

# Early Childhood State of the State

Summer 2024

July 16, 2024



# OBJECTIVES AND AGENDA

## **As a result of this presentation, participants will:**

- 1) Review key 2023-2024 accomplishments for early childhood in Virginia
- 2) Learn more about what's ahead for 2024-2025

## **Agenda:**

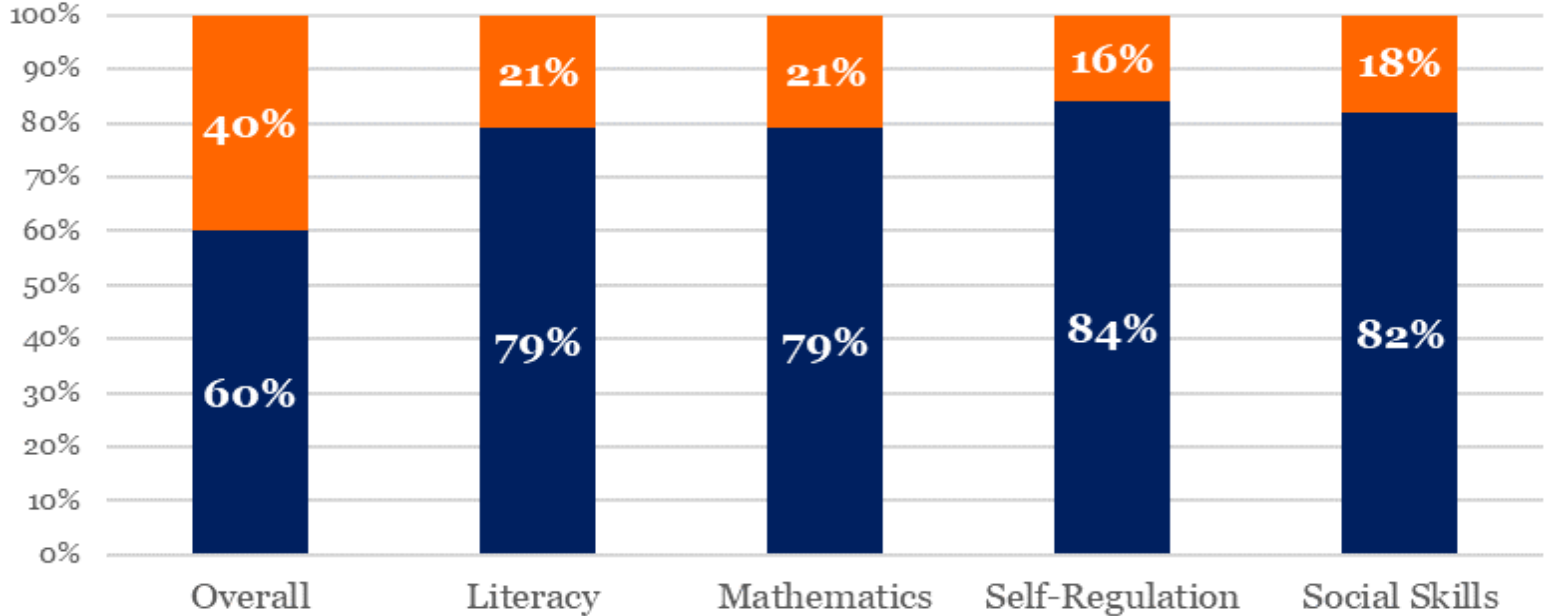
- Virginia's Shared Challenges and Vision for the Future
- Key Accomplishments and What's Ahead
  - Access and Choice
  - Quality Improvement
  - Family Engagement
  - Health and Safety
  - Regional Capacity and Innovation
- Next Steps and Questions

# Shared Challenges

# SCHOOL READINESS IN VIRGINIA



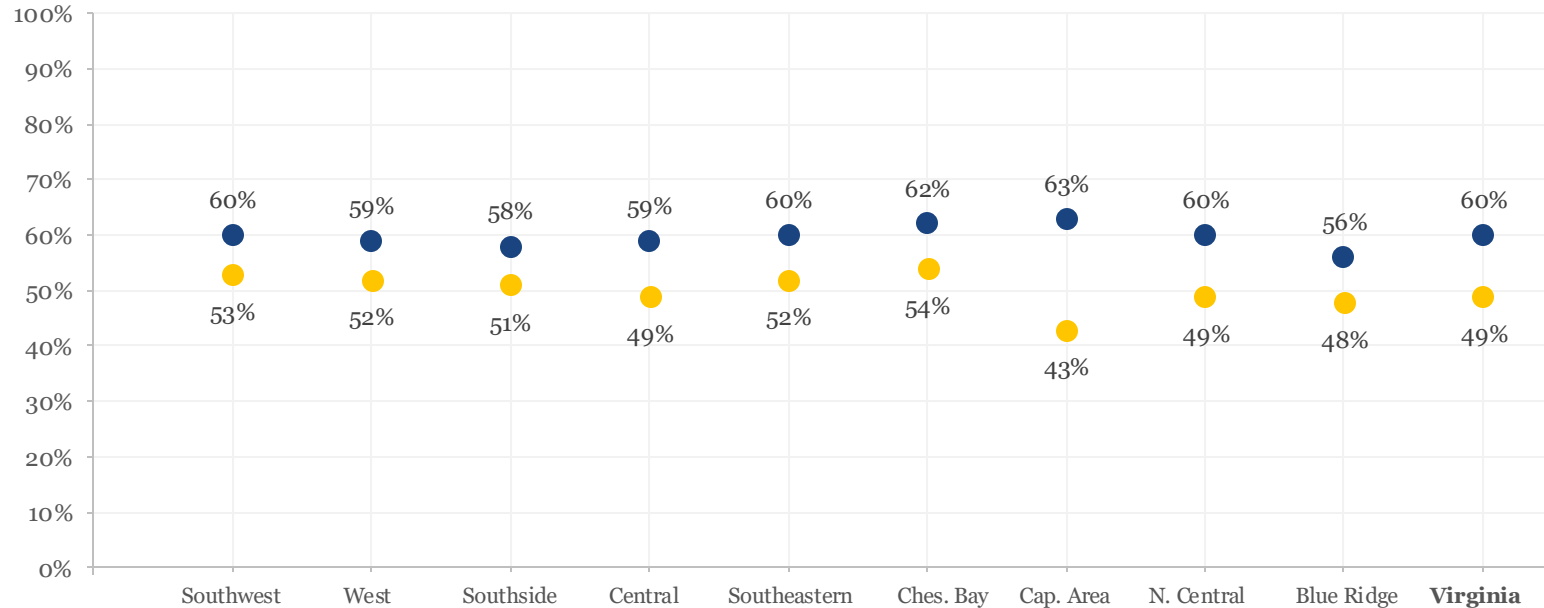
**40%** of Virginia's kindergarteners began 2023-24 needing to build skills in Literacy, Mathematics, Self-Regulation, and/or Social Skills.\*



