

## ATTACHMENT 2

# SYNTHESIS OF STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

## CHILD CARE STUDY 2022

### WHAT WE DID

To conduct the analysis, the issue group organized into regional teams overlaying education regions with LWV local leagues. We then created three different questionnaires to be used with three different audience groups. One to be used with parents, one for childcare educators and administrators and one for community officials working on issues with children. We sought a variety of perspectives with respect to individual demographics in respondents, size and type of childcare facility and urban/rural settings. In total, we were able to interview 41 individuals across all regions and across the stakeholder groups. Insights from these interviews have been incorporated throughout the findings section of the

<b>Educational Region</b>	<b>LWV Local Leagues</b>
Central	Richmond Metro Area
Eastern	South Hampton Road
Peninsula	Williamsburg Metro Area
Fairfax	Arlington & Alexandria, Fairfax, Falls Church, Loudon
Northern	Prince William & Fauquier Area, Fredricksburg
Valley	Charlottesville Area
Piedmont	Lynchburg, Roanoke Valley
Western	Montgomery County, Washington County

We interviewed 41 stakeholders. These stakeholders included 11 providers, 8 community officials, 12 parents, and 10 Licensing Inspectors and Administrators from the Virginia Department of Education, Division of Early Childhood Care and Education, Office of Child Care Health and Safety. The interviews were guided by protocols developed by the Childcare Issue Group. These protocols can be found in an appendix to this document. The interviews took about 30 minutes each. They were conducted between November 2021 and May 2022.

The eleven providers were from the following regions: Fairfax, Valley, Eastern, Central, and Piedmont. They were primarily childcare center teachers or administrators. We also interviewed a home visiting provider, an in-home childcare provider, and afterschool providers. Five of the eleven providers offered infant care and eight providers were affiliated with organizations that provided care to more than 50 children.

The eight community officials were from the following regions: Fairfax, Valley, Eastern, and Central. We interviewed county managers for the Virginia Childcare Subsidy Program, a county director of

the Office of Children, a county director of childcare services, a pediatrician, a city human services analyst working in childcare, and the directors of community organizations supporting childcare.

The twelve parents we interviewed were from the following regions: Fairfax, Valley, Eastern and Piedmont. Five of the families had infants (0-2), nine had preschoolers (3-5), and seven had school age children (6-12). In eight of the households, all adults present worked full-time.

The 10 staff members of the Office of Childcare Health and Safety we interviewed included 6 Licensing Administrators and 4 Licensing Inspectors. They represented four regions of the state: Fairfax, Valley, Eastern, and Western. The Licensing Administrators supervise the inspectors, issue the licenses in their regions, meet with providers, and make referrals to home office for sanctions. The inspectors are on the road visiting childcare centers, Head Start centers, religious exempt facilities, and afterschool care. Their role is monitor health and safety issues in the centers.

## WHAT WE LEARNED

**There is consensus on quality childcare.** Parents, providers, community leaders, and state regulators all agree on some basic components of quality childcare:

- High quality, trained staff that is well compensated,
- Ongoing improvement in quality of education for all ages,
- Affordable care for all, and
- Safe, healthy environments including appropriate child to adult ratios.

**Staffing is the most pressing problem.** In discussing staffing, we address both retaining current staff and hiring new staff members. For current staff, we heard that they are "...overworked, underpaid, and overwhelmed." Issues facing childcare providers and their staff members include the following.

- Staffing problems cause centers to make difficult adjustments to meet required teacher-child ratios. The adjustments increase the stress in centers. For example, directors may be required to take on teacher roles to keep the center within the requirements. Staff may be working longer hours.
- The COVID pandemic has placed a significant stress on childcare workers and providers. With the ever-changing rules and regulations, providers must negotiate between the requirements, the children's needs, and parental wishes.
- Many childcare workers were laid off during the pandemic and have not returned to the field. The intense demand for workers now means that these individuals can go to better paying jobs with better benefits.
- Difficulty staffing the centers means that some new hires are unexperienced and untrained in childcare. This increases the stress at the center.
- Care providers are stretched financially. Any increase in compensation for childcare educators means an increase in tuition and may not be enough to convince workers to

stay. Moreover, traditional keys to employee retention such as opportunities for further training and advancement require resources that providers do not have.

- The COVID pandemic also changed the face of early childhood education. Mask wearing and social distancing require these workers to reconceptualize what it means to care for small children. In addition, children returning to group care are facing problems transitioning from home. Centers are seeing increased behavioral problems and other issues that workers are not trained to handle. These factors increase stress at a center.
- The current high inflation rate is hurting everyone but especially providers whose resources are stretched to the limit and workers who are not paid well to begin with. Workers are leaving the industry.

Difficulty in hiring new staff members was also a theme that ran through many of our interviews.

- There are few applicants.
- Typical recruitment methods are not working. Those hiring are using alternative methods to find staff members including networking with other centers and reaching to high school and community college programs.
- Applicants often agree to an interview and then do not show up, likely because they have found a better job.
- Providers indicated that pre-hiring requirements were costly for potential staff or the centers and risky because new hires may decide not to show. One interviewee suggested that portable background checks, medical checks, streamlined expectations and sufficient time to complete these activities would be helpful.
- The costs of training and credentialing staff was burdensome to centers already stretched thin.

**Accessibility remains an issue for a variety of reasons.** Cost is an important barrier to accessible childcare. While parents indicated that they understand that childcare workers needed to be reasonably paid, they told us that cost was an issue for them. They told us that the assumption that everyone could pay the market rate was incorrect and that parents need help. One community leader told us that even in the wealthier areas of the state, the high cost of living makes childcare unaffordable.

These comments stem from current cost assessments but cost also affects accessibility to high quality childcare. We were told that “Parents can’t bear the burden of paying for quality;” but neither can the centers where resources are stretched thin to increase worker compensation. Facility resources for implementing quality activities affect the kind of care the children receive.

The Virginia Childcare Subsidy Program is an important effort in Virginia to mitigate the barriers of cost in accessing childcare. We heard that this program needed to be expanded even further to

ensure that all have access to childcare. More programs need to be encouraged to participate. Centers may not participate in the subsidy program or there may be a limited number of subsidy spots for children resulting in fewer places for children than are needed. This may result in parents who qualify for the program not being able to find a place for their children.

**Children with special needs require attention.** Meeting the needs of children with special needs was mentioned by interviewees from several groups describing children in all age groups. They told us that teachers are not trained to address the needs of these children and many do not have time to focus on the children because of staffing shortages. The interviewees described children who do not speak English, children with learning differences, children who have experienced trauma, children experiencing behavioral problems, children with autism, and children experiencing mental health problems.

**Parents want and need more flexibility.** Our parents specifically told us that they needed more flexibility in childcare options and methods for paying for childcare. They told us they needed more information on available support of childcare costs and how to access that. The cost of care was a considerable burden to some of the families. And, they wanted more options for support, a rethinking of how childcare is paid for. They also stressed the importance of more flexible hours and days open for parents who work nontraditional hours or whose workplaces do not follow school calendars.

**Finally, we heard that the root of many of these issues is that our culture does not value the contribution of childcare providers.** Interviewees told us that childcare workers are not valued for what they do likely because their work is viewed as babysitting not education. That there is little community understanding of the critical importance of early quality care and what young children really need. A community official summed up the situation by saying that the government has to make a choice to invest in childcare if we want to provide the ideal childcare situation to all our State's young children.