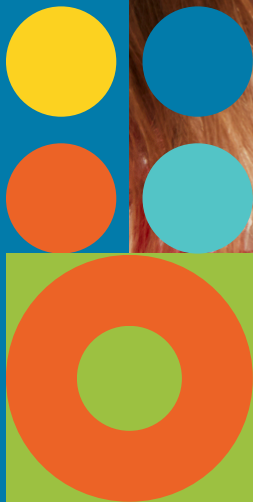




COALITION FOR CHILDHOOD SUCCESS REPORT

2024



Executive Summary

The lack of equal access to affordable early childcare options impacts thousands of communities across the nation, stressing the financial and social well-being of millions of families. EO, a new nonprofit organization that formerly served as the program arm of United Way Southwest Virginia (UWSWVA), is confronting this issue head on in the southwest region of Virginia (SWVA). EO has an extensive 60-year history of uniting the community to solve shared challenges and developing innovative programs to help them collectively thrive. EO has established the RRSW Coalition for Childhood Success (CCHDS), a network of childcare professionals, providers, and community leaders who collaborate to understand regional childcare needs, and develop and institute solutions that leverage available resources for meaningful change.

Challenges related to early childcare in SWVA are multi-faceted and directly contribute to the current economic conditions throughout the region. The lack of accessible, affordable childcare impacts youth development, inhibits the economic potential of families, and strains local businesses. To combat these issues, the CCHDS aims to understand how to maximize their capabilities and resources as a collective to form actionable solutions for the childcare providers and families they serve.

After extensive discussion, the Coalition isolated a few challenges around which to focus its problem-solving efforts. The targeted areas for improvement and transformation are:



Cost of Care: Nineteen percent (19%) of median household income in SWVA is spent on childcare, which is 10 percent higher than Loudon County (9%), one of the wealthiest counties in the nation.[1]



Quality of Care: Twenty-six percent (26%) of SWVA early childcare and education program leaders report struggles in finding qualified personnel, which is vital for delivering quality care, despite the majority of childcare providers participating in and meeting expectations of the VA's Birth to 5 Quality Initiative (VQB5).[2]



Capacity to Serve: Forty-five percent (45%) of providers in the region report that filling available slots is a challenge even with high demand and waitlists present throughout SWVA.[3]



Childcare Decision Making: One out of four children do not attend preschool. Thirteen percent (13%) of parents making those decisions do not feel that preschool is necessary and fifty-three percent (53%) decided to keep their young children at home.[4]

With these statistics in mind, the group focused on developing solutions for these targeted areas. The following report details the CCHDS' approach in identifying solutions that address these challenges in ways that benefit the children and families of SWVA, its childcare providers, and the region at large.

Data Sources & Approach

Each spring, the CCHDS invites members to a single-day gathering to discuss pertinent childcare topics, spark collaboration amongst members from different fields of work, brainstorm initiatives, and set goals for the upcoming year. The information referenced throughout this report comes from contributions from the past two CCHDS gatherings, a mix of EO primary research efforts, and relevant secondary research materials. The CCHDS' approach is participatory and data driven, ensuring that voices and perspectives from every corner of the SWVA region are heard and initiatives are set with clear intent.

The last two annual CCHDS gatherings (2023 & 2024) enabled vibrant discussions that helped members gain a better understanding of the region's childcare challenges, identify tactics for optimal collaboration, and determine how to leverage data to drive action for system-building in the region. Among its primary research, EO utilized the 2024 SWVA Childcare Landscape Report and Preliminary 2024 Parent Preschool Choices Survey in its discussions and as a basis for recommendations in this report.



2024 SWVA Childcare Landscape Report

Published by EO in spring 2024, this report provides an overview of the current state of childcare in SWVA, drawing on a diverse array of primary and secondary resources. Information from this report grounded discussions at the 2024 CCHDS gathering, underscoring the need for investment in high-quality, affordable childcare to support the region's economic and social well-being.



Data Sources & Approach continued

Preliminary 2024 Parent Preschool Choices Survey

Developed and implemented in spring 2024, this survey captured numerous insights on regional need and parent decision making for childcare and preschool. Preliminary survey data included over 600 responses submitted across eight localities, offering a substantial dataset for the members to analyze and discuss at the CCHDS gathering on May 14, 2024.

