

Recommendations

[IMAGE]	Recommendations of the BBF State Advisory Council
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The State Advisory Council (SAC) is the Governor-appointed early childhood advisory body that works to set priorities and direction for statewide initiatives on behalf of Vermont's young children. In 2018, the SAC worked to drive collective action in Vermont around two key areas: addressing trauma and adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) through a focus on protective factors and social and emotional wellness, and building capacity for Vermont's early care and learning system.

Supporting the Early Care and Education Workforce

Why It Matters

As brain science developed to teach us about how much growth and learning happens before age 5, the child care profession has changed to encompass a wider range of skills and responsibilities befitting that important time in a child's life. The expectations for child care professionals has grown to include knowledge of child development, education and psychology.

According to a survey of Vermont parents of young children published as the Early Care and Learning Household Study, 67% of parents of children birth to age 2 are using some form of child care, and 79% of families with children ages 3-5. The need for a robust early care system with educated, well compensated providers is driven by the needs of families.

Opportunity for Vermont to Turn the Curve

In early 2018, the Child Development Division (CDD), inspired by the BBF SAC's commitment to address capacity in the early learning system, convened a Capacity Coalition that identified key strategies to pursue in order to begin to develop workforce capacity. Since that time, BBF's Early Learning and Development Committee has been coordinating action and monitoring progress on these strategies.

In 2018, BBF published the Building Vermont's Future from the Child Up Think Tank report, including six key recommendations on how Vermont can improve our child care system so that professionals can get adequate education, be compensated appropriately for their work, and to create long-term stability and viability for the industry. In addition, a

Demand Study was released, exposing an even greater need for child care in Vermont, underlining the importance of growing capacity.

Also last year, the Vermont Legislature passed some investments in the child care system, including \$600,000 in one-time money for workforce incentives, including a scholarship program. The SAC recommends the following actions to continue to move the needle for Vermont's early care and education system.

RECOMMENDATION 1: Support education costs and compensation for the early childhood education workforce, including scholarships, loan repayment, and wage supplementation.

The BBF Early Learning and Development committee has identified three opportunities for state-level policy to support the early childhood education workforce:

1. Funding to maintain and expand scholarship programs for early educators
2. Establishment of a loan repayment program for early educators
3. Establishment of a wage supplement program as we work toward adequate compensation for early educators

Scholarships support early childhood educators who need and/or desire to increase their qualifications. For those who have already accrued related educational expenses, paying back their student loans is a barrier to employment in the field with wages at their current levels. A wage supplement program will allow those who desire to work in the field to do so. Even before a long-term solution is in place, Vermont needs to invest in this essential workforce.

RECOMMENDATION 2: Continue investment in redesigning the state's Child Care Financial Assistance Program

There is a need for continued progress and investment in the state's planned 5-year redesign of the Child Care Financial Assistance Program. In order to reach the state's Early Childhood Action Plan result that "all children have access to high-quality early learning opportunities that meet their needs," Vermont must continue make progress in Year 2 of its 5-year plan, including:

1. Increasing the CCFAP rate paid to child care providers so those reimbursement rates are closer to the true cost of high-quality care
2. Investing in the costs of higher education for the early childhood education workforce, and
3. Fully supporting the needed investment in the technology system required to implement the redesigned CCFAP structure and provide an accessible platform for families, educators, and administrators

Supporting the Mental Health of Children and Families

Why It Matters

Early childhood mental health is the foundation of all future development. Positive environments and stable, and responsive relationships build a strong foundation which shapes a child's ability to make friends, cope with adversity, and achieve success in school, work and community.

Opportunity for Vermont to Turn the Curve

Building Bright Futures State Advisory Council identified early childhood and family mental health as a priority to focus on in 2019. The Council learned from families and those working in early childhood about the increased demand for early childhood mental health services across the state. They also had a growing concern for increased acuity of needs by Vermont families with young children. In response, BBF convened an Early Childhood Mental Health Taskforce to identify barriers and policy needs to reach a more integrated system. The following recommendations are highlighted for policy makers to note where greater investment is needed.

