



# EARLY CHILDHOOD

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## VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

# Ready B5 Recap

January 2023





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# Message From Our Leaders

As we start 2023, I wanted to reflect on all we accomplished together in 2022. Each December, we publish a Dashboard that highlights the incredible efforts of early childhood programs, educators and families in Virginia. We included the Dashboard in the newsletter (page 8-9) and here's what I found most exciting.

First, we have worked closely with our new Governor, elected officials, community leaders and all providers, including schools, Head Start, child care and family day homes, to increase the number of birth-to-five children who receive early childhood care and education. Research shows that these experiences help prepare children for school and can have lifelong positive effects. Thanks to your efforts, thousands more children and their families are benefiting and are more likely to enter kindergarten ready. This is especially true for infants, toddlers and three-year-olds. While gaps and wait lists remain, especially for infants, we are making real progress here.

Second, early childhood educators are receiving more feedback than ever before in Virginia. This fall 2600+ sites registered for VQB5, our new statewide measurement and improvement system. You all completed more than 8,000 classroom observations, including infant, toddler, and family day home classrooms. We especially appreciate how everyone supported our educators through these new experiences. As a result of your efforts, thousands of educators received specific feedback on their strengths and opportunities for improvement. When I talk with child care teachers, many tell me that this is the first time that they have received personalized feedback that both makes them feel proud and helps them improve as educators.

Third, we applaud your continued efforts to engage families. Much is going on for families with young children right now. We hear that you are experiencing all sorts of behaviors and feelings in your classrooms. Supporting our little learners to overcome these challenges and thrive takes all of us, starting with engaging our families as our children's first and most important teachers. Each of our Ready Regions are establishing Family Councils and we continue to conduct family surveys to gather as much information as possible. But you continue to serve as the most important ambassadors of our efforts with our families; we know the most meaningful family engagement is between our educators and the families of the children in their care.

Finally, we want to thank you for all the time that you have dedicated to helping us here at the VDOE improve. Leaders from the field have spent countless hours helping us to streamline the child care center regulations, improve the federal relief grants program and set new child care subsidy rates and family copayments. You have completed surveys and sent emails. You have attended meetings and talked to our team. You have volunteered your time, perspective and insights and we value all of it. January is a time for thank-you notes and I wanted to personally thank you for your feedback because we always consider it a gift.

What a year. Please take a moment to look at our Dashboard and reflect on our progress. As always, we look forward to our work together in 2023.





# Early Childhood Goals

## ACCESS AND CHOICE

Expand accessibility of quality public and private early care and education to reach vulnerable children, ensure all families have quality choices and better prepare Virginia's future workforce.

## FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

Increase the capacity of early care and education providers to engage and support families to foster children's healthy development, learning, and well-being towards school readiness.

## QUALITY IMPROVEMENT

Improve child outcomes by supporting continuous improvement of teacher-child interactions and use of curriculum in all classrooms/settings.

## HEALTH AND SAFETY

Partner with providers to keep all children in care healthy and safe.

## REGIONAL CAPACITY AND INNOVATION

Establish regional infrastructure supported by strong statewide data systems to coordinate across all settings, address unique community needs and ensure opportunity for all children statewide.



# Virginia Increases Funding for Child Care to Support School Readiness and Meet the Demand of Working Families



**“Participating in the Child Care Subsidy Program has enabled our center to fulfill our commitment to serve more children and families in our community”**

As of October 1, the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE), in partnership with the Department of Social Services (VDSS), rolled out an innovative, best-practice model that increases how much the state pays to providers in the Child Care Subsidy Program (CCSP). New rates are based on the actual cost to provide quality child care and nearly all providers will benefit from higher rates that support them to improve quality and expand offerings. In turn, Virginia families will have more choices for quality, affordable child care and more children will enter kindergarten ready.

