



Early Childhood Family Engagement Assessment Report 2020



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Family Engagement Assessment Executive Summary

The Building Bright Futures (BBF) Family Engagement Assessment project was conducted in 2020 to inform and improve how people who serve Vermont's children and families respect and engage families as partners. The project seeks to inform each level of Vermont's early childhood system – including families, communities and systems – about how to strengthen families as decision makers, strategies to nurture resilient families, and ultimately help children thrive. The project centered around a Family Engagement survey which was developed and executed to embody family engagement principals at each level of the process.

Creating meaningful partnerships with families leads to better outcomes for children.

22
Parent Ambassadors

424 survey responses from Vermont families with a child age five or younger

The BBF Families and Communities committee achieved its membership goal of 51% families

77% of all respondents strongly agreed that they feel welcomed and are treated with kindness

Survey responses illustrated a variety of family experiences. Responses differed by up to 40 percentage points in some cases.

Policy Recommendations

- A. Use a common definition of family engagement and partnership
- B. Create meaningful partnerships
- C. Commit to ensuring that children and families are in all policies
- D. Increase understanding of families' experiences and break down barriers created by systemic, institutional, and individual racism

VISION

BBF maintains the vision and strategic plan for Vermont's Early Childhood System. Vermont's vision for the Early Childhood system is to be an integrated continuum of comprehensive, high quality services that is equitable and accessible and will improve outcomes for each and every child in the prenatal period to age eight and their family in Vermont.

Building Bright Futures' Role

Building Bright Futures (BBF) is Vermont's early childhood public-private partnership mandated by Vermont's Act 104 and the federal Head Start Act to serve as the State Advisory Council (SAC) on Early Childhood. The SAC is the mechanism to advise the Governor and Legislature on the current status of children from the prenatal period to age eight and their families. Within these legislative mandates, BBF is charged with 5 primary responsibilities: Convening, Monitoring, Responding, Empowering, and Advising.

The Family Engagement Assessment was conducted in concert with the [2020 Early Childhood \(EC\) Systems Needs Assessment](#) and an update to [Vermont's Early Childhood Action Plan \(VECAP\)](#). Eight areas of need emerged from the Needs Assessment including family leadership in the early childhood system. The needs assessment found that early childhood stakeholders at all levels of the system need to recognize families as partners whose voices are critical to the system's success. Family engagement at the provider, agency, and community level is a VECAP strategic priority and rooted in [Vermont's Guiding Principles](#).

This project utilized the BBF network infrastructure which includes 12 regional councils, The State Advisory Council (SAC) and 7 committees putting The Vermont Early Childhood Action Plan (VECAP) into action including the Early Childhood Interagency Coordinating Team (ECICT) (See Figure 1). BBF informs this infrastructure by identifying and presenting the most up-to-date high-quality data. Its regional and statewide infrastructure allows BBF to have a presence in every corner of the state and in all communities. This network allows for the communication and escalation of barriers, and challenges and recommendations from both regions and from the State Advisory Council to policy makers. As decisions are made, the BBF infrastructure facilitates changes to the early childhood system to improve the lives of children and families across the state. This project utilized this infrastructure for implementation and will be used again to share the data and implement findings resulting from the project.

Figure 1 Building Bright Futures Multi-Tiered Infrastructure



Introduction

Families bring a wealth of skills, knowledge, and diverse perspectives to the programs and systems they engage with. The Family Engagement Assessment project was conducted in 2020 to inform and improve how people who serve Vermont's children and families respect and engage families as partners. The project seeks to inform each level of Vermont's early childhood system – including families, communities and systems – about how to strengthen families as decision makers, strategies to nurture resilient families, and ultimately help children thrive. Family voice is a crucial aspect toward creating an early childhood system that is more equitable, responsive, and accountable to families and communities.

Children's parents or caregivers are the first and most important teachers and guides, uniquely positioned to nurture their children to be healthy and to develop the capacities they will need to be ready for school and successful in life¹. Yet, creating opportunities for authentic and collaborative parent and family engagement is not always easy. Building Bright Futures grounded the process of developing and conducting the Family Engagement Assessment to embody family engagement principals at every step. This included hiring a parent leader as the project manager, crafting an assessment tool aligned with family engagement principles, recruiting and training diverse parent ambassadors from across the state to carry out the survey, and having parent leaders involved in the data analysis to inform the findings.

BBF Parent Ambassadors disseminated a survey intended to evaluate the early childhood system's delivery of services, supports, and timely information about programs for Vermont's families with children 0-5 with the aim of informing and improving Vermont's early childhood system, with a focus on birth to age five.

Questions covered three main areas:

- ❖ Family perspective regarding the early childhood programs and resources they access;
- ❖ Family perspective on Kindergarten transition; and
- ❖ Assess what Parent Leadership Programs exist across Vermont

The project was funded by the PreSchool Development Grant Birth-Five awarded to the State of Vermont in 2018 and executed in 2020.

¹ Center for the Study of Social Policy. *Parent and Family Engagement: A Community Action Brief*. Retrieved from <https://cssp.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Community-Action-Brief-Family-FINAL.pdf>

What is Family Engagement?

