

**Bridging the Divide: Higher Education and Early Childhood Leaders’
Position Statement on Early Childhood Teacher Preparation**

We, the undersigned, assert that:

- School readiness for Virginia’s children, the gateway to educational and workforce success, is both an educational and economic imperative. **For Virginia to achieve optimal return on investment in early childhood interventions, quality is non-negotiable.**
- A primary determinant of young children’s learning and development is the capabilities of the adults who interact with and care for them. Since the majority of Virginia’s children ages 0-5 are in households where all parents work, early childhood practitioners are key partners for families in supporting young children’s healthy development during these most formative and foundational years. **Young children – especially those at risk – must have access to high quality early learning experiences, led by highly competent teachers, to have the academic and social-emotional foundations to succeed in school.**
- Because of the diversity and range of early childhood education programs (including but not limited to regulated private child care and publicly funded Head Start or state preschool programs), the early childhood workforce is large and diverse. **The competencies, skills, and knowledge that these professionals need to effectively support the development and learning of very young children (birth to age 5) are distinct from those for teachers of older children – not lesser, but different.**
- As well, the requisite credentials for lead teachers, as stipulated by different regulatory authorities, differ drastically. This creates a structural divide between early education environments regulated by social services and those regulated by education agencies as well as a discrepancy in the required credentials for early educators. This divide has challenged and distracted us from developing a sensible cohesive career pathway for Virginia’s early educators. While there exist various opportunities for early childhood practitioners to earn credit hours and credentials, for practitioners who wish to hone skills specific to teaching young children by achieving ever-increasing credentials, **Virginia has a gap at the baccalaureate level.**
- For incumbent early educators who begin their career pathway at a community college and then choose to pursue a bachelor’s degree, there are two significant roadblocks. First, the existing Associate of Applied Science (AAS) degree in early education does not transfer seamlessly into a bachelor’s degree program, which requires an individual to take an additional year of coursework. Second, Virginia has no early childhood-specific baccalaureate degree program to transfer into, so these students must at best pursue a tangentially related degree and only then move on to early childhood-specific post-baccalaureate or master’s programs. **Especially for a workforce who requires specialized skills yet will earn infamously low wages, this cumbersome pathway is both inefficient and insufficient.**

We believe that the higher education system in Virginia can contribute to near- and long-term solutions to foster and support a high-competency early childhood workforce for the Commonwealth. We have identified root-cause barriers and specific recommendations for a priority goal and relevant action steps. Core principles have guided our vision for efficient and economical higher education pathways for early educators to achieve the distinctive skills and demonstrate mastery through stackable credentials.

Goal Statement: We recommend Virginia’s pursuit of a goal to streamline a career pathway for teachers of children ages birth to 5 that builds core skills early, intentionally, and affordably. This pathway will build on current assets, align with nationally-recognized standards, and award meaningful credentials along the continuum that indicate mastery of core skills as well as provide opportunities for enhancing skills and specialization. Streamlining this career pathway will provide an additional benefit in improving the more traditional education pathway for the early educator workforce.

1. **Asset and Barrier:** While there is an affordable offering of stackable credentials at Virginia's community colleges building important core skills specific to teaching children ages birth to 5, the early childhood coursework and degrees are not offered at all of Virginia's community colleges and may be inconsistent across colleges.

Recommended Short Term Action: Recognize the early childhood associate degree as a critical core credential for early educators in Virginia. Ensure these offerings are readily available to practitioners in all regions of the Commonwealth.

Recommended Long Term Action: Strive for nationally-recognized accreditation of associate degree programs to demonstrate the quality and distinction of these programs for early educators.

2. **Asset and Barrier:** While teacher preparation programs exist at Virginia's universities for educators leading classrooms in grades PK-12, there are few baccalaureate programs in Virginia that are specific to preparing teachers with the skills needed to support the development of children ages birth to 5, and none of these lead to teacher licensure.

Recommended Action: Pilot a) creation of BA programs at Virginia universities that are aligned with nationally accepted standards and take advantage of flexible credit hours for specialized preparation for early educators, and b) develop program-to-program articulation agreements that create a more seamless transfer of the associate degree to the baccalaureate level for early educators, based on a shared set of professional standards, competencies, and student outcomes.

3. **Asset and Barrier:** While there is availability of PK-3 and PK-6 teacher licensure in Virginia, historically, these programs have focused heavily on elementary-aged children, and licenses do not ensure that candidates receive specialized early childhood development preparation and field practice or demonstrate competencies aligned with nationally accepted standards for the early childhood profession.