*\* Students with complete data on each individual measure were included to obtain these estimates.*

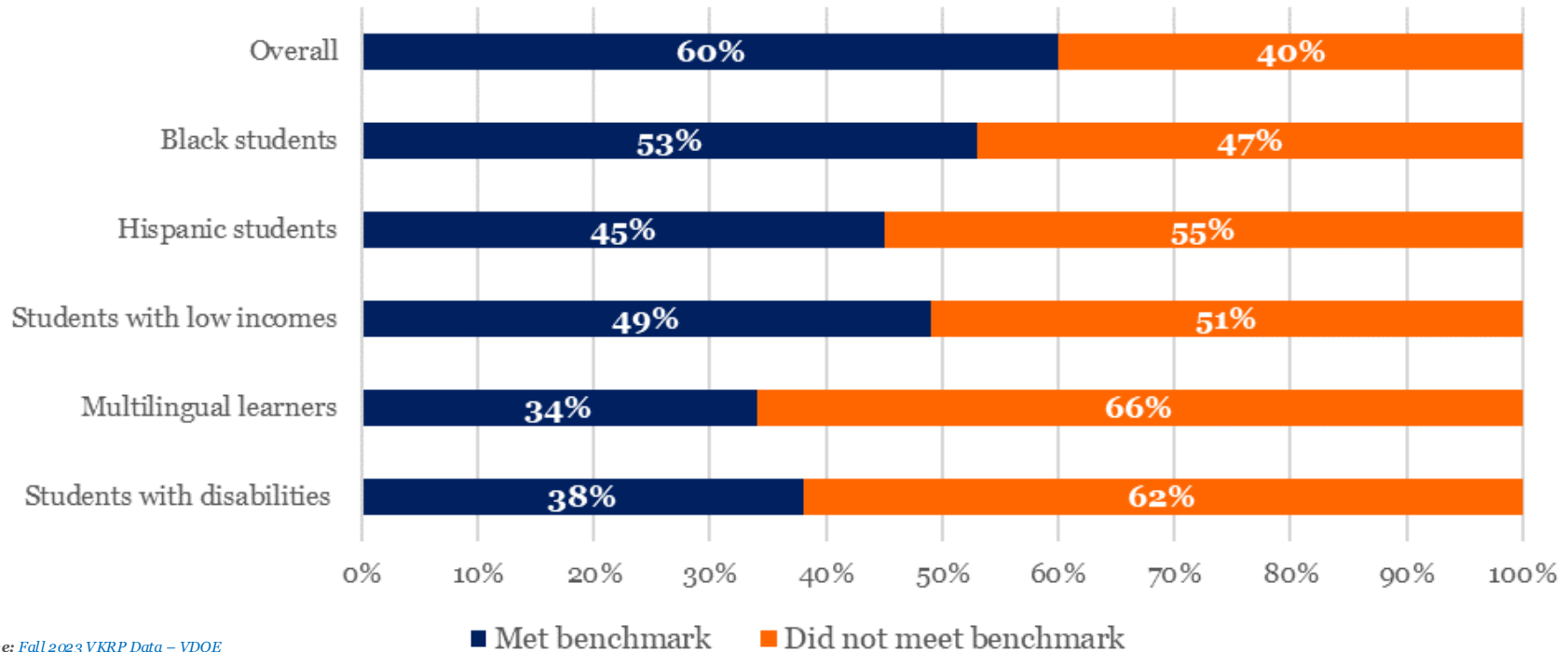
# REGIONAL VARIATIONS IN READINESS

Students from low-income families are less likely to enter kindergarten ready in every region of Virginia.



# PERSISTENT DISPARITIES IN READINESS

Students who have historically faced barriers are less likely to enter kindergarten with the skills needed to succeed.



# DEMONSTRATED IMPACT IN VIRGINIA

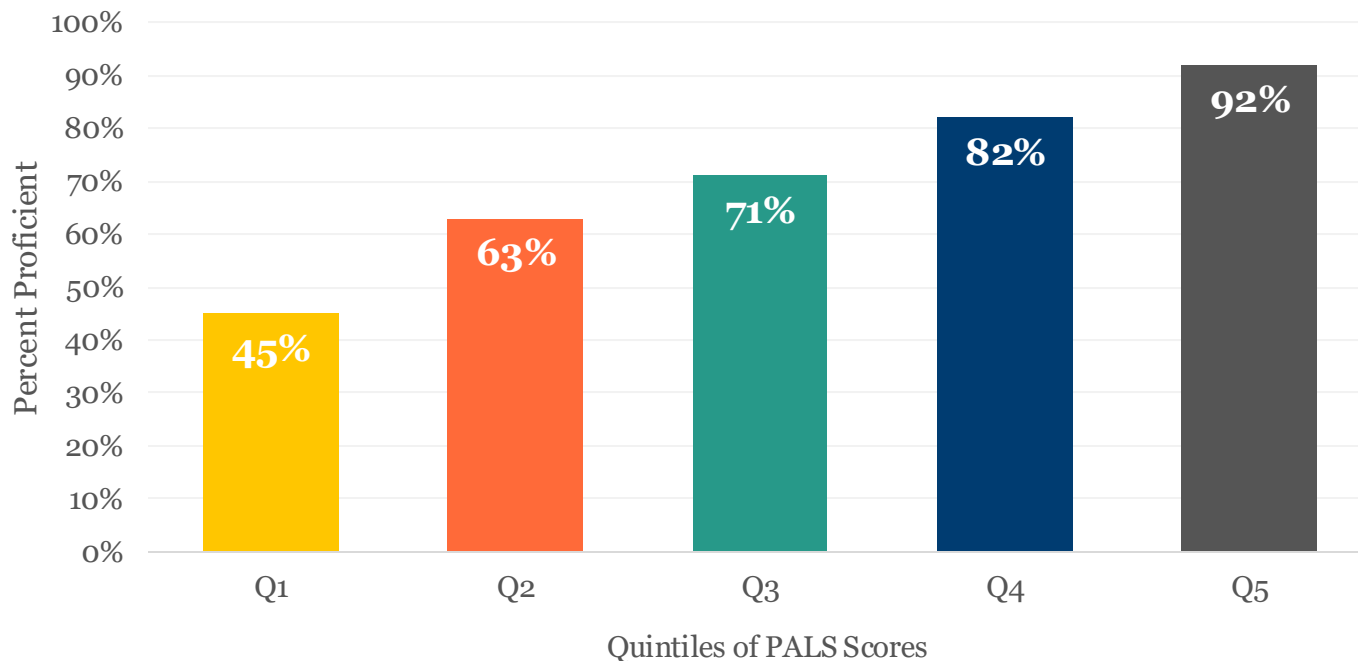
Preschool can have a significant impact on school readiness for Virginia students from low-income backgrounds. Research shows this pattern holds true for different public and private early childhood experiences.



Only about **3** out of **10** students from low-income background with no preschool experience enter school ready.

