



Date: February 13, 2025  
 To: Chair Wood and Chair Conlon, and members of the House Committee on Human Services and House Committee on Education  
 CC: Representative Rey Garofano and Senator Martine Larocque Gulick, Legislative members on the State Advisory Council  
 From: Dr. Morgan Crossman, Executive Director, Building Bright Futures  
 Re: Building Bright Futures Budget Allocation

### **Building Bright Futures’ Role in Vermont’s Early Childhood System**

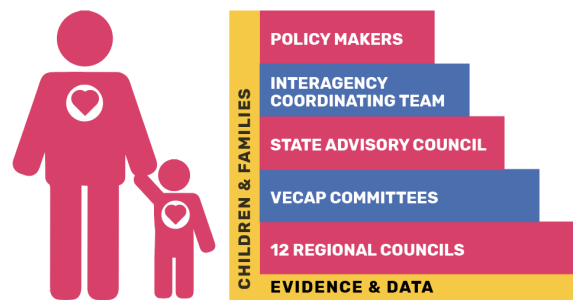
Building Bright Futures (BBF) is Vermont’s early childhood public-private partnership charged under Title 33, Chapter 46 and the federal Head Start Act to serve as Vermont’s Early Childhood State Advisory Council. State statute charges BBF with maintaining and monitoring the vision and strategic plan for Vermont’s early childhood system and serving as the primary advisor to the Governor and legislature on the status of children in the prenatal period through age 8 and their families.

**BBF’s mission:** To improve the well-being of children and families in Vermont by using evidence to inform policy and bringing voices together across sectors and within regions to discuss critical challenges and problem-solve.

Building Bright Futures State Advisory Council (SAC) does not directly lobby for or oppose any specific bill or action discussed within the legislature or legislatively appointed committee. Our role is to convene and elevate the voices of families and early childhood partners, monitor the system by identifying high-quality up-to-date data, and synthesize this information to advise decision-makers.

**BBF Network Infrastructure:** BBF has five primary responsibilities: to advise, monitor, convene, empower, and respond. These roles and charges are fulfilled through BBF’s infrastructure, which includes a network of over 500 early childhood partners (figure below):

- A network of 12 Regional Councils convene early childhood experts throughout Vermont communities to move forward local and statewide early childhood priorities.
- 7 Vermont Early Childhood Action Plan (VECAP) committees uphold and monitor the early childhood vision and strategic plan for Vermont.
- The State Advisory Council (SAC) brings together cross-sector early childhood leaders to issue recommendations, increase coordination to advance a connected and evolving early childhood system, and advise the Governor and legislature.



**BBF harnesses the power of the Vermont Early Childhood Data and Policy Center and the expertise of the network to support data-informed decision-making and policies.**

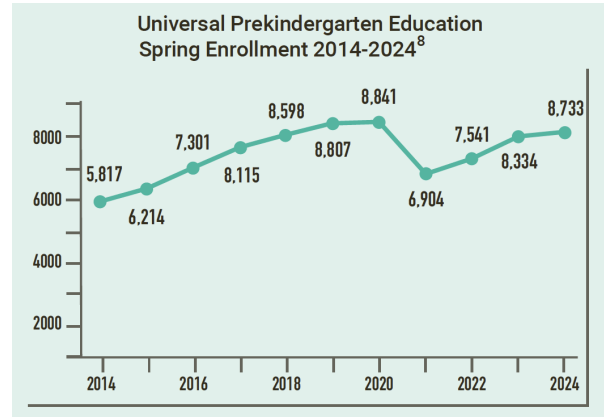
## Data snapshot on Prekindergarten Education in Vermont

**Enrollment:** Overall we’ve seen an increase over time in pre-K program enrollment. Most recent data reflects approximately 8,700 children in Vermont participating in universal pre-K. UPK enrollment has recovered to pre-pandemic levels.

