



GrowSmart 2020

All children will be born healthy, enter kindergarten ready to learn, and continue to read proficiently through third grade, establishing a strong foundation for success in school and in life.

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Desired Outcome

As a community, we prioritize our youngest citizens and work to ensure their healthy physical, cognitive, and social-emotional development. We recognize the importance of the first eight years of life, both to an individual's future prospects and to our city's economic vitality and quality of life. There is alignment of resources and services for an early childhood coordinated system to ensure all children meet developmental milestones. Families have the knowledge, skills and abilities to support their children's healthy development in all areas and at all stages of life, from pre-natal to eight years of age. All children in our community have access to high-quality childcare and early education and enter kindergarten ready to learn. All children in Virginia Beach City Public Schools have the opportunity to attend a customized kindergarten program that spans the length of the traditional school day. Virginia Beach GrowSmart and Virginia Beach City Public Schools have a strong mutual partnership and work together to ensure all children read at or above grade level by third grade. The Virginia Beach business community recognizes the importance of early childhood education and development for the economic growth of our city. Members of the business community actively support Virginia Beach GrowSmart's efforts and help to ensure its financial sustainability.

Current Reality

Various City and community partners work to align resources, but Virginia Beach lacks a streamlined early childhood coordinated system, in which all partners are aware of and support each other's efforts. Virginia Beach GrowSmart does not have sufficient data to determine the number of children who are not meeting developmental milestones or the percentage of these children who are accessing support services. There is a lack of understanding within the early education community (childcare and early education providers) about developmental milestones and the resources available to families of children who do not meet these milestones. At least a quarter of first-time parents in Virginia Beach do not receive needed services to ensure their children's healthy physical, social-emotional, and cognitive development. (*Source:* Virginia Beach Department of Public Health). Parents and families either lack information about available services and resources or are unable to access them due to insufficient program funding.

Families of young children in Virginia Beach have inconsistent access to affordable, high-quality childcare and preschool. This is due, in part, to the fact that only about 18% of eligible sites are rated under the Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS), and only nine are accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). (*Sources:* Smart Beginnings www.smartbeginnings.org, NAEYC directory: <http://www.naeyc.org/academy/accreditation/search> and Virginia Department of Social Services website: <http://www.dss.virginia.gov/facility/search/cc.cgi>) Industry challenges specific to childcare and early education, such as low wages, high turnover and strict regulations, often result in a site being *either* high-quality *or* affordable for the average family, but not both. Another factor that negatively impacts accessibility is the inadequacy of the childcare subsidy program to meet families' economic needs. This tends to disenfranchise children from low-socioeconomic backgrounds from attending high-quality early education programs.

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Additionally, preschool teachers do not have a comprehensive tool to measure kindergarten readiness across multiple domains, including mathematics, literacy, oral language and social-emotional readiness. Virginia Beach City Public Schools assesses all kindergarten students prior to and early in the school year, using the Extended Day Kindergarten (EDK) assessment and the Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening (PALS); however, there is currently not a comprehensive readiness tool that is universally used in the year *prior* to kindergarten. PALS data from 2013 reveal that 91% of children entering Virginia Beach City Public Schools kindergarten are ready to learn in the area of foundational literacy skills. While this figure indicates tremendous improvement over previous years, it does not necessarily represent the entire population of Virginia Beach kindergarteners, nor does it measure readiness in areas other than literacy.

The majority of kindergarten students in Virginia Beach City Public Schools' 55 elementary schools attend a half-day kindergarten program. The division's 13 Title I elementary schools attend full-day kindergarten. Students in each of the remaining 42 elementary schools may be selected for an Extended Day Kindergarten (EDK) program, based on the results of an assessment administered to all kindergarten students within the first two weeks of the school year. Each elementary school's capacity for the EDK program is between 15 and 30 students. (*Source: Virginia Beach City Public Schools Teaching and Learning staff*)

Public opinion on the necessity of a full-day kindergarten program for all students is divided, and members of the VBCPS School Board have varying stances on the issue. Other major obstacles to the implementation of a customized, all-day kindergarten program include: a substantial, unknown initial investment and at least \$12 million per year to sustain the program; the need to design a new program and curriculum; increased facilities, staffing and transportation needs; and wrap-around childcare needs. (*Source: Virginia Beach City Public Schools Administrative staff*)

