



**Building Bright Futures State Advisory Council (BBF SAC)  
Meeting Minutes  
May 24, 2021 (via Zoom)**

**SAC Members Present:** Cheryle Wilcox, Eddie Gale, Jessica Brumsted, Christy Swenson, Miranda Gray, Flor Diaz Smith, Ken Jones, Mike McRaith, Ashely Miller, Renee Kelly, Aly Richards, Ilisa Stahlberg, Amy Johnson, Becca Webb, Chloe Learey, Wendy Trafton, Kate Rogers, Paul Dragon

**Absent:** Emily Merrill, Lexi Duquette

**Community Partners/Guests:** Lee Lauber, Becky Millard Kristen Martin, Deb Grennon, Kelly Pajala, Margaret Atkinson, Matt Levin,

**Staff present:** Morgan Crossman, Beth Truzansky, Jay Austin, Amanda Biggs, Robin Stromgren, Dora Levinson, Katie Mobbs,

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## **Welcome & Introductions**

### **1. Welcome all in attendance, review agenda**

The May SAC meeting was dedicated to understanding federal investments, as well as what is on the horizon for Vermont and how these can be leveraged to address needs and gaps facing families, communities and the early childhood system. BBF convened the May 24 State Advisory Council with 75 participants. The full recording is linked [here](#).

### **2. SAC General Business**

#### **a. Working agreements**

In an effort to welcome newcomers and invite a full range of voices, the SAC adopted working agreements. Working agreements are an important process to create a space where people feel willing and able to speak their truths/be themselves, take risks, be creative, and ultimately produce something of shared value.

- Listen for understanding, not disagreement
- Consider the opinions and experiences of others
- Be mindful of the difference between intent and impact
- Step up, step back (take turns speaking, make room for others to speak)
- Tolerate ambiguity
- Lean into discomfort
- Bring a spirit of experimentation and creativity
- Remember that what we hear is often more important than what we say
- Honor complexity and the fact that as individuals we do not know it all
- Share responsibility for success

#### **b. Approval of March minutes:**

Motion by Flor Diaz Smith, Chloe Learey, Co-Chair called for discussion, all members voted in favor of approving. Ken Jones and Eddie Gale abstain from the vote.

**c. Vote on Executive Committee Nomination of Emily Merrill**

The SAC welcomed Kendal Smith, Director of Policy Development and Legislative Affairs for Governor Scott. Kendal will be joining the SAC as a non-voting member to ensure alignment with the Governor's office as we move forward with early childhood initiatives. The SAC also voted for Emily Merrill to join the SAC Executive Committee as a parent and at-large member. Next, the SAC took a step to welcome newcomers and invite a full range of voices, the group agreed to a set of working agreements (also called group norms).

- Emily Merrill nominated to serve as the At-Large Member on the Executive Committee for a two year term until March 31, 2023

Motion by Eddie Gale, Christy Swenson seconds, all members voted in favor of approving.

**d. BBF Organization updates from Dr. Morgan Crossman**

Dr. Morgan Crossman, Executive Director of BBF, provided a few organization updates to strengthen each layer of the BBF Network (including the SAC, the VECAP Committees and the Regional Councils) and build a fiscally sustainable team to support the infrastructure. BBF is transitioning to a staff of 12 with 4 directors supporting the Network's policy work (including the SAC, VECAP Committees, testimony, monitoring and data to inform policy, network communications and development) and 4 managers supporting the work of our 12 regional councils. This team of 8 will also have support from 2 part-time administrative managers.

She also highlighted work to develop a more diverse budget of \$1.3M for FY22 in addition to projecting a budget through 2026. The SAC celebrated an increase to BBF's state/legislative allocation from \$244K to \$505K as well as a more equitable split between state, private philanthropic and federal dollars to support this critical public and private work.

The SAC will review and vote on the FY 22 Budget at a **brief specially called meeting on Tuesday, July 6<sup>th</sup>**.

