



Early Childhood Education Working Group

2022 REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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Introduction



In the fall of 2019, the University of Virginia created the President's Council on UVA-Community Partnerships ("the President's Council"). The goal of the Council, in the words of the Final Report, is to "focus on implementing interventions and strategies that lead to demonstrable results that community members can feel and experience in their lives." Following this charge, the newly created President's Council established five working groups that included both University and community members to develop recommendations for action in the four priority areas: Pipelines & Pathways and Local Economy, to focus on jobs and wages, as well as Affordable Housing, Public Health, and Early Childhood Education.

The impetus for improving access to high-quality early childhood education is indicated by data about the need, lived experience, as well as disparate educational attainment in Central Virginia. Low-income families have very few opportunities to access high-quality education before four years of age. In addition, there are fewer slots than are needed for preschool services for children who are poor or near poor. Data from Charlottesville/Albemarle and the surrounding areas indicate there are over 8,000 childcare slots needed

CHARLOTTESVILLE/ALBEMARLE DATA*

OVER 8,000

Childcare slots needed to meet current demand

**OVER \$100
MILLION**

In lost business revenue due to inadequate availability of childcare.

*(Virginia Early Childhood Foundation (VECF), n.d.)

to meet current demand and that there has been over \$100 million in lost business revenue due to inadequate availability of childcare (Virginia Early Childhood Foundation (VECF), n.d.).

Charlottesville, like many school divisions, reports seeing “persistent achievement differences — often along lines of race and socioeconomic status — in areas such as standardized testing, diploma type earned, [and] enrollment in advanced classes.” (Charlottesville City Schools, n.d.). For example, in 2021 in Charlottesville and Albemarle, 36% and 38% of students began the school year below the expected level for kindergarten entry (<https://www.e3va.org/locality-readiness-data/>). Across Virginia, a comparison of school readiness data across demographic subgroups highlights disproportionately higher rates of below-benchmark scores among historically marginalized students (Virginia Kindergarten Readiness Program (VKRP), 2021).

Participants among several focus groups held during the early formation of the President’s Council also highlighted the need for this work: three of the four focus groups discussed their desire for not only “affordable, on-Grounds childcare for low-wage workers,” but also the University’s facilitation of improved access to and communications about childcare and other health-related and educational resources.

The Working Group met regularly from the fall of 2021 through the fall of 2022 to ensure the initial charge captured the need appropriately, given the timing of the 2019 coronavirus pandemic. The group reviewed evidence-based practices to support high-quality early care and education experiences for children from historically and currently marginalized groups, including children of color, Dual Language Learners, and children with special needs. Members of the group shared current practices from the local community that have been successful in hiring, retaining, and supporting early childhood educators, in addition to challenges that they are currently facing.

The group also discussed current statewide early childhood initiatives, for example, the Virginia Literacy Act (Virginia Department of Education (VDOE), 2022), the Virginia Kindergarten Readiness Program (VKRP, n.d.), Virginia Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation (UVA School of Education and Human Development, n.d.) and the Preschool Development Grant Birth to Five (PDG B-5; VECF, 2021), in considering ways that our recommendations to the President’s Council could be distinct from, but aligned with, ongoing statewide initiatives.

The group reviewed survey data gathered by Dr. Daphna Bassok through the Study of Education through Partnerships at the University of Virginia to develop a broader understanding of the experiences of early childhood educators and administrators (Bassok, Michie, & the Study of Early Education through Partnerships at the University of Virginia, 2022) both statewide and locally. Finally, the group mapped recommendations from the Pipelines and Pathways Working Group that aligned with opportunities.

In this report, we detail background research that provides the foundation for our recommendations, the charge for the group from the President's Council, the scope of work, and recommendations.

IN 2021 IN CHARLOTTESVILLE AND ALBEMARLE*

36%

Of students in **Albemarle** began the school year below the expected level for kindergarten entry.

38%

Of students in **Charlottesville** began the school year below the expected level for kindergarten entry.

