



# Annual Report 2023-24

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## Letter from the Executive Working Group

Child care has always been a critical service for thriving workplaces and communities because it allows employees and students to more actively engage with their work knowing that their children are being cared for in a safe, healthy, and engaging environment. Additionally, access to high quality early education ensures that young children develop the needed social and cognitive skills to be kindergarten ready. The presence, or lack, of this resource at such a crucial stage of a person's development and learning has wide-reaching implications for their long-term academic performance, and eventually professional lives.

Despite its importance, the challenges in finding affordable and flexible child care have increased in recent years, forcing Virginia Tech employees and students to make tough decisions that may affect their family's quality of life. This fiscal year was particularly stressful as child care centers and parents anticipated the end of COVID-era funding and increased tuition costs. Additionally, the early childhood education workforce crisis is a significant challenge and results in many centers operating at less than capacity.

Through the Early Childhood Education Initiatives (ECEI), Virginia Tech has been making a coordinated effort to help our caregivers better navigate these challenges by connecting them to campus, regional, and state resources. We are working to grow that pool of resources, and to strengthen the child care workforce that we depend on in our communities through advocacy and professional development.

We have much to be proud of this year. In particular, we want to highlight that we:

- Provided educational programming and support services for the university community
- Partnered with four new childcare providers, including one in the Roanoke Valley
- Pilot programs aimed at developing early childhood education teachers
- Supported professional development and recognition events for our local child care providers

All of this was made possible thanks to our employees who remain engaged in this important work and our extensive collaborations and partnerships across the commonwealth. The result of those collaborations is reflected in the following annual report, as well as the initiatives' growing efforts, partnerships, and momentum. We look forward to continuing to advance our childcare work.

Sincerely,

The Executive Working Group



## Introduction

The 2023-24 Annual Report for Virginia Tech's Early Childhood Education Initiatives (ECEI) aims to provide an overview of the accomplishments, ongoing efforts, and strategies supporting Virginia Tech faculty, staff, and students. ECEI at Virginia Tech is a comprehensive program aimed at supporting access to quality, affordable and flexible early care and education to faculty, staff, and students.

## Executive and Advisory Committee

The executive and advisory committee working groups are a collaborative gathering of university leaders and employees who support the work of ECEI.

### *Executive Working Group*

This group is responsible for developing a vision and strategy for future caregiving, advancing caregiving initiative programs and policies for university employees and students, and advocating for funding strategies while coordinating budget requests in support of new or enhanced programs and services. The group also sponsors surveys and other data analytic strategies.

### Executive Working Group Members

- Vice President for Strategic Initiatives & Special Assistant to the President: Lisa Wilkes, Chair
- Vice President for Human Resources: Bryan Garey
- Vice Provost for Faculty Affairs: Ron Fricker
- Manager for Early Childhood Education Initiatives: Kim Thomason



## Advisory Working Group

This group is responsible for identifying early childhood education programs and services to enhance affordability, accessibility, quality, and flexibility. They submit recommendations to the Executive Working Group, and conduct assessment and benchmarking.

### Advisory Working Group 2023-2024 Members:

- Early Childhood Education Initiatives: Kim Thomason, Chair
- A/P Faculty Representatives: Brandy Morse and Mallory Tuttle
- CDCLR: Karen Gallagher
- Graduate Student: Olawumi Rafiat Kaka
- Faculty Representatives: Katie Carmicheal and Brittany Howell
- Hokie Wellness: Ana Agud
- Little Hokies Hangout: Marin Riegger
- Staff Representatives: Denise Crawford
- Women's Center/Provost's Office: Christine Dennis-Smith and Anna LoMascolo
- Graduate Assistant to Early Childhood Education Initiatives: Isabel Valdivia

## University Overview

Virginia Tech's 2020 strategic plan, [The Virginia Tech Difference: Advancing Beyond Boundaries](#), and the Global Distinction Initiative, outline the university's goal to "Be a destination for talent." As the university increases its faculty and staff, the need for child care grows as a top priority, making ECEI's work instrumental to help recruit and retain world-class faculty and staff.

