



Vermont Family Leadership Mapping Project

Results of the 2024 Family Leadership Inventory

FUNDED BY THE PRESCHOOL DEVELOPMENT GRANT

Executive Summary

About the Family Leadership Mapping Project

As a state, Vermont is committed to increasing opportunities for family leaders, elevating family voice in early childhood decision-making, and building a shared vision for how to sustainably support family partnership in Vermont's early childhood system. One of the ways this work is moving forward is through the mapping of family leadership opportunities that allow families to influence system-level decisions about early childhood services and policies with a statewide approach.

Browse the [Family Leadership Dashboard](#) for an in-depth look at the characteristics of statewide opportunities.

Key Family Leadership Mapping Findings

- ▶ 18 opportunities matched the project scope.
- ▶ 11 opportunities had at least one role open to an unlimited number of parents and families.
- ▶ Opportunities covered 9 areas of impact including family health, education, basic needs, mental health, and early childhood development.
- ▶ 10 of the 18 opportunities rely on grant funding to embed parent and family leadership.
- ▶ 15 of 18 opportunities included compensation in the form of contracts, stipends, honorariums, hourly wages, gift cards, and/or coverage of child care and/or transportation costs. Rates ranged from \$18 to \$50 dollars per hour.

Significance for Policymaking and Decision-Making

- ▶ There is a need for a membership template for legislatively mandated bodies as well as guidance outlining best practices for ensuring inclusion of family leaders.
- ▶ There is a need for consistent, accessible, compensated opportunities for families to increase their leadership skills.
- ▶ To sustain these leadership opportunities, predictable and non-competitive funding sources need to be secured.

What does "parent" mean?

When we use this language, we are referring to all adults who have a primary role caring for a child. We recognize that family structures differ and that this can include grandparents, foster parents, aunts, uncles, adoptive parents, and birth parents.

All parents are leaders. They are experts in caring for their families and understanding the individualized care, services, and support each of their children or family members needs. We know that when primary caregivers are consulted and valued as experts on their own experiences and needs, outcomes for children improve, as do relationships between families and the systems and individuals that serve them.¹



¹Henderson, A.T. & Mapp, K.L. (2002). [A new wave of evidence: The impact of school, family, and community connections on student achievement](#). Austin, TX: Southwest Education Development Laboratory.



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October 2024

About BBF's Family Leadership Work and PDG Activity 3.1

BBF is charged to maintain and monitor the vision and strategic plan for Vermont's early childhood system, [Vermont's Early Childhood Action Plan](#) (VECAP). The VECAP helps hold Vermont leaders and decision-makers accountable to working towards the state's collective vision for its early childhood system: an integrated continuum of comprehensive, high-quality services that is equitable, accessible, and improves outcomes for each and every child in the prenatal period through age 8 and their family. To that end, Goal #2 of the VECAP is that families and communities play a leading role in children's well-being. Building a system that listens to the needs of families and creates space at the table to make decisions together are core elements of success. One way to work towards the goal of maximizing parent and family engagement and leadership in the system is to understand existing statewide opportunities.

Currently, Vermont is executing work under the [Preschool Development Grant](#) (PDG), a three-year federal grant awarded to the state to strengthen the early childhood system, support the early childhood workforce, and improve the quality and availability of services for children from birth to age 5. Through PDG Activity 3.1, BBF is working with state partners to increase opportunities for family leaders, elevate family voice in early childhood decision-making, and build a shared vision for how to sustainably support family partnership in Vermont's early childhood system. As one key deliverable of that effort, BBF committed to mapping leadership opportunities for parents and caregivers to advise on statewide policymaking and system-wide efforts.

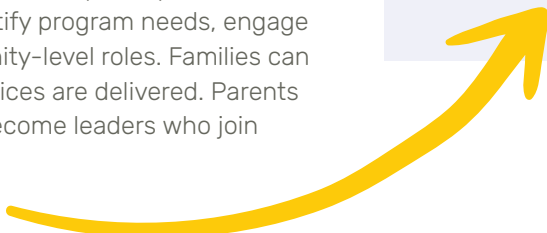
BBF's Approach to Family Leadership: All Parents are Experts

All parents are leaders. From the moment the parenting journey begins, caregivers become experts. They are experts in caring for their families and understanding the individualized care, services, and support each of their children or family members needs. Each family interacts and intersects with the early childhood system in unique ways. As families access services or connect to support, there are opportunities for them to shape the interactions and relationships they have with the programs they participate in. Families can help identify program needs, engage in programmatic decision-making, and take on community-level roles. Families can serve as powerful change agents in improving how services are delivered. Parents empowered as community-level change makers may become leaders who join initiatives to advise statewide policymaking efforts.



What does "parent" mean?