**3. Early Childhood Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic: Existing and Future Investments, Priorities and Gaps**

Building a well-resourced and fiscally sustainable early childhood system is a priority. Monitoring this system and coordinating early childhood investments is one of BBF's charges in state statute. It is also one of the four goals in the Vermont Early Childhood Action Plan,

All children have a healthy start

Family and Community play a leading role in children's well-being

All children and families have access to high-quality opportunities that meet their needs

The early childhood system will be integrated, well-resourced and data-informed

The remainder of the May SAC meeting was dedicated to understanding federal investments, as well as what is on the horizon for Vermont and how these can be leveraged

to address needs and gaps facing families, communities and the early childhood system. This conversation is timely with the passing of the State Budget, the ongoing pandemic challenges as well as due to the pandemic, a surplus in the State’s general fund and billions of dollars of Federal investment to support recovery. There have been three major emergency relief packages approved by Congress: one passed in March allocated \$31 million to Vermont, another in December sent \$126 million, and the American Rescue Plan Act passed in March will result in an additional \$284 million to Vermont. (source) This is a welcome investment after a particularly tumultuous year for children, families and those who provide services to them. The SAC was joined by three agency leaders to talk about what is known about existing and "on the horizon" federal investments in their sector:

Cheryle Wilcox, Interagency Planning Director, Department of Mental Health  
 Miranda Gray, Interim Deputy Commissioner, Child Development Division  
 Dr. Heather Bouchey, Deputy Secretary, Vermont Agency of Education

The **Department of Mental Health** will receive an additional \$2.4M in Mental Health Block Grant funds from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). The purpose of these funds are for community based mental health supports to fund over the next four years. Stakeholder input is currently being gathered from a range of groups (i.e: peer organizations, standing committees, and Vermont Care Partners) to help determine the most effective way to utilize funds. Once this information gathering is complete, DMH will take the plan back to the Mental Health Block Grant Planning Council for additional input and recommendations before the Commissioner of Mental Health makes a final decision.

The **Child Development Division** will receive approximately \$47 million dollars in American Rescue Plan Act money coming to both stabilize early childhood now and invest funds over the next 3 years to position Vermont to be able to support early childhood needs for years to come. These are one-time funds therefore it is important to strategically invest in ways that support the system now and avoid creating unfunded obligations in the future. Funding streams are identified in the table below.

The **Agency of Education** will receive approximately \$566M that are directed to school districts for children PreK through grade 12. Each state developed a plan informed by a needs assessment and districts are in the process of conducting a similar process and will include an extensive stakeholder engagement process. The state’s priorities, outlined in for these funds are to support students and schools navigate out of the pandemic:

1. Social emotional functioning, mental health, and well-being
2. Student engagement and truancy reduction
3. Academic achievement and success
4. Vermont was fortunate to open schools to in-person learning in September, earlier than many other states.

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**COVID Recovery Funding Streams Presented at the May 24 BBF State Advisory Council**

Agency Receiving Funds	Amount	Purpose	Timeframe
Department of Mental Health	\$2.4M	Mental Health Blog Grant-Expand community based mental health supports	9/1/2021 – 9/30/2025

Child Development Division	\$29.3M	Stabilization Funds-Stabilize childcare industry by supporting operating expenses	9/30/2023
	\$18.3M	Child Care Development Block Grant-CCDF priorities include supporting the quality and capacity of the childcare industry (i.e: workforce professional development, development/enhancement of tiered quality rating system for child care services (STARS), improve supply and quality of child care programs and services for infant and toddlers, etc.) The state is waiting for official guidance.	9/30/2024
	\$380,252	Community Based Child Abuse Prevention Program Funds-Priorities include enhancement of community-based and prevention focused programs; support coordination of resources and activities to strengthen and support families to reduce the likelihood of child abuse and neglect; and to foster understanding, appreciation and knowledge of diverse populations.	9/30/2025
Agency of Education	\$566M	ARPA and Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSR) - Priorities include student mental health, engagement and academic achievement. Eligible expenses include special education services; activities to address the unique needs of high-risk student populations; remote learning and education technology; summer and after-school programming; learning loss and recovery services; mental health supports; facility updates and repairs). Federal guidance requires 90% of the funds be expended by local school districts.	9/30/2023 and 9/30/2024
Agency of Commerce and Community Development	\$131.5M	Economic Recovery Grant program-Grants for businesses (including the childcare industry) who experienced a decrease in revenue.	

