



Introduction

To ensure effective and coordinated Smart Beginnings for all of Virginia's young children, many partners have contributed to a comprehensive plan, with the purpose of building and sustaining a system in Virginia to support parents and families as they prepare their children to arrive at kindergarten healthy and ready to succeed. The plan is designed to provide practical guidelines, including

- ✓ Prioritized goals, measurable objectives and strategies;
- ✓ Outcomes to measure progress;
- ✓ Clear accountability and communication of results.

Guiding principles

The development of this plan was guided by several key principles:

- ✓ Virginia's plan is for *all* children and families, regardless of income, geographic location, race, ethnicity, language, or special needs.
- ✓ Parents and families are the most influential people in a child's life and must be supported by communities and included as primary partners at every level.
- ✓ Families should be partners with stakeholders and service providers in coordinating and evaluating services and supports.
- ✓ Programs and supports must be developmentally, culturally, and linguistically appropriate.
- ✓ Preventive approaches are more economical and effective than costly remediation later in life.
- ✓ Utilization of best practices to deliver high quality early childhood services and programs helps ensure that children are ready to succeed in school and in life.
- ✓ Partnership across all sectors of the community, both public and private, is necessary to ensure the effectiveness and impact of services.
- ✓ It is essential that strengthening and improving the early childhood system proceed collaboratively at both the state and local level, with flexibility to support local decision-making and priorities.
- ✓ Successful transitions into elementary school and beyond sustain the foundation of healthy early childhood development.
- ✓ Virginia's plan is proactive, anticipating the need to address dynamic forces that bring both opportunities and unexpected obstacles and impact future policy goals.

Methodology for making progress and continuous improvement

At the state level, key leadership responsibilities are being recommended for the Governor's Working Group on Early Childhood Initiatives (GWG) in the public sphere and the Virginia Early Childhood Foundation (VECF) in the private sphere. However, building an effective and comprehensive early childhood system of services is collaborative work involving many partners, both private and public. Toward that end, collaborative committees comprised of numerous agencies and organizations will be established in each goal area, as a strategy for continuous monitoring of collective progress, developing shared database capacity for tracking results, and on-going recommendations for further improvements needed.

Goal One: Governance and Financing

All sectors will be engaged in creating and sustaining collaborative structures to ensure an effective early childhood system.

Objective A: Establish and sustain a structure within the executive branch to effectively coordinate the planning, financing, delivery and evaluation of early childhood programs. **(lead partner: GWG)**

Strategies:

- i. Establish working group of senior leaders of relevant agencies and organizations**
- ii. Promote collaborative strategies for the most effective governance and leadership among agencies and organizations**
- iii. Align and integrate service deliveries across agencies and organizations**

Objective B: Create and sustain a statewide public-private entity to consistently guide early childhood initiatives and provide resources, technical assistance, and accountability to local coalitions. **(lead partner: VECF)**

Strategies:

- i. Establish an effective organizational structure for the Virginia Early Childhood Foundation**
- ii. Serve as a centralized source for exchange of information and resources**

Objective C: Increase the capacity of local partnerships working to coordinate, improve, and expand delivery of early childhood programs and services. **(lead partner: local coalitions w. VECF)**

Strategies:

- i. Create local leadership coalitions at the community level**
- ii. Develop local strategic plans to meet identified needs aligned with statewide priorities**
- iii. Create learning communities to share best practices and resources**

Objective D: Increase public-private investments and braid funding streams for maximum impact. **(lead partner: GWG & VECF)**

Strategies:

- i. Maximize available resources and secure sustainable, diversified investment**
- ii. Coordinate state and local level resource development**

Objective E: Ensure accountability with program standards and measurement mechanisms to track identified outcome indicators. **(lead partner: GWG w. School Readiness Task Force)**

Strategies:

- i. Define standards**
- ii. Utilize appropriate assessment instruments and outcome indicators**
- iii. Develop a method for tracking system and child outcomes**

Objective F: Promote a high quality workforce providing services for young children and families. **(lead partner: GWG w. Professional Development Task Force)**

Strategies:

- i. Increase the supply of qualified professionals**
 - a. Conduct or utilize workforce studies to identify gaps and critical shortages
 - b. Promote recruitment and retention strategies in fields and geographic areas with high needs
 - c. Ensure adequate compensation and benefits
- ii. Increase access, availability, and affordability of professional development**
 - a. Create a continuum of training, education, and ongoing professional development
 - b. Expand the capacity of training and education institutions and organizations
 - c. Expand scholarships, loan forgiveness, and other financial incentives

Goal Two: Parent Support and Education

All families of children prenatal to five will have the information and supports they need to promote their child's optimal development and school readiness.

