

# Briefing on Early Childhood Education in Virginia

November 13, 2013



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### **Why do we care about Virginia's Youngest Children –**

Because we know what role early childhood development plays in the long term success of Virginia.

To meet our long term goals- You have heard how global competitiveness makes workforce preparation increasing more meaningful. You've also heard how the age wave of baby boomers who will soon retire. The unknowns for our not too distant future point to the need to prepare our workforce of tomorrow. That is why VA business leaders have embraced investments in early childhood.

To meet short term goals –We want all children to show up with the skills and experience they need to be success in school and do continue to succeed in school. We currently have limited information about our children's school readiness. Recent 4<sup>th</sup> grade test scores show us that our overall test scores are improving, but not for economically disadvantaged children.

We also know that there could be a solution available to improve short term success in school and long term success in the workforce- investing in early childhood programs and systems. As an added benefit, early childhood programs have the 1-2 punch of a two-generation approach, helping parents right now work or continue their education and can help children flourish for years to come.

# Recent Reports on Early Childhood Related to Virginia

*JMU Early Childhood Needs Assessment*

*VECF School Readiness Report Card*

*AECF The First Eight Years*



Over the summer we learned there would be several published this fall on VA's early childhood system. Rather than expect everyone to read these reports, we thought we would give you the highlights and cross-cutting themes.

Two of these reports were initiated by the Early Childhood Advisory Council, which had been designated as our School Readiness Council to meet the criteria of a systems-building grant from the US Dept of Health & Human Services. The ECAC selected Teresa Harris and John Almarode of JMU to complete the Needs Assessment. The Assessment sought out a better understanding of:

- The number of children 0-5 who might be eligible for early childhood programs

- The current supply

- The gap between the number of children eligible and supply

- A comprehensive analysis of VA early childhood education and care system, ie child care

- A fiscal map of how funding is allocated across agencies.

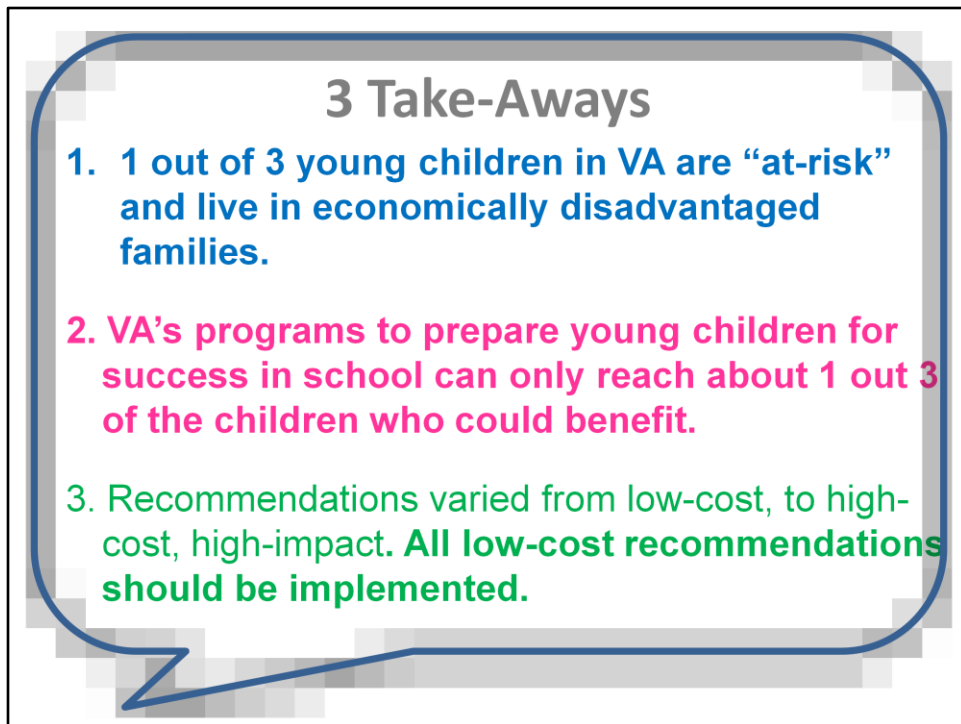
My understanding is that the full report will be made available on the DSS website soon.

This grant funded *School Readiness Report Card* was produced by Virginia Early Childhood Foundation under Kathy Glazer's Leadership. The Report Card gives a snapshot of how each of the localities in VA compare to one another across indicators of school readiness. The report is organized into indicators of Risk, the Reach of programs, Results of VA's initiatives and Recommendations.

We also included "The First Eight Years" recently released by our KIDS COUNT partner, the Annie E. Casey Kids Count project that looks at our early childhood system birth to age eight (a slightly a broader reach than where we usually focus on early childhood Virginia). Although this is national report, it includes state specific data in the report and even more online in our KIDS COUNT Data Center.

## **Goals of Our Briefing**

- 1. Review the characteristics of Virginia's youngest residents**
- 2. Do Virginia's current offerings meet the need?**
- 3. Highlight new findings in research**
- 4. Synthesize recommendations across reports**

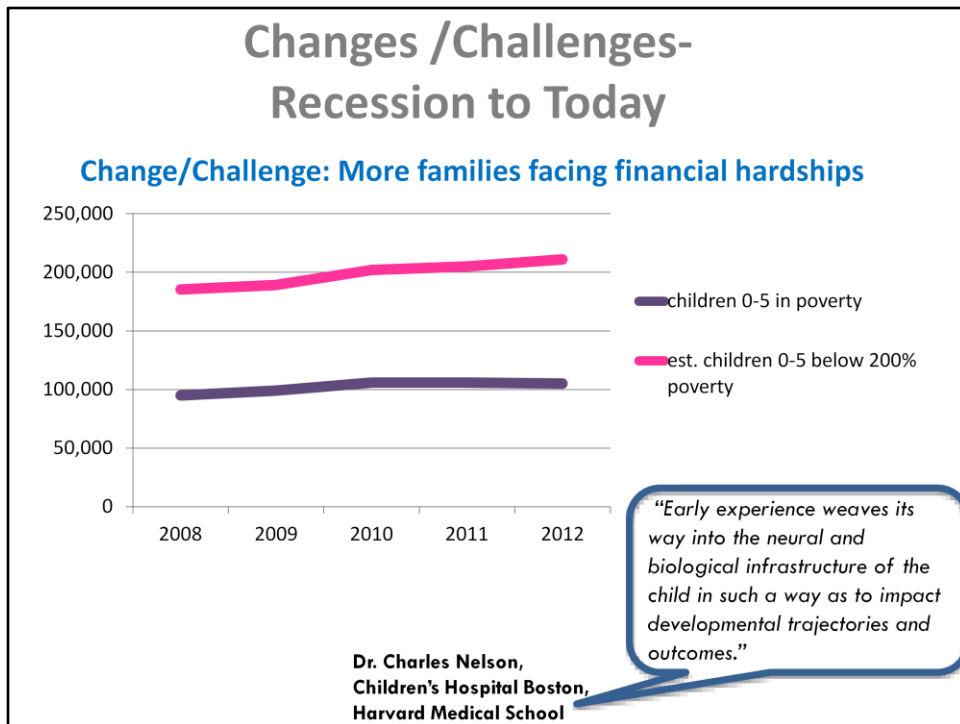


a couple of Take Aways.

