



Integration in Vermont's Early Childhood System

Executive Summary

Integration has once again risen as a priority nationally and within Vermont. Vermont's early childhood stakeholders currently perceive "integration" as an interdisciplinary process or approach that brings together, or links, subcomponents of the larger early childhood system through collaboration, coordination, and alignment to ultimately reduce silos and duplication, and to improve outcomes, sustainability, functions, and efficiency.

Over the past year, as part of its advisory role, Building Bright Futures undertook an information gathering effort through a survey and stakeholder discussions to determine areas of consensus and barriers impeding progress toward integration in the early childhood system. High-level themes are listed below. High-level themes are listed below.

Barriers and challenges to integration

- + A lack of clarity and communication surrounding the governance of early childhood programs
- + Gaps in funding and sustainability of critical services for young children and families
- + Ongoing challenges and a current state of crisis related to the workforce, and the ability to find, retain, and justly compensate early childhood professionals
- + Barriers to equitably serving and providing access to all families and young children
- + A lack of integration in data systems and persistent data gaps

Key values and infrastructure

- + Values: (1) Holding Children and Families at the Center when Making Policy, Administrative, and Programmatic Decisions; (2) Equity; and (3) Family, Community, and Professional-Informed Decision-Making
- + Infrastructure: Vermont early childhood stakeholders have experienced, perceived success, or see value in many existing initiatives and structures and stressed the importance of maintaining or building the capacity of the Child Development Division (CDD) and Children's Integrated Services (CIS), among a multitude of efforts

Data needed to inform decision-making

- + Stakeholders identified a need for the following data to inform decision-making around early childhood systems integration: an inventory of early childhood expenditures; an in-depth analysis of the governance, administration, and financing of the early childhood system; consistent access to high-quality data to inform decision-making; prioritization of early childhood data efforts; and consistent review of national best practice

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Introduction

Vermont’s early childhood system includes a complex array of services, resources, and support for children and families provided in a variety of contexts by agency and community partners. This system is primarily governed by two agencies: The Agency of Human Services (AHS) and the Agency of Education (AOE). For many years, Vermont early childhood partners, stakeholders, providers, and other experts have worked to develop and implement a vision for Vermont’s early childhood system that largely focuses on integration within and across the two lead agencies alongside communities and early childhood stakeholders. This vision is outlined within Vermont’s Early Childhood Action Plan (VECAP): “The early childhood system will be an integrated continuum of comprehensive, high-quality services that is equitable, accessible and will improve outcomes for each and every child in the prenatal period through age eight and their family in Vermont.” The fourth VECAP goal of the plan states, “the early childhood system will be integrated, well resourced and data-informed.”

Vermont’s early childhood stakeholders currently perceive “integration” as an interdisciplinary process or approach that brings together, or links, subcomponents of the larger early childhood system. These linkages are established through collaboration, coordination, and alignment to ultimately reduce silos and duplication, and improve outcomes, sustainability, functions, and efficiency. However, Vermont has not currently adopted a formal definition, or determined how best to measure integration for the early childhood system. This task is being undertaken by Building Bright Futures as part of our role in statute and through funding from a federal HRSA Grant over the next four years.

Between Governor Scott’s emphasis on the importance of a cradle-to-career vision, the 2020 Early Childhood Needs Assessment, increased awareness due to the COVID-19 pandemic of the gaps and inequities of the early childhood system, and several federal initiatives, integration has risen to a place of not only being a priority of the field, but a priority for Vermont, as well as states across the country.

For the purpose of this brief on the status, challenges, and opportunities associated with integration within the early childhood system in Vermont, feedback was gathered from the BBF Network (methodology further described below). These findings solely represent stakeholder’s perceptions, not necessarily the true state of integration.



Information Gathering and Methodology

In its advisory role, Building Bright Futures (BBF) is committed to presenting the most up-to-date data on the status of children, families, and the early childhood system. Just as important is BBF's ability to capture and disseminate the perspectives of families and early childhood professionals across all sectors. These information gathering efforts allow key stakeholders and decision-makers to see a point-in-time snapshot of data collected from the early childhood field on key initiatives, the impact of those initiatives, priorities, challenges, and considerations for policy.

