

THE CASE FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION REFORM IN VIRGINIA

Every child is capable of and deserves to enter school ready, but Virginia is failing to prepare all children to succeed in school and life.

40% of students entering kindergarten each year lack the key literacy, math, and social-emotional skills that predict success.

Two-thirds of Virginia children under age 6 have all available parents in the workforce.

24% of economically-disadvantaged four-year-olds and 72% of economically-disadvantaged three-year-olds lack access to quality preschool.

Only 25% of Virginia's early childhood programs that receive public funding participate in the state's voluntary quality measurement system.

VIRGINIA RANKS

- 37th nationally in early childhood governance.
- 33rd nationally in preschool funding.

In July 2019 Governor Northam issued Executive Directive 4 asking an Executive Leadership Team of state agency leaders to conduct listening sessions, analyze data, collaborate across agencies and develop a comprehensive set of recommendations to address access to, quality of and state governance challenges around early childhood education. These recommendations are now under consideration by Governor Northam as he prepares for the 2020 session.

As a result of that process, and in order to address the significant gaps in school readiness, the Executive Leadership Team recommends that Virginia:

MAXIMIZE ACCESS FOR AT-RISK THREE AND FOUR-YEAR-OLDS

Virginia should continue to leverage federal funding opportunities, but must also provide new investments to close the access gaps for our at-risk three and four-year-olds. By expanding access thoughtfully in partnership with communities and the private sector, Virginia can ensure quality for new slots and preserve much-needed access for infants and toddlers.

Therefore the Administration should consider how to:

- ✓ serve more eligible four year-olds in public and private settings by:
 - increasing the VPI rate and shift to rebenchmarking the rate, to better cover costs of quality services;
 - incenting public-private partnerships or mixed delivery in private settings;
 - enabling same-year reallocation to meet actual need; and
 - increasing operational flexibility in order to use all available funding.

- ✓ pilot the expansion of two existing state programs—VPI and Mixed Delivery Grants—to include at-risk three- year-olds on a small scale basis in both public and private settings. Additional expansion would be contingent on meeting quality thresholds and demonstrating positive outcomes; and
- ✓ preserve and maximize all available federal funding, specifically Early Head Start, Head Start, Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) and Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

BUILD A UNIFORM MEASUREMENT AND IMPROVEMENT SYSTEM

Virginia should establish a uniform measurement and improvement system that is required for all early childhood programs that take public funds, and phase it in over three years. This system should focus on the quality of teacher-child interactions in all publicly-funded infant, toddler and preschool classrooms. Ultimately it should align health, safety and quality expectations, measure cost impact and incent private providers to take public funds.

Therefore the Administration should consider how to:

- ✓ advance legislation to establish and require publicly-funded programs to participate in a uniform measurement and improvement system that supports families to make informed choices, provides feedback to teachers, and is indicative of positive child outcomes; and
- ✓ secure federal funding to compliment existing state funds to support the development of a new quality improvement system.

CONSOLIDATE STATE OVERSIGHT AND ADMINISTRATION OF EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE AND EDUCATION SYSTEMS

To achieve these ambitious objectives and build the foundation for lasting change, Virginia should establish a single and durable point of accountability for school readiness at the state level. One board (Board of Education) and one agency (Virginia Department of Education) should be responsible for oversight and administration of early care and education outside of the home.

Therefore the Administration should consider how to:

- ✓ advance legislation to transition functions and regulations related to child care and early learning outside of the home—oversight of Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG), child care subsidy, child care licensing and Head Start Collaboration—to the Board of Education and Department of Education, and ensure the Board of Education has adequate representation from the early childhood sector.



“When children have access to quality, stable, affordable care and education during their earliest years, they build the foundation they need for future success, not only for themselves, but for their communities.”

— GOVERNOR RALPH S. NORTHAM