

Supporting the New River Valley's **EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS**



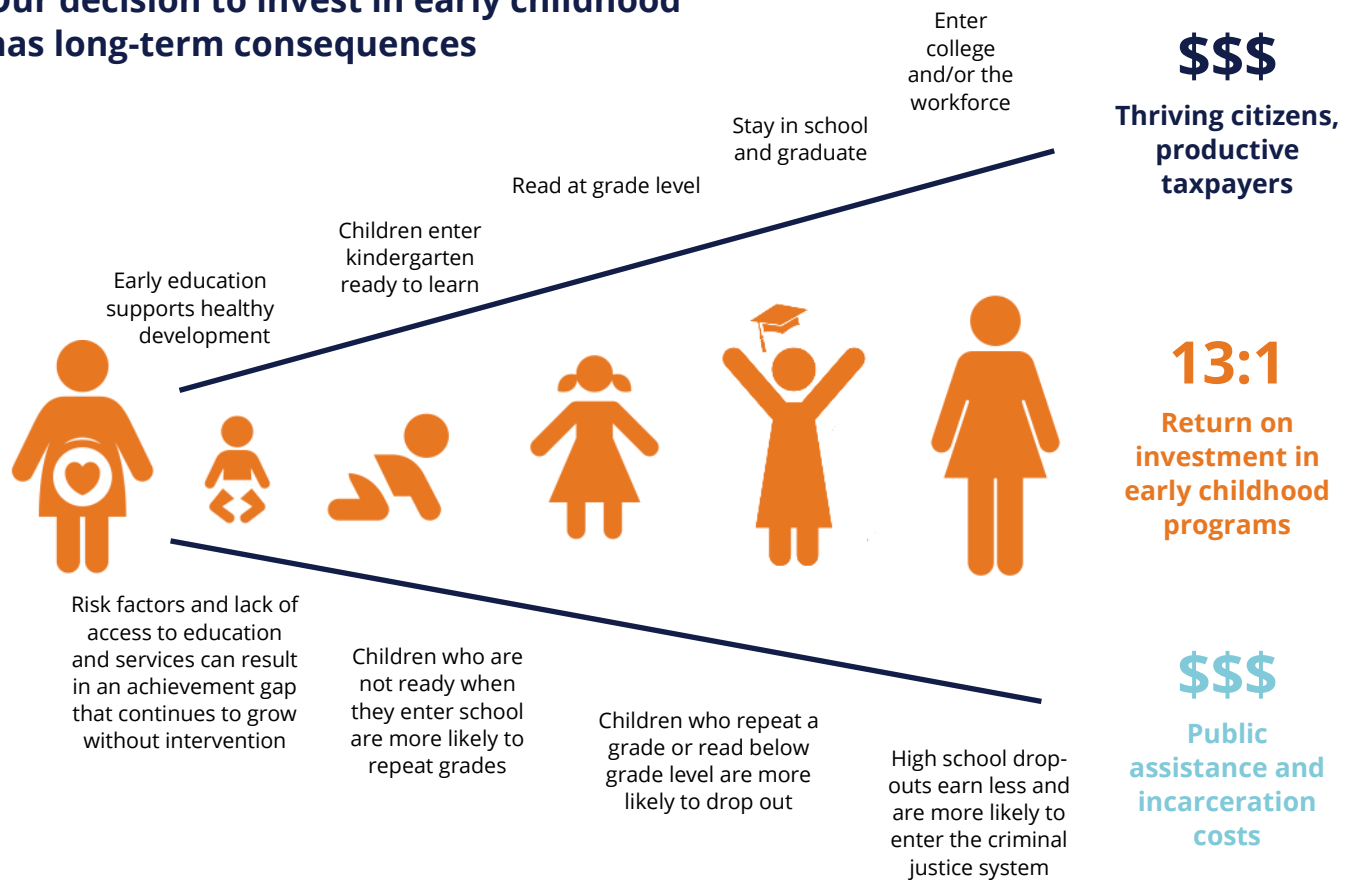
The
**COMMUNITY
FOUNDATION**
of the New River Valley

The Importance of Early Childhood and Quality Childcare

Providing access to high quality, early education is an essential part of supporting the New River Valley's current and future workforce. The COVID-19 pandemic underscored how critically important childcare access is to current workers, many of whom had to leave the workforce to care for their young children when providers closed their doors. Like housing and public education, access to high-quality childcare is an essential part of recruiting and retaining a talented workforce in the New River Valley.