Over the past year, Building Bright Futures undertook an information gathering effort to determine areas of consensus and barriers impeding progress toward integration. This effort was inspired by VECAP Goal 4, which outlines an early childhood system that is “integrated, well resourced, and data-informed” as a key objective, and H. 394, *An act relating to reorganizing the administration of child care and early learning services*.

The first data collection effort was through recorded verbal discussions at the State Advisory Council (SAC) meeting with the support of an online tool called IdeaBoardz, in which stakeholders could anonymously respond. The second form of data collection was a qualitative survey of stakeholders between February 23 and March 17, 2021. Finally, BBF captured qualitative stakeholder perspectives about early childhood systems integration throughout convenings of the Vermont Early Childhood State Advisory Council Network from February 2021 to December 2021. The multimodal strategy for gathering information, while less rigorous than traditional academic research, has proved effective in engaging a wide range of stakeholder voices over a longer period of time. The following questions were discussed:

- + What are the key components of an integrated prenatal to age 8 early childhood system and what's currently in place in Vermont?
- + What are the persistent barriers Vermont faces to achieve these components of an integrated system?
- + Where are the opportunities for improvement to reach true integration for our prenatal to age 8 system?
- + What additional data and information is needed to inform decision-making related to integration?

State Advisory Council Information Gathering. While the State Advisory Council (SAC) is composed of 23 Governor-appointed early childhood leaders, SAC meetings are open to the public and are therefore, rich convenings including early childhood stakeholders across Vermont. The February 23, 2021 meeting focused on early childhood integration included 263 public and private partners participating virtually.

Qualitative Survey Responses. In total, the survey had 144 complete respondents who represented 31 sectors/disciplines and every region of Vermont. The most prominent sectors that respondents represented were early childhood education including afterschool (51%, 74 respondents), the early childhood system (24%, 35 respondents), and advocacy (23%, 33 respondents). Most respondents identified themselves as direct service providers (44%), with other significant representation from both leadership (33%) and management (31%) roles. Additionally, more than 50% of respondents were a parent or caregiver of a child under 9 (53%, 76 respondents). Respondents primarily identified as White (85%) or preferred not to respond (10%).

The Vermont Early Childhood State Advisory Council Network Perspectives. The Network includes over 450 early childhood stakeholders coming together over the course of the year through Regional Council meetings, VECAP Committee Meetings, and the State Advisory Council.



Key Themes

The following key themes resulted from information gathering over the past year:

- + Challenges to integration in Vermont's early childhood system
- + Vermont's existing integration values and infrastructure
- + Data and information needed to inform decision-making

Theme 1: Challenges to Integration in Vermont's Early Childhood System

As part of this information gathering effort over the last year, Vermont's early childhood stakeholders have identified a range of challenges and barriers to systems integration based on their perceptions and experiences with what successful integration within the system should look like.

Stakeholders' most prevalent concerns fell into six primary categories that they identified as being critical to integration in Vermont's early childhood system. While not an exhaustive list, these themes rose to the top of early childhood partners' responses regarding what components are key in establishing an integrated, efficient, comprehensive, seamless system for children and families, and what barriers currently are hindering progress toward Vermont realizing that vision for the system:

- + Family, provider, and educator engagement and partnership in decision-making
- + Governance and administration
- + Workforce supports and compensation
- + Equity of services, access, and decision-making
- + Finances and resources for the system
- + Data governance and data integration

Quotes From the Field: Challenges at Hand

"Persistent barriers include 1) chronic underfunding which leads to an early childhood system based on scarcity and competition; 2) inadequate and incompatible data systems which prevents true understanding of the effectiveness and efficiency of programs and strategies; and 3) insufficient alignment of values—or communication of values—both current and historical, both actual and perceived."

"Trust. When things are changed by people who do not have lived experiences of the systems they change, the new process and procedures do not reflect the kind of support people need. There needs to be real ways for people's voices to be heard and reflected in policy to build trust."

"Hands down the biggest barrier is funding. What consistently happens is our limited capacity forces other initiatives to start up to fill the gap and thus it stretches already thin funding across even more projects. We need a robust commitment to prevention and early childhood in the form of adequate funding to better integrate throughout the systems and build on the great work that has been done over the last decade in the [early childhood] field."