The first is that despite Virginia's overall wealth, we are home to an increasing number of young children facing financial hardship. Over one in three young children lives in families below 200% poverty. Targeting our early childhood efforts to the children experiencing financial hardship, may also catch the children experiencing other risk factors, such as their parents mental health, that are harder to pinpoint.

The second is that we have programs in place that could better prepare VA's future workforce. By and large, these programs are targeted to at-risk children. But we have not increased our investments to keep up with increasing need and thus, have not seen improvements in school readiness or 4<sup>th</sup> grade reading scores for all kids.

The third is there are low-cost recommendations that we could put in place today to initiate long term improvements in our early childhood programs and their opportunities to collaborate, innovate, blend public & private funds and provide accountability for those funds.

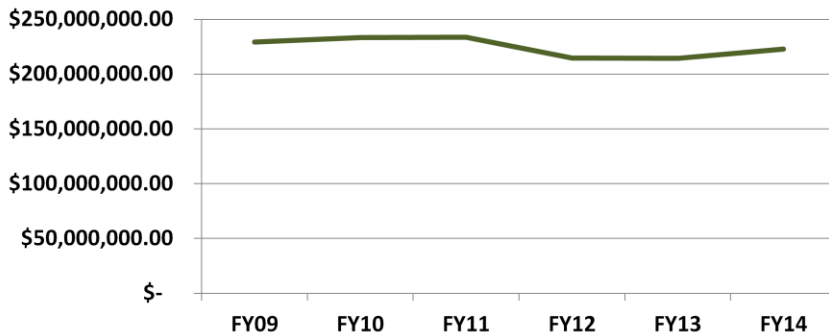


So before we get on the data from the reports we wanted to provide you with a bit of Voices' own analysis of how the world of ECE has changed since recession.

The first change/challenge is that more young children are growing up in poverty now than before the recession. And many more kids living in economically disadvantaged families at 200% of poverty, which is about an annual salary of \$39,000 for a family of three. Our brain researchers that have studied infants, toddlers and children's brains tell us that impact of economic hardship is most detrimental to a young child or baby because of the malleability of the brain during those earliest years.

## Changes /Challenges- Recession to Today

### VA budget allocations for all early childhood programs\*



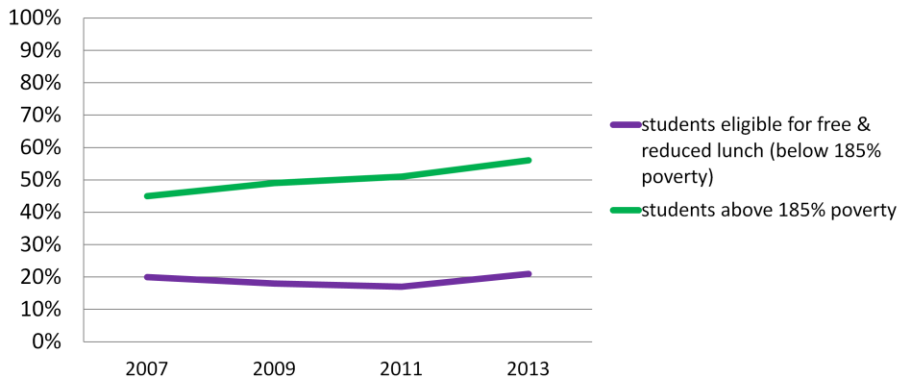
\* Early childhood programs include: child care assistance, home visiting (CHIP & Healthy Families, early intervention (IDEA Part C), VPI and VECF

The next slide tells the story of how we have maintained during the recession. We have added together the funding for all of the ECE programs that appear in the state budget (so this includes state dollars and federal dollars allocated by the state). The total represents child care assistance, VPI, home visiting programs, early intervention and the VECF. Over the last five years this funding has declined and remained relatively flat with increases attributed to VPI enrollment and funding the shortfall in early intervention services.

For the last few years we've maintained fairly consistent rates of kindergarten literacy readiness, despite the increase in at-risk children, that can be attributed to this constant support. But we are being bypassed by many states that are not content to maintain. VA just passed on the chance to apply for Race to the Top federal funds. 14 states currently receive the federal Race to the Top grant to boost their systems, and 16 more states, plus DC, just applied for the funds as well. Other states are using their state dollars to invest, MI under a R Gov and Legislature, just made a \$65 mil investment to expand their preschool program. National research cites our Southern sisters in GA, OK, LA, and NC as models of high quality preschool programs and expansion. We want to be sure VA can keep pace.

