HB/SB 30
Item #145
14. Virginia Preschool Initiative Payments

a.1) It is the intent of the General Assembly that a payment estimated at $95,094,542 the first year and $104,837,028 the second year from the general fund shall be disbursed by the Department of Education to schools and community-based organizations to provide quality preschool programs for at-risk four-year-olds who are residents of Virginia and unserved by Head Start program funding and for at-risk five-year-olds who are not eligible to attend kindergarten. Of this amount, $8,649,934 the first year is provided to increase the per pupil amount to $6,959, and $18,200,973 the second year is provided to increase the per pupil amount to $7,655.

2) These state funds and required local matching funds shall be used to provide programs for at-risk four-year-old children, which include quality preschool education, health services, social services, parental involvement and transportation. It shall be the policy of the Commonwealth that state funds and required local matching funds for the Virginia Preschool Initiative not be used for capital outlay. Programs must provide full-day or half-day and, at least, school-year services.

3) The Department of Education shall establish academic standards that are in accordance with appropriate preparation for students to be ready to successfully enter kindergarten. These standards shall be established in such a manner as to be measurable for student achievement and success. Students shall be required to be evaluated in the fall and in the spring by each participating school division and the school divisions must certify that the Virginia Preschool Initiative program follows the established standards in order to receive the funding for quality preschool education and criteria for the service components. Such standards shall align with the Virginia Standards of Learning for Kindergarten.

4) a) Grants shall be distributed based on an allocation formula providing the state share of a $6,959 per pupil grant in the first year and a $7,655 per pupil grant in the second year for 100 percent of the unserved at-risk four-year-olds in each locality for a full-day program. The number of unserved at-risk four-year-olds in each locality shall be based on the projected number of kindergarten students, updated once each biennium for the Governor’s introduced biennial budget. Grants to half-day programs shall be funded based on the state share of $3,480 in the first year and $3,828 in the second year per unserved at-risk four-year-old in each locality.
b) Out of this appropriation, $2,837,266 the first year and $6,117,049 the second year from the general fund is provided to serve at-risk three-year-olds who are residents of Virginia and unserved by Head Start funding on a pilot basis using criteria as determined by the Department of Education. Localities may apply to participate in the pilot by May 15 each year and shall be selected on a competitive basis. Pilot providers shall be required to: (i) demonstrate broad stakeholder support, (ii) track outcomes for participating children, (iii) demonstrate how they will maximize federal and state funds to preserve existing birth to five slots, (iv) support inclusive practices of children with identified special needs, and (v) collaborate among the school division, local department of social services, programs accepting child care subsidy payments, and providers for Head Start, private child care, and early childhood special education and early intervention programs. In addition, localities shall be selected using other criteria that include prioritizing: (i) communities with limited child care options; (ii) programs serving children in private, mixed-delivery settings; or (iii) communities that demonstrate full support of public and private providers. Grants shall be distributed based on an allocation formula providing the state share of a $6,959 per pupil grant in the first year, and a $7,655 per pupil grant in the second year. Grants to half-day programs shall be funded based on the state share of $3,480 in the first year, and $3,828 in the second year.

c) Full-day programs shall operate for a minimum of five and one-half instructional hours, excluding breaks for meals, and half-day programs shall operate for a minimum of three hours of classroom instructional time per day, excluding breaks for lunch. Virginia Preschool Initiative programs may include unstructured recreational time that is intended to develop teamwork, social skills, and overall physical fitness in any calculation of total instructional time, provided that such unstructured recreational time does not exceed 15 percent of total instructional time or teaching hours. No additional state funding is provided for programs operating greater than three hours per day but less than five and one-half hours per day. In determining the state and local shares of funding, the composite index of local ability-to-pay is capped at 0.5000.

d) For new programs in the first year of implementation only, programs operating less than a full school year shall receive state funds on a fractional basis determined by the prorata portion of a school year program provided. In determining the prorated state funds to be received, a school year shall be 180 days or 990 teaching hours.

b.1) Any locality that desires to participate in this grant program must submit a proposal through its chief administrator (county administrator or city manager) by May 15 of each year. The chief administrator, in conjunction with the school superintendent, shall
identify a lead agency for this program within the locality. The lead agency shall be responsible for developing a local plan for the delivery of quality preschool services to at-risk children, which demonstrates the coordination of resources and the combination of funding streams in an effort to serve the greatest number of at-risk four-year-old children. Starting in fiscal year 2021, localities may apply for additional funds to serve at-risk three-year-old children on a pilot basis.

