VERMONT'S EARLY CHILDHOOD STRATEGIC PLAN 2030

Final October 2025

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Message from the Building Bright Futures Executive Director and the Co-Chairs of Vermont's Early Childhood State Advisory Council

It is with deep gratitude and a profound sense of responsibility that we present Vermont's Early Childhood Strategic Plan 2030. This plan is not merely a road map, but a collective call to action—a vision forged by people who care deeply about the well-being of our children, families, and communities. Our vision is simple yet transformative: to ensure that every family, from pregnancy through their child's eighth year, is healthy, supported, and thriving.

Grounded in the science of child development, brain research, and the deep understanding that children grow best in environments where they feel nurtured and connected, the Plan outlines five strategic goals to set the foundation for this work: meeting children's basic needs, supporting families in safe and healing environments, ensuring access to high-quality opportunities for every child, valuing and sustaining the early childhood workforce, and building a coordinated, well-resourced, and data-driven system. Together, these goals define a future where Vermont's children and families experience equity, belonging, and justice.

This Strategic Plan is both bold and practical. It serves as Vermont's "plan of plans" for the early childhood system: a comprehensive roadmap that unites the many efforts already underway across our state. By aligning priorities across health, education, family support, and community well-being, it provides a shared framework for action that honors local innovation while setting clear statewide direction.

The Plan reflects voices from across Vermont. Nearly 200 parents, grandparents, caregivers, educators, health providers, and community leaders contributed their experiences and expertise, alongside insights from 49 statewide needs assessments and planning documents. This input ensures that the vision is both data-driven and deeply rooted in community. We are grateful to each person who contributed their time, perspectives, and lived experience.

At its heart, this Plan centers fairness, belonging, and justice. Families reminded us that they are seeking systems that are responsive to their needs, that honor their leadership, and that actively work to remove barriers to their success. This is a call for systems that are not just functional, but just—systems that help families navigate not only day-to-day challenges but also larger systemic issues like high costs of living, housing shortages, workforce instability, and long-standing disparities in access and opportunity.

The Plan also addresses critical issues facing communities today, including climate change and substance use. Families and communities are directly impacted by these challenges, which affect health, stability, and opportunity. By including them, the Plan acknowledges the realities that shape children's lives and strengthens our system's ability to support families in responding to these threats.

This work is especially urgent given the national political climate, where debates about early childhood have profound local impacts. Vermont has long led the way in championing children and families, and this Plan reaffirms our commitment to prevention, equity, and shared accountability. It identifies the priorities that must guide investments, policies, and practices in the years ahead.

Our call to action is clear: this is not just Building Bright Future's plan, it is Vermont's plan. Its success depends on each and every one of us: families, early childhood professionals, community leaders, policymakers, researchers, advocates, and business leaders. Progress will require honest dialogue, courageous decisions, and coordinated action across sectors, communities, and the state.

We invite you to see yourself in this Plan. Use it as a guide in your community, your program, your policymaking, and your advocacy. Hold us—and one another—accountable to its vision. Together, we can build a comprehensive and resilient early childhood system where every child has the opportunity to thrive.

With appreciation and commitment,

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A Message to Vermont Families

This year, hundreds of Vermont residents came together to share their stories, hopes, and challenges about raising young children in our state. Parents, grandparents, caregivers, educators, and community members spoke honestly about what's working and what's not. We listened closely. What we heard was clear: Families are strong and resourceful, but many face barriers that make life hard.

Here's what the Plan is about
The Plan is a roadmap to ensure that every child, from before birth through age 8, has what they need to grow and do well. It builds on your voices, along with research and statewide planning, and it reflects a simple but powerful vision:

- Families can meet their basic needs like housing, food, health care, child care, and transportation.
- Children grow up in a safe and healthy environment.
- Every child has access to high-quality opportunities to learn and develop.
- The early childhood workforce is well-prepared and paid fairly.
- Vermont's systems work together to meet the needs of families.

Why it matters
Families told us they don't want handouts. They want systems that respect their knowledge and their way of life, and make it possible for their children to succeed. This plan sets out clear goals and actions for state leaders, communities, and organizations to work on together.

See the full plan
The complete text of Vermont's Early Childhood Strategic Plan 2030 is available online. A few pages that might be of interest include the "Executive Summary" and the "How to Use the Plan" page. You might also want to take a look at specific goals and strategies designed to help families, community leaders, policymakers, and educators take action.

What happens next
This plan is not just a document. It's a shared commitment across state leaders, organizations, and communities. We know progress won't happen overnight—and we also recognize the urgency of the moment. Families are navigating rising costs, a housing crisis, workforce shortages, and the lingering effects of the pandemic and systemic inequities. Change must happen within this reality. Step by step, and in partnership with you, we will keep moving forward to build a Vermont where every child has the chance to thrive.

Thank you for sharing your stories, your wisdom, and your trust. We look forward to continuing this work with you.

Executive Summary

Vermont's Early Childhood Strategic Plan 2030 provides a shared vision and roadmap to ensure every child in Vermont, from the prenatal period through age 8, has the resources, opportunities, and support to thrive. The Plan is guided by Building Bright Futures' (BBF) legislative mandate to steward Vermont's early childhood system and was developed in partnership with The Creative Discourse Group (TCDG), the State Advisory Council, and partners across the state.

Released in 2025, this update builds on the 2020 Vermont's Early Childhood Action Plan (VECAP) and reflects what families, caregivers, and early childhood professionals shared through intensive engagement. Nearly 200 Vermonters contributed through conversations, letters, and storytelling. They included parents, grandparents, kinship and foster caregivers, educators, health providers, and community leaders. Their input was paired with analysis of 49 statewide planning documents and needs assessments to ensure the goals are both community-driven and evidence-based. Partners also shaped iterative revisions, refining language, strengthening priorities, and ensuring the Plan reflects Vermont's diverse perspectives and expertise.

The Strategic Plan centers equity, belonging, and justice. It celebrates the strengths and resilience of Vermont families while confronting systemic barriers such as high costs of living, housing shortages, limited access to health and child care, and discrimination. Families emphasized that they are not seeking handouts. They want responsive and culturally affirming systems that honor their expertise and support their children's success.

Six foundational principles shape the Strategic Plan and its implementation: (1) Families and caregivers are leaders and central to decision-making, (2) Equity and justice are non-negotiable, (3) Brain and developmental science guide our work, (4) Action steps build on community strengths and resilience, (5) Bold, achievable goals drive collective action, (6) Accountability, transparency, and continuous improvement are essential.

This plan offers a collective direction and measurable steps to move toward a Vermont where every child and family experiences equity, belonging, and justice. The vision for 2030 is that:

- Children and families consistently have their basic needs met, including stable housing, nutritious food, income, and transportation.
- Children grow up in safe, healthy, and nurturing environments that promote healing and resilience.
- Children and families gain access to inclusive, high-quality opportunities that support their development and well-being.
- Children are cared for by a well-prepared, well-supported, and equitably compensated early childhood workforce.
- Vermont's early childhood system is family-centered, coordinated, well-resourced, and data-driven.

To move toward this vision, the Plan identifies five strategic goals, each paired with example actions that demonstrate how progress can be made.

Goal 1: All Children and Families Have Their Basic Needs Met. Children cannot thrive without stable housing, food, income, and transportation. The stress of being unable to meet basic physiological needs such as food and shelter, often due to poverty, impacts parents' and caregivers' capacity to create environments that support early childhood development. To advance this goal, Vermont must develop and expand financial supports, implement paid leave and family-friendly workplace policies, remove barriers that limit access to basic resources, and address the needs of those most impacted by economic insecurity.

Goal 2: All Children Are Raised in Safe, Healthy, and Healing Environments. Every child should grow up in conditions that support health, safety, and resilience. Stable, nurturing environments help children thrive in school, build strong relationships, and grow into healthy adults. Unsafe or unstable settings, trauma, and poor health can disrupt development and increase risks of chronic illness, mental health challenges, academic struggles, and involvement in child welfare or justice systems. To advance this goal, Vermont must invest in preventative health care, ensure access to health insurance, build emergency preparedness and climate resilience, invest in community infrastructure such as parks and broadband, and center racial equity in the child protection and health and human services systems.

Goal 3: All Children and Families Have Access to High-Quality Opportunities That Promote Child Development and Well-Being. Every child deserves access to opportunities that nurture their physical, social-emotional, and intellectual growth. Early experiences and relationships are the foundation of healthy development, preparing children for success in school and life. Without access, too many children miss critical developmental supports, deepening disparities in learning and long-term well-being. To advance this goal, Vermont must increase equitable access and affordability of early childhood education through a coordinated mixed-delivery system, increase inclusion for children with disabilities and developmental delays, ensure access to early intervention and special education, provide support and resources to early childhood education programs and schools, and reduce or eliminate exclusionary discipline in early childhood settings.

