The Virginia Preschool Initiative was established in 1995 to serve disadvantaged 4-year-olds who are not able to participate in other prekindergarten programs. State funds are allocated to localities to enable them to serve 60 percent of their at-risk 4-year-olds who are not being served by federal programs such as Head Start or Title I. Funding is calculated at $5,400 per eligible child, with the cost to be shared by the state and local governments based on an index that indicates a locality’s ability to contribute. While the prekindergarten program is targeted to children at risk, each locality determines which specific risk factors children must have to qualify. Schools, Head Start programs, and private agencies can receive funds to operate prekindergarten programs.

The Virginia Preschool Initiative served 5,886 4-year-olds in 2002–2003 and received $18,051,702 in state funding.