*(<https://www.e3va.org/locality-readiness-data/>)

SCHOOL READINESS ACROSS VIRGINIA*

A comparison of school readiness data across demographic subgroups highlights **disproportionately higher rates of below-benchmark scores among historically marginalized students.**

*(Virginia Kindergarten Readiness Program (VKRP), 2021)

Background

Teacher Training and Professional Development



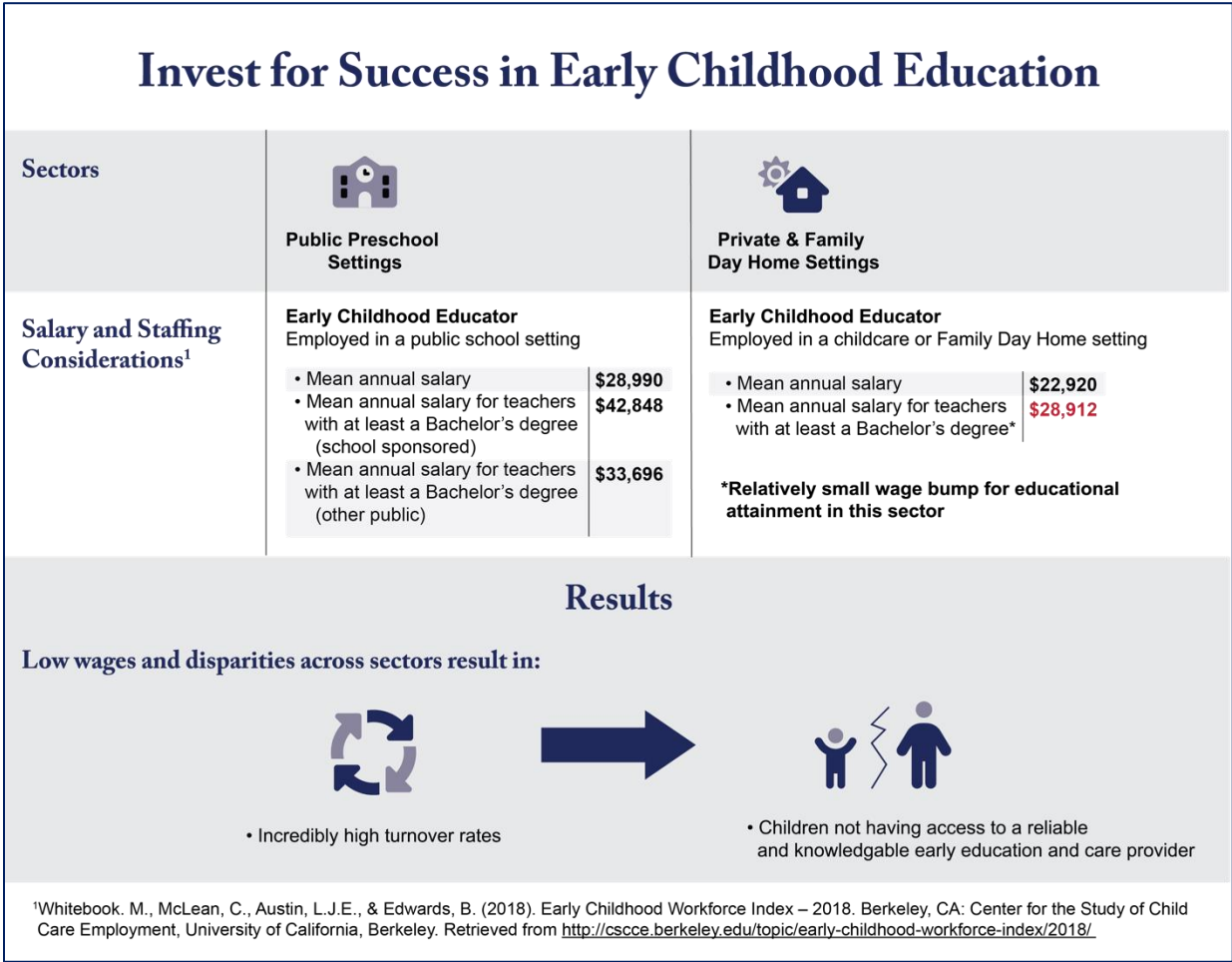
Having a well-qualified, supported, and consistent early care and education (ECE) workforce is critical in ensuring that young children receive experiences early in life that help them grow and thrive (Institute of Medicine (IOM) and National Research Council (NRC), 2015). However, historically, the ECE workforce has been characterized as having low-education, low-compensation, and low-stability (Bassok, Fitzpatrick, Loeb, & Paglayan, 2013). This is particularly true for educators of children with special needs and Dual Language Learners.

