

Report from the Access to and Quality of Child Care and Preschool Workgroup

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I. Introduction and Overview of the Landscape in Virginia

Membership, charge and goals of the workgroup

Overview of Early Childhood Education Landscape

- Describe lay of the land, provide demographic information about where kids are and thumbnail of basic systems in place.
- Presents big picture in Virginia, changing landscape with CCDBG
- Emerging developments
- List the features of accessible system as considerations; impact of affordability on where we are now and impact on access to quality
- Recognize and support the work of DSS

II. Features of an Accessible System and Recommendations for Improvement

The workgroup agreed that the key factors that impact the accessibility of the early childhood education system include:

- Affordability (impacted in part by subsidy eligibility)
- Demand for services
- Choice in provider/ provider-type
- Services for kids with special needs (language, behavioral, medical, developmental)
- Nontraditional hours for parents in shift-work
- Education of providers on taking subsidies (in with professional development as well)
- Transportation (public transit routes, vouchers for families to fix cars, etc)
- Zoning, HOA's and Insurance – impact accessibility of child care in certain localities
- Differences in accessible vs. available care
- Expanded Access to Quality via existing systems – (i.e. VSQI – Accreditation, etc.)

They recognized that each community throughout the Commonwealth has different needs, as well as different resources to address each of these challenges. The result is system that is fragmented, unaffordable for many, and inconsistently meets the needs of families. For these reasons, the group recommends the following:

Yellow Highlighting – recommendation needs specifics

Blue Highlighting – fill in with PD Reccs

- *Recommendation #1: Conduct a Targeted Statewide Needs Assessment* to determine:
 - i. Underserved areas of the state, including neighborhoods of concentrated poverty
 - ii. Where greatest need is for access is to infant/toddler slots, nontraditional hours, services for those that have special needs, are homeless, etc.

(This has to be included in the state plan that DSS will be developing this summer. Do we want to recommend CCCS workgroup participates in that?)
- *Recommendation #2: Targeted research and analysis should be done on the accessibility of a balanced mixed-delivery system (public and private) of early child care and education.* This analysis should explore the question of how eligibility criteria, age requirements, and increased public programs impact the market for and availability of early child care and education. Finally, out of that analysis, recommendations should be made to carefully increase accessibility.
 - Who should conduct this research and analysis?
- *Recommendation #3: Technical assistance on business operations should be available to all providers, particularly on the true cost of quality care.* Cost of quality care is an issue for all families, regardless of socio-economic status. Such assistance should include analysis of “What is the true cost of quality care?” with online tool. As the state gains additional insight on this area, information on the cost of quality could be used to inform policies regarding incentives, including new revenues and tax credit measures for families and providers.
 - See also Recommendation #15 – do we want to include technical assistance for braided and blended programs in this recommendation?
 - Is DSS providing the technical assistance recommended above?

III. Features of Quality Programs

The workgroup agreed that quality programs exceed state licensing regulations, including basic health and safety requirements, and achieve higher standards endorsed by other state and national early childhood entities, including but not limited to Head Start, the Virginia Preschool Initiative (VPI), the Virginia Star Quality Initiative (VSQI), State recognized accreditations, National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) Accreditation and National Association for Family Child Care (NAFCC). Quality involves ongoing self-study and continuous improvement, which is assured through consistent standards and positive outcomes.

The group adopted the pillars of quality articulated in the *Virginia Early Childhood Needs Assessment Report* produced by James Madison University in 2014, as a foundation for quality that all Virginia programs should strive to achieve. “Longitudinal studies indicate that the best outcomes for children and their families come from an investment in high quality programs that provide 1) well-trained staff, 2) appropriate adult-child ratios and group sizes, 3) stimulating interactions and learning experiences, and 4) parent education and engagement.”

Within each of those 4 pillars of quality, the group identified some core components that describe the pillar itself. These components come from a variety of sources and are cited below.

1. Well-Trained Staff (*Defer to Professional Development Group for full scope*)

Any staff working in early childhood settings should understand the foundational value of health and safety requirements, the importance of stimulating interactions and learning experiences. Additionally, staff should be able to conduct formal or informal screenings and/or referrals for children who may need additional services.

