Virginia's Mixed Delivery Grant Program
A RETROSPECTIVE
Children who participate in quality early childhood programs experience lifelong benefits. They do better in school overall and have healthy life outcomes (Meloy et al., 2019). Experiences and environments for young children matter, and early childhood care and education (ECCE) programs make a difference. For this reason, the state of Virginia is investing to provide high-quality early learning opportunities for every child in the state.

**WHY THE EARLY YEARS MATTER**

Virginia wants to make sure that all families with young children have access to opportunities for learning and development and that those options meet families’ needs and preferences. The Mixed Delivery program is an effective, strategic program to support academic, social, and lifelong success for all of Virginia’s children.

**VIRGINIA’S SYSTEM FAILED TO PREPARE**

55% of children from economically disadvantaged families and 66% of children with special needs

**MORE THAN 37,000 CHILDREN ENTERED VIRGINIA KINDERGARTEN UNPREPARED**

58% of Hispanic children and 53% of Black children do not have equitable opportunities “to enter school ready to meet literacy, mathematics, science, history/social science and developmental standards.”

Virginia’s Mixed Delivery Grant Program

One of the ways that Virginia can make sure that young children have a chance to attend preschool is through VECF’s Mixed Delivery program that leverages various local, state, and federal preschool funding sources to serve children under one roof or in one classroom.

Mixed Delivery grants are state funds granted to communities to provide preschool education to children in Virginia. These grants support preschool in private ECCE programs, creating more and different options for families besides school-based preschool. The Virginia Early Childhood Foundation (VECF) awards and manages these grants on behalf of the Virginia Department of Education. The grants have been made since 2016 and are awarded through a competitive application process. Community organizations serve as Mixed Delivery grantees. These grantees are well-known, trusted partners within their communities.

As part of a FY20 $85 million investment effort to support families with preschool age children, the state increased investment in Mixed Delivery and shifted the program model to focus on providing direct services, thereby increasing access to quality preschool for additional 3- and 4-year old children. This program now provides direct funding for preschool slots at diverse private and community-based programs. Mixed Delivery grantees establish partnerships with private child care providers (centers and family day homes) who then provide preschool to eligible children. Eligibility is based on the income of each family, similar to the Virginia Preschool Initiative (VPI) guidelines. With a focus on access, Mixed Delivery, using state and federal dollars, served 250 children in the fiscal year 2021, and is on track to serve more than 1,200 children in FY22, expanding the opportunity for communities to meet the needs and preferences of more families and children.

WHAT IS THE MIXED DELIVERY GRANT?

The Virginia Early Childhood Foundation and Mixed Delivery partners are led by the guiding principle that young children learn best when their health and safety needs are met and they have consistent, predictable, playful interactions with nurturing, responsive caregivers.
UNDERSTANDING PROGRESS OF THE MIXED DELIVERY GRANTEES

We asked Mixed Delivery grantees about their work, school readiness, and equity. The grantees were asked to focus their responses through the lens of the program’s five commitments:

1. ENGAGE FAMILIES
2. BUILD RELATIONSHIPS
3. INCREASE ACCESS
4. STRENGTHEN QUALITY
5. CONFRONT RACIAL INEQUITY

Grantees believe that the newly structured Mixed Delivery program is an asset, describing how the program has helped ECCE partners with economic recovery during the COVID-19 pandemic. Grantees said that there are benefits to members of the workforce (teachers/educators) and to children and families who may not have had other opportunities for in-person care and education during the COVID-19 pandemic. Grantees worked together to collect and use information to understand topics such as children’s learning, classroom environments, and financial strategies. Some communities described an increased focus on racial justice through activities such as equity training for leaders or educators.

WHERE TO GO FROM HERE?

With the expansion of a new model during a time of multiple crises—both the COVID-19 pandemic and the focus on racial justice following the murder of George Floyd—learning and recommendations for this new model are available. These recommendations can help policymakers, state leaders, and grantees and their partners consider the best ways forward. VECF and School Readiness Consulting (SRC) worked together to consider what next steps make sense. We believe these steps can help Virginia continue to increase access to preschool for all children. The key directions listed here can support progress in service of Virginia’s children, families, and communities.

As a consulting firm focused exclusively on early childhood, School Readiness Consulting partners with cities, districts, states, foundations, and nonprofits to develop and implement system-wide strategies that improve outcomes for children in school and life. SRC believes that improving early childhood and affirming the right for all children to thrive represents the greatest opportunity to create a just society.

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**ENGAGE FAMILIES**

- Develop and implement coordinated enrollment strategies to streamline access to early education programs for families.

- Engage racially, culturally and linguistically diverse families as central actors in Mixed Delivery program design, policies, implementation, and decision making, and improve outreach to families using communication vehicles and strategies that meet their needs and preferences.

**BUILD RELATIONSHIPS**

- Maximize state and federal investments to ensure Virginia has a comprehensive, sustainable public-private mixed delivery preschool system.

- Build on existing efforts to further expand shared services and formal networks to support center- and home-based private ECCE sites participating in Mixed Delivery partnerships.

- Create a refreshed name, brand, and communication strategy for the Mixed Delivery program to ensure clarity among participating ECCE sites and facilitate awareness for families.

**INCREASE ACCESS**

- Focus Mixed Delivery resources in ways that prioritize socioeconomic, racial, and linguistic diversity for the children, families, and communities being served.

- Maximize use of existing federal, state, and local funding to expand access and participation in Mixed Delivery (through technical assistance, etc.) specific to integrated financing and shared services.
**STRENGTHEN QUALITY**

- Ensure existing challenges for ECCE providers are connected by linking them to grantees for available technical assistance related to curriculum, assessment, quality supports, and other programmatic requirements.

- Continue building Mixed Delivery grantee capacity for early childhood data use, research, and evaluation to inform equitable service delivery and systems development.

**CONFRONT RACIAL INEQUITY**

- Implement equitable financing strategies through the mixed delivery program such as sliding scale that limits family tuition or co-payment to no more than a minimal percentage of their household income, use of a graduated wage early educator wage scale to guide appropriate compensation, and funding that meets the full cost of high impact services.

- Increase requirements for Mixed Delivery grantees specifically on reflecting on and dismantling racially biased and inequitable practices at the systems and policy level.
A robust, sustainable mixed delivery program is key to Virginia’s goal of increasing access to early education for Virginia’s children. Moreover, it delivers quality options across diverse settings that meet the needs and preferences of Virginia’s families while supporting children’s school readiness and well-being. This grant also supports Virginia’s small business sector and overall economy. The Mixed Delivery program is an important part of Virginia’s strategy to support all children in having a quality preschool experience.

“So many of our families before, if they felt like they couldn’t afford it, they may have ended up not accepting working full time or having to juggle and getting grandma and piecing together...This is critical for today’s working families.”

– Mixed Delivery Grantee
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