

## City of Alexandria, Virginia

## MEMORANDUM

**DATE:** APRIL 21, 2016

**TO:** THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

**THROUGH:** MARK B. JINKS, CITY MANAGER

**FROM:** DEBRA R. COLLINS, DEPUTY CITY MANAGER

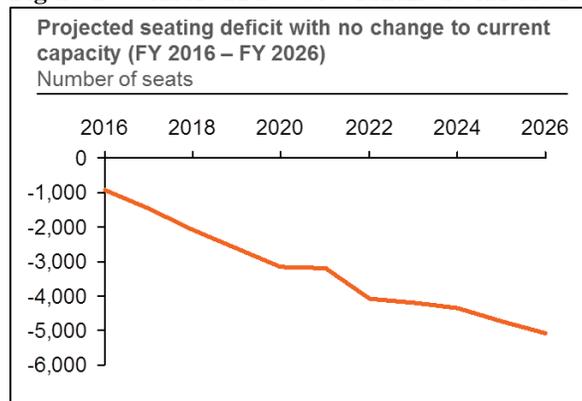
**SUBJECT:** PRE-K FACILITY IN ALEXANDRIA

The purpose of this memorandum is to provide the City Council with an updated project timeline and operating plan for the leased pre-K facility that was proposed as part of Alexandria City Public Schools' School Board Adopted FY2017-2026 Capital Improvement Plan (CIP). The information provided herein is a response to the City Manager's recommendation that a funding discussion be postponed until the involved parties outline a plan for specific administrative and programmatic details.

### 1. Why is this new pre-K center being proposed?

Alexandria City Public Schools (ACPS) is committed to well-coordinated, high-quality pre-K education in the city. However, ACPS faces current and future space constraints in its elementary school sites where pre-K is currently housed (see **Figure 1**), limiting its ability to accommodate growing student enrollment. Many pre-K school sites are significantly over capacity with less-than-optimal spaces—an issue voiced by parents and community members at multiple City Council meetings.

**Figure 1 – CAPACITY CONSTRAINTS AT ACPS**



To ameliorate this situation, ACPS has requested \$8.262 million in funding for the lease and retrofit of a pre-K facility as part of the City's FY2017-2026 CIP. The launch of the pre-K center in 2017/2018 would allow up to 360 pre-K students (approximately 20 classrooms) to be transferred from elementary schools, freeing up elementary school spaces for approximately 462 to 546 K-5 students (depending on grade level configurations). If funding for a building is not granted for 2017/2018, space to accommodate students in pre-K and grades K-5 will continue to be a serious challenge.

### 2. Who will be impacted by the creation of the proposed pre-K center?

The primary parties affected by the creation of a new pre-K center include ACPS and The Campagna Center (TCC). ACPS, which currently manages and administers the Virginia Preschool Initiative (VPI), would transfer some of its current VPI slots to the pre-K center. In addition, a select number of existing Head Start classrooms would be transferred to the center as currently operated by TCC. TCC relies on ACPS for classroom space for meeting the required local match to access federal funding to support comprehensive services for 309 preschool children.

Partners affected by this initial transition (e.g., ACPS, TCC, and City of Alexandria) are working together to ensure a smooth transition. Moreover, providers across Alexandria that serve young children and families stand to benefit

from use of a pre-K center’s communal space for joint professional development, off-hours student enrichment, and parental engagement activities.

### 3. What administrative and programmatic elements need to be considered as part of the new pre-K center?

The pre-K team’s research, which included benchmarking other communities with stand-alone pre-K centers and analyzing the current pre-K system in Alexandria, indicates that there are six main components that need to be considered when planning for a pre-K center (see **Figure 2**). Because the pre-K center would house both HS and VPI pre-K slots under one roof, these six components—which include at least 24 subcomponents—are the ones that would need to be brought into alignment during different stages to allow the center to meet the requirements of both programs. Some elements are necessary to align from the start, even if VPI and HS classrooms are run separately; other elements of alignment only become relevant once additional work is completed to better understand the feasibility of “blended classrooms,” where children from both HS and VPI are educated within the same classrooms. Blending classrooms, an emerging best practice nationally, has many benefits, including offering equitable services to all students (no matter what funding stream they are linked to) and leveraging (and multiplying the effect of) existing resources.

