

S.206: The ECE Profession Bill Strengthens Vermont's Early Childhood Educator Workforce

Background: The Early Childhood Educator (ECE) Profession Bill would create individual licensure through Vermont's Office of Professional Regulation (OPR) for more than 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 is informed by feedback from more than 1,000 Vermont early childhood educators. In 2026, the ECE Profession Bill was introduced to the Senate as S.206.

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. As public investment expands Vermonters' access to child care, Vermont needs to recruit and retain a qualified workforce to work in these programs. To attract this workforce, early childhood educators in non-public-school child care settings need to be recognized for their skills and qualifications and have a clear map for professional growth. Meanwhile, families need transparency and confidence in the qualifications of the educators caring for their young children.

Why It Matters: Qualified educators lead to better outcomes for children in kindergarten and beyond. The qualifications of a child's early childhood educator are the single most important factor in high-quality early learning experiences. Children in any child care program deserve educators who meet clear, consistent standards for preparation and practice. The bill fills gaps in our current system, ensures more children have access to child care, supports families in going to work, and provides all children the opportunity to benefit from early experiences that prepare them for school and lifelong learning.

What the Bill Does: The bill is informed by Vermont's child care workforce and is designed to strengthen 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 early childhood education 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 recognized. One family child care home educator said:

"A license to practice creates a way for us to be recognized to teach what we are actually qualified to teach. That is equity that does not currently exist. It will keep me in business, it's stability for my children and families, and it encourages younger providers to stay in the field."

Licensure also formally recognizes educators' skills and strengthens the professional status of early childhood education across Vermont.

Retention Provisions: Based on workforce advocacy, the bill includes robust retention provisions, including a legacy Family Child Care Provider license, 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 ECE profession. The framework for a national ECE 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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