

# United Way of Roanoke Valley

## Early Learning Strategies



Quality early childhood development and support for students, both in and out of the classroom, is essential for our entire community. Because education begins at home, United Way of Roanoke Valley seeks to empower and support parents to serve as their child's first teacher.

Our strategic programs are designed to provide children and their families access to quality, affordable learning opportunities, empowering them to read at grade level and graduate on time.

### Smart Beginnings Greater Roanoke

Getting our children ready for school requires the commitment of our entire community; from parents and schools to childcare providers and social service organizations, we all have a role to play. Smart Beginnings Greater Roanoke is a collaborative effort of community leaders who are working together to ensure that every child in Greater Roanoke enters kindergarten with the skills needed to succeed in school and in life by providing young children between birth and kindergarten with special support and programming.



### Virginia Quality

Choosing an early childhood program is one of the most important decisions a family can make. By voluntarily participating in Virginia Quality, early learning programs show their staff, families, and community that they are committed to quality for young children.

There are four main factors that determine what makes a successful Virginia Quality site: child to staff ratios; teacher-child interactions; the learning environment; and staff education, qualifications, and training.



### Infant Toddler Specialist Network (ITSN)

Infant and toddler specialists provide assistance to strengthen the capacity of early care and education programs so they can deliver high quality services to their families. ITSN offers on-site mentoring and support, training and technical assistance for caregivers, teachers and administrators, as well as professional development opportunities.



## Smart2Start

This pilot program helps create a more effective, consolidated early education and care system to put Virginia's youngest residents on the path to school readiness and academic success from infancy.

By streamlining recruitment, eligibility, and enrollment, Smart2Start makes it easier for all families to review and enroll in early education and care opportunities that meet the needs of children.



## Virginia's Investment in Early Education

United Way of Roanoke Valley supports the Commonwealth's upcoming historic investment of nearly \$95 million for Virginia's young children and families. This investment in equity and our economy recognizes and addresses long-standing barriers and underfunding of the state's preschool program, as well as the importance of engaging both public and private providers in the delivery of high-quality early-childcare services.

Research shows that investing early is one of the most fiscally responsible investments we can make. But it is also our best opportunity to level the playing field for at-risk children right from the start. We must ensure every child starts school with the same opportunity for success.

- Only 60% of Virginia's kindergartners begin school with the key literacy, math, and social-emotional skills needed to be successful in school. Only half of children from economically disadvantaged families enter school fully ready to learn.
- Our current workforce needs are changing - nearly 70% of Virginia's children live in families in which all parents work, making child care both a necessary work support and a key school readiness opportunity.
- Currently in Virginia, 24% of economically disadvantaged four-year-olds and 72% of economically disadvantaged three-year-olds lack access to quality preschool. VA ranks 33<sup>rd</sup> nationally in preschool funding

United Way of Roanoke Valley is currently piloting an initiative to ensure Virginia's precious early childhood resources are administered with a shared vision, increased efficiency and a single, durable point of accountability. By creating a more effective, consolidated early childhood system, we can position Virginia firmly on the path to school readiness and academic success, delivering a more capable workforce and a more prosperous and livable Commonwealth.