

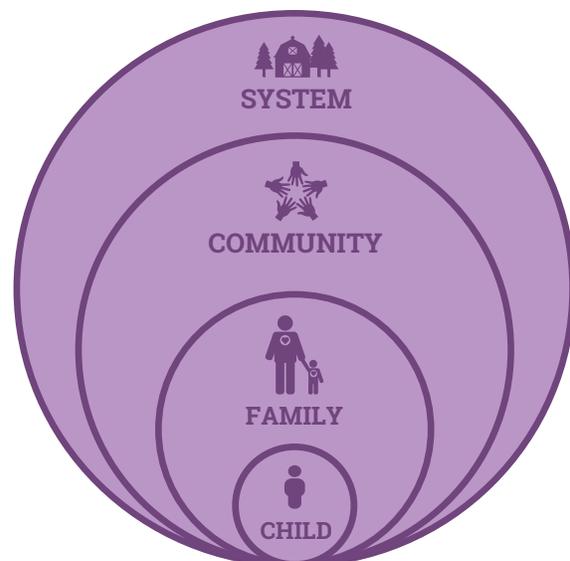
# 2021-2022 POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE VERMONT EARLY CHILDHOOD STATE ADVISORY COUNCIL NETWORK



The State Advisory Council (SAC) is Vermont's Governor-appointed, primary advisory body on the well-being of children prenatal to age eight and their families. In partnership with Vermont's Early Childhood Action Plan (VECAP) Committees and the Regional Council Network, the SAC sets priorities, and strategic direction for statewide initiatives using the VECAP and up-to-date data. The annual SAC recommendations are developed with input across all BBF network gatherings and seeks to identify the current gaps and needs in policy, promote action in strategic areas for the coming year, ensure recommendations are measurable and move Vermont toward a more equitable early childhood system. In the 2021 recommendations, the SAC continues to seek improvement in 5 key policy areas originally outlined at the start of the COVID-19 Pandemic in 2020 and identifies areas where there are barriers that need a strategy to reach resolution as a step toward policy change:

- A RESPOND TO VERMONT'S MENTAL HEALTH CRISIS**
- B ADDRESS CHRONIC INEQUITIES IN VERMONT'S EARLY CHILDHOOD SYSTEM**
- C ELEVATE FAMILIES AS DECISION MAKERS**
- D DEVELOP A WELL-RESOURCED EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION SYSTEM**
- E EVOLVE THE EARLY CHILDHOOD DATA SYSTEM AND INFRASTRUCTURE**

The 2021 SAC Recommendations continue to promote meaningful change across the **four levels of Vermont's early childhood system**: 1) **child outcomes**, 2) **families and communities**, 3) **early childhood agencies, service providers, and 4) policy makers** (e.g. the legislature, Governor, etc.). Each recommendation identifies which level of the early childhood system is targeted for change within the next year and how it is aligned with Vermont's Early Childhood Action Plan (VECAP). The ultimate goal of all recommendations is to improve outcomes for each and every child.



# RESPOND TO VERMONT'S MENTAL HEALTH CRISIS



**Why it Matters:** Early childhood and family mental health is the foundation of all future child development. For many children, mental health challenges resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic will have both short- and long-term consequences to their overall health and well-being. This includes children's capacity to regulate, express emotion, form close, secure relationships, and to explore the environment and learn. Optimal family mental health with stable and responsive relationships builds a strong foundation allowing children to develop resilience to ensure that stress is tolerable rather than toxic and to grow into secure, healthy adults.

Decades of neglect and underinvestment in the systems that address mental health needs across childhood settings have been exposed by the COVID-19 pandemic and must be addressed urgently. The pandemic has highlighted more than ever the need for increasing mental health resources and supports across settings and in multiple modes. While the need and acuity are continuing to rise, recruiting and retaining the mental health workforce has escalated from a challenge to a crisis.

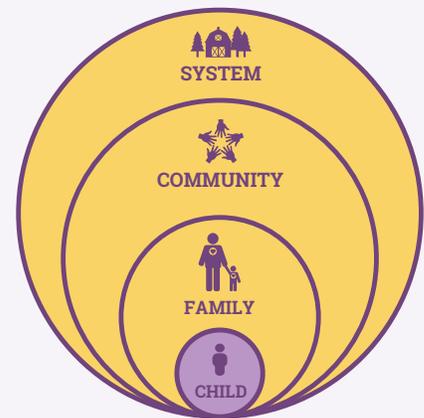
## LEVELS REQUIRING ACTION > FAMILY - COMMUNITY - SYSTEM

### **RECOMMENDATION 1 (Level 2-4) Invest in community-based mental health supports for children and families (funding, human capital, and coordination):**

- > Expand connection of mental health in primary care and education settings (screening, care coordination, training and investment in credentials).
- > Expand funding for Early Childhood and Family Mental Health (ECFMH) consultation, education and treatment to support children's mental health in ECE settings.
- > Continue the use of telehealth as a practice that improves access to care (ie: equipment, billing/insurance coverage, etc.)
- > Expand Mobile Response and Stabilization Services.

