

A close-up photograph of a young child with light brown hair, smiling and looking towards the camera. The child is wearing a grey turtleneck sweater with a colorful striped pattern on the sleeve. They are holding onto a metal chain link, likely from a swing. The background is blurred, showing what appears to be a playground structure.

# Vermont's Early Childhood System Data and Priorities

Presentation to House Committee on Ways and Means  
Dr. Morgan Crossman, Executive Director

January 21, 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 Hartwick, 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



*\*Executive Board denoted with an asterisk*

# Vermont's Early Childhood Plan 2030: EDUCATION PRIORITIES



**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	2	3	4	5
All Children and Families Have Their Basic Needs Met ★ Economic Security Food Security Housing Transportation	All Children Are Raised in Safe, Healthy, and Healing Environments ★ Mental & Physical Health Care Safe & Vibrant Communities	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	All Children Are Supported by a Well-Prepared, Well-Supported Early Childhood Workforce ★ Preparation Compensation Recruitment & Retention	Our System Centers Children and Families and Is Coordinated, Well-Resourced, and Data-Driven ★ Family-Centered, Data-Driven Decisions Coordinated Support Aligned Leadership & Resources

## Goal 3: High-Quality Opportunities - early learning, PreK, inclusion, quality, and PK-3 transformation

- 3A. Early intervention, inclusion, and prevention
  - *Access, inclusion, reducing exclusionary discipline*
- 3B. Mixed-delivery early childhood education system (child care + Head Start + UPK)
  - *Affordability, accountability, quality, coordination across partners, agencies and districts*
- 3C. PK-3 transformation (Act 73 + early learning alignment)
  - *Center children, protect access to UPK for 3s & 4s, literacy & numeracy screening and supports, and equip schools to respond to mental health, trauma, and basic needs*



## What do we know about PreK?



**Access:** Vermont has ranked second for 3-year-olds and sixth for 4-year-olds in access to UPK

- 61 percent of 3-year-olds
- 78 percent of 4-year-olds were enrolled in publicly-funded PreK programs

### **Capacity:**

- 44% of slots are available in school-based programs and 56% are available in center-based and family child care homes