**Access:** Vermont also consistently ranks 2nd in the country for having the highest access for 3-years for universal pre-K, and has been in this position since 2017. Vermont has ranked sixth for 4-year-olds in access to UPK

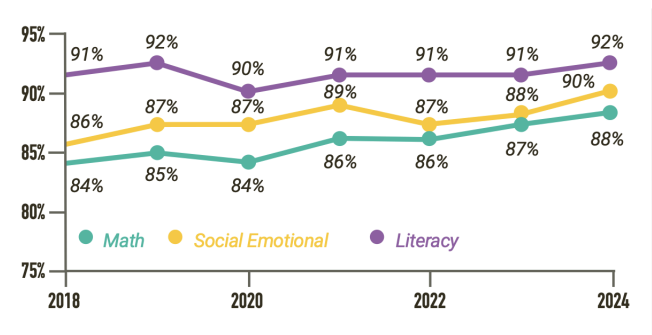
**Capacity:** When considering potential decision-making or policy changes related to the program, it is important to understand the current capacity of pre-K in the state. Licensed capacity of universal pre-K suggests that 43% of slots are available in school-based programs and 57% are available in center-based and family child care homes, which reinforces the importance of a mixed delivery system in our rural state.

**Child Outcomes:** Child outcomes are critical to review right now as we’re thinking about changes to the system. Quantitative and qualitative data illustrate that there are some things that are not working for children, families, and programs that need to be strengthened. As we consider the best ways to expand the program, it is important to target the components that aren’t working well, without changing or sacrificing the elements that are working well.



- **Readiness for Kindergarten:** Children who attended a pre-K program before entering kindergarten had higher rates of readiness for kindergarten than those who did not attend. In the fall of 2023, 85% of students were identified as ready for kindergarten. Children who attended a publicly funded pre-K were more likely to be ready (87%) than those who did not (79%).<sup>1</sup>
- **Social Emotional Development & Math:** There has been an increasing trend for 4-year-olds meeting or exceeding expectations for math and social emotional development in the spring of each year, while literacy has remained relatively steady over the same time period.<sup>2</sup>
- **Benefit from length of access:** Research shows us that two years of access to pre-K is beneficial for child development outcomes, particularly as we’re looking to ensure our children are prepared to enter kindergarten.<sup>3</sup>

**Figure 18: 4-Year-Olds Meeting/Exceeding Expectations for Social, Emotional, Literacy & Math Assessments<sup>15</sup>**



<sup>1</sup> Vermont’s Early Childhood Data & Policy Center at Building Bright Futures. (2025). The State of Vermont’s Children: 2024 Year in Review. Building Bright Futures: Williston, VT. Retrieved from [www.buildingbrightfutures.org/data-page/state-of-vermonts-children/](http://www.buildingbrightfutures.org/data-page/state-of-vermonts-children/)

<sup>2</sup> Vermont’s Early Childhood Data & Policy Center at Building Bright Futures. (2025). The State of Vermont’s Children: 2024 Year in Review. Building Bright Futures: Williston, VT. Retrieved from [www.buildingbrightfutures.org/data-page/state-of-vermonts-children/](http://www.buildingbrightfutures.org/data-page/state-of-vermonts-children/)

<sup>3</sup> National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER). (2024). State of Preschool: 2023 Yearbook. Retrieved from <https://nieer.org/yearbook/2023/executive-summary#:~:text=Access%20for%203%2Dyear%2Dolds,outside%20of%20preschool%20special%20education.>



<b>Regulated Early Childhood Education Programs</b>		
Children under 5 enrolled in early childhood education programs	<b>16,799</b>	December 2023
Licensed Capacity		December 2024
Infants	3,711	
Toddlers	3,710	
Preschoolers	12,622	
Pre-K	9,670	
<b>Child Care Financial Assistance Program (CCFAP)</b>		
Children enrolled in the Child Care Financial Assistance Program	10,169	December 2024
<b>Head Start</b>		
Head Start Enrollment	709 children ages 3 to 5	Sep. 2023 - Aug. 2024
Early Head Start Enrollment	540 children under 3	Sep. 2023 - Aug. 2024
<b>Universal Prekindergarten Education</b>		
Enrollment	<b>8,733</b>	Spring 2024
Licensed Capacity	<b>9,419</b>	December 2024
School based	4,057 (43%)	
Private program	5,362 (57%)	

**Data Efforts resulting from the Prekindergarten Education Implementation Committee (PEIC)**

The Prekindergarten Education Implementation Committee (PEIC), composed of 18 members representing different organizations and constituencies, was created to assist the Agency of Education in improving and expanding accessible, affordable, and high-quality prekindergarten education for all 4-year-old children on a full-day basis on or before July 1, 2026. The PEIC met monthly over the course of 16 months through virtual committee and subcommittee meetings, in addition to one in-person meeting, [resulting in a report](#) delivered to the Legislature on December 6, 2024, issuing four key recommendations, alongside a compilation of documentation and data on the current status of universal prekindergarten education in Vermont’s mixed delivery system.