## Changes and Challenges- Recession to Today

Proficient on the NAEP 4th Grade Reading Exam



**Only 6 states outperformed or matched VA's not economically disadvantaged students.**

**Economically disadvantaged students in 22 states outperformed VA's economically disadvantaged students.**

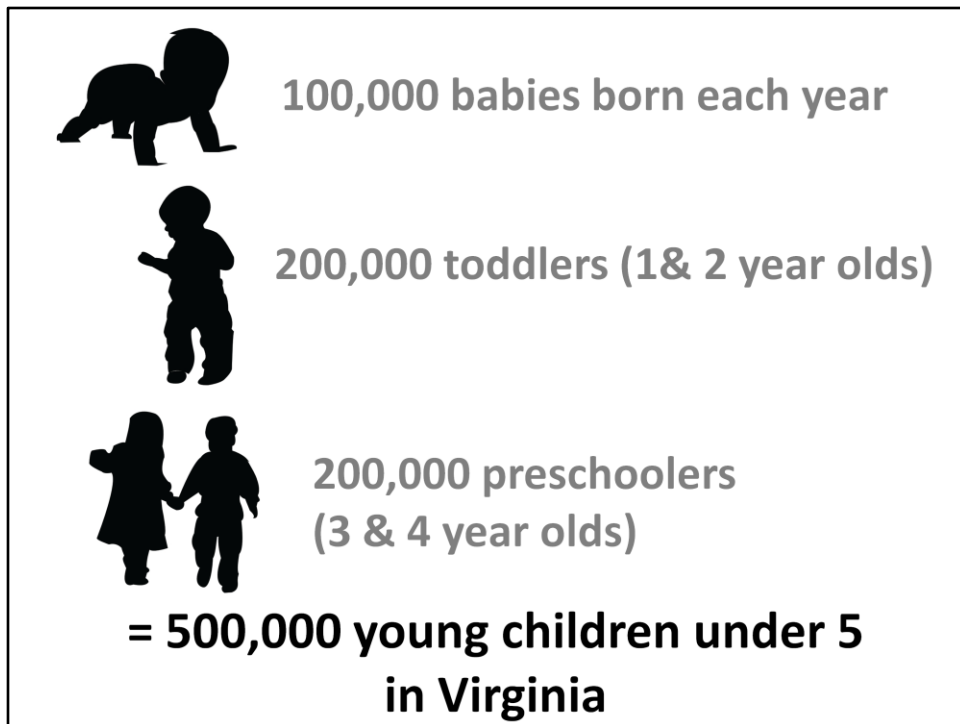
So how does VA stack up to other states? This slide shows gains, for SOME students. We just patted ourselves on the back for significant improvements in 4<sup>th</sup> grade reading scores, and it wonderful to see VA's teachers and students making these gains. In this chart we took another slice of the 4<sup>th</sup> grade reading scores and compared students who were economically disadvantaged, eligible for free & reduced lunch below 185% poverty, to their non-disadvantaged peers. The significant improvement in scores was attributed to our non-disadvantaged students. This year there were only 4 states, plus DC, where the non-disadvantaged students do better than VA's nondisadvantaged students and 1 that did the same. But there were 22 states with low-income students outperforming VA's low-income students.



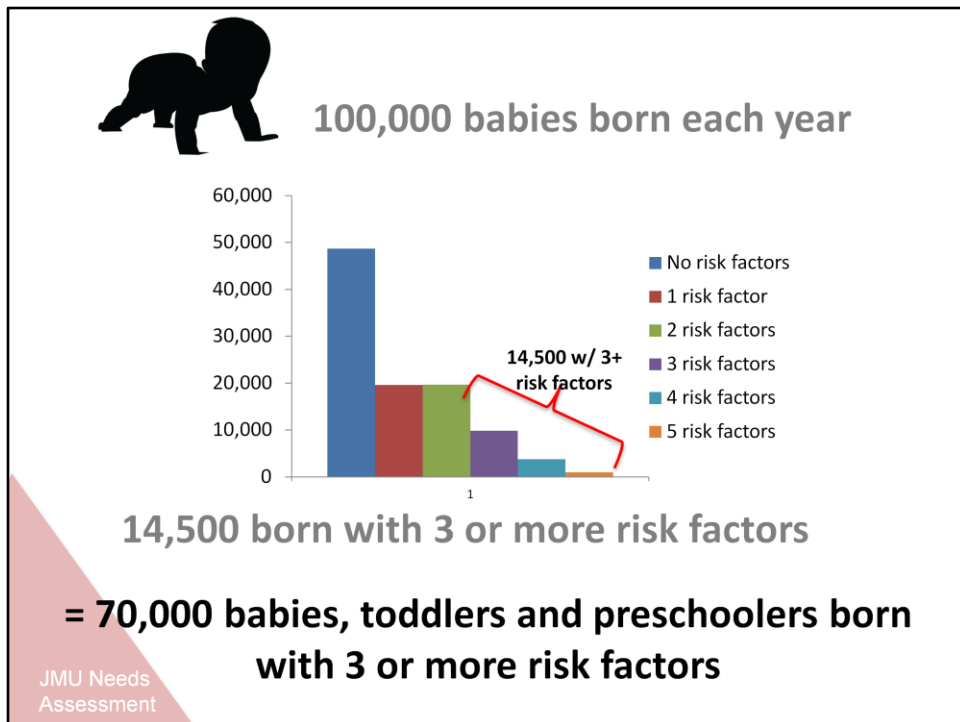
## Indicators of Risk

Indicators	ECE Reports		
	<i>JMU Needs Assessment</i>	<i>School Readiness Report Card</i>	<i>AECF- The First Eight Years</i>
Children Living in Poverty	X	X	X
Low Maternal Education	X	X	X
Births to Teenage Mothers	X	X	
Low Birth Weight	X	X	
Prematurity	X		
Congenital Anomalies	X		
Parental Depression			X
Emotional Help with Parenting			X
Unmarried Parents	X		
Mother's Illegal Substance Use While Pregnant	X		

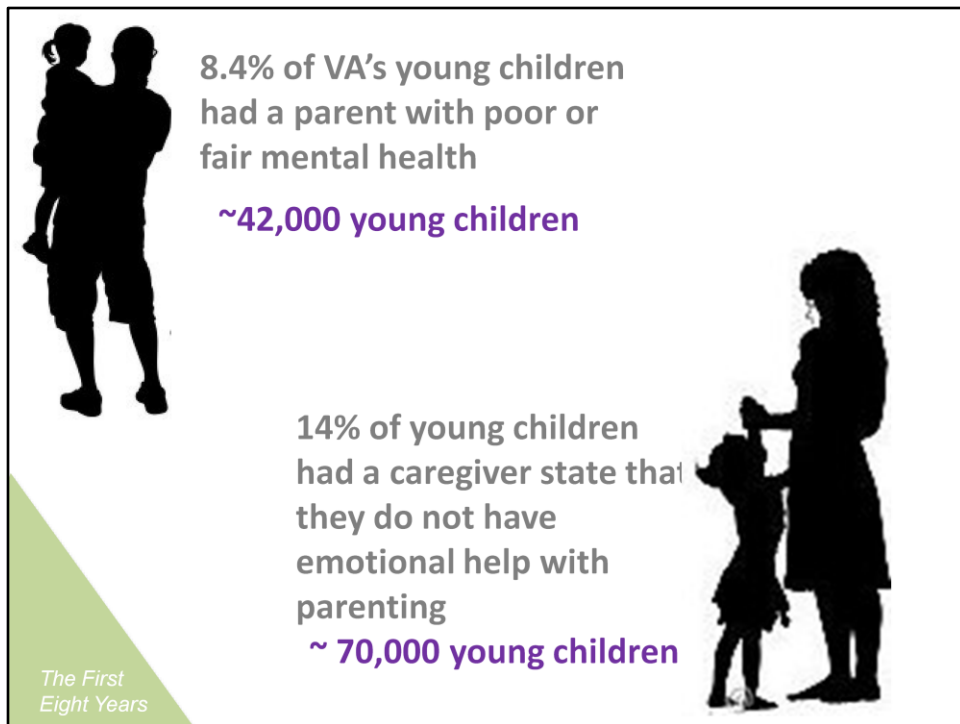
We looked across these different reports to find validity and consistency in the data. This gives a broad look at the children facing challenges beyond their control. Having access to multiple reports allows us to highlight other categories of risk, beyond economic disadvantage, that could be our flags to identify our target population. The indicators of risk represented in the reports and data analysis are represented here.



