: <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/teaching/development/pbc/pbc-resources.html>)



During Year 1 of VPI+, across the 11 school divisions, 14 coaches were hired, trained and supported by CASTL to deliver high-quality Practice-Based Coaching to all VPI+ teachers and some teachers in improved classrooms. For most divisions, this was the first time that coaching was a part of their VPI program, and for many of the coaches, it was their first time moving into this role. So, as with many areas of VPI+, 2015-16 was a year for building foundations of good practice and forming a learning community of coaches across divisions.

Coach logs were collected in fall 2015 and spring 2016. Because fall 2015 data captured a brief time span (about 6 weeks of instruction time) between October and December 2015, we will focus on the spring data from January to May 2016 (5 months). In the spring of 2016, SRI Coach log data showed that 131 teachers (96 in VPI+ New and 35 in VPI+ Improved classrooms) received coaching, with over 1,500 coaching contacts, averaging 11 coaching hours per teacher in the spring. Coaches typically had contact with teachers twice-per-month through 1-1 coaching meeting discussions, classroom observations, and/or group meetings/trainings.

In individual coaching contacts, coaches provided a range of support strategies: most commonly modeling (22% of coaching contacts), providing resources and materials (22%), connecting to curriculum resources (21%), and reviewing data (19%). Less frequently, coaches supported teacher practice change through video review—reviewing footage of a teacher’s own classroom (7%). Much more detailed data on coaching is available in the *SRI Spring 2016 Summative Report*.

CASTL's Role

CASTL provided ongoing training and support to coaches throughout the year. This began with a 3-day training in August 2015 in which coaches learned the basics of Practice-Based Coaching and evidence-based coaching techniques, such as motivational interviewing.

Throughout the year, CASTL hosted monthly group support calls for coaches in which they shared case studies to highlight successes and challenges around particular aspects of their work, and received feedback from CASTL and their peers.

Each coach also had 1-on-1 support calls with CASTL in which CASTL's implementation specialist provided individualized support and feedback to ensure coaches' work with each of their teachers remained focused and effective.

Coaches came back together for a group training at UVA in February with an emphasis on how to use data to inform how to focus their work with teachers, more in-depth work on motivational interviewing techniques, and specific strategies for integrating video review into coaching.

Over the course of the year, CASTL supported coaches to narrow coaching focus to the areas of greatest need for each teacher, to align coaching focus with overall division goals for continuous improvement, and to move toward more intensive and impactful types of coaching strategies, such as data review and video review.

VPI+ Successes

Coaches used data to inform their work with teachers.

Through CASTL's support of coaches and division leadership across the first year, the coaches used classroom data (CLASS, ECERS) and child data (PALS, GOLD) to help them focus in on areas of greatest need and support for their teachers' growth. Coaches documented the sources of data for assessed needs in teachers' individualized professional development plans.

Additionally, division coordinators and coaches used division-level and classroom-level data to inform their planning for continuous improvement – both at the broader division level as well as at the individual classroom level. This was demonstrated in division's creation of Continuous Improvement Plans and through follow-up discussions with CASTL.

Teachers received timely feedback and support for their daily work with students.

As a result of VPI+, many divisions had coaches for the first time. Through this work, strong collaborative partnerships between coaches and teachers were built during Year 1, providing the foundation for the type of changes that effective coaching can make possible. Through a variety of different types of coaching interactions in Year 1, teachers across divisions received feedback and support for their work – aligned with the areas of greatest need – as identified together by both the teacher and coach early in the year.

Areas for Growth

Coaching would benefit from a greater focus on specific areas of need for each teacher.