# LINKING READINESS TO 3RD GRADE READING

Virginia children who enter kindergarten ready are more likely to read on level in 3rd grade.



*Source: Probability of Proficiency on Third-Grade SOL by Kindergarten PALS Quintile (All Children) – Bassok, Herring, McGinty, Miller, & Wycoff, 2019*



# WHY FOCUS ON SCHOOL READINESS?

**Early childhood is the foundation. Quality ECCE programming leverages rapid birth-to-five brain development, enabling children to maximize their potential.**

Babies are beginning to link language to core cognitive abilities at just **3 MONTHS.**



Gaps in children's vocabulary start to appear as early as **18 MONTHS.**



By the time children are **3 & 4 YEARS OLD** their vocabulary, attention, and general knowledge are predictors of **THIRD & FOURTH GRADE** reading comprehension.



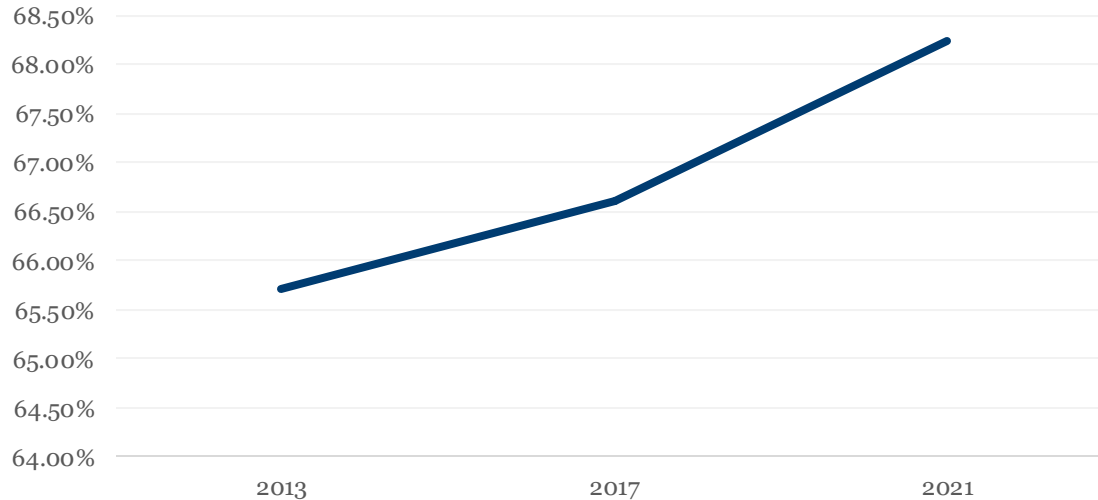
**THIRD GRADE** reading ability is one of the best predictors of **HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION.**



# SCHOOL READINESS AND WORKING FAMILIES

Parents are children's first and most important teachers but more Virginia families depend on early childhood care and education.

Percent of Virginia Children Under Age 6 With All Available Parents in the Workforce

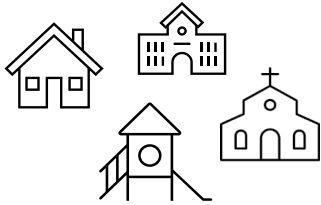


**TWO OUT OF THREE**  
Virginia children under the age of 6 have all available parents in the **WORKFORCE**

Shared Vision for the Future

# OUR SHARED VISION

We envision a Virginia where *all* children have the opportunity to enter school ready.



**Families have a variety of affordable, high-quality early learning options.**



**Programs are measured, supported to improve, and rewarded for continuous improvement.**



**Parents can work or go to school and meet their family's needs.**

# GOALS OF THE UNIFIED SYSTEM



**COMPETITIVE EDUCATOR COMPENSATION IS ESSENTIAL TO EACH AREA**

# Access and Choice

*Accomplishments and Next Steps*

# CONTINUED GROWTH IN FAMILY DEMAND

## **More children than ever before were served with public funds in birth-to-five settings in 2023-2024.**

- More than 2,500 children benefited from Mixed Delivery this year, a 25% increase from the prior year.\*
- More than 23,000 children benefited from VPI this year, including 890 in community provider settings.
- Demand for the Child Care Subsidy Program continues to increase, with enrollment growing from just over 39,000 in May 2023 to over 43,750 in May 2024.
- All partners worked with Head Start to ensure that Virginia maximizes all federal resources, helping to offer access to comprehensive two-generation services for our most vulnerable families.

In total, 24% of Virginia's birth-to-five year olds are attending a program that takes public funding, meaning more choices for more families.

*\*Enrollment data as of January 2024*

# FUNDING TO SUSTAIN ACCESS FOR FAMILIES

**The 2024 Virginia General Assembly Session significantly increased state funding for early childhood access.**

- Virginia State Budget includes \$366M+ in FY25 and \$461+M in FY26 in state funds for early childhood.
- Combining this with federal funding, Virginia will invest \$1.1 billion this biennium to support access to early childhood programs.
- New Commission on Early Childhood Care and Education helped elevate the need for state funding in fall 2023.
- Governor Youngkin initiated this commitment through the [\*Building Blocks for Virginia Families\*](#) initiative in December 2023.
- Starting in 2024, VDOE will implement waitlists, support policy changes and provide new reporting on the use of funds. With the ability to reallocate funding across programs, VDOE can also help ensure Virginia is maximizing all funds and responding to parental preferences.



# PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARENT CHOICE SYSTEM

Virginia's early childhood system consists of multiple public and private providers that offer birth-to-five care and education across multiple settings.



Over **1,900**  
family child  
care homes



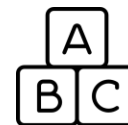
**~2,700**  
licensed  
child care  
centers



