

# **Virginia's Early Childhood System**

## **SREB Meeting of the Legislative Advisory Council**

**Delegate Mike Cherry**

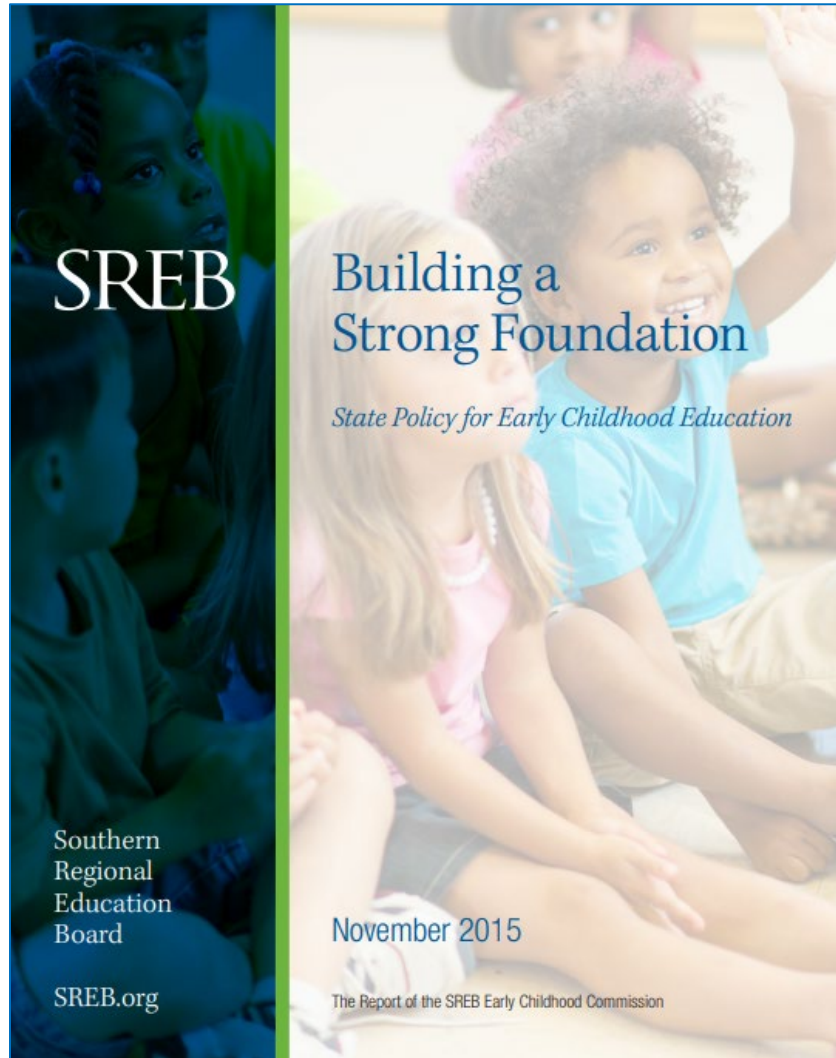
**Virginia House of Delegates 74<sup>th</sup> District**

**Emily Anne Gullickson**

**State Superintendent of Public Instruction**

*September 27, 2025*

# Virginia Has Been Guided by SREB's 2015 Report



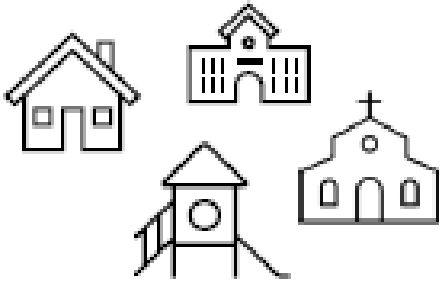
## Recommendations of the SREB Early Childhood Commission

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- Program Quality
- Teacher Quality
- Accountability
- Access
- Governance

# Virginia's Shared Vision

**We envision a Virginia where all children have the opportunity to enter school ready.**



Families have a variety of affordable, high-quality, public-private early learning options.



Programs are measured, supported to improve, and rewarded for continuous improvement.



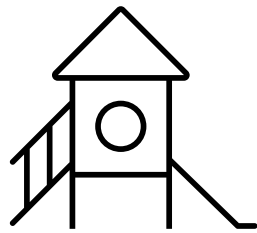
Parents can work or go to school and meet their family's needs.

# Virginia's Public-Private Early Childhood System

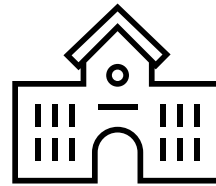
Virginia's system consists of multiple public and private providers that offer birth-to-five care and education across multiple settings.



