

Chesapeake Bay Regional Early Experiences Council

Summer 2024 Partnership Update



CREEC's Strong Regional Coalition Continues to Grow

The Chesapeake Bay Regional Early Experiences Council (CREEC) continues to grow and diversify its partnership with more than 40 organizational partners providing early childhood and youth programs and services across the 10 counties in Virginia's Middle Peninsula and Northern Neck.

The coalition is working to create a bold regional vision for early childhood and youth success across the communities we serve.

Chaired by Debbie Lancucki, Director of Three Rivers Healthy Families, the group was launched in February of 2023 with an initial focus on early childhood success. As the partnership has expanded and diversified, the group has incorporated youth success into its work as well.

"It's been so inspiring and gratifying to see this partnership continue to grow in diversity and scope," Lancucki said. "The strength of our partnership is that while we recognize all of our programs are doing amazing work for families and children, we become so much stronger when we amplify our voices and work together to solve some very challenging issues like access to child care and the need for more funding to expand services to our most underserved communities."



Above, this spring CREEC members came together in White Stone to begin finalizing the coalition's Common Agenda for early learning and youth success. At right, CREEC members joined the Regional Resiliency Equity Work Group at the Mattaponi Reservation.



Partners Finalizing Vision for Early Learning and Youth Success



CREEC partners discuss challenges to accessing child care and other programs for children and youth.

CREEC partners came together in April to begin finalizing the coalition's Common Agenda for Early Childhood and Youth Success. As part of this discussion, members looked closely at the challenges to accessing early childhood programs and services, particularly in rural communities. The group also discussed the need for expanded advocacy efforts with local and state elected officials, as well as other stakeholder groups.

The group's overarching goal was to move toward a final Common Agenda that will drive CREEC's future work and strategic priorities. The coalition is using a Collective Impact model which leverages the strengths of all its partners to advance challenging regional issues. Among the priorities in finalizing this agenda include:

- Use state and local data to inform the Council's strategic direction,

See CREEC COMMON TAKING SHAPE, Page 4



The CREEC partnership was well represented in the 2024 General Assembly for Child Care Lobby Day in January. CREEC partners Latesha Washington (second from left) and Jullien Pitts (third from left) visited a number of state legislators to talk about how vital child care is for working families. Above, Latesha and Jullien are with other advocates and staff from Del. Destiny Levere Bolling's office.

CREEC and Other Advocates Celebrate Historic Investments Early Childhood Programs

Last month, the General Assembly passed, and Governor Glenn Youngkin signed into law, a biennial state budget with over **\$1.1 billion in funding for child care services!**

This includes more than \$366 million in 2025 and \$461 million in 2026 in state funds for slots in the Child Care Subsidy Program, Mixed Delivery, and Virginia Preschool Initiative.

This incredible progress would not have been possible without advocacy efforts of CREEC partners and other advocates across the state. Those efforts paid off in other areas as well, as significant investments were also made in home visiting, as well as youth programs and services.

As part of CREEC advocacy efforts, the partnership plans to meet with local legislators from the Northern Neck and Middle Peninsula to both thank and deepen relationships with our local elected officials.

In other early care news, the **Commission on Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE)** held its first meeting of 2024 on July 22 at Reynolds Community College Workforce Development and Conference Center in Richmond, VA, with additional monthly meeting dates set through November.

During the first meeting, the Commission reflected on progress made during the 2024 General Assembly session and discussed priorities for the year ahead. The ECCE Commission, established in 2023, is comprised of legislators and representatives of business, economic development, local government, school divisions, parents, and early care and education programs.

More About CREEC and Its Diverse Partnership...

Did you know that in our region, more than 40 percent of our children arrive at school without the basic skills they need to be successful? And for children of color, children in economically disadvantaged situations, and special needs children, the gap only increases.



CREEC is a regional partnership of more than 40 organizations working together to level the playing field for all our families and children.

