



Vermont's Early Childhood System Data and Priorities

Presentation to House Committee on Human Services
Dr. Morgan Crossman, Executive Director

March 11, 2026

Building Bright Futures Serves as Vermont's Early Childhood Advisory Council

Building Bright Futures' role is to:

- Advise Vermont's Governor, Administration, and Legislature
- Convene early childhood partners through the Building Bright Futures Network
- Empower and elevate the voices of families and early childhood professionals
- Monitor the early childhood system through high-quality, up-to-date data
- Respond to needs by elevating emerging priorities and issuing policy recommendations



Vermont's Early Childhood State Advisory Council

January, 2026

Public Members

*Ilisa Stalberg, Vermont Department of Health, MCH
*Renee Kelly, Head Start Collaboration Office
Janet McLaughlin, DCF Child Development Division
Jessica Vintinner, Agency of Commerce and Community Development
Laurel Omland, Department of Mental Health
Susan Colburn, Agency of Human Services, Secretary's Office
Erin Davis, Agency of Education

Public Non-Voting Members

Monica Hutt, Chief Prevention Officer, Gov's Office
Miranda Gray, Deputy Commissioner, Economic Services
Lindsay Barron, Director of Policy & Planning, Family Services

Legislative Members

Rep. Rey Garofano, Vermont House of Representatives
Sen. Martine Gulick, Vermont Senate

At-Large Members

* Flor Diaz Smith, Vermont School Boards Association
* Rebecca Webb, Barre Unified Union School District
Laura Young, Parent Representative
Debra Hartswick, Retired Pediatrician
Amber Hewston, Parent Representative
Carol Lang-Godin, Parent Child Center Network
Sharon Harrington, Vermont Association for the Education of Young Children
Erica McLaughlin, Vermont Principals' Association
Kiona Baez Heath, Vermont Network Against Domestic and Sexual Violence
*Christy Swenson, Capstone Community Action/Head Start
Xusana Davis, Office of Racial Equity
Danielle Lindley Mitchell, Washington County Mental Health Services
Eddie Gale, A. D. Henderson Foundation
Dimitri Garder, Business Leader



Vermont's Early Childhood Plan 2030

Vermont's Early Childhood Strategic Plan 2030

Every Vermont child thrives in safe, healthy, and nurturing environments, supported by strong families, a valued workforce, and a coordinated system that puts children at the center.



GOALS

1

All Children and Families Have Their Basic Needs Met



Economic Security
Food Security
Housing
Transportation

2

All Children Are Raised in Safe, Healthy, and Healing Environments



Mental & Physical Health Care
Safe & Vibrant Communities

3

All Children and Families Have Access to High-Quality Opportunities That Promote Child Development and Well-Being



Inclusion & Services
Access & Affordability
Child-Centered Decision-Making

4

All Children Are Supported by a Well-Prepared, Well-Supported Early Childhood Workforce



Preparation
Compensation
Recruitment & Retention

5

Our System Centers Children and Families and Is Coordinated, Well-Resourced, and Data-Driven



Family-Centered, Data-Driven Decisions
Coordinated Support
Aligned Leadership & Resources

How This Plan was Built

- Rigorous mixed-methods approach
- Nearly 200 Vermonters contributed
- Shaped by lived experience, needs and assets, evidence, data, and existing plans and recommendations.



Primer on UPK



Publicly Funded

- 10 hours/week of prekindergarten education for 35 weeks per year

Inclusive

- 3- and 4-year-olds, and 5-year-olds not enrolled in kindergarten

Portable

- Parents choose where to enroll
- Funding follows the child

Mixed Delivery

- Public Schools
- Community-based private and nonprofit programs including child care centers, Head start programs, and family child care homes

Jointly Administered

- AOE Early Education and AHS DCF Child Development Division

High Quality

- licensed educators
- curriculum aligned with Vermont Early Learning Standards



Vermont's Early Childhood Plan 2030: Prekindergarten Education

- Keep children at the center of Vermont's Prekindergarten-grade 3 education transformation.
- Maintain access to Universal Prekindergarten education (UPK) for 3-, 4-, and 5-year-olds not yet eligible for kindergarten, while addressing barriers (e.g., schedule, geography, and program choice) to ensure all families have access.
- Align child care, Head Start, Universal Prekindergarten education (UPK), and afterschool policies and funding so families experience seamless services across ages and settings.
- Strengthen coordination between the state, school districts, and UPK partner programs by establishing clear statewide guidance, standardized contracts and registration, and streamlined data systems and reporting practices.
- Involve families, students, educators, and community partners as co-creators in shaping governance practices that are transparent, responsive, and focused on what helps children thrive.
- Increase collaboration and partnership between community-based UPK programs and partnering school districts to effectively prepare children for kindergarten and transition successfully (e.g., use of regional UPK Coordinators, access to educational resources, family supports, and professional development opportunities).
- Increase funding and reduce administrative barriers to securing additional resources for children who need additional support to be safely included in child care (e.g., Special Accommodation Grants, Early Childhood Special Education supports in Universal Prekindergarten education (UPK) programs)



