

Smart Beginnings Rappahannock Area Profile

The Need

- Almost 40% of children in Spotsylvania County and almost 30% of children in Stafford County are eligible for free or reduced lunch. Between 12 and 14% of children in these counties fell below acceptable Kindergarten Readiness levels in 2014.
- Due to the population growth in both Spotsylvania and Stafford Counties, schools are currently using all of their classrooms and are unable to accommodate additional VPI classes.
- Spotsylvania and Stafford County report that they do not have the funding in the budget to support the expansion of existing VPI slots in their school systems.
- Current VPI + programs require teachers to possess a Virginia teaching license. However, to obtain and maintain this license a teacher usually must be working in a public school. Teachers working in private programs do not have access to this license. In addition, teacher licensure does not certify the skills necessary to teach four-year-olds.
- Furthermore, traditional VPI programs operate only part of the day and do not meet the needs of parents for the length of the workday and commute.

Project Goals

- This project intends to address the issue of availability of affordable quality preschool services to low-income parents in Stafford and Spotsylvania Counties by utilizing available slots in existing licensed child care centers.
- This project will target four-year-old children of working parents that cannot afford the full cost of licensed child care and who are not currently enrolled in a Head Start or VPI program.

Project Plan

- Eighteen four-year-olds will be served each year of the grant period in two licensed child care programs, one in Stafford County and one in Spotsylvania County.
- One program will provide 9 full timeⁱ preschool slots in their traditional Junior Kindergarten classroom using a curriculum that is fully aligned with Virginia's Foundation Blocks.
- Another program will provide 9 full time preschool slots in their Montessori classroom using curriculum that is fully aligned with Virginia's Foundation Blocks.
- Teachers at both sites will participate in PD and apply to earn a micro-credential, which is part of an innovative system that allows teachers to learn about specific skills they might lack and demonstrate mastery of those skills.
- A blended funding model will be piloted in both counties, and will involve a contractual arrangement between a private child care provider and community agency.

Evaluation Plan

- CLASS and ECERS will be used as tools for the measurement of quality instruction and programming.
- The Child Observation Record (COR) will be used for assessment in the traditional classroom and Montessori anecdotal observations will be used in the Montessori classroom.
- Pre-K PALS will be administered in the fall and spring.
- Measurement of success of the teacher micro-credentialing system will be conducted by the developers of the micro-credential at University of Virginia, Curry School of Education.
- Measurement of success of the Blended Funding Tuition Model will include data on enrollment, parent surveys, and willingness of both partners to continue with the arrangement long term.

ⁱ Full time is defined as a 6 hour VPI day, Monday through Friday for 40 weeks.