

2025 Policy Recommendations of the Vermont Early Childhood State Advisory Council Network

DRAFT for September SAC

The State Advisory Council (SAC) is Vermont's Governor-appointed, primary advisory body on the well-being of children from the prenatal period through age 8 and their families. Each year, in partnership with Vermont's Early Childhood Action Plan (VECAP) Committees and Regional Councils, the SAC sets priorities and strategic direction for statewide initiatives by endorsing a series of Policy Recommendations. These annual Policy Recommendations of the Vermont Early Childhood State Advisory Council Network are developed using the VECAP, up-to-date data, and the most pressing feedback collected throughout the year on the challenges being faced in the early childhood system. The annual Policy Recommendations seek to identify the current gaps and needs in policy, to promote action in strategic areas for the coming year, and to be measurable.

Access to Basic Needs (VECAP Goal 1)

Enact a Strong Paid Family and Medical Leave Insurance Program

- Enact a Paid Family and Medical Leave Insurance program for Vermonters seeking to take time off to care for a family member or themselves while welcoming a new child into the family, while navigating an illness or injury, or after experiencing a loss. Ensure the benefit through this program covers all caregivers in the case of a two-parent household, and that the benefit is generous enough that loss of income is not a barrier for those looking to utilize the program. *Renewed Policy Recommendation (2024)*

Invest to Ensure Families Have Access to Safe and Secure Housing in the Immediate Term and Long-Term

- Seek an immediate increase in the number of allowable days for families in the state's Emergency Housing Program and investigate other potential improvements to the program aligned with upcoming recommendations from the General Assistance Emergency Housing Task Force and data such as the Vermont State Health Assessment.
- Address Vermont's housing crisis in the long-term, recognizing that extreme weather events have only exacerbated the challenge, by making significant and sustained public investments in the development of new housing in priority areas, with a focus on efforts aiming to create or rehabilitate permanently affordable housing.

Family Partnership and Resilience (VECAP Goal 2)

Enact Best Practices Statewide for Elevating Community and Family Voice

- The legislature should enact a formal guidance/protocol for naming membership when creating new legislatively mandated bodies with support from the Joint Fiscal Office. This protocol should become a required part of standard operating procedure for the legislature. A membership template must include individuals with relevant lived experience that is determined based on a given bill's impacted communities. *Renewed Policy Recommendation (2022, 2024)*
- Once these individuals are recruited to serve on legislatively mandated bodies, the coordinating entity should be required to provide an orientation and targeted supports to reduce barriers to full participation of family representatives or community members. Additionally, the legislatively mandated body should be required to receive training on how best to support family leaders to ready the table for their success and ensure the inclusion of their voices.

Improve and Provide Transparency in Family and Parent Compensation Practices for Involvement in State-Convened Entities

- The State of Vermont should have consistent policies for compensating families with lived experience for their time serving on state-convened entities within the early childhood system. When a state-convened entity, such as a Commission, is asking families for their time and expertise, compensation should not only be offered but should be aligned with the National Center for Family & Parent Leadership's Parent Leader Compensation Scale. Transparent information about the compensation rate, frequency, and method (and any paperwork requirements) should be advertised when recruiting for the opportunity so that families know what to expect financially.

High-Quality and Inclusive Early Care/Education/Afterschool Programs (VECAP Goal 3)

Maintain Vermont's National Leadership on Universal Pre-K Access

- Ensure Vermont's Universal Prekindergarten Education (UPK) program continues to lead the country by maintaining universal access for 3- and 4-year olds in a mixed delivery system (school-, center-, and home-based programs) and centering the developmental needs of young children and their families. *Renewed Policy Recommendation (2022, 2023)*
- In order to monitor the Universal Pre-K program, effectively create and implement a new protocol for monitoring and accountability, including a robust research and data collection and analysis process. The development of the process should include feedback from impacted communities and individuals (families, educators, Act 166 Coordinators, preK-12 administrators, etc.). Collected data should include enrollment

by student characteristics, financial information, staffing, and student outcomes. Final implementation should be a partnership between the Agency of Education, the Child Development Division, and Building Bright Futures.

Ensure Access to High-Quality Child Care for Families Experiencing Homelessness

- Ensure child care access for children identified as homeless by waiving the family share and enacting presumptive eligibility for families experiencing homelessness to reduce administrative burden and potential lags in coverage and promote access to high-quality child care.

High-Quality Services for Families Facing Adversity (VECAP Goal 3)

Invest in Systems that Better Support Families, Children, Staff, and Providers Navigating the Child Welfare System

- Secure sufficient state funding to fully implement the Comprehensive Child Welfare Information System (CCWIS). *Renewed Policy Recommendation (2024)*
- Utilize the Family Services Division's federal case review report and program improvement plan to make data-informed programming and financing decisions to improve the systems serving young children in Vermont's foster care system.

Early Childhood Workforce (VECAP Goal 3)

Invest to Ensure Inclusion and Meet Social-Emotional Health Needs in Early Education Programs

- Ensure early childhood educators have access to sufficient support staff (Occupational Therapists, Speech and Language Pathologists, Physical Therapists, Paraeducators, Early Childhood Mental Health Practitioners, and providers of ongoing coaching) to support full inclusion and the social-emotional well-being of every child.
- Identify priority investments in teaching practices that are developmentally appropriate and increase the capacity of the early childhood education workforce and system to foster the development and learning of every child. These investments will build new support and reinforce existing supports that elevate assets and counter biases so that children with disabilities and social-emotional health needs can access and fully participate in all learning environments.

Seamless, Equitable, Data-Driven System of Care (VECAP Goal 4)

Align Demographic Data Collection Across Agencies

- Given expected changes in federal reporting of demographic data, convene critical partners to align data collection practices across agencies. This will support the identification and improvement of systems or programs that are not currently meeting the needs of people of color, children with disabilities, and other vulnerable populations in Vermont. Determine required funding to update infrastructure to comply. Ensure that the strategy allows individuals to fill out required forms in a way that aligns with the ways in which they self-identify while meeting federal requirements. *Renewed Policy Recommendation (2023, 2024)*

Make Critical Investments in Data & Technological Infrastructure

- Fully fund and expedite the development and execution of the Child Development Division's Information System (CDDIS), including a module for Children's Integrated Services that supports data collection, monitoring, and case management. *Renewed Policy Recommendation (2024)*
- Explore strategies to enable all early childhood partners to compete for state funding opportunities regardless of current financial resources, including a potential fund that would allow for advance payments for grants and contracts.

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