Goal 4: All Children Are Supported by a Well-Prepared, Well-Supported Early Childhood Workforce. The early childhood workforce is essential to the health and success of children, families, and communities. A strong workforce not only ensures high-quality care and learning but also underpins Vermont's economy by enabling parents to work and employers to thrive. Without equitable pay, professional recognition, and long-term investment, the state risks ongoing shortages, instability, and lost opportunities for children and families. To advance this goal, Vermont must expand access to affordable, high-quality training, education, and professional development for the early childhood workforce; increase compensation and benefits to allow workers to meet their basic needs and to thrive; and engage in effective recruitment and retention tactics to attract a broad, stable, diverse workforce.

Goal 5: Our System Centers Children and Families and Is Coordinated, Well-Resourced, and Data-Driven. Families and caregivers must hold real power in shaping decisions, and families' transitions across systems must be smooth and coordinated. Caregivers are experts on the care, services, and supports each family member needs, and their voices should guide the policies, practices, and investments that shape their lives. High-quality, up-to-date data is an essential tool for learning about and responding to the needs of children and families statewide. To advance this goal, Vermont must involve families in leadership and decision-making, improve transitions among services, invest in improvements to data systems, and promote collaboration among early childhood leaders.

This Plan is a shared tool for families and caregivers, policymakers, advocates, educators, researchers, and business leaders to work from a common vision. It sets clear objectives and flexible strategies to guide investments, align priorities, and track progress through 2030. Vermont's children cannot wait. The Strategic Plan represents a collective commitment to build a just, inclusive, and resilient early childhood system where every child and family has the opportunity to thrive.

GRAPHIC OF 5 GOALS - in development by graphic designer

Commitment Statement

Vermont is committed to building an early childhood system where every child and family has equitable opportunities for health, development, and well-being. We recognize that systemic racism, ableism, poverty, and other forms of oppression create barriers that harm children and families, and we pledge to confront and dismantle these inequities.

We honor the strengths that children and families bring through their culture, heritage, language, and lived experience, and we commit to systems that not only celebrate and nurture those strengths, but also share power with families in shaping decisions. We believe all families are leaders and should be respected as experts in their children's lives. Their voices, especially those historically excluded, should be central in shaping policies, programs, and services.

Through this plan, **Vermont affirms its responsibility to advance equity, belonging, and justice for every child and family.** This requires shared responsibility and collective action to ensure equity is embedded in both vision and practice. Our values of equity, collaboration, and integrity shape this work to:

- Confront and dismantle systemic barriers and biases
- Share power through authentic partnerships with families and communities
- Ensure accountability through transparent, ethical, inclusive, and equity-driven practices

By working together with a relentless focus on equity and justice, Vermont commits to building an early childhood system that ensures health, safety, belonging, happiness, and the opportunity to thrive for every child and family—now and in the future.

Strategic Planning Process

Overview

Vermont's Early Childhood Strategic Plan (the Plan) was developed as part of Building Bright Futures' (BBF) statutory responsibility to steward the state's early childhood system. In partnership with The Creative Discourse Group (TCDG), BBF facilitated a collaborative and iterative process to draft the 2025 update, including three cycles of Input, Analysis, and Drafting. To center engagement and transparency, BBF and TCDG developed a transparency protocol that guided the process from start to finish. The protocol established clear steps to document all input, minimize personal bias, preserve data integrity, ensure balance of positional power, and track decisions related to the Plan. It ensured that partners could see how input was gathered, how themes were identified, and how final choices were made. Throughout the process,

community input was triangulated with existing goals, emergent themes, and system priorities to ensure that the Plan reflects both lived experiences and evidence-based best practices.

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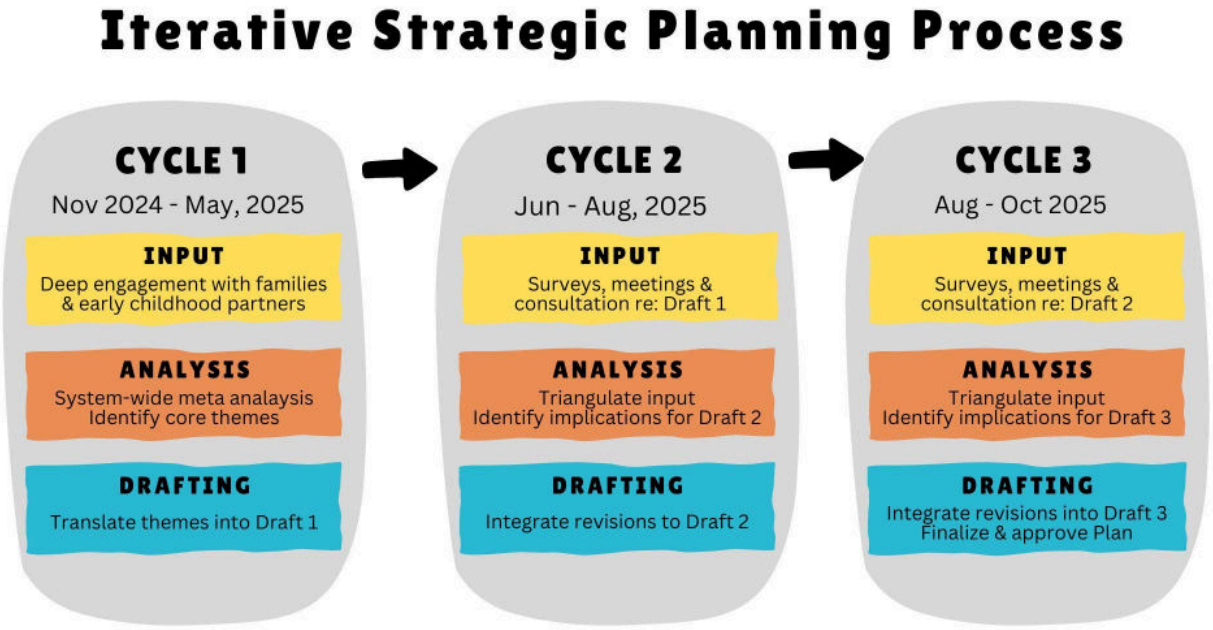

Input

The first cycle of the process used an intensive, multifaceted community engagement process to ensure that the Plan reflected the lived experiences and priorities of Vermont families. Cycles two and three refined the findings from Cycle one by engaging early childhood professionals, decision-makers, and cross-sector advisors in review and input opportunities.

Community Input

In 2024, BBF and TCDG implemented a comprehensive community engagement process, which intentionally engaged families from all across the state, including rural families, families of color, immigrant families, families without stable housing, and families raising children with disabilities. In total, 197 individuals participated in the process, including 92 family members (parents, grandparents, and students) and 105 early childhood professionals representing various roles across the system.

The engagement process featured multiple approaches:

- Photo booth interactions at community events, offering quick and accessible opportunities for families to share input

- 90-minute facilitated community conversations hosted by local partners, creating space for deeper dialogue
- An immersive “day-in-the-life” exchange, pairing state leaders with child care providers to foster mutual understanding
- Handwritten letters describing their experiences and ideas for change

All Input gathered through these methods was analyzed using a combination of human review and technology-assisted analysis to identify key themes. Findings were then validated through cross-checking with facilitators, notetakers, and advisors to ensure they accurately reflected participant perspectives.

The analysis revealed that Vermont families are strong, resourceful, and proud of their ability to navigate daily challenges. Families were clear about what’s working well: community programs, early intervention, playgroups, supportive school staff, free meals, and trusted relationships. At the same time, families face significant barriers, including:

- Financial stress and housing instability
- High costs of food, housing, health care, and child care
- Transportation challenges
- Confusing or hard-to-access services
- Long waits for child care, health care, and mental health care
- Discrimination based on race, disability, immigration status, recovery status, or parenting style

Families emphasized they are not seeking handouts. Instead, they want systems that are responsive, inclusive, and aligned with the creativity and resilience they demonstrate every day. They called for comprehensive, long-term solutions, including:

- Affordable housing and child care
- Improved wages
- Accessible and culturally responsive services
- Stronger community networks
- Meaningful opportunities for families to shape decision-making

These insights became a foundational element of the Plan, providing a clear, grounded vision shaped directly by the families and professionals who experience the system every day.

Partner Input

In 2025, BBF engaged early childhood partners, professionals, decision makers and advisors in ongoing review and input on the Plan. Input was collected through qualitative surveys, Strategic Plan committee meetings, and one-on-one consultations with BBF Network members including State Advisory Council members, legislators, advocates, researchers, and agency leaders. During the second and third cycles of the process, draft goals and objectives were posted on the BBF website and input solicited online.

Analysis

Each cycle of the strategic planning process included a phase of input analysis and triangulation across data sources to identify revisions to the draft Plan.