I'm not going to give you too many numbers but I do want to go over some simple math to give you a picture of VA's youngest residents. And we'll work with round numbers to make it easy. Approximately 100,000 babies are born each year in VA. That means that within a year, those 100,000 babies turn into 100,000 1 year olds, then 2 year olds and on and on. So we have 100,000 children in each age cohort, and when we add up all 5 age cohorts, that becomes 500,000 babies, toddlers and preschoolers in VA.



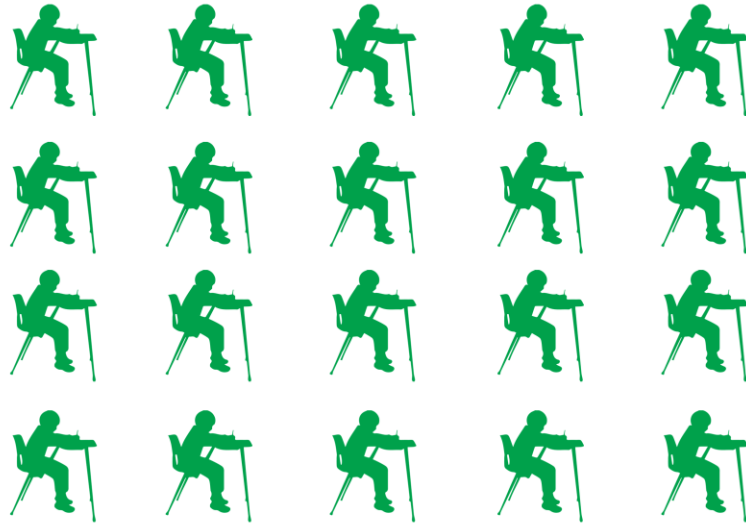
So, more on our 100,000 babies- the researchers at JMU doing the Needs Assessment looked at our birth data from our Vital Health Records and approximated the number of children birth to age three facing multiple risk factors at birth. Tied to research, they focused on the children born with 3 or more risk factors at birth. According to their analysis, approximately 14,500 children are born in VA each year facing 3 or more of those risk factors at birth. If we multiply that number across the age cohort of 0-5 we find that 70,000 children under 5 in VA who faced those risk factors at birth.



The supplemental data in the First Eight Years report from the Casey Foundation allowed us to look data compiled by ChildTrends for Casey from the National Survey of Children's Health and ECLS-K data. From these surveys we learn about other indicators of risk, most significantly the risk factors that parents faced. These surveys found that 8.2% of young children had a parent that experienced poor or fair mental health, that percentage was higher for economically disadvantaged families, more than double that at 17.4%

It also showed that parents wanted more emotional help with parenting. 14% of parents in VA did not have the social network to turn to when they needed additional support and validation in their role as a parent. These indicators help us better understand the need for that 2 generation approach- the opportunity to help the parents that will in turn help the child.

If these 20 students represent a typical Virginia kindergarten class...



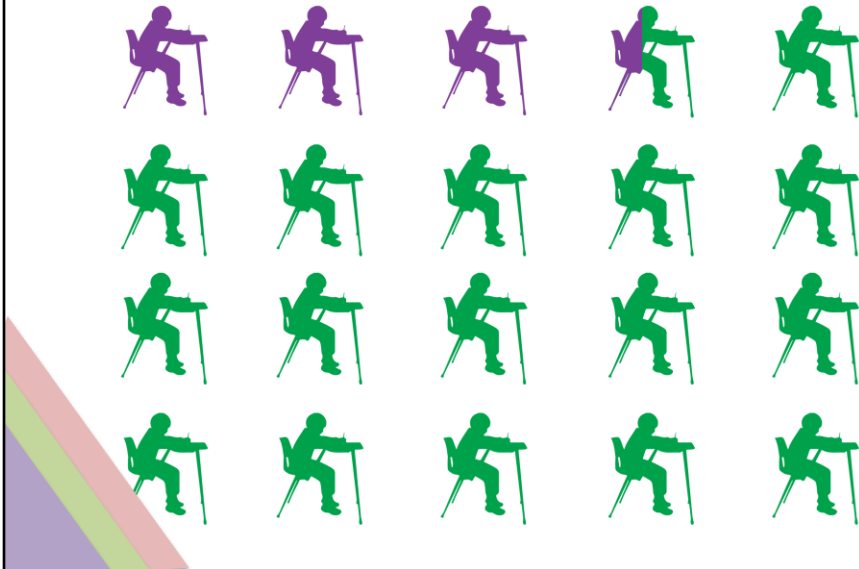
If we picked a classroom of 20 students to represent the average classroom in VA- almost 3 kids were born with 3 or more risk factors, more than 3 live in poverty and more than 7 are economically disadvantage, so one out of three of VA's kids. This is what a typical classroom may look like across the state but the reality is that many communities- our urban centers, and in many transitioning suburban communities those figures will be even higher.

Given our data on risk we find that at the VERY least 70,000 children under 5 could benefit from comprehensive and coordinated approaches to foster healthy early development. So how does VA do at providing those opportunities ...

2.8 children were born with 3 or more risk factors



3.4 children are living in poverty



**7.2 children are economically disadvantaged  
(below 200% poverty)**





## High Quality Programs

	ECE Reports		
High Quality Interventions	JMU Needs Assessment	School Readiness Report Card	The First Eight Years
Home Visiting	X	X	X
Early Intervention (Part C)	X	X	X
Special Education (Part B)		X	
Head Start	X	X	X
VPI	X	X	X
Title I Preschool	X	X	X
VSQI	X	X	X

First we must define, not only the supply of programs, but whether they hold up to our definition of *high-quality*.

