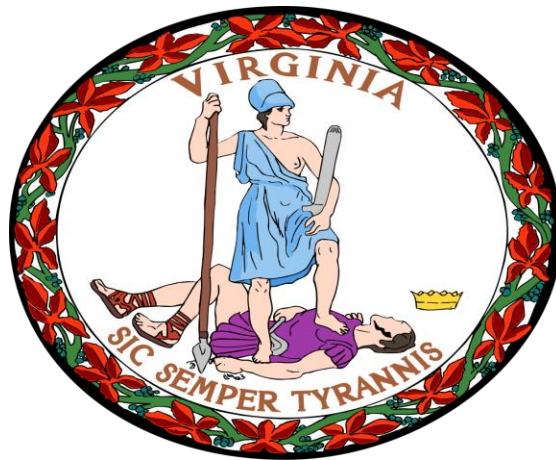


GOVERNOR'S ADVISORY COMMISSION ON QUALITY CHILD CARE AND EDUCATION

Recommendations Report

November 1, 2019



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Delegate Jeffrey Bourne

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Executive Summary

On June 26, 2018, Governor Northam created the Governor's Advisory Commission on Quality Child Care and Education (the Commission) through Executive Order. The Commission was charged with studying Richmond's Capitol-area child care offerings and delivering recommendations to the Governor for how to improve or develop new child care opportunities for area state employees with young children.

In collecting the relevant information for this assignment, the Commission conducted research on other states' and private employers' child care practices, and employed the use of a survey and focus group sessions. This research helped identify key child care themes and challenges experienced by state employees, and guided the Commission's discussion and recommendation creation process. The Commission ultimately agreed that, to best serve Capitol-area state employees' child care needs, the Commonwealth will need to adopt innovative solutions to address systemic challenges, including workplace parent culture; deficiency of benefits and lack of choice; and affordability and quality assurance.

The Commission's complete findings and recommendations are shared [here](#).

Background

Importance of the Issue

The Commonwealth of Virginia employs approximately 100,000 employees. Many of these employees play a critically-important role outside of their working hours – that of a parent. These employees work hard to secure a future that is bright and full of opportunity for their children. The Commonwealth should ensure a supportive work environment where employees can work toward the success of their families and the Commonwealth. Currently, state employees across the Commonwealth struggle with the access to and affordability of quality early care and learning environments for their children. Childhood is a time of development and discovery for parent and child alike. Having a reliable, safe, and nurturing environment where young children can grow and explore individual potential is key to a parent’s ability to be a productive member of the workforce. In order to compete to recruit and retain talented young employees, the Commonwealth must support state employees’ ability to access and afford early care and learning for their children.

Executive Order 13 Established

On June 26, 2018, Governor Northam signed Executive Order 13, effectively establishing the Virginia Advisory Commission on Quality Child Care and Education (Commission).

The Commission was created through executive order to explore the feasibility of providing an evidence-based early care and learning program for young children of state employees working on and around Capitol Square in Richmond, as this area reflects the highest concentration of the state’s labor force.

The Commission’s membership was appointed by the Governor and is co-chaired by the Secretaries of Education and Health and Human Resources or their designees (Co-Chairs). Membership also consists of the following: A representative from the Office of the First Lady; the Secretary of Administration or her designee; two members from the House of Delegates, as recommended by the Speaker of the House; one member from the Senate, as recommended by the President pro tempore of the Senate; and experts in early childhood education and development, as appointed by the Governor.

State Employee Child Care Needs Survey

Survey Design

To better assess the child care needs of state employees who are parents, the Commission recommended a comprehensive child care survey be distributed to approximately 18,000 Virginia state employees via email to collect confidential feedback.

To best analyze how state employees currently view and utilize local child care options, the survey, utilizing best practices reported by other states and private employers, prompted respondents on topics like quality, affordability, and location through a series of 22 thoughtfully designed questions.