**946** public  
schools



**~870**  
religiously-  
exempt child  
care centers

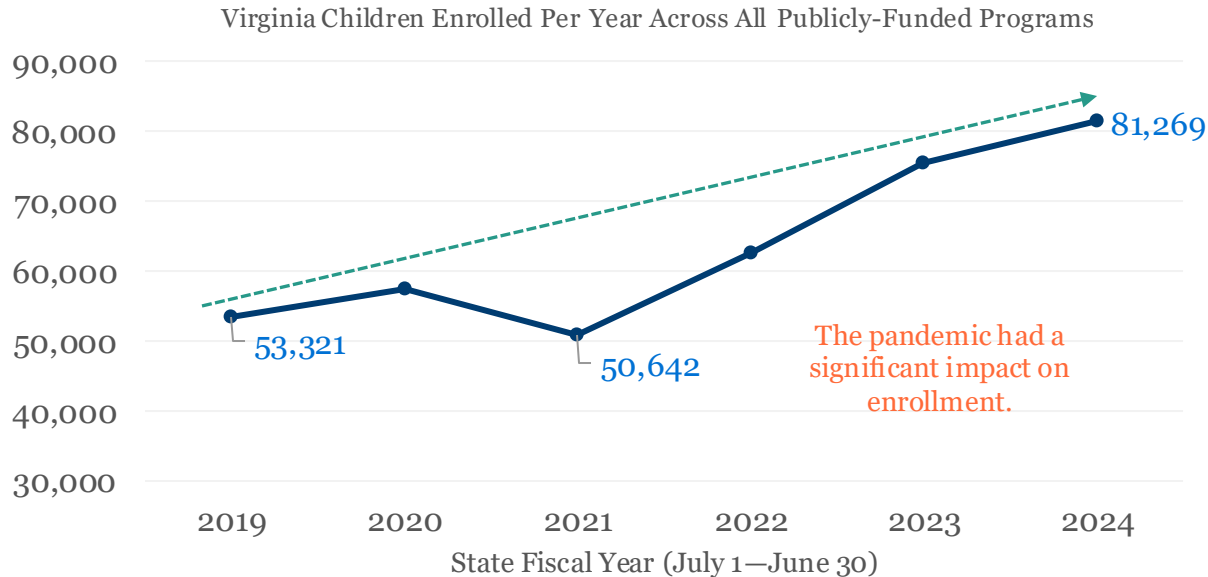


**50** Head Start  
and Early  
Head Start  
grantees  
(across 364  
sites)

*Note: Site totals are not mutually exclusive and should not be summed. Additional site types include certified preschools, local government approved centers, and short-term child day centers (generally summer camps).*

# MORE CHOICES FOR MORE FAMILIES

More families are seeking to participate in Virginia's publicly-funded early childhood system.



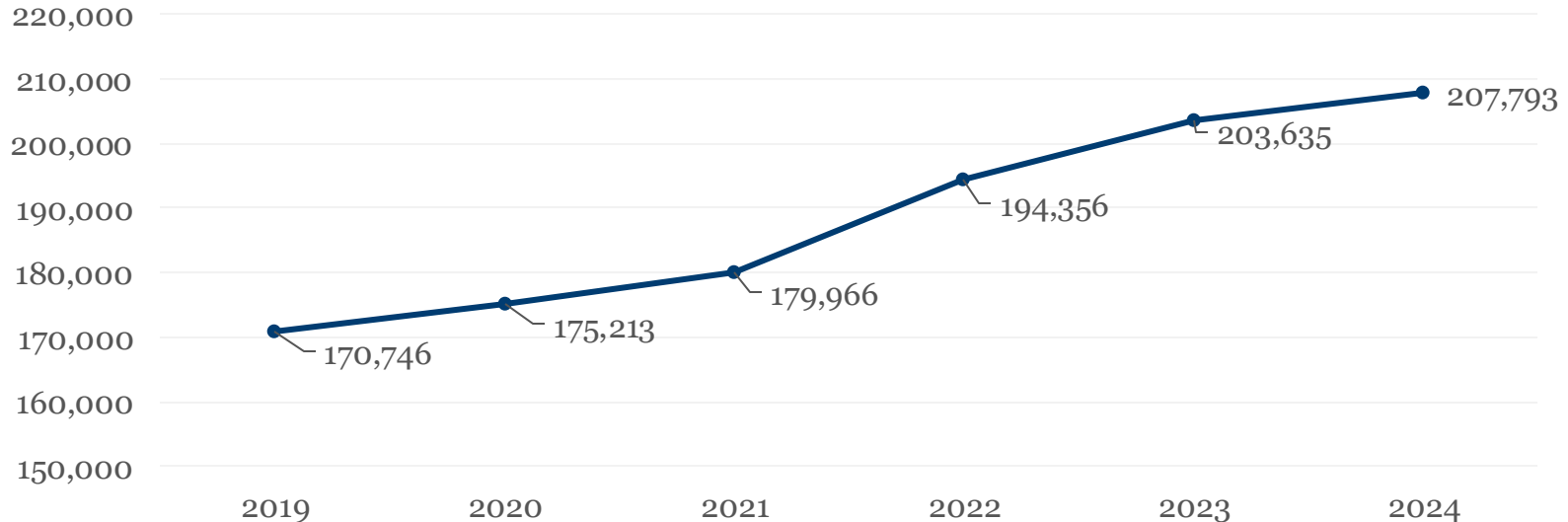
The pandemic had a significant impact on enrollment.

**52%  
INCREASE**  
in enrollment as  
of fall 2023  
compared to  
pre-pandemic

# MORE PROVIDERS TAKE PUBLIC FUNDS

More private and non-profit providers are choosing to take public funds, participate in VQB5, and serve more children in need.

Capacity to Serve Publicly-Funded Children in Private Settings in Virginia, 2019-2024



# COORDINATED ENROLLMENT IN READY REGIONS

**Ready Regions are leading the way in piloting access and enrollment innovations to support coordinated enrollment practices.**

- 100% of Ready Regions participate in coordinated enrollment activities.
- Virginia is piloting BridgeCare, a coordinated enrollment technology solution in three regions and will begin transitioning to a statewide “marketplace” and exploring options for single point of entry applications.



# WHAT'S NEXT FOR ACCESS AND CHOICE?

- **Implement Waitlists and Improve Strategies to Measure Family Demand**

Through new data collection and reporting on waitlists and unmet demand, Virginia will better understand family demand for programs to help inform funding need.

- **Build Supply in Child Care Deserts**

Increase supply by maintaining rates at Cost-of-Quality and strengthening Navigator program.

- **Elevate Best Practices**

VDOE and VECF will continue working with Ready Regions to strengthen access and enrollment efforts.

- **Identify New Strategies to Increase Access and Affordability**

VDOE will explore new ways such as digital wallets to make it easier for families, businesses, philanthropy and local government to contribute towards child care.

# Quality Improvement

*Accomplishments and Next Steps*

# STATEWIDE PARTICIPATION IN VQB5

To ensure all children are ready for Kindergarten, Virginia has developed the Unified Virginia Quality Birth to Five System (VQB5).

- VQB5 recognizes the impact of every classroom, provides feedback to every educator, and supports all programs to improve.
- As of August 2023, all publicly-funded programs that serve children ages birth to five are required by state law to participate.
- Early childhood programs that do not receive any public funds have the option to participate.
- VQB5 quality profiles will be publicly posted in the fall of 2024.



VIRGINIA'S EARLY CHILDHOOD SYSTEM MUST ENSURE THAT ALL CHILDREN HAVE QUALITY TEACHING AND LEARNING EXPERIENCES THAT MEET THEIR UNIQUE NEEDS.