Family engagement can look different depending on the circumstance: parents or caregivers could be involved in advocacy, programmatic advisory, and/or parent leadership in the community. The term “families” is used instead of “parents” to be inclusive of the diverse home environments (10% of Vermont’s children under age 18 live with relatives, in foster homes or in group quarters)². While there are several models of family engagement to choose from, the key themes maintain that families should be engaged and convened in ways that promote equity, inclusiveness, and cultural and linguistic responsiveness.

Vermont’s family engagement work is inspired by the Center for the Study of Social Policy and the Strengthening Families Approach, which articulates five protective factors that mitigate risks and promote strong families and healthy child development. (See Figure 2) Vermont goes a step further to ensure that families are not only engaged, but are valued partners at each level of the work. There is a full range of family engagement opportunities and approaches at the child, family, provider, community supports and resources, and systems levels (See Figure 3).

Figure 2 Strengthening Families 5 Protective Factors

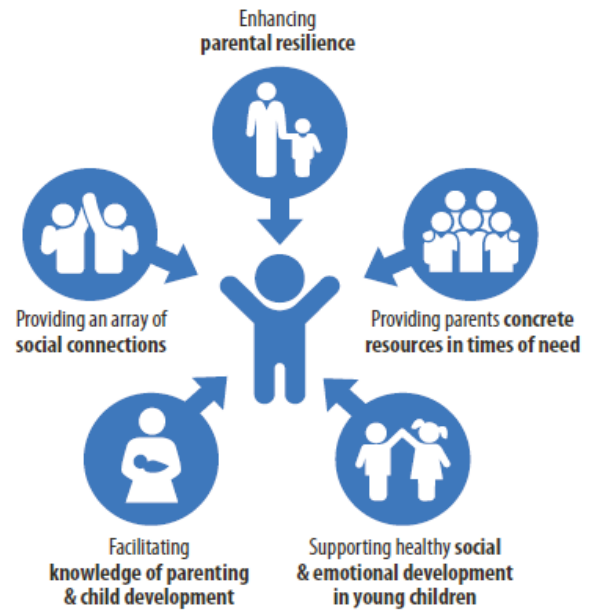
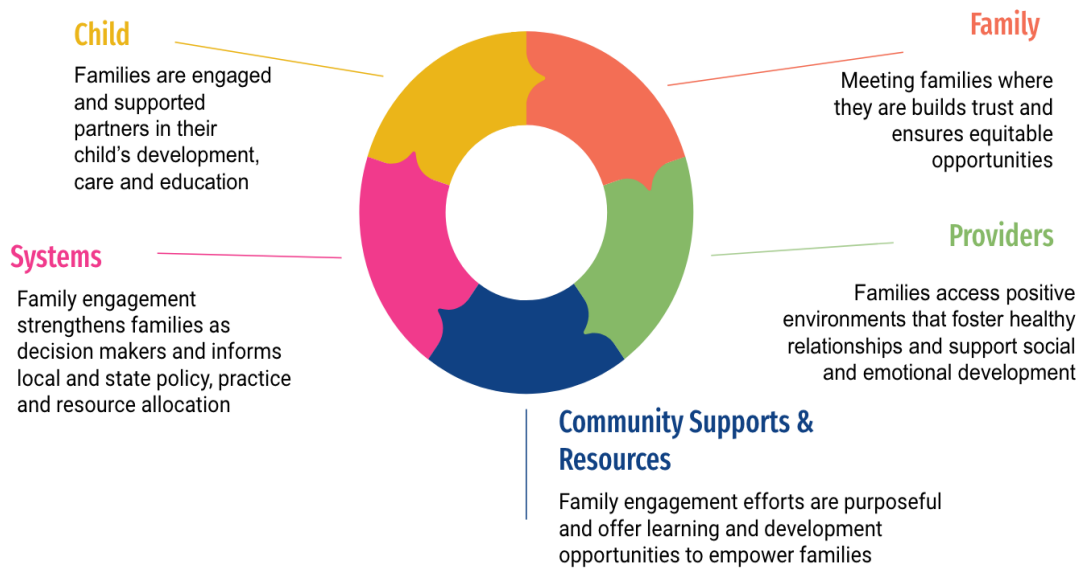


Figure 3 Spectrum of Family Engagement

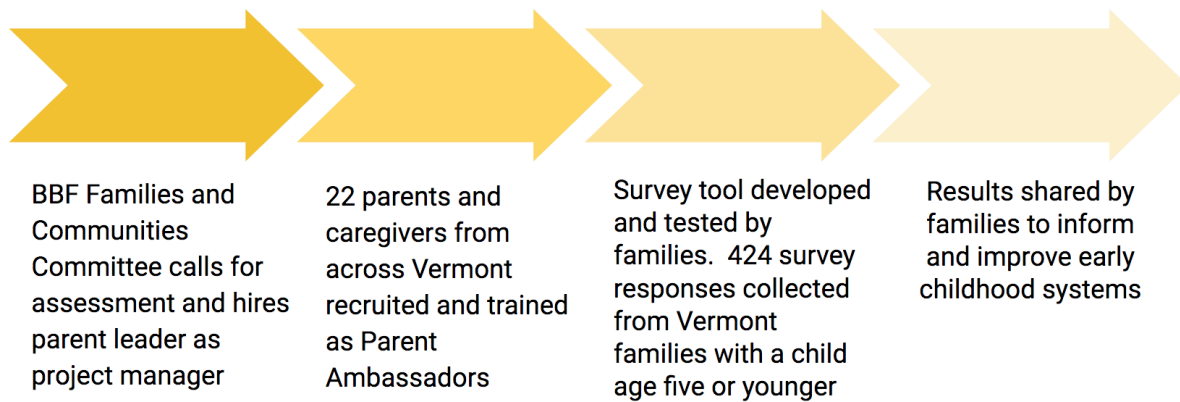


² U.S. Census Bureau (2019). Tables B09001, B09002, and B09018, Vermont (2014–2018). American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates. Retrieved from data.census.gov