2) The proposal must demonstrate coordination with all parties necessary for the successful delivery of comprehensive services, including the schools, child care providers, local social services agency, Head Start, local health department, and other groups identified by the lead agency. The proposal must identify which entities were consulted and how the locality will ensure that federal funds are preserved and maximized. The proposal must also demonstrate a plan for supporting inclusive practices for children with identified special needs.

3) A local match, based on the composite index of local ability-to-pay, shall be required. For purposes of meeting the local match, localities may use local expenditures for existing qualifying programs, however, at least fifty percent of the local match will be cash and no more than fifty percent will be in-kind. In-kind contributions are defined as cash outlays that are made by the locality that benefit the program but are not directly charged to the program. The value of fixed assets cannot be considered as an in-kind contribution. Philanthropic or other private funds may be contributed to the locality to be appropriated in their local budget and then utilized as local match. Localities shall also continue to pursue and coordinate other funding sources, including child care subsidies. Funds received through this program must be used to supplement, not supplant, any funds currently provided for programs within the locality. However, in the event a locality is unable to continue the previous level of support to programs for at-risk four-year-olds from Title I of the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), the state and local funds provided in this grants program may be used to continue services to these Title I students. Such inability may occur due to adjustments to the allocation formula in the reauthorization of ESEA as the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015, or due to a percentage reduction in a locality's Title I allocation in a particular year. Any locality so affected shall provide written evidence to the Superintendent of Public Instruction and request his approval to continue the services to Title I students.

c. Local plans must provide clear methods of service coordination for the purpose of reducing the per child cost for the service, increasing the number of at-risk children served and/or extending services for the entire year. Examples of these include:
1) "Wraparound Services" -- methods for combining funds such as child care subsidy dollars administered by local social service agencies with dollars for quality preschool education programs.

2) "Wrap-out Services" - methods for using grant funds to purchase quality preschool services to at-risk four-year-old children through an existing child care setting by purchasing comprehensive services within a setting which currently provides quality preschool education.

3) "Expansion of Service" - methods for using grant funds to purchase slots within existing programs, such as Head Start, which provides comprehensive services to at-risk three- and four-year-old children.

d.1) Local plans must indicate the number of at-risk four-year-old children to be served, and the eligibility criteria for participation in this program shall be consistent with the economic and educational risk factors stated in the 2015-2016 programs guidelines that are specific to: (i) family income at or below 200 percent of federal poverty guidelines, (ii) homelessness, (iii) student's parents or guardians are school dropouts, or (iv) family income is above 200 percent but at or below 350 percent of federal poverty guidelines in the case of students with special needs or disabilities. Up to 15 percent of a division's slots may be filled based on locally established eligibility criteria so as to meet the unique needs of at-risk children in the community. If applicable, local plans must also indicate the number of at-risk three-year-old children to be served using the same eligibility criteria listed above. Localities that can demonstrate that more than 15 percent of slots are needed to meet the needs of at-risk children in their community may apply for a waiver from the Superintendent of Public Instruction to use a larger percentage of their slots. Localities must demonstrate that increasing eligibility will enable the maximization of federal funds and will not have a negative impact on access for other individuals currently being served.

2) The Department of Education is directed to compile from each school division the aggregated information as to the number of enrolled students whose families are (i) at or below 130 percent of poverty, (ii) above 130 percent but at or below 200 percent of poverty, (iii) above 200 percent but at or below 350 percent of poverty, and (iv) above 350 percent of poverty. The Department shall report this information annually, after the application and fall participation reports are submitted to the Department from the school divisions, to the Chairmen of House Appropriations and Senate Finance Committees. In addition, the Department will post and maintain the summary information by division on the Department's website in keeping with current student privacy policies.
e.1) The Department of Education shall provide technical assistance for the administration of this grant program to provide assistance to localities in developing a comprehensive, coordinated, quality preschool program that prepares all participants for kindergarten.

