



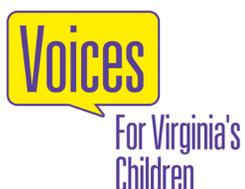
Success in School Depends on a Strong Foundation

Virginia's future prosperity depends on the healthy development of all children. Success in school produces a capable, competitive workforce, and the foundation for this success is built even before children enter kindergarten.

In fact, scientific research has clearly established that the early years, pre-natal to age 5, are the most critical period for promoting the brain development on which all learning is based.

In the U.S., public investments in children are the smallest when their potential impact is greatest—during these early years. Virginia has made recent strides in addressing this discrepancy through increased investments in early childhood programs. Unfortunately, recent budget cuts are a step backwards and a threat to healthy childhood development. A strong early childhood system is critical to promoting the school readiness and educational success of all children. A weakened system diminishes the potential of our children and jeopardizes Virginia's ability to produce a capable workforce—the driver of future economic success.

The VOICES FOR VIRGINIA'S CHILDREN
Early Childhood Policy Action Network



Foundation Cracking?

Since 2009, nearly \$15M has been cut from Virginia's early childhood system.*

* Analysis by Voices for Virginia's Children.



CHIP of Virginia • Prevent Child Abuse Virginia/Healthy Families Virginia • Just Children/Legal Aid Justice Center
Smart Beginnings of Greater Richmond • Virginia Association for Early Childhood Education (VAECE)
Virginia Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Networks (VACCRRN) • Virginia Early Childhood Foundation
Virginia Head Start Association • Virginia League of Social Services Executives • Virginia Organizing • Voices for Virginia's Children

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What the General Assembly Can Do in 2012:

Maintain funding for Virginia's Home Visiting programs



Home Visiting services provided by Healthy Families Virginia and CHIP of Virginia are an essential component of Virginia's early childhood system, ensuring a good start in life for children born into very challenging family situations including deep poverty and high family stress. Parents voluntarily receive research-based services in which trained home visitors bolster their parenting knowledge and skills. Home visiting programs have been shown to improve early childhood health outcomes, prevent child abuse and neglect and increase the use of positive childrearing practices in these vulnerable families.

Budget cuts since 2009 have reduced state funding for CHIP and Healthy Families by almost one-third and caused the closure or downsizing of programs in many communities. Nine localities have lost all home visiting services. Statewide, the number of families served has fallen by 10%— nearly 600 families per year no longer have access to these essential services.

The success of Virginia's early childhood/school readiness system depends on providing effective home visiting to the most vulnerable families and children. Maintaining funding for this critical segment of the system is the highest priority.

Strengthen investment in other Key Components of Virginia's Early Childhood/School Readiness System

- **The Virginia Preschool Initiative (VPI):** VPI provides quality preschool to low-income children – those who are most likely to start school already behind and unlikely to catch up. A 2007 JLARC study found that VPI participants start school better prepared than non-participants. By reaching additional at-risk children, Virginia can reduce the achievement gap, promote higher graduation rates, and save millions in lower costs for remedial and special education, grade retentions and social service programs.
- **The Virginia Early Childhood Foundation:** The public/private VECF uses state funding to leverage additional private and public dollars, which then support school readiness initiatives in more than 90 communities. Local coalitions bring together business, education, health and other leaders to create these locally-driven school readiness initiatives. VECF has successfully leveraged four dollars for every dollar of state funds invested.
- **The Child Care Assistance Program** annually helps more than 30,000 low-income working parents afford the high cost of child care. As a result, parents stay employed and on the path to self-sufficiency while their children receive quality child care that fosters school readiness. Due to insufficient funding, thousands of parents cannot obtain assistance; and provider payment rates are so low that qualified providers drop out of the system.
- **The Virginia Star Quality Initiative (VSQI)** improves the quality of child care and early education to ensure that programs effectively promote school readiness. Participation is voluntary – willing programs are assessed and then receive training and technical assistance to improve quality. Increased funding will allow the initiative to progress beyond its current “pilot” stage and reach all willing providers. These providers comprise one of the largest segments of small business in Virginia. The VSQI is an investment that strengthens the small business sector, promotes school readiness, ensures that working parents can find quality child care, and helps attract additional businesses to Virginia communities.