

Data and Governance Workgroup Recommendations for the Commonwealth Council on Childhood Success

Since beginning its work last fall, the Data and Governance Workgroup has undertaken a significant process of learning about the current Virginia structure of programs and agencies serving children during their first 8 years of life. As demonstrated in the chart below, Virginia currently operates a very complex web of programs and regulatory functions that lead to duplicative work, a lack of shared goals and outcomes, as well as customer service challenges for provider partners and families and that have the potential to limit Virginia's ability to provide well-coordinated and high quality services that ensure the best success for children. In reviewing Virginia's governance model, workgroup members have had conversations with numerous other states about the structures governing their children's related services and the processes by which those were developed. Underlying this process has been a focus on what child development research suggests are the best ways to support children's development, on how Virginia can best partner and work with the many providers of children's services, and how Virginia can best provide a seamless experience for families so they can best utilize the appropriate services.

The workgroup identified a variety of models with common themes and trends in other states. Some of the states reviewed house all or most of their children-related programs under one agency or under an entity dedicated specifically to the needs of children. Other states house programs in different agencies but have formal structures in place to ensure collaboration and coordination across programs and agencies at the highest levels.

The workgroup found that a number of states have seen fiscal improvements, organizational efficiencies, and better outcomes for children as a result of organizational changes. States that have created more unified governance structures for the provision of early childhood services claim that the new structures:

- **Saved money;**
- Made it easier to **seek & receive targeted grant funding** that touches multiple related programs;
- **Improved child outcomes;**
- **Reduced paperwork** and administrative burdens for providers and eased the burden on those seeking services;
- **Prioritized family experience** improvements and more "user friendly" access to services; and
- Created **shared goals and metrics** under mutually reinforcing organizing principles.

Additionally, the workgroup sought input and ideas from a wide variety of Virginia stakeholders about the current administrative framework, ongoing challenges, and opportunities for improvement. Among the most consistent pieces of feedback was the recognition that Virginia lacks a comprehensive professional development framework serving all providers in the early childhood field. Child development research indicates that the success of children between infancy and age 8 is related to the training teachers and childcare professionals receive and shows that there are significant similarities between the qualities that make for a good pre-k teacher and those that make for a good teacher in early elementary school. Furthermore, there was an overwhelming consensus among service providers pertaining to prohibitive challenges and a frustrating lack of cohesion in working with multiple state agencies' respective grant, licensure, and reporting requirements associated with childcare, the Virginia Preschool Initiative (VPI), and related programs. This issue can also be seen in the disconnect between our efforts to measure, track, and provide quality services and the varied and complex licensing and quality standards among childcare, preschool, and early education facilities. Instead of treating licensure as a quality improvement tool, we tend to treat it as a regulatory compliance process that is not as aligned with our quality efforts as it could be. This is a missed opportunity for Virginia and our provider partners.

According to the recent Virginia Kindergarten Readiness Project study, data indicates that 34% of children in Virginia reach kindergarten underprepared for success in one or more key domains (literacy, self-regulation, social, emotional, or math skills). While some of the lack of preparation can be traced to funding and access to programs, we believe there are also professional development, program quality, customer service, and related

factors at play as well. The Commonwealth should be doing a better job of ensuring that early care and learning experiences help prepare students to succeed in kindergarten and beyond.

There are a number of major programs in Virginia which are designed and poised to help children thrive during their early years, including: Head Start and Early Head Start (coordinated by and including the Head Start Collaboration Office), Virginia Preschool Initiative (VPI) and the new VPI+ expansion grant, child care licensing, child care subsidies, the Commonwealth’s quality rating improvement system (QRIS) which is known as the Virginia Star Quality Initiative (VSQI), home visiting services, nutrition programs for children and their families, early intervention services, etc. The responsibility for administering this vast array of programs is currently divided between the Department of Social Services (VDSS), the Department of Education (VDOE), the Department of Health (VDH), and the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services (DBHDS).

Below is an organizational chart of the major early childhood care, education and health programs serving the needs of Virginia’s young children (though it is certainly not comprehensive of all programs and initiatives):

<i>Secretary of Education</i>	<i>Secretary of Health and Human Resources</i>		
<i>Dept of Education</i>	<i>Dept of Health</i>	<i>Dept of Social Services</i>	<i>Dept of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services</i>
Virginia Preschool Initiative (VPI) VPI+ (Federal Pre-school Expansion Grant) Title 1 Preschool Special Ed Preschool Early Reading Intervention	WIC Nutrition Resource Mothers Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems Grant Partners in administration: CHIP of Virginia Maternal, Infant, Early Childhood Home Visiting Program (MIECHV) Home Visiting Consortium (funded by MIECHV, administered in partnership with other agencies)	Division of Child Care & Early Childhood Development - Child care subsidy - Childcare provider training/professional development Head Start Collaboration Office Division of Licensing & Programs Partners in administration: Healthy Families Virginia, VA Early Childhood Foundation (VECF, which facilitate local Smart Beginnings Networks), Infant Toddler Specialist Network (ITSN), Child Care Aware Resource & Referral (CCA- VA)	Part C Early Interventions Behavioral Health services via Community Service Boards

It should be noted that all of these programs are state administered, with a few exceptions. Head Start and Early Head Start funds flow directly from the federal government to local grantees. The Head Start Collaboration Office helps resource and coordinate the activities of all Virginia Head Start grantees.

