

Vermont Child Care and Early Childhood Education Systems Analysis

As required by Act 45

FINAL REPORT

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By Elliot Regenstein and Nasha Patel

FORESIGHT LAW+POLICY



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Executive Summary

Background: Vermont’s children, families, and providers have for years struggled to operate within a fragmented early childhood landscape. The state’s current approach to governance of childcare and early childhood education results in a system hard for families to navigate and one that limits quality experiences for children. The current structure has also led to frayed relationships between “human services” providers and advocates on the one hand, and “education” providers and advocates on the other. The system has lacked coherence, leadership, and vision – not through the fault of anyone working in the system, but simply because it was not designed to support a unified early childhood system.

Charge: Recognizing the need for change, in 2021 the Vermont General Assembly passed Act 45, which called for a Child Care and Early Childhood Education Systems Analysis to examine Vermont’s early childhood system, and then make recommendations for how it might be improved. Building Bright Futures was charged to oversee the process and hired the team of Foresight Law + Policy and Watershed Advisors to conduct the Systems Analysis. The conclusions in the report are solely those of Foresight and Watershed.

Conclusions: The Systems Analysis concludes that Vermont’s system of early childhood governance (with a specific focus on childcare and early childhood education) is fundamentally broken, and needs to be changed. State government cannot in its current configuration reach the state’s goals for the success of Vermont’s children and families. The report includes a set of recommendations for how the state might improve its early childhood governance, with specific steps state policymakers should consider taking.

Recommendations: *Our recommendation is to create a new unit of state government that is focused entirely on early childhood, with a single empowered leader with oversight of a core cluster of key early childhood programs. This new unit should not be administered solely by either the agency of human services or the agency of education.*

We believe that the most important change the state needs to make is to create a single unit of government focused on early childhood – one with elevated leadership and unified authority over a broad set of programs, likely including at least Universal Pre-K, child care, Children’s Integrated Services, and the Head Start Collaboration Office. This unit would be responsible for:

- setting the state’s vision for early childhood;
- managing different program funding streams, and seeking to knit them into a more coherent whole;
- setting standards for quality, and supporting ongoing program improvement;
- supporting professionals;
- engaging stakeholders, including families and providers;
- and clearly communicating to early childhood providers, and about the early childhood system to a broader audience.

To be successful, this unit will need to maintain strong relationships across a complex child care and early education system. At this time, the primary relationships with schools are held by the Agency of Education, and the primary relationships with private providers are held by the Agency of Human

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Services. Both of those sets of relationships are important, as is the expertise currently housed within each agency. Placing the new early childhood unit solely within either agency would run the risk of jeopardizing those relationships by cutting off a key group of stakeholders from the agency with which it has built a partnership. That is why we have recommended a hybrid approach, meant to draw on the strengths of both agencies. A new standalone agency for early childhood agency would also be consistent with the principles we articulate, but is not the primary recommendation because of concerns stakeholders raised about how that might fit in the overall structure of Vermont state government.

This approach comes with potentially substantial administrative complexity, and we do not want to minimize the challenges of implementation. But Vermont's current fragmented system creates substantial complexity for communities, providers, and families; the process of simplifying state government oversight should alleviate some of the burden on them, even as the transition puts some burden on state government itself. And in the long run, our view is that a dedicated early childhood unit is Vermont's best hope of improving outcomes for children and families.

I. Introduction

A. *Early Childhood Governance in Vermont: The Current Moment*

Vermont's children, families, and providers have for years struggled to operate within a fragmented early childhood landscape. The state's current approach to governance reinforces divisions among providers that make the system hard for parents to navigate, limits quality experiences for children, and the current structure has helped lead to frayed relationships between "human services" providers and advocates on the one hand, and "education" providers and advocates on the other. The system has lacked coherence, leadership, and vision – not through the fault of anyone working in the system, but simply because it was not designed to support a unified early childhood system.

Recognizing the need for change, in 2021 Vermont legislators passed a [law](#) charging Building Bright Futures (BBF) with overseeing Vermont's Child Care and Early Childhood Education Systems Analysis. BBF issued a request for proposals to find a contractor for the work, and subsequently hired the team of Foresight Law + Policy and Watershed Advisors to conduct the Systems Analysis. This Systems Analysis – authored by Foresight and Watershed -- is intended to examine Vermont's early childhood system, and then make recommendations for how it might be improved. The methodology by which it did so is described in greater detail below, but **the conclusions in this report are solely those of Foresight and Watershed.**

The Systems Analysis concludes that **Vermont's system of early childhood governance is fundamentally broken, and needs to be changed.** The Governor and General Assembly have done important work to bring the governance conversation to this point, and this report concludes that they will need to sustain their commitment if Vermont is to change a system that is – at minimum -- inefficient and burdensome for the state, communities, providers, and parents. State government cannot in its current configuration reach the state's goals for the success of Vermont's children and families. This report includes a set of recommendations for how the state might improve its early childhood governance, with specific steps state policymakers should consider taking.

Our core recommendation is to create a new unit of state government that is focused entirely on early childhood, and that is not administered solely by either the Agency of Human Services or the Agency of Education. In this report we discuss the reasoning that led to this recommendation, including other options that we considered.

The Vermont General Assembly commissioned this report because it recognized that it needed to do better. In conversations with Vermont stakeholders, there was widespread agreement that something needs to change – and a relatively deep and broad agreement on one core facet of that change, at least among non-governmental stakeholders. Outside of government, there appears to be a relatively strong consensus that the state needs a unified early childhood agency, one with a strong and empowered leader. Why that is and what that might look like will be discussed in much greater depth throughout the report, but that fundamental point of consensus is important to emphasize at the outset.

So before discussing the recommendations in detail, it is worth pausing to reflect on the moment Vermont faces. Throughout the process many stakeholders told us that Vermont policymakers are hesitant to make major changes if it will cause any key constituency group to be unhappy. Our recommendation here is for what we think is the best option for moving forward, and that

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recommendation is based in meaningful part on what we think Vermont stakeholders – including the executive and legislative branches of government, community leaders, advocates, providers, and families -- can best absorb. But even with that consideration in mind, there will almost surely be some constituents who have concerns about the proposal. Indeed, our proposed course of action raises meaningful concerns, and there is no guarantee that it will be successful.

That speaks to the nature of early childhood governance. As we have emphasized throughout the process, there is no magical right answer that solves all the problems; instead, there are a series of tradeoffs that the state must make, with potential benefits and challenges to any approach. We have recommended the approach that appears to have the most potential benefits and the fewest potential challenges, and have articulated what we think those benefits and challenges are -- but we recognize that reasonable people might well disagree with our conclusion. We hope that policymakers will take our recommendations seriously, and we also emphasize that taking our recommendations seriously means listening carefully to stakeholders who disagree with them.

But it's important to remember that the status quo is an option, one that comes with far more challenges than benefits. Vermont stakeholders have reminded us time and again that agreement about the problem does not always lead to agreement about the solutions. That failure to come to agreement has a cost – one that is high, and rising. We recommend that Vermont policymakers seize this moment and work toward improvement. We believe it is possible. Vermont's children deserve better, and this report is offered in the spirit of helping policymakers do better by those children.

What ultimately matters is that the Vermont early childhood system is set up to ensure that children and families have a positive experience – and that those positive experiences lead to beneficial outcomes later in life. The Systems Analysis was launched because there are many providers, community leaders, and state officials working to provide exceptional experiences for children and families, but who cannot maximize their impact given the way Vermont's early childhood system is currently designed. Accordingly, improving state systems is an important strategy for supporting communities and families; the needs of those communities and families is what gives this project a sense of urgency.

B. Definitions

For purpose of this Systems Analysis, the definition of “governance” will be the definition used in the 2015 book *Early Childhood Governance: Choices and Consequences*, edited by Sharon Lynn Kagan and Rebecca Gomez¹:

[G]overnance is not restricted to government and instead incorporates efforts in the public and private sectors, including partnerships of both. It relates to ways in which *authority* is created and distributed (e.g. the defining/producing of rules and actions and the granting of power), the ways *accountability* is required (e.g., the verification of performance), and the degree to which the entity that governs has *durability*.²

¹ S.L. Kagan and R. Gomez (Eds.). (2015) *Early Childhood Governance: Choices and Consequences*. Teachers College Press.

² Kagan, S.L. Conceptualizing ECE Governance: Not the Elephant in the Room. In *Early Childhood Governance: Choices and Consequences* (p 11). All emphasis in the original.

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In the early childhood context, “governance” typically refers to how state government configures its authority over key programs and funding streams.

This Systems Analysis will also use the term “child care and early childhood education” (CCECE) to reference “home- and center-based services that are developmental and educational in nature.”³ Where the Systems Analysis is taking a broader lens and looking at CCECE in the context of other services – including but not limited to home visiting, early intervention, and other health and social supports – it will use the broader term “early childhood.” Because of the strong focus on CCECE, the term “provider” will mean a provider of CCECE services unless otherwise specified.

One of Vermont’s primary CCECE programs is its Universal Pre-k Program (UPK), which is jointly administered by the Agency of Education and the Agency of Human Services. This program can be administered by both schools and private providers. Schools also provide other early childhood services, including special education services required under the Individuals with Disability Education Act (IDEA).

The distinction between CCECE and other early childhood services is important to understanding the scope of this Systems Analysis. The statute authorizing the Systems Analysis focuses on Vermont’s “child care and early childhood education systems.”⁴ That term is defined to mean “programming provided at a center-based child care program or family child care home regulated by the Department for Children and Families’ Child Development Division that serves children from birth through 12 years of age.”⁵ During the course of the Systems Analysis some stakeholders considered the statutory language to be a limiting principle, while others considered it to be a jumping-off point.

This Systems Analysis takes the latter approach, with the recognition that child care and early childhood education should be at the heart of the conversation. The Systems Analysis recommendations focus on CCECE, and establishing a governance approach that makes sense for CCECE.⁶

C. Methodology

In 2021, Vermont law charged BBF with overseeing Vermont’s Child Care and Early Childhood Education Systems Analysis. BBF issued an RFP, and subsequently hired the team of Foresight Law + Policy and Watershed Advisors to conduct the Systems Analysis.

The Foresight/Watershed team began the process by conducting an extensive landscape analysis. In the fall of 2021 and early 2022, the Foresight/Watershed team conducted interviews and focus groups with over 85 Vermont early childhood stakeholders about the current status of Vermont’s early childhood

³ Kagan, S.L. with Landsberg, E. (2019). The Quest for Social Strategy. In S.L. Kagan (Ed.). *The Early Advantage 2: Building Systems That Work for Young Children* (p 5). Teachers College Press. Note that this Systems Analysis uses somewhat different definitions than *The Early Advantage 2*, but those terms draw on the classifications identified in that book.

⁴ 33 Vt. Stat. Ann. § 4603 Sec. 13.

⁵ 33 Vt. Stat. Ann. § 4603 Sec. 13(c).

⁶ If Vermont successfully establishes a unit of government that manages the CCECE system more effectively, it may want to add responsibilities to that unit’s portfolio that fall outside the definition of CCECE.

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systems. Those stakeholders are listed in Appendix A.⁷ The team also reviewed dozens of reports about the Vermont early childhood system; a list of those reports is included in Appendix B.

On February 11 the Systems Analysis consultants – Foresight Law + Policy and Watershed Advisors – prepared a [summary table of major themes](#) identified by Vermont stakeholders. In February and March, the Foresight/Watershed team shared the major themes document widely, and solicited feedback on the BBF website.⁸ It presented about the findings at multiple meetings, including:

- the Vermont Early Childhood Action Plan Child Outcomes Accountability Team;
- the Vermont Business Roundtable Early Care and Learning Task Force;
- a forum for early childhood educators and administrators co-hosted by BBF and the Vermont Association for the Education of Young Children; and
- four Early Childhood Regional Council meetings that were open to the public statewide – Rutland, Franklin-Grand Isle, Southern Vermont, and Caledonia-Southern Essex.

Over the course of February and March, the team shared the summary table with stakeholders and solicited their feedback. In general, the response was to affirm the draft findings. Section II of this report is a slightly modified and updated version of that narrative.

In early April the Foresight/Watershed team shared a document that identified some possible options for the future of Vermont’s early childhood governance. The team had chosen not to discuss these options earlier in the process; experience in other states has shown that it can be counter-productive to focus too heavily on the model options too early in the process. Once the model options were shared, the team conducted a survey of stakeholders that resulted in more than 300 responses. The results of that survey were summarized in a [blog post](#) that was published on May 13.

Throughout the process the Foresight/Watershed team met regularly with an Early Childhood Systems Analysis Advisory Committee that was convened specifically to provide stakeholder guidance on the process. The Advisory Committee included representatives from multiple sectors of the early childhood system – including the Agency of Education, the Agency of Human Services, advocacy organizations, and representatives of communities and providers. The Foresight/Watershed team also conducted regular check-ins with the Governor’s office, agency leaders, and legislators throughout the process.

Importantly, Act 45 called for two major studies of the early childhood system; this Systems Analysis is just one of them. The other is a Financing Study due to the legislature by January 15, 2023. That study will be conducted by the RAND Corporation. The Foresight/Watershed team will provide ongoing support to the RAND team as it conducts its work.

The Foresight/Watershed team is deeply grateful for the active engagement of stakeholders throughout the process. Without their insights, this work would not have been possible. The team hopes that

⁷ The vast majority of stakeholders interviewed were either professionals who work on state policy (as elected officials, executive branch officials, or advocates), or professionals who work on early childhood service delivery at the local level (including but not limited to school officials and private child care providers).

