



Date: March 15, 2023
To: Chair Campion and members of the Senate Committee on Education
From: Dr. Morgan Crossman, Executive Director, Building Bright Futures, Anna Brouillette, Policy and Programs Director, Dora Levinson, Research and Data Director, Beth Truzansky, Deputy Director
Re: S.56: An act relating to Child Care and Early Childhood Education - Considerations for Universal Prekindergarten Education Study Language

Building Bright Future’s 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. State statute charges BBF with maintaining and monitoring the vision and strategic plan for Vermont’s Early Childhood System. The Building Bright Futures State Advisory Council (SAC) does not directly support or oppose any specific proposal or bill. Instead, our role is to convene and elevate the voices of families and early childhood stakeholders; monitor the system by identifying and providing high-quality up-to-date data to inform policy and decision-making.

Scope of work and roles identified in the UPK Study Committee

Based on the discussion of the Senate Committee on Education on 3/14/23, it seems that there are three (3) discrete scopes of work that need to happen related to the UPK Study Committee:

1. **Compiling data and identifying data gaps:** The first need identified by your Committee is a thorough review of the existing data on Vermont’s Universal Prekindergarten Education program. We commend you all for identifying some key questions and data needs that will inform decision-making on pre-K including questions about: academic outcomes, benchmarks of quality, capacity and demand, workforce constraints, special education, and more.

As the key data stewards in this work, Building Bright Futures (BBF), the Vermont Agency of Education (AOE), and the Child Development Division (CDD), could collaborate to compile all available data required within the current study language and outline existing data gaps. This will require additional capacity of BBF, AOE, and CDD data and policy teams. **This work must happen before convening a Study Committee and the data is critical to understanding the current and potential pre-K systems as well as the costs associated with changing or expanding the system.**

BBF has the expertise and capacity to support AOE and CDD in compiling this data and identifying gaps. This work is already identified as a priority under other scopes of work and grant deliverables, but would need to be significantly expedited to provide available data and gaps. *Of note, not all of the data currently outlined in the study may be available by the time of the final report but a list of ongoing gaps and challenges could be provided.*

2. **Convening a Study Committee:** Next, your committee has expressed interest in naming an entity to be responsible for convening a study committee to review the available data, discuss the vision for expanding on current UPK policy, and make recommendations that can be used by the legislative committees of jurisdiction to develop a bill within FY24. Since the committee has expressed this as a priority it feels important to note that **given the lack of unified vision for UPK policy it is unrealistic to**



expect a study committee to come to agreement on the future of UPK policy within this timeframe (4 months).

As currently written, the Agency of Education through the Secretary of Education or their designee will oversee the work of the Prekindergarten Education Study Committee and its Report. While the Agency of Education plays a key role in the administration of Vermont's Universal Pre-K Education program, the bifurcated system means they are one half of the program's oversight, with the Child Development Division playing this role as well. Therefore, we would suggest that a neutral, third-party convener bring both Agencies/Divisions together, alongside the rest of the committee, to study the questions at hand, as the findings of the study have implications for the governance and oversight of the UPK program overall.

BBF is well-positioned to convene and staff such a study committee. If we are not tasked with convening the study committee, it will be important for a member of our team to serve as a study committee member to support broader stakeholder engagement and bring expertise regarding UPK data.

In addition, we recommend considering the following, related to the timing and scope of the committee:

- a. Delaying the required report date to January 15, 2024 at the earliest given the scope of work and timeline constraints
- b. That the bill language clearly articulates what information the legislature would like to see in the final report.
- c. That the scope of work and decision-making authority must be clearly articulated for the study committee.

In addition to the data compiled, it is critical for the study committee to build recommendations based upon testimony provided during the FY23 legislative session (e.g. stakeholder feedback, national best practice, and existing data efforts).

3. Determining the cost: Finally, the Committee has expressed interest in having access to fiscal analysis related to the cost of implementing an expanded UPK program. Once the available data is compiled, it will be important for an appropriate entity to use that data to determine the costs associated with the study language on funding and costs. It is not appropriate for BBF to hold this scope of work.

Universal Prekindergarten Education Study Membership

In addition to further considering the oversight of the pre-K study, we encourage the committee to ensure that the study committee has a robust and diverse membership. We recommend the following partners be included in the study committee's membership:

- At least two current UPK Coordinators
- At least two family representatives with varied experience with UPK
- The Executive Director of Building Bright Futures or designee
- A member of the Senate appointed by the Pro Tem of the Senate
- A member of the House appointed by the Speaker of the House