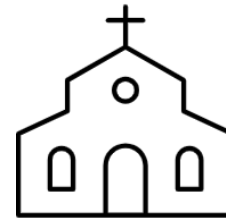
**2,000+**  
family child  
care homes



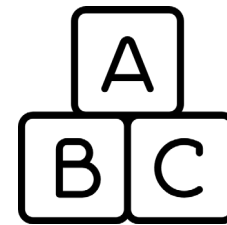
**3,000+**  
licensed  
child care  
centers



**954**  
public  
schools



**880+**  
religiously-  
exempt  
child care  
centers



**46** Head Start  
and Early Head  
Start grantees  
(*across 360+  
sites*)

# Key Progress toward Vision

**With bipartisan support, Virginia has unified its public-private birth-to-five early childhood care and education system to:**

- Increase parent choice and access;
- Improve teacher and program quality;
- Measure outcomes;
- Build lasting regional infrastructure; and
- Continually promote innovation and excellence, and accountability.

***As a result, more Virginia children are entering kindergarten with quality early childhood experiences that helped prepare them to be successful in school and beyond.***

# Program Quality Overview

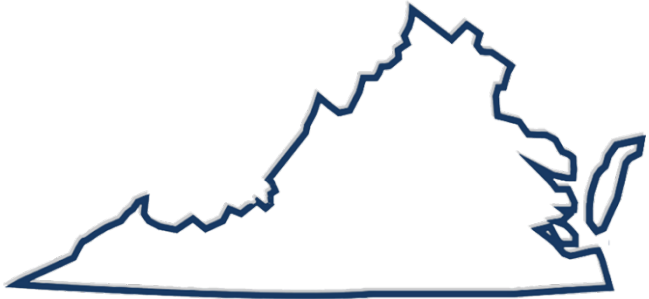
**SREB**

Southern Regional  
Education Board

## 2015 Recommendation

*Provide incentives to improve quality in early childhood development programs.*

### VIRGINIA'S 2025 HIGHLIGHTS



**100% of all publicly-funded early childhood development sites (3,121)** participate in the state's quality improvement system (VQB5), and 98% of programs met or exceeded the state's VQB5 quality expectations in 2023-2024 year.

**The only state** that regularly assesses every publicly funded early childhood classroom to measure and improve quality and makes data available through a unified data system.

# Program Quality: VQB5 Theory of Change

To prepare all children for kindergarten, Virginia’s early childhood system must ensure they have quality teaching and learning experiences that meet their unique needs.

- VQB5 measures and supports improvement in infant, toddler, and preschool teaching and learning using two nationally-recognized quality indicators for all publicly-funded early childhood classrooms (~12,000 classrooms).