Aligning with Early Childhood Documents

The first cycle of the process included a comprehensive review of system-wide plans, assessments, and reports. A meta-analysis of the early childhood system landscape was conducted, drawing on 49 documents—including strategic plans, needs assessments, data briefs, annual reports, and more. Each data set was analyzed for emergent themes, which were then cross-referenced and triangulated with the 2020 Vermont's Early Childhood Action Plan (VECAP) Goals and Objectives and a set of technology-generated themes. A more in-depth meta analysis was completed as part of the Preschool Development Grant-required Needs Assessment with 12 documents. The resulting themes informed the first draft of the 2025–2030 Vermont's Early Childhood Strategic Plan's Goals and Objectives.

Triangulation Across Input

All input collected during the process – including from the community engagement process, partner surveys and meetings, one-on-one meetings, and input shared informally through conversation or email – was entered into an Input Database. Input was reviewed by the Strategic Plan Advisory Committee and analyzed for crosscutting themes, tensions across input sources, and areas that required further input. Any decisions made about revisions to the Strategic Plan were documented within the Input Database to minimize personal bias and ensure they reflected the lived experiences and priorities of Vermont families.

Drafting

The Plan went through three cycles of major revision based on the input and analysis of the previous phase. The Strategic Plan Advisory Committee reviewed all versions and revisions and approved the final draft. The Plan was crafted to reflect a forward-looking vision for Vermont's early childhood system, grounded in best practices and aligned with the priorities of early childhood community members.

About the Plan

Structure

Goals, Objectives & Strategies

Graphic in development by designer to include the following text:
The section below outlines five long-range goals, objectives to translate those goals into measurable targets, and strategies to take action toward objectives.

- **Goals** express Vermont's long-range priorities for children and families. They reflect the state's early childhood framework and set direction for strengthening the overall system including early learning and development programs, the workforce, and essential infrastructure. Goals emphasize collaboration across sectors and center the experiences of families as the foundation for building a stronger, more equitable system.
- **Objectives** translate the broad goals into specific, practical, and measurable targets. They are tailored to Vermont's current needs and serve as stepping stones toward long-term progress.
- **Strategies** describe the approaches that partners at all levels (state, community, and program) can use to move objectives forward. They are intentionally flexible so that diverse partners can engage in ways that match their role and capacity.
- **Example Actions** illustrate how a strategy might be put into practice. These examples are possible ways to carry out a strategy. They are not exhaustive, but meant to spark ideas and provide options for partners to adapt.

What Happens Next?

Call out box referring to later section w hyper link

This Plan is intended to be a living document that is broadly accessible, collaboratively stewarded, and regularly updated. Following the Goals, Objectives, Strategies, and Example Actions is information about how different audiences can use this Plan, how it will be implemented and stewarded, and how progress will be monitored over the next five years.

Definitions

The goals, objectives, and strategies described in this Plan are grounded in the following definitions:

- **Early Childhood System:** Vermont's early childhood system is a multi-sector network of services, supports, policies, and infrastructure that collectively promote the healthy development, learning, and well-being of children from the prenatal period to age 8 and their families. It encompasses a broad array of domains including early care and education, physical and mental health, nutrition, early intervention and special education, family support, housing, and economic stability.

This system is sustained by strong cross-sector collaboration among families, educators, health professionals, state and local agencies, advocates, philanthropists, and businesses. This system is guided by the recognition that early childhood is a critical window for lifelong learning, well-being, and opportunity—and that the environment in which a child grows must be stable, supported, and inclusive to foster their full potential.

- **Early Childhood Programs and Services**: A broad range of formal and informal services, programs, and supports for pregnant people, young children and their families and caregivers, and the professionals who serve them.

- **Early Childhood Workforce**: Providers of a broad range of services, programs, and supports for pregnant people, young children and their families and caregivers, and their peers. This includes, for example, early childhood and family mental health providers, early elementary teachers, perinatal and pediatric healthcare providers, early childhood educators, special educators, data stewards, administrators, case managers, and social workers.

Goals, Objectives & Strategies

Goal 1: All Children and Families Have Their Basic Needs Met

Children cannot thrive without stable housing, food, income, and transportation. The stress of being unable to meet basic physiological needs such as food and shelter, often due to poverty, impacts parents' and caregivers' capacity to create environments that support early childhood development. To advance this goal, Vermont must develop and expand financial supports, implement paid leave and family-friendly workplace policies, remove barriers that limit access to basic resources, and address the needs of those most impacted by economic insecurity.

OBJECTIVE 1.A.: STRENGTHEN ECONOMIC SECURITY FOR FAMILIES

➢ **1.A.1. Develop and expand financial supports.**
Example Actions:

- Increase Reach Up benefit amounts to be sufficient to meet recipients' basic needs (e.g., food, housing, clothing).
- Maintain and promote 3SquaresVT, Child Tax Credits, Child Care Financial Assistance, the USDA Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants,

and Children (WIC), and the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP).
- Increase financial support for kinship caregivers to match foster care reimbursement rates, ensuring equitable compensation for all caregivers providing stable, family-based care.

➢ **1.A.2. Implement paid leave and family-friendly workplace policies.**

Example Actions:
- Enact a paid parental, caregiving, sick and paid leave insurance program that covers all Vermont workers without implicit or explicit gender distinctions, and ensure that the benefit is sufficiently generous for low-income families to utilize the program.
- Develop guidelines and encourage employers to adopt workplace policies that promote child-parent attachment, lactation support, and flexible schedules.

➢ **1.A.3. Remove barriers that keep especially vulnerable families from being able to access resources to meet their basic needs.**

Example Actions:
- Streamline eligibility criteria, applications, and service delivery while removing structural barriers and addressing historical harms of racism, xenophobia, ableism, and poverty criminalization.
- Invest in family-led design by engaging people with lived experience to shape services, inform policy, and identify system gaps.
- Provide culturally and linguistically appropriate outreach, navigation, and case management by partnering with trusted messengers, hiring peer and community navigators, and translating materials in ways that resonate with diverse families.
- Expand integrated service delivery models that co-locate or coordinate access to programs such as Head Start, Children's Integrated Services (CIS), Developmental Understanding Legal Collaboration for Everyone (DULCE), and other wraparound supports to make it as easy as possible for families to access services they need in one place, and consider tools such as mobile outreach, virtual platforms, and drop-in supports in non-stigmatizing spaces to increase flexibility in service delivery.
- Establish legal aid partnerships to help families navigate eligibility systems, challenge discriminatory denials, and access benefits without fear.

➢ **1.A.4. Identify and address barriers for those most impacted by economic insecurity, including caregivers who are unhoused, post-incarceration, immigrants, or those seeking employment.**

Example Actions:
- Mitigate barriers to unhoused parents and caregivers seeking employment (e.g., direct deposit, permanent address requirements).

- Support programs and services that help reintegrate post-incarcerated parents and caregivers and provide pathways to employment.
- Identify opportunities for expediting paths to employment for parents and caregivers while immigration statuses are being processed.
- Review employer background check requirements to identify and remove unnecessary or overly punitive barriers to employment, while upholding standards that ensure the safety of children and vulnerable populations.

OBJECTIVE 1.B.: CREATE FOOD SECURITY

➢ **1.B.1. Advance equitable food access and nutrition.**

Example Actions:

- Provide resources to state and local food programs (e.g., 3SquaresVT, WIC, food pantries, food banks) to allow them to respond to increased needs
- Address inequities in food access by expanding affordable, reliable pathways for families in underserved areas to obtain nutritious food (e.g., grocery retail incentives, mobile markets, or food delivery options), while also supporting community-based initiatives that strengthen local food security and provide supplemental nutrition education.
- Support breastfeeding as the recommended standard for infant health while affirming parent choice in feeding as an act of wellness and agency, ensuring all families have access to the information, resources, and supports they need..

➢ **1.B.2. Ensure access to nutritious and culturally relevant food in early childhood settings.**

Example Actions:

- Mitigate barriers to expanded access to early childhood meal programs such as the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP).
- Maintain state and federal resources for Universal School Meals.
- Invest in sustainable farm-to-early-childhood-program initiatives that offer fresh, culturally appropriate foods.
- Ensure that all child nutrition programs incorporate menus, food traditions, and practices that reflect the food traditions of the populations they serve.

OBJECTIVE 1.C.: EXPAND AND ENSURE SAFE AND AFFORDABLE HOUSING FOR ALL FAMILIES

➢ **1.C.1. Invest in housing infrastructure.**

Example Actions:

- Encourage development models that promote long-term affordability and housing stability, including permanently affordable homes and shared equity housing, while maintaining flexibility to meet diverse community needs, including the need for multigenerational and accessible housing.

- Expand affordable homeownership pathways for first-generation, first-time, and low to moderate income buyers, and for families historically excluded from asset-building, through down payment assistance, financial education, shared equity models, and community land trust partnerships.
- Build upon wastewater and drinking water infrastructure to support compact and affordable housing development in villages and downtowns. (See Strategy 2.B.2. for expanded family-friendly infrastructure strategies.)
- Invest in rental weatherization and energy efficiency to improve health, cut costs, and support housing stability for families.
- Update state and local land-use governance, regulations, practices, and investments to eliminate barriers to family-centered housing development.

