



# **CASTL Summary of Initial VPI+ Division Consultation Visits**

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### **Appendix – CASTL Initial Division Consultation Attendee Lists**

## **I. Introduction**

The aim of CASTL’s consultation role for VPI+ is to partner with the 11 participating divisions to plan and implement VPI+ successfully. VPI+ implementation involves coordination of many “moving parts,” from finding space and hiring/training staff, to recruiting students, to planning comprehensive services. Within the context of this complexity, CASTL’s responsibility is to help divisions make decisions that focus on *what’s happening in VPI+ classrooms* that will ultimately lead to children’s success in preschool and readiness for Kindergarten. To that end, we envision supporting each division through a process of continuous quality improvement—including setting goals, planning (with a focus on PD plans), and using data to inform changes at the program-, teacher-, and classroom-levels.

CASTL arranged initial visits at each division to accomplish three main goals: 1) start building relationships, 2) gather information about division needs and strengths, and 3) begin joint planning. Visits lasted 2-3 hours, including a meeting with the local division team and an optional classroom visit. Personnel attending the meetings typically included the VPI+ coordinator and an administrator; occasionally, program partners, teachers, or coaches joined as well (See Appendix for a list of attendees at each division visit). Meeting agendas included general introductions, an overview of CASTL’s consultation role and annual activities, divisions sharing information related to consultation areas, and joint planning for the next visit. CASTL followed up with divisions who had additional questions at the meeting.

These initial visits were successful in meeting our goals. Meeting attendees were engaged and open about sharing strengths and needs. All divisions shared information that will help guide local planning, CASTL’s consultation with divisions, and VPI+’s work with divisions, more broadly. This report summarizes information provided by divisions and “*Implications for CASTL support*” (see Section II below, points #1-8), followed by recommendations for CASTL and the VPI+ implementation team (see Section III on p. 8).

## **II. Information gathered in visits and implications for CASTL consultation**

### **1) Student population needs**

Given VPI+/VPI focus on serving low-income children, student/community populations are low-income and typically ethnically diverse across divisions. Many divisions have high and increasing numbers of dual-language learner (DLL) students, with the predominant language being Spanish. Some divisions report having Spanish-speaking staff and a high percent of language match between teachers and students (Prince William, Fairfax), but in most cases, children speaking other languages are immersed in English-speaking classrooms.

A few notable concerns about student populations that arose included children's social-emotional needs, generally-speaking (Brunswick, VA), as well as specifically: children experiencing trauma (Richmond, Henrico, Chesterfield, Norfolk), children displaying challenging behavior (Richmond, Sussex, Henrico, Norfolk, Giles), and the effects of poverty on brain development (Henrico). Inclusion of children with special needs will be a greater emphasis than previously for some divisions.

*Implications for CASTL support: Divisions will benefit from PD resources corresponding to students' needs in the areas of dual language learners (especially strategies for English immersion classrooms), trauma, challenging behavior, and inclusion.*

## **2) Workforce**

Most divisions have started the hiring process and are confident about their ability to hire highly qualified teachers with experience in early childhood education (PreK-K). A couple division representatives did report concerns about having to hire teachers internally from higher grade levels. More widespread concerns were also raised about sustainability of VPI+ related to workforce. For instance, there were worries about teachers losing positions after the grant ends. Also, some representatives reported challenges in their VPI+ community-based settings in terms of finding qualified teachers and paying salaries consistent with those of the local schools.

*Implications for CASTL support: It is anticipated that most teachers working in VPI+ will be experienced early childhood teachers; that said, we expect great diversity in terms of teachers' capacities and skills that will become more evident in the QRIS and evaluator data. Workforce/sustainability will be an important long-term planning issue to discuss at the levels of the VPI+ Implementation Team and locally.*

## **3) Professional Development**

All divisions provide a standardized set of PD. Typically, PD offerings have been limited in time and scope, consisting of workshops offered before and during the school year. PD workshop topics have varied, but have included comprehensive curriculum and formative assessment, as well as targeted curricula/strategies in some divisions; for instance, focused on reading (Richmond, Chesterfield, Fairfax), math (Chesterfield) or social-emotional strategies (Prince William). Some divisions have brought in experts or sent teachers out to institutes for learning on special topics, such as neurosequential processing/ trauma (Henrico); executive functioning (Fairfax); family engagement (Fairfax), and special needs/inclusion (Brunswick- autism; Richmond).