Though CASTL worked to support coaches to intentionally narrow their focus across the second half of Year 1, selecting and maintaining areas of focus was a consistent

challenge within coaching. Determining how to choose a focus proved difficult for a number of reasons. Given that this was the first year of the grant, the number of new tasks and new information to learn was overwhelming to many coaches. There was also so much information and data coming in that it proved challenging for coaches to wade through it and prioritize areas of focus. Furthermore, the Practice-Based Coaching framework was not a structured coaching model; i.e., it did not specify focus on a shared lens for viewing practice, provide content-specific training (e.g., math instruction) or materials to really lay out a specific scope and sequence for a coach's work with teachers. These factors led to less focus in coaching sessions than we would recommend in future years.

Teachers need to be provided with enough intensity in coaching sessions to really promote changes in practice.

The changes we hope to see in teachers' classroom practice as a result of coaching are complex. According to the *SRI 2016 Spring Formative Report*, teachers reported that they were very satisfied with their coaching experiences (72% strongly agreed that they had a positive, collaborative relationship with their coach). However, a smaller percentage of teachers reported that they had changed their teaching practice as a result (42% strongly agreed). SRI data demonstrated that coaching contacts with teachers were irregular in many cases. Many coaches reported that getting pulled into other activities was a barrier to increased intensity of coaching. Additionally, more intensive coaching methods, such as use of video, were underutilized in Year 1.

Recommendations and VPI+ Implementation Team Supports

- **Coach time needs to be protected for direct coaching (1-1 coaching sessions, focused observations) and planning coaching/professional development.**
 - ➔ *Implementation Team Recommendations:* CASTL and VDOE will continue to communicate the importance of protected coach time to coaches and division coordinators, and will work with specific divisions to problem-solve any challenges as the need arises.
- **Coaches should set a schedule with teachers for 4x/month coaching contacts, ideally, or at minimum, 2x/month coaching contacts to facilitate ongoing, regular follow-up.**
 - ➔ *Implementation Team Recommendations:* CASTL will ask for more specific information from coaches in monthly 1-1 support calls, involving the review of coach logs and case studies to help support higher dosage of coaching contacts. Coaches

will also review their coach log data from the bi-annual SRI Formative reports, guided by data review activities provided by CASTL.

- **Coaches should use intensive coaching support strategies with regularity. At least 1x/month, coaches should facilitate teachers reviewing exemplar videos and reviewing their own classroom videos. Coaches and teachers should review data to plan instruction at least 3x/year.**

➔ *Implementation Team Recommendations:* CASTL will provide additional training and support in use of these more intensive coaching strategies at the fall 2016 and winter 2017 coach trainings.

- **Coaches should use classroom/program data to plan coaching focus and help differentiate intensity and focus based on individual teacher needs. For instance, coaches should set a goal for the percent of coaching contacts to focus on areas of school readiness goals for their division and also ensure that teachers get targeted support for areas of individual need.**

➔ *Implementation Team Recommendations:* CASTL will continue to support coaches to use division data and individualized data to inform their coaching and other professional development planning for each teacher. CASTL will also continue to hold annual leadership academies for VPI+ staff (coordinators, coaches, family engagement, administrators) to help narrow in on the areas of greatest need, make specific goals related to support, and determine how to adapt their supports for individual teachers.

- **As programs plan for sustainability, ensuring sufficient resources for coaching in both new and improved classrooms would be beneficial.**

➔ *Implementation Team Recommendations:* Some divisions have reported success in early plans to retain coaching resources after the grant ends. CASTL will work to share these ideas across divisions and consult with divisions on this topic in the final years of the grant.

- **Coaches need to develop content expertise to support knowledge building and effective implementation of teacher practices. This can be gained through shared professional development experiences with teachers as well as supplemental coach training in content-focused models (e.g., math, social-emotional).**

➔ *Implementation Team Recommendations:* Coaches in many divisions have attended or have plans to attend trainings specific to the types of content areas on which they intend to focus much of their coaching. For example, those focused on improving math instruction for their teachers attended a summer intensive training at the Erikson Institute focused on understanding effective early childhood math instruction. Coaches will benefit from additional professional development opportunities, beyond those provided by CASTL in Year 2. CASTL will work to help identify opportunities for coach professional development.

