

## 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.

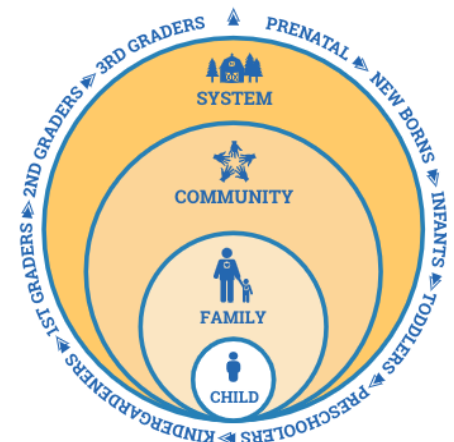
State statute charges BBF with maintaining and monitoring the vision and strategic plan for Vermont's early childhood system called Vermont's Early Childhood Action Plan (VECAP). The vision is for Vermont's early childhood system to be an integrated continuum of comprehensive, high quality services that 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

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## 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).**

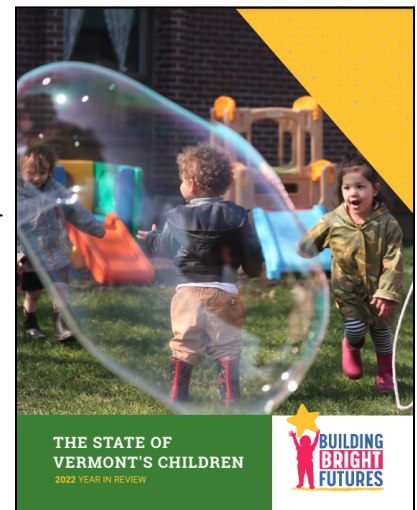
### THE STATE OF VERMONT'S CHILDREN

On Jan. 9, 2023, Building Bright Futures and Vermont's Early Childhood Data and Policy Center released our legislatively mandated report, *The State of Vermont's Children: 2022 Year in Review*. The report provides an objective, data-driven assessment of the well-being of young children and families in Vermont and includes the 2023 Policy Recommendations from Vermont's Early Childhood State Advisory Council Network on how best to improve outcomes for each and every child in the prenatal period to age 8 and their family.

- [Download a PDF of the report](#)
- [Watch the briefing](#)
- [Request a free hard copy of the report](#)

As the primary advisor to Vermont's Governor and General Assembly on early childhood, BBF publishes *The State of Vermont's Children* annually in early January to give Vermont's policymakers a robust snapshot of the early childhood data they need at the start of each session. While the full report contains over 100 contextualized indicators, six highlights are captured below.

- There has been a 60% increase in the proportion of children in Vermont ages 3 to 8 with an emotional or mental health condition, while at the same time there was no change for the U.S. as a whole.
- Vermont currently has the lowest number in over two decades of out-of-home residential treatment beds for children.
- There were 16,381 children enrolled in child care in 2021, but 76% of infants, 54% of toddlers, and 52% of preschoolers likely to need care still do not have access to high-quality programs.
- Vulnerable students (ages 5 to 8) are excluded from their classrooms at higher rates:
  - Students eligible for free and reduced lunch make up 35% of the student population but account for 72% of suspensions.
  - Children receiving special education services make up 15% of the student population but account for 36% of suspensions.
- A family of four needs almost \$110,000 to meet its basic needs.
- There has been a striking increase in the number of homeless children under 9 enrolled in school, from 268 during the 2020-2021 school year to 398 in the 2021-2022 school year.



*This year's report marks the 10th annual release of *The State of Vermont's Children* (formerly known as *How Are Vermont's Young Children and Families?*). We are proud of our 10 years of building Vermont's capacity to prioritize data-driven decision-making!*

## Vermont's Early Childhood Data and Policy Center | Vermonkidsdata.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. To centralize this data, we partner with data stewards across all of the agencies, departments and divisions that support children and families, alongside private partners, and pull national data, to compile and make data publicly available. The following partners have contributed the most recent data: Vermont Afterschool, the Vermont Agency of Education, the Vermont Association of Hospitals and Health Systems, the Vermont Blueprint for Health, Vermont Care Partners, Champlain Valley Office of Economic Opportunity, the Vermont Department for Children and Families (Child Development Division, Economic Services Division, Family Services Division, and Office of Economic Opportunity), the Vermont Department of Health, the Vermont Department of Labor, the Vermont Department of Mental Health, Help Me Grow Vermont, Hunger Free Vermont, Vermont Kin as Parents, Let's Grow Kids, the Vermont Network Against Domestic & Sexual Violence, the Vermont Office of Racial Equity, the Vermont Parent Child Center Network, and the Urban Institute.