## Early Childhood Education Initiatives

Established in the fall 2018, with the formalization of the Program Manager position formalized in spring 2021, ECEI strives to enhance caregiving support for both university employees and students through a variety of initiative, programs, and policies. Using data to prioritize employee and student support, community engagement and collaboration, and professional development of the early care and education professionals of the New River Valley (NRV), ECEI aims to significantly impact parents' choice to access quality early care and education.

The key pillars of care – **quality**, **accessible**, **affordable**, and **flexible** – drive the programs and strategies surrounding child care.







## 2023-24 Accomplishments

Over the past year, several strategies and subsequent actions have been taken, including but not limited to:

- Establishing four new partnerships with organizations that provide quality early childhood education, bringing the total up to five.
- Establishing a collaborative partnership with [Cultural Care Au Pair](#).
- Collecting and disseminating a regional summer camp and programs inventory for VT caregivers in the New River Valley and Roanoke areas.
- Continuing premium access to [Care.com](#) to help find child care and adult care.
- Creating a new internship program for Virginia Tech students with local child care programs for the 2024-25 school year.
- Increasing the frequency and range of topics in the “Conversations About Our Children” Lunch & Learns for VT families.
- Joining the Virginia Business Roundtable for Early Education, with a focus on securing state financial support for ECE programs.
- Co-sponsoring early care and education career day, “Those Who Can, Teach,” for high school students of the New River Valley.
- Co-sponsoring the NRV Child Care Summit, which shares information about the state of child care in the NRV, highlights creative ways that employers have supported the child care industry, and shares ideas for short and long-term investments of time and talent to stabilize and grow the sector.
- Sponsoring the Igniting Connections Symposium, which offers a full day of free professional development and networking for early care and education professionals from across the NRV.



## VT Employees Child Care Needs — Employee Survey 2023

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To identify the Virginia Tech community's child care needs, a survey open to all faculty, staff, and students was administered in fall 2023. This survey was used to inform the ECEI Strategic Plan for 2024-26.

With an 80% response rate (1,495 responses), the survey showed that 56% of respondents are currently caring for one or more infants, toddlers, children, or adolescents between the ages of 0 and 18. The following graphs and analysis further support the importance of the initiative's work at Virginia Tech.

Regarding the age distribution of children and adolescents VT employees reported caring for (Figure 1), the largest age group was Kindergarten through 3rd grade, making up 23.2%. The survey also showed infants, young toddlers, and toddlers together to make up 33.6% of the total children cared for. This further emphasizes the need for early childhood education programs and accessible child care specifically for younger children.

Assessing the current state of child care arrangements (Figure 2) shows that most children are either attending school or attending a child care program during work hours. However, day-to-day arrangements had a 10.4% response, which means that there are families that do not have reliable and consistent child care arrangements.

The main reasons behind unmet child care needs as shown in the survey responses below include the lack of back-up care options, lack of available child care in the respondent's area and the financial strain of child care (Figure 3). These survey responses align with the core pillars of care which are to provide quality, accessible, flexible and affordable care.

### *Child Care Needs Survey Summary*

- **76%** need and/or use of some form of child care
- **14%** are the sole custodial caregiver for their child(ren)
- **47.1%** report that their current care is not reliable, flexible, or accessible enough
- **21.2%** report backup care is needed 1-2 times a month
- **57.5%** need backup care a few times a year





