



Vermont's Early Childhood System Data and Priorities

Presentation to Senate Committee on Education
Dr. Morgan Crossman, Executive Director

January 16, 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

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

Legislative Members

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Sen. Martine Gulick, Vermont Senate

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* Flor Diaz Smith, Vermont School Boards Association
* Rebecca Webb, Barre Unified Union School District
Libby Daghlion, 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

**Executive Board denoted with an asterisk*



About Vermont's Early Childhood Strategic Plan

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

- Vermont's statewide strategic framework for early childhood through 2030
- A comprehensive, cross-sector "plan of plans" to align policy, investments, and implementation
- Developed through extensive community and family engagement and informed by data and system analysis
- Designed to guide long-term policy, budget, and system planning



Vermont's Early Childhood Plan 2030:

EDUCATION PRIORITIES



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*




State of Vermont's Children



Bright spots

- 58%  in the overall number of children enrolled in CCFAP, and a remarkable 82%  in infant enrollment.
- 91% of 4-year-olds meeting or exceeding expectations in literacy
-  number of children in out-of-home protective custody

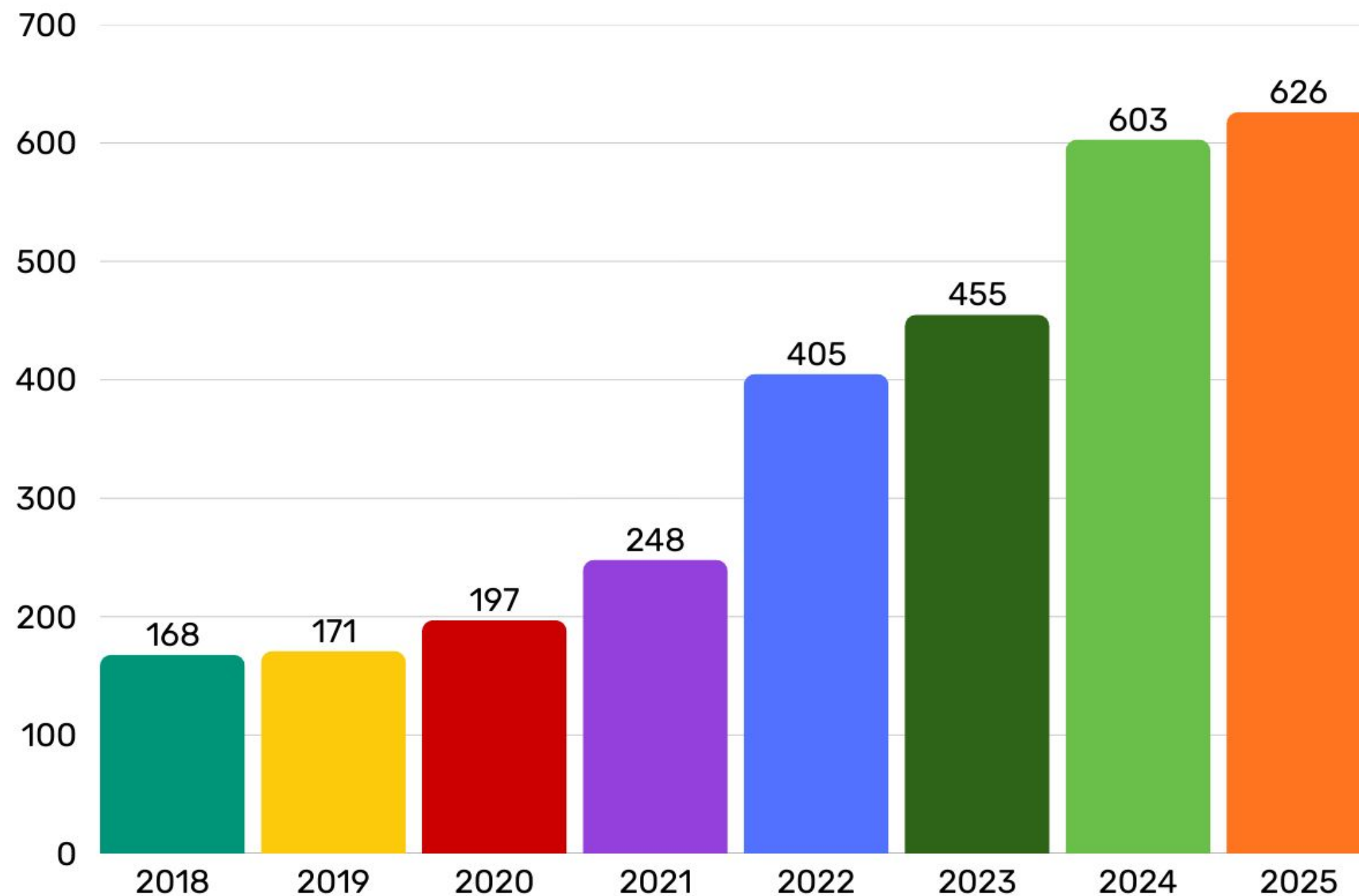
Areas to monitor & course correct


- 273 %  in the the number of children under age 9 identified as homeless
- 48% of 3rd graders proficient or above in **reading**, 35% for historically marginalized children
- 35% of 3rd graders proficient or above in **math**, 24% for historically marginalized children
- Wide gaps in the percent of students living in poverty ranging from 17% to 67%



What do we know about Vermont's population of homeless children?

Students Under 9 Identified as Homeless (McKinney-Vento)

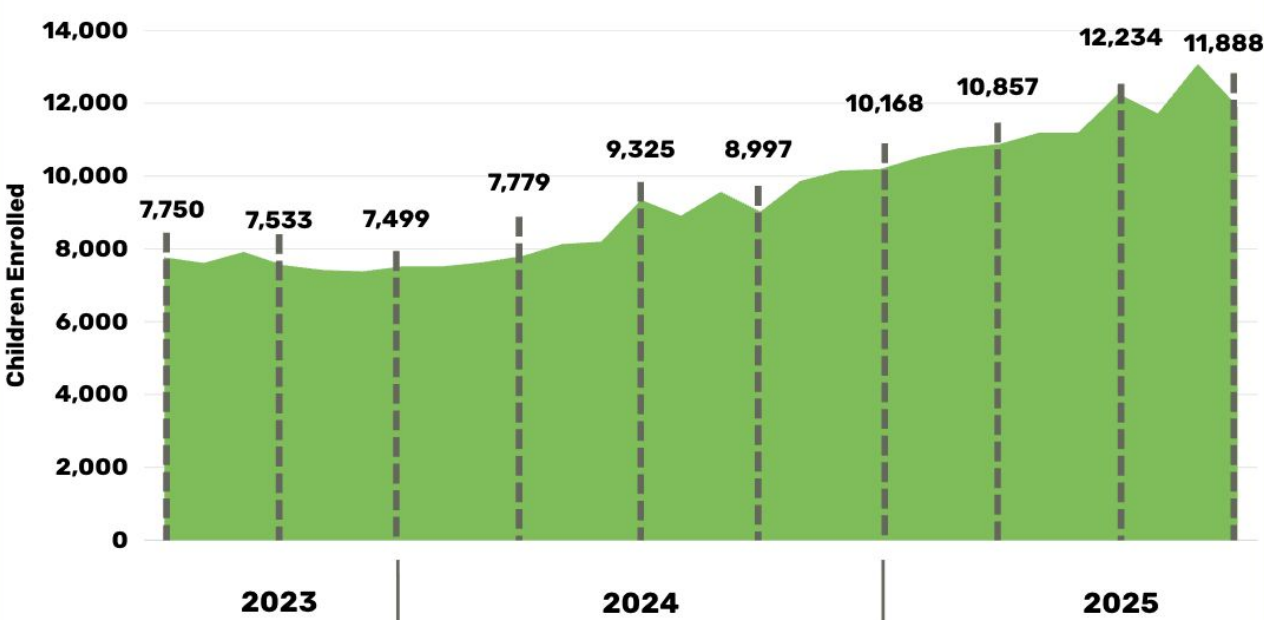


- 626 students under 9 eligible for homelessness support services  273% since 2018
- Children's unmet basic needs significantly impacting their ability to show up to school ready to learn