There are several programs targeted to low-income families that offer financial support and a path to self-sufficiency. We WIC, child care assistance, EITC, health insurance and other programs help the family's financial bottom line and provide a safety net of supports. However, they are not targeted solely to our youngest children.

Today we will focus on what these reports single out as "high-quality programs". We define those as the programs that are evidence based or evidence informed and target young children and their early learning goals. We will look at four program areas in-depth to compare our estimated need to capacity

## Home Visiting

Our network of Home Visiting programs serves about 12,000 families per year

Outcomes of Virginia's home visiting programs:

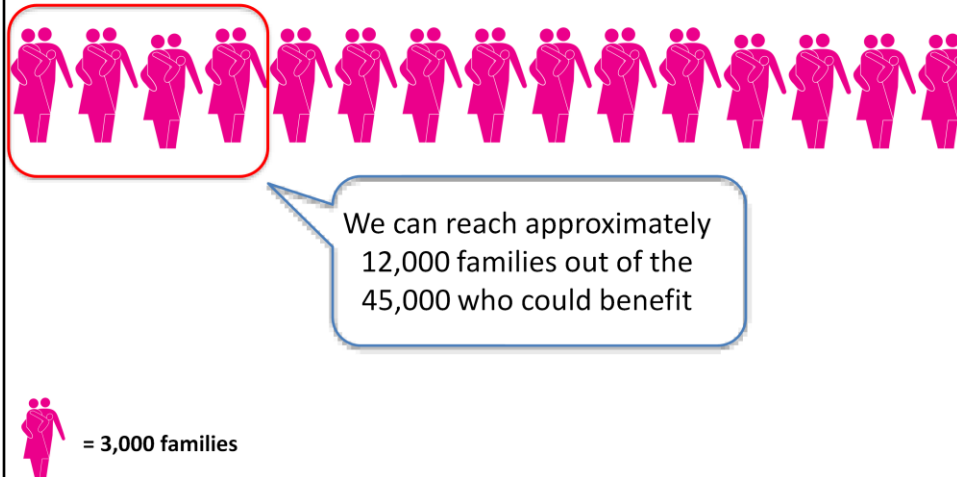
- Reduction in premature birth
- Improved families' connections to health insurance and a medical home
- Increased immunization rate
- Reduced cases of abuse and neglect



Home Visiting= CHIP, Healthy Families, Parents As Teachers, Project Link, Nurse-Family Partnership & Resource Mothers

The first high quality program is home visiting- Virginia is home to several models of home visiting. VA programs have demonstrated improvements in premature and low-weight births and connections to community resource. Families volunteer to work with a coach or mentor over a few years on achieving goals for their families.

## Home Visiting



So with 14,500 babies facing risks, and estimated 26,000 kids under 5 with a parent with poor mental health and 70,000 kids under 5 with a parent that stated they needed more emotional help, of which 58% or 45,000 kids, come from low-income families. We estimate that home visiting could benefit approximately 45,000 children. So how do we do? Right now we have the opportunity to serve about 7800 families at a time or about 11-12,000 families over the course of the year as some families complete their goals and move on and new families join

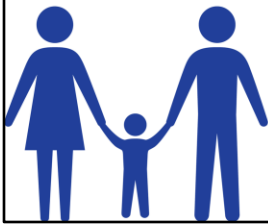
## Early Intervention

Early Intervention/IDEA Part C (Also known as the Infant & Toddler Connection) provides therapy and care coordination to approximately 15,000 VA children with identified developmental delays and their families.

DBHDS reports that 1 out of 5 of the babies and toddlers served catch up to their peers within a short time frame and do not need any additional therapy.

20% of families with young children in VA had concerns about their child's development

- 31% of low income families vs. 14% higher income families



Early intervention services are therapies and guidance to help families of infants and toddlers experiencing developmental delays. These children may have been born with some of the birth risks we have already discussed, like prematurity or low birth rate, or may have other health or physical conditions that delay their development. The therapy and guidance help 1 out of 5 of the children served catch up to where they should be developmentally before they turn 3 and help many children live up to their full potential.

## Early Intervention



= 10,000 families

We serve about 15,000 out of the 60,000 families that say they have concerns about their child's development

The Casey Report tells us that 20% of VA parents identify concerns with their child's development. It also shows that in VA, 28% of families state that their child had received a developmental screening compared to slightly lower than the national average and below rates of 54% in NC. For the 60,000 children under five with parents expressing concerns about development, approximately 15,000 babies and toddlers receive the appropriate therapy and care coordination to ensure they catch up each year.

## Affordable Preschool

Head Start demonstrates a lifetime of benefits, beyond test scores

Children that attended were more likely to have the literacy skills they needed when they started school than their peers who did not attend VPI or attended a non-VPI preschool.

**90% of VPI students met literacy competencies when they entered kindergarten** compared to 65% of children who did not attend preschool and 87% of children who attended a non-VPI preschool. (Huang & Invernezzi, UVA, 2011)

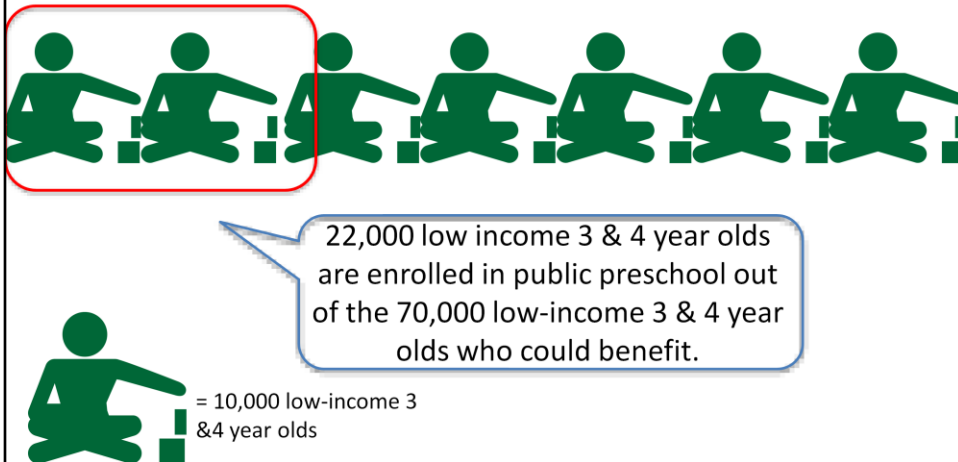


We define affordable preschool, as preschool opportunities readily available to low-income families in the public settings, those offered by the Virginia Preschool Initiative and Head Start. We know the parameters guiding their classrooms that translate to high quality programs. So for the purposes of understanding what affordable, high quality preschool we will focus on those two programs.

