



FACT SHEET

The State of Early Childhood in Virginia

April 10, 2015

The Virginia General Assembly passed legislation to provide voluntary preschool to at-risk four-year-olds—known as the Virginia Preschool Initiative, or VPI—in 1995.¹ The program operates in 88 percent of Virginia school districts and has seen increased enrollment for two consecutive years.² Additionally, state funding increased \$2 million, and new benchmarking of the funding formula will provide enough money for more than 24,000 additional preschool slots in the 2012-13 school year.³ Virginia is the recipient of a U.S. Department of Education Preschool Expansion Grant that will allow the state to expand high-quality preschool programs in targeted communities.⁴ The program currently serves 17 percent of the age-eligible population in all settings, including public schools, child care centers, and family child care homes.⁵

Virginia children need more investment to expand access and increase quality

One of the leading research intuitions on state preschool programs, the National Institute for Early Education Research, or NIEER, has established 10 benchmarks of quality. Virginia meets six of them. The state has the opportunity to improve quality by ensuring that teachers have at least a B.A. degree and assistant teachers have a C.D.A. degree. Additionally, VPI should provide at least one meal per day or require site visits.⁶ Virginia would be more likely to increase accessibility rates and improve quality benchmarks by increasing funding of the program.

- In 2013, Virginia ranked 23 out of 41 states in per-student funding.⁷
- Virginia currently spends \$3,752 per student, less than the spending rates in states with programs that meet almost all of the benchmarks, including Oklahoma and Georgia, and below the national average of \$4,026.⁸

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Early childhood education can support Virginia's most vulnerable populations

Many Virginia children live in families feeling severe financial strain. Growing up in such an environment affects young children's ability to thrive, putting them behind their wealthier peers on a number of developmental, educational, and social measures. The stress that often comes with living in poverty can also adversely affect brain development in children's early years. High-quality early education has been proven to alleviate these risk factors and help close the school-readiness gap.⁹

- 36 percent of Virginia children under age 6 live in low-income families.¹⁰
- 5 percent of Virginia children live in areas of concentrated poverty, putting them at a greater risk of starting kindergarten behind.¹¹

Child care is out of reach for many Virginia families

Virginia is one of 31 states where the cost of child care is higher than in-state tuition and fees at a public college.¹² In Virginia, where 65 percent of children under age 6 have all available parents in the workforce, child care is not a luxury—it is a necessity.¹³

- For a family with children in Virginia, the median income is \$74,100 per year.¹⁴
- The average annual cost of a child care center in Virginia is \$10,028 for an infant and \$7,696 for a 4-year-old.¹⁵

Endnotes

1 Virginia Department of Education, "Virginia Preschool Initiative: Guidelines for Virginia Preschool Initiative Application" (2014), available at http://www.doe.virginia.gov/instruction/early_childhood/preschool_initiative/guidelines.pdf.

2 W. Steven Barnett and others, "The State of Preschool 2013: State Preschool Yearbook" (New Brunswick, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research, 2013), available at <http://nieer.org/sites/nieer/files/yearbook2013.pdf>.

3 Ibid.

4 U.S. Department of Education, "Programs: Preschool Development Grants," available at <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/preschooldevelopmentgrants/index.html> (last accessed April 2015).

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid.

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid.

9 Jack P. Shonkoff and others, "The Lifelong Effects of Early Childhood Adversity and Toxic Stress," *Pediatrics* 129 (1) (2012): e232–e246, available at <http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/129/1/e232.short>.

10 National Center for Children in Poverty, "Virginia: Demographics of Young, Low-Income Children," available at http://www.nccp.org/profiles/VA_profile_8.html (last accessed March 2015).

11 Kids Count Data Center, "Children Living in Areas of Concentrated Poverty" (Baltimore, MD: Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2013), available at <http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/6795-children-living-in-areas-of-concentrated-poverty#detailed/2/2-52/false/1376,1201,1074,880,11/any/13891,13892>.

12 Child Care Aware of America, "Parents and the High Cost of Child Care" (2013), available at http://usa.childcareaware.org/sites/default/files/cost_of_care_2013_103113_0.pdf.

13 Kids Count Data Center, "Children Under Age 6 with All Available Parents in the Labor Force" (Baltimore, MD: Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2013), available at <http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/5057-children-under-age-6-with-all-available-parents-in-the-labor-force#detailed/2/2-52/false/36,868,867,133,38/any/11472,11473>.

14 Kids Count Data Center, "Median Family Income Among Households with Children" (Baltimore, MD: Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2013), available at <http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/65-median-family-income-among-households-with-children#detailed/2/2-52/false/36,868,867,133,38/any/365>.

15 Child Care Aware of America, "Parents and the High Cost of Child Care."

16 Authors' calculations based on Child Care Aware of America, "Parents and the High Cost of Child Care."

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For a typical family with an infant and a 4-year-old in Virginia, the average cost of child care at a center amounts to

1/3

of annual income¹⁶