⁸ March also saw the culmination of a year-long process led by Building Bright Futures to engage with stakeholders about the need for integration in the early childhood system, which led to the publication of [Integration in Vermont’s Early Childhood System](#) – a report that highlights similar themes to the ones that have emerged in the Systems Analysis.

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stakeholders will continue to discuss these issues constructively as the conversation continues in the months ahead.

D. Overview of Recommendations

Our core recommendation is to create a central unit of government focused on CCECE – one that has an empowered, elevated leader. Based on the current Vermont landscape, we believe that unit has the best chance of success if it is established with a dual reporting structure; the head of the unit should report to both the Secretary of the Agency of Education and the Secretary of the Agency of Human Services. This section provides an overview of why we came to that conclusion.

1. Vermont's Current Context

Vermont currently houses early childhood services and oversight in multiple agencies, involving AOE and AHS.

- AOE's [Early Education division](#) is responsible for universal pre-k (in collaboration with AHS), early childhood special education, and monitoring.
- The [Child Development Division](#) (CDD) of the AHS Department for Children and Families is responsible for child care subsidies, licensing, quality ratings, early intervention, and Children's Integrated Services. Some other related services are also housed within the Department for Children and Families, including the Family Services Division and the Economic Services Division.
- The [Maternal & Child Health Division](#) of the AHS Department of Health partners with CDD to lead the state's home visiting work, as part of its responsibility for other important programs relating to the health of young children and their mothers.
- The [Department of Mental Health](#) at AHS partners with CDD on Children's Integrated Services and the delivery of early childhood and family mental health.

There are some key factors underscoring our recommendations that are worth identifying.

Vermont's problems are structural. While our landscaping process identified some amount of personality-based friction, we see Vermont's challenges as fundamentally structural. Authority for early childhood services is too fragmented, particularly within CCECE. As discussed below, some of the most serious structural problems include:

- Differing definitions of quality in different CCECE settings;
- Inconsistent oversight of CCECE providers; and
- Differing expectations and supports for CCECE professionals in different settings.

Accordingly, the tension between the roles of the Agency of Human Services and the Agency of Education is a structural problem, not a personality problem. Indeed, the agencies repeatedly reminded us that they are in fact collaborating with each other; if they are actually collaborating, and providers are not seeing positive impacts from that collaboration, that reinforces the idea that the problem is a structural one. The current system simply does not allow for responsiveness to the challenges the system is facing.

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Vermont lacks high-level agency leadership focused on early childhood. Vermont's Agency of Human Services includes six Departments, one of which is the Department for Children and Families. That Department is made up of six divisions, one of which is the Child Development Division. This means that when AHS is setting its agenda it must balance CDD's needs with those of five other Divisions within its Department, as well as five other Departments. While the Agency of Education is structured differently, the head of its early education program reports to a division director, who in turn reports to a Deputy Secretary, who then reports to the Secretary.

In sum, **neither agency has an empowered senior leader focused solely on early childhood.** Some of the problems that have festered in the system – described further below – seem to us symptomatic of that lack of high-level focused leadership. Importantly, this should not be taken as a criticism of current or former occupants of these positions; indeed, just the opposite. While of course different personnel bring different strengths to their roles, the current structure in Vermont means that even a skilled and knowledgeable champion for early childhood in the senior-most early childhood role within each agency is not part of the agency's top leadership. And while the top leaders in the agency may understand and advocate for early childhood, their roles are simply too broad for early childhood to be their primary focus.

The early childhood system is diverse, and has a broad set of stakeholders central to its success. The lack of a high-level leader to whom a diverse set of stakeholders can raise awareness of concerns and have confidence they are empowered to solve, increases the complexity of the challenge: ***no single elevated leader feels accountable to all the groups needed for a successful early childhood system.***

Vermont's state government lacks infrastructure and capacity. The state lacks the infrastructure and capacity needed to successfully execute its functions. This problem has been exacerbated of late by attrition and hiring challenges in the Agency of Human Services' Child Development Division, described further below. Many stakeholders also offered their view that for years the Agency of Education has not had a sufficient number of staff to meet its mandate. If the state is going to change its governance model, that provides an opportunity to redesign its capacity.

The mixed-delivery system requires dedicated, specialized expertise to manage. The state currently uses a mixed-delivery approach to child care and early childhood education, particularly in the delivery of UPK. The term mixed delivery is defined in the federal Every Student Succeeds Act as “a system of early childhood education services that are delivered through a combination of programs, providers, and settings (such as Head Start, licensed family and center-based child care programs, public schools, and community-based organizations); and that is supported with a combination of public funds and private funds.”⁹

One reason for our recommendation is that oversight of the mixed delivery system requires relationships with both public and private providers – and an understanding of how both sectors interact with each other, creating different challenges for each. Having fragmented oversight has contributed to an environment in which both private and public providers struggle with how they are

⁹ 42 U.S.C. 9831(b)(5), retrieved from <https://www.congress.gov/114/plaws/publ95/PLAW-114publ95.pdf>.

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managed by the state. For state government to truly understand the complexities of the CCECE system – and develop policies that help simplify and integrate it -- will require developing a unit of government charged with understanding and overseeing that system in its entirety. At this point neither AOE nor AHS has that charge, and accordingly neither has developed that expertise.

Vermont Needs Clear Metrics and Better Data. Many of the goals for Vermont’s early childhood system are actually widely shared. What will be important for the state going forward is to develop a clear set of metrics for the early childhood system, to gauge whether the work is proceeding as planned – and whether it is having the intended impact. Further discussion will be needed to define the state’s goals and metrics, and a good deal of work will likely be needed to develop the data infrastructure to support the ongoing measurement of progress. That data will be important in guiding the ongoing management of the state’s strategies.

It will be important in Vermont’s conversation to be clear about what outcomes the state is seeking, and what tools it has to measure those outcomes. Many of the most important positive outcomes of early childhood investment go beyond academic test scores, and Vermont should not define success strictly in those terms. Moreover, the state must also be sensitive to the burdens of data collection, and not require substantial effort from providers to collect data that will not actually be used for system improvement.

Finally, the state’s metric development should acknowledge that there is no current research base showing a direct relationship between governance changes and improved child outcomes.¹⁰ So in addition to metrics for the overall success of the early childhood system, the state should have separate metrics focused on the impact of the governance change; these latter metrics will likely have much more of a process focus. Both kinds of metrics are important, but they are different.

2. Vermont’s Path Forward

An effective early childhood governance model in Vermont would establish the following:

- A leader responsible for a significant cluster of programs, staff, and funding related to services before kindergarten. We focus in this report on CCECE, noting that further engagement may be needed to define the exact list of services to be included.
- A charge to unify a fragmented early childhood system to improve experiences for children and families – and the elevation, funding, structure, and accountability to ensure it occurs.
- An oversight structure that allocates roles between the state and local governments in a manner that provides each with the best chance to succeed. This should include state officials who partner with and support effective, efficient, and innovative local leaders to implement solutions that make sense for their regions, while ensuring that the state is setting a vision – and holding communities and providers accountable to help achieve that vision.
- A set of metrics for success developed by a diverse group of stakeholders, and then a data collection and analysis process by which stakeholders at every level can understand Vermont’s progress toward achieving its goal for children and families.

There are multiple possible pathways toward building this infrastructure. ***Based on our understanding of the landscape, our recommendation is to create a standalone unit solely focused on early***

¹⁰ Regenstein, E. (June 2020), [Early Childhood Governance: Getting There from here](#), Foresight Law + Policy, 14.

childhood; that unit could be a new agency, or could be a hybrid unit that works across agencies. In the latter scenario, it would need to be at least the equivalent of a Department at the Agency of Human Services – but rather than sitting solely within a single agency, the unit head would report to both the Secretary of Education and the Secretary of Human Services. This unit would be responsible for – at a minimum – state pre-k, child care, the Head Start Collaboration office, and Children’s Integrated Services.

We make this recommendation for the following reasons:

- There is a strong belief among early childhood providers that early childhood is its own discipline, one that requires its own dedicated and focused leadership. We agree with that assessment, and believe the state needs unified leadership and focused expertise. We believe that a “coordinated” model – even with a potential Governor’s Office focused on coordination – is not adequate to deliver this level of leadership and expertise. Therefore, we do not recommend that the state use a coordinated model.
- Reflecting that belief, we recommend creating a new unit that is strongly connected to the leadership at both AOE and AHS.
 - ***We believe the best option to be a hybrid approach that would create a new unit solely focused on early childhood, and whose leader reports directly to both the Secretary of AHS and the Secretary of AOE.*** This is different than a consolidated approach in which a new unit is created that reports only to the head of one agency. This could take the form of either a new Department of Early Childhood at AHS, or a Division of Early Childhood at AOE; the head of the unit could then report to both Secretaries. There is no doubt that this arrangement could foster some administrative complexity, and is not without its pitfalls. But we think this arrangement would best address the top priorities of this work:
 - It would create a senior, elevated leader with real authority over a broad sweep of the early childhood system.
 - It would potentially create a single unit of government that could develop real expertise in the full scope of the mixed delivery system, rather than just component parts. That process would take time, but this administrative configuration seemed best suited to supporting that process.
 - It would keep strong ties to both AHS and AOE, and engage both agencies’ leadership in the process of overseeing the early childhood system.
 - Arguably this approach does the least to cross any “red lines” that stakeholders may have drawn for themselves.
 - Creating a standalone agency solely focused on early childhood is an option that appealed to many stakeholders; indeed, it was the top choice in the stakeholder survey. We heard some concerns that within the overall structure of Vermont state government this approach may not work at this time, because the amount of administrative effort it would take to create a new agency might outstrip the benefits of having unified oversight; we also heard concerns that having UPK administered by an agency other than AOE would create complication for the administration of the Education Fund. Those concerns are real -- but if state leaders believe those concerns are surmountable,

a standalone agency would be a potentially successful approach to addressing the state's needs.

- A model that consolidated oversight into either AHS or AOE could provide stronger leadership and coordination than the current configuration, but we have significant concerns about each potential consolidated model.
 - In the stakeholder survey we conducted (described below in I.C), the possibility of consolidating into AOE was a polarizing prospect. Many stakeholders had that option as their first choice; indeed, only one option was more popular (described further below). But many other stakeholders said it was their least favored option; only the status quo was described by more respondents as the option they most want to avoid. In contrast, very few stakeholders identified consolidation into AHS as their top choice option.
 - In addition to the results of the survey, we heard quite a lot from education stakeholders about their connection to AOE, and the Governor's Office (among others) believes strongly that early childhood education must be tightly connected to the rest of the education continuum, particularly K-12. We share that instinct, and appreciate the education community's deeply felt ties to AOE. We therefore do not recommend consolidating early childhood functions solely into AHS.
 - We heard from many stakeholders in the private provider community that in their view, AOE's orientation and expertise would make it difficult for AOE to effectively manage the mixed delivery system. We believe that over time AOE's capacity to manage the mixed delivery system could certainly be strengthened, but agree that at this time AOE has not yet articulated a vision of its potential role in an early childhood system that private providers have found compelling. We have seen situations in other states where legislative efforts to give education agencies authority over private providers have sparked bitter confrontations, and we would like very much to avoid seeing something similar in Vermont; in states that have had those fights, it has sometimes been difficult to rebuild relationships after legislative resolution has been achieved. What we heard from many Vermont stakeholders is that they would prefer a more collaborative approach, and we think the best way to pursue that more collaborative approach is to avoid any legislative proposals that would vest in AOE full authority over the early childhood system.

Regardless of what governance model the state settles on, there are other key principles the state should keep in mind:

- If the state is making a change, it should clearly define some desired outcomes of the change, and then measure whether those outcomes are being achieved. This Systems Analysis offers some preliminary ideas for that conversation, but further stakeholder work should be conducted to finalize a set of desired outcomes.
- The state-local dynamic is critical to the early childhood system and serving children and families well, and getting that dynamic right takes ongoing work. The state's governance structure must be designed with the success of state-local relationships in mind, recognizing that communities will appropriately take differing approaches to their work – but that the state has an important role in setting a baseline of quality and access.

II. Vermont's Current Early Childhood Landscape

This section summarizes key findings from the stakeholder engagement process. The Foresight/Watershed team does not vouch for the truth of any of the stakeholder statements reported here. But it is clear that there are certain beliefs that are deeply and widely held within the stakeholder community, and this summary is meant to help provide a shared understanding of what those beliefs are. There are also some cases where individual comments are reported for added context. All comments are anonymous, as contributors were promised anonymity in exchange for their candor.

Reports like this are generally not commissioned by state governments unless stakeholders with deep investment in the system have raised serious concerns. Those serious concerns are reflected here. It is also typical of reports like this that the concerns expressed are primarily about the functioning of state government, and how that impacts efforts and work at all other levels of the system. As noted above, that issue is a structural one, and not necessarily a reflection on the work of current state agency staff.

Indeed, one of the most sensitive issues in conversations about early childhood governance is the complex interplay between challenges of system design, and challenges of interpersonal relationships. Both kinds of challenges are reflected here, and it is important to emphasize that challenges of system design can have a major impact on the context of interpersonal relationships – and indeed, can make it very difficult for those interpersonal relationships to be successful. The Foresight/Watershed team has observed that dynamic at work here, and has named it specifically so that it can be addressed constructively. Much of the work ahead will necessarily be focused on how to build on and strengthen existing relationships while addressing structural obstacles; this will likely include supporting the evolution of those relationships through a discussion of – and potentially the execution of – meaningful structural changes.

