

## Reauthorized Head Start Legislation Benefits Fairfax County Programs

Legislation that President George W. Bush signed into law last December has reauthorized Head Start through fiscal year 2012, eliminated the National Reporting System (a testing program for 4- and 5-year olds in Head Start), and aligned Head Start curricula and instruction with state early learning standards. The new law also enables Head Start programs to serve additional low-income children and families.

“The reauthorization of Head Start ensures that Fairfax County Early Head Start and Head Start children and their parents will continue to have access to high-quality, early care and education opportunities they otherwise might not have,” said Jennifer Branch, director of Fairfax County’s Head Start programs.

Among other provisions, the new law:

- Gives Head Start agencies \$2 million in fiscal year 2008 for local training and improvement efforts;
- Guarantees Head Start programs an annual cost-of-living increase;
- Improves transportation for homeless children to and from Head Start programs;
- Improves the transition of Head Start children to schools through better coordination between programs and schools;
- Establishes new professional development and education criteria for the Head Start teaching workforce; and
- Guarantees comprehensive services, including mental health, socio-emotional development, and other family services, in the earliest years.



## Study Lauds Virginia Preschool Initiative

The Virginia General Assembly, which will vote on Governor Tim Kaine’s budget this spring, can look to its own Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission (JLARC) for guidance on the Governor’s proposal to expand participation in the Virginia Preschool Initiative (VPI). Established in the mid-1990s, VPI serves 4-year-olds who are considered “at risk” of not doing well in school and are not served by federal Head Start programs.

The JLARC’s recent study of the initiative finds that participating children outperformed other kindergartners by significant margins on a literacy test last year. Kindergarten teachers and principals told JLARC members that children in the VPI program enter kindergarten better prepared academically and socially than children who don’t attend preschool. The study also notes that, “VPI classrooms typically provide a positive learning environment, and student engagement with classroom activities is usually high.”

The commission evaluated the VPI program through classroom observations, an analysis of test score results, a survey of kindergarten teachers and principals, and an assessment of compliance with program standards. Study results support other research showing that high-quality preschool programs serving at-risk children can produce positive long-term effects on student achievement, grade repetition, special education placement, high school graduation, and delinquency.

## Parents’ Booklet Offers a Boost

Parents in Fairfax County have a new resource to guide their children toward success in kindergarten and beyond. “Helping Your Child Love to Learn” is being distributed to early childhood programs throughout the county for dissemination to parents.

“We wanted to create a very user-friendly booklet filled with activities that parents can readily enjoy with infants, toddlers, and preschoolers as part of their daily routines,” said Vera Steiner Blore, Fairfax Futures executive director. “The booklet has been so popular that we are already in our second printing.”

The colorful, easy-to-use booklet highlights activities that build children’s language, literacy, math, science, and artistic skills, and promotes their social and emotional development. Available in Spanish (through support from the Zonta Club of Fairfax County) and English, the booklet complements the Early Learning Guidelines that Fairfax County’s Office for Children has established for

early childhood education professionals.

Made possible through a generous grant from the Freddie Mac Foundation, the booklet was launched at a ceremony at Falls Church-McLean Children’s Center. Attendees included Virginia State Delegate

Jim Scott and William Soza, chairman of Security One Bank and a member of the Fairfax County Economic Development Authority.

“Helping Your Child Love to Learn” can be downloaded at [www.fairfax-futures.org](http://www.fairfax-futures.org).



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A vital part of Fairfax Futures, these members of the *School Readiness Network* pool their dedication, dollars, time, and talent to support improvements in early childhood education and invest in our region's future.

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**Save the Date: Fairfax Futures' Fourth Annual  
School Readiness Symposium, Saturday, April 26, 2008**



Investing in School Readiness

# READY!

News for Early Childhood Educators • Winter 2008

## Governor's Budget Reflects Effort to Improve Early Childhood Education

Fairfax Futures, in partnership with state and local early childhood advocates, has worked hard to stress the importance of quality care and education for Virginia's youngest children, and Governor Tim Kaine is listening. The budget that the Governor presented to the General Assembly this session funds wider access to child care programs.

### Help for Working Families

As part of the Working Families Child Care Coalition (WFCCC), Fairfax Futures has pushed for additional funding to help low-income working families. About 10,000 children are on the statewide waiting list for child care assistance. Inadequate program funding undermines prior state and local efforts to move families off welfare and into long-term economic stability.