2026 Policy Recommendations Related to Vermont's Universal PreK Program

Advance Prekindergarten Education in Vermont's Education Transformation

- Ensure that prekindergarten expansion **maintains access for 3-year-olds while exploring increased hours for 4-year-olds** within a mixed-delivery model
 - Consistent with recommendations from the Prekindergarten Education Implementation Committee (PEIC)
- **Establish appropriate PreK weighting within the state's funding formula** to support universal access to high-quality, developmentally appropriate programs that reflect the true cost of early learning, inclusion, and family engagement
- Special consideration must be given to the unique local context and needs of rural and border communities
 - **Prioritize equitable access in areas struggling to provide PreK**



Recommendations from The Prekindergarten Education Implementation Committee (PEIC)



The PEIC was formed to support the potential expansion of the universal PreK program by 2026. The committee issued a final report with four recommendations, including:

- Maintaining benefits for 3-year-olds
- Expanding access for 4-year-olds
- Commissioning a report on pupil weighting, and
- Reviewing the methodology for updating the rate for non-school-based programs

The PEIC's challenges highlight the need for strengthened data systems to inform PreK policy and accountability.



Data: Universal Prekindergarten in Vermont

What do we know about UPK?

Access

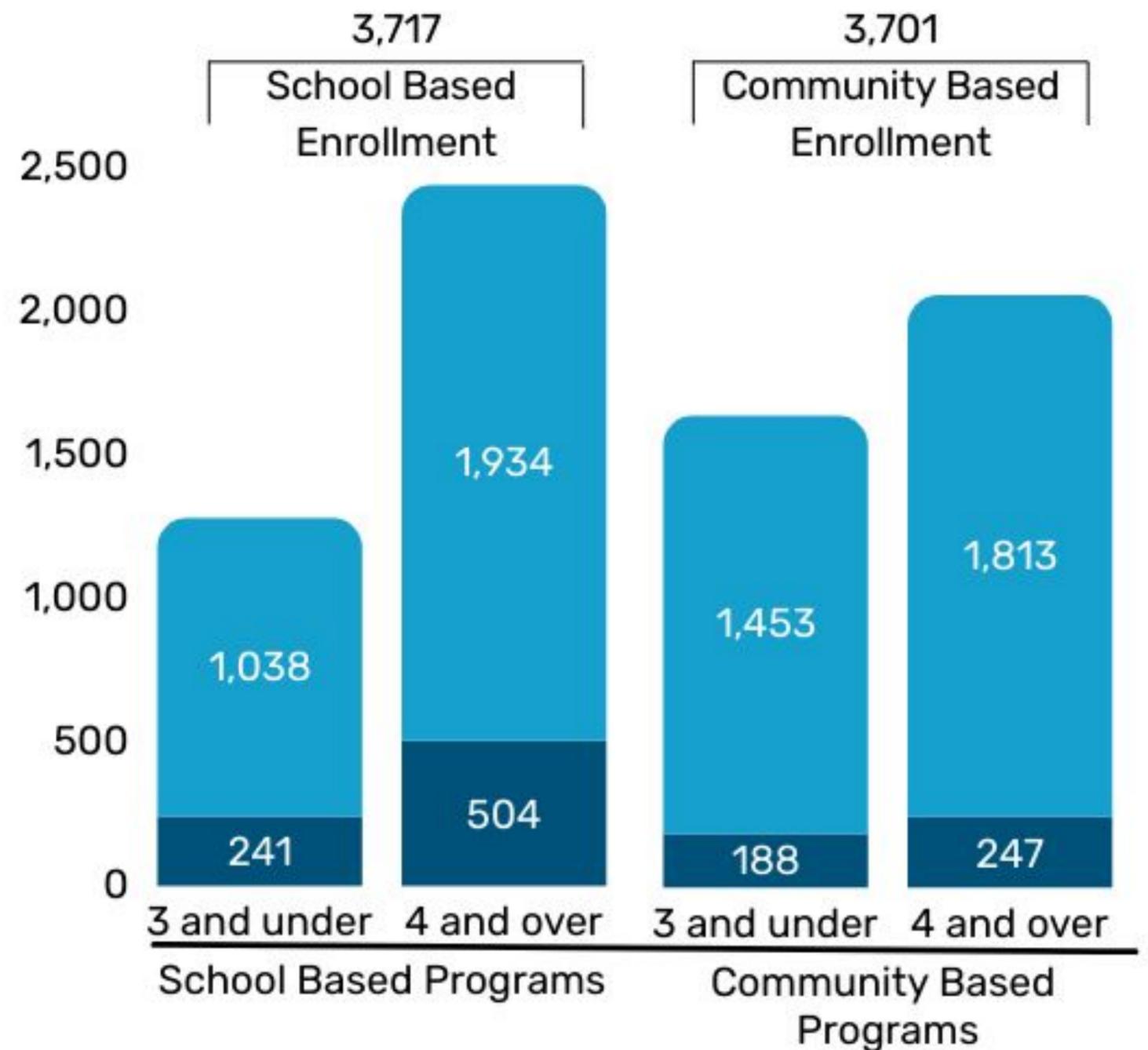
Vermont has ranked second for both 3- and 4-year-olds in access to UPK