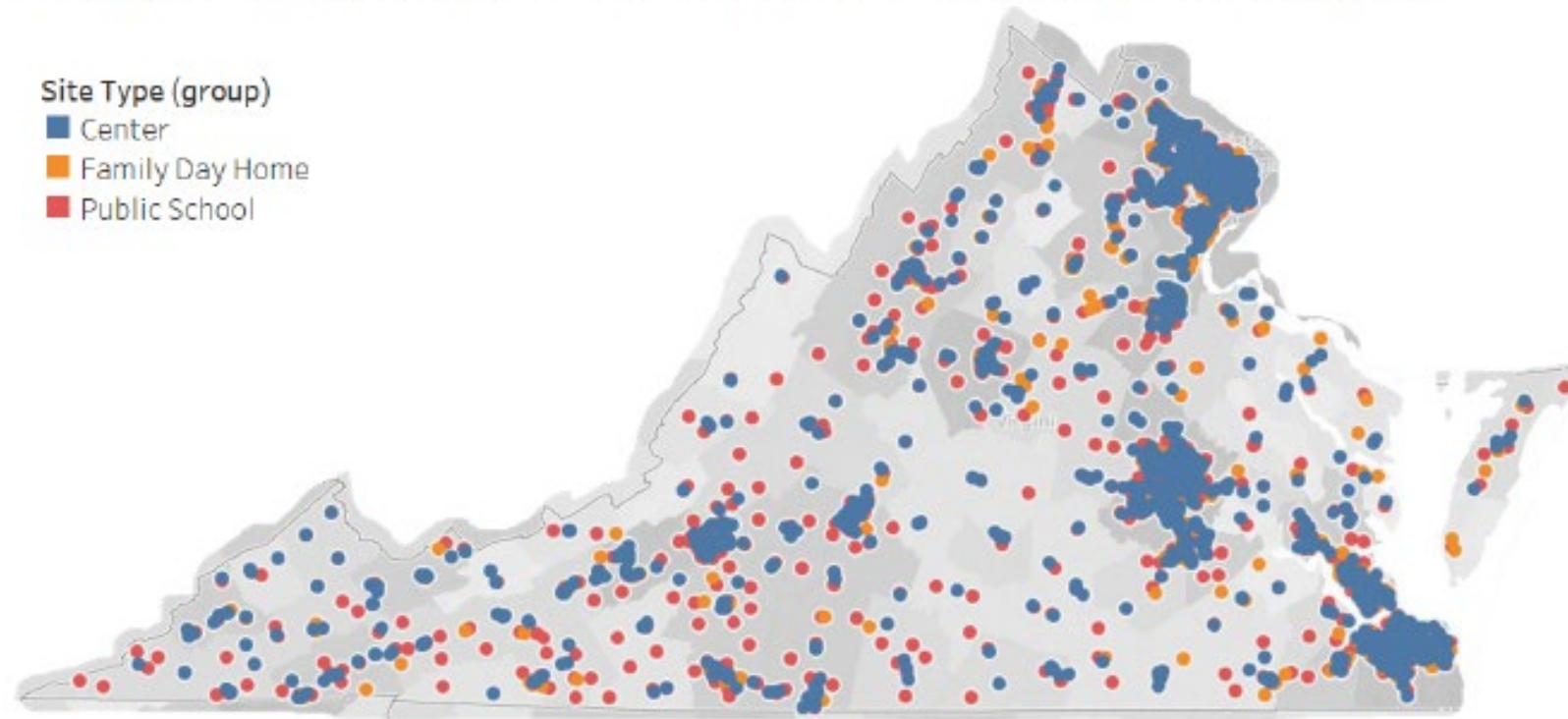
Interactions	Curriculum
Measure teacher-child interactions and instruction in a developmentally-appropriate way using the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS)	Measure the use of approved curricula* that are aligned with Virginia’s Early Learning and Development Standards
Research shows that stimulating and supportive interactions between teachers and children and effective use of quality curricula promote children’s holistic learning and development, <i>resulting in improved school readiness.</i>	

*\*Use of an approved curriculum in VQB5 is optional. There is no VQB5 curriculum requirement.*

# Program Quality: High Quality Available Statewide

In Fall 2024, VQB5 results showed that 98% of 3,121 sites met or exceed the state's quality expectations in 2023-2024 year. VQB5 continues to grow, leading to quality child care programs across Virginia.

This past year, ~3,400 sites participated in VQB5, with sites in every city and county in Virginia. That's ~300 more sites than the previous year.



