



WHEN WE WORK TOGETHER, CHILDREN SHINE



# The State of Vermont's Young Children and Families

## House Committee on Human Services

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[www.buildingbrightfutures.org/](http://www.buildingbrightfutures.org/)

## Convening

Vermont's early childhood community to foster coordination and collaboration, communication, solidify feedback loops, share best practices and problem-solve.

## Responding

to fill the gaps in child and family need at the regional and systems level.

## Monitoring

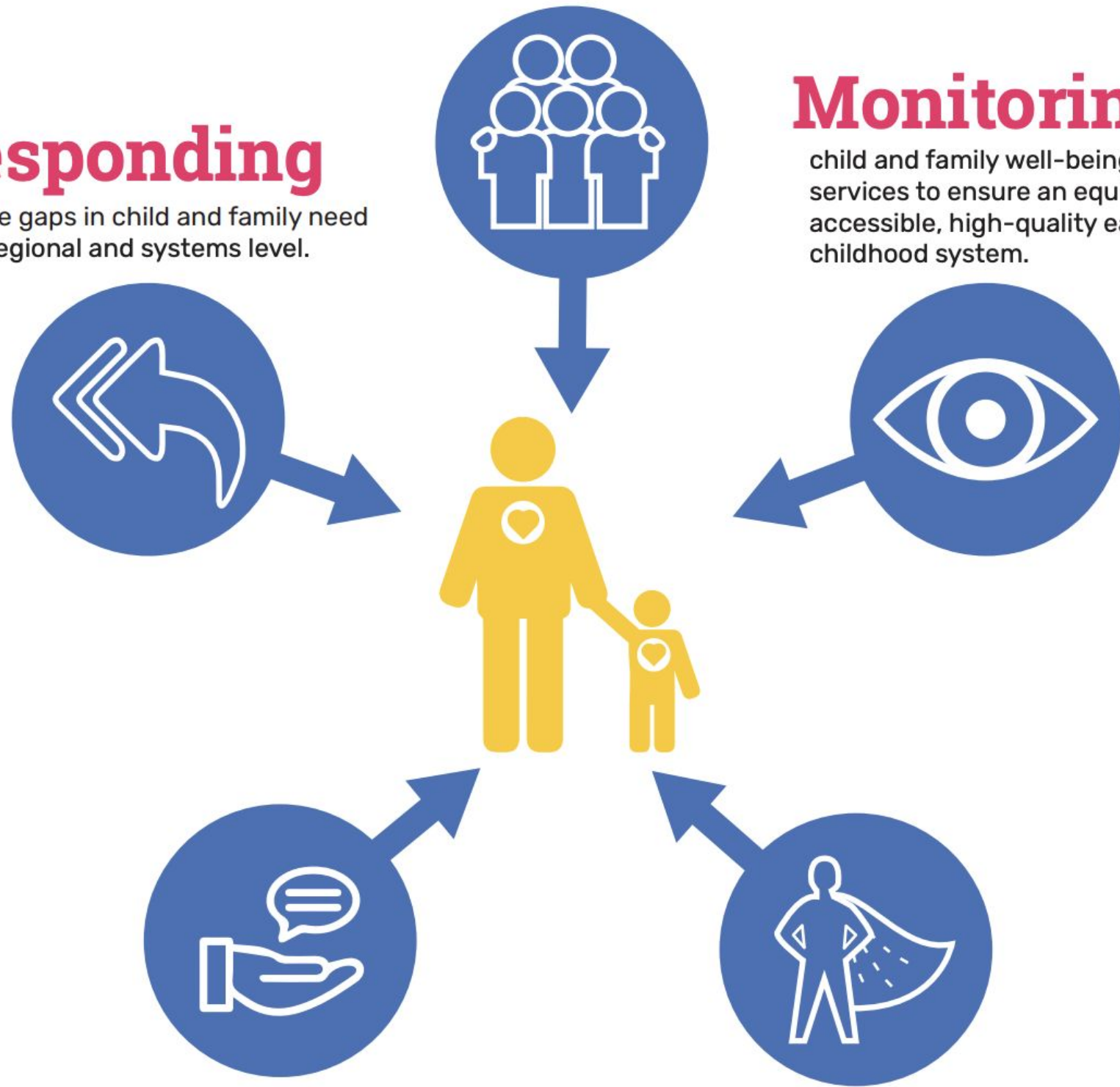
child and family well-being and services to ensure an equitable, accessible, high-quality early childhood system.

## Advising

the Governor and legislature on the well-being of Vermont's children and families using the most up-to-date high-quality data to inform forward-thinking policy.

## Empowering

families and communities by providing the opportunity to lead and elevate their needs.



# Building Bright Futures' Role within this vision & principles: Vermont's Act 104 | Federal Head Start Act

- Mission: To improve the well-being of all children and families in Vermont by using evidence to inform policy and bringing voices together to discuss critical challenges and problem-solve.

BBF maintains the vision and strategic plan for Vermont's Early Childhood System.

