



For Virginia's Children

# Executive Summary Building Our Future: The State of Virginia's Early Childhood System

## October 2011

This unique report looks at how well Virginia is preparing young children for school – and life.

The good news is that Virginia has had much success improving education and care for its youngest residents over the last several years.

The troubling news is that the economic downturn means thousands of Virginia's children are not getting the critical early care and education they need. Smart investments in early childhood education not only benefit kids, they also boost the economy. These investments are not luxuries, but necessities.

In this report, we celebrate the successes, explain the challenges and offer ideas for addressing them. Our ideas are not just about spending more money – we also include smarter ways to use current funding for a bigger impact on kids.

Research shows that kids who are behind when they start kindergarten tend to stay behind. All Virginia children deserve the chance to start school with the skills they need to succeed in the classroom and beyond. This report offers practical, no-nonsense suggestions to make that a reality.



### Why Early Childhood Education Matters

The greatest opportunity to impact a child's development occurs between the pre-natal period and age five. The quality of early care and learning experience that children receive during this period is critical to their future learning, development and success in life.<sup>1</sup>

## A Road Map for Improvement

Virginia should be proud of its progress in early childhood education, but the state has many opportunities to make programs for young children stronger. This report highlights some of them, including:

PROGRAM	SUCCESS	OPPORTUNITY
Child Care Subsidy Program	Approximately 30,000 families receive child care assistance so that parents can work.	Ensure that working families have access to quality settings by increasing reimbursement rates for child care providers.
Home Visiting	Home visiting is proven to reduce rates of child abuse and neglect, and increase immunization rates and formal early education.	Increase state savings associated with child health and development by restoring home visiting funds to the 2009 funding level.
Virginia Preschool Initiative (VPI)	VPI helps close achievement gaps. Its students score higher on early education assessments than non-VPI participants.	Make policy changes to address the barriers that prevent localities from fully participating in VPI.

## Highlights: How the Economic Downturn is Hurting Virginia's Young Children

- 1. The high cost of child care means kids are not getting the quality early care and education they need.** Parents are moving kids into less expensive care settings where program quality is unknown. **That's partly because monthly child care needs for two kids exceed the median monthly cost of rent.** Child care is as much, or even more than, the average monthly mortgage payment in every state.
- 2. Extremely low reimbursement rates for child care providers mean fewer providers who are able to accept children with subsidies.** Virginia's child care subsidy program helps ensure that parents can work to break out of poverty. Access to child care can mean the difference between continued government dependence and true financial independence. But even if kids get subsidies, the state's reimbursement rates are so low that it can be hard to find a program that accepts subsidy students.
- 3. Problems such as child abuse, malnutrition and neglect rise when the economy slows, yet home visiting services that curb these problems in vulnerable families are decreasing.** Research shows home visiting programs also help better prepare students for school.

## Early Childhood Investment: Good for Kids, Good for the Economy

Virginia lawmakers need to know that smart investments in early childhood education are good for the economy – today and in the future:

- For every dollar invested in early childhood education, \$7-16 are generated in special education savings, child welfare savings, decreased grade retention, reductions in juvenile crime, reductions in adult crime, increased earnings by parents, and increased tax contributions.
- A pro-business state like Virginia needs strong early childhood programs to maintain a strong workforce. Cognitive and noncognitive abilities are necessary for a productive workforce, and deficits that emerge early in life are very difficult to change later.<sup>2</sup> The dollars we invest in early childhood education today will result in a better workforce tomorrow.

## Success Snapshot: Smart Beginnings Coalitions

The 28 Smart Beginnings coalitions across Virginia make up the core of the state's early childhood system.

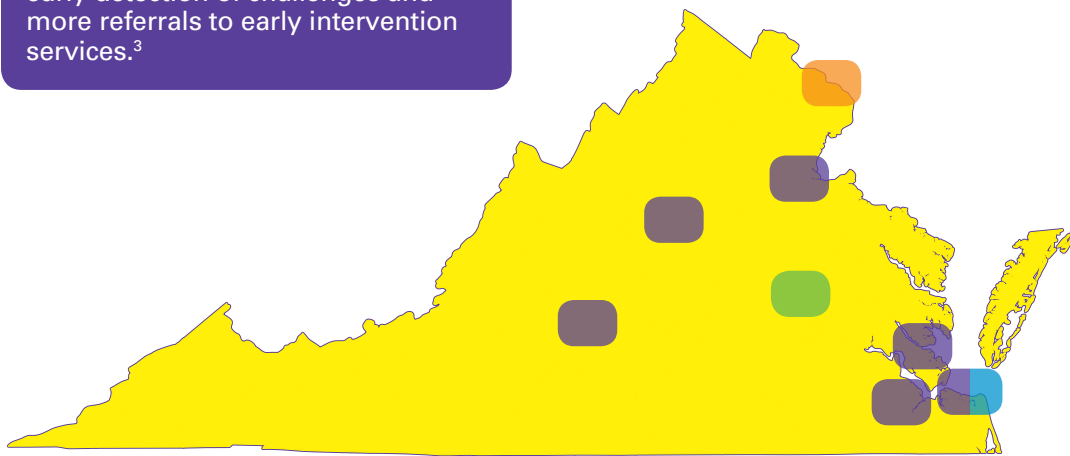
Here are some examples of the how these diverse coalitions, which began in 2007, work to improve early childhood education in their localities:

**Six Smart Beginnings coalitions** serving 20 jurisdictions expanded their use of developmental screenings to reach over 1,200 additional children, resulting in early detection of challenges and more referrals to early intervention services.<sup>3</sup>

**Alexandria-Arlington:** Partnered with others to leverage \$60,000, sending 22 early care and education professionals to attend continuing education classes.

**Richmond:** Increased promotion of school registration; 1,100 families participated in parenting classes.

**South Hampton Roads:** Created alliance with nearly 70 faith-based congregations and preschools to drive public investments in early childhood.



(Endnotes)

<sup>1</sup> National Research Council and Institute of Medicine. From Neurons to Neighborhoods: The science of early childhood development. 2000. Washington, D.C. National Academy Press

<sup>2</sup> James Heckman and Dimitriy Masterov. The Productivity Argument for Investing in Young Children. October 2004.

<sup>3</sup> Smart Beginnings of Central Virginia, Western Tidewater, Virginia Peninsula, Charlottesville/Albemarle, South Hampton Roads, and Rappahannock Area.