

## Fairfax County Equitable School Readiness Strategic Plan: Birth to Eight

Research and experience have demonstrated in Fairfax County and communities across the country that when young children have access to high-quality early learning and developmental opportunities, they do better in school and life. These outcomes benefit not only children birth to eight and their families, but also contribute to the enduring well-being of the community. Reflecting the goals of One Fairfax<sup>1</sup>, which lifts up equity as a core policy principle, the Fairfax County Equitable School Readiness Strategic Plan represents a deeply held and widely shared commitment to ensure that the county's school readiness resources best support those who need them most.

The Fairfax County Equitable School Readiness Strategic Plan

lays out a comprehensive vision and implementation roadmap which incorporates invaluable input from families with young children in neighborhoods across the county, early childhood educators and other partnering professionals, government agencies, and schools. Key input was also included from groups with a focus and interest in early childhood health, development and school readiness including community-based non-profits, institutes of higher education, and various associations. The vision and implementation plan is built upon the following core strategies:

- Establish meaningful partnerships with families to grow school readiness opportunities in all communities and support children's optimal development in all settings.
- Provide equitable offerings of high-quality early development and learning experiences and related school readiness supports throughout the county.

- Foster quality and effective professional learning in all early childhood programs and services.
- Promote equity-focused planning and decision making, as well as shared accountability, through the use of data.
- Nurture a whole community commitment to school success for all children.

The Successful Children and Youth Policy Team (SCYPT)<sup>2</sup> has provided helpful feedback and endorsed the Equitable School Readiness Strategic Plan. With continued community engagement, momentum and support, the implementation of the strategic plan presents a vital and sustainable approach for ensuring that all young children in Fairfax County will have the equitable supports necessary to begin school fully ready to succeed, and thrive.

To view the full report visit [www.fairfaxcounty.gov/familyservices/office-for-children](http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/familyservices/office-for-children).

<sup>1</sup> Fairfax County Board of Supervisors and School Board adopted a joint social and racial equity policy called One Fairfax.

<sup>2</sup> Successful Children and Youth Policy Team (SCYPT) is comprised of leaders from multiple sectors with Fairfax County. The team's role is to set community-wide goals and priorities for public policies as it relates to children, youth and families. [www.fairfaxcounty.gov/health-humanservices/scypt](http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/health-humanservices/scypt)

# Child Development Series Engages Spanish Speakers



Jill Aviles of NVAEYC, series facilitator.

Office for Children and Northern Virginia Association for the Education of Young Children have a shared commitment to supporting Spanish-speaking early

childhood educators.

In the fall of 2017, they began offering a series of monthly sessions for Spanish-speaking family child care providers affiliated with Early Head Start and Community Education and Provider Services. The course was called Building Nurturing Relationships with Infants and Young Toddlers.

Family child care providers had the opportunity to share meaningful discussion, exchange ideas, and identify similar challenges and possible solutions. The four sessions built on each other, culminating in a sharing of lessons learned and practices

implemented during the series. Discussion topics explored various topics, including:

- Ways to support positive interactions for overall infant well-being.
- Brain development and the effect of toxic stress.
- The importance that family child care providers play in the lives of infants and toddlers.
- Observation methods.
- Temperament traits.

Resources from the Program for Infant/Toddler Care (PITC) and Infant/Toddler CLASS dimensions, along with family engagement information, were integrated throughout the series.

Providing these sessions in Spanish and responding to the unique needs of family child care settings contributed to the success of the series. When asked what they liked the most, many participants indicated that having the

sessions in Spanish helped them understand concepts such as:

- Learning about observation.
- How to respond to individual children.
- The importance of responding when an infant cries.

One of the providers summed up the benefit of the series perfectly, “I was interested in learning in my language about child development.”

“We are thankful for the opportunity to collaborate with NVAEYC.” said Duan Shankle, EHS family child care coordinator. “This professional learning series gave Spanish-speaking family child care providers a great opportunity to explore what quality infant toddler programs are like and practice strategies to increase nurturing interactions with children.”

## Virginia Quality Hosts Regional Symposium

Early childhood educators and professionals from the Northern Region attended the Virginia Quality Symposium in December. Virginia Quality programs in the City of Alexandria, Arlington County, Fairfax County, City of Falls Church, City of Fairfax and Loudoun County were invited to this event which explored “Beautiful Beginnings: A Developmental Curriculum for Infants and Toddlers” by Helen Raikes and Jane McCall Whitmer.

Raikes, a professor in the Department of Child, Youth and Family Studies at the University of Nebraska at Lincoln, and her graduate research assistant Mashael Altwijri, provided an introduction to this curriculum, which takes an experience-based approach to enhancing children’s development. The research-supported program is built on each child’s natural strengths and interests, recognizes and expands upon emerging development and encourages progress in challenging areas.

Organizers had a variety of goals for this symposium and the professionals attending to:

- Review milestones of infant and toddler development to prepare educators to help young children meet developmental goals, thus enhancing school readiness.
- Raise awareness of the concepts in this innovative curriculum.
- Gain practical experience in establishing goals and planning creative, appropriate activities to use in their programs.
- Learn the correlation between this curriculum and the Ages & Stages Questionnaires® (ASQ).

