

City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: APRIL 13, 2010

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

FROM: JAMES K. HARTMANN, CITY MANAGER

SUBJECT: BUDGET MEMO # 55 : COST OF QUALITY PRE-KINDERGARTEN FOR THREE AND FOUR YEAR OLDS

This memorandum is in response to a request from Councilman Krupicka regarding the cost of ensuring that all four year olds have a quality pre-kindergarten experience and the cost if this opportunity was expanded to include three year olds.

The standard for quality pre-kindergarten in Alexandria includes either accreditation or a Star Quality rating as determined by the Quality Rating Improvement System (QRIS) and wraparound services such as health screenings with follow-up and family support. The two Alexandria programs that meet this standard are Alexandria Head Start, which serves 309 four year olds and the Virginia Preschool Initiative (VPI), with six participating centers that serve a total of 246 four year olds. Alexandria's Head Start program is at capacity.

The average cost of a ten-month program at a VPI center is \$8,276 per child. The Alexandria City Public Schools' (ACPS) enrollment projections indicate that 1,314 children will enroll in kindergarten in the fall of 2011. Those children would have been four years old the previous year (FY 2011 / SY 2010 – 2011); therefore, the projection provides a base number to work from in calculating cost, beginning in FY 2011. The ACPS projections estimate that there will be 1,330 three-year-olds enrolled in kindergarten in FY 2013. These children would be three years old in FY 2011.

The Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) estimates that 866 children in Alexandria are eligible for VPI, if they are not already enrolled in Head Start. In the current fiscal year, 246 children are enrolled in VPI and 309 in Head Start, which means that there is state funding available for an additional 311 children. Assuming an average cost of \$8,276, the local cost of serving those children for ten months would be an additional \$2.6 million offset by \$933,000 in grant funds from VPI, for a fiscal impact to the City of \$1.6 million. Identifying children who are eligible for federal child care assistance dollars would lower the cost of the program, if there is sufficient federal grant funding available.

The cost of pre-kindergarten for the remaining 448 children (1,314 minus the 866 estimated as VPI eligible by VDOE) would be \$3.7 million if they attended a full day program. The cost of serving an estimated 1,330 three year olds for ten months would be \$11 million (1,330 x \$8,276 per child). The total general fund cost for serving all four and three year olds after deducting all other revenue sources are shown in the following chart.

	Children	Cost
Estimated Additional Cost VPI Program.....	311	\$2,573,836
Less VPI Grant Revenue.....		\$933,000
City Cost of 311 Children.....		\$1,640,836
Serve Additional 4 yr. Olds.....	448	\$3,707,648
Serve 3-year Olds	1,330	\$11,007,080
Total Impact to City General Fund	2,089	\$16,355,564

The cost as shown in the above table is for the educational program only and does not include the cost of wraparound services. This memorandum also does not address space issues which limit the availability of slots in child care programs.

Recognizing that many parents need non-traditional care in the evenings or on weekends that is not available in center based care, the Department of Human Services' Office for Early Childhood Development has begun an effort to develop and strengthen home-based child care programs so that children in those environments may be prepared for kindergarten as well. To assist in this effort, City Council approved, in the context of the FY 2009 budget, a set-aside to fund a pilot of the Portage Curriculum guide which was developed specifically for family child care providers. Ten of 153 locally approved providers, completed the first training on the Portage Curriculum and participated successfully in a 6-month program that provided weekly on-site mentoring in the use of the curriculum. The pilot ended in February 2010; however, staff continues to seek grant opportunities that would allow the department to continue and expand the program.