

VIRGINIA'S EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE AND EDUCATION SYSTEM

WHAT IS EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE AND EDUCATION (“CHILD CARE”)?

Parents of young children choose an early childhood care and education (or “child care”) program where qualified teachers outside of the home support their child's safety, well-being, social-emotional development, and learning among peers while parents work or prepare for employment.

WHY IS QUALITY CHILD CARE IMPORTANT?

Access to quality child care is critical to supporting:

- **School-Ready Children.** From birth to age five, a child's brain develops more than at any other time in life. During this time, quality interactions with responsive caregivers bolster healthy cognitive, social-emotional, and physical development and set children up for improved school readiness and lifelong success.
- **Work-Ready Parents.** Child care services ensure parents can go to work or prepare for employment to support their family's financial security, economic mobility, and self-sufficiency.
- **Thriving Communities and Economy.** Parents' access to child care through a strong child care system generates millions of dollars for communities in cost savings and economic benefits, including through enhanced workforce participation, improved business productivity, and increased state tax revenue.

CHILD CARE CHALLENGES FACED BY VIRGINIA FAMILIES

Despite important progress in strengthening Virginia's child care system, parents report ongoing struggles in finding and affording child care that meets their families' needs and preferences. Virginia families face:

- **Lack of child care access.** According to an October 2023 Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission (JLARC) [report](#), there is an estimated statewide shortage of at least 33,000 infant and toddler child care “slots.” Without enough child care slots, VDOE [found](#) that approximately half of eligible preschoolers and more than 90 percent of eligible infants and toddlers in Virginia in 2023 lack access to publicly-funded child care.
- **High child care costs.** The October 2023 JLARC [report](#) found that the costs of infant and toddler care are considered unaffordable for more than 80 percent of Virginia families, and the cost of preschool is considered unaffordable for 74 percent of Virginia families. In nearly every region, VDOE [found](#) that it costs more to send one child to child care than to earn a bachelor's degree from a local public university.

VIRGINIA'S PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARENT CHOICE SYSTEM

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



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



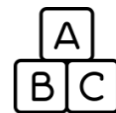
~2,700
licensed child
care centers



946 public
schools



~870 religiously-
exempt child
care centers



52 Head Start and
Early Head Start
grantees (across
364 sites)

The Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) serves as a [single point of accountability](#) for Virginia's child care system, overseeing implementation of Virginia's quality measurement and improvement system (VQB5). Using consistent classroom observations and collection of comprehensive data, VDOE aims to track and support all publicly-funded birth-to-five programs to offer high-quality early education services. Through the [Ready Regions](#) infrastructure administered by the Virginia Early Childhood Foundation, VDOE ensures statewide VQB5 coordination, accountability, and family engagement.



ROLE OF PUBLIC FUNDING IN CHILD CARE

Public funds support choice and affordability in early childhood for eligible populations.

- Public funds enable at-risk families to choose child care options that meet their unique needs.
- Unlike K-12, all eligible children are not guaranteed to be served with early education. Eligibility criteria are used to prioritize public funds to support those in most need or who may benefit most.
- Public funds flow to both public and private settings in a system designed to 1) foster access to diverse providers and 2) address diverse family needs and preferences.

Across the public-private child care system, Virginia:

- Sets consistent health, safety, and quality expectations; funds providers to meet expectations; and holds them accountable.
- Captures consistent data down to the classroom level across all provider types under the VQB5 system to promote continual quality improvement, support accountability, and demonstrate impact.
- Engages families by soliciting feedback and being responsive to evolving families' child care needs.

FIVE KEY STATE- AND FEDERALLY-FUNDED CHILD CARE PROGRAMS:

- **Virginia Preschool Initiative (VPI)** - provides free, high-quality *school day, school year* pre-K services to children from families who earn less than/up to 200% of the federal poverty guidelines (FPG).
- **Mixed Delivery Preschool Grant Program (MDP)** - provides public funding to support free, *full day, full year* high-quality child care in private settings; meets the same child eligibility, curriculum, and assessment requirements as VPI.
- **Head Start (HS) and Early Head Start (EHS)** - provides federally-funded free, high-quality child care to children from families who earn less than/up to 130% FPG.
- **Child Care Subsidy Program (CCSP)** - helps eligible families pay for child care, allowing parents or caregivers to work, search for work, or participate in education and training and for children to experience quality early learning opportunities. The state reimburses the program selected by the family for the child's attendance at a set rate, while the family pays a share of the cost (copayment) on a sliding scale based on family income.
- **Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE)** - provides special education services through local school divisions, with support and coordination from VDOE for eligible children with a disability to support development and school readiness. Preschool-age children from age two through five may be eligible for ECSE under one or more of 13 disability categories, which are defined in federal and state regulations.

Program	Age	Setting & Hours	Eligibility	Local Criteria Allowable?	# of Children Served in FY23	Funding Source
Virginia Preschool Initiative (VPI)	3-5	Primarily schools; some child day centers; school day, school year	200% FPG, or 350% if there is a disability; child or family at risk; free to family; <u>not</u> connected to parental work status	For 15%	22,290 (92% are 4- year-olds)	State funds and local match
Mixed Delivery Preschool Grant Program (MDP)	3-5 (pilot for infants and toddlers)	Child day centers and family day homes; full-day, full-year	200% FPG, or 350% if there is a disability; child or family at risk; free to family; <u>not</u> connected to parental work status	For 15%	2,142 (87% are 3- and 4-year-olds)	State and temporary federal funds
Early Head Start (EHS)/Head Start (HS)	Birth-3 (EHS) 3-5 (HS)	Schools, child day centers, and family day homes; school day, school year	Household income up to 130% FPG; free to family; <u>not</u> connected to parental work status	No	13,766 (80% are 3- and 4- year-olds)	Federal funds and local match
Child Care Subsidy Program (CCSP)	Birth-12	Child day centers and family day homes; up to full-day, full year	Household income up to 85% SMI; family contribution of \$0-180 child/month; dependent on parental work status	No	37,249 (58% are under age 5)	Federal funds and state match

* Note: Early Childhood Special Education serves 13,000 children through federal funds; funding and setting vary based on children's needs.