Most programs are excited about the resources that they will have for PD, but feel challenged knowing what the best PD will be and how to fit it into the current school schedule. Some divisions reported satisfaction with PD provided in the past and have concerns about whether they might continue offering PD that is not on the procured PD list (e.g., Fairfax, Henrico).

Many divisions report using some data to determine what teachers' PD needs are consistent at a program level. Some divisions (primarily those who had QRIS) reported using CLASS data in some or all of their PreK programs to determine teachers' instructional weaknesses needing remediation through PD (Henrico, Fairfax, Prince William, Giles). Few divisions individualize PD to a large extent; thus, the VPI+ "individualized PD plans" will be new for most divisions. Coaching is one means to individualize support to teachers that hasn't been widely available until this grant.

Divisions are trying to think through how to leverage PD resources in the VPI+ grant to serve a larger population of their preschool teachers (within grant restrictions) to enable consistent PD offerings. The logistics of offering different PD to different teachers across different programs is daunting to some of the larger divisions (e.g., Norfolk, Chesterfield). Administrators at the VPI+ and division level also brought up interest in aligning PD across Pre-K and K-3.

*Implications for CASTL support: There are significant resources devoted to PD in this grant. PD offerings are typical of the field – mostly "one-and-done" offerings, with limited attempts to align with the needs of teachers and minimal follow-up as applied to classroom practice. This reinforces one of CASTL's goals to work with coaches and coordinators to use data to provide sequenced, on-going PD to support improvement efforts. In addition, clarity around the Procured PD list will be helpful to divisions as they plan for the paid-for PD offerings this spring.*

#### **4) Coaching**

Programs are in process of hiring staff to serve as a coach to their VPI+ teachers. It is anticipated that divisions will hire 13 coaches, and these coaches' backgrounds will vary substantially from extensive coaching experience to some supervision experience to classroom experience only. Areas of expertise will likely differ in terms of knowledge in evidence-based strategies for children with a range of needs (e.g., literacy and math, challenging behaviors, DLL).

For most programs, formalized, ongoing, and non-evaluative coaching will be new. Informal coaching, mentoring, or evaluative supervision has typically been a part of other staff's roles, like lead teachers and education/disability specialists. For the few divisions with existing coaching in PreK programs, a few different models were used.

Coaches' roles will likely vary by the amount of time allotted to coaching and the coach-to-teacher/classroom ratio. Divisions will have the autonomy to devote coaches' time only to new VPI+ classrooms or both new and improved VPI+ classrooms. Three coaches will be part-time (in Chesterfield, Giles, and Sussex) and two of these coaches (in Chesterfield, Giles) will split their time between coaching and family engagement coordination.

*Implications for CASTL support: Given the wide range of backgrounds/experiences of VPI+ coaches, CASTL will be assessing coaches’ needs (through a survey, ongoing data collection) and individualizing training/supervision/PD to their needs. CASTL will also provide divisions with recommendations for initiating coaching in programs where coaching is new and managing coaches’ time so it’s most likely to result in classroom- and child- level outcomes. Managing coaches’ time may be a greater challenge for divisions where 1 staff person serves many classrooms or fills the role of coach and family engagement coordinator.*

**5) Curricula**

Out of the 11 divisions, three (Henrico, Fairfax, and Prince William) have submitted requests to continue their current curricula and eight are planning to switch to the VDOE-procured curricula (see Table 2). As can be expected, these eight divisions were eagerly anticipating the announcement about the selected curriculum<sup>1</sup>. Many divisions expressed concerns about teachers and administrators converting to a new curriculum and anticipate some resistance and/or “growing pains” 2015-2016. Although some divisions expressed a desire to convert all of their PreK programs (sometimes a mix of VPI+, VPI, Head Start, and Title I) to the new curricula, they do not have the funds available this year. Logistics of training and supervising teachers using different curricula/assessments across classrooms is an anticipated challenge.