There have been studies or reports that the effects of Head Start fade by third grade. I wanted to address this concept. When we hear about the “fade out” effect, we are relating to performance on achievement tests, not the impact on long term trajectory of a life. Head Start has demonstrated to contribute to long-term success-educational attainment, employment and fewer teen pregnancies. I don’t think many of us would want our successes tied to our 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade reading scores.

Looking at Virginia researchers at UVA have evaluated VPI and found that children who participated in VPI were more likely to have the desired literacy skills at kindergarten entry and on to first grade than their peers who did not participate in VPI. So we know VPI does good work. But there are more children who could benefit than are offered the opportunity to attend. Our state funding formula tied to Lottery Funds estimates that 24,500 low income 4 year olds could benefit from VPI, beyond the children currently served by Head Start, yet we only use about 17,000 of those opportunities and leave 7,500 4 year olds who could be eligible without the opportunity to attend. These opportunities are not provided because some localities do not use all of their allocated slots citing lack of classroom space or insufficient funds for local match.

## Affordable Preschool



When we add the number of children served in VPI, about 17,000 four year olds, and in Head Start, about 15,000 3 & 4 year olds, we get 22,000 3 & 4 year olds participating in these affordable, high quality preschool programs. That recent number crunching from Child Trends and Casey estimated that 65% of VA low-income 3&4 year olds were not enrolled in preschool compared to 45% of their peers from higher income households. We can do more number crunching and estimate that there are 70,000 3 & 4 year olds below 200% of poverty that could benefit from high quality preschool but we can only serve about 22,000 kids. So 1 out of 3 of the disadvantaged preschoolers do not get the opportunity to attend.

## High Quality Child Care

60% VA early childhood educators had more than 10 years of experience; slightly higher than national average

Over half of providers in child care centers have AA or BA degrees

Average hourly wages of child care employees

- with AA degree ~ \$11 an hour

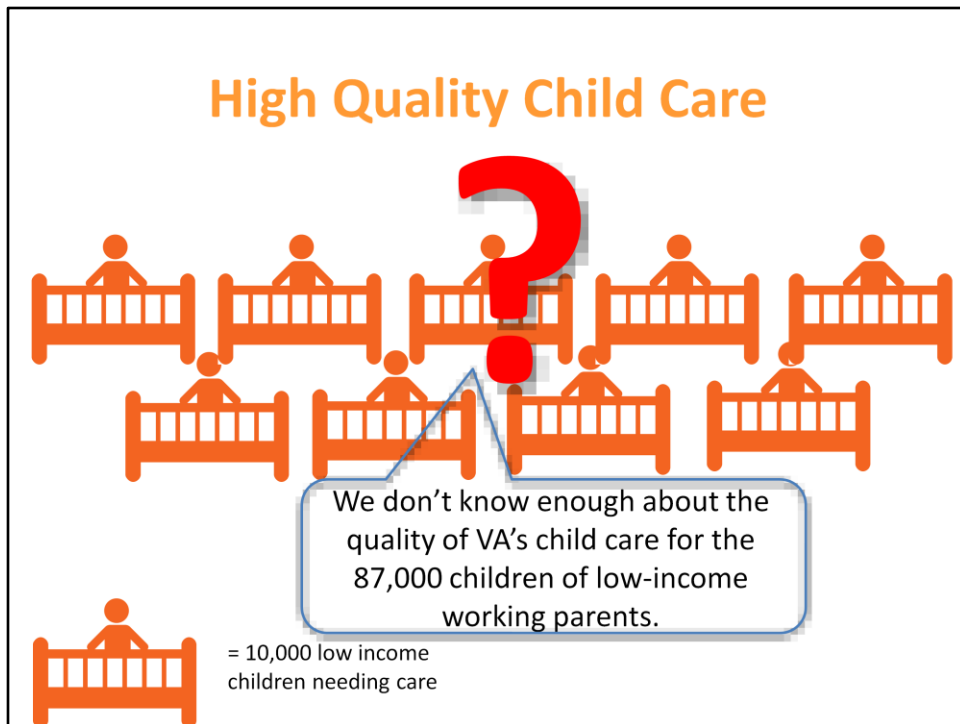
- with BA degree ~ \$13.50 hour



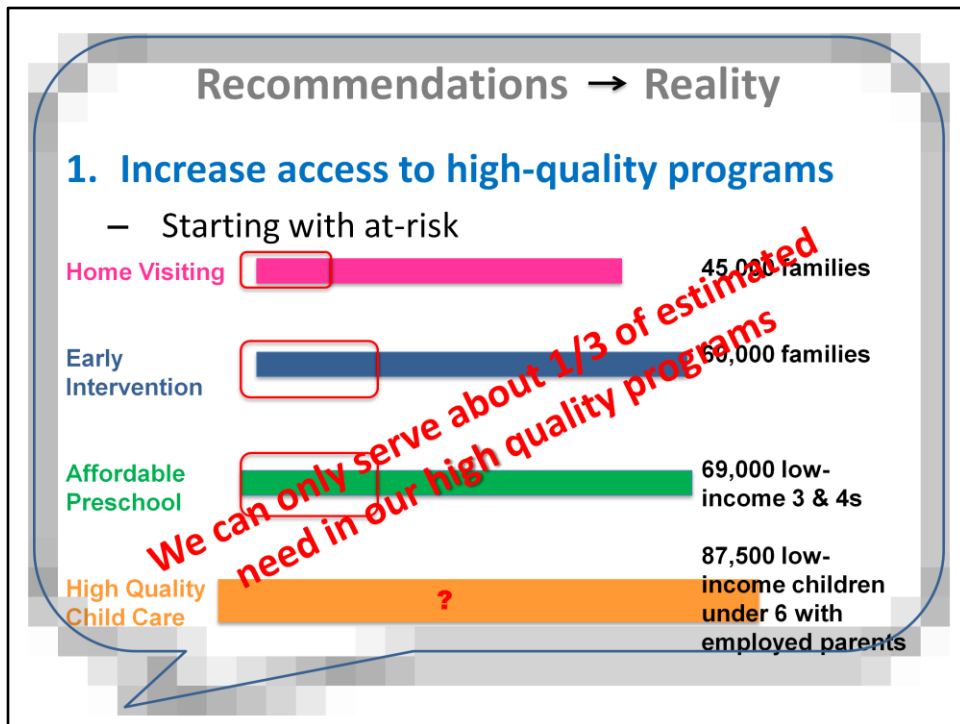
High quality preschool and early care- The next intervention that we know makes a significant impact on high quality early care settings. In Virginia our child care providers reflect a wide variation- nannys, home care providers, those in formal settings like the child care center and faith-based programs. We must fundamentally ensure these programs are safe and that children's health is a primary concern. We must also ensure that early childhood educators are appropriately skilled to work with young children as babies, to toddlers and preschoolers.

