Richmond, Virginia

City Population: 220,289
Median Family Income: $41,331
Race/Ethnicity Demographics:
40.8% White  50.6% African-American  6.3% Hispanic  2.3% Asian  2.3% Other
Number of School Districts: 1

Early Childhood Workforce Landscape

- Richmond has an Early Childhood Cabinet and Early Childhood Action Council, which support the work of the Richmond Early Childhood Action Project, a project that prioritizes strengthening early childhood education in high poverty communities. The Cabinet and Action Council are both public-private partnerships. This work lives in Richmond’s Office of Community Wealth Building, which was established in 2014 by former Mayor Dwight Jones to prioritize a two-generation approach to poverty reduction.
- The Office of Community Wealth Building has lead the city’s early childhood work, including coordinating and aligning early childhood programs through the Early Childhood Cabinet. Supporting increased early childhood education opportunities, as well as the early childhood workforce, has correctly been recognized as an important anti-poverty strategy.
- Workforce Development is also a significant component of the work of the Office of Community Wealth Building. Housing these two areas of work in the same office makes Richmond well positioned to address issues that affect the early childhood workforce, which is at the crux of early childhood education and workforce development.
- Richmond’s early childhood work has consistently included a strong focus on lifting up the voices of communities in poverty. In Richmond, leaders recognize that supporting the early childhood workforce is a strategy to lift families out of poverty, both because reliable early childhood settings allow parents to work and reliable early childhood settings begin with supported early childhood educators, and also because many early childhood educators live in or close to the poverty line themselves.
- From an initiative to survey families living in housing projects in Richmond, a clear need to understand the needs of, and support, family, friend and neighbor (FFN) providers has emerged. Richmond has a strong understanding that many early education providers are experiencing financial hardship or poverty themselves, as well as trauma and other adverse life experiences.
- As part of a grant through the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, Richmond has been able to fund a community navigator position to help families access services. This person can play an important role in helping connect families to city services and infuse quality into informal networks of care. Richmond is hoping that this community router position can be institutionalized as part of the workforce development work within the Office of Community wealth building. The information that this router brings, from directly listening to low-income families in Richmond, also helps the case for why informal networks of care are viable networks and for the need to support informal providers.
Also as part of this grant from the W. K. Kellogg foundation, Richmond developed a scan of early childhood providers and conducted two pilot focus groups in high-poverty areas to ensure the voices of residents of communities in poverty are part of the conversation around early education.

Smart Beginnings Greater Richmond is a regional coalition of public and private organizations, business and citizens working together to ensure that the success of the region’s children. It is one of 17 regional Smart Beginnings initiatives that form a state-wide network supported by the Virginia Early Childhood Foundation.

Child Savers, a local non-profit, administers the Quality Rating Improvement System and provides professional development for private providers. The QRIS system is rigorous and comprehensive and uses the CLASS tool from the University of Virginia.

The Richmond public schools provide professional development for teachers that are in the schools and part of the Virginia Preschool Initiative.

There are some local community colleges that are committed to providing content in that classes that prepares early educators for the classroom.

In February 2017, the Education Compact was released. The Education Compact is a document that states a commitment to organizational collaboration between the Office of Mayor Levar Stoney, the Richmond City Council, and the Richmond Public Schools, and lays out a plan for that collaboration. Through the education compact, early childhood work in Richmond is being elevated to a top mayoral priority. Leaders in the Office of Community Wealth building are in the midst of an ongoing process to leverage this increased attention to early childhood without losing the very intentional and deep focus on the voices and needs of communities in poverty.

Challenges

- A lack of understanding of the knowledge and skills required to be an early educator.
- Early educators need training on social determinants of wealth, trauma, and the impact of poverty to understand the students of, and challenges of, the early education system in Richmond.
- Directors struggle with high staff turnover. Early education teachers often live in high poverty neighborhoods and face financial hardship.