The following secondary materials were equally as important in informing the CCHDS Coalition's recommendations:



Department of Social Services Childcare Search (2023)
<https://dss.virginia.gov/facility/search/cc2.cgi>



VECF Infant Toddler Gaps Analysis (2023)
<https://vecf.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/ECE-VECF-Toddler-Gap-Report-2023-Draft11.pdf>



LinkB5 Portal (2023)
<https://linkb5.virginia.edu>



Provider Workforce Survey (2023) --UVA SEE Partnerships
<https://www.see-partnerships.com/2023vaworkforcesurveysnapshot.html>
VQB5 Practice Year 2 Data (2023) -- VA Department of Education



American Community Survey (2022) – U.S. Census Bureau
<https://data.census.gov>

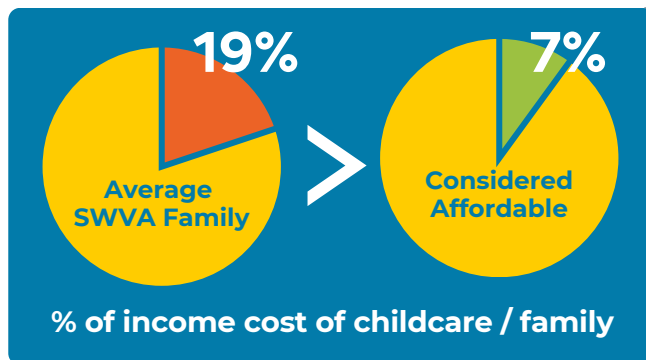
These reports and sources of local and regional data offer valuable and informative insights related to childcare; however, they only express part of the story. A key strength of the CCHDS is its diverse membership and the varying perspectives and lived experiences that it brings forward. This diversity enables the Coalition to contextualize the data, draw meaningful conclusions, and develop achievable, ambitious solutions for change.



Challenges & Recommendations for Action

Early childcare systems struggle for a plethora of reasons that may include but are not limited to: weak infrastructure, limited funding, low levels of higher education attainment, and low household income. SWVA feels the brunt of these challenges and more. However, in recent years, it has made strides in fortifying the childcare system through a variety of initiatives by EO, area non-profits, and local academic institutions, including the implementation of coordinated enrollment, mixed delivery, and initiatives focused on serving income-constrained families at little to no cost to them. The impact of these efforts has been significant, and yet there is still opportunity for improvement. The CCHDS is focusing on elements of the system that are not only recognized as needing enhancement, but also primed for change.

CHILDCARE COST



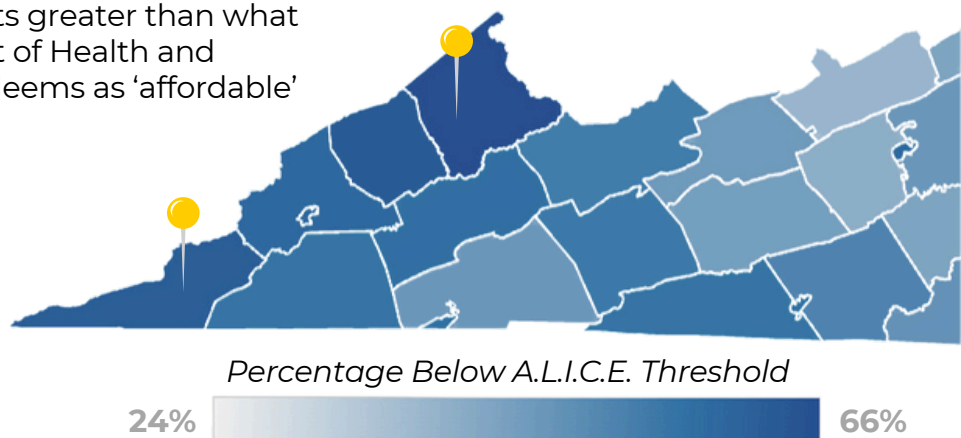
Critical Data Point: 19% of Income Spent on Childcare

The 2024 SWVA Childcare Landscape Report notes that the cost of childcare for families in SWVA is 19%, which is alarmingly 12% points greater than what the U.S. Department of Health and Human Resources deems as 'affordable' (7% of income).

