

Date: April 7, 2022

To: Senate Economic Development

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

Re: Investments in Early Childhood Education Workforce Development

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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 envisioned in Act 45 last year and that H.703 starts to address. Early childhood educators are central to that vision and training that prepares them for their roles and compensation that values them for their skilled work are essential.

In my testimony today, I want to address three primary areas:

1 - Early Childhood Educator Outreach and Recruitment Initiative

2 - Pre-Apprenticeship Program for Early Childhood Education students in High School CTE programs

3 - Technical fixes needed to ensure the Student Loan Repayment Assistance program established in Act 45 is effective and efficient

In addition, VTAEYC encourages Vermont to make continued 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. 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 - with dedicated resources.

## Proposed Early Childhood Educator Outreach and Recruitment Initiative

In this time of deep need within the field and by Vermont families who need child care, Vermont should create a robust workforce development strategy for Early Childhood Education as the state has done for other fields central to Vermont's economy.

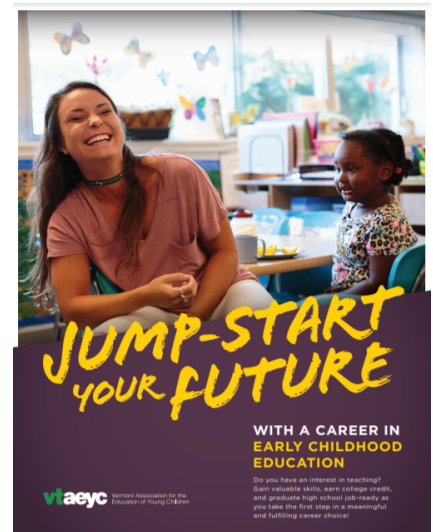
With support of the many partners and programs,, VTAEYC is ready to partner with the state to establish a coordinated, resourced outreach and recruitment and initiative that attracts talented educators into the field.

What we're seeing now is:

- Vermont early childhood education employers lack the time and resources to sort through the various programs designed to support employment in early childhood education and design effective outreach and recruitment strategies.
- Marketing materials for Vermont early childhood education careers exist but have not been widely leveraged because there has been no funding for a coordinated dissemination campaign.
- Piecemeal efforts aimed at recruiting and training new early childhood educators are not working because they sometimes lack understanding of the early childhood education employment market, have limited awareness of Vermont's early childhood education systems and resources, and/or are under-resourced.

Right now, VTAEYC offers [resources and programs](#) that support early childhood educators at various points in their career. This includes career awareness materials, a pre-apprenticeship program for high school CTE students, a Registered Apprenticeship program, the T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood Scholarship program, the state's largest ECE professional development conference, and - soon - the new Student Loan Repayment Assistance Program for early childhood educators with recent degrees. With that experience plus strong partnership with CDD, Northern Lights at CCV, Building Bright Futures, Let's Grow Kids, and many others, VTAEYC is well-positioned to coordinate a state-level initiative that leverages existing investments and provides valuable support for Vermont's early childhood education programs.

While Vermont has invested in a variety of strategies to build the early childhood education workforce, outreach and coordination of these efforts is not currently funded. As a result, these efforts 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 will also be provided to regional groups working to attract more educators.
- Ensure Vermont’s early childhood education employers 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.
- 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, resources for program development and a more strategic approach to 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.

With dedicated time 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.

Budget: \$125,000 total

Consultant (or temporary grant-funded position)	\$80,000	1600 hours at \$50/hour (or temporary staff at \$65K + benefits)
Marketing	\$40,000	Material design and printing, translation services, paid media (primarily targeted social media)
Other expenses	\$5,000	Mileage, admin

## Vermont Early Childhood Education Pre-Apprenticeship Program

With support from the Vermont Dept of Labor in SFY21 and SFY22, the Vermont Association for the Education of Young Children (VTAEYC) developed and piloted a Pre-Apprenticeship program for high school students enrolled in Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs that aligns with the Registered Vermont Early Childhood Education Apprenticeship Program (VECEAP). The **Vermont Early Childhood Education Pre-Apprenticeship program** includes:

1. **Paid internships within an early childhood education program.** Each pre-apprentice has a qualified mentor from the early childhood education program who will observe them using VECEAP Skill Level observation forms and provide guidance and resources to support the pre-apprentice’s ongoing growth and development as an early childhood educator. Pre-apprentices will track their hours so they can be used for advanced standing hours if they choose to participate in the Registered VECEAP.
  
