Vermont's Early Childhood Strategic Plan 2030

Addendum: Artificial Intelligence and Vermont's Early Childhood System

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Framing

Since the unanimous endorsement of the Strategic Plan 2030 in November 2025, AI has advanced significantly, including within the early childhood system. The Plan anticipated changes of this kind and included a process for addenda when a significant issue emerges during the plan period. This addendum uses that process to address AI.

Like the Strategic Plan itself, this addendum gives Vermont's early childhood system and its partners a shared foundation for visioning, problem-solving, decision-making, testimony, and advocacy. It is not intended to presume or promote the use of AI. Instead, it offers a shared framework for evaluating AI wherever it is being considered or used.

Below you will find foundational principles, guiding questions, and additional objectives, strategies, and example actions organized within the Plan's goals.

Foundational principles

- **AI is a tool.** It can support the work of the early childhood system, but it does not replace the people who do that work or the relationships at its center.
- **Children, families, and the workforce stay at the center.** AI should be judged by its effect on them, not only on cost or efficiency.
- **People, not systems, remain responsible.** Human judgment and accountability stay with professionals, not with tools or vendors.
- **Privacy, security, and data integrity are protected.** Children's and families' data is handled with care wherever AI touches it.
- **AI should narrow gaps, not widen them.** Access, benefit, and protection extend to under-resourced communities, not only to those already well served.

Guiding questions for considering or using AI

- What problem are we trying to solve?
- Is AI the right tool, and what must remain a human responsibility?
- Who benefits, and who could be disadvantaged?
- What are the risks?
- What information is being used, and how is privacy protected?
- How will we know whether this is actually improving outcomes or experiences?

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

OBJECTIVE 2.B.: CULTIVATE SAFE AND VIBRANT COMMUNITIES

As AI tools enter community life, this objective extends to how AI is used in emergency preparedness, communication, and access to community infrastructure, so that it reaches and protects under-resourced communities rather than widening existing gaps.

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

- Explore AI as a tool to support community emergency preparedness, such as modeling weather-related risks and helping small, under-resourced communities plan for emergencies.
- Explore AI as a tool to make emergency communication more accessible to families, such as rapid translation of alerts into multiple languages and plain-language formats during fast-moving events.

2.B.2. Build essential community infrastructure that supports children's health, safety, development, and family connection.
Additional Example Action:

- Invest in equitable access to broadband, AI tools, and the training to use them, so that rural and under-resourced communities can benefit from these tools alongside better-resourced ones.

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

OBJECTIVE 4.C.: ENSURE THE USE AND DEVELOPMENT OF AI STRENGTHENS THE EARLY CHILDHOOD WORKFORCE AND CENTERS HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS

As AI tools enter early childhood settings, this objective extends Goal 4's commitment to a well-prepared, well-supported workforce to how AI is used and developed, so that it strengthens the workforce's capacity and expertise rather than displacing it.

4.C.1. Support the responsible use and development of AI tools that increase educator capacity without displacing professional judgment.

Example Actions:

- Explore a Vermont Early Learning Standards (VELS)-based curriculum planning tool that helps educators align their own planning to shared, data-informed benchmarks, while leaving instructional decisions to the educator.

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- Ensure any AI-based curriculum or planning tool adopted for use in Vermont classrooms is explicitly positioned as additive, supporting educators' existing expertise rather than replacing it.
- Ensure practical, Vermont-specific guidance is available on responsible use of commonly available AI tools already in use across the workforce, including what tasks they are and are not well suited for and how to protect children's and families' information (see Strategy 5.C.3. and 5.E.1.).
- Pair the introduction of AI-based planning tools with training that helps educators use them critically rather than automatically, including how to review AI-generated output before relying on it (see Strategy 5.F.2).

4.C.2. Ensure AI supports access, communication, and administrative efficiency without reducing responsive human support or destabilizing the early childhood and family support workforce.