We then heard from Dr. Holly Moorehouse, Executive Director of Vermont Afterschool about her team's work during the pandemic and significant expansion of summer programs for children across the state. Afterschool programs have served an essential role in supporting children and families through the pandemic and have an amazing opportunity this summer to expand access for children to participate in programming. Vermont Afterschool was awarded federal relief funds to expand access to summer enrichment opportunities at camps, libraries, recreation programs, teen centers and other non-profit organizations serving children in grades K-12 youth this summer.

Ken Jones is an Economic Research Analyst at the Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development and member of the SAC. He spoke of economic investment opportunities for people in the childcare industry by ACCD. The Economic Recovery Grant program is for businesses who have experienced a decrease in revenue. ACCD has already awarded several rounds of funding; and noted funds are progressively harder to qualify. There are other Facilities Grants such as the Northern Borders Regional Commission, to fund renovations (such as for child care facilities).

Attendees were able to provide feedback on how to invest these funds to meet critical needs in Vermont. Given the one-time investment, it is important to identify critical one-time priorities and needs as well as gaps in state and federal investment. We used the information shared by agency partners to understand funding criteria, timeline and where there is flexibility. Using ideaboardz, we also identified remaining gaps to inform future federal and private funding opportunities.

Insert graphic with content from ideaboardz (see text below)

BBF will share this information on needs and priorities with Agency leaders as one step to strategic investments. From here, BBF seeks to be able to map needs across the existing state and federal supports and move anything unfunded into the gaps. This work to align resources, reduce duplication, and identification of needs will help to better meet the needs of kids and families coming out of the pandemic.

Results of the idea boards by category are listed below. Of note, the numbers in parentheses are the # of votes/support for each topic.

#### **Department of Mental Health: One-time investment needs**

- Provide increased outpatient access (ie: same-day or next-day appointments for those in crisis, mobile health) (13)
- A comprehensive 24/7 crisis continuum for children: including screening and assessment; mobile crisis response and stabilization; residential crisis services; psychiatric consultation; referrals and warm hand-offs to home- and community-based services; and ongoing care coordination. (8)
- Early childhood and family mental health (ie: childhood development/parenting classes, supporting EMTSS Statewide in all Early childhood program models prioritizing partnerships between DAs and regulated child care with a focus on expanding EMTSS - to support mental health of children AND staff (11)
- Support for crisis and school-based services that promote access to care for children (7)
- Improve Information Technology infrastructure- increase availability of broadband and cellular technology for providers, especially in rural and frontier areas; use of GPS, to expedite response times, and to remotely meet with the individual in crisis. (6)
- Advance telehealth opportunities to expand crisis services for hard-to-reach locations, especially rural and frontier areas. Expand technology options for callers, including the use of texting, telephone, and telehealth. Note: States cannot use the funds to purchase any items for consumers/clients. (5)
- Workforce & professional development- incentives for mental health providers to relocate to VT, or stay in VT, whether this is moving stipend or loan repayment (3)
  - diversify the workforce
- Address boarding issues in the inpatient/ER setting either by opening a new inpatient setting, or improving Partial Programs (1)

#### **Child Development Division: One-time investment needs**

- Workforce Development: Flexibility/scaffolding in licensure, incentivize workforce, create compassionate communities of practice, Introduce child care as a career option for students in Grades 6-8 (9)

- Increase compensation for early educators
- Workforce Compensation: Early educator workforce stabilization payments (supplemental wages, benefits, bonuses, (4)
- Workforce Compensation: Pay health insurance premiums for child care providers -Note that we need navigators to help folks access new ARPA-reduced premiums (6)
- Business Acumen - Provide child care management software, training and hardware. Such investment in shared services hubs (5)
- Professional Development: Training in Touchpoints to support relationships and engagement with families (1)
- Professional Development: Coaching reflective supervision support in childcare programs (3)
- Professional Development: Universal PreK private program training and TA to support high quality PreK education. Joint agency oversight (3)
- Mental Health: Mental health supports for children and professional development for childcare workforce (4)
- Mental Health: Resource and reinforce CIS, esp. CIS-EI, which is an entitlement program (1)
- Mental Health: Supporting regional partnerships between DAs and regulated child care with a focus on expanding EMTSS - to support mental health of children (3)
- Data Infrastructure: A one-time investment of \$1,591,590 to build on a successful model of expanding the Salesforce Community using the Family Center of Washington County data system solution across all twelve Children's Integrated Services regions in Vermont. (2)
- Data infrastructure: Better data collection re: food access and food insecurity data also needs to be disseminated so it can be used (2)
- Data system: IT upgrades and modernization we cannot have good data unless these systems are updated and/or developed (1)
- Complete STARS evolution work so higher quality recognition matches with what stakeholders observe in program practices. (2)
- Workforce: Engage businesses in understanding their employees' child care needs and support their investment in local child care options (1)
- Childcare Industry Stabilization and Development: Stabilization Payments for operating expenses: rent, PPE, equipment & supplies to respond to COVID-19) (4)
- Capital Improvements: Increased space/installation of HVAC air exchange; kitchen infrastructure to improve nutritious meals/snacks (2)
- Capital Improvements: Renovations and upgrades to physical spaces for more efficient HVAC and air filtration systems (1)
- Capital Improvements: Funds for early childhood education and afterschool programs to fence their outdoor play spaces and expand their indoor spaces