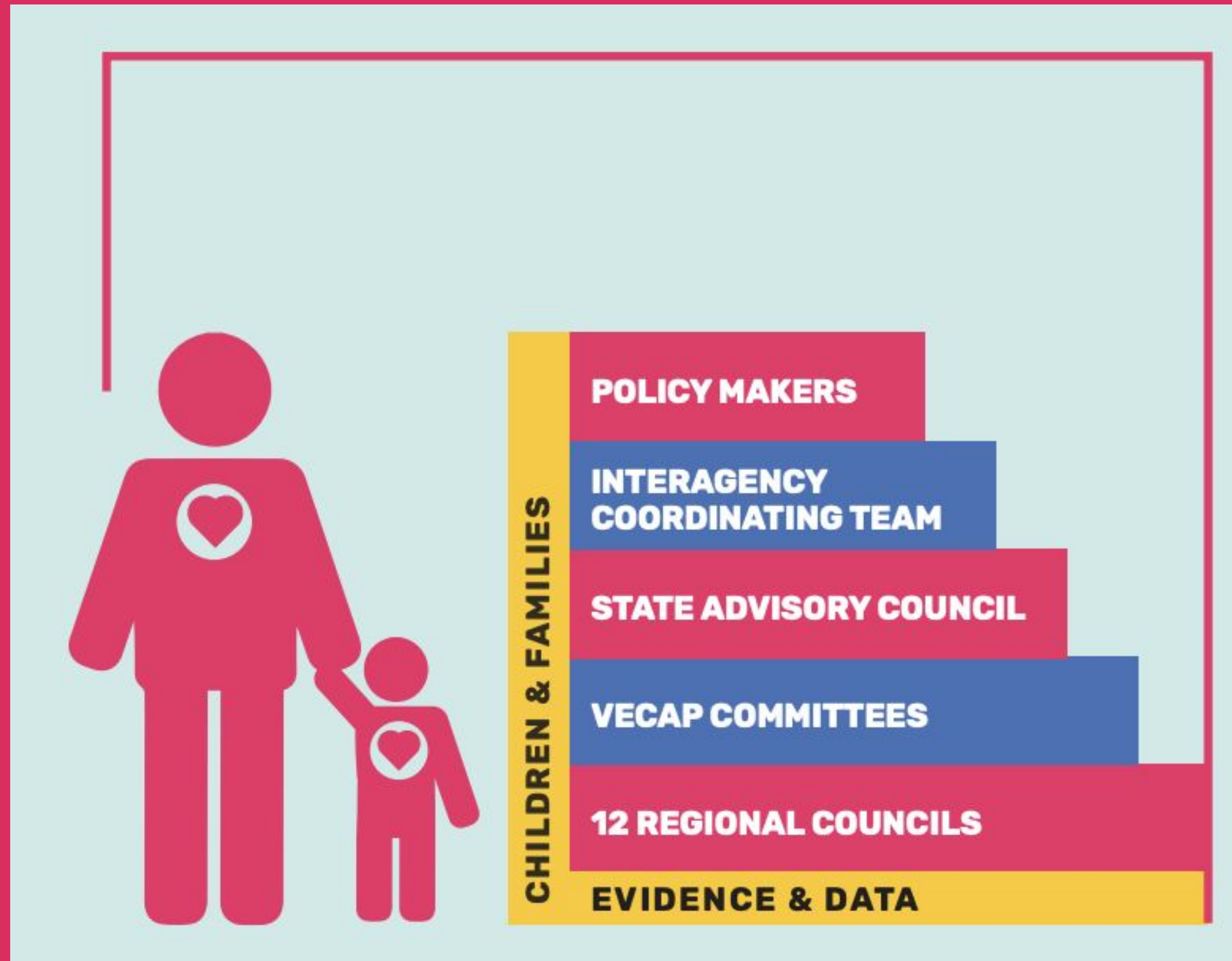
- Vision: The vision is for early childhood to be an integrated, continuous, comprehensive, high quality system of services that is equitable, accessible and will improve outcomes for all children prenatal to age eight and their families in Vermont.

# Building Bright Futures

## Early Childhood

### Infrastructure and Network

(300+ members)



The Building Bright Futures State Advisory Council and network infrastructure is charged by Act 104 to use evidence and data to monitor the system of services and provide the mechanism to support accountability.

# Data and Resource Documents Produced by the BBF Network During the COVID-19 Pandemic

## Early Childhood Systems Needs Assessment EXECUTIVE SUMMARY 2020

Vermont's PDG-5 Needs Assessment highlighted the conditions of the early care and education system for Vermont's 35,769 children 0 to 5. Overarching needs include data gaps, chronic underfunding, and limited family engagement.

**36%** of children under age 6 live in households with income below **200%** of the Federal Poverty Level.

**1 in 5 children** between the ages of **6 and 8** has a social, emotional, or behavioral health condition, while this is only true for **8% of children under 5**.

**62%** of infants lack access to a child care provider, up to **89%** in rural counties (pre-COVID).

**Lack of funding** "Chronic lack of funding undermines the quality of supports we provide."

**1,004** unique cases of child abuse and neglect in **2019**.

**2%** of EC stakeholders agreed that the workforce is well-equipped (has resources necessary) to meeting needs of children and families.

Vermont collects a tremendous amount of data, but does not readily have the data available that leaders need to make decisions about EC investments, resources, and strategies in one, easily accessible place.

**Methodology:** The needs assessment collected primary data through a survey and focus groups with families, early childhood providers and other community and agency leaders, and reviewed 18 documents with data and information on the status of children and families.

### The Needs Assessment Found:

**Equity and Vulnerable Populations:** Gaps in the early childhood system more severely impact specific groups. Families living in rural communities, BIPOC, and children who experience other risk factors, such as poverty, homelessness, or immigrant/refugee status, face exacerbated access, quality and affordability gaps.

**Quality and Accessibility:** Access to childcare remains a significant challenge across the state, particularly for infants and toddlers. Etc.

**Early Childhood and Family Mental Health:** Vermont's EC community is deeply concerned for the current mental health challenges of children and families and the potential lasting secondary effects of COVID-19.

**Workforce:** Developing and sustaining a pipeline of early childhood professionals is costly and remains a challenge across the state.

**System Integration:** Rigid policies and funding have many services still operating in silos. Alignment, collaboration and coordination efforts remain a challenge at the system level and are necessary for success at the regional level, starting with aligned messaging in the mixed-delivery system.

**Family Leadership and Engagement:** EC stakeholders at all levels of the system need to recognize families as partners whose voices are critical to the system's success.

**Resources and Funding:** Despite the successful investments in Vermont's EC system, EC programs are not adequately funded, and securing stable funding is a significant concern for EC programs across the state.

**High Quality Data:** Lack of high quality data across the early childhood system limits knowledge of outcomes and services and undermines informed decision-making at the state and local levels.

## VERMONT'S EARLY CHILDHOOD ACTION PLAN (VECAP) The 5 year vision & strategic plan<sup>1</sup>

### VERMONT'S VISION

Vermont aspires to realize the promise of each and every Vermont child by ensuring that the early childhood system is an integrated, continuous, comprehensive, high quality system of services that is equitable, accessible and will improve outcomes for all children in the prenatal period to age eight and their families in Vermont.

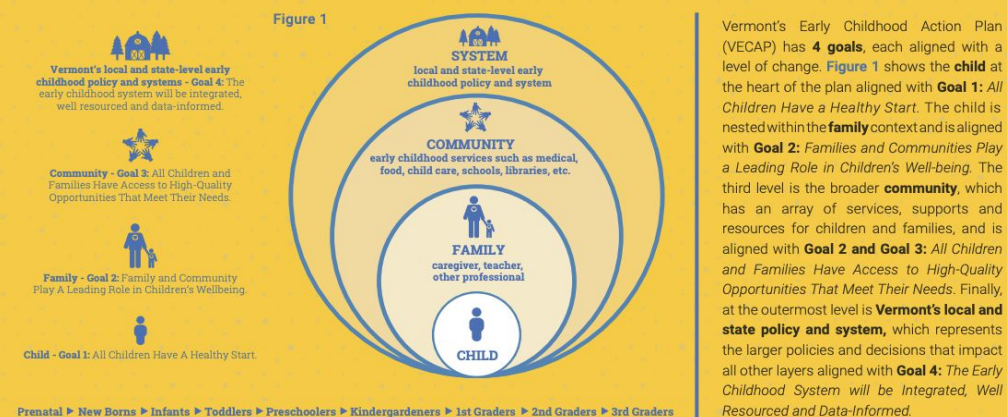
### Vermont's Early Childhood Action Plan (VECAP)

is a bold, collaborative approach to building a comprehensive and integrated early childhood system that promotes healthy child development and family stability. The VECAP outlines a cohesive vision by the year 2026, and establishes shared accountability to achieve statewide priorities for children and families from the prenatal period through age eight.