➢ **1.C.2. Guarantee families have access to safe and secure housing in the immediate and long-term.**

Example Actions:

- Create new developmentally appropriate emergency transitional shelter for unhoused families, building on lessons learned from the General Assistance/Emergency Housing program, and access to coordinated entry systems and non-punative supportive services.
- Align housing strategies with economic justice by supporting Mckinney-Vento coordination and addressing the growing gap between wages and housing costs to ensure families can access affordable, stable homes.
- Expand access to housing subsidies for families with young children by reducing barriers, updating the Fair Market Rent formulas, and investing at the state level to offset potential federal cuts.
- Advance regulatory reforms that remove barriers to affordable housing and emergency shelter development while centering equity and sustainability in Vermont's communities.

OBJECTIVE 1.D.: IMPROVE FAMILIES' ACCESS TO RELIABLE TRANSPORTATION

➢ **1.D.1. Address family transportation needs to ensure access to healthcare, education, employment, basic needs, and family support services.**

Example Actions:

- In alignment with the Vermont Food Security Roadmap, provide low-barrier financial support for transportation, such as vouchers, gas cards, and funding for personal transportation needs such as car seats, snow tires, car inspections, repairs, no-interest loans, subsidies for cars, or other items.
- Improve Medicaid transport to meet the needs of families (e.g., allowing Medicaid to transport more than one child).

- Improve transportation for children who qualify under McKinney-Vento status to reduce barriers for students experiencing homelessness to ensure continuous education with minimal interruptions.

➢ **1.D.2. Fund affordable public transportation that improves access for disabled and rural families, including routes and schedules for child care, medical, and afterschool schedules.**

Example Actions:

- Make the public transportation system and its vehicles more efficient and accessible, ensuring parents can travel with strollers, car seats, and multiple children.
- Maintain or expand funding for functional public transportation.
- Offer timely interpretation and disability services for those who need it.
- Prioritize transportation investments that support Vermont's climate and clean energy goals (e.g., low-emission vehicles, active transportation, and regional mobility solutions).

➢ **1.D.3. Eradicate systemic gaps in transportation access for families through coordinated transportation planning with health, education, and human services agencies.**

Example Actions:

- Join the Transportation and Climate Initiative Program (TCI-P) when regional market viability exists.
- Increase investment in on-demand public transportation options, micro-transit models, flexroute transportation, and rideshare services in alignment with the Food Security in Vermont: Roadmap to 2035.

Goal 2: All Children Are Raised in Safe, Healthy, and Healing Environments

Every child should grow up in conditions that support health, safety, and resilience. Stable, nurturing environments help children thrive in school, build strong relationships, and grow into healthy adults. Unsafe or unstable settings, trauma, and poor health can disrupt development and increase risks of chronic illness, mental health challenges, academic struggles, and involvement in child welfare or justice systems. To advance this goal, Vermont must invest in preventative health care, ensure access to health insurance, build emergency preparedness and climate resilience, invest in community infrastructure such as parks and broadband, and center racial equity in the child protection and health and human services systems.

OBJECTIVE 2.A.: ENSURE EQUITABLE ACCESS TO COMPREHENSIVE MENTAL AND PHYSICAL HEALTH CARE FROM PREGNANCY THROUGH EARLY CHILDHOOD

➢ **2.A.1. Invest in preventative health care strategies.**

Example Actions:

- Ensure all perinatal individuals, infants, and children are covered by adequate and continuous health insurance.
- Promote the importance of regular well-child visits, oral health care, developmental monitoring and screening, and vaccinations across all early childhood sectors and with families.
- Ensure universal screening for perinatal mental health, food security, housing security, and developmental delays in medical settings and ensure it is followed by timely, trauma-informed, and culturally and linguistically responsive referrals.
- Sustain home visiting for families with young children or who are expecting a baby through birth or adoption.
- Expand timely access to mental health treatment for parents, caregivers, and family members.
- Ensure services are delivered and covered by insurance in the most appropriate setting for the child or family, including home and community settings.

➢ **2.A.2 Ensure family-centered, coordinated, and culturally responsive care.**

Example Actions:

- Integrate pediatric physical, mental, and oral health, providing coordinated care through shared referrals, joint care planning, co-located services, and culturally responsive family engagement.
- Increase access to doula services through expanded Medicaid coverage, family outreach, and workforce development.
- Ensure coordinated, equitable care across systems by developing an anti-racism accountability framework for health and human services systems in collaboration

with Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC), immigrant, and disability justice coalitions.
- Ensure culturally and linguistically appropriate services, translation, interpretation, and staff training.
- Integrate multigenerational strategies in medical settings (e.g., Developmental Understanding Legal Collaboration for Everyone (DULCE) and Touchpoints, two strategies that promote whole family engagement and build caregiver confidence through developmentally informed support).
- Expand navigation support with coordinators, community health workers, and clear crisis guidance for families.

➢ **2.A.3 Promote Health Care Access and Sustainability by Investing in Innovative Service Delivery.**

Example Actions:

- Invest in flexible service delivery models that meet children and families where they are, including in homes, schools, Parent Child Centers, designated agencies, and via telehealth.
- Sustain rural health care access by exploring regional health care strategies, such as the ability to access services across state lines.
- Sustain programming that supports primary care and health care providers in responding to pediatric and perinatal patients' mental health, such as the Vermont Consultation and Psychiatry Access Program.
- Engage state and local leaders to explore successful implementation strategies used in other contexts to increase access and utilization to early childhood mental health consultation and training.

➢ **2.A.4 Increase access to specialized health care services and care.**

Example Actions:

- Expand access to substance use treatment and recovery supports for parents and caregivers.
- Address barriers limiting the availability of specialized service workforce such as early childhood and family mental health providers, occupational therapists, physical therapists, and speech-language pathologists due to payment structures and low reimbursement rates.
- Address service gaps by investing in consultation programs, training, and cross-sector partnerships to better support children with chronic health conditions and disabilities across every region of the state.
- Expand access to intensive home-based and crisis services for children with complex, high-level needs.
- Expand support for perinatal loss by connecting families to peer support resources and bolstering professional training in bereavement care.

- Lift the legislative moratorium so that new therapeutic independent schools can be created to support Vermont's complex students.

OBJECTIVE 2.B.: CULTIVATE SAFE AND VIBRANT COMMUNITIES

➢ **2.B.1. Advance climate resilience and community emergency preparedness to mitigate impact on children and families with a focus on under-resourced communities.**

Example Actions:

- Build stronger partnerships across early childhood, environmental, and emergency preparedness systems to advance climate resilience strategies that protect children and families.
- Budget for current and future climate costs, prioritizing under-resourced communities, communities of color, and those facing environmental and social injustice.
- In alignment with the Vermont Climate Action Plan, expand equitable access to weatherization, electrification, and utility upgrades to help rural homeowners, landlords, municipalities, and institutions (e.g., school districts, universities, and hospitals) to reduce costs and improve family well-being.
- Support community-based, energy-efficient mobility solutions (e.g., micro-transit, ride shares, EV access) to address transportation barriers for families.
- Identify and prioritize funding for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC)-led environmental justice initiatives as central to Vermont's resilience and sustainability.

➢ **2.B.2. Build essential community infrastructure that supports children's health, safety, development, and family connection.**

Example Actions:

- Prioritize sidewalks, crosswalks, playgrounds, and parks that allow families with young children to move safely, play, and access community services, especially in historically disadvantaged communities.
- Invest in free and low-cost family connection opportunities (e.g., peer support groups, playgroups, affinity groups, library programming, and other connection points), to reduce isolation and stress for caregivers.
- Ensure that health and safety infrastructure (e.g., pediatric and family health clinics, urgent care, mental health supports, fire/EMS, community-centered safety alternatives) is trauma-responsive and accessible to families with infants and young children.
- Increase investment in housing, broadband, and transportation infrastructure that fosters families' access to child care, health care, and early learning opportunities.

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➢ **2.B.3. Make Vermont a place where every family feels welcome, supported, and safe.**

Example Actions:

- Abolish discriminatory and carceral policies that disproportionately criminalize and surveil Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC), disabled, and immigrant families, disrupting childhood stability and harming children's sense of safety and belonging.
- Strengthen and enforce policies that ensure Vermont communities are safe and welcoming for people of all backgrounds, races, ethnicities, family structures, sexual orientations, gender identities, disability statuses, socio-economic statuses, immigration statuses, and religious or spiritual affiliations.
- Respond to violence, abuse, and neglect by investing in trauma-informed, survivor-centered supports and culturally responsive crisis services that mitigate children from the impact of trauma.
- Develop policies and practices that recognize that all families do not feel the same level of safety in communities based on immigration status.
- Fund transformative justice and community-led safety alternatives that support families in crisis and prevent children's exposure to traumatic systems involvement (e.g., BIPOC-led crisis response teams, non-police emergency supports, restorative justice practices for family conflict).