CCHDS Focus: Significant A.L.I.C.E Demographic

Thirty-two percent (32%) of households are A.L.I.C.E, meaning approximately a third of families are above the poverty line but struggle to afford basic needs (the national average is 29%). Buchanan County and Dickenson County, both in the SWVA Ready Region, have A.L.I.C.E ratios of 67% and (64% respectively, the two highest in the state of VA). [1] With lower salary ranges in this region, this is even more impactful.

SWVA A.L.I.C.E % BY COUNTY



[5] American Community Survey 2022, www.census.data.com (regional income calculated by a weighted average of localities' median annual incomes), <https://www.unitedforalice.org/state-overview/virginia>

Challenges & Recommendations for Action

continued

Recommended Actions for Change

Ensure Families Are Aware



Increase awareness of available low-cost or no-cost childcare opportunities through increased advertising and communications in localities with the highest levels of unfilled slots.

Get Parents to Work



Enable parents to rejoin the workforce earlier by increasing infant and toddler slots across SWVA.

Strengthen Businesses



Avoid reduced workable hours by prioritizing wrap-around care as an available offering (i.e. schools obtaining licensure to authorize wrap-around care for 3- and 4-year-olds).

Build Relationships with Local Corporations



Develop meaningful relationships with local organizations and corporations by using data to tell the story of the SWVA childcare landscape and how their involvement through funding and advocacy can offset high costs and increase access.

Capitalize on Available Tools/Resources



Leverage “VA Cost Estimation Model”^[6] to increase subsidies and awareness of needed childcare support to local businesses and organizations.

Eliminate Redundancies



Bring community leaders together to identify gaps in funding and ensure effective allocation for the benefit of all parties.



Challenges & Recommendations for Action

continued

QUALITY OF CARE

Critical Data Point: Virginia's Birth to 5 Quality Initiative (VQB5) & Staffing

While 100% of the region's classrooms met or exceeded the expectations for quality set by Virginia's VQB5 system, the data doesn't tell the whole story. VQB5 uses two indicators of quality: 1) teacher-child interactions, and 2) use of approved curriculum. Therefore, educators become a critical piece of the quality puzzle. In SWVA, 26% of early care and education programs reported a critical lack of staffing – so while teacher-child interactions are strong, childcare providers are straining to achieve these high-quality standards without the necessary staffing support at their centers.



**26% OF EARLY
CARE AND
EDUCATION
PROGRAMS
REPORTED A
CRITICAL LACK
OF STAFFING**

CCHDS Focus: Maintaining High-Quality Standards

Childcare providers across the region are meeting and even exceeding quality expectations, suggesting that increased support and access to resources can lead to promising prospects for the future of childcare in SWVA. However, significant challenges remain. In the 2023 CCHDS Gathering Participant Pre-Survey, at least a quarter of respondents cited inadequate funding and a limited pool of quality providers and workforce as the greatest challenges to address.[7]

Recommended Actions for Change

Invest In Teacher and Staff Development



Provide opportunities for teachers and staff to develop their knowledge base and skillsets through subsidizing further education and training.

Ensure Teachers and Staff Feel Valued



Define a robust wage and benefits model for childcare providers to offer to their teachers and staff.

Avoid Wasted Resources



Ensure that available funding and resources are used and allocated to areas in need through increased collaboration across providers.

[7] 2023 EO Coalition Gathering Participant Pre-Survey – What is the greatest challenge within this Coalition that may inhibit the ability to solve the existing childcare challenges in Southwest VA?

