

AEII Executive Summary

**Prepared for the Chairpersons of House Appropriations
and Senate Finance Committees**

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Helping Virginia's early childhood leaders and teachers provide high-quality early learning experiences to support children's learning and development.

Executive Summary

The team at UVA-CASTL's [Advancing Effective Interactions and Instruction](#) (AEII) initiative worked in partnership with the [Virginia Department of Education](#) (VDOE) to help Virginia's early childhood leaders and teachers in publicly funded birth-to-five early childhood programs provide high-quality early learning experiences to support children's learning and development. In particular, CASTL-AEII coordinated independent, external Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS®) observations to learn about the quality of teacher-child interactions in early childhood classrooms and the alignment between local and external observations. In addition, CASTL-AEII supported local leaders to provide their teachers with high-quality individualized professional development (PD), including equity-focused professional learning communities and virtual coaching to help teachers implement equitable social-emotional teaching practices with every child.

COVID-19 Impact and Implications

COVID-19 continued to produce a widespread, significant impact on communities and the education system, especially for low-income families and communities of color ([CDC, 2022](#); [Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 2022](#)). Although early childhood programs moved from virtual and hybrid offerings in 2020-21 back to mostly in-person instruction in

2021-22, educator staffing shortages were common, leading to a disruption in continuity of care and education for attending children ([July 2021 NAEYC report](#)). Because pandemic-and post-pandemic-related challenges remain for many families, programs, and communities, continuity of learning to promote children's social-emotional and academic development, as well as high-quality interactions and instruction, were pressing priorities for early childhood programs.

CLASS® Observations and Data in Early Childhood Classrooms

CASTL-AEII conducted external CLASS® observations in 667 early childhood classrooms across the 17 PDG communities (now the 9 Ready Regions) in sites participating in the first year of the [Unified Virginia Quality Birth-to-Five System \(VQB5\)](#). These observations took place in 135 Infant classrooms, 202 Toddler classrooms, and 330 PreK classrooms, which were spread across school-based programs (145 classrooms), center-based programs (484 classrooms), and family day home programs (38 classrooms). These observations represent the most comprehensive and largest effort to date¹ to reflect children's experiences in Virginia's early childhood programs receiving public funding. Given the critical role interactions play in supporting young children's

The program has helped me realize that each child is different and has different needs and it's worth taking time to get to know each and every one of them to best help them.

– Educator

¹ For context: between 2017-2021, only 50 Infant classrooms and around 70 Toddler classrooms participated in the former quality improvement system, as participants were primarily PreK classrooms. Similarly, 170 childcare programs and only 1 family day home provider participated in the system; participants were predominantly in school-based settings.

development, understanding where there are strengths and challenges in providing these experiences will enable a targeted and data-informed approach to ensuring access to enriching experiences for all.

Key takeaways from the 2021-22 external CLASS® data indicate that:

- Many birth-to-five classrooms across age groups and types of programs offer enriching opportunities for children around the Commonwealth.
- Evidence of less effective experiences across all program types and ages point to a need for a comprehensive approach to intervention and support.
- Examining the alignment between local and external CLASS® observations provides insight on where regions can focus their attention to enhance their local observation practices.
- COVID-19, as well as the teacher staffing shortage, continued to pose challenges for conducting external observations. Flexibility and sensitivity to programs' needs should be continued in Practice Year 2.

Professional Development Supports

CASTL-AEII's professional development (PD) supports continued to address pandemic-related classroom challenges that heightened inequities. These PD supports included services (i.e., leader consultation, training, and coaching) and resources for leaders and teachers in early childhood education (ECE) programs. CASTL-AEII expanded online resources for leaders to aid in interpreting CLASS® data and planning data-driven PD to improve the quality of interactions, instruction, and curriculum implementation in birth-to-five early childhood classrooms. Other supports for leaders included equity-focused professional learning communities (PLCs). CASTL-AEII also added resources to the ECE Resource Hub focused on equitable

Teacher Feedback on Perceived Benefits of Coaching



social-emotional instruction and foundational interactions to help early childhood teachers support children and families. Additionally, virtual coaching supported individual teachers in improving their equitable social-emotional instruction and interactions.

Key takeaways from data on PD supports include:

AEII Coaching

- The coaching model continued to show promise for birth-to-five educators in diverse settings.
- The COVID-19 pandemic posed significant challenges for educators, overall, and affected their capacity to engage in coaching.
- The coaching model could benefit from modifications that will increase teacher engagement.

Professional Learning Communities

- PLCs demonstrated promise as a modality for supporting leaders' capacity to utilize resources provided on the ECE Resource Hub to achieve division- or community-level PD goals.
- Attendance in a recurring monthly meeting at a standard time was challenging given needs for leaders to take on other roles in their programs they support.

Other Resources and VQB5 Supports

- The [ECE Resource Hub](#) and AEII websites continue to provide useful information for ECE leaders and teachers around the state.
- CASTL-AEII developed and provided needed resources to support CLASS® data use and VQB5 implementation, including the Toolkit for Leaders to Promote Quality Improvement.
- Collaborations with other ECE teams across the Commonwealth were essential to CASTL-AEII's work.

Leader Reports on Satisfaction with PLC Sessions (On a scale where 1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree)



I appreciate the opportunity to talk about important and meaningful topics and getting resources and facilitation tools to help carry the information back to our schools.

– Educator

Looking Ahead

CASTL-AEII will collaborate with the VDOE to support ECE leaders and educators as they approach the daunting task of COVID-19 recovery in an equitable and inclusive manner to ensure high-quality ECE experiences for all children in the 2022-23 school year.

To this end, we will:

- Support the transition of external CLASS® observations to a new vendor.
- Serve high-needs classrooms to improve experiences for children through a refined CASTL-AEII Professional Development model, which will include virtual coaching and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation (ECMHC) services.
- Build upon existing partnerships and work to enhance collaboration across birth-to-five initiatives across Virginia, and in particular the Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation pilot.
- Collect ongoing implementation data in CASTL-AEII professional development to track referrals and teacher engagement and analyze outcome data to monitor impact.

The full Progress Report can be accessed [here](#) or at <https://rga.lis.virginia.gov/Published/2022/RD317/PDF>.

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