Methodology

The BBF Families and Communities Committee is tasked with monitoring Vermont’s Early Childhood Action Plan (VECAP) Goal 2: *Families and Communities Play a Leading Role in Children’s Well-being*. The committee called for the Family Engagement Assessment and designed the methodology. The committee hired a parent leader as project manager and, in the Winter of 2020, recruited 22 parents and caregivers from across Vermont for the role of Parent Ambassador. These Ambassadors were trained using a framework developed in collaboration with The Center for Study of Social Policy (CSSP). The goals were to a) build strong relationships with one another b) build relationships with the BBF network c) execute the Parent Engagement Survey and c) initiate a transformation on how the EC system sees and utilizes family engagement and families as partners.

Figure 4 Family Engagement Assessment Methodology



Originally, Parent Ambassadors planned to collect quantitative and qualitative data by traveling to playgroups, child-care settings, libraries, etc. in their communities. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and resulting shut down of many of these in-person services in March 2020, a change to an online survey distribution model became necessary. Overall, 122 Surveys were collected in-person between March and May, and 322 were collected electronically in June and July of 2020. Of the 464 total responses, 424 were completed by families with children five or younger and therefore included in the analysis. The remaining 40 responses were from families with children older than five and were therefore excluded.

This project was carried out by the BBF Families and Communities committee with vision and direction by a consultant with extensive lived experience on the topic. The role of Parent Ambassadors was an instrumental. Despite the challenges of COVID, the shift to 100% virtual meetings to train parent ambassadors and execute the survey, was crucial to maintain connections and a shared humanity.

The Family Engagement Survey Tool was designed as a peer survey with the option to be completed independently on paper, digitally, or through an interview with the Parent Ambassador. Narratives could be collected in the comment section but remained optional. Modeled after the [CSSP’s Leadership](#)

[Assessment tool](#)³, The Family Engagement Survey questions were intentionally worded for accessibility and refined with input from families for clarity, that they were culturally sensitive and culturally relevant. Parent Ambassadors were trained to accommodate families needs: reading questions read aloud, offering to scribe, or access to an interpreter.

The Family Engagement Survey was distributed using a peer-to-peer strategy in an attempt to reach families who may not otherwise be accessing services and therefore not represented in existing data sets. Due to the pandemic, Parent Ambassadors reached out to their communities using social media platforms, email, text, and “over the fence” word of mouth — ensuring that respondents came from families with children age five or younger residing in Vermont.

Beyond their role in the survey project, BBF’s Parent Ambassador team participated in BBF Vermont Early Childhood Action Plan committee meetings, State Advisory Council meetings, Regional Councils, and subcommittees. The Parent leader and project consultant served an essential role to build relationships, maintain communication and provide whatever support necessary for Parent Ambassadors’ engagement. She also supported BBF staff to foster strong relationships with their Parent Ambassadors by engaging in regular check-ins, providing instruction and support and ensuring that parents and caregivers were compensated for their time. This resulted Parent Ambassadors stepping into leadership roles; one as the co-chair to the Families and Communities committee and the other as co-chair of the Southeast Vermont Regional Council. Parent Ambassadors prepared and presented findings from the survey to BBF Regional Councils and VECAP committees.

³ The Center for the Study of Social Policy. *Parent Engagement and Leadership Assessment Tool*. Retrieved from <https://cssp.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Parent-Engagement-and-Leadership-Assessment-Guide-and-Toolkit-ABRIDGED-1.pdf>

Results

Survey Focus: What questions were asked?

The Family Engagement Survey was focused on five statements about the family's chosen place of contact for respondents to rate on a scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree as well as a space for additional comments.

Family Engagement Survey Questions

1. I feel that my children and I are treated with kindness and feel comfortable and welcomed.
2. I feel like my providers understand and welcome my family's culture and values.
3. I feel that I'm given the opportunity to make decisions about how to best care for my child(ren) and family.
4. I feel it was easy to communicate my needs to staff at the program
5. For families who had transitioned from PreK to Kindergarten or were in the process of that transition: Before and during this transition, the staff made every effort to understand my needs and the needs of my child(ren).

