

Virginia's Plan to Ensure High Quality Instruction in all VPI Classrooms FAQ

In response to the 2018 General Assembly, the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) created [A Plan to Ensure High-Quality Instruction in All Virginia Preschool Initiative \(VPI\) Classrooms](#). The Plan describes how Virginia will work to ensure that VPI provides a high-quality preschool experience.

The Plan calls for quality improvements in three areas:

- 1) Use of integrated, evidence-based curriculum
- 2) Assessing teacher-child interactions
- 3) Providing individualized professional development.

Using Integrated Evidence-Based Curriculum

1. *Why is selecting an evidenced-based, integrated and comprehensive curriculum so important?*

- An evidenced-based, integrated, and comprehensive curriculum, when fully implemented, is an essential tool for promoting child learning and development. A high-quality curriculum makes it easier and more efficient for teachers to engage in sensitive, responsive, and cognitively stimulating teacher-child interactions.

2. *What is the timeline for using an integrated, evidence-based and vetted curriculum?*

- Starting in 2019-2020, all participating divisions or communities must either be:
 - Using a vetted curriculum in all classrooms or
 - In the process of having their curricular materials reviewed or
 - Planning for using a vetted curriculum no later than the start of 2020-2021 school year.
- Beginning in 2020-2021, all school divisions must implement a vetted, evidence-based, integrated, and comprehensive curriculum, and describe their plan for providing curriculum aligned training and professional development for teachers.

3. *What is the process for vetting curricula?*

As requested and submitted to the 2018 General Assembly, the VDOE created [A Plan to Ensure High-Quality Instruction in All Virginia Preschool Initiative \(VPI\) Classrooms](#). In this plan, the VDOE committed to working with the Center for Advanced Study of Teaching and Learning (CASTL) at UVA to develop a process for vetting curriculum and a list of comprehensive curricula currently used in VPI classrooms.

4. *What curricula have already been vetted for use in VPI classrooms?*

- **Curricula that have been vetted for use in VPI classrooms as of April 2019:**
 - Big Day for PreK
 - Creative Curriculum
 - Frog Street
 - HighScope
 - Opening the World of Learning
 - Tools of the Mind

- Fairfax County Public Schools Pre-K curriculum
 - **Curricula currently being vetted as of April 2019:**
 - Kindercare
 - Starfall curriculum
 - STREAMin3
 - We Can Early Learning
 - School divisions may contact Cheryl Strobel (Cheryl.Strobel@doe.virginia.gov) and request a vetting of an evidenced-based, integrated, and comprehensive curriculum.
5. *How can divisions pay for the purchase of a new curriculum if needed?*
- Purchasing a curriculum has always been an allowable use of VPI state and local match funds and one that has been strongly encouraged.
 - Purchasing curriculum for VPI classrooms is an allowable use of state Textbook Funds.
 - School divisions may also partner with other federal-and state-funded programs to purchase a curriculum and curriculum-related professional development.
6. *Will Early Childhood Special Education self-contained classrooms, Title I classrooms or Head Start classrooms be required to implement an evidenced-based, integrated, and comprehensive curriculum?*
- At this time, only VPI-funded classrooms are required to ensure curricula are vetted. However, all children benefit when teachers use a quality curriculum and teachers benefit from collaborative professional development. School divisions are strongly encouraged to use a vetted curriculum in all preschool classrooms, regardless of funding source.
 - Programs are encouraged to use the same curricula across early childhood program types when possible, including ECSE, Head Start, Title I and VPI. This promotes alignment for students as they prepare to enter kindergarten.
7. *What kind of training and support is needed to implement a curriculum with high fidelity?*
- While securing an evidenced-based, integrated and comprehensive curriculum is essential, simply providing the materials is not enough to support their implementation.
 - Teachers and instructional leaders need training and ongoing support to implement all of the components of a curriculum with high fidelity. For example,
 - Teachers need access to all curriculum materials and introductory trainings,
 - Program leaders should be fully versed in the curriculum, and
 - Divisions need curriculum experts who can provide ongoing training and support.

