

My name is Kim Freeman, and I teach aspiring early childhood educators at Windham Regional Career Center, the career and tech ed, or CTE, program in Brattleboro. I also teach foundational early childhood education online courses at Community College of Vermont, working with learners across the state. I've worked in many roles—infant-toddler teacher, preschool teacher, and for 11 years, I ran a family child care home, which I later transitioned into a center when a space opened in my town.

I support S.206 and early childhood educator licensure because every child deserves a high-quality early learning experience, and that starts with well-prepared educators. As a CTE teacher and a CCV instructor, I can tell you about some pathways that currently exist, and some that have the potential to expand once licensure is established. But I will start by saying the future workforce is in my classroom today. My high school students are eager to learn, earn college credits, do fieldwork, and graduate qualified for licensure at ECE I. They leave my program with 12 college credits and paid experience through the Youth Apprenticeship program. They're not intimidated by coursework or licensure requirements—they're motivated and proud of their growing expertise.

When I asked my students what they wanted you to know, one student said,

“ I am a 10th-grade student at Brattleboro Union High School, and I am enrolled in WRCC in the Early Childhood Education program. Since I was 4 years old, all I wanted to do was be a teacher and work with people to help them grow. I wanted to understand the best way to help, which is why I took my WRCC class to learn about the child's development and ways to support them. I could have just gone into babysitting and looking after children; however, now that I've taken my education course, I realize that working with kids is not as simple as just wanting to and finding joy in it. After taking this class, I feel better prepared to support children's growth and development in a workplace setting and even when caring for my younger siblings. For example, I know how to de-escalate situations without making the child feel shame, I also know how to regulate myself along with helping children find skills that work best for them to self regulate, I know how to educate children on topics in a fun and engaging way, and I know how to solve a conflict in the classroom without raising my voice or being visibly upset. These are only a few things I learned from taking this class.”

These sentiments were echoed throughout the class. Future early childhood educators want to be prepared to handle the complexity of a classroom and skillfully support the children's development.

Of the 17 CTE programs in Vermont, 8 already have clear early childhood education pathways. There's a program opening in Barre, and I've consulted with them about how to structure their program and what CCV coursework to offer. This expansion is

informed by the work to get our preparation programs ready for ECE licensure, aligned with national recommendations and the recommendations of our own state workforce. I have no doubt that once early childhood education is a recognized profession with individual licensure, more interest will be generated.

The charge of CTE programs is to provide pathways for professions that 1. are needed—and our state needs child care—and 2. that are viable careers. Well, we built that blueprint. The investments that have already been made through Act 76 support living wages: First Children’s Finance recently showed that thanks to that investment, [family child care is now a viable business model in Vermont](#). And this legislation before you creates clear career paths. S.206 allows my students to see their careers unfold before them.

So let’s talk about these pathways for young people. Does every high schooler in Vermont have CTE programs available to them? I believe they should, and my experience shows that when we create ECE pathways, students line up to participate. This is the kind of expansion that happens after licensure is established, and it will. ECE I, ECE II, and ECE III don’t even exist yet, and the kids are making plans around them. If we build it, they will come.

So what other pathways are available, right now, to high schoolers? In Vermont, every high school student has vouchers to take two college classes for free. Right now, in my Intro to ECE CCV class, I have two non-CTE high school students who have chosen to use their vouchers to take Intro to ECE, and both of them are so excited that they’re going to continue studying it.

The resources to keep studying are there for all students. My students take advantage of free college classes, scholarships, and grants, allowing them to earn associate and bachelor’s degrees without overwhelming student debt. Some of them want to go to college out of state, or they want a traditional four-year campus experience. However, many don’t want to, or don’t see that as an option, or need to work full-time. Many want to stay in their home communities. When we go over all the resources and the paths offered through CCV and Vermont State University, they realize that they can make this work. My CTE graduates can build on the 12 credits they earned through my program and earn a degree while working full-time in early childhood education. When students see a clear career path, they stay in the field. A license to practice means workforce retention.

The future of early childhood education is bright. I see passionate, driven students ready to commit to this career. The system of licensure in S.206 is how we elevate the profession, strengthen our workforce, and ensure that all children receive the high-quality education they deserve.

Thank you,

Kim Freeman, Brattleboro