Originally established in 2013 along with the Vermont Early Childhood Framework, the updated VECAP is a structure around

which to build coordinated action across public and private stakeholders throughout Vermont. It centers around making measurable changes in early childhood outcomes through identification of common goals, strategies to reach those goals, and the use of common language to align initiatives. It is built on Vermont's Guiding Principles which articulate Vermont's commitment to fully include each and every child and their family in a continuum of meaningful experiences to ensure their health, mental health, safety, happiness and success now and into the future.

## MAKING CHANGE FOR CHILDREN, FAMILIES, COMMUNITIES AND THE EARLY CHILDHOOD SYSTEM



Vermont's Early Childhood Action Plan (VECAP) has **4 goals**, each aligned with a level of change. Figure 1 shows the **child** at the heart of the plan aligned with **Goal 1: All Children Have a Healthy Start**. The child is nested within the **family** context and is aligned with **Goal 2: Families and Communities Play a Leading Role in Children's Well-being**. The third level is the broader **community**, which has an array of services, supports and resources for children and families, and is aligned with **Goal 2 and Goal 3: All Children and Families Have Access to High-Quality Opportunities That Meet Their Needs**. Finally, at the outermost level is **Vermont's local and state policy and system**, which represents the larger policies and decisions that impact all other layers aligned with **Goal 4: The Early Childhood System will be Integrated, Well Resourced and Data-Informed**.

Vermont's Early Childhood Action Plan (VECAP) has **4 goals**, each aligned with a level of change. The nested nature of these layers indicates bidirectional relationships; when change happens at any level, it also has the ability to impact the layers around it. Each goal of the VECAP ultimately seeks to improve outcomes for Vermont's children and families at the heart of Vermont's Vision.

<sup>1</sup> Full VECAP at <https://bit.ly/VECAP2020>



## Early Childhood Family Engagement Assessment Report 2020



# Our Collective Vision: *Visualization of a Vermont Child Born in 2026*



*In the year 2026, a child is born to a family in Vermont. We will call her baby Mariah. Vermont is a state where all children and families are accepted for who they are and we support this child from the very start all the way through their development and education. This child thrives with the loving care of her parents and caregivers. Her family is safe and stable in their home and have food in their fridge today and on the horizon. Baby Mariah's parents use paid family leave and home visiting to support the physical and mental health of both parents and baby. The family is connected to their diverse community and can access services, resources and support they need including but not limited to high quality child care, a faith community, mental health support, healthy food and jobs. Mariah grows into a toddler, preschooler and eventually transitions into the local elementary school. She is resilient to navigate even the difficult days she will face.*

*Mariah does not yet know there is a community holding her and her family through a seamless system of support. This is a system where all children have a healthy start. Where families and communities play a leading role in children's well-being. Where families have access to high quality opportunities that meet their needs. And where the early childhood system is integrated, well resourced and data-informed. This is the future.*



# The State of Vermont's Young Children and Families

2020

*"Now more than ever, data are essential to helping policymakers and administrators understand the needs in their states including helping families access services." –  
Child Trends*

**How are Vermont's  
Young Children  
and Families?**

2020 REPORT



# State Advisory Council 2020 Policy Recommendations

How are Vermont's Young Children and Families Report, pgs 6-11



- A. Recognize Vermont's early care and education system and workforce as essential**
- B. Mitigate COVID impacts on family economic stability and mental health**
- C. Recognize chronic inequities and racism as a public health crisis**
- D. Empower family voice to rebuild a stronger system**
- E. Evolve our data system to address gaps**



## RECOMMENDATION 1

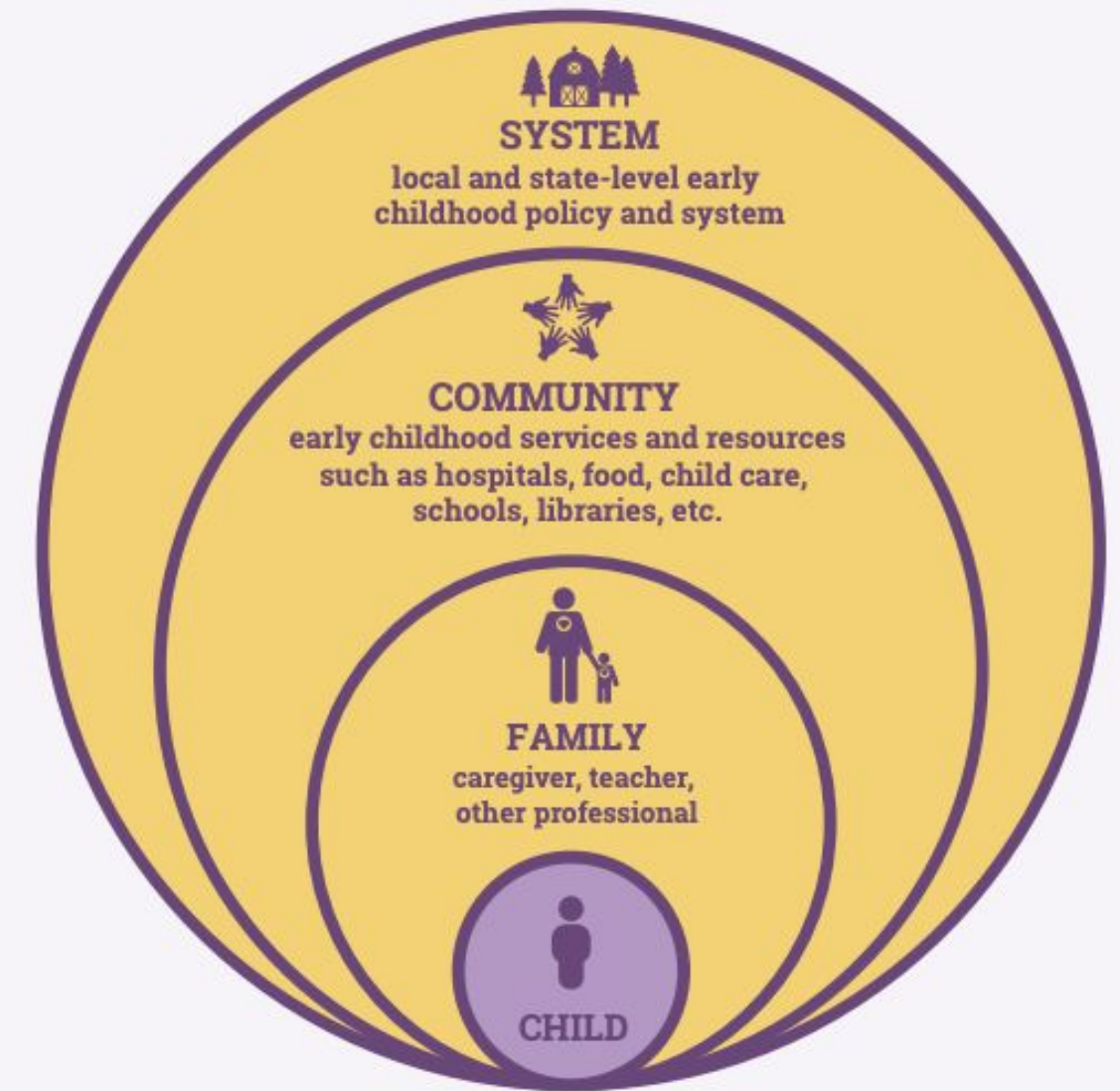
### Fund Education Costs, Compensation For Early Childhood Education Workforce, Including Scholarships, Loan Repayment, And Wage Supplementation:

- > Sufficiently fund and expand scholarship programs for early educators and maintain this revenue annually.
- > Establish a loan repayment program for early educators.
- > Establish a wage supplement program to progress toward adequate compensation for early educators.
- > Prioritize workforce development and hazard pay for this sector.