Challenges & Recommendations for Action

continued

COALITION'S GREATEST PERCEIVED CHALLENGES



31%

LACK OF PROVIDERS
AND WORKFORCE



25%

LACK OF FUNDING



14%

ADVOCACY, OUTREACH
& INVOLVEMENT



12%

POPULATION &
GEOGRAPHY



10%

MAINTAINING ACTIVE
COALITION



8%

TEACHER PAY

Challenges & Recommendations for Action

continued

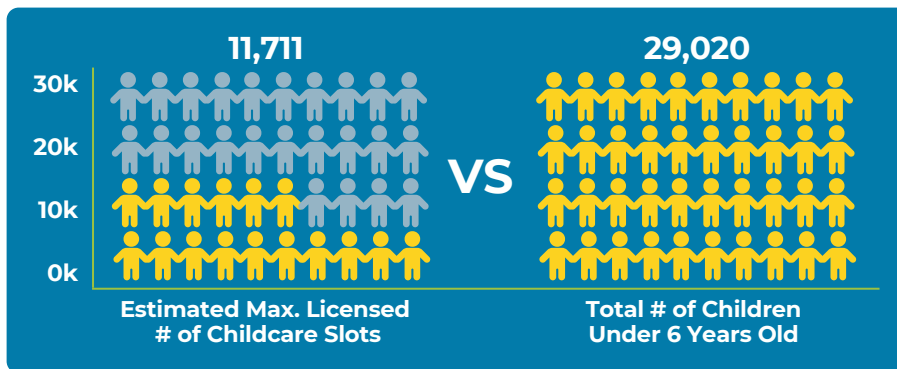
CAPACITY TO SERVE

Critical Data Point: Slot Fulfillment

Forty-five percent (45%) of providers in the region report that filling available slots is a challenge even with high demand and waitlists present throughout SWVA.

CCHDS Focus: Aligning Need to Unused Capacity

It is estimated that there are nearly 25,000 children in the infant to 4-year-old age group in the SWVA region with current service capacity totaling only 11,771 licensed slots across all provider types (source: VDSS Child Care Search; includes ALL sites in SWVA, not just publicly funded). Demand greatly outweighs supply, yet on average, there are between one and three unfilled slots at any given provider for infants, toddlers, 3- and 4-year olds.[8]



Recommended Actions for Change

Expand Access Through Collaboration



Expand access through coordinated enrollment efforts like the use of the Birth to 5 Hub and frequent collaboration among public schools, Head Start/Early Head Start Agencies, and private providers.

Expand Workforce Pool



Implement programming and internship opportunities for interested students across all age levels.

Adapt to Fill Slots



Implement a flexible framework to serve families who are deemed ineligible for childcare cost reductions by a marginal disqualification.

Challenges & Recommendations for Action

continued

CHILDCARE DECISION MAKING

Critical Data Point: Parental Childcare Decision-Making Behavior

Twenty-five percent (25%) of respondents to the Preliminary Parents' Preschool Choices Survey state they did not enroll their child into preschool.[9]

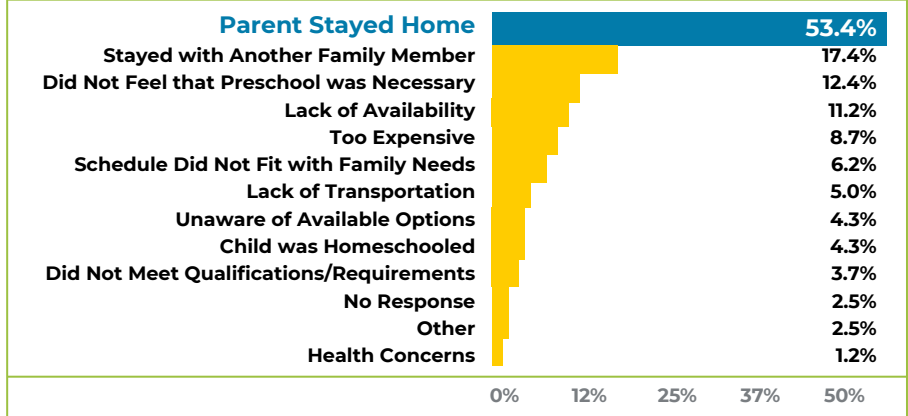
CCHDS Focus: Understanding Why Parents Decide to Stay Home

Of those parents who did not enroll their child into preschool, 13% felt that preschool is not necessary, and 53% chose to keep their child at home if there was a stay-at-home parent.[10] It is unclear if parents stayed at home by choice/preference for childcare, or if they were unable to secure work outside the home.

Understanding the factors behind these statistics is crucial as decisions about childcare are influenced by preferences, financial capacity, and

education/awareness of available options. Studies have shown that children enrolled in preschool benefit significantly in their development and academic success, raising questions about whether parents are aware of these benefits or if their choices are driven by affordability and personal preferences.

Q: Choose Your Reason for Deciding NOT to Enroll Your Child In a Preschool Program



Recommended Actions for Change

Understand Parents' Motives



Bolster research efforts to gauge parent reasoning behind childcare decisions to inform service type needs and approach to marketing.