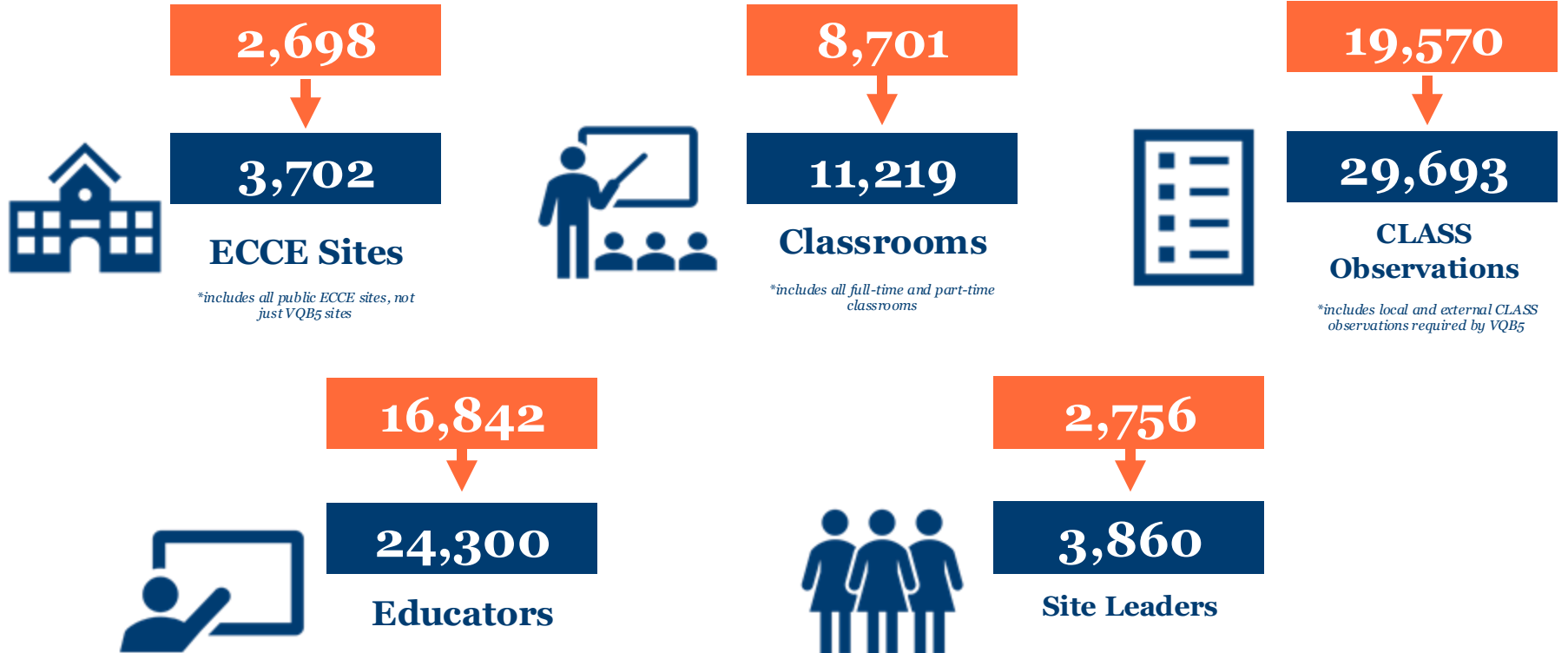
# SUMMARY OF VQB5 IN 2023-2024

**VQB5 full implementation launched in August 2023 and has been a success:**

<b>Participation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 100% of publicly-funded programs in Virginia are participating in VQB5.</li><li>• More than 16,000 educators received financial support through RecognizeB5.</li></ul>
<b>Measurement</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 99% of VQB5 classrooms completed required local CLASS observations in the fall.</li><li>• 100% of VQB5 classrooms completed required local CLASS observations this spring.</li><li>• Over 80% of sites reported using an approved quality curriculum.</li></ul>
<b>Improvement</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Feedback from nearly 30,000 local and external CLASS observations was used to identify strengths and areas for improvement.</li><li>• 70 curricula are approved.</li><li>• VQB5 measurements were used to prioritize coaching for classrooms who need it the most.</li></ul>
<b>Quality Profile Website Development</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Over 35 engagement sessions were held in the spring about VQB5 Quality Profile Mock-Ups, which included over 3,000 educators, families, and regional ECE partners.</li><li>• VDOE is using feedback to finalize profiles and launch new website in fall 2024.</li></ul>