Each of the five statements are explored below in two different ways. The first is the percent of families who "strongly agreed" with the statement for each of the following populations to show the variation in experiences of Vermont families:

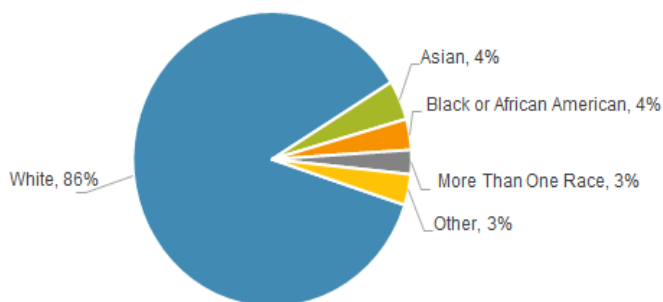
- All respondents;
- Respondents identifying as Black or African American;
- Respondents identifying as more than one race;
- Respondents who indicated they participate in 3SquaresVT which indicates that the household income is less than 185% of the Federal Poverty Level;
- Respondents who chose a child care setting as their place of contact; and
- Respondents who chose a medical home as their place of contact.
- Respondents who chose a school based program as their place of contact (for Kindergarten transitions only).

The second way that the statements were explored is through the quotes that respondents shared in their additional comments. While it can be helpful to give a percent, the quotes help to fill out the picture of how or why a response was chosen.

Figure 5 Survey Responses by Race

Demographics (race and geographic location)

The Family Engagement Survey generated 424 responses from Vermont families with a child age five or younger. This number shows a robust response. While the sample size was small, survey responses from BIPOC, Asian,



and Hispanic families with young children in Vermont **were higher** than the state’s overall population distribution, (See Figure 5). Geographically, there was participation from families from each Vermont county, although not at the same rate as the county population would suggest. (See Figure 6).

Figure 6 Survey Responses by County and Population by County

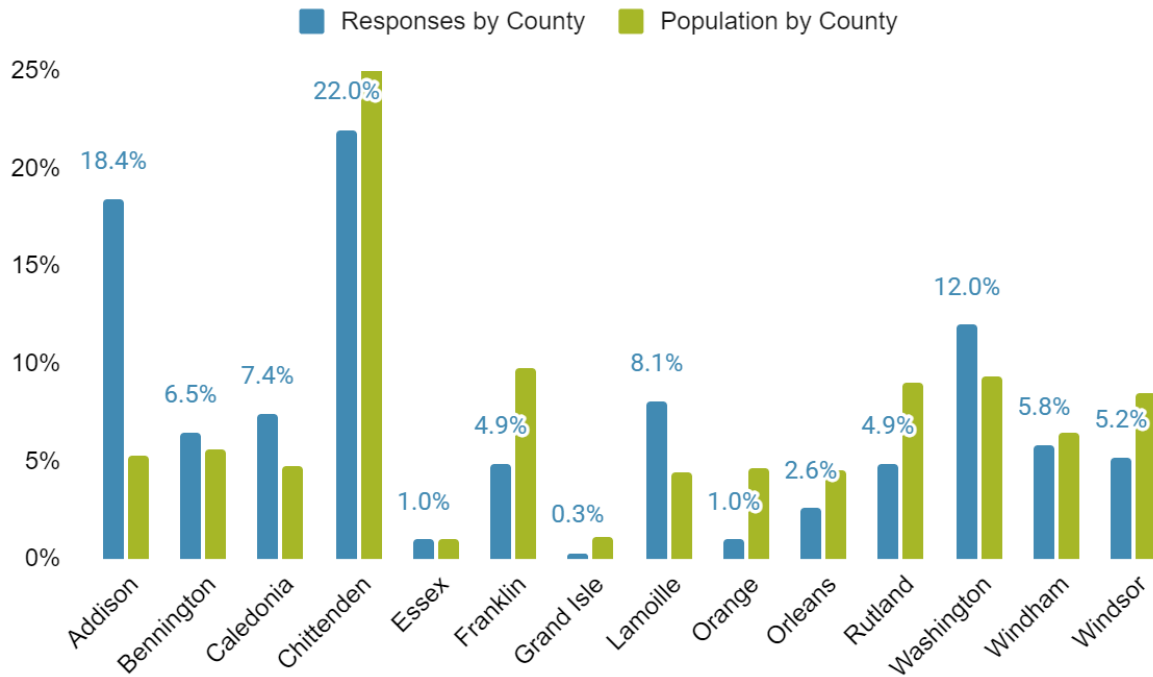
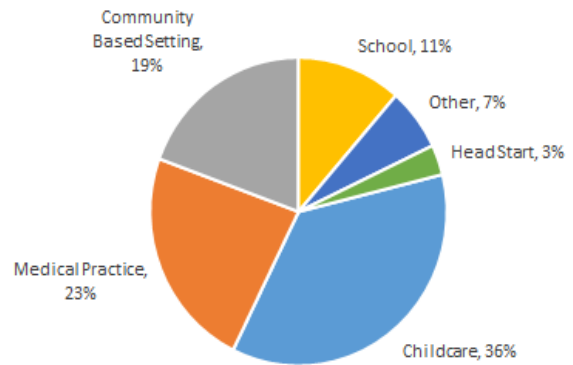


