Application for Preliminary Sunrise Review Assessment

Recognizing Early Childhood Education as a Licensed Profession in Vermont

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Vermont Association for the Education of Young Children

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A Note to Readers

Vermont's current system for early childhood education is complex. To understand the context within which this Sunrise Review Application was developed, we recommend reviewing the Background Information on Vermont's Early Childhood Education System and Glossary in the Appendices before reading the full application. Many terms throughout this document are linked to the glossary, making it possible to jump to those explanations, as needed. It helps to be clear about the use of some terms in this document that refer to programs, people, and the profession.

Programs: The programmatic settings in which early childhood educators work are currently referred to in Vermont statute and regulations as "regulated child care programs," or simply "programs." In this application, we alternately use "child care" and "early childhood education" depending upon the context.

People: Vermont statute and regulations use the term "child care provider," or simply, "provider," along with different titles depending on an individual's qualifications and setting. We use "provider" in our descriptions of the current system. However, our emphasis is on "Early Childhood Educator," a title that reflects the consensus to align with the Unifying Framework and to establish a recognized profession.

"ECE" appears as the abbreviation for "Early Childhood Educator," similar to RN as the professional abbreviation for Registered Nurse. You will see this most often in reference to the professional designations proposed in this application: ECE I, ECE II, and ECE III.

We use "the workforce" or "the early childhood education workforce" to refer collectively to those who currently serve as early childhood educators and whose input informed this application.

Profession: Finally, the term "early childhood education profession" indicates the recognized profession we propose to be established in this application. The "early childhood education profession" is distinguished from the "early childhood field" in the Glossary.

We appreciate your careful reading of this important document and look forward to engaging with the Office of Professional Regulation's deliberative process.

Sincerely,
Sharron Harrington, Executive Director
Vermont Association for the Education of Young Children

Overview

The National Movement to Transform the Early Childhood Education Workforce

In 2015, the National Academy of Medicine released *Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth Through Age 8: A Unifying Foundation*, a groundbreaking report highlighting the science of early childhood development and learning, how well-prepared early childhood educators can support this critical period in a child's development, and the urgent need to address the United States' fragmented early childhood education workforce by establishing early childhood education as a recognized profession.[1] To quote from the report's introduction: "Children are already learning at birth, and they develop and learn at a rapid pace in their early years, when the environments, supports, and relationships they experience have profound effects. Children's development from birth through age 8 is not only rapid but also cumulative. Early learning and development provide a foundation on which later learning is constructed, and consistency in high-quality learning experiences as children grow up supports continuous developmental achievements. The adults who provide for the care and education of young children bear a great responsibility for their health, growth, development, and learning, building the foundation for lifelong progress. …Indeed, the science of child development and of how best to support learning from birth through age 8 makes clear what an important, complex, dynamic, and challenging job it is for an adult to work with young children in each of the many professional roles and settings where this work takes place."[2]

In response to this report, in 2017, the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), one of the leading early childhood education organizations in the United States, formed the Power to the Profession Task Force to establish consensus on the definition of and structure for a recognized early childhood education profession that supports the education and development of young children, birth through age 8, across all early childhood education settings.[3] Representatives of 15 national early childhood, labor, and business organizations drafted documents and gathered input from over 11,000 educators and dozens of organizations from all over the country. Input was collected through surveys, focus groups, and conference sessions in both English and Spanish.

In March 2020, the Power to the Profession Task Force published *The Unifying Framework for the Early Childhood Education Profession*, hereafter referred to as the *Unifying Framework*, which centers on the "audacious vision" that "each and every child, beginning at birth, has the opportunity to benefit from high-quality early childhood education, delivered by an effective, diverse, well-prepared, and well-compensated workforce across all states and settings."[4]

The *Unifying Framework* describes the broader early childhood field, made up of individuals from many occupations, with many names, titles, and roles, who do valuable, complex work with children and families. Within that broader field, the *Unifying Framework* recommended establishing clarity around the specific early childhood education profession, made up of those who are called early childhood educators, whose responsibilities are to care for and promote the learning of young children from birth through age 8, to establish the foundation for lifelong

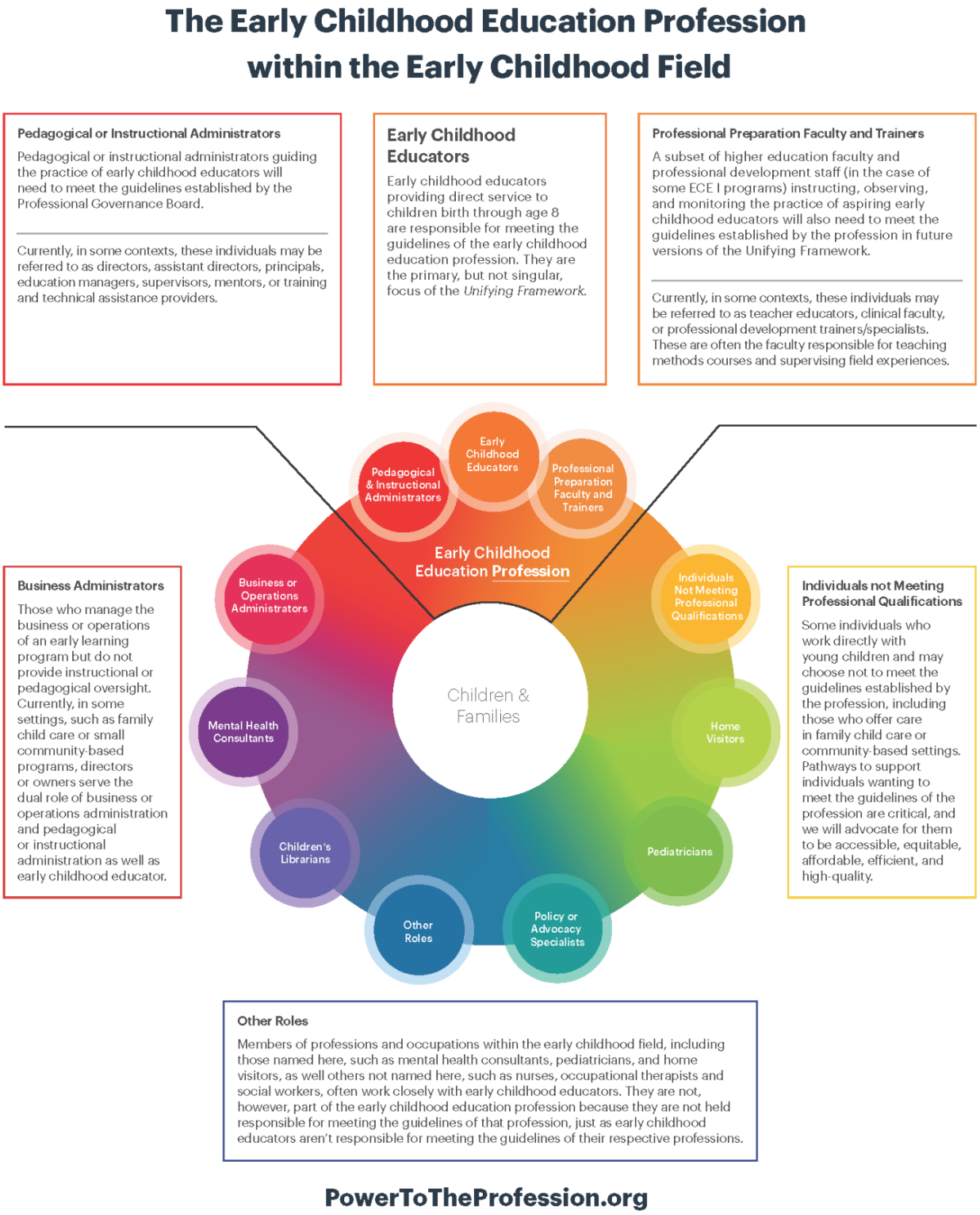
learning and development. See Figure 1 for more detail.[5] For the purposes of this application, we are focusing on recognizing the profession of early childhood education, made up of professional early childhood educators.

The *Unifying Framework* puts forward a number of recommendations for defining and creating a structure for a recognized early childhood education profession, including:

- One profession with a core set of responsibilities that all early childhood educators are accountable for.
- Aligned preparation programs that are accessible, affordable, efficient, equitable, and built on NAEYC's *Professional Standards and Competencies for Early Childhood Educators*.
- Three designations within the profession—ECE I, ECE II and ECE III—each with its own required level of professional preparation and specific scope of practice.
- Professional compensation that includes benefits, is comparable across settings and age groups, increases with preparation and competencies, and allows early childhood education to be pursued as a career.
- Steps to individual licensure for early childhood educators that include completing professional preparation with accompanying field experiences, passing a licensure assessment, and applying for licensure.
- Transitional provisions to support current educators becoming licensed members of the profession by valuing their expertise and years of experience.
- Pathways to support individuals who choose to meet the guidelines of the profession, so that they are able to do so in a way that is efficient, effective, and affordable.
- Increasing public investments that support early childhood education as a public good.
- Implementation commitments that are based on the best implementation science, phased-in timelines, and addressing barriers that may be faced by those working in family child care homes or small community-based centers.

