Early Childhood Education – Workgroup on Quality

Hosted by the Virginia Commission on Youth

June 17, 2014 – 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.
House Room 3, The Capitol

Meeting Notes

Workgroup Members:
Senators Colgan, Lewis, Marsden, Miller, and Ruff
Delegates R.P. Bell, Dance, Krupicka, Mason, Orrock, Peace, Plum, Pogge, Sickles

Cabinet Officials:
The Honorable William Hazel, the Honorable Anne Holton, Ms. Holly Coy, Mr. Lawrence Wilder

Attendees included representatives from the business community, child care providers, program administrators, educators, advocacy organizations, school officials, and social service organizations. Over 114 individuals attended.

Welcome and Purpose
The Honorable Christopher Peace, Chair
Virginia Commission on Youth

Delegate Peace welcomed the Workgroup members and participants and asked that the members introduce themselves. Delegate Peace stated that there was rising awareness of the value of quality early childhood education. He noted that the Workgroup was fortunate to have the involvement from Governor McAuliffe's office. Both the previous and the current administrations have acknowledged the importance in investing in quality early learning because of its impact on both school and workforce readiness. Delegate Peace reviewed the meeting agenda and then turned the meeting over to Dean Pianta for a presentation on what the research showed was present in quality early childhood education programming.

Review of the Research on Quality in Early Learning Settings
Robert C. Pianta, Ph.D., Dean
Curry School of Education, University of Virginia
Dean Pianta provided an overview of the challenges, impact, and research on quality in early learning settings. Highlights from this presentation are outlined below.

- Challenges of improving quality in early childhood education:
  - Improving infrastructure;
  - Regulation;
  - Variation in local implementation; and
  - Give and take of improving access and improving quality.

- The impact of quality programs:
    - Scaled-up state level preschool efforts (OK, GA, MD, PA, NC) have demonstrated they can close achievement gaps- 50% in one year, 30% in long term.
    - Smaller scale experimental programs (Perry, Abecedarian, Chicago) have demonstrated return on investment (ROI) of $3-15 (depending on how and when calculated).
    - Head Start evaluations – a very mixed bag as far as outcomes, very few benefits in short term, largely no effects.
- In Virginia:
    - 2007 Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission (JLARC) study found some evidence of benefit for students enrolled in the Virginia Preschool Initiative (VPI).
    - No controlled evaluations, quality curriculum uneven, lacking readiness assessments, strong work on standards.
- Program Quality
    - Structural quality aspects (e.g., ratio, teacher credentials/degrees, etc.) have no evidence that they drive student learning/quality. What matters most is the quality of the child's experience/quality of interaction with the educator.
    - Qualities of child's experiences (e.g., curriculum, teacher interactions) are demonstrated to impact learning. Low-income children especially benefit from classrooms with strong instructional support.
    - Defining quality has shifted to focus on what matters for children's learning. This includes teacher-child interactions, curriculum, and workforce development.
    - One study measured the average ratings of interactions in Pre-K through 3rd Grade classrooms. With class scores being the measure, teacher-child interactions had the highest influence on quality. Classroom organization had moderate impact on quality, and instructional support had the lowest impact on quality.
    - Instructional support shown to impact children's pre-kindergarten as evidenced by better language and math skills at the end of kindergarten. Emotional support shown to influence social competence and behavior problems.
- What has been demonstrated to help teachers improve instructional support:
    - Coaching – My Teaching Partner (MTP) model, when tested, teachers with MTP coaches had more sensitive interactions with students, increased student engagement, and improved language stimulation. High-poverty classrooms benefit greatly and early career teachers benefit even more. Children with MTP teachers had greater gains in tests/literacy, lower levels of problem behavior, and higher levels of expressive language.
    - MTP is a three-credit college course focuses on improving teachers' knowledge of effective interactions, their skills in identifying effective interactions, and applying those skills in the classroom.
    - Program design and professional development with focus on interactions, skills, and implementing evidenced-based effective curriculum.
- Key findings to improving quality:
    - Direct training in knowledge of child development including literacy, math, and social, this is critical. Money is already present; there is a need to re-deploy existing resources.
    - Skills training in interactions also have benefits.
    - Skills training in curricula and delivery have benefits.
    - Use of evidence-based educationally focused curricula (least prevalent among preschool programs).
    - Program design matters.
- Access and quality:
    - Observations, feedback, and coaching must be long-term and focused; and

