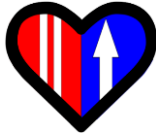


S.56 & Opportunities for the Evolution of VT's Early Care & Education System



**Paul Behrman, Principal Consultant
Walnut Leadership**

Testimony on S.56 Before
VT Senate Committee on Health and Welfare
February 15, 2023



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INTRODUCTIONS

Thank you! I am honored to be of service to you today.

Paul Behrman

- **Consultant / Trainer / Keynote Presenter** (July 2021 – present)
- **Director**, CVOEO / Champlain Valley Head Start – Burlington, VT (1999 – 2021)
- **Chair**, Vermont Head Start Association (2000 – 2021)
- **National and state commissions**, including OHS, PMFO, NHSA, and Gubernatorial Appointment to [Vermont Blue Ribbon Commission on Financing High Quality, Affordable Child Care](#)
- **Lived experience** as a VT ECE programs administrator
- **Knowledge gained** through 25+ years in Head Start management, advocacy and consulting work
- **Background**: Former Lawyer, Service-Oriented Leader, Social Justice Advocate



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ROAD MAP

1. Head Start Overview
2. S.56 – What's Wonderful
3. S.56 – Concerns
4. Opportunities for the Evolution of VT's Early Care & Education System
5. Thank you!



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HEAD START OVERVIEW

Head Start programs are national, federally-funded child and family development programs that provide high-quality, comprehensive education and development services for very low-income children (up to 130% FPL) and social services for their families.

- **Head Start** serves preschool children ages 3-5 and their families.
- **Early Head Start** serves pregnant women and children birth to age 3 and their families.

Comprehensive education and development services for children are designed to promote school readiness, and include early education, health, nutrition, mental health, and services for children with special needs. **Services for parents** are designed to promote family engagement, and include parent leadership and social service supports.

Head Start programs are *high-quality, research-based* programs with rigorous *accountability* and proven, *positive outcomes* for children.



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HEAD START OVERVIEW

Head Start / Early Head Start comprehensive development services include:

High quality, early education services to close the achievement gap for at-risk children

- Research-based curriculum and Teaching Strategies Gold developmental assessment aligned with the Vermont Early Learning Standards
- Focus on children's social, emotional, cognitive and physical development
- Specifically designed to support successful preparation for school readiness and transition to kindergarten
- Expertise in serving children with special needs, and individualizing services for all children



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HEAD START OVERVIEW

Head Start / Early Head Start comprehensive development services include:

Coordination of children's health services

- Health, behavioral and developmental screenings
- Medical, dental and mental health services
- Food and nutrition services
- Assuring that children have health care providers
- Assuring that children are up-to-date on physical and dental exams and receive needed follow-up treatment



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HEAD START OVERVIEW

Head Start / Early Head Start comprehensive development services include:

Family engagement and social service support for families

- Individualized home visits to engage parents in their children's growth, learning and development
- Assisting families in accessing social services and community resources to meet their needs
- Addressing a wide range of stressors and crises with the goal of helping to assure family stability and well-being



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S.56 – WHAT'S WONDERFUL

"So the greatest thing we can do is to find what is healthy and laudable about somebody else and reflect that to them. It's a large assignment, to be able to help people look deep within themselves and find what is wonderful in there, because at the core of everyone is something wonderful."

The Extraordinary Mr. Fred Rogers

And, the same can be said of S.56!



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S.56 – WHAT'S WONDERFUL

Leadership for the development of, and investment in, VT's Early Care & Education system

- **Thank you, Legislators, for your leadership** in prioritizing the continued development of Vermont's system of early care and education (ECE) for the benefit of Vermont's children, families and workforce!
- Your willingness to pursue increased public investment, and systems development, for Vermont's ECE system, is outstanding, and **we appreciate you!**



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S.56 – WHAT'S WONDERFUL

Proposes important changes to the Child Care Financial Assistance Program, including:

- Calculating payments to programs based on cost of care, inclusive of increased compensation for early childhood educators, instead of market rates.
- Expanding eligibility for families up to 450% of the federal poverty level by July 2024.
- Switching to an enrollment-based payment system instead of attendance-based payments.
- Removing all work, education, and health eligibility requirements so that eligibility for CCFAP is determined solely on family income.
- Creating a non-citizen child care assistance program for families who are not eligible for CCFAP due to citizenship status.



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S.56 – WHAT'S WONDERFUL

Other positive changes proposed in the bill, including:

- Asking DCF to work with Building Bright Futures to establish **tiered professional compensation standards for employees** in child care programs by 2024.
- Creating a **new property tax exemption** for family child care home programs, as well as for property owners that provide space to child care programs for at least 25% below fair market value.
- Providing **staff retention payments to child care programs**, including family child care home providers, in 2023.
- Providing additional funding for **early childhood educator scholarships**.