DATA USE

Year 1 Activities

Divisions are receiving data from a number of different sources as a part of their participation in VPI+. Although many divisions have a strong culture around use of data to inform improvement, many of these data sources were new to VPI+ staff (i.e., coordinators, coaches, teachers). As just one example, very few of the divisions had people with the knowledge and expertise to fully interpret and use CLASS and ECERS data provided by VECF. Therefore Year 1 focused on building capacity of staff in each division to interpret and use these data most effectively.



Data sources available to VPI+ divisions are summarized briefly in Table 2 on the following page.

Table 2. Data Available to Divisions in VPI+

	Assessment Name	Description	Primary Use(s)	
			Formative	Summative and/ or Evaluation
Teacher collected and reported data	Teaching Strategies GOLD [®] (TS GOLD)	Whole-child, observational, authentic assessment collected by teachers in the areas of Language, Cognition and General Knowledge including Approaches Toward Learning, Mathematics, Social-Emotional, and Physical domains.	X	
	Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening for Preschoolers (PALS-PreK)	Teacher completed direct assessment of early literacy development.	X	X
	Teacher-Child Rating Scale – 2 (TCRS-2)	A teacher-report measure of children’s behavior and skills that assesses task orientation, assertiveness, peer social skills, and behavior control.		X
	Motor Development	Teachers were asked to rate children’s gross and fine motor development skills (holding a pencil, running, jumping, kicking, throwing, catching, hopping, bouncing a ball) and asked to note whether a child could or could not perform these skills – yes vs no.		X
Direct assessments conducted by evaluators	Woodcock-Johnson Applied Problems Subtest (WJ-AP)	The Applied Problems subtest is a widely used norm-referenced measure of a limited number of early math skills (e.g., counting, number sense).		X
	Dimensional Change Card Sort (DCCS)	This direct assessment measures children’s cognitive flexibility by asking them to sort picture cards in three phases of increasing difficulty.		X
	Head-Toes-Knees-Shoulders (HTKS)	The HTKS task requires children to play a game in which they must do the opposite of what the assessor asks. The task has three parts, and children must demonstrate a certain number of items correct in each part to continue the task.		X
Classroom Observations	Classroom Assessment Scoring System [®] (CLASS); Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale-Revised [®] (ECERS-R)	Observed classroom quality data in the areas of teacher-child interactions and learning environments, aligned with Virginia’s Quality Rating and Improvement System	X	X
Family Survey	VDOE developed survey	Family survey data at the division and state levels on comprehensive services and satisfaction with program.	X	
Other	SRI Formative Data	Division and state-level data on <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enrollment and access (fall) • Program implementation and quality (fall) • Training and technical assistance provided • Professional development /coaching received (includes coaching log data) • Perceived facilitators and barriers to implementation • Teacher background, beliefs, practices (spring) 	X	

CASTL's Role

CASTL is focused on ensuring that VPI+ data is being used to inform ongoing improvement at every level (classroom, program, state). A major focus in Year 1 was ensuring that all VPI+ and affiliated school staff understood the purpose of each data source and had the information needed to interpret its meaning in actionable ways.

One of the primary ways in which CASTL focused division attention on data and helped to make data more useful during Year 1 was through the Leadership Academies held in early 2016. Teams from each division included VPI+ coordinators, coaches and family engagement coordinators. Some divisions brought division administrators and other VPI+ staff. At these 2-day meetings, teams viewed division-level data across a number of different areas and used it to inform the creation of Continuous Improvement Plans (CIPs) with four broad goals – two focused on areas of school readiness for young children, one focused on supporting children's successful transition to kindergarten, and one focused on sustaining the work and resources of VPI+ after the anticipated termination of federal funding.

In the summer division visits, CASTL staff met with teams from each division to provide individualized support around interpretation and use of Year 1 data, with a focus on updating CIP plans as needed based on the new data.

Finally, CASTL consulted with key VPI+ partners to ensure data was being delivered to divisions in ways that made it most actionable.

