



Date: February 23, 2022  
 To: Members of the House Committee on Commerce and Economic Development  
 From: Dr. Morgan Crossman, Executive Director, Building Bright Futures  
 Re: The Role of Building Bright Futures in Vermont’s Early Childhood System

**BUILDING BRIGHT FUTURES’ ROLE IN VERMONT’S EARLY CHILDHOOD SYSTEM**

Building Bright Futures (BBF) is Vermont’s early childhood public-private partnership charged under Title 33, Chapter 46 and the federal Head Start Act to serve as Vermont’s Early Childhood State Advisory Council, the mechanism used to advise the Governor and Legislature on the status of children in the prenatal period through age eight and their families. BBF’s mission is to improve the well-being of children and families in Vermont by using evidence to inform policy and bringing voices together across sectors and within regions to discuss critical challenges and problem-solve.

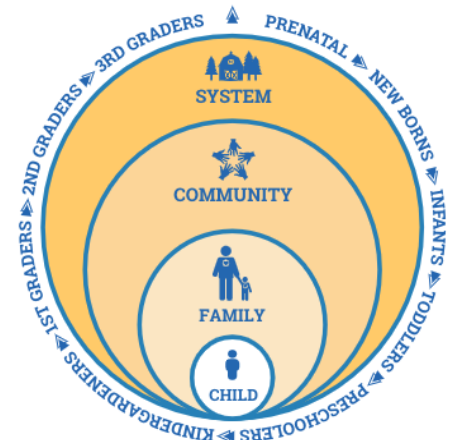
State statute charges BBF with maintaining and monitoring the vision and strategic plan for Vermont’s Early Childhood System called Vermont’s Early Childhood Action Plan (VECAP). The vision is for Vermont’s Early Childhood System to be an integrated continuum of comprehensive, high quality services that is equitable, accessible that will improve outcomes for each and every child in the prenatal period through age eight and their families. The following four goals were developed with input from over 450 early childhood public and private partners through the State Advisory Council Network to align with the four layers of the ecological systems model: child, family, community, and system:

Goal 4 (System): THE EARLY CHILDHOOD SYSTEM WILL BE INTEGRATED, WELL-RESOURCED, AND DATA INFORMED

Goal 3 (Community): CHILDREN HAVE ACCESS TO HIGH QUALITY OPPORTUNITIES THAT MEET THEIR NEEDS

Goal 2 (Family): FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES PLAY A LEADING ROLE IN CHILDREN’S WELL-BEING

Goal 1 (Child): ALL CHILDREN HAVE A HEALTHY START



BBF’s role is to convene and elevate the voices of families and early childhood stakeholders; monitor the system by identifying and provide high-quality up-to-date data to inform policy and decision-making; and to advise the Governor and Legislature by making recommendations that move the early childhood system toward the four goals identified in Vermont’s Early Childhood Action Plan (VECAP). These roles are fulfilled through BBF’s infrastructure which includes a network of over 450 early childhood stakeholders (figure to the left):



- A network of 12 Regional Councils convening early childhood experts throughout Vermont communities to move forward local and statewide early childhood priorities;
- 7 Vermont Early Childhood Action Plan (VECAP) committees upholding and monitoring the Early Childhood vision and strategic plan for Vermont;
- The State Advisory Council (SAC) brings together cross-sector early childhood leaders to issue recommendations, increase coordination to advance a connected and evolving early childhood system, and advise the Governor and Legislature.



Three ways in which BBF meets state and federal mandates are outlined below:

1. Data to inform policy and accountability
2. Elevating family and community voice through Regional Councils and Committees
3. State and federal monitoring and advisement

---

### DATA TO INFORM POLICY & ACCOUNTABILITY

**BBF is committed to using and producing the most up-to-date, high-quality data to inform decision-making and serves a critical role in Vermont, operating as a broker of data and information to guide policy decisions and strategy related to children, families, and the Early Childhood System. One critical note is that there is no centralized place where data across all sectors is integrated and housed within or across State Agencies. To help meet the need BBF developed Vermont’s Early Childhood Data and Policy Center at [Vermontkidsdata.org](http://Vermontkidsdata.org).**

#### **Vermontkidsdata.org**

Vermontkidsdata.org is a hub of the most high-quality, up-to-date information on the status of children and families across sectors. It is a critical tool for answering policy questions by centralizing data from the complex early childhood system.

**Data:** If you have a data question, you can see what data exists through our VECAP data dashboard, which is searchable by topic area. BBF has centralized over 40 indicators or data points in a data dashboard to monitor our strategic plan across different domains of well-being and services (child development, education, health, basic needs, communities, etc.), which we also present through the State of Vermont’s Children report annually. To centralize this data, we partner with data stewards across all of the agencies, departments and divisions that support children and families (AOE, CDD/CIS, DMH, ESD, FSD, MCH, DCF, etc.), alongside private partners (PCCs, Head Start Directors, Let’s Grow Kids, Hunger Free Vermont, Education Development Center, etc.) and pulling national data, to compile and make data publicly available.

**Publications:** You can also review a robust collection of Vermont-specific and national publications, policy briefs and webinars organized by topic and year.

**Policy:** Finally, you can track early childhood policy in Vermont by seeing previous and current SAC Network Policy Recommendations, information about what’s happening on the federal policy level through memos BBF developed to support an understanding of Build Back Better, and previous BBF testimony to the legislature.

#### **THE STATE OF VERMONT’S CHILDREN**

In addition to [Vermontkidsdata.org](http://Vermontkidsdata.org), Building Bright Futures is mandated to submit an annual report on The State of Vermont’s Children (formerly known as How Are Vermont’s Young Children and Families?) which features the most up-to-date data on the health and well-being of young children and their families in Vermont.