### **Equity Gaps Remain**

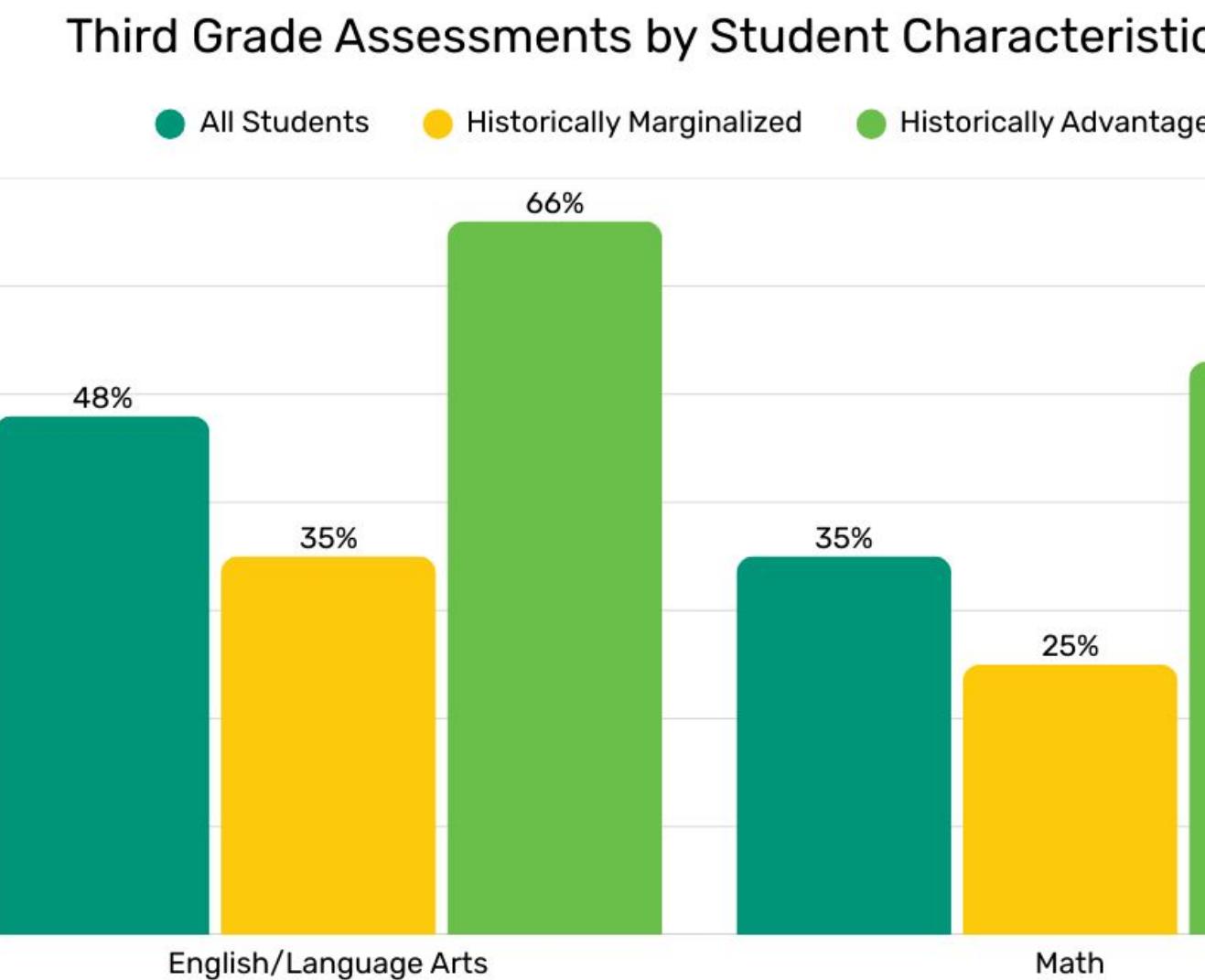
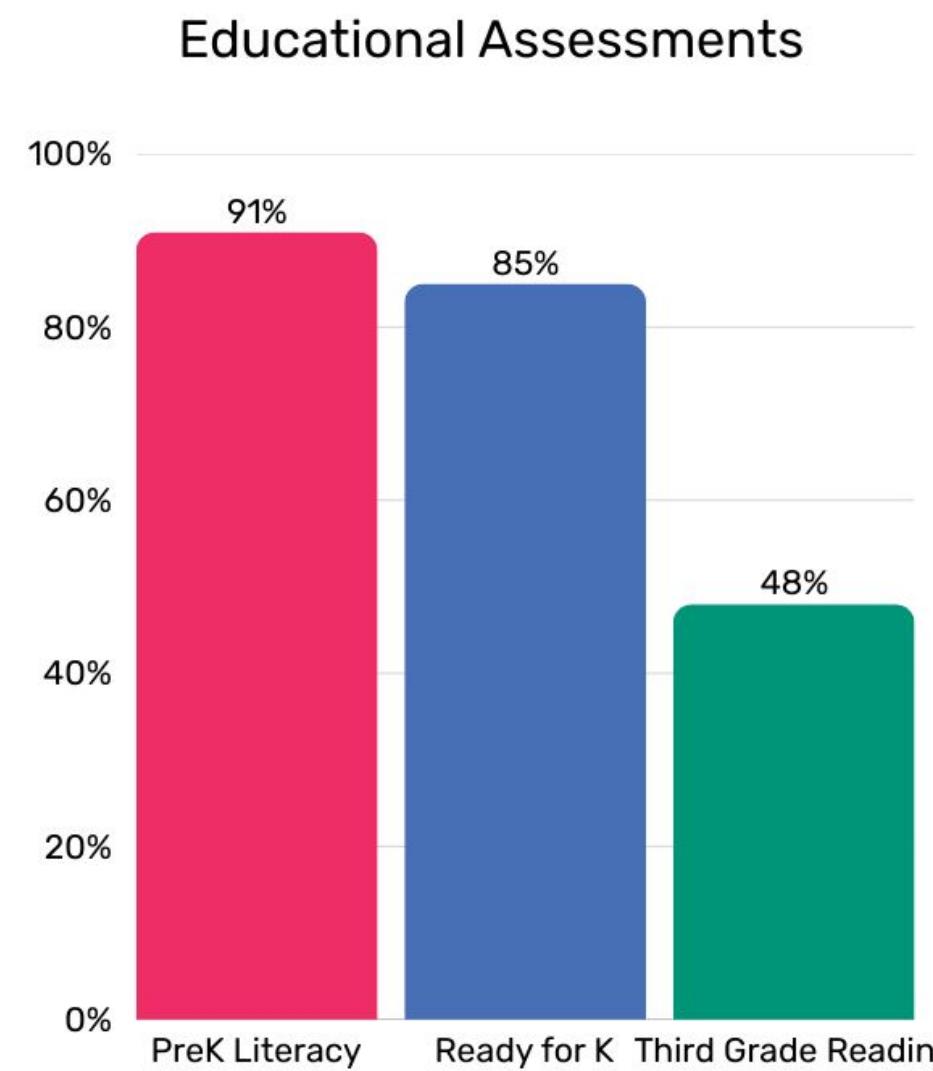
- Rural areas, namely in Essex County
  - 111 children 3 and 4-years old in Essex County
  - 93 licensed slots in UPK programs
- Specialized child care and programs well poised to serve children with disabilities and special health care needs



# Data: Education Outcomes in Vermont

## What do we know about education outcomes?

Outcomes as measured by three assessments at the end of PreK, at the beginning of Kindergarten, and at the end of third grade