**What is vermontkidsdata.org?**  
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**Data Dashboard**  
Vermontkidsdata.org includes searchable individual data points across sectors (mental health, basic needs, child development, and education). For UPK, the data dashboard contains the most recent data on UPK enrollment.

**Publications**  
The publications page is a robust collection of Vermont-specific and national publications by topic. The page is organized to provide a broad overview of each component of the early childhood system and dive into what is known about a particular topic. UPK publications include official documents, studies, and reports that can be used to inform policy development.

**Policy**  
The policy sections outline how the BBF Network and State Advisory Council identify priorities, make recommendations, and track progress on those recommendations. Other policy work includes documentation of legislative testimony, data briefs, and analysis of and advancement on federal legislation. UPK is a clear priority identified in the 2021 Policy Recommendations under "Develop a Well-Resourced Early Care and Education System."

**Data Question**  
Do you have a question about early childhood data in Vermont? For example, the status of universal prekindergarten education (UPK)?

**What's next?**  
Vermontkidsdata.org provides the foundation for Vermonters to understand what data and evidence exist (and what is missing) to build an early childhood system that is integrated, well-resourced, and data-informed (VECAP Goal 4). Two mechanisms that will be used to support this work are Early Childhood Grand Rounds and the Data and Evaluation Committee.

Vermontkidsdata.org is a program of Building Bright Futures

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

**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 federal policy initiatives related to children and families, and BBF testimony to the Vermont Legislature.

## 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. 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 (ECSA). 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.

Foresight Law + Policy and Watershed Advisors went through a rigorous process of documentation review, interviews, focus groups, surveys, and the ECSA Advisory Committee feedback to arrive at these findings and recommendations.

[Initial themes](#) were presented to the ECSA Advisory Committee in February 2022 [[link to recording](#)].

In April, the Foresight/Watershed team produced a draft of [Vermont Governance Options](#) for consideration. This draft was presented to the ECSA Advisory Committee and a joint committee hearing of the House Committee on Human Services, and the Senate Committee on Health and Welfare on April 13 [[link to recording](#)].

[The Final Report and Recommendations](#) were submitted to the legislature on July 1, 2022 as required by Act 45 and was [presented in a webinar on July 11, 2022](#).

BBF also served as members of the Government and Community Stakeholder Advisory Committees for the RAND Financing Study overseen by Vermont's Joint Fiscal Office (JFO). [RAND's final report](#) was published on January 17th, 2023.

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## **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.

