Implementation Plan for the Virginia Core Team
developed through participation in the
National Academy of Medicine’s
Innovation to Incubation B-8 Initiative
2015-16

Submitted to
Kimber Bogard, Director, Innovation to Incubation, National Academy of Medicine
by
Kathy Glazer, President, Virginia Early Childhood Foundation
on behalf of the Virginia Team
September 30, 2016
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Virginia Team Roster .................................................................................................................. 3

Introduction and Context ................................................................................................................. 4

Problem Statement ............................................................................................................................ 6

Opportunities and Resources .......................................................................................................... 7

Focus for the Team’s Work .............................................................................................................. 8

Work Plan Activities ......................................................................................................................... 9

Timeline ........................................................................................................................................... 10

Principles ........................................................................................................................................ 11

Standards: Affirmation and Recommendations .............................................................................. 12

Position Statement and Recommendations .................................................................................... 15

Next Steps ....................................................................................................................................... 17

Conclusion ...................................................................................................................................... 17

References ...................................................................................................................................... 19
VIRGINIA TEAM ROSTER

Holly Coy
Deputy Secretary of Education
Office of the Governor Terry McAuliffe

Dr. Mark Ginsberg
Dean of Education
George Mason University

Kathy Glazer, Team Lead
President
Virginia Early Childhood Foundation

Dr. Bridget Hamre
Associate Director
Center for Advanced Study of Teaching and Learning
University of Virginia

Dr. Megan Healy
Assistant Vice Chancellor for Academics and Employer Partnerships
Virginia Community College System

Erin McGrath
GEAR UP Senior Coordinator/Program Director
State Council on Higher Education for Virginia

Dr. Sara Miller
Administrative Director of the Early Childhood Development Initiative
Longwood University

Dr. Sharon Morrissey
Vice Chancellor for Academic Services and Research
Virginia Community College System

Alexis Rodgers
Policy Director
Office of Lieutenant Governor Ralph Northam

Dr. Christine Schull
Professor and Assistant Dean
Early Childhood Education
Northern Virginia Community College Alexandria

Paul Smith
Associate for Student Mobility Policy and Research
State Council on Higher Education for Virginia

Alison Lutton, Independent Consultant, Advisor to the Virginia Team
INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

During the summer of 2015, the Virginia Early Childhood Foundation, partnering with the Virginia Chamber of Commerce, hosted a meeting of high level stakeholders to begin a statewide discussion regarding the early childhood workforce, which was dubbed the “Upskilling Initiative.” This convening brought high level and multi-sector attention to the importance of the early learning workforce and the need for a cohesive system of professional development supports. Discussions highlighted current barriers to professional development pathways and credentialing and spawned a working paper which has captured the attention of leaders with the power to make change and to leverage support for goals related to the early childhood workforce. The working paper has served as a compass for the state’s efforts and guided subsequent activities and strategies. This leadership group rallied around this key statement of agreement:

*If we want to improve outcomes for children, especially those at risk, we must invest in the capabilities of the adults who are supporting their growth and development. And if we want effective teachers for young children, we must not only have the kinds of regulations and standards that define a skilled workforce, but we must also ensure that we have a system that supports their acquisition of those skills and competencies.*

In both areas, Virginia’s methods and systems are not as coherent and aligned as they could be.

From the initial discussion, three initiatives have sprung:

1. First, the convening attracted the attention of the National Academy of Medicine. Following the publication of a seminal report entitled Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth Through Age 8, National Academies determined as a next phase to convene a 9-month collaboration across five states to focus on practical implementation of plans to transform the early childhood workforce. Virginia was selected as one of these states, and the Kellogg Foundation funded the Virginia team’s participation.

2. The discussion and conundrums earned the attention of Delegate Tag Greason (R-Loudoun), who subsequently sponsored HB46 to create a high level School Readiness Committee – patterned after Virginia’s highly-effective Standards of Learning Innovation Committee – to attend to the early educator workforce. The Committee has a specific charge, composition, and structure outlined in the legislation. Over the coming months, the committee will hear from experts from within and outside of Virginia to address key issues such as hearing about the national dialogue on the workforce, understanding the research base about the distinctive competencies this workforce needs, assessing existing resources and demands, and providing recommendations and guidance for refining Virginia’s system of supports for early educators.