- 58% of 3-year-olds
- 76% of 4-year-olds

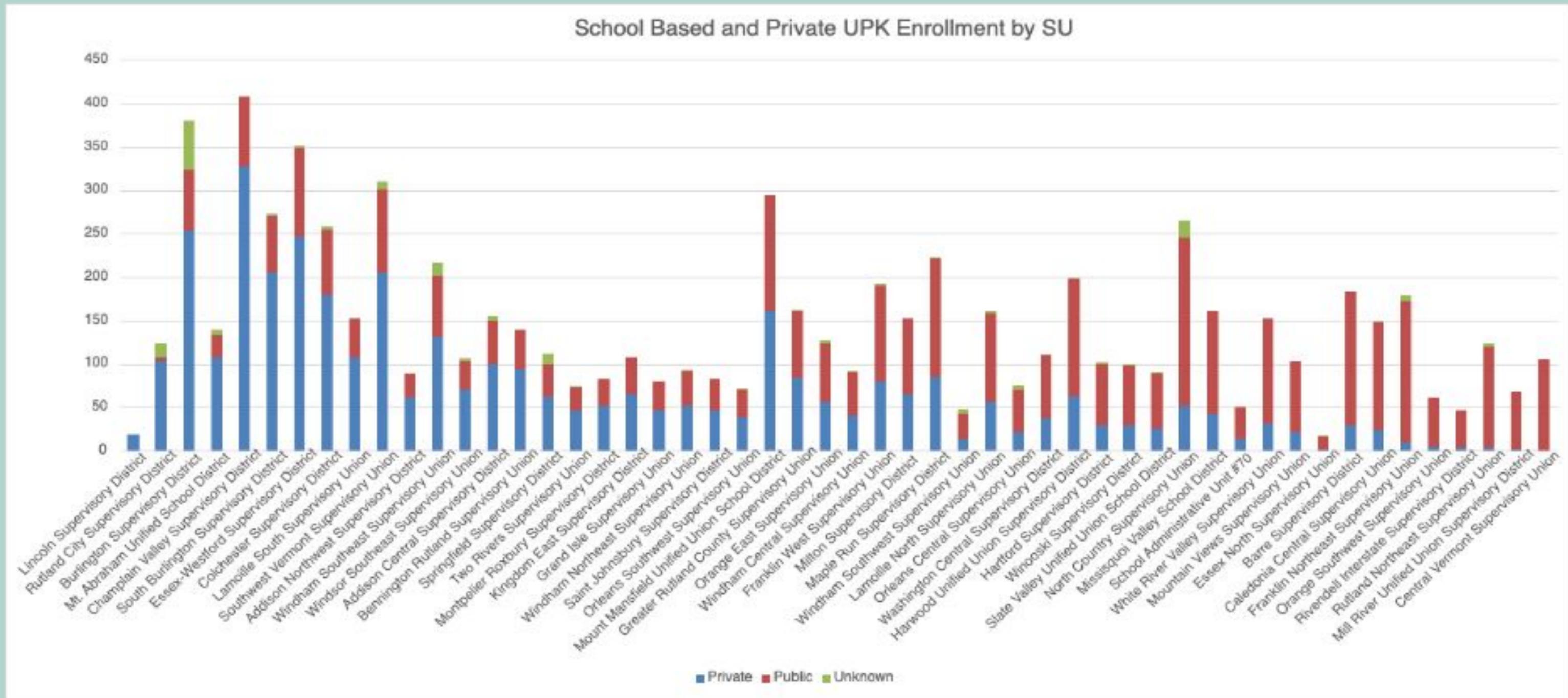
NIEER "State of Preschool Yearbook: 2024"