**Figure 2 - PRE-K CENTER COMPONENTS**



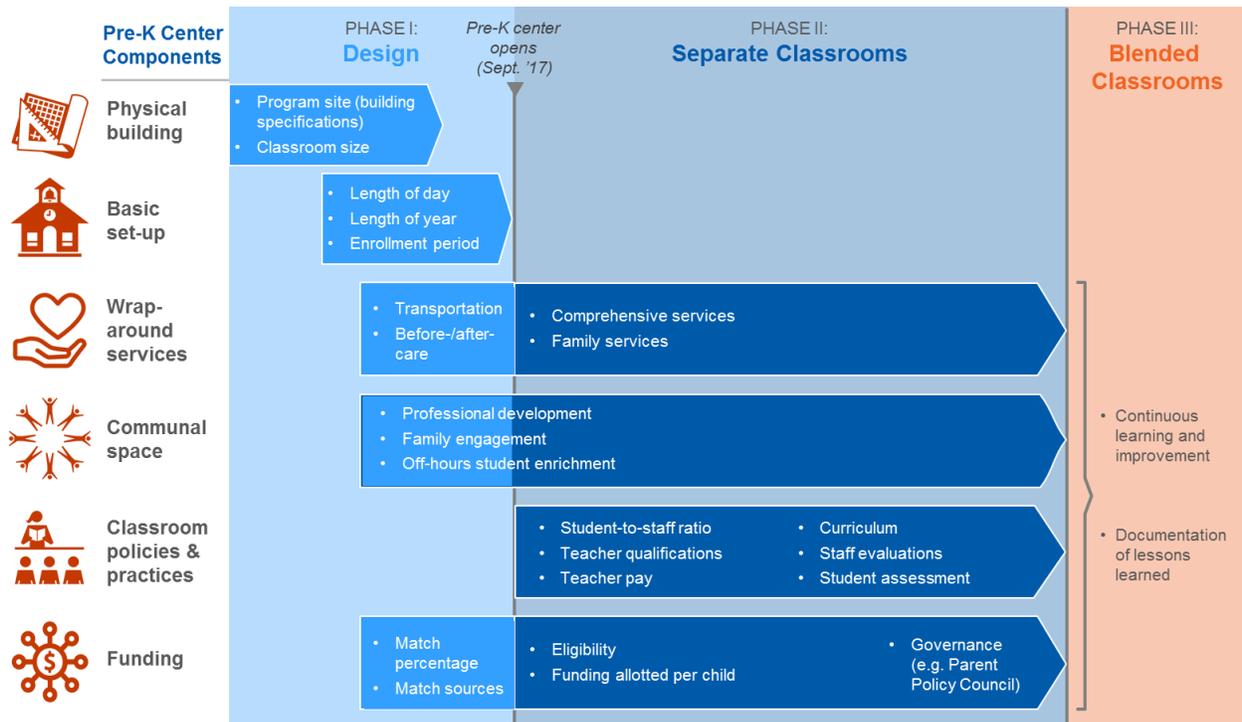
The components and subcomponents to consider, plan for, and bring into alignment over time are:

- **Physical building:** program site (including building specifications), classroom size
- **Basic set-up:** length of the school day and school year, enrollment period
- **Wrap-around services:** transportation, before- and after-care, each program’s comprehensive services\*\*\* (e.g., health, vision, dental check-ups) and family services (e.g., facilitating access to social services)
- **Communal space:** professional development (including for non-center early care and education providers), family engagement, off-hours student enrichment (e.g., after-school programs)
- **Classroom policies and practices:** student-to-staff ratio, teacher qualifications and pay, staff evaluation, student assessments, curriculum
- **Funding:** eligibility criteria, funding allotment per child, local match percentage and sources, governance (e.g., parent policy council)

\*\*\*These components and subcomponents are currently part of existing VPI and/or HS offerings in Alexandria (e.g., both VPI and HS offer a wide array of comprehensive services to students). Alignment refers to how VPI and HS could harmonize components—if feasible—to the same offering level (i.e. *all* students in the center eventually benefitting from *each* of these comprehensive service offerings currently part of VPI and/or HS).