Using federal funding, Virginia provides child care vouchers through the CCSP to lower-income families who are working, in school or job training, or looking for a job. Participation in the CCSP is at an historic high; prior to the pandemic, roughly 22,000 children participated. Last month, nearly 30,000 children were served at nearly 2,000 child care programs statewide.

In response to the Biennial Budget, the VDOE and VDSS worked with national experts to develop a best-practice model to set rates based on the cost to meet quality expectations. The model accounts for meeting basic health and safety standards and assumes competitive compensation for educators. Data show that Virginia programs that participate in the CCSP have lower average compensation and, as a result, have more turnover, vacancies and recruitment challenges. In contrast, increasing payment rates enables private providers to be more competitive, attract quality talent, fully staff classrooms, increase retention, and better meet the demand of working families in Virginia education across the Commonwealth.

“Participating in the Child Care Subsidy Program has enabled our center to fulfill our commitment to serve more children and families in our community,” stated Kristi Snyder, owner of Rainbow Riders, a child care center in Blacksburg, Virginia. “With the Department of Education’s efforts to ensure that payment rates better reflect the true cost of quality care and education, we’ll be able to



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better provide impactful experiences for our little ones and offer more competitive compensation to recruit and retain talented staff.”

No new requirements are attached to the new rates. Providers will not be forced to increase pay or raise private rates. Rather, the VDOE, in partnership with Ready Regions across the state, will continue to onboard all child care programs that take public funding into VQB5, the state’s new measurement and improvement system, by August 2023. Implementing this statewide system to measure classroom quality will help ensure these additional funds help improve child outcomes. Ultimately Virginia families will benefit through greater access to quality, affordable options that meet their needs and put their children on track for success.

“The Child Care Subsidy Program helped my family access child care services which enabled my wife and me to keep working. I am very grateful that we were able to choose high quality care that met our needs and provided a great experience for our children. I hope that the new improved rates will encourage more child care providers to participate in the subsidy program. Families need to have more affordable choices available to them so they can find providers and services that fit their needs and the needs of their children,” said Nicholas Palacio, a parent of five children from Staunton, Virginia.

### **Increase in programs for VPI, MDG, and Head Start**

The revisions to the CCSP are an important step in increasing access to quality early childhood care and education opportunities for Virginia families. Virginia has seen an increase in participation in other early childhood programs this year as well. The Virginia Preschool Initiative has increased its four year old enrollment by 7.6%, while VPI for three-year-olds increased by 28.5%. The Mixed Delivery Grant program, operated by the Virginia Early Childhood Foundation, has increased preschool enrollment by 38.5%. They have also expanded to serving infants and toddlers in a pilot program with 200 slots.

To review some of Virginia’s key accomplishments in early childhood during 2022, please take a look at our 2022 Early Childhood Dashboard (pages 8-9).

# Spotlight On



## Jeffrey “Jeff” Williams

### Director of the Office of Child Care Health and Safety (OCCHS)

Jeff joined VDOE in May 2021, approximately one month before the OCCHS (Licensing), transitioned from the Virginia Department of Social Services (VDSS) to the VDOE. Because of his 20+ years of child care experience as a regulator, policy developer, provider and consumer, Jeff saw the wonderful potential for child care transitioning over to VDOE. The transition, like many, for Jeff and the team has at times been difficult, but he and the OCCHS team are really excited about the great things happening in child care in Virginia.

Jeff believes his work and personal experiences positioned him well to lead the OCCHS team. His experience having children in child care helps him remain focused on what’s important – keeping children healthy and safe. His experience as a child care provider helps him remain understanding of all the struggles providers have doing the best they can to love and care for the child in their care. His experience as a Licensing Inspector, Operations Consultant, Program Consultant, and a Licensing Administrator, helps him remain understanding of all the difficulties OCCHS faces walking the line of holding child care providers accountable while always seeking to be encouraging, helpful, consultative, and empowering.

