

Early educators should indeed be acknowledged for the important work we do, and I agree that certain educational qualifications should be required for those wishing to open or run licensed establishments.

However, I speak on behalf of many early educators who have dedicated years to this field. Our main concern lies in how the new recommendations will be implemented for current providers. The OPR suggests that all providers will need to obtain an associate degree, and while we understand that this will be a gradual process over several years, this requirement seems burdensome and unrealistic for many. The majority of childcare providers in this state operate between 7:00 AM and 5:00 PM, Monday through Friday, year-round. After hours, we often attend professional development training from 6:00-8:00 PM or attend all-day conferences on weekends. In addition, we are responsible for staying up-to-date on regulations, managing paperwork, ensuring food program compliance, completing STARS assessments, building curricula, networking, cleaning, updating taxes, and more—all while working long days. This does not even account for our personal family responsibilities.

Legislators expect us to earn an associate degree, despite the fact that many providers have only recently obtained their GEDs in response to previous requirements. Many chose this career to support their families and create a stable income, and they have worked diligently to remain open over the years. They adapted to the 2016 regulations, earned their GEDs, and navigated the STARS system and ongoing professional development. Now, many are being told, "You no longer qualify as an Early Childhood Educator unless you pursue an associate degree." This is a discouraging reality, and I believe Vermont will see a significant number of providers leave the field.

How does the OPR plan to incorporate years of training and professional experience into a system that demands college-level coursework?

As mentioned earlier, many current providers do not have college degrees. I was truly amazed by the dedication of the wonderful women and men who helped and supported me while I was opening my business. The profession's demands are overwhelming, both while working with children and in the work required beyond the standard 7:00 AM to 5:00 PM day. These providers may not have formal college degrees, but I can confidently say they are far more qualified than someone fresh out of college with a B.A. in Early Childhood Education.

Their life experiences and hands-on training speak volumes. Their willingness to support new providers should not go unnoticed, as life experiences in this field are far more valuable than a degree. Perhaps legislators should carefully consider the pros and cons of implementing such a significant change in the early education landscape. I invite you to spend a week working alongside us to truly understand the full scope of our daily responsibilities. Only then will you be able to grasp the real impact of the demands being placed on us.

This experience could provide valuable insight into our work and the challenges we face.

I truly hope that you take in consideration all that I have said for myself & my fellow family childcare workers. Why do this & push more out of this business just to make the shortage worse than it is already.

Sincerely Yours,
Jeanine Wixson