Recommended Short Term Action: Support the further amendment of currently proposed changes in the PK-3 teacher licensure regulations in consideration by the Virginia Board of Education, to emphasize content and practice mastery specific to ages birth to 5 years old. Differentiate and promote the PK-3 license as the preferred licensure for teachers of children birth to age 8 (as distinct from the PK-6 licensure for teachers of students ages 6-12) for baccalaureate-degreed teachers.

Recommended Long Term Action: Explore the feasibility of development of a birth to age 8 license available to candidates in baccalaureate degree programs.

We believe these recommendations will help bridge the divide and create career and education pathways that are more cohesive and effective for supporting knowledge and skills specific to early childhood development. Improved skill-building and credentialing opportunities for the early childhood workforce, paired with concerted strategies for in-service supports such as specialized training and coaching, will lead to a strong corps of high-quality early educators helping build the brains of the Commonwealth's next generation.

Sincerely,

Virginia's Core Team to the National Academies' Innovation to Incubation Initiative, *August, 2016*

National Academy of Sciences Incubation to Innovation Project

VIRGINIA TEAM ROSTER

Holly Coy
Deputy Secretary of Education
Office of the Governor Terry McAuliffe

Dr. Mark Ginsberg
Dean of Education
George Mason University

Kathy Glazer
President
Virginia Early Childhood Foundation

Dr. Bridget Hamre
Associate Director
Center for Advanced Study of Teaching and Learning
University of Virginia

Dr. Megan Healy
Assistant Vice Chancellor for Academics and Employer Partnerships
Virginia Community College System

Erin McGrath
GEAR UP Senior Coordinator/Program Director
State Council on Higher Education for Virginia

Dr. Sara Miller
Administrative Director of the Early Childhood Development Initiative
Longwood University

Dr. Sharon Morrissey
Vice Chancellor for Academic Services and Research
Virginia Community College System

Alexsis Rodgers
Policy Director
Office of Lieutenant Governor Ralph Northam

Dr. Christine Schull
Professor and Assistant Dean
Early Childhood Education
Northern Virginia Community College Alexandria

Paul Smith
Associate for Student Mobility Policy and Research
State Council on Higher Education for Virginia

Guiding Principles for Virginia's Early Childhood Higher Education Pathway

Adopted by the Virginia Core Team July, 2016

The Virginia early childhood higher education pathway will:

1. Contribute toward a continuum of training, education, technical assistance, and credentials that support and improve practice and career opportunities for early educators working with young children from birth through age 8¹
2. Offer high quality, competency-based, stackable credentials beginning with options at the high school level, spanning community college programs, to undergraduate and graduate level programs in Virginia's colleges and universities¹
3. Improve higher education affordability, access, and articulation opportunities for the early childhood workforce¹
4. Link to state efforts to increase availability, accountability, capacity and demand for early childhood higher education programs¹
5. Increase professional development system integration through alignment of standards, competencies and credentials across birth through age 8 early learning sectors including child care, Head Start, Pre-K, and early grades²
6. Improve quality assurance processes in higher education to provide accountability to professionals, young children and their families, governing bodies, and the public, ensuring that degree and certificate programs are high quality in design and implementation and meet national standards of the profession as well as state requirements²
7. Support increased diversity in the early childhood workforce at all professional levels and across all sectors through the recruitment, retention, and completion of students whose gender, race, language, culture, socioeconomic background, and other characteristics reflect the diversity of children and families served in early childhood education programs²
8. Align with efforts to increase compensation parity for early educators across settings, sectors and age of children served, by adopting a unifying framework of expected knowledge, competency, responsibilities, and qualifications across birth through age 8 settings, sectors, age groups, roles, and adjacent or similar states²
9. Develop and enhance programs in higher education through regular review and revision of requirements and content; and through work with local practice communities to improve program design, facilitate cross-institutional relationships, and identify appropriate and diverse field placements³
10. Be informed by evidence-based research and practice, supports ongoing research and evaluation, and is innovative and responsive to evolving community and state contexts³

These guiding principles build upon the work of:

¹ The July 2015 Upskilling the Early Childhood Workforce Working Paper

² The Virginia state team that participated in the 2015 pilot of NAEYC Indicators of Progress to Support Integrated Early Childhood Professional Development Systems

³ The Virginia state team that participated in the 2016 National Academy of Medicine project and related report Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth through Age 8: A Unifying Foundation