

Governor Shares Plan at Fairfax Futures' Leadership Forum

Governor Tim Kaine outlined his proposal to expand the Virginia Preschool Initiative (VPI) during his keynote address at Fairfax Futures' Community Leadership Forum on School Readiness. Stressing the need to prepare young children for success in school, he described his plan to expand VPI's eligibility criteria. Right now, children who are eligible for free lunches can enroll in the program. The Governor would broaden enrollment to include children eligible for reduced-price lunches. By fiscal year 2012, the number of at-risk 4-year-olds who could be served by VPI under the proposed expansion is projected to reach 30,000.

Business, education, government, and community leaders met with the Governor at the September 25 forum, an event made possible through support from Fairfax Futures' **School Readiness Network** business partner, Capital One. In her introduction to Governor Kaine's speech, Katherine Busser, executive vice president at Capital One, remarked: "Children's quality education is the key to the continued success of our company and the region's economy."

Participants voiced their shared commitment to invest in the county's youngest children. Ellen Galinsky, president and co-founder of the Families and Work Institute, spoke to the forum's attendees about building systems that promote early learning. The forum also featured remarks

by Gerry Connolly, chairman of the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors, and a panel presentation—"School Readiness at Work in Fairfax County"—moderated by Univision news anchor Norma Montenegro. Panelists were: Dr. Jack Dale, superintendent of Fairfax County Public Schools; Fairfax County Juvenile Court Judge Gayl Carr; J. Knox Singleton, president of Inova Health System; and Verdia Haywood, deputy county executive in charge of Fairfax County's human services agencies.

More than 140 leaders attended the forum, including Virginia state Senator Mary Margaret Whipple; Virginia state Delegates Ken Plum, Jim Scott, Mark Sickles, and Virginia Watts; and Virginia's secretary of education, Tom Morris. Also in attendance were Cathy Hudgins, supervisor of Fairfax County's Hunter Mill District, and Fairfax County School Board members Phil Niedzielksi-Eichner, Ilryong Moon, and Kathy Smith.

"The Community Leadership Forum on School Readiness has helped to forge productive partnerships," noted Vera Steiner-Blore, executive director of Fairfax Futures. "Together we are raising the bar for early childhood education in Fairfax County."



Governor Tim Kaine



Discussing the various aspects of school readiness are (left to right) Fairfax County Public Schools Superintendent Jack Dale, Fairfax County Juvenile Court Judge Gayl Carr, Inova Health System President J. Knox Singleton, and Deputy County Executive Verdia Haywood.

Governor Tim Kaine (front row, center) and Fairfax County Board of Supervisors Chairman Gerry Connolly (second on right) greet **School Readiness Network** business partners. Back row, left to right: Charlene Wheeless, Raytheon IIS; Mia Walton, Rolls-Royce North America; Elaine Cudney, Deloitte; Tim Sargeant, Dominion Virginia Power; Janet Barnard, Cox Communications, Northern Virginia. Front Row, left to right: Amy MacKay, PNC; Carolyn Berkowitz, Capital One; Katherine Busser, Capital One; Julia Huggins, CIGNA HealthCare Mid-Atlantic; and Cheryl Clarke, Freddie Mac Foundation.



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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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Investing in School Readiness

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News for Early Childhood Educators • Fall 2007

Readiness Collaborative Improves Early Learning Programs

Success is written all over the rating charts of child care centers and family child care homes in four neighborhoods that participated in a two-year pilot program under Fairfax County's School Readiness Collaborative (SRC). Child care providers showed increased competencies in all aspects of a nationally recognized assessment of early learning environments.

"The Collaborative's activities have proven to be effective at raising the skill levels of early childhood professionals," said SRC director Gail Bjorklund. "The big winners here are our children."

Program evaluators used the Environmental Classroom Rating Scale and the Family Day Care Environmental Rating Scale to assess several categories of child care and education. Both scales range from 0 (inadequate) to 7 (excellent). Prior to the pilot program, the ratings ranged from 4.00 to 5.97. At the end of the program, the ratings ranged from 6.06 to 6.75, with greatest improvement in the areas of listening and reasoning skills.