## RECOMMENDATION 2

### Continue Investment In Redesigning The State's Child Care Financial Assistance Program (CCFAP) By Making Progress In Alignment With Year 3 Of The State's 5-Year Plan, Including:

- > Increase the CCFAP rate paid to early care and education providers so those reimbursement rates closely reflect the true cost of high-quality care thereby reducing the burden on early care and education programs to subsidize the system through low wages and other cost-saving efforts.
- > Fully support needed investments in the technology system(s), staff and resources required to implement the redesigned CCFAP structure and providing an accessible platform for families, educators, and administrators.



RECOGNIZE  
VERMONT'S  
EARLY CARE  
&  
EDUCATION  
SYSTEM &  
WORKFORCE  
AS  
ESSENTIAL

(pg 7)



## LEVEL REQUIRING ACTION > SYSTEM

### RECOMMENDATION 1

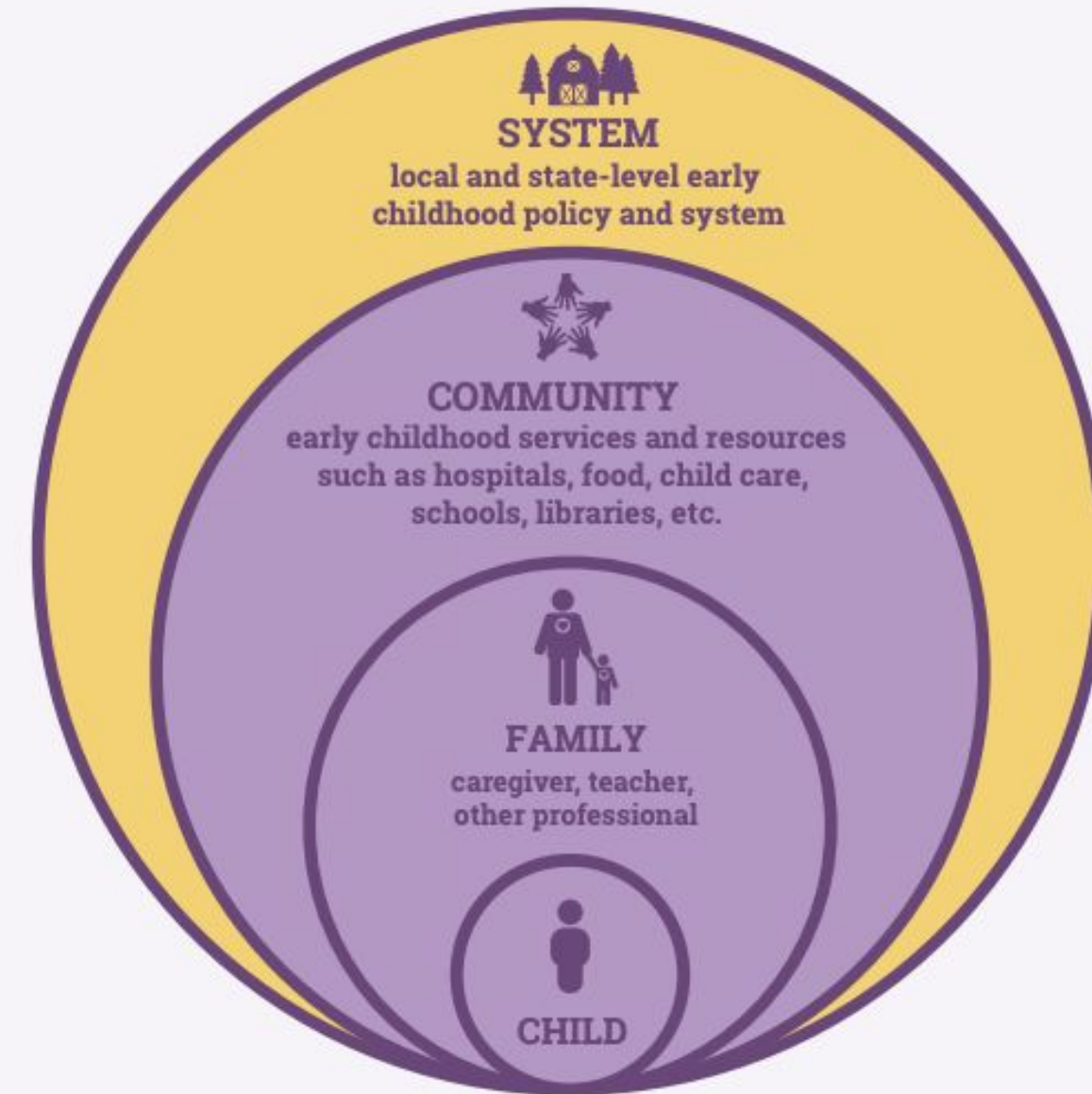
#### Mitigate The Health And Economic Effects Of The Pandemic On Families:

- > Extend economic support beyond expiration of CARES Act funds that expire in December.
- > Extend flexibility in eligibility for programs (e.g. Reach Up work requirements) so parents can engage in other activities that help them invest in their future and integral to the health and well-being of their family.

### RECOMMENDATION 2

#### Sustain And Strengthen The Integration Of Mental Health Services For Children And Families Through Flexible Funding For Integrated Mental Health Across Settings:

- > Continue to allow telehealth to be covered by insurance so families can access the care they need.
- > Invest in flexible service delivery and availability.
- > Focus on mental health prevention and staff burnout across many settings.