VPI+ Successes

Divisions had access to rich data to inform ongoing improvement efforts.

PALS Pre-K data has been available for years in VPI programs and this has been instrumental in enhancing the quality of early literacy instruction across the Commonwealth. But we know that effective preschool programs focus on much more than literacy. VPI+ divisions now have much richer data sources to evaluate the success of their program across school readiness domains, as well as classroom observational data that can directly inform professional development efforts. The effective use of these data over the next three years will be instrumental in ensuring the success of the VPI+ initiative.

Divisions demonstrated great positive energy around data use.

In the fall of 2015, as many elements of VPI+ were getting off the ground, some VPI+ coordinators reported concerns about the amount of data being collected. However, during CASTL's year-end visits to each division, all coordinators and many other staff articulated how helpful these data were to their understanding of the impacts of their program. Within many divisions there were staff members with deep knowledge and experience in using data who helped lead discussions about the implications of data. In divisions with less expertise in this area, VPI+ staff demonstrated openness to learning new methods for interpreting and using data.

Divisions started building local capacity to interpret and use CLASS data.

All divisions received detailed reports on the quality of teacher-child interactions in each of their "new" classrooms based on VECF's CLASS observations. In the fall of 2015 few coordinators or coaches were familiar enough with the CLASS to fully utilize these data. Over the course of the year, however, knowledge and

expertise on CLASS increased in every division. During the summer of 2016, VECF provided several 2-day CLASS Observer Trainings around the state, helping to expand the CLASS knowledge of many coaches, coordinators, and administrators.

Areas for Growth

Data need to be provided in ways that best facilitate effective use.

The VPI+ Implementation team can continue to refine the ways in which data are shared to make them most useful to divisions. The Spring Summative Reports to divisions were very helpful in supporting them to analyze their successes and challenges in Year 1. However it was hard for some divisions to use the reports to get an overview of how students in subgroups were doing across areas assessed. Many divisions also had questions about the implications of some elements of the data collected by SRI (e.g., the Dimensional Change Card Sort task) with which they were less familiar.

All VPI+ partners need to be clear on which data is being used for what purpose.

With so much data being collected, it is important to share an understanding of the purpose of each data source. The biggest point of confusion in Year 1 was in relation to the extent to which the data collected by SRI on student outcomes was for summative or formative purposes. Divisions also struggled to interpret these SRI data in relation to their GOLD data, which sometimes conveyed different messages about how students were doing.

VPI+ is missing information on success in supporting students' early language development, a critical school readiness skill.

Due to the confines of the initial evaluation plans, Year 1 did not include any direct assessments on children's development of language skills such as vocabulary knowledge and oral expression. Teachers did complete formative assessments on language using GOLD. However, having a direct assessment of language would be a significant improvement to the VPI+ project, particularly given that seven of the 11 school divisions have decided to focus on language as a part of their Continuous Improvement Plans. At the state level, these data would be a very important indicator of the success of the program, as gains in early language skills are highly predictive of third grade reading skills.

Recommendations and VPI+ Implementation Team Supports

Based on these observations we suggest that:

- **Divisions use data to inform the ongoing implementation and refinement of their Continuous Improvement Plans.**
 - ➔ *Implementation Team Recommendations:* CASTL will consult with divisions on their CIPs throughout the fall and use time in Leadership Academies in early 2017 to support divisions in these efforts. CASTL will also share best practices in data use across divisions.
- **VPI+ Implementation Team members continue to refine reports in ways that facilitate use.**
 - ➔ *Implementation Team Recommendations:* CASTL will share suggestions from divisions that arose during our summer 2016 visits with SRI, VECF, and VDOE and be available for continued consultation on revisions to these reports. In particular producing sub-group reports across outcomes would facilitate sub-group analysis.
- **Each division shares key Year 1 data with local stakeholders.** Teachers, parents, division leadership, and the local communities are invested in the success of the VPI+ initiative. It will be important for each VPI+ division to share data on VPI+ successes and areas of focus as one way to build buy-in for ongoing investments in early learning.
 - ➔ *Implementation Team Recommendations:* CASTL will facilitate a session at the September 20th VPI+ Implementation Team meeting to support divisions in sharing out Year 1 data to community stakeholders. CASTL also plans to share what is going well with data use across the state in Leadership Academies in winter 2017.