➢ **2.B.4 Advance a child protection system that reduces harm and centers racial equity with a focus on reducing unnecessary child welfare involvement rooted in poverty.**

Example Actions:

- Conduct an equity impact review of mandatory reporting statutes with a focus on reducing unnecessary child welfare involvement rooted in poverty. Partner with families who are directly impacted to reduce harm, build trust, and support prevention.
- Develop targeted recruitment, culturally responsive training, mentoring, and support to increase the number of licensed Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) foster parents and kinship placements to ensure children in custody are cared for in culturally affirming, family-like homes that reflect their identities and support continuity of relationships.
- Shift toward family-like treatment settings and commission an updated evaluation of child welfare practices, with particular attention to treatment and congregate care settings, aligned with the Stop Institutional Child Abuse Act.
- Implement and monitor Family Care Plans with continuous quality improvement processes to support families impacted by substance use within health and social systems.

Goal 3: All Children and Families Have Access to High-Quality Opportunities That Promote Child Development and Well-Being

Every child deserves access to opportunities that nurture their physical, social-emotional, and intellectual growth. Early experiences and relationships are the foundation of healthy development, preparing children for success in school and life. Without access, too many children miss critical developmental supports, deepening disparities in learning and long-term well-being. To advance this goal, Vermont must increase equitable access and affordability of early childhood education through a coordinated mixed-delivery system, increase inclusion for children with disabilities and developmental delays, ensure access to early intervention and special education, provide support and resources to early childhood education programs and schools, and reduce or eliminate exclusionary discipline in early childhood settings.

OBJECTIVE 3.A.: NURTURE CHILDREN'S PHYSICAL, SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL, AND INTELLECTUAL GROWTH THROUGH EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

➢ **3.A.1. Commit to improving access to early intervention, special education, and inclusive services for children with developmental delays, disabilities, or special health care needs.**

Example Actions:

- Ensure timely screening, evaluation, and referral so that early intervention and school-based special education services follow the child and are delivered without unnecessary delays. (See Strategy 5.B.1. for related strategies to reduce delays and improve service access across systems.)
- Provide training for home visitors and early childhood educators to improve their use of the Universal Developmental Screening Registry and support effective cross-sector data sharing.
- Address ongoing workforce shortages by developing the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) early intervention services for infants and toddlers (Part C) and special education for school-aged children (Part B) workforce, including home visitors, developmental specialists, family support workers, and therapists, so that the state can meet its service obligations for entitled services under federal law. (See Objective 4.B. for cross-sector strategies to recruit, retain, and support a thriving early childhood workforce.)
- Assess and strengthen service dosage (i.e. the frequency and length of sessions) so that children with developmental needs receive support at levels consistent with evidence-based practices, reducing the likelihood of more intensive interventions later.
- Stabilize and strengthen Children's Integrated Services (CIS) by addressing funding and billing challenges, ensuring flexible and equitable resource distribution, and

rebuilding a coordinated, collaborative system that supports families, professionals, and regional leadership.
- Ensure smooth, coordinated transitions for children receiving home- and community-based supports and those in early care and education settings (e.g., through the use of transition protocols and checklists, consistent interagency communication, transition support to families, and aligning individualized family services plans and individualized education plans to reduce disruption).

3.A.2. Increase inclusion for children with disabilities and developmental delays in all learning and social spaces alongside their peers.

Example Actions:

- Provide children with individualized accommodations, differentiated interventions, and inclusive instruction.
- Strengthen the capacity of educators and early childhood professionals through coaching, professional development, and technology supports that enable differentiated instruction, active engagement, and inclusive practices aligned with Vermont Early Learning Standards.
- Promote equity and full participation by designing curriculum, instruction, and classroom practices that make learning environments accessible, inclusive, and responsive to the diverse needs of all children.
- Improve cross-sector and cross-district coordination to ensure that 3 to 5-year-old children with disabilities have equitable access to special education and related services in all settings, with a clear commitment to maximizing inclusion and participation alongside peers in the least restrictive environment.

➢ 3.A.3. Reduce and eliminate exclusionary discipline (suspensions, expulsions, seclusions) in all early childhood settings.

Example Actions:

- Create agreed-upon definitions, consistent interagency guidance, unified messaging, and implementation support for best practices related to prevention and inclusion.
- Expand access to timely consultation and intensive coaching to families and programs to respond to children's challenging behaviors.
- Strengthen the Specialized Child Care program to ensure consistent access to inclusive, developmentally appropriate, and trauma-informed child care to vulnerable children.
- Implement restorative, anti-racist behavioral supports by training and coaching educators, embedding restorative practices in early childhood settings, and establishing accountability systems that track and publicly report discipline data by race, disability, and other factors.

- Ensure sustainability by funding ongoing professional development, supporting peer learning networks, and integrating restorative practices into licensing, quality standards, and continuous improvement processes.
- Increase funding and reduce administrative barriers to securing additional resources for children who need additional support to be safely included in child care (e.g., Special Accommodation Grants, Early Childhood Special Education supports in Universal Prekindergarten education (UPK) programs)

OBJECTIVE 3.B.: DELIVER ACCESSIBLE, AFFORDABLE, HIGH-QUALITY EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION IN A MIXED-DELIVERY SYSTEM

**NOTE:*

1. *The Every Student Succeeds Act defines a mixed-delivery system as "a system of early childhood education services that are delivered through a combination of programs, providers, and settings (such as Head Start, licensed family and center-based child care programs, public schools, and community-based organizations); and that is supported with a combination of public funds and private funds."*
2. *In this section, "early childhood education" includes child care, prekindergarten education, Early Head Start and Head Start, and afterschool and out-of-school-time care.*

➢ 3.B.1. Increase equitable access to early childhood education by ensuring families, regardless of setting or geographic area, have options that meet their diverse needs.

Example Actions:

- Sustain investment in community- and school-based afterschool and summer learning programs through extended-day and year-round care models, flexible funding, and scheduling incentives to meet the needs of working families.
- Maintain access to Universal Prekindergarten education (UPK) for 3-, 4-, and 5-year-olds not yet eligible for kindergarten, while addressing barriers (e.g., schedule, geography, and program choice) to ensure all families have access.
- Align child care, Head Start, prekindergarten, and afterschool policies and funding so families experience seamless services across ages and settings.
- Improve language access for Child Care Financial Assistance Program (CCFAP) and other affordability supports by offering translated materials and interpretation services throughout the application and renewal processes.
- Support families who choose to homeschool with access to curricula, learning resources, and developmental guidance.
- Leverage data on supply and demand of regulated programs to identify geographic and age-specific gaps in access, and strategically allocate resources to expand capacity to address disparities.

➢ 3.B.2. Ensure all families can afford early childhood education.

Example Actions:

- Expand opportunities for all eligible families to access Early Head Start and Head Start services by strengthening coordination of state and federal funding.
- Ensure all families who are eligible have access to Vermont's Child Care Financial Assistance Program (CCFAP).
- Expand CCFAP eligibility as needed to ensure no family pays more than 10% of their household income for child care.
- Continue monitoring public investments in child care and ensure alignment with broader affordability strategies to support family well-being. (See Strategy 1.A.1 for more.)
- Ensure resources are efficiently coordinated, braided, and blended across funding streams to meet families' diverse needs for hours, location, instructional approach, and culturally reflective staff.
- Address hidden costs (e.g., transportation, meals, materials, co-pays) so affordability includes the full cost of participation, not just tuition.

➢ 3.B.3. Ensure children are educated and cared for in high-quality environments and by well-prepared early childhood educators.

Example Actions:

- Continue to develop and implement policies that recognize that strong, developmentally appropriate adult-child interactions are the basis of quality.
- Support educators and home visitors to deliver culturally responsive, inclusive instruction and create early childhood environments that affirm all children's identities and foster belonging.
- Develop and implement a system to strengthen accountability by using clear quality benchmarks, including National Institute for Early Education Research's recommendation to advance early childhood educator licensure, with ongoing monitoring, support, and improvement over time. (See Strategy 4.A.3 for more.)
- Continue to refine Vermont's Step Ahead Rating System (STARS) as the Quality Rating Improvement System, using state results and national research to identify opportunities to strengthen tools for measuring and improving quality.
- Use proven models and performance standards like Head Start and National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) to embed a two-generation, family-centered approach.

➢ 3.B.4. Provide supports that ensure programs have what they need to provide access, affordability, and quality.

Example Actions:

- Cultivate varied funding streams to cover program start-up, expansion, and quality improvements.