Example Actions:

- Evaluate AI-enabled service models for their effect on the quality and continuity of human interaction between children and families and the professionals who serve them, not only on the access or efficiency gains they offer.
- Evaluate AI tools used in early childhood and family support settings for their effect on job stability and role security for the skilled workforce, and weigh that effect, not only cost or efficiency gains, when deciding whether to adopt or keep them.
- Involve the early childhood workforce in decisions about where and how AI tools are introduced and used in their work, consistent with the Plan's existing commitments to workforce voice and retention (see Objective 4.B.).

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

OBJECTIVE 5.E.: GOVERN DATA PRIVACY, INTEGRITY, AND TRANSPARENCY AS AI TOOLS ENTER THE EARLY CHILDHOOD SYSTEM

High-quality data is core to Goal 5, and AI tools introduce new pathways for that data to be collected, combined, and used. Vermont's early childhood system must extend its existing data governance commitments (Strategy 5.C.3.) to specifically address AI.

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5.E.1. Protect the privacy and integrity of children's and families' data as AI tools are introduced into early childhood systems.

Example Actions:

- Establish clear standards for what data can and cannot be used to train or inform AI tools operating in Vermont early childhood contexts, with particular attention to data collected from or about children.
- Prohibit vendors from reusing children's and families' data from AI features embedded in early childhood data systems (e.g., assessment and case management platforms) to train their own models or share it with third parties without explicit authorization, and require transparency about how that data is stored and retained.
- Ensure families are informed when AI tools are used in services that affect them, and that consent and data protection practices meet or exceed the standards already established for early childhood data systems generally (see Strategy 5.C.3.).
- Build AI-specific criteria into existing data quality, security, and equity review processes rather than creating a separate, parallel process.

5.E.2. Monitor emerging best practices regarding the use of technology, including AI, in early childhood settings.

Example Actions:

- Ensure state, national, and field-level guidance on AI use in early care and education is tracked and shared across early childhood system partners on an ongoing basis.
- Ensure resources are developed and made available for early childhood educators and families on media literacy, appropriate screen time, and the responsible use of AI-enabled tools and toys.
- Create ongoing, system-level opportunities for early childhood partners to review what is being learned, so that guidance reflects real experience in Vermont classrooms and homes rather than only vendor claims or national trends.

OBJECTIVE 5.F.: ADVANCE VERMONT POLICY AND REGULATION ON AI THAT CENTERS CHILDREN, FAMILIES, AND HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

Goal 5 calls for coordinated leadership and alignment of resources across the early childhood system (Objective 5.D.). As Vermont develops its statewide approach to AI, early childhood partners have a role to play in ensuring that approach reflects the needs of children and families.

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5.F.1. Engage in state-level AI policy processes to ensure the needs of children, families, and communities are represented.

Example Actions:

- Monitor and, where appropriate, engage with Vermont's AI Economic Task Force to ensure early childhood and family well-being are part of the state's economic AI strategy.
- Share data and perspective from the early childhood system with legislators and regulators considering AI policy.
- Monitor the need for ongoing policymaking systems and processes and consider a permanent legislative committee dedicated to AI, Technology, and Data.
- Advocate for state AI policy and regulation that accounts for impacts on the early childhood workforce, family economic security, and community infrastructure, not only economic growth or technology adoption broadly.
- In line with Objective 5.A. (Shift power to families and utilize their expertise in system design and decisions), ensure that families are engaged in AI policy discussions and decision-making.

5.F.2. Ensure that people, not systems, remain responsible and accountable for AI-informed decisions, recommendations, and communications that affect children and families.

Example Actions:

- Advocate for state AI policy, procurement standards, and contracting requirements that keep a named person accountable for AI-produced output that informs decisions about a child or family, such as screening, referral, eligibility, or service communications, so that accountability rests with a professional or agency rather than with a vendor or tool.
- Build human-review expectations into the state's existing standards for early childhood programs and data systems, including licensing, quality standards, and data governance (see Strategy 5.C.3.).
- Require that AI tools procured for early childhood settings disclose when output is AI-generated, preserve professionals' ability to review, question, and override it, and build in a step that prompts human review or, at minimum, acknowledgement before output is used, so review is part of the workflow rather than a passive, skippable default.
- Support the development of shared professional ethics and practice guidance for AI use across the early childhood system, developed with the workforce and families, that defines what responsible human oversight of AI-produced output looks like in everyday practice.

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