LEADERSHIP

Year 1 Activities

The success of VPI+ depends in large part on leadership. Effective leaders help ensure that the structures and resources are in place to create and sustain effective practice at all levels. Many divisions had new leaders join their VPI or preschool teams as VPI+ coordinators. Other divisions had existing leadership take ownership of the VPI+ initiative. Across VPI+ divisions, these leaders worked to ensure that the new funds were used in ways that had the strongest impact on children's development and learning.

Building and supporting effective teams was an important leadership task in Year 1. In most divisions, these teams consisted of VPI+ coordinators, coaches, and family engagement coordinators. In smaller divisions, one individual served multiple roles. Some larger divisions had additional team members supporting VPI+. Teams that had worked together for longer periods were ready to hit the ground running, while other teams took some time to develop the relationships and structures needed to support a complicated new initiative. However, as we worked with VPI+ divisions across the year, we saw clear evidence that teams were coming together to help best support the teachers, families, and children in their divisions.

It is critical for all VPI+ teams to have a strong improvement orientation as they work to use data to refine and improve the program in coming years. If leadership adopts a compliance mindset, then it is likely that other members of their team will do so as well and thus miss important opportunities



to improve the impact of the program on children and families in their communities. In Year 1, all VPI+ divisions worked to develop and refine Continuous Improvement Plans to help ensure they were using improvement orientations in their daily work. These CIPs helped to focus the divisions on the areas of greatest importance and set clear targets for success. CASTL will continue to support divisions in using CIPs in coming years.

CASTL's Role

CASTL has supported school division leadership through trainings and consultation in Year 1. School division VPI+ coordinators received approximately 26 hours of CASTL support in the form of regular calls, Leadership Academies, and webinars.

Ten of the 11 school divisions sent teams to CASTL organized Leadership Academies. At the academies, VPI+ coordinators, coaches, and family engagement coordinators came together for two days to begin the process of creating Continuous Improvement Plans for their divisions, a process that involved them taking a careful look at the data from their division to make focused decisions about where to invest their energy in the coming years.

During the summer of 2016, CASTL visited each school division to examine Year 1 data and refine their CIP plans.

Another key element to the success of VPI+ is the extent to which the VPI+ teams are engaged with the larger leadership teams within their school divisions. Making sure that the preschool program is an integrated part of the larger school division structures is important to its long-term sustainability and effectiveness. During our multiple visits and contacts with divisions across Year 1, we saw significant variability in the degree to which VPI+ was integrated into broader K-12 systems. In some divisions, VPI+ teams were working closely with building and division-level administrators. Principals learned more about the preschoolers in their schools and how they can best support their preschool teachers. Division administrators helped to reduce barriers that interfered with effective early childhood teaching practice. In other divisions, the VPI+ team was less connected to the larger school system, indicating a need for greater integration in coming years.

VPI+ Successes

VPI+ teams worked together to set ambitious goals, create detailed plans for achieving those goals, and identify clear metrics to help them know if they have succeeded.

By focusing on a few key goals in the coming year, VPI+ teams in each division have strived to align resources and efforts in ways that will best support teachers, families, and children in their programs. There was a clear sense by the end of Year 1 that most divisions had put many of the foundational pieces in place so that Year 2 efforts could focus on working together to achieve the ambitious goals they set for themselves in their CIPs. A sampling of division goals is on the following page.