In addition to highlighting themes from our conversations, we have highlighted some recommendations from previous Vermont reports. Our goal is to highlight what the state has articulated as its desired end state, to give a frame of reference for the current condition; those ideas are captured in the rightmost column (“Desired End State”). Documents referenced below include:

- the [State of Vermont's Children 2021](#) (“2021 Review”);
- the [Vermont Early Childhood Action Plan 2020](#) (“VECAP”);
- the [2021 Recommendations of the Building Bright Futures State Advisory Council](#) (“SAC”);
- the [Vermont System of Care Report 2021](#) (“System of Care”);
- the [2020 Early Childhood and Family Mental Health Task Force Report](#) (“Mental Health”);
- the [Vermont State Health Improvement Plan 2019-2023](#) (“Health”);
- the [Vermont Department of Health Division and Maternal and Child Health Strategic Plan January 2019-December 2022](#) (“M&C Health”);
- the [2019 Vermont Head Start and Early Head Start Needs Assessment Report](#) (“Head Start”);
- the [2019 “How Are Vermont's Young Children and Families?”](#) (“C&F”);
- the [2018 Building Vermont's Future From the Child Up Think Tank Recommendations](#) (“Think Tank”); and
- the [Blue Ribbon Commission on Financing High Quality, Affordable Child Care Final Report](#) (“Blue Ribbon”).

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The team also reviewed the [Early Childhood Systems Needs Assessment 2020](#) (“Needs Assessment”) and the [2018 Prekindergarten Education Study: Final Report](#) (“Pre-K Education Study”), which focused more on describing existing conditions than recommending specific changes. In addition to the reports referenced here, the team reviewed numerous other reports and documents that provided additional background and content.

Importantly, this project is a Systems Analysis, and is focused on the health of systems – and how those systems support the people working within them. Where it identifies challenges faced by particular organizations or roles, it should not be read as laying blame on those organizations or the people in those roles.

Major Themes

| Area | Theme | Desired End State |
|---|---|--|
| <p>State Government Capacity</p> | <p><i>Leadership Capacity</i></p> <p>Leadership capacity takes many forms. Many of the stakeholders interviewed talked about the leadership at the Agency of Education (AOE) and the Child Development Division of the Department for Children and Families in the Agency of Human Services (CDD). Stakeholders; those stakeholders generally perceived that while leaders in both AOE and AHS express support for early childhood, there are meaningful disconnects between the political leadership and the line staff in both agencies. This means that the higher-level agenda being pushed by appointed officials is not necessarily reflected in the work of the line staff, and that the staff with the greatest expertise on early childhood are not necessarily included in setting the agencies’ high-level agenda.</p> <p>Some themes that emerged included:</p> <p><u>AOE</u></p> <p>The concerns about AOE are that it does not understand the early childhood ecosystem, and takes a very school-centric view of the world. There is a sense among private providers that AOE does not appreciate the value that comes from the mixed delivery system, and pushes for policies that would shift resources away from private providers and toward public schools. There is also a perception that AOE is more focused on oversight and systems than relationships and partnerships, meaning that it cares more about ensuring compliance than about having strong working engagement with providers.</p> | <p>Partner with communities, and promote individual staff development (M&C Health p. 4)</p> <p>Adopt organizational and institutional practices that advance equity (Health p. 12)</p> <p>Improve staff recruitment (System of Care p. 22)</p> |

| Area | Theme | Desired End State |
|------|--|-------------------|
| | <p><u>CDD</u></p> <p>The concerns raised about the current CDD leadership are that – in comparison to previous CDD leaders – it has not cultivated a strong relationship with community-level leaders. The perception is that it is focused on centralizing power, and that its lack of understanding of the ECE system is a limitation. Concerns were also raised about the current CDD leadership’s lack of early childhood expertise.</p> <p><u>Collaboration</u></p> <p>Stakeholders raised concern about how collaboration is working, in multiple directions. There is a sense that AOE and CDD do not work together effectively. Numerous providers told stories of struggling to navigate the differences between how the two agencies approach providers; numerous stakeholders told specific stories about discussing a specific problem separately with each agency, and receiving conflicting guidance from the two on how to address the issue. The disconnect in the execution of basic functions – such as data collection and professional development – can reinforce schisms at the local level. This dynamic has been identified before, including in the Pre-k Education Study (page 45).</p> <p><i>Staff Capacity</i></p> <p>There is a wide perception that both AOE and CDD are understaffed. Stakeholders expressed a view that this has been a problem for a long time, and that the current administration has not sought to fundamentally change this dynamic. That choice is defensible, but has consequences.</p> <p>In the case of CDD, the perception is that the Division is in a tricky position. Recent initiatives to dismantle the Department did not come to fruition. But the specter of that initiative hanging over CDD has made it hard for CDD to retain and recruit talent.</p> <p>Overall, the sense of many stakeholders is that the state’s laudable emphasis on expanding access to child care and early childhood education services has not been accompanied by a necessary commitment to develop the staff capacity needed to help CCECE providers improve quality and expand capacity to meet the need.</p> | |

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| Area | Theme | Desired End State |
|------------------------------|--|--|
| <p>Local Capacity</p> | <p>Vermont has private providers who are providing outstanding services to children while actively engaging in their community; it also has school leaders who are delivering great pre-k and showing community-level leadership on early childhood issues. But that is not true everywhere. Local capacity is very uneven, and developing sustainable collaboration can be challenging in low-population rural communities.</p> <p>Local leaders sometimes struggle with a lack of support from the state. There is a sense that the state acts reactively to put out fires, and lacks an affirmative vision for its role in supporting communities.</p> <p>Regardless of the state role, many communities lack coherent systems for delivering early childhood services. The low pay for early childhood professionals makes it hard to attract talented staff, and most communities cannot afford to support local coordination and collaboration. The communities that have been able to support coordination and collaboration believe that their work has improved the experience of children and families.</p> <p>As noted above, policy disconnects at the state level reinforce the incoherence at the local level. The different requirements for school versus private settings can make it difficult for different providers to collaborate, or even to see themselves as part of the same system. State policy also allows for program quality that varies dramatically from neighborhood to neighborhood, without strong enforcement of minimal expectations that can serve as a baseline for local innovation.</p> <p>Exacerbating the problem of local coordination is that geographic boundaries are not aligned. AOE and AHS have very different regional and local configurations. This makes it harder for state staff to coordinate their support for local collaboration and improvement efforts.</p> <p>All told, the lack of focus on local capacity leads to significant equity issues among communities. Some communities have had the resources to develop more coherent local approaches, and there are examples of outstanding community collaborations. Unfortunately, the communities with the greatest need generally have not been able to develop successful local structures.</p> | <p>Create strong community capacity (VECAP 2.3)</p> <p>Support family engagement (SAC Rec. 3.2)</p> <p>Improve equitable access, including supporting state administrative capacity (SAC Rec. 4.1)</p> <p>Make the system easier for families to navigate (Mental Health Rec. 4)</p> <p>Make the system easier for families to navigate (C&F, p. 40)</p> <p>Create a system of hubs (Think Tank, p. 4)</p> |

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| Area | Theme | Desired End State |
|---|--|--|
| <p>The Human Services/ Education Dynamic</p> | <p>Picking up on a theme noted above, stakeholders largely fall into either an “education” camp or a “human services” camp. There’s tension between them at every level: the legislature, the administration, in communities. There are examples of collaboration and successful partnership for the state to build on, but it’s important to acknowledge this elephant in the room.</p> <p>Some stakeholders articulated this divide somewhat differently, focusing on the distinction between “public” and “private” service providers (particularly in CCECE). Some stakeholders also described the existence of a “public health” camp that does not fit neatly with either education or human services.</p> <p>Stakeholders identified specific areas that currently represent a disconnect between the two camps – e.g. teacher licensing, professional development, pay and benefits – but also noted that the two worlds have different norms and expectations. This dynamic has been identified previously, including in the Pre-K Education Study (pages 16-17).</p> <p>One dynamic identified by some stakeholders is that school buildings in communities that have lost population have empty space that they can use for pre-k – making it hard for private providers to compete, given their need to pay rent. But because pre-k is only for ten hours a week, many stakeholders think it can benefit from being integrated with other services – including but not limited to child care – and many stakeholders expressed concern about the ability or inclination of school districts to do that integration. There are, however, some examples of school districts that have been leading in this work.</p> <p>Stakeholders widely believe that the design of the state’s pre-k program is deeply flawed, and very difficult to implement successfully at the local level. The pre-k program is subject to joint oversight by CDD and AOE; the problems with the program’s design may be exacerbating tensions between the two agencies. Moreover, in many communities the pre-k program appears to be the primary point of contact between private providers and school districts, and its design flaws appear to be contributing to friction at the local level. The state’s approach to pre-k oversight appears to have been adopted with the aspiration that it would lead to improved coordination</p> | <p>Expand and improve UPK (SAC Rec. 4.2, 2021 Review p. 8)</p> |

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| Area | Theme | Desired End State |
|--|--|--|
| | <p>between the human services and education sectors; because that aspiration has not been achieved, a redesign of the program might be an important step in improving relationships at the state and local level.</p> | |
| <p>Children’s Integrated Services</p> | <p>Children’s Integrated Services (CIS) is an innovative approach Vermont has used, developing services that are integrated at the state and regional level – with the intention of making it easier for families to access the package of services they need. CIS has been highlighted nationally, and its flexibility is valued by families. The fact that it shifts administrative burden from families to the state is widely believed to be positive.</p> <p>But while CIS is big enough to require a lot of work, state agencies have not over time allowed it to “become the system,” at least outside the early intervention context. Many key decisions -- about what should be part of CIS or remain separate, how programs within CIS should be administered and evaluated, and how programs not part of CIS should relate to CIS – are complicated by a lack of resources to serve the state’s children and families with the greatest need. An added challenge is the tension between ensuring that specific programs are funded and administered in a certain manner on the one hand, and CIS goal of local flexibility to use funds to meet individual community needs on the other hand.</p> <p>Like other functions of state government, Children’s Integrated Services is seen as understaffed.</p> <p>Stakeholders indicated that the comprehensive nature of the CIS approach has made it hard to define success for CIS – or to collect data on what success looks like. The divide in the stakeholder community among human services, education, and public health also has made it more difficult for CIS to expand its constituency.</p> | <p>Strengthen CIS (SAC Rec. 2.2) Involve Head Start in supporting CIS (Head Start p. 25)</p> |
| <p>Special Education</p> | <p>The question of how best to deliver special education to preschool-aged children (ages 3 and 4) came up from several stakeholders. Some stakeholders noted that in Vermont, many adults live in one community and work in another – and they may seek child care in the community where they work, or even in a third community between where they live and where they work. This can be a challenge if their child is identified for special education services, because the responsibility for those services sits with the home school district. According to AOE, school districts are allowed to provide services outside of their</p> | |

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| Area | Theme | Desired End State |
|--|---|---|
| | <p>jurisdiction, but they are not required to; the district’s obligation is to offer a Free and Appropriate Public Education within a Least Restrictive Environment, which the family may accept or decline.</p> <p>Some education stakeholders have articulated special education as a key reason to centralize early childhood services at school districts, given their capacity in that area. Human services stakeholders were more likely to advocate for increased flexibility in special education service delivery, allowing children to receive services in the settings where families have actually placed them.</p> <p>Importantly, the federal Individuals with Disabilities Act specifically assigns oversight responsibilities for Part B services (ages 3 and up) to the Agency of Education. Services for younger children (Part C) are currently administered by the Agency of Human Services through Children’s Integrated Services.</p> | |
| <p>Collaborative Structures</p> | <p>Most stakeholders expressed appreciation for the existence of collaborative structures -- including the BBF State Advisory Council, seven Vermont Early Childhood Action Plan Committees, and 12 regional councils. But there were some dissenting voices. One concern raised about the formal collaborative structures is that they are a place where participants put their best foot forward in a scripted manner, rather than digging into complex problems and trying to solve them; by this take, the behaviors at common tables are not reflective of those away from those tables. Another concern raised was that collaboration is a means, not an end – and that the existence of collaborative structures does not appear to have led to meaningful policy change.</p> | <p>Include families in decision-making (VECAP 2.4) Require parent representation (SAC Rec. 3.1) Engage parents on Local Interagency Teams (System of Care p. 21) Engage families in designing the system (Blue Ribbon p. 34)</p> |
| <p>Data</p> | <p>The desire for improved data is strong, and there are promising nascent efforts to produce better information – and support that data production with analytics and reporting. But the overall infrastructure for producing data is not adequate to the task, particularly when it comes to linking data across agencies.</p> <p>One concern raised in stakeholder interviews was that political leaders want better data, but to date have not spent the resources needed to produce that data. There have been some unsuccessful efforts to improve data systems in the past, and good project design will be needed to succeed in future work – and to build trust.</p> | <p>Commit to early childhood data integration, and using data for impact (2021 Review p.8) Use data and best practices to scale MTSS (SAC Rec. 2.1) Develop a comprehensive data system to support CIS (SAC Rec. 2.2) Commit to data integration and</p> |

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| Area | Theme | Desired End State |
|------|--|---|
| | <p>Stakeholders generally acknowledged that there is not yet a consistent culture of using data for decision-making at the policy level, but pointed to important work going on to change that culture (including a new BBF website, and a new Data & Evaluation Committee organized by BBF). At the operational level there are some examples of successful data use, although there is inconsistency in data use practices across state agencies – and across communities.</p> <p>Stakeholders agreed that more could be done to improve data collection. Making data useful to the programs actually collecting information would be important to improving the accuracy of data. Moreover, those providers need better supports and training – and the data systems they are using need to be more user-friendly.</p> <p>Data is seen as an important tool for furthering racial equity.</p> <p>There are some agency staff working on data analysis, but stakeholders do not believe there are enough analytics staff people to meet the system’s need. Stakeholders would also like to see improved access to integrated data for research and analysis purposes, leveraging partnerships with higher education and other partners.</p> <p>Stakeholders do not currently see a coherent plan for data use, but would like for the Systems Analysis to advance that conversation.</p> <p><i>Note: An expanded version of the findings regarding data was shared with the Data and Evaluation Committee on January 20, 2022. This summary reflects the results of that Committee’s conversation.</i></p> | <p>governance (SAC Rec. 5.1)</p> <p>Use data to show program impacts (SAC Rec. 5.2)</p> <p>Improve longitudinal data systems (Mental Health Rec. 4)</p> <p>Invest in improved data systems (C&F p. 40)</p> <p>Address barriers to Head Start participation in data systems (Head Start pp. 26-27)</p> |

Summary of Major Challenges

Based on the landscape analysis, there are a number of specific challenges stakeholders have identified that potentially warrant a change in governance.