In December 2021, the Commission on Professional Excellence in Early Childhood Education (the "Commission") was formally launched as a national professional governance body. Its mission, initially outlined in the *Unifying Framework*, is "to advance the framework for a unified, cohesive, and equitable early childhood education profession informed by and in partnership with early childhood educators across states and settings." It is comprised of national early childhood education organizations as well as individual educator members who represent those working across all early childhood education settings and working with children ages birth through age 8.

Figure 1: The Early Childhood Education Profession within the Early Childhood Field



Advancing Early Childhood Education as a Profession in Vermont

In alignment with the work of the Commission and the *Unifying Framework*, Vermont has been at the forefront of states working toward advancing early childhood education as a recognized profession since 2018. With leadership from the Vermont Association for the Education of Young Children (VTAEYC), a NAEYC affiliate, Vermont's Advancing Early Childhood Education as a Profession initiative has been cited as a model, and we are often asked to share our strategies and results with NAEYC, the Commission, and other states.[6]

From the beginning, Vermont's initiative has been workforce-led and inquiry-based. In 2018, our first question was "What is the will of the Vermont early childhood education workforce about whether to pursue advancing as a profession?" 58 professional development sessions were conducted with 715 early educators from all regions of the state (approximately 12% of the total early childhood education workforce at the time, although limited early childhood education workforce data means that this total was difficult to assess).[7] In each of the sessions, following a presentation about Power to the Profession and what professions have in common, participants engaged in a facilitated conversation and then completed a survey about their views on becoming a recognized profession. Survey results showed that 96% supported taking action toward becoming a profession while only 4% of respondents supported "Do nothing. Wait and see what happens."[8] This consensus led to the next phase of inquiry.

In 2019, the Advancing Early Childhood Education as a Profession Task Force was formed and led the next phase of outreach to the workforce to discover: "Will the Vermont early childhood education workforce choose to align with the *Unifying Framework*?" To ensure authentic engagement of the workforce and credible results, outreach efforts were broad and robust, including emails, personal contact, newsletters, and working through center directors and early learning networks of family child care home educators. Additional attention was given to connecting with K-3 public school teachers, students in early childhood education preparation programs, and educators in regions of the state that are sometimes underrepresented.

In-person professional development sessions, which began in 2019, shifted to virtual environments after the onset of the pandemic in 2020. This supported increased access to these sessions for members of the early childhood education workforce in all regions of the state and in all settings. Each session opened with explaining the recommendations in the *Unifying Framework* for a specific aspect of the proposed new profession and then engaging in a facilitated conversation in which all voices were heard in response to the questions "What excites you about these recommendations for early childhood education as a recognized profession?" and "What raises a question or concern?"

Follow-up surveys showed high levels of support for these key pieces of the *Unifying Framework*, as seen in Table 1.[9,10,11,12]

Table 1: Advancing Early Childhood Education as a Profession Professional Development Session Follow-Up Survey Results, 2019-2022

As Described in the Unifying Framework	Survey Results - Agree
Professional Identity ● Name of profession/professional ● Role and responsibilities ● Age range: Birth through age 8 ● Early childhood education profession within the early childhood field 357 Vermont early childhood education workforce participants	 90% 98% 84% 93% 40% survey response rate
Three Designations with Aligned Preparation Pathways ● Early Childhood Educator (ECE) I, II, and III ● Aligned preparation programs—minimum 120 clock hours, associate degree in ECE, bachelor's degree in ECE ● Implementation commitments 318 Vermont early childhood education workforce participants	 98% 91% 98% 63% survey response rate
Professional Compensation ● ECEs with similar qualifications and experience to be comparably compensated regardless of setting ● Compensation to include adequate benefits package ● Compensation increases with increased preparation and competency ● Compensation not to be differentiated based on the age of children served 409 Vermont early childhood education workforce participants	 99% 99% 97% 99% 58% survey response rate
Professional Licensure ● Interest in becoming licensed as early childhood educator ● Believe professional licensure will lead to better compensation, benefits, and respect ● Feel included in the commitment that anyone who wishes to be a part of the profession will have resources, supports, and pathways to do so 371 Vermont early childhood education workforce participants	 89% 96% 91% 58% survey response rate

In addition to gauging the amount of support for parts of the Unifying Framework, surveys collected demographic information from responders, including:

- Current role/title
- Current setting
- Years of experience
- Highest level of education completed.

One use for this demographic information was to monitor for a good representation across roles, types of programs, newer and more experienced educators, and a range of educational attainment. A second use was to enable subgroup analysis to answer questions such as: "Did educators working in family child care homes and educators working in center-based child care programs respond very differently?" In fact, they did not respond very differently.

Ultimately, as the chart on the previous page shows, a clear consensus emerged among the members of the early childhood education workforce in Vermont who participated in these sessions and surveys that they do wish to align with the recommendations outlined in the *Unifying Framework*, and that they believe this work to advance early childhood education as a recognized profession should progress. As previously stated, these participants were diverse, representative of the workforce as a whole, and numerous enough to yield credible results.

The Task Force and others involved in the Advancing Early Childhood Education as a Profession initiative are currently engaged in a third inquiry: "How will this new profession work?" There is design work underway on aligned preparation pathways. A minimum compensation scale has been developed and is under consideration. We are working with the Community College of Vermont (CCV) on flexible pathways for the current workforce to transition into professional licensure. Additionally, we are working with partners to draft legislation that will establish the profession, as described in the *Unifying Framework*.

In an important sense, this Sunrise Review Application is future-oriented; establishing individual professional licensure for early childhood educators will move us toward a new system designed to enable us to fulfill Vermont's vision of a transformed early childhood education system. Throughout this document, we describe the systems change work that has already been completed, the efforts that are currently underway, and what is next on the horizon to establish this as a newly-recognized profession in Vermont and nationally. We describe transition provisions that will be in place for the current workforce, as well as the pathways that will welcome those in the future who wish to make early childhood education their profession and life's career.

To be clear, we recognize that Vermont currently has many wonderful, well-prepared individuals working in the field of early childhood education. In fact, we note a recent publication that shows a trend toward formal education among the Vermont early childhood education workforce.[13] And yet, as the *Unifying Framework* describes, the field is fragmented across funding streams, age spans, and settings. For the purposes of this Sunrise Review application, it is necessary to be explicit about the current and potential harm of not having a unified, well-prepared, and well-compensated early childhood education profession. We discuss this in significant detail under Question 8 in this document.

While all states currently license and regulate child care *program settings*, Vermont may be among the first to adopt the national guidance to license early childhood *educators* working with children beginning at birth as a recognized profession. Establishing individual professional licensure for early childhood educators aligns with Vermont's transformational work in early childhood education and will move us toward a new system and set of supports designed to enable us to meet the needs of children, families, educators, and communities in our state.

Efforts to Improve Vermont's Early Childhood Education System

For many years, early childhood educators have been advocating to create a more equitable, affordable, and accessible system that better supports children, their families, and early childhood educators. For background as you review this application, more information on Vermont's current early childhood education system can be found in the Appendices.

Over the past decade, Vermont has undertaken significant and strategic initiatives to advance its early childhood education system. Key milestones include:

- Formation of and report from Vermont's Blue Ribbon Commission on High-Quality, Affordable Child Care;[14]
- Redesign of the Northern Lights system of supports in 2017, in direct response to the recommendations from the Transforming the Workforce report;
- The Building Vermont's Future from the Child Up Summit and Think Tank;[15, 16]
- The Vermont Early Care and Learning Needs Assessment;[17]
- Passage of Act 45 during the COVID-19 pandemic;[18]
- The Evaluation of Vermont's Early Childhood Professional Development System, Vermont's Child Care and Early Childhood Education System's Analysis;[19, 20]
- The Vermont Early Care and Education Financing Study;[21] and
- Passage of Act 76 in 2023, which is making historic investments in Vermont's early childhood education system and its essential workforce to make progress towards becoming a more affordable, accessible, and equitable system. [22]

With the passage of Act 76, the state is intending to achieve significant returns on its historic investments, including improved outcomes for children, increased labor force participation from parents and guardians, and positive economic benefits. However, positive returns rely on ensuring that Vermont creates a high-quality, affordable, accessible, and equitable early childhood education system. As the primary drivers of access, equity, and quality, early childhood educators play a critical role in achieving the state's vision. To ensure accountability in achieving a system that best supports Vermont's youngest children, their families, and our communities, the time is right for early childhood education to become a recognized profession in Vermont. We are at a convergence point of the workforce-led efforts to advance early childhood education as a recognized profession and the state's efforts to create a more equitable, affordable, accessible, and high-quality early childhood education system. Professional recognition of the early childhood education workforce is not only a necessary next step in the system transformation set in motion by these previous important efforts, but it also supports OPR's own analysis in the 2020 *Structural Considerations in the Regulation of Professions and Occupations* report that noted an absence of a professional licensing system for Vermont's early childhood educators, and that such a system could be held by OPR.[23]

Our Proposal

As in other states, historically, Vermont's early childhood education system has been complex and fragmented. We know—and research bears this out—that the single most important element in high-quality early childhood education is the educator who works directly with young children. This individual's qualifications and competencies are paramount, along with the ability to provide continuity and stability for young children and their families. We are proposing that these individual educators who hold primary responsibility for the learning and development of young children during the critical years from birth through age 8 be individually licensed by a stand-alone Vermont Board of Early Childhood Educators as well-prepared, accountable professionals at the ECE I, ECE II, or ECE III designation they qualify for, with the accompanying respect and professional compensation that their critical role deserves.

We know that this proposed system of licensure for early childhood educators will intersect with some existing systems. So, it is helpful to be clear about who is not included in the proposal. We do not suggest that individuals who are duly licensed by the Vermont Agency of Education to teach young children in public schools or in partner Pre-K programs obtain additional licensure from a Vermont Board of Early Childhood Educators; we do not aim to duplicate or supplant that existing regulatory system. Nor does this proposal suggest individual professional licensure as an early childhood educator be required for afterschool program staff who, while serving important care and education functions, do not hold the same role and primary set of responsibilities for the learning and development of young children as early childhood educators. Others who would not be required to have individual professional licensure include those supervised by educators with ECE II or ECE III licensure—substitutes, trainees, others who play temporary roles—along with those categorized as "family, friends, and neighbors." At the same time, for anyone wishing to meet the profession's requirements, there must be equitable, accessible, affordable, efficient pathways to prepare them for the distinct role and skilled responsibilities of the early childhood education profession.

Figure 2: Power to the Profession Shared Accountability Framework

For more on the role and responsibilities of early childhood educators, please see Question 7.

As seen in Figure 2, the "Shared Accountability" framework, which came out of the Power to the Profession Task Force, shows an interrelationship among key parts of the system we are proposing. The passage of Act 76 in 2023 has begun to make significant public investment in Vermont's early childhood education system and strengthened supports and resources for the field. Establishing early childhood education as a recognized profession with individual licensure creates a level of professional accountability that is essential. "As a profession, early childhood educators welcome increased, clear, and consistent accountability that is aligned with our definitions of professional competencies and results in increased compensation. We understand that we can only expect the significant, sustained increases in public financing that are needed to move the profession forward if we are willing to be accountable for their effective use. At the same time, we understand that we can only be held accountable if we have necessary and sufficient supports, resources, and infrastructure."[24]

Q1: Profession/Occupation Seeking Regulation

Profession: Early Childhood Education

Professional: Early Childhood Educator

Q2: Person/Organization Submitting Application

Name:	Sharron Harrington
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Roles:	Policy & Research Director for Let's Grow Kids; Advancing Early Childhood Education as a Profession Project Consultant and Policy & Research Advisor to the Core Team
Organization:	Let's Grow Kids
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Q3: Vermont Society/Association

Organization:	Vermont Association for the Education of Young Children (VTAEYC)
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Phone:	802-681-8382
Email:	sharron.harrington@vtaeyc.org
Website:	https://www.vtaeyc.org/

The Vermont Association for the Education of Young Children (VTAEYC) is a membership organization representing over 605 early childhood educators and 3,800 interested parties in Vermont. VTAEYC advances equity and excellence in early childhood education and advocates for policies that move early childhood education forward now and into the future. VTAEYC is a state-level affiliate of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and has been recognized as having the highest retention rate of members of any affiliate of its size in the country.

VTAEYC's work is guided by Vermont-specific Core Values and NAEYC's Core Values and Beliefs, Code of Ethical Conduct, and Position Statement on Equity. Our work is also aligned with Vermont's Early Childhood Education Guiding Principles and Vermont's Early Childhood Action Plan.

Q4: National Society/Association

Organization:	National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)
Contact:	Michelle Kang, Chief Executive Officer
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Phone:	(202) 350-8851
Email:	mkang@naeyc.org
Website:	https://www.naeyc.org/

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) is a professional membership organization that works to promote high-quality early learning for all young children, birth through age 8, by connecting early childhood practice, policy, and research. NAEYC advances a diverse, dynamic early childhood education profession and supports all who care for, educate, and work on behalf of young children. The association comprises nearly 60,000 individual members of the early childhood community and 52 affiliates, all committed to delivering on the promise of high-quality early learning. Together, they work to achieve a collective vision: that all young children thrive and learn in a society dedicated to ensuring they reach their full potential.

Organization:	The Commission on Excellence in Early Childhood Education
Contact:	Dr. Shyrelle Eubanks, Chairperson
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Website:	https://www.commissionece.org/

The Commission on Excellence in Early Childhood Education is a profession-led governance structure that currently includes a diverse range of 27 individuals, comprising representatives from 16 early childhood workforce-oriented organizations and 11 early childhood educators from a variety of states and settings. The Commission is a semi-autonomous body currently housed at NAEYC. Its primary duties are to hold the standards, competencies, and guidelines of the early childhood education profession; set the parameters for quality assurance of individuals and professional preparation programs; and coordinate with state and federal bodies to promote alignment with the profession's recommendations. Its future work includes: designating additional guidelines for the profession; designating accreditors of professional preparation programs; approving specializations; and advocating for a birth through age 8 licensure structure.

Q5: Does the national organization have a license or certification process?

NAEYC has not historically had a license or certification process for individual early childhood educators. NAEYC does have two accreditation processes for programs that connect to staff qualifications and competencies—NAEYC Accreditation of Early Learning Programs and NAEYC Accreditation of Higher Education Programs.

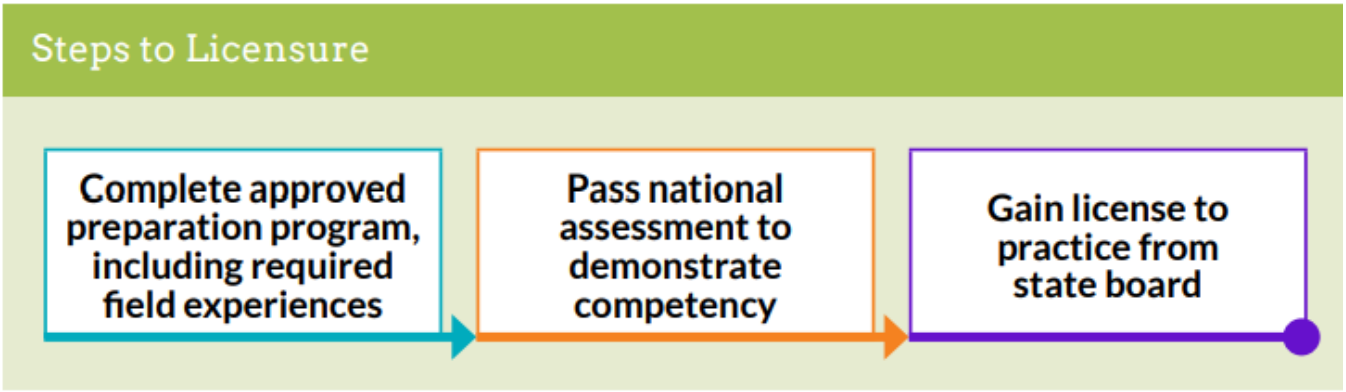
In NAEYC's early learning program accreditation process, Standard 6: Staff Competencies, Preparation, and Support states, "The program employs and supports a teaching and administrative staff that have the qualifications, knowledge, and professional commitment necessary to promote children's learning and development and to support families' diverse needs and interests."[25]

In NAEYC's higher education accreditation process, updated in 2021, Standard D: Developing Candidate Proficiency in the *Professional Standards and Competencies* guides higher education programs to Appendix A in the *Professional Standards and Competencies* "Leveling of the Professional Standards and Competencies by ECE Designation"—that is, the three designations—ECE I, ECE II, and ECE III—proposed in the *Unifying Framework*.[26,27, 28] Programs must demonstrate how their students are prepared in NAEYC's *Professional Standards and Competencies for Early Childhood Educators* through the curriculum in the program, including field experiences. Programs must provide evidence, via student performance on comprehensive assessments, that individuals are indeed proficient in the *Professional Standards and Competencies*. Again, this accreditation process outlines requirements for higher education programs that prepare early childhood educators; it is not a license or certification process that applies directly to individuals.