School Readiness Goals:

- VPI+ will enhance its educational services to ensure that all children entering kindergarten have the foundational language skills they need to succeed. (Chesterfield)
- VPI+ will enhance its educational services to ensure that all children entering kindergarten have the foundational math skills they need to succeed. (Brunswick)
- All four-year-old children will enter kindergarten with age appropriate executive function skills. (Fairfax)
- VPI+ will enhance children's vocabulary, problem solving and general knowledge through math activities and interactions. (Giles)
- PCPS will enhance its support services to improve student ability to regulate social-emotional behaviors. (Petersburg)

Transition Goals:

- All four-year-old children will have a successful transition to kindergarten. (Fairfax)
- Program will ensure that every child has the skills and supports necessary to succeed during their transition to kindergarten. (Henrico)
- Children will make connections and use classification skills in the area of mathematics. (Richmond)

Sustainability Goals:

- The program will continue providing comprehensive services to preschool students and families beyond the current grant period of funding. (*Most divisions worded the sustainability goal the same way*)
- VPI+ classrooms will continue to operate after Year 4 and offer comprehensive services to students and their families. (Winchester)

Divisions began planning for how to sustain VPI+ programing at the end of the federal grant.

Several school divisions reported they have strong division and community support for continuing VPI+ after the federal funding ends. Some suggested they will use Title 1 funds for this purpose while others say they have yet to work out details but have support for continuation of the program from top-level division administrators.

A growing learning community was initiated, in which best practices in preschool education were shared across the 11 school divisions.

Most divisions acknowledged that, prior to VPI+, they rarely communicated with other divisions about their programs. In just one year, a dynamic learning community has begun to emerge among knowledgeable and talented preschool leaders across the state. VPI+ teams came together at VDOE-hosted VPI+ Implementation Team Meetings in September 2015 and June

2016, as well as during several CASTL trainings throughout the year. This is an area for continued growth in years to come, and it will be important to find ways to continue to foster the diffusion of knowledge being generated through VPI+ across the 11 school divisions and beyond.

Areas for Growth

Many building administrators could benefit from additional engagement in VPI+ and training in the latest science on teaching in early childhood.

During our many contacts with divisions (i.e., site visits, Leadership academies, support calls) most divisions' VPI+ staff communicated a need for deeper engagement with building administrators. Although the majority VPI+ classrooms are housed in elementary school buildings, many are viewed as somewhat separate from the daily activities of the school. In addition, teachers reported that they often got contrasting feedback from their VPI+ coach and building administrators. Often, building administrators were expecting to see more direct and whole group instruction than is developmentally appropriate for 4-year olds. Teachers also reported that some principals seemed primarily focused on early literacy and did not recognize the importance of other school readiness skills. There is a clear need in many divisions for principals to demonstrate a greater knowledge of the latest science on effective preschool instruction. Building strong partnerships between VPI+ and elementary school building administrators will be important to the long-term sustainability of the program.

There was less structured support for family engagement coordinators in Year 1, and many divisions struggled with knowing how to best support these staff.

Family engagement coordinators had access to training through general state-level meetings, regional Leadership Academies, and occasional webinars; however, the ways in which family engagement coordinators used their times and the services they provided were determined by the school divisions. Local capacity for guiding family engagement coordinators most effectively varied widely. In some divisions, particularly those with a history of Head Start programs, family engagement coordinators were able to leverage existing resources to help provide specific guidance on activities and procedures to engage families. This was more challenging in many other divisions. In division visits, many division coordinators said they wanted more clarity about what was expected as well as access to more resources and training for their family engagement staff.

Few divisions had clearly aligned plans for preschool to third grade.

During leadership academies all divisions were asked to write plans related to kindergarten transition and preschool to third grade alignment. Most divisions reported that they did some

transition activities but that preschool to third alignment had not been a focus in their divisions. They discussed challenges such as a lack of cohesion between the curriculum, classroom experiences, and expectations of their VPI+ program with their K-3 classrooms. Getting division-wide buy-in for the importance of preschool to third alignment will be an important task in coming years in many VPI+ communities.