Family, Provider, and Educator Engagement and Partnership in Decision-Making

The lack of opportunities for family leadership and decision-making was identified as a significant barrier to integration across the Early Childhood System. By providing parents and caregivers opportunities to bring forward thoughts and concerns, and to engage in systems conversations and decision-making processes, stakeholders suggested that families can become leaders in designing a responsive system that works for them, resulting in more seamless integration. Stakeholders suggested that creating a culture that invites and supports family engagement is critical to incorporating feedback from those who may be unfamiliar with the systems, language, and processes used in current decision-making structure. This culture shift includes providing the necessary training and coaching to support partnership with a diverse and representative group of families. Stakeholders indicated that including caregivers and communities will not only lead to trust and engagement, but to better outcomes for children and families.

Parent leaders have outlined several barriers to participation including resources, transportation, professional development, inadequate interpretation services, and generally a lack of partnership and prioritization. Throughout information gathering, partners indicated that without strong parent partnership and supports, an integrated system that best meets the needs of all families in Vermont is impossible to achieve.

Governance and Administration

The current governance structure was a concern identified by many of the state's early childhood stakeholders, who worry it impedes the state from making significant progress toward integration and achieving optimal outcomes for children and families. For instance, many stakeholders perceived that the multiple agencies that oversee early childhood-related programs and services operate under different frameworks, philosophies, and values when it comes to administering programs that serve young children and families. Stakeholders perceived a lack of clarity around roles and programmatic function, duplication of administrative efforts, siloing, fragmentation, and a lack of collaboration and coordination across the many departments, programs, and agencies overseeing this work. This fragmentation has appeared to stakeholders through gaps in communication, lack of clarity, and missed opportunities to better serve children and families. Valuing existing expertise within state agencies, departments, and divisions, was also perceived as a governance and management challenge across both agencies.

Stakeholders' perceptions of the Agency of Education include concerns that coordination and collaboration are not strongly valued, and that decisions tend to be made within a silo with little stakeholder feedback. Stakeholders' perceptions of the Child Development Division reflect concerns about leadership transitions coinciding with a critical shortage of content expertise in child development, child care, and supporting children with disabilities. These perceptions, agency leadership transitions, alongside concerns about the reorganization of CDD proposed by H. 394, have left an overwhelming tension in the field, and challenged early childhood stakeholders' confidence and trust in the state agency's ability to lead key programs and services for young children (across both entities). Stakeholders suggested that mitigating gaps in leadership and content expertise would better promote alignment and reduce duplication in the programs and policies that serve young children and families in Vermont, leading to a more integrated system.

Stakeholders identified a need to examine systems that govern and administer child care and early childhood education, including decision-making authority; capacity and quality; collaboration and integration; barriers and challenges; mechanisms to strengthen system oversight; and data infrastructure. Act 45, passed by the Legislature in 2021, has set this examination in motion with independent contractors who are examining these critical questions and comprehensive stakeholder feedback. More information can be found in the concluding section of this brief.

Workforce Supports and Compensation

When asked what components were key to integration, Vermont's early childhood partners continuously pointed to a strong, well qualified, well compensated, and supported workforce across all sectors. Many stakeholders have described the current moment as a "workforce crisis" in Vermont's early childhood system. The crisis is stemming from challenges with recruiting and retaining, as well as providing appropriate compensation and benefits to early childhood professionals. Stakeholders identified the low compensation in child care and early educator roles in particular, along with other early childhood professions, as being a persistent barrier to hiring and retaining high-quality staff, and ultimately, to keeping their programs open. Additionally, insufficient workforce training, professional development, and support were frequently mentioned challenges. These challenges also inhibit the early childhood workforce from participating as actively in collaboration efforts (for example, opportunities for them to be actively engaged in the BBF Network), which limits the ability to ensure their voices are heard as experts within their respective sectors. Without a strong and supported workforce, stakeholders expressed significant concern that an integrated and well-resourced early childhood system is out of reach.