- Each year the report includes the Policy Recommendations of the Vermont Early Childhood State Advisory Council Network, a profile for each of Vermont’s 12 Building Bright Futures regions which align with the Agency of Human Services Districts and a Data Spotlight
- [The State of Vermont’s Children: 2021 Year in Review](#) was released on January 10, 2022 along with [a virtual briefing](#) on the key findings. The BBF also released [a three-minute video](#) on key takeaways. If you are interested, you may [request a free hard-copy](#) of the report.
- [The 2021 Data Spotlight](#) was on Vermont’s Early Childhood Workforce Crisis (p 10-12).



## ACCOUNTABILITY

Because of the complicated system of governance and administration (i.e. multiple Departments, Divisions, Agencies, and private community partners such as health care providers, child care programs, and parent child centers, responsible for service delivery and administration), BBF functions as an accountability infrastructure, in which, we have the relationships and political capital to hold “people’s” feet to the fire. If partners across the system aren’t able to follow through in their role, responsibility, or commitments, we have the infrastructure and relationships to hold each other accountable by immediately identifying and communicating the issue, providing guidance on how to correct or manage the topic at hand, and supporting communication to early childhood stakeholders.

### System-Wide Accountability Studies

One example of how BBF is holding Vermont’s Early Childhood System accountable is through Vermont’s Child Care and Early Childhood Education Systems Analysis. The Legislature identified the Building Bright Futures State Advisory Council as the appointed body to oversee [Vermont’s Child Care and Early Childhood Education Systems Analysis](#) and procure a contractor. A rigorous procurement process led Vermont to contract with Foresight Law + Policy and Watershed Advisors. The Systems Analysis is ongoing and when formal recommendations are published by the national experts in July, they will inform the state in determining what the appropriate next steps will be for strengthening, altering, further investing in, etc. the governance and administration of programs that serve young children and their families. BBF will also work closely with the Joint Fiscal Office (JFO) to ensure alignment between the Systems Analysis and the Financing Study, also mandated by Act 45 and signed into law in 2021. JFO has issued a [Request for Proposals](#) and is currently accepting proposals to conduct the Financing Study through March 2, 2022. The Financing Study will support Vermont in determining the cost of providing high-quality child care and outline promising financing strategies to fund the early childhood system in Vermont by January 2023.

---

## ELEVATING FAMILY AND COMMUNITY VOICE THROUGH REGIONAL COUNCILS & COMMITTEES

BBF believes that representation and family and community voice matters. With support from a federal HRSA grant co-awarded to BBF and the Vermont Department of Health (alongside our legislative allocation), we are working to ensure that families, communities, and those under-represented or systematically oppressed have a voice throughout our network as partners; that families are serving as leaders and decision-makers; and that diverse family voice, alongside critical data, is a driving force for building early childhood policy in Vermont.

Through BBF’s 12 state-wide Early Childhood Regional Councils, Family Ambassadors, and the Families and Communities Committee, those voices are heard and elevated. These committees and councils assess family and community needs, problem solve, coordinate, and take action. These groups work to collectively identify gaps for children and families and improve access to services and supports across early care, health, and education for young children and families in their communities throughout the state. As stated by a Parent Ambassador from the Families and Communities Committee, *“This is the one place I feel my voice is heard and it matters.”* This parent now serves as a voting member of the Early Childhood State Advisory Council.

---

## STATE & FEDERAL MONITORING & ADVISEMENT

As the primary advisor to the Governor and Legislature on the well-being of children and families prenatal through age eight, BBF consistently monitors early childhood priorities, needs of families, and data to inform decisions. In addition the the traditional advising BBF does through annual policy recommendations, legislative testimony, monitoring the VECAP and indicators, and producing the State of Vermont’s Children report, advising takings place through a range of mechanisms:



- Individual or team meetings between BBF leadership and leadership throughout the legislature and the Administration, during which BBF leadership elevates concerns and issues from the field, provides guidance to decision-makers on how to best tackle urgent priorities, and supports communication efforts, alongside monitoring accountability.
- Responding to urgent requests from the legislature, the administration, the Joint Fiscal Office, and other Vermont leaders related to the following: data; stakeholder perspectives on urgent issues; federal legislation; ongoing studies and task forces; early childhood priorities, issues, and needs; guidance to the field; early childhood COVID-19 emergency response; requests for proposals; hosting webinars; and considerations for upcoming bills and policy changes.
- On a weekly basis, capturing and elevating of emerging issues and considerations from the field to Agency leaders

BBF also monitors legislation on the federal level in order to inform partners on upcoming changes, support the state in readying itself for potential investments, and help inform policymakers on the current state of programs, data, and initiatives related to early childhood in Vermont. Specifically, over the past several months BBF has been monitoring Build Back Better, the federal reconciliation bill with significant programming and financing for social services, including child care and universal prekindergarten. BBF has been actively engaged in conversations with our congressional delegation about the status of Vermont’s child care and Universal Prekindergarten Program. Additionally, BBF convened state partners to begin to consider potential opportunities and areas in which data or additional information is needed to best implement these policies, should the legislation be passed.

---

### **EARLY CHILDHOOD WORKFORCE IN THE 2021-2022 POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS** **ENDORSED BY THE SAC**

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. The Building Bright Futures State Advisory Council (SAC) does not directly support or oppose any specific proposal or bill, however, at least annually, the SAC releases policy recommendations to improve the well-being of children and their families in Vermont. The early childhood workforce appears in the following sections of the [2021 recommendations](#):

- 1. Respond to Vermont’s Mental Health Crisis | Recommendation 2: 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 and LGBTQIA communities, and the ability to meet rural needs.)
  - Respond to the burden and stress on current mental health workforce causing staff burnout.
- 2. Develop a Well-resourced Early Care and Education System | Recommendation 1: 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.