Some divisions were very concerned about the sustainability of the VPI+ program after the end of federal funding.

Divisions varied in their optimism about sustainability. Many reported that they felt they could get funding to maintain the additional slots for children but uncertain if they would be able to maintain the quality enhancements such as dedicated coaches, family engagement coordinators, and comprehensive services.

Recommendations and VPI+ Implementation Team Supports

Based on these observations we suggest that:

- **VPI+ teams continue to work closely together to meet the ambitious goals they have set.**
 - ➔ *Implementation Team Recommendations:* CASTL will continue to support divisions to work effectively as a team in order to make decisions, plan and implement practice. Effective teamwork was one area of focus in the leadership academies in Year 1, and CASTL will continue to refine that focus to help divisions work most effectively and efficiently in the future.
- **Divisions develop plans for strong collaborations with building administrators.** Most divisions reported that they had at least 1 or 2 principals who were fully supportive and engaged with their preschool classrooms. It would be helpful to include these administrators in Year 2 VPI+ activities, such as Leadership Academies or CASTL summer consultation visits.
 - ➔ *Implementation Team Recommendations:* CASTL will investigate opportunities for additional training and support for building administrators on best practices in early childhood education.
- **VPI+ teams work with division administrators on preschool to third grade implementation plans.**
 - ➔ *Implementation Team Recommendations:* CASTL will examine best-practice models for preschool to third grade implementation across the Commonwealth and across the

country and look to provide opportunities for training and technical assistance in this area in the coming years.

- **Family engagement coordinators have additional supports and guidance on best practices.**

➔ *Implementation Team Recommendations:* VDOE has already been working to provide additional supports in Year 2, including a meeting in September for family engagement coordinators and VPI+ coordinators focused on this topic. CASTL also included resources for family engagement coordinators on the new VPI+ website.

- **Divisions receive additional support in building out sustainability plans.**

➔ *Implementation Team Recommendations:* CASTL will work with other VPI+ implementation partners to provide individualized support to divisions around sustainability. In some divisions there is a clear need to work to influence key decision makers, while other divisions could use assistance in different approaches to financing preschool (e.g., use of Title 1 funds or collaborations with Head Start). This will be a focus of the Year 2 CASTL Leadership Academies.

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APPENDICES

Summary of the CLASS Pre-K tool

Summary of ECERS-R tool

Appendix A

Summary of the CLASS Pre-K tool

(modified from *Improving Teacher-Child Interactions: Using the CLASS in Head Start Preschool Programs*, accessed at: <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/teaching/docs/using-the-class.pdf>)

Domain	Dimension	Description
Emotional Support	Positive Climate	Considers the comfort, warmth, and respect displayed in teachers' and students' interactions with one another and the degree to which they display enjoyment during learning activities.
	Negative Climate	Reflects the level of expressed negativity such as anger, hostility, or aggression demonstrated by teachers and/or children.
	Teacher Sensitivity	Encompasses teachers' awareness of and responsivity to students' individual academic and social-emotional needs.
	Regard for Student Perspectives	The degree to which the teachers' interactions with students emphasize students' interests and ideas and promote child autonomy rather than being very teacher-directed.
Classroom Organization	Behavior Management	Encompasses teachers' use of effective methods to prevent and redirect misbehavior by communicating clear behavioral expectations and minimizing time spent reacting to behavioral issues.
	Productivity	Considers how well teachers manage instructional time, transitions, and routines so that students have maximal opportunities to learn.
	Instructional Learning Formats	The degree to which teachers maximize students' engagement by providing clear learning objectives, interesting materials, and facilitation.
Instructional Support	Concept Development	The degree to which instructional discussions and activities promote students' higher-order thinking skills versus rote learning.
	Quality of Feedback	Involves how teachers provide feedback focused on expanding children's learning and understanding versus correctness.
	Language Modeling	Involves teachers using language-facilitation techniques including: self-and parallel talk, open-ended questions, repetition and extension, and use of advanced vocabulary.