The appendix of the Prekindergarten Education Implementation Committee’s final report illustrates that despite a challenging timeline and scope, members of the PEIC were able to produce important data and resources that can and should be used going forward to inform policy and decision-making related to UPK in Vermont.



The following survey efforts yielded important qualitative data in addition to interviews, public comment, and a range of data captured prior to the PEIC's work:

- A survey distributed public prekindergarten teachers fielded through the VTNEA list
- A survey distributed to principals through the Vermont Principals Association list
- A survey distributed to all Vermont superintendents by the Agency of Education
- A survey distributed to school board members through the Vermont School Boards Association list

Themes resulting from the survey are outlined below. A more comprehensive review of the findings can be found on page 71-100 of the PEIC report.

**Key themes Identified that we need to consider in expanding our models:**

- **Infrastructure Needs:**
  - Retrofitting classrooms, expanding transportation, addressing deferred building maintenance
  - Developing age-appropriate spaces (bathrooms, playgrounds, heating/cooling, etc.)
- **Workforce**
  - Need for qualified early childhood educators, special education staff, and support personnel
  - Impact on staffing ratios, licensing, and professional development needs

**Impact on 3-Year-Olds and Mixed-Delivery Model:**

- Concerns about removing 3-year-olds from pre-K programs, importance of prioritizing developmental outcomes
- Challenges with delivering special education services for young children

**Regulatory and Oversight Issues:**

- Need for simplified oversight and regulation across agencies
- Desire for clearer communication and stronger coordination between public/community based programs as well as between the state and local LEAs

**Financial Considerations:**

- Significant funding required for staff time, infrastructure, transportation, technology upgrades, and special education services
- Requests for increased pupil funding adjustments due to financial concerns
- Financial strain on school budgets amid state budget cuts

**Importance of Maintaining Mixed-Delivery Model:**

- Flexibility for families, particularly in rural areas
- Support for 3-year-olds, child care and afterschool care schedules that work for families
- Collaboration with community-based providers and programs

**Special Education and Transition Needs:**

- Restructuring of special education services for young children
- Transition planning for 3-year-olds moving from early intervention services to public schools
- Impact on children with disabilities, mental health challenges, and special health care needs



### Areas of agreement:

- Coordinated approach for pre-K expansion
- Strong partnerships, sustainable funding, and clear communication needed to address challenges
- Maintaining access for 3-year olds mixed delivery, and expansion for 4-year olds
- High quality, well educated workforce
- Need to truly understand the cost across settings
- We need data infrastructure, systems, capacity

### Strengths and Challenges of the PEIC

The following strengths and challenges are of note from Building Bright Futures' role in monitoring Act 76. In addition to BBF's monitoring role, BBF's executive director held a voting seat on the PEIC and nominated and supported two family representatives on the committee.

#### Strengths of the PEIC

Strong facilitation: Molly Loomis was hired as an expert facilitator to support the co-chairs, the Interim Secretaries of Education (first Heather Bouchey, then Zoie Saunders), and DCF Deputy Commissioner Janet McLaughlin in fulfilling the charge of the PEIC. Molly Loomis executed her role as an expert facilitator by supporting AOE and CDD in the following: convening the committee and subcommittees; conducting surveys and presenting emerging themes; consistently communicating with committee members; developing a strong and adaptable project plan; coordinating presentations and data collection efforts; identifying areas of agreement and tension points; facilitating challenging discussions about vision, strategy, and recommendations; and summarizing the committee's work in a final report.

Commitment to data-driven decision-making: The PEIC worked to ground discussions in existing state and national data as well as national best practice by bringing in content experts to present and participate in discussions with the committee. Further, committee members helped compile and document existing data, data gaps, and ongoing data efforts; field an online survey to public prekindergarten teachers, principals, school board members, and superintendents; facilitate a group interview protocol; and compile existing constituent feedback.

