

What are the most pressing issues, related to access to and quality of child care and preschool, that you think need to be addressed by this workgroup?

Professional Development and Retention of Teachers:

The need for consistent and quality professional development for the workforce available statewide. Build on the work of the Virginia Cross-sector Professional Development work group.

Professional development to support the workforce so they can and will work with children with diverse abilities and needs. We need to increase the number of placements that are of quality for the special needs population (children with disabilities, special health care needs, English language learners, etc)

Establish a competency-based professional development framework for early care and education practitioners in Virginia. Framework would inform the requirements and guidelines for pre-service education, in-service education and training for practitioners in all early care and education settings.

One of the most pressing issues related to access to and quality of child care and preschool is the retention of qualified teachers. This is due to the low pay and lack of benefits associated with the teaching positions. Often if a teacher is qualified with a degree, he/she will leave the position as soon as a teaching position in the public school system becomes available. As a result, programs are forced to hire new teachers with minimal education and experience. These teachers are implementing strategies such as how they were parented as a child or that were attempted during prior babysitting jobs.

Improving teacher qualifications can be financially challenging for programs. If teachers are trained during the day, then substitute teachers must be paid to staff the classrooms during the training. If teachers are trained after operating hours, then overtime compensation must be provided (even if free trainings can be located).

Provide training opportunities for childcare providers in health/wellness topics

Create a professional development system supported by licensing.

Access:

Availability of quality child care and early education - statewide

Business training for child care operators to increase likelihood of success

Development of strategies that promote the financial success of the early education and childcare industry

Lack of a clearinghouse for information for parents about childcare, health and support services

Ensure access to quality early childhood programs statewide. Examine the distribution of early childhood programs (Child Care, Head Start, VPI) throughout the state, Identify known quality providers, Identify service gaps, Identify strategies to expand the availability of quality early care and education; Expand QRIS.

Quality:

Selection and training of early education teachers

Lack of programmatic outcomes information required for evaluation

Establishing quality standards for Out of School Time and a system for data management

The financial limitations of programs is also a contributor to access and quality. Often a program is aware of what steps can be taken to promote quality (higher wages to retain qualified teachers, more nutritious meals, materials that facilitate growth in all developmental domains etc) however, revenues barely cover expenses or the program falls short of meeting all expenses.

Families are also limited to access and quality due to constraints within the household budget since programs that maintain higher standards of quality charge higher rates that are often not affordable. Additionally a family's understanding of quality, developmentally appropriate practices, and the natural progression of developmental milestones can impact how a school is selected.

VA's Quality Rating System:

Voluntary nature of quality rating system

Improve Virginia's QRIS to include health standards

Expand QRIS

Updating QRIS standards for early childhood

Encourage/recruit more centers to participate in QRIS, provide resources to improve quality

Child Care Licensing:

Strengthening child care regulations to support quality care (including fingerprint checks and lowering the licensing threshold)

Ensure child care licensing statutes adequately protect and promote children's' health, safety and well being.

Identify and eliminate statutory exceptions/exemptions that leave children unprotected; Require that child care providers participating in the State Child Care Subsidy Program be licensed.

Looking at current child care system and what needs to be added or changed to better protect children in care and to improve quality i.e. requiring fingerprint background checks, family child care threshold, 14 exemptions to licensing, creating a training and technical assistance system for child care providers, increasing wages for child care including subsidy reimbursements for vendors, improving the child care scholarship model to include and outcome based approach, transition from preschool/child care to school.

Defining childcare beyond preschool - including out-of-school time for elementary age

Create a professional development system supported by licensing.

Kindergarten Readiness Assessment:

Development and adoption statewide of a comprehensive kindergarten readiness assessment would help pre-kindergarten and kindergarten teachers assess if children are ready for school and on track for school success; It would also help the Commonwealth gain greater insight as to types of early childhood experiences that correlate with school success.

Administration:

Ensure maximum coordination between and among government agencies that oversee and/or interact with child care providers.

Identify the range of government (and possibly nonprofit organizations) with which child care providers interact and the nature and frequency of the interactions to identify if unnecessary duplication/overlap occurs, if unnecessary barriers exist that prohibit enhanced data sharing, and if better coordination or technology could streamline interactions and save time and money for all parties; Potential entities to participate in this analysis might include: Department of Health, USDA, VDSS Child Care Subsidy, Professional Development and Licensure Programs, Office of the Fire Marshall, Local governments (business licenses, zoning, etc.), Smart Beginnings Coalitions, Quality Rating and Improvement System Regional Coalitions, Others?

Transitions:

Promote alignment and smooth transition between segments of the early childhood education continuum. Prior to entering the first grade, it is not unusual for young children to be served in a number of early care settings including home or relative care, birth-to-three child care, a pre-kindergarten experience for four-year-olds, and then kindergarten for five-year-olds .

Because there is no unified “early childhood system,” early care and education professionals that purposefully align expectations and activities (through curriculum alignment, transition planning, portfolio development, and activities like “visits to the big school”) make it easier for children and their families to anticipate and succeed at each major step in early education

Other:

Build cross sector support for early childhood development, including: Identify and promote strategies to encourage private sector support for quality child care; Tax incentives, low interest loan programs, awards and recognition

Include community child care in pre-K