Successful Strategies

The SRC brought together child care programs and public elementary schools in neighborhoods in Alexandria

(Hollin Meadows), Annandale (Annandale Terrace), Reston (Lake Anne), and Vienna (Freedom Hill). Program strategies focused on two goals—providing a shared understanding of early learning, and giving child care professionals the knowledge and skills to prepare young children under their care for success in school. Major components included:

- *Early Learning Guidelines*—created primarily for child care providers—which encompass benchmarks that describe both the knowledge and skills children develop from birth to age 5 and learning experiences that are key to

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State Awards Fairfax New Start Strong Grant

Fairfax County is one of just 11 counties included in a preschool pilot program as part of Governor Kaine's Start Strong initiative to expand high quality preschool opportunities for 4-year-olds in Virginia. The pilot program provides funding for 65 children from low-income families. Centers and child care providers will develop individual learning plans that establish educational goals and will document outcomes for children. Fairfax County's Office for Children (OFC) will provide on-site curriculum training, technical assistance, and assessment assistance to support the participating teachers and child care providers.

Outcome assessment is a key component. The pilot program offers another opportunity for the OFC to demonstrate that quality early care and education programs contribute to successful outcomes when children go to kindergarten.

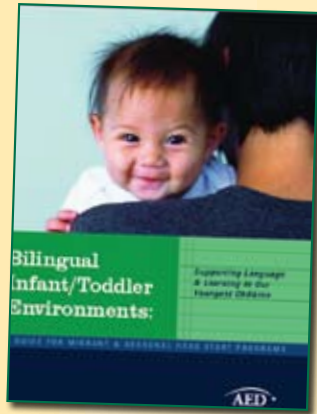


Ready-to-use Resources

Bilingual Infant/Toddler Environments: Supporting Language & Learning in Our Youngest Children

By Robert Stechuk, Susan Burns, and Sharon Yanadian, Academy for Educational Development, 2006

It is increasingly common for early childhood educators to find in their classrooms some children from English-only households, others from households using another language exclusively, and multilingual children who switch from one language to another. This report suggests ways to use linguistic diversity to benefit individual students and the classroom as a whole.



The authors reviewed questionnaires completed by staff members in Migrant and Seasonal Head Start programs, which predominately serve monolingual Spanish and bilingual Spanish-English households. After analyzing the surveys and other studies, the authors “do not find evidence to support a separate set of ‘second language’ learning experiences.” Methods that foster learning a first language are equally productive in learning a second.

Effective teachers will help each child feel confident in whatever language, combination of languages, or nonverbal communication methods he or she chooses to use at any given moment. Criticizing or correcting a child for mixing languages is strongly discouraged.

In general, the authors conclude, “social interactions that are supportive, culturally and individually relevant, and cognitively challenging” are the key to supporting the extraordinary language capacities innate in every child.

www.aed.org/ToolsandPublications

Early Care and Education for Children in Low-Income Families: Patterns of Use, Quality, and Potential Policy Implications

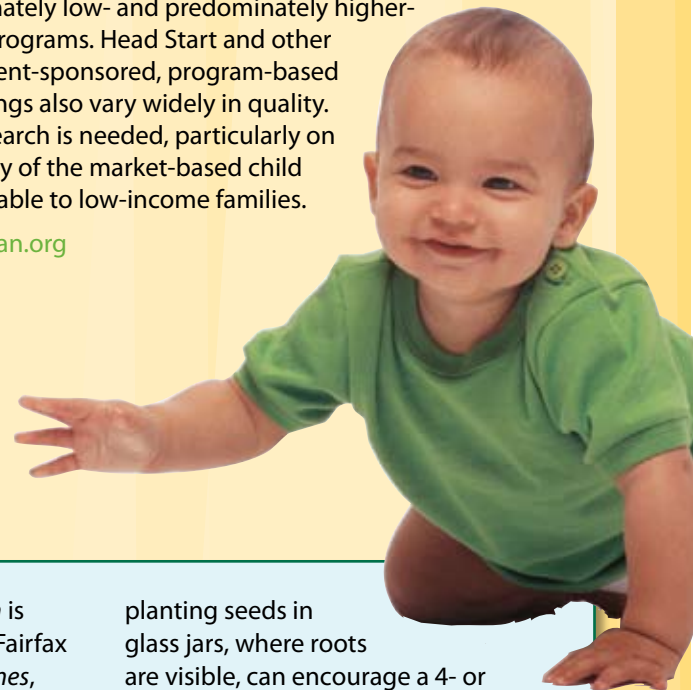
By Gina Adams, Kathryn Tout, and Martha Zaslow, Urban Institute, May 2007

