



Virginia Unified Early Childhood System: Phase One

This past year Governor Northam signed legislation to create the Virginia Unified Early Childhood System, which is designed to support children's school readiness regardless of economic, cultural or ethnic background. Over the next three years, the Virginia Department of Education will develop and scale the system to ensure quality in all publicly funded early childhood programs. Fairfax County is one of ten communities in the state piloting the new system. Office for Children staff has recruited programs to participate and are working closely with early childhood programs to provide resources and guidance, including technical assistance and professional learning opportunities for early childhood educators. Additionally, OFC staff are working to share information with educators and the public about the system so that families and programs are aware of this exciting initiative.

On July 1, the Unified Virginia Quality System, Birth-Five entered Practice Year One. During this first year, programs that are participating in the Preschool Development Grant B-5 (PDG B-5) will be measured on the quality of

infant, toddler and preschool teaching and learning. Educators in every classroom will be observed using the Classroom Assessment Scoring System® (CLASS) tool. Additionally, the curriculum used will be reviewed and approved to ensure that it aligns with the Virginia Early Learning & Development Standards.

During Practice Year One, the results of the assessments will remain private and will not have direct consequences on educators or programs. Instead, they will be used at the state level to analyze equity impact and make improvements to the system. Continually measuring the quality of programs will help drive improvements to the system and in the classroom.

Another way the system will improve early childhood education is by expanding supports for educators. Participants will receive frequent feedback,

recognizing their strengths as well as identifying areas for growth, to help strengthen their practice. The Office for Children will work to provide professional learning opportunities and support to address needs identified by the assessments. One on one coaching will also be utilized to address areas for growth.

To learn more about the Virginia Unified Early Childhood System, visit <https://bit.ly/3idfaQx>.



Wolf Trap Kept the Arts Going Through the Pandemic!

Since 1981, Wolf Trap Institute for Early Learning Through the Arts, a program of Wolf Trap Foundation for the Performing Arts, has been committed to bringing joyful, active learning through the arts to children, educators and families. When schools closed to in-person learning in 2020, Wolf Trap addressed the challenges facing early childhood educators with enthusiasm and creativity that paved the way for an influx of new, innovative resources, tools and strategies. During the 2020-21 program year, Wolf Trap adapted their services to different platforms to deliver virtual residencies, professional development workshops and family involvement workshops for early childhood programs in the community, centers and family child care homes, Fairfax County Public Schools Pre-K, Higher Horizons Day Care, and Greater Mount Vernon Community Head Start.



Teaching Artists transformed residencies and professional learning workshops for the virtual space with early childhood educators to develop creative approaches that would engage children learning from home and in-person. In some cases, teaching artists interacted with children directly via their online platform. Just as in traditional professional development workshops, teaching artists provided educators with ideas and techniques for incorporating arts into their lesson plans; helping them to address the unique challenges they were facing in their new teaching environment.

Post-workshop surveys revealed that 96% of professional development workshop participants learned skills they could apply to their work. A family child care partner shared, “Ms. Maria is amazing. She gave me so many ideas of how, through music and art, I can teach my children more easily, especially since they are very young children. I really enjoyed my Virtual Residency program. Thank you for this opportunity!”

“The pandemic has taught us how important it is to evolve with the needs of the community . . .”

During Family Involvement Workshops, families enjoyed singing along and interacting from the comfort of their homes while teaching artists delivered arts integrated, multi-disciplinary experiences that encouraged active learning. One hundred percent of respondents from the workshops’ post-surveys indicated that they will be able to use ideas from workshops to support their children’s learning at home.

Throughout the pandemic, Wolf Trap staff remained focused on providing educators and families with tools to create practical, engaging learning experiences for young children throughout the year—bringing some welcome joy and relief to families and educators alike. Moving forward, Wolf Trap plans to continue to adapt its services to include both virtual and in-person learning.