2. **Training and coursework.** CTE programs offer industry standard training that may include: CPR and first aid, VT mandated reporter training, child care licensing-required nine-hour orientation, and the Northern Lights@CCV Fundamentals course. In addition, each pre-apprentice has the opportunity to take one CCV early childhood education college course during the pre-apprenticeship program via the dual enrollment program.

The 2021/2022 school year is the first full year of the program. Seventeen (17) students from seven (7) CTEs statewide are actively participating; they are from Burlington Technical, Burlington (4), Hannaford Career Center (Middlebury) (1), Northwest Career & Tech Center, St. Albans (3), River Valley, Springfield (1), Southwest Tech, Bennington (4), Stafford Technical, Rutland (1), and Windham Regional, Brattleboro (3). Three (3) additional CTE centers plus fourteen (14) additional students expressed interest in the program but were unable to participate this year, largely due to COVID-related complications with scheduling and transportation. Feedback from students, CTE instructors, mentors, and ECE programs all point to the program being an effective and valuable entry-level training program for high school students interested in entering early childhood education.

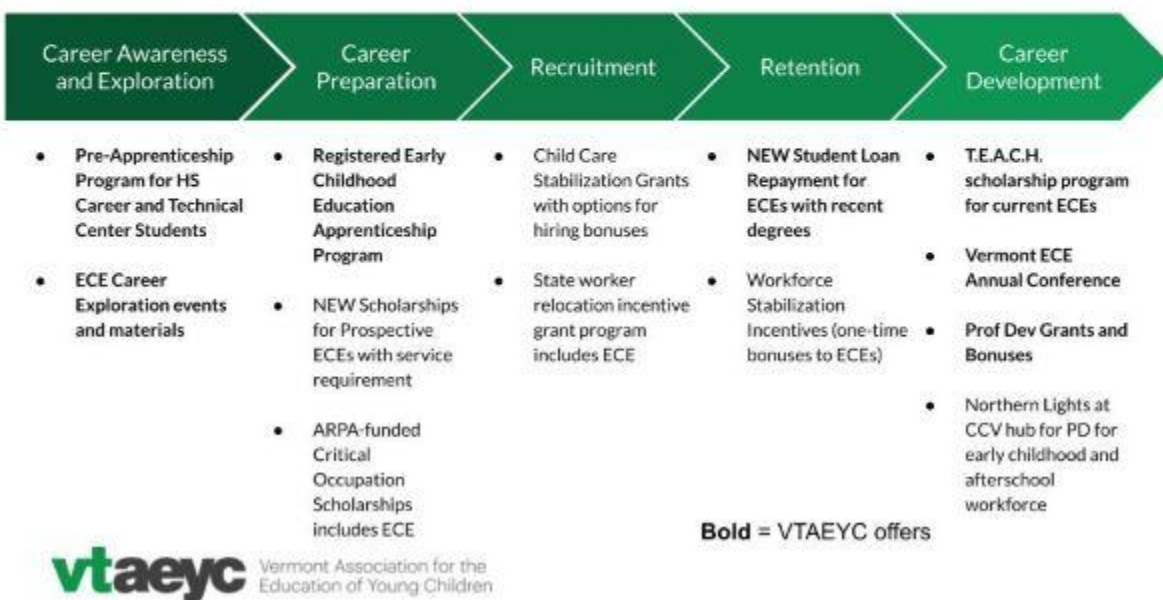
<b>Budget for 2022/2023 school year</b>	
Student stipends (\$13/hour, avg 7.5 hours/week, 24 weeks/year for seniors, 12 weeks for juniors)	\$46,800
Mentor stipends (\$500/student/semester)	\$20,000
Sponsor (ECE program) stipends (\$250/student/semester)	\$10,000
Personnel (salary + fringe) for coordination with students, CTE programs, mentors, sponsors, and DOL	\$21,900
Admin (5% of expenses)	\$3,840
	<b>\$102,540</b>

## Technical adjustments to Student Loan Repayment Assistance

As VTAEYC prepares to launch this new and important support for early childhood educators, the Advisory Council established for this Student Loan Repayment Assistance has identified some adjustments to the legislative language that would clarify intent and simplify administration. These include changes to language re: eligibility that will simplify employment verification and include more intended recipients, clarification of the employment commitment, and elimination of provision that individuals cannot participate in Student Loan Repayment if they participate in TEACH or the forthcoming prospective ECE scholarship program.

## Background on VTAEYC's role in ECE Workforce Development in Vermont

# Vermont's Early Childhood Education Workforce Development strategies



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. This is for those already working in ECE for 30 hours/week and 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. This program should be expanded to include more early childhood educators struggling with student loans.

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.”