- Provide technical assistance to strengthen inclusive, equitable, and culturally responsive practices in programs, hiring, and instructional design.
- Increase the availability of ongoing facilities funding, including grants, low-interest loans, and incentives, with priority for programs in underserved areas, infants, toddlers, summer/afterschool care, and children with special needs.
- Increase collaboration and partnership between community-based Universal Prekindergarten education (UPK) programs and partnering school districts to effectively prepare children for kindergarten and transition successfully (e.g., use of regional UPK Coordinators, access to educational resources, family supports, and professional development opportunities).
- Strengthen coordination between the state, school districts, and UPK partner programs by establishing clear statewide guidance, standardized contracts and registration, and streamlined data systems and reporting practices.

OBJECTIVE 3.C.: Keep Children at the Center of Vermont's Prekindergarten–Grade 3 Education Transformation

**Note: Vermont's prekindergarten through grade 3 (PK–3) education system is undergoing major transformation as part of Act 73, the state's redesign of public education. While the long-term vision for early learning is still being developed, this is a pivotal moment to rethink how Vermont supports its youngest learners. Over the next five years, partners across the education system will work together to create a clear, shared vision for PK-3—one that prioritizes children's well-being and learning, promotes equity, and builds a strong foundation for lifelong success. This collaborative effort will refine goals, strategies, and measures of progress, and will set a new standard for high-quality, inclusive, and equitable early learning in Vermont.*

➢ 3.C.1. Center the needs, well-being, and success of children and families as the core purpose of Vermont's education transformation process, as outlined in Act 73: An act relating to transforming Vermont's education governance, quality, and finance systems.

Example Actions:

- Involve families, students, educators, and community partners as co-creators in shaping governance practices that are transparent, responsive, and focused on what helps children thrive.
- Establish an education governance framework that provides clear roles, responsibilities, and accountability across all levels of the education system, ensuring coherence in how decisions translate into improved experiences and outcomes for students.
- Ensure that PreK expansion maintains access for 3-year-olds, while expanding for 4-year-olds in a mixed delivery model, in line with the recommendations from the Prekindergarten Education Implementation Committee (PEIC).
- Identify appropriate PreK per-pupil cost within Vermont's education foundation formula to ensure universal access to PreK that reflects the real costs, including staffing, special education services, transportation, and family engagement.

- Reduce disparities for historically marginalized groups by prioritizing the needs of rural and underserved districts in funding and governance changes.
- Use data and feedback loops that track how transformation efforts affect children's learning, engagement, and well-being, and adjust strategies to ensure the system remains accountable to those outcomes.

➢ **3.C.2. Ensure safe, high-quality, culturally responsive learning environments to improve child educational outcomes.**

Example Actions:

- Align PreK-grade 3 learning environments with Vermont's education quality standards to ensure safety, quality, and equity across schools.
- Expand access to evidence-based literacy instruction and professional learning for all K–3 teachers, in alignment with Act 139, Vermont's act supporting young readers.
- Sufficiently and equitably fund school districts to implement literacy screening and follow-up supports.
- Sufficiently and equitably fund school districts to expand high-quality numeracy instruction and resources that support foundational math skills through play-based and inclusive approaches.
- Strengthen coordination between early intervention and school-based special education services to ensure smooth service transitions and reduce disruptions in support. (See Strategies 3.A.3. and 3.A.1. for more.)
- Expand use of restorative practices, positive behavioral supports, and culturally responsive approaches to reduce exclusionary discipline and to foster belonging.

➢ **3.C.3. Equip schools to respond to mental health, trauma, and basic needs of students and staff.**

Example Actions:

- Expand access to mental health supports through school-based staff (e.g., counselors, social workers) and partnerships with local health providers and community organizations.
- Invest in evidence-based social-emotional learning (SEL) curricula and professional development for teachers.
- Strengthen family/school partnerships and provide resources for language access and basic needs (e.g., nutrition, clothing, transportation, afterschool supports) to ensure full participation and culturally responsive supports for students.
- Support staff well-being and sustainability through mental health resources, professional learning communities, and workforce supports that reduce burnout and promote retention.

Goal 4: All Children Are Supported by a Well-Prepared, Well-Supported Early Childhood Workforce

The early childhood workforce is essential to the health and success of children, families, and communities. A strong workforce not only ensures high-quality care and learning but also underpins Vermont's economy by enabling parents to work and employers to thrive. Without equitable pay, professional recognition, and long-term investment, the state risks ongoing shortages, instability, and lost opportunities for children and families. To advance this goal, Vermont must expand access to affordable, high-quality training, education, and professional development for the early childhood workforce; increase compensation and benefits to allow workers to meet their basic needs and to thrive; and, engage in effective recruitment and retention tactics to attract a broad, stable, diverse workforce.

OBJECTIVE 4.A.: ENSURE THE EARLY CHILDHOOD WORKFORCE IS WELL PREPARED

➢ **4.A.1. Guarantee access to pre-service training, education, and professional development to improve child outcomes.**

Example Actions:

- Ensure credential and degree programs align with workforce needs, are offered at Vermont higher education institutions, and provide stackable, portable options.
- Stabilize and expand funding for early childhood post-secondary education and training, making programs accessible, affordable, and attractive for earning necessary credentials to meet current and future workforce needs.
- Invest in post-secondary education and training infrastructure, including financial and academic counseling, to support an equity-centered recruitment strategy, using inclusive language and diverse outreach to students, advisors, and counselors.
- Use equity-centered recruitment strategies to attract students, advisors, and counselors from diverse backgrounds through targeted outreach and financial and academic counseling.
- Invest in and retain early childhood higher education faculty and trainers by funding positions (tenured when possible), research, graduate programs, and professional supports.
- Identify opportunities for school- and community-based Universal Prekindergarten early childhood educators to collaborate on professional development (e.g., alternatives to funding limitations, Supervisory Unions and Supervisory Districts including school and community-based early childhood educators in their professional development planning).

➢ **4.A.2. Set expectations for services and organizations to promote equity and justice and dismantle systems of oppression.**

Example Actions:

- Build workforce capacity to respond to trauma and community crisis through training, peer support, and mental health resources, embedded in healing-centered practices.
- Examine existing equity standards in quality frameworks, licensing, and improvement plans, and seek out opportunities for continuous quality improvement.
- Invest in and expand the use of tools that prioritize equity (e.g., Northern Lights Equity and Inclusion Audit Tool, foster parent training, and staff training for the Department of Children and Families (DCF) and Family Services (FS)) and develop new resources based on community-identified needs.

➢ **4.A.3. Advance a well-prepared, well-qualified early childhood workforce by developing a clear system of professional expectations, career pathways, and accountability.**

Example Actions:

- Advance credentialing and licensure, with strong transition supports for the current workforce, alignment across agencies, and mechanisms for coaching, mentoring, and continuous quality improvement.
- Promote transparency and accountability by ensuring families have access to information about educator qualifications, program practices, and learning environments, with a focus on increasing positive experiences and outcomes for children.
- Revise Vermont's early childhood workforce registry according to the PER standards established by the National Workforce Registry Alliance. Workforce registries are a best practice recommended by the National Institute for Early Education Research to help states track credentials, training, and professional development needs.
- Reward the commitment of veteran professionals by supporting systems that award longevity and quality-based bonuses or increased reimbursement rates.
- Expand access to expert, business-specific guidance for child care owners and directors tailored to their unique business models.

OBJECTIVE 4.B: ENSURE THE EARLY CHILDHOOD WORKFORCE IS STABLE AND ABLE TO THRIVE

➢ **4.B.1. Ensure that the early childhood workforce is well-compensated and can meet their basic needs.**

Example Actions:

- Work toward compensation and benefit parity across school- and community-based settings, sectors, and age of children served so families experience consistent quality regardless of where they access early childhood services.
- Provide funding to support comprehensive benefit packages, comparable to other fields with similar qualifications and levels of responsibility, including benefits especially relevant to this field, including paid family leave and child care benefits.
- Promote and enhance existing state policies that seek to provide affordable benefits to Vermont employers and employees (e.g., Vermont Health Connect, Vermont Saves).
- Increase reimbursement rates for billable services to enable community-based programs (via Children's Integrate Services, Parent Child Centers, Designated agencies) to increase compensation for professionals, including mental health providers, social workers, speech-language pathologists (SLPs), occupational therapists (OTs), and physical therapists (PTs).
- Continue incremental increases to Child Care Financial Assistance Program (CCFAP) reimbursement rates to provide child care programs with sufficient funds to increase wages and offer benefits.