Jeff began working with children while in college in a licensed summer and after school program. He graduated college with a degree in Social Sciences with an emphasis in psychology and secondary education. After college he worked for a church and ran its religious exempt child care program. Soon afterwards, Jeff became a Licensing Inspector with VDSS. He worked his way up the organization and left Licensing in 2011. Prior to leaving, Jeff and his wife adopted 2 girls. Needing more time at home for them is what prompted Jeff to leave Licensing. He worked for another state agency in the field of regulation but returned to VDSS in 2019 as a Project Manager for the Division of Family Services. While there he worked with programs and staff focused on child abuse and prevention, foster care, adoption, and family violence. He was also responsible for working with licensed children’s residential facilities and their trauma informed care programs.

Jeff is the proud father and grandfather of 3 daughters, 4 granddaughters, and 1 four month old grandson. Since he considers himself a young grandfather he came up with his own “cool” name, G-Daddy.

## Staff | Provider Acknowledgments

The VDOE Division of Early Childhood Care and Education includes six key offices that together support the agency’s goal to support birth-to-five programs in the state. These offices include:

- Office of Child Care Health and Safety
- Office of Access and Enrollment
- Office of Classroom Learning
- Office of Head Start Collaboration
- Office of Operations
- Office of Quality and Workforce



This quarter, we were pleased to welcome the following new members to our team:

**Susan Mallory, Licensing Inspector (Piedmont); Neshara Gaston, Licensing Inspector (Central); Marie LaMonica-Sarro, Early Childhood Learning Projects Manager; Karen Quist, Early Childhood Workforce Manager; Jami Town, Scholarship Processing Technician**



# EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE & EDUCATION IN VIRGINIA

## A SNAPSHOT OF 2022

1



### GOAL 1: ACCESS AND CHOICE

#### Rebound in Enrollment

**60%** Increase in Mixed Delivery Grant (MDG), including 200 new infant and toddler slots

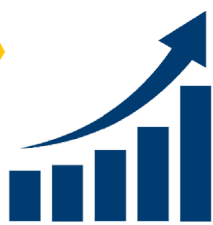
**16%** Increase in VPI (20,000+ students)

**26%** Increase in Child Care Subsidy Program

Full rebound enrollment for Head Start

Over 2,000 3-year-olds enrolled in VPI & MDG  
•1,488 in VPI and 606 in MDG

2



### GOAL 2: QUALITY IMPROVEMENT

**1,500+**

sites received practice rating for VQB5, Virginia's new unified measurement and improvement system

78% of VQB5 sites using state-approved curriculum in Practice Year 1

RecognizeB5 distributed \$9.5 Million to over 5,000 eligible educators

Over 9,700 CLASS observations conducted in 4,300 classrooms, providing more feedback to educators than ever before

VQB5 is Growing: Over 1,000 new sites in VQB5 (from 1,500+ to 2,600+) in Practice Year 2



3



## GOAL 3: FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

Every Ready Region hired a full-time position to support family engagement and to launch a regional family council

**13,000+** survey responses collected from families on their needs and challenges

4



## GOAL 4: HEALTH AND SAFETY

Stakeholders engaged in 16.5 hours to help streamline and strengthen regulations

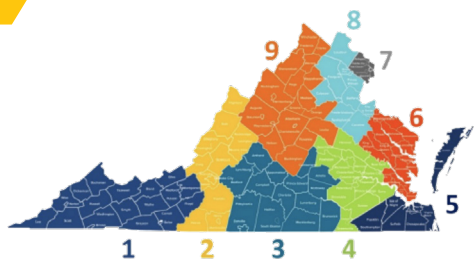


Returned to in-person inspections

**260+**

Newly licensed providers

5



## GOAL 5: REGIONAL CAPACITY AND INNOVATION

**\$400 Million** of federal relief funds were sent to nearly **5,000** private child care and family day home providers

**\$13 Million**

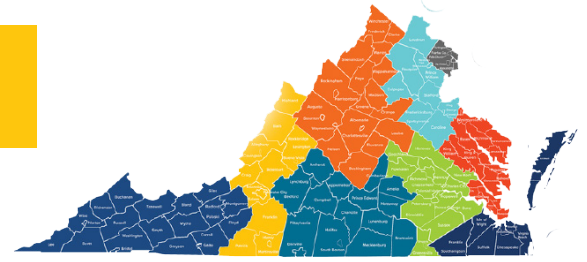
Invested in Ready Regions to support coordination, accountability, and family engagement

