Creating a Coordinated, Integrated Early Care and Education System: 
State Early Childhood Administration

In 2018, the Bipartisan Policy Center examined how states oversee federal and state funding dedicated to early childhood education, or ECE, programs. Now in 2021, we revisit each state system to understand enacted improvements and emerging challenges in state governance.

As the country adjusts to a new reality of work and home life amid the pandemic, American families are faced with the challenge of finding and affording quality child care, now more than ever. Early learning operates within a fragile business model, in which services cost more than most families can afford to pay. For this reason, states must administer funding with efficiency and effectiveness to ensure families are able to access programs and to maximize the reach of federal and state investments.

States are now responsible to distributing recent COVID-19 relief funding for child care—allocated through three successive relief packages by Congress in 2020—in addition to established funding streams that support multiple early childhood programs. The relief packages are intended to stabilize the fragile system that challenged access to affordable, reliable care. State governments are tasked with coordinating and combining the many different ECE funding streams allocated to them.

For all but one federal program, governors have wide discretion with regard to the administration and coordination of early childhood funding. The Bipartisan Policy Center set out to re-examine the issues of state governance, coordination, and integration by reviewing how states are meeting requirements set by federal statutes and agencies, as well as how states are capitalizing on the opportunity to create efficiency through their governance structures.

With this in mind, BPC is making recommendations at the federal and state level with an eye towards further reducing duplication and improving results for families. These recommendations are summarized in the full report. The following summarizes the findings for Virginia.

More state data, including funding levels and demographic information, can be found at https://bipartisanpolicy.org/report/national-child-care/.

STRENGTHS OF VIRGINIA’S EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION SYSTEM

• Virginia manages four programs serving children -- Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF), the Head Start Collaboration Office, state Pre-K, and IDEA Part B, Section 619 -- under one agency, which improves efficiency and allows for better alignment of eligibility and monitoring requirements and quality improvement activities.

• Virginia’s Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) is mandatory for licensed providers receiving subsidy, which ensures quality of care of subsidized children.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR VIRGINIA’S EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION SYSTEM

• Facilitate cross-agency communication to ensure seamless coordination and transition for IDEA Part C (infants/toddlers) and Part B, Section 619 (3-5 year olds).

• Increase efficiency and cost-effectiveness of monitoring and oversight by aligning the administration of the Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) and state Pre-K with the Child and Adult Care Food Program.

• Ensure the State Advisory Council for Early Education and Care, mandated by the Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007, is fulfilling its required activities, including conducting a statewide needs assessment on the quality and availability of early care and learning programs.
Flow of Federal Early Childhood Funds: Virginia

**KEY:**
- Funding mandated for State Departments of Education
- Funding provided directly to local organizations
- State does not receive funding
- Partnership with funding provided by state department or agency

**Virginia Office of the Governor**

- **Department of Health & Human Services**
  - Office of Head Start
  - Office of Child Care - CCDF
  - Office of Family Assistance - TANF

- **Department of Agriculture**
  - Food & Nutrition Service - CACFP

- **Department of Education**
  - Office of Early Childhood - Part B, Section 619
  - Head Start State Collaboration Office
  - Virginia Preschool Initiative (state Pre-K)
  - CCDF

- **Department of Social Services**
  - Division of Benefit Programs - TANF

- **Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services**
  - CACFP

- **Office of the Governor**
  - Virginia Early Childhood Foundation - Virginia Quality (VQ)

**Local Institutions**

- Early Head Start-Child Care Partnership - Grants to local organizations
- Local Head Start Programs

**Virginia Early Childhood Foundation**

- Virginia Quality Birth through Five (VQBS)

**Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS)**

Virginia’s pilot program, VQ, was statewide, voluntary, and ended in June 2022. VQ ratings under VECF will remain publicly available through fall of 2024 at which time the first quality ratings under the new VQB5 system will be made public. As of fall 2023, the VQB5 program is required for all programs that receive public funding and voluntary for all else.

**State Advisory Council (SAC)**

Virginia launched its inaugural Early Childhood Advisory Committee in 2021. The Committee is responsible for advising the Board of Education on all matters related to Virginia’s unified early childhood system and serves as the state’s official advisory council.
BPC reviewed the following federally-funded programs to assess the efficiency and integration of Virginia’s early care and education system.

- Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF)
- Head Start
- Child Care Access Means Parents in School (CCAMPIS)
- Early Intervention Program for Infants and Toddlers with Disabilities (IDEA Part C)
- Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five (PDG B-5)
- Preschool Grants for Children with Disabilities (IDEA Part B, Section 619)
- Promise Neighborhoods
- Striving Readers Comprehensive Literacy
- Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)
- Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)
- Early Head Start – Child Care Partnership (EHS-CCP)
- Race to the Top, Early Learning Challenge