



Date: March 13, 2025
 To: Chair Bongartz and members of the Senate Committee on Education
 CC: Representative Rey Garofano and Senator Martine Larocque Gulick, Legislative representatives 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

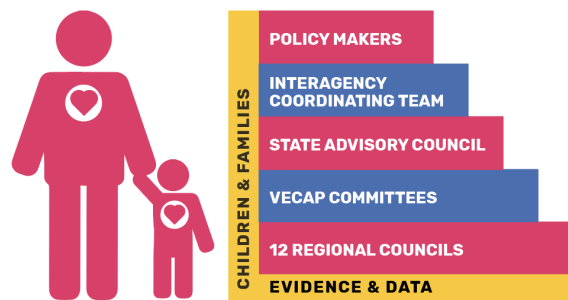
Building Bright Futures (BBF) is Vermont’s early childhood public-private partnership charged under Title 33, Chapter 46 and the federal Head Start Act to serve as Vermont’s Early Childhood State Advisory Council. State statute charges BBF with maintaining and monitoring the vision and strategic plan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



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

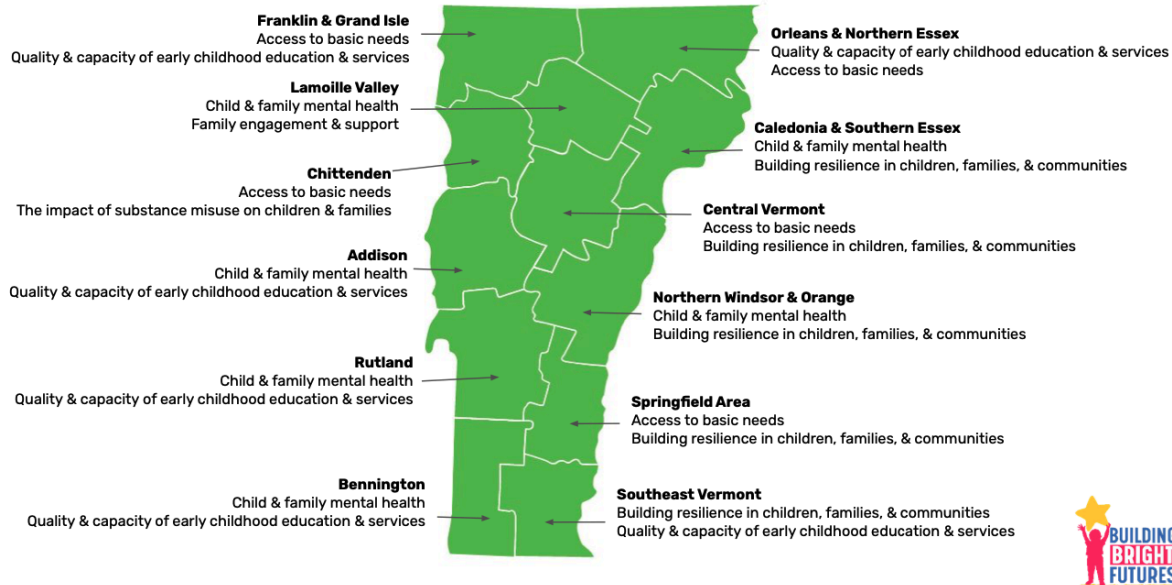
Elevating System Needs and Priorities

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



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.