It was an opportunity for participants to familiarize themselves and practice using this curriculum which:

- Supports children as they progress in eight key areas: communication, gross motor, fine motor, intellectual,



Mashael Altwijri and Helen Raikes of University of Nebraska with OFC School Readiness Coordinator Betsi Closter.

discovery, social, self-help, and pretend.

- Fosters each child’s individuality by carefully observing the child and selecting appropriate goals based on the child’s needs and interests.
- Uses—in many cases—materials readily available in most settings.
- Easily tracks child’s progress with goal sheets for recording objectives for each age range.

# VPI Peer Share Program Promotes Process Art

## Sessions focus on knowledge sharing among teachers



Children have the opportunity to explore with paint and foil.

In the fall, early childhood specialists with Virginia Preschool Initiative developed a series of four classes, The Dribble Drabble Peer Share Opportunity, to demonstrate to educators the value of process art.

Process art is recommended by early childhood experts, because it allows children to experiment with creating through use of a wide range of materials, at their own developmental level. As a result, each work of art is as individual as each child.

Participants learned about the importance of process art through interactions with peers and through resources such as the book “Dribble Drabble Process Art Experiences for Young Children.”



VPI teachers at the final Dribble Drabble Session.

One of the primary goals was for educators to read and use the activities in the “Dribble Drabble” book. Specialists used hands-on experiences at each session to bring the book to life.

Classes met every other week for four sessions this fall, and each session had a focus topic:

- Assessment.
- Developmental skills.

- The educator’s role in the area of art.
- How to identify domains.

At the end of each session, participants received materials and supplies they could use to implement the process art experiences with the children in their programs. In the following session, samples of children’s work were shared with the whole group along with what was learned as they implemented the techniques.

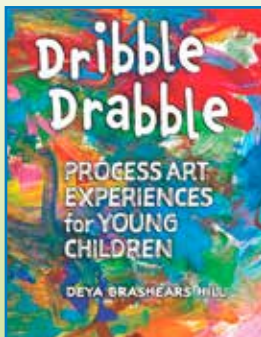


Teachers create one-of-a-kind mobiles in the class.

VPI mentor Marybel Enriquez explained, “The educators had many positive things to share about how the process art impacted their programs. They were also able to hear from each other what they liked and what was changed either by the children or educator, what went well and what did not, and they picked up useful tips from each other’s experiences.”

“Each session provided a safe environment to share with one another and learn from one another about their experiences. One educator was comfortable enough to share that the activity with the children did not go as planned and how she made changes to the material to make the activity meaningful for the children,” said VPI Specialist Lynn Cartledge.

Given the success of this first Dribble Drabble class, the specialists plan to offer it again in a different part of the county in the spring. Additionally, other peer share opportunities are planned on other topics.



Children at a VPI center create process art with chalk and paper.



Crinkled up foil gives the children an alternative to experience how paint can be applied to paper.

# Head Start Events Promote Family Engagement



Families enjoy a treasure hunt at the Fall festival.



Families learn about tips to avoid the flu at the Breakfast and Learn.



Families participate in the first Breakfast and Learn at GMVHS.



Children enjoy a performance by Wolf Trap Artist Kofi Denis.

One of the core values of the Head Start program is honoring and supporting the parent-child relationships that are central to a child's healthy development, school readiness and well-being. Head Start provides opportunities throughout the year that support the health and success of the entire family.

## Breakfast and Learn

A new initiative called Breakfast and Learn is one way staff at Greater Mount Vernon Community Head Start promotes family engagement. Last month, parents participated in this fun and nutritious cooking activity. They made Orange Oatmeal Pancakes and scrambled eggs. Once everyone was seated and eating breakfast, Head Start Nutritionist Daniela Sensini, discussed the four steps for food safety, and a speaker from the Health Department, Nikki Wilkens, shared some tips to avoid the flu virus.

Also on hand that day was Natalie Thornock, GMVHS health coordinator, a co-collaborator for Breakfast and Learn. She explained, "It was such a hit with the parents

that sessions are planned to continue every other month starting in March 2018."

## Fall Festival Family Fun

In November, GMVHS invited parents to participate in its Annual Fall Festival. This highly anticipated event promotes family engagement through developmentally appropriate seasonal activities for children. Head Start Coordinator Julie Fowler explained that "The fall festival is a great opportunity for families to spend time with their child learning through play." This year the activities included something to appeal to all the senses:

- A colorful fall art activity.
- An upbeat performance by Wolf Trap artist Kofi Dennis.
- A variety of sensory tables.
- Flavorful fall treats.

Fowler explained that "These events offer a way for staff and families to strengthen their relationships and support family engagement in the program."

## Office for Children

This employee newsletter is published by the Office for Children, a division of the Fairfax County Dept. of Family Services. If you have any questions, contact Angela Morlu at 703-324-7528 or Nancy McDonough at 703-324-8042. [www.fairfaxcounty.gov/ofc](http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/ofc).



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