



Virginia Considers Making Parents Train For 30 Hours To Help At Their Kids' Preschool

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My wife and I are the proud (and exhausted) parents of two young sons, and we live in Falls Church, Virginia. Our oldest is “two half” and will be starting a “cooperative” preschool down the street this September. That means we volunteer in his classroom and help run the school—charity auction, field trip transportation, etc.—and in return we save on tuition. It’s a win-win.

Currently, co-oping parents in Virginia must undergo four hours of annual training before they can volunteer in the classroom—basic things like first aid and certain laws relevant to child care. As reported by the *Washington Post*, however, the Virginia Department of Social Services is considering regulations that would require co-oping parents instead to undergo approximately *30 hours* of training—just to help in the classroom a few hours each month, completing daunting tasks like passing out snacks and sweeping the floors.

My wife, who is planning to be our “participating parent,” will be devastated if the regulations are adopted. She’s a full-time lawyer and when she’s not working she’s making sure that our sons are fed and happy. (I do that too, but we’ll leave aside the issue of marital negotiations over child care and other household chores for another time.)

She’s proud that she can balance work and family while being involved in our son’s preschool—she’s going to chair the hospitality committee! She willingly underwent a background check that was in several respects more intense than that for her top-secret security clearance, all because she wants our son to feel loved and supported during his first few years of school. But as a working mom, she simply can’t take *nearly a week off work* to complete the training the Virginia Department of Social Services is contemplating.

She’s not alone. Many parents choose co-oping preschools because they want to participate directly in their children’s education. Indeed, parental involvement in education is associated with improved academic achievement and fewer behavioral problems. Parental involvement can also be especially comforting for preschoolers, many of whom are as young as two years old and in an institutional environment for the first time in their lives. The fact that

parents volunteer in co-oping preschools is an *advantage*, not something onerous regulations should discourage.

Co-oping can also make preschool affordable. Tuition for my son to attend part-time is just a little north of \$100 *a month*—and no, I’m not telling you where, because the preschool is our hidden gem. Because the costs are lower, co-oping preschools are a great option for lower-income families, who most need the educational jump-start that preschool can provide.

Now, driving parents away and the costs up might conceivably be worth it if the proposed training came with substantial benefits. But, underscoring the disconnect between the proposed training and the reality of co-oping preschools, the training includes topics like preventing shaken-baby syndrome (there are no babies at our preschool, which begins at two) and safe-sleep practices (there are no naps at our preschool, where classes last a few hours per day).

File this one away in the category of regulatory solutions in search of a problem, right next to Washington DC requiring daycare workers to get a college degree.

Indeed, according to the Virginia Department of Planning and Budget’s analysis of the increased training requirements, the “proposed changes are not driven by identified deficiencies that might affect the health or safety of children in care” and “the costs of these changes likely far outweigh the convenience of having one standard for all licensees.”

Yet the Department of Social Services appears to be plowing ahead with the proposed regulations anyway, stating that one component of the training is “free” and that most of the topics it covers are “not new,” as if any of that is relevant to the Department of Planning and Budget’s point that there is simply no reason to require this time-consuming training. Daycare and other childcare workers have to conform to all kinds of regulations, very few of which have been proven to benefit children.

Is this the kind of forward-thinking administration new governor Ralph Northam had in mind when he campaigned on “economic opportunity for all Virginians”? As one commenter on the *Washington Post* article put it, “Well they just created a few more Republicans in Northern Virginia.”

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