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The Scope of the Family Leadership Mapping Project

There are programs and agencies across Vermont that are engaging parents on boards, on advisory committees, in programmatic surveys, through two-generation approaches, and via other strategies to improve relationships between families and service providers caring for children. Because of the breadth of different opportunities and programs supporting family engagement, partnership, and leadership in Vermont, in order to complete this Family Leadership Mapping Project, BBF defined a more narrow scope of family leadership opportunities that we were interested in learning more about. **For the purpose of this mapping effort, we focused only on family leadership opportunities that allow families to influence system-level decisions about early childhood services and policies with a statewide approach.**

While they do not meet the criteria of the Family Leadership Mapping Project, programs like Head Start Policy Councils and Parent Child Centers, along with others, are incredible examples of programs providing leadership experience to families at the programmatic and regional level. One powerful example of a community-based organization that elevates family perspectives is the Janet S. Munt Family Room in Burlington. The Family Room Advisory Committee includes family representatives who inform programmatic activities and services. The group also opens its doors to agencies across the state that are interested in accessing the input of diverse community voices. Community organizations like this across the state are modeling how organizations can foster partnerships and connections that reach and influence statewide decision-making.

Our Approach to Mapping Early Childhood Family Leadership Opportunities

Over the course of several months, BBF convened a dynamic group of partner organizations from the BBF Families & Communities Committee, the Vermont Department of Health, the Department of Mental Health, Children's Integrated Services, the Child Development Division, the Agency of Education, and the Vermont Family Network. The advisory group was charged with identifying opportunities to survey, developing a survey with key characteristics of leadership opportunities, and reflecting on the findings. We developed a survey tool that was distributed throughout the statewide BBF network, as well as to targeted partners who were known to run family leadership programs. Through the survey, we sought to identify key characteristics of family leadership opportunities, including the early childhood sector they relate to, the roles parents and caregivers play, the number of family representatives who participate, and how family leaders are supported and/or compensated for participation.



Family Leadership Mapping Findings

We collected information on 18 opportunities that matched the project scope. Organizations that sponsored activities included state government agencies, nonprofit agencies, and one academic institution. We also identified that two of the organizations included in this project also offer ongoing parent learning opportunities that are accessible to all Vermont families. Characteristics of current families represented within these opportunities included geographic diversity, racial and ethnic diversity, and life experience diversity.

Organizations reported a number of ways that parents could participate. For example, the Vermont Family Network offers a leadership training series, policy and advocacy opportunities, conferences, focus groups, parent match programs, employment opportunities for family leaders, and seats on their Board of Directors. Parents joining Vermont Family Network opportunities are offered orientations, mentorship, role descriptions, and translation support to allow them to fully attend. All 18 organizations surveyed offered opportunities for family leaders to serve as committee members. Organizations also offered a number of other types of engagement:

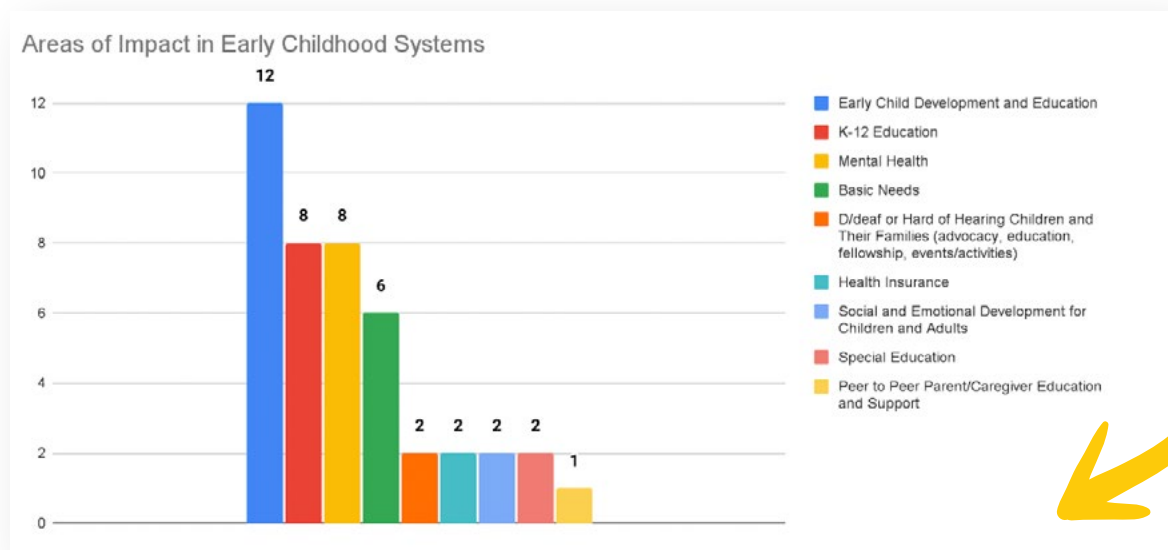
- ▶ 50% offered opportunities for members to attend conferences
- ▶ 77% offered opportunities to share family perspectives through providing input through surveys, focus groups, and interviews
- ▶ 38% offered opportunities to testify to the Vermont Legislature (or other mandated bodies)
- ▶ 50% offered opportunities for parent representatives to serve in committee leadership roles

Eleven out of 18 opportunities to join meetings and conferences were open to an unlimited number of interested parents and families. The remaining opportunities had limited membership, an application process for membership, or membership appointed by the governor.