Appendix B

Summary of the ECERS-R tool

(modified from the *Virginia Quality Level 3 Self-Study: ECERS-R*, July 2015)

Subscale	Item	Description
Language-Reasoning	Books and Pictures	Children have access to explore a wide variety of books. Teachers read aloud during planned story time and spontaneously (e.g., in centers).
	Encouraging Children to Communicate	Teachers support children as they acquire and practice language and provide materials that facilitate communication.
	Using Language to Develop Reasoning Skills	Teachers talk with children about logical relationships (same/different) and introduce concepts using concrete experiences and objects.
	Informal Use of Language	Teachers encourage and engage in back-and-forth conversations throughout the day, including routines/transitions.
Activities	Fine Motor	Children have access to many materials that stimulate fine motor skills and a minimal ¹ -substantial ² portion of the day to freely explore them.
	Art	Children have free access to many art materials and art activities and a minimal-substantial portion of the day to freely explore them.
	Music/Movement	Children have access to music materials in the classroom, and a minimal-substantial portion of the day to freely explore them.
	Blocks	Children have access to many blocks and accessories in the classroom, and a minimal-substantial portion of the day to freely explore them. Sufficient materials and a well-organized space are provided to facilitate play for small groups of children.
	Sand/Water	Children have access to sand and/or water play as a regular part of their program and a variety of toys to facilitate sensory play.
	Dramatic Play	Children have access to many dramatic play materials and a minimal-substantial portion of the day to freely explore them.
	Nature/Science	Children have access to many nature/science materials in the classroom, and a minimal-substantial portion of the day to freely explore them.
	Math/Number	Children have access to many math/science materials in the classroom, and a minimal-substantial portion of the day to freely explore them.
	Use of TV, Video, and/or Computers	Children have limited access to technology materials, with only developmentally appropriate technology provided (preferably with adult facilitation).
	Promoting Acceptance of Diversity	Classroom materials show non-stereotyping displays of diversity across racial, cultural, abilities, and/or gender groups.

¹ Minimal portion of the day is 1 hour for an 8-hour program, 45 minutes for a 6-hour program

² Substantial portion of the day is 1/3 of the day, or 2 hours 40 minutes for an 8-hour program, 2 hours for a 6-hour

² Substantial portion of the day is 1/3 of the day, or 2 hours 40 minutes for an 8-hour program, 2 hours for a 6-hour program

Subscale	Item	Description
Interaction	Supervision of Gross Motor Activities	Teachers monitor and supervise effectively to protect children's safety during gross motor activities (e.g., outdoors). Teachers have positive interactions with children during gross motor activities.
	General Supervision of Children	Teachers monitor and supervise effectively to protect children's safety during activities other than gross motor (e.g., bathroom). Teachers monitor proactively for behavior problems.
	Discipline	Teachers guide behavior through clear age-appropriate expectations, simple, consistent rules, and supportive strategies to help children learn self-discipline. Proactive, non-punitive punishment is used.
	Staff-Child Interaction	Teachers interact with children in a warm, respectful way and respond sensitively to children's social-emotional needs.
	Interactions Among Children	Teachers promote positive relationships and social skills by giving children many opportunities to talk, play, and manage conflicts positively with peers.
Program Structure	Schedule	Teachers provide a consistent yet flexible routine that includes minimal-substantial portion for play, including outdoor play time, and child-led activities, with less time in whole group and minimal transitions. The daily schedule is displayed visually for children.
	Free Play	Children have at least one hour each day to freely choose materials and peers to play with. Teachers provide varied play materials and facilitate play to promote positive peer interactions and social skills.
	Group Time	Group times are relatively short and appropriate for the children in the group to promote child engagement and reduce need for corrections. Alternative activities are provided for individual children as needed.
	Provisions for Children with Disabilities	Teachers involve children with disabilities in group activities with their peers and make modifications to the environment, program, or schedule as needed to meet children's needs.