3. Governor Terry McAuliffe introduced funds in his proposed budget in December, 2015, which the 2016 General Assembly supported, to establish a scholarship and credentialing initiative for early educators to be administered by the Virginia Early Childhood Foundation in partnership with Virginia’s community colleges. This initiative will make it possible for teachers in early childhood classrooms to bolster their skills and immediately put their learnings into practice – benefitting at-risk children in the near term.
This report summarizes the work of Virginia’s Core Team as part of the Innovation to Incubation B-8 initiative, and will be provided both to the National Academy and to the School Readiness Committee, along with a presentation at the Committee’s November, 2016 meeting.

The work of Virginia’s core team has resulted in significant contributions to informing Virginia’s focused discussion on the early childhood (EC) workforce, including:

- Establishment of a set of principles for addressing the EC workforce and career/ed pathways
- Affirmation of a standards framework guiding the EC profession
- Discernment of key barriers in the current career and education pathways for the workforce
- A vision for a seamless professional development pathway characterized by stackable credentials focused on early educators’ acquisition of the specific skills, competencies, and knowledge needed to most effectively support young learners, and
- Development of a position statement and key recommendations to overcome the barriers to effectively supporting this critically important workforce and profession.

Key research questions for Virginia’s leaders’ discussions are:

- What do we need to learn/map about this workforce?
- What do we need to learn/map regarding PD opportunities for workforce?
- To what extent do PD standards and structures reflect current knowledge?
- To what extent do PD opportunities offer a clear, stackable, and affordable continuum?
- To what extent is high quality content available and accessible to every practitioner at every stage of continuum?
- What are our state priorities for this workforce?
- Who has the power and the will to make critical changes and improvements?
1. We know that we have gaps and misalignments in the current higher education pathway for the early educator profession.

![Image of The current PD pathway in Virginia]

2. We know that we will need to work on both “the frame” (standards and structures) and “inside the frame” (content of those standards and structures) to ensure high quality professional development opportunities along the continuum for the early educator workforce.

![Image of Developing a Plan in 2 Parts: The Frame, and Inside the Frame]
3. We know that moving forward will require systems change.

“We now know that some of our structures and systems that set standards and requirements for teacher education and training (like licensing for child care programs through social services and licensure for teachers in public schools) that have been established over decades do not reflect the new knowledge that we have about effective teaching and learning for young children. At the same time, these structures and systems are bifurcated; there is one set of standards and supports for those teaching in private settings (usually under the purview of the Virginia Department of Social Services and its responsibilities for the licensing and regulation of child care programs and providers) and those teaching in public settings (under the purview of the Virginia Department of Education and its responsibilities for oversight of public schools and teacher licensure). These agencies have very different philosophies, mandates, and practices, yet both have the same ultimate responsibilities and commitment to ensure that young children (especially those at risk) have opportunities to start school ready to learn and succeed.”

4. We know that we will need both collective and individual leadership for

- Collective problem solving and agreement on plan with cross-cutting accountability
- Clear lead responsible for convening stakeholders, structuring work, developing timelines, gathering information, scheduling accountability checks
- Readiness for disruptive change and motivation to achieve collectively developed goals

**OPPORTUNITIES AND RESOURCES**

1. We are building upon and will feed back into the Upskilling Virginia’s Early Learning Workforce initiative.

2. We have new resources in the state budget and establishment of the new School Readiness Committee, dedicated to focusing on the early learning workforce.

   The key goal of the Committee is to ensure an effective professional development and credentialing system for the early childhood education workforce in the Commonwealth, including the (i) development of a competency-based professional development pathway for practitioners who teach children birth to age five in both public and private early childhood education programs; (ii) consideration of articulation agreements between associate and baccalaureate degree programs; (iii) refinement of teacher licensure and education programs to address competencies specific to early childhood development; (iv) alignment of existing professional development funding streams; and (v) development of innovative approaches to increasing accessibility, availability, affordability, and accountability of the Commonwealth’s workforce development system for early childhood education teachers and providers. The Committee shall periodically review its key goal and make recommendations to the Board of Education, the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia, and the General Assembly.

3. We have new resources in the state budget for a scholarships/credentialing initiative for the early educator workforce, administered by VECF in partnership with VCCS.