### **RECOMMENDATION 2 (Level 3-4) Address the mental health workforce crisis in Vermont (Designated and Specialized Service Agencies, CIS, private providers, social workers):**

- > Implement strategies to recruit and retain the mental health workforce including workforce sign-on and retention bonuses, relocation costs, tuition reimbursement, loan repayment, housing stipends for new employees, purchase of apartments for new employees' short-term stays, and financial support toward child care.
- > Increase payment rates.
- > Build a workforce that is reflective of the Vermont population (with particular attention to BIPOC, GLBTQA, ability to meet rural needs.)
- > Respond to the burden and stress on current mental health workforce causing staff burnout.



# ADDRESS CHRONIC INEQUITIES IN VERMONT'S EARLY CHILDHOOD SYSTEM



**Why it Matters:** Equitable access to education-based services, resources, and support for children with mental, emotional, developmental, and behavioral conditions and special health care needs and their families is critical to creating an optimal environment for all children and their families. The full implementation of Early Multi Tiered Systems of Support (Early MTSS) will culturally transform educational settings and encourage true inclusion while also providing structure and support for all children. Creating this optimal environment also requires a system of services, resources, and supports. While awaiting the recommendations from Vermont’s Child Care and Early Childhood Education Systems Analysis, there are existing systems that must be maintained.

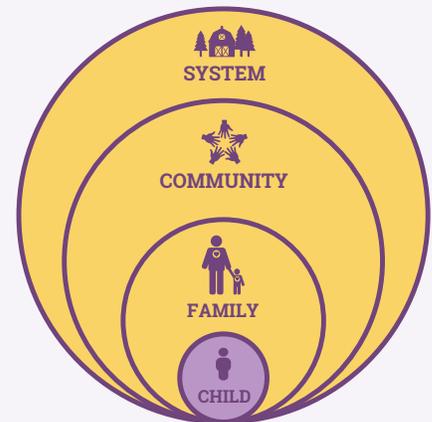
## LEVELS REQUIRING ACTION > FAMILY - COMMUNITY - SYSTEM

**RECOMMENDATION 1 (Levels 3-4) Invest in evidence-based frameworks for supporting children's social emotional development statewide and implement these practices as designed and researched:**

- > Utilize existing data, reports, and national best practices to determine how to scale implementation of Early MTSS statewide.
- > Monitor and evaluate the efforts to promote equitable access and outcomes for children.
- > Provide coaching through Early MTSS as an evidence-based practice for educators and staff.
- > Utilize Early MTSS to support and retain highly qualified, consistent, early childhood professionals.

**RECOMMENDATION 2 (Level 3-4) Strive for seamless navigation of services. Improve the existing infrastructure; recognizing forthcoming recommendations from Vermont’s Child Care and Early Childhood Education Systems Analysis in July 2022:**

- > Strengthen the current Children’s Integrated Services (CIS) infrastructure by developing a strategy to address persistent challenges such as: lack of a comprehensive data system and complex administrative and financial burden.
- > Continue to fund child development and behavioral support programs to meet current and future needs such as: Special Accommodations Grants (SAGs); Specialized Childcare; Help Me Grow; Early MTSS; ECFMH treatment, consultation and education.
- > Develop an integrated and consistent data system to document efficacy, impact, and monitor outcomes and equitable access to high quality resources, supports and services. \*See Evolve the Early Childhood Data System and Infrastructure recommendations below.



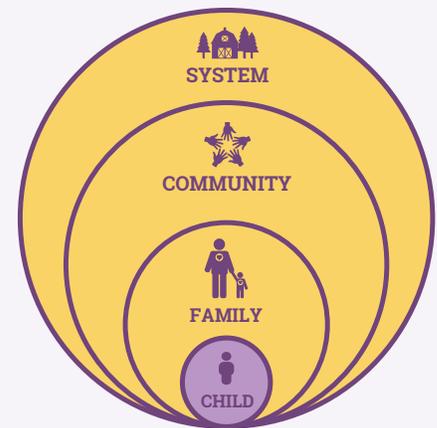
# ELEVATE FAMILIES AS DECISION MAKERS

**Why it Matters:** Family knowledge, values, beliefs, and cultural backgrounds should always be incorporated into the planning and delivery of policies and services. Providing parents and caregivers opportunities to express their thoughts and concerns contributes to an early childhood system that mirrors the diverse needs of Vermont families. It also provides children and future generations the opportunity to have a voice and be leaders in the creation of the system instead of solely being consumers of resources, services, and supports. Such partnership and the inclusion of parents and caregivers in critical systems conversations and decision-making processes ensures families become leaders in designing a responsive system that works for them.

