

First Step: The Facts

What is First Step?

First Step is a prekindergarten program in Newport News Public Schools. Primarily funded by state and federal funds, it provides school readiness activities for 4 and 5 year-old children, in full-day programs. Classes are made up of 18 students, with a licensed teacher and teacher assistant.

The program has expanded from serving fewer than 400 students to serving approximately 1,350 students through reallocating the division's Title I funds from a remediation to an early intervention focus. First Step is free for children who qualify and transportation is provided.

The First Step Program has 4 full day centers:

- Marshall Early Learning Center.
- Lee Hall Early Childhood Center.
- Watkins Early Childhood Center.
- Denbigh Early Childhood Center.

Those four centers provide:

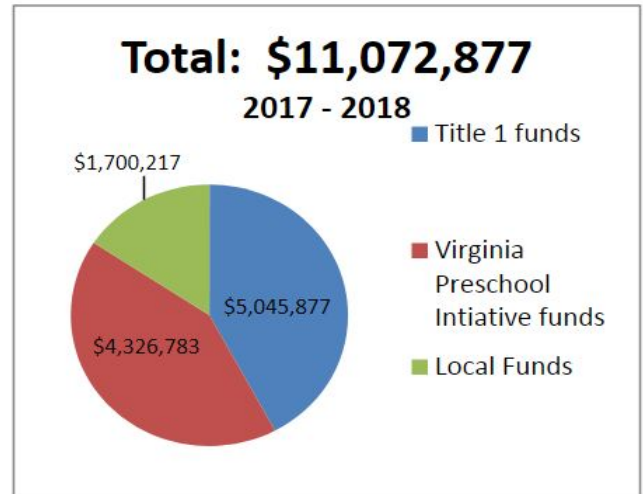
- 1,350 available student slots.
- 76 classes.
- 5 special education classes.

To be eligible for the program a child must:

- live in a Newport News Public School zone;
- be 4 years old by September 30 of that school year;
- be completely toilet trained and
- qualify based on a list of state criteria; some components include, parent income, parent education.

Funding:

Funding is provided by Virginia Preschool Initiative funds, Federal Title 1 funds, and local funds.



How effective is the program?

The program currently serves approximately 53% of the school division's Kindergarten population. PALS testing shows that First Step experience cuts the percentage of students failing to meet or exceed the benchmark almost in half as compared to students who do not have First Step.

First Step students are better prepared for a strong start in Kindergarten!