From the extensive surveys collected through the JMU Needs Assessment, we know that VA's early childhood educators are a fairly skilled and committed bunch. We also know that despite their skills and commitment, they are getting paid bupkis. Let's for second compare two spectrums of our learning continuum, child care and higher ed. Although they seem like an unlikely pair, we can compare these two ends of the spectrum, for several reasons: 1. because they cost about the same. That's right- full time infant care costs just as much (or more) than tuition at VCU. And 2. There are close to as many 2 and 4 year college students in VA's public institutions as there are young children needing child care- about 240,000 each. But that is where the comparisons end... Higher ed is part of statewide infrastructure that is significantly funded and subsidized comparison to the \$200 mil. going to early childhood education. And I imagine college profs are getting paid more than \$10-11 an hour. What if we did invest comparably and incentivize in our early learning system, when children's brains are more open to learning, as in higher ed?





Although this is a significant business sector, we know little about the quality of our child care settings in VA. Research tells us that higher quality care is linked to improved school readiness. To better understand the quality of our child care offerings, VA has developed a quality rating and improvement system, the Star Quality Initiative. Our rating system takes into account the classroom environment, teachers' credentials and the interactions between teachers and students. VA's rating system has been recognized as one of the most comprehensive for including interactions. Recently the system has expanded so that a child care center in any locality could participate. Yet with limited resources we can only rate about 300 of the 3,000 plus centers statewide leaving a lot of unknown about the quality of care for many of kids. The Casey report uses census data to estimate that 87,000 low-income children under 6 have working parents. This is the population that we estimate could benefit most from child care of the highest quality, like that you saw touring PFFN today, a 4 star center. We know that 22,000 3 & 4 year olds are enrolled in an affordable, high quality preschool, but beyond that we don't know much about where other low-income children are enrolled in care or the quality of the settings.

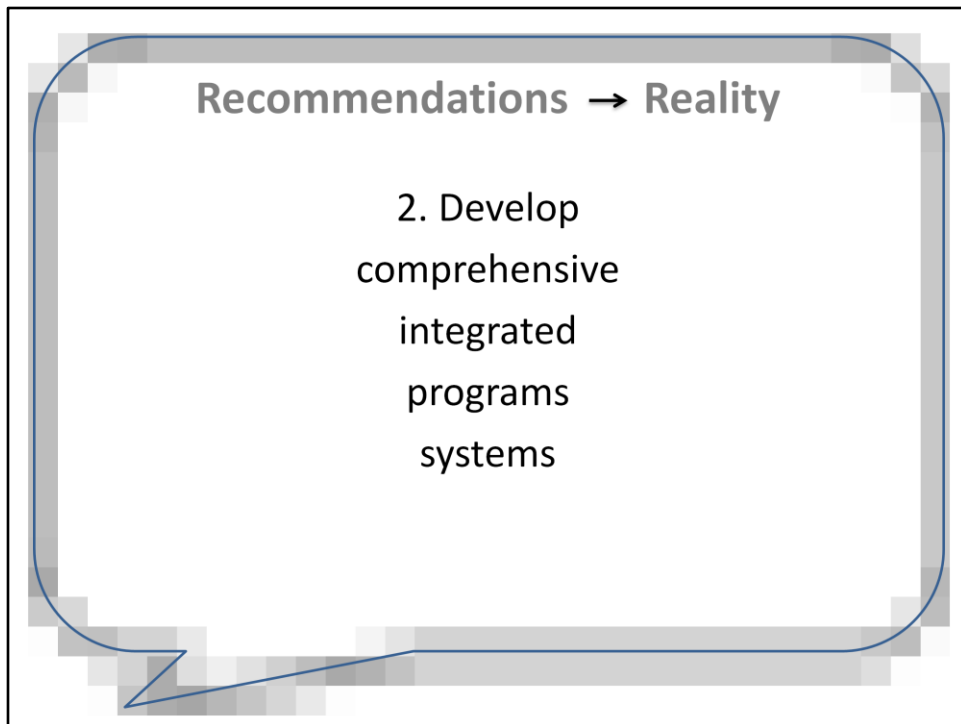


**Recommendations:** As with the data on need and program reach, we also compared recommendations across the 3 reports. Most of the recommendations were very similar in scope, it was nice to see the national report identify the same areas of growth that our VA stakeholders did. To highlight the recommendations, we added more examples of how they could match the reality today. We also thought it was important to view the recommendations as not only what would be good policies for VA, but helpful to professionals currently working in the field of early ed and our Youngest Virginians. We want to highlight recommendations that are low-cost and a few that are high cost. We believe that even the low cost recommendations can be high impact.

#### Increase access to high-quality programs

As we've seen through the data analysis, VA does not have the capacity to provide the high quality learning opportunities to all the children that could benefit. We are only able to reach about one of third of the children who could possibly benefit in each program area. While identifying the resources to serve all young children may seem like a massive and expensive undertaking we can plan for expansion bit by bit building on our success and ensure we are in line with our neighboring states.

We could take several tactics to handle expansion. For example, our policymakers could prioritize utilizing all the funds currently allocated to low-income, at-risk 4 year olds in the VPI by offering incentives to localities and promoting partnerships with high quality private preschool providers and child care. We could also look at targeted but comprehensive neighborhood-level approaches, can expand services within one community to bring the impact closer to scale. These approaches would take more investments, but also come with many opportunities for leveraging public funds, and a long-term ROI.