Early childhood educators know that the quality, extent, and type of care provided during the pre-kindergarten years have a significant impact on a child’s development, regardless of income level. This study focuses on low-income families and addresses several aspects of their early care and education (ECE) experience.

The authors found that low- and higher-income families make use of ECE programs in different ways. Participation in ECE programs is common among children from low-income families, and use of particular ECE programs varies with such factors as accessibility, family preferences, and socioeconomic constraints. Low-income children may encounter more potentially disruptive structural and administrative changes over the course of their ECE experience than higher-income children.

Several studies suggest that a sizeable proportion of ECE programs would fail to achieve a rating of “good” on widely used observational measures. These deficiencies exist in both predominately low- and predominately higher-income programs. Head Start and other government-sponsored, program-based care settings also vary widely in quality. More research is needed, particularly on the quality of the market-based child care available to low-income families.

www.urban.org



Fairfax Futures Helps Parents To Nurture Early Learning

Children are born ready to learn, and parents are their child’s first teacher. With that in mind, Fairfax Futures is developing *Helping Your Child Love to Learn*, a booklet showing parents simple and enjoyable activities that will help their children be successful in kindergarten. The booklet will be released in English and Spanish in late October.

Helping Your Child Love to Learn is designed as a complement to Fairfax County’s *Early Learning Guidelines*, currently used by early childhood educators. The booklet includes age-appropriate ways to nurture learning.

Parents can encourage creativity in infants or toddlers by gently moving their child’s body while listening to music. Having a 2- or 3-year-old sort the family’s socks helps to lay the foundation for mathematics. And

planting seeds in glass jars, where roots are visible, can encourage a 4- or 5-year-old’s sense of curiosity.

The booklet is made possible through a grant from the Freddie Mac Foundation. The Spanish translation is funded by the Zonta Club of Fairfax County. Related material will be available on the Web later this fall.

www.fairfax-futures.org

Educators Discuss Readiness and Diversity

Every fall, early childhood educators in Fairfax County welcome children from diverse linguistic backgrounds. Thanks to Fairfax Futures' third annual school readiness symposium, many of these educators started this fall with new tools in their education kits. The symposium's title: *Supporting School Readiness in a Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Community*.

Nearly 300 early childhood educators from the child care, preschool and public school communities came together this past spring to hear keynote speaker Dr. Eugene Garcia and other well-known experts on children's cultural and linguistic diversity. The morning panel included Monimalika Day (George Mason University), Pilar Fort (Zero to Three), and Robert Stechuk (Academy for Educational Development).

Following the morning panel, participants had the opportunity to attend one of five workshops. Several **School Readiness Network** members, including Northern Virginia Literacy Council, Virginia Alliance of Family Child Care Associations, Fairfax County Public Library Foundation, Fairfax County Public Schools, Department of Family Services, Reach Out and Read, Voices for Virginia's Children, and Wolf Trap joined **Network** business partners PNC Bank and Apple Federal Credit Union to provide information and resources of interest to symposium attendees. Educators visited the information tables to learn how these community organizations, public agencies, and businesses support the broader early care and education community.

To see the entire Symposium Summary, visit www.fairfax-futures.org.

Over 100 languages are spoken by children in Fairfax County Public Schools.