“The pandemic has taught us how important it is to evolve with the needs of the community,” said Jennifer Edelen, Director of Wolf Trap Institute. “We want to be a true resource to early childhood educators, and we are committed to delivering arts integrated content in a way that is both meaningful and accessible to early childhood educators and their students.”



ITC Celebrates Early Intervention Awareness and Staff Appreciation Month in May

Each May, the Commonwealth of Virginia recognizes the importance of early identification and intervention for infants and toddlers who may need support to reach their full potential. This year was no different. To read Governor Northam's full proclamation, visit <https://bit.ly/2XnAyMp>.

Despite the pandemic, the past year the Infant and Toddler Connection of Fairfax-Falls Church fulfilled their mission by providing most of their services on a virtual platform. By utilizing technology, they provided assessments and developed supportive plans for more than 1,500 of the county's youngest residents and their families. ITC's Early Intervention Specialists became experts in supporting the goals and outcomes of each family using coaching and a video screen. One family who received support virtually said, "ITC has been a wonderful resource for us, and we are so fortunate to have been a participant. They handled such an incredibly challenging year with professionalism, flexibility and calm."

To celebrate Early Intervention Awareness month, ITC hosts an annual picnic for staff. Fortunately, the date of the picnic this year coincided with the change in guidance from Governor Northam, allowing staff to get together outdoors. More than 60 staff members gathered for the event, held at Van Dyck Park in the City of Fairfax. It was a fun time full of energy and enthusiasm, with several staff wearing ITC's signature

purple. One staff member shared, "this has made me recognize how much I missed having my team around me in person. Some of these people I see on a screen two or three times a week but today was different."

In April, ITC began providing in-person outdoor or center visits to their families. The number of in-person visits has grown steadily each week. Beginning in late June, staff will switch to in-person services in the child's natural environment as the primary mode of service delivery. The transition will be a challenge as staff once again hit the roads and highways of Fairfax County and negotiate the scheduling challenges of traveling between visits. ITC will continue to provide telepractice services for families who prefer that method, while also working closely with the State to determine the role of virtual services in the future. The lessons learned and expertise developed by staff during the pandemic has shown that telepractice is a useful tool to support families in addition to traditional in-person services. ITC will continue to provide outreach to the community to increase awareness of the programs they offer while also focusing on their vision of ensuring all that infants and toddlers with a developmental need are identified, supported, accepted, included and valued in their families and the community.



CAMP FAIRFAX

Join Us for a Summer of Fun!

Located in Community Centers and FCPS locations throughout Fairfax County, Camp Fairfax provided a summer of fun for rising 1st-7th graders. Children enjoyed a variety of engaging curriculum experiences in the visual arts, performing arts, and sports and fitness, which were incorporated into weekly themes such as Game Shows Galore, By the Sea, Community Connectors, the Tokyo Olympics, and Weird but True, Exploring Fun Facts about Everything. Camp Fairfax staff were committed to ensuring a safe environment through the consistent implementation of health and safety protocols, and dedicated to providing a great summer camp experience for children and families.



Clockwise from bottom right: A child at Weyanoke shares the fish she created by mixing sand and paint; Many centers hosted their own Summer Olympics - a child at Weyanoke crosses the finish line while children at Keene Mill created a banner for the games; Siblings at Cunningham Park play a game of Bingo; A child at Cunningham Park shows off the paper shark he designed; Inspired by a rescued owl, children at Weyanoke created mini owls using recycled cardboard; A child at Cunningham Park enjoys a cup stacking challenge; Children at Saratoga show the vegetables they harvested from their garden; children at Belvedere celebrated ocean life with a Boardwalk Fiesta!

Fairfax County
O F C Office for Children

This employee newsletter is published by the Office for Children, a division of the Fairfax County Neighborhood and Community Services. If you have any questions, contact Gwen Jones at 703-324-7137 or Nancy McDonough at 703-324-8042. Fairfaxcounty.gov/ofc.



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