This fragmented administration creates a number of pressing challenges. The programs are not aligned under a common set of priorities or goals for the Commonwealth; the state lacks a comprehensive professional development framework that serves all early childhood care and education providers; public and private providers must work with different agencies and report varying program outcome metrics to each; families often get lost in the maze; and most importantly, children's outcomes suffer when the combination of services they need to support their success are not tightly integrated.

Based on this external and internal research, the group established two main objectives with a number of recommendations supporting each:

Objective I: *The Commonwealth needs to develop explicitly stated goals and objectives for achieving school readiness and success that govern all publicly-funded early childhood programming and the appropriate resources for measuring success.* First the state must align its early childhood development priorities and then develop measurable goals to support those priorities. Additionally, appropriate assessment tools must be put in place to track progress, and the information from these tools must then be easily shared across agencies as appropriate.

Recommendations in Support of Objective I:

1. The Commonwealth Council on Childhood Success, in consultation with the Children's Cabinet, should review existing metrics and develop annual performance goals and metrics for school readiness and children's success in the Commonwealth within the Virginia Performs framework. In support of that work, they shall:

- a) Evaluate public investments in school readiness and children's success programming and continuously reevaluate the most efficient means of applying public resources to reach the annual performance goals;
- b) Track and assess school readiness performance using existing governmental resources and those of research universities and/or experienced research and review bodies; and
- c) Establish a process to annually report to the Governor, General Assembly, Children's Cabinet, the Commission on Youth, and the Board of Education on those goals and progress being made towards their achievement.

Objective II: *The Commonwealth's agencies and divisions responsible for early childhood services should be organized to maximize success for children, to reduce the administrative burdens on service providers, to ensure consistent and quality professional development for the professionals that work with children, to support quality family and child experiences, and to report progress on the Commonwealth's relevant early childhood goals and objectives.* Through strategic alignment of all its efforts in the arena of school readiness, the Commonwealth can apply common goals, priorities, and performance metrics to programming designed to promote school readiness and offer a "one-stop" point of entry for consumers and service providers.

Recommendations in Support of Objective II:

2. The Children's Cabinet, in partnership with the Commonwealth Council on Childhood Success, should direct a full review within and across the HHR and Education secretariats and develop recommendations regarding the governance and organization of programs serving children from birth through age 8. Together they should develop a timeline and process for such an evaluation, and integrate the cost-benefit analysis in recommendation #4. Together, they should recommend

a governance model whereby the Commonwealth can most efficiently streamline children's services within and across agencies and Secretariats to improve school success outcomes. Ultimately, the streamlined governance model should ensure that:

- a) Programs that serve children are all focused on and preparing them for success in school and beyond; and measure that progress consistently under a unified framework.
- b) Priority is given to aligning public programs that serve children in early care and education settings (VPI, Head Start, VSQI, child care). Those should then be closely integrated with early childhood health and intervention services.
- c) The administrative burdens on service providers that must work with multiple agencies and offices are minimized.
- d) Data sharing is prioritized and all agencies with child-serving programs are encouraged to participate in and share data through the Virginia Longitudinal Data System.
- e) Licensure and quality standards are aligned and coordinated so as to reduce administrative burdens on providers and to ensure that the focus is on best outcomes for children.
- f) A comprehensive and coordinated professional development framework exists for all early childhood providers in the state and supports the continuum of child development up to age eight.
- g) Quality rating and other assessment systems are coordinated and aligned to both monitor outcomes as well as to ensure they are administered efficiently and effectively.
- h) The Commonwealth is maximizing its ability to access and implement grant opportunities that cross multiple children's programs.
- i) Programs that work together, such as childcare services and preschool programs, are organized and aligned so as to reduce burdens on service providers and increase access for families.
- j) Promote and facilitate "one-stop" program access for families.
- k) There is a unified approach to regularly reporting to the Governor, the Legislature and other stakeholders on the state of children's success in the Commonwealth (per recommendation #1).
- l) Resources are efficiently utilized to provide technical assistance and disseminate best practices, such as blended and braided funding, to local public and private providers.

3. The legislature should permanently formalize the Commonwealth Council on Childhood Success, to include representation of relevant state agencies, stakeholders, schools, institutes of higher education, parents, private and non-profit early childhood providers, the business community and others. Numerous federal grants require the Commonwealth to have an early childhood advisory council, and permanently creating such an entity with specific requirements about its composition will ensure these issues are address consistently and at the appropriate levels. Per the recommendations above, the Council should be responsible for coordinating goals and metrics for children's services in the Commonwealth, and for reporting on the progress of such goals and metrics to the Governor, Legislature, and Children's Cabinet.

4. As part of the continuing conversation, the Data and Governance Workgroup should explore and facilitate a comprehensive cost-benefit analysis of a realignment of children's programs and services within and across secretariats in Virginia. This work should be conducted by an organization or institute of higher education with the requisite expertise, experience, capacity and resources to do so. Such an analysis should include:

- a) Analysis of the full fiscal impact, taking into account not only capital improvements and "start-up" costs, but also long term savings from various governance and alignment efforts. It should also consider improved access to more streamlined funding opportunities.
- b) Incorporating recommendations of other child-serving entities;
- c) Emphasizing data sharing and data coordination across and within agencies as a priority;
- d) Analysis and review of goals for early childhood preparedness to determine whether those goals adequately work for Virginia.