UPK Enrollment by Program Setting, Age, and IEP - Fall 2025

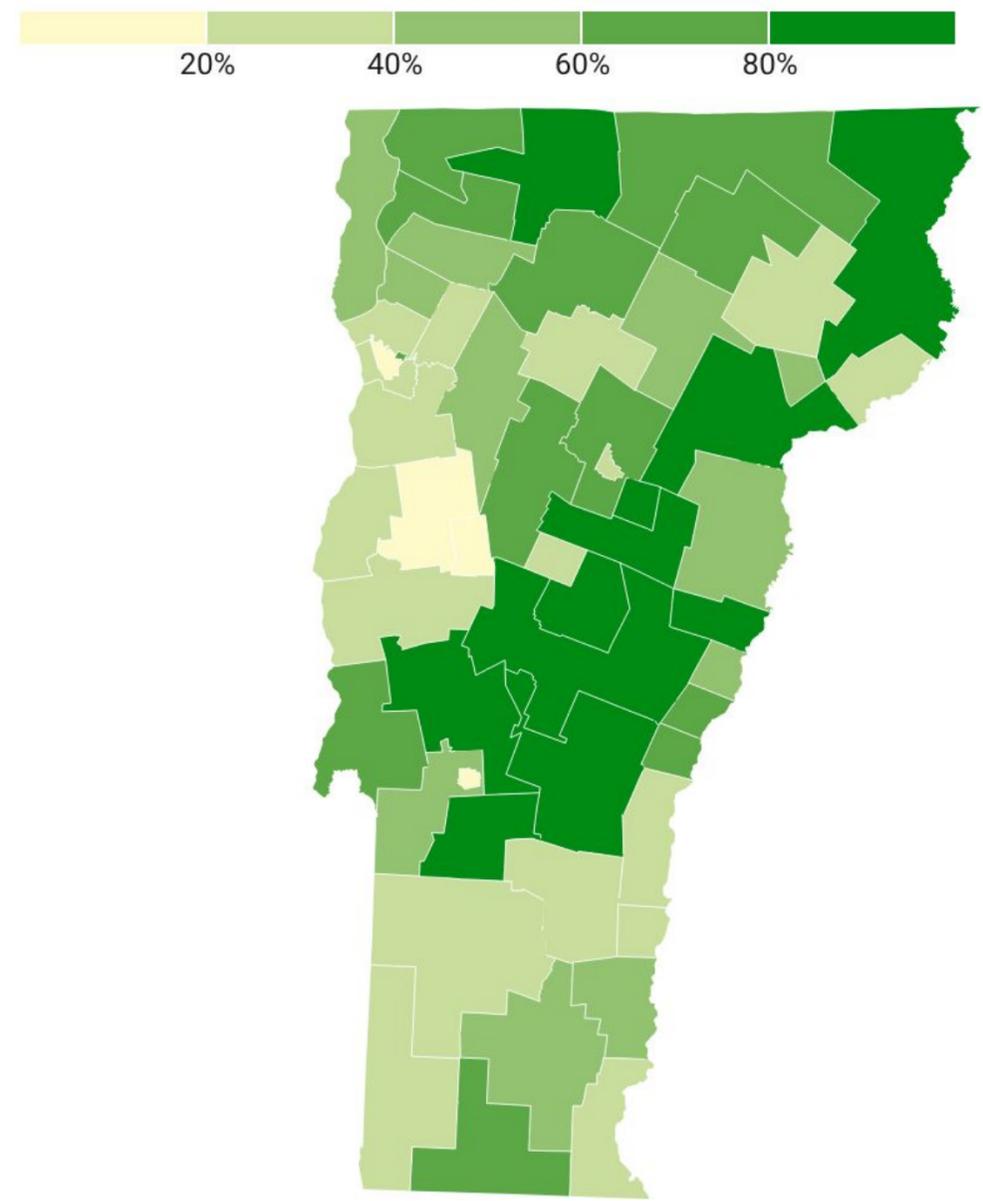


Data: Universal Prekindergarten in Vermont Regional Differences



Data: Universal Prekindergarten in Vermont Enrollment by Program Setting