#### **Other Priority Investments and Needs**

- Connectivity and broadband - including providing support for childcare providers in the beneficial use of online services (10)
- Universal Prekindergarten Education (UPK)- expand full-day programming for 3 and 4-yr-olds in public AND private settings (10)

- Meeting family basic needs- housing, food, diapers, strollers, toys, transportation, access to nutritious food while in care (8)
- Diversity, equity and inclusion -SMARTIE goals (8)
- Creating an integrated, comprehensive early childhood system (7)
- Expand Early Multi-tiered Systems of Support (EMTSS) to be statewide. (7)
- Continued funding of Children’s Integrated Services as a primary prevention program as originally designed (6)
- Families experiencing Substance Use Disorder (SUDs) - supporting families with holistic, in-patient care to help people get back on their feet (5)
- Physical infrastructure for education/schools (4)
- Family access to informal services - providing skills and resources for families not using professional childcare services, ie expand access to play spaces (3)
- Workforce health care - improve access to insurance, provide navigators for new ARPA benefits for individuals and for employers. Add peer supports (3)
- Workforce and professional development (one-time and chronic investment) - licensure flexibility and scaffolding, standardization of public and private licensure and administrative requirements, recruitment and retention, loan forgiveness, housing support, substitutes, support for alternative pathways to licensure and certification (2)
- Literacy and achievement (1)
- Economic Development (1)
- Child engagement/truancy in education (1)
- Social emotional development, mental health and well-being

**Department of Mental Health: Gaps in investment**

- Trauma-informed efforts - arts and music services; holistic mind-body practices like yoga; treating racism as a traumatic experience and pushing for equity in all systems (6)
- Social emotional development, mental health and well-being (3)
- Building family resilience - school curriculum including resiliency training (1)

**Child Development Division: Gaps in investment**

- Special Accommodations Grants (SAG) - support for children with disabilities and special health care needs (15)
- Build out, not resolve - CIS (4)
- Full funding for CIS system and providers (3)
- Provide Parent Child Centers with funding to cover full costs of providing services (3)
- Add capacity for coaching to STARS so that Vermont’s QRIS is about improvement, not only rating (3)
- Robust program supports, mentoring and coaching - STARS, shared services, connection to Specialized Child Care, EMTSS (4)
- Business acumen (2)
- Workforce compensation and benefits commensurate with qualifications and experience (childcare, CIS and other EC educators) (2)
- Staffed family childcare networks with funding from new CDD/CCDF funds (2)
- Ongoing effort to recruit and onboard new EC, family child care and afterschool programs and staff (1)

- Parent respite for all families (1)

#### **Barriers to EC Investment**

- Challenging grant applications, data collection requirements, limited staff capacity to complete applications (3)
- Limitations to federal guidance and allowances (1)
- Age of child and transitioning between services/programs (1)
- Limited state funds available and/or resistance to raising more revenue to support more investment (1)
- Federal funding typically going to higher level supports/admin and not the providers 'in the trenches',
- How to support nutritious food access when CACFP ineligible
- Lack of guidance or TA from agencies
- Inability to specifically voice ECF mental health issues as distinct from larger mental health system issues
- Bridge opportunities between local schools and private childcare programs (eg a staff person such as springfield has)

#### **4. Adjourn**

3:00 pm meeting adjourned

**Next Meeting- Tuesday July 6<sup>th</sup>, 2021 | 10:00-11:00am Via Zoom.**