



Developing a Diverse Economy in Southern and Southwest Virginia

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VIRGINIA EARLY CHILDHOOD FOUNDATION EXPANDS ACCESS TO EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

Smart Beginnings Program Seeing Success and Expansion

Richmond, VA – Early childhood education plays a vital role in ensuring that children have the best chance to reach their academic potential and contributes to the overall well-being of families and communities. The Virginia Early Childhood Foundation (VECF) knows this and is working to expand access to early childhood education across Virginia through their Smart Beginnings initiative. Smart Beginnings is designed to support local communities in pulling together the systems to support young children and ensure that they receive a high quality education right from the start. Results have been positive and many of these local

initiatives have continued to operate past their initial grant period and to attract additional funds to the region for school readiness purposes.

Since 2009 the Tobacco Region Revitalization Commission has awarded more than \$1.8 million in grant funds to the VECF to develop the six Smart Beginnings initiatives currently at work in twenty- six counties in Southern and Southwest Virginia. In addition to fostering Smart Beginnings, VECF is working to increase the number of early childhood education programs participating in Virginia's Quality Rating and Improvement System. Known as Virginia Quality, this program aims to assess and systematically improve the quality of child care and early learning programs by providing helpful tools and resources. Since 2015, with a 3-year award of \$130,000 from the Tobacco Region Revitalization Commission, VECF has leveraged the outreach and coordination provided by Smart Beginnings initiatives in the rural communities of Southern Virginia to engage 45 new programs in Virginia Quality with the ultimate goal of 60 new programs engaged in quality improvement by the end of April 2018. TIC grant funding is also supporting efforts to upskill the early education workforce through scholarships to support certification or enrollment in degree coursework for early educators in Southern Virginia. At the mid-point of this three-year grant, VECF's efforts have reached programs and teachers impacting approximately 2000 children in the region.

Kathy Glazer, President of the Virginia Early Childhood Foundation said, *"VECF is grateful for the Tobacco Commission's long-standing partnership and recognition of early education as key to both workforce and economic development in the tobacco regions. The Commission's leadership and commitment to school readiness has laid the groundwork for a strong future workforce in these communities."*

The Tobacco Region Revitalization Commission aims to develop a diverse economy in Southern and Southwest Virginia. In order to do so it is important that

we support our local communities and help provide them with the tools they need to compete for jobs and investment. Education is critical in this mission and early childhood education provides a jumpstart for academic achievement that will prepare residents to take on high quality jobs as they become available. When companies are determining where to locate or expand they often look at the ability of a local workforce to meet their needs and, increasingly, consider quality of life for their employees in their decision making. Access to high quality early childhood education can play a role in making sure these jobs come to Southern and Southwest Virginia.

Tobacco Commission Vice-Chair, Senator Frank Ruff said, *“The Tobacco Commission understands the need for our young ones to have a good start if they are to compete in today's world. We have been pleased to partner with the Virginia Early Childhood Foundation to make their programs available in our region.”*

About The Tobacco Region Revitalization Commission

The Tobacco Region Revitalization Commission is a 28-member body created by the 1999 General Assembly. Its mission is the promotion of economic growth and development in tobacco-dependent communities, using proceeds of the national tobacco settlement. To date, the Commission has awarded 2,036 grants totaling more than \$1.1 billion across the tobacco region of the Commonwealth, and has provided \$309 million in indemnification payments to tobacco growers and quota holders.

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