One national credential that individuals working with young children in Vermont and in other states may earn is the Child Development Associate (CDA) Credential. Offered not through NAEYC but through the Council for Professional Recognition (another organizational member of the Commission on Professional Excellence), this credential is based on 120 clock hours of non-credit training. It is intended to be renewed every three years. In Vermont, a current CDA may qualify an individual for a Career Ladder Level II Certificate and to work as a Family Child Care Home early childhood educator (FCCH) or as a Teaching Assistant in a Center-Based Child Care and Preschool Program (CBCCPP).

The *Unifying Framework* recommends a clear set of steps for professional licensure—as an ECE I, an ECE II, or an ECE III—that will be aligned across states, systems, and settings, allowing for portability and reciprocity. The expectation is that individuals will complete formal professional preparation that includes field experiences, pass a national assessment, and then apply to the Vermont Board for licensure as an Early Childhood Educator. Currently, the Commission on Professional Excellence in Early Childhood Education has created model legislation that articulates a professional licensure system that states can adopt, and it is identifying potential licensure assessments for states to use. The Commission is leading this work, as the national professional governing body, so that this profession will truly be unified and national in nature, not a patchwork of diverse states each with their own standards, regulations, and processes as exists currently. As described in the *Unifying Framework*, the steps to a process for individual, professional licensure will be as shown in Figure 3.[29]

Figure 3: *Unifying Framework* Steps to Individual Early Childhood Educator Professional Licensure



Q6: List other states currently regulating this profession/occupation. For each state, attach copies of the laws and rules.

As noted in the overview, no state currently recognizes early childhood education as a singular profession. However, the national Power to the Profession initiative led to the creation of the Commission on Professional Excellence in Early Childhood Education, a national body established to oversee the profession of early childhood education. The Commission, while still in its formative phase, has recommended that states explore professional recognition of their respective early childhood education workforces, and is working to create models to support states in carrying out this recommendation.

Currently, all U.S. states and territories regulate child care programs, and state and territory governing bodies of education license individual educators to practice in the public school system and regulate the qualifications necessary for independent and/or charter school educators. The key driver behind these regulations is the understanding that by investing public funding, there must be professional conduct accountability to the public. While any state or territory accepting federal Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) dollars must "have in effect child care licensing requirements," these licensing requirements include regulations related to the operation of child care programs by setting type. They do not focus on accountability for individual early childhood educators, as seen in the public school system or the related field of nursing.[30, 31, 32] CCDF guidance specifies that states may adopt rules and regulations beyond CCDF guidance, which would allow for a state to recognize early childhood education as a profession and still be in compliance with CCDF rules.

While several other states are exploring the systems, structures, financing, and legislation needed to support a well-prepared, well-compensated, and licensed early childhood education profession—including Delaware, Connecticut, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, and New Mexico—Vermont may be the first state to adopt national guidance to professionally license individual early childhood educators.

NAEYC, in collaboration with The Education Trust, also worked with early childhood educators of color through the convening of focus groups to evaluate how professionalization could potentially create negative outcomes for early childhood educators who have been marginalized by early childhood education systems. The findings of this work can be found in the report *Increasing Quality, Centering Equity: Experiences and Advice from Early Childhood Educators of Color*.[33] The study affirmed early childhood educators' belief that "our diversity is our strength," and made recommendations relative to the process of professionalizing early childhood education, with a particular focus on increasing access to professional preparation in higher education institutions:

1. Make it affordable and accessible: Combine debt-free and loan-forgiveness policies.
2. Make it possible: Reduce and eliminate nonfinancial barriers to success.
3. Make it align with our realities: Count all settings.
4. Make it meaningful: Establish comparable compensation for comparable qualifications.
5. Make it more efficient: Create seamless, articulated teacher preparation pathways.
6. Make it feasible: Lessen the time it takes educators to reach attainment.
7. Make it real: Value experience with college credit.
8. Make it supportive: Use cohort models and mentors.
9. Make it consistent: Streamline accountability systems.
10. Make it bigger: Think outside the classroom.

These recommendations were considered in the development of model legislation and regulations for states to use in their respective efforts to achieve professional recognition for their early childhood educators. Model legislation and regulations for the licensure of early childhood educators as a profession at the state level has been developed by the Commission and is available upon request.

Q7: Define the services provided by this profession/occupation. What is the Scope of Practice?

Young children develop and learn best when they have consistent relationships with adults who are knowledgeable about how to support their health, growth, development, and learning. Early childhood educators create optimal learning environments, support children across all learning dimensions, and partner with families. This is complex, skilled work with responsibilities, competencies, and a code of ethics that are defined and embraced by the profession.

In April 2020, early childhood educators in Vermont expressed overwhelming support for aligning with the *Unifying Framework*'s description of the role and responsibilities of the early childhood education profession.[34]

Role:
The distinct role of the early childhood education profession is to care for and promote the learning, development and well-being of children from birth through age 8 to establish a foundation for lifelong learning and development. This foundation for learning is built through reciprocal relationships between early childhood educators and the children they serve. Reciprocal relationships require attention to family and child diversity—including race, ethnicity, language, culture, social class, immigrant status, family structure, special needs, and learner characteristics—which is one of the multiple influences on children's development and learning.

Responsibilities:
Members of the early childhood education profession, a distinct profession in the early childhood field, are prepared to be accountable for the following responsibilities:

1. Planning and implementing intentional, developmentally appropriate learning experiences—including play-based learning experiences—that promote the social-emotional development, physical development and health, cognitive development, and general learning competencies of each child served;[35]
2. Establishing and maintaining a safe, caring, inclusive, and healthy learning environment;
3. Observing, documenting, and assessing children's learning and development using guidelines established by the profession;
4. Developing reciprocal, culturally responsive relationships with families and communities;
5. Advocating for the needs of children and their families;
6. Advancing and advocating for an equitable, diverse, and effective early childhood education profession that is well-compensated;
7. Staying current with new research and updated practice (e.g. trauma-informed, etc.);
8. Engaging in reflective practice and continuous learning; and
9. Following a Code of Ethics for professional conduct.[36]

These responsibilities are consistent across all early childhood education settings that support young children from birth through age 8.

For more on the specific Scopes of Practice for each of the three designations—ECE I, ECE II, and ECE III—please see the response to Question 12B in this Application.

Q8: What harm or danger to the health, safety, or welfare of the public can be demonstrated if the practice of this profession/occupation were to remain unregulated?

Without a system of individual professional licensure for early childhood educators, Vermont's children, families, communities, and early childhood educators themselves face multiple forms of harm or danger, or the potential for harm or danger, to their health, safety, and welfare. As the state makes significant public investments in its early childhood education system, shared accountability is critical to creating a system in which children, families, communities, and early childhood educators can thrive.

Harm or Danger to the Health, Safety, or Welfare of Children and Families

Suboptimal Outcomes for Children

Children are at the heart of Vermont's early childhood education system, and supporting their healthy development is central to the purpose of the system. According to research from the U.S. Departments of Health and Human Services and Education, "… it is imperative that [young] children be exposed to high-quality learning experiences that support their comprehensive development and health, and that set their life trajectories in a positive direction."[37] This research has also shown that the quality of early childhood education programs is directly tied to the professional preparation and low turnover of a program's staff.[38] When children have quality early childhood education experiences led by well-prepared early childhood educators with whom they develop trusted relationships over time, they experience positive developmental and educational outcomes. The quality and stability of a child's relationships in the early years also lays the foundation for a wide range of later developmental outcomes and competencies including positive social skills, a sophisticated understanding of emotions, a love of learning, and a comfortable sense of self.[39] A child who is in an environment with supportive relationships and consistent routines is also more likely to develop well-functioning biological systems, including strong neural connections, that promote positive development and lifelong health.[40] Unfortunately, Vermont's current early childhood education system faces significant challenges with early childhood educator turnover and variations in early childhood educator preparation that can result in suboptimal outcomes for children.

The Impact of Early Childhood Educator Turnover on Child Outcomes

Numerous entities, from the international Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, to the Yale School of Medicine, to the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis, have studied the impact of high staff turnover in early childhood education and its impact on child development and outcomes.[41, 42, 43] Across the board, studies have found that high turnover has a negative impact on children and can also impact children's families: staff turnover can reduce the quality of programming being offered to children, and families may

find it difficult to form a positive relationship with teaching staff if staff are regularly changing.[44]

National research has found that high turnover rates in early childhood education are primarily driven by low wages.[45] During the pandemic, record numbers of early childhood educators left the field because they could obtain higher wages and better benefits in the public education sector if they also held a public school educator license, or in fields requiring lower qualifications, such as the food services industry.[46] Making such significant job transitions can have emotional, physical, and financial impacts on individual early childhood educators in addition to impacting the children they care for and educate. Nobel Prize-winning research from Dr. James Heckman has found that all children benefit from high-quality early learning experiences, and children from low-income families, multilingual learners, and children with special needs benefit the most.[47] When children do not have access to high-quality early learning experiences, it can result in suboptimal health and developmental outcomes.[48]

The Impact of a Lack of Early Childhood Education Professional Licensure on Child Outcomes

The lack of an early childhood education profession also leads to variability in quality. The quality of child care programs varies greatly across the state, meaning that some children and families do not have access to high-quality programs.[49] As previously noted in this section, national research has shown that program quality is correlated with professional preparation of early childhood educators.[50] Furthermore, in situations of real and perceived scarcity of early childhood education programs, there has historically been a pattern of lowering qualification requirements for program staff in a misguided attempt to address staffing shortages. These decisions tend to be reactive, not based on best practice or research, with the intention to alleviate supply challenges impacting children and families. However, research has shown that when qualification requirements are lowered, it can actually exacerbate supply challenges rather than solve them, as working conditions tend to worsen, leading to even more turnover.[51] Additionally, lowering professional preparation standards and quality standards undermines educators' ability to deliver on the science of early learning, and harms, rather than supports, early childhood development and children's health and development outcomes.[52]

Financial Harm to Families

As noted earlier in this section, Vermont's current system focuses on early childhood education setting oversight rather than on the early childhood educators themselves, who are the primary drivers of the safety and quality of a program.

The current lack of individual professional accountability means that families are having to navigate an early childhood education system in which the primary information available to families is focused on overarching program information. While current state regulations do include information on the minimum preparation requirements for various roles in Vermont's early childhood education system, there is wide variability in the qualifications required for given roles. This information is complex, written in regulatory language, and families must spend significant amounts of time to find, understand, and contextualize this information to

each individual program they are considering. The current system privileges families who have time, energy, and money to undertake this level of effort. A regulated profession would minimize the "buyer beware" nature of the current system: It would help to shift some of the burden currently placed on families to the state and the profession itself through a system of professional accountability. This would help to ensure that all families are able to trust, as a baseline, that early childhood educators are well-prepared professionals.

The creation of a licensed profession will establish standardized, tiered licenses that will help families better understand the requirements for and expectations of early childhood educators working in a given program and make this information easier to understand and more accessible. This reduces the inequitable due diligence currently required of families, and thereby reduces financial harm.

Lack of Individual Early Childhood Educator Professional Conduct Accountability

Protecting the health, safety, and welfare of children is paramount for Vermont's early childhood education system. As noted on page 20 of OPR's own report, "Regulatory Assessment: State Regulation of the Occupations and Professions," current child care regulations track only disciplinary actions at the early childhood education program level, not at the individual early childhood educator level.[53] High-level health and safety violation information is publicly available on the statewide level through Vermont's Scorecard Dashboard, and at the program level through the Bright Futures Child Care Information System.[54, 55] However, neither of these publicly-available sets of information provide, or collect, information on any professional misconduct of individual early childhood educators. This means that an early childhood educator could be terminated from a position at one program due to unprofessional conduct, and there would be no lasting, publicly-available record of their infractions, meaning that they could easily be hired by another program, exposing new children and families to unprofessional conduct. This exact scenario has occurred on a number of occasions throughout Vermont and in other states; only through word of mouth have problematic staff been stopped from "program hopping."

Additionally, while state and federal regulations require early childhood educators to undergo background checks, the scope of background checks only includes specific criminal charges. There is a wide breadth of professional misconduct that can occur before an individual might engage with the criminal justice system, and even if an early childhood educator is charged with criminal misconduct, it can take time for background check systems to update to include this information. In the most severe cases, unprofessional conduct has resulted in serious harm to children. A recent example of this comes from Boston: Due to a lack of individual professional conduct accountability, an individual was engaging in criminal activity out of her home where she was also operating a family child care program, jeopardizing the health, safety, and welfare of children in her care. The individual was trafficking cocaine and fentanyl and was able to continue operating her early childhood education program, even after being arrested and pleading guilty, because the background check process failed to detect her pending charges when her program's license was renewed.[56] It was only after her probation officer told the court that she was working with children that her program's license was revoked.[57] The families of

the children enrolled in the program were not notified that the program was closed due to drug-related activities, and were not aware that their children had been exposed to illegal drugs and criminal activity on a daily basis.[58]

Harm or Danger to the Health, Safety, or Welfare of the General Public

Diminished Societal Outcomes

Numerous studies have shown that without quality, affordable, and accessible early childhood education, communities and economies suffer, and as noted earlier in this section, quality is intrinsically linked to the professional preparation of early childhood educators.[59]

According to the Nobel Prize-winning research of Dr. James Heckman, when families have access to comprehensive, quality early childhood education, it yields a positive, two-generational effect on the workforce and on communities, especially from children with adverse backgrounds, multilingual learners, and children with special needs.[60] When families do not have access to this level of care, there are direct, negative impacts on the welfare of the general public, including negative correlations with crime, family structure stability, health outcomes, workforce productivity, education outcomes, and economic gains. Without a regulated profession of early childhood education, it is difficult to guarantee that professionally prepared early childhood educators, whose work can mitigate these negative impacts, will work throughout the system.

Economic Harm

Currently, the shortage of well-prepared, well-supported, and well-qualified early childhood educators is negatively impacting the supply of quality child care in Vermont. Recent studies have found that more than three out of five of Vermont's youngest children likely to need early childhood education don't have access to the child care they need, and that in order to meet this demand, Vermont needs approximately 2,314 additional lead early childhood educators.[61] Specifically regarding negative economic and workforce impacts of these child care challenges, national research has shown that when children don't have access to quality early childhood education, parental workforce participation and productivity challenges result in significant economic losses. Nationally, the infant and toddler child care crisis costs the United States $122 billion in lost earning, productivity, and revenue every year.[62] Families lose $78 billion per year in forgone earnings and job search expenses. Productivity problems cause employers to lose $23 billion annually due to child care challenges faced by their workforce. Vermont is estimated to lose $195 million per year in lost earnings, productivity, and revenue.

For Vermont employers, this translates to somewhere between $4.8 million and $6 million per year in economic losses due to child care challenges.[63] These Vermont-specific estimates only account for child care challenges experienced by families with access to child care; they do not account for the lost economic value of families with adults currently not participating in the labor force due to a lack of accessible early childhood education, which, as discussed earlier in this section, is due in part to a lack of well-qualified early childhood educators.

This financial harm particularly impacts mothers in Vermont's labor force. Nationally, women earn less than men. Much of the widening in wage disparities occurs after family formation,

when mothers reduce their hours of work to care for young children.[64] This year's Nobel Prize in Economics winner, Dr. Claudia Goldin, demonstrated the labor market effects of the "motherhood penalty," or how the gender wage gap gets worse for women when they become mothers. Nationally, mothers earn $0.89 for every dollar a father is paid.[65] The motherhood penalty peaks when children are youngest, which is also the period of time it is most difficult to find child care.[66] A working mother earning Vermont's median household income of $67,674 would face a projected loss of $711,210 if she had or adopted a child at age 35 and remained out of the workforce for five years, until the child could enroll in kindergarten. This figure represents the value of lost wages, lost wage growth over the woman's career trajectory, and lost retirement asset growth.[67] The lack of a regulated early childhood education profession limits the levers that policymakers, parents, and providers can use to consistently and fairly reduce gender pay disparities. Until we are able to increase early childhood educator compensation overall and close the gaps, these disparities will continue to adversely impact women and mothers in Vermont who work both inside and outside the early childhood field.

Additionally, early childhood educators' too-low income currently translates into a significant loss in tax revenue for the federal government as well as for state and local governments. If early childhood educators were paid commensurate with their peers who teach in the K-8 public school system, their pay would increase significantly.[68] In an analysis of tax revenue, researchers found that paying early childhood educators a salary commensurate with K-8 educators would mean an increase in federal revenues of approximately $27.1 billion. State and local tax revenue would also increase a total of $15.8 billion. [69] In total, tax revenue gains would equal about $42.9 billion in just one year. [70]

Harm or Danger to the Health, Safety, or Welfare of the Early Childhood Education Workforce

Financial Harm

As noted throughout this application, a central challenge for early childhood educators is low compensation for their skilled work. Many fields, including nursing and occupational therapy, experienced this challenge before achieving professional recognition.

According to the U.S. Department of the Treasury, child care workers' wages are so low that they rank in the bottom two percent of all occupations nationwide.[71] Vermont-specific research has also found that wages for early childhood educators fall short of pay for similar occupations in the state. In Vermont, registered nurses and lead early childhood education teachers are both required to have a bachelor's degree in their area of study to enter their respective workforces.[72] However, the median annual wage for registered nurses ($79,990), who are members of a regulated profession in Vermont, is more than $40,000 greater than that of early childhood teachers ($39,280).[73]

Additionally, compensation in today's early childhood education system carries its own inequities. Currently, early childhood educators with similar experience, qualifications, and job responsibilities, but working in different job settings, are not comparably compensated. In the current system, individuals working with infants and toddlers are generally compensated less than their similarly qualified peers working with older young children.[74] For example,

Vermont's Child Care Financial Assistance Program (CCFAP), which helps Vermont families that meet certain income- and need-based criteria afford child care, pays family child care home (FCCH) early childhood educators less for their services than center-based child care and preschool programs (CBCCPPs). For an infant attending child care full-time, the state currently reimburses CBCCPPs $471 per week, while FCCHs receive only $304 per week.[75] Additionally, Vermont kindergarten teachers, licensed by the Agency of Education, earn a median annual salary of $54,770, whereas Vermont child care workers earn a median annual salary of $39,280.[76] Act 76 is working to address the disparities between payment rates for family child care homes versus center-based child care and preschool programs. Recognizing early childhood education as a profession, aligned with work being undertaken by the legislature on early childhood educator wage standards, will help to eliminate pay discrepancies by setting and age group served.

Society, historically and currently, also undervalues the labor of women, and women comprise the majority of the early childhood education workforce in the United States.[77] Because the benefits of quality early childhood education have been produced by women's labor throughout most of history, child care has rarely been viewed as "real" work.[78] Nationally, women—disproportionately women of color and immigrant women—make up 94% of the early childhood field.[79] Over the past century, women's participation in the labor force has risen dramatically, but the early childhood education system has been informed and shaped over the years by ingrained stereotypes around women's roles, including the differences between the appropriate roles for white women and women of color.[80] The *Unifying Framework* speaks to the difficult realities facing the early childhood education field today to illustrate significant equity issues for the early childhood education workforce in the current system: "The system's chaos disproportionately harms candidates without power and privilege… (and) further marginalizes those who do not have the power or privilege to easily access or navigate the complex and chaotic web of degrees or credentials."[81] Research has shown that the labor of women and people of color is significantly undervalued in the United States. Women in the U.S. who work full-time, year-round are typically paid only $0.84 for every dollar paid to their male counterparts. This gap in earnings translates into $9,990 less per year in median earnings.[82] The wage gap is even wider for women of color. The wage gap translates into an annual loss of $22,120 for Black women, $30,450 for Latinas, $28,747 for Native women, and $4,690 for Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander women.[83]

When an occupation becomes a recognized profession, the establishment of clear standards, expectations, licensure requirements, and accountability provides the optimal foundation upon which minimum compensation standards can be established to address these implicit biases in pay. Historically, "educational requirements increase, compensation remains low, and the impact is disproportionately felt by women of color."[84] The early childhood education workforce, like most of the "helping occupations," is primarily made up of women, often from communities of color, whose poverty-level wages keep the cost of care to families from being even higher.[85] The approach proposed in this application is designed to support a more equitably accessible and supported system for early childhood educators.

Right now, however, in addition to receiving very low wages, most early childhood educators have limited or no access to professional benefits like healthcare and retirement accounts.[86]

Data collected through various workforce surveys conducted by VTAEYC and NAEYC show that many of Vermont's early childhood educators, especially those working in family child care homes (FCCHs), have been in the workforce for significant periods of time (30 or more years), and that many educators do not have the retirement savings set aside to be able to stop working until they absolutely must. This is both a source of financial harm that may progress into harm to health or safety, discussed in more detail below, as early childhood education is a very physical occupation that requires movements that can adversely impact the body over time, especially in older age.[87]

Personal Harm

As noted in the previous section, most early childhood educators in Vermont do not have access to benefits, including things like health, dental, vision, paid leave or vacation, etc. through their jobs.[88] In Vermont, only 29% of private center-based early childhood educators have access to health insurance for themselves.[89] For FCCH educators, medical benefits are even more rare, with only 24% having health insurance for themselves.[90] Inadequate health benefits have resulted in direct personal harm.

The lack of benefits directly impacts the health and safety of the workforce, as early childhood educators, by the nature of their job, are frequently exposed to infectious diseases and parasites, as young children tend to be most vulnerable to these contagions. This harm was exacerbated during the pandemic, when early childhood educators, as essential workers, were at the forefront of exposure to COVID-19. This meant that early childhood educators were literally risking their lives to provide safe, quality care and education to the children of other essential workers, often without reliable access to health insurance.[91] Since the pandemic, early childhood educators continue to grapple with underlying physical and emotional health issues. Many early childhood educators have elevated levels of stress, struggle with lack of sleep, and have at least one chronic health condition.[92] This is concerning, as experiences of negative physical and emotional well-being can reinforce one another. [93]

Early childhood educators who operate child care programs within their homes (FCCHs) are particularly at risk of experiencing personal harm because of a lack of professional status for the early childhood education workforce. FCCH educators are the lowest compensated of any regulated early childhood education setting. In Vermont's current early childhood education system, FCCH programs receive a tuition reimbursement rate that is only 65% of the tuition reimbursement rate paid to CBCCPPs for an infant in full-time child care: a difference of almost $170 per week, per child.[94] These individuals must try to make their earnings cover all of the tasks required of a business owner, teacher, cook, and custodian. Unfortunately, this can mean that they sacrifice their own physical and mental health to make ends meet. In one case that was shared with VTAEYC, a FCCH early childhood educator was pregnant with twins and could afford to take only one week off from work after giving birth.

A recent study of the Canadian early childhood education workforce shows that about 8% of women working in child care services had work absences due to injury or illness. Having such absences was associated with a greater likelihood of leaving the child care sector in subsequent years, with almost 14% who were injured or ill leaving the workforce in that year.[95] Work

absences caused by injuries or illness leads to child care workers to leave the field and lowers the degree of personnel retention within the field.

Burnout and Diminished Well-being

Low levels of teacher well-being pose significant challenges for the early childhood field and the children they serve. Well-being is a consistent predictor of teachers' intentions to stay in the early childhood education workforce, the quality of their teaching, and their ability to benefit from professional development programs.[96] In a recent national survey, the vast majority of providers reported higher levels of stress as a result of staff shortages (81% of center-based and 73% of home-based providers), along with anxiety, depression, and difficulty decompressing. Inadequate resources, staff shortages, low wages, and a general lack of systemic support for early childhood education have also led to the majority of providers (71%) feeling burned out "often" or "always" and less able to provide quality care. In a Vermont specific workforce survey, 43% of early childhood educators reported feeling burned out.[97] Early childhood educators experiencing more burnout have had higher levels of emotional distress, leading to an increase in the number of educators considering leaving the early childhood education workforce since the pandemic. [98]

Lack of Standardized, Transferable Professional Recognition and Preparation System

The State of Vermont maintains Northern Lights at Community College of Vermont (CCV), the hub of Vermont's professional development system for early childhood and afterschool, which provides an array of professional development and career advising supports, including a Vermont-specific professional recognition career ladder with corresponding level certificates. These career ladder level certificates were created and revised based on national best practices and are similar to state-specific career ladders and certificates in other states, but they are not transferable to other states.

The *Unifying Framework* identifies that "While most states have career ladders and lattices that drive the trajectory of a subset of the current early childhood workforce, their complexity can drive others away. …Further, even if individuals do manage to progress up the ladders, they often find themselves earning the same wages, with the same work responsibilities (or more), as they had on the lower rungs."[99]

As in other states, movement along the Northern Lights Career Ladder does not necessarily equate to increased wages, and the level certificates are not transferable to other states. This contributes to an environment where early childhood educators invest in professional development and higher education coursework without the guarantee of advancement or increased compensation.

The benefits of raising education standards for early childhood educators through professional licensure go beyond improving quality of professional practice to also include support for higher compensation, easier recruitment of well-qualified candidates, and reduced staff turnover, resulting in a more stable workforce.[100]

Q9: What benefit can the public reasonably expect if this profession/occupation is regulated and how would it be measured?

Benefits for Children and Families

Early Childhood Educator Professional Conduct Accountability

As discussed in Questions 8 and 23, because early childhood education data in Vermont is primarily tracked at the program level, it is difficult for policymakers and families using regulated child care in Vermont to readily obtain needed information about the workforce. A regulated profession will allow centralized tracking of this information, provide the state with the ability to provide targeted supports and take disciplinary action related to individual professional conduct infractions and violations, and provide prospective employers and the public access to data, investments, qualifications, and disciplinary history to make informed decisions about children's safety and welfare.

