

# S.206 Strengthens Vermont's Early Childhood Educator Workforce

**Background:** S.206, known as the Early Childhood Educator Profession Bill, would create individual licensure through Vermont's Office of Professional Regulation (OPR) for about 8,000 early childhood educators in non-public school (home- and center-based) child care programs. Addressing this regulatory gap in the system ensures that all Vermont children have access to qualified early childhood educators, no matter the child care setting. The bill was shaped by extensive input from more than 1,000 Vermont early childhood educators, and includes legacy provisions, requested by family child care home and center-based educators, to ensure everyone in the current workforce can keep working and nobody is pushed out. Meanwhile, recent data trends show an incoming child care workforce excited for professional recognition, taking advantage of education supports to earn qualifications, and opening and expanding programs.

**The Challenge:** Most of Vermont's young children attend non-public school child care programs based in homes and in centers. These programs are regulated, but there is currently no system of individual regulation for the people working in them. Families need transparency and confidence in the qualifications of the educators caring for their young children. As public investment expands access to child care, Vermont needs to recruit and retain a qualified workforce to work in these programs. To attract this child care workforce, early childhood educators need to be recognized for their skills and qualifications and have a clear map for professional growth.

**Why It Matters:** Credible research repeatedly shows that qualified early childhood educators lead to better outcomes for children in kindergarten and beyond. Children in all child care programs deserve educators who meet clear, consistent standards for preparation and practice. This bill provides all Vermont children the opportunity to benefit from quality care that prepares them for school and lifelong learning. Reliable child care is essential to Vermont's rural economy, allowing families to work and local businesses to operate in communities that rely on family child care homes and small programs. This bill fills gaps in our current system, ensures more children have access to child care, and supports families in going to work.

**What the Bill Does:** S.206 is informed by Vermont's child care workforce and strengthens it with clear career pathways that connect qualifications to compensation and accountability. A license to practice gives early childhood educators a professional identity, career pathways, and a way to communicate their expertise—just like members of any other licensed profession. This makes child care a stable, attractive career choice.

The bill includes retention provisions to help the current workforce increase qualifications over time. New state data show incentives to increase qualifications are already working, with an 8.5% increase in workforce participation and a 22% increase in workforce participants with degrees since Act 76 passed in 2023. Vermont already has many well-prepared early childhood educators who want their expertise formally recognized through licensure, and existing workforce development programs show strong enrollment and interest from future early childhood educators.

One family child care home educator said professional recognition is critical to the future of family child care: "It will keep me in business, it's stability for my children and families, and it encourages younger providers to stay in the field."

**Retention Provisions:** Based on workforce advocacy, the bill includes robust retention provisions, including a legacy Family Child Care Provider license that allows experienced home providers to continue in the new system, a similar legacy license for experienced center-based program educators, a longer transition period, and expanded degree eligibility. These provisions support current educators while preparing the next generation of professional early childhood educators.

**Alignment with National Standards:** The bill aligns with the framework for a unified, national early childhood educator profession. The framework for a national profession, put forth by the Commission for Professional Excellence in Early Childhood Education, is endorsed by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), the National Association of Family Child Care (NAFCC), the National Association of Early Childhood Teacher Educators (NAECTE), and the National Education Association (NEA), among others. This alignment ensures Vermont's approach meets national standards for professional practice.



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