2. Appropriate Adult-Child Ratios and Group Sizes

Adult-child ratios and group sizes have a significant impact on the quality of any education program and their impact has been the subject of extensive studies. The workgroup agreed that the adult-child ratios set forth in current Virginia licensing is acceptable and does not need adjustment at this point in time. Early childhood education programs should strive for the highest standards set forth by the quality systems the program operates within (VPI, Head Start, NAEYC, etc).

3. Stimulating Interactions and Learning Environments

The workgroup agreed that this pillar of quality, stimulating interactions and positive learning environments, is critical to the child's experience and their learning outcomes. The group drew on a variety of existing sources to identify the key components that high-quality programs exhibit, and all should strive for.

The VDSS *Competencies for Early Childhood Professionals* outlines the basic components of a quality learning environment for young children ([pages 43-58](#)), which includes specifics about the overall learning environment; learning strategies; curriculum; schedules; routines and transitions; the physical environment; materials and equipment; and collaboration with families and the broader community.

Additionally, the workgroup agreed that the highest quality, enriched environments for children will have the following common threads ([from Six Principles of Early Education](#)):

- Include a steady source of positive emotional support
- Provide a nutritious diet with enough protein vitamins, minerals, and calories
- Stimulate all the senses (not necessarily all at once)
- Have an atmosphere free of undue pressure and stresses but suffused with a degree of pleasurable intensity
- Present a series of novel challenges that are neither too easy nor too difficult for the child at his or her own stage of development
- Allow for social interaction for a significant percentage of activities
- Promote the development of a broad range of skills and interest that are mental, physical, aesthetic, social, and emotional
- Give the child the opportunity to choose his or her own activities
- Give the child a chance to assess the results of his or her own efforts and to modify them
- Create an enjoyable atmosphere of exploration and fun learning

4. Parent Education and Engagement

Again drawing from the VDSS *Competencies for Early Childhood Professionals* (page 35-36), the group agreed on core factors related to parent education and engagement that should be a part of any quality program. They include:

- a) Knowing and Respecting Families
 - Create a welcoming and inclusive environment for all families, accepting their cultural practices
 - Learn about and understand families' circumstances, goals, values, concerns regarding their children
 - Maintain confidentiality
 - Nurture Families as Advocates
- b) Communication
 - Communicate daily with the family to exchange information -- share info
 - about the child's progress, activities, interests
 - Communicate program policies with families
 - Share information regularly with the family obtained from child observation, and formal and informal assessments, collaborating with the family to plan strategies and individual services
- c) Collaborative Community Partnerships
 - Involve families in program-wide activities

IV. Recommendations to Expand Access to Quality

The workgroup identified 3 major categories of short and long term recommendations to help increase the number of children participating in and number of providers administering programs that meet their comprehensive definition of quality: Improving the Floor; Moving More Providers towards Systems of Quality; and Coordinated Administration and Sustainable Funding.

1. Improving the Floor for Quality

Basic health, safety, and quality standards are embedded in licensure and regulations on the operation of various early childhood programs. These standards establish a floor that is designed to protect the health and safety of all children. By strengthening these base requirements, Virginia can ensure that all children, regardless of setting, are in healthy environments.

Additionally, as the Commonwealth increases quality standards for children receiving subsidies under the CCDF and develops its state plan for implementation, we should look for opportunities to apply higher standards of quality in settings for all children, regardless of subsidy status.

➤ *Recommendation #4: Reduce threshold for licensure of Family Day Care Providers. Providers should be licensed after the caring for a 3rd unrelated child. This is national average, and an appropriately threshold at which the provider's care becomes a business. Implementation*

of this reduction should be incremental and phased in so that DSS, providers and families can adjust appropriately. The policy change requires funding for DSS to implement fully.

➤ *Recommendation #5: Establish penalties for violations of this reduced threshold.* The 2015 General Assembly charged DSS with examining this issue before the 2016 session, and the workgroup recommends full implementation of such penalties by the General Assembly. Without serious consequences for violations of the law, providers will continue to take more children than they can safely care for. As Virginia has seen, the consequences for such actions are often deadly for young children.