Act 76 Monitoring in 2025

Children Enrolled in CCFAP, June 2023 – Sept. 2025¹



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

September 2025

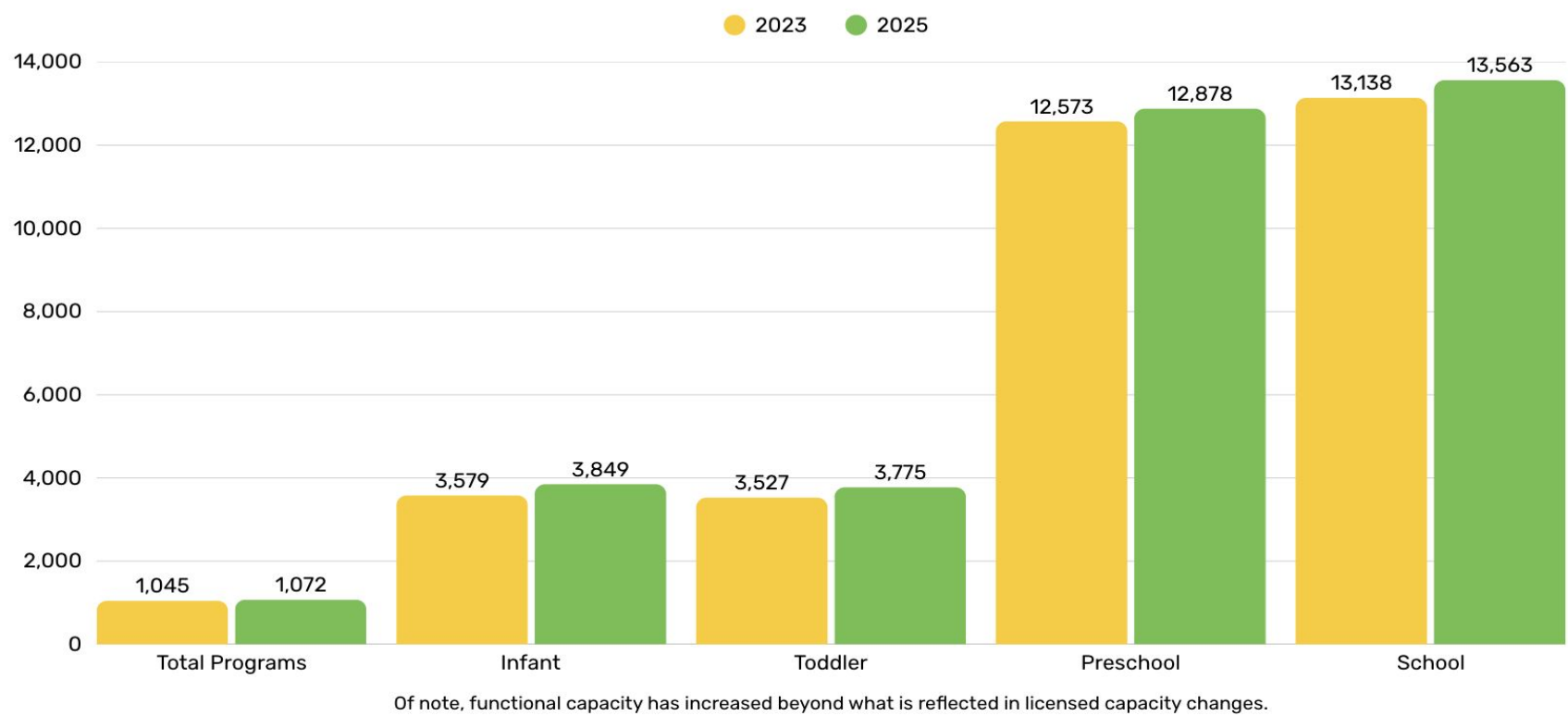
+ 5.2%
individuals working in
regulated child care
settings⁶