Responding to WFCCC's efforts, Governor Kaine has proposed a reallocation of \$17 million in federal child



care funds to help more low-income working families obtain quality, affordable early care and education for their children.

WFCCC partners also include Fairfax County's Office for Children, Reston Interfaith, Infant/Toddler Family Day Care, Virginia Alliance of Family Child Care Associations, Virginia Child Care Resource and Referral Network, and Voices for Virginia's Children.

### Expanded Eligibility

The Governor's budget also includes funding that would increase the number of at-risk 4-year-olds eligible to participate in the Virginia Preschool Initiative by expanding eligibility to include both free- and reduced-lunch eligible children. Governor Kaine has promoted quality early childhood education since he entered office in 2006. He shared his views on the importance of access and quality at Fairfax Futures' School Readiness Leadership Forum held at Capital One last September 25.

## Are They Resilient, Resourceful, Ready?

### Fairfax Futures' Symposium Focuses on Social and Emotional Development

Readiness for school is more than simply learning the ABCs. It also means that children are curious, enthusiastic about learning, and able to communicate effectively. They can regulate their emotions and adapt to their environment.

### Free Event April 26

On Saturday, April 26, 2008, Fairfax Futures will bring together early childhood educators for its fourth annual symposium, "Resilient, Resourceful, and Ready for School: The Importance of Social and Emotional Competence for Young Children." The symposium will feature Dr. Daniel Gartrell, director of the Child Development Training Program at Minnesota's Bemidji State University and a former Head Start teacher for the Ojibwe nation.

Invitations for this free event—made possible through a generous grant from the Freddie Mac Foundation—will be mailed in March. For updated information, visit [www.fairfax-futures.org](http://www.fairfax-futures.org).

## Win a Children's Resource Basket

What do you find helpful—and not so helpful—about Ready! newsletters? Please take a few minutes to fill out an online survey at [www.fairfax-futures.org](http://www.fairfax-futures.org). Everyone who responds online will automatically be entered into a drawing for a children's resource basket (filled with books, finger paints, puppets, and other goodies) at the April symposium. Thanks!

Nominate an extraordinary educator.

Details on page 3.



# Ready-to-use Resources

## Taking Stock: Assessing and Improving Early Childhood Learning and Program Quality



## *Taking Stock: Assessing and Improving Early Childhood Learning and Program Quality*

National Early Childhood Accountability Task Force, 2007

The concern for children's early learning has fostered an emphasis on accountability and standards-based assessments. Yet poorly conceived accountability measures can waste resources and lead to misguided

decisions. What really works?

The Pew Charitable Trusts, the Foundation for Child Development, and the Joyce Foundation asked a task force of prominent educators to spend two years tackling difficult issues of accountability. After reviewing state and federal initiatives, the National Early Childhood Accountability Task Force has proposed a framework for making informed decisions about education programs for 3- and 4-year-olds.

Chaired by Dr. Sharon Lynn Kagan, the task force offers multiple approaches to meet different state needs. Within this framework, however, the task force recommends that all states:

- Develop a single, unified system of standards, data, assessments, and professional efforts across all categorical programs and funding streams;
- Align high-quality and comprehensive standards, curriculum, and assessments along a continuum from pre-kindergarten through grade 3;
- Assure that all child and program assessments are valid and reliable, meet high psychometric standards, and are well suited for their intended purpose;
- Support full inclusion of all children in accountability and improvement efforts; and
- Provide adequate resources to help programs meet performance standards and support accurate, credible, and useful assessments and effective program improvement plans.