High-quality childcare is also essential to building our future workforce. The Virginia Department of Education argues that a child's first years of life are incredibly important to their success in kindergarten and beyond¹, while renowned expert Dr. James J. Heckman, the Henry Schultz Distinguished Service Professor of Economics at the University of Chicago, argues that every dollar spent on high quality, birth-to-five programs delivers a 13% annual return on investment for communities.² Access to high quality, early education has physical and behavioral health benefits, and results in higher rates of high school graduation and lower rates of substance misuse, among other benefits.

Our decision to invest in early childhood has long-term consequences



Graphic adapted from Smart Beginnings NRV, 2019, a program of the Virginia Early Childhood Foundation

1. Virginia Department of Education, 2023. <https://www.doe.virginia.gov/teaching-learning-assessment/early-childhood-care-education>
2. The Heckman Equation, 2023. <https://heckmanequation.org/>

The Need to Support the Early Childhood Workforce

Qualified educators are the backbone of childcare. Recruiting and retaining staff has always been challenging for childcare providers, but following the pandemic, the industry is at a crisis point. As of fall 2022, childcare centers in the NRV were operating at about 50% of their licensed capacity due to a lack of teachers, meaning our centers have the physical space to accommodate more children but lack the number of teachers needed to meet state-mandated ratios and provide high-quality care.³

The lack of teachers is not surprising when we consider that the starting salary for an early educator in the NRV is between \$12 and \$16 per hour, often without benefits. With public schools similarly feeling the crunch of a tight labor market, many childcare teachers move into the public school system, while still others leave the industry altogether for higher pay and less stress.⁴

Unlike some other industries, raising prices to raise pay is not an easy decision. Childcare center directors must balance paying their staff a wage worthy of their expertise with keeping tuition affordable for families. For example, the average cost of infant care in Virginia is more than \$15,000 annually, a significant expense that makes any tuition increase difficult for families to absorb. And, that annual tuition is still not reflective of the true cost of providing high-quality care.⁵

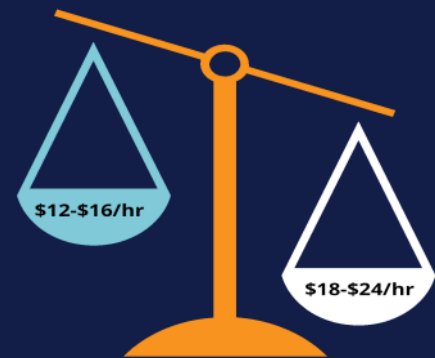
The New River Valley's childcare providers have maximized pandemic-relief dollars to raise pay and provide bonuses, but their long-term ability to maintain and grow teacher pay is precarious. This uncertainty limits a center's ability to meet or expand care in response to demand, resulting in lengthy waitlists, especially for infant and toddler care. Moreover, those teachers that remain in the field are trying to stave off burnout while navigating an increase in behavioral challenges among the children in their care.

The NRV is at an inflection point. Business, government, and community leaders recognize that childcare is essential to recruiting and retaining talent in our region, yet the childcare workforce is underpaid and overburdened. To support our current and future workforce in all industries, we must work together to stabilize and grow the childcare workforce.



WORKFORCE CRISIS

In fall 2022, NRV childcare centers were operating at about 50% of their licensed capacity due to teacher shortages.



INADEQUATE PAY

Starting salaries range from \$12 to \$16 per hour, well below the \$18-\$24 per hour available for some entry-level office or retail positions.



LENGTHY WAITLISTS

One high-quality Blacksburg center serves 56 children ages 0-24 months. The waitlist for this age group was 211 children in 2022.

3. Data compiled from the Virginia Department of Social Services by Virginia Tech Early Childhood Education Initiatives, September-October 2022.
4. Data gathered from childcare provider meetings and one-on-one discussion by Virginia Tech Early Childhood Education Initiatives, 2022.
5. Child Care Aware of Virginia, Data Services, 2023

How You Can Help!

As in so many areas of community life, the New River Valley boasts innovative solutions to supporting childcare and strong partnerships to test and scale those solutions across the region. First Steps, an initiative of the Community Foundation of the New River Valley, and Virginia Tech created the NRV Childcare Summit Series to share information about the state of childcare in the NRV, highlight creative ways that employers have supported the childcare industry, and share ideas for short and long-term investments of time, talent, and treasure to stabilize and grow the sector. Ultimately, we seek to invest local dollars and expertise to support NRV childcare providers while advocating for greater state and federal investment.