### 4. Which elements need to be brought into alignment and by when, to allow for a September 2017 launch?

Not every one of the 24 subcomponents will be aligned simultaneously, nor will they be aligned by the time of the center’s opening in September 2017. The pre-K team will work to develop a phased approach to subcomponent alignment, prioritizing those that are essential to center operation and most feasible to implement. **This phased approach is presented in the Figure 3 below, with the blue arrows representing the period of time during which *planning and decision-making* for subcomponent alignment would take place.**

**Figure 3 - TIMELINE OF KEY ALIGNMENT DECISIONS BETWEEN HS AND VPI**

**Phase I: Design** – During this initial phase (from now until the pre-K center opening in September 2017), pre-K team members will focus on aligning those subcomponents that are essential for the center’s operation. The physical building’s location and specifications will account for a potential future blending of HS and VPI classrooms, ensuring, for example, that the building has enough classrooms to accommodate 360 students while not exceeding classroom size maximums for either program. An ACPS administrator will be assigned to the center to serve as the building administrator for safety, supervision and accounting purposes. Length of the school day, year, and enrollment period will be matched across programs in order to enable a uniform schedule for bus transportation and before- and after-care start and end times. ACPS has initiated a phasing-in process to build capacity to provide the necessary transportation services for students attending the center, regardless of program, in collaboration with TCC. Currently, 65 percent of current VPI students do not reside within the boundary of their assigned school. In addition, TCC’s local match arrangement will need to be maintained so that it can continue to qualify for federal HS funds.

Programming for the center’s communal space will be designed to accommodate a variety of uses by both center and non-center community members. ACPS and TCC will work collaboratively in the identification and administration of special programs and in the commitment to any formal external partnerships that benefit all students in the center. Any use of the center outside of designated hours and center programming would follow ACPS Facilities Use policies and procedures.

Proper alignment of the subcomponents during this phase will ensure that the center can launch and function smoothly during its first year of occupation by VPI and HS classrooms.

- **Phase II (Separate Classrooms) and Phase III (Blended Classrooms):** Planning and decision making associated with Phase II and III will require careful planning and the involvement of partners beyond those directly impacted by the transition of existing classrooms to a new location.

## 5. What kind of experience does Alexandria have in this area?

Alexandria has a history, particularly in its recent past, of coordination and alignment in early care and education as demonstrated by the many efforts completed very recently that include:

- The Children & Youth Master Plan (CYMP) developed a set of strategies to improve outcomes for Alexandria’s children and youth aged prenatal to 21 years and their families
- ACPS 2020 is a roadmap for Alexandria City Public Schools 2015-2020, which outlines particular pillars to ensure that every student in Alexandria succeeds. Those pillars include academic excellence, education equity, and family and community engagement.
- The Early Care and Education Work Group (ECEW) formed to support implementing the strategies articulated in the CYMP. This group has worked collaboratively to articulate a Common Agenda (based on the CYMP) that prioritizes a set of initial projects that provide an opportunity for improving quality and access to an early care and education system for Alexandria’s children under 5:
  - A Glass Doors brochure, which aggregates eligibility, enrollment, and other information from ACPS, TCC and other pre-K providers in Alexandria in one easy-to-read form for parents
  - A Quality Collaborative, aimed at professional development and other quality-boosting opportunities for early care and education teachers and staff
  - A common screening process and enrollment form to better connect families with services

Moreover, Alexandria has recently been highlighted by the Voices for Virginia’s Children as a bright spot for its approach to using a mixed delivery system (i.e., school and private providers) to deliver services to four year-olds. Currently, Alexandria exceeds many of the basic requirements for HS and VPI (e.g., both ACPS and TCC provide a longer school day than required by their respective funders, which increases the employment flexibility of working parents, among other benefits).

While there is no historical precedent for a standalone pre-K center in Alexandria, the pre-K center will be supported by a robust early care and education infrastructure.

## 6. Which communities in Virginia and beyond have been interviewed and analyzed? What lessons can we learn from them?

Every community has a particular context and history, but there are lessons that pre-K team has learned from benchmarking and interviewing other communities and entities that have successfully achieved alignment in pre-K and/or built a standalone pre-K center. Those entities include Richmond Public Schools (runs standalone pre-K centers), Henrico County Public Schools (runs a standalone pre-K center and blends classrooms), New York City’s Department of Education (a national bright spot in mixed pre-K delivery at scale), Austin ISD (blends classrooms), and Community Action Project Tulsa (a partnership between a private provider and multiple school divisions). A few of those lessons include:

- A center that blends classrooms and aligns other components raises all boats by offering the same, high quality services to all students
- A center can serve as an important connection point for the community—from hosting social and family service providers to offering space for early care and education activities for the entire community
- Alignment has the potential to reduce the overall cost of pre-K per student by creatively leveraging existing resources

## GLOSSARY OF ACRONYMS

ACPS	Alexandria City Public Schools	HS	Head Start
CYMP	Children & Youth Master Plan	TCC	The Campagna Center
CIP	Capital Improvement Plan	VPI	Virginia Preschool Initiative
ECEW	Early Care and Education Work Group		