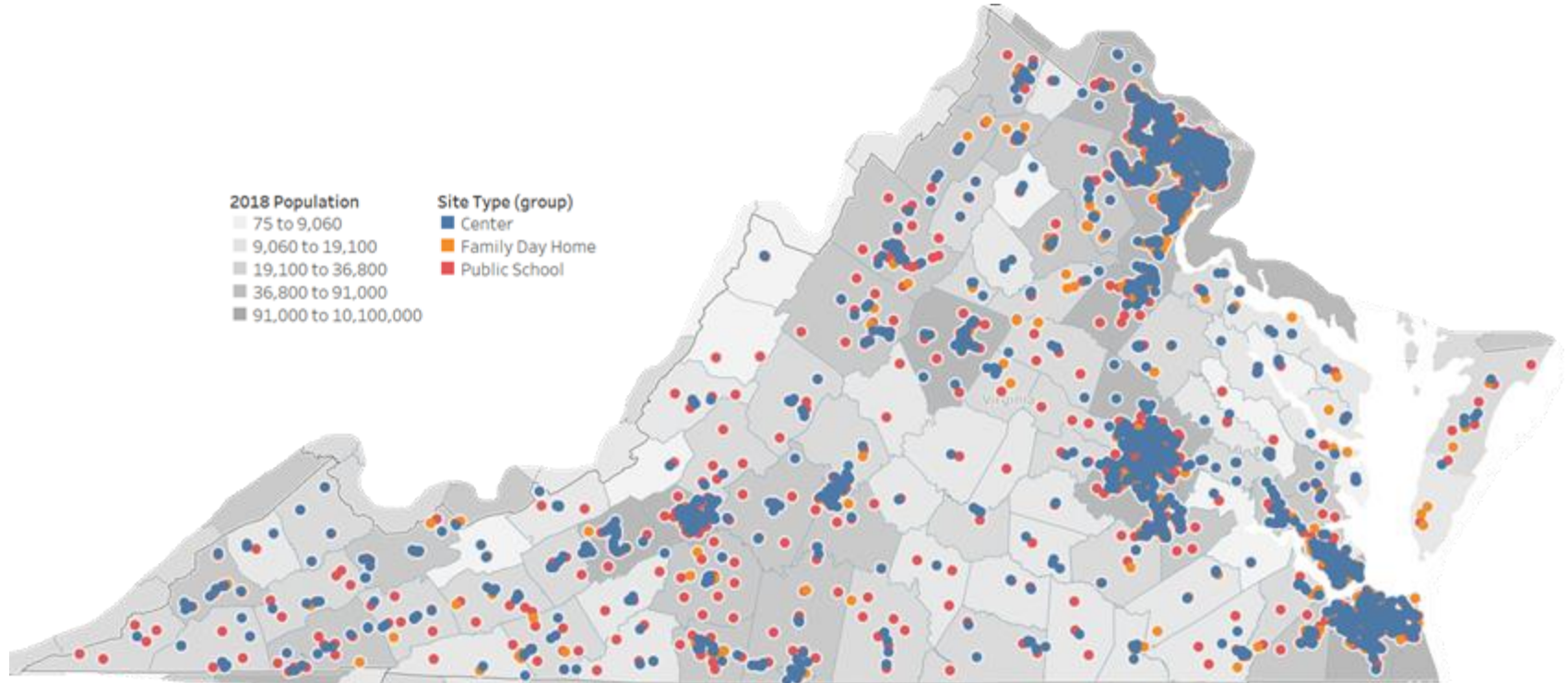


# VQB5 GROWTH BY THE NUMBERS



# IMPACT STATEWIDE

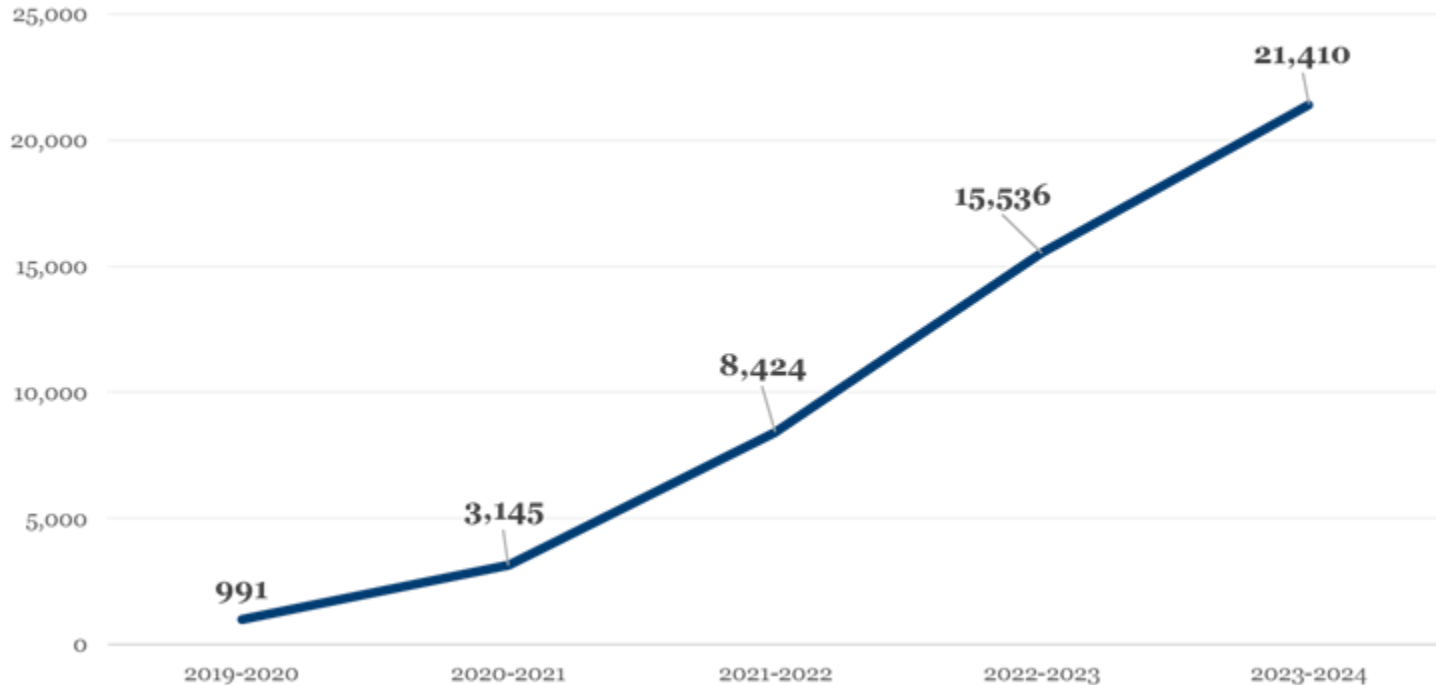
VQB5 includes early childhood programs in every city and county in Virginia.



# GROWTH IN CLASS OBSERVATIONS

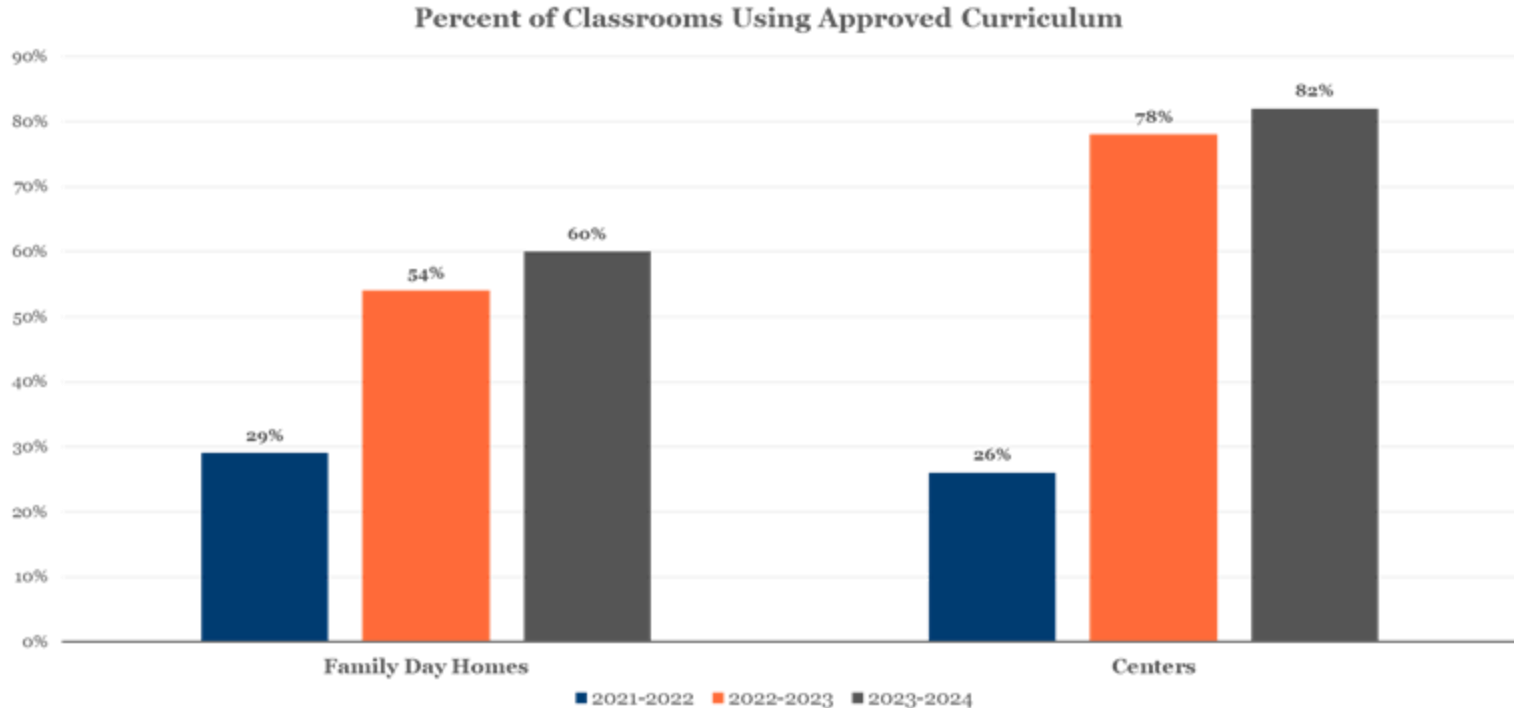
Local CLASS observations coordinated by Ready Regions (and previously, Preschool Development Grant –PDG Communities) have grown exponentially in only 5 years.

