

The Children's Center

Head Start & EHS FY2025 Community Assessment Update

Service Area

The service area includes the Cities of Suffolk and Franklin and the Counties of Isle of Wight and Southampton. Centers are located in areas that have close geographic proximity to major thoroughfares given the lack of transportation in the rural communities served. Centers are also located closer to areas of employment and business that families are likely to frequent.

Community Assessment Overview

This document provides an update to key indicators that are reported out on in the FY2025 proposal to the Office of Head Start. The Community Needs Assessment is updated annually and it is used to inform program design decisions, including the location of services, program options, community partnerships and more. This document is not a comprehensive list of all possible indicators; rather it includes key indicators required by the annual refunding application that are used to understand enrollment and accessibility trends in our communities.

Number of income children/eligible children

Estimates of eligible children are derived from the American Community Survey (ACS) from the U.S. Census Bureau. The 5-year estimates are considered the most reliable, are based on the largest sample size, and have been used by The Children's Center for many years to understand trends in our communities. While 1-year estimates reflect the most "current" data, they are only available for communities with a total population size of 65,000+ (only the City of Suffolk exceeds this). We also recognize that the ACS data are an estimated statistic, not an actual count, reported at the 90 percent confidence level. This means that 90 percent of the time, the estimate contains the true population value within the margin of error (e.g., +/- 10).

- According to the 2019-2023 American Community Survey 5-year estimates, an estimated **1,388** children under 5 years are living in poverty in the service area. We estimate that there are **833 EHS eligible and 555 Head Start eligible** children as a result. The number of eligible children remains relatively consistent.
- The City of Franklin continues to have the highest rate of childhood poverty in the service area. Historically 100% of Franklin students have qualified for Free and/or Reduced Lunch.
- The City of Suffolk continues to be the most populous community in the service area, and home to the greatest number of children living in poverty in the service area.

Table 1: Estimated Number of Children Living in Poverty, 2016-2020 vs. 2018-2022¹									
	2017-2021 ACS			2018-2022 ACS			2019-2023 ACS		
Locality	# <5	# <5 in poverty	% <5 in poverty	# <5	# <5 in poverty	% <5 in poverty	# <5	# <5 in poverty	% <5 in poverty
City of Franklin	602	183	30.4%	608	176	28.9%	617	155	25.1%
Isle of Wight	1,897	283	14.9%	1,912	300	15.7%	1,923	222	11.5%
Southampton	799	111	13.9%	846	131	15.5%	815	82	10.1%
City of Suffolk	5,945	1,021	17.2%	5,918	960	16.2%	6,008	929	15.5%
Total	9,243	1,598	17.3%	9,284	1,567	16.9%	9,363	1,388	14.8%

- Data from Annie E. Casey Foundation Kids Count Data Center reveals that Virginia has relatively few children in foster care as discussed in prior proposals. In 2022-2023, 2 Head Start and 8 EHS children were enrolled in foster care at any point during the school year.
- We continue to evaluate the needs of the homeless population in the Western Tidewater as the estimated number of homeless individuals tripled from 2014 to 2022. In 2023-2024, 12 children (4 Head Start and 8 EHS) were determined to be eligible for the program based on their status as homeless; this represents a slight decline from the 14 children served the year before.

Health and education needs

- The Children's Center continues to respond to the community's needs data that suggests we have significant prenatal and postpartum needs. We continue to consider the following in our work: (1) Franklin and Suffolk are above the state average for teen pregnancy rate (Franklin is more than two times the state average). (2) Franklin has a significant infant mortality problem. (3) Notably, the challenges in Franklin also correlate with income: the rate of households with cash public assistance income is almost 6 times the state average.

Preschool/child care/subsidy/kindergarten readiness

- According to the Virginia Kindergarten Readiness Program (VKRP), 42% of Virginia children enter school unprepared in at least one of the key four areas – literacy, mathematics, social-skills and self-regulation.
- Preschoolers enrolled in VKRP classrooms participate in a fall and spring VKRP assessment. According to the Fall 2023 VKRP Report:²

¹ ACS 5-Year Estimates. Table S1701.