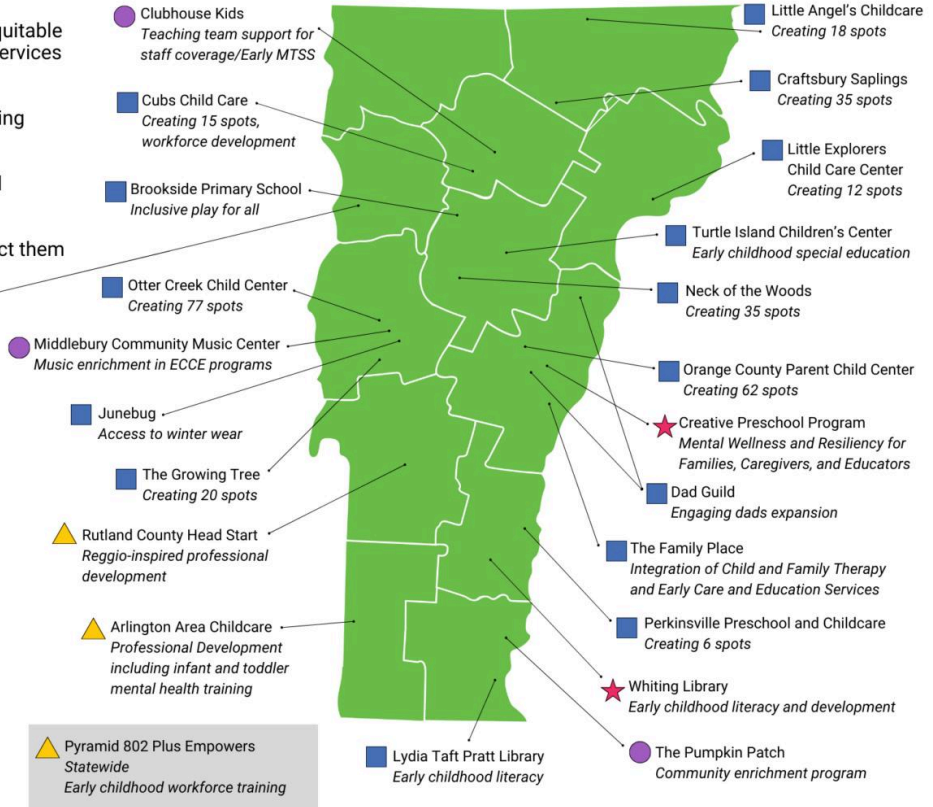
Fall 2024 VECF Grantees

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



CURRENT PRIORITIES: 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 this testimony, we want to draw attention to three areas of implementation of the law, the Child Care Financial Assistance Program, the work of the Pre-Kindergarten Implementation Committee and the SAC's policy recommendations related to pre-K.

In order to effectively monitor Act 76 implementation, 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](#).

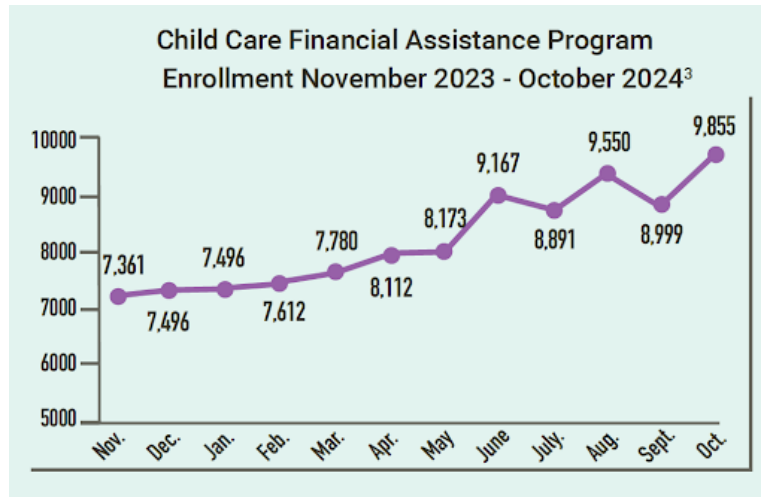
Key components of our Act 76 monitoring efforts, as outlined in the report including tracking timeliness, communication, and other indicators related to implementation; gathering qualitative data and feedback from early childhood partners on both implementation and impact of the law and its investments; 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.

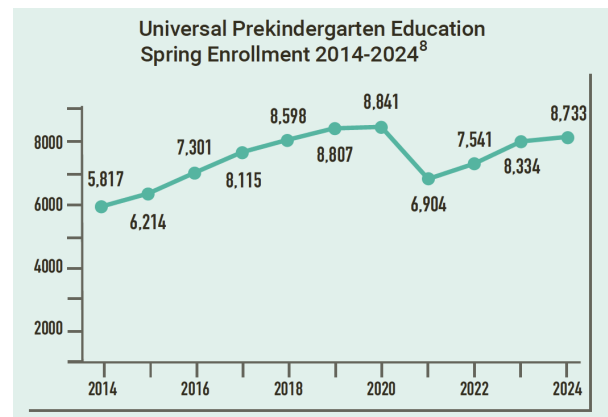
- **CAPACITY:** Increase of 170 infant slots in 2024 and in 2024, more child care programs opened (60) than closed (40) for the first time since at least 2018
- **AFFORDABILITY:** 550 families at 175% FPL who no longer have a copay
- **AWARENESS:** 1,500 CCFAP applications submitted online in two months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



Data snapshot on Prekindergarten Education in Vermont

Enrollment: Overall we’ve seen an increase over time in pre-K program enrollment. Most recent data reflects approximately 8,700 children in Vermont participating in universal pre-K. UPK enrollment has recovered to pre-pandemic levels.

Access: Vermont also consistently ranks 2nd in the country for having the highest access for 3-years for universal pre-K, and has been in this position since 2017. Vermont has ranked sixth for 4-year-olds in access to UPK.



Capacity: When considering potential decision-making or policy changes related to the program, it is important to understand the current capacity of pre-K in the state. Licensed capacity of universal pre-K suggests that 43% of slots are available in school-based programs and 57% are available in center-based and family child care homes, which reinforces the importance of a mixed delivery system in our rural state.