Figure 7 Responses by Place of Contact

Place of Contact

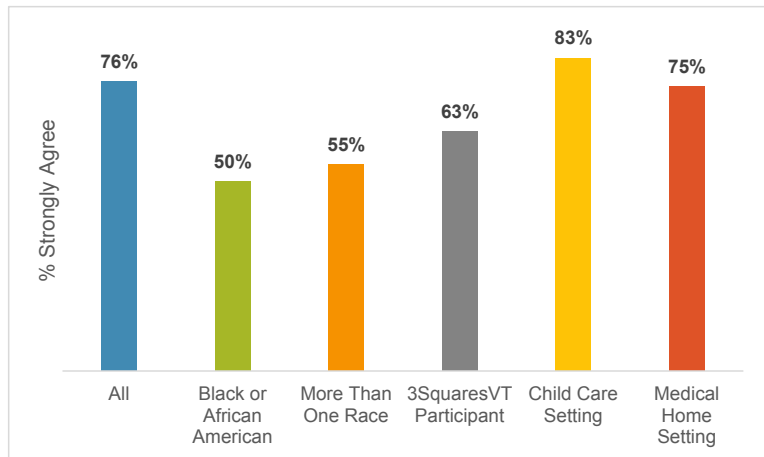
Families were asked to choose one place they attend or a resource they access with their child 0-5. Families were not instructed on how to choose the place or resource (e.g. the most common place or the most trusted place). They were asked to keep this place in mind when responding to the survey questions (See Figure 7).



I feel that my children and I are treated with kindness and feel comfortable and welcomed.

76% of families strongly agreed with feeling welcomed and treated with kindness. As can be seen in Figure 8, when grouped by the characteristics above, the highest percent of ‘Strongly agree’ responses were from child care (83%) and medical home (75%) settings while the lowest percent of ‘Strongly agree’ responses were from families who received 3SquaresVT food assistance due to low household income (63%), families identifying as Black or African American (50%), and families identifying as more than one race (55%).

Figure 8 Respondents who Strongly Agree that their Family was Welcomed and Treated with Kindness



What made respondents feel this way?

Quotes from families about what made them feel they were treated with kindness and feel comfortable and welcomed:

“Our case manager is helpful and not judgmental”

“Dr. [REDACTED] is the first doctor I’ve met to truly understand addiction as a parent and really care to help.”

“The library itself is amazing and the programs that we provide are such good experiences for my daughter.”

“The teacher that works with my child is awesome, very aware of his needs.”

“They are very warm and accommodating, knowledgeable and accepting of different parenting choices.”

“██████ is like a 3rd parent to our children and we couldn't be happier with her involvement in their development”

“She treats us like family!”

“Way above and beyond in this department. A librarian attended my child's drive-by birthday party and gave her a book from the whole children's department.”

“They are always welcoming and have a lot of resources available including child care.”

Quotes from families about on what did not make them feel they were treated with kindness or made to feel comfortable and welcomed:

“Communications and passive aggressive behavior feel critical of parents and lack of understanding of diverse needs and situations of kids and families, particularly those who might learn differently, or those from less privileged households”.

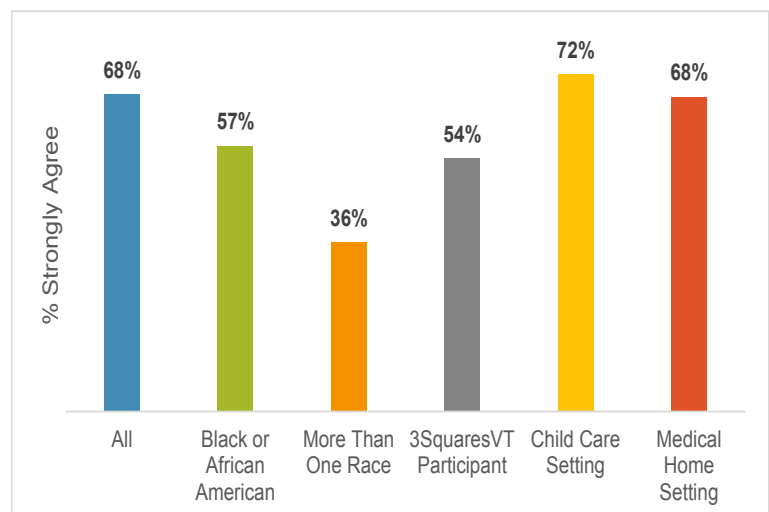
“I think they have too many kids and don't really give enough attention to each kid”

“Some turnover in staff there lately has been a struggle.”

I feel like my providers understand and welcome my family's culture and values.

68% of families strongly agree they felt their family's culture and values were understood and welcomed. As can be seen in Figure 9, when grouped by the characteristics above, the highest percent of 'Strongly agree' responses were from child care (72%) and medical home (68%) settings while the lowest percent of 'Strongly agree' responses were from families who received 3SquaresVT food assistance due to low household income (54%), families identifying as Black or African American (57%), and families identifying as more than one race (36%).

Figure 9 Respondents who Strongly Agree that their Family's Culture and Values Were Understood and Welcomed



What made respondents feel this way?

Quotes from families on what made them feel their culture and values were understood and welcomed:

“They are very interested in my culture and ask questions.”

“They were open to and non judgemental about our decisions around baby sleep and solids.”

“They were supportive of feeding and care decisions that work best for our family.”

“I have built great relationships with the people I've met through the group. It's really nice to meet people with different ideals and parenting styles.”

Quotes from families about on what did not make them feel their culture and values were understood and welcomed:

“There’s an insiders vs outsiders culture that exists in the larger school that begins in preschool.”

