



April 19, 2021

Dear Virginians,

When I started college, I felt unprepared. I remember having tutors in so many of my classes, and feeling like I had to work three times as hard because my school, compared to other schools in Virginia, didn't have the resources it should have. No student should ever feel like that. Every young Virginian deserves a chance to learn and to thrive in the classroom, so they're prepared for other parts of their lives.

Early childhood education yields both immediate and long-term benefits for students, including increased preparedness for kindergarten, early development of social and emotional skills, and a stronger likelihood of graduating high school.<sup>1</sup> In addition to reduced crime rates and a stronger workforce, the savings incurred by the Commonwealth with stronger early childhood education would outweigh costs in under a decade.<sup>2</sup> And yet, access and affordability continue to shutter student participation across the Commonwealth.

This lack of access is compounded by the high costs of child care. In fact, in some parts of the Commonwealth, child care costs almost as much as a year at a community college – that's a problem. The lack of affordability prevents children from accessing safe and nurturing educational environments, working families from receiving the help they need, and state and local economies from realizing their full productivity and efficiency goals.

The COVID-19 pandemic further exposed the systemic inequities in our education system as well as the inadequacy of child care infrastructure in our Commonwealth. As a working mother of twin three-year-old boys, I understand the importance of ensuring affordable, high quality child care and improving access to early childhood education – it's about ensuring the best for our children.

As Governor, I will push progress on these issues by investing more state funding into early childhood education, expanding Virginia Preschool Initiative (VPI) eligibility to three-year-olds, supporting community and private programs, and working to increase pay for our early educators. Regarding child care, I will implement a working families' refundable tax credit, increase access to child care subsidies, and work to meet the growing demand for child care so that more families can return to the workforce.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Carroll Foy

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<sup>1</sup> ["Virginia Education Report." VaOurWay. Last Accessed 2/22/21.](#)

<sup>2</sup> ["Virginia Education Report." VaOurWay. Last Accessed 2/22/21.](#)

## Strengthening Early Childhood Education

Education is the cornerstone to becoming a lifelong learner, leader, and change agent. But growing up in Petersburg, which has one of the highest rates of unaccredited schools, my peers and I did not receive the benefits of a strong education system.

Beyond increased preparedness for kindergarten and early development of social and emotional skills,<sup>3</sup> research shows that children who attend high quality early childhood education programs are less likely to be placed in special education,<sup>4</sup> less likely to be retained in a grade,<sup>5</sup> more likely to graduate from high school,<sup>6</sup> and less likely to be arrested or to struggle with substance abuse as adults.<sup>7</sup> A substantive body of research suggests that “early childhood education produces a profound, lifelong advantage.”<sup>8</sup>

And right now, not enough children in our Commonwealth have access to the various benefits of early childhood education (ECE). According to the state Department of Education, about 40 percent of children “enter kindergarten without being fully ready with the literacy, math, self-regulation, and social skills needed to thrive in school.”<sup>9</sup> To combat this, I will:

- **Implement full-day preschool for at-risk three- and four-year-olds** by expanding VPI eligibility criteria to include three-year-olds and investing more VPI funding per pupil. Increased access gives students more time to develop needed skill sets, helps early childhood educators to identify and address potential learning problems early on, and grants working families peace of mind regarding child care. And while all children benefit from preschool, research shows that “at-risk and disadvantaged students gain more from pre-K programs than their peers.”<sup>10</sup>
- **Ensure dedicated funding streams to support early childhood education.** Without reliable funding plans, we can expect our students and educators, especially from at-risk school districts, to suffer more with less resources. To combat this, my administration will ensure dedicated sources through increased state investment and create a set-aside of 40 percent of marijuana sales revenue to the Virginia Preschool Initiative.
- **Make necessary reforms to the Local Composite Index (LCI).** Localities have voiced repeatedly the fiscal and structural barriers that prevent the full use of state contributions.<sup>11</sup> The inflexibility of the LCI to account for less well-off school districts contributes to unfilled VPI slots<sup>12</sup> and exacerbates the overall education divide. As Governor, I will direct the Virginia Department of Education to evaluate and improve the LCI to ensure equitable and accurate measures regarding a locality’s ability to pay. Additionally, my administration will ensure that the Commonwealth is paying its fair share, freeing up local dollars to pay for other needed expenses like school renovations and broadband infrastructure projects.
- **Promote mixed delivery strategies** to allow community-based and private programs to access state funding. Less than 20 percent of children attend preschool.<sup>13</sup> The VPI experiences high waitlist rates, and at the same time, localities have unfilled VPI slots because of limited physical