Figure 1

*Age Distribution of Children Cared for*

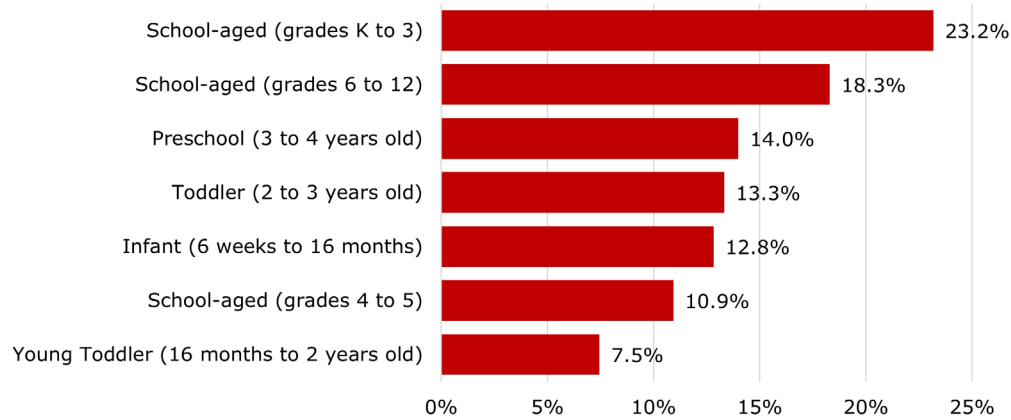


Figure 2

*Characterization of Children's Current Child Care Arrangements*

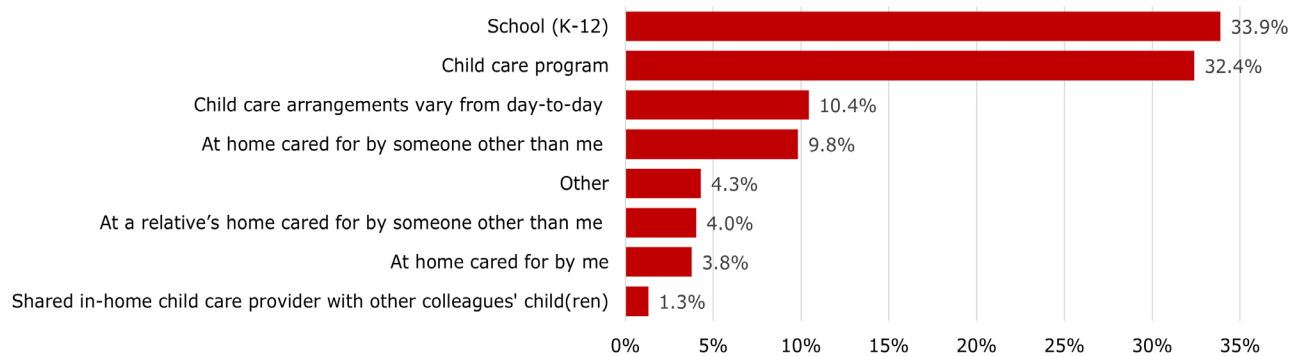
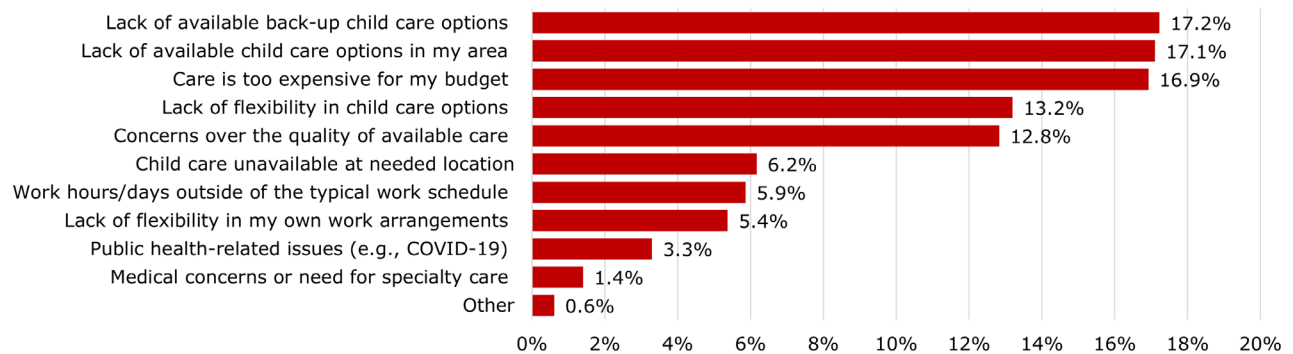