Commitment of committee members: PEIC members demonstrated passion and commitment to the process, child outcomes, and improving access to pre-K statewide.

Data and resources that resulted from PEIC's work: The appendix of the Prekindergarten Education Implementation Committee's final report illustrates that despite a challenging timeline and scope, members of the PEIC were able to produce important data and resources that can and should be used going forward to inform policy and decision-making related to UPK in Vermont. In addition to the qualitative survey data outlined above, the following information gathering and documentation were critical additions to the work:

- An interview protocol used with private pre-K teachers, UPK coordinators, leaders from AOE, CDD, Head Start, and others, page 54-66 of the PEIC Report.
- Constituent data and feedback, page 100-102 of the PEIC Report.



- A [Pre-K Program Quality Matrix](#): The report contains a number of tables comparing Vermont’s current UPK program to national quality standards related to programmatic elements spanning topics such as staff: child ratios, Lead Classroom Teacher qualifications, curriculum supports, and more, page 17-24 of the PEIC Report.

### Challenges of the PEIC

Unrealistic charge and timeline: While the Legislature was well-intentioned in charging the PEIC with identifying next steps in expanding Vermont’s universal prekindergarten program, the committee was not set up for success given a number of factors that made its charge, scope, and timeline unfeasible:

- Lack of aligned vision: It is important to name the lack of a unified vision for pre-K policy statewide. The majority of the committee was not in agreement with the vision or philosophy behind pre-K as articulated by the Legislature. Some of the areas of biggest disagreement with that vision and charge related to removing access to pre-K for 3-year-olds, concerns about the capacity of public schools and the potential financial impacts on private child care programs, the impact on afterschool and out-of-school-time care, and the financial impact on the state as a whole if the program were to expand as initially intended, given the lack of data on cost, infrastructure needs, and workforce needs.
- Lack of existing data and systems: During the previous legislative session, many partners testified to the current lack of infrastructure and systems in place to capture data needed to inform decision-making. These partners made recommendations for capturing data prior to forming a committee. In particular, the lack of data on costs associated with changing or expanding the system was raised as a significant concern among many partners. Without adequate resources being committed (funding, staff capacity, mechanisms in place), collecting all of the new data on the current system required to inform decision-making was not feasible. The committee compiled existing data and collected basic information from key education partners to inform decisions to the best of their ability with the resources at hand. As anticipated, not all of the data required by Act 76 was available, but a list of ongoing data gaps was compiled, and next steps were articulated.

Evolving political landscape: Since the passing of Act 76, several initiatives and events have evolved that have impacted the work of the PEIC.

- School budget crisis: In 2024, Vermont experienced a statewide trend of school budgets being voted down, indicating significant community concern about the rising cost of property taxes and education spending.
- The Commission on the Future of Public Education: The Commission on the Future of Public Education was launched under H.887 to study Vermont’s public education system and make recommendations to ensure all students are afforded quality educational opportunities in an efficient, sustainable, and equitable education system that will enable students to achieve the highest academic outcomes. While not focused on pre-K, this work happening in parallel should be considered when making decisions about the future of the pre-K program, and the vision for expanding pre-K should ideally be a shared one across conversations related to the future of our education system in Vermont.



- Containment of Education Spending: Governor Scott issued a call to school leaders and school boards to contain education costs and suggested the importance of collaboration among public, private, and community education system partners to solve the challenge of continuously increasing property taxes.
- Leadership transitions: Since the committee was created, the Agency of Education has seen a series of leadership transitions, including the Secretary and Deputy Secretary roles. Like all leadership transitions, this turnover presented challenges for executing the scope given ongoing onboarding and orienting to the system, as well as challenges with dividing co-leadership responsibilities for the PEIC.