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<sup>3</sup> [“Virginia Education Report.” VaOurWay. Last Accessed 2/22/21.](#)

<sup>4</sup> [Megan Feldman. “New Harvard Study Reveals Lasting Benefits of Quality Early Childhood Education.” First Five Years Fund. 3/23/18.](#)

<sup>5</sup> [Megan Feldman. “New Harvard Study Reveals Lasting Benefits of Quality Early Childhood Education.” First Five Years Fund. 3/23/18.](#)

<sup>6</sup> [Megan Feldman. “New Harvard Study Reveals Lasting Benefits of Quality Early Childhood Education.” First Five Years Fund. 3/23/18.](#)

<sup>7</sup> [Kelsey Piper. “Early childhood education yields big benefits – just not the ones you think.” Vox. 10/16/18.](#)

<sup>8</sup> [Kelsey Piper. “Early childhood education yields big benefits – just not the ones you think.” Vox. 10/16/18.](#)

<sup>9</sup> [Marie Albiges. “Virginia will spend a record amount on early childhood education.” Virginia Pilot. 3/02/20.](#)

<sup>10</sup> [Claudio Sanchez. “Pre-K: Decades Worth of Studies. One Strong Message.” NPR. 5/3/17.](#)

<sup>11</sup> [“2020 Children’s Budget Report.” Virginia Early Childhood Foundation. Last Accessed 03/23/21.](#)

<sup>12</sup> [“The Future of Virginia.” VaOurWay. Last Accessed 3/23/21.](#)

<sup>13</sup> [“The State of Preschool 2019.” The National Institute for Early Education Research. Last Accessed 03/24/21.](#)

capacity in the classroom.<sup>14</sup> As Governor, I will work to address unmet needs by supporting non-traditional brick and mortar establishments that serve Virginia’s preschoolers, especially at-risk three- and four-year-olds. My administration will develop inclusive and research-based eligibility guidelines to ensure consistency in outcomes with VPI programs.

- **Increase teacher pay for early childhood educators.** In 2017, national median wages for early educators were at poverty-level, and they were even worse for early educators of color and for early educators who worked with infants and toddlers.<sup>15</sup> And this low compensation doesn’t just affect early educators, as early educators who “face economic stress and inadequate working conditions have more difficulty engaging in high-quality teacher-child interactions that matter most for facilitating children’s learning.”<sup>16</sup> My administration will raise teacher pay for early educators so that our state can effectively recruit and train early educators and work towards guaranteeing ECE.
- **Develop and execute a statewide assessment to ensure high-quality instruction.** While getting Virginia students access to early childhood education is vital, it’s just part of the battle. My administration will develop a statewide assessment and use the data to determine what changes need to be made so that our children are getting the highest quality instruction throughout their ECE journey.

## Improving Access to Child Care

I first ran for office while pregnant with my twin boys, and as I raise my sons here in our Commonwealth, I understand that too many Virginia families are struggling with the high cost of child care. And while this issue affects many in our Commonwealth, it disproportionately impacts working mothers and families of color. A recent study found that “across all states, the price of center-based care exceeds 27 percent of median household income for single working parents, especially families of color,” and in Virginia, single parents pay nearly half of their income for center-based infant child care.<sup>17</sup> The yearly price of center-based child care for two kids “costs a married couple living at or below the federal poverty line over 100 percent of their annual household income.”<sup>18</sup>

That is simply not a sustainable reality, and that is why I have made a clear commitment to ensuring affordable, high-quality child care throughout the Commonwealth. As Governor, I will:

- **Through my Virginia Child Care Access Now (VA CAN) Initiative**, establish a Task Force of state leaders, representatives from child welfare agencies, child care providers, and community advocates to develop a plan to:
  - improve access to and the affordability of child care by soliciting input from underserved populations,
  - establish public-private partnerships with companies to construct new child care facilities,
  - research how child care subsidies are currently being used (and how they have worked in the past),
  - improve compensation to the child care workforce,
  - and study state and federally funded child care and early learning programs.