➢ **4.B.2. Promote recruitment into the early childhood workforce.**

Example Actions:

- Implement targeted marketing and recruitment campaigns to elevate the visibility and value of early childhood and related careers (e.g., home visitors, early interventionists, special educators, speech-language pathologists (SLPs), occupational (OTs) and physical therapists (PTs), early childhood educators, mental health clinicians).
- Promote clear, supported career pathways beginning in secondary schools and technical education programs, consistently and statewide, with opportunities to explore early childhood education licensure, Master's of Social Work (MSW) programs, allied health careers, and other roles that serve children and families.
- Invest in recruiting a diverse workforce through internships, grow-your-own programs, scholarships, mentorship, and streamlined licensing for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) and immigrant professionals.
- Expand access to scholarships, tuition assistance, loan repayment, and wage incentives to encourage workforce entry.
- Ensure coordination across training, licensing, and support programs so that entry points into the workforce are clear, visible, and accessible across disciplines.

➢ **4.B.3. Promote retention of the current workforce.**

Example Actions:

- Enhance workforce well-being with policies and supports that reduce burnout (e.g., substitute staffing pools, mental health resources, reflective supervision, and flexible schedules).
- Support equitable hiring, retention, and promotion practices, including bias-free recruitment, equitable pay, and clear career pathways.
- Expand the capacity of the primary care, mental health, and pediatric behavioral health workforce using consultation programs, with attention to both geography and demographic representation.
    - Strengthen interdisciplinary professional networks (e.g., Vermont's Early Childhood and Family Mental Health (ECFMH) Directors, Home Visitors, Early Childhood Networks, program directors, speech-language pathologists, social workers, and other care professionals) to foster connection, reduce isolation, and support peer learning.
- Invest in professional development by covering training time, travel, substitutes, and licensure costs to keep the workforce current and improve child development and family outcomes.
- Support leadership development of experienced professionals with expanded roles, professional development, mentorship, and recognition to improve continuity and quality for families.

Goal 5: Our System Centers Children and Families and Is Coordinated, Well-Resourced, and Data-Driven

Families and caregivers must hold real power in shaping decisions, and families' transitions across systems must be smooth and coordinated. Caregivers are experts on the care, services, and supports each family member needs, and their voices should guide the policies, practices, and investments that shape their lives. High-quality, up-to-date data is an essential tool for learning about and responding to the needs of children and families statewide. To advance this goal, Vermont must involve families in leadership and decision-making, improve transitions among services, invest in improvements to data systems, and promote collaboration among early childhood leaders.

OBJECTIVE 5.A.: SHIFT POWER TO FAMILIES AND UTILIZE THEIR EXPERTISE IN SYSTEM DESIGN AND DECISIONS

- **5.A.1. Foster a culture that uplifts family voice by recognizing families as experts in their own experiences, supporting their participation in state early childhood systems leadership, and equipping system leaders to sustain their engagement.**

  Example Actions:

  - Invest in pathways, meeting structures, and training that empower caregivers to shape policy, lead in their communities, and pursue elected roles.
  - Build anti-racist, trauma-informed, and linguistically and disability accessible infrastructure that centers family leaders as collaborators, thereby ensuring they can build relationships and directly share their needs, ideas, and expertise with system leaders.
  - Ensure all family engagement efforts recognize and include families of all compositions and structures, including kinship care; foster families; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and more (LGBTQ+) parents; multigenerational households; and, others.
  - Offer ongoing professional development for system leaders to apply best practices in family engagement, including trauma-responsive training.
  - Ensure alignment with strategies that elevate family leadership in governance and decision-making. (See Strategy 1.A.3.)

- **5.A.2. Adapt governance structures to increase parent and caregiver representation in decision-making.**

  Example Actions:

  - Enact a formal protocol for naming membership when creating new legislatively mandated bodies that must include modalities for engaging individuals with

relevant lived experience, based on a given bill's impacted communities. This protocol should become a required part of standard operating procedure for the legislature.
- Design engagement structures that best meet the needs of family and community collaborators, intentionally embedding accessibility, safety, transparency, and clear supports to break down barriers and support full participation.
- Implement consistent guidance around compensation, training, and support for family leaders serving on state-convened entities.
- Create metrics to track decision-making power sharing with family representatives beyond participation.

OBJECTIVE 5.B.: SUPPORT FAMILIES' SEAMLESS TRANSITION ACROSS SERVICES, RESOURCES, SUPPORTS, AND EDUCATION

➢ **5.B.1. Ensure that families can find and access the services they need.**

Example Actions:

- Maintain existing early outreach programs with proven outcomes (e.g., home visiting, Developing Using, and Learning with Child-Centered Experiences (DULCE), high-quality pediatric medical homes, Parent Child Centers).
- Invest in a centralized, coordinated intake and referral system to ensure families have equitable access to needed services, don't have to retell their story multiple times, and can easily connect to supports.
- Expand the availability and use of translation when producing family communications, surveys, events, and parent education materials. Coordinate with culturally responsive training and expectations. (See Strategy 4.A.2. for additional detail.)
- Monitor and address barriers to cross-district service delivery and coordination (e.g., referral to early intervention, early intervention to special education, early childhood education to school-based programs, community- to school-based programs).
- Implement cohesive transition strategies and enhance family partnerships to support educational progression and readiness between prekindergarten through grade 3.
- Explore strategies to ensure timely and accurate evaluations for children needing identification through screenings (e.g., use of third-party evaluations). (See Objective 3.A.1. for related strategies to improve universal developmental screening, referral systems, and access to early intervention services through the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA.)
- Mitigate risks to families avoiding services out of fear of surveillance. Ensure data protection and provide information so individuals understand both the benefits and risks of having their personal data collected, used, and protected.

➢ **5.B.2. Promote a coordinated approach to supporting children and families.**

Example Actions:

- Ensure families are able to access all programs they are eligible for by strengthening referral pathways, outreach, and coordination with enrollment teams.
- Simplify eligibility and enrollment procedures to allow families who qualify for one benefits program to be automatically enrolled in additional programs with consent.
- Support families' transitions (e.g., across services, lapse in care, move, age out) to ensure continuity and minimize disruptions.
- Provide high-quality service coordination to families navigating complex needs, such as special health care, mental health conditions, and substance use disorders. Include clear points of contact, family-centered care planning, and streamlined communication across health, education, and social service systems.

OBJECTIVE 5.C.: USE DATA TO INFORM DECISIONS, GUIDE INVESTMENTS, AND DRIVE BOLD ACTION

➢ **5.C.1. Monitor services and outcomes collaboratively across public and community partners.**

Example Actions:

- Identify Vermont's timely questions, priorities, and gaps in data across early childhood sectors.
- Consistently collect and analyze data that shows whether families can access the services they need, identifies gaps in child and family well-being, and measures long-term impacts.
- Include the ability to track outcomes and service utilization for children with special health care needs in data systems, disaggregated by condition type and access to specialty care.
- Connect data to examine long-term outcomes for children across multiple agencies, departments, divisions, and partners to understand the impacts of early childhood programs over time.
- Name and measure "belonging" and "social connection" as key outcomes across health, education, and social services.

➢ **5.C.2. Invest in dedicated staffing needed to partner with communities to collect, manage, and analyze data.**

Example Actions:

- Invest in the full data cycle—from collection to analysis, dissemination, and use.
- Build capacity for agency data teams, direct service providers, and community-based partners through sustainable staffing and compensation for organizations without data entry and analysis capacity.

- Strengthen and incentivize high-quality data practices by streamlining collection mechanisms, enhancing feedback loops across systems, and supporting data sharing through targeted infrastructure and partner support.
- Partner with impacted communities throughout the data cycle to ensure they have ownership of their experiences and are empowered to advocate for and make decisions for themselves.

➢ **5.C.3. Improve the technological early childhood data infrastructure to be agile and responsive, compatible, equitable, and secure.**

Example Actions:

- Develop and advance adaptable data, technological, and finance systems that keep pace with changing needs and align across state agencies to provide a complete picture of children, families, and communities.
- Ensure data quality through validation, correction, and the use of standardized definitions across partners and sectors, so information is accurate, consistent, and equitable in how it represents all children and families.
- Advance data equity and governance by setting clear standards for ethical collection and use, ensuring privacy and transparency, and applying culturally responsive safeguards (e.g., consent, impact assessments, data minimization, and encryption) to protect communities and prevent harm.
- Ensure data transparency and accountability by making information publicly available through equity reports, dashboards, and feedback channels that communities can use for advocacy and system improvement.
- Build trust and address family concerns around data use by ensuring transparency, consent, and control, demonstrating that data strengthens services without causing harm.

➢ **5.C.4. Ensure that Vermont decision-makers use high-quality data to confront opportunity gaps, inform policies and programs, and support equity-driven investments.**

Example Actions:

- Foster an equity-centered data culture by building data literacy, valuing both quantitative and qualitative insights, and embedding evidence to guide equitable resource allocation and prioritize where investments are most impactful.
- Utilize disaggregated data by race, ethnicity, income, geography, language, educational attainment, and other relevant factors to identify and address inequities among children, families, and communities.
- Drive continuous quality improvement by regularly reviewing data use practices and decision-making processes. Refine strategies based on evaluation findings, new research, technology, and partner feedback.

