

MEMO

TO: Secretary Aimee Guidera
Delegate Carrie Coyner, Chair
Members, Virginia Commission on Early Childhood Care and Education

FROM: Elliot Regenstein

DATE: August 21, 2023

RE: Summary of July 20 Meeting of the Commission on Early Childhood Care and Education

The Virginia [Commission on Early Childhood Care and Education, charged with developing a long-term financing plan for Virginia's early childhood care and education \(ECCE\) system](#), held its first meeting on July 20, 2023. As the Commission seeks to develop a set of core principles for its work, a few priorities were identified by members throughout the meeting:

- The importance of keeping a focus on child experiences and school readiness outcomes, and making sure that children are having the high-quality experiences that set them up for success later in life.
- The challenge of aligning available care to the needs of families – including making sure that care is available in locations and at times that allow parents of young children to participate in the workforce. The Commission would like to maximize family choice; that means ensuring that there are a variety of high-quality options available to every family, and that families have the support they need to navigate those options and choose one that is affordable and works for them.
- Prioritizing help for the families with the greatest financial need, while also ensuring that services are available to middle class families squeezed by the high cost of child care.
- Commitment to increasing access and choice for families based on growing family demand and need.
- The need to support the early childhood workforce in order to ensure both access for families and program quality – including through:
 - improving compensation;
 - creating better working conditions for early childhood professionals;
 - strengthening the pipeline of talent to remedy staffing shortages;
 - engaging private businesses with innovative strategies; and
 - leveraging state and federal programs outside of the traditional early childhood realm that can help early childhood professionals (and families with young children). These may include workforce initiatives, like accelerated training and apprenticeships, and also opportunities to access affordable health care.

The Commission recognized some core elements that Virginia's system will need in order to be successful and achieve priorities:

- Actionable data about child and teacher/leader experiences, with quality improvement processes to ensure that lessons learned are regularly applied to make child experiences better;

- Financing system that is based on a prudent growth model responsive to parent demand, predictable and sustainable at the state level to allow providers to deliver high-quality services and allow families to access and afford those services;
- Systems of support for families to identify the services they need and want;
- Compensation and conditions needed to ensure that early childhood professionals stay in the field, and that the sector is able to attract the talented workforce it needs to meet demand; and
- Parent and provider voice (those most impacted) informing the policy process and state-level decisions.

One issue the Commission will seek to address in greater detail is the role of state government in supporting the early childhood service ecosystem. State government plays a critical role in helping families and early childhood providers, and the Commission will consider how the state can maximize its impact while supporting family choice and local leadership.

- Virginia has worked hard to strengthen its regional and community infrastructure for early childhood, with important positive effects.
- This should include a look at the state’s approach to regulation; some regulation is needed to ensure minimum health, safety and quality, but too much regulation can become a burden for providers and families and stifle supply building.
- Currently the child care system depends heavily on parent payments, partially subsidized by state and federal funding streams (for a portion of eligible families).
- Overall, the Commission’s initial discussions focused on how the state can create a funding and policy environment that makes it easier for providers to deliver high-quality services, and for families – especially those with limited means – to access those services.

Virginia is fortunate to be a state with a growing economy, attracting new businesses and families every year. The Commission discussed how early childhood is key to the state’s economy in both the short and long term. In the short term, families need child care in order for adults to participate in the workforce. In the long term, early childhood education is key to getting children off to a good start; the state cannot meet its goals for grade-level literacy and high school achievement without a strong early childhood system.

The Commission discussed some of the state’s existing assets and the early childhood system’s core strengths:

- The mixed delivery system;
- Funding services based on a Virginia-specific cost of quality methodology;
- Ready Regions, the accountability system and accompanying data system (VQB5 and LinkB5);
- Commitment to quality and parent choice; and
- Strong governmental leaders with a commitment to public-private partnerships and data-informed decision-making.

These assets will need to be leveraged to address some of the state’s biggest challenges -- which include supply gaps, workforce turnover and shortage, and high costs for families. The Commission heard that it must plan for a growth-based trajectory for early childhood care and education services, while building on Virginia’s assets and recent accomplishments, and then to be aggressive in pushing the plan forward year after year in order to achieve the robust return on investment associated with high quality early learning experiences.