## LEVELS REQUIRING ACTION > FAMILY - COMMUNITY - SYSTEM

**RECOMMENDATION 1 (Levels 2-4) Representation and voice matter. Engage families with lived experience to participate in leadership and decision making across sectors and policy areas:**

- > Require each legislatively mandated board/committee/study section/decision-making body have at least 1 parent representative with lived experience (having parented children through the early childhood years 0-8, experience with the system of services).
- > At the community, state, and policy level, conduct review of programs, policies and legislation to ensure that revisions and requirements consider the impact and consequences to child development and family well-being.
- > Utilize the BBF Families and Community committee to consult on policy development; particularly when parent representation on committees is not yet reached.
- > Foster engagement by calling out and working to dismantle barriers that are symptoms of systemic, institutional, and individual racism.



**RECOMMENDATION 2 (Levels 2-4) Create a culture that invites and supports family engagement and partnership, and provides the necessary training and coaching to attract families who are unfamiliar or uncomfortable with the current process, language, and decision-making structure:**

- > Develop and use a common definition of family engagement and partnership throughout the state's early childhood system.
- > Invest in strategies to engage culturally and linguistically diverse populations (provide translation and interpretation, accessible language, utilize cultural brokers, identify current barriers etc.)
- > Provide training and coaching of early childhood professionals, boards/committees and policy makers in order to successfully engage diverse populations and families as decision makers.
- > Promote and increase family participation through engagement, training, coaching, compensation in early childhood programs and services.
- > Measure impact and ensure accountability by conducting regular family engagement assessments.

**RECOMMENDATION 3 (Levels 2-4) Fully commit to the Vermont Guiding Principles Supporting Each and Every Young Child and Family's Full and Equitable Participation by advancing policies and practices that honor of each family's culture, strengths, and expertise:**

- > Create a strategic plan to operationalize the Vermont Guiding Principles.
- > Demonstrate commitment by posting the Vermont Guiding Principles on organization/agency websites, aligning Guiding Principles into State of Vermont contracts, and referencing in scopes of work.
- > Demonstrate commitment to fully include each and every child and their family by referencing Guiding Principles in early childhood laws and initiatives

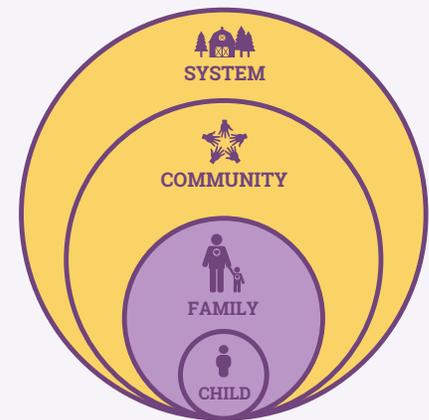
# DEVELOP A WELL-RESOURCED EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION SYSTEM

**Why it Matters:** The COVID-19 pandemic has further illustrated the need to invest in early care and education, universal prekindergarten (UPK), and out of school time care. There is nation-wide discussion about how to improve, invest, and strengthen the early childhood system. While Vermont has made significant investments in early care and education, UPK, and out of school time care, it is important to use this critical moment in time to leverage federal investment and build on the infrastructure already in place.

## LEVELS REQUIRING ACTION > COMMUNITY - SYSTEM

**RECOMMENDATION 1 (Level 4) Improve equitable access to affordable, high quality early care and afterschool programs by responding to the gaps in current funding:**

- > Respond to the ECE workforce crisis by investing in compensation, recruitment, retention, training, and professional development.
- > Identify state administrative capacity required to serve more families due to the planned expansion of CCFAP and anticipated federal investment.
- > Implement and monitor CCFAP eligibility expansion through the development of the CDD Information System.
- > Seek resolution around CCFAP payment by enrollment vs attendance policy in CCFAP that will both foster stability of the childcare industry and improve access for children and families.