Recommendation 1: Build the capacity of parents and caregivers to promote children's health and wellbeing

The healthier parents and caregivers are, the greater the capacity to stay calm under pressure and support their children's emotional development. We must provide adults involved in the lives of infants, toddlers, and preschoolers the knowledge to promote social and emotional development. Opportunity for Vermont to Turn the Curve:

A. Embed the Strengthening Families Protective Factors framework in all early care and learning programs to build family strengths, enhance child development and reduce the likelihood of child abuse and neglect. The five protective factors are: parental resilience; social connection; knowledge of parenting and child development; concrete support in times of need; and social and emotional competence of children.

B. Expand opportunities to foster secure attachment between children and their parents. Successful models include MESCH home visiting; home visiting and parental support through Parent Child Centers; and the Resource Parent Curriculum for foster, adoptive and kin caregivers about the impact of trauma on the development, attachment, and behaviors of children in their care.

Recommendation 2: Ensure families are partners in mental health

Family-centered care ensures families have a primary decision-making role in the care of their children. Creating meaningful partnerships leads to better outcomes for children.

Opportunity for Vermont to Turn the Curve:

A. Build a system where families know where to go for help and supports are provided in an accessible, culturally competent way. Ensure families are involved in what care their child needs and support transitions from early childhood to pre-k to the elementary education system.

B. Ensure families are in leadership positions to inform policy, practice, and funding decisions such as Head Start Policy Councils, Designated Agency committees with families advising on early childhood Part B and C services, BBF Families and Communities Committee, and Local and State Interagency Teams (Act 264 Teams).

Recommendation 3: Investment in prevention and early detection builds resilient children who turn into resilient adults

Interventions at this age have the biggest impact at the smallest dosage. A tiered approach provides universal supports and prevention practices to all children and individualized interventions to the very small number of children with persistent challenges.

Opportunity for Vermont to Turn the Curve:

A. Vermont’s Early Multi-Tiered System of Supports (Early MTSS) framework promotes Pyramid Model research based practices and strategies to support positive social and emotional skills. Practices are geared to families, home visitors, teachers, special educators, and mental health providers. Tier 1: universal supports through responsive relationships and high quality environments. Tier 2: prevention practices target social emotional strategies for children at risk of challenging behavior. Tier 3: individualized intensive interventions.

The Early MTSS framework includes ongoing training, on-site coaching, use of fidelity measures, and mental health consultation.

B. Invest in flexible funding to support Early Childhood and Family Mental Health consultation to help children struggling in early care and learning programs. ECFMH consultation provides an ECFMH specialist to strategize with early educators. Preschool teachers with access to mental health consultation are less likely to expel children with behavioral problems from their programs¹.

C. Increase the use of universal developmental screening to assess children’s development, identify challenges and connect children to supports as soon as possible. Help Me Grow is building a coordinated developmental screening and response system and trains early educators to use screening practices.

Recommendation 4: Make the early childhood system easier to navigate so families receive high-quality and timely care

Vermont’s early childhood system requires coordination across sectors including: healthcare, education, early care and learning and social service and early intervention programs. Many services still operate in silos, often due to rigid policies and funding, making it difficult for families to navigate. It is

¹ {Gilliam, W. (2005). Prekindergarteners left behind: Expulsion rates in state prekindergarten systems. New Haven, CT: Yale University Child Study Center. }

important to create more flexible funding for innovative solutions such as Children's Integrated Services (CIS), Integrating Family Services (IFS) and mental health payment reform.

Opportunity for Vermont to Turn the Curve:

A. Utilize BBF, the entity charged with being Vermont's State Advisory Council on Early Childhood by both state and federal mandates, to bring together partners across state agencies, regions and communities to facilitate effective communication and collaboration, information gathering and dissemination of best practices.

B. Create more resilient and trauma informed communities that include community-based mental health supports such as Mobile Response and Stabilization Services to provide supports and interventions for families and their child before emotional and behavioral difficulties escalate.

C. Invest in up-to-date, high quality data and longitudinal data systems required to address data gaps and key policy, program and service challenges for children and families. This will guide more equitable and strategic resource investments.