There are not enough educators with specialized training in instructional strategies that are specific to Dual Language Learners (Torre Gibney, Kelly, Rutherford-Quach, Ballen Riccards, & Parker, 2021). Similarly, children with disabilities who are from families with low-incomes receive lower quality care than their typical developing peers (Wall, Kisker Peterson, Carta & Jeon, 2006). While there is a shortage of early childhood educators more generally, the need is particularly great with regards to educators with training related to Dual Language Learners (Putman, Hansen, Walsh, & Quintero, 2016) and special education (Pennington McVey & Trinidad, 2019).

The field has long studied the science of child development and the competencies and professional learning experiences that support educators to provide high-quality experiences for young children (IOM and NRC, 2015). However, access to and funding for professional learning experiences remain fragmented. Educators often can't access professional development, training, and credentialing opportunities (Warner-Richter, Paschall, Tout, & Lowe, 2020). Teacher-child ratios do not allow educators to leave the classroom, so there is no opportunity to engage in coaching or consultation that could improve practice (MELC, 2016). Many early childhood educators are paid hourly, can't take time off for additional training, and there is no access to substitute teachers due lack of funding and issues with a depleted workforce (Rous, Singleton, & Howard, 2014).

When compensation and financial support are available for training opportunities and college courses, ECE professionals in both center and home-based settings are much more likely to engage in these experiences. For example, results from the 2012 National Survey of Early Care and Education showed that home-based teachers and caregivers who received financial support were more than three times as likely to enroll in a college course than those who did not receive this type of support (Warner-Richter et al., 2020). However, even when support is available to engage in training and PD, in some ECE sectors there are not mechanisms in place whereby if educators obtain additional training and professional development, they are better compensated because there are not additional funds for increased wages (Coffey & Khatrar 2022). Not surprisingly, educators who obtain additional training and education often leave their positions for higher paying jobs (Kaplan & Mead, 2017), leading to turnover, instability, and programs with decreased capacity to serve young children (see Figure 1).

Figure 1
Investments Needed for Success in Early Childhood Education



Teacher Workforce and Compensation

Nationally, early childcare providers, who are disproportionately women of color, earn substantially less than K–12 educators, and over half rely on public assistance to make ends meet (Whitebook, McLean, Austin, & Edwards, 2018). In 2019 in Virginia, the median wage for a child care worker was \$10.96/hour. Virginia early educators with a bachelor’s degree are paid 22.4 percent less than their colleagues in the K-8 system. The poverty rate for early educators in Virginia is 16.4 percent, much higher than for Virginia workers in general (8.2 percent) and 7.9 times as high as for K-8 teachers (2.1 percent) (Gould, Whitebook, Mokhiber, & Austin, 2020). Recent data from a statewide survey of Virginia childcare providers and teachers suggests that turnover, even before the Covid-19 pandemic, was high in child care centers, and even higher where pay was lower (Bassok et al., 2022). In responding to an open-ended question about why they left the field of early childhood education, a surveyed teacher responded, “It’s a sad state of affairs when those entrusted with teaching our children cannot support themselves on the wages offered. I suppose we’ll just keep hoping that high quality professionals will continue to accept that poverty is the cost of caring” (Bassok & Weisner, 2022, p. 6). The pandemic has exacerbated these challenges. Nearly all childcare center directors in Charlottesville-Albemarle and surrounding counties are struggling with staffing, and many directors are reporting negative impacts due to hiring challenges such as turning families away and hiring less qualified applicants (Bassok et al., 2022). ECE Working Group members who work in local ECE settings have described similar challenges.