Percent of UPK Students Enrolled in School Based Programs

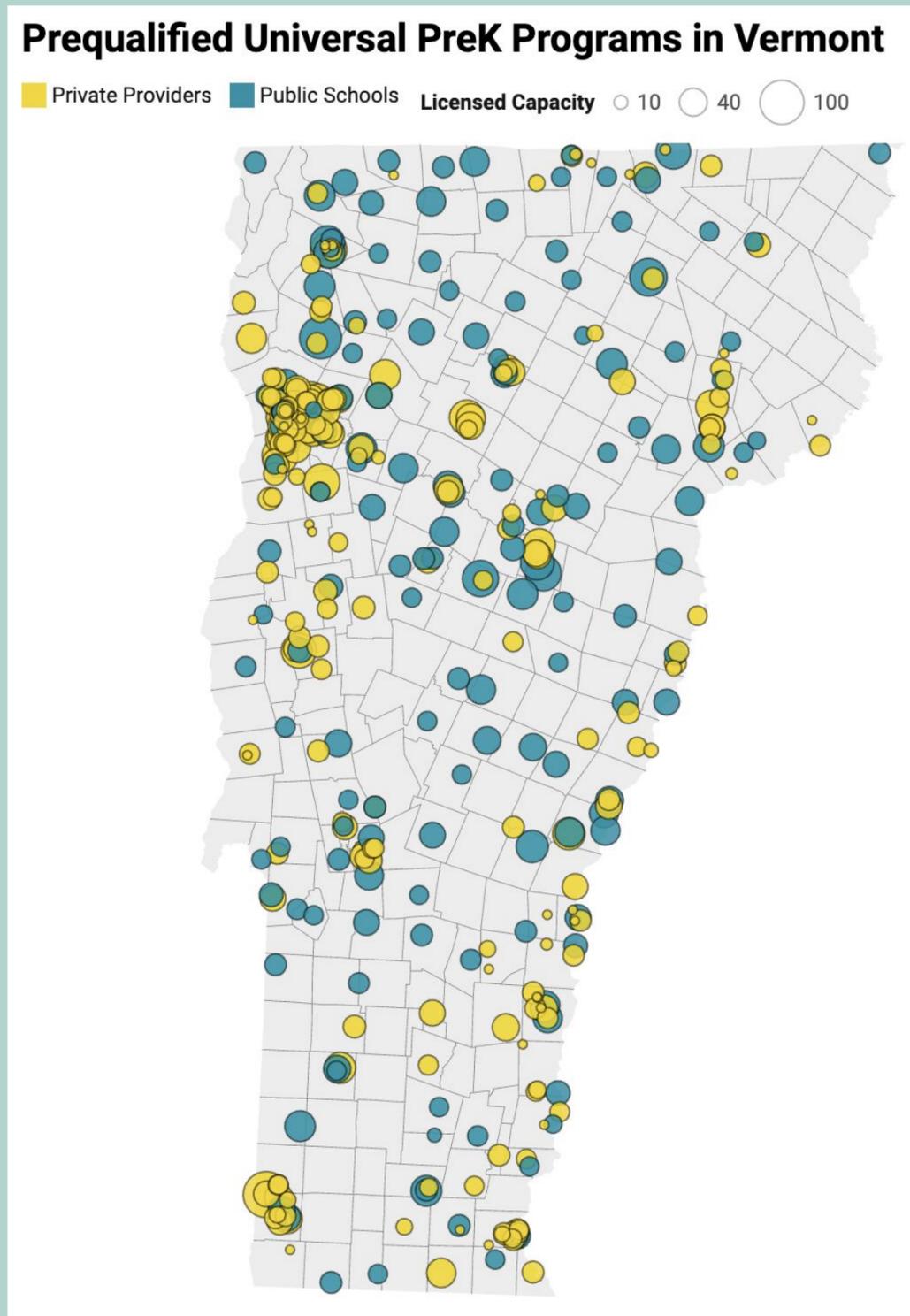


Map: Building Bright Futures • Source: Vermont AOE Research and Statistics Section • Created with Datawrapper