Here is what we are working toward:

- Ensuring all families have access to high quality early childhood and youth programs and services, prioritizing rural areas and marginalized communities.
- Mobilizing local families and CREEC partners to engage elected officials and key influencers regarding the need for greater investment in early childhood and youth programs.
- Developing and fostering dedicated relationships with early childhood and youth partners, service providers, elected officials, public sector partners and philanthropy to guarantee a more efficient and coordinated system in support of children, youth, and families.

As CREEC's membership continues to grow, we would like to invite you to join in the movement to support strategies to expand services and create equitable access for our families most in need. **For more information, contact Debbie Lancucki: lancucki@mpnn.state.va.us**



Our Mission

Chesapeake Bay Regional Early Experiences Council's mission is to collaborate with families, early childhood stakeholders, and community leaders through an equity-centered process which advocates for high-quality services supporting a healthy start in life.

Q and A with Rickkida Tate from The Haven

Her Passion for Children and Families Fuels Her Work to Build Thriving Communities

When you meet Rickkida Tate, it doesn't take long to discover her incredible passion for children and families in the communities she serves at The Haven Shelter and Services.

Located in Warsaw, The Haven has been in operation for more than 35 years and works to prevent and eliminate all types of domestic and sexual violence within its service area.

In CREEC's Partner Spotlight, Rickkida shares more about her background, work, and passions:

Q: Tell us about your professional journey and how you came to The Haven?

"I have been in the early childhood field for about 16 years. I started as a teacher's assistant in private preschools as I pursued my degree in education and also worked as a substitute/paraprofessional at Essex County Public Schools. I became a Prekindergarten teacher at the Richmond County YMCA Preschool in 2017 and in 2019 I became the Assistant Director. I started at the Haven Shelter in 2018 as their overnight Support Counselor and gained a new perspective of our local advocates."

Q: Talk to us about some of the shelter's many achievements, and what



One of Rickkida's passions is seeing children grow, experience new things, and "be the little sponges they are!"

is ahead in your work?

"Last year, we were able to host 44 adults and 60 children with 4,303 nights of emergency shelter. We have facilitated over 50 sessions of our 'DO YOU' program in our local schools for more than 30 students. This cohort helps to build healthy relationship skills and more for our teens."

Q: Tell us about what brings you joy in your work?

"While teaching, seeing the children retain information that I taught them was a big highlight in my career but knowing that children who witness domestic violence are at an increased risk for academic and developmental delays and seeing them joyful, learning new ways to cope with stress or interacting with others in a positive way, it makes me want to come back and do it all over again the next day!"

Q: What are some of the trends you are seeing in terms of what families are experiencing and what are the most prevalent gaps you see in services?

"Obtaining affordable child care and housing for single parents has been one of struggles in assisting residents and community clients. A lack of outreach opportunities to families with disabilities may be attributed to the rapid decline in physical and mental healthcare providers serving our community."

Q: For people who want to get involved in The Haven's mission, what are some of the best ways they can get engaged?

"The Haven is always looking for great volunteers to help with events or day to day operations at our Administrative Office. We also accept donations for residents' basic needs." Learn more at: www.havenshelter.org/volunteer

Chesapeake Bay Regional Early Experiences Council Partners

The Avalon Center
Bay Aging
Boys and Girls Clubs of the Northern Neck
CA & J Farm
Community Foundation for a greater
Richmond (Mathews, Gloucester,
and River Counties)
Courthouse Pediatrics
Cuddle Bugs
Essex County Public Schools
FirstSpark/Ready Region Chesapeake Bay
Gloucester County Public Schools
Grand Kids Child Care Center
The Haven Shelter Services
Horizons Unlimited Early Learning Center
The Mother's Heart

Just Harvest
Kids First Foundation
King and Queen County Public Schools
King William County Public Schools
Lancaster County Public Schools
Lancaster Department of Social Services
Little Lights Child Care
Mathews County Public Schools
Middlesex County Public Schools
Middlesex Department of Social Services
Middle Peninsula/Northern Neck
Behavioral Health
Mile High Kids
Northumberland County Public Schools
Northumberland Department of
Social Services