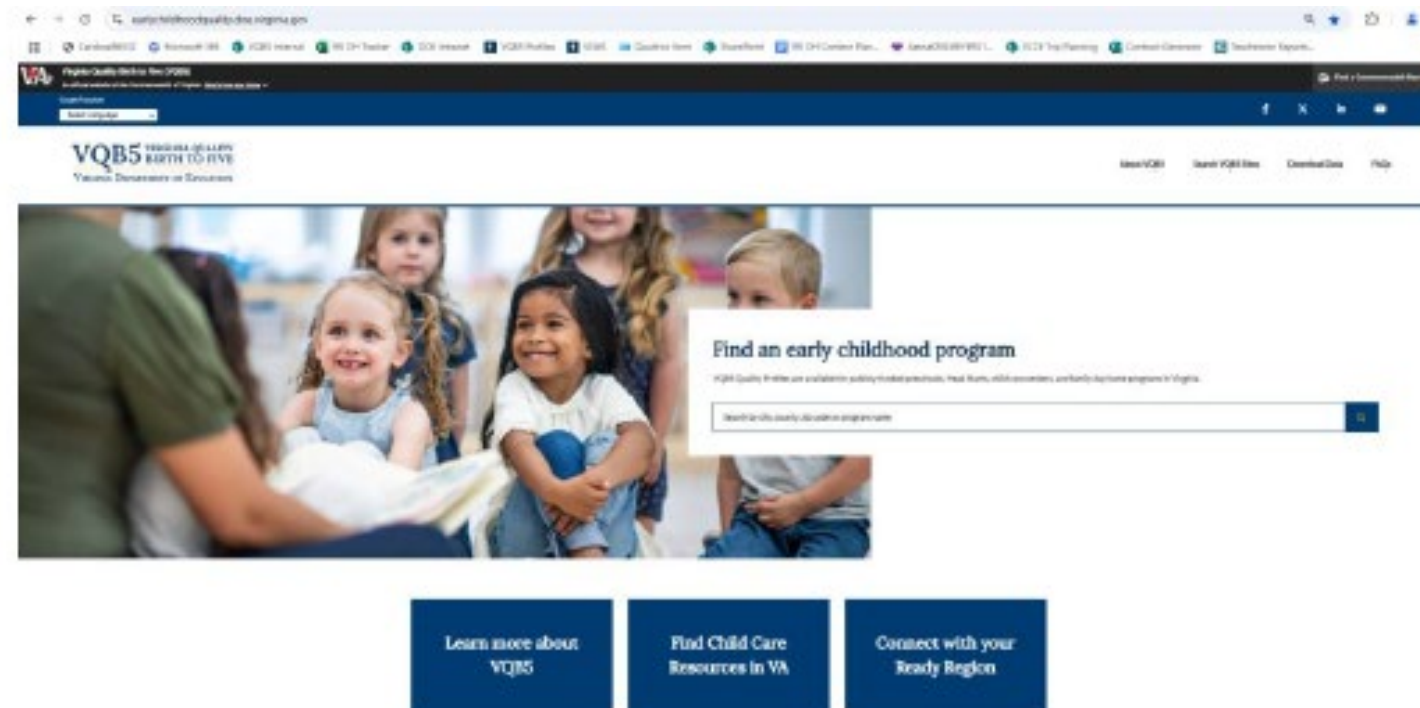


# Program Quality: Family Choice Includes Quality

**VQB5 supports family choice and engagement through the one-stop portal.**

The VQB5 Quality Profile Website has had 100,000+ views since launching in October and serves as a one stop portal for information about quality, health and safety.

([www.earlychildhoodquality.doe.virginia.gov](http://www.earlychildhoodquality.doe.virginia.gov))



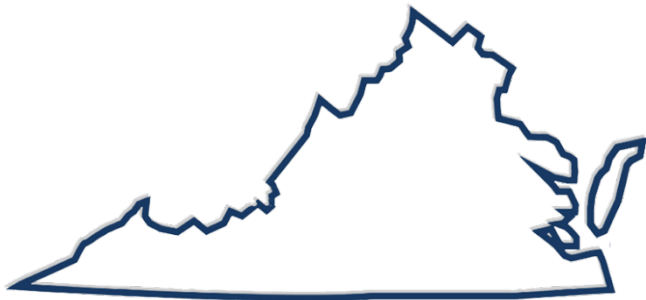
# Teacher Quality Overview

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Education Board

## 2015 Recommendation

*Develop and sustain a high-quality early childhood program workforce that has the competencies to foster the social, emotional and cognitive development of young children.*



## VIRGINIA'S 2025 HIGHLIGHTS

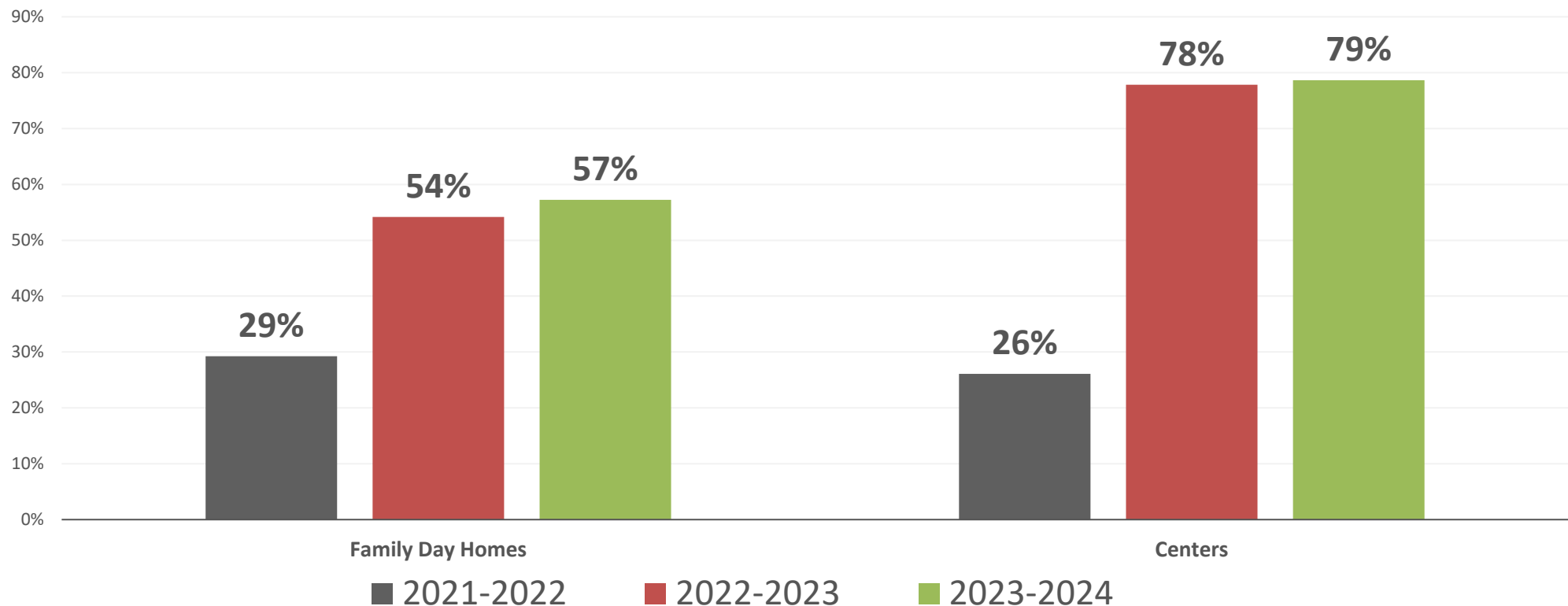
**1 of only 4 states** that reimburses child care providers based on true business costs, a shift toward industry sustainability and promoting Virginia's quality standards and competitive wages for educators and retain effective teachers in classrooms.