Figure 3

*Reasons Behind Unmet Child Care Needs*







## The Future of Early Childhood Education Initiatives

The ECEI strategic plan for FY 2024-27 includes three main strategic goals along with subgoals and priorities:

**Goal 1:** Expand access to quality early childhood education programs.

**Goal 2:** Implement caregiving, educational and outreach programs to support employees who fulfill caregiving roles.

**Goal 3:** Strengthen regional/state partnerships and engagement.

The strategic plan also outlines the initiative's priorities internally, regionally and at the state level.

### *Internal Priorities:*

- Explore space share to increase infant and toddler care.
- Evaluate opportunities to develop flexible care programs, building upon Little Hokies Hangout.
- Revisit back-up care reimbursement program.
- Explore partnerships focused on school-age care, with particular focus on after school care.
- Continue to explore further partnerships in Roanoke.
- Evaluate the opportunity to expand Dependent Travel Program to colleges for teaching and research faculty.
- Evaluate needed outreach programs and events that will increase parent education and support of working parents at Virginia Tech.

### *Regional and State Priorities:*

- Identify opportunities to increase family-based child care.
- Support workforce development and recognition of ECE career pathway.
- Serve as active member with Virginia Business Round table for Early Education working to advance awareness and support for accessible child care across the Commonwealth.
- Support Unified Virginia Quality Birth to Five System (VQB5) quality initiatives through Ready Regions.
- Support the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) ecosystem by providing leadership in statewide organizations.



## Partnerships and Collaborations

The ECEI works to establish both internal as well as regional and state partnerships in order to meet the demand for high quality and affordable child care for children of university faculty, staff and students.

### *Internal:*

- **Little Hokie Hangout:** A flexible, subsidized care program primarily for graduate student families, open to Virginia Tech students and employees for children ages 2-5. Faculty and staff pay an increased rate.
- **Womens Center:** Located on campus, the Womens Center has direct resources to a Working Parents' Listserv, Little Hokies Hand-Me-Down (where caregivers can receive gently used items), and Kids Night Out (a free hour and a half of child care for ages 2-10).
- **Hokie Wellness Child Care:** Provides information on child care options available locally and resources for parents to support work-life balance through their website.
- **Child Development Center for Learning and Research (CDCLR):** Provides a model early care and education program for local, state, and national early childhood communities.
- **Care.com:** Virginia Tech full-time faculty/staff and non-student wage employees have unlimited premium access to Care.com for finding child care, adult care, pet care, housekeeping, and tutoring.
- **Confidential office hours:** Available to all employees to connect with peers to ask questions about being a parent at Virginia Tech.
- **Monthly Lunch & Learns:** An opportunity for Virginia Tech families to learn more about caregiving topics.
- **Working Parents at VT:** A Facebook page to connect Virginia Tech employees with colleagues.
- **The Child Study Center (CSC):** A specialty research, service, and training facility devoted to the comprehensive assessment, treatment, prevention, and understanding of problems of childhood and adolescence.