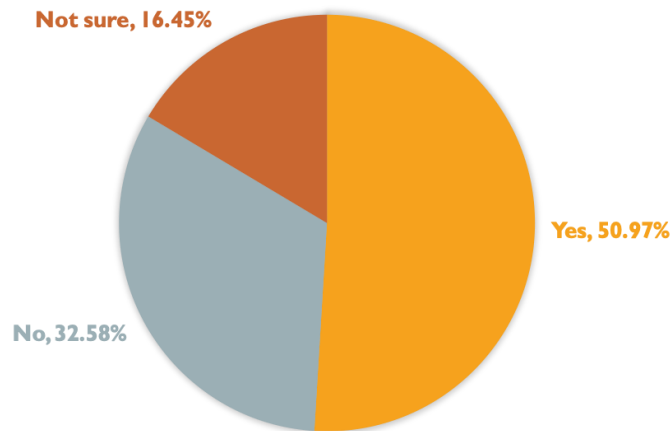
Survey Responses and Findings

Of the approximately 18,000 state employees who received the survey, 3,679 responded, with 1,437 individuals reporting having at least one child currently in child care, and 419 individuals reporting anticipating needing child care within the next three years.

Key findings from the survey of employees are found below.

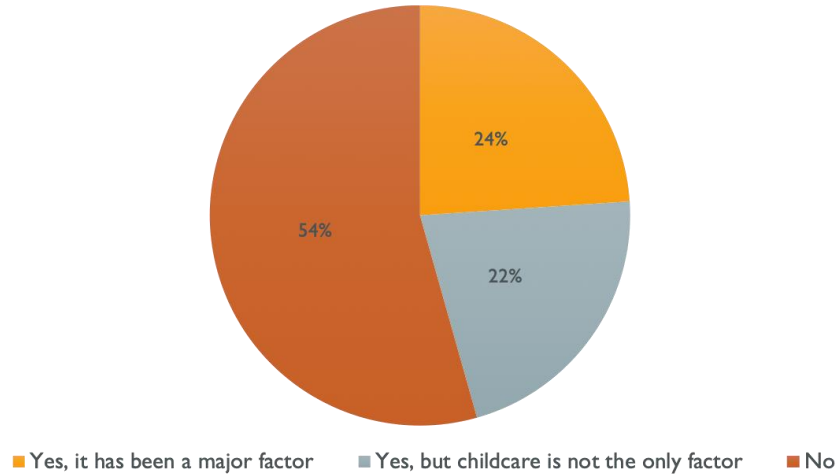
Affordability

Do you consider this affordable based on the services you receive?



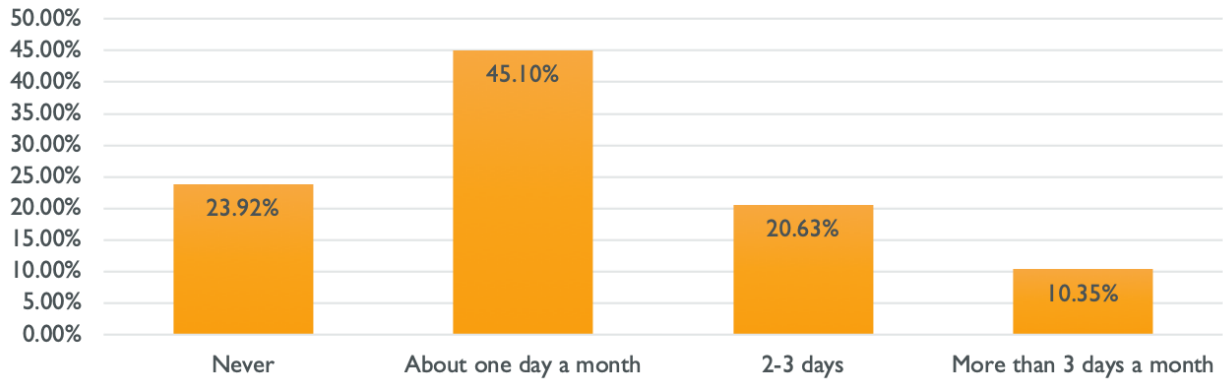
Impact on Retention

Have your childcare needs caused you to consider leaving your current position, or taking a new position with a different employer, in the past 12 months?