    - Supporting teachers in the classroom and focusing on professional skills.
- Recommendations – A path forward for Virginia
    - Stronger, evidence-based curriculum with training on implementation;
    - Continued emphasis on quality of interactions Improve school readiness and quality assessments;
    - Improve data and decision-making infrastructure to link to long-term gains; and
    - Enroll at-risk young children in programs that can make an impact.

Virginia's Early Learning Quality Improvement Initiatives

Department of Education

Christine Harris, Director Office of Humanities and Early Childhood Education

Dr. Harris discussed the Virginia Department of Education's role in early childhood education. The major points from this presentation are listed below.

- The Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) has primary responsibility for several early learning programs:
    - State/local funding – Virginia Preschool Initiative (VPI)
    - Federally funded/administered by VDOE – Title I preschool; Early childhood special education
    - Federally funded administered by Head Start Offices – Head Start
- VPI uses state funds to serve four-year-olds who are at-risk for school failure and not presently receiving services from Head Start.
- VPI state share funding is projected on the state's share of $6,000 per eligible child and the local share of the cost is capped at 50%.
- VPI quality focuses on teacher quality, professional development, accountability, and collaboration.
- Quality – Localities must ensure the following:
    - teachers must have teaching license from Board of Education; adhere to standards from the Foundation Blocks for Early Learning; provide professional development; address assessment; minimum of half day; limit class size to 18; 9:1 child: staff ratio
- Local variation – each locality designs local program based on funding and need; eligibility determined by locality. Examples include student selection criteria based on poverty, homelessness, English language learners, and family stress.
- Impact – VPI participation is linked to a reduced likelihood of repeating kindergarten and better outcomes on the kindergarten literacy Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening (PALS) assessment.
- Participation levels in Virginia – Of 135 localities, 131 are eligible for funding and 119 that participate. There are 24,629 eligible children in Virginia and 18,021 participating children.
- Challenges in implementation – local match and insufficient classroom space are top two challenges reported by school divisions; VDOE has one staff member to handle site management and professional development.

Department of Social Services

Barbara Newlin, Director, Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Development

Ms. Newlin discussed the Virginia Department of Social Services' role in early child care. The major points from this presentation are listed below.

- The Virginia Department of Social Services (VDSS) has primary responsibility for licensing childcare programs and administering Child Care and Development Funds (CCDF), which provide subsidies, quality improvement and professional development activities, and consumer education.
- Virginia has over 8,000 child care providers with capacity to serve over 360,000 children

    - Licensed child care centers (2,468)
    - Licensed family day homes (1,342)
    - Local ordinance providers (1,878)
    - Religiously exempt child care centers (996)
    - Voluntarily registered family day homes (903)
    - Unregulated subsidy providers (802)
    - Other (76)
- Federal regulation requires activities in childcare subsidy, quality improvement, professional development, and consumer education.
- Childcare subsidy
    - Provides low-income families with financial resources to find/afford quality childcare, parental choice; in fiscal year 2013, over 43,000 children served, 82% in licensed care.
- About Virginia's quality improvement initiatives:
    - Virginia Star Quality Initiative is Virginia's Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS), there are also local quality initiatives; and
    - Virginia's Star Quality Initiative purpose is to help families identify high quality child care/preschool options and assist child care/preschool programs in providing high quality early care.
- Professional Development -- scholarships, endorsement, distance learning, infant & toddler specialist network, and early childhood mental health
- Challenges:
    - Quantity v. quality;
    - Length of time needed to demonstrate return on investment,
    - data fragmentation (bringing VDSS data in longitudinal system); and
    - Private sector industry.

Virginia Early Childhood Foundation/Smart Beginnings
Kathy Glazer, President

Ms. Glazer provided an overview of the work of the Virginia Early Childhood Foundation. The major points from this presentation are listed below.