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S.56 – CONCERNS

- **Sweeping changes to VT's UPK system**
- **Significant governance changes which do not align with recent analysis commissioned by the VT Legislature**
- **Potential unintended consequences with substantial, adverse impacts for Vermont's children, families and workforce**



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S.56 – CONCERNS

Sweeping changes to Vermont's universal pre-K program that would have consequences for families and child care programs:

- **Requires all public schools to offer universal, voluntary, full-school-day, school year pre-K to all 4-year old children in their district**, either in their school buildings or by contracting with a neighboring school district.
- **Removes three-year-old children** from the universal pre-K program.
- **Removes private partner programs** from the universal pre-K program, while still allowing them to provide care to 4-year old children who choose to attend using financial support from CCFAP if they are eligible, or paying out of pocket.



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S.56 – CONCERNS

Significant governance changes that do not align with the recommendations of the [Vermont Child Care and Early Childhood Education Systems Analysis Final Report](#) that was commissioned by the VT Legislature and released last year by Watershed Advisors and Foresight Law and Policy.

- S.56 reflects more, continued suggestions regarding the shuffling of AOE and DCF/CDD oversight, with **more prospects for a bifurcated, rather than unified, VT ECE system**.
- S.56 fails to reflect the major recommendations of the Report, commissioned by the Legislature, for a **unified ECE system governed by a newly created, single unit of government**



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S.56 – CONCERNS

Significant governance changes that do not align with the recommendations of the ECE systems analysis commissioned by the VT Legislature

"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."

[Vermont Child Care and Early Childhood Education Systems Analysis Final Report](#) that was commissioned by the Legislature and released last year by Watershed Advisors and Foresight Law and Policy.



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S.56 – CONCERNS

Potential, unintended consequences with substantial, adverse impacts for Vermont's children, families and workforce

"The tendency of many states and cities has been to invest in preschool, since they can link these programs with the public education system. While preschool is an excellent public investment, **child care policy should begin at birth rather than in the year or two before kindergarten.**

In fact, a preschool-only approach can have unintended consequences on the price and supply of infant and toddler child care; many providers use revenues from larger classes of older children to subsidize the high costs associated with infant care. ***When public preschool crowds out the market for private tuition preschool, providers can no longer cross-subsidize the cost-intensive care of infants and toddlers, leading to fewer slots and higher prices."***

[Investing in Infant and Toddler Child Care to Strengthen Working Families. The Center for American Progress](#)



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OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE EVOLUTION OF VT'S EARLY CARE & EDUCATION SYSTEM

Gold standard = full public funding for care and education of children ages birth* to age 5



- Akin to full public funding for care and education of children ages 6 to 18 (K – grade 12 system)
- Unfortunately, as a society, to date we have failed to invest sufficiently in the most critical years of children's brain development; thus, we have failed to reap the rewards of that investment for the quality of life in our communities (e.g., educational attainment, health, poverty, racism, environment, crime and corrections system, etc.)

*Starting shortly after birth, many families need high-quality care for their newborn children. However, many agree that our societal focus should begin with *high-quality prenatal care* to assure the best outcomes for children and expectant families

"Building the system toward the gold standard": As a society, we should *begin with investment and systems-development for infants and toddlers and their families*



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OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE EVOLUTION OF VT'S EARLY CARE & EDUCATION SYSTEM

Develop, and invest in, high-quality ECE systems for Vermont's infants and toddlers and their families. #FirstYearsFirst

CHILDREN: Prenatal to age three is critical for lifelong health and development

"A growing understanding of how responsive relationships and language-rich experiences for young children help build a strong foundation for later success in school has driven increased investment and sparked innovation in early learning around the world. The rapidly advancing frontiers of 21st-century biological sciences now provide compelling evidence that the foundations of lifelong health are also built early, **with increasing evidence of the importance of the prenatal period and first few years after birth**. The science is clear on two points:

- What happens during this period can have substantial effects on both short- and long-term outcomes in learning, behavior, and both physical and mental health.
- All of these domains are remarkably interdependent and the potential for learning is inexorably linked to the quality of physical and mental health."

[Connecting the Brain to the Rest of the Body: Early Childhood Development and Lifelong Health Are Deeply Intertwined](#). Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University.