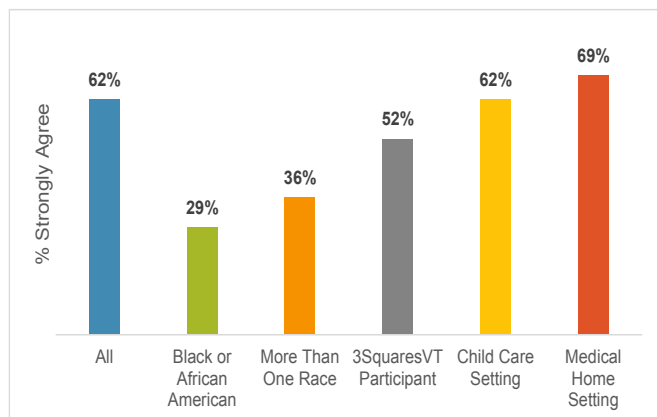
“We provide different levels of care. We’ve also noticed a difference in care as our child got older and needed more attention.”

“Not all providers are sensitive or inclusive to us as a 2 mom family.”

I feel that I’m given the opportunity to make decisions about how to best care for my child(ren) and family.

62% of families strongly agree that they were given the opportunity to make decisions about how to best care for their child(ren) and family. As can be seen in Figure 10, when grouped by the characteristics above, the highest percent of ‘Strongly agree’ responses were from child care (62%) and medical home (69%) settings while the lowest percent of ‘Strongly agree’ responses were from families who received 3SquaresVT food assistance due to low household income (52%), families identifying as Black or African American (29%), and families identifying as more than one race (36%).

Figure 10 Respondents Who Strongly Agree to Being Given the Opportunity to Make Decisions About How To Best Care for Their Children



Quotes from families about what made respondents feel they had opportunities to make decisions on how best to care for their child and family:

“I occasionally feel that the school is a little strict regarding food and what my child can/cannot wear to school, but other than that, yes, I feel I have the ability to make the best decisions for my family.

“They help find resources.”

“Very warm and accommodating, knowledgeable and accepting of different parenting choices.”

“They were open to and non judgemental about our decisions around baby sleep and solids.”

Quotes from families about what limited their opportunities to make decisions on how best to care for their child and family:

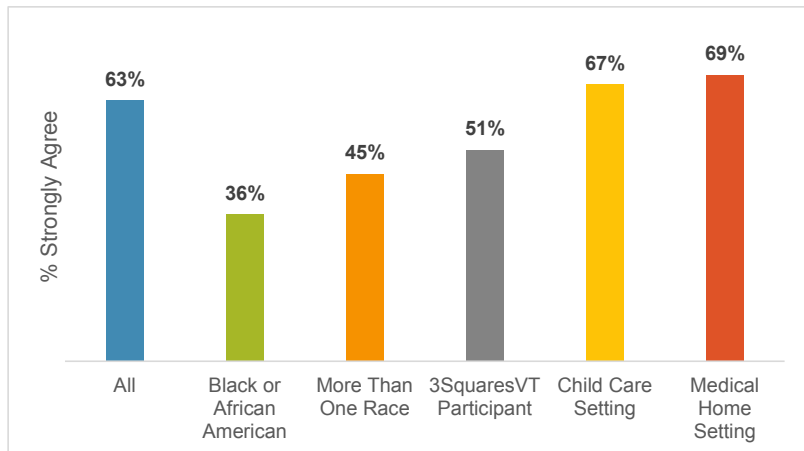
“There are always so many rules”

“There is one lead teacher that I dislike because it seems like she tries to overrule parental decisions and assert her own value system, specifically around food and which foods she thinks my child should be eating.”

I feel it was easy to communicate my needs to staff at the program

63% of families strongly agree that it was easy to communicate their needs to staff at the program. As can be seen in Figure 11, when grouped by the characteristics above, the highest percent of ‘Strongly agree’ responses were from child care (67%) and medical home (69%) settings while the lowest percent of ‘Strongly agree’ responses were from families who received 3SquaresVT food assistance due to low household income (51%), families identifying as Black or African American (36%), and families identifying as more than one race (45%).

Figure 11 Respondents Who Strongly Agree It Was Easy to Communicate Their Needs to Staff at the Program



Of the limited comments to this question, families responded positively to timeliness of response to questions and having reliable opportunities to connect with providers during appointments or at drop off or pick up.

Quotes from families about what made it easy to communicate their needs to staff at the program:

“The school is very attentive and responds to all questions or concerns promptly, even after hours.”

Regarding COVID impact, “I valued the time we used to check in with the teachers during the pickup/drop off and due to covid that's been limited/non-existing. But that's not on the school or the teachers. It's just the way things are.”

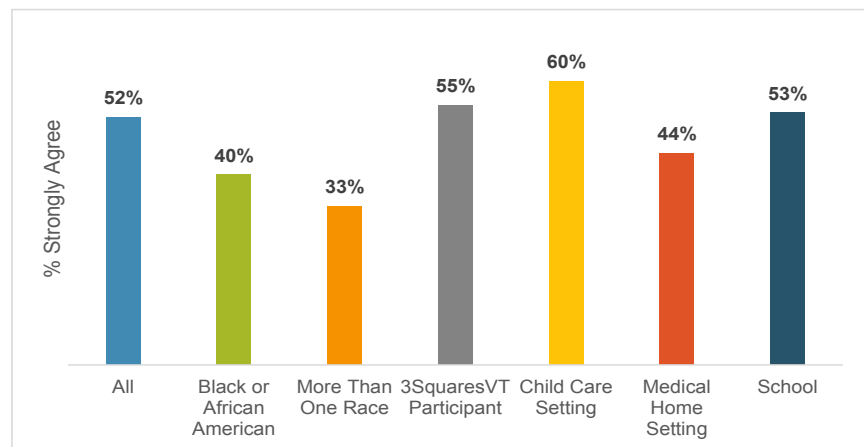
Transitions from PreK to Kindergarten

Before and during this transition, the staff made every effort to understand my needs and the needs of my child(ren).