Led to **100% of localities** and school divisions participating in Practice Year 2. Over **80% of all publicly funded sites**, and **100% of school divisions** are now participating in VQB5

**\$7.5 Million**

invested in technology systems and data interoperability in 5+ systems statewide

# Ready Regions



## Ready Region Central

### What are you most looking forward to next year about your Ready Regions work?

It has been amazing to see the transformation of PDG into this new quality improvement system since the start. Working more closely with our improvement partners and strengthening existing relationships has been a highlight this year. Thrive Birth to Five looks forward to exploring a sustainable model to support teachers through coaching and training with our partners going forward. We have been thrilled to see so many programs embrace VQB5 during a challenging time with staffing and COVID to improve their own skills as leaders and teachers. Many directors are eager to become reliable in the CLASS tool and want to learn more about how to coach their teachers to improve interactions.

### What are you most proud of/what have been the highlights of your RR work so far?

Thrive Birth to Five's biggest win since the pilot year of the Preschool Development Grant (PDG) has been the support we have been able to provide to our Early Childhood Special Education classrooms in Chesterfield Public Schools. Providing them with CLASS observations for the first time and offering feedback and coaching was very well received and sometimes the first time many had gotten this type of support. Using a peer-to-peer model during COVID, teachers were eager to strengthen those teacher/child interactions in a challenging teaching environment and help each other better support families during a very stressful time. This has been a great model as the rest of our school systems came on board for Practice Year 2.

### What makes your Ready Region special and/or unique?

We were fortunate to have existing, strong relationships with Smart Beginnings Southeast and ChildSavers as Thrive Birth to Five transitioned to our new role as Ready Region Central. Partner agency staff have worked closely with us to recruit, observe, train, and coach programs as we moved into Practice Year 2. The existing relationships they had were crucial to make this a smooth transition and we are thankful daily for their continued partnership in this work. Their passion for quality early care and willingness to step up and support programs has helped Thrive Birth to Five meet and exceed our goals.

Thrive Birth to Five is the lead agency for Ready Region Central. To learn more about their work visit [www.thriveb5.org](http://www.thriveb5.org).



# Reflections

A Summary of Fourth Quarter Successes

## Child Care Centers and Family Day Homes



The Office of Child Care Health and Safety (OCCHS) team had a busy quarter. The OCCHS has continued its work on updating two regulation sets, General Procedures and Information for Licensure, and Background Checks for Child Day Programs and Family Day Systems to provide clarification of existing requirements and better align the regulations with statutory requirements. The Board of Education approved the draft regulations in October 2022, and we hope to see the regulations posted for public comment in the upcoming quarter. A quick reference guide with detailed instructions on how to submit a Virginia Central Registry Search (CRS) request through the [CCAPS](#) portal was posted on the department's [website](#) in November 2022, and we were pleased to announce that the notary requirement was removed from the CRS request form. The OCCHS has been working diligently on enhancing the online portal to make it easier to

navigate the process of submitting initial applications for licensure, registration and exemption, and we anticipate that providers will be able to submit renewal applications and annual filings using an online platform next quarter. We look forward to continuing collaborating with providers in the months to come. Have a safe and wonderful winter season!

## Virginia Preschool Initiative

The Virginia Preschool Initiative (VPI) has been consistently growing over the last 5 years. The 2022-2023 school year continued this trend with a 7.6% increase in four-year-old enrollment, while VPI for three-year-olds increased by 28.5%. The use of expanded state criteria, local criteria, and the reallocation of slots across the state has allowed communities across Virginia to serve a total of 21,640 young learners this year. VPI will continue to fund students in communities with available slots through the end of the year, with a potential increase of 2,270 more students through VPI late enrollment.