**RECOMMENDATION 2 (Levels 3-4) Seize the day on UPK. Expand access to UPK toward a vision of universal, high-quality, equitable, mixed-delivery, free, and inclusive, education for all three and four-year-olds:**

- > Revise the regulatory framework for quality and equity, including agency roles and ability to provide leadership, support and oversight; defining and monitoring quality standards for governance, facilities, licensing, and regulations; and revising the strategic plan with a shared vision toward integration with the larger early childhood system.
- > Seek resolution in the appropriate number of hours and weeks per year for UPK education and appropriate weighting of students
- > Expand Act 35 (An act relating to the Task Force on Equitable and Inclusive School Environments) to cover private UPK programs.

**RECOMMENDATION 3 (Level 4) Monitor progress and results of the Vermont Child Care and Early Childhood Education Systems Analysis (ECSA) and leverage Federal investment to develop a well-resourced early childhood system:**

- > Anticipate the ECSA report July 1, 2022 and use the State Advisory Council to develop a 3-year plan and process for how to move from recommendations toward implementation.
- > Identify funding to execute the Finance Study outlined in [Act 45](#).
- > Leverage Federal investments (e.g. ARPA) to improve child and family outcomes by coordinating across agencies, stabilizing the early childhood workforce, and building quality and capacity of programs.
- > Monitor federal investment in child care and PreKindergarten education and engage in National conversations to inform the development and implementation of the American Families Plan.
- > Utilize the Vermont Early Childhood Action Plan (VECAP) and other strategic plans to inform funding allocation. Environments) to cover private UPK programs.

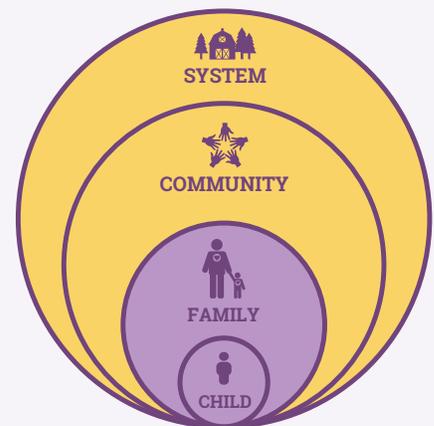
# EVOLVE VERMONT'S EARLY CHILDHOOD DATA SYSTEM AND INFRASTRUCTURE

**Why it Matters:** Vermont leaders have recognized that using evidence and data to inform policy is an essential strategy for positively impacting outcomes for children and families. Although there have been investments in select data systems and development of several procedures for measuring outcomes, Vermont's early childhood systems for the collection, analysis, and use of data on the whole remain inadequate. Vermont must now concretely prioritize and invest in integrated early childhood data systems and procedures to utilize findings. This is the first step to ensuring the resources, services, and supports currently serving young children and their families are as effective and efficient as possible. *Please note that the results from Vermont's Child Care and Early Childhood Education Systems Analysis (July 2022) and the Early Childhood Budget (July 2022) will likely result in recommendations that fall under this umbrella.*

## LEVELS REQUIRING ACTION > COMMUNITY - SYSTEM

### **RECOMMENDATION 1 (Level 3-4) Commit to early childhood data integration and governance through sustained funding, dedicated staffing, data infrastructure, and data-driven accountability at all levels of the system: executive, legislative, and agency leadership:**

- > Commit to restarting and resourcing the Early Childhood Data Governance Council based on national best practice and findings from the ECSA.
- > Secure data sharing agreements and prioritize data sharing activities and procedures (i.e. coordinate storage, analysis, access and use protocols and processes that maximize efficiency and the security of each partners' data and resources).
- > Secure sustained funding for personnel to ensure high quality data through the following activities: simplify data management and reporting activities; training and TA to support quality collection and reporting; engagement in data integration meetings and visioning.
- > Utilize the VECAP Data and Evaluation Committee to vision and build a data development agenda, convene subject matter and data experts, prioritize data integration and collaboration, monitor progress on key indicators for Vermont's early childhood system, and serve as an advisory body for data initiatives.
- > Enhance data systems and integrate them with the State Longitudinal Data System including the CDD Information System, Common Education Data Standards, Universal Developmental Screening Registry, and the development of a data system for Children's Integrated Services.



### **RECOMMENDATION 2 (Levels 2-4): Commit to utilizing data to demonstrate the impact of programs, policies, and resources through routine monitoring and rigorous evaluation:**

- > Continuously collect high quality, up-to-date data.
- > Require and invest in regular monitoring, analysis, and evaluation of new and existing programs and initiatives with an equity lens using process and outcome measures to document impact on children, families, and the early childhood system.
- > Strengthen programs, policies, and resources based on recommendations resulting from the required monitoring, analysis, and evaluation.