Equity of Services, Access, and Decision-Making

Equitable access to services within Vermont's early childhood system emerged as a clear guidepost for many stakeholders, and was identified as an area in which our state and programs have room for improvement. Our ability to realize an integrated system that provides the highest quality, equitable access to services, resources, and supports for each and every child and family in Vermont was identified by stakeholders as a challenge. For instance, within Vermont's Universal Prekindergarten Education program, it continues to be a challenge to serve children regardless of rural geography, other care needed (beyond 10 hours a week), and specialized behavioral or health care needs. Similarly, the challenges associated with affordability in Vermont's child care system remain an equity gap when it comes to finding and accessing high-quality care. Equity is a core value within the broader goals of building an integrated early childhood system, yet several programs and initiatives still struggle to provide equitable access to high-quality opportunities for each and every child. The ways in which each of these services, needs, or factors intersect is not adequately addressed by the current status of integration in our system, based on stakeholders' feedback.

Finances and Resources for the System

Another theme that emerged consistently was chronic underfunding of early childhood programs. The lack of a fully funded system was identified as being the root cause of many other challenges and barriers stakeholders identified related to systems integration. For instance, insufficient funding of many early education programs was suggested to be the barrier in providing a livable wage to the workforce, better training and supporting early educators, and more. These resource gaps lead Vermont programs and providers to filling in cracks and backfilling needs, versus having aligned and braided funding to support the vision for integration; a well-designed, well-resourced system that is comprehensive and meets all needs. Additionally, stakeholders perceive underfunding as leading to scarcity and competition within Vermont's system, rather than the integration and continuity they feel would best serve children and families. While the system's overall funding was a clear concern, particular programs stood out to stakeholders as being particularly underresourced including: Children's Integrated Services (CIS), child abuse prevention training, child care financial assistance (CCFAP), and afterschool, summer, and third space programs.



Data Governance and Data Integration

The final challenges identified by stakeholders fell into the theme of data governance and data integration. Survey results suggested that members of Vermont's early childhood community continue to be frustrated by the lack of integration and inability to glean data on outcomes across programs serving young children and their families and understand the gaps for subpopulations of children. Additionally, the need to track the funding and impact of early childhood programs over time was identified as a missed opportunity by many partners. Because early childhood stakeholders placed a significant focus on the challenges associated with early childhood data as a means to strengthen integration, an entire theme is dedicated to data and information needed to inform decision-making.

Theme 2: Vermont's Existing Integration Values and Infrastructure

Early childhood stakeholders developed a shared vision for system integration through Vermont's Early Childhood Action Plan in 2020. This information gathering effort reinforced several key values that early childhood stakeholders share. These principles are current strengths or commitments of Vermont's early childhood system, and stakeholders suggested that they should continue to be held up as we strive toward further integration in our system. These values include:

- + Holding children and families at the center
- + Equity
- + Family, community, and professional-informed decision-making

Holding Children and Families at the Center

Vermont early childhood stakeholders and partners expressed hope that we will continue to design and implement programs that prioritize the needs of children and families, rather than valuing the status quo, or the needs of administrators. Stakeholders also suggested that they would like to see the system become more seamless for families to navigate, and to ease transitions between the variety of services that children and families may be accessing (afterschool and third space programs, child care, universal pre-K, Children's Integrated Services, early childhood special education, specialized health services, and more). This "seamlessness" appeared repeatedly as an attribute, our outcome, of what early childhood partners in Vermont see as a well-integrated system. Stakeholders also described the need for a cultural or paradigm shift for what we mean by "early childhood," including recognizing the importance and value of prevention-oriented programs, the inclusion of the prenatal period and afterschool and third space programs in the system, and the importance of wraparound services.

Equity

A commonly identified principle was providing equitable access to services including afterschool and third space programs, child care, universal prekindergarten, Children's Integrated Services (CIS), early childhood special education, specialized health services, and more. In addition to equitable access to services, early childhood stakeholders in Vermont have recognized the critical nature of designing and implementing services that seek to correct systemically unjust practices and policies that have historically disproportionately impacted Vermonters of color and other underserved and marginalized populations. This theme included the desire to engage with parents, communities, and the early childhood field in an equitable and empowering way. Stakeholders also expressed the need to better include and support the participation of historically underrepresented and underserved communities and populations when designing and implementing systems change. Stakeholders suggested that improving on the system's current level of integration would require more inclusivity and conscious efforts to engage all communities and populations in Vermont.

