



Special Accommodation Grants:
Increasing Access to Child Care for Children with Specialized Needs:
A Plain Language Summary for Everyone

What are Special Accommodation Grants (SAGs)?

The Special Accommodation Grants (SAGs) program helps children with disabilities or other specialized needs get the support they need to stay in child care programs. The grants can pay for three things: 1) training, 2) equipment, and 3) one-on-one help for these children (hiring an assistant). Two organizations worked together to look at data to understand how well the grant program is working and to find ways to make it better. These organizations were Building Bright Futures (BBF) and the Children's Integrated Services State Team (CIS). CIS is part of the Child Development Division - Department for Children and Families. The data that was looked at was from July 2021 to June 2022. [Main Findings of the Report](#)

Who applied for SAGs?

- There were 74 applications from July 2021 to June 2022.
 - Of those 74 applications, 64 applications met the requirements.
- Of the 64 child care programs, 27 were given grants but later dropped out.
 - The most common reason those programs dropped out was because they couldn't hire an assistant (93%).
- More applications came from some areas of Vermont than from others. We couldn't tell why there were regional differences in the number of applications, so we tested two ideas.

[Read the Full Data Brief](#)

- Did applications come from areas with more people?
 - When we looked at the data, this was not true.
- Did applications come from areas where there are more child care programs?
 - When we looked at the data, this was not true, either.

How many children did the grants support?

- A total of 40 children were supported through SAGs from July 2021 to June 2022.
- These 40 children were receiving care in 37 programs.
- Programs received a total of \$252,592 in SAG funds to support the children in their child care programs.
- Most of these children were also receiving state or federal support, like Medicaid or Child Care Financial Assistance.
- 85% of these children had mental, emotional, developmental, or behavioral health conditions.
 - Almost all of these children were at risk of having to leave their child care program (91%).
- Half of the children were ages 3 to 5.

How well did the program work for children?

- Most children supported by these grants met important goals. For each of these goals, the goal was rated as achieved:
 - All of the Time (100%)
 - Most of the Time (75%)
 - Less than 50% of the Time

- When reporting on the data, we combined the responses for “All of the Time” and “Most of the Time.”
- These were the results:
 - In 100% of the situations, safety was assured for all.
 - In 95% of the situations, children were able to form relationships with adults.
 - In 87% of the situations, children were able to increase their self-regulation skills.
 - In 78% of the situations, children remained in their child care.
 - In 74% of the situations, children were able to form relationships with other children.

More Context

Funding:

- The SAG program is often seen as underfunded. But we found out that more information is needed to understand the real cost and how many children need grants.
- Federal funds have doubled the amount of SAG money available for the months between July 2022 and September 2024.

Uncertainty About How the System Will Be Organized:

- It’s not certain how the early childhood system will be run in the future.
- This makes it hard for current programs that help children, including SAGs, to plan for the future.

Making Improvements:

- Changes were made to improve the program after getting feedback.

Examples of these changes are:

- Covering more types of expenses
- Making the application process easier
- This process is known as Continuous Quality Improvement.

Data Limitations:

- While this is the best data we had to examine the SAG program, the data in this report might not give a complete picture. Some reasons for that include:
 - The numbers of people and programs were fairly small
 - Some programs did not report data on the outcomes for children
 - The COVID-19 pandemic affected the quality of the data

Challenges and Issues to Think About in the Future

Administrative Challenges:

- The work it takes to apply for a SAG and to manage assistants can be difficult for programs. Improvements could include:
 - Paying grant money in advance instead of reimbursing afterward
 - Involving families and program staff in improvements
 - Giving support for hiring and managing assistants

Unknown Need:

- The information we have only shows who uses the program now. It's possible that more Vermont children need help from these grants.

- We need more data to be able to understand and meet all children's needs.

Staff and Resources:

- The Child Development Division, Children's Integrated Services State Team needs more staff time and resources to manage the SAG program and Specialized Child Care Services more effectively.
- Developing better data systems and reviewing the successes and challenges of the program would help Vermont make better decisions.

Having to Leave a Child Care Program:

- Most children with mental or behavioral health needs in programs applying for SAGs were at risk of losing their spot in a child care program.
- Short-term approaches are needed to keep this from happening while applications are being processed.

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The information in this report does not necessarily represent the views of the State of Vermont.