MITIGATE  
COVID  
IMPACTS ON  
FAMILY  
ECONOMIC  
STABILITY &  
MENTAL  
HEALTH

(pg 8)

RECOGNIZE  
CHRONIC  
INEQUITIES  
& RACISM  
AS A PUBLIC  
HEALTH CRISIS

(pg 9)

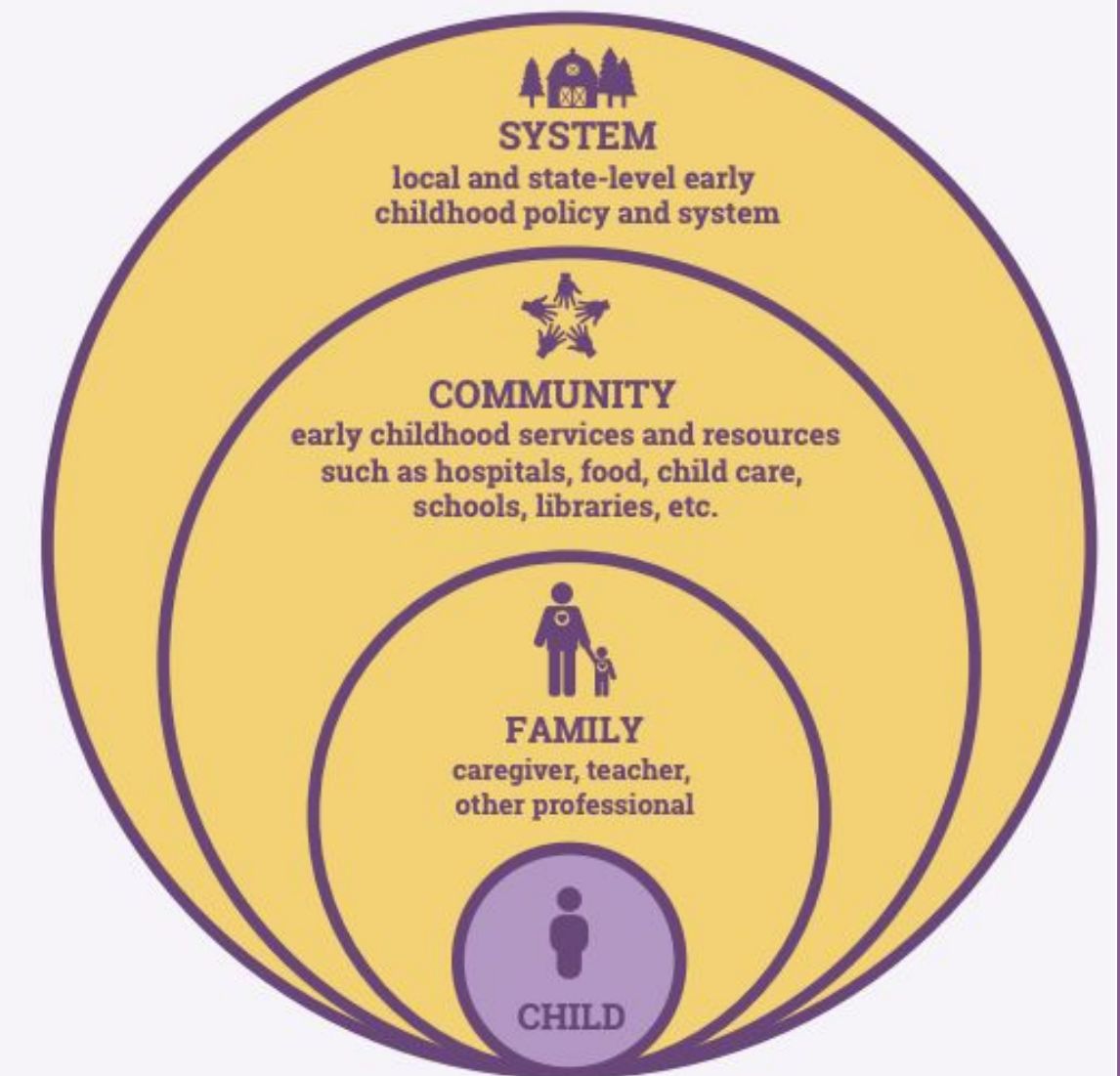
LEVELS REQUIRING ACTION > FAMILY, COMMUNITY, SYSTEM

**RECOMMENDATION 1**

**Partner With Vermont's Racial Equity Task Force To Identify And Build Structures Of Support For Racially Diverse Populations And Address Health Disparities And Systemic Impacts Of Racism.**

**RECOMMENDATION 2**

**Align And Integrate Equity Initiatives To Leverage Impact And Expertise Across Sectors And Early Childhood Partners To Inform Strategies In The Vermont Early Childhood Action Plan And Early Childhood System.**



## RECOMMENDATION 1

**Increase Opportunities For Parent And Caregiver Representatives To Serve On Committees, Legislatively Mandated Study Sections And Decision Making Bodies To Inform Local And State Policy, Practice And Resource Allocation:**

- > Require each legislatively mandated board/committee/study section have at least 1 parent representative with lived experience.

## RECOMMENDATION 2

**Commit To Ensuring That Children And Families Are In All Policies:**

- > Similar to the “health in all policies” initiative, this recommendation is based on incorporating child development and family well-being considerations into all decision-making across sectors and policy areas.
- > At the state-agency and community-based partners level, and at the policy-making level, review programs, policies and legislation to ensure that revisions and requirements consider the impact and consequences to child development and family well-being.



EMPOWER  
FAMILY  
VOICE TO  
REBUILD A  
STRONGER  
SYSTEM

(pg 10)



**This is the one place I feel my voice is heard and it matters.**

- Parent Member of the BBF VECAP Families & Communities Committee

## LEVELS REQUIRING ACTION > FAMILY, COMMUNITY, SYSTEM

### RECOMMENDATION 1

Restart And Support The Early Childhood Data Governance Council And Utilize The BBF Data And Evaluation Committee To Identify And Elevate Data Gaps And Align Priorities Through Cross-Sector Collaboration.