Place Every Child In Need



Ensure coordinated enrollment efforts are utilized and accessible to parents with children ages 3-4 to reduce the amount of unfilled available slots in preschools.

Communicate Benefits



Educate parents through marketing initiatives and community engagement events about the social and cognitive benefits that preschool and kindergarten preparation have on children.

CCHDS Progress & Importance

The CCHDS has made notable strides in enhancing the health and well-being of children in Southwest Virginia over the past 12 years. Through strategic initiatives and collaborative efforts, CCHDS has targeted critical areas to bolster the region's early childhood systems, underscoring the significance and impact of their work.

STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK AND ACHIEVEMENTS PROGRESS

From July 2021 to June 2024, CCHDS crafted a strategic framework to synchronize regional efforts toward children's health and well-being. This framework focused on **four primary goals**, each addressing essential aspects of childhood development and support systems.

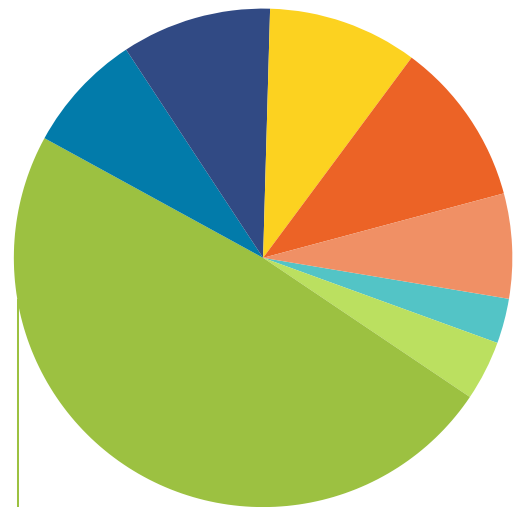
GOAL 1 Education and Engagement

Receiving the title of Ready Region Southwest enabled EO to centralize efforts and enhance efficiency through a "Hub" or backbone agency model. This initiative engaged over 480 partners who contributed more than 28,000 hours of stakeholder involvement. A Family Council was established with 32 representatives actively designing and developing the regional early childhood system, increasing awareness and advocacy efforts.

GOAL 2 Equitable Access

The creation of the Birth to 5 Hub provided a comprehensive online resource for families, offering information on early care and education options. The Mixed Delivery Program, with nearly \$6 million annually in tuition support, enabled families access to care at low or no cost, stabilizing 26 providers. The implementation of Virginia's quality measurement and improvement system, VQB5, ensured high-quality experiences in early learning environments, encompassing 100% of publicly funded programs by 2024.

Goals continued on next page



SECTORS REPRESENTED ACROSS PARTNERS ENGAGED

- ECCE Providers
- Government
- Families
- Community-Based Organizations
- Healthcare + Human Services
- Businesses
- K12 Education
- Higher Education

CCHDS Progress & Importance continued

GOAL 3 Health and Well-Being

CCHDS initiatives focused on social and emotional learning through the Southwest Virginia Trauma Informed Community Network (TICN). The AI's Pals initiative, renewed for another three-year cycle, supported over 1,500 children in developing social-emotional skills. Additionally, the Developmental Screening Initiative promoted early detection and support for children, ensuring they achieve developmentally appropriate milestones.

GOAL 4 Workforce Development

CCHDS partnered with workforce and economic development entities to support a diverse and competent early childhood workforce. The Early Childhood Career Pathway and the Shared Services Alliance highlighted the ongoing investment in lifting the entire early care and education system across SWVA.

IMPORTANCE OF CCHDS WORK

The progress made by CCHDS underscores the critical importance of a coordinated, regional approach to early childhood development. The initiatives not only address immediate needs, but also lay the foundation for long-term systemic change. By focusing on collaboration, data-driven strategies, and stakeholder engagement, CCHDS has positioned SWVA as a leader in early childhood education and support.



The collective efforts of the Coalition have led to improved access to quality childcare, better support for families, and a stronger early childhood workforce. These achievements demonstrate that with the right framework and collaborative spirit, meaningful change is possible, ultimately ensuring that all children in SWVA are ready for school and ready for life.



READY

REGION
Southwest

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