

**City of Alexandria, Virginia
FY 2024 Proposed Operating Budget & CIP
Budget Questions & Answers**

March 23, 2023

Question: What would it take and cost to develop a coordinated childcare application system to better connect families to childcare, assess eligibility for VPI and childcare subsidy, integrate across providers and improve the family experience?

Response:

Most of the components needed to develop a coordinated childcare application system are already in place in Alexandria through existing services and partnerships. The collaboration among early childhood providers, both public and private, through Kids First Years and other partnerships over the past five years has laid a strong foundation for this next phase of coordinated enrollment.

In Alexandria, no single early childhood provider (e.g., public school, Head Start program, or childcare) has enough seats to provide all children with a high-quality early childhood education (ECE) experience that will prepare them for entry into kindergarten. Coordinated enrollment will help build a unified system of early childhood education in order to maximize the use of available ECE seats.

Several publicly funded local ECE partners have been participating in a coordinated enrollment group since 2017 where the creation of similar enrollment forms, registration activities and the sharing of enrollment information has taken place. A fully coordinated enrollment effort would include coordinated information campaigns, eligibility determination and matching eligible families to services based on need and preference.

With the proposed coordinated enrollment, parents would be directed to one application for childcare or pre-K, using an online form linked with the websites of any participating program that is received by the Enrollment Coordinator. Parents would be able to indicate a first, second, and third choice for their child. All applications would be processed through the DCHS Coordinated Enrollment Specialist who would utilize knowledge of all programs and funding streams to honor parent choice, inform and educate parents about high quality care and available resources. Parent choices would be made directly to the program, initiating follow-up from the program. The development of a comprehensive MOU among the various programs participating in the joint enrollment effort would be needed to support the effective collaboration.

The only unknown and potentially unfunded component of this effort is the development or adoption of a universal application and database system, common phone number, and website. It would be necessary to have consultative support in leading a committee to create the approach for these components. There is a database product that is being explored by some Virginia jurisdictions and funders that includes a Coordinated Enrollment Module that has portals for both families and providers. Through the Family Portal, families can apply for and manage their program enrollment, and communicate with all necessary stakeholders using a messaging app within the system. Through the Provider Portal, providers can manage enrollment and communicate with families and partners through a messaging app. There is also an Administrative Portal, that allows for the management of subsidized programs, review and processing of family applications, and matching families with selected providers

with available slots. More information about this product and others will be gathered to determine what would be the most appropriate for use in Alexandria.

Benefits of Coordinated Enrollment:

- For early care and education (ECE) programs it allows more families to enroll in the program that best meets their needs. Multiple ECE service providers, including Head Start, VPI, and childcare programs, may develop a joint application and work with families on selection and enrollment.
- For families, coordinated enrollment can reduce burden on parents. Ideally a single application and a one-stop location would be available to parents to assist parents in the registration process, eliminate duplication of enrollment paperwork and appointments. It also can help families learn what services they are eligible for and choose from available options.
- For the locality, the coordinated enrollment process can ensure a more efficient use of limited federal, state, and local resources and allow ECE programs to be aware of the needs of the community earlier and be able to plan services accordingly.

The service categories listed below outline the comprehensive approach for engaging families with young children in support of coordinated and equitable child care access.

Service Category	Program Area	Partners	Funding Source	Costs
Outreach and Navigation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outreach to families • Needs assessment • Navigation 	DCHS / Kids First Years	Ready Regions	\$0
Healthy Development and Early Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Home Visiting • Learn and Play Groups 	Healthy Families AHD CAC	Public-Private Partnerships	\$0
Parent Education and Coordinated Enrollment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinated Enrollment • Database Management • Parent Orientation • Manage Fiscal aspects of braiding and blending funding streams • Application and data system 	DCHS/ACPS/Kids First Years/Child Care partners/State partners	Ready Regions funded position. TBD for Data system and consultation	\$0 TBD