- *Differing expectations for private providers and schools in the UPK program.* Stakeholders talked about the differences in program design within UPK for private and school-based providers. In effect children receive very different experiences depending on which setting they are in. But the lack of unified control over the program has left this problem unresolved for years.

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- *Different monitoring expectations for service providers.* Both AOE and AHS play some role in oversight in different settings, and we heard multiple stories from providers about the two agencies providing guidance that was misaligned – or even contradictory. In some cases providers told us about asking one agency about an issue, receiving an answer they did not like, and then simply going to the other agency to get a different answer.
- *Different requirements for personnel in different settings.* The state has no overarching definition of quality teaching in early childhood. AOE and AHS have different visions of teacher competency, which leads to very different expectations for professional development. Stakeholders reported a lack of alignment between the professional development offered to private providers and that offered to schools – and added that there is often significant inconsistency among schools themselves. Moreover, neither the AOE or AHS professional development systems are aligned with Head Start, nor is any of that professional development aligned with the coursework offered at community colleges and four-year institution.
- *Divergent expertise.* Schools are increasingly being called on to provide comprehensive services, including the kind of developmental services in which AHS specializes. But school districts do not always have expertise in that kind of work, and neither agency is well positioned to help them.
- *Private providers still see schools as an existential threat.* While this appears to be a less urgent issue now than it has been at times in the past, private providers are concerned that schools will expand their early childhood offerings in ways that will collapse their business model.¹¹ This may be a particular concern in communities that have lost population, leaving the school building with empty rooms. The perception that AOE and schools do not understand the benefits of private providers contributes to the community’s sense of unease.
- *There can be a divergence between where special education services are needed and where they are offered.* School districts are allowed to provide special education services in private settings, but generally choose not to. This can be challenging for parents who seek CCECE services outside a school setting – particularly in settings outside their home school district. Many parents seek private providers near where they work (or at least on their way to work), which might be outside the boundary of their home school district; for many such parents, obtaining special education services has been challenging.
- *A lack of systemic data.* While individual services have data about their enrollment, the state does not have useful overarching data that can give policymakers a sense of how the system as a whole is serving children and families – including how some families may be accessing multiple services.
- *Access deserts.* There are some communities that are simply underserved by CCECE programs, and the lack of data and coordination at the state level has made it harder to systemically address those service gaps.

¹¹ This is a common problem in states around the country. Regenstein, E., and Strausz-Clark, C. (January 2021). [Improving Parent Choice in Early Learning](#), American Enterprise Institute, 3-4.

III. Governance Options

In April, the Foresight/Watershed team shared a document that informed stakeholders of the possible options for moving forward. This section reflects a modestly edited update of that April document. It identifies the basic choices available to the state, and highlights some of the benefits and challenges of each approach. In April and May stakeholders provided feedback based on this document, including a survey. The results of that feedback are described in other sections.

Models of Early Childhood Governance

In early childhood governance, there are three basic models for how states organize their early childhood funding streams and functions: Coordinated, Consolidated, or Created.¹²

| Coordinated | Consolidated | Created |
|--|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Early childhood funding streams and functions live in multiple, distinct agencies – requiring coordination across those agencies• Sometimes a centralized office helps to facilitate coordination | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Early childhood funding and functions are consolidated into an existing agency that also has other responsibilities (typically the state education agency or a human services agency) | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Early childhood funding and functions are consolidated into a single agency that is created to focus on early childhood services• Agency has a sole or primary focus on early childhood, without other responsibilities |

Vermont currently utilizes a coordinated approach, involving the Agency of Education (AOE) and the Agency of Human Services (AHS).

- AOE’s [Early Education division](#) is responsible for universal pre-k (in collaboration with AHS), early childhood special education, and monitoring.
- The [Child Development Division](#) (CDD) of the AHS Department for Children and Families is responsible for child care subsidies, licensing, and ratings, early intervention, and Children’s Integrated Services.
- The [Maternal & Child Health Division](#) of the AHS Department of Health partners with CDD to lead the state’s home visiting work, as part of its responsibility for other important programs relating to the health of young children and their mothers.

¹² Regenstein, E., and Lipper, K. (May 2013). [A Framework for Choosing a State-Level Early Childhood Governance System](#), Build Initiative; see also *Getting There from Here*, pp. 56-58.

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- The [Department of Mental Health](#) at AHS partners with CDD on Children’s Integrated Services and the delivery of early childhood and family mental health.

This section includes an analysis of the benefits and challenges of the following options:

- A.1 Coordination: Maintain the Current Structure
- A.2 Coordination: Add a Centralized Coordinating Office (e.g. a “Governor’s Office of Early Childhood”)
- B.1 Consolidation into the Agency of Human Services
- B.2 Consolidation into the Agency of Education
- C. Creation of a New Agency or Department focused on Early Childhood

Part IV of the summary discusses the need for interagency connections, regardless of what governance approach the state chooses. Part V highlights some issues that the state will need to address if it chooses to change its current governance structure.

Introduction

There are many state and federal programs focused on serving children from birth through kindergarten entry – and when authority for those programs is dispersed among multiple agencies, it can be difficult to develop a coherent early childhood system.¹³ Recognizing that, in 2021 Vermont initiated a Systems Analysis; the goal of the Systems Analysis is to develop a more effective early childhood system in the state.

Vermont’s early childhood community (providers, advocates, regulators, etc.) has articulated some core values that should be reflected in its system integration work:

- Holding children and families at the center, including making it easy for them to navigate the system to find the services they need;
- Equity – including the need to expand access to underserved communities, and ensure that historically underrepresented and underserved communities are better represented in – and better served by – the policy-making process;
- Having decision-making informed by families, communities, and professionals; and
- Leveraging existing integration initiatives.¹⁴

If governance is to be changed, the state should be clear on its purposes for making that change. While governance has an indirect impact on child outcomes, it does have a substantial impact on the communities and providers whose work has a more direct impact on outcomes. State articulations of purpose typically emphasize the state’s role in supporting families, providers, and communities -- and in strengthening the state’s overall birth-through-graduate school education system (referred to hereafter as “P-20”). Some of the purposes commonly articulated by states in changing governance include:

- Minimizing the burden on families -- particularly low-income families -- seeking to access services;
- Ensuring quality across the full range of available services;
- Expanding access to services;

¹³ *Getting There from Here*, p. 6.

¹⁴ *Integration in Vermont’s Early Childhood System*, pp. 7-8.

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- Efficiently delivering services, including successfully executing core functions of state government (described further below); and
- Elevating the level of leadership on early childhood issues in state government.¹⁵

These goals are in many ways interconnected and complementary. Ultimately, if a change is to be made, the Governor and General Assembly should be clear on why a change is warranted. Stakeholders have in different ways articulated the need for improvement in all of these areas, so any of them could be part of the state's overarching goal.

In thinking about how Vermont might achieve its goals, it is important to consider the functions of state government. Through its statutory and regulatory power state government can serve a number of critical functions that impact community leaders and providers, including:

- Collaborating with multiple stakeholders to define a vision for the future of the early childhood sector, and ensuring that policymaking reinforces the goals of that vision;
- Money management (fund distribution, budgeting, resource allocation);
- Setting standards for – and supporting improvement in – service quality (maintaining learning standards, defining program quality, monitoring implementation, supporting improvement, maintaining data systems, facilitating research and evaluation);
- Supporting professionals (licensing, pre-service education, professional development);
- Engaging and supporting families and stakeholders (determining eligibility, supporting family and community engagement, building local capacity, supporting enrollment); and
- Communications and public relations (informing about child development, informing about government-funded services).¹⁶

State government's effectiveness in executing these functions should be a central consideration in choosing a governance model. Indeed, getting better at these functions has been a major driver of governance change in other states. And as discussed above, stakeholders believe the state is struggling in all of these areas:

- *Collaboration*: Stakeholders strongly believe that neither AOE nor AHS is effective at collaborating with stakeholders outside of its direct purview (schools and private providers, respectively).
- *Money management*: The fragmentation of funding distribution will be addressed further in the Financing Study, but stakeholders widely believe that the current system of money management is not supporting quality experiences for children and families.
- *Setting standards for service quality*: The differing quality standards in UPK between school and private settings is a major point of friction in the provider community.
- *Supporting professionals*: Differences in qualifications and support systems for different kinds of providers makes it harder for teachers to receive the support they need, and leads to inefficiencies at the system level.
- *Engaging and supporting families and stakeholders*: While both agencies have had some success at engaging families and stakeholders, the lack of a coordinated approach across agencies can be confusing for families.

¹⁵ *Getting There from Here*, pp. 11-12.

¹⁶ *Getting There from Here*, pp. 26-27.

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- *Communications and public relations:* Neither AOE nor AHS is well set up to communicate broadly about the benefits of the early childhood system as a whole.

The state should also consider how it can minimize administrative burden, which can make it difficult for community leaders and providers to serve families most effectively.¹⁷ Administrative burdens can shift costs from the state onto families – including the cost of figuring out what services they are eligible for, the cost of complying with rules, and the psychological cost that can come with receiving public benefits.¹⁸

Beyond the basic functions of the system, some states have envisioned a role for state government that brings a new level of leadership and coherence to the early childhood service delivery. These states see state government as having a responsibility to families that goes beyond managing funding streams. In these states empowered state-level leaders work with early childhood stakeholders to define a collective vision, and put in place frameworks that help communities and programs serve families more effectively – along with ongoing supports to implement those frameworks, and stronger accountability for how public funds are used. Given the frustrations expressed by Vermont stakeholders about the current lack of coherence in the system, it is worth considering whether Vermont could move to a governance model that elevates the level of leadership at the state government level.

Regardless of the state's governance model, the state will need to be sensitive over time to its dynamic partnership with community leaders and providers. There are certain decisions about the system that properly sit at the local level, because communities are better positioned to make them than the state is.¹⁹ At this point Vermont need not itemize which decisions should sit at the state and which should sit at the community level; instead, Vermont should focus on establishing a state governance approach that is well positioned to manage the state-local dynamic over time.

Moreover, regardless of how the state configures its governance, it will need to ensure that it has the capacity to execute its functions. Vermont stakeholders offered the following thoughts on the state's current capacity:

- Many Vermont stakeholders see the current system as fragmented. In particular they identified a divide between education stakeholders and human services stakeholders, who have different worldviews and approaches to their work.
- Many stakeholders believe that state agencies do not currently have the staff capacity needed to successfully fulfill their assigned functions. Moreover, many stakeholders believe that there is a divide within both AHS and AOE between the politically-appointed leaders and the front-line staff.
- If any governance change is made, its exact scope will need to be defined. This document assumes that any governance change will include at least (a) early education and care programs currently overseen by CDD, and (b) state pre-k. It could well also include home visiting and other responsibilities; as noted earlier, the exact scope of the change can be a contentious issue. In

¹⁷ *Getting There from Here*, pp. 27-28 (discussing Herd., P. and Moynihan, D. (2018). *Administrative Burden: Policymaking by Other Means*. Russell Sage Foundation).

¹⁸ *Getting There from Here*, p. 28 (discussing *Administrative Burden*).

¹⁹ *Getting There from Here*, p. 33.

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general the stakeholders we spoke with focused on CCECE, and our analysis generally does the same.

For the system to be successful it will require political leaders and program leaders to be on the same page about the work needed – as well as adequate capacity to get the job done.²⁰ Stakeholders should consider whether the proposed new governance model will make a difference to the likelihood of success for any future capacity-building initiative.

The Challenges Facing the System

As described in Section II, stakeholder engagement processes have identified a number of challenges that the state’s early childhood system faces, which the Systems Analysis is meant to help the state address. Some of the most significant challenges include:

- Stakeholders are deeply dissatisfied with the fragmentation of the current system, and concerned that it makes it difficult for communities and providers to serve families effectively.
- The early childhood system does not have a high-ranking champion within state government whose full-time focus is early childhood – and who has line authority over a significant number of programs.
- State government does not have a unified oversight body that can develop expertise in the functioning of the complex ecosystem of early childhood programs, as opposed to providing oversight of some portion of that system.
- State government is not currently seen by outside stakeholders as having deep expertise in child development.
- There is a major disconnect between human services and education that goes beyond the relationship between AHS and AOE.
- Some stakeholders express concern that AOE does not fully understand the importance of the comprehensive web of services provided to young children and their families, and other stakeholders express concern that AHS is not well positioned to connect early childhood to schools and the education system.
- The state does not currently have integrated data that provides a holistic sense of what is happening in the early childhood system; the state is currently working to develop such a system.
- Any change in state-level governance requires a great deal of work, including a multi-year change management effort.