Virginia Beach GrowSmart and Virginia Beach City Public Schools partner frequently for isolated projects and programs but experience organizational obstacles to the development of a strong, ongoing partnership. The two entities have in place neither a comprehensive system for data sharing nor any formal agreement for how they will work together and support each other's efforts to move the needle on third grade reading. Currently, at least 26% of third grade students in the school division do not read on grade level and significant performance gaps exist among student subgroups. (*Sources: Virginia Beach City Public Schools Teaching and Learning staff; Virginia Department of Education*) Additionally, students who make gains because of participation in either *Early Discoveries* or EDK often fall behind again during the first, second and third grades. (*Source: Virginia Beach City Public Schools Research Brief: Preschool and Kindergarten Experiences Longitudinal Study: Patterns of Academic Achievement Through Third Grade*)

The local business community is partially engaged in the efforts of Virginia Beach GrowSmart, but greater awareness of the economic impact of early childhood experiences is needed. GrowSmart's ability to sustain and expand its current initiatives in the long term is jeopardized by a decrease in Early Learning Challenge grant funding and the lack of a clear financial sustainability plan.

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Long-Range Plan 2014-2020	
Strategy: GrowSmart 1	We collaborate with community partners to ensure all children in our city have access to high-quality childcare and early education and enter kindergarten ready to learn. <i>(Karen Kehoe)</i>
Initiatives:	<p>1.01 Expand participation in the Quality Rating and Improvement System. <i>(Lauren Small)</i></p> <p>1.02 Identify and promote scholarships and professional development opportunities for childcare and early education professionals. <i>(Marty LaGiglia)</i></p> <p>1.03 Increase parent education efforts about how to choose a quality setting for childcare and early education. <i>(Marty LaGiglia)</i></p> <p>1.04 Increase access to star-rated sites for children from low-socioeconomic and diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. <i>(Holly Dickson, Lauren Small)</i></p> <p>1.05 Help children and families experience a smooth and enjoyable transition to kindergarten. <i>(Karen Kehoe)</i></p>
Strategy: GrowSmart 2	We collaborate with the Virginia Beach City Public Schools to ensure all children have the opportunity to attend a customized kindergarten program that spans the length of the traditional school day and meets the educational needs of every student. <i>(Gloria Harris)</i>
Initiatives:	<p>2.01 Work closely with influential leaders within VBCPS to make a strong case for a re-envisioned customized kindergarten program that would span the length of the traditional school day. <i>(Jerry Stewart)</i></p> <p>2.02 Identify and publicize information about the benefits and challenges of implementing an all-day, customized kindergarten program. <i>(Kelli Cedo)</i></p> <p>2.03 Facilitate presentation of findings and recommendations to the Virginia Beach City Public School Board, as appropriate. <i>(Karen Kehoe)</i></p> <p>2.04 Develop a communications/marketing strategy aimed at rallying public support for an all-day, customized kindergarten program. <i>(Eileen Cox)</i></p>
Strategy: GrowSmart 3	Virginia Beach GrowSmart and Virginia Beach City Public Schools have a strong mutual partnership and work together to ensure all children read at or above grade level by third grade. <i>(Karen Kehoe)</i>
Initiatives:	<p>3.01 Align GrowSmart’s pre-K efforts more closely with VBCPS’ <i>Compass to 2015</i> Strategic Plan, specifically the K-3 Literacy Initiative. <i>(Kelli Cedo)</i></p> <p>3.02 Implement a comprehensive system for data sharing between GrowSmart and VBCPS to improve student achievement in reading by third grade. <i>(Kelli Cedo, Karen Kehoe)</i></p>

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	3.03 Identify and partner with VBCPS, other City departments and community partners to expand existing programs and/or implement new programs designed to improve reading on grade level by third grade. <i>(Karen Kehoe)</i>
Strategy: GrowSmart 4	We collaborate with community partners to ensure all families have the knowledge, skills and abilities to support their children’s healthy physical, social-emotional and cognitive development at all stages from pre-natal to eight years of age. <i>(Virginia Beach Dept. of Public Health Healthy Families VB manager - VACANT)</i>
Initiatives:	4.01 Educate parents on the specific milestones in their children’s development and increase their awareness of available programs, services and resources to help their children meet these milestones. <i>(Katie Cerqua, Debbie Wolcott)</i> 4.02 Advocate for increased state funding for early intervention services that have proven positive outcomes. <i>(Karen Kehoe)</i> 4.03 Expand the existing nurse health educator program at Sentara Princess Anne Hospital (PAH) to implement a “universal contact” program for all parents who deliver at PAH. <i>(Virginia Beach Dept. of Public Health Healthy Families VB manager - VACANT)</i>
Strategy: GrowSmart 5	We ensure alignment of resources and services for an early childhood coordinated system to ensure all children in Virginia Beach meet developmental milestones. <i>(Jennifer McElwee)</i>
Initiatives:	5.01 Identify all services and programs that currently exist in Virginia Beach and regionally to serve young children (0-8) and their families and identify gaps. <i>(The Planning Council)</i> 5.02 Coordinate with United Way South Hampton Roads in that organization’s efforts to implement universal adoption by childcare and early education providers of the Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ) and Ages and Stages Questionnaire: Social-Emotional (ASQSE) as screening tools for the identification and referral of children who are not meeting developmental milestones. <i>(Sarah Bishop, Kristen Carter)</i> 5.03 Form partnerships with the local pediatric community to ensure ASQ and ASQSE are being correctly administered, interpreted and used by families and health care practitioners for the identification and referral of children who are not meeting developmental milestones. <i>(Sarah Bishop, Kristen Carter)</i> 5.04 Collaborate with Elevate Early Education (E3) in our community efforts. <i>(Jerry Stewart)</i>