- Considerations for quality learning:
    - School readiness happens locally; to ensure it requires community capacity and expertise;
    - There is great variation across communities – not "one size fits all";
    - More than $.5 billion in public financing that communities must knit efficiently;
    - Joint public/private responsibility;
    - Two-way communication state/local; and
    - Data driven-decision making.
- Approximately 500,000 children birth to age 5 in Virginia with about 100,000 in each age cohort, 66% live in households where all parents work, meaning that 330,000 children need child care/preschool arrangements, 75,000 have more than two risk factors.
- The Virginia Star Quality Initiative is Virginia's Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS)
    - Administered through a public-private partnership between VDSS and Virginia Early Childhood Foundation (VECF), participation is voluntary;
    - Public/private partnership envisioned by the business community; founded in 2007; focused on local/regional efforts of Smart Beginnings communities;
    - Federal, local, and private funding supports the initiative; and

    - Includes teacher-child interactions as a measurement standard and a mechanism for improvement.
- Growth plan- by 2016 hope to double the number of children reached by QRIS; currently in conversation with community colleges to retool coursework to focus on interactions

Working Lunch and Discussion/Questions and Answers

Workgroup Members and Attendees

Discussion facilitated by Vikki Barth, Leadership Metro Richmond

Delegate Peace thanked Ms. Barth with Leadership Metro Richmond for facilitating the meeting. Delegate Peace also thanked Dominion and noted that they had generously provided lunch so that all meeting attendees could stay and participate during this portion of the meeting. Ms. Barth asked questions about key takeaways from each of the speaker's presentations and facilitated a discussion with the Workgroup members and the meeting participants. Key discussion points from the Workgroup members and the participants are outlined below.

Discussion Points from Workgroup Members/Participants

- A member of the Workgroup suggested mapping/linking QRIS-rated programs to areas of highest need; this would also show where there were regional gaps and help communicate the benefits of licensure to providers; this was important because families may not realized that they might also qualify for other benefits through VPI including participating in the childcare food program.
- A member of the Workgroup inquired which entity sets criteria for training programs and how teacher preparation and professional development could be better aligned to ensure it contains elements that best demonstrates outcomes with either licensing, QRIS, or professional development tying these all together.
- While there should be more focus on workforce development in early childhood education, structural issues must not be minimized because there is a responsibility to ensure the child is safe, 50% of children in Virginia are in unregulated care, structural issues can be critical to ensure safety, this is not an "either/or" situation.
- The question was raised whether MTP certification should be included in all licensure requirements.
- There are three main funding streams and there are current challenges with blending and braiding funding due to regulatory and funding guidelines – can the Commonwealth look at this and figure out how to reduce barriers and improve access and collaboration? VDOE and VDSS efforts should be linked so that quality improvement activities are focused in low performing schools.
- VDSS is tasked with overseeing child welfare but program funding is in silos, the question should be how to synergize efforts to meet the basic needs of the child, a cross-sector professional development committee that examines competency and standards would be helpful to achieve alignment. Both VDOE and VDSS have responsibility in this arena. A response to this is re-convening the Early Childhood Advisory Committee to ensure that there are coordinated policies. It would be helpful to include representatives from the legislature on this Committee.
- Several members inquired how licensure could be more focused on child outcomes rather than physical plant requirements. Questions were asked whether there were any risks with growing Virginia's QRIS system while the rating standard was in the process of being revised. The members stated that there should be focus on thinking differently about licensure to emphasize training of provider in developmentally appropriate care; a new paradigm must be employed and must leverage the most "bang for the buck; funding should be expended on training/QRIS. The

QRIS could be used as a platform to help ensure that coursework and training for teachers is effective.

