

OVERVIEW OF CHILD CARE STUDY AND CONSENSUS PROCESS

INTRODUCTION

In 2021, the newly formed child care issue group identified a need to update the LWV-VA's study to more fully reflect the many aspects of what it takes to establish and maintain a thriving early childhood care and education system for young children (0-5), afterschool children (6-12), parents, and childcare educators. The issue group completed its study in September 2022 which included interviews with over 50 stakeholders representing parents, providers and community officials, a comprehensive literature review, and data analysis to explore the accessibility, affordability, effectiveness, safety and equitability of Virginia's current child care system. Consensus reports were returned from local Leagues between November 2022 and February 2023.

OVERVIEW OF THE CHILD CARE STUDY

The study found that child care for children age 0-6 in Virginia is woefully inaccessible, meeting only 57% of projected demand. Similarly, for every child that attends an after-school summer program, four others would do so if it was available and affordable. There aren't enough providers, especially in rural counties, for infant care and for after-school programs. This lack of access is largely driven by the low pay available for child care educators with compensation often trailing hourly rates earned by fast food and retail workers while requiring higher levels of education. Child care is also unaffordable to hundreds of thousands of families, requiring parents making the median wage or below to spend up to 30% of their incomes on childcare. This means women especially leave the workforce while children aren't adequately prepared for kindergarten and miss out on the benefits of after-school enrichment activities.

After years of treating child care like glorified babysitting, Virginia is taking steps to improve the quality of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) for children 0-6 by rolling out quality standards. Yet many private providers are exempt from participating. This means it remains to be seen how much these standards will address the issue that 42% of Virginia's kindergarteners began the 2021-2022 school year below the expected levels for kindergarten entry. Virginia's child care system also fails to meet the needs of all children equitably. Black, Hispanic, rural, neurologically divergent and children who speak English as a second language all trail behind others in terms of participating and benefiting from ECCE and after-school opportunities.

To address these issues, the study sought to explore various policy solutions and organized these by stakeholder group. We found that:

For parents, especially black, Hispanic, and low-income parents, the most important variables affecting whether they lean in to paid work or stay home to care for their child(ren), include the supply of care options and how affordable these options are. To ensure sufficient supply and affordability, the Government needs to help establish more providers while offsetting the cost of care for parents.

For child care providers, the single most important variable affecting their ability to deliver quality care and remain operational in Virginia is the availability of qualified staff. The shortage of staff is driven by low compensation compared to other occupations, but the only way that compensation can increase is if the Government increases its investments in the industry because providers' fees are constrained by what parents can afford.

For young children (0-6), the most important variables affecting whether they are safe and learn requisite social-emotional skills to be ready for kindergarten involve the quality of care they receive, the health and safety standards practiced in their care settings, and how equitably they are treated by those providing care. To address these variables, the Government needs to expand the adoption and adherence to quality and safety standards while streamlining equity considerations in policy and funding decisions.

For school age children (6-12), the most important variable affecting whether they have a safe and nurturing place to go after school is related to the accessibility and affordability of after-school programs. To address these issues, the Government needs to directly fund quality after-school programs that students can easily access and all parents can afford.

OVERVIEW OF THE CONSENSUS PROCESS

The Issue Group shared 10 questions with local leagues organized by our stakeholder groups and considering issues of access, affordability, viability, quality, safety and equity. We received detailed responses from 13 leagues. There was overwhelming consensus on most questions and majority consensus on all questions. A table of all responses is included on the next page. Many leagues offered helpful comments and suggestions that the issue group has incorporated in the suggested position update. Particular comments worth noting include:

- Clarification that the highest earning parents should not receive subsidies
- Clarification that the maximum fees a parent is responsible for should be tied to percentage of income rather than a fixed amount
- Removal of any reference to “mixed delivery” and a clarification that no public funds be spent on private pre-schools which is in conflict with the LWV’VA’s position that public funds should not be spend on private institutions
- Clarification that any support offered directly to providers should be tied to quality and should primarily be spent on raising teacher pay

CONSENSUS RESPONSES

LOCAL LEAGUE	PARENTS			PROVIDERS		YOUNG CHILDREN (0-5)			SCHOOL CHILDREN (6-12)	
	1: Affordability	2: Accessibility	3: Equity	4: Sustainability	5: Viability	6: Accessibility	7: Quality, Health & Safety	8: Equity	9: Affordability & Access	10: Quality & Equity
Arlington & Alexandria	Yes*	Yes	Yes*	Yes*	Yes*	Yes	Yes*	Yes*	Yes	N/A
Charlottesville	No*	Yes	Yes	No*	Yes	No*	Yes*	Yes	Yes	Yes
Fairfax	No Consensus*	Yes*	Yes*	Yes*	Yes*	Yes*	No Consensus	Yes*	Yes*	Yes*
Falls Church	No Consensus*	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes*	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Fredericksburg	Yes	Yes	Yes	No*	Yes*	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Loudoun County	Yes*	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes*	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Lynchburg*	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Montgomery County	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Prince William Fauquier	No*	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes*	Yes*	Yes	Yes	Yes
Richmond	Yes	Yes*	Yes	Yes*	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Roanoke Valley	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes*	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
South Hampton Roads	Yes*	Yes*	Yes*	Yes*	Yes*	No Consensus*	Yes*	Yes	Yes*	Yes*
Washington County	Yes*	Yes*	Yes*	Yes*	Yes*	Yes*	Yes*	Yes*	Yes	Yes
Williamsburg	Yes*	Yes	Yes*	Yes*	Yes	Yes*	Yes*	Yes	Yes	Yes
TOTAL	9	13	13	11	13	11	12	13	13	12