4. Current revisions to state requirements for higher education programs leading to teacher licensure provide an opportunity to review B8, cross sector alignment are underway.

5. We have increasing understanding from stakeholders and policy makers that “School readiness is linked to workforce readiness” and “The most important factor in school success and learning outcomes for young children is the capabilities of the adults who support their growth and learning.” – Upskilling Virginia’s Early Learning Workforce working paper.
In order to focus on a feasible work plan for this National Academy of Medicine project and understanding its central role in next steps for Virginia, the team elected to focus on Recommendation 5.

**Recommendation 5: Develop and enhance programs in higher education for care and education professionals.**

**Recommendation 5a:** Institutions of higher education, including leadership, administrators, and faculty, should **review and revise the requirements and content of programs** for students pursuing qualification to practice as care and education professionals working with children from birth to age 8.

**Strategic Goal:**

*Create a pathway of high quality, competency-based, stackable credentials beginning with options at the high school level, spanning community college programs, to undergraduate and graduate level programs in Virginia’s colleges and universities.*

This pathway should address barriers in:

- **Affordability:** 1) ensures programming is affordable to early educators and 2) increases efficiencies in existing funding streams for professional development
- **Access:** enables incumbent early educators to attend training and coursework that 1) work with their schedules, and 2) ensures that they learn and can practice key competencies
- **Articulation:** establishes a seamless transfer of credits between certificates, associate, and bachelor degree programs across Virginia
- **Availability:** increases early childhood-specific certificates and degrees
- **Accountability:** reconciles employer standards with competencies
- **Capacity:** requires sufficient instructors to handle influx of new early childhood students
- **Demand:** ensures credentials are desired by both early educators and employers
## WORK PLAN ACTIVITIES

1. **Gather and review information about current state competencies, credentials and job requirements, including induction, practicum, and orientation requirements.**

   This will include:
   - Existing VA career pathway levels and credentials, state PK-8 licensure options, and EC higher education programs at undergraduate and graduate levels
   - Existing statewide EC certificates that articulate into statewide EC AAS, current statewide AAS degree, and any existing associate-to-baccalaureate articulation agreements
   - Existing PK-8 teacher requirements for orientation/induction and practicum/student teaching across child care, Head Start, and P-4 school sectors

2. **Review proposed revisions to state program approval of ECE baccalaureate and post-baccalaureate programs leading to PK-8 licensure, identify opportunities and challenges, and provide feedback to BOE.**

3. **Draft chart of high level alignment and gaps in state standards/competencies/student outcomes between:**

   - Student outcome/assessment requirements in proposed state program approval of ECE baccalaureate degree programs leading to B8 licensure (2016)
   - Statewide EC associate of applied science (A.A.S.) student competencies/learning outcomes, Virginia Competencies for Early Childhood Professionals (2008), and national standards of the B8 early education profession and related higher education accreditation systems (NAM, NAEYC)

4. **Prepare report for presentation to the Upskilling Virginia’s Early Learning Workforce stakeholder group and new School Readiness Committee to include:**