All of these challenges are real, but they are not of equal importance – and each potential model would address each challenge differently. The narrative below discusses at a high level how the state’s choices might impact its ability to address each of these issues.

In addressing early childhood governance, states are hamstrung to some degree by fragmentation at the federal level. That said, revisiting governance provides an opportunity for the state to navigate the federal landscape more effectively. A new governance approach could help Vermont better integrate the multiple disparate sources of federal funding, improve its federal reporting and compliance, harmonize interpretations of federal rules to make operations easier for programs, and engage with the

²⁰ *Getting There from here*, pp. 41-46.

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federal government to show how the state is using federal funds to implement a coherent vision. Vermont alone cannot change the nature of federal fragmentation, but it can develop state structures that provide a buffer for communities and providers against the negative impacts of that fragmentation.

A.1 Coordination: Maintain the Status Quo

If Vermont policy leaders really wanted to keep the structural status quo, it probably would not have commissioned a Systems Analysis. Stakeholders in the course of the project explained that there have been better and worse periods for collaboration among state agencies, but many of them emphasized that even during the best times the state’s dispersed configuration of authority is an impediment to system coherence. The stakeholder survey emphatically rejected the idea of maintaining the status quo. But Vermont stakeholders have also noted the state’s tendency to avoid hard choices – which can be a force for preserving the status quo. The table below summarizes benefits and challenges of the current system.²¹

| Benefits | Challenges |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">Minimizes disruption and the burdens of transition, particularly on state agencies. (For more on those burdens, see III.F below.) | <ul style="list-style-type: none">Siloed oversight of funding streams that creates burdensome and unnecessary complexity for communities and providers.Lack of clear authority to make key cross-cutting decisions.Lack of a unified culture across state early childhood leaders and staff.Less visibility into the overall budget for early childhood.Fragmentation among stakeholders and advocates.Hard to develop a coherent equity strategy.Added burdens to integrating data.Early childhood may not have a senior-level champion within its host agencies. |

A.2 Coordination: Add a Centralized Coordinating Office

Vermont could choose to add a central coordinating office – perhaps in the Governor’s Office – to facilitate coordination between agencies. Hawaii, Illinois, and Ohio are among the states that have used a similar model.

A centralized office housed in the Governor’s Office will generally be seen as political, and associated with the Governor – which can be both good and bad. Some governor’s offices have survived transitions across administrations, although when that occurs the office’s place in the larger politics of the governor’s office may shift. Our analysis here assumes that a central coordinating office housed in the governor’s office would indeed be seen as political (and led by a political appointee). It also assumes

²¹ The material in each of the pro and con tables is drawn from both the Major Themes summary and from *A Framework for Choosing a State Early Childhood Governance System*.

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that the office would not exercise authority over any individual programs, but would instead serve in an active role seeking to improve coherence and bring consistency across funding streams.

| Benefits | Challenges |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Minimizes disruption and the burdens of transition, particularly on state agencies. (For more on those burdens, see Section V.) ● Provides a single leadership point of contact within state government. ● Provides a high-level advocate for early childhood within the administration. ● May be able to create a unified early childhood budget. ● Could be a voice for equity in the system. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Siloed oversight of funding streams that creates burdensome and unnecessary complexity for communities and providers. ● Does not necessarily clarify lines of authority to make key cross-cutting decisions. ● Lack of a unified culture across state early childhood leaders and staff. ● Fragmentation among stakeholders and advocates. ● Added burdens to integrating data. ● Early childhood may not have a senior-level champion within its host agencies. ● Requires some amount of capacity and personnel, in an environment where staffing is typically kept lean. |

B.1 Consolidation into the Agency of Human Services

Several stakeholders noted that the Child Development Division was in many ways meant to provide the kind of unified oversight needed in the early childhood system – and indeed, it does bring together multiple early childhood programs. The table below summarizes the benefits and challenges of consolidating early childhood into the Agency of Human Service – which would include, at a minimum, shifting full responsibility for UPK to CDD.

If the state consolidates functions into AHS it should consider whether it should create a Department of Early Childhood, rather than have early childhood remain a division within a larger department. The benefits and challenges analysis below assumes that if early childhood functions were consolidated into AHS that AHS would elevate the leadership of early childhood to the Department level. If early childhood functions were consolidated into AHS without elevating the leadership, many of the benefits identified here would not be realized, and some of the challenges would be more difficult to address.

The current Department for Children and Families serves a somewhat different function. The Department includes function that cut across multiple age spans, such as child safety and protection and foster care. It also does not have responsibility for some programs that might be seen as core services focused on young children and their families. If the state decides to consider consolidation at the Agency of Human Services it will need further work to determine what intra-agency configuration will provide the best support to the programs focused on the early childhood years.

| Benefits | Challenges |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Allows for more unified oversight of child care and early childhood education, with potentially greater consistency in policy – making things easier for communities and providers. ● Provides a single leadership point of contact within state government, and more unified accountability within state government. ● Creates an entity that could develop greater expertise in child development, which could then be applied to policy. ● Creates an entity that can develop expertise in the functioning of the entire early childhood system, not just schools or private providers. ● Potentially improves integration of UPK with the many human services administered by AHS. ● Potential to create a unified early childhood budget. ● Easier to promote a unified vision, with integrated goals and performance metrics. ● Easier to integrate data. ● Coherence makes it easier to promote equity, and to measure whether equity is being achieved. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Potentially complicates the role of schools in the early childhood system; would require AHS to substantially ramp up its capacity to work with school districts, and would require schools to adjust to a new oversight relationship. ● Potentially complicates the state’s ability to use education funds to support early childhood education. ● There are concerns that housing early childhood functions at AHS would make it harder to maintain an educational focus in UPK – and make it harder to define and maintain a central role for UPK in the state’s P-20 educational continuum. ● Potentially adds complexity to the relationship between UPK and (a) Part B special education, and (b) kindergarten. ● Potentially disruptive to all stakeholders during a transition. ● Would require a buildup of capacity to meet the agency’s new responsibilities. |

B.2 Consolidation Into the Agency of Education

Pre-k is one of the signature programs in early childhood, and is seen by many stakeholders as an important educational service. Moreover, there are stakeholders who see critical benefits – operationally and politically – to have early childhood as part of the education system. These are some of the reasons to consider consolidating early childhood functions into the Agency of Education.

The Agency of Education’s internal structure is quite different than that of the Agency of Human Services. The Agency of Human Services is already organized into six departments, so it is comparatively straightforward to consider what it might mean to create a seventh.²² By contrast, the Agency of Education does not have departments; at AOE “divisions” are the largest unit within the agency.²³ Still, it should be possible to consider a consolidation within AOE in which the head of the early childhood unit is senior enough to be a direct part of the Secretary’s leadership team.

²² The Agency’s Department structure is described on its website: <https://humanservices.vermont.gov/about-us/departments.ver>

²³ The Agency of Education’s organizational chart is available on its website: <https://education.vermont.gov/documents/aoe-org-chart>.

| Benefits | Challenges |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Allows for more unified oversight of child care and early childhood education, with potentially greater consistency in policy – making things easier for communities and providers. ● Provides a single leadership point of contact within state government, and more unified accountability within state government. ● Creates an entity that could develop greater expertise in child development, which could then be applied to policy. ● Creates an entity that can develop expertise in the functioning of the entire early childhood system, not just schools or private providers. ● Potentially helps to solidify for the public and policymakers the educational importance of early childhood. ● Potentially helps to integrate early childhood with the K-12 education system. ● Potential to create a unified early childhood budget. ● May make it easier to leverage education funds for early education purposes. ● Easier to promote a unified vision for early childhood, with integrated goals and performance metrics. ● Easier to integrate data. ● Coherence makes it easier to promote equity, and to measure whether equity is being achieved. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Consolidating functions does not necessarily elevate leadership, although that could be addressed by ensuring that AOE has a senior leader responsible for early childhood who reports directly to the superintendent. ● Potentially complicates the role of private providers in the early childhood system; would require AOE to substantially ramp up its capacity to work with private providers, and would require those providers to adjust to a new oversight relationship. ● There are concerns that this approach runs a higher risk of losing the “whole child” focus of early childhood. ● It would be harder to administer Children’s Integrated Services at AOE given its connections to other AHS responsibilities. ● Potentially complicates the relationship between early childhood services and other human services administered by AHS. ● Potentially diminishes the visibility of infant-toddler services. ● Potentially disruptive to all stakeholders during a transition. ● Would require a buildup of capacity to meet the agency’s new responsibilities. |

C. Creating a New Agency or Department focused on Early Childhood

Some states have chosen to create a new standalone agency focused on early childhood. There are many similarities in the benefits and drawbacks between consolidation and creation. When states are seeking to choose between those two approaches, one of the biggest questions they face is whether the early childhood system will be better served by a small standalone agency or a unit in a larger one. States that have created standalone early childhood oversight entities include Alabama, Colorado, Connecticut, Georgia, Massachusetts, New Mexico, and Washington.

Another possibility might be to adopt a version of the model used in Pennsylvania. Pennsylvania’s Office of Child Development and Early Learning (OCDEL) is administered by a Deputy Secretary who reports to two agency heads: the leaders of the Department of Education and the Department of Human

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Services.²⁴ The Vermont equivalent would likely be to create a new Department of Early Childhood (or some similar title), with a Commissioner who reports to the heads of both AHS and AOE.

In Pennsylvania there is some tradition of senior officials reporting to two different authorities – often a senior official in their agency and one in the governor’s office – but even with that tradition the dual reporting structure requires political skill. It is also important to note that in Pennsylvania the Department of Education and Department of Human Services are two of the most powerful agencies in the state’s legislative process. While the Pennsylvania model has numerous potential benefits for Vermont, if Vermont is interested in exploring the model further it should consider how it might adjust the model based on Vermont’s different context.

The table below summarizes some of the benefits and challenges of moving to a standalone agency or the Pennsylvania model. The benefits and challenges are generally the same; *italicized* text refers to changes specific to the Pennsylvania model, and text in SMALL CAPS refers to changes specific to creating a new agency.

| Benefits | Challenges |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Allows for more unified oversight of child care and early childhood education, with potentially greater consistency in policy – making things easier for communities and providers. ● Provides a single leadership point of contact within state government, and more unified accountability within state government. ● Elevates the profile of early childhood in the overall scheme of Vermont state government. ● Creates an entity that could develop greater expertise in child development, which could then be applied to policy. ● Creates an entity that can develop expertise in the functioning of the entire early childhood system, not just schools or private providers. ● Potential to create a unified early childhood budget. ● Easier to promote a unified vision for early childhood, with integrated goals and performance metrics. ● Easier to integrate data. ● Coherence makes it easier to promote equity, and to measure whether equity is being achieved. ● <i>Creates an empowered leader bridging the gap between education and human services.</i> ● Has the highest likelihood of creating a role that would attract and retain talented leaders. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Potentially disruptive to all stakeholders during a transition. ● Creates need for new patterns of cross-agency coordination and collaboration. ● Would require a buildup of capacity to meet the department’s new responsibilities. ● <i>Creates ongoing management complexity with a dual reporting structure.</i> ● SMALL AGENCIES MAY STRUGGLE TO BE SUCCESSFUL IN VERMONT’S POLITICAL CULTURE. ● SEPARATING UPK FROM AOE COULD ADD COMPLEXITY TO THE ADMINISTRATION OF THE EDUCATION FUND. |

²⁴ For more information about OCDEL, see its [website](#).

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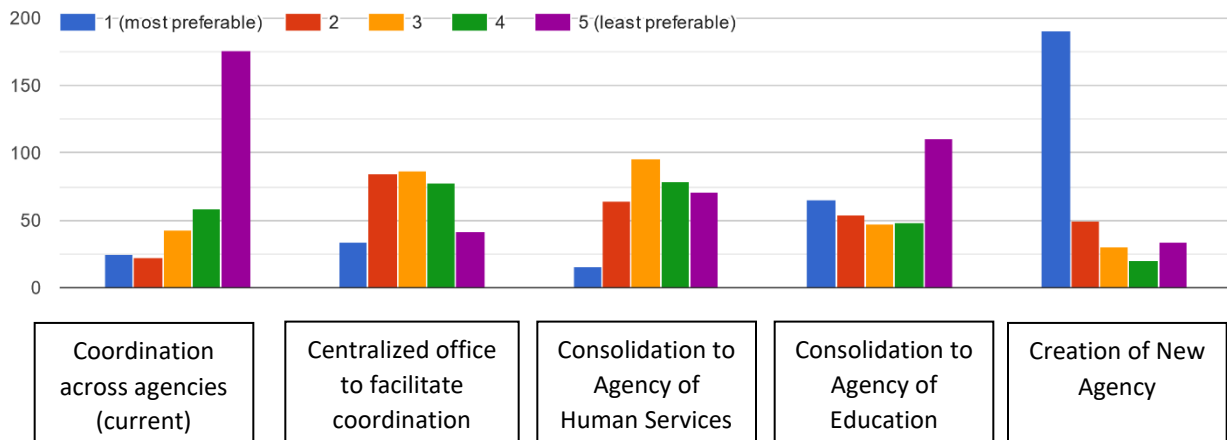
D. Results of the Stakeholder Survey

As part of the Vermont Child Care and Early Childhood Education Systems Analysis, Building Bright Futures offered a survey for stakeholders to indicate their preferred governance option moving forward. The major takeaway from the survey was that respondents were strongly opposed to maintaining the status quo, and their preferred option for moving forward was to create a new structure (rather than consolidate early childhood governance into an existing agency).

The options included:

- Keep the structural status quo;
- Consolidate child care and early education functions into an existing agency – either the Agency of Education or the Agency of Human Services; or
- Create some sort of new agency or unit focused on early childhood.