We offer the ideas below as a starting point and welcome new ideas and feedback as we implement these approaches across the region.



Short-Term Opportunities to Support the Early Education Workforce

GIVE YOUR TIME

Become a Business Mentor

Childcare directors have the unique responsibility of offering quality early education while managing a business with a highly complex set of regulations and requirements. Many directors began as educators, but need greater experience and education in business practices, from finances to human resource management, and more. Through this program, business and government leaders with relevant expertise will be paired with childcare administrative staff to understand the childcare business and offer insight and advice in business management.

For more information about this program, contact Jessica Wirgau at jessicawirgau@cfnrv.org.

Promote the Virginia Childcare Subsidy Program with Your Employees and Peers

The Virginia Childcare Subsidy Program helps qualifying families with young children access childcare. Income eligibility expanded during the pandemic and remains in place. Financial help is available to families whose income is below 85 percent of the state median income — for instance, a family of four earning \$7,412 a month. Many NRV childcare providers are already subsidy vendors, and more are signing up every day, but too few parents know about the program and expanded income eligibility. First Steps and its partners will provide the materials and information you need to promote the subsidy with your employees and peers.

For more information about promoting the childcare subsidy, contact Margaret Hurst at margarethurst@cfnrv.org or Kim Thomason at kimbe74@vt.edu.

INVEST FINANCIALLY

Support All First Steps Workforce Programs

First Steps is a network of more than sixty organizations working to support young children and their families, with a particular emphasis on supporting and strengthening the early childhood education and development workforce through professional development, recognition, and compensation. Gifts to First Steps support many initiatives, including:

- **The Early Childhood Champion Awards:** Honoring early educators, health and human service providers, and advocates. Nominees are recognized at an annual celebration, and honorees receive a cash prize courtesy of the Community Foundation.
- **Online and Virtual Training Sessions:** Offered free of charge with experts on topics such as identifying development delays, special education resources for teachers and families, best practices for recruiting and retaining your workforce, and more.
- **Tools and Events to Promote Early Childhood Education as a Career:** Flyers, presentation templates, and talking points to help promote early childhood education as a profession and ways to enter the field.

Improve Retention through Onsite Mentorship

Childcare directors must sometimes hire teachers with limited experience in early childhood education and development, and they are limited in their ability to continuously train and mentor new teachers as they manage all other aspects of the business. This can lead to quick burnout of new teachers, and difficulty in maintaining a high level of quality across the center. This program revives a successful local mentorship system that ended in 2019. It deploys a team of highly experienced local educators to provide one-on-one, in classroom mentorship to childcare providers across the NRV. Program directors can request a certain number of mentorship hours for their staff, and financial contributions will be used to pay mentors and cover travel to and from those centers.

How to Give

Contributions to First Steps and the mentorship program are managed by the Community Foundation of the New River Valley (CFNRV), a 501c3 public charity. All contributions are tax deductible as allowed by law. To make a gift:

- **Give by Check:** Make checks payable to the CFNRV, P.O. Box 6009, Christiansburg, VA 24068-6009. Please put 'First Steps ' or 'Teacher Mentorship' in the memo line.
- **Give Online:** Visit cfnrv.org/give. The form will ask if you wish to direct your donation. Please write 'First Steps ' or 'Teacher Mentorship', then complete your payment information.
- **Request an Invoice:** Email Jessica Wirgau at jessicawirgau@cfnrv.org to request an invoice.

Looking for Sponsorship Opportunities?

The CFNRV offers year-round and program-specific sponsorship opportunities to support the community and promote your business. Contact Jessica Wirgau at jessicawirgau@cfnrv.org or at 540-381-8999 for more information.

Long-Term Opportunities to Support the Early Education Workforce

JOIN A WORKGROUP

Developing sustainable solutions to increase teacher pay and expand opportunities to see early childhood education as a desired career path will take additional time and research. As part of the NRV Childcare Summit Series, we are seeking volunteers to join work groups focused on:

Exploring a Family Scholarship Program

Communities in Virginia and across the nation have created scholarship funds that allow qualifying families to receive scholarships to offset childcare tuition costs. This gives childcare centers greater flexibility to raise tuition and teacher pay, without outpricing families. Join us to explore models, determine how the program aligns with other funding sources, and consider whether a regional childcare scholarship makes sense for the NRV.

Growing Workforce Development Programs

Join us in working with career and technical education teachers in public schools and higher education partners to craft recruitment and job placement programs. This group will develop strategies to promote early childhood education as a career choice, support students pursuing a credential or degree, and place students in childcare jobs.