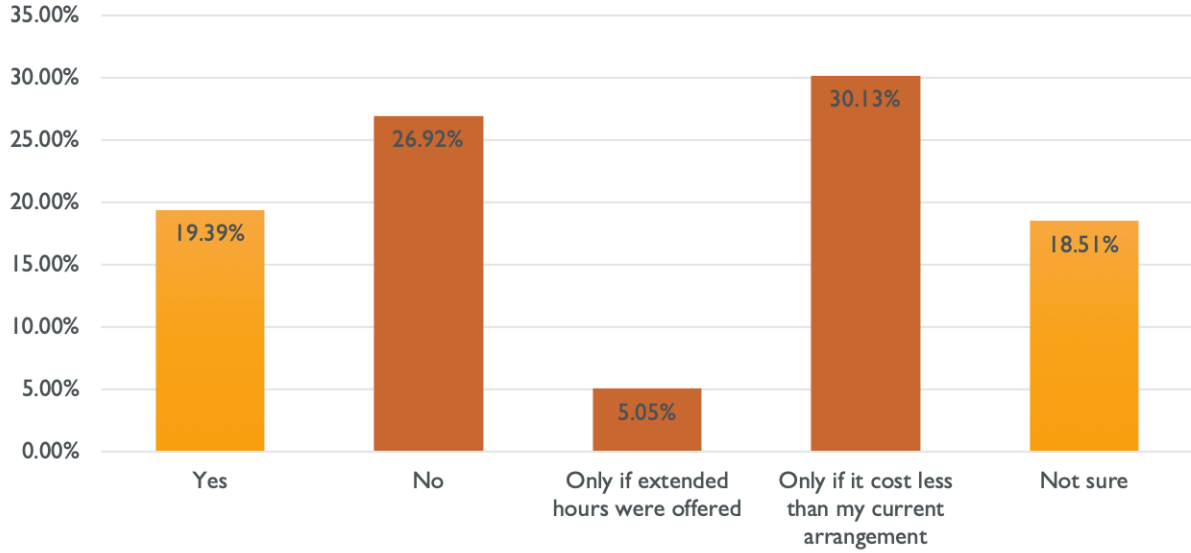
Impact on Productivity

How often in a typical month do you miss work, or arrive late/leave early because of issues with childcare?



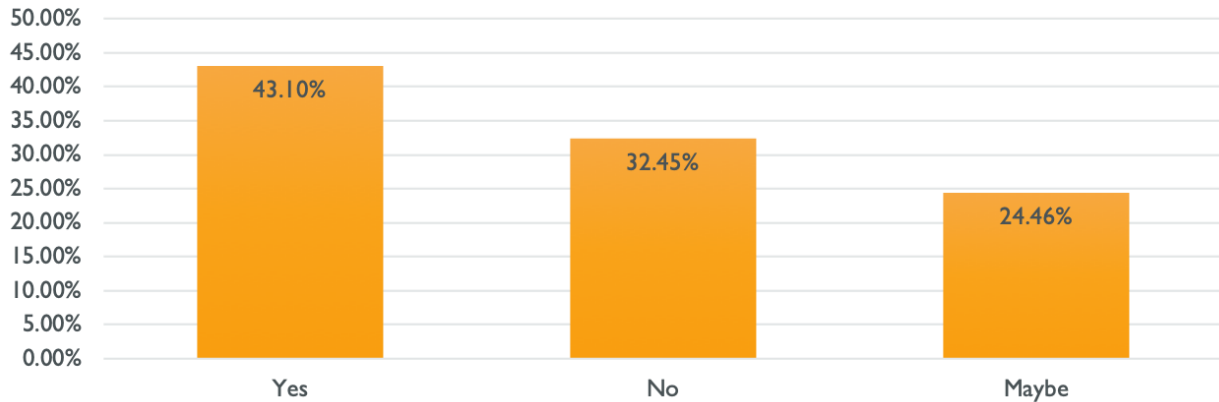
On-Site Child Care Facility

If offered, would you use a childcare center in the Capitol Square area as your primary source of childcare?