The survey generated 326 responses. While a diverse range of stakeholders shared their opinions, the largest category of respondent was from the early childhood education sector (172 responses). Other well-represented groups included Pre-K-12 education (71), cross-sector professionals (37), state agency professionals (27), advocates (26), and parents (26). (Respondents were allowed to identify in more than one category.) The survey results were as follows:



Some major takeaways from the survey included:

- **Survey respondents were opposed to maintaining the status quo.** In fact, 176 respondents (54%) identified the status quo as their least preferred option, with another 59 (18%) ranking it next-to-last. By contrast, only 48 respondents (15%) listed the status quo as one of their top two options.
- **Survey respondents wanted to try a new structure, and not simply consolidate functions into an existing agency.** An overwhelming 191 respondents (59%) listed a new agency as their top choice, with another 50 (15%) listing it as their second choice.
- **Respondents had strong feelings about the Agency of Education, both pro and con.** The second most popular option was consolidation into AOE, which was the top choice of 66 respondents

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(20%). But 111 respondents (34%) said that consolidation into AOE was their least preferred option, punctuating those votes with comments expressing strong opposition to such a move.

E. Interagency connections

No matter how Vermont configures its state-level early childhood governance, there will be an ongoing need for interagency collaboration and active partnership between public and private early childhood leaders.²⁵ The federal Head Start law requires all states to maintain a State Advisory Council focused on early childhood. That Council is required by law to include members representing certain specific state agencies – and other constituencies; it also is required to make recommendations on a range of subjects.

In Vermont the Building Bright Futures State Advisory Council (BBF-SAC) fulfills the state’s obligations under the Head Start Act.²⁶ In addition to federal compliance, BBF is also named in state statute as the primary advisory body to the Governor and General Assembly on the well-being of children and families, charged with maintaining and monitoring the vision and strategic plan for Vermont’s early childhood system. The entity was created outside of state government to ensure that public, private, legislative, and family voices collectively develop the vision and strategy for children and families.

BBF also supports strategic plan committees and regional councils that bring together local early childhood leaders throughout the state (12 regional councils and seven strategic plan committees).²⁷ Importantly, the BBF statewide and regional councils do not exercise administrative oversight; instead, they serve as advisory bodies. These councils are meant to bring together public officials with oversight authority, and a range of other stakeholders. They provide a forum for leaders inside and outside government to learn from each other, and to strengthen ties among state and local leaders as they work collaboratively to meet the needs of children and families.²⁸ The Council’s work can be strengthened by ensuring that the right voices are at the table at each level of the network; if the state makes a governance change, that should lead the state to revisit how its collaborative structures are populated.

A potential governance change would require the state to consider the best role for the BBF-SAC going forward. The state has chosen to invest certain core functions in the BBF-SAC – such as setting a vision for the early childhood system – and will need to revisit which functions properly sit in a well-defined lead agency, and which should sit in a collaborative multi-stakeholder body. The BBF-SAC plays an important role in defining the success of the system and then determining whether or not success has been achieved; that role will still be needed in a reconfigured landscape, but how the BBF-SAC executes that role will need to evolve to adapt to changed conditions. Vermont has committed to reaping the benefits of public-private partnerships, and if the public sector is undergoing a significant redesign then the nature of the partnership is likely to change.

The BBF-SAC can also provide important support through the process of transition, helping stakeholders to adjust to their new reality. But they should not be the only venue in which collaboration takes place;

²⁵ *Getting There from Here*, p. 59.

²⁶ For more information about the Council see the [Building Bright Futures website](#).

²⁷ For more information about the regional councils see the [Building Bright Futures website](#).

²⁸ In some states local councils exercise programmatic authority, with the power to allocate resources. The Systems Analysis did not explore the possibility of changing the nature of local governance.

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indeed, state agencies sometimes need space to work together without outside stakeholders present, and vice versa.

Interagency data sharing is another issue that is currently in sharp focus for Vermont. There are meaningful efforts underway to strengthen the state's culture of data use, and to integrate data across multiple funding streams. BBF is at the center of these discussions. Once the state has greater clarity on its overall approach to governance, it will be possible to develop recommendations for improved data infrastructure that would support the proposed governance approach. For now, BBF is supporting collaborative work to improve the state's data infrastructure and use.

In sum, interagency collaboration, public-private partnerships, and data sharing are important values to Vermont early childhood stakeholders. A potential change in agency governance should take account of these issues, and in turn the BBF-SAC (and its VECAP Committees) can provide important support to the process of choosing and implementing a new governance approach. The BBF-SAC is an important institution, one that is well positioned to evolve to meet the changing needs of the state.

F. State-Community Connections

One major goal of the Systems Analysis is to make sure that important decisions are made by the right people, with the right information. It is also about making sure that the right capacities are in place to support those decisions.

In general, local leaders will be in the best position to make decisions that benefit from ongoing interaction with families and providers. The state will be in the best position to house oversight and backbone capacity – and to address issues where statewide consistency is a value. The state can then configure its capacity to ensure that both the state and communities are in a position to be successful.

In many states one goal of a process like this Systems Analysis will be to take burdens off of families and communities and put them on the state. While the current administration has kept a focus on having a lean state government, it has also expressed a willingness to build capacity where doing so might serve a valuable operational purpose – including reducing the burden on families and communities. The administration's approach puts a premium on articulating the operational benefits of any capacity contemplated for state government, and ensuring that it has an essential operational purpose. It could also be a rationale for establishing a public-private partnership to perform important state-level functions.

It is important to emphasize that there are certain costs that are paid by somebody, even if that somebody is not state government. When state government lacks capacity, the cost of that is often felt at the community and provider level – where the lack of coherence and support adds additional expense, including through the costs of compliance with conflicting mandates. In any fair accounting of the costs of maintaining a system, expenditures at the state level must be considered in light of their potential savings at other levels.

If proposed state-level expenditures will create efficiencies and reduce burdens elsewhere, that should be a legitimate justification for those expenditures – but if proposed state-level expenditures do not have that effect, then it is reasonable to consider whether they are not actually worthwhile. There is no question that some of the changes the state will consider in early childhood governance come at some

cost. But those costs must be weighed against the cost of the status quo, which places the burden inequitably on the families and communities with the most limited resources.

G. Transitions

If Vermont decides to make a change to its governance structure, it will need to develop a transition plan.²⁹ At this point it is premature to map out what that would entail in any great detail. But because the impact of a transition is an important factor in deciding whether or not it is worth it to make a change, it is worth briefly summarizing some of the work that would be needed to make a transition a success. This work includes:

- Defining the exact parameters of what is and is not moving. Again, the assumption in this document is that at the very least a governance change would focus on CCECE. It could well include more, though, depending on the state's goals and rationale for the change – and the practical realities facing other programs that could be included.
 - One approach to consider is to start with a change focused solely on CCECE, and then consider in future years whether the new early childhood unit would be an appropriate home for other programs. Some of the older early childhood agencies began with a CCECE focus and then have added new responsibilities over time as their capacity grew and the needs of the state shifted.
- Redesigning and building personnel capacity. A governance change creates new roles and changes existing roles. That is a substantial challenge for the staff already on the job – and will likely require hiring new staff.
 - One thing for the state to consider will be whether some functions might appropriately live in a public-private partnership.
- A transition in governance creates a number of logistical challenges in state government. This includes addressing issues like budgeting, accounting, information technology, personnel, and more.
- A transition in governance also creates a number of cultural challenges in state government. A new configuration will bring together new colleagues who have been shaped by very distinct agency cultures – and may already have working relationships based on those cultures. Forging a unified culture in a new agency is a substantial management challenge; this culture-building work takes a focused plan, as well as time and skill, and will not be easy.
- Indeed, a governance transition places different pressures on political leaders, agency managers, and front-line staff. There is already a sense that there are disconnects among those groups; the state will likely need to have intentional strategies to strengthen those relationships in a new configuration.
- Moreover, a governance change places pressure on community leaders and providers. The state would need an intentional strategy for multi-directional communication with stakeholders throughout the process, and for ensuring that the changes do not adversely impact providers and families.

That is a lot of work, and historically most state governments are not well positioned to successfully execute the kind of complex change management the transition requires. Strong vision and leadership

²⁹ For more on transition planning see *Getting There from Here*, pp. 63-67.

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will be needed to make any change successful. In some states philanthropic and business leaders have played valuable roles in supporting the process of transition. Overall, though, it is important for the state to keep in mind that while the long-term goals of a governance change might be ambitious, in the short term it will be important to focus on basic functionality – and to have reasonable expectations about the timeline for system improvement.

It is also important to keep in mind that simply changing governance structures will not solve the problems of the early childhood system. Changes in governance can be an essential part of a larger strategy to develop and implement a vision for how children and families are served in the state, and stakeholders have largely approached the Systems Analysis in that spirit. But it is a reminder that if the state chooses to adopt a new governance structure, how it goes about making that change is arguably more important than the structure it chooses.

Conclusion/Recommendations

A. A Proposed Direction for the Governance Conversation

Governance is all about tradeoffs; there are no easy and obvious right answers. But for Vermont at this time, *we believe the best option for state governance is to create a standalone unit of state government with an elevated, empowered leader.* We believe that the best approach to establishing that unit is a hybrid model that would have the unit's leader reporting to both the Secretary of AOE and the Secretary of AHS. This would involve creating a Child Care and Early Childhood Education Department within the Agency of Human Services (or an analogous approach within the Agency of Education, which has a different administrative structure). This approach is not without its complications, but we believe it is the structure with the best chance to be successful.

We start our analysis by identifying the need for unitary leadership, which Vermont currently lacks. In some other states, there is a senior empowered leader whose full-time job is looking out for the best interests of the early childhood system as a whole, or at least all of CCECE – and who has line authority for major early childhood funding streams, including at a minimum pre-k and child care. No such person exists in Vermont, and the overall dynamic of the system reflects that absence. As the Think Tank report says (p. 10), “Governance for the future early care and learning system would include clear leadership and authority for decision-making[.]” We believe that creating this kind of unitary leadership is the single most important change that could come out of this Systems Analysis process.

Some stakeholders recommended that Vermont simply bifurcate its oversight, giving the Agency of Education responsibility for pre-k and the Agency of Human Services responsibility for child care. If Vermont's goal is to simply ensure compliance with existing statutory requirements, that approach could work. But if Vermont's goal is to nurture and equip a diverse set of service providers in a way that meets the needs of children and families, that approach is unlikely to be successful. To us that is the equivalent of having one agency to set traffic requirements for cars, and another to set traffic requirements for trucks and motorcycles; we do not believe that such an approach would promote vehicular safety.

If the state is willing to create elevated and unified leadership in early childhood, it then needs to have somewhere to place that leadership. The question of where that leadership should be housed has proven to be a difficult one for Vermont, as it has been for other states. As noted previously, in Vermont there has been a significant divide between education and human services – but also a growing recognition that early childhood has become a policy area that demands its own expertise. The diverse array of early childhood services do not fit neatly into historical definitions of “human services” and “education” as distinct categories; they are properly and proudly both.

Accordingly, the expertise needed to successfully oversee an early childhood system is its own kind of expertise, one that neither AHS or AOE has yet been charged with developing. While in theory both agencies could develop that expertise if charged with administering CCECE, many stakeholders have significant doubts that they could do so – doubts that appear to be grounded in a long history of experience with both agencies. Both politically and operationally, an effort to consolidate within only one of the two agencies seems unlikely to be successful.

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This new administrative model could also serve the state well as it looks to change its approach to early childhood financing. If the Financing Study recommends making the state's approach to early childhood funding more integrated and coherent – which it might – then having integrated oversight would be helpful to the implementation of that new approach to financing. As noted earlier, maintaining the Agency of Education's involvement could also be important to ensuring that the Education Fund can still be used to support early childhood.

We appreciate that one of the Governor's stated goals is to create a cradle to career education system.³⁰ We also understand that this goal seemingly creates a natural pull to have early childhood administered by AOE. But we would posit that for a cradle to career education system to be truly successful, each phase of that system – early childhood, K-12, and higher education – should be overseen by an agency that truly understands the cultural and policy complexities and nuances of that particular phase. At this time, AOE is not well positioned to be that agency for the early childhood system. Accordingly, we believe the best path to a cradle to career system is to create a new entity to oversee early childhood that is not strictly a unit of AOE, even if the entity's head reports in part to the Secretary of AOE.

We also believe this approach would be the best path forward for one of the General Assembly's signature programs: universal pre-k. The UPK program has had multiple implementation struggles; some of those struggles are connected to the fact that it is only funded for ten hours a week, but others are driven by the fact that it is administered by two separate agencies. Unifying the management of UPK is an important strategy for addressing the program's operational challenges. Stakeholders also told us that historically the General Assembly has resisted efforts to give any agency other than AOE any oversight responsibility for the Education Fund, which is another reason to retain a role for AOE in UPK oversight.

Similarly, we think this approach would help to address two other goals specifically identified in Act 45: increasing access to affordable child care, and ensuring that an antiracist approach is used in modifying existing policies. With child care as with UPK, we believe that having an empowered leader able to oversee both programs could lead to each program better meeting the needs of families. That empowered leader would also be in the best position to ensure that policy change and new policies are antiracist; in the current structure, no single leader has responsibility for that assurance.

While CIS is not specifically addressed in Act 45, we see CIS as a very promising approach to service delivery. We believe its approach is directionally correct, and hope that it will be an important building block in a reconfigured governance structure. Indeed, the philosophy behind CIS is one that should inform a broader range of work by the state, and we hope CIS itself will evolve to take advantage of new opportunities under unified leadership.

