



CASE STUDY VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Early education that leads to school readiness: proven lessons for creating a strong start with high-quality preschool environments

Preschool is the building block to lasting education success, but high-need communities often lack high-quality preschool experiences that promote school readiness

CHALLENGE/GOAL

The Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) wanted to increase access to high-quality early learning environments for at risk four-year old children in high-need communities. VDOE needed to gather timely and useful information to support and improve implementation of the expanded preschool program, [Virginia Preschool Initiative Plus \(VPI+\)](#).

SOLUTION

SRI International designed and launched a four-year comprehensive evaluation of the VPI+ that unlocked key formative, summative and cost data-informed insights to support continuous improvement, accountability and decision making for delivering more effective preschool experiences.

The evaluation made a significant impact on how VDOE, its partners and the school divisions offer professional development, implement data-informed instruction, and plan for future preschool programming.



The work by SRI was instrumental in understanding the initiative's impact on the children's continued education success, as well as extracting findings to improve the program's overall approach.

Each fall and spring, SRI produced formative reports and webinars to share an in-depth understanding of the findings for VDOE and the participating school divisions. This enabled them to incorporate the insights into their strategies for enhancing the preschool learning experience.

The reports revealed valuable knowledge into the accomplishments and challenges made possible by the initiative, and offered recommendations for improving enrollment, attendance, technical assistance, director and coach training, professional development and teacher coaching. Districts also benefited from gaining insight into effective ways to structure their curriculum and assessments, access comprehensive services, and improve family engagement.

Rather than evaluating data at a single point in time, SRI measured the direct impact the initiative had on children's learning and development during the preschool year, at kindergarten entry and at the end of kindergarten and first grade, through multiple summative evaluation studies.

The findings were significantly positive and consistent with similar analyses of other high-quality preschool programs.



Children who attended VPI+ made significant gains from fall to spring across all school readiness domains: literacy, math, approaches to learning, social and emotional development. The majority of children entered kindergarten ready and a rigorous regression discontinuity design study confirmed that participation in VPI+ accelerated children's development in early literacy, math and self-regulation skills.

Finally, the evaluation also conducted a cost analysis that provided the per-child cost of implementing the VPI+ model across the 11 school divisions using existing administrative data on costs, including grant reimbursements, documentation of matching costs maintained by each division and other local administrative data on expenses not included in either of the other data sources. The financial data is being combined with the outcome data to determine the cost benefits of the initiative.

Findings about program impacts and implementation are presented in [annual reports](#).