Objective A: Increase access for all families to quality information and supportive services.

Strategies:

- i. Develop effective and efficient methods for providing information to all parents (lead partner: Parent Education Coalition)**
 - a. Increase awareness of state resources such as the New Parent Kit, the 211 Line, and Child Care Resource and Referral
 - b. Increase awareness of community services that promote prevention and inclusion
 - c. Educate parents about high quality early care and education as a support for school readiness
- ii. Equip child- and family-serving providers with information to best serve families. (lead partners: Home Visiting Consortium & Child Abuse and Prevention Plan Group)**
 - a. Increase provider awareness of how to refer to and work with local home visiting services and parent education programs
 - b. Adopt uniform messages across agencies, disciplines, and organizations
- iii. Identify gaps and develop strategies for expanding services.**

Objective B: Increase the quality of parenting support programs.

Strategies:

- i. Implement best practice models, promising practices, and evidence-based family support programs (lead partners: VECF & AAP)**
 - a. Provide professional development opportunities for child care and health professionals on best practices for supporting parents of all children
 - b. Promote and support use of best practices and researched based models in local coalitions
 - c. Involve families in the design and evaluation of services
 - d. Increase diverse parent representation on local and state-level coalitions and planning
 - e. Implement strategies to sustain parental involvement
- ii. Increase collaboration and coordination of services at the state and local levels (lead partners: Library & VECF)**

Goal Three: Early Care and Education

All families will have access to high quality early care and education.

Objective A: Improve the quality of early care and education programs.

Strategies:

- i. Establish a voluntary statewide quality ratings and improvement system (QRIS) (lead partner: SQAT)**
 - a. Create QRIS standards for all early learning settings
 - b. Implement QRIS
- ii. Promote alignment of child care programs and public schools**
 - a. Promote *Foundation Blocks for Early Learning* and *Milestones of Child Development*
 - b. Promote transition practices
 - c. Provide joint professional development
 - d. Explore PK-3 strategies

Objective B: Expand availability and access to high quality early care and education programs.

Strategies:

- i. Establish and maintain a strong and effective preschool network**
 - a. Coordinate enrollment among Head Start, VPI, and private child care providers
 - b. Blend classrooms and coordinate services
 - c. Promote effective and efficient funding strategies and policies
- ii. Promote greater efficiency, accessibility and quality in the subsidy system**
 - a. Integrate subsidized child care into preschool delivery
 - b. Identify needs and gaps in subsidized services
 - c. Increase the percent of eligible families receiving subsidies and promote quality
 - d. Provide equitable subsidy reimbursement rates
- iii. Identify and address local barriers to expansion of high quality child care programs**

Goal Four: Health

All families of children prenatal to age five will have access to a full range of prevention and treatment services to ensure their children are healthy.

Objective A: Foster public and private sector initiatives to improve the affordability of health services.

Strategies:

- i. **Increase health insurance coverage, ensuring services during the prenatal, infant, toddler, and childhood years (lead partners: Children's Health Coalition & DMAS)**
 - a. Promote enrollment and retention of all eligible children in Medicaid or FAMIS and all eligible pregnant women in FAMIS Moms (**partners: VHCF, Sign Up Now coalitions & grantees**)
 - b. Explore policy changes to expand Medicaid eligibility for children and pregnant women (**partner: Children's Health Coalition**)
 - c. Educate health care providers about Medicaid reimbursement for oral health assessments and dental varnish services (**partners: AAP, VIADC, Children's Health Coalition**)
 - d. Promote mandate of Medicaid reimbursement for oral health assessments and dental varnish services
 - e. Increase Medicaid reimbursement rates (**partners: AAP, VIADC, Children's Health Coalition**)
 - f. Enhance employer-sponsored health insurance

Objective B: Increase access to health services through expansion, increased coordination, and effective practices and policies.