**2.2 million minutes of teacher observations** to inform VQB5 quality ratings and feedback for improvement.

# Teacher Quality: Focus on Curriculum

VQB5 does not require curriculum but encourages all sites to choose a high quality curriculum from a state-approved list with multiple options. This strategy has helped increase use of curriculum in family day homes and child care.

Percent of Classrooms Using Approved Curriculum



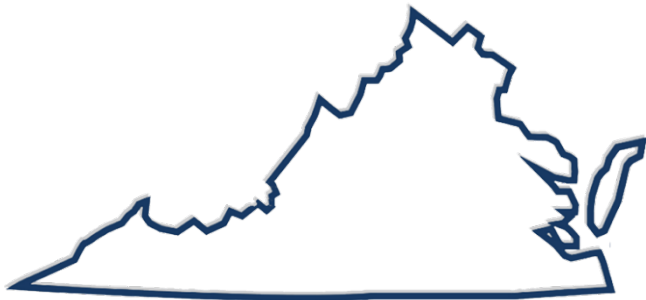
# Accountability Overview

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## 2015 Recommendation

*Enact state accountability systems that assess program performance and reward quality.*

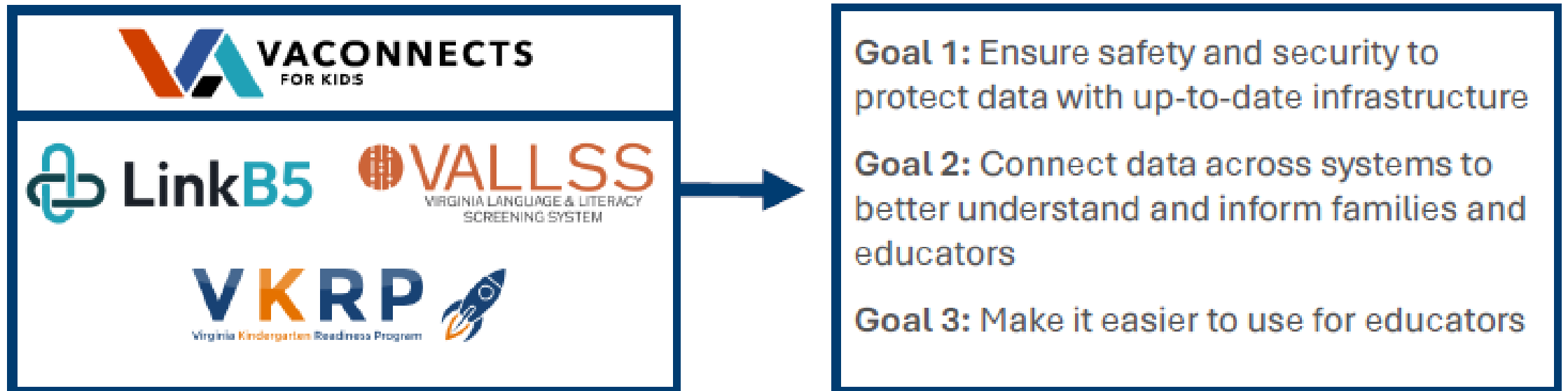


## VIRGINIA'S 2025 HIGHLIGHTS

**The only state** that regularly assesses every publicly funded early childhood classroom to measure and improve quality and makes data available through a unified data system.

# Accountability: Outcomes Tracked Over Time

Virginia Connects for Kids (VAConnects) is a new integrated data system that links three state data systems to improve coordination and usability for data from birth through 8th Grade.