### *Regional and State:*

- **Rainbow Riders:** Provides full-time care for children from infancy to pre-kindergarten, part time programs for preschool aged children and school age programs for children in kindergarten - 5th grade. Located at 307 N. Knollwood Drive, Blacksburg, VA.
- **Valley Interfaith Child Care Center:** Provides child care for children aged 6 weeks to 12 years of income-eligible and working families in the New River Valley. Located at 950 Heather Drive, Blacksburg, VA.
- **Giles Health & Family Center:** A private, non-profit center that provides an Early Head Start and child care programs for children aged 6 weeks to 12 years. Located at 701 Wenonah Avenue, Pearisburg, VA.
- **Children's Nest:** Provides child care, preschool, and summer programming for children ranging in age from 4 weeks to 12 years old. Located at 1155 Draper Road SW Blacksburg, VA.
- **Champion Early Learning Center:** Provides child care for children 6 weeks - 12 years and participates in Virginia's subsidized child care program. Located at 5342 Fallowater Lane, Roanoke, VA.
- **First Steps:** Established in 2016, First Steps is a regional initiative that supports early childhood education and development in the New River Valley. They seek to increase knowledge about and access to services, help strengthen ECE workforce development, and create shared messaging to give agencies a common voice. Their recent focus is to build connections between providers and develop tools for advocacy.
- **NRV Cares:** A private, non-profit organization dedicated to protecting children and strengthening families. These services are available to all citizens living in Virginia counties of Floyd, Giles, Montgomery, Pulaski, and the City of Radford.



## Community and Regional Engagement

The ECEI has worked to engage with the local and broader regional community to offer better access to quality, affordable, and flexible early care and education to faculty, staff, and students.

- **Igniting Connections Annual Early Childhood Symposium:** Convened at The Inn at Virginia Tech's Blacksburg Campus, more than 100 professionals from the New River Valley attended a day dedicated to early childhood education. The day consisted of keynote speaker Mary Anderson, local speakers from nine institutions across the NRV, facilitated discussions, experience sharing, and recognizing extraordinary educators. The most recent symposium (September 22nd, 2023) was also the third consecutive year that the Community Foundation of the NRV's First Step led the Early Childhood Champion Awards.
- **NRV Regional Childcare Summit Series:** Led by Virginia Tech in partnership with the Community Foundation of the NRV, over 35 local leaders most recently met on April 19th, 2023, to discuss approaches to ensuring families of the New River Valley have access to quality early care and education. With the partnership, Virginia Tech has shared statewide initiatives impacting NRV ECE providers, shared models of how NRV employers are supporting the ECE workforce, and created an option menu of both short- and long-term financial and in-kind ways to support the ECE workforce.
- **Virginia Association for the Education of Young Children (VAAEYC):** Serves both at a local level (NRV VAAEYC) and state level (VAAEYC) and serves Virginia early educators with local public policy support, accreditation support, professional development, and connections.
- **VA Voices:** Voices for Virginia's Children is the commonwealth's only independent, multi-issue child policy and advocacy organization.
- **Virginia Business Roundtable for Early Education (VBREE):** Founded and convened by the



*The Igniting Connections Early Childhood Symposium brought ECE educators from across the NRV.*





Virginia Early Childhood Foundation (VECF) with the support of the Virginia Chamber, GO VA, and the Virginia Economic Developers Association (VEDA) and is comprised of executives in business/employers, local & regional chambers, and economic development agencies representing all Ready Regions in Virginia.

- **Child Development Associate (CDA) Council:** The council for Professional Recognition is a leader in the credentialing of early childhood educators worldwide. CDA council promotes improved performance and recognition of professionals in the early childhood education of children ages birth to 5 years old.
- **Child Care Aware of VA:** A community-based network of child care and early education specialists working to increase the accessibility, availability and quality of child care in Virginia.
- **Giles Focus Network:** The livability initiative began as a three-year regional planning process, which provided an opportunity for NRV residents to develop a vision for the future and develop strategies.





## Closing Statement

The Executive and Advisory Board of the Early Childhood Education Initiatives at Virginia Tech continue to make strides towards the strategic goals outlined in this report. Within 2023-24, multiple accomplishments towards communicating caregiving careers to the community support the University Global Distinction goal of “Be a Destination for Talent”. Working with the care center partners, committee, the Virginia Tech community and the various collaborations established this year continues to reflect the University’s motto *Ut Prosim* (That I May Serve). Recent updates to these initiatives can be found on the Virginia Tech Care Giving website.

## Appendices

- [Caregiving.vt.edu](https://caregiving.vt.edu)
- [Child care resources for employees](#)