We do not want to minimize the challenge of creating a new position that reports to two different Secretaries – and indeed, the Secretaries of two agencies that (1) both have much broader purviews, and (2) have historically struggled to work together effectively. That is a hard job. But we see that as a more attractive job than any of the roles currently defined in state government – or the role of trying to oversee the full suite of early childhood programs from within either AHS or AOE. We also note that if the political will in fact exists to create a more standalone unit of government – one that would create

³⁰ For more, see the Governor's website at <https://governor.vermont.gov/content/creating-cradle-career-education-system>.

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unified leadership without a dual reporting structure – that we believe that would have a good chance of succeeding.

In the course of the process we heard some meaningful hesitancy about this hybrid approach, particularly from stakeholders connected to the education system. We appreciate that hesitancy and understand where it comes from. We greatly respect the role AOE plays within the early childhood system, but based on our experience in the process we do not recommend giving AOE sole authority for any of the functions currently housed at CDD.

B. School Aged Child Care

The Systems Analysis is required to “be divided by birth through five years of age and six years of age through 12 years of age.” Our recommendations – like the process that produced them – have focused on the birth to five years; however, as part of the process, we did engage with after-school providers and the cross-sector system that supports children through age 12.

Providers of school-age afterschool care echoed similar concerns related to funding and regulations for afterschool being split between the two departments, with AOE administering [21st Century Community Learning Centers](#) and AHS administering [Child Care and Development Fund](#) school-age afterschool. This fragmentation results in additional bureaucratic, workforce, and quality challenges that are related but not quite the same as the early childhood challenges discussed above. Should Vermont move forward with governance reforms, the question of how to situate school-age afterschool administration to increase coherence for providers and families must be addressed as part of the process.

C. Data Systems

As noted in Section II, there is a strong commitment to improving data systems in Vermont. BBF has done important work to discuss data dashboards, and how data might be used to gauge overall system health. Ideally, a change in governance will represent an opportunity to improve the state’s capacity to produce and analyze data, which will improve the state’s ability to hold itself accountable for improving child and family outcomes.

In thinking about the data work ahead, it is important to distinguish among different kinds of data project.

- Each funding stream in the state has an existing management system, which is used for state oversight purposes. Typically providers enter data into the system, and then aggregated reports are produced by the state agency overseeing the program. There have been efforts initiated to update some of these systems.
- There is also a need to integrate data from across each of those management systems to get a clear picture of what is happening in the system at any given moment.³¹ This, too, has been a subject of important conversations at the state level. If the state moves forward with a new governance structure, that presents an important opportunity to integrate data; indeed, bringing multiple funding streams under the same roof may make it easier to create the

³¹ Regenstein, E. (August 2017), [An Unofficial Guide to the Why and How of State Early Childhood Data Systems](#), the Ounce of Prevention Fund.

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oversight needed for an integrated data system. The state can also take advantage of new technology that makes it easier and cheaper for states to integrate early childhood data.³²

- Integrating data on the “back end” for analysis purposes is different than developing new systems for case management, or for facilitating single-point-of-entry service enrollment for parents and families. Those projects are also a critical part of state work to improve the use of data in serving children and families.³³

Both of these kinds of data work are essential. Improving management systems – and **creating an Early Childhood Integrated Data System – will allow the state to produce new kinds of information to inform decision-making, and increase the accuracy of the data it produces.** Those are both critical values.

Better data is also important to ongoing accountability for the system. The Advisory Committee discussed the importance of having clear goals for the system, and a lead unit or agency responsible for making progress toward those goals. Having better data is essential to that process. Creating a single early childhood unit would make it easier to integrate data from different sources, and also establish clearer lines of responsibility for taking action to achieve Vermont’s goals.

For the state to truly leverage its data will require ensuring adequate analytic capacity. This includes state staff conducting data analysis; the state already has some such staff, although not enough to meet the need – especially if the state’s data output increases meaningfully. In addition to professional analysis, the state should support continued opportunities for stakeholders to engage with data; BBF and Vermont’s Early Childhood Data and Policy Center should continue to be useful supports for this work.

D. What Happens Next?

Our recommendations will be considered by the Administration and the General Assembly, which must decide whether they believe the changes articulated here are necessary. We note that as part of this process **the General Assembly may want to consider the possibility of new committee structures, including committees specifically designed to address issues relating to early childhood.**

As we noted earlier in the process, many stakeholders indicated that Vermont has a culture of not wanting to create “losers.” Many stakeholders said that the state is constantly looking for ways to make

³² Regenstein, E. (June 2022), *The Importance of Modernizing Technology in Developing Early Childhood Integrated Data Systems*, Foresight Law + Policy. Retrieved from: https://www.flpadvisors.com/uploads/4/2/4/2/42429949/flp_importancemodernizingtechdevelopingecintegrateddatasystems_21june2022.pdf.

³³ Gebhard, B. (2022). *Strengthening Connections: State Approaches to Connecting Families to Services*. Zero to Three. Retrieved from: https://www.zerotothree.org/resources/4309-strengthening-connections-state-approaches-to-connecting-families-to-services?utm_medium=email&utm_source=email_link&utm_content=whats_new_02.28.2022&utm_campaign=Q2_2022_Policy+Center_Resources; Stoney, L. (January 2022). *Bridging the Data Gap: Diverse Delivery Requires 21st Century Technology*. Opportunities Exchange. Retrieved from: https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5f4d7a7ef6c82325c5ec80c0/t/61e73be1a3ef005db06fd478/1642544097841/OppEx_2022_IssueBrf_BridgingDataGap.pdf.

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everyone better off without making anyone worse off. For example, if a proposal would make many categories of stakeholders much better off but would be mildly detrimental to another category of stakeholder, the proposal would not move forward – even though as a whole the system would likely be better off if it did.

We do not believe that the proposed approach would create “losers;” indeed, one of its appeals is that it does not obviously disadvantage any important constituency. We recognize that not everyone will agree with our proposed direction – and if the experience of other states is any guide, the reticence may be strongest on the part of the agencies themselves. A change of the kind proposed here would undoubtedly be disruptive in the short term, which is hard for agencies to navigate (as described above).

If any change is to be successful, there should be clear metrics and desired outcomes guiding that change. We did not develop specific metrics in the course of this Systems Analysis, but we emphasize the importance of creating them. We believe the metrics should be collaboratively developed by the impacted stakeholders, and should focus on the kinds of outcomes that a governance change is actually likely to produce. Relatedly, if the state agrees to make a change, we believe that it should commission an evaluation of that change, to inform further evolution down the road. In doing so it should define an appropriate role for BBF -- which by statute is required to monitor Vermont’s early childhood system, and which could support the state in developing appropriate metrics to be used for continuous quality improvement.

If the state commits to a change, it will need to establish a transition process (as described in the previous section). It may want to consider having some sort of board or managers to oversee that process. It should also consider creating a transitional period to allow the agencies to put in place systems that allow the new unit to be successful. For example, New Mexico passed a law creating a new agency in early 2019, and scheduled the agency to come into existence on July 1, 2020; in the interim, it created a transitional budget – one that allowed for the hiring of some senior leadership before the agency came into existence. If the General Assembly acts in 2023 to create a new governance structure, it should consider when that structure should officially come into existence.

A transition in governance structures does come at some cost. These changes typically do not radically change the staffing levels of state government, although it is likely that the proposed change would require some additional staff – particularly if the new entity is to have adequate capacity to fulfill its mandate. There should also be some one-time expenses to support the process of transition, including process supports for affected agencies and personnel. We have not done a full estimate of these potential costs.

While there is widespread acknowledgment that the current state structure is not working, there is also skepticism from some providers that rearranging oversight at the state level will make any meaningful difference at the provider level. For any state-level change to be meaningful may require achieving at least three things:

- Clarity about what exactly state-level governance change is meant to accomplish. Focusing on the concrete ways in which governance change should benefit communities, providers, and families should guide any decisions about what new state government structures should look like. A strong connection between system goals and system design is a key to the success of early childhood governance.

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- Creating the kind of empowered, high-level leadership that can offer the system real coherence – both in operations, and in messaging. Part of the problem for early childhood right now is that it has no single ambassador from the administration to the legislature, the provider community, families, and the public; creating a single leader who has programmatic oversight and the ability to communicate about it could create a stronger sense of early childhood as an empowered field.
- Operationally, the state could benefit by organizing around function rather than funding stream. Fund distribution, definitions of quality, professional development, enrollment, and more are currently administered separately for each different service; having a holistic approach could be a significant benefit for providers and communities. Note that this does not mean that all services need to be identical; it simply could mean that services are better harmonized, and that any differences in approach are the result of intentional and thoughtful choice rather than simply differences in oversight responsibility.

One lesson learned from other states is that simply moving oversight of programs from one agency to another does not bring about the kind of change the system needs. Any change in oversight has to be paired with a commitment to systems change, and new kinds of expertise (described further below).

In addressing this issue, the state will surely be mindful of a tension between designing structures that are meant to be durable over years (or even decades), and navigating the current interpersonal dynamics of the state's leaders inside and outside government. There are no easy answers here; all government structures are populated by actual people, and the human dynamics of this moment are deeply relevant.

A focus on building stronger leadership also places a premium on finding leaders who can actually take advantage of the opportunity. In addition to building a new culture, that includes engaging effectively with political leaders and the stakeholder community; identifying the right policy tools and levers to address problems identified by stakeholders; and managing the operations of the agency to effectively serve its constituents. Stakeholders who have lived through changes in other states have emphasized that the first leader of a new entity must be skilled at managing and navigating the bureaucracy; their sense was that if the new entity does not establish an effective management structure very quickly, that none of the other goals of the governance change will be achieved.

Vermont's early childhood community has been engaged, candid, and passionate throughout the process of developing this Systems Analysis. That community deserves better than the current structures state government has set up to serve it. Fortunately, there are leaders in the executive and legislative branch of state government with a strong action imperative to make things better. So we hope that this report and its recommendations will be helpful to those political leaders and the entire early childhood community as they chart – and navigate – a path forward.

APPENDIX A

Vermont Early Childhood Systems Analysis Interviewees

| Name | Role | Organization |
|--------------------------------|--|---|
| Sarah Adams-Kollitz | Director | Burlington Children’s Space |
| Tori Anguish | Assistant Director | Trinity Children’s Center |
| Rep. Sarita Austin | State Representative | House – Education |
| Meg Baker | Universal PreK Coordinator | Addison Central School District, Addison Northwest School District, and Mount Abraham Unified School District |
| Paul Behrman | Chair | Vermont Head Start Association |
| Drew Bennet | Ed Statistician | Agency of Education |
| Emanuel Betz | Nita M Lowey 21 st Century Community Learning Centers State Coordinator | Vermont Agency of Education |
| Karen Bielawski-Branch | Home visiting | Vermont Department of Health, Division of Maternal & Child Health |
| Rebecca Bishop# | Operations Director | Bennington Head Start |
| Seth Bowden | President | Vermont Business Roundtable |
| William J. Bonsignore# | Afterschool Program Quality Facilitator (APQF) | Rutland City Public Schools |
| Rep. Jessica Brumsted*# | State Representative | House of Representatives – Human Services |
| Dr. Breena Holmes | Associate Professor of Pediatrics | Vermont Children’s Health Improvement Project; former Director, Vermont Department of Health, Division of Maternal & Child Health |
| Elizabeth Brown | Director, Rutland County Head Start | Rutland Mental Health Services |
| Sean Brown | Commissioner | Department for Children and Families |
| Sandra Cameron | Director of Public Policy | Vermont School Boards Association |
| Lori Canfield | Head Start Director | Southeastern Vermont Community Action |
| Sherry Carlson# | Private co-chair to ELD, Chief Program Officer | Let’s Grow Kids |
| Sue Ceglowski | Executive Director | Vermont School Boards Association |
| Elizabeth Chambers | NCSU Encore Program Coordinator | |
| Morgan Cole | Former Children's Integrated Services Director | Formerly Child Development Division, Department for Children and Families |
| Xusana Davis | Executive Director | Racial Equity Advisory Panel |
| Douglas (DJ) Denniston | | Child Development Division |

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| Name | Role | Organization |
|----------------------------|---|---|
| Flor Diaz Smith* | Board Member | Washington Central Unified Union School District; Vermont School Boards Association |
| Paul Dragon* | Executive Director | Champlain Valley Office of Economic Opportunity |
| Nicole Dubuque# | Policy Director | Child Development Division, Department for Children and Families |
| Lexi Duquette* | | Parent |
| Sheila Duranleau | Director of Programs | Child Development Division, Department for Children and Families |
| Jen Fortman | Parent co-chair F&C | Parent |
| Jeff Francis | Executive Director | Vermont Superintendents Association |
| Daniel French | Secretary | Agency of Education |
| Leslie Friedman | Education Programs Coordinator | Agency of Education |
| Megan Fuerst | Legislative Associate | Action Circles |
| Eddie Gale*# | Vermont Program Director | AD Henderson Foundation |
| Christy Gallese | Director | Burlington School District |
| Dimitri Garder# | Founder | Global Z |
| Rey Garofano | Child Care Quality Program Administrator | Child Development Division, Department for Children and Families |
| Deb Gass | Executive Director | Brattleboro Town School District's Education Services |
| Wendy Geller | Division Director, Data Management and Analysis Division | Agency of Education |
| Maureen Gillard | School Age Childcare Director | Essex Junction Recreation and Parks |
| Marie Gilmond | Executive Director | Tapestry & Epic Programs |
| Sandra Grave | Director | Champlain Valley Head Start |
| Miranda Gray*# | Interim Deputy Commissioner | Child Development Division, Department for Children and Families |
| Cynthia Green# | Farm to Early Childhood Education Partnership Coordinator | Shelburne Farms |
| Sen. Ruth Hardy# | State Senator | Senate - Health and Welfare |
| Shelley Henson# | Director of Early Education | Champlain Valley School District |
| Diane Hermann-Artim | Associate Academic Dean | Community College of Vermont; chairs the Early Childhood Higher Ed Consortium |
| Margot Holmes | Current PCC Network President | PCC Network |
| Danielle Howes | Program Improvement Manager, Children's Integrated Services | Child Development Division, Department for Children and Families |
| Monica Hutt | Chief Prevention Officer | AHS |