   - Affirm Upskilling the Workforce paper or suggest additions regarding the existing landscape and identification of strengths, gaps, misalignments, and opportunities.
   - Core principles and goals for any revisions to higher education programs - Guiding Principles for the Higher Education Pathway
   - Affirmation or suggestions regarding state definition of school readiness
   - Role of national standards of the profession as foundational/core competencies/outcomes for all B-8 teachers and related training/degree programs, with the VA 0-5 Competencies for Early Childhood Professionals as a supporting resource for training and education programs.
   - Next step in higher education pathway work – regional articulation pilots
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Events</th>
<th>Goal</th>
<th>Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Oct 2015-</td>
<td>Team invitations and confirmations</td>
<td>Core team discussion of NAM recommendations, priorities, potential</td>
<td>- Review proposed teacher ed program approval changes, existing state competencies, articulation agreements, community college offerings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan 2016</td>
<td></td>
<td>activities</td>
<td>- Through SCHEV, introduce initiative to state articulation committee.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February</td>
<td>Feb 5 Core team Meeting #1 in DC</td>
<td>Follow up on core team assignments, stakeholder engagement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March</td>
<td>Core team call March 2</td>
<td>Follow up on core team assignments, stakeholder engagement</td>
<td>• Review proposed teacher ed program approval changes, existing state competencies, articulation agreements, community college offerings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Through SCHEV, introduce initiative to state articulation committee.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April</td>
<td>Core team call April 8</td>
<td>Core team discussion of drafts outline of work plan, stakeholder</td>
<td>Confirm draft work plan (team), begin draft B8 competency alignment chart.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>engagement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td>May 2-3 Core team Meeting #2 in CA</td>
<td>Core team brings notes, develop draft work plan &amp; next</td>
<td>Affirm revised Guiding Principles for higher education pathway. Follow up on May team assignments. Develop plan to coordinate with larger Upskilling group and workforce committee.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>team assignments</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June</td>
<td>Core team call June 10</td>
<td>Share draft work plan with stakeholders, gather input</td>
<td>Affirm revised Guiding Principles for higher education pathway. Follow up on May team assignments. Develop plan to coordinate with larger Upskilling group and workforce committee.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July</td>
<td>Core team call July 7</td>
<td>Core team drafts implementation plan</td>
<td>• Affirm school readiness definition and recommendation re ECE training and education outcomes / standards / competencies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Core team Meeting #3 July 21-22 in DC</td>
<td></td>
<td>- Develop feedback to BOE on proposed revisions to P-3 teacher prep program approval.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Develop plan for pilot of transfer degree.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August</td>
<td>Core team meeting if needed, TBD</td>
<td>Gather input on draft implementation plan from stakeholders, incorporate</td>
<td>Work transitions to new School Readiness Committee with focus on workforce development. Final edits and formatting for report from this team.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>feedback</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September</td>
<td>Release plans in states</td>
<td></td>
<td>First meeting of School Readiness Committee.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Present detailed findings and recommendations to the School Readiness Committee.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Submit scholarly paper to the National Academy’s Perspectives for publication.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Virginia’s Core Team established the following guiding principles:

**Guiding Principles for Virginia’s Early Childhood Higher Education Pathway**

*Adopted by the Virginia Core Team July, 2016*

The Virginia early childhood higher education pathway will:

1. Contribute toward a continuum of training, education, technical assistance, and credentials that support and improve practice and career opportunities for early educators working with young children from birth through age 8.

2. Offer high quality, competency-based, stackable credentials beginning with options at the high school level, spanning community college programs, to undergraduate and graduate level programs in Virginia’s colleges and universities.

3. Improve higher education affordability, access, and articulation opportunities for the early childhood workforce.

4. Link to state efforts to increase availability, accountability, capacity and demand for early childhood higher education programs.

5. Increase professional development system integration through alignment of standards, competencies and credentials across birth through age 8 early learning sectors including child care, Head Start, Pre-K, and early grades.

6. Improve quality assurance processes in higher education to provide accountability to professionals, young children and their families, governing bodies, and the public, ensuring that degree and certificate programs are high quality in design and implementation and meet national standards of the profession as well as state requirements.

7. Support increased diversity in the early childhood workforce at all professional levels and across all sectors through the recruitment, retention, and completion of students whose gender, race, language, culture, socioeconomic background, and other characteristics reflect the diversity of children and families served in early childhood education programs.

8. Align with efforts to increase compensation parity for early educators across settings, sectors and age of children served, by adopting a unifying framework of expected knowledge, competency, responsibilities, and qualifications across birth through age 8 settings, sectors, age groups, roles, and adjacent or similar states.

9. Develop and enhance programs in higher education through regular review and revision of requirements and content; and through work with local practice communities to improve program design, facilitate cross-institutional relationships, and identify appropriate and diverse field placements.

10. Be informed by evidence-based research and practice, supports ongoing research and evaluation, and is innovative and responsive to evolving community and state contexts.

These guiding principles build upon the work of:

2. The Virginia state team that participated in the 2015 pilot of NAEYC Indicators of Progress to Support Integrated Early Childhood Professional Development Systems
3. The Virginia state team that participated in the 2016 National Academy of Medicine project and related report Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth through Age 8: A Unifying Foundation
Virginia’s Core Team believed it important to review and either affirm or recommend amendment to several national and Virginia guiding standards and alignment frameworks. The team’s review included:

A. Virginia’s Definition of School Readiness, originally established and adopted in 2006
B. Crosswalk of national and Virginia frameworks regarding the competencies for early childhood practitioners
C. Virginia’s education program, licensure, and endorsement regulations

A. Virginia Definition of School Readiness

Virginia’s Definition\(^1\) of school readiness describes the capabilities of children, families, schools and communities that promote student success in kindergarten and beyond. Each component – children, families, schools and communities – plays an essential role in developing school readiness.