### RECOMMENDATION 2

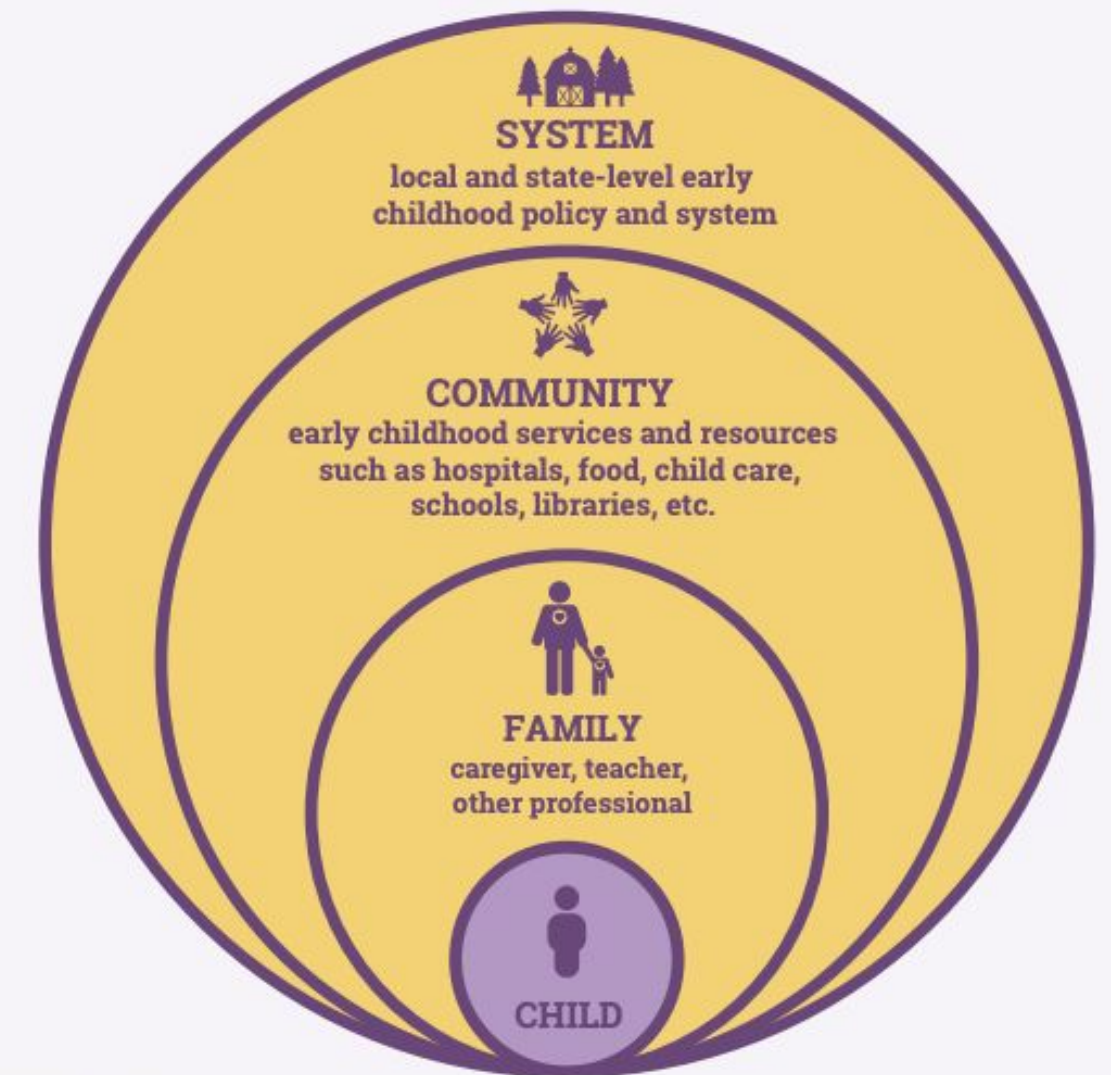
Promote Data Literacy And Using Data To Inform Policy Across Sectors By Educating Vermonters About The Importance Of High-Quality Data Collection, Reporting And Integration.

### RECOMMENDATION 3

Fully Fund Existing Early Childhood Data Initiatives To Fidelity: Early Childhood Information System (E.g. Bright Futures Information System, Children's Integrated Services) And The State Longitudinal Data System.

### RECOMMENDATION 4

Create An Early Childhood Budget That Identifies All Financial Sources Dedicated To Children And Their Families From Prenatal To Age Eight To Monitor, Align And Leverage Financial Resources.

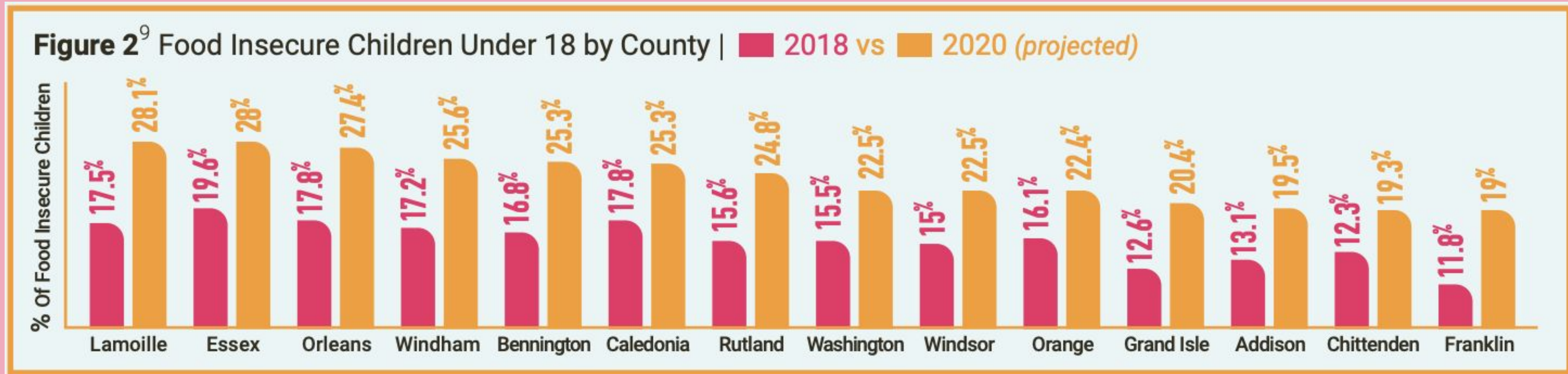


EVOLVE OUR  
DATA  
SYSTEM TO  
ADDRESS  
GAPS

(pg 11)

# Vermont's COVID-19 Data Spotlight: Food Insecurity

(pg 12)



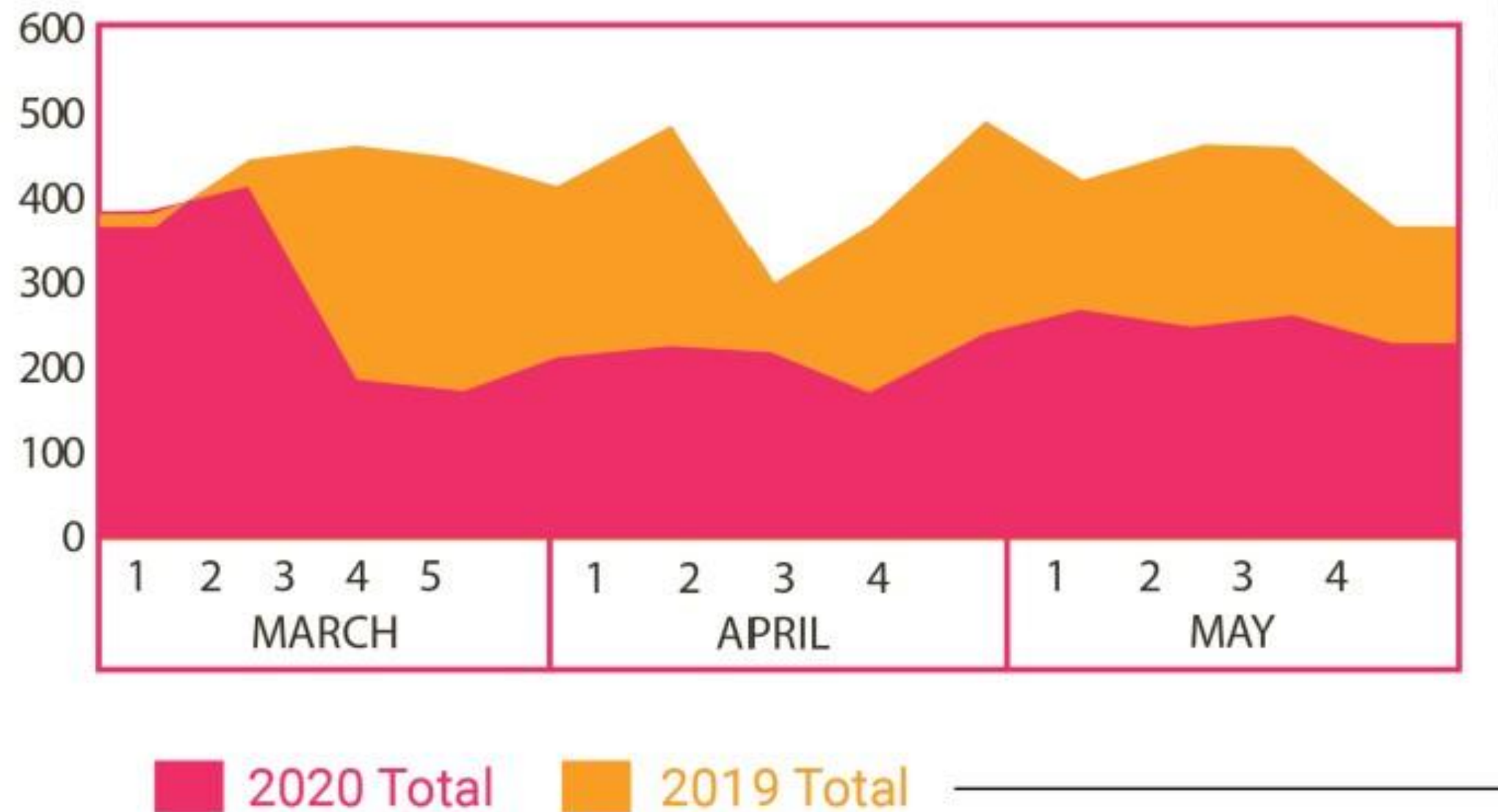
Food insecurity is rising.

“I am seeing so many generous programs offering food pickup but the families with the highest need cannot access a lot of these programs because they cannot drive and don't have transportation.”

# Vermont's COVID-19 Data Spotlight: Family Support Calls

(pg 13)

Figure 3<sup>13</sup> Number of Calls to the Child Protection Hotline 2019 vs 2020 Weekly Comparison



- Fewer calls to Child Protection Hotline and investigations compared to last year (less eyes on kids)
- Calls to Help Me Grow (2-1-1) from families seeking support increased by 600% during the period from March 15 through June

# Early Childhood & Family Mental Health

(pg 22)

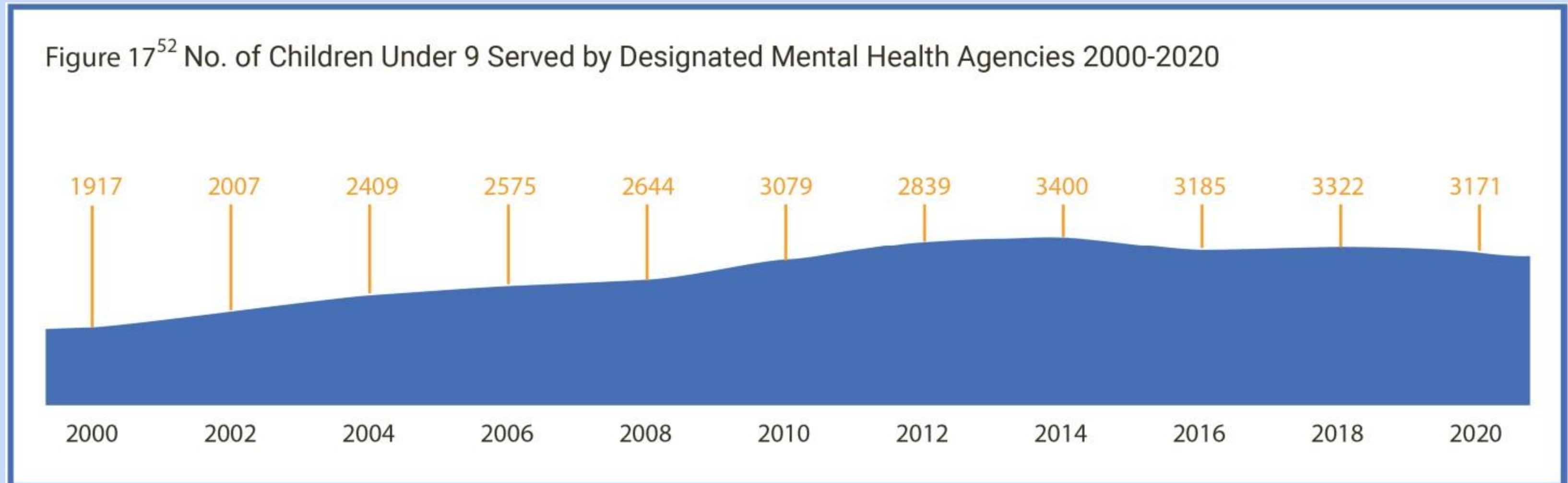


**1 in 5 children** between the ages of 6-8 has a behavioral, emotional or mental health condition.



“We are concerned about the impact [COVID-19 and transition for young children] has had on our children emotionally and physically ...The compounded stress is really just more than families can handle.”

# Early Childhood & Family Mental Health (pg 22)



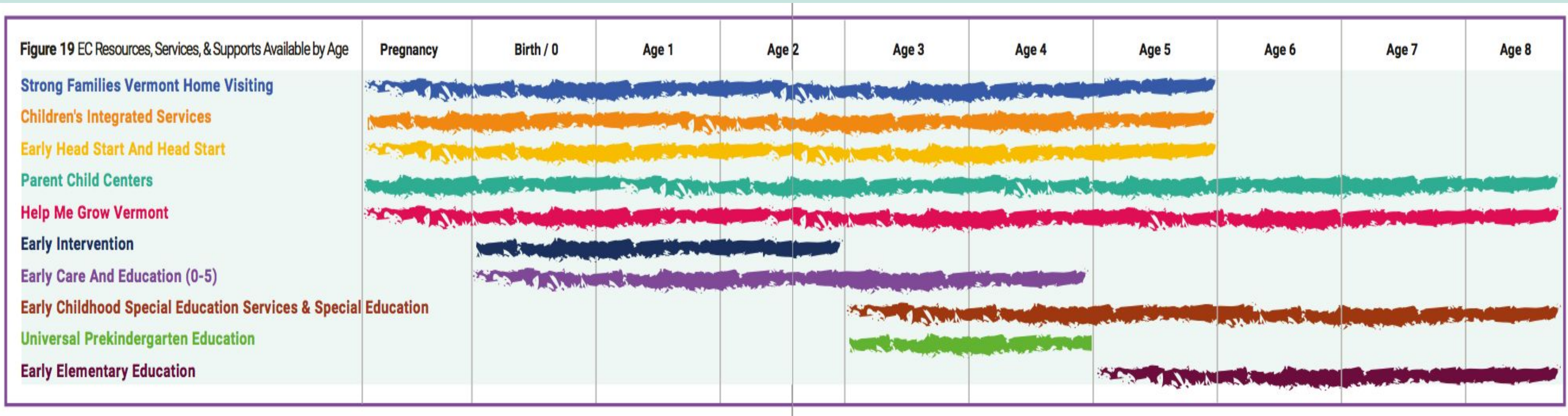
Consistent increase over time in the number of children accessing services through designated mental health agencies.

