

The Virginia Kindergarten Readiness Program (VKRP) builds a more comprehensive understanding of school readiness and success.

UNDERSTANDING IMPLICATIONS OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON VIRGINIA KINDERGARTEN READINESS SKILLS - SPRING 2021

- In the fall of 2020, 80,586 children entered kindergarten—a 12.8% drop in enrollment compared to the fall of 2019.
- The vast majority (84%) of those children began the 2020-2021 school year in a virtual setting. Many children (68%) continued to receive some instruction in a virtual setting in the spring of 2021.
- Throughout the 2020-2021 school year, educators worked tirelessly to establish connections with their students, respond to their social-emotional needs, support their learning and development, and understand their skill development during kindergarten.
- The Virginia Kindergarten Readiness Program (VKRP) gives schools, teachers, and families a complete picture of school readiness in 4 key areas: Mathematics, Literacy, Self-Regulation, and Social Skills. Spring 2021 was the first time that VKRP was administered statewide in the spring to kindergarten students.

Teachers completed spring VKRP assessments for most students*:

Assessment	Total Percent Assessed	Percent Assessed Remotely
PALS: Literacy	99%	29%
EMAS: Mathematics	95%	33%
CBRS: Self-Regulation and Social Skills	97%	N/A

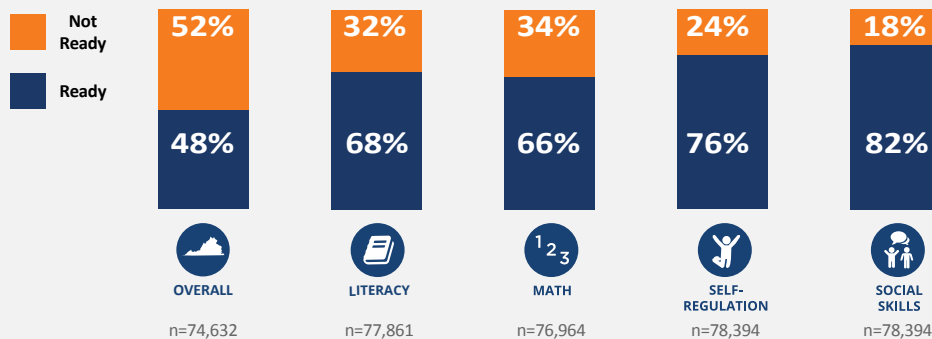
*Students with an expected PALS or VKRP assessment included in these estimates.

STATEWIDE KINDERGARTEN READINESS LANDSCAPE - SPRING 2021

Virginia defines school readiness as, “the capabilities of children, their families, schools, and communities that best promote student success in kindergarten and beyond.” The spring readiness rate is based on the expected skill levels of a kindergarten student at the end of the academic year.

52% of Virginia’s kindergarteners ended the school year still needing to build foundational skills in Literacy, Math, Self-Regulation, and/or Social Skills*

*Students with complete data on each individual measure were included to obtain these estimates.



- COVID-19 continues to have a negative impact on learning. In the fall, 45% of students fell below the benchmark in one or more foundational areas of learning. This spring, that percentage rose to 52%.
- In reading, mathematics, and self-regulation, the number of students who scored, or were rated, below benchmark increased, indicating that many students will need support as they enter into first grade.
- Students needing more support at the end of kindergarten were disproportionately students of color, English Language Learners, students with disabilities, and students from low-income families. These patterns point to disparities in supports and educational experiences and elevate concerns that disparities were likely exacerbated during the 2020-2021 school-year. For example:
 - 65% of Black children, and 68% of Hispanic children ended the school year below the benchmark.
 - 67% of children from low-income backgrounds ended the year below the benchmark.
 - 70% of English language learners ended the school year below the benchmark.
 - 75% of children identified as having a disability ended the school year below the benchmark.

YOUNG CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

- The COVID-19 pandemic has had a traumatic impact on many children's lives. Parents and caregivers lost their jobs, students lost connections to their peers, and students lost loved ones.
- VKRP added new teacher report items to better understand students' mental health and well-being.
- Teachers reported being moderately, very, or extremely concerned about the mental health and social-emotional well-being for about ~11% of kindergarten students. This number was stable from fall to spring.

Teachers reported being very worried about
1 in every 10
students



"I have taught virtually for the entire school year. I am very concerned about my students since they have never been in a classroom setting. The transition for some students from home, where a parent is helping them, to 1st grade on their own may be difficult."

- KINDERGARTEN TEACHER

IMPLICATIONS FOR LEARNING

Large variations in children's learning experiences during the 2020-2021 school year will yield vastly different skill levels within classrooms next year. As a result, many students will need tailored academic and social emotional support across the school-year to engage in unfinished learning and to continue building new skills. In response, the Virginia Department of Education has supported school divisions, schools, families, and communities with various resources. [Click here](#) for a detailed resource list.

This coming school-year, accelerating student progress while attending to students' social-emotional needs will require divisions and schools to be proactive in determining how they can meet each student's needs.

- Divisions, schools, and teachers should use data to help inform instructional decisions. VKRP, PALS, and other formative and summative assessment from the school year should be used to plan instruction at the group and individual student levels. Plans should be developed for data sharing across grade levels.
- Teachers need support to differentiate their instruction to support each student's learning. Small group instruction and just-in-time intervention can be used to help accelerate student learning. High-quality curricula can be used to provide guidance around differentiating instruction.



Starting in the fall of 2021, VKRP will be statewide in all publicly funded 4-year-old preschool classrooms (e.g. VPI, VECF mixed delivery).

High-quality early learning experiences set the stage for school success and can narrow early opportunity gaps. By expanding VKRP to Pre-K, we can measure growth over time — both within a school year and across school years (age 4 through the end of kindergarten).