



Date: January 31, 2025
 To: Chair Wood and members of the House Committee on Human Services
 CC: Representative Rey Garofano, Legislative representative on the State Advisory Council
 From: Dr. Morgan Crossman, Executive Director, Building Bright Futures
 Re: Overview of Building Bright Futures and Vermont’s Early Childhood System

Building Bright Future’s Role in Vermont’s Early Childhood System

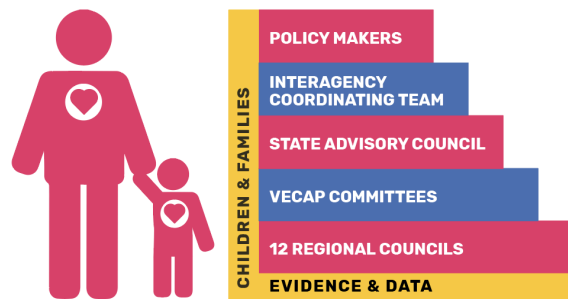
Building Bright Futures (BBF) is Vermont’s early childhood public-private partnership charged under Title 33, Chapter 46 and the federal Head Start Act to serve as Vermont’s Early Childhood State Advisory Council. State statute charges BBF with maintaining and monitoring the vision and strategic plan 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 eight 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 450 early childhood partners (figure below):

- A network of 12 Regional Councils convening early childhood experts throughout Vermont communities to move forward local and statewide early childhood priorities;
- 7 Vermont Early Childhood Action Plan (VECAP) committees upholding and monitoring 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 TO INFORM POLICY & ACCOUNTABILITY

BBF is committed to using and producing the most up-to-date, high-quality data to inform decision-making and serves a critical role in Vermont, operating as a broker of data and information to guide policy decisions and strategy related to children, families, and the early childhood system.

MONITORING

Vermont's Early Childhood Data and Policy Center: The center is designed to be an independent source of data, research, and publications on the early childhood system, including:

- [Vermont's Early Childhood Data Portal](#), where you can sort, visualize, and download data
- A searchable database of BBF's [publications and resources](#)
- BBF's recent [legislative advisement](#) and [Act 76 monitoring](#) (additional information on Act 76 monitoring is below)

[The State of Vermont's Children](#) is Building Bright Future's keystone report and contains key indicators and trends to watch related to the wellbeing of young children and their families. Our 2024 Report elevates the following indicators that reflect both areas where Vermont is successfully supporting young children and their families, and areas where increased focus is needed.

Bright spots for the well-being of young children and families in 2024:

- With increased enrollment in CCFAP, Vermont is leading the country in prioritizing affordability and access to child care.
- Vermont is consistently leading the country in access to UPK for three- and four-year olds.
- Increasing number of four-year-old children meeting or exceeding expectations in math and social emotional development.

Areas to monitor that data in 2024 indicates are a challenge for Vermont children:

- A striking increase in the number of homeless children.
- Significant increases in the number of children with emotional and mental health conditions over time.
- High rates of Perinatal Mood and Anxiety Disorders.
- Low rates of third graders being proficient or above in reading, rates much lower for historically marginalized children.
- While Vermont has rates of actual child victimization consistently falling below the national average, our surveillance practices and laws are likely deterring families in need of support from seeking resources.
- Our antiquated data systems are hindering our ability to monitor the systems and improve our ability to meet the needs of our kids.

Vermont's available data on the well-being of children and their families can help illustrate what challenges to consider prioritizing in the coming year. Our decisions on what to prioritize for families and children indicate what we value most.