Northern Neck Christian School
Parent Child Development Corporation
Richmond County Department
of Social Services
Richmond County Public Schools
Riverside Health System
Rural Infant Services Program
Starting Point Academy Preschool
Three Rivers Health District
Three Rivers Healthy Families
Three Rivers Resource Mothers
Thrive Virginia
Virginia Chapter of the
American Academy of Pediatrics
Virginia Department of
Social Services



CREEC partners discuss current conditions impacting local children and families across the Middle Peninsula and Northern Neck.

Common Agenda Taking Shape

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- which will be an integral part of the regional common agenda for CREEC.
- Support the engagement of broad stakeholder input – with a focus on families and early childhood and youth providers from marginalized communities – to inform local and regional priorities.
- Support efforts to engage community members in this important movement.

At the April meeting, CREEC members began to identify key themes from each of the focus areas (Access, Advocacy, Data Usage and Align Systems/Build Relationships) that will be used to finalize the Common Agenda. Some of those included:

- **Prioritize partner collaboration and demonstrate how we can work effectively together to solve local and regional problems.**
- **Collect, analyze, and leverage local and regional data to better understand and address community-level issues around access and local needs.**
- **Find ways to authentically engage diverse families in CREEC’s work and organize parent focus groups/surveys to help inform needed change.**
- **Educating community leaders and local elected officials (town councils, mayors, superintendents, etc.) about the importance of investing in early childhood and youth programs, and the tremendous payoff to society when all children and families have the opportunity to thrive.**
- **Better understanding regional demographics and challenges rural communities face in accessing programs.**
- **Leverage CREEC’s work and what we are learning to benefit the families and children we serve.**

CRECC’s Common Agenda (DRAFT)

Expand Access



Ensure all families have access to high quality early childhood and youth programs and services, prioritizing rural areas where services are not easily accessed and marginalized communities without services.

Advocate



Mobilize key stakeholders, including CREEC members, local families, and advocates to engage local elected officials and key influencers regarding the need for greater investment in early childhood and youth programs.

Data



Collect and utilize data that supports the work of the CREEC Partnership and will effectively describe barriers to quality early childhood and youth programs that will lead to systems level changes and increased funding that will benefit our families.

Astounding Facts About the Earliest Years

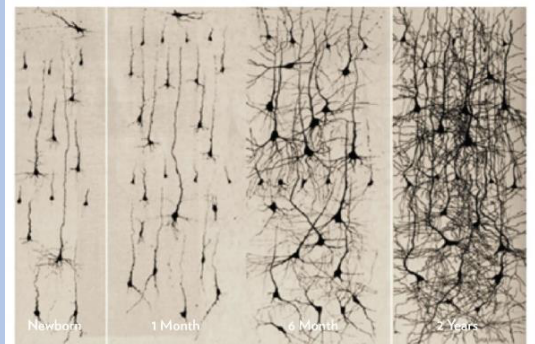
The evidence is conclusive that the early years of a child’s life are critical for brain development. In fact, 90 percent of the brain is developed by the time a child enters kindergarten! This is when the foundation is set for all learning.

Quality early learning environments and positive teacher interactions greatly influence a child’s first five years of life. They form the strength of that foundation. Sadly, there are too many children right here in our communities who live in challenging circumstances and do not receive the good start they

deserve.

National research tells us that children’s behavior problems, low achievement, delinquency, and crime have roots in the first years of life, and even before birth. Those primary years provide children with experiences that lead to developing a broad base of knowledge, cognitive skills, and important social emotional skills.

Greater investments in quality programs for our children and youth support not only the workforce of tomorrow – but today as well!



DRAMATIC GROWTH OF NEURONAL ARCHITECTURE FROM BIRTH TO 2 YRS

“The first five years have so much to do with how the next 80 will turn out.”

- Bill Gates, Sr., Co-Chair of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation