Building Bright Futures
Vermont's Early Childhood State Advisory Council

September 2026 State Advisory Council — Meeting Notes

Monday, September 28, 2026 | Held via Zoom

Meeting Logistics & Council Business

Morgan Crossman, Executive Director of Building Bright Futures, opened the meeting and outlined the agenda: council business, a preview of the AI addendum to the Strategic Plan, early childhood systems change updates on Universal Pre-K and Coordinated Intake and Referral, and a briefing from Vermont's federal delegation.

- **Roll call & quorum:** Carol Lang-Godin conducted roll call of public, legislative, and private at-large members. Quorum was confirmed.
- **July 2026 minutes:** Motion to approve made by Eddie Gale, seconded by Dimitri Garder. Approved with no opposition and five abstentions.
- **Regrets:** Monica Caserta Hutt, Rep. Rey Garofano, Margaret Walsh, Sharron Harrington, Susan Coburn, Erica McLaughlin, and Lindsay Barron were absent or sent regrets; Laurel Omland and Pat Fitzsimmons joined later.

AI Addendum to the Strategic Plan 2030

Anna Brouillette, BBF's Policy and Program Director, previewed a forthcoming addendum to Vermont's Early Childhood Strategic Plan 2030. Because the plan is treated as a living document, it includes a formal process for adopting addenda — and AI has rapidly entered early childhood programs, data systems, and state policymaking since the plan was drafted.

- The addendum is intended to make sure that the needs and interests of children and families are centered when Vermont is discussing policymaking and regulations related to AI. It also aims to provide a shared foundation for testimony and advocacy on AI, keep human relationships at the center of early childhood work, and protect the privacy and security of children and families.
- It focuses on **Goal 4** (workforce use of AI, centering professional judgment) and **Goal 5** (privacy and transparency standards).
- The Executive Committee has provided feedback on the current draft. The draft will be shared in the October meeting materials, with formal adoption alongside policy recommendations anticipated in November.

Systems Change Updates: Preschool Development Grant

Two major bodies of work supported by the Preschool Development Grant (PDG) were highlighted, followed by Council discussion.

1. Universal Pre-Kindergarten (UPK) — Morgan Crossman & Janet McLaughlin

- Janet McLaughlin (Child Development Division) highlighted Vermont's national leadership in pre-K access for three- and four-year-olds and its strong quality standards, while acknowledging continued work ahead.
- A UPK working group is focusing on joint administration between the Child Development Division (CDD) and the Agency of Education (AOE) so that school districts and community-based programs receive consistent, clear guidance.
- Work is underway in three areas:
  - **joint administration and monitoring**;
  - **data** — what is the data we don't have access to and how do access that data in a timely and standardized way (for example the number of hours each pre-K program provides, workforce and licensure data, and formalized data roles and agreements); and
  - **funding mechanisms**, led by the Joint Fiscal Office, examining whether pre-K should be funded through the education funding formula or a categorical grant.
- Strategic plans on pre-K implementation and data are expected to be ready for the upcoming legislative session.

2. Coordinated Intake and Referral Systems (CIRS) — Ilisa Stalberg

- Vermont's family supports — Parent Child Centers, Children's Integrated Services, Help Me Grow, and 2-1-1 — are strong individually but not consistently integrated statewide.
- Mathematica is supporting system mapping and decision-making, and a statewide CIRS task force held an August convening focused on envisioning an ideal system. The next step is some important decision making.
- Vermont was awarded a new five-year Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems (ECCS) grant, securing continued funding for CIRS work. Key decisions will be made over the next three to six months, followed by implementation.

Council Discussion

- **Sustaining UPK work beyond the PDG:** Deborah Singiser asked about continuity when the current PDG ends in December. Morgan shared that BBF will apply for the next one-year PDG, which will focus on data systems and infrastructure and aligns closely with the UPK data work, while acknowledging the broader challenge of relying on federal funds for systems-level change.

- **UPK and education transformation:** Sen. Martine Gulick asked how UPK fits within the education reform expected to dominate the next two legislative years, including access concerns if schools close or districts merge. Morgan noted the Strategic Plan prioritizes the vision for universal pre-K within education transformation, encouraged consistent "pre-K to 12" framing, and emphasized the Council's role in protecting high-quality pre-K, maintaining access for three- and four-year-olds, and the mixed delivery model. Pat Fitzsimmons (AOE) described a joint AOE, BBF, CDD, and Head Start effort to develop a Portrait of an Early Learner, to be launched at the VTAEYC Conference. Janet McLaughlin emphasized shared goals, shared accountability, and systems of support that can adapt to structural change.
- **Alignment with the Rural Health Transformation Grant:** Beverly Boget (Vermont Early Childhood Advocacy Alliance) asked how this roughly $200 million grant's closed-loop referral system will interact with CIRS and 2-1-1. Ilisa shared that the CIRS team is coordinating with the AHS grant team, that there is no intention to duplicate 2-1-1's infrastructure, and that more detail will follow a vendor announcement.
- **Family voice in CIRS design:** Amber Hewston asked how families shape the system. Ilisa confirmed parent input is built into the task force, and Emily Smith (Family and Child Health) described a PDG-funded family journey mapping study with PIRE following 20 families over nine months, including families with higher needs and children with special health care needs. The protocol was developed with people with lived experience, and families are compensated for their time. Early insight: families highly value high-touch care coordination.

Federal Delegation Briefing

Staff from Vermont's congressional delegation shared updates on federal issues affecting children, families, and early childhood programs.

Senator Welch's Office — James McNerney

- Raised concern about federal grant cancellations and rescissions, including a recent attempt to cancel approximately $2.2 billion in grants across HHS, Education, Justice, and HUD.
- Highlighted the proposed Head Start rule, which would expand federal authority to cancel grants and could limit future eligibility for affected organizations.
- Noted the recently passed Farm Bill does not reverse SNAP reductions, which have reduced or eliminated benefits for thousands of Vermonters. Federal legislative activity is limited, with a possible lame-duck session in November and December.

Senator Sanders' Office — Sydney Hicks

- The office is preparing a caucus comment letter opposing the proposed Head Start regulations, which would remove most program performance standards, increase class sizes, make it harder to serve families experiencing homelessness, and reduce minimum program hours. Vermont-specific feedback on the rule's impact is welcome.
- Flagged forthcoming Child Care and Development Fund (CCDBG) proposed regulations as an area to watch—the proposed expansion of child care subsidies for married stay-at-home parents could reduce the funding available for child care..
- A continuing resolution funds the federal government through December 11; full FY27 appropriations are not expected until 2027.

Representative Balint's Office — Kaleigh Calvao & Morgan Nichols

- The office joined the bicameral letter opposing the proposed Head Start rule and continues oversight of federal funding rescissions and civil rights issues.
- FY27 funding is expected to be handled through an extended continuing resolution.
- Partners are encouraged to contact the office directly when they experience federal impacts in real time.

Children and Families with Disabilities — Krista Syringo, Vermont Family Network

- Concern was raised about federal threats to the rights of children with disabilities, compounded by the extended vacancy in Vermont's Director of Special Education position.
- James McNerney shared Senator Welch's concern about proposals to shift special education oversight from the Department of Education to HHS, and noted his office is tracking the issue with AOE.
- The public comment period on the proposed Head Start rule closed October 6.

Upcoming Meeting Dates

- Monday, October 26, 2026 — In-person meeting in Stowe, 10:00 a.m.–12:00 p.m., as part of the two-day SAC retreat. A Zoom option is available for those who cannot attend in person; the registration link was shared during the meeting.
- November 23, 2026 — The AI addendum is anticipated for adoption alongside the Council's policy recommendations.