*-2020 data is an outlier and should be interpreted in context*



# Child Development & Education

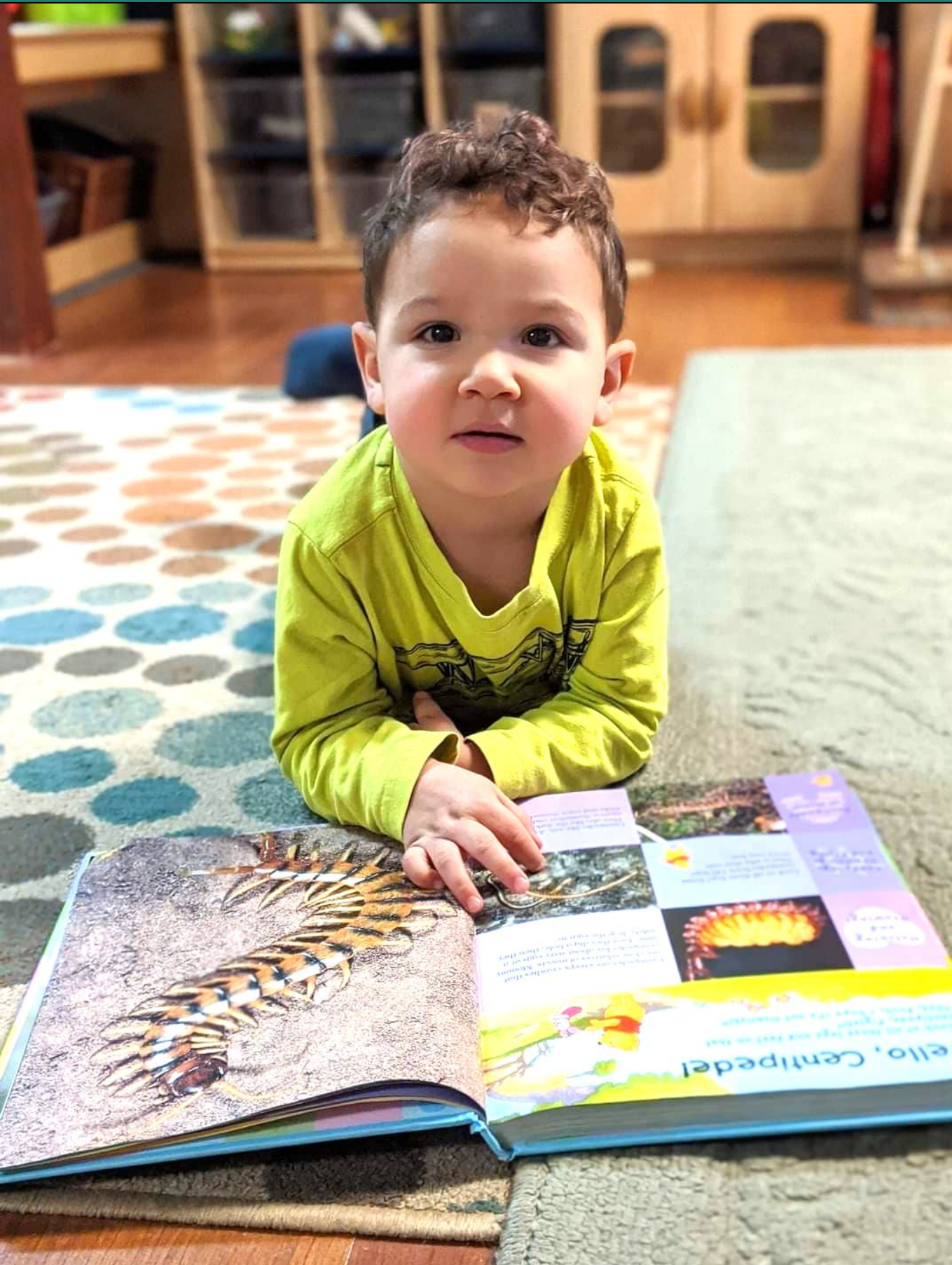
(pgs 24-25)



*VECAP Goal 4 - Our vision is for the Early Childhood System to be Integrated, Well Resourced and Data-Informed*

# Child Development & Education: Child Care Access

(pgs 26-27)



## Child care

Of children likely to need care,

- 62% of infants
- 27% of toddlers
- 30 % of preschool-aged children

**do not have access** to full day, full year, regulated child care programs

# Child Development & Education: Assessments

(pgs 27-28)

## Teaching Strategies Gold

**85%**

or more met or exceeded expectations across literacy, math, and social emotional domains

3 or 4 year olds

## Ready for Kindergarten Survey

**84%**

of Vermont's children are ready for kindergarten

Entering kindergarten

## Third Grade Math & Reading

**50%**

of Vermont's children are proficient in reading and 53% in math in 3rd grade

3rd grade

# Stakeholder Perspectives | January 2021



## **Within 24 hours of requesting feedback:**

- 69 individual responses
- 60% identified as a parent of a child under the age of 9
- 32 sectors represented
- All 12 Vermont regions represented



# Key Challenges Identified by Respondents

1. Basic Needs/Family Economic Impact
2. Child and Family Well-Being
3. Child Development
4. Health
5. Organizational Financial Stability
6. Social Connection and Relationships
7. Inequities and Gaps Widening for Subgroups of the Population



# Considerations for Moving Forward



1. Focus on the entire early childhood system
2. Build and invest in connections, community and strong, trusting relationships
3. Prioritize innovative virtual engagement (telehealth, etc.)
4. Focus on mental, emotional and behavioral challenges
5. Additional financial support will be required to maintain the early childhood infrastructure
6. Seek stakeholder participation & perspectives

# Vermont's Early Childhood Resource, Data, and Policy Center



- A catalog of high quality resources for families, communities, and early childhood professionals
- National and Vermont-specific datasets, data spotlights, and related policy recommendation briefs and fact sheets
- A data dashboard to monitor indicators identified in Vermont's Early Childhood Action Plan (VECAP)
- Reports and publications from BBF, agency and community partners
- Recorded research presentations, webinars, and early childhood grand rounds
- A portal for stakeholders to ask questions about existing data, make recommendations for needed data, and report data gaps and priorities