[www.earlyedaccountability.org](http://www.earlyedaccountability.org)

## *Who is Ahead and Who is Behind? Gaps in School Readiness and Student Achievement in the Early Grades for California's Children*

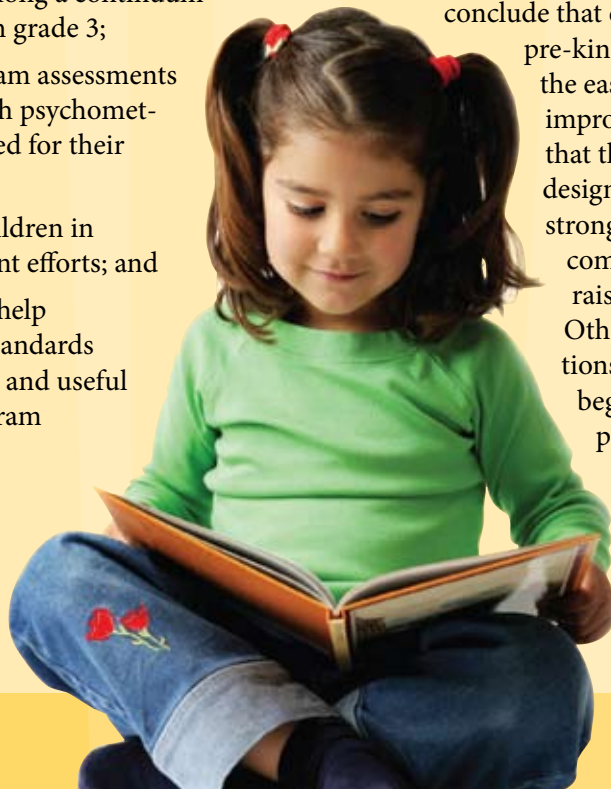
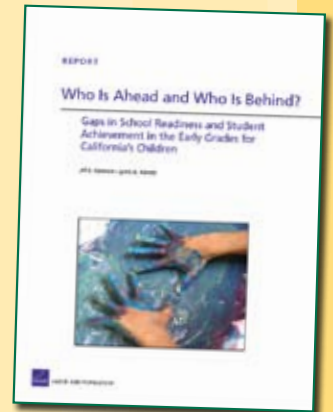
Jill S. Cannon and Lynn A. Karoly, Rand Corporation, 2007

This report is part of a major effort to assess the potential of high-quality pre-kindergarten programs to improve student achievement in California's elementary schools. The focus here is on measuring the extent of current problems, and the authors begin by counting the number of students in kindergarten through grade 3 who fail to reach the state's minimum standards for several basic skills.

The authors note that more than half of the state's second and third graders did not pass the 2007 California Standards Tests in English and math, and nearly half of first graders in a sample of 17 school districts failed to meet benchmark standards for reading. Factors such as income, parents' education, and household language preferences strongly influenced student achievement. However, differences in educational achievement are visible even after allowance is made for family variables; the authors note that, "even among more advantaged groups of students, a sizeable percentage does not meet state education standards."

After examining programs nationwide, the authors conclude that expanding access to high-quality pre-kindergarten programs might be one of the easiest and most cost-effective ways to improve student performance. They note that the "beneficial effects from well-designed preschool programs [make] a strong case for considering preschool as a component of a multi-pronged strategy to raise student achievement in California." Other strategies include interventions with disadvantaged children that begin before age 3 and family literacy programs.

[www.rand.org/pubs/technical\\_reports/TR537/](http://www.rand.org/pubs/technical_reports/TR537/)



# Seeking Educator Award Nominations

Fairfax Futures will honor one or more educators who go beyond the ordinary to help children and their families make a successful transition to kindergarten. The School Readiness Award(s) will be presented at the fourth annual School Readiness Symposium on April 26.

If you know an early childhood educator from a licensed or permitted Fairfax County community program or a Fairfax County Public School principal, teacher, or resource center staff member who you believe deserves a School Readiness Award, please download the 2008 nomination form at [www.fairfax-futures.org](http://www.fairfax-futures.org). Self-nominations are welcome. Applications must be received by Fairfax Futures no later than Wednesday, March 26, 2008.

## Last Year's Winners

Elizabeth Powers and Dr. Anita Blain received School Readiness Awards in 2007 for their work on both sides of the transition process. Powers, a teacher at ACCA Child Development Center in Annandale, forged partnerships with neighborhood schools, served as a mentor for family care providers, and earned Fairfax County's new School Readiness Certificate.

Dr. Blain, a former principal of Timberlane Elementary School, visited families preparing for kindergarten there. She led tours of her school and made sure that all children felt welcome. Dr. Blain continues her school readiness efforts as the current principal of Wolftrap Elementary School.