Number of Local CLASS Observations Completed Over Time



# GROWTH IN USE OF CURRICULUM

Use of approved curriculum in family day home and center-based classrooms has grown significantly over time.



# SUPPORTING CLASSROOM LEARNING

Virginia has expanded the number of curriculum options, including free options, and increased educators understanding of child learning and progress.

<b>Curriculum</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <a href="#">70 quality curricula</a> options have been approved including STREAMin3.</li><li>• <a href="#">STREAMin3</a> is 1 of 4 free or low-cost options.</li><li>• New <a href="#">Early Childhood Curriculum Webpage</a> has resources to aid in choosing curriculum and understanding the connection between curriculum and CLASS.</li></ul>
<b>Assessment</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 7,480 3-year-old and 36,590 4-year-old learners in Mixed Delivery, VPI, and Head Start completed <a href="#">VKRP screenings</a> in spring 2024.</li><li>• Family focus groups helped improve the VKRP Family Information Report.</li><li>• VKRP will offer optional mid-year screening window statewide in 2024-2025.</li></ul>
<b>ELDS Resources</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 510 educators registered for the Early Learning and Development Standards (ELDS) micro-credential.</li><li>• <a href="#">ECE Resource Hub</a> continues to expand content monthly, now including a Take-Home Strategy page to support interactions and learning at home.</li></ul>

# RECOGNIZEB5: IMPACT ON THE FIELD

**Since 2019, RecognizeB5 has provided direct financial incentives to support the retention of child care and family day home teachers.**

- RecognizeB5 (formerly known as the Teacher Recognition Program) has evolved rapidly since beginning in 2019 with a \$2.9 million federally-funded pilot.
- Participation in RecognizeB5 has increased dramatically from 2,023 educators in 2019-2020, to 16,310 educators in 2023-2024.
- Between 2021 and 2024, funding for RecognizeB5 increased significantly with the addition of federal COVID funding and increased state investment.
  - \$40+ million dollars supported 14,975 educators in child care and family day homes.
  - Since 2019, over \$80 million dollars has been distributed to educators.

# RECOGNIZEB5 IN 2024-2025 AND BEYOND

**Even with a significant state investment, RecognizeB5 will be reduced in future years.**

- Federal COVID funds are ending. In response, the General Assembly made a significant investment of 20 million dollars for 2024-2025.
- Overall funding for RecognizeB5 in 2024-2025 has been reduced by half. This means that the total amount educators may receive in the upcoming year has been reduced to \$1,500.
- **For 2024-2025:** Lead and assistant educators will be eligible for a maximum of \$1,500.
  - This will be primarily supported through funding from the 2024 Virginia State Budget.
  - As in prior years, this will be divided into two equal payments (\$750 each payment).
- **For 2025-2026:** Currently there are no funds for RecognizeB5 in the 2025-2026 state budget.
- VDOE issued a notice of this change to all eligible educators on July 8 and has updated the resources on the [RecognizeB5 Website](#).

# WHAT'S NEXT FOR QUALITY IMPROVEMENT?

- **Continue to Support Statewide Participation**  
Support the field as VQB5 evolves and help everyone understand the benefits.
- **Support Use of Data at the Local Level**
  - Increase use and understanding of data at the regional, site, and classroom levels.
  - Develop VAConnects, a new integrated data system for LinkB5, VKRP and VALLS.
- **Focus Quality Improvement Supports**  
Connect sites with the resources and supports they need to improve, including site improvement planning for those that need the most help.
- **Release of VQB5 Quality Profiles in Fall 2024**  
Share public profiles to recognize site accomplishments and inform families.
- **Support the Early Childhood Workforce**  
Support RecognizeB5 changes and ongoing work to achieve more competitive compensation.



# Family Engagement

*Accomplishments and Next Steps*

# LEARNING FROM FAMILY EXPERIENCES

**Virginia continues to engage families and use their feedback to shape the work.**

- Roundtable discussions featuring family input were held in each Ready Region and virtually in fall 2023 to inform strategic planning.
- 8,000+ families completed a survey on their experiences with the Child Care Subsidy Program, providing valuable insights.
- Family surveys and focus groups with families informed this year's Mixed Delivery evaluation.
- The [Virginia Promise Partnership](#) Parent Advisory Group has continued to convene and provide family perspectives and guidance to regional and state early childhood initiatives.



# FAMILY COUNCILS AND FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

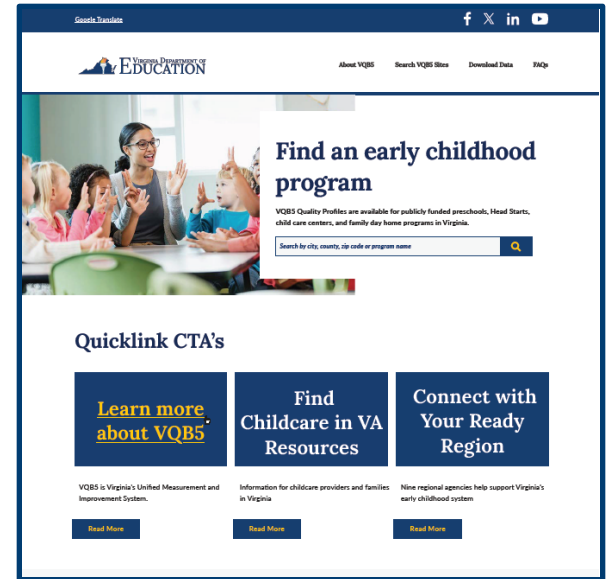
**Each Ready Region regularly convenes a family council to help build regional systems that work for families.**

- Regional family councils are a formal mechanism to engage families in systems-level decisions in every Ready Region.
- Family councils helped inform Mixed Delivery, Coordinated Enrollment, Family Survey, and VQB5 this year.
- Ready Regions have tried new approaches to family engagement, including text messaging and hosting in-person events.
- Ready Regions continue to pilot and expand BridgeCare, an online platform that makes it easier for families become aware of and apply for options.

# VQB5 FOR FAMILIES

VQB5 Quality Profiles will be posted online starting in the fall of 2024.

