

Coordinated Enrollment Overview

Virginia's Current Early Childhood (EC)Landscape is characterized by several different types of providers, including Head Start, VPI, child care centers, family day homes, religious-exempt programs, early childhood special education (ECSE), and early intervention services, among others. In many ways, this diversity is a strength of the EC system in that it allows providers to develop targeted approaches for serving children, and it allows families to choose providers that meet their needs and preferences. However, this diversity also creates enrollment challenges both for providers and families.

Challenges for Families

Some of the challenges families face when enrolling their children in EC programs relate to:

- **Information** - Families may have trouble finding information about programs, including information about program quality, cost, and eligibility. Families often have to navigate disparate websites and visit numerous sites. These challenges may be particularly pronounced for families of Virginia's most vulnerable children.
- **Eligibility** - Programs have different eligibility requirements, including financial or disability requirements, and children may be eligible for multiple programs. These requirements can make it difficult for families to ensure children are placed in the programs that best meet their needs.
- **Applications** - Families often have to complete separate applications for each program, even though many applications require similar information, which can be time-consuming and redundant. Often, these applications have different timelines, which poses further challenges for families.
- **Waitlists** - Waitlist processes are stressful for families since they often do not know where they sit on the waitlist and may be on multiple waitlists at the same time.

Challenges for Providers

EC providers may also face enrollment challenges in these same areas, including:

- **Information** - Having to manage information campaigns, maintain websites, and plan outreach events can be time-consuming, particularly for programs without personnel dedicated to these tasks.
- **Eligibility** - Requesting and maintaining relevant child eligibility records can create administrative burdens for programs, which may be especially onerous for smaller programs.
- **Applications** - Creating, reviewing, and responding to family applications is time-consuming. Further, providers have no way of knowing if families have enrolled their children elsewhere, and so time spent reviewing applications may yield no returns.
- **Waitlists** - Since families may be on multiple waitlists, there is inherent instability in the waitlist for any single provider, which makes it difficult to plan for enrollment.

Coordinated Enrollment

To alleviate some of these challenges for families and providers alike, the state is requesting that all publicly-funded programs and sites participate in Coordinated Enrollment initiatives. Coordinated Enrollment seeks to establish regional EC community strategies that can simplify enrollment processes and benefit families and providers. Some benefits of Coordinated Enrollment include:

- Greater availability of information for families.
- Clarity in program requirements and ease of program comparison for families.
- Planned, purposeful inclusion of children with delays and disabilities.
- Less duplication of efforts and reduced administrative burdens for programs.
- More stability for programs, which allows for efficient longer-term planning.