The VDOE wants to extend our thanks to all VPI teachers and staff, who have worked tirelessly every day to ensure students have access to high quality early learning experiences. We know they are working hard to support students while navigating the requirements of VQB5, VKRP, state reportings, and many other duties. We hope they know the work they do will make a difference in the lives of young Virginians for years to come.

## Early Childhood Special Education

Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) teachers around the state are committed to learning more about the ways special education and related services can be implemented in a variety of settings, including settings where preschoolers with disabilities are included with preschoolers without disabilities. This fall, the VDOE provided professional development to support the provision of common instructional models that require team members from different disciplines to work together to plan and implement an appropriate educational program. The VDOE provided a Community of Learning to teachers endorsed in ECSE who use the itinerant model. The virtual series focused on building competencies to implement itinerant services to ensure the active and meaningful participation of young children with disabilities in general education settings. Additionally, in collaboration with VDOE's only

Pre-K Co-Teaching in Excellence team, the Training and Technical Assistance Center (TTAC) at Old Dominion University hosted a statewide book study for preschool co-teaching teams.

## Head Start

Our Early Head Start and Head Start recipient agencies are working diligently to stabilize the workforce to ensure the long-term viability of expected comprehensive services provided to over 14,000 families across the Commonwealth. With the support of the Office of Head Start, programs have been looking at their organizational structure to identify sustainable ways to effectively maintain high quality and implement data informed strategic plans.

At VDOE, we would like to give thanks to all head start staff across every service area that has worked through the challenging times of the last two years and are rebounding towards continued promotion of school readiness for our most vulnerable families. To learn more about the latest federal OHS guidance to support the stabilization of the workforce, check out information memorandum [ACF-IM-HS-22-06](#).



## VQB5

This quarter over 8,500 infant, toddler and preschool classrooms, including family day homes from across the state, received individualized and supportive feedback by completing CLASS observations as a part of their participation in VQB5 Practice Year 2. Feedback from local and external CLASS observations in VQB5 is helping teachers and program leaders better understand what children are experiencing as well as providing classroom and site level data that is being used to guide professional development. To learn more about how CLASS observations are used in VQB5, check out the [VDOE Local Observation Guidebook](#).

The VDOE wants to extend our appreciation to local and external CLASS observers, as well as our Ready Regions and Teachstone External Observation team partners who have worked tirelessly throughout the fall to schedule and complete observations. These local and state efforts are strengthening Virginia's early childhood system and helping to ensure all children have access to quality teaching and learning experiences that meet their unique needs.

## Early Learning Support

Virginia recognizes all of the exceptional work of programs, educators, and community members to build relationships with children, assess their skills and progress, and provide safe, fun, and nurturing learning environments. Dept. Supt. Conway and our team here at the Office of Early Childhood Learning extend heartfelt expressions of gratitude for your commitment to this deeply impactful work this fall in this [Letter of Thanks to Virginia's ECCE Professionals](#).

Birth to five educators may explore the resources below to foster school readiness and meet the unique needs of all young children across the Commonwealth:

- [ECE Resource Hub](#), now with expanded content
- [VKRP](#) and [VLP](#) resources
- ELDS Introductory Micro-Credential: [new enrollment period now open](#)

# Focus On Wellness

The Virginia Department of Health shared [3 Tips for Healthy Holidays](#) ahead of the season, but these recommendations do not have an expiration date! Tip 3- **Build mental and physical health with the love of friends and family**-- tops our wishlist of things made possible for everyone over the holiday break.

We appreciate the positive connections you are making with the children and families you serve and hope you will continue to make many more within your work and personal lives in this new year. Research tells us it's actually good for your health (read [The Health Benefits of Strong Relationships](#))!





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