The survey asked about transitions because this is a particularly challenging time as a child moves from early care and learning, head start or community based programs to prekindergarten education, and then to kindergarten. Supporting families in making informed decisions improves child outcomes.

52% of families strongly agreed and 13% disagree or strongly disagree that staff made every effort to understand their needs and the needs of their child(ren) before and during the transition. As can be seen in Figure 12, when grouped by the characteristics above, the highest percent of ‘Strongly agree’ responses were from child care settings (60%) and families who received

Figure 12 Respondents Who Strongly Agree to Every Effort was Made to Understand Their Needs Before and During the Kindergarten Transition



3SquaresVT food assistance due to low household income (55%), while the lowest percent of ‘Strongly agree’ responses were from medical home settings (44%), families identifying as Black or African American (40%), and families identifying as more than one race (33%). Because not all families had children who were in the transition age group, this is only reflective of 169 responses.

62% strongly agree or agree that every effort was made by their early childcare educators to understand their families needs before and during the transition to kindergarten. 62% strongly agree or agree that every effort was made by their medical providers to understand their families needs before and during the transition to kindergarten. In addition, 80% of families strongly agree or agree that schools are making positive efforts in supporting the transition to kindergarten.

Of the limited comments to this question, families responded positively about their PreK programs supporting them around the transition to Kindergarten. In addition, there were a few comments about limitations due to the impact of COVID-19 during the transition in 2020.

Quotes from families about efforts made to understand their needs and the needs of their child(ren) before and during the transition from Pre-K to Kindergarten:

“For my older child, [REDACTED] absolutely did this. The younger one still has two more years of preschool.”

“My son will be 4 years in August, may not be going to Kindergarten then, but I am fully satisfied with the amount of progress that my son is making at [REDACTED].”

Quotes from families about limitations, specifically due to COVID-19, to understanding their needs and the needs of their child(ren) before and during the transition from Pre-K to Kindergarten:

“Still a work in progress. Return to school plans aren’t even made yet.”

“This question seems out of context given the current pandemic. The school is doing everything they can to provide for my child at this time but no one yet knows what to expect for a fall semester (and a transition to kindergarten).”

Vermont Leadership Programs

The survey also asked if respondents had attended a leadership program and the types of programs. Those reported include:

Table 1 Vermont Leadership Programs and Sponsoring Organization Families Reported Attending

Parenting Program, Addison County Parent Child Center
YMCA Early Learning Readiness Program at ECHO Lake Aquarium and Science Center
Foster Parenting/Kinship Training, Department for Children and Families
Grow Your Own, behavioral, and not losing your top , Head Start / Early Head Start New England Conference
Growing Better Readers, Vermont Humanities and Building Bright Futures
Parenting program, The Family Center
Leadership series, Vermont Family Network & Green Mountain Self-Advocates
Leadership and advocacy training, Let's Grow Kids
Personal Care Attendant LNA training
Parenting class, Rutland Parent Child Center
childcare training, Church
RPC+TIPS, Counseling Service of Addison County
Self Sustaining Leadership, Chance for Change
Parent ambassador training, Building Bright Future
Ready Rosie Parents as Leaders, Bennington County Head Start

The survey collected information on the types of leadership programs families participated in, as well as the sponsoring organization. This informs stakeholders in family engagement and family leadership development in the state.

Conclusions

Lessons Learned about Family Experience

The results from the Family Engagement survey show varied family experience both by the type of setting and by family characteristics. Further investigation of these variations is needed. However, the recommendations below when acted upon will help organizations, agencies, and the full early childhood system to improve family experience for each and every Vermont child and family.

Lessons Learned about Family Engagement

The Family Engagement Assessment, at its heart, is about informing how service providers interact with families to support them in building protective factors. The survey informs the early childhood system how to strengthen families as partners and decision makers, how to build more resilient families and ultimately improve child outcomes. Families and parents play an important role, not just as participants, but as leaders to inform the creation of a system that meets their needs, is more equitable, responsive, and accountable to families and communities.

Figure 1 Words Used to Talk About Family Engagement



Families desire opportunities to actively participate in their child’s development, make decisions in the early childhood system. The inclusion of parents as stakeholders provides Vermont with a lucrative opportunity to leverage the newly hired network of parent leaders to increase diversity in decision-making bodies, in order to better reflect the population served.

Of primary importance is the continued **reinforcement of the message that parent and caregiver voice is valued.** Vigorous family engagement

should be a part of program governance within early childhood organizations system-wide. Partnering and consistently consulting with families with lived experience can greatly inform and improve service delivery and impact. Careful facilitation and maintenance of a parent leader network – using strategies like reimbursement for participation, by reinforcing connections and relationship building, and providing learning and development opportunities – will foster the inclusion of parents and caregivers as key stakeholders and decision-makers across the EC system.