Table 2. Curricula previously used in each division

Division	Curricula used 2014-2015
Fairfax* Sussex Winchester	Locally developed
Prince William*	High Scope
Richmond	High Scope + Houghton Mifflin: Where Bright Futures Begin
Henrico* Petersburg Chesterfield	Houghton Mifflin: Where Bright Futures Begin
Norfolk	Houghton Mifflin: Splash into PreK
Giles	Creative Curriculum
Brunswick	Creative Curriculum + OWL

\*Division in process of curricula and assessment review process

A majority of divisions have not had a strong focus on teachers’ fidelity of implementation with their chosen curricula. Thus, teachers vary in how they implement curricula, sometimes classroom-to-classroom or site-to-site. It was frequently reported that teachers, and sometimes administrators, resist

<sup>1</sup> VDOE’s selection of Creative Curriculum was announced 6/29/2015, after our division consultation visits concluded

implementing what they perceive as overly “prescriptive” or “standardized” curricula. On the other hand, some division leaders welcome more structured approaches to curricula that can help ensure more consistent high-quality interactions and comprehensive coverage of learning domains (like math, science) across classrooms.

*Implications for CASTL support: In almost all divisions, it will be a shift to focus on fidelity of curricula implementation, and the chosen curriculum (Creative Curriculum) will be new to most. It is clear that in the first year of VPI+, a major role for coaches and local VPI+ teams will be to support curriculum implementation. We will need to frame for teachers and administrators the purpose of high quality curriculum implementation towards improving child outcomes. Given multiple domains of focus in the comprehensive curriculum, we must also be thoughtful about how to help teachers (and coaches working with teachers) to devote their time and activities toward prioritized outcomes. For instance, teachers will need help to know how to devote adequate instructional time in areas of greatest need. Finally, it is important to acknowledge that no single curriculum will necessarily be “the” solution. At the end of year 1 and beyond, we should use data to inform which elements are “working” and which are not to plan for supplements or modifications.*

## **6) Assessments**

In 2014-2015, all divisions were using the state-required PALS, and most divisions report on the success of their programs based on their PALS data (growth from Fall-Spring and/or Spring outcomes). Math or other domain-specific assessments were rarely reported. Thus, many divisions aren’t sure about the impact of their program on child outcomes other than literacy. Some divisions use PALS and other measures (typically teacher-reported anecdotal records) to identify teachers that need extra support, though individualized PD or coaching is rarely available for these teachers.

Most programs have been collecting data at the child, classroom, and program levels. However, the extent to which these data have been used to guide classroom instruction varies widely. More than half of divisions reported using systems designed to help teachers use data to plan individualized instruction, such as holding regular data review/goal setting meetings or providing 1-on-1 mentoring that pairs more experienced teachers with less experienced ones. Other divisions lacked structured opportunities around training/assisting teachers with data. In most divisions, it seemed that more was needed to promote teachers’ widespread use of formative data.

Some teachers and administrators voiced concerns that formative assessments are too time intensive and do not provide enough useful information. It appears that some teachers complete assessments for the sake of ‘checking the box’ without the intention of using the data systematically. Other concerns raised by divisions about assessments included feasibility of data collection (e.g., teacher time for data collection) and program capacity to collect, interpret, analyze data. On the other hand, a few divisions are quite satisfied with their data systems. In these cases,

teachers collect and regularly enter data into programs like PROMIS and ChildPlus, which pull data into reports, and program staff with data expertise are available to assist staff.

