

## VECAP Summit 2023

### Inventory of accomplishments, priorities, and purposeful action

This information was collected as part of the May 2023 State Advisory Council Meeting, which served as the summit for Vermont's Early Childhood Action Plan (VECAP). This is not an exhaustive list but rather a collection of accomplishments and ideas from the discussion.

#### VECAP Goal 1: All Children Have a Healthy Start

##### Accomplishments

- Universal school meals were made permanent through the passage of [H.165](#) legislation providing all students free breakfast and lunch in public schools.
- Over \$200M was invested to expand rental housing and homeownership, which will expand access and affordability for Vermonters.
- The passage of [H.217](#) increases access and affordability of child care.
- Vermont improved access to services for those with Opioid Use Disorder through [H.222](#).
- [H.94](#) provides for a five-year plan to look at the rateable reduction to Reach Up.
- Pediatric offices participating in DULCE (Developmental Understanding and Legal Collaboration for Everyone) extended universal family support for families with new babies through a medical-legal partnership.
- Vermont invested in health care access for those in need, particularly in Children's Integrated Services, Designated Agency service delivery, and doula services.
- ASQ Online made developmental screening more accessible and is used across settings (home visiting, Head Start, primary care offices, and child care and prekindergarten).
- Decision-makers have a greater understanding of the gaps that families experience in accessing basic needs (housing, food, education, community, health care).

##### Priorities/Purposeful Action

- Explore how to better meet the mental health needs of 6- to 8-year-olds and expand the same flexibility of programming that is provided for the 0-6 age group (e.g. access to community-based mental health services).
- Integrate mental health expertise into the early childhood workforce rather than only providing mental health support "as needed."
- Work to address transportation gaps for families, particularly for summer care.
- Increase access to food security programs, expand the capacity of local food shelves to serve the needs of their community, and promote universal access to food security programs to reduce stigma and increase access.
- Evaluate and look for areas to improve how families navigate to the resources they need and different eligibility criteria.
- Improve support for families experiencing homelessness and connect them to the HOME voucher program.

#### VECAP Goal 2: Families and Communities Play a Leading Role in Children's Well-Being

##### Accomplishments

- The Vermont Interagency Coordinating Council includes family representatives and provides opportunities for families to share what is working and what isn't working about Children's Integrated Services (CIS)/Part C.

- Input from families about their experiences with CIS/Early Intervention was collected and published with policy considerations in a BBF data brief.
- The Vermont Family Network received funds to strengthen CIS regional family engagement. This is an ARPA funded project through the Child Development Division (CDD) that resulted from stakeholder input.
- The Office of Racial Equity prioritized language access by compensating parents to translate materials and make them available.
- A Families of Color Advisory Committee advised Let's Grow Kids policy development. Modeled family engagement practices and ensured a strong feedback loop making sure families understood the impact of their voice.
- The BBF Network prioritized family leadership and engagement by maintaining two family representatives serving on the SAC, and families make up the majority of the VECAP Families and Communities Committee.
- BBF published the [2022 Family Engagement Assessment](#).
- The Preschool Development Grant was developed in consultation with the Families and Communities Committee and includes a focus on family partnership and leadership efforts.
- H.217 includes two compensated family representatives on the Prekindergarten Education Implementation Committee.

**Priorities/Purposeful Action**

- Build social connectedness among families through playgroups, parent support groups, and community events.
- Expand flexibility in parenting and home visiting service delivery to allow families to choose from aligned models that will elicit desired results. The model doesn't matter as long as it's working (e.g. Parents as Teachers, Head Start, MTSS).
- Diversify membership and build capacity of the Families and Communities Committee to address policy considerations outlined in the Family Needs Assessment.
- Expand the influence of families advising on policy making by expanding where families sit on boards, study groups, and advisory committees and ensuring there are sufficient supports (both financial and cultural/staffing) for them to fully participate.
- Utilize the Center for Studying Social Policy ECLink committee to strengthen family engagement strategy in Vermont.
- Strengthen parent advisory boards and expand the capacity of Parent Child Centers to cultivate family leadership and influence.