- **Ready Children** are prepared socially, personally, physically and intellectually to meet literacy, mathematics, science, history/social science and developmental standards for four-year-olds described in *Virginia’s Foundation Blocks for Early Learning*.
- **Ready Families** include parents and other adults who take responsibility for school readiness through direct, frequent and positive involvement with their children and by maintaining stable relationships and environments that promote healthy development and learning.
- **Ready Schools** provide a seamless transition to a learning environment led by skilled teachers and welcome all children with opportunities to enhance and build their skills, knowledge and abilities.
- **Ready Communities** – including businesses, faith-based organizations, early childhood service providers, community groups and local governments – support schools and families through information and access to high-quality child care and other early learning opportunities and services.

After a scan of multiple states’ definitions and consideration, the team recommends affirming the current Virginia school readiness definition to guide the school readiness and related career development work going forward. *(confirmed during July 7, 2016 team meeting)*

B. Professional Standards and Competencies: Crosswalk

The Virginia Core Team reviewed a crosswalk to compare the categories, span or range of knowledge/understanding competencies, and the cognitive demand and skills in applied practice competencies across several guiding standards frameworks (National Association for the Education of Young Children or NAEYC; National Academy of Medicine/Institute of Medicine; Virginia’s Competencies for 3 and 4 year old endorsement area; Virginia’s Competencies for PreK-3\(^{rd}\) grade area; and Virginia’s Competencies for Early Childhood Professionals from birth to age 5). The crosswalk made it possible for the team to consider the worthiness of revisions to Virginia’s standards and/or to discern appropriate connections between competencies, credentials, and roles on a birth through age 8 early childhood education career pathway.

\(^1\) To view the full definition, see [http://www.doe.virginia.gov/instruction/early_childhood/school_readiness/va_school_readiness_definition.pdf](http://www.doe.virginia.gov/instruction/early_childhood/school_readiness/va_school_readiness_definition.pdf)
The purpose of the competency crosswalk is to support Virginia’s interest in competency based credentials that can be portable and stackable: recognized and valued by Virginia employers and state agencies across the child care, Head Start and education sectors; aligned with Virginia state requirements for teacher education programs leading to licensure; recognized or at least understood in neighboring states and increasing the potential for cross-state reciprocity; and stacking from high school through graduate education levels and from entry to advanced roles.

Findings

Content categories and span of knowledge similarities and gaps: When compared to the NAM and NAEYC national competencies, the VA 3- and 4-year-old certification competencies, VA PreK-3 certification competencies and VA Competencies for EC Professionals (Birth to K) appear to have complementary strengths and gaps.

- The VA 3- and 4-year-old competencies are stronger in child development, family and community relationships, and developmentally appropriate teaching strategies, but may have gaps related to assessment, teaching strategies, knowledge of academic disciplines in an ECE curriculum, and professionalism.

- The VA Prek-3 competencies are stronger in some aspects of child assessment and its use, and in understanding and teaching the content of academic disciplines, but may have gaps related to child development, assessment, family and community relationships, developmentally appropriate/effective teaching strategies, and professionalism. They appear to be closely aligned with the old NCATE ACEI SPA standards currently under revision by CAEP.

- The VA Competencies for EC Professionals were developed before the NAEYC standards were revised in 2009 and may need strengthening to address current NAEYC Standard 5, knowledge and application of academic disciplines in an ECE curriculum.

Early childhood age/grade range:

- In general, the NAEYC and NAM competencies are very similar in content and address the full developmental period of early childhood, birth through age 8 across all early education settings.

- None of the VA competencies are written for implementation across B-8 age range. Each addresses different but overlapping age ranges.
  - The Department of Education licensure for teachers of Prek-3 presumably address ages 3 or 4 through 8
  - The Department of Education endorsement for teachers of 3- and 4-year-olds appears to overlap with the PreK-3 endorsement
  - The Department of Social Services’ VA Competencies for EC Professionals are written for birth to kindergarten.