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Strategy: GrowSmart 6	We connect with the private sector so that the Virginia Beach business community recognizes the importance of early childhood education and development for the economic growth of our city, actively supports Virginia Beach GrowSmart's efforts and helps to ensure its financial sustainability. (<i>Jerry Stewart, Karen Kehoe</i>)
Initiatives:	6.01 Improve communication between Virginia Beach GrowSmart and local business leaders to determine common concerns and goals. (<i>Jerry Stewart, Lauren Small</i>) 6.02 Develop a plan for financial sustainability, to include the formation of a 501(c)(3) foundation that will enable GrowSmart to take in additional grant funding and/or corporate and private donations. (<i>Karen Kehoe</i>)

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Appendix

Ages and Stages Questionnaires (ASQ-3): A Parent-Completed Child Monitoring System: This is an early and accurate developmental screening and monitoring system for infants and young children. This system is easy to administer, low cost, appropriate for diverse populations and accurately identifies the few infants or young children who may need further assessment for developmental delays and disorders. The ASQ-3 is composed of 21 questionnaires designed to be completed by parents or other primary caregivers at any point between 1 month and 5 1/2 years of age. Questionnaire intervals include 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, 12, 14, 16, 18, 20, 22, 24, 27, 30, 33, 36, 42, 48, 54, and 60 months of age. (adapted from ASQ-3 User's Guide Third Edition page 3)

Ages and Stages Questionnaires: Social and Emotional: The Ages and Stages Questionnaires: Social Emotional (ASQ:SE) were developed as a companion tool to the widely used Ages and Stages Questionnaires (ASQ), a well researched system that uses parent report to screen the development of infants and young children. The ASQ: SE were developed and continue to be studied in an effort to address the need for age-appropriate tools to monitor very young children's behavior and address parental concerns. In addition, the ASQ: SE provide an inexpensive, culturally versatile tool for states to participate in child-find activities for children at-risk for social-emotional and behavioral delays.

The original ASQ system consists of a series of 19 parent completed questionnaires that screen a child from 3 months to 5 years of age and cover five domains of development: communication, fine motor, gross motor, problem solving and personal/social.

The Ages & Stages Questionnaires-Social Emotional (ASQ: SE) were developed to monitor a child's development in the behavioral areas of self-regulation, compliance, communication, adaptation, autonomy, affect and interaction with people. ASQ: SE questionnaire intervals correspond with the ASQ system, screening children from 3 months to 5 1/2 years of age. Questionnaire intervals are as follows: 6, 12, 18, 24, 30, 36, 48 and 60 months.

For more information on the ASQ or ASQ:SE systems, see the publisher's website (Paul Brookes Publishing, Inc.) at www.brookespublishing.com

Compass to 2015: *Compass to 2015* is the title of Virginia Beach City Public School's strategic plan. It was developed by VBCPS in partnership with the entire community. It was adopted by the school board October 2008.

Developmental Milestones: Developmental Milestones are the stages in the neuromuscular, mental, or social maturation of an infant or young child, generally marked by the attainment of a capacity or skill, such as rolling over, sitting with good head control, smiling spontaneously, laughing, and following moving objects with the eyes. (*Medical Dictionary for the Health Professions and Nursing*, © Farlex 2012)

Early Discoveries: The YMCA of South Hampton Roads has been providing stimulating preschool child care for more than 30 years. As one of the nation's largest, not for profit child care leaders, the YMCA of South Hampton Roads opened the doors to Early Discoveries in 1995

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with a strong commitment to assisting at-risk families by recognizing the immediate need for quality care and early intervention. YMCA Early Discoveries is part of the statewide Virginia Preschool Initiative program for at-risk four-year-olds. YMCA Early Discoveries serves those children who are continually exposed to high risk factors and situations that are likely to have an adverse impact on their social, emotional, physical, and cognitive development. Our program is unique because of the public-private partnership it represents, existing through a collaboration between Virginia Beach City Public Schools and the YMCA of South Hampton Roads. The primary purpose of Early Discoveries is to prepare eligible four-year-olds for kindergarten by ensuring that each child is "read to learn." We accomplish this through a safe, developmentally appropriate learning environment.