Assessing Teacher-Child Interaction Quality - CLASS® Observations

8. *Why is assessing teacher-child interaction quality important?*
 - CLASS® observations provide critical guidance on creating supportive relationships, well-organized learning environments and cognitively-stimulating learning opportunities.
 - Through both local and external observations, pre-K classrooms are better prepared to support child learning and development. In 2019-2020, VPI programs are strongly encouraged to grow their capacity to support the use of the CLASS® tool.
9. *What is the CLASS® observation tool?*
 - The Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS®) is a validated, reliable observation tool that measures the quality of interactions between teachers and children.
 - Research indicates that children in classrooms with higher CLASS® scores show more learning and development.
 - The CLASS® is used to measure and strengthen thousands of early childhood classrooms nationwide.
 - In Virginia, the CLASS® is already used by all Head Start and VPI+ classrooms. Over 200 private and public preschool classrooms in Virginia have participated in Virginia Quality that includes CLASS® for rating teacher and child interactions.
10. *How many times will VPI classrooms be observed and rated using the CLASS tool each year?*
 - Beginning in 2018-2019, and continuing in the 2019-2020 school year, all VPI classrooms will have the quality of their teacher-child interactions assessed at least once every two years using the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS®) by external observers. [Read more in the External CLASS® Observations section]
 - Beginning in the 2019-2020 school year, VPI programs are strongly encouraged, but not required, to begin observing VPI classrooms with local CLASS® observers twice per year. [Read more in the Local CLASS® Observations section]

External CLASS® Observations

11. *When will external observations by UVA/CASTL start and be completed?*
 - The Virginia General Assembly requires that all classrooms be observed and rated by June 30, 2020.
 - Fifty VPI programs' classrooms will be observed prior to June 2019.
 - The remaining VPI programs' classrooms will be rated by external observers beginning fall of 2019 and through spring 2020.
12. *Who is doing the external CLASS® ratings?*
 - External observations will be coordinated by the Center for Advanced Study of Teaching and Learning (CASTL) at the University of Virginia (UVA). CASTL is working with highly trained, reliable CLASS® observers to conduct the observations.

13. *Who will set up the external ratings, and when will this be determined?*
- CASTL will work with VPI coordinators to schedule external observations. A list of information needed to initiate the process will be shared with VPI coordinators in advance.
14. *How big of a window will there be that the external observer could come to a VPI classroom unannounced?*
- There will be a window of 2 weeks for each classroom.
15. *Will VPI coordinators get to choose blackout dates?*
- Yes. CASTL will work with coordinators to schedule observations around a limited number of blackout dates.
16. *What will the observation protocol be for external observations?*
- External CLASS® observations will take place using the following guidelines:
 - Four 20-minute cycles
 - Any time of day (morning or afternoon)
 - No “specials,” field trips, etc.
 - Requires that lead teacher (not a short-term substitute) be present. Typically, this would be any lead teacher present in the classroom for 10 consecutive school days.
 - Additional details on protocols and procedures for CLASS® observations in Virginia is in the [Maximizing CLASS Observations Guidance](#).
17. *Can we use our Virginia Quality/QRIS observation data to ‘count’ for these external ratings?*
- Yes, CLASS® data collected by Virginia Quality in classrooms within the 2018-2020 window may be used for the VPI External Observations. This is because Virginia Quality uses reliable CLASS® observers following a procedure consistent with our external observation protocol (four 20-minute cycles, no “specials” or field trips.) Programs wishing to use Virginia Quality data should contact CASTL to discuss data sharing plans.
 - Programs wanting to use another source of external data may contact CASTL and VDOE to submit a formal request, along with documentation of observer training credentials and the observation protocol for review.
 - Additional details on protocols and procedures for using multiple sources for CLASS® observations in Virginia is in the [Maximizing CLASS Observations Guidance](#).
18. *Will all our VPI classrooms be rated—even inclusive VPI classrooms and bilingual/DLL VPI classrooms?*
- Yes. CLASS® is valid and useful across inclusive and bilingual/DLL settings. All children regardless of setting need to have access to high quality teacher-child interactions. Research has found CLASS® to be an effective teacher development and feedback tool across all early learning settings.
19. *Will Early Childhood Special Education self-contained classrooms, Title I classrooms and/or Head Start classrooms in schools receive external CLASS® observations?*
- At this time, only VPI-funded classrooms are required to be rated. However, school divisions are encouraged to build enough capacity to observe all preschool classrooms.

20. *How will data/feedback from external observations be shared?*

- Written feedback reports will be provided by CASTL directly to coordinators. It is anticipated that reports will be provided to VPI program leaders within four weeks from the date the observation occurred.

21. *What are the quality thresholds for external CLASS® observations?*

- As part of the legislative requirement establishing external CLASS® observations, the following statewide minimum acceptable thresholds for Pre-K CLASS® scores at the domain level were established:
 - Emotional Support = 5
 - Classroom Organization = 5
 - Instructional Support = 3.25

22. *Who will have access to CLASS® data and how will it be used?*

- At present, CASTL will use a data system that stores and compiles data. CASTL will assist in providing data to stakeholders in the following ways:
 - CASTL will provide VPI coordinators summary reports of the observations at the teacher-level and program-level. This pilot baseline data will provide a picture of the quality of interactions within the division. This data should be used to inform decisions on planning professional development for teachers.
 - For the state, external CLASS® observation data will be shared in aggregate form. Data will be used to understand the current quality of interactions across the state.