2) The Department shall provide interested localities with information on models for service delivery, methods of coordinating funding streams, such as funds to match federal IV-A child care dollars, to maximize funding without supplanting existing sources of funding for the provision of services to at-risk three- and four-year-old children. A priority for technical assistance in the design of programs shall be given to localities where the majority of the at-risk three- and four-year-old population is currently unserved.

f. The Department of Education shall include in the program's application package specific information regarding the potential availability of funding for supplemental grants that may be used for one-time expenses, other than capital, related to start-up or expansion of programs, with priority given to proposals for expanding the use of partnerships with either nonprofit or for-profit providers. Furthermore, the Department is mandated to communicate to all eligible school divisions the remaining available balances in the program's adopted budget, after the fall participation reports have been submitted and finalized for such grants.

g. Out of this appropriation, $3,982,079 the first year and $3,285,258 the second year from the general fund is provided to support Virginia Preschool Initiative slots to serve children on wait lists. In each year, unused grants distributed as provided in paragraph C.14.a.4. of this Item shall be redistributed based on guidelines established by the Department of Education subject to the appropriation available for this purpose. Such guidelines shall provide the criteria used to redistribute grants and provide for the notification of grants redistribution to programs no later than July 1 of each year. The Department shall conduct this process annually, and the redistribution shall not affect the allocation formula for the subsequent year. The Department of Education shall submit a comprehensive report, detailing, but not limited to, the number of calculated slots and funding allocated to each school division, the number of calculated slots filled by each school division, supplemental grants requested and awarded by each school division, the number of waiting list slots requested by each school division, the number of waiting list slots offered to each school division, the number of waiting list slots filled by each school division, and the funding allocated for the filled waiting list slots by each school division
to the Chairmen of House Appropriations and Senate Finance Committees no later than December 31 each year.

h. Out of this appropriation, $5,020,000 the first year and $5,005,000 the second year from the general fund is provided to support an add-on grant of $2,500 per child for approximately 2,000 children to incentivize mixed-delivery of services through private providers. These add-on grants are intended to provide funds to minimize the difference between the amount of the per-pupil grant allocation and the per-pupil cost to serve a child in a community-based or private provider setting. Recipients of the add-on grants will be encouraged to support classrooms that support inclusive practices of children with special needs. Localities shall indicate in their plans submitted pursuant to C.14.b.1 of this Item how many of their Virginia Preschool Initiative slots will be provided in community-based or private provider settings to receive the add-on grant.

i. The Department of Education shall develop a plan to determine, recognize, and biennially rebenchmark the per-student funding amount of the Virginia Preschool Initiative, similar to the current formula supporting public K-12 education in Virginia. In developing such plan, the Department shall (i) identify needs to implement such plan, including reporting from local school divisions, (ii) include relevant stakeholders, including school division finance staff and local Virginia Preschool Initiative administrators, (iii) identify any legislative or Appropriation Act amendments necessary for implementation, and (iv) plan for full implementation to benchmark the per-student funding amount of the Virginia Preschool Initiative.

j. Out of this appropriation, $10,000,000 the first year and $10,000,000 the second year from the general fund is provided to expand a pilot initiative to support public-private delivery of pre-kindergarten services for at least 1,000 at-risk three- and four-year-old children each year. It shall be the policy of the Commonwealth that state funds and required local matching funds for the Virginia Preschool Initiative not be used for capital outlay. Programs must provide full-day or half-day and, at least, school-year services.