For more information or to join a work group, contact Kim Thomason at kimbe74@vt.edu.

CONSIDER A PARTNERSHIP

The NRV Childcare Summit Series has highlighted several innovative ways that business, community, and government leaders have come together to expand access to affordable, high-quality childcare. These are models for small, medium, and large employers alike. Contact information for models highlighted in the series are below, or you can contact Kim Thomason with Early Childhood Education Initiatives at Virginia Tech to learn more about these models and partnership ideas at kimbe74@vt.edu.

Childcare Stipend Programs

Stipend programs can improve recruitment and retention by providing additional funds to childcare staff based on their tenure and professional credentials. The Giles Incentives for Teachers (GIFT) and Pulaski Early Educator Awards for Credentials (PERC) programs, along with the incentive program currently in development using ARPA dollars from the Town of Blacksburg, provide models for how to incentivize longevity and continued professional development using local dollars. Local governments, businesses, and individuals have helped to finance these programs. For more information contact Jessica Wirgau at jessicawirgau@cfnr.org.



Mixed-Use Model at Calfee Community and Cultural Center

From 1894 to 1966, the Calfee Training School educated African American children in Pulaski. Today Calfee alumni and community leaders are refurbishing the historic school to meet current needs, including the creation of a childcare center, community kitchen, digital learning lab, meeting space, and museum. Calfee has leveraged federal, state, and local funding sources, and provides a model for integrating childcare into a mixed-use facility in partnership with public and private childcare programs. To learn more contact Co-Executive Directors Binti Villinger (binti@calfececc.org) and Jill Williams (jill@calfececc.org).

Employer – Off-site Childcare Partnerships

Medium and large-scale employers in the NRV have developed partnerships with existing childcare providers to ensure employees have access to care. The employer provides a reliable, annual funding stream to the childcare program to increase access to quality childcare opportunities . Virginia Tech has partnered with Rainbow Riders Childcare Center and is currently exploring opportunities to expand its partnerships to other providers , while both Carilion New River Valley Medical Center and Radford University have partnered with the Radford Early Learning Center. To learn more about this approach, contact Kim Thomason of Virginia Tech at kimbe74@vt.edu or Agida Manizade with Radford Child Development at amanizade@radford.edu.

Employer In-House Childcare

Red Rooster Coffee Company in Floyd created a small, in-house childcare program – the Yellow Hen – in response to a lack of childcare options for its employees. The company subsidizes the childcare center to make tuition affordable for employees and a small number of community members not affiliated with the business. The onsite center encourages parents to visit their children during the day, and provides a valuable benefit to attract and retain employees. To learn more, contact Red Rooster owner Haden Polseno-Hensley at support@redroostercoffeeoaster.com.

Faculty & Staff Resources Supporting Childcare

Virginia Tech provides resources for employees to support caregiving, which can be reviewed on at caregiving.vt.edu. In addition, Virginia Tech is currently piloting a backup care system in partnership with Care.com subsidized in part by the university. For more information on the Care.com partnership please contact Hokie Wellness at hokiewellness@vt.edu.

In-Kind Contributions of Training or Materials

Childcare centers require regular trainings for employees in CPR, medication administration, and more. They also need materials for classrooms and items for building and grounds upkeep. These expenses can add up quickly, making it difficult for directors to budget wage increases or bonuses that can help attract and retain employees. Your business may be able to provide in-kind support through volunteer hours and material donations. For more information, contact Kim Thomason at kimbe74@vt.edu.

About First Steps

Established in 2016, First Steps is a network of agencies and individuals working to support young children and families in the New River Valley. It is guided by a Leadership Team of childcare providers, health and human service agency representatives, public school teachers, and advocates, with administrative support and programmatic funding provided by the Community Foundation of the New River Valley. Together, network members pursue three priorities:

- Increase knowledge about and access to available services through an early childhood education and development information hub.
- Identify shared values and messaging so agencies can speak with a common voice about the importance of early childhood.
- Support and strengthen the early childhood education and development workforce through professional development, recognition, and compensation.

For more information about First Steps
visit cfnrv.org/first-steps or
contact Community Foundation staff:

Margaret Hurst, First Steps Program Coordinator
margarethurst@cfnrv.org

Jessica Wirgau, CEO
jessicawirgau@cfnrv.org
540-381-8999

**first
STEPS**

Photos in this publication are courtesy of Community Foundation of the New River Valley, Giles Community Garden, Wilsie Photography, and Wonder Universe: A Children's Museum.