23. *What is considered a VPI classroom that will be observed?*

- Any classroom with one or more VPI-funded students, regardless of public or private setting, is a VPI classroom and will be observed and rated.

Local CLASS® Observations

24. *Are VPI Classrooms required to be rated by local CLASS® observers in 2019-2020?*

- VPI programs are strongly encouraged, but not required, to begin observing VPI classrooms with local CLASS® observers during the 2019-2020 school year.
- The VDOE will continue to work with local communities to meet the expectations set forth in the VPI Plan, which states that all VPI classrooms should be observed twice a year with local observers.
- All local observations should include debriefing with feedback to teachers based on their scores and areas for improvement. All divisions that conduct local CLASS® observations should keep a record of the observations completed and share collected data with the VDOE.

25. *Who are the local observers?*

- Local observers will be determined and selected at the local level. The vision for the Commonwealth is to build local capacity for ensuring high quality teacher and child interactions through a continuous improvement process.

- Localities may consider selecting principals, assistant principals, directors, coaches, or early childhood coordinators to receive CLASS® observer reliability training, observe and give individualized feedback to teachers. Local communities should consider what other early childhood programs within the region may also be using the CLASS® observation tool and potentially seek to coordinate observers across programs.
26. *Will VDOE or CASTL provide the training for local CLASS® observers to become trained and reliable?*
- No, neither. Starting in summer 2019, limited funds will be available to localities through a competitive application process. These funds will assist localities in building local capacity for conducting CLASS® observations and providing feedback to teachers for continuous improvement of teacher and child interactions. The VDOE will continue to seek additional opportunities to support divisions in building capacity with the CLASS® tool.
 - Localities should consider other sources of professional development funds to support CLASS® training, both to train reliable observers and to provide foundational CLASS® knowledge to teachers.
27. *Who will create the observation schedule, provide feedback, and share CLASS® data for local observations?*
- Localities will be required to create observation schedules based on the state protocol for CLASS® observations (currently under development), provide feedback to teachers and share results with the state.
28. *How many reliable CLASS® observers should a locality have in place per number of VPI classrooms?*
- This is a local decision based on the role and responsibilities of staff selected to be observers and the location of VPI classrooms. One CLASS® observation is estimated to take approximately 2 hours for classroom observation, 30 minutes for report development, and 30 minutes for feedback with the teacher.
29. *How will local CLASS® observation data be stored and shared with the VDOE?*
- VPI programs will be required to share local CLASS® observation results with the VDOE.
30. *What types of training on CLASS® do localities need to consider?*
- Training on CLASS® is available to support divisions in preparing to use the CLASS® tool. Information on training for the CLASS® tool comes from Teachstone, the certifying organization for CLASS®.
 - Training to become a reliable local observer: Training local observers is a critical first step for preparing to use the CLASS® tool. This can be done through regional trainings, onsite trainings, and local shared trainings. Information is provided on this site.
 - Training to prepare teachers to understand the CLASS® tool: Teachstone provides introductory trainings for teachers to familiarize them with the CLASS® methodology.
 - Information about training on the CLASS® tool can be found on the [Virginia Planning for CLASS Observations website](#), or by contacting [Sedra Spano](#) from Teachstone.

31. *What are the recommendations for observing in classrooms that contain a large percentage of students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs)?*

- Many VPI classrooms will include children who have IEPs. In addition, the CLASS® tool is being used in self-contained classrooms in which most, if not all, of the children have an IEP. To obtain valid information about the efficacy of the teacher-child interactions, the observer must follow the protocol outlined in the CLASS® manual and look for evidence of all of the CLASS® dimensions during the observation, regardless of the composition of the classroom. Dimensions or indicators may not be skipped as the types of interactions described by the CLASS® are important for all learners, regardless of ability. Additionally, we provide the following recommendations:
 - Observers should have a background in special education.
 - Observers should briefly talk with the teacher or administrator to learn about any special circumstances they should take in account when coding (e.g., types of disabilities, alternative or augmentative communication systems in use, behavior intervention plans). These circumstances would not alter CLASS® codes, but rather would provide context to help the observer understand the nuances of the behaviors they observe.
 - Use the CLASS® tool that corresponds to the chronological age of the majority of the children in the classroom.