MONITORING ACT 76

Building Bright Futures is charged with monitoring Act 76 and is tracking both implementation and impacts related to the law's significant changes to and investments in Vermont's child care system. In order to do this well, BBF collaborates with a wide range of partners including state agencies, Vermont's federal delegation, community partners, early childhood educators, and families. The [2024 Act 76 Monitoring Report](#) was

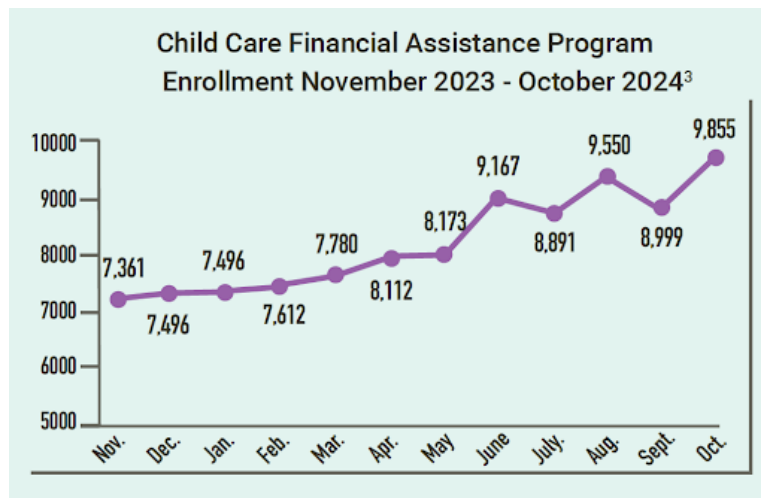


submitted to the legislature on January 15, 2025. More information, including a plain language version of the report can be found [on Building Bright Futures' website](#).

Key components of our Act 76 monitoring efforts, as outlined in the report including tracking timeliness, communication, and other indicators related to implementation; gathering qualitative data and feedback from early childhood partners on both implementation and impact of the law and its investments; elevating areas of challenge or intended consequence related to the law and its investments; participating in and elevating findings and challenges associated with the Prekindergarten Education Implementation Committee (PEIC); and regularly compiling, updating, and disseminating key indicators related to child care access, affordability, quality, workforce, the child care sector, and more.

A snapshot of some of these indicators here illustrate just some of the impacts we are tracking related to Vermont's investments in the early education system. We would be happy to return to the committee to testify in more depth on our 2024 monitoring efforts.

- **CAPACITY:** Increase of 170 infant slots in 2024 and in 2024, more child care programs opened (60) than closed (40) for the first time since at least 2018
- **AFFORDABILITY:** 550 families at 175% FPL who no longer have a copay
- **AWARENESS:** 1,500 CCFAP applications submitted online in two months
- **ENROLLMENT:** 1,256 families above 400% now enrolled in CCFAP
- **WORKFORCE:** 480 career ladder bonuses awarded October 2023 to September 2024



ADVISEMENT

2025 State Advisory Council Policy Recommendations

Annually, the Building Bright Futures team works with the State Advisory Council and Network to identify the current gaps and needs for young children, their families, and the early childhood system. More of this process can be [found here](#). This year's recommendations represent needs and emerging priorities from across the state's early childhood system including:



- Enacting best practices statewide for elevating the voices of families and community members.
- Investing to ensure families have access to safe and secure housing in the immediate term and long-term.
- Supporting families, children, staff, and providers navigating the child welfare system by investing in system improvements that will improve service delivery.
- Investing to ensure inclusion and meet social-emotional health needs in early education and afterschool programs.
- And many more: [Read the full recommendations here.](#)

ACCOUNTABILITY

Due to the complicated system of governance and administration, including multiple Departments, Divisions, Agencies, community and private partners that oversee and deliver services to young children and families, it is critical to have an accountability and monitoring entity for Vermont’s early childhood system. BBF functions as this accountability infrastructure. Our team’s strong relationships, content expertise, and infrastructure to coordinate and convene cross-system conversations enable us to play a key role in holding partners accountable and elevating areas for strengthened continuous quality improvement. If partners across the system aren’t able to follow through in their role, responsibility, or commitments, we have the infrastructure and relationships to hold each other accountable by immediately identifying and communicating the issue, providing guidance on how to correct or manage the topic at hand, and supporting communication to early childhood stakeholders.