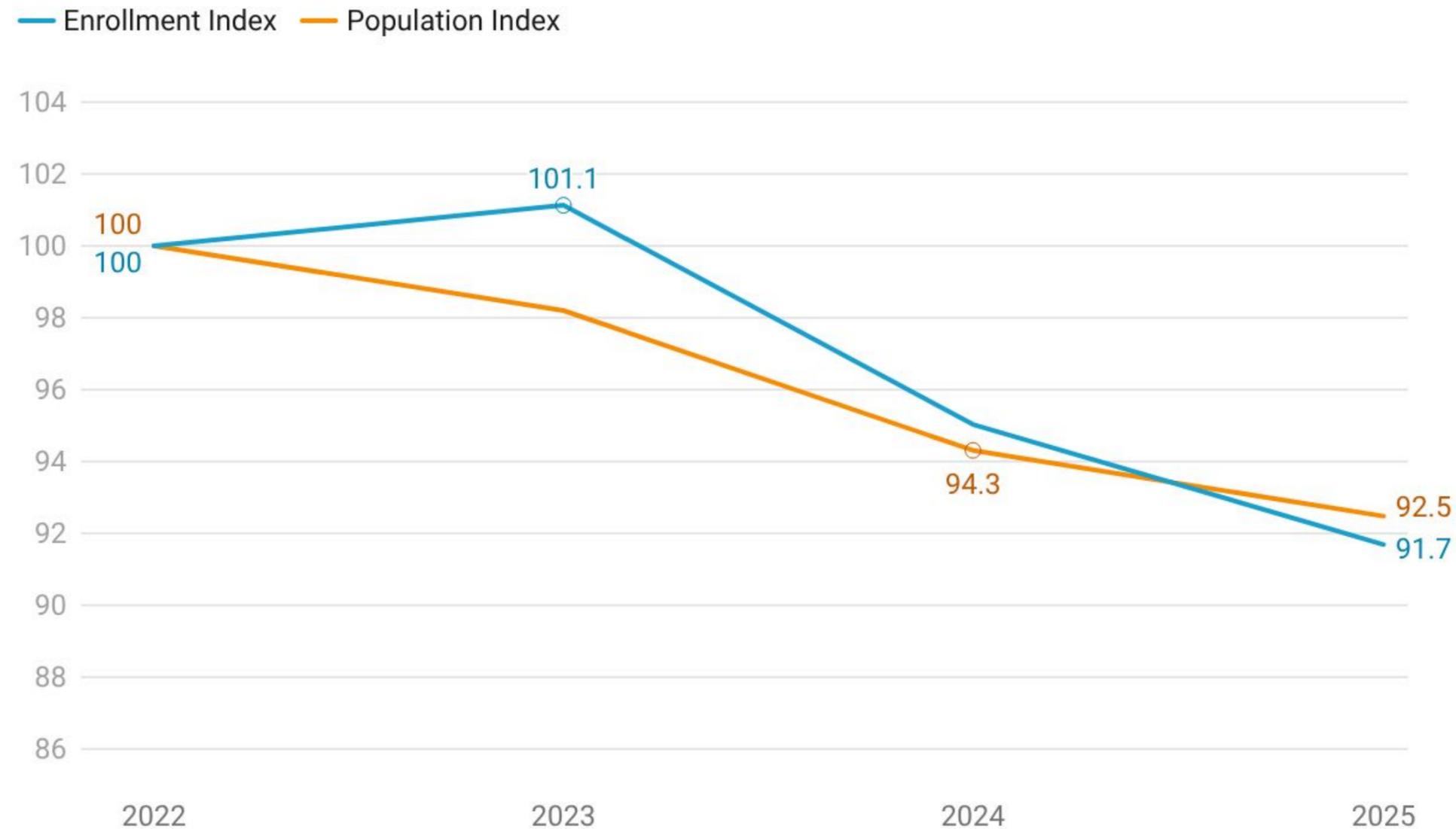
Data: Universal Prekindergarten in Vermont

Location by Program Setting



Data: Universal Prekindergarten in Vermont Population and Enrollment

UPK Enrollment and Population Fall 2022 to Fall 2025

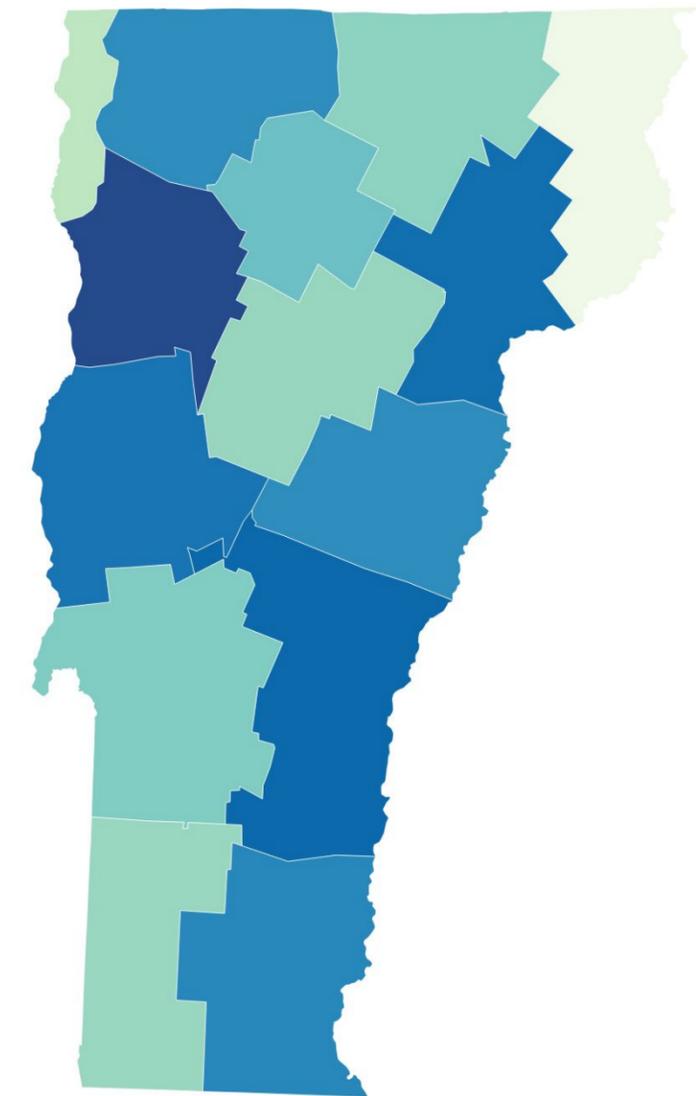


Population projections for 2025 are based on U.S. Census Bureau county estimates from 2020 to 2024.