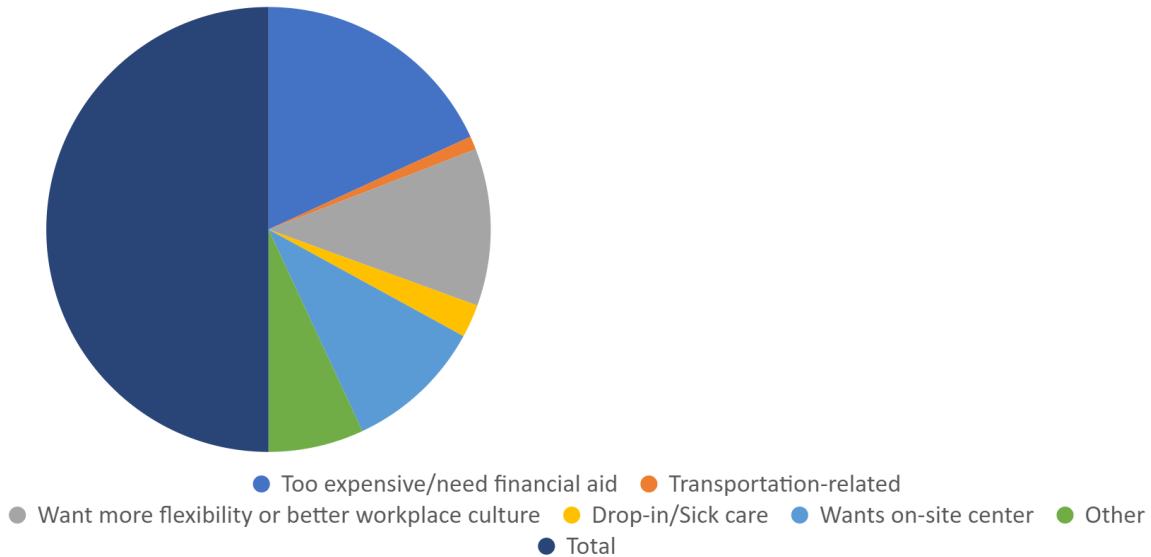
Changing Child Care Needs During General Assembly

Would you use an extended-hours (before 9:00 AM or after 5:00 PM) childcare option during the General Assembly session?



Results from Open Comment Section

Please share any additional comments or ideas that would help support you with your childcare needs.



Many state employees reported paying close to or more than their mortgage for childcare.

“For the past five years, we have paid double our mortgage payment in childcare for one child. It roughly runs about \$12k-\$13k each year. Now that he is starting school, that cost is going to drop by half, but we still need both before school and after school childcare as his school does not start until 9:00AM and I don't get off work until 5:30AM.”

“A state childcare center in Richmond would be convenient for many state employees, but the largest burden tends to be financial. The cost of having just two children in some form of child care often exceeds the cost of a mortgage or monthly rent. It would be very helpful if that cost could be reduced/subsidized.”

Nearly 250, or 23%, of comment concerned workplace culture and flexibility for parents.

“Promote flexible work schedules and a culture of understanding and empathy surrounding new mothers.”

“Build a culture that recognizes women with children are professionals and produce at their highest capacity if they are supported. Educating supervisors may also be advisable.”

Additional Insight from Focus Groups

Based on the findings on the state employee child care survey, the Commission recommended conducting focus group sessions to further explore the impact child care has on the retention of state employees, and to what degree a state employee's income determines their availability and selection of a child care provider.

Two focus groups were designated, with participants selected from the pool of survey respondents who volunteered their contact information for further questions. The first focus group was comprised of respondents who indicated that they are considering employment elsewhere, with child care challenges being the driving factor.

The second focus group was comprised of respondents who meet certain income and household criteria, specifically those who reported being either a 1 working-parent household with \$17k-70k in total income and at least one child, or two working-parent household with \$34k-\$140k total income with two or more children.

Participants were asked:

- What are the ages of your children, do you have children in grades K-12, too?
- How did you learn about your child care options/how did you decide on the option(s) you currently use?
- What is your position and agency?
- How do you commute to work?
- Would drop-in or sick care be helpful to you?
- How important is an experienced educator to you when choosing a child care option?
- How do you define quality?
- Do you have children with special needs?