Strategies:

- i. **Increase awareness and access to health care**
 - a. Coordinate and expand use of medical and dental homes (**partners: AAP, MHP, Children's Health Coalition, WIC**)
 - b. Educate pregnant women and families about the value and use of medical and dental homes (goal 2 crossover)
 - c. Distribute the NPK to all new parents as part of universal parent education (**partner: WIC**)
 - d. Educate medical providers about best practices (as defined by Bright Futures and AAPD)
 - e. Educate non-medical child and family service providers about typical and atypical physical, dental, and behavioral development and services
 - f. Promote Joint Commission on Health Care recommendations related to premature and low birth weight infants
 - g. Reduce disparities by ensuring availability and coordination of services for diverse populations
- ii. **Increase availability and access to behavioral health services**
 - a. Increase early intervention, perinatal depression, and substance abuse treatment services (**partners: IMH, DMAS, AAP, MHP, WIC, VDH**)
 - b. Pursue universal screening of all children 0-5, beginning at birth (**partner: ABCD, DSS, Part C**)
 - c. Train child- and family-serving providers in the identification of children in need of further assessment (**partners: AAP, SCHEV, IMH**)
 - d. Facilitate information-sharing and referrals across disciplines and systems (e.g., EHDl to Part C; NICU follow up; babies of substance abusing mothers) (goal 1 crossover)
- iii. **Increase availability and access to early dental care (lead partners: AAP, Bright Futures, VIADC, VDH, VDA, MCV, Part C/Early Intervention)**
 - a. Promote initial pediatric dental appointment in the first year
 - b. Educate prospective parents about the need for early dental services
 - c. Train medical and dental students in standards of care
 - d. Train non-medical and child care providers on dental risk assessment and prevention tools
 - e. Examine the scope of practice for professionals to maximize access to preventive services
 - f. Promote early referral of CSHCN for dental care
- iv. **Promote healthy behaviors among all pregnant women and young children.**
 - a. Promote nutrition education for parents and families
 - b. Expand SNAP (State Nutrition Action Plan) to include other community partners including child care providers
 - c. Implement CHAMPION plan
 - d. Educate child and family service providers, including those serving high risk populations (goal 3 crossover)
 - e. Ensure that professional education curricula include high risk behaviors (e.g. alcohol consumption during pregnancy, substance abuse, obesity)
 - f. Maximize participation in WIC, Food Stamps, local food pantries, and other nutrition programs for high-risk populations (goal 2 and 3 crossover)
 - g. Improve documentation/ information sharing around referrals so that agency can contact families to initiate services

Goal Five: Public Engagement

All Virginians will recognize the importance of early childhood and act to support policies and investments promoting a Smart Beginning for all children.

Objective A: Persuade the public and key leaders and decision makers of the importance of early childhood and the benefits of early childhood initiatives (i.e., Make the Case).

Strategies:

- i. **Develop uniform messages and frames**
- ii. **Select target audiences; plan and execute tailored communication methods**
- iii. **Plan and execute print, broadcast and online media approaches to persuade general public**
- iv. **Facilitate local, community-driven public awareness campaigns (i.e help local school readiness coalitions conduct campaigns)**
- v. **Conduct state and local media relations efforts to increase positive media placements**

Objective B: Increase participation and engagement of leaders to support state and local early childhood initiatives.

Strategies:

- i. **Increase the number and strength of local Smart Beginnings coalitions**
- ii. **Recruit and cultivate local leaders from business, faith communities, law enforcement, and other sectors statewide**
- iii. **Establish and cultivate relationships between these local leaders and key elected and government officials**

Objective C: Promote collective action to alter key early childhood systems and policies at local and state levels, in both public and private entities.

Strategies:

- i. **Prepare community leaders to conduct personal advocacy with elected officials**
- ii. **Encourage and support local coalition-sponsored advocacy activities**
- iii. **Strengthen partnerships and communication among early childhood stakeholders**
- iv. **Jointly define key policy change priorities and collective action steps**
- v. **Create and strengthen communications to promote legislative advocacy by early childhood supporters**
- vi. **Create a statewide Business Leader Advisory Council to support early childhood initiatives**

Objective D: Regularly inform the public and all stakeholders of progress on Virginia's Plan for Smart Beginnings.

Strategies:

- i. **Create a Virginia Plan for Smart Beginnings section within www.smartbeginnings.org**
- ii. **Post updates to this plan and provide status reports**
- iii. **Publish an annual online report of progress**
- iv. **Conduct an annual meeting of stakeholders**
- v. **Establish online communications vehicle (list-serv) for sharing information**
- vi. **Create and execute a plan to brand and market this initiative**