

The logo for 'Voices' is a yellow speech bubble containing the word 'Voices' in a bold, black, sans-serif font.

For Virginia's  
Children

A purple rectangular box containing the text '2021 EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION LEGISLATIVE AGENDA'. The year '2021' is in a large, bold, yellow font, while the rest of the text is in a white, bold, sans-serif font.

Emily Griffey | Voices for Virginia's Children  
804-649-0184 ext. 101 | [emily@vakids.org](mailto:emily@vakids.org)



There is no question that 2020 dramatically changed the early learning sector in Virginia. In November 2020, one-third of the licensed child care capacity in the state was still closed. Currently, the majority of public preschool programs are offering virtual instruction for students. The impact of the pandemic will have long-term implications for children as well as the child care sector.

Our child care sector has only achieved stability at current levels through additional federal resources. Nearly \$170 million in response funds have been directed to child care and public preschool by the legislature and the Northam administration, and an additional \$198 million in federal resources will come to Virginia from the "second stimulus."

As state legislators look to help young children and their families recover from the pandemic, we owe them to consider these priorities.

## **LONG TERM BIG, BOLD VISION FOR ECE**

As we look to the future of early education, we must address the long standing problem of parents who cannot afford to pay more for child care and underpaid early educators who cannot afford to earn any less. As we seek long-term solutions to rebuild this sector, it's important to keep these dual goals in mind to identify public investments and tools that can provide better pay for teachers and supports for the overall system to keep costs down for parents. Virginia cannot go back to a system that requires parents to pay more than college tuition for their child care. Virginia also cannot go back to a system that is based on paying low wages to teachers and caregivers. The recognition that child care is essential for our workforce should change the positioning and prominence of child care on any state and federal policy agenda in the future. It is critical to have your advocacy to continue to support it.

## IMPROVING COMPENSATION FOR EARLY EDUCATOR FRONTLINE HEROES

### Compensate child care worker in line with their importance in society

For young children to continue to have loving and prepared caregivers, and for parents to find child care, we must ensure there is a workforce to support children and the sector. A recent UVA study of the racial composition and compensation of the early childhood workforce, found that 2 out of 5 early educators in child care centers reported household incomes under \$25,000. Prior to the pandemic, the national median wage in child care was \$10-14 per hour. In May 2020, 35% of early educators reported decreased earnings due to COVID-19 closures.

Educators in the private child care sector tend to be more women of color. Lead teachers in private programs were three times more likely to be Black than teachers in public preschool programs. The Northam Administration has offered \$1,500 incentive payments to some educators in PDG B-5 pilot communities. In FY20 about \$3 million distributed to 2,000 teachers as \$1,500 recognition payments and another \$3 million is set to be distributed this year. A UVA study comparing those who received an incentive versus those who did not receive an incentive showed that the recognition payment reduced teacher turnover in child care centers.

For the many child care programs that have remained open, early educators have put themselves at risk of exposure to love and nurture our babies. These heroes deserve to be compensated in line with their importance in our society and children's lives.



**We will support additional incentive payments for educators and efforts that seek to increase minimum wages in child care settings by offering additional financial support.**

## **CREATE OPPORTUNITIES TO FUND THE TRUE COSTS OF QUALITY CARE & EARLY LEARNING**

### **Invest in early care through contracting services**

Since caregiving is expensive and classroom ratios are small, the child care sector must often make choices between paying staff higher wages, offering additional services, or charging parents even higher tuition rates. Rather than creating an ideal of what is offered to children for care, which includes their education during years with exponential growth and development, we should create services based on what can be afforded and what the market can bear.

Virginia does not have to continue down the path where we base our public investments on what the market will bear. We have a choice to pay for child care based on the true cost of quality. Virginia has not taken advantage of two policies that would allow us to use state and federal funds to support the child care sector: contracting for services or paying rates based on true costs. As we seek policies to stabilize the child care sector Virginia should move down a path to embrace these policies and changes to how we use our Child Care Development Funds.



**We support a pilot effort to begin a process contracting for slots and an evaluation of the true cost of providing high quality care including adequate wages, wraparound services and affordability for families.**

## **BUILDING IN SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL SUPPORTS INTO EVERY ASPECT OF EARLY LEARNING**

### **Ensure a multi-pronged, statewide system of support for mental health**

We don't yet know the full impact that the pandemic will have on young children, but we do know that the stressors of the pandemic can produce a long-term impact on quickly growing and developing young brains. For children of color, the economic and emotional impact of the pandemic is layered on top of racial and historical trauma for their families and their communities.

Recent U.S. Census Household Pulse data shows that more than 1 in 5 parents in Virginia reported feeling hopeless or depressed. When parents struggle with their mental health, their children are also likely to struggle. Early educators have directly expressed the toll of being on the front lines and worry about their own health while also serving children who are experiencing months of trauma and disruption. We must do better to support children and their caregivers in response to the pandemic including expanding access to early childhood home visitation.

VDOE and state partners conducted a study on implementing mental health consultation models in child care in the fall of 2020 and found opportunities to start building up our systems. Voices believe that agency administrators and program leaders from education, social services, mental health and health agencies should review their professional development and program support plans to boost services for social-emotional health into every program plan. This would include efforts such as additional social-emotional screening tools for children, implicit bias and equity training for educators, service linkages, and workforce development efforts.



**To ensure a statewide system of support for children and caregivers there must be a multi-pronged and multi-faceted response with support from the legislature and administration creating a foundation of solid social-emotional wellness**