Family, Community, and Professional-Informed Decision-Making

Stakeholders suggested that it is important that policymakers and program administrators include all partners in implementing strategies to move toward the vision of an integrated system. This includes using the VECAP as the collaboratively developed vision; ensuring the voices of those most impacted are included in discussion of vision and strategy; providing clear, transparent communication about governance and administration; and supporting partners and the early childhood field with the changes associated with the transition to realize an integrated and comprehensive early childhood system. As challenges and opportunities for continuous quality improvement arise, change management practices must ensure that families, providers, and other stakeholders are supported and that any administrative burden is reduced as much as possible. However, maintaining the central focus on improving the well-being of children and families is paramount and should be clearly reflected in changes made. Further, stakeholders suggested that family-friendly or family-oriented communication from programs and services was an important component of engaging families and those most impacted. Similarly, providing clear and transparent communication and opportunities for input and feedback for providers, educators, and others working directly with children and families is critical for policymakers and program administrators to consider and implement throughout this process.

Existing Integration Infrastructure

While barriers to integration exist, Vermont has prioritized building strong infrastructure and initiatives over the past decade to work toward seamless navigation for families and an integrated early childhood system.

Stakeholder's feedback indicated that Vermont early childhood stakeholders have experienced, perceived success, or see value in many existing integration initiatives and structures. Examples of where stakeholders expressed support for maintaining (or building capacity of) existing infrastructure include the Child Development Division and Children's Integrated Services (CIS), which were largely seen as strong integration-oriented efforts.

Quotes From the Field: Existing Integration Infrastructure

"An integrated prenatal to age 8 [early childhood] system is crucial for Vermont through the Child Development Division as it is uniquely designed as a holistic and integrated system to identify risk factors early on and approach the family as a whole and ease the navigation process. Vermont is a leader in integrated services and other states look to us as the experts on how to deliver these services seamlessly."

"CIS is built on best practice and research, as is IFS and to dismantle these systems rather than fully fund them is a huge step backwards and away from a cradle to career proposal."

"CIS is seen as a promising model across the country."

"The CIS approach is informed by decades of research demonstrating the value of integrated service delivery both for improved outcomes as well as return on investment. It has been continually monitored, supported, and improved in Vermont, resulting in a program that is considered a model nationally and frequently heralded as such. However, it does require oversight, continuous improvement, and adequate funding, like any program. By dismantling the CIS unit at the state level, unbundling the payment, and returning oversight of each individual service to a different agency or departments at the state, Vermont will return to a fractured service delivery system rife with inefficiencies and massive inconsistency across the state."

The Child Development Division (CDD)

Stakeholders suggested that Vermont is leading the way nationally through the initial intent to integrate and align resources, supports, and services through CDD. Stakeholders described aligned and integrated early childhood governance and administration, as well as braided funding strategies, as critical cornerstones in creating a seamless system for kids and families. Stakeholders further suggested that when designing or redesigning governance for early childhood programs, many states across the country are turning to similar models. Responses indicated support for the division's goal of serving children and families through a child development, family-focused, and strengths-based lens. Of note, while the vision and intent of CDD is valued and described as leading the way nationally, stakeholders also described challenges associated with the current status of CDD: is under resourced; lacks capacity to meet the true vision and need; does not truly integrate all early childhood services; and lacks content expertise and knowledge around the needs of children and families and the programs and system supporting them.

Children's Integrated Services (CIS)

The current model of Children's Integrated Systems (CIS) was also held up by stakeholders as a critical way to support seamless navigation of services for children and families. CIS is also viewed by stakeholders as a best practice model that states across the nation are moving toward for aligning and integrating services and braiding finances. Stakeholders shared that they would prefer to see CIS further invested in and strengthened, rather than dismantled. However, stakeholders also articulated some of the challenges associated with CIS: is under resourced; is an administrative burden for some sectors; and has no data system to capture service provision and impact.