*Implications for CASTL support: For most programs, the formative assessment procured by VDOE—announced on 6/29/15 as Teaching Strategies GOLD— will provide a wider range of data than most divisions currently collect (often focused on language/literacy). This change offers new opportunities to improve program-, classroom-, and child-level planning. While just a few programs will be new to the process of collecting and using data systematically, most divisions (even the most experienced) seem to have room to improve in terms of supporting teachers' widespread use of formative assessment data. Therefore, CASTL must add a major focus—supporting teachers' use of assessment to individualize instruction— to VPI+ coaching and PD resource provisions. Divisions should utilize VPI+ coaches, supported by CASTL, as valuable resources when developing program-level and teacher-level PD plans to align with data-informed needs.*

## **7) Leadership/Administration**

Most VPI+ classrooms will be housed in K-5 school buildings with some supervision of teachers provided by school principals. It varies whether these principals have PreK experience and/or are welcoming to the PreK programs. Many divisions spoke about seeking more integration of their PreK teachers into the elementary schools where they are located. This may be a continuing challenge given expansion of VPI+ classrooms into more school sites. In our meetings, it was shared that principals in some divisions welcome VPI+ classrooms into their schools but it was perceived that some seem to lack sufficient knowledge about Early Childhood Education to properly supervise PreK teachers.

Also of note, two divisions reported concerns as to the level of local community support for PreK. These teams are concerned about support for VPI+ changes short-term and long-term, and seek greater advocacy locally to promote sustainability for VPI+. In other places, community support/advocacy for PreK/VPI+ was reported to be an area of strength.

The local VPI division teams we met with varied on a number of dimensions. Some teams were largely well-established whereas others were in transition due to staff changes or considerable expansion. Some VPI+ coordinators had extensive administrative experience, whereas others primarily had classroom backgrounds. Some divisions had expertise internally or consulted with experts in the field to make innovations in certain areas. For instance, Chesterfield and Richmond reported implementing literacy interventions that led to improvements in teacher practices and child outcomes. In terms of family engagement, Prince William reported high success from their Summer Health Fair model (i.e., more children and parents getting health needs met sooner), and Chesterfield reported a great increase in parent participation (to over 50%) when implementing a new set of parent workshops.

Many strengths in the local VPI+ teams were noted across divisions, including that most teams had 1 or more people with extensive careers dedicated to public PreK. All teams reported a strong commitment to improving/expanding VPI for children in their area. Furthermore, teams expressed interest in working with other VPI+ division teams and building a strong learning community for PreK programs across Virginia.

*Implications for CASTL support: Local leadership/administration will be critical for providing the vision, oversight, and support needed to promote change in VPI+ classrooms. CASTL recognizes the potential need for PD aimed at administrators and will provide recommended free resources as well as invite local administrators to webinars, meetings, etc. Furthermore, CASTL plans to conduct the second division consultation meeting with groups of division teams to promote communities of learning to leverage division strengths and cross-fertilization of effective ideas and practices.*

## **8) Partnerships, Comprehensive Services, and Family Engagement**

Most divisions reported having in place a number of local partnerships, especially in terms of child health screenings. Some divisions had in-school therapeutic services, referrals to child/family mental health services in the community, as well as a range of parent-education offerings. Other divisions reported interest in accessing a wider range of services but were limited by the availability of services offered locally. Programs in or near Northern Virginia and Richmond appear to have easier access to community services than those programs in rural areas or places with more widespread poverty (e.g., Brunswick, Petersburg, Norfolk).

One of the biggest points of variation among programs was the history of family engagement services in their PreK programs. When VPI was combined with or run by the same agency as Head Start, extensive family engagement services were pre-existing. Other divisions reported that family engagement services will be new. Some teachers expressed excitement around home visiting.

*Implications for CASTL support: Partnerships, especially family engagement, is an area of strength for some divisions and an area of need for others. Establishing learning communities across divisions, as mentioned previously, is one way to share effective practices. Furthermore, collaboration with VECF/Smart Beginnings may be useful for divisions who are struggling to find or access community resources in their divisions.*

## **III. Recommendations for CASTL and VPI+ leadership team**

These visits helped solidify CASTL's plans around supporting divisions in this first year of grant implementation. In our assessment, there is a significant range in divisions' capacities to implement their plans in ways that will ensure strong

student development and learning. Most divisions had areas of strength as well as areas of challenge. We see the following as the most important areas to address in the first year of the grant.