Parent Engagement Strategies to support consistent meeting attendance by parents and caregivers

According to BBF’s Parent Ambassadors, the top three strategies to support consistent meeting attendance were:

- Allow children to attend

- Schedule meetings around naptime and after bedtime
- Shorten the length of meetings

Sustained attention should be paid to recruiting, training, coaching and listening to parent perspectives when making decisions about how to convene with families as partners to inform strategies to meet the diverse needs of Vermont’s families with young children.

Quotes from our Parent Ambassadors about their involvement with the BBF parent engagement assessment:

“I am so moved by the clear statements at the beginning of each meeting that each person’s needs matter, at all moments. Taking a bathroom break, nursing your baby, answering your child’s questions, eating a snack, taking a breath, turning your screen off...they are all understood as part of Life. If these statements were made at all meetings everywhere, regardless of the people present, it feels like we might all actually be able to be more present and more productive. It feels both revolutionary and obvious at the same time!”

“I felt connected to other parents and people around the state who are committed to making our children & families a BIG priority!”

“I made a lot of connections with program leaders around my county in order to connect with parents, and I was able to have good conversations with them about what is needed in our area for the families of young children.”

“Gaining relationships, getting my voice heard, giving me purpose outside of my home life, making connections by talking with friends and other parents in my community.”

Limitations

The data collection method was based on self-selection and relied on self-response. The method also relied heavily on the personal networks of Parent Ambassadors. Results cannot therefore be considered representative of all Vermont families with young children. Overall, response distributions are not aligned with the population by county or region. The distribution method was based on Parent Ambassador's personal networks and primarily influenced by geography. Responses came from all corners of the state, though not representative. Addison County, for example, is home to 5.3% of the Vermont's children, Parent Ambassadors from this region delivered 18% of survey responses by leveraging existing relationships between local organizations and parents/caregivers that had already been built by local organizations.

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting "stay home, stay safe" order, Parent Ambassadors distributed a digital version of the survey, thereby limiting respondents to those with access to internet and technology. Future efforts need to place emphasis on reaching out to even more marginalized communities, particularly fathers, grandparents who are primary caregivers, and BIPOC community members.



Building Bright Futures Family Engagement Policy Recommendations

Building Bright Futures' Families and Communities Committee arrived at four policy recommendations based on the survey results and the process of conducting the Family Engagement Assessment.

A. Use a common definition of family engagement and partnership.

- a. Increase organizational and agency coordination efforts including the creation of common language and shared understanding of what success looks like when partnering and engaging with families.

B. Create meaningful partnerships.

- a. Increase opportunities for parent and caregiver representatives in leadership and decision making roles to inform local and state policy, practice and resource allocation. (e.g. committees, legislatively mandated study sections, decision-making bodies)

C. Commit to ensuring that children and families are in all policies.

- a. Incorporate child development and family well-being into decision-making across sectors, impact areas, and policy areas. Review programs, policies, and new legislation to ensure that revisions and requirements consider the impact and consequences to child development and family well-being at the state-agency, community-based partners level, and at the policy-making level.

D. Increase understanding of families' experiences and break down barriers created by systemic, institutional, and individual racism.

- a. Prioritize addressing bias, racial equity, and inclusion across the early childhood system and build it into policies, practices, and operations. Welcome, respect, and value parents and caregivers representing the diversity of the community for their unique contributions.⁴

⁴ The Center for the Study of Social Policy. *Parent Engagement and Leadership Assessment Guide and Toolkit*. Retrieved from <https://cssp.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Parent-Engagement-and-Leadership-Assessment-Guide-and-Toolkit-FINAL.pdf>

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Discussion Guide for the Early Childhood Family Engagement Assessment

Framing Language Building Bright Futures recently released a Family Engagement Report to inform and improve how service providers interact with families to support them in building protective factors. The survey informs how to strengthen family parents as decision makers, how to build more resilient families and ultimately improve child outcomes. Parents play an important part not just as participants, but as leaders to create a system that is more equitable, responsive, and accountable to families and communities.

This guide is to assist in local discussions and ways this report can be a tool to have dialogue, share information, and build a common language and understanding to better serve children and families.

Discussion Facilitation Ideas

- o Share the report with participants at least a week ahead of time. Build at least 5 minutes into a council meeting for people to review the introduction (at minimum) that can then guide discussion, rather than assuming people will have had time to read it thoroughly ahead of the meeting.
- o Introduce the report using framing language – have participants take turns reading the introduction.
- o Review the methodology, data and graphics in the report. Discuss what can be learned from the data to improve partnering with families?
- o Review the definition for family engagement. How is this similar or different from the definition you are using in your program?
- o In pairs, review the report and focus on the project methodology and 4 policy recommendations. Choose one question to discuss:
 - A. What stood out for you in the report that surprised you?
 - B. What opportunities do families have to serve as leaders, partners, specialists, decision-makers in your organization?
 - C. How does your organization define “Family Engagement”?
 - D. What shift in practice can you make to improve how families are involved in making decisions?
 - E. What changes in your agency, the state system, policy or funding would make this recommendation/strategy more successful?
- o Return to the large group and ask:
 - What did you learn from your discussion with your pair that excites you?
 - What is a change we (as a staff, department, council) can do to promote family engagement?