²[VKRPSNAPSHOT FALL2023 2 2 SVL revised outlinedversion](#)

- VKRP expanded to publicly funded three-year-old and mixed age (three- and four-year-old) classrooms in fall 2023. Over 3,300 3-year-olds and 23,800 4-year olds were assessed in their fall 2023 program. Children were enrolled in various program types, including Head Start, VPI, Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE), Title I, Virginia Early Childhood Foundations (VECF) Mixed Delivery, and private child-care programs and family day homes that received public funds.
 - Approximately 1 in every 4 students were below the benchmark in early Literacy foundational skills (23%).
 - Approximately 1 in every 5 students were below the benchmark in Mathematics skills (18%).
 - Teachers reported that most children entered kindergarten displaying solid foundational Self-Regulation and Social Skills, with 15% and 17% falling below the benchmark, respectively. Overall, these figures were very similar to the year before.
- VKRP slot distribution is based on local enrollment and wait list data, and the state re-allocates slots annually. The table below depicts the total number of slots available in 2024-2025 in the service area, and the proposed 2025-2026 allocation, which is consistent with 2024-2025.³

Table 2: Virginia Preschool Initiative Slot Allocation by School Year			
Locality	2023-2024	2024-2025	2025-2026 Proposed
Franklin City	60	45	45
Isle of Wight County	99	122	121
Southampton County	65	76	75
Suffolk City	442	364	364
Total	666	607	605

- Money for child care subsidies through the Virginia Department of Social Services has become harder to access, with notable reductions in subsidies from 2015 to 2021. A lapse in data then occurred. In March 2025, we accessed the most recent data, last updated in October 2023, and found that subsidies had increased back to pre-2016 levels in the state. Accordingly, in our service area, subsidies have increased significantly from the data published last in 2021.

³ See FY26 VPI Slots Initial Allocation by Division. <https://www.doe.virginia.gov/teaching-learning-assessment/early-childhood-care-education/virginia-preschool-initiative>. Data accessed March 22, 2025.

Table 3: Subsidies, 2015 - 2023⁴							
Locality	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2021	2023
City of Franklin	51	25	45	41	78	39	35
Isle of Wight County	53	26	31	24	21	23	37
Southampton County	16	11	14	10	18	10	32
City of Suffolk	246	195	181	160	255	138	271
Virginia	29,295	22,612	20,595	19,347	23,722	Not available	24,523

Children with disabilities

The Children’s Center has historically exceeded 10% disabilities enrollment in the EHS program. In 2023-2024, there were 69 children enrolled with an IFSP of whom 42 were identified prior to the program year and 27 were identified during the program year. With a cumulative child enrollment of 230, this means 30% of EHS children had a diagnosed disability. As of February 2025, 49 children had already been diagnosed with a disability (21% of children cumulatively served in school year 2024-2025 to date).

Enrollment of children with disabilities in Head Start has historically been lower, as receiving school districts are very stringent in the determination of eligibility and challenges have been encountered where children are screened as “on target” and are not moved forward for evaluation despite ongoing concerns about the child. In addition, many 3-year-olds in Head Start are accessing the state preschool program when they turn 4-years-old, which means that there are fewer preschoolers with special needs in Head Start. In 2023-2024, there were 11 Head Start children with an IEP including 8 who were identified during the program year and 3 during the program year. With a cumulative enrollment of 216, this means 5% of Head Start children had a diagnosed disability. As of February 2025, 8 children had already been diagnosed with a disability (5% of children cumulatively served in school year 2024-2025 to date).

⁴ [Child Care Subsidy - Child Care Subsidy \(CSV\) - Virginia Open Data Portal](#) which is accessible through [Child Care Subsidy - Dataset - Virginia Open Data Portal](#).