

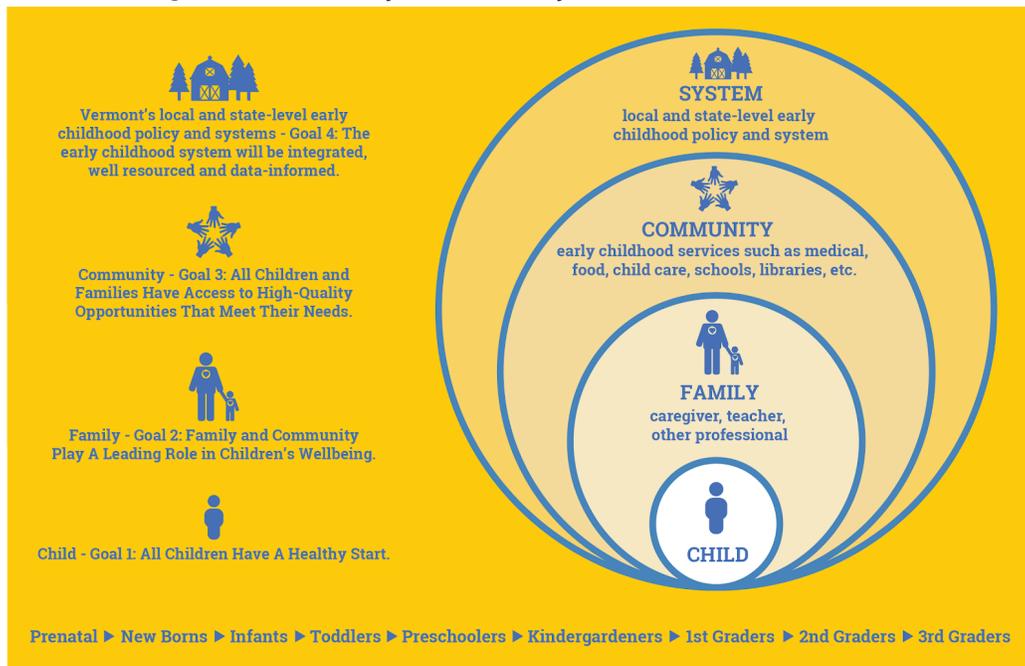


## SAC Policy Recommendations 2020

*Final recommendations for presentation to the State Advisory Council on October 26th with abridged context. The vision is to use abridged language in How Are Vermont's Young Children and Families report and then present the finalized recommendations as stand-alone policy briefs providing context and highlight successful strategies when appropriate.*

*\*Note: The 2020 SAC Recommendations seek to create meaningful change across multiple levels of Vermont's Early Childhood Service System: 1) child outcomes, 2) families and communities, 3) early childhood agencies, service providers, etc., and 4) policy makers (e.g. the legislature, Governor, etc.) (See Figure 1). Each recommendation identifies which layer of the early childhood system is targeted for change within the next year and how it is aligned with Vermont's Early Childhood Action Plan (VECAP).*

Figure 1 depicts the 2020 update to Vermont's Early Childhood Action Plan (VECAP). This visual depicts Vermont's 4 goals for the early childhood system:



Each goal is mapped to a level of change represented through an ecological systems framework (concentric circles). At the heart of the visual is the child, which is aligned with Goal 1. The other levels or environments the child grows up in set the state for social, emotional and cognitive development.

At the next level, the child is nested within the family context. Children's sense of who they are and how to interact, depends largely upon the stability of their relationships with others. Having caregivers who are sensitive, consistent and invested in their well-being is critical to that child's developmental trajectory. This level is connected to Goal 2.

The third level is the broader community, which includes the families' neighborhood, schools, libraries, hospitals/doctors, and an array of services, supports and resources for children and families, which is aligned with Goals 2 and 3.

Finally, at the outermost level is Vermont's local and state policy and system. This level represents the larger policies and decisions that impact all other layers. The nested nature of these layers indicates bidirectional relationships; when change happens at any level, it also has the ability to impact the layers around it, ultimately seeking to improve outcomes for children and families back at the heart of the

## Recommendations

### A. Recognize Vermont's Early Care and Education System and Workforce as Essential (Childcare Capacity and Workforce)

*\*Recommendations seek to impact change at the following levels:*

- *Level 4 - Policy Makers (e.g. Vermont's legislature and Governor)*

**Recommendation 1 (Level 4):** Fund education costs and compensation for the early childhood education workforce, including scholarships, loan repayment, and wage supplementation.

The early childhood education (ECE) workforce rose to the challenge during COVID-19, stepping in to support children of essential workers and then reopening for all children in June. They nimbly and safely responded to support wellness for all children and families, demonstrating the critical role they play in a healthy VT infrastructure and economy. A well-prepared, well-compensated ECE workforce is essential to both health and economic prosperity.

Vermont's early care and education workforce as essential are to:

- Sufficiently fund and expand scholarship programs for early educators and maintain this revenue annually.
- Establish-a loan repayment program for early educators.
- Establish a wage supplement program to progress toward adequate compensation for early educators.
- Prioritize workforce development and hazard pay for this sector.