Early Learning Challenge (ELC) Grant: In 2009, the five cities of South Hampton Roads – Chesapeake, Norfolk, Portsmouth, Suffolk, and Virginia Beach – were given the opportunity to apply for a five-year, \$500,000 grant from Smart Beginnings South Hampton Roads. These Early Learning Challenge Grants were to be used for purposes of improving quality education and school readiness for young children, ages 0-5. The grants required applying cities to match grant funds dollar for dollar over the life of the grant, which ends in 2014, for a total investment of \$1,000,000 per locality.

Elevate Early Education (E3): “Elevate Early Education, a 501c3 organization, is a social entrepreneurial venture that aggressively pursues and challenges policy makers to make early education in our state a priority through awareness and advocacy.” (Source: The E3 School, LLC “Talking Points and Q&A” document, distributed 11/04/2013)

Extended Day Kindergarten (EDK): EDK-Extended Day Kindergarten (EDK) is a program that provides kindergarten students with additional instructional time and support in the areas of reading, writing, and math. Each elementary school offers at least one EDK class with 15 students – smaller in size than the school division's average kindergarten program.

National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC): The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) is the leading world organization on issues affecting young children (defined as 0-8 years old). NAEYC’s stated mission is: “to serve and act on behalf of the needs, rights and well-being of all young children with primary focus on the provision of educational and developmental services and resources.” (Retrieved 19 Nov 2013 from: <http://www.naeyc.org/about/mission>)

Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening (PALS): PALS is a literacy screening that is used to determine if students have foundational literacy skills in key areas or require intervention in these skill areas. PALS is administered to all Virginia Beach City Public Schools students at the beginning of the kindergarten year.

Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS): A Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) is a process by which childcare and early education programs are evaluated and rated against a specified set of criteria accepted as indicative of quality. In Virginia Beach, QRIS is often used interchangeably with “VSQI,” or the Virginia Star Quality Initiative (see below);

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however, technically, QRIS is a more general term for any such rating and improvement system, while VSQI is specific to the Commonwealth of Virginia. The QRIS in Virginia is voluntary and not tied to licensure requirements.

Title I: “Title I, Part A (Title I) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, as amended (ESEA) provides financial assistance to local educational agencies (LEAs) and schools with high numbers or high percentages of children from low-income families to help ensure that all children meet challenging state academic standards. Federal funds are currently allocated through four statutory formulas that are based primarily on census poverty estimates and the cost of education in each state.” (*Source:* United States Department of Education website: <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/titleiparta/index.html>)

Virginia Preschool Initiative: Since the beginning of the 1995-1996 school year, many Virginian communities have a significant resource for at-risk four-year-old children--the Virginia Preschool Initiative. This program was created to benefit children at risk of educational failure who are not enrolled in a preschool program. The Virginia Preschool Initiative is the result of a three-year study conducted by the Virginia Department of Education. The initiative was designed from the Head Start model, but it has gone beyond. Each city can design the program to meet their community needs as long as an education component is in place. Kindergarten readiness is the thrust. Funding is provided from the state and a local match is contributed by the city. To be eligible for the program, children must meet qualifying risk factor criteria, must be four years old by September 30th of the current school year, and must reside in the city where the program is offered.

Virginia Star Quality Initiative (VSQI): The Virginia Star Quality Initiative (VSQI) is the Commonwealth’s initiative to get licensed child care facilities, family day homes, and religious-exempted programs rated under the voluntary quality rating and improvement system (QRIS). The initiative includes evaluating programs then assigning them a “star rating” of 0 to 5 stars. This initial rating is followed by two years of mentorship with a qualified early childhood mentor to help the program improve the quality of the services it offers to children and families. The four standards of VSQI are: 1) Teacher Education, Training, and Qualifications; 2) Teacher-Child Interactions [assessed using the Classroom Assessment Scoring System, or CLASS]; 3) Structure; and 4) Environment and Instruction [assessed using the Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale, or ECERS]. VSQI/QRIS are often used interchangeably in Virginia Beach.