

Response to Questions on the FY 2016 Budget

Request By: Supervisor Hudgins

Question: What are the County and FCPS commitments to the continued Pre-K expansion in the FY 2016 budget?

Response: School Readiness describes the capabilities of children, their families, schools and communities that will best promote student success in kindergarten and beyond. Early childhood education and Pre-K programs support the development of children's cognitive, social, emotional and physical development skills which are strong predictors of success in school. A mixed delivery system of both County and FCPS programs helps to ensure the availability of many options to support the diversity of needs in the County. The County addresses school readiness by supporting and expanding quality community-based programs that are accessible; creating a network of programs that promote school readiness through the alignment of curricula to the Virginia Foundation Blocks for Early Learning; supporting children living in poverty to reach fall kindergarten benchmarks and providing access to quality childcare. In the FY 2016 Advertised Budget Plan funding of \$941,122 specifically supports the following school readiness initiatives:

- Child Care Assistance and Referral (CCAR) Program: An increase of \$600,000 supports locally funded financial assistance for child care to working families with low and moderate income. CCAR is an integral part of the school readiness initiative as the program helps to ensure that children at-risk for school failure can attend regulated early childhood settings. As proposed in the School Readiness presentation at the Human Services Committee meeting on November 26, 2013, funding was originally intended to provide additional slots. However, in September 2014, the Virginia Department of Social Services increased the state's Maximum Reimbursable Rates paid to child care providers participating in the state-funded CCAR program. This increase created a situation where the state's reimbursement rates were higher than the County's reimbursement rates. As a result, child care providers are receiving a higher subsidy payment for those children receiving state-funded subsidies than they are for those children receiving locally-funded subsidies. Prior to this increase, the rates between the two systems were the same. The County has historically adjusted the local Maximum Reimbursable Rates to be consistent with the state. To not do so would create disparity between the two systems and increases the likelihood the child care programs may only enroll children whose child care subsidy is funded by the state.

The FY 2016 Advertised Budget Plan includes \$1.0 million to partially fund the rate increase, which is estimated to be \$2.3 million. Additionally, the School Readiness funding which was originally intended to serve additional children will now decrease the number of children who will not receive services due to the rate increase. This means total funding of \$1.6 million is included in the FY 2016 Advertised Budget Plan in support of the CCAR program. This leaves a \$0.8 million shortfall between what the County was able to fund and the full value of the rate increase. This shortfall will be addressed by managing enrollment through natural attrition but it is anticipated that the program will serve 93 fewer children.

- Local Cash Match for Early Head Start (EHS) Expansion: Local Cash Match funding of \$200,000 is included in support of the recently awarded Early Head Start Childcare Partnership and Expansion grant. EHS is a national child and family development program that provides quality early childhood education and comprehensive family support services to income eligible families with children birth to three years of age and expectant parents. The expansion will allow the program to serve an additional 56 children, including 16 children in two classrooms in a center-based program at Gum Springs Glenn Children Center and 40 children through partnerships with regulated family child care providers.
- Virginia Quality Rating and Improvement System (VQRIS): Funding of \$141,122 enables additional County child care centers/preschools and family child care homes serving children living in poverty to participate in this key program that defines standards for early childhood education and creates a framework for accountability. An additional 30 programs will be rated and receive mentoring as part of VQRIS.

The County has worked closely with FCPS to develop a system that provides community-based as well as school-based options for school readiness. It is hoped that the FCPS School Board will support continued expansion of the school-based programs; however, expansion of community-based programs is not contingent on additional school funding.