

Date: February 23, 2022

To: House Committee on Commerce and Economic Development

From: Janet McLaughlin, Executive Director
Vermont Association for the Education of Young Children

Re: Investments in Early Childhood Education Workforce Development

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. The [Vermont Association for the Education of Young Children](#) (VTAEYC) is the state's largest professional organization of early childhood educators and their allies with a mission to advance equity and excellence in early childhood education. On behalf of our 500 members, thank you for your actions over the past two years to support early childhood education programs in Vermont. Even with those investments, Vermont has a severe crisis in early childhood education staffing. In a recent survey of early childhood education programs in Vermont conducted by our national parent organization, 71% of center-based programs reported experiencing a staffing shortage ([NAEYC](#)).

Early childhood educators have been stepping up during the COVID-19 pandemic - and for decades before that - to care for our children and families, despite exceptionally low pay and a lack of resources to meet families' increasingly complex needs. What we're seeing now - an acute workforce shortage during a tight labor market - is the predictable and painful result. And it's negatively impacting kids, families, educators, communities, employers and the economy.

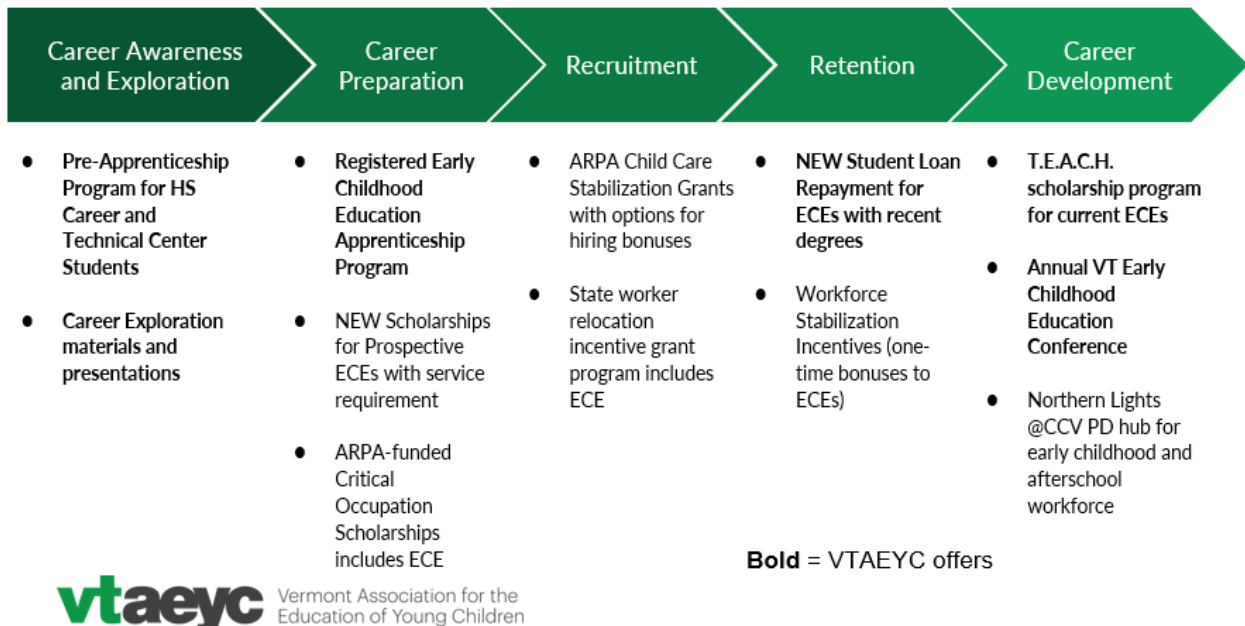
We need both immediate action to ensure that early childhood education survives the present moment and long-term strategic investments that create the early childhood education system that you envisioned in Act 45 last year. Early childhood educators are central to that vision and compensation that values them for their skilled work is essential.

First, in order to retain current early childhood educators and recruit new early educators to the field, Vermont should make immediate investments in compensation for early childhood educators that allows talented early childhood educators to enter and remain in the field. We hear from VTAEYC members and others in the field that educators are leaving work they love - or not finding their way to early childhood education at all - because they simply can't afford to pay their bills. At a time when the labor market is increasingly tight, Vermont should do more for this foundational workforce. In addition to support for programs that will allow them to increase regular compensation and offer retention bonuses, Vermont should address three of the most common reasons people leave the field: health insurance, student loans, and - ironically - child care costs. Vermont should:

- Offer premium assistance to ensure all early childhood educators working in Vermont have access to health insurance and health services they can afford.
- Expand the student loan repayment assistance program currently in development to early childhood educators who earned degrees in the last 20 years.
- Provide no-cost child care for the children of early childhood educators working in regulated programs.