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| Name | Role | Organization |
|---------------------------|---|---|
| Linda January# | Director | Otter Creek Children's Center |
| Amy Johnson* | Former President | Parent Child Center Network President |
| Michele Johnson | Consultant | Agency of Education |
| Ken Jones*# | Economic Research Analyst | Vermont Agency of Commerce |
| Bob Keeley | Education Project Manager | Agency of Education |
| David Kelley | Research & Statistics Section Chief | Agency of Education |
| Renee Kelly*# | Director, Vermont Head Start Collaboration Office | Department for Children and Families, Agency of human Services |
| Janet Kilburn | Early Childhood Director | Vermont Department of Health, Division of Maternal & Child Health |
| Leila LaRosa | Chelsea Site Coordinator | White River Valley Supervisory Union |
| Chloe Leary* | SAC private co-chair, Executive | Winston Prouty Center |
| Matt Levin# | Executive Director | Vermont Early Childhood Advocacy Alliance |
| Sheri Lynn | | Lynn Management Consulting |
| Sen. Ginny Lyons | Chair Senate Health and Human Services | Senate - Health and Welfare |
| Denise Main | Executive Director | Sunrise Family Resource Center |
| Katie McCarthy# | ECSE Coordinator II/IDEA 619 | Agency of Education |
| Janet McLaughlin# | Executive Director | Vermont Association for the Education of Young Children |
| Mike McRaith* | Assistant Executive Director | Vermont Principals Association |
| Emily Merrill* | | Parent |
| Laurie Metcalfe# | Director | Northshire Day School |
| Christel Michaud# | Director of Licensing | Child Development Division, Department for Children and Families |
| Becky Millard# | Private co-chair PPD, Director | Northern Lights at Community College of Vermont |
| Dr. Ashley Miller* | Pediatrician | South Royalton Health Center |
| Josh Miller | Executive Director | Janet S. Munt Family Room Parent Child Center |
| Nicole Miller | Assistant Director | Vermont Afterschool |
| Elizabeth Mitchell | Director, Early Childhood Program | Howard Center |
| Holly Morehouse | Executive Director | Vermont Afterschool |
| Amy Murphy# | Early Education Inclusion Coordinator | Agency of Education |
| Reeva Murphy | Former Deputy Commissioner | Child Development Division, Department for Children and Families |
| Chelsea Myers | Associate Executive Director | Vermont Superintendents Association |
| Jay Nichols | Executive Director | Vermont Principals Association |
| Nancy Noel | Director of Child Care Services | Southwestern Vermont Health Care |

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| Name | Role | Organization |
|---------------------------|--|--|
| Lauren Norford | Program Manager, Early Childhood Mental Health Services | Rutland Mental Health Services |
| Kaitlin Northey# | UVM EC Research Representative | University of Vermont |
| Laurel Omland | Director | Child, Adolescent & Family Unit, Vermont Department of Mental Health |
| Tricia Pawlik | Program Improvement Coordinator | Vermont Afterschool |
| Laura Pentenreider | HRSA Maternal depression grant manager | Vermont Department of Health, Division of Maternal & Child Health |
| Nancy Powers | Program Director | Northeast Kingdom Community Action (NEKCA) |
| Anne Rada | Child Care Benefits Administrator | Child Development Division |
| Betsy Rathbun-Gunn | Early Childhood Education Administrator | United Counseling Service Bennington College |
| Thato Ratsebe | Associate Director | Association of Africans Living in Vermont |
| Sonja Raymond# | Owner | Apple Tree Learning Center (also former Executive Director, Vermont Association for the Education of Young Children) |
| Aly Richards*# | Chief Executive Officer | Let's Grow Kids |
| Lynne Robbins# | Early Childhood and Afterschool Systems Specialist | Child Development Division, Department for Children and Families |
| Dana Robson | Children's Mental Health Operations Chief | Department of Mental Health |
| Kate Rogers# | Early Education Programs Manager | Agency of Education |
| Jim Salsgiver | Dorset School Board Member | VSBA Director |
| Wendy Scott | Universal Pre-K Coordinator | Agency of Education |
| Kendal Smith# | Director of Policy and Legislative Affairs | Governor's Office |
| Lauren Smith | Help Me Grow Coordinator | Vermont Department of Health, Division of Maternal & Child Health |
| Ilisa Stalberg*# | Maternal & Child Health Director | Vermont Department of Health, Division of Maternal & Child Health |
| Christy Swenson* | Head Start Program Director | Capstone Community Action |
| Margaret Tarmey | Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) Coordinator | Vermont Department of Health, Division of Maternal & Child Health |
| James Trimarchi# | Director of Child Care Services | Southwestern Vermont Health Care |
| Lindsey Trombley | Executive Director | Orange County Parent Child Center |
| Hilary Watson | Public co-chair F&C (Family Engagement Coordinator) | Interagency Coordinating Council for Vermont |
| Becca Webb* | Act 166 Coordinator/Special Education | Barre Unified Union School District |
| Rep. Kate Webb | State Representative | House of Representatives – Education |

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| Name | Role | Organization |
|---------------------------|-------------------------------|---|
| Cheryle Wilcox*# | Interagency Planning Director | Vermont Department of Mental Health |
| Rep. Theresa Wood# | State Representative | House of Representatives – Human Services |

*-Member of the State Advisory Council; #-Member of the Systems Analysis Advisory Committee

These interviews were conducted to inform the initial findings that were released in February 2021. After those findings were released, Foresight and Watershed conducted stakeholder outreach to hear reactions to the findings. That stakeholder outreach included the following Regional Council Meetings: Rutland Regional Council (February 17); Franklin-Grand Isle Regional Council (February 17); Southeast Vermont Regional Council (March 9); and the Caledonia-Southern Essex Regional Council (March 21). Additionally, meetings were held with members of the business community, early childhood educators, and other interested stakeholders.

Members of the Systems Analysis Advisory Committee who are not referenced in the above table are listed below.

| Name | Affiliation |
|------------------------------|--|
| Leslie Bergeron | CDD |
| Alyssa Blackwell | Seed and Sew |
| Heather Bouchey | Agency of Education |
| Morgan Crossman | Building Bright Futures |
| Wendy Cunningham | Missisquoi Valley School District |
| Elena Gustavson | Vermont Community Loan Fund |
| Danielle Harris | Greater Burlington YMCA |
| Kim Keiser | Turrell Fund |
| Katarina Lisaius | Agency of Human Services |
| Rose Morrison | Community College of Vermont/Northern Lights |
| Helen Myhre | Champlain Valley Head Start |
| Diane Nichols-Fleming | Northcountry Supervisory Union |
| Jen Severance | Let's Grow Kids |
| Wendy Trafton | AHS Secretary's Office |
| Michelle Trayah | Northwestern Counseling and Support Services |
| Sarah Truckle | AHS Secretary's Office |
| Beth Truzansky | Building Bright Futures |
| Keith Williams | CDD |

APPENDIX B

Resources Reviewed by the Foresight/Watershed Team

| Publishing Organization | Year | Title |
|--|------|---|
| Bipartisan Policy Center | 2021 | A Cohesive Vision for Child Care, Head Start, and Pre-K |
| Bridgespan Group | 2021 | How Philanthropy Can Support Systems-Change Leaders |
| Building Bright Futures | 2020 | How are Vermont's Young Child and Families? |
| | 2020 | Early Childhood Family Engagement Assessment Report 2020 |
| | 2020 | Early Childhood Systems Needs Assessment 2020 |
| | 2020 | Vermont Early Childhood Action Plan 2020 |
| | 2019 | How are Vermont's Young Children and Families? |
| | 2018 | How are Vermont's Young Children and Families? |
| | 2018 | Building Vermont's Future from the Child Up: 2018 Think Tank Recommendations |
| | 2017 | How are Vermont's Young Children and Families? |
| | 2017 | Substance Use & Opiate Task Force Report and 2017 Recommendations |
| | 2017 | Building Vermont's Future from the Child Up: Summit Report |
| | 2015 | Early Childhood Budget Report - FY2013 |
| Education Commission of the States | 2021 | Early Care and Education Governance |
| Education Development Center, Inc (EDC) | 2021 | Evaluation of Vermont's Early Childhood Professional Development System Final Report |
| | 2015 | Understanding and Assessing the Facility Needs of Vermont's Early Learning and Development Programs |
| Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis | 2015 | Investments in Early Childhood Development Yield High Public Returns |
| Institute for Child Success | 2015 | When Brain Science Meets Public Policy: Rethinking the Governance of Early Childhood Systems |
| Let's Grow Kids | 2022 | Child Care is Essential to Our Economy |
| | 2021 | 2021 Legislative Agenda |
| | 2020 | Access: The Need for More Early Childhood Educators in Vermont |
| | 2020 | 2020 Legislative Agenda: Strengthening Vermont's Early Care & Education System |

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| Publishing Organization | Year | Title |
|--|-------------|--|
| | 2020 | STALLED at the START Vermont's Child Care Challenge: An analysis of the Supply of and Demand for Regulated Child Care for Children Birth through Five in Vermont |
| | 2018 | STALLED at the START Vermont's Child Care Challenge: An analysis of the Supply of and Demand for Regulated Infant and Toddler Care in Vermont |
| | 2017 | Growing Vermont's Kids: A Policy Vision for Vermont's Early Care & Learning System |
| | 2016 | STALLED at the START Vermont's Child Care Challenge: An analysis of the Supply of and Demand for Regulated Infant and Toddler Care in Vermont |
| Let's Grow Kids and Vermont Birth to Five | 2018 | Who's Who and What's What in Vermont's Early Care and Learning System |
| Let's Grow Kids and Vermont Commission on Women | 2018 | Women, Work, and Child Care |
| Let's Grow Kids, Voices for Vermont's Children, Building Bright Futures, Vermont Early Childhood Advocacy Alliance, and Hunger Free Vermont | 2020 | COVID-19 Vermont Family Impact Survey |
| National Academies Press | 2015 | Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth Through Age 8: A Unifying Foundation |
| NORC at the University of Chicago | 2019 | Young Children's Early Care and Learning in Vermont |
| State Interagency Team | 2021 | Vermont System of Care Report 2021: Covid-19 Edition |
| University of Vermont Education and Social Services | 2021 | The Early MTSS-123 Project |
| University of Vermont Education and Social Services and the University of Vermont Center on Disability & Community Inclusion | 2021 | Promoting Inclusion and Exploring Supports for Children with Specialized Needs in Early Childhood Education Settings: Recommendations to Prevention Suspension and Expulsion |
| Vermont Agency of Education | 2020 | Pupil Weighting Factors Report Act 173 of 2018, Sec 11 |
| | 2019 | Prekindergarten Education Study: Final Report Subtitle: Act 11 (Special Session) of 2018, Section E.500.7 |

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| Publishing Organization | Year | Title |
|--|------|---|
| Vermont Agency of Education, Building Bright Futures, Help Me Grow, and Higher Ed-Early Childhood Consortium | 2021 | Vermont Guiding Principles: Supporting Each and Every Young Child and Family's Full and Equitable Participation |
| Vermont Agency of Human Services (AHS) | 2016 | Analysis of Early Childhood and Family Mental Health (ECFMH) in Vermont |
| Vermont Blue Ribbon Commission on Financing High Quality, Affordable Child Care | 2016 | Final Report 2016 |
| Vermont Department for Children and Families Child Development Division | 2020 | Vermont Regulated Child Care and Early Learning Program Report on Program Closures, Capacity and Enrollment |
| | 2019 | 2019 Vermont Child Care Market Rate Survey and Cost of Care Report |
| | 2019 | Data on the Regulated Child Care, Preschool and Afterschool Workforce and the Children's Integrated Services (CIS) Workforce |
| Vermont Department of Health | 2018 | Vermont State Health Assessment 2018 |
| | 2018 | Vermont State Health Improvement Plan 2019 - 2023 |
| Vermont Department of Health Maternal and Child Health Division | | Division of Maternal and Child Health Strategic Plan January 2019-December 2022 |
| | 2020 | Title V Five-Year Needs Assessment |
| Vermont Department of Mental Health | 2020 | Vision 2030: A 10-Year Plan for an Integrated and Holistic System of Care |
| Vermont Department of Mental Health and Building Bright Futures | 2021 | How Are Vermont's Young Children and Families? Report Supplement: Early Childhood and Family Mental Health During the COVID-19 Pandemic |
| Vermont Head Start Collaboration Office (VHSCO) | 2020 | 2019 Vermont Head Start and Early Head Start Needs Assessment Report |
| | 2018 | 2018 Vermont Head Start and Early Head Start Needs Assessment Report |
| | 2017 | 2017 Vermont Head Start and Early Head Start Needs Assessment Report |
| | 2016 | Combined 2015 and 2016 Vermont Head Start and Early Head Start Needs Assessment Report |
| Wilder Research | 2017 | Vermont's Early Care & Learning Dividend |