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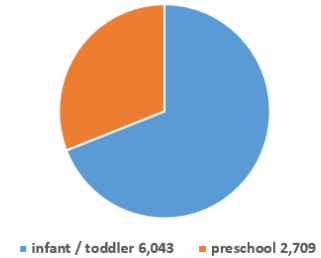
Develop, and invest in, high-quality ECE systems for Vermont's infants and toddlers and their families. #FirstYearsFirst

FAMILIES: Infant / toddler care is expensive, and supply is scarce

"Currently, child care is most expensive and hardest to find when children are in their first few years of life, making infant and toddler care a **promising investment in the financial security of families and the well-being of young children**. The price of infant care today is higher than public college tuition in most states."

[Investing in Infant and Toddler Child Care to Strengthen Working Families.](#)
[The Center for American Progress.](#)

VT - Need for Infant/Toddler slots vs. Preschool slots



[STALLED AT THE START:](#)
[VERMONT'S CHILD CARE CHALLENGE – Feb. 2022](#)



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FAMILIES: The cost of Infant / toddler care most adversely impacts middle- and low-income families and women

"For most parents, child care choices are constrained by the high cost of providing care for an infant or toddler. With few affordable options, some parents leave the workforce out of necessity rather than choice, which can have a compounding effect on lifetime earnings and savings. This circumstance disproportionately affects women and has been identified as one of the primary reasons that the United States now trails other economically developed nations when it comes to female labor force participation."

[Investing in Infant and Toddler Child Care to Strengthen Working Families.](#) [The Center for American Progress.](#)

#equity.



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WORKFORCE: Strong Theory #1 (data needed):

Within the current ECE system, there is a **higher percentage of vacancies** in available infant / toddler teacher jobs than in available preschool teacher jobs.

- General consensus is that it is much more challenging to recruit and retain infant/toddler teacher workforce than preschool teacher workforce
- Likely attributable to infant / toddler teacher wages being among the lowest wages in the field...



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WORKFORCE: Strong Theory #2 (more clearly defined data needed):

Within the current ECE system, infant / toddler teachers have **the lowest average wages in the field**

Vermont ECE Wages		
Source: BLS Occupational Employment Statistics		
Job	Average hourly wage	Notes
Kindergarten Teachers	Annual wage: \$56,360 + benefits • If divided by 2,080 hours (full year) hourly: \$27.10 • If divided by 1,680 hours (school year) hourly: \$33.55	Occupation code 25-2012
Preschool Teachers	\$18.84 / benefits?	Occupation code 25-2011
Infant/Toddler Teachers	\$15.84 / benefits?	Occupation code 39-9011 (labeled as "Childcare Workers")

Source: [BLS Occupational Employment Statistics](#)



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Develop, and invest in, high-quality ECE systems for Vermont's infants and toddlers and their families. #FirstYearsFirst

HOW WE GET THERE – A #FirstYearsFIRST DRAFT

1. High-quality program models which drive funding and investment plans
2. Innovative, high-quality governance systems
3. World-class, modernized delivery systems and services



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Develop, and invest in, high-quality ECE systems for Vermont's infants and toddlers and their families. #FirstYearsFirst

HOW WE GET THERE – A #FirstYearsFIRST DRAFT:

1. High-quality program models which drive funding and investment plans
 - Update high-quality program modeling and cost-modeling, built upon and extending the work of the [Vermont Blue Ribbon Commission on Financing High Quality, Affordable Child Care](#)
 - Use modernized program and cost models, and community data, to drive funding and investment levels and plans



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Develop, and invest in, high-quality ECE systems for Vermont's infants and toddlers and their families. #FirstYearsFirst

HOW WE GET THERE – A #FirstYearsFIRST DRAFT:

2. Innovative, high-quality governance systems

- Structure a unified Vermont ECE system governed by a newly created, single unit of government

"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.

[Vermont Child Care and Early Childhood Education Systems Analysis Final Report that was commissioned by the Legislature and released last year by Watershed Advisors and Foresight Law and Policy.](#)



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Develop, and invest in, high-quality ECE systems for Vermont's infants and toddlers and their families. #FirstYearsFirst

HOW WE GET THERE – A #FirstYearsFIRST DRAFT:

3. World-class, modernized delivery systems and services

- "Accentuate the positive." Continued development and expansion:
 - High-quality: develop new programs and expand existing programs
 - Professionalized workforce
 - Better systems/service integration with health, mental health, family services
 - Modernized infrastructure: facilities, transportation, technology, etc.
 - Economies of scale
 - Positive, trackable impacts and outcomes for children, families and communities
 - More.



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THANK YOU!

- Thank you for your precious time and for this opportunity!
- Contact:

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#FirstYearsFirst