Common themes emerged in both focus groups:

- Availability and cost of child care is a significant challenge for employees of all salaries in both groups
- Quality of care was very important to participants, but the definition of what constituted a quality program differed. Long waitlists and high costs left some participants simply seeking a safe facility for their children
- Transportation to and from child care facilities was a major obstacle that impacted productivity and work hours for most participants
- There was uncertainty among participants about the official policies for parents. Attitudes and culture concerning parents in the workplace differed significantly between agencies and departments

- Participants were divided on whether drop-in or sick care would be helpful for them on capitol square
- Most participants with children under 18 months expressed gratitude for parental leave policies established in 2018
- Parents in both groups brought up frustration with the Virginia Department of Social Services (VDSS) website and expressed a desire for a better online tool to compare child care options near them. Only two participants had heard of Virginia's current Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS)
- Parents would like the Commonwealth to enforce uniform family-friendly human resources policies, but recognize the challenge of doing so for a wide variety of positions in varying locations

One employee in the retention group stated, "My 17-year-old self would be proud of the job I have today - that's why I have not left for more money in the private sector." Several employees agreed that their jobs were fulfilling because they believe they are serving the public and helping people, and that this was a major factor in their decision to remain with the Commonwealth rather than leaving for employment elsewhere.

Several employees in both focus groups explained that understanding and flexible supervisors were the deciding factor in staying in their current jobs. One participant gave the example of a supervisor who allowed them to adjust their start time 15 minutes later to accommodate his transportation of children to off-site child care centers. Multiple participants in varying pay bands and agencies reported inconsistencies in what accommodations were allowed for parents.

Recommendations

Continue Existing Initiatives

1. State employees frequently noted the state's new paid family leave policy and the Flexible Spending Accounts as significant benefits that support families with children. The Commonwealth should maintain and expand these existing benefits and help all employees understand how to maximize them.

Culture and Consistency

1. The Commonwealth should provide resources to supervisors and parents to encourage a family-friendly work culture. Agencies should be encouraged to host periodic informational sessions on resources available for parents and caregivers.
2. The Commonwealth should provide a digital and physical packet of resources to employees expecting children. An ideal website for employees would provide clear explanations of how to access benefits and policies (i.e. breastfeeding policies for state employees) and frequently used public resources (i.e. Virginia Quality Rating System, and information about VPI and Child Care Subsidy).
3. The Commonwealth should continue to pilot innovative, family-friendly programs, like allowing infants in the workplace, where feasible.

Benefits

1. The Commonwealth should explore providing a stipend or discount for employees to use at child care facilities that participate in quality observation sessions and ratings reviews. Any potential pilots should focus on state employees in the lower half of pay bands and incentivize high quality programs.
2. The Commonwealth should include reserved space for expansion of child care facilities in the Department of General Services' master plan for Capitol Square. These centers should give priority to state employees over other members of the community.
3. The Commonwealth should consider connecting employees with extended hours options at local providers during General Assembly Session.

System-wide Issues

1. In order to maintain a competitive workforce, the Commonwealth should address the rising cost of, and lack of access to, quality child care statewide and should work to eliminate child care deserts.
2. The Commonwealth should focus on improving compensation, professional development, and retention of early childhood educators, as the quality of student-educator interaction is one of the greatest indicators of a child's success in school and beyond.
3. The Commonwealth should work with private child care providers and nonprofit stakeholders to improve and promote the existing online resources for comparing child care options. A uniform quality measurement and improvement system that is accessible and user-friendly would provide better information to educators and parents. The Governor should look to the report submitted in response to Executive Directive Four by the Chief School Readiness Officer and the Commissioner of the Virginia Department of Social Services for guidance on responding to these systemwide challenges.

Conclusion

- Results of the employee survey and focus groups suggest this is a significant retention and productivity issue for state employees
- There are several simple steps that can be taken in the near future to support parents of young children in the state workforce
- Many of the issues faced by state employees are not unique to the state workforce. There is much work to be done to increase the availability, quality, and affordability of early childhood care and education across the Commonwealth
- It is worth considering what the state can do to support state employees who are responsible for elder care as numerous employees wrote emails and comments in response to the survey highlighting this issue.