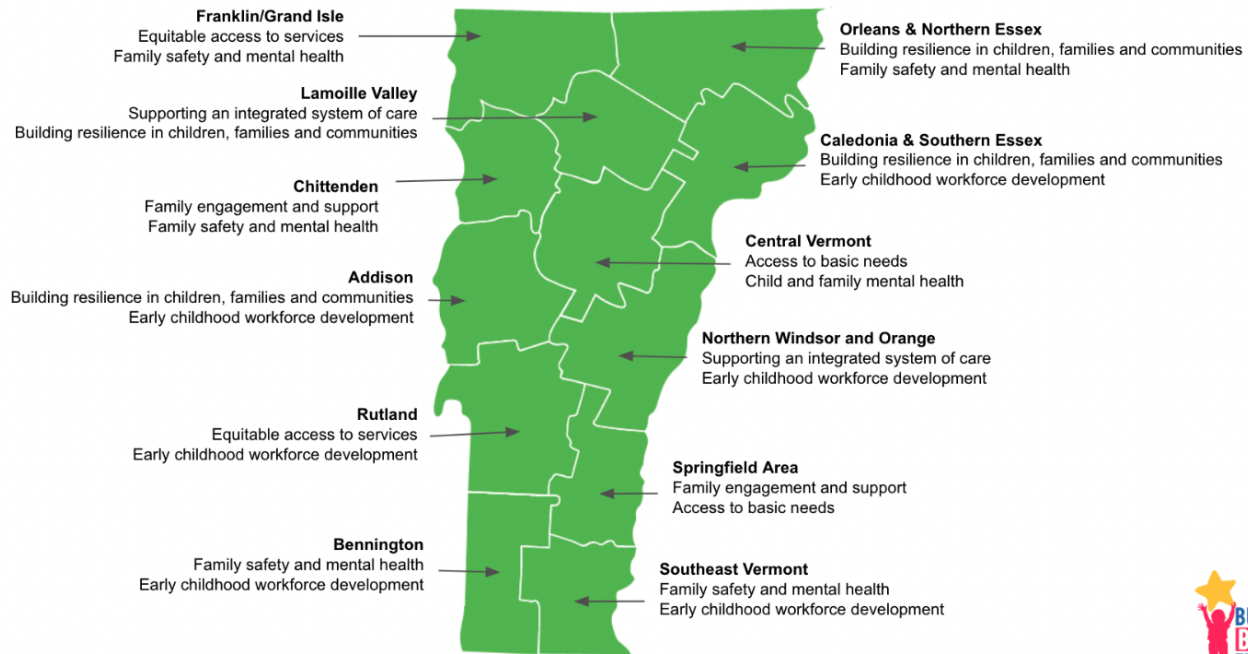
### **VECAP Families and Communities Committee**

The BBF Families and Communities Committee works to develop a statewide approach that enriches and expands family partnership and leadership at the provider, agency, and community levels. The Families and Communities Committee strives to be made up of majority parents and caregivers, with providers in partnership, to help create an early childhood system that mirrors the diverse needs of Vermont families. By providing parents and caregivers opportunities to bring forward thoughts and concerns, and partner in systems conversations and decision-making processes, families become leaders in designing a responsive system that works for them. 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. Through BBF's 12 state-wide Early Childhood Regional Councils and the Families and Communities Committee, those voices are heard and elevated.

### **Early Childhood Regional Councils**

Building Bright Futures has 12 regions throughout Vermont that align with the Agency of Human Services districts. Each regional early childhood council, supported by one of BBF's Regional Managers, brings together community members committed to young children and families. Councils are guided by the State and Regional Early Childhood Action Plan, and identify annual priority actions based on community needs and gaps (2022 priorities shown in the figure below). The Regional Councils also advise the BBF State Advisory Council on opportunities to strengthen both local and statewide systems of care, health, and education. Council meetings are open to the public and have a regular meeting schedule. These committees and councils assess family and community needs, problem solve, coordinate, and take action.

## Building Bright Futures Regional Council Priorities 2022



### The Vermont Early Childhood Fund

The Vermont Early Childhood Fund (VECF) is a BBF initiative to support creative solutions that will improve the well-being of children (prenatal-age 8), families, as well as the Vermont communities in which they live. Each year BBF Regional Councils, the early childhood experts within communities, identify two key issues impacting children and families in each of Vermont’s 12 regions (outlined above). Recognizing the expertise of Regional Councils and to use the funds most effectively, the Vermont Early Childhood Fund uses these regional priorities to guide the investment. In January 2022, Building Bright Futures announced seven grantees of the Vermont Early Childhood Fund. One critical example of the success of the VECF was [bringing vision and hearing screenings to more children in Bennington, VT](#). In January 2023, Building Bright Futures announced the next round of seven grantees!

### 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. The State Advisory Council (SAC) is Vermont’s Governor-appointed, advisory body. The 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 [2023 Policy Recommendations](#) can be found here.

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 takes 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.
- As needed, 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 to help inform policymakers on the current state of programs, data, and initiatives related to early childhood in Vermont. BBF has been actively engaged in conversations with our congressional delegation, the Governor's team, and the Administration about the status of Vermont's early childhood system.

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