Levels of competency, cognitive demand and skill:

- The NAM and VA teacher certification competencies are linked to policy or policy recommendations regarding initial licensure in BA level programs.

- The NAEYC standards include competencies at both initial licensure at undergraduate or post-baccalaureate levels and preparation for advanced specialized role levels (accomplished teacher, administrator, public policy and advocacy specialist, and teacher educator/researcher) at graduate degree levels.
The VA Competencies for EC Professionals include Level I (implement program guidelines and policies), Level II (implement with independence and initiative), Level III (design, assess, modify the environment; model and encourage best practices) and Level IV (leadership and inquiry) items for each competency area.

Following consideration of the comparative strengths and weaknesses of the national and Virginia standards, the Virginia Team concluded that following the nationally-developed and recognized standards (of either or both NAEYC and NAM) is advisable. While each of the Virginia standards have strengths, they each also have gaps that are addressed by the NAEYC and NAM standards in that the focus of the national standards is on the birth to age 8 continuum and are comprehensive in scope of content and levels. Virginia should revise and adapt their standards, aligning with the national frameworks.

C. Regulations for education programs, teacher licensure, and endorsement

Virginia’s Team recognizes and appreciates that the proposed revisions to the regulations for education programs offer some flexibility and the opportunity for universities that so choose to incorporate coursework specific to competencies for those teachers working with children birth to age 5. Previously, constraints in available credit hours meant that baccalaureate programs in Virginia universities could effectively prepare teachers for K-12 but did not include enough early childhood-focused content to effectively prepare teachers for children birth to age 5. The new language and increased flexibility in credit hours opens the door – for the first time in many years - for universities to design and offer education programs specific to the preparation of teachers of very young children.

The Team also discussed and is in the process of finalizing recommended refinements to the PK-3 and PK-6 licensure regulations revisions, with the goal of ensuring they are focused on the skills and competencies research has shown that educators need to effectively teach young children. While the Team plans to meet with VDOE and VBOE representatives to discuss their recommendations, the deficiencies of the current licensure structure for ensuring the competencies for teachers of young children, paired with the current absence of early childhood-specific baccalaureate programs, beg an alternative strategy. Although the Team believes that refinements to the proposed licensure requirements would significantly improve the preparation of early childhood educators, they also believe that these changes alone are not sufficient. More needs to be done to ensure that licensure tracks that include teaching young children give preservice teachers 1) more time working with children at this age range and 2) more specific coursework on the development of young children and implications for effective teaching practices.

The Team encourages consideration of a redesign of the early childhood degree to include birth through eight or the new development of a birth through five or birth through eight degree to ensure this type of thorough and adequate preparation.
We, the undersigned, assert that:

- School readiness for Virginia’s children, the gateway to educational and workforce success, is both an educational and economic imperative. **For Virginia to achieve optimal return on investment in early childhood interventions, quality is non-negotiable.**

- A primary determinant of young children’s learning and development is the capabilities of the adults who interact with and care for them. Since the majority of Virginia’s children ages 0-5 are in households where all parents work, early childhood practitioners are key partners for families in supporting young children’s healthy development during these most formative and foundational years. **Young children – especially those at risk – must have access to high quality early learning experiences, led by highly competent teachers, to have the academic and social-emotional foundations to succeed in school.**

- Because of the diversity and range of early childhood education programs (including but not limited to regulated private child care and publicly funded Head Start or state preschool programs), the early childhood workforce is large and diverse. **The competencies, skills, and knowledge that these professionals need to effectively support the development and learning of very young children (birth to age 5) are distinct from those for teachers of older children – not lesser, but different.**

- As well, the requisite credentials for lead teachers, as stipulated by different regulatory authorities, differ drastically. This creates a structural divide between early education environments regulated by social services and those regulated by education agencies as well as a discrepancy in the required credentials for early educators. This divide has challenged and distracted us from developing a sensible cohesive career pathway for Virginia’s early educators. While there exist various opportunities for early childhood practitioners to earn credit hours and credentials, for practitioners who wish to hone skills specific to teaching young children by achieving ever-increasing credentials, **Virginia has a gap at the baccalaureate level.**