### **1) Build a Strong Community of Learning across Divisions**

One of the ways in which we think we can best support divisions given this range of needs is to work towards building a strong community of learning among divisions. This community of learning needs to drive toward a very specific set of goals aligned with the grant and draw from the resources within CASTL and across the state. We see multiple ways in which we can help support this community of learning, including:

- Have regional division consultation meetings, rather than one-on-one meetings (see Recommendation #2 below for more information).
- Foster connections among coaches through coach training and support, making sure to provide opportunities for them to share best practices and successes with one another.
- Use implementation meetings strategically to help foster relationships among specific divisions that may be good partners on specific topics.
- Although it is not a part of our scope of work, we think it would be helpful to have some organization more formally support the network of family engagement coordinators, as this was a new area for many divisions. Family engagement coordinators may also be included in future VPI+ meetings and trainings.

#### Action Steps:

1. Work with VDOE, VECF, and CELO on agenda for next implementation meeting to meet these goals.
2. Start planning a way in which the website that we will develop can house resources to help support this community of learning.

### **2) Hold Regional Division Consultation Meetings in January 2016**

As we talked with divisions, it was clear that our plan to visit again this summer was too early for most divisions to be deeply engaged in the type of goal setting and planning we want to accomplish during our next meetings. It is our assessment that having these meetings in January will be more productive. In addition, we think it will be both more efficient and effective to run these as regional meetings where we bring teams from 2-4 divisions together to engage in systematic continuous improvement planning together.

We propose to build off of work we have done with Head Start in running Leadership Academies across the country over the last two years. These academies have been specifically focused on planning around coaching, but we will expand this model to conduct a 1-2 day event for divisions that will end with each division having completed an initial continuous improvement plan with specific goals for the year and an action plan related to each of those goals across the areas of curricula,

assessment, PD, and coaching. We will also focus heavily on helping divisions make plans around data use in ways that will allow them to assess the extent to which they met these goals in the first year of the grant. Another area of focus for these meetings is helping divisions plan for ways to use the extensive PD resources in the grant most wisely to have a meaningful impact across VPI+ and improved classrooms.

Action Step:

1. We will provide VDOE a detailed plan and proposed dates for these regional consultation meetings by July 20<sup>th</sup>, 2015. We anticipate we can accomplish this with no budget implications for divisions.

**3) Find Ways to Provide Extensive Training and Technical Assistance on Data Use**

Based on our visits it is clear that a major area of technical assistance across the four years of the grant needs to be on effective data use – at both the classroom and program level. Many divisions have had little data from which to assess program effectiveness beyond PALS, which really limits our knowledge about the impact of these programs beyond literacy. In most districts, even the use of PALS data has been fairly limited (e.g., just showing gains from fall to spring). In order to support an effective continuous improvement process during the four years of this grant, we will need to work closely with divisions in planning how they will use their own data, QRIS data, as well as that coming in from the evaluation.

There is a similar need for much more training and support around using formative data to inform instruction in classrooms. Even divisions that do collect strong formative data rarely reported it is being used well by most teachers.

Action Steps:

1. Coordinate with VPI+ evaluation team to get a clear understanding of the types of data that will be available to divisions to support systematic program improvement efforts, as well as the timing of the availability of these data.
2. Continue to collaborate with VECF around sharing of CLASS data. In a meeting June 24<sup>th</sup>, we came up with an initial plan around CLASS data collection for Fall 2015.
3. Talk with VDOE about ways to build capacity of divisions to engage in systematic analysis and reporting of data. A few divisions, mostly the larger ones, have these resources in house, but those are rarely focused much on preschool. And, other divisions have no capacity in this area.
4. Integrate a focus on data use into September VPI+ implementation team meeting.
5. Work with coaches specifically on supporting teachers in use of formative assessment data.
6. Ensure that there are resources for teachers PD on using formative assessment data to support effective instruction.

#### **4) Support Use of Effective Coaching Models**

Coaching will be new in most divisions and therefore coaches and teachers will need support as this effort gets up and running. There was a great deal of confusion among divisions in exactly what CASTL would be providing to coaches. Many assumed we would be supporting coaches in using a specific coaching model. We communicated this was not the case, but we expect there is still considerable confusion in this area.