- Families will have one-stop portal for information about health, safety, and quality.
- VDOE has shared website ‘mock-ups’ with families and stakeholders to gather feedback.
- To help families begin to understand what VQB5 is, VDOE has developed an overview of [VQB5 for Families](#).



# WHAT'S NEXT FOR FAMILY ENGAGEMENT?

- **Focus on Families**

Engage families through Ready Region Family Councils, surveys, and other efforts. This will be especially important as families experience waitlists and more limited resources.

- **Improve Family-Friendly Website for VQB5**

Launch VQB5 Quality Profile website and work with families to improve the website and increase understanding of how quality is measured and why it matters.

- **Expand Family Tools and Resources**

Produce resources to make the early childhood system more understandable to families, including information on [VQB5](#), [VKRP](#) and [early learning resources](#).

# Health and Safety

*Accomplishments and Next Steps*

# KEY UPDATES FOR HEALTH AND SAFETY

**The Office of Child Care Health and Safety (OCCHS) supports child care providers while ensuring the health and safety of children.**

In 2023-2024, VDOE completed:

- 14,060+ inspections at licensed and unlicensed but regulated child day programs;
- 1,130+ complaint investigations; and
- 150+ investigations in response to allegations of unlicensed activity.

VDOE has strengthened supports for the field by:

- Securing funding to cover the cost of criminal background checks through June 2025.
- Updating Provider Portal to be more user friendly with instructions and buttons.
- Updating subsidy orientation training for unlicensed centers/homes with Child Care Aware.
- Revising the Statement of Exemption form to streamline information collected.
- Offering free daily health observation training with the Community College Workforce Alliance in English and Spanish.

# POLICY SHIFTS

## **New and revised policies and laws will increase flexibility.**

- *General Procedures and Information for Licensure, and Background Checks for Child Day Programs and Family Day Systems*, were revised and pending approval to be posted for Public Comment.
- Provisional hire law was passed by General Assembly in 2024 to allow child care providers to hire staff more quickly. New employees may begin employment while waiting on all background checks as long as they have eligible national fingerprint results and they are supervised by an individual with all required background checks.
- State budget allows Superintendent of Public Instruction to increase staff-to-child ratios and group sizes for licensed child day centers and child day centers that participate in the Child Care Subsidy Program or Mixed Delivery Grant Program by increasing the number of children per staff by one (1) child for groups of children from birth to five, and two (2) children for groups of school age children.



# REVISING REGULATIONS

## **First draft of revised child care regulations will go to the Board in July 2024.**

- The VDOE established a workgroup in December 2021 to inform the revision of regulations for licensed child day centers that included center-based program leaders, health and safety experts, and other key stakeholders.
- The workgroup spent a year reviewing the standards, which then went to Early Childhood Advisory Committee and Board of Education (Board) as a Notice of Intended Regulatory Action (NOIRA) in 2023.
- NOIRA public comment ended in 2024 with 550+ comments from 240+ commenters.
- VDOE amended regulations based on public comment and ECAC endorsed in May 2024.
- The draft will go before the Board on July 25, 2024, for a first review, with the second review expected in Fall 2024.
- Board approval will move the draft forward for additional public comment.

# WHAT'S NEXT FOR HEALTH AND SAFETY?

- **Making Revised Regulations Available for Public Comment**

Draft standards will become available for a 60-day public comment period after approval by the Governor.

- **Establishing Protocol and Training For Epinephrine**

Work with VDH to support providers to implement new state law that requires EpiPens.

- **Enhancing Licensing Data System**

Continue to update the licensing system used for health and safety inspections for efficiency and effectiveness.

- **Strengthening Training, Support, and Partnership**

Continue to revise and improve training and supports including preservice training.

# Regional Capacity and Innovation

*Accomplishments and Next Steps*

# READY REGIONS OPERATING AT SCALE

**Ready Regions provide VQB5 coordination, accountability, and family engagement statewide.**

- This year, Ready Regions engaged 100% of Virginia's publicly-funded early childhood sites.
- Ready Regions are local leaders with a strong focus on:
  - Building relationships with leaders and educators, acting as the "on the ground" leaders for statewide efforts.
  - Measuring and supporting quality through VQB5.
  - Supporting increased access with a focus on coordinated enrollment.
  - Engaging families through regional councils.



[Ready Regions Website](#)

# INNOVATION HIGHLIGHTS

**Virginia is innovating at all levels of our early childhood system.**

- *Improving Data Systems:* VAConnects will improve coordination and usability of LinkB5, VKRP, and VALLS.
- *Supporting Access in High-Need Areas:* Navigators are working in the field to increase supply in child care deserts and underserved areas.
- *Piloting New Approaches to Educator Training:* Early Educator Fast Track Initiative, through Virginia Early Childhood Foundation, is testing approaches to address recruitment, training and retention for child care teachers.



# WHAT'S NEXT FOR REGIONAL CAPACITY AND INNOVATION?

- **Empower Regional Leaders to Use Data Effectively**

Ensure every child enters school ready by building data and analytic capacity at every level which is especially important with limited resources.

- **Support New Early Childhood Providers**

Increase the number of publicly-funded options through Navigators and other efforts.

- **Maintain a Strong Network of Regional Entities**

Support the field during recompetition for Ready Region Lead Agencies for 2026-2029 and continue to offer technical assistance and support to Ready Regions.

- **Continue to Innovate through Future Federal Grant Opportunities**

Virginia is applying for a Preschool Development Grant to fund innovations.

Next Steps

# WAYS TO STAY ENGAGED IN 2024-2025

## 1. Sign Up for [Readiness Connections Updates](#)

- Weekly updates are shared with over 16,000+ subscribers.

## 2. Get Connected to your [Ready Region](#)

- Ready Regions are the key regional source for information, updates, and opportunities to get involved.

## 3. Prepare for the 2024-2025 year of [VQB5](#)

- Registration for VQB5 2024-2025 will take place from August 15-October 1 through Ready Regions, and is required for all publicly-funded programs. Programs that do not receive any public funding have the option to participate.





[Earlychildhood@doe.virginia.gov](mailto:Earlychildhood@doe.virginia.gov)

# READY REGIONS LEAD AGENCIES

<b>Southwest</b>	United Way of Southwest Virginia
<b>West</b>	United Way of Roanoke Valley
<b>Southside</b>	Center for Early Success
<b>Central</b>	Thrive Birth to Five
<b>Southeastern</b>	Minus 9 to 5, Eastern Virginia Medical School
<b>Chesapeake Bay</b>	FirstSpark (formerly Smart Beginnings Virginia Peninsula)
<b>Capital Area</b>	Fairfax County Office for Children
<b>North Central</b>	Foundation First (formerly Smart Beginnings Rappahannock Area)
<b>Blue Ridge</b>	United Way of Greater Charlottesville

\*\*See [Ready Regions Contact List](#) for County/City Breakdown and contact information