This is a nationally broken system, but UVA could invest locally to illustrate that if there is funding in the system, it could improve experiences for children. The Working Group’s recommendations in this report are centered around key investments that UVA could



“It’s a sad state of affairs when those entrusted with the teaching our children cannot support themselves on the wages offered.”

- **Surveyed Teacher,**
Bassock & Weisner, 2022, p. 6

make to support high-quality ECE experiences for young children in our community. Broadly, we suggest investing in training and professional development opportunities, and the supports necessary for the workforce to engage in these opportunities, that will enhance the quality of early education. We also recommend building on the state’s incentive model with a local incentive model that provides salary increases for additional training and staying within the ECE field.

Charge

The President's Council for the Early Childhood Education (ECE) Working Group articulate the following goal: *"leverage the larger local and statewide ECE efforts (without being redundant with what has already occurred, given large new state initiatives) to improve equity in early childhood education, with expectations that young children (0-5) in our community who are from low-income backgrounds and children of color experience an effective, high-quality early childhood education, including supports for their academic development, social-emotional development, and mental health and well-being."*

The Working Group added to this goal by recognizing that the early childhood care and education system is complex and that changes to any one part of it affects other parts. The livelihoods of the women, many of whom are Black and Brown, who comprise the workforce may be affected by our work. With this in mind, we considered the inter-relatedness of the issues for children, families, and educators/providers.

Scope of Work

- Given that much of the ECE teacher workforce earns less than a living wage, provide recommendations toward extending the living wage commitment (UVA, City) to local ECE centers to protect the investment in education, training, and PD by professionalizing the wages early childhood educators receive and increasing retention.
- Acknowledge that the pandemic has increased the complexity and stress of educators' and administrators' jobs in ways that have impacted their mental health and well-being. Identify potential UVA-community collaborations that could help support teachers and administrators.
- Gather information about current compensation practices at local private and public preschools and ECE centers.
- Identify potential high leverage UVA-community collaborations that have the power to increase access to effective, high-quality early childhood education experiences for poor and minority children with an emphasis on teacher training (pre- and in-service) and curriculum.
- Determine the viability of a program that removes barriers for early education degree students from the local community, incentivizes local placement, and provides professional support to improve retention.

Deliverables

1. Recommendations about expanded access to placement and retention of qualified, trained, and supported early childhood educators (including supports for mental health and well-being) in the local community.
2. Recommendations on the need to appropriately compensate early childhood educators so there is equitable access to highly qualified teachers who stay in the field.
3. Recommendations around the provision of services for children with special needs, particularly for young children in private and mixed delivery settings, that meet the needs of communities served.
4. Recommendations around the provision of services for Dual Language Learners.
5. Identification of one or two starting projects related to training and supporting ECE workers where UVA and the community will collaborate to increase effective, high-quality educational experiences for Black and Brown children from low-income backgrounds.