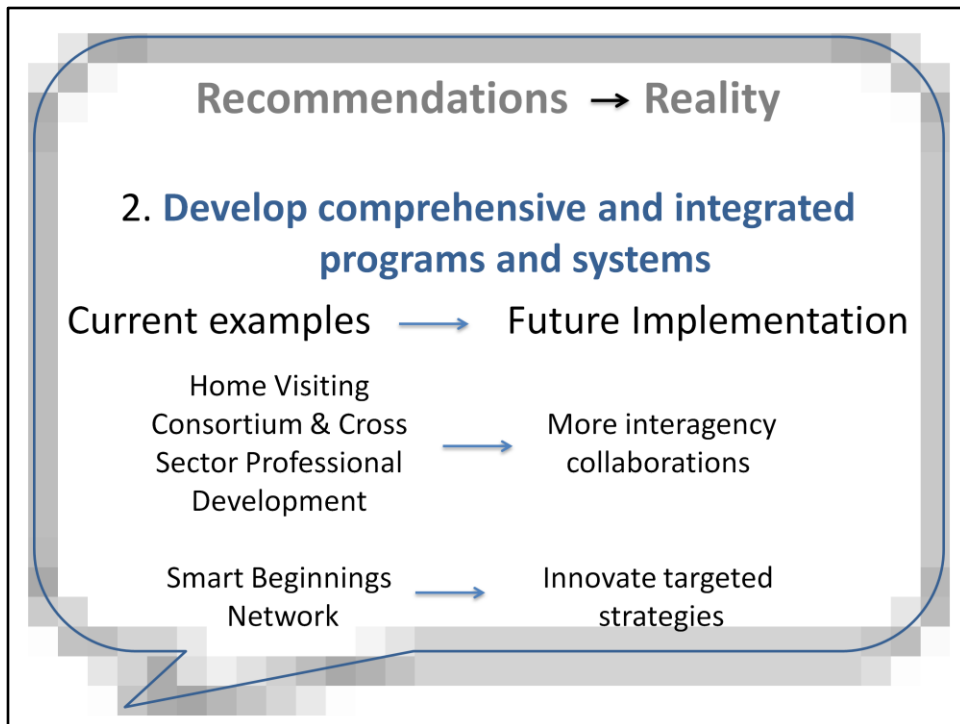
This recommendation was universal across the latest reports. it sounds great, it also sounds like a lot of buzzwords. To prove this recommendation is not lip service, let's break down what this statement really means and how it applies in VA.

Comprehensive- provides a venue for multiple approaches- parenting help, health, prevention

Integrated- allows those different approaches to use each others' strengths and allows professionals with expertise to share wisdom and resources

Programs- the preschool classrooms, home visitors, therapists, etc.

Systems- the funding, accountability and administration of these programs.



Breaking down the buzzwords we get a better understanding that these recommendations are not exactly costly, but do take significant commitment and follow through. We have several examples of integrated, comprehensive approaches that have been years in the making to get where they are today- the Home Visiting Consortium integrates the HV programs into a continuum of services sharing professional development. The cross sector professional development network allows early childhood educators access to quality improvement. The Smart Beginnings Network has fostered regional collaborations, such as the implementation of VA's Star Quality initiative, kindergarten registration and home visiting expansion happens through partnership of local stakeholders.

What could keep this momentum going? The continued leadership of VECF for our statewide early childhood plan and the Smart Beginnings Network. We should also replicate our successful model of interagency collaborations in other areas such as health promotion and prevention. We would like to have more avenues to work across silos to blend and braid funding.

## Recommendations → Reality

### 3. Improve accountability and data-driven decision making

- A “cradle to career” vision: Who asks if we meet our goals? Who celebrates successes?
- Data-driven decision-making:
  - Kindergarten entry assessment data
  - Longitudinal data system

We just went over a lot of data, how could these reports suggest we really need more data? But there are limits to what we have access to- we don't know about the quality of all our child care services, what families are receiving a comprehensive complement of programs and how early experiences contribute to success across the lifespan. As we look to build new data systems we also need to ensure that all the stakeholders that could benefit, classroom teachers, administrators, etc. will have access to the data. We also need to keep our eye on the big picture- our kids are achieving better outcomes. That is where accountability comes into play.

Pilot projects are underway for a comprehensive kindergarten readiness assessment. This assessment would look beyond literacy skills. Through this pilot we should also develop ideas of how early childhood professionals can also use this tool to align with early learning guidelines and develop easily digestible tips for parents to prepare their children for school.

An assessment is one piece of the data puzzle, but certainly not all. It is imperative that we do not put VA's early childhood efforts on hold while the assessment is being piloted. We have a perfect opportunity right now, as the profile of ECE has been elevated across the country in a bipartisan manner, to fulfill Virginia's vision for a cradle to career pipeline. The primary entity that has provided the vision and accountability in Va, the ECAC, is coming to a turning point at the end of an Administration and grant cycle. At this moment, VA's leaders from the Exec and Legislative branch can use this opportunity to identify who needs to be at the table to make early childhood decisions, and ensure that those leaders represent all ECE stakeholders- business leaders, researchers, ECE professional and policy makers from both sides of the aisle.

Today bi-partisan leaders in Congress are introducing comprehensive early childhood legislation. In a time that has been marred by partisan rancor, Congressional leaders are bridging the divide to show bi-partisan support for investments in ECE. We've seen this kind of leadership before in VA, in fact, I think we could call it the VA Way

# What will be Virginia's Way?



So what will be Virginia's Way on early childhood education? I'm looking forward to what the next Governor and next General Assembly have in store... will they provide the additional accountability of a renewed Council and cradle to career vision? Will they prioritize restoring funding to the home visiting programs that have experienced cuts and fund the short falls in early intervention? Will they work across the aisle to form a bipartisan early childhood caucus? Any of those ideas would be a good place to start, and we have seen through our synthesis that there is the need and momentum to move these ideas forward.

## The Path to Virginia's Prosperity



Voices for Virginia's Children/2014 Unified Early Childhood Agenda  
Contact: Emily Griffey, [Emily@vakids.org](mailto:Emily@vakids.org)

Our role at Voices as an advocacy organization is focused on moving the ball forward on legislative and budget issues. Some of the examples we discussed today, data & accountability systems and collaborative agreements may not be handled by our elected officials but lie in the hands of our administrators and foundation leaders. To point us closer to the next steps that our policy makers and elected officials can take, Voices has convened early childhood stakeholders to identify their shared legislative priorities and develop a Unified Early Childhood Legislative Agenda. Over the past year over 20 partners have collaborated to share their thoughts on how policymakers can support early childhood. This year our theme is Virginia's Path to Prosperity. On the path you will see many of the programs we discussed today, you also see the link to long-term success. We are asking policymakers this year to ensure our proven programs are on solid footing and restore funding to home visiting and to fully fund early intervention. We also ask that they learn more and ask more about how to fully use all of our VPI slots and to ensure our child care system is safe, high quality and affordable.