Chart: Building Bright Futures • Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2020 to 2024 county population estimates (Vintage 2024); Vermont Agency of Education, Research and Statistics Section, UPK enrollment data. • Created with Datawrapper

Percent of 3- and 4-year-olds Enrolled in UPK vs Projected Population

UPK enrollment as a share of the projected 2025 population of 3- and 4-year-olds in each county.

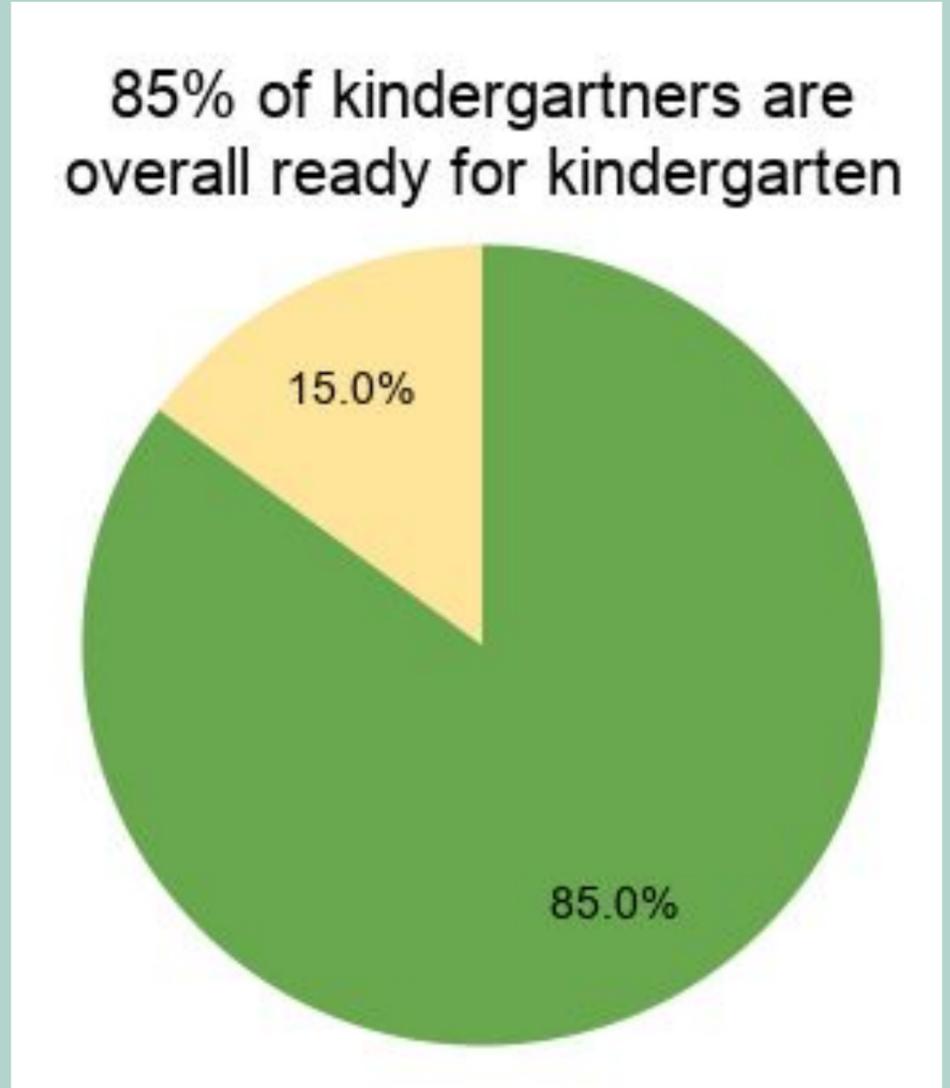
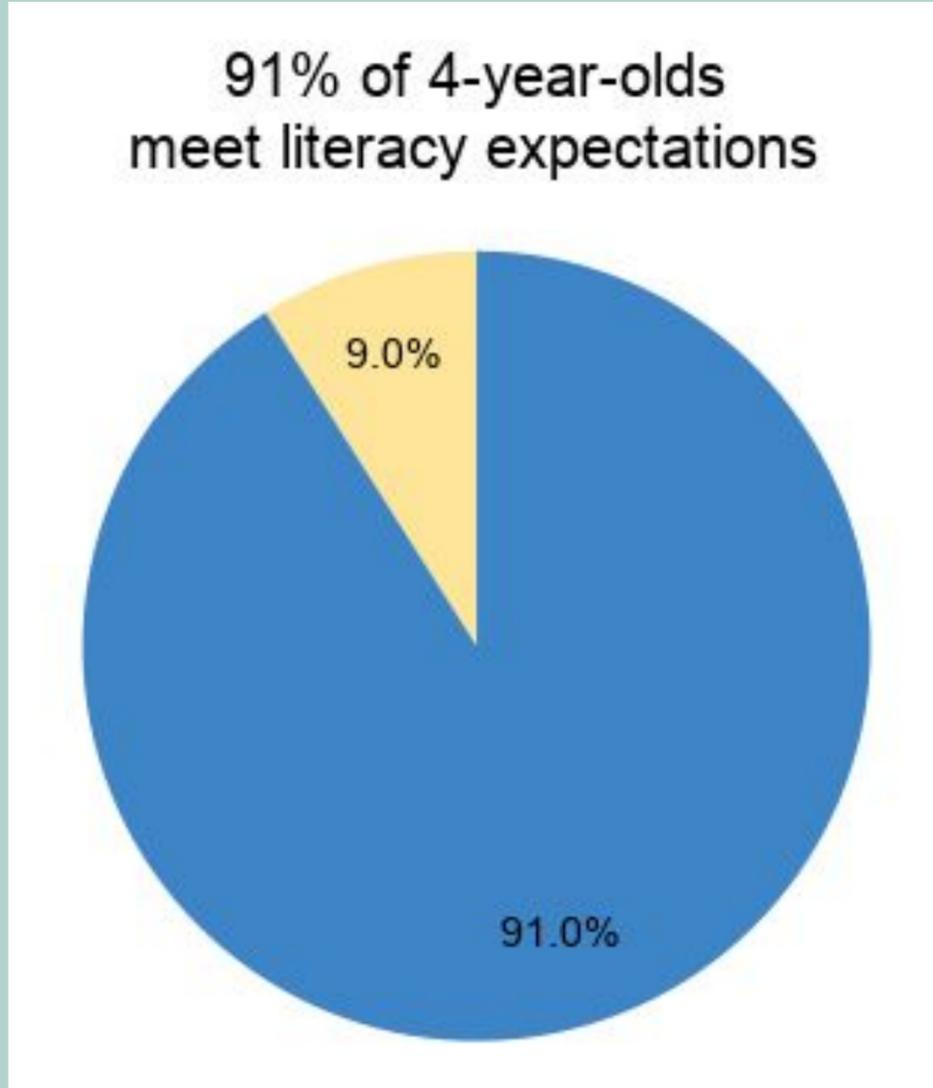