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<sup>14</sup> [“The Future of Virginia.” VaOurWay. Last Accessed 3/23/21.](#)

<sup>15</sup> [Caitlin McClean, “Increased Compensation for Early Educators: It’s Not Just ‘Nice to Have’ – It’s a Must-Have.” Center for the Study of Child Care Employment. 2/11/20.](#)

<sup>16</sup> [Caitlin McClean, “Increased Compensation for Early Educators: It’s Not Just ‘Nice to Have’ – It’s a Must-Have.” Center for the Study of Child Care Employment. 2/11/20.](#)

<sup>17</sup> [Holly Gambrell, “Virginia Parents Pay More For Infant Child Care Than For Public College Tuition.” Northern Virginia Mag. 12/30/19.](#)

<sup>18</sup> [Holly Gambrell, “Virginia Parents Pay More For Infant Child Care Than For Public College Tuition.” Northern Virginia Mag. 12/30/19.](#)

- **Expand the Working Families Earned Income Tax Credit.** Currently, the EITC is not refundable, meaning that low- to moderate-income residents only receive the amount equal to their income tax, even if their estimated amount exceeds the amount owed in other taxes. This reduction costs working families (about 600,000) upwards of 200 million dollars per year.<sup>19</sup> My administration will pass legislation to eliminate this restriction,<sup>20</sup> so that working families can receive the full value of their state credit and pay for needed expenses like child care.
- **Promote strategies to strengthen and support the child care industry** through background check portability and the use of subsidy contracts.<sup>21</sup> Many working families require child care to return to or enter the workforce. To meet this growing demand, under my administration, state agencies will administer safe and expedient approval processes for qualified individuals and volunteers to fulfill temporary child care needs, leading to the creation of “substitute pools” across the Commonwealth.<sup>22</sup>
- **Increase the value and reach of child care subsidies.** The number of low-income children receiving child care subsidies in Virginia has declined in recent years,<sup>23</sup> with a record 34 percent drop between 2015 and 2018.<sup>24</sup> My administration will work to strengthen access to high quality child care by encouraging child care providers to accept child care subsidies, increasing reimbursement rates where possible, and expanding professional development opportunities for child care providers and early childhood educators through education and training incentives. Additionally, I will push for increased federal funding from the Child Care Development Block Grant.
- **Enact a Quality Rating Improvement System.** Recommended in the [Virginia Education Report](#), this state-level assessment will determine the quality of child care programs and create a pathway for uniform and high-quality outcomes across the Commonwealth. My administration will work towards mandatory participation by child care providers.

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<sup>19</sup> [“Building on What Works: A Refundable EITC Would Support Families in Every District and Locality.” The Commonwealth Institute. 12/19/19.](#)

<sup>20</sup> [“HB 1435: Low-income taxpayers.” Virginia’s Legislative Information System. Last Modified 02/11/20.](#)

<sup>21</sup> [“HB 2086: Child care providers.” Virginia’s Legislative Information System. Last Modified 02/05/21.](#)

<sup>22</sup> [“Child Care Background Check Portability: Supporting the Needs of Working Parents.” ChildCare Aware of Virginia. 01/2021.](#)

<sup>23</sup> [“2019 CCDBG State Snapshots.” Child Care Aware of America. Accessed 02/17/21.](#)

<sup>24</sup> [“For Families Who Need Them Most, Child Care Subsidies Haven’t Always Helped.” WAMU 88.5. 04/23/19.](#)