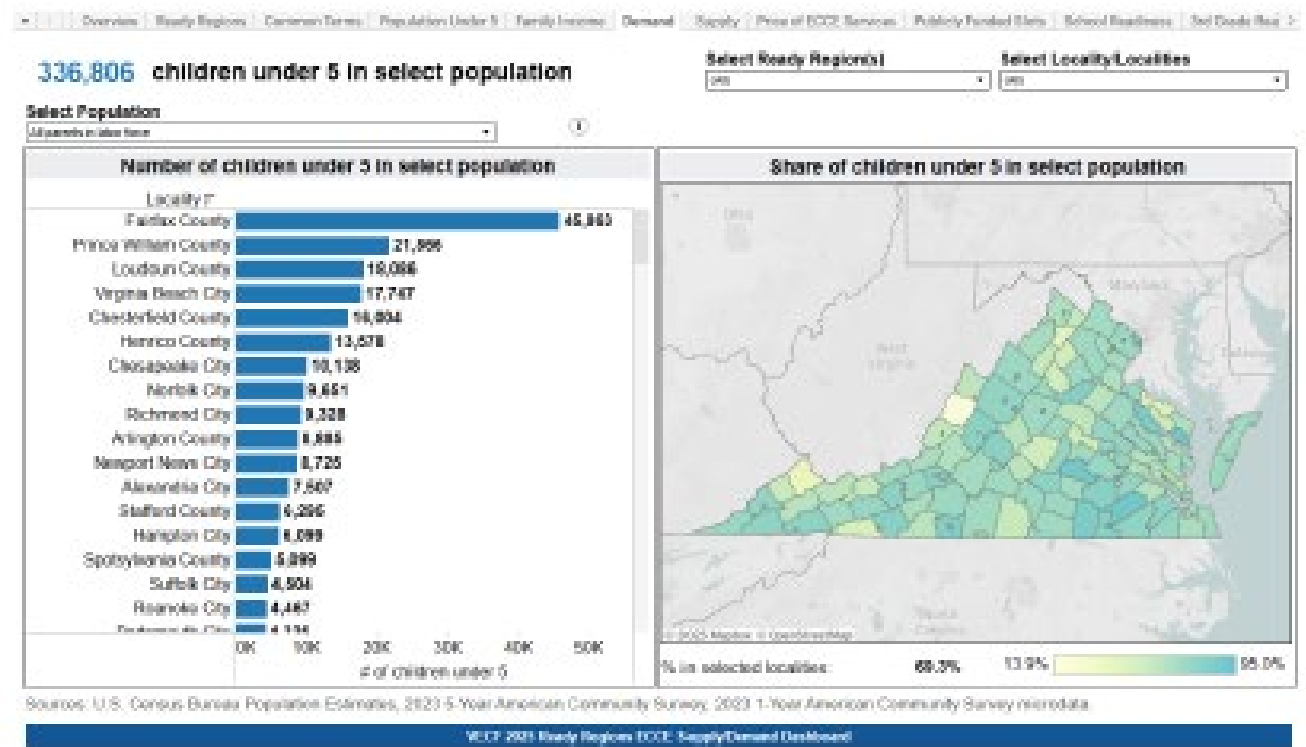


# Accountability: Data Drives Investment

VECF developed data resources to support Ready Regions and stakeholders to target investments and make decisions to ensure school-ready children, work-ready parents, and business-ready communities.

Dashboard uses multiple sources of data to provide information on:

- Demand for ECCE in Virginia;
- Supply of ECCE, including publicly-funded slots; and
- Child and family outcomes.



# Access Overview

**SREB**

Southern Regional  
Education Board

## 2015 Recommendation

*Provide high-quality early learning services to the groups of young children most likely to benefit from interventions.*



