

Early Childhood Policy Network Unified Policy Agenda 2017

Every Virginian should be able to contribute to our economic success but we have not yet achieved that promise. The path to prosperity begins with early childhood education. It starts as early as nine months old when research can point to gaps in learning by income level. The path begins with parents and a two-generation approach-- support to strengthen families, and assurances that working families can find child care and receive a high-quality education.

Despite strong support for early childhood education in Virginia more children are showing up at kindergarten without the skills they need to succeed. A larger portion are facing economic hardship at home and stress and trauma in their communities which can disrupt their learning.

But the good news is that we know what works....

- Nurturing and supportive relationships with parents and caregivers can buffer the impact of stress and trauma.
- Early intervention during the first three years of life can help children catch up and avoid longer term, more expensive remediation.
- Access to high quality early learning provides the boost to narrow the achievement gap before kindergarten.

We ask our policymakers to...

Protect our investments in early education that support strong families, healthy children, and high-quality early learning.

As we face a budget shortfall we must ensure that Virginia continues to realize returns for investments in young children. Those returns can be demonstrated particularly when our state invests in prevention and intervention for pregnant women, infants, and toddlers, and in quality improvement of early learning.

Strengthen families to stabilize our economy and provide children with a strong start.

Raising young children is a challenge for anyone. Now imagine those challenges while not earning enough to support your family. Research suggests that differences in parenting explain roughly a third of the income-related gaps in child development. We must support parents through health education, parent mentors/home visitors and access to mental health and substance abuse treatment.

Ensure the safety of children in all child care settings.

There are too many stories of children that have been hurt or neglected in a child care setting that we could have prevented. Virginia must ensure that everyone who provides child care as a business has a fingerprint background check and meets minimal levels of safety standards.

Help families access child care.

We must build mixed-delivery models, partnerships between public and private settings, to provide more child care and leverage funding streams. We must marry the goals of access and affordability for families with efforts to improve quality.

Realize the opportunity to intervene with a young child experiences toxic stress or trauma.

Experiences in the first few years of life build changes into the biology of the human body that influence physical and mental health over a lifetime. Recognize that trauma-informed best practices and nurturing relationships with parents and caregivers can buffer the impact of trauma.