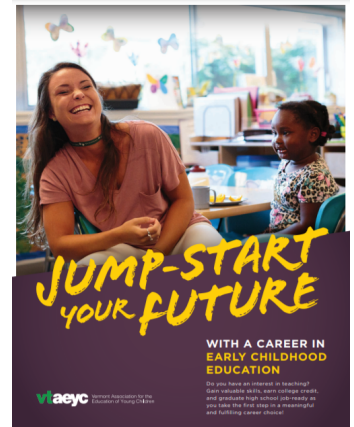
Second, Vermont must create a robust workforce development strategy for Early Childhood Education as the state has done for other fields central to Vermont’s economy. VTAEYC is ready to partner with the state to embed early childhood education recruitment into all state workforce development programs and to establish a coordinated, resourced recruitment campaign that attracts talented educators into the field.

Early Childhood Education Workforce Development strategies



Right now, VTAEYC offers [resources and programs](#) that support early childhood educators at various points in their career.

- For career awareness, we offer [materials](#) and **presentations** on early childhood education as a career to teens and adults.
- For career exploration and preparation, VTAEYC created a **pre-apprenticeship program** to build a pipeline from high school into the ECE workforce. In its first full year this school year, students enrolled in Career and Technical Education are getting training and practical experience as they work in child care programs and earn hours towards a Registered Apprenticeship.
- For career preparation, we partner with the VT Department of Labor to collaborate to offer the **Vermont ECE Apprenticeship Program**. Apprentices document 4,000 hours of supervised on-the-job training and complete a specific sequence of six college courses.
- For career development, we offer **T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood VERMONT**, an evidence-based scholarship program designed to make education affordable and accessible for those working in ECE. Vermont's T.E.A.C.H. program currently supports educators seeking Apprenticeship, AAs, BAs, and Teacher Licensure.
- For recruitment and retention, we are excited to add the new **Student Loan Repayment Assistance Program for the Early Childhood Workforce** to our portfolio this Spring for early childhood educators who earned AAs or BAs in the last five years.



Each of these programs is possible because of federal and state funding; however, outreach and coordination of early childhood education workforce development is not currently funded. As a result, efforts like these fail to reach as many people as they can, new efforts across the state are sometimes under-resourced or duplicative, and misperceptions about the opportunities within early childhood education persist.

With investment in an early childhood educator recruitment campaign, VTAEYC can:

- Conduct a high-quality career awareness campaign that provides accurate information about the rewards and opportunities of being an early childhood educator that includes presentations, paid media, brochures, and other resources. This would include expanding on partnerships with CCV, VDOL, CTEs, and high schools and promoting opportunities – such as scholarships for higher education – that potential early childhood educators may not be aware of. Resources can also be provided to regional groups engaging in this work.
- Implement recruitment strategies common in other industries including ECE career fairs, shared hiring promotions, informational Q&A sessions and other

supports for people considering entering the workforce or getting ready to complete ECE degrees. Depending on the priorities of ECE program leaders and resources available, this could also include support for screening or other human resources functions.

- Coordinate and provide support to efforts within the state to provide an entry-level training program for early childhood educators. Right now, several CTE centers as well as regional groups are creating similar programs that could benefit from connection to state-level systems and resources for program development and recruitment. In addition, there is significant interest in ensuring these programs attract and support a diverse workforce that more fully reflects the young children and families served by the state's early childhood education programs that needs a shared and focused effort.
- Ensure Vermont's ECE program leaders are informed and supported to take advantage of (or promote) the programs designed to recruit and retain early childhood educators such as scholarships for higher education or the worker relocation grants.

With a full-time team member and a modest budget for marketing and outreach, VTAEYC could leverage state-level programs and outreach opportunities while providing useful and targeted support for local and regional recruiting efforts.

Long-term, Vermont needs a robust workforce development strategy rooted in a coherent and consistent early childhood education profession with clearly defined roles, sensible pathways to enter and grow within the profession, and professional level wages and benefits, all within a supportive state infrastructure. In the last three years, a task force of current Vermont early childhood educators has engaged with nearly 2000 of their peers around the national "Unifying Framework for the Early Childhood Education Profession" with support from VTAEYC. As this committee begins to think beyond the immediate investments needed to support early childhood educators today, I encourage you to invite members of the [Advancing as a Profession Task Force](#) to speak with you and share their vision in which "each and every child beginning at birth has the opportunity to benefit from high-quality, affordable early childhood education delivered by a diverse, effective, well-prepared, and well-compensated workforce."