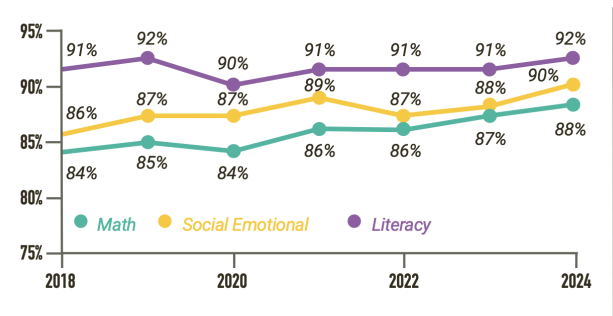


Universal Prekindergarten Education		
Enrollment	8,733	Spring 2024
Licensed Capacity	9,419	December 2024
School based	4,057 (43%)	
Private program	5,362 (57%)	

Child Outcomes: Child outcomes are critical to review right now as we’re thinking about changes to the system. Quantitative and qualitative data illustrate that there are some things that are not working for children, families, and programs that need to be strengthened. As we consider the best ways to expand the program, it is important to target the components that aren’t working well, without changing or sacrificing the elements that are working well.

- **Readiness for Kindergarten:** Children who attended a pre-K program before entering kindergarten had higher rates of readiness for kindergarten than those who did not attend. In the fall of 2023, 85% of students were identified as ready for kindergarten. Children who attended a publicly funded pre-K were more likely to be ready (87%) than those who did not (79%).¹
- **Social Emotional Development & Math:** There has been an increasing trend for 4-year-olds meeting or exceeding expectations for math and social emotional development in the spring of each year, while literacy has remained relatively steady over the same time period.²
- **Benefit from length of access:** Research shows us that two years of access to pre-K is beneficial for child development outcomes, particularly as we’re looking to ensure our children are prepared to enter kindergarten.³

Figure 18: 4-Year-Olds Meeting/Exceeding Expectations for Social, Emotional, Literacy & Math Assessments¹⁵



¹ Vermont’s Early Childhood Data & Policy Center at Building Bright Futures. (2025). The State of Vermont’s Children: 2024 Year in Review. Building Bright Futures: Williston, VT.

Retrieved from www.buildingbrightfutures.org/data-page/state-of-vermonts-children/

² Vermont’s Early Childhood Data & Policy Center at Building Bright Futures. (2025). The State of Vermont’s Children: 2024 Year in Review. Building Bright Futures: Williston, VT.

Retrieved from www.buildingbrightfutures.org/data-page/state-of-vermonts-children/

³ National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER). (2024). State of Preschool: 2023 Yearbook. Retrieved from <https://nieer.org/yearbook/2023/executive-summary#:~:text=Access%20for%203%2Dyear%2Dolds,outside%20of%20preschool%20special%20education.>



Data Efforts resulting from the Prekindergarten Education Implementation Committee (PEIC)

The Prekindergarten Education Implementation Committee (PEIC), composed of 18 members representing different organizations and constituencies, was created to assist the Agency of Education in improving and expanding accessible, affordable, and high-quality prekindergarten education for all 4-year-old children on a full-day basis on or before July 1, 2026. The PEIC met monthly over the course of 16 months through virtual committee and subcommittee meetings, in addition to one in-person meeting, [resulting in a report](#) delivered to the Legislature on December 6, 2024, issuing four key recommendations, alongside a compilation of documentation and data on the current status of universal prekindergarten education in Vermont’s mixed delivery system.

The appendix of the Prekindergarten Education Implementation Committee’s final report illustrates that despite a challenging timeline and scope, members of the PEIC were able to produce important data and resources that can and should be used going forward to inform policy and decision-making related to UPK in Vermont.

The following survey efforts yielded important qualitative data in addition to interviews, public comment, and a range of data captured prior to the PEIC’s work:

- A survey distributed public prekindergarten teachers fielded through the VTNEA list
- A survey distributed to principals through the Vermont Principals Association list
- A survey distributed to all Vermont superintendents by the Agency of Education
- A survey distributed to school board members through the Vermont School Boards Association list

Themes resulting from the survey are outlined below. A more comprehensive review of the findings can be found on page 71-100 of the PEIC report.