- Develop and publish an annual *Equity Impact Statement* showing how disaggregated data informs funding, program changes, and systemic accountability.
- Make data actionable and transparent by sharing dashboards and reports in plain language, tracking equity progress publicly, and using findings to drive continuous improvement.

OBJECTIVE 5.D.: SUSTAIN AND STRATEGICALLY ALIGN EARLY CHILDHOOD LEADERSHIP AND RESOURCES

➢ **5.D.1. Promote collaboration and aligned leadership through Vermont's Early Childhood State Advisory Council and its Early Childhood Interagency Coordinating Team.**

Example Actions:

- Ensure active and consistent engagement of leadership across agencies, departments, divisions, the Governor's office, and the State Advisory Council.
- Promote and strengthen information sharing, interagency relationships, collaboration across organizations, and coordination of projects, funding, and communication.
- Use the Strategic Plan as a shared foundation for visioning, problem-solving, and decision-making across the system.
- Center children and families in all policy and leadership decisions, ensuring their needs guide priorities and action.
- Strengthen state systems and communication so family-serving organizations can focus more energy on supporting children and families, not navigating bureaucracy.
- Utilize the expertise and priorities from Regional Councils, Strategic Plan Committees, and the State Advisory Council to inform strategy.

➢ **5.D.2. Collaborate to sustain and maximize investments and develop long-term funding strategies for the early childhood system.**

Example Actions:

- Sustain core services by prioritizing stable, long-term investments in foundational child and family health, mental health, and other essential supports.
- Maximize resources through strategic blending and braiding of federal, state, local, and philanthropic funds, coordinated across agencies and partners.
- Center equity in funding decisions by conducting equity assessments, addressing systemic underfunding, and redirecting resources toward culturally responsive, community-led solutions.
- Align spending with impact by using the Strategic Plan as a blueprint, coordinating budgets, and regularly reviewing programs and infrastructure to validate effectiveness and adapt to evolving policy and fiscal conditions.

- Strengthen partnerships with state, community, and philanthropic leaders to secure investments and ensure that funding strategies reflect the needs and leadership of families most impacted.
- Review chronically underfunded priorities and systemic inequities, and validate or sunset programs or approaches based on effectiveness.

What Happens Next?

Vermont's Early Childhood Strategic Plan is more than a document. It is a roadmap for collective action. Families, policymakers, advocates, early childhood professionals, and other early childhood partners can use it to set a shared vision and guide the development of programs, policies, and actions at the state and community levels. Naming goals, objectives, and strategies is just the first step; the harder work of implementing, stewarding, and monitoring this vision for Vermont's early childhood system lies ahead.

Everyone has a role in advancing this vision. Partners carry strategies forward through various means, including: direct action and service delivery, amplifying the vision and engaging new allies; and, tracking progress, surfacing inequities, and sharing lessons learned. Together, these roles ensure that the Plan is collectively owned, actively implemented, and continuously improved.

How to Use the Plan

Graphic in development by designer to include the following text:

Legislators, the Administration, and Early Childhood Leaders Can:

- Reference the Plan when considering funding allocations, formulating priorities, and developing legislation.
- Reference existing efforts or best practices called out in the Plan when developing policy.
- Better understand the priorities of families and early childhood professionals.
- Identify resource gaps and create policies or budgets to fill them.

Advocates Can:

- Reference the Plan when advocating for change in a variety of settings including legislative testimony.
- Hold policymakers accountable to advancing the shared goals in the Plan.
- Demonstrate a commitment to shared priorities and encourage community involvement to ensure local voices contribute to the implementation of the Plan.

Families Can:

- Use the Plan to advocate to system leaders and policymakers to make changes centering the needs of young children and families.
- Ensure their own perspectives, and those of other families are reflected and prioritized.
- Find ideas and shared language for advocacy for issues that impact families and their communities.

State Advisory Council Members and BBF Staff Can Use This Strategic Plan To:

- Set and uphold a shared vision for Vermont's early childhood system.
- Monitor and promote progress across all goals.
- Guide resource allocation to equitably meet identified needs.

The Early Childhood Workforce Can Use This Plan To:

- Use their perspectives and expertise to support state and local initiatives that prioritize young children and families and the early childhood workforce.
- Advocate for investments in early childhood programming, workforce development, and curriculum aligned with the Plan and lend their expertise to support implementation.

Other Partners (e.g., Higher Education, Researchers and Business Leaders) Can:

- Influence policymaking and legislation at the state and local level in ways that prioritize young children, families, and the early childhood workforce.
- Review and align early childhood degree and credential programs and professional development offerings and make changes to better align them with the goals in the Plan.
- Revise their workplace policies as needed to better support employees with young children.
- Develop partnerships to share data and use data responsibly.

Stewarding the Plan

The success of this Plan depends on shared ownership and action, not top-down direction. Meaningful progress by 2030 will come from working together with each partner contributing within their own areas of expertise and sphere of influence while supporting and learning from one another. Partners may include State agencies, community organizations, families, and all those who are committed to improving outcomes for Vermont's children and families.

Being a steward means taking part in collective efforts to strengthen Vermont's early childhood system. Participation is voluntary and flexible. Partners can engage at different levels and adjust their involvement as priorities or capacity change. Stewards of the Plan share accountability for measuring progress, drawing insights from outcomes, and refining approaches over time. Stewards may:

- Lead or support implementation of specific parts of the Plan.
- Contribute time, resources, or advocacy to advance key strategies.
- Promote equity, inclusion, and fairness.
- Help inform policy, practice, or public awareness.
- Align their organizational goals and values with the Plan's vision and priorities.
- Fulfill formal responsibilities, such as statutory or mandated roles, that align with and advance the Plan's implementation.

As the landscape evolves, new partners are encouraged to join in addressing emerging needs. All commitments will be publicly available to ensure transparency, accountability, and encourage collaboration.

Monitoring Progress

The Plan is a living document that must be responsive to evolving political contexts, emerging evidence, and the lived experiences of children, families, and providers. Monitoring progress is more than collecting data; it is an opportunity to reflect, adapt, and hold ourselves accountable to the values of equity, inclusion, and shared leadership that guide this plan.

Ongoing Family Engagement and Leadership: Monitoring must center the voices of those most impacted. Families, not just as informants but as co-leaders, must have continuous and supported opportunities to shape how progress is understood and achieved. This includes:

- Creating ongoing spaces for families to contribute to reflection, evaluation, and action in meaningful leadership roles.
- Ensuring that family engagement structures are resourced, accessible, and safe for those who have been historically excluded.
- Lifting up community-rooted insights including storytelling, interviews, and lived experience narratives alongside data to present a fuller picture of system performance.

- Developing a clear and visible feedback loop that shows families how their input leads to real change.

Annual Implementation and Reflection Cycle: Building Bright Futures will host an annual Strategic Plan Summit to review data, share stories, celebrate successes, identify barriers, and consider course corrections.The Summit will bring together families, professionals, and system leaders to:

- Review progress on each of the Plan's five goals.
- Identify which strategies are driving impact, where barriers persist, and what gaps remain.
- Reflect on who is benefiting from system improvements and who is still being left behind, with a focus on closing those gaps.
- Elevate promising practices, family-led solutions, and innovations emerging from communities.
- Translate insights into action including shifts in policy, funding, partnerships, or programming that ensure the Plan stays meaningful and equity-driven.

These collective insights will inform opportunities, priorities, and policy recommendations for the next stage of system development.

Combining Data and Lived Experience: Monitoring will bring together both population-level indicators and qualitative insights from partners, families, and communities so that progress is understood in full context not just in numbers, but also in lived experience.

- Population-level indicators, key measures for each goal in the Strategic Plan, will be tracked in the Early Childhood Data Portal. These will show how the system is doing over time and whether outcomes for children and families are improving.
- Partner reporting and qualitative insights: In addition to the data, partners will share yearly updates on their progress, impacts, and challenges. These stories will add essential context to the numbers, highlighting both contributions and the complexity of barriers and system change.
- Family perspectives will be centered through interviews, listening sessions, storytelling, and community-based data collection led by trusted messengers.

Shared Accountability: Stewards of the Plan share responsibility for tracking progress, learning from results, and adapting as needed. Stewardship is not a static role; it is a continuous process of collaboration, reflection, and course correction to ensure the Plan is responsive and effective. Annually, BBF will convene stewards and the BBF network to:

- Assess progress toward the Plan's goals and strategies.
- Reflect on engagement with families, ensuring their voices inform decision-making and system improvements.
- Evaluate equity impacts, identifying where disparities persist and how they are being addressed.
- Document contributions to collective goals and shared outcomes across Vermont's early childhood system.

Progress will be publicly shared to promote trust and accountability. If the monitoring process reveals urgent gaps, missed opportunities, or new challenges, the Plan will be updated through formal addenda. The adaptive process allows for timely adjustments while maintaining alignment with long-term goals.

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