### Outcome and Final Report of PEIC

The final PEIC Report was submitted on December 6 after a brief extension was requested and granted by the Legislature (the report was originally slated to be submitted December 1, 2024). The report summarized a range of influences on the committee process, including reflections on the challenges outlined above; situated the work within available national and statewide data; outlined successes and opportunities for improvement; and named four key recommendations that resulted from the committee’s work. These recommendations include:

1. Maintaining the current prekindergarten benefit for 3-year-olds
2. Expanding access for 4-year-olds
3. Commissioning an analysis of Vermont’s pupil weight for prekindergarten
4. Reviewing methodology for establishing prekindergarten payments to non-school-based programs and proposing updates

### The State Advisory Council Network’s 2025 Policy Recommendations Related to Pre-K

On Nov. 4, 2024, the State Advisory Council (SAC) formally endorsed the [Policy Recommendations](#) of the Vermont Early Childhood State Advisory Council Network for 2025. These annual recommendations represent the most pressing and actionable priorities for early childhood stakeholders throughout the Building Bright Futures Network. The [State Advisory Council](#) (SAC) is Vermont’s Governor-appointed, primary advisory body on the well-being of children from the prenatal period through age 8 and their families. In partnership with Vermont’s Early Childhood Action Plan (VECAP) Committees and the Regional Councils, the SAC sets priorities and strategic direction for statewide initiatives using the VECAP and up-to-date data. The annual recommendations are developed with input across all BBF Network gatherings and seek to identify the current gaps and needs in policy, promote action in strategic areas for the coming year, ensure recommendations are measurable, and move Vermont toward a more equitable early childhood system. Below are the 2025 recommendations endorsed by the State Advisory Council related to Vermont’s universal pre-K program.

### Monitor to Ensure Equitable Access for All 3- & 4-Year-Olds in Vermont’s Universal Pre-K Program

- Ensure Vermont’s Universal Prekindergarten Education (UPK) program continues to lead the country by maintaining universal access for 3- and 4-year-olds in a mixed-delivery system (school-based, center-based, and home-based programs) and centering the developmental needs of young children and their families. *Renewed Policy Recommendation (2022, 2023)*
- Task the Agency of Education, Child Development Division, and Building Bright Futures to create, implement, and update as necessary a monitoring and accountability protocol to better monitor Vermont’s Universal Prekindergarten Education (UPK), including robust data collection and analysis. The development of the process should include feedback from impacted communities and individuals



(families, educators, Act 166 Coordinators, the Prekindergarten Education Implementation Committee, preK–12 administrators, etc.) and should be mindful of the additional capacity and skills reporting this data requires from programs. Collected data should include financial information, enrollment by student characteristics, staffing, and student outcomes.

- Secure sustained funding for personnel across all three entities to ensure high-quality data through the following activities: data management and reporting activities, training and TA to support quality collection and reporting, engagement in data integration meetings and visioning, data analysis, and making data publicly available.

### **What the SAC’s Policy Recommendations Mean Related to Pre-K**

Vermont is seen as a national leader for its mixed-delivery pre-K program for children 3, 4, and 5 years of age not yet enrolled in kindergarten. As of 2023, [the state ranked sixth in the country for access for 4-year-olds and second for access for 3-year-olds](#). During the 2022-2023 school year, [universal pre-K enrollment was at 8,334](#). In June 2024, [42% of capacity for universal pre-K children was in school-based programs and 58% in private programs](#).

This year, the Prekindergarten Education Implementation Committee (PEIC) has been convened under the legislature’s charge to examine existing delivery of universal pre-K and make recommendations for expanding access for children through the public school system, private providers in contract with the school district, or both.

The BBF Network sees it as critical to continue our state’s commitment to serving both 3- and 4-year-olds in the program and maintaining the program’s mixed-delivery model, which [aligns with national best practices](#) and meets the varied needs of children and families. In addition to this commitment, increased resources and capacity are needed to build out a more robust system for monitoring and data collection work to understand and track over time key characteristics of the program, such as student outcomes, staffing, and student characteristics in order to ensure equitable access and program efficacy.

### **Why these Recommendations Matter for UPK in Vermont**

Based on the experiences of families, early educators, and young children, the current universal pre-K system has many strengths to continue leaning into, especially its mixed-delivery model, which centers the developmental and varied needs of young children and families. Within the work of the PEIC, the need for stronger data and research systems has become increasingly apparent. Without investing more resources to collect needed data on pre-K, it will not be possible for the legislature to make data-informed decisions while considering expanding access to the program.