Between December
2022 and 2024

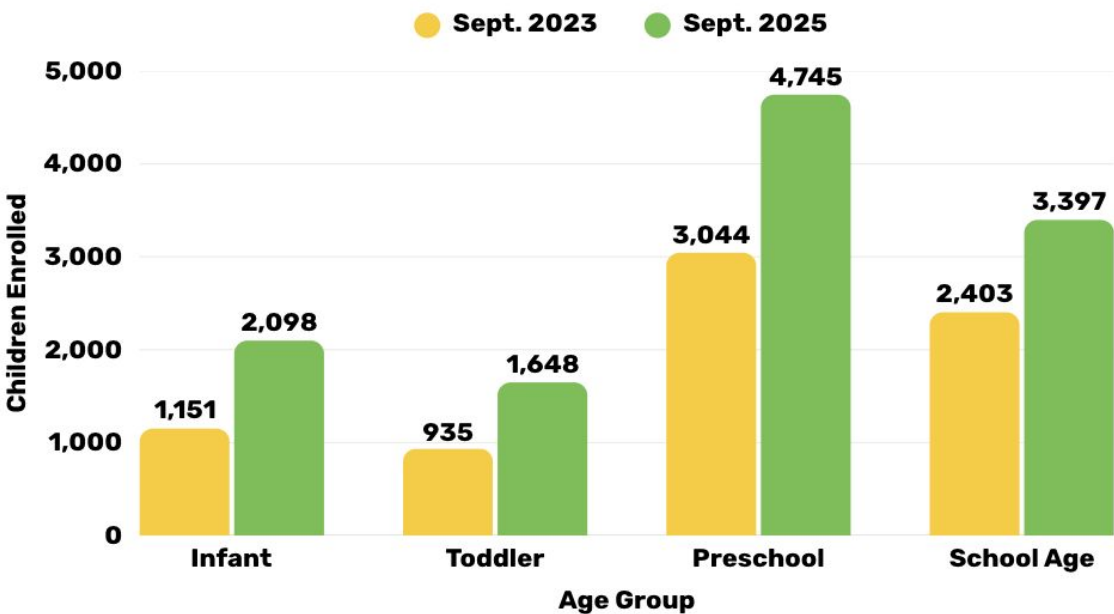
+ 22.4%
individuals holding
verified associate,
bachelor's, master's,
or doctoral degrees⁶

Between December
2022 and 2024

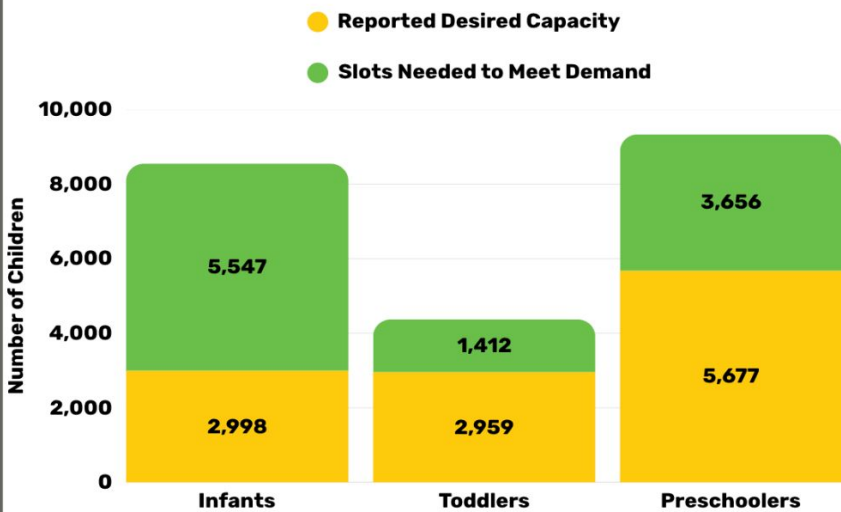
Licensed Child Care Programs & Capacity by Age, Sept. 2023 vs. Sept. 2025¹



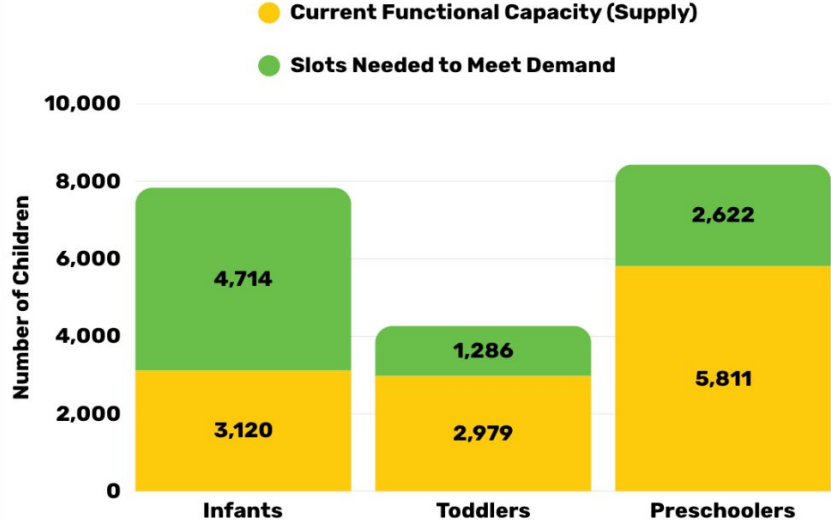
Children Enrolled in CCFAP by Age Group
Sept. 2023 vs. Sept. 2025¹



