



Feb 14th, 2019 Building Bright Futures Testimony to House Human Services

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Materials:

- How Are Vermont's Young Children and Families 2018 Report
- Young Children's Early Care and Learning in Vermont Research Highlights
- Building VT's Future from the Child Up Think Tank Report

BBF as an organization

- Building Bright Futures was created in statute to:
 - Advise the administration and legislature on early childhood policy
 - Monitor the well-being of VT children and families
 - Convene individuals, organizations, and agencies committed to young children at both the regional and state level, recognizing that we can better meet the diverse needs of all children and families when we work together.
- Our structure
 - Early Childhood State Advisory Council
 - 12 Regional Early Childhood Councils
 - Statewide Early Childhood Action Plan Committees
 - Vermont Insights - early childhood data portal
 - How Are VT's Young Children and Families - annual report and recommendations
- BBF's goals for legislative engagement
 - Be a resource to legislators
 - Provide high level early childhood policy recommendations
 - Help legislators access relevant early childhood data
 - Connecting you to diverse, cross-sector voices and perspectives from our statewide council network
 - We do not advocate for specific legislation as an organization.

How Are Vermont's Young Children and Families Report

- Every year, Building Bright Futures releases the *How Are Vermont's Young Children and Families?* report, which provides a data-based, point-in-time snapshot of the well-being of young children and families through a variety of indicators across early education, health, and human services.

- The child care data in our 2018 report/data highlights how Vermont continues to make necessary strides in increasing the quality of early care and learning programs, while grappling with inadequate program capacity.
- The good news is that the quality of Vermont's child care programs continue to improve. Not only has there been a major increase in the percent of child care programs participating in STARS, which is Vermont's quality rating system, but more and more of those programs are being rated at the highest levels of quality. STARS rates programs on a scale of 1 to 5 and the percent of programs rated at the 3, 4, and 5 STAR level has doubled in the last five years from 30% of programs to 60%
- Despite strides in quality, Vermont continues to face significant child care capacity challenges. We know that Vermont families can't find the quality, affordable child care they need. Earlier this fall, the Joint Fiscal Office issued a report highlighting the overall reduction in child care slots across the state. So we know that supply is low, and demand is high. The report estimates that more than half of infants and toddlers likely to need child care in Vermont don't have access to any regulated child care programs.
- The attention being paid to Vermont's child care capacity crisis is warranted. This issue requires our attention and action. At the same time, we cannot address capacity at the expense of the tremendous growth we have seen in program quality. We must identify strategies that promote child care program quality and capacity simultaneously.
- To that end, this year's How Are Vermont's Young Children and Families highlights how, in Vermont's efforts to address the availability of high-quality childcare, retaining and recruiting the workforce has emerged as a significant roadblock to expanding capacity. BBF has identified two immediate opportunities that require policy attention to support education costs for the early childhood workforce,
 - •Funding for and expansion of scholarship programs for early educators
 - •Develop a mechanism and funding to support early educators with student debt
 Addressing our capacity crisis through a focus on developing a highly-qualified workforce, allows us to also continue our commitment to improving the quality of early learning experiences for all Vermont children.

Young Children's Early Care and Learning in Vermont - Research Highlights from the 2018 Vermont Early Care and Learning Household Survey

- In our efforts to monitor the early childhood system in Vermont and make policy recommendations accordingly, the practices and preferences of Vermont families when it comes to child care have always been somewhat of a blind spot. We have relied primarily on anecdotal or proxy data.
- In order to get better information, this past year Building Bright Futures (BBF), in partnership with the VT Department for Children and Families Child Development Division and Let's Grow Kids, contracted with the National Opinion Research Center (NORC) at the University of Chicago to conduct a survey exploring the child care arrangements, needs, and preferences of Vermont families with children under 6 years old. We are releasing the findings of that survey today.

- You have a copy of the full research brief, and I'm going to walk you through a few key highlights. We would happy to come back with our partners, including our researchers at the University of Chicago, to testify on the results of the survey in more detail.
- Highlights of the 2018 Vermont Early Care and Education Household Survey findings include:

Demand is high

- Use of regular care (center-based, paid home-based, unpaid home-based) is very common among households with young children, with center-based care being the most prevalent. Just one in five households (21 percent) report using no regular non-parental care.
- 80% of households have all parents working, and of those, almost all use some kind of child care. Additionally, of the 20% of families who have at least one parent not working, still almost half use some kind of child care. This suggests that demand is high in Vermont across different types of families.

All types of care are valued by families

- This survey reflects that families see strengths in all forms of care. It is notable that all three types of care are seen as nurturing. Center-based care is seen as strongest for education and socialization, but lacks affordability and flexibility. Friend or relative care is seen as the most affordable, flexible, and nurturing, and family child care homes show up somewhere in the middle.

Our lowest income and working families need more support

- This survey suggests that we may have even more to do to support our lowest income families. 41% of families living at or below 150% of the Federal Poverty Level rely on some kind of unpaid care compare to about one quarter of those with higher incomes. When they do pay for care, these families pay a significantly higher percentage of their income on child care costs.

Availability of child care impacts our workforce and economy

- When asked about their most recent search for child care, over half of parents said they looked for care so that a parent could work or change work schedules. About half of parents also reported that availability of early care and learning affects how much they work.

Building VT's Future Think Tank Recommendations

- Background:
 - BBF has been involved in a multi-year, statewide stakeholder engagement process to develop long term systems recommendation for the future, culminating in the work of the Building Vt's Future from the Child Up Think Tank. This dynamic group of cross-systems partners has been meeting since April to develop an actionable blueprint for the future of Vermont's 0-5 early care and learning system. That builds on the work of the Blue Ribbon Commission on Financing High Quality Affordable Child Care. The result is aslate of recommendations that set the course and direction of our early care and learning

system to a future that will serve Vermont's children and families for generations to come.

- Executive Summary:
 - Critical to determine a clear governance structure
 - Recommendation 1: High-Quality Program Support and Accountability
 - Recommendation 2: Professionalized Workforce & Professional Compensation
 - Recommendation 3: Early Care and Learning Hubs
 - Recommendation 4: New Sources of Revenue
 - Recommendation 5: Redesigned Child Care Financial Assistance
 - Recommendation 6: A Dedicated Early Childhood Fund
 - All of the recommendations received support from a super-majority of Think Tank members. Fundamental concerns are noted in the Minority Opinion section at the end of each recommendation where applicable.
- Opportunity:
 - Recommendations provide high-level context for some short term opportunities to strengthen the system this session. Our hope is that they also encourage thoughtful discussions about what policy, practice, and legislative changes might need to happen over the next 10 years to move us toward this vision.