## VIRGINIA'S 2025 HIGHLIGHTS

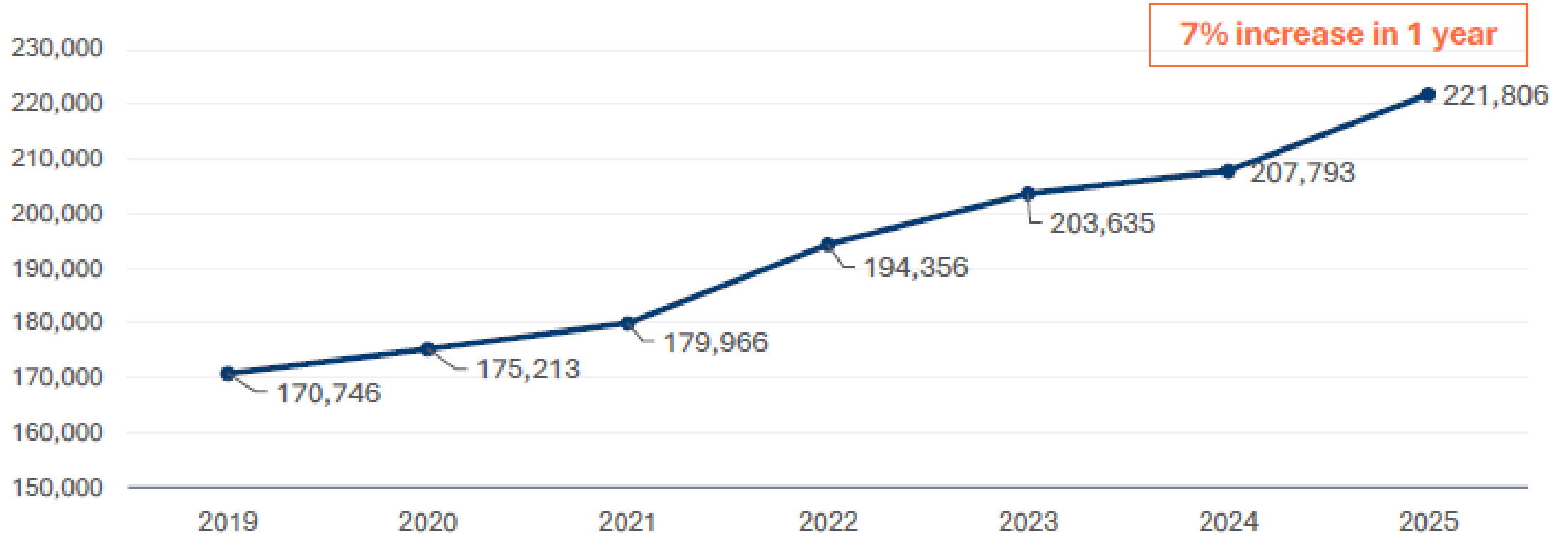
**4th state** with higher income eligibility limit (85% SMI) for child care subsidies, allowing more hardworking low- and middle-income families to access child care, ensuring incentives to work and earn more.

**1 of 15 states** that limits subsidy family copayments to 5% or less of income, allowing eligible families to build economic stability.

# Access: Provider Participation Boosts Capacity

More private providers are choosing to take public funds with maximum capacity increasing by 30% since 2019.

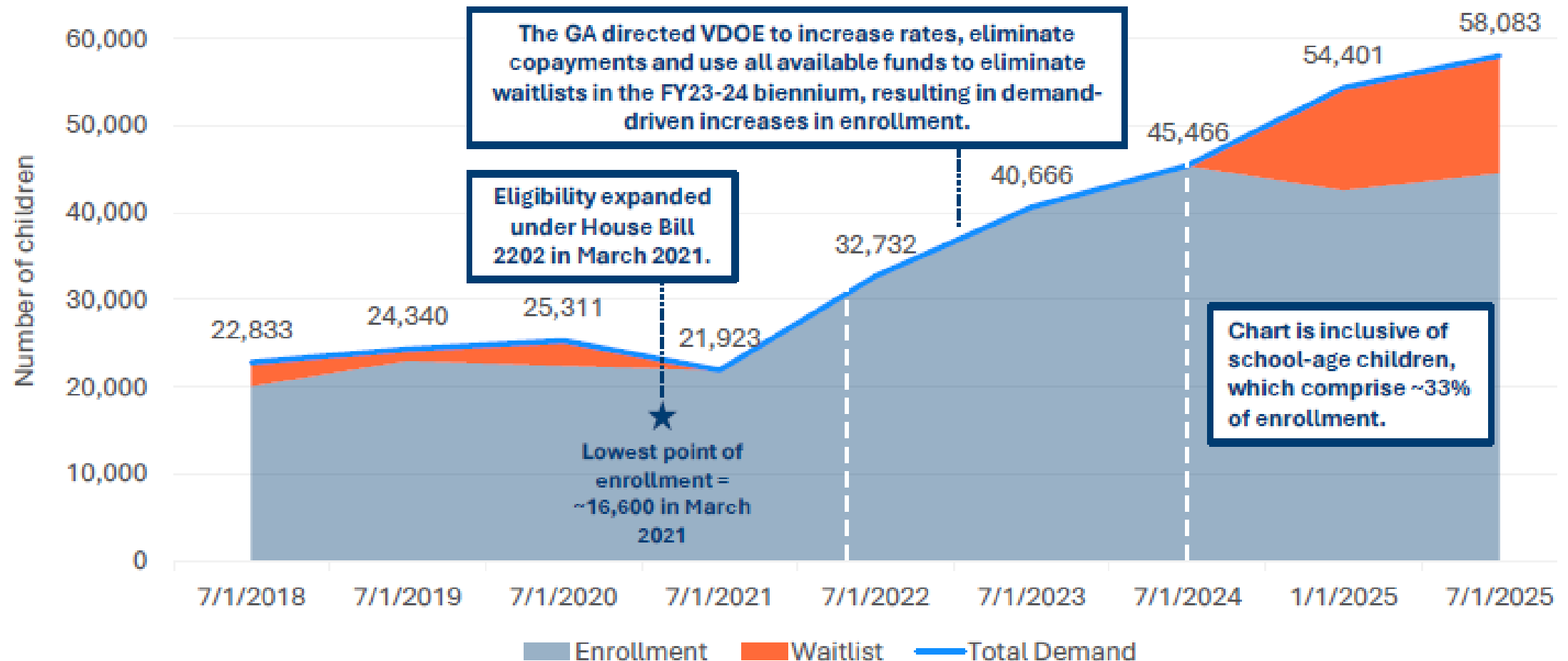
Capacity to Serve Publicly-Funded Children in Private Settings in Virginia, 2019-2025





