

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In order to update LWV-VA's position on child care, the member delegates approved a study on child care at the June 2021 Convention. This study is the synthesis of the Child Care Study Group's (CCSG) work over the past year. The study is informed by interviews with over 50 individual stakeholders, academic reports, and data analysis to explore the accessibility, affordability, effectiveness, safety, and equitability of Virginia's current child care system. The study identifies gaps and challenges in the current system and also recommends solutions to these challenges.

The study found that child care for children ages 0-6 in Virginia is woefully inaccessible, meeting only 57% of projected demand. Similarly, for every child that attends an after-school summer program, four others would do so if it was available and affordable. There aren't enough providers, especially in rural counties, for infant care and for after-school programs. This lack of access is largely driven by the low pay available for child care educators with compensation often trailing hourly rates earned by fast food and retail workers while requiring higher levels of education. Child care is also unaffordable to hundreds of thousands of families, requiring parents making the median wage or below to spend up to 30% of their incomes on childcare. This means women especially leave the workforce while children aren't adequately prepared for kindergarten and miss out on the benefits of after-school enrichment activities.

After years of treating child care like glorified babysitting, Virginia is taking steps to improve the quality of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) for children 0-6 by rolling out quality standards. Yet many private providers are exempt from participating. This means it remains to be seen how much these standards will address the issue that 42% of Virginia's kindergarteners began the 2021-2022 school year below the expected levels for kindergarten entry. Virginia's child care system also fails to meet the needs of all children equitably. Black, Hispanic, rural, neurologically divergent and children who speak English as a second language all trail behind others in terms of participating and benefiting from ECCE and after-school opportunities.