Given the timing of the PD/Coaching RFP, it seems reasonable that CASTL will focus coach support in the fall on general best practices of coaching, as well as on supporting coaches to enhance curriculum implementation and formative assessment use. We will also provide coaches with a CLASS overview to help them prepare their teachers for the fall assessment by VECF.

We will work with VDOE to be clear with divisions around expectations for coaching models. Ideally divisions will use a specific model of coaching with some evidence base of impact on teacher behavior and/or student outcomes – but we recognize the need to work with each division to ensure that they have a rigorous coaching model and a plan of action that will allow them to assess the ways in which this is working to promote effective teaching and learning.

#### Action Steps

1. The August coach training will focus on: coaching best practices, curricular implementation, formative assessment data use, and effective teacher-child interactions.
2. Make plan with VDOE for communicating with divisions at the September meeting more specifically around expectations for coaching.

#### **5) Other Areas**

A few other areas that should be addressed, but are not as urgent:

- Look into supports for principals and division leadership to help build support and sustainability for VPI+ at the classroom, school, and community level.
- In the spring, work with divisions around planning for kindergarten transition.

**Appendix**

CASTL Initial Division Consultation Visit Information  
 (Names and titles are as reported to CASTL by school divisions during May and June visits. These are subject to change as divisions complete hiring for VPI+ positions over the summer months.)

Division	Visit date	Attendee names and titles
Winchester	5/19/15	Angie Cain (VPI+ coordinator) Doug Joyner (Coordinator of Curriculum and Instruction) Joanie Hovatter (school principal) Beth Dalling (current VPI/ future VPI+ teacher)
Brunswick	5/22/15	Becky Akers (VPI+ coordinator) Carolyn Meredith (school principal) Dora Wynn (superintendent) JoAnn Edmonds (current VPI teacher) Myrtle Garnes (current VPI teacher)
Henrico	5/27/15	Gail Jones (VPI+ coordinator) Susan Flemmons (Preschool Coordinator)
Richmond	5/27/15	Ron Robertson (VPI+ coordinator) Frank Hughes (Educational Consultant, current VPI coach)
Sussex	5/28/15	Rodney Berry (VPI+ co-coordinator, Director of Instruction) Dr. Lisa Winfield (VPI+ co-coordinator/ VPI+ Family engagement coordinator) Julius Hamlin (school principal) Janice Poarch (current PreK/ future VPI+ teacher) Rebecca Council (current PreK/ future VPI+ teacher)
Petersburg	5/28/15	Stephanie Bassett (VPI+ co-coordinator, Asst. Superintendent) Tonya Brown-Fletcher (center principal) Angela Thorpe (VPI+ partner: Head Start Coordinator)
Prince William	6/2/15	Kathy Channell (VPI+ Coordinator, Head Start Director) Hilari Moore (Ed/Disability Specialist) Camille Kelly (Ed/Disability Specialist)
Fairfax	6/3/15	Maura Burke (VPI+ coordinator, School Readiness Coordinator) Betsi Closter (School Readiness Coordinator-Fairfax County OFC) Anne-Marie Twohie (Community-based programs, OFC director)
Chesterfield*	6/9/15	Kelly Tobe (Title I Professional Development Coordinator) Randi Burnett (Head Start Ed/Disability Specialist) David Williams (Head Start Instructional Specialist) Elizabeth “Liz” Arboleda (Head Start Family and Community Partner. Manager)
Giles	6/12/15	Michele Thompson (VPI+ coordinator, Director of SpEd) Cathy Webb (current SpEd teacher/ future VPI+ coach) Sharon Farmer (administrative assistant)
Norfolk*	6/22/15	Tamilah Richardson (PreK-4 coordinator) Deborah Battle (PreK-4 Teacher specialist, VPI coach) Kim Jennings (Community-based center director) Navine Fortune (Community-based lead teacher and Asst. Director)

\*Note: VPI administrators recently retired in these divisions; in process of hiring a new VPI+ coordinator at time of initial meeting