Recommendations

1. **Expand access to placement and retention of qualified, trained, and supported early childhood educators in the local community.**
 - A. Partner with ongoing initiatives that are being offered through UVA's School of Education and Human Development (SEHD) and the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) to offer free coursework, training, and practice-based coaching, subsidized through University funds, to local ECE providers or individuals who are interested in entering the ECE profession. Core to this recommendation and aligned with the recommendations from the Pipelines and Pathways Working Group, we recommend that there be specific outreach to employees of the University, its affiliates and contractors, to make these training and professional development opportunities known and available to this group of individuals.
 - a. The School of Continuing and Professional Studies and the SEHD currently offers a concentration in early childhood that includes 18 credits comprising six required courses ([School of Continuing and Professional Studies](#)). Courses develop students' foundational knowledge and skills in early childhood. We request tuition waivers or some other mechanism for local early childcare providers to be able to take these courses for free.
 - b. Researchers at the Center for Advanced Study of Teaching and Learning (CASTL) within SEHD have developed evidence-based coaching programs to support high-quality teacher child interactions in ECE classrooms ([AELL Coaching](#)), and to support young children's mental health and social-emotional development through an [Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation \(ECMHC\) Pilot](#). We request funding to hire and support coaching and consultation staff to support expanded ECE Coaching and ECMHC for free to all local childcare providers.
 - c. The Virginia Literacy Act (VLA; VDOE, 2022), passed in 2022 by Virginia's General Assembly, is being implemented to improve literacy outcomes for Virginia students. SEHD's [Virginia Literacy Partnerships](#) is partnering with the VDOE to ensure that educators are using evidence-based literacy curricula, assessing students using approved literacy screeners, using data to inform instruction and intervention, and engaging in training on evidence-based literacy instruction. The VLA specifies that every reading specialist "will coordinate and oversee intervention for students not meeting literacy benchmarks, and will develop and monitor student progress on student reading plans..." To support this work, we request tuition reimbursement for students to support high-quality training of local Reading Specialists. We also request funds to develop and teach a course that could be offered for free to local early childhood educators on the science of reading.
 - d. There is a great need for a system that provides teachers with access to high-quality professional development targeting specific teaching competencies. But offering high-quality professional development is not sufficient. We must also move to certifying that teachers who have participated in this PD have actually gained these teaching competencies. There remains a significant need for ways to certify that all teachers have the skills they need to support students' learning and development (IOM and NRC, 2015). One innovative strategy to meet this need is to develop a system of microcredentials for teachers and other professionals. Microcredentials, also known as digital badges, provide documentation that teachers have learned about and obtained specific teaching skills. Over time, teachers can accrue a set of microcredentials that

demonstrate the depth of their knowledge and expertise around any number of areas (Gamrat et al., 2014). They offer a complement to other efforts in more traditional higher education efforts as they are targeted primarily towards teachers who might have formal degrees but may not have all the knowledge and expertise they need to succeed as teachers. They also respond to the changing educational landscape by meeting the diverse needs of the modern workforce – and early efforts in the teacher education space are promising (Gibson et al., 2016). We request support to establish a system for providing credit-based microcredentials to early childhood educators. We also request funding for a platform through which learners can participate in the microcredentials and receive digital badges if they have achieved mastery. Finally, we request support to encourage the Provost's Office to approve a pathway for microcredentialing and stackable credentials, and approval from the Board of Visitors for a tuition and fee structure for credit-bearing microcredentials.

- e. For all training, professional development, and consultation, we request funding to facilitate educators' participation in these opportunities. ECE programs and educators need 1) paid time off of their jobs to attend, 2) funding for programs to hire substitutes so teachers can attend, and 3) if the training are on weekends or evenings, childcare must be offered.

2. Appropriately compensate early childhood educators so there is equitable access to highly qualified teachers who stay in the field.

- A. Supplement teacher compensation through direct payment to teachers to improve early educator compensation with the goal of recruiting and retaining more qualified early childhood educators. A Teacher Compensation Initiative, [RecognizeB5](#), is currently being implemented at the state level, and evaluation results suggest that this has been an effective approach to educator retention. In an experimental evaluation of the impacts of financial supports for early educators, results showed that teachers who received payments were substantially less likely to leave their sites (Bassok et al., 2022). We suggest implementing a similar initiative at the local level to supplement current wages of ECE professionals in our community.
- B. The [School of Education and Human Development](#) currently offers several paths to becoming a teacher including four-year degree programs in elementary education, special education, and early childhood education. Additionally, the SEHD offers a one-year Post-Graduate Master of Teaching (PGMT) in Elementary, English as a Second Language, Secondary, and Special Education, as well as online Master of Teaching options in ESL and Special Education. There are very few programs that incentivize teaching in Virginia and the local community. African American Teaching Fellows (AATF) is the only program specifically tied to the local community. We recommend providing financial incentives for graduates who commit to teaching in ECE settings within the local community for a certain period of time, upon graduation. This could potentially be set up as a “sister” program to AATF using a parallel model with a slightly different mission.
- C. The Pipelines and Pathways working group suggested the creation of a UVA entity to assist with opportunity navigation based on seeker's skills and interests. They suggested expanding UVA's Talent Flex function to include a UVA Navigator role to match the skills and interests of job-seekers with available entry level job opportunities. “The UVA Navigator would assist with shadowing and mentorship opportunities, which is valuable to all job-seekers but could be especially useful to job-seekers with disabilities.” We recommend a similar entity (or possibly the same with expanded functioning) that would help individuals find and fill local ECE educator roles identified by area

agencies and schools. These individuals can and should be encouraged to engage in the training and professional development opportunities outlined under Recommendation 1.