Stakeholders continuously acknowledged that the current capacity and resources within CDD and CIS are lacking and that additional support is necessary to meet the intent of the division and program.

Other Programs and Services that Strengthen Integration

BBF's statewide information gathering efforts have consistently articulated the importance of strengthening existing communication, collaboration, and partnerships across all levels of our system to ease transitions for families, streamline siloed efforts, and reduce duplication. It is clear that Vermont's early childhood stakeholders strongly value these practices as essential to the success of creating a sustainable, integrated Early Childhood system that realizes the promise of each and every child. In addition to CDD and CIS, several other programs, frameworks, and initiatives were named that reflect ongoing efforts to support integration in Vermont's early childhood system, including, but not limited to:

- + Act 166 - Universal Prekindergarten Education (UPK)
- + The Early Childhood Interagency Coordinating Team (ECICT)
- + Head Start and Early Head Start
- + Help Me Grow VT (HMGVT)
- + Let's Grow Kids
- + The Parent Child Center Network (PCCN)
- + Vermont's Early Childhood State Advisory Council Network - Building Bright Futures (BBF)
- + The Vermont Interagency Coordinating Council (VICC)

Theme 3: Data and Information Needed to Inform Decision-Making

Using evidence to inform policy is becoming a cornerstone to improving the well-being of children and their families across Vermont. Although there have been investments in select data systems and development of several procedures for measuring outcomes, Vermont's systems for the collection, analysis, and use of early childhood data on the whole remain inadequate. Stakeholders elevated the following themes associated with data needs in Vermont's early childhood system related to improving on the current status of integration:

- + Early childhood expenditures
- + Publicly accessible, high-quality data and using data to inform decision-making
- + Identification of data gaps and prioritization
- + Consistent review of national best practices

Quotes From the Field: Data to Inform Decision-Making

"We need more information on the efficacy of current state and federal investments in Early Childhood."

"PLEASE require a thorough evaluation of the current [early childhood] system by hiring experts to complete this evaluation and produce a comprehensive report with recommendations. This evaluation needs to be done by an organization with expertise in early childhood systems and compare the Vermont system to national data and information."

"Linking systems of data across various agencies and platforms could be a tipping point to guarantee greater accuracy and integrity of data. Then there would be more real data points to act on with positive intent and coordinated purpose."

"Longitudinal data collection is necessary to inform best practices and determine efficacy and outcomes within the birth-grade 3 continuum."

"We must evaluate the systems while integrating them to ensure all aspects of the system follow best practice and research-based solutions, not just policies and practices that have always been done. This way we can bring together our systems and improve our systems for children and families."

Early Childhood Expenditures

Stakeholders identified a need to centralize early childhood financing data to promote transparency through the development of an early childhood budget inventory. This inventory can be used to facilitate discussions about current and future investments and opportunities for better alignment.

Publicly Accessible, High-Quality Data and Utilization to Inform Decision-Making

Vermont's early childhood stakeholders and 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 the 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. There is currently no centralized system for integrating early childhood data across state agencies,

departments, and divisions serving children and families, and even independent or siloed data efforts have stalled or struggled to succeed. Further, stakeholders reported the need for a centralized hub of data and research that's easily digestible. Ultimately, stakeholders articulated the need to prioritize and invest in an integrated early childhood data system to ensure that the resources, services, and supports currently serving young children and their families are as effective and efficient as possible.

Identification of Data Gaps and Prioritization

There are questions that Vermont is not currently able to answer due to data gaps and a need for a centralized solution to identify and monitor what data exists, the limitations of existing data, and the pursuit of prioritized data gaps. The 2020 Early Childhood System Needs Assessment includes a 10-page table of data gaps, however, as a system, Vermont hasn't yet had the capacity to make progress toward addressing those gaps. Addressing these data gaps is a critical component of ensuring that Vermont's early childhood system is integrated, well-resourced, and data-informed, as outlined as the state's goal in the VECAP.