- One member inquired how parents locate high quality child care providers who accept child care subsidies. Families may assume any child care provider is licensed and this is not always the case.
- The question was also raised how parents access the subsidy and are the folks that need the help the most being reached. Child Care Aware and 2-1-1 are two methods that help families access the subsidy.
- A member noted that it is very challenging for policymakers and providers to find the balance with mounting licensure requirements and ensuring that early childhood education programs were not cost prohibitive for parents. There is a need to balance the cost of licensure and focus on those program components that are proven to work. The question to ask is how the STAR rating can even more focused on outcomes.
- There is a need to look at differences between a "2 star" versus a "4 star" facility, such a ranking difference may not impact success. It would be helpful to re-measure criteria to ensure they reflect success. There may be opportunities for Virginia to simplify criteria, and include in the rating training experiences.
- Question, shouldn't a school's rating be based on outcomes? (e.g., the school has strong teachers but they may not be teaching in an optimum environment.). Response, ratings are weighted, higher percentage points awarded for interactions versus structure.
- The members asked about federal Head Start funding and how to utilize that funding to ensure Virginia was obtaining the best outcomes for these children. There is also a need to foster quality improvement and collaboration with Head Start programs to help find the balance in licensure of standardizing regulations. Funding for Head Start is an "apples to oranges comparison". Head Start provides additional services including mental health, dental, screening, parent involvement, development, GED, workforce development. Head Start was among the first programs to receive a 5-star rating.
- Several members asked how Virginia could increase participation in QRIS; there is a need to solicit interest and buy-in from local school administrators to keep the system moving forward.
- There was also interest in benchmarking Virginia's progress with that of other states.
- Strong teacher-child interactions are critical to help a child feel loved/ training others to take on role of the "mom". identifying youth is one part of equation, must also get these youth to these programs, disparity in population, is there an opportunity to partner with businesses and non-profits to show families how to be good teachers? Show those agencies that interact with these families that there are other opportunities and options for these families (e.g., CHIP of Virginia, Resource Mothers). It is critical that families be shown how to engage with their children. There is also a need to make connections between children involved in the court system and availability of quality early learning opportunities.
- There is no training component in Virginia's Star Rating System. Mentoring improves Star Rating (2-star to 5-star), mentoring and training support improve outcomes! The training investment is critical.
- Issues with VPI include the local match requirement and space, rural areas may have space, but may be located across town so this then causes a transportation issues.
- VPI has other services including health screenings, vision, and hearing services. Transportation is an issue but localities have an opportunity to provide transportation. VDSS can inform families of these services. Example, Crater District's attempts to braid funding with Title I.
- Localities in a different situation than they were in the mid-2000s. Now they confront the choice whether to fund this program or a teacher. New school construction has also been limited. Allow the locality to fix the problem to meet their needs. One size does not fit all. Include flexibility in guidelines, intended as a partnership with locality.

- There are space issues throughout the Commonwealth in K-12 schools. Elementary school children attending class in trailers, lack of available space. "Quilted system of funding" – 1,000 youth on waiting list to receive subsidy. It was noted that youth in Head Start, placed at the top of the VPI list.
- Virginia has a diverse delivery system, creative arrangements with private providers and braiding funding. Fairfax offers VPI in private settings. Need to work with families to deliver what they need. Funding issues, allocations may not align with need. It is also important that Virginia continue to engage with the private sector. Virginia is fortunate that private sector/corporations are investing in early childhood programs. It is in the best interests of the corporate community to invest in early childhood education. The Chamber of Commerce's Blueprint Virginia emphasizes early education.
- New public/private equity models (e.g., Pay for Success) requires public/private collaboration, ongoing currently in Virginia, this may be a funding model to consider?
- Technology can help identify youth with special needs, unfortunately, there are never enough providers to meet the need, perhaps the Centers for Excellence model can be used to meet the need in a virtual way.
- Technology can be used to innovate and deliver effective professional development at a level of scale, online delivery is a good way to do this (e.g., VCU program to train for Autism).
- Technology can also help inform decision-making by examining what the data says and allowing the data to inform policy decisions and outcomes. The business side can help with this (e.g., SAS and CSA).
- Virginia must also support state efforts to expand the availability of quality, affordable community-based childcare for military families, with a focus on National Guard and Federal Reserve families who are unable to access on-installation child care programs.