Improved Outcomes for Children

The delivery of high-quality early childhood education is linked to the professional preparation and compensation of the individual early childhood educators providing care and education. The U.S. Department for Health and Human Services' Administration for Children and Families released a report in 2023 highlighting how high-quality early childhood education programs yield improved outcomes for all children, and children from low-income families, multilingual learners, and children with disabilities experience larger-than-average benefits.[101]

According to the research of Dr. Heckman, as noted in Question 8, these benefits impact not only learning and development, but also key areas including improved long-term health, economic security, lower criminal justice system interactions, and greater lifetime economic gains. Creation of a regulated early childhood education profession is a way to demonstrate to families and the public that their historic investments catalyzed by Act 76 are paired with assurances that early childhood educators delivering care and education to Vermont's youngest children in every setting will have the necessary professional preparation and supports. This will help to ensure that Vermont's early childhood education system is able to deliver on these benefits to individual children and to society as a whole.

Increased Equity

In its 2019 position statement, *Advancing Equity in Early Childhood Education*, NAEYC defines equity as, "the state that would be achieved if individuals fared the same way in society regardless of race, gender, class, language, disability, or any other social or cultural characteristic. In practice, equity means all children and families receive necessary supports in a timely fashion so they can develop their full intellectual, social, and physical potential."[102] The position statement goes on to recommend six actions that everyone involved in any aspect of early childhood education can undertake to advance equity. Two of these recommendations are particularly relevant when considering how to create a more equitable early childhood education system in Vermont:

- Recommendation 2: Recognizing the power and benefits of diversity and inclusion; and
- Recommendation 4: Acknowledge and seek to understand structural inequities and their impact over time.[103]

Having a well-prepared, diverse early childhood education workforce is a critical benefit for children and their families.[104] Well-prepared early childhood educators can promote equitable program practices that lead to strong outcomes for children who have been marginalized by early childhood education systems.[105] The *Unifying Framework* was developed around policy recommendations that address the equity considerations necessary to ensure a diverse workforce that is reflective of the culture, language, and lived experiences of the children and families served by early childhood education programs.[106, 107]

An additional benefit of establishing early childhood education as a profession is that it will help to ensure that all children, especially those whose lives have been impacted by structural inequities, have access to well-prepared early childhood educators who can recognize each child's unique strengths and support the full inclusion of all children.[108]

While the establishment of early childhood education as a profession is just one piece of the puzzle in addressing the inequities that exist and persist in the early childhood education field and society more broadly, it will help to create real, concrete change for children and their families.

Benefits to the General Public

As noted in Question 8, quality early childhood education yields two-generation impacts that have broad, positive impacts on society. In 2016, the Vermont Blue Ribbon Commission on Financing High Quality, Affordable Child Care wrote in their final report that, "The Commission believes Vermont should be a national leader in early care and learning by ensuring equal access to high-quality care for all Vermonters. …Businesses benefit by employing parents who can focus on work because they are assured their children are in a safe, nurturing setting. Moreover, young children, the future workforce, are developing a critical foundation for success."[109] If all Vermont children who need access to child care had access to well-prepared, well-supported early childhood educators, Vermont could expect to see $22.8 million in returns, annualized over a child's lifetime. For one cohort of children from birth to age 5, this means that Vermonters could expect returns of $1.3 billion.[110]

An additional benefit of having a well-prepared early childhood education workforce that can support increased expansion of Vermont's early childhood education system is how the availability of child care has been shown to attract young families.[111] In Vermont, a state with a rapidly aging population and a need for additional members of the workforce, this presents a critical potential benefit.[112] Additionally, as the intention is for early childhood education to be a national profession with reciprocal licensure, it will ease the ability of licensed early childhood educators to relocate to Vermont and continue in their professional roles serving young children and their families without interruption or delay, and with an assurance of safety and security even across state lines.

Benefits for the Early Childhood Education Workforce

Increased Wages and Benefits

For most fields that have gone through a professionalizing process, compensation (wages and benefits) increases accordingly. The field of nursing is an excellent example of how transforming to become a professional, licensed workforce can transform an entire field in a holistically positive manner. Before professionalization, nurses were often considered "pillow fluffers," despite the critical role they played in the field of health care. With the evolution of the field into a professionalized, licensed workforce, wages and benefits have increased significantly and public perception has positively changed.[113] This crucial outcome—which could address much of the potential harm outlined in Question 8— also aligns with the intent of the Vermont Legislature, as demonstrated through the recent passage of Act 76 (detailed in the Overview of this application). During deliberations on Act 76, the Legislature identified the need to increase early childhood educators' wages. It is the intent of the Legislature to establish minimum pay standards for the early childhood education workforce within the next several years. By voluntarily embarking now on an intentionally inclusive, workforce-centered process of professional recognition, the Legislature will have the opportunity to partner with the profession to ensure that minimum pay standards reflect the professional designations and nature of the field. Minimum pay standards aligned with other professions would significantly change early childhood educators' personal financial security and contribute greatly to the economy at large.

Standardized, Transferable Credentials

As the national professional governing body, the Commission on Professional Excellence in Early Childhood Education holds standards, competencies, and guidelines for the early childhood profession; sets the parameters for quality assurance and preparation of educators; and coordinates with state and federal bodies. Given this national approach, in tandem with work being done in the states, a key benefit of early childhood education becoming a licensed profession is the establishment of credentials for early childhood educators that are reciprocal and directly transferable across states that align with the recommendations of the *Unifying Framework*. This will create improved economic benefits to early childhood educators, structure compensation to be comparable for similarly licensed educators across settings and age groups within the field, create transferability for early childhood educators should they move to or from Vermont, and create a clear, nationally recognized pathway for current and prospective early childhood educators to follow.

This last point is critically important, as research indicates that Vermont needs approximately 2,314 additional early childhood educators who are able to independently educate a group of children in order to meet demand for regulated early childhood education in our state.[114] A viable path towards recruiting and retaining educators to meet this need depends on aligned compensation, professional pathways, and accountability, which can be accomplished and supported in the context of a recognized and regulated profession.

Benefits for Administrators of Vermont's Early Childhood Education System

Accessible, Transferable Data on Individual Early Childhood Educators

Administrators institute, navigate, and balance a complex array of regulations and requirements that have been layered on the child care system in the absence of a regulated early childhood education profession. Establishing a regulated profession is ultimately designed to benefit administrators as well as educators, children, and families by reducing the burden of guesswork and paperwork that takes time, money, and attention. While Vermont may be one of the first states in which early childhood educators can be professionally licensed, the way in which the profession will be structured and licensed, as overseen by the Commission on Excellence in Early Childhood Education, will be such that the profession is national in nature. There will be a consistent process for early childhood educators to become licensed, and licensure will be reciprocal and transferable across states. This standardized system, based on shared criteria, will make it easier and clearer for state administrators to recruit and retain early childhood educators moving from other states into Vermont.

Q10: Why isn't the public protected from unprofessional practitioners through means other than regulation?

Currently, federal and state statute and regulations primarily focus on regulating child care programs, not the individuals who work in those programs. While regulations for CBCCPPs and for FCCH programs require individuals to pass background checks and meet certain minimum training and/or education criteria, disciplinary actions for those individuals are not tracked.

Between the minimal protection of a background check to the extreme measure of criminal prosecution for law-breaking behavior, there is a vast middle ground for potentially unprofessional, unethical, and/or harmful behavior for which there is no fair and equitable mechanism to address. In other professions, the individual's license can be revoked. Because early childhood education is not currently a profession, that recourse does not exist. Instead, families are forced to rely on a word-of-mouth "system" that is inherently inequitable, and the result is a substantial gap in protecting the public that should be unacceptable when the stakes for children's health, safety, and learning are so high. The engineers that families trust to design safe roadways and bridges are licensed professionals; the landscape architects that families enlist to help them design beautiful outdoor spaces are licensed professionals; the nurses families trust to provide medical care and counseling when children are sick are licensed professionals; the auctioneers that families may use to help them sell housewares and valuables when older family members pass away are licensed professionals; and the public school educators families trust when their children are ready for elementary school are licensed professionals. Infants, toddlers, and preschoolers are vulnerable, yet families do not have access to a system that is designed to provide both support and accountability to the educators at the core of it.

Professional licensure of the early childhood education workforce would provide a critical level of oversight and disclosure, allowing children, families, and programs to be better supported and served by well-prepared, well-supported, and well-compensated early childhood educators—and better protected from unprofessional practitioners.

Q11: Type of professional regulation sought

Licensure

Q12a: What other regulated professions/occupations perform similar services to those of this profession/occupation?