These opportunities represent a commitment to including the voices of those with lived experiences to inform policymaking and statewide service delivery. Respondents identified nine areas in which these opportunities impacted early childhood systems related to early child development and education, K-12 education, and mental health and basic needs. (See the areas of impact chart below.) Several of these opportunities were also pathways to strengthening peer networks and increasing personal knowledge.

We found that the majority of these opportunities offered compensation in recognition of the time and expertise parent leaders bring to the table. For programs that are able to offer stipends, compensation ranged from \$18 to \$50 dollars per hour. Compensation was described by respondents as often being dependent upon the time commitment, the level of collaboration or engagement, and the constraints of the funding source.

Funding source constraints are also connected to sustainability considerations, as 10 of the 18 organizations included in this project rely on grant funding to support parent and family leadership.



Significance for Policy and Decision-Making

We applaud efforts in our state to authentically embed family leadership as a critical component of ensuring that systems and policies are designed and improved based on the needs of children and families. We know that when primary caregivers are consulted and valued as experts on their own experiences and needs, outcomes for children improve, as do relationships between families and the systems and individuals that serve them.² Through this project, we also recognized gaps in family leadership opportunities that need to be filled and areas for future collaboration and learning.

As outlined in the [2024 Policy Playbook](#) of the Vermont Early Childhood State Advisory Council Network, there is a lack of a formal process or protocol that is used when the legislature is implementing advisory bodies, implementation committees, or other groups. Those with lived experience are often either minimally represented or not represented at all. In addition to the need for a membership template, guidance outlining best practices for holding universally accessible meetings

with a culture of being welcoming to family leaders would support Vermont in advancing more equitable systems of decision-making.

To empower family leadership, we must also provide opportunities for family leaders to build their skills and capacity to participate. Meaningful participation of primary caregivers in decision-making is a key goal articulated in Vermont’s Early Childhood Action Plan. In order to effectively include families with lived experiences to inform policy and decision-making, there should be consistent, accessible, compensated opportunities for families to increase their leadership skills.

Ten of the 18 organizations included in this project rely on grant funding to embed family leadership and development opportunities. In order for organizations like Building Bright Futures and the Vermont Family Network to offer these opportunities, sustainable forms of funding that go beyond the Preschool Development Grant’s three-year cycle, need to be secured.

²Henderson, A.T. & Mapp, K.L. (2002). [A new wave of evidence: The impact of school, family, and community connections on student achievement](#). Austin, TX: Southwest Education Development Laboratory.

See the Results of the Family Leadership Mapping Project

We invite you to browse the [Family Leadership Dashboard](#). The dashboard can be used by parent representatives, parent leaders, and agencies incorporating family and parent leadership in their practices. Parent representatives and leaders can view opportunities and connect to organizations to get involved. Agencies can use the information to guide family leadership goals and connect to partner organizations.

The dashboard is not a searchable tool; however, individual columns can be sorted to adjust viewing.



Acknowledgements

We send our gratitude to the Family Leadership Inventory Advisory Committee for their time and expertise advancing this work.

If you have questions or have updates to your organization's Family Leadership Dashboard listing, please contact the BBF Family Leadership Coordinator at tlachapelle@buildingbrightfutures.org.

Family Leadership Inventory Advisory Committee

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Resources to Guide Family Leadership and Engagement

[Family and Parent Leadership Overview](#): National Center for Family and Parent Leadership

[Ripples of Transformation](#): Families Leading Change in Early Childhood Systems: A Family Engagement Toolkit for Providers and Program Leaders, Commissioned by First 5 Alameda County with a grant from the Center for the Study of Social Policy

[Parent Engagement and Leadership Guide and Toolkit](#): EC-LINC An Initiative of CSSP

[Family Engagement in Systems Assessment Tool \(FESAT\)](#): Family Voices

[Parent Leaders Compensation Scale](#): National Center for Family and Parent Leadership

[Engaging Community Members](#): A Guide to Equitable Compensation: Center for Health Care Strategies

[Applying Trauma-Informed Principles to Work with Family Advocates](#): Zero to Three