BUILDING BRIGHT FUTURES STATE ADVISORY COUNCIL | ALLOCATION INCREASE

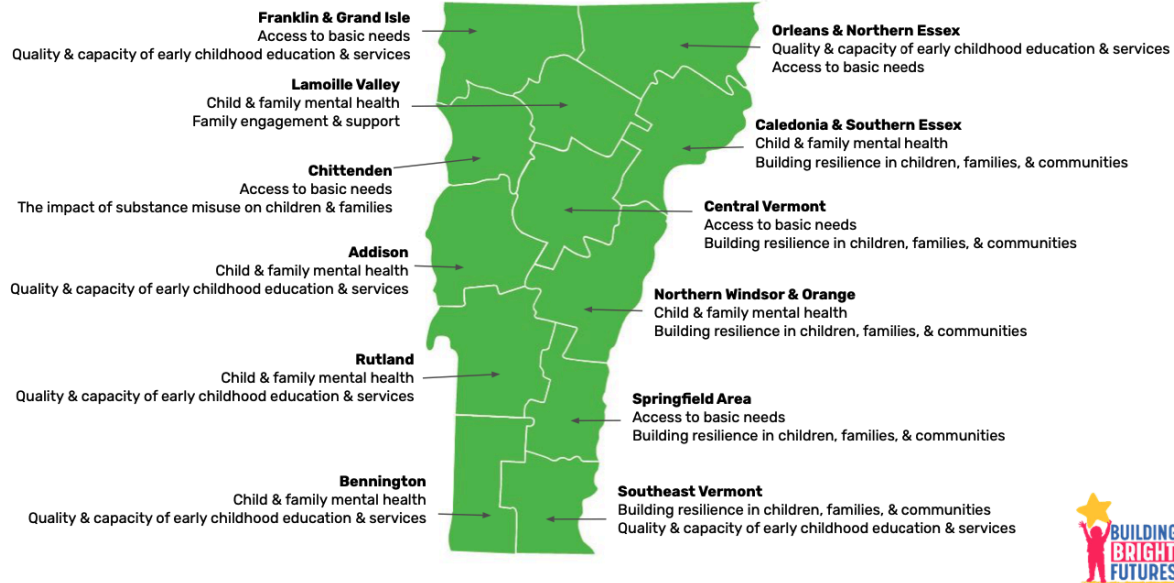
BBF’s role has increased in recent years, including being named responsible for monitoring Act 76. To execute our work in a way that truly meets the needs of the early childhood system in a sustainable way, we require an additional base public investment of \$322,444.50 annually (a total of \$1,094,151.50 annual base allocation) beginning in Fiscal Year 2026. This additional funding would support personnel, overhead, Regional Councils, and program expenses/contracts. BBF advised the Legislature and decision-makers more than 150 times during the 2023-2024 biennium. This allocation will allow BBF to continue to provide timely direct advisement on policy and program implementation based on the most up-to-date data and monitoring efforts.

ELEVATING FAMILY AND COMMUNITY VOICE, SYSTEM NEEDS AND PRIORITIES

Elevating System Needs and Priorities

Twelve Early Childhood Regional Councils bring together early childhood partners to identify gaps, share expertise and resources, elevate regional and family voices, and implement strategies in each region of Vermont. Fully integrated into their communities, Regional Councils work to improve access to supports across early care, health, and education in their communities. Regional Council members include mental health counselors, home visitors, pediatricians, social workers, food shelf directors, early childhood educators, and preK–12 administrators; families of children through age 8; and community members invested in the well-being of young children. Annually, each Regional Council selects two priorities to guide their work in the region, these are pictured below.

Building Bright Futures Regional Council Priorities 2024-2026



BBF convenes seven [VECAP committees](#) that are guided by the goals and objectives identified as essential in Vermont's Early Childhood Action Plan, the state's strategic plan for young children and their families.