The profession that performs services most similar to early childhood educators is that of public school educators. Over the course of the 20th century, public school teaching shifted from a fragmented occupation to a professionalized field with proficiency and training standards, licensure processes at the state level, and a system of teacher licensure reciprocity between most states.[115] Unlike early childhood education, public education is considered a public good, so the professional regulation and oversight of public school teachers and administrators was incorporated into states' governing bodies that oversee public education. In Vermont, the Vermont Standards Board for Professional Educators (VSBPE) creates rules that govern the training, licensing, and professional standards of teachers, administrators, and professional support staff requiring a license pursuant to 16 V.S.A. Chapter 51. The aim of the statute is to help ensure high-caliber professionals and high-quality public educational programs for Vermont students.

In alignment with the rules from the VSBPE, the Vermont Agency of Education (AOE) receives materials from each applicant and then makes a determination about whether they qualify for a Vermont educator license. This license is required for educators working in public school programs.

A Vermont Educator License issued by the AOE with an endorsement in Early Childhood Education (described below) is similar in qualifications and scope of practice to one of the three designations that we propose being licensed by a Vermont Board of Early Childhood Educators: Early Childhood Educator III (ECE III). However, there is no parallel regulatory structure under VSBPE for ECE I or for ECE II, as we are proposing here.

Name of license issued by AOE: Vermont Educator License
Endorsement on that license: Early Childhood Education
Possible instructional levels authorized by that license:

- Birth-Grade 3 (may include limits)
- Pre-K-Grade 3 only
- Birth-Pre-K only

Because early childhood education is not identified in statute or current practice in Vermont as a public good, VSBPE is not the best entity to oversee the professional recognition and licensure of the early childhood education profession for early childhood educators who operate across settings, many of which are outside the public education sphere. Additionally, VSBPE does not oversee staff who perform roles not under the Vermont Educator License

umbrella, such as paraeducators. To advance early childhood education as one national profession with three designations, as the *Unifying Framework* proposes, requires standardized credentialing that creates transferability/reciprocity for early childhood educators throughout the United States. This necessitates a stand-alone professional body, as opposed to an expansion of the scope of Agency of Education licensure.

While separate, the proposed Vermont Board of Early Childhood Educators will align with VSBPE through a shared set of standards and competencies: the *Professional Standards and Competencies for Early Childhood Educators*.[116] Published by NAEYC in 2019, these are embedded in the recommendations of the *Unifying Framework* that guide the preparation and qualifications for the three designations ECE I, ECE II, and ECE III. In March 2023, the *Professional Standards and Competencies* were the basis for a recommendation from a committee convened by AOE to the VSBPE for a revision to the qualifications for an Endorsement 5440-36 as an Early Childhood Educator.[117]

Other professions that are regulated by OPR in Vermont and bear some similarities to early childhood education are nursing, occupational therapy, and physical therapy. While these professions serve individuals across the age spectrum, they include specializations for working with pediatric patients. Their services may be performed in a variety of settings—public or private. And, each of these professions has more than one designation for professional licensure, depending upon preparation: a nurse may be Registered or Licensed Practical. There is a designation for Occupational Therapist or an Occupational Therapy Assistant. Similarly, there is a Physical Therapist or a Physical Therapy Assistant. All these professions' individual practitioners were determined to require professional licensure to assure the health, safety, and welfare of their clients. We believe these assurances are necessary for early childhood educators as well.

While Vermont is undertaking efforts to achieve professional recognition for early childhood education, the Commission on Professional Excellence in Early Childhood Education is working to establish national professional oversight with a professional board in each state, like nursing. What Vermont establishes will ultimately be part of the national profession. Vermont is at the forefront of this work and in regular conversation with the Commission, and we have the opportunity to inform and influence what happens at the national level.

Q12b: How will the program distinguish between or among respective scopes of practice?

In April 2021, early childhood educators across Vermont expressed strong support for aligning with the *Unifying Framework*'s description of three designations with aligned preparation pathways.[118] With their accompanying scopes of practice, these professional designations and preparation pathways—as described in the *Unifying Framework*—are in the following chart.[119]

Table 2. *Unifying Framework* Licensure Designations, Aligned Preparation Pathways, and Scopes of Practice

Designation	Aligned Preparation Pathways	Scope of Practice
Early Childhood Educator I (ECE I)	Approved Certificate or Credential Program in Early Childhood Education that is: ● A minimum of 120 clock hours ● Includes required field experience	Birth-Age 8: ● Can play a support role ● Can serve as effective member of an early childhood education teaching team ● Receives guidance from ECE II or ECE III
Early Childhood Educator II (ECE II)	Approved Associate Degree Program in Early Childhood Education that is: ● A minimum of 60 credits of college-level coursework ● Includes required field experience	Birth-Age 5: ● Can play a lead role ● Can serve as effective member of early childhood education teaching team ● Can guide the practice of ECE I ● Receives guidance from ECE III K-Grade 3: ● Can play a support role ● Can serve as effective member of early childhood education team ● Receives guidance from ECE III Note: In Universal Pre-K classrooms in community-based programs, ECE II graduates can serve as a support educator. In Vermont, the lead educator role is filled by an AOE-licensed Educator with an ECE endorsement.
Early Childhood Educator III (ECE III)	Approved Bachelor's Degree Program in Early Childhood Education that is: ● A minimum of 120 credits of college-level coursework ● Includes required field experience	Birth-Grade 3: ● Can play a lead role ● Can serve an effective member of early childhood education team ● Can guide the practice of ECE I and ECE II Note: In all Universal Pre-K classrooms, the lead educator role is filled by an AOE-licensed Educator with an ECE endorsement.

Q13: How many practitioners of this profession/occupation do you estimate are practicing in Vermont?

Based on the latest report issued by the Vermont Department for Children and Families' Child Development Division, as of December 31, 2022 there were 6,239 individuals working in early childhood education roles in regulated child care programs (CBCCPPs and FCCHs) in Vermont serving infants, toddlers, and/or preschoolers.[120] Note that administrative, custodial, and other support staff were excluded from the count, as this application is focused on the professional recognition of teaching staff. Staff counted include: Aide, Assistant, Substitute, Teacher, Teacher Associate, Trainee, Registered Family Child Care Provider, and Licensed Family Child Care Provider.

Q14: Estimate the percentage of the practitioners practicing in each type of setting.

Vermont child care regulations recognize two primary types of program settings serving children from birth to five: Center-Based Child Care and Preschool Programs (CBCCPPs) and Family Child Care Homes (FCCHs). According to data from the Vermont Early Childhood Education and Afterschool Workforce Report issued by the Vermont Department for Children and Families' Child Development Division on January 2, 2024, the distribution of early childhood education workforce across program settings is as follows:[121]

Percent of early childhood educators working in CBCCPPs: 88%
Percent of early childhood educators working in FCCHs: 12%

In reviewing these numbers, it is important to keep in mind that CBCCPPs employ numerous staff members, while most FCCHs are sole proprietor operations. Even though the number of early childhood educators working in FCCHs comprise a much smaller percentage of the current workforce than CBCCPP staff, they play a critical role in supporting access for families and children, especially in rural areas of the state.

Q15: Is formal education required?

Yes, formal education will be required and is critically important, given what we know about the brain science of early learning; the complex, skilled work required; and the range of things that early childhood educators must know and be able to do.

For each designation, there will be approved preparation programs, including required field experience. The goal is for approved programs to provide clear pathways, and to prepare individuals according to the *Professional Standards and Competencies for Early Childhood Educators*.[122] For ECE II and III, formal education culminating in a degree is required—an

early childhood education associate degree for ECE II and an early childhood education bachelor's degree for ECE III. For ECE I, individuals will have a package of three specific stackable college courses, as described below.

Early Childhood Educator I (ECE I) requires a minimum of 120 clock hours in an approved credential/certificate program. Design work has just been completed on a package of three courses at Community College of Vermont (CCV) that will prepare individuals for ECE I licensure. We have received feedback from the Commission about the suitability of this package as an approved preparation program for ECE I in Vermont. In addition, there may be a non-credit, 120 clock-hour option through a national Child Development Associate (CDA) credential offered by the Council for Professional Recognition. However, the Council has not adopted the *Professional Standards and Competencies for Early Childhood Educators*, and the CDA is not as universally credit-bearing or stackable, while the Vermont ECE I Preparation Program through CCV will be.[123]

Early Childhood Educator II (ECE II) requires an associate degree in early childhood education. In Vermont, this degree is available through CCV. In terms of flexible pathways, CCV has a robust set of options for Prior Learning Assessment options, which allow those pursuing associate degrees to get credit for knowledge and competencies they built through previous work experience.

Early Childhood Educator III (ECE III) requires a bachelor's degree, or an initial master's degree, in early