# Summit Focuses on African American Children

Fairfax County's justice system and foster care program serve a disproportionate number of African American children relative to the county's African American population. There is also an achievement gap between African American students and the general population. How can a wide range of resources best be used to rectify this situation? A new community collaborative — Together We're the Answer — aims to find out and to put the results into practice.

A broad spectrum of concerned citizens met at a county-wide summit, "Building on the Strengths of African American Families," hosted by Together We're the Answer last November 17. Summit participants included families and youth, as well as representatives from faith communities, nonprofit organizations, Fairfax Futures, Fairfax County's

Office for Children, other county agencies, and Fairfax County Public Schools. One conclusion participants reached is that school readiness and school performance are key elements in improving the lives of the county's African American children and youth. Participants agreed to foster school readiness through mentoring and ongoing relationships with adults who are committed to supporting academic and lifelong success. Together We're the Answer draws members from businesses, faith communities, fraternal organizations, local government, nonprofit organizations, schools, and the general public. The coalition is planning neighborhood-wide summits throughout 2008 that will forge partnerships to move communities beyond dialogue to actions that will improve outcomes of African American families.

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# Quality Improvement Pilot Rates Fairfax Pre-K Programs

The Commonwealth of Virginia is piloting the use of a quality rating and improvement system (QRIS) to help assess, improve, and communicate the level of quality in the early care and education settings that families consider for their children.

Eighteen classrooms located in eight child care centers throughout Fairfax County will be rated as part of the QRIS pilot. State-trained evaluators rated six classrooms last fall; they will rate the same classrooms and 12 additional classrooms this spring.

## Star Quality Rating

The QRIS rating system covers a broad assessment of classroom-based programs, including learning environments, instructional practices, coordination with parents and community resources, education and training of staff, and classroom interactions. Programs will likely be rated once every two years by evaluators

who will also be regularly assessed for their consistency and reliability.

The voluntary system uses five levels of quality that incorporate and build upon Virginia's licensing standards, Board of Education requirements, and Head Start performance standards. The "star quality" system rates programs on a rising-star basis from one through five, similar to the way restaurants and hotels are rated. Stars are awarded based on achievement in each area. Although no stars will be designated during this phase of the QRIS pilot, each participating center director will receive feedback from the rater who tested the tool in the center's program.

Maryland, 11 other states, and the District of Columbia have launched similar quality rating systems that help define standards for early childhood education and create a framework for accountability. The QRIS system is also under consideration in several other states.

*"This system will...  
[encourage] quality  
improvement in all of  
Virginia's classrooms."*

—Governor Tim Kaine



## News from the *School Readiness Network*

# CIGNA HealthCare Mid-Atlantic Joins Network

Thomas Martel, president of CIGNA HealthCare Mid-Atlantic, notes that CIGNA HealthCare prides itself on being a "Business of Caring®." Martel recently announced that CIGNA HealthCare Mid-Atlantic has teamed up with nearly 70 businesses, public agencies, community organizations, and other early childhood education advocates in the **School Readiness Network** to improve the care and education of young children throughout Fairfax County.

"We care about our CIGNA members, providers, and customers, and the

communities where we live and work," Martel said. "Our partnership with Fairfax Futures' **School Readiness Network** allows us to support Fairfax County's youngest residents. CIGNA HealthCare strives to empower individuals at every age to reach their own best health, vitality, and quality of life. By introducing healthy lifestyles and habits at a young age as part of school readiness activities, we believe we can increase the overall health and well-being of tomorrow's communities."

The nonprofit CIGNA Foundation assists numerous charities and organi-

zations, particularly those serving communities where CIGNA employees live and work. CIGNA Foundation also plays a major role in CIGNA's ongoing partnerships with March of Dimes and Susan G. Komen for the Cure.

CIGNA HealthCare ([www.cigna.com](http://www.cigna.com)), based in Bloomfield, Connecticut, provides medical benefits plans, dental coverage, behavioral health coverage, pharmacy benefits, and products and services that integrate and analyze information to support consumerism and health advocacy.



For general information on the **School Readiness Network**, go to [www.fairfax-futures.org/SRN-about.htm](http://www.fairfax-futures.org/SRN-about.htm).

For information on becoming a corporate member of the **Network**, contact Vera Steiner Blore at 703.324.8126 or at [vera.steinerblore@fairfax-futures.org](mailto:vera.steinerblore@fairfax-futures.org).