Supply and Demand of Child Care by Age, Sept. 2023⁴



Supply and Demand of Child Care by Age, Sept. 2025⁵



What do we know about PreK?

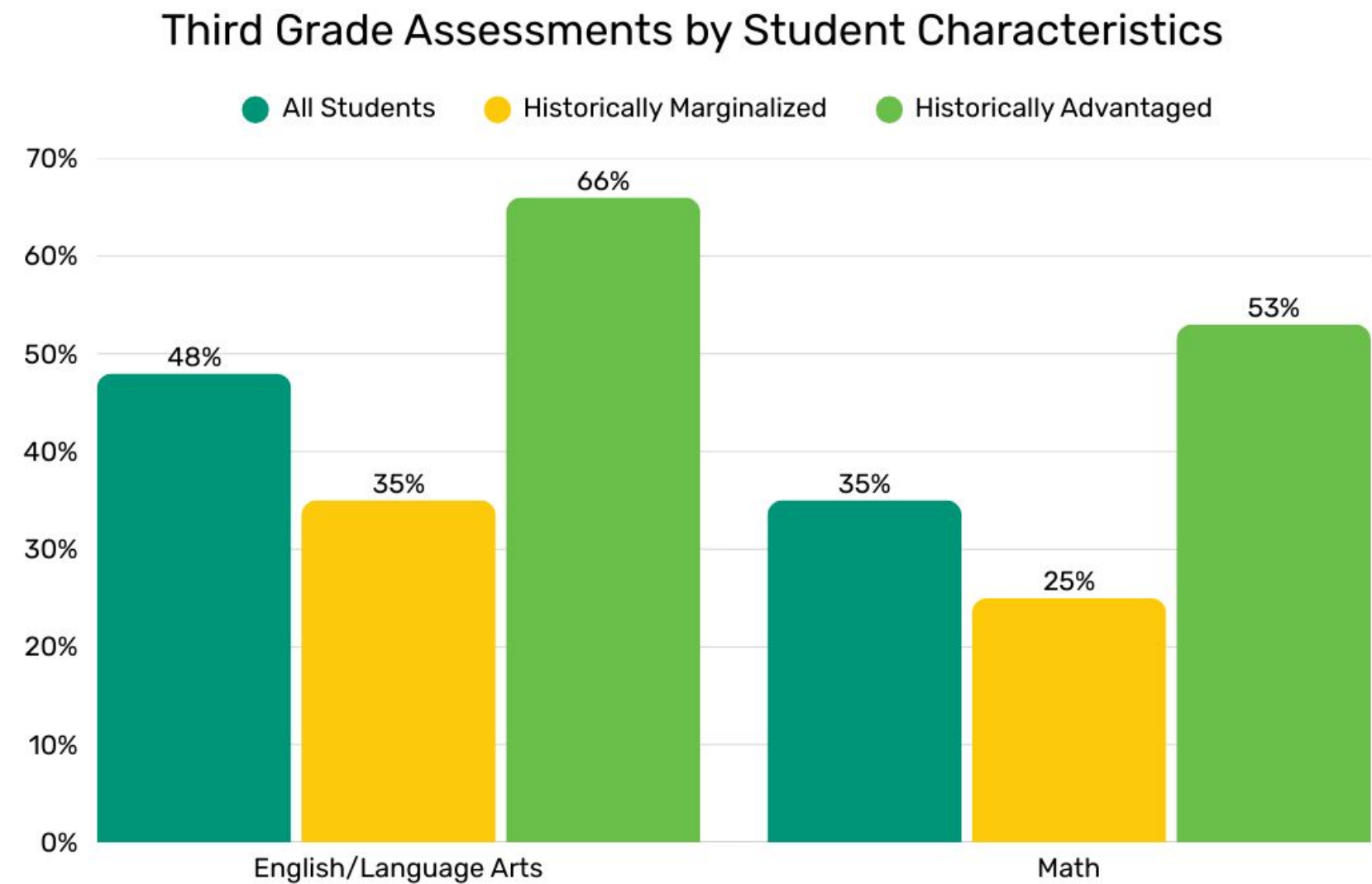
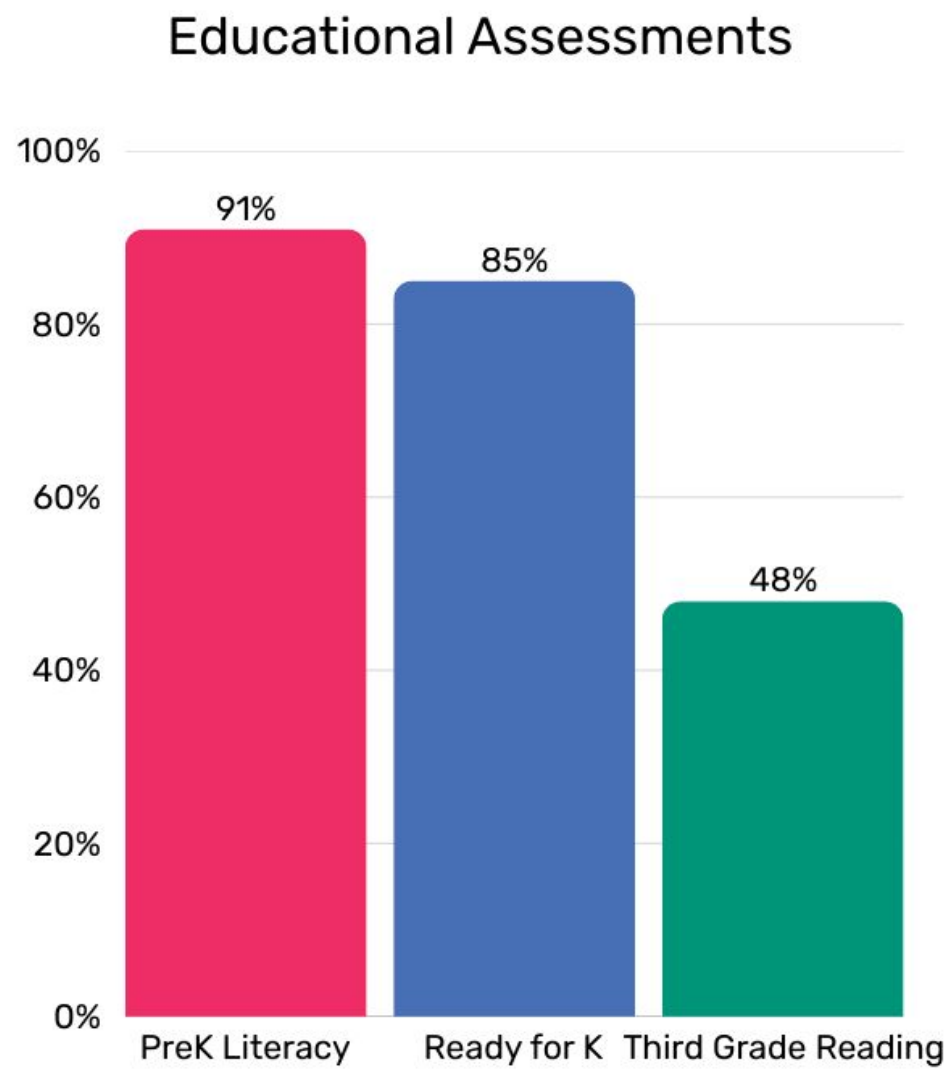


- **Access:** Vermont has ranked second for 3-year-olds and sixth for 4-year-olds in access to UPK
 - 61 percent of 3-year-olds
 - 78 percent of 4-year-olds were enrolled in publicly-funded PreK programs
- **Capacity:**
 - 44% of slots are available in school-based programs and 56% are available in center-based and family child care homes
- **Child Outcomes:**
 - 2 years of PreK is beneficial for children



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



- UPK is widely seen as a meaningful investment in children
- 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 Implementation Challenges



- 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 must be a factor 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.

