

Spring 2021 VKRP Survey Report Executive Summary

The Virginia Kindergarten Readiness Program (VKRP) is an initiative focused on building a more comprehensive understanding of school readiness and success. As an assessment system, VKRP adds measures of mathematics (Early Mathematics Assessment System-EMAS), self-regulation, and social skills (Child Behavior Rating Scale-CBRS) to complement Virginia's statewide assessment of literacy skills using the Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening (PALS, pals.virginia.edu). In the spring of 2021, VKRP was administered statewide in kindergarten classrooms from 132 public school divisions across the Commonwealth.

Spring 2021 VKRP Survey

The spring 2021 VKRP survey was sent to 7,476 VKRP users and 2,915 users completed the survey for a response rate of 39.0%. Users included kindergarten teachers and school and division administrators from all 132 divisions in Virginia. The survey included questions related to: 1) participants' demographic characteristics, 2) instruction, family engagement and teachers' well-being, and 3) feedback on VKRP. Key takeaways are highlighted within this executive summary. Responses reflect the views of the survey respondents and may not be reflective of the population of VKRP users.

COVID-19 Impact on Instruction

The COVID-19 pandemic continued to cause disruption and pose significant challenges for teachers and administrators in the spring of 2021. Schools faced ongoing closures, quarantines, and difficulties in ever-changing instructional formats including fully remote, physically distanced in-person, concurrent and hybrid mix. Almost half (48%) of responding teachers felt that the quality of their teacher-child interactions had declined compared to years prior to the pandemic. Only 8% of teachers felt that teacher-child interactions had improved this year, considering these additional challenges.

Due to the shift of instructional formats, 88% of teachers reported feeling mild, moderate, or extreme concern that student social-emotional skills were developing more slowly than before COVID-19. An average of 71% of teachers were mild, moderately, or extremely concerned that they may be missing signs of abuse or neglect or that students would not be able to access the mental health supports that they need. As families played a critical role as partners in education this spring, more than half (56%) of teachers reported that many or all families seemed overwhelmed by trying to support their children's learning at home.

School and division leaders faced significant hurdles with management of enrollment and attendance, both of which were reportedly experienced more than in the fall of 2020 (58% and 80%, respectively). Leaders also shared that almost half (45%) of students still struggled with access to reliable internet, but almost all (96%) had school issued devices to support virtual learning at home.

Despite COVID stressors and challenges, leaders, educators and families demonstrated true flexibility, resilience and strength in the spring of 2021. Ultimately, 89% of teachers reported that many or all families were doing their part to support student learning. Teachers also still reported feeling satisfied with student progress (76%) and agreed that they as educators were making a significant difference in the lives of their students (96%). One teacher shared that, "This school year I was virtual, concurrent and in-person. We did the very best we could. My students achieved a lot. I am very proud."

VKRP Administration and Data-Use During COVID-19

Following the spring 2021 assessment window, almost all teachers and leaders found that VKRP training resources were helpful to learn or review information in preparation of EMAS or CBRS assessment administration. Most teachers administered both the EMAS and CBRS (remote or in-person), and 42% of administrators reported providing direct support to teachers to administer the in-person EMAS assessment. Regarding EMAS administration, many teachers continued to report that the assessment was difficult, time consuming, or too long.

Despite continued logistical challenges due to the pandemic, many teachers reported that spring administration was no longer challenging due to instructional format, a notable shift from fall 2020 responses. More than half (64%) of responding teachers said that virtual and physically distanced learning formats did not impact their administration of the EMAS. Similarly, 68% of teachers felt that instructional format did not impact CBRS administration. 77% of teachers felt they knew their students well enough to answer questions regarding each child's self-regulation and social skills on the CBRS, a significant increase from 38% in the fall of 2020. One teacher reported that, "The fall assessment (of the CBRS) was harder due to the students being virtual; however, it was easier in the spring since having more conversations and observations with students virtually."

Following administration, teachers reviewed EMAS and CBRS data to guide instruction and provide targeted supports. 46% of teachers reported that the CBRS well-being items (added in response to COVID-19) were helpful and 52% reported that they were able to receive resources from administrators to support identified students of high concern.

Some teachers and administrators shared that they were too overwhelmed to use VKRP instructional resources due to challenges of the pandemic, but 49% of teachers found that VKRP resources were useful to their instruction. One teacher shared that, "The information on the website was helpful to me. The instructional resources were very helpful to our kindergarten team. We talked about some of the information in our meetings."

Most teachers did not share Family Information Reports (73%) or Family Resource Packets (80.3%) with parents or guardians, but those who did share felt they were useful (67%). One teacher reported that, "I was not aware of the family resources at the end of the survey... it would have been very helpful to have that and to have told families about that."

The COVID-19 pandemic continued to impact Virginia's kindergarten instruction and assessment in the spring of 2021. The dedication of teachers and leaders to collect VKRP data will continue to be critical as families, schools and state leaders prepare for an ongoing recovery of an educational and health crisis.