# Advisement: 2026 Policy Recommendations

- The 2026 Policy Recommendations include the following priorities:
  - Ensure Child and Family Food Security Needs Are Met
  - Strengthen Housing Stability for Vermont Families
  - Ensure Health and Mental Health Care Access
  - Sustain Access to Mental Health Consultation and Support
  - Invest in Trauma-Informed and Child-Centered Supervised Visitation for Families Statewide
  - Streamline Fingerprinting-Supported Background Checks
  - **Advance Prekindergarten Education in Vermont's Education Transformation**
  - Protect Child Care Investments
  - Advance Early Childhood Educator Licensure
  - Protect Vermonters' Data and Privacy
  - Strengthen Children's Integrated Services (CIS)
  - Listen to Families and Use Qualitative Data in Times of Change
  - And many more: see the [handout on Policy Recommendations](#)



# 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**



# Act 76 Monitoring: 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.**



# 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*



- Public school capacity and infrastructure gaps limit expansion
- Workforce constraints will be a factor in feasibility
- 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
- Equity across ages, settings, and needs remains unresolved
- Sustainable funding and “true cost” clarity are essential
- Communication, standardization, and system monitoring need strengthening
- Administrative complexity and unclear oversight create barriers



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

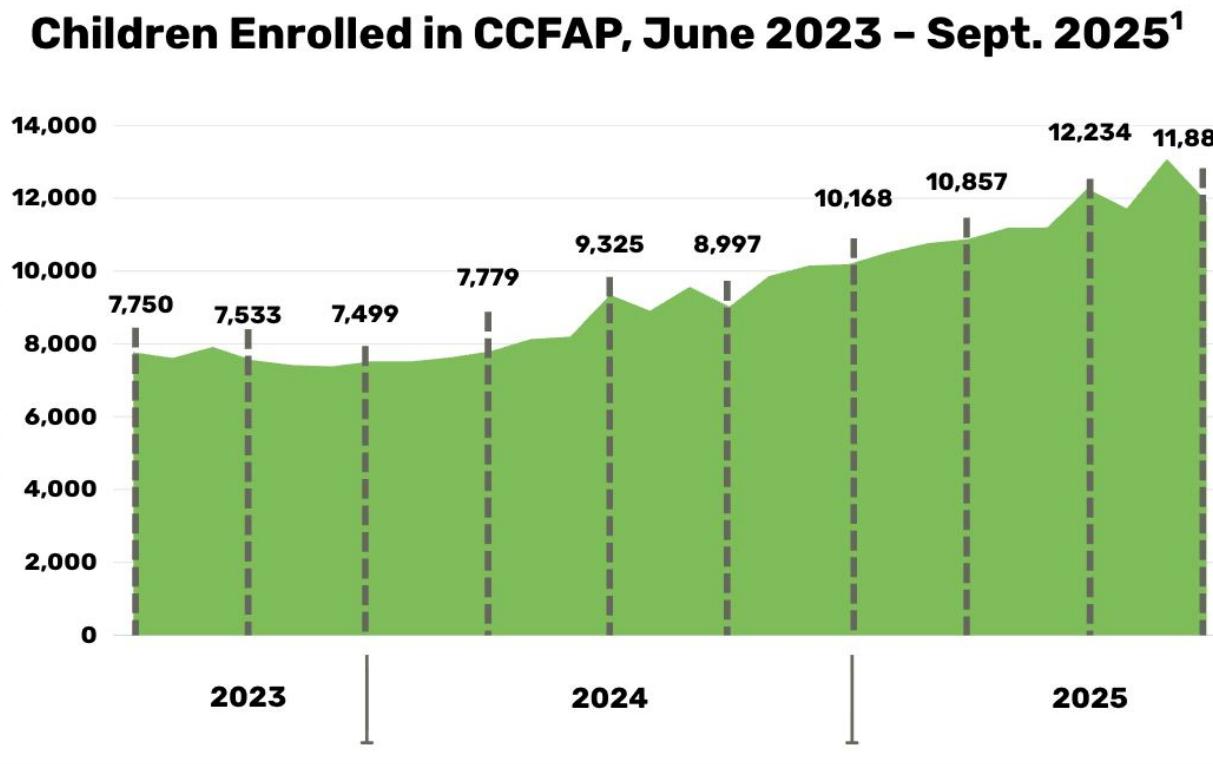


**Don't forget the stories!**

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



# Act 76 Monitoring in 2025



**2,273 families determined eligible for CCFAP with income-exempt service needs (23% of all families)**  
September 2025

**+ 5.2% individuals working in regulated child care settings<sup>6</sup>**  
Between December 2022 and 2024

**+ 22.4% individuals holding verified associate, bachelor's, master's, or doctoral degrees<sup>6</sup>**  
Between December 2022 and 2024