Providing Individualized Professional Development

32. *What are the expectations for VPI programs and professional development?*

- Teachers and instructional assistants must attend at least 15 clock hours per year of professional development that supports their knowledge, skills, and practice to facilitate effective teacher-child interactions and instruction that promotes children’s learning and development towards kindergarten readiness.
- Professional development should:
 - Be data driven.
 - Have specific, articulated objectives.
 - Be practice-focused, with an explicit emphasis on linking new concepts to the classroom.
 - Include feedback-analysis loops.
 - Be delivered with sufficient dosage, providing the appropriate intensity, duration and follow-up.
- Additional guidance on how to best plan effective professional development will be released in the *Virginia Professional Development Guide* in 2019.

33. *What professional development and technical assistance will CASTL be providing during the first two years of this initiative?*

- CASTL will serve as a technical assistance center in the following ways:
 - Work with all divisions to offer teachers an *introduction to the Initiative*, including information about the CLASS® prior to being observed. (Note that this is distinct from CLASS® trainings provided by Teachstone, explained in item 20.)

- Present at the four regional 2019 Spring VPI Coordinator Meetings, with a session focused on how best to use CLASS® data to provide feedback and inform professional development selection;
- Survey VPI program leadership about current professional development practices, capacity, and needs.
- Provide ongoing support to locality leadership teams related to preparation for external CLASS observations, supporting local CLASS® feedback to teachers, and planning for PD beyond the current year;
- Produce professional development resources and directories of free professional development resources that align to needs and plans.
- Produce a professional development guide (with VDOE) that identifies existing resources that map onto a set of best practices for effective professional development (and in part focuses on CLASS®-related practices);
- Present at Leadership Academy trainings in Spring 2020 to support regions in building capacity and collaboration around data-driven PD planning.

34. *What resources will CASTL and VDOE provide?*

- CASTL is in the process of creating an annotated resource list that will be shared. This list will offer links to videos, websites, webinars, and articles that cover an array of topics related to both CLASS® and professional development.
- Progress is being made on this resource list and is anticipated to be available by fall 2019.

35. *Will CASTL provide professional development resources related to other early childhood topics (e.g., social & emotional development, literacy, mathematics)?*

- CASTL's current scope of work related to professional development will concentrate heavily on local leadership teams and teachers with CLASS® observations and how to use them for feedback and selection of existing professional development. However, we will gladly take your requests for other types of professional development back to the CASTL/VDOE team to consider as we plan for the future.

36. *Who will pay for professional development?*

- Divisions are responsible for securing and funding PD.
- Divisions are expected to use the data collected from CLASS® observations and curriculum use to decide how to best support their teachers and students.

37. *When will professional development take place?*

- For VPI programs starting the external CLASS® observation process, a CASTL team member will work with the VPI coordinator to determine best timing for the *Introduction to the Initiative* training for teachers and leaders.
- Localities will be in control of selecting and/or delivering other early childhood PD, timing will be up to the locality.

General Initiative Questions

38. *Where can I find additional guidance on the information covered here?*
- Additional information on the expectations for VPI programs can be found in the [2019-2020 VPI Program Guidelines](#).
39. *How do programs receive feedback on their success in meeting VPI Program Guidelines?*
- All VPI programs will receive VDOE feedback in meeting VPI Program Guidelines through participating in a two-year monitoring and continuous improvement process once every four years.
 - The first year of the monitoring and continuous improvement process includes a desk review, VPI self-study, and development of a continuous improvement plan. The second year of the process includes an onsite visit to the VPI program.
40. *What is the target date for full-implementation of the state VPI plan?*
- Full implementation of the plan will begin in 2019-2020, but localities will have flexibility in the first year.
 - The vision is that by 2022, more Virginia children will enter kindergarten ready. The overall state plan for early childhood includes families and children served by VPI but will also include those served through a wide spectrum of publicly-funded preschool services.
41. *Who is CASTL?*
- CASTL is an interdisciplinary center at the University of Virginia that provides leadership on effective teaching and learning. CASTL is a strategic partner in this initiative and the Virginia Kindergarten Readiness Program. CASTL was previously a strategic partner with VDOE in the VPI+ federal grant.
42. *What roles will the VDOE and CASTL play in implementation of the plan?*
- The VDOE will set and communicate expectations, administer funding to support local purchases and implementation of curriculum and CLASS® observations.
 - CASTL will help to vet curriculum, facilitate external CLASS® observations of every VPI classroom by June 2020, and provide professional development tools and technical assistance.
43. *Why is VPI not using ECERS/ERS, like Virginia Quality does?*
- ECERS/ERS focuses on early childhood environments, which are important, but not the primary focus of the statewide initiative requested by the General Assembly. CLASS® exclusively focuses on teacher and child interactions and instruction.
 - VPI programs interested in ECERS/ERS are always welcome to participate in Virginia Quality.