Focus Areas/Recommendations

1. **Improve workforce/professional development opportunities to ensure Virginia's activities are appropriate to obtain outcomes** – link professional development opportunities across programs/setting to what we know works in quality improvement- on-going coaching and feedback, i.e. My Teaching Partner, and adopting effective curriculum.
2. **Focus on pieces of the quality improvement puzzle that improve outcomes –** focus more attention in professional development and quality improvement on high quality interactions, mentoring/feedback, skill building and curriculum. Redirect funding from areas that have less impact. Concentrate on areas of greatest need (such as communities with high poverty rates and low performing schools) for targeted impact.
3. **Link child care licensure process to outcomes –** review design of licensure system so that it encourages focuses more on best outcomes for child and less on physical requirements of settings. Look to areas to decrease regulatory requirements that can save money without jeopardizing safety.
4. **Build alignment of early learning settings, starting with professional development –** align professional development activities and overall goals/outcomes among early learning settings, VPI, Head Start and Child Care. Professional development can be starting point for these settings with different funding sources and accountability.
5. **Providing higher quality programs comes at greater cost** – need to balance "trade off" between quality and quantity. Cuts to overall school system funding have affected expansion of early learning. Allow opportunities to learn from communities that are blending and braiding funding to maximize impact (i.e. Fairfax). Align child care subsidy funds and with VPI funds for quality improvement in private settings. Look at Pay for Success private equity model for new funding opportunities.

6. **Leverage all connections and opportunities** – examine opportunities for collaboration to serve children "at the margins"/involved in court system and military families; look at parent-focused programs/home visiting. Encourage collaboration between DSS and DOE to "front-load" educational opportunities. Support re-convening of the early childhood advisory council and involve legislators. Break down silos between programs to encourage collaboration (good model in Virginia for the provision of homelessness services).
7. **Look to technology as an aid and to bring down costs** – online tools can be very useful in training and reaching providers. Data integration and analytics should be used to make better policy decisions.

Recap and Closing Remarks

Delegate Peace

Delegate Peace asked that everyone rise to greet his Excellency, the Governor of Virginia. Governor McAuliffe thanked everyone and stated that he wanted to stop by and address the Workgroup because he understands the importance of early childhood education. Access to high quality, early childhood programming should not depend on one's zip code. The Governor stated that economic development also starts with quality Pre-K programming. He stated that he had just returned from making a major job announcement in Hampton and would soon be making another significant announcement relating to jobs. Governor McAuliffe emphasized that he was committed to ensuring Virginia's economy was healthy. This could be done by making sure that Virginia had a qualified workforce. He stated that this starts with Pre-K. Virginia can lead every other state in the country in economic development, particularly if he could relay to potential employers/manufacturers that they had access to a qualified workforce for the next 25 to 30 years.

Governor McAuliffe reiterated his passion about early childhood education and stated that he and the Secretary of Education were ready to assist the Commission and the legislature. He stated he looked forward to reviewing the recommendations from the Workgroup and looked forward to doing what he could to help. Secretary Holton stated that she was in attendance during the afternoon and that the members had been working hard on this topic all day.

Delegate Krupicka stated that the Workgroup access the low hanging fruit and to better coordinate. This includes assessing the area of workforce and professional development to ensure that Virginia is focusing on promoting the outcomes as well as coordinating to tie outcomes to existing requirements. This meeting was important because of the emphasis on outcomes and the Workgroup should focus on continuing to "move the ship forward" by prioritizing legislative and regulatory work to activities that research shows leads to high quality outcomes for youth. This discussion may lead to hard decisions. Virginia's early care programming can be more outcome-focused, particularly with how priorities are set. This can be tied to licensure. There very well may be certain areas of regulation that can be decreased so that Virginia does not focus on those items that impede the policies which are proven to work. Delegate Krupicka stated that focus must be on those high impact items. Additionally, attention should be on making smart choices about the requirements imposed upon child care providers. This must be done to ensure that they are asked to do things that work and add value. Finally, many agencies are involved in this issue and there is a need to bring down programmatic "silos" and facilitate coordination/communication.

Delegate Peace asked the Workgroup members to offer closing remarks. He thanked everyone for their participation, asked that everyone continue the discussion and collaboration, and stated that the meeting notes would be distilled and placed on the Commission's website. Delegate Peace stated that Ms. Atkinson would be receiving comments by email. Delegate Peace stated that the issues discussed today were very important ones and thanked everyone for their involvement. The meeting was then adjourned.