1) The Department of Education shall establish academic standards that are in accordance with appropriate preparation for students to be ready to successfully enter kindergarten. These standards shall be established in such a manner as to be measurable for student achievement and success. Students shall be required to be evaluated in the fall and in the spring by each participating provider and grantees must certify that the Virginia Preschool Initiative program follows the established standards in order to receive the funding for quality preschool education and criteria for the service components. Such standards shall align with the Virginia Standards of Learning for Kindergarten.
2) The Department of Education shall require and ensure that all participating classrooms have the quality of their teacher-child interactions assessed through a rigorous and research-based observation instrument at least once every two years.

3) Any locality that desires to participate in this grant program must submit a proposal each year to the Virginia Early Childhood Foundation. For the first year, the application must be submitted by August 15. For subsequent years, the application must be submitted by May 15 to align with the Virginia Preschool Initiative timeline. Each application shall identify a lead agency for this program within the locality. The lead agency shall be responsible for developing a local plan for the delivery of quality preschool services to at-risk three- and four-year-old children in private settings that demonstrates the coordination of resources and the combination of funding streams in an effort to serve the greatest number of at-risk children.

4) The proposal must demonstrate coordination with all parties necessary for the successful delivery of comprehensive services, including schools, child care providers, local social services agency, Head Start, local health department, and other groups identified by the lead agency. The proposal must also demonstrate a plan for supporting inclusive practices for children with identified special needs.

5) Local plans must indicate the number of at-risk three- and four-year-old children to be served, and the eligibility criteria for participation in this program shall be consistent with the economic and educational risk factors stated in the current program guidelines that are specific to: (i) family income at or below 200 percent of federal poverty guidelines, (ii) homelessness, (iii) student’s parents or guardians are school dropouts, or (iv) family income is above 200 percent but at or below 350 percent of federal poverty guidelines in the case of students with special needs or disabilities. Up to 15 percent of slots may be filled based on locally established eligibility criteria so as to meet the unique needs of at-risk children in the community.

6) Notwithstanding any provisions of § 22.1-299, Code of Virginia, and in order to achieve the priorities of the Joint Subcommittee on Virginia Preschool Initiative for exploring the feasibility of and barriers to mixed delivery preschool systems in Virginia, recipients of a Mixed-Delivery Preschool grant shall be provided maximum flexibility within their respective pilot initiative in order to fully implement the associated goals and objectives of the pilot. Recipients of a Mixed-Delivery Preschool grant and divisions participating in such grant pilot activities shall be exempted from all regulatory and
statutory provisions related to teacher licensure requirements and qualifications when paid by public funds within the confines of the Mixed-Delivery Preschool pilot initiative.

k. Out of this appropriation, $6,419,996 the first year and $7,062,088 the second year from the general fund is provided to support increased Virginia Preschool Initiative teacher to student ratios and class sizes, as follows:

1) Any classroom that exceeds benchmarks set by the Board of Education shall be staffed as follows: (i) one teacher shall be provided for any class of ten students or less; (ii) if the enrollment in any class exceeds ten students but does not exceed 20, a full-time teacher's aide shall be assigned to the class; and (iii) the maximum class size shall be 20 students.

2) All other classrooms shall be staffed as follows: (i) one teacher shall be employed for any class of nine students or less; (ii) if the enrollment in any class exceeds nine students but does not exceed 18, a full-time teacher's aide shall be assigned to the class; and (iii) the maximum class size shall be 18 students.

l. Out of this appropriation, $306,100 the first year and $306,100 the second year from the general fund is allocated for the Department of Education to provide grants of no more than $30,000 each for local school divisions that have applied for such funds for the sole purpose of providing financial incentives to provisionally licensed teachers teaching students enrolled in the Virginia Preschool Initiative and who are actively engaged in coursework and professional development, toward achieving the required degree and license that satisfy the licensure requirements reflected in § 22.1-299, Code of Virginia. School divisions must submit applications to the Department of Education by December 1 of each year. Priority for awarding grants shall be given to hard-to-staff schools and schools with the highest number of provisionally licensed teachers teaching students enrolled in the Virginia Preschool Initiative. The Department of Education shall develop the application process to be provided to school divisions that have provisionally licensed teachers employed and are teaching students enrolled in the Virginia Preschool Initiative.