3. Recommendations around the provision of services for children with special needs, particularly for young children in private and mixed delivery settings, that meet needs of communities served.

- A. In sections 1-2 above, we outline recommendations related to training and compensation for early childhood educators that would provide coursework and professional development related to understanding and supporting the needs of diverse learners and would help to appropriately compensate early childhood educators to stay in the field. These recommendations would have direct impacts on the provision of high-quality care and education for children with special needs who are served in local ECE settings. We recommend that UVA create a special education teacher pipeline through [existing degree programs](#) including: BSED-Special Education, MT-Special Education, and the Special Education General Curriculum Graduate Teaching Certificate. As recommended in section 1 above, offering free or low-cost coursework and training for individuals interested in teaching young children with disabilities could help address the special education teacher shortage. And per section 2, providing financial incentives for graduates who commit to teaching within the local community for a certain period of time, upon graduation could help entice special education graduates to teach locally.

4. Recommendations around the provision of services for Dual Language Learners.

- A. Charlottesville has about 600 English Language/Multilingual Learners, and Albemarle County serves over 1,200 (Albemarle County Public Schools, n.d.). There are not enough educators with specialized training in instructional strategies that are specific to Dual Language/Immersion education to serve Dual Language Learners in our local community. UVA and specifically the SEHD has the opportunity to help fill this void in our local community by offering an endorsement for DLL teachers. This will require the following resources for the design and eventual implementation of this program at low or no cost to local ECE providers:
 - a. Support to a faculty or staff person to design courses for the endorsement.
 - b. 0.5 FTE to coordinate the program with the Curriculum Instruction and Special Education department with the SEHD. Once the program is developed, courses should be offered for free or low cost for local ECE providers.

5. Identification of one or two starting projects related to training and supporting ECE workers where UVA and the community will collaborate to increase effective, high-quality educational experiences for Black and Brown children from low-income backgrounds.

- A. Even after decades of research, Black and Brown children continue to be disproportionately represented in discipline referrals, suspensions, and expulsions (Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010; Vincent, Sprague, & Tobin, 2012). Additionally, Black students, compared with their White peers, are less likely to experience high-quality early care and education (Barnett, Carolan, & Johns, 2013; Early et al., 2010; Latham, Corcoran, Sattin-Bajaj, & Jennings, 2021), have access to higher level instruction (Desimone & Long, 2010), and are more likely to attend schools with less experienced teachers (Kalogrides & Loeb). The Working Group recommends the development and implementation of a training and coaching program around diversity to meet the needs of Black and Brown children in the classroom (8-10 weeks). The development of the training should incorporate

parent perspectives, and coach observations in the classroom. As part of the training and coaching, teachers should receive a stipend to improve the diversity of materials in their classrooms.

- B. UVA should offer symposia 1-2 times per year for local ECE administrators and educators that includes keynote speakers and training on the implementation of effective approaches to reducing racism and bias and improving learning experiences for young students that lead to positive outcomes for students from historically marginalized backgrounds. Possible topics might include developing an action plan for diversity, equity, and inclusion, adverse childhood experiences and trauma informed care, and culturally responsive teaching. Decisions about what content to incorporate into the symposia should be based on strong input from local community ECE providers and educators.

Recommendations At-A-Glance

1. Expand access to placement and retention of qualified, trained, and supported early childhood educators in the local community.
2. Appropriately compensate early childhood educators so there is equitable access to highly qualified teachers who stay in the field.
3. Increase effective, high-quality educational experiences for children with special needs, Dual Language Learners, and Black and Brown children from low-income backgrounds.



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