Key themes Identified that we need to consider in expanding our models:

- **Infrastructure Needs:**
 - Retrofitting classrooms, expanding transportation, addressing deferred building maintenance
 - Developing age-appropriate spaces (bathrooms, playgrounds, heating/cooling, etc.)
- **Workforce**
 - Need for qualified early childhood educators, special education staff, and support personnel
 - Impact on staffing ratios, licensing, and professional development needs

Impact on 3-Year-Olds and Mixed-Delivery Model:

- Concerns about removing 3-year-olds from pre-K programs, importance of prioritizing developmental outcomes
- Challenges with delivering special education services for young children

Regulatory and Oversight Issues:

- Need for simplified oversight and regulation across agencies
- Desire for clearer communication and stronger coordination between public/community based programs as well as between the state and local LEAs



Financial Considerations:

- Significant funding required for staff time, infrastructure, transportation, technology upgrades, and special education services
- Requests for increased pupil funding adjustments due to financial concerns
- Financial strain on school budgets amid state budget cuts

Importance of Maintaining Mixed-Delivery Model:

- Flexibility for families, particularly in rural areas
- Support for 3-year-olds, child care and afterschool care schedules that work for families
- Collaboration with community-based providers and programs

Special Education and Transition Needs:

- Restructuring of special education services for young children
- Transition planning for 3-year-olds moving from early intervention services to public schools
- Impact on children with disabilities, mental health challenges, and special health care needs

Areas of agreement:

- Coordinated approach for pre-K expansion
- Strong partnerships, sustainable funding, and clear communication needed to address challenges
- Maintaining access for 3-year olds mixed delivery, and expansion for 4-year olds
- High quality, well educated workforce
- Need to truly understand the cost across settings
- We need data infrastructure, systems, capacity

Outcome and Final Report of PEIC

The final PEIC Report was submitted on December 6 after a brief extension was requested and granted by the Legislature (the report was originally slated to be submitted December 1, 2024). The report summarized a range of influences on the committee process, including reflections on the challenges outlined above; situated the work within available national and statewide data; outlined successes and opportunities for improvement; and named four key recommendations that resulted from the committee's work. These recommendations include:

1. Maintaining the current prekindergarten benefit for 3-year-olds
2. Expanding access for 4-year-olds
3. Commissioning an analysis of Vermont's pupil weight for prekindergarten
4. Reviewing methodology for establishing prekindergarten payments to non-school-based programs and proposing updates

The State Advisory Council Network's 2025 Policy Recommendations Related to Pre-K

- Ensure Vermont's Universal Prekindergarten Education (UPK) program continues to lead the country by maintaining universal access for 3- and 4-year-olds in a mixed-delivery system



(school-based, center-based, and home-based programs) and centering the developmental needs of young children and their families. *Renewed Policy Recommendation (2022, 2023)*

- Task the Agency of Education, Child Development Division, and Building Bright Futures to create, implement, and update as necessary a monitoring and accountability protocol to better monitor Vermont’s Universal Prekindergarten Education (UPK), including robust data collection and analysis. The development of the process should include feedback from impacted communities and individuals (families, educators, Act 166 Coordinators, the Prekindergarten Education Implementation Committee, preK–12 administrators, etc.) and should be mindful of the additional capacity and skills reporting this data requires from programs. Collected data should include financial information, enrollment by student characteristics, staffing, and student outcomes.
- Secure sustained funding for personnel across all three entities to ensure high-quality data through the following activities: data management and reporting activities, training and TA to support quality collection and reporting, engagement in data integration meetings and visioning, data analysis, and making data publicly available.
- Examine how best to provide a continuity of pre-K and related services for children in rural regions and border regions, some of whom go on to attend kindergarten in bordering states (*2024 SAC Policy Recommendation*)

What the SAC’s Policy Recommendations Mean Related to Pre-K

- Vermont is seen as a national leader for its mixed-delivery pre-K program for children 3, 4, and 5 years of age not yet enrolled in kindergarten.
 - [Ranked sixth in the country for access for 4-year-olds and second for access for 3-year-olds.](#)
- Vermont maintains a mixed delivery model in alignment with national best practices
 - [42% of capacity for universal pre-K children was in school-based programs and 58% in private programs.](#)
 - Increased resources and capacity are needed to build out a more robust system for monitoring and data collection work to understand and track over time key characteristics of the program, such as student outcomes, staffing, and student characteristics in order to ensure equitable access and program efficacy.

Why these Recommendations Matter for UPK in Vermont

Based on the experiences of families, early educators, and young children, the current universal pre-K system has many strengths to continue leaning into, especially its mixed-delivery model, which centers the developmental and varied needs of young children and families. Concerning equity gaps remain particularly in the border regions in Essex County regarding access to the benefits of pre-k education. It is our hope that with your help, we can address this barrier to access and equity, the inability of families to access pre-K dollars to attend pre-K programs in New Hampshire, even if these programs are the only programs that families can reasonably access and where these children will ultimately attend kindergarten. Within the work of the PEIC, the need for stronger data and research systems has become increasingly apparent. Without investing more resources to collect needed data on pre-K, it will not be possible for the legislature to make data-informed decisions while considering expanding access to the program.