# Access: Working Families Drive Historic Demand

Virginia's working families drive growing demand, with total demand for publicly funded child care increasing consistently since 2021.



# Access: Impact on Employment and Workforce

Virginia prioritizes public funding for birth-to-five children in working families.

These investments are paying off - recent increases in enrollment are correlated with an increase in labor force participation and a decrease in unemployment.

## Economic Development Examples

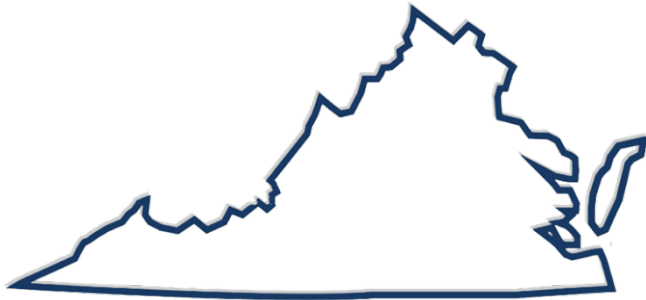
# Governance Overview

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Southern Regional  
Education Board

## 2015 Recommendation

*Establish a comprehensive and integrated framework of policies and programs to support early childhood development in the state.*



## VIRGINIA'S 2025 HIGHLIGHT

**1 of 8 states** that have consolidated all early childhood education programs (e.g., pre-K, child care subsidies, QRIS, licensing, and Head Start State Collaboration Office) into one entity.

# Governance: Coordination across Regions

Ready Regions, led by VECF, lead system coordination with a focus on VQB5 implementation, accountability, and family engagement.

- In 2024-2025, VECF led triennial recompetition process to identify Ready Regions for 2025-2028.
  - Nine entities were selected as lead agencies.
- Ready Regions engage 100% of Virginia's publicly-funded sites and have met all performance expectations related to:
  - Building relationships with leaders, educators and community partners as "on the ground" leads.
  - Measuring and supporting quality through VQB5.
  - Increasing access and coordinating enrollment.
  - Engaging families through regional councils.



[Ready Regions Website](#)

**READY**  
REGIONS

# Governance: Public-Private Partnership and Business Engagement

## **New initiative: Shovel Ready Task Force which exists to:**

1. Promote child care as essential to Virginia's modern economy and quality of life priorities
2. Accelerate the expanded supply of classrooms, sites, and environments to deliver game-changing childcare services
3. Substantially upgrade the capabilities within the child care industry and the stature of the early educator profession.

# Governance: Public Private Partnerships & Innovation

**Virginia is first in the country to develop an innovative new digital wallet tool that will make it easy for employers of any size to contribute to the cost of child care for their employees.**

When launched statewide in the spring of 2026, the digital wallet will include:

- A family portal where parents can receive funds from their employer(s) and other entities to support child care costs and make payments directly to child care providers for tuition;
- A child care provider portal for receiving payments and affirming delivery of services; and
- A donation interface for employers and other third-party funders (e.g., municipalities, non-profits).

Designed to be scalable and easy-to-use, the platform will achieve multiple goals:

- Make child care more affordable for families by enabling employers and others to contribute to child care costs (e.g., charitable donations);
- Offer businesses and other third-parties a new and efficient way to contribute towards infant-to-five-year-old child care costs and better support employees no matter the size of the company; and
- Provide an easy and secure process by which providers can collect payments from families.

# Questions & Discussion