Consistent Review of National Best Practices

While Vermont is a valuable place to develop and test unique programs and frameworks, stakeholder feedback suggested that to improve integration in the early childhood system, the state would benefit from consistent review of national best practices, cutting edge research, and partnerships with other states. Stakeholders outlined the need for opportunities to embed Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) efforts throughout the early childhood system; consistently discuss lessons learned; identify opportunities to implement projects and scale; and finally, to use data and national best practices to inform service provision, program implementation, and decision-making, versus remaining content with the current system operations. Early childhood partners described times when Vermont and other states have learned from each other, as leading to stronger, more integrated, data-driven early childhood systems building.

Limitations

The findings of this brief do not necessarily indicate the views of Building Bright Futures' staff, the State Advisory Council, or the State of Vermont. Data were collected and compiled from a subset of the Building Bright Futures Network, and therefore, may also not represent the views of all members.

Of note, although a robust network of stakeholders have provided their perspectives, the stakeholders and their recommendations might not necessarily be representative of all Vermont early childhood stakeholders. Demographic data were not collected on the broader group of stakeholders. In addition, responses include qualitative feedback from SAC participants at the February 23, 2021 meeting and Vermont Early Childhood State Advisory Council Network representatives over the last year, during which time political and financial changes have taken place that may impact stakeholders' perspectives. Finally, there are likely many other efforts across the early childhood system focused on integration that are not specifically captured in this summary.

Ongoing Effort to Prioritize Early Childhood Integration: Vermont's Child Care and Early Childhood Education Systems Analysis

Over the past year, Vermont has prioritized integration within the early childhood system in a range of ways that have supported our ability to move toward Goal 4 of the VECAP. During the 2021 legislative session, the Vermont Legislature passed H.171, now Act 45, a bill focused on governance, administration, and financing of the early childhood system. Among other components related to child care, the bill charged Building Bright Futures to facilitate Vermont's Child Care and Early Childhood Education System's Analysis including procuring a team of national experts in early childhood systems to analyze and produce recommendations related to the governance and integration of Vermont's child care and early childhood education system.

With a strong team of national experts secured, this work is well underway and to date, has involved holding a well-rounded series of interviews and focus groups with stakeholders and partners in Vermont's early childhood system. At the February Works-in-Progress meeting with the Advisory Committee, the contractors shared initial findings and themes reflecting stakeholder feedback about the current status of Vermont's early childhood system. Throughout the months of February and March, additional interviews and focus groups have been scheduled through VECAP Committees and Regional Councils to support public engagement and important opportunities to provide feedback and insight. By July 2022, Vermont will have clear recommendations for the next steps on how to proceed with administering and organizing its comprehensive, high-quality system of early childhood education for young children and their families including a summary of key themes and framing of major decisions facing the state.

Act 45 also includes a finance study led by the Joint Fiscal Office, who will procure a team of national experts to examine the cost of high-quality child care and early childhood education, estimate the cost of transforming the system to provide that care, and recommend viable mechanisms to sustainably fund that system. A Request for Proposals (RFP) has been issued and the Budget Adjustment has included the funding for the Joint Fiscal Office to execute this scope of work. The Systems Analysis and finance study will lead Vermont to be well positioned by 2023 to initiate a process to improve the well-being of children and families through strengthening the governance, administration, and financing of the early childhood system.



Vermont's Early Childhood
Data & Policy Center

[Vermontkidsdata.org](https://vermontkidsdata.org)

Vermont's Early Childhood Data and Policy Center is a hub of the most high-quality, up-to-date data and information on the status of children and families across sectors. It is a critical tool for answering policy questions by centralizing data from Vermont's complex early childhood system including a data dashboard; a robust collection of Vermont-specific and National publications, policy briefs, and webinars; and a page dedicated to early childhood policy in Vermont. [Vermontkidsdata.org](https://vermontkidsdata.org)

Building Bright Futures (BBF) is Vermont's early childhood public-private partnership, charged under Vermont Title 33 § Chapter 46 and the Federal Head Start Act (Public Law 110-134) as Vermont's Early Childhood State Advisory Council (SAC), the mechanism used to advise the Governor and Legislature on the well-being of children in the prenatal period through age 8 and their families. BBF maintains the vision and strategic plan for Vermont's early childhood system. BBF's Network infrastructure includes 12 Regional Councils, seven VECAP Committees, and the State Advisory Council. [Buildingbrightfutures.org](https://buildingbrightfutures.org)



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