Keynote speaker Dr. Eugene Garcia

Among the key points that emerged from the day's presentations:

- ▶ No matter what the home language, early exposure to language is critical for all children.
- ▶ Children's home language is a fundamental resource because it is connected to the formation of personal identity and the way children think about themselves, and it supports their ability to relate to and understand others.
- ▶ Young children are capable of learning different languages at the same time; bilingual exposure does not produce confusion or delays in young children.
- ▶ Exposure to English should not be at the expense of a child's first language.
- ▶ When working with young English language learners, remember that many students who sit silently may not be producing language but will be listening and internalizing the English language structure.
- ▶ Culturally competent early childhood educators have a strong understanding of their own culture, are good at engaging families from different cultures, and are able to negotiate and create a respect or understanding of both cultures.
- ▶ It is vital that educators nurture and support a child's home language and culture.
- ▶ Ensure that all children are respected and made to feel welcome in the classroom; encourage their success and let them know that teachers are there to help them achieve their full potential.

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Monimalika Day



An Apple for the School Readiness Network

Rooted in Northern Virginia's education community and founded in 1956 by 10 local schoolteachers, Apple Federal Credit Union (AFCU) understands the value of knowledge and learning. "We believe it is vital that educators in the early childhood and K-12 community receive the training and support they need to help prepare the next generation for success in school and in life," said Robert Sowell, Sr., vice president for community relations and a member of Fairfax Futures' Board of Directors. "That's why Apple Federal Credit Union has renewed its support as a business partner in Fairfax Futures' **School Readiness Network**."



In 2006, AFCU established the Apple Federal Credit Union Education Foundation, an independent charitable organization (with a separate board and an executive director) that maintains and expands AFCU's legacy of charitable giving and community service.

Because of AFCU's generous support, the Foundation (www.afcufoundation.org) uses all funds donated by the public for charitable activities. Through the Foundation, AFCU provides scholarships, recognizes and rewards outstanding teachers, promotes student achievement and financial literacy, makes grants for academic programs, and contributes to community-oriented charities and organizations such as Fairfax Futures.

Collaborative Boosts Skills

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the development and implementation of quality early learning programs.

- ▶ A 40-hour training program, intended for child care providers and culminating in a School Readiness Certificate, that focused on how to support school readiness.
- ▶ Individualized, on-site coaching to help child care providers follow through on concepts they learned in the School Readiness Certificate program.
- ▶ Educational equipment and materials for the participating providers to help them improve their learning environments.
- ▶ School readiness teams that strengthened connections among public elementary schools, child care programs, and parents and children to help children make successful transitions to kindergarten.

Created as part of Virginia's Smart Beginnings initiative, the SRC brought together a local partnership that included Fairfax County's Office for Children, Fairfax County Public Schools, Head Start, Northern Virginia Community College, and Fairfax Futures. The *Early Learning Guidelines* are already available online for use throughout the county.

For more information, please visit www.fairfaxcounty.gov/ofc.

Welcome to the Network

Congratulations to these latest members of the **School Readiness Network**, who have teamed up with more than 50 businesses, public agencies, community organizations, and other early childhood education advocates to support school readiness for all of our county's young children.

- ▶ CIGNA HealthCare Mid-Atlantic
- ▶ College of Education and Human Development, George Mason University
- ▶ Deloitte
- ▶ Devotion to Children
- ▶ Fairfax County Department of Systems Management for Human Resources
- ▶ Fairfax County Health Department
- ▶ Fairfax County Retired Educators
- ▶ Fairfax Education Association
- ▶ Inova Health System
- ▶ Northern Virginia Community College
- ▶ Reach Out and Read
- ▶ United Christian Parish Preschool
- ▶ Voices for Virginia's Children—NoVA
- ▶ Washington Area Women's Foundation
- ▶ Zonta Club of Fairfax County

Join us! Visit www.fairfax-futures.org/SRN.html

Launching Pads to Kindergarten

When early childhood educators get together, there's no telling how many "aha!" ideas will grow out of the conversation. This one sprouted during a school readiness class that the Office for Children's Institute for Early Learning held last June for directors of early childhood education programs in Fairfax County.

Last spring Sleepy Hollow Preschool in Annandale posted signboards next to the "fours" classrooms. The preschool invited families to decorate the boards with information about which school—including Sleepy Hollow Preschool—their children would be attending in the fall. The preschool's director, Debbie Brown, noted how effective these signboards turned out to be.

"The murals became launching pads for many helpful conversations about the transition to kindergarten," Brown explained. Children and their parents enjoyed discovering who was going to go where. The murals also reminded families to gather information they would need for kindergarten orientations.

