

# Virginia

## Background

### Virginia Preschool Initiative (VPI)

Virginia Preschool Initiative (VPI) offers half- and full-day pre-K for at-risk four-year-olds who are not served by Head Start. Risk factors are determined locally but should be based on economic and educational need.<sup>1</sup>

The Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) administers VPI as a formula grant. Only certain local government entities—e.g., school divisions and local departments of social services—are eligible for VPI funding.<sup>2</sup> Localities that receive VPI funding can subcontract with community providers, including charter schools.

### Charter schools in Virginia

Virginia permits start-up and conversion charter schools. Only local school boards are permitted to serve as authorizers in Virginia. For regional charters, multiple boards may work together as an authorizer. All charter applicants must be reviewed by the state board of education before they can apply to the local school board. Under limited circumstances, the state, via the Opportunity Educational Institution Board, may authorize the restructuring of a low-performing traditional public school as a public charter school.<sup>3</sup> Currently, only local school boards authorize charter schools in Virginia, and they have approved just six charter schools in the entire state.

## Process for Accessing Pre-K Funds

Localities that are interested in offering VPI submit a program proposal application to VDOE. The proposal must demonstrate the lead agency's collaboration with community organizations and develop child eligibility criteria based on the community's definition of "at-risk." Localities must provide a match in local funds in order to be considered for state pre-K funding.

VDOE selects localities based on the quality of the application and determines how much funding to award localities based on the number of at-risk four-year-olds who are not served by Head Start. Localities that are awarded VPI funding determine a local process for subcontracting with community providers, including charter schools.



TOTAL SCORE

25/50


Virginia's climate for charter schools to offer pre-K is **not hospitable**

- + There are no state statutory or regulatory barriers to charter schools accessing state funding for pre-K.
- Compared to K-12 funding levels, low pre-K program funding makes offering pre-K less attractive to charters.
- + The size of the pre-K program does not limit charter access for funding.
- The funding, application, or approval process creates a barrier to charter access.
- Automatic enrollment from charter pre-K to kindergarten is prohibited in legislation or practice.




## Barriers


### Are there any statutory or regulatory barriers to charter schools accessing state funding for pre-K?

 **No.** Virginia's charter law and pre-K legislation do not directly address whether charter schools are permitted to offer pre-K. In practice, there are only two elementary charter schools in Virginia, and neither school offers pre-K.


### Is the funding level of the state pre-K program a barrier to charter access?

 **Yes.** Low pre-K program funding, compared to K-12 funding levels, makes pre-K less attractive to charters. If a charter school offered half-day VPI services, it would receive only 27 percent of the per-pupil funding amount that charters receive to serve full-day K-12 students. If it offered full-day VPI, it would only receive 56 percent of the K-12 funding amount.


### Is the size of the state pre-K program a barrier to charter access?

 **No.** The size of the program is not a barrier to charters accessing state pre-K funds. The program serves about 17 percent of all four-year-olds in the state.


### Is the application, approval, and/or funding process a barrier to charter access?

 **Yes.** The application process is a barrier to charter access. Charter schools interested in offering VPI can only access funding by contracting with localities that receive VPI funding.

### Is automatic enrollment from pre-K to kindergarten prohibited in legislation or practice?

 **Yes.** Charter schools that subcontract with a district to offer VPI are not permitted to grant enrollment preference to pre-K students enrolled in the charter school's pre-K program.

### Are there any other barriers to charter access?

 **Yes.** There are few charter schools in the state, due in part to the state's weak charter law. The state's small charter sector limits the degree to which charter schools can serve as pre-K providers in Virginia.

## Recommendations

To address these barriers to charter access, the state should:

- Strengthen its charter law to open the state to additional charter schools and explicitly permit charter schools to offer pre-K.
- Require localities that receive VPI funding and have charter schools located in the community to include charter schools on an equitable basis in deciding how to allocate pre-K slots to schools and community-based providers in the district.
- Require local school board authorizers to consider new charter petitions that include pre-K.



	Virginia Preschool Initiative (VPI)	Charter schools in Virginia
Year created	Launched in 1995 <sup>4</sup>	Charter law enacted in 1998 <sup>5</sup>
Children in state	207,218 three- and four-year-olds in Virginia <sup>6</sup>	1,543,443 school-age children in Virginia <sup>7</sup>
Children served	17,295 children served 0 percent of three-year-olds 17 percent of four-year-olds <sup>8</sup>	725 students served .05 percent of school-age population Six charter schools <sup>9</sup>
Charters offering pre-K	No charter schools in Virginia offer pre-K. <sup>10</sup>	Two charter schools in Virginia offer elementary programs. <sup>11</sup>
Funding	Districts receive \$3,000 to \$6,000 to offer VPI. <sup>12</sup>	Charter schools receive \$10,969 per pupil to serve K–12 students. <sup>13</sup>

## Endnotes

1 Virginia Department of Education (VDOE), “Virginia Preschool Initiative: Guidelines for the Preschool Initiative Application 2015–2016,” [http://www.doe.virginia.gov/instruction/early\\_childhood/preschool\\_initiative/guidelines.pdf](http://www.doe.virginia.gov/instruction/early_childhood/preschool_initiative/guidelines.pdf), 6.

2 W. Steven Barnett et al., “The State of Preschool 2013: State Preschool Yearbook” (New Brunswick, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research, 2013), <http://nieer.org/sites/nieer/files/yearbook2013.pdf>.

3 National Alliance for Public Charter Schools (NAPCS), “Measuring Up: Virginia,” <http://www.publiccharters.org/get-the-facts/law-database/states/va/>.

4 W. Steven Barnett et al., “The State of Preschool 2013.”

5 NACPS, “Measuring Up: Virginia.”

6 State population data calculated using ACS 2012 five-year estimates; U.S. Census Bureau, “American Community Survey,” [www.census.gov/acs](http://www.census.gov/acs).

7 Ibid., all children in households, three to seventeen years old.

8 W. Steven Barnett et al., “The State of Preschool 2013.”

9 NACPS, “Measuring Up: Virginia.”

10 VDOE, “Virginia’s Public Charter Schools,” [http://www.doe.virginia.gov/instruction/charter\\_schools/charter\\_schools.shtml](http://www.doe.virginia.gov/instruction/charter_schools/charter_schools.shtml).

11 Ibid.

12 VDOE, “Virginia Preschool Initiative Payments,” Appropriation, Section 4, [http://www.doe.virginia.gov/instruction/early\\_childhood/preschool\\_initiative/appropriation\\_act\\_language.pdf](http://www.doe.virginia.gov/instruction/early_childhood/preschool_initiative/appropriation_act_language.pdf). VDOE allots localities a lump sum of funding based on a rate of \$6,000 per unserved at-risk student for full-day services and \$3,000 for half-day services. Programs are required to secure a local match. The match amount depends on the features of the locality but cannot exceed 50 percent.

13 VDOE, “Total Expenditures for Operations,” [http://www.doe.virginia.gov/administrators/superintendents\\_memos/2013/085-13a.pdf](http://www.doe.virginia.gov/administrators/superintendents_memos/2013/085-13a.pdf).