**Recommendation 2 (Level 4):** Continue investment in redesigning the state's Child Care Financial Assistance Program (CCFAP).

Continue to make progress in alignment with Year 3 of the state's 5-year plan, including:

- Increase the CCFAP rate paid to early care and education providers so those reimbursement rates closely reflect the true cost of high-quality care thereby reducing the burden on early care and education programs to subsidize the system through low wages and other cost-saving efforts.
  - Fully support needed investments in the technology system(s), staff and resources required to implement the redesigned CCFAP structure and providing an accessible platform for families, educators, and administrators.
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## **B. COVID impacts on family economic stability and mental health**

The COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting economic recession have negatively affected child and family mental health. Concerns about health, finances, work, child care, and access to food and other resources are all contributing to increasing stress.

*\*Both recommendations seek to impact change at the following level:*

- *Level 4 - Policy Makers (e.g. Vermont's legislature and Governor)*

**Recommendation 1 (Level 4):** Mitigate the health and economic effects of the pandemic on families

- Extend economic support beyond expiration of CARES Act funds that expire in December.
- Extend flexibility in eligibility for programs (such as Reach Up work requirements) so parents can engage in other activities that help them invest in their future and integral to the health and well-being of their family.

**Recommendation 2 (Level 4):** Sustain and strengthen the integration of mental health services for children and families through flexible funding for integrated mental health across settings

- Continue to allow telehealth to be covered by insurance so families can access the care they need.
  - Invest in flexible service delivery and availability.
  - Focus on mental health prevention and staff burnout across many settings.
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## **C. Chronic inequities and racism as a public health crisis**

It is critical to elevate the focus on health equity for Vermont's young children and their families, recognizing that during the early childhood years, the effects of racism and poverty can have profound impacts which shape health throughout life.

*\*Both recommendations seek to impact change within the following levels:*

- *Level 2 - Families and Communities (e.g. within Regional Councils, local community groups)*
- *Level 3 - Early childhood service system (e.g. within state agencies and community-based partners)*
- *Level 4 - Policy Makers (e.g. Vermont's legislature and Governor)*

**Recommendation 1 (Levels 3 & 4):** Partner with Vermont's Racial Equity Task Force to identify and build structures of support for racially diverse populations and address health disparities and systemic impacts of racism.

**Recommendation 2 (Levels 3 & 4):** Align and integrate equity initiatives to leverage impact across sectors and early childhood partners. Leverage expertise to inform strategies in the Early Childhood Action Plan and early childhood system.

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#### **D. Family voice to rebuild a stronger system**

Create pathways and connect families to platforms for parents and caregivers to be partners in public policy and decision-making processes.

*\*Both recommendations seek to impact change within the following levels:*

- *Level 2 - Families and Communities (e.g. within Regional Councils, local community groups)*
- *Level 3 - Early childhood service system (e.g. within state agencies and community-based partners)*
- *Level 4 - Policy Makers (e.g. Vermont's legislature and Governor)*

**Recommendation 1 (Levels 3 & 4): Increase opportunities for parent and caregiver representatives to serve on committees, legislatively mandated study sections and decision making bodies to inform local and state policy, practice and resource allocation.** Require each board/committee/study section to have at least 1 parent representative in legislation moving forward.

**Recommendation 2 (Levels 3 & 4): Commit to ensuring that children and families are in all policies**

Similar to the "Health in all policies" initiative, this recommendation is based on incorporating child development and family well-being considerations into all decision-making across sectors and policy areas. At the state-agency and community-based partners level, and at the policy-making level, review programs, policies and legislation to ensure that revisions and requirements consider the impact and consequences to child development and family well-being.

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#### **E. Evolve our data system to address gaps**

Invest in data culture, data literacy, and existing data infrastructure and data monitoring by financially supporting cross-sector collaboration and aligned priorities. Strong cross-sector data linkages will help decision-makers understand the long-term impact and return on investment for early childhood services and programs, and improve child outcomes.

*\*Recommendations seek to impact change at the following levels:*

- *Level 2 - Families and Communities (e.g. within Regional Councils, local community groups)*
- *Level 3 - Early childhood service system (e.g. within state agencies and community-based partners)*
- *Level 4 - Policy Makers (e.g. Vermont's legislature and Governor)*

**Recommendation 1 (Level 3):** Restart and support the Early Childhood Data Governance Council and utilize the BBF Data and Evaluation Committee to identify and elevate data gaps and priorities.

**Recommendation 2 (Levels 2 & 3):** Promote data literacy and using data to inform policy across sectors by educating Vermonters about the importance of high quality data collection, reporting and integration.

**Recommendation 3 (Level 4):** Fully fund existing early childhood data initiatives to fidelity: Early Childhood Information System (Bright Futures Information System, Children's Integrated Services) data system, and the State Longitudinal Data System (SLDS).

**Recommendation 4 (Levels 3 & 4):** Create an early childhood budget that identifies all financial sources dedicated to children and their families from prenatal to age eight to monitor, align and leverage financial resources.