- For incumbent early educators who begin their career pathway at a community college and then choose to pursue a bachelor’s degree, there are two significant roadblocks. First, the existing Associate of Applied Science (AAS) degree in early education does not transfer seamlessly into a bachelor’s degree program, which requires an individual to take an additional year of coursework. Second, Virginia has no early childhood-specific baccalaureate degree program to transfer into, so these students must at best pursue a tangentially related degree and only then move on to early childhood-specific post-baccalaureate or master’s programs. **Especially for a workforce who requires specialized skills yet will earn infamously low wages, this cumbersome pathway is both inefficient and insufficient.**

We believe that the higher education system in Virginia can contribute to near- and long-term solutions to foster and support a high-competency early childhood workforce for the Commonwealth. We have identified root-cause barriers and specific recommendations for a priority goal and relevant action steps. Core principles have guided our vision for efficient and economical higher education pathways for early educators to achieve the distinctive skills and demonstrate mastery through stackable credentials.

**Goal Statement:** We recommend Virginia’s pursuit of a goal to streamline a career pathway for teachers of children ages birth to 5 that builds core skills early, intentionally, and affordably. This pathway will build on current assets, align with nationally-recognized standards, and award meaningful credentials along the continuum that indicate mastery of core skills as well as provide opportunities for enhancing skills and
specialization. Streamlining this career pathway will provide an additional benefit in improving the more traditional education pathway for the early educator workforce.

1. Asset and Barrier: While there is an affordable offering of stackable credentials at Virginia’s community colleges building important core skills specific to teaching children ages birth to 5, the early childhood coursework and degrees are not offered at all of Virginia’s community colleges and may be inconsistent across colleges.

   **Recommended Short Term Action:** Recognize the early childhood associate degree as a critical core credential for early educators in Virginia. Ensure these offerings are readily available to practitioners in all regions of the Commonwealth.

   **Recommended Long Term Action:** Strive for nationally-recognized accreditation of associate degree programs to demonstrate the quality and distinction of these programs for early educators.

2. Asset and Barrier: While teacher preparation programs exist at Virginia’s universities for educators leading classrooms in grades PK-12, there are few baccalaureate programs in Virginia that are specific to preparing teachers with the skills needed to support the development of children ages birth to 5, and none of these lead to teacher licensure.

   **Recommended Action:** Pilot a) creation of BA programs at Virginia universities that are aligned with nationally accepted standards and take advantage of flexible credit hours for specialized preparation for early educators, and b) develop program-to-program articulation agreements that create a more seamless transfer of the associate degree to the baccalaureate level for early educators, based on a shared set of professional standards, competencies, and student outcomes.

3. Asset and Barrier: While there is availability of PK-3 and PK-6 teacher licensure in Virginia, historically, these programs have focused heavily on elementary-aged children, and licenses do not ensure that candidates receive specialized early childhood development preparation and field practice or demonstrate competencies aligned with nationally accepted standards for the early childhood profession.

   **Recommended Short Term Action:** Support the further amendment of currently proposed changes in the PK-3 teacher licensure regulations in consideration by the Virginia Board of Education, to emphasize content and practice mastery specific to ages birth to 5 years old. Differentiate and promote the PK-3 license as the preferred licensure for teachers of children birth to age 8 (as distinct from the PK-6 licensure for teachers of students ages 6-12) for baccalaureate-degreed teachers.

   **Recommended Long Term Action:** Explore the feasibility of development of a birth to age 8 license available to candidates in baccalaureate degree programs.

We believe these recommendations will help bridge the divide and create career and education pathways that are more cohesive and effective for supporting knowledge and skills specific to early childhood development. Improved skill-building and credentialing opportunities for the early childhood workforce, paired with concerted strategies for in-service supports such as specialized training and coaching, will lead to a strong corps of high-quality early educators helping build the brains of the Commonwealth’s next generation.

Sincerely,

Virginia’s Core Team to the National Academies’ Innovation to Incubation Initiative, *August, 2016*
The Virginia Team will meet in October with representatives of the Virginia Department of Education and Board of Education to discuss potential refinement of teacher licensure language or alternative approaches.