Population projections for 2025 are based on U.S. Census Bureau county estimates from 2020 to 2024. UPK enrollment data are reported at the supervisory union (SU) level. When an SU spans more than one county, enrolled students are distributed across counties in proportion to each town's total population.

Map: Building Bright Futures • Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2020 to 2024 county population estimates (Vintage 2024); Vermont Agency of Education, Research and Statistics Section, UPK enrollment data. • Created with Datawrapper



Data: Universal Prekindergarten in Vermont Education outcomes - PreK Literacy and Ready for Kindergarten



Qualitative PreK Data Gathering Efforts: 2019–2024

What's Working/What Stakeholders Value



- PreK is widely seen as a meaningful investment in children
- Vermont's approach to PreK is leading the country in access
- Mixed-delivery and partnerships strengthen access and success
- Maintaining 3-year-old PreK is a priority
- Dedicated UPK coordination improves implementation
- Shared commitment to quality and developmentally appropriate practice
- Strong engagement and qualitative data collection to inform decisions



Qualitative PreK Data Gathering Efforts: 2019–2024

What Must Be Solved/Key Considerations



- **Special education** and transitions require intentional discussion in ed transformation related to PreK
- **Mixed-delivery** sustainability and impacts to community-based programs, Head Start, and afterschool programs must be factors in any PreK transition discussions
- **Public school capacity and infrastructure** gaps limit expansion
- Sustainable funding and **“true cost”** clarity are essential
- Communication, standardization, and **system monitoring** need strengthening
- **Workforce** constraints will be a factor in feasibility
- **Equity** across ages, settings, and needs remains unresolved
- Administrative complexity and unclear **oversight** create barriers



Vermont's Early Childhood Data and Policy Center

Check out Vermont's Early Childhood Data and Policy Center for more information, tools, and data



Don't forget the stories!

When we combine stories and numbers, or qualitative and quantitative data, we create stronger, fairer policies, and opportunities for equitable growth and development.



**Vermont's
Early Childhood
Data & Policy
Center**