**VECAP Goal 3: All Children and Families Have Access to High-Quality Opportunities That Meet Their Needs**

**Accomplishments**

- Loan repayment and scholarships were expanded for early childhood workforce (early childhood educators, social workers, and Children's Integrated Services) to support recruitment and retention.
- Advanced professional development options expanded to meet the needs of those working in the field.
- School districts are working to expand and align Early MTSS (pre-K) and MTSS (K-12) to make sure teachers have the foundation to support students.
- Child care is more affordable to families with expanded CCFAP eligibility up to 400% of

the federal poverty level effective April 1, 2024, and 575% of the federal poverty level effective October 1, 2024.

- More early childhood educators are accessing higher education through Community College of Vermont (CCV) programs (certificates, degree, and non-degree coursework) as a result of state and federal investments. Additional career advancement opportunities for early educators to earn their associate's and bachelor's degrees are available through other higher education institutions.
- VTAEYC (Vermont Association for the Education of Young Children) has expanded and sustained workforce development programs (apprenticeships, technical career centers, TEACH) due to public and private investments.
- First Children's Finance opened a Vermont office to provide business technical assistance to early childhood entrepreneurs.
- The Child Development Division awarded SPARQS contract to VTAEYC to provide a wraparound system of resources to support high-quality for all regulated childcare and afterschool programs in Vermont. SPARQS stands for System for Program Access to Resources for Quality Supports.
- *Room for Me* and *Make Way for Kids* capacity-building grants and expanding on those to be able to include start-up support for staffing has been a huge opportunity for new programs coming online.

#### **Priorities/Purposeful Action**

- Build a more coordinated kindergarten transition process for families regardless of where they live across the state through sharing best practices and cross-district information sharing.
- Use data to examine if special supports for pre-K are delivered in an equitable way to children and families across the mixed delivery system. Identify what resources are needed to fill any identified gaps.
- Continue to improve how Special Assistance Grants (SAG) are administered.
- Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funding has been a huge help to schools to support family needs with additional case management staff. Help schools maintain this level of support when funding goes away.
- Implement changes to childcare and pre-K as outlined in H.217, including: monitor the system so the state can be more supportive and less punitive; build stronger relationships across state agencies; build a pay structure for early childhood educators; and conduct a study of UPK funding.
- Examine policy and funding changes to deliver early childhood special education services across school district lines.
- Strengthen the quality of CIS services by compensating private CIS providers for case management. This is especially needed for complex needs and around pre-K transitions.
- Continue to invest in the financial security of the early childhood workforce through increased wages and benefits. Identify a way to provide affordable health care to early educators who otherwise do not have access.
- Conduct an evaluation of the impact of the developmental screenings and referral system.

## VECAP Goal 4: The EC System Will be Integrated, Well-Resourced, and Data-Informed

### Accomplishments

- Vermont was awarded two major grants to support the early childhood system: The State Professional Development Grant and the Preschool Development Implementation Grant.
- BBF supported the Early Childhood Investment Committee with building a baseline spending inventory. BBF's data compilation efforts resulted in FY 2021 spending data from eight Agencies/Divisions with programming related to the early childhood period: the Agency of Education, the Child Development Division, the Family Services Division, the Economic Services Division, the Agency of Commerce and Community Development, the Department of Mental Health, the Department of Corrections/Lund, and the Maternal and Child Health Division.
- The VIP-3 Grant (Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems through HRSA) has supported a meta-analysis of recent needs assessments and other similar early childhood reports to help begin to catalog priorities and needed updates to the VECAP. This grant has also supported increased collaboration and integration among the Family and Child Health team at Vermont Department of Health and other early childhood partners.
- Strengthened partnerships to make sure families are being served (e.g. between Head Start and Parent Child Centers).

### Priorities/Purposeful Action

- Monitor investments in health care delivery (CIS, DAs, DULCE, etc) to make sure the money is working to meet our goals.
- Kids and families need to feel they belong and that systems are designed for them to succeed. What is the metric to judge progress?
- Specialized services in school and flow of funds—all families deserve support. How do we normalize this and ensure equity in access across district lines? Families can't do that themselves.
- Statewide system for accountability to public funding—ensure HQ programming and seamless transitions.
- Partner with Vermont's Federal Delegation to bring resources into the system.
- Invest in Children's Integrated Services data system (CIS) and strategies to increase compensation and contracting.
- Continue to develop the CDD Information System to improve data collection and reporting.