The Virginia Team will present their findings in detail to the School Readiness Committee in November, offering their insights and recommendations to the new legislatively-created committee for consideration and near-term action.

The Team will pursue a pilot to establish BA programs that seamlessly receive transfers from Virginia’s Early Childhood Associate degree programs and lead to teacher licensure. Current steps toward this objective include a discussion this month with the deans of education at Virginia’s universities, an update to the statewide Transfer Committee of the State Council on Higher Education in Virginia, and discussions among interested universities and their corresponding community colleges to develop effective programming and relevant articulation agreements to test the feasibility of a transfer pilot.

CONCLUSION

Over the course of 10 years in the classroom, one early childhood teacher may launch the educational trajectory – and the workforce preparedness – of nearly 200 children. Strategies to help these individuals be as effective as they can be can have a big payoff for the Commonwealth.

Because lead teachers, assistant teachers, and administrator positions in early childhood are on the “in demand” job list developed by the Commonwealth, there is broad recognition that Virginia needs to groom this workforce as quickly, efficiently, and strategically as possible to fill these important jobs.

Yet unlike some other professions that are a focus of Virginia’s workforce initiatives at present, these jobs are historically poorly compensated. Leveraging resources to provide for their continuing professional development and acquisition of the skills and the credentials they need to do their jobs well is essential to the development of Virginia’s future ready workforce.

Since Virginia needs a talented workforce to lead early childhood classrooms now, the Virginia Team recommends implementing strategies that focus immediately on the skills of existing educators on the front lines in classrooms with at-risk children, while also working to make professional development pathways more cohesive to prepare and support the ongoing skill building of early childhood professionals.

For practical reasons, Virginia must be strategic about the plan to boost the skills of this workforce in the most expedient and cost-effective way. Because of their targeted approach to building competencies, the community college route is a viable avenue to a skilled early educator workforce.

At the same time, Virginia must focus on making the early childhood professional’s career and education pathway more streamlined, with accessible, affordable, and stackable credentials with entry points and meaningful credentials (aligned with the mastery of core competencies) along the continuum from high school to post-baccalaureate degrees. Longer-term actions and considerations include:

- Promoting programs for students dually enrolled in high school and in community college coursework to earn an early childhood credential upon graduation from high school
- Considering ways to establish the early childhood associate degree as a critical core credential for early educators in Virginia
• Piloting the articulation of a competency-rich Associate degree to a BA program that is focused on the specific skill-building for educators of young children and leads to teacher licensure

• Considering the feasibility of establishing a birth to age 8 teacher’s license

• Aligning with other workforce development initiatives to address wage and work conditions, including registered apprenticeships for the early educator workforce and the potential for field-testing graduated wage scales with willing employers.

Virginia’s Team for the Innovation to Incubation initiative has devoted extensive time, talent, and thoughtful consideration to providing these insights and recommendations for the consideration by Virginia’s leaders serving on the School Readiness Committee. They believe that addressing the professional development pathways for the early educator workforce in Virginia to be an urgent and important priority for the Commonwealth.

If we want to improve outcomes for children, especially those at risk, we must invest in the capabilities of the adults who are supporting their growth and development. And if we want effective teachers for young children, we must not only have the kinds of regulations and standards that define a skilled workforce, but we must also ensure that we have a system that supports their acquisition of those skills and competencies.
REFERENCES

STATE
VA Competencies for Early Childhood Professionals (2008)

VA Career Pathways levels

VA community college system statewide Early Childhood Development AAS
http://courses.vccs.edu/programs/major/636.EARLYCHILDHOODDEVELOPMEN

VA House Bill 46
http://lis.virginia.gov/cgi-bin/legp604.exe?161+ful+HB46

VA Upskilling Virginia’s Early Learning Workforce working paper, July 2015

NATIONAL
National Academy of Medicine Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth through Age 8: A Unifying Foundation
http://www.nap.edu/catalog/19401/transforming-the-workforce-for-children-birth-through-age-8-a

National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) Standards for Early Childhood Professional Preparation
http://www.naeyc.org/ncate/standards

NAEYC Workforce Designs: Policy Blueprint for State Early Childhood Professional Development Systems &
NAEYC Build It Better: Indicators of Progress to Support Integrated Early Childhood Professional Development Systems
http://www.naeyc.org/policy/ecwsi