➤ *Recommendation #6: As group sizes are incorporated into licensure, they should be appropriate to the age of children and the type of child care setting involved, and should reflect current research-based minimum standards.* Currently, group size is not including in licensing standards, but must be incorporated as required by the new CCDBG funding and the state's implementation plan.

➤ *POTENTIAL Recommendation #7: Require fingerprint background checks (put a pin in this until gov's amendment comes out; if we're out of compliance we need to note that in this report)*

➤ *Recommendation #8: Health, safety and quality standards should be verified with all providers, including programs that are exempt from licensure.* A verification processes should be developed and applied where not currently in place and supported in code and regulation. Over the long term the information gleaned from these inspections should inform health, safety and quality standards for such programs.

2. Moving More Providers Towards Systems of Quality

The workgroup identified a comprehensive definition of quality care that accounts for a variety of early childhood settings and the numerous existing definitions of quality that exist throughout the state and the country. The group affirmed the need for that variation, as it empowers parents to choose from a variety of high quality program approaches, such as religious education, Montessori models, home based care, and public and private center based care. Without excluding any one system, the following recommendations were made to help move more providers towards these systems of quality:

- *Recommendation #9: Educate providers about opportunities for quality improvement*
 - Need specific strategies
 - Technical assistance from DSS
- *Recommendation #10: Coordinated/ comprehensive professional development system*
- *Recommendation #11: Educate parents about finding quality programs*
 - Need specific strategies

- *Recommendation #12: Tiered reimbursement for quality (currently there are just two tiers based on whether or not a program is licensed)*
 - Strategies based on study sent to the GA?
- *Recommendation #13: Recognizing that VSQI is just one standard of state recognized quality; the group recommends expanding opportunities for providers, who are not currently in any system of quality, to access VSQI and improve their programs*
 - Potential strategies include: linking to subsidies
 - Zelda and Barb to bring additional ideas on Monday

3. Coordinated Administration and Sustainable Funding

The group recognizes that the early childhood care and education space in Virginia is fragmented due to public programs being administered by various government agencies; unaffordable for many low and middle income families; does adequately not meet the demand for infant or after-hours care, for example; and is difficult to administer by both public and private entities because subsidies and the state's per pupil funding do not adequately cover the true cost of care. From every perspective in the system- parents, providers, school districts and state administration – there is a demonstrable need for better coordination, improved efficiency, and sustained funding. Recognizing this, the workgroup has made the following recommendations:

- *Recommendation #14: CCCS workgroup (?) should study the need for increased fiscal resources in the system; examine possible strategies for improvement in the coming year. Possibilities for study should include capturing new revenue; innovative governance models to better coordinate systems and achieve efficiencies; etc*
- *Recommendation #15: DSS (and DOE?) should provide additional technical assistance for braided and blended programs for any combination of federal, state, local public and/or private programs.*
- *Recommendation #16: Re: Continuing role of CCCS and/or this work group in developing state plan?*

➤ *Professional Development Recommendations*

V. Appendix

Workgroup Roster

Subgroup Roster

JMU Needs Assessment

Competencies for Early Childhood

Six Principles of Early Education

**Access and Quality of Preschool and Childcare Subgroup
Meeting Agenda**

Monday, March 30 at 1pm

DSS Central Regional Office, Richmond Room

1604 Santa Rosa Road; Richmond, VA 23229

And via conference call 866-842-5779 and with pass code 4752632705 (*please note this is a new conference number*)

I. Welcome and Introductions

II. Reports from Subgroups

Access: Sharon Veatch

Quality: Karen Lange / Toni Cacace-Beshears

Professional Development: Phyllis Mondak / Teresa Harris

III. Discuss Priority Area #4: Strengthen outreach and education Virginia parents regarding quality early care. Develop initial list of recommendations.

IV. Planning for Final Workgroup Meeting

Upcoming Meetings:

Monday, April 13, 2015 at 1pm (same location): Finalize recommendations of the workgroup to send to the full council

April 24, Workgroup Recommendations due to Holly Coy by COB

Next Full CCCS Meeting:

May 4, 2015 at 3pm in West Reading Room of the Patrick Henry Building