- **The Child Outcomes Accountability Team (COAT)** is committed to improving the health and well-being of children and their families by addressing systemic issues and building coordination across the health, mental health, basic needs, and early childhood systems of care.
- **The Data and Evaluation Committee** is charged with prioritizing data integration; creating and monitoring a data development agenda; serving as the accountability mechanism to monitor progress toward the four goals of the VECAP; and serving as a primary advisor for research, data, and evaluation efforts.
- **The Early Childhood Interagency Coordinating Team (ECICT)** is composed of agency leaders committed to identifying and reducing barriers in state government to strengthen the early childhood system. They seek to implement the VECAP and build an integrated continuum of comprehensive, high-quality services that is equitable and accessible and will improve outcomes.
- **The Early Childhood Investment Committee** seeks to document and monitor investments in Vermont's children and families.
- **The Early Learning and Development Committee** is devoted to improving the quality and capacity of services, with a focus on alignment and best practices for children and families from child care through early elementary education.
- **The Families and Communities Committee** works to develop a statewide approach that enriches and expands family partnership and leadership at the provider, agency, and community levels.
- **The Professional Preparation and Development (PPD) Committee's** mission is to develop, coordinate, and promote a comprehensive system of quality learning opportunities for current and prospective early childhood and afterschool professionals.



Elevating Family & Community Voice

Best practices show sound, strong policy recommendations that ensure equitable access to services require the knowledge and expertise of people who are directly impacted. BBF serves as a key liaison between families, communities, providers and decision-makers.

The [Families and Communities Committee](#) (F&CC) is the home base that leads the BBF portfolio of family leadership work. Family leaders share their voices to inform the BBF network and decision makers and participate in learning and leadership development opportunities. Parent representatives are showing up and leading the committee's work in many powerful ways, including:

- Two family leaders serve as members on the State Advisory Council.
- The committee launched an online [Family Leadership Dashboard](#) where Vermont families can browse current leadership opportunities and get involved. The team also published the [Vermont Family Leadership Mapping Project](#), a 2024 report which explores the findings' significance for policymaking and decision-making related to the gaps in family engagement and leadership opportunities.
- Two F&CC members serve on the VT Early Childhood Fund Grant review teams.
- Presented a [Grand Rounds](#) online training last year featuring a panel of national experts who dove into promising practices and challenges in embedding family leadership across the early childhood system.
- Authored BBF's policy recommendations to support family leadership. The [policy recommendations](#) are informed by the [Family Needs Assessment](#) data and speak to establishing policies and guidance that outlines best practices for holding universally accessible meetings with a culture of being welcoming to family leaders to support Vermont in advancing more equitable systems of decision making. The recommendations align with the findings of the family leadership inventory project and with what we are learning about promising practices across the nation.
- Currently, the committee is collaborating with a national partner to complete the [3rd Family Needs Assessment](#). Data collected in the family needs assessment amplifies family perspectives on what is working well and areas of improvement to inform policy making.

RESPONSE TO EMERGING NEEDS AND PRIORITIES

In fiscal year 2024, the [Vermont Early Childhood Fund \(VECF\)](#), administered by Building Bright Futures, awarded more than \$2.6 million in grants through the federal Preschool Development Grant. Funds were distributed to 42 organizations in communities throughout Vermont to meet a variety of needs. As a result of this funding:

- 13 early childhood care and education (ECCE) programs are creating or preserving 280 spots throughout Vermont. Most of these programs are located in geographically isolated/rural areas and serve families with low incomes.
- One project is expanding access to child sexual abuse prevention education.
- Five projects are expanding access to developmental assessments and supports for children with special health care needs and their families.
- Three projects are serving English language learners (ELL) and/or migrant/undocumented families by providing paid ECCE training; hiring bilingual staff; and increasing access to services, support, and healthcare to ELL and migrant/ undocumented families.
- Six projects are providing professional development/training for ECCE providers that will better

equip staff to handle behavioral challenges.

Fall 2024 VECF Grantees

Grantee Focus Areas

- Increase access/provide equitable access to early childhood services and programs
- Improve the quality of existing services and programs
- ▲ Develop the early childhood workforce
- ★ Engage families and connect them to services

Chittenden County

- Champlain Center for Play Therapy and Family Counseling
Child parent relational therapy and therapy
- ★ Greater Burlington YMCA
Expanding family engagement & teacher support
- ▲ Lund
Growing the childcare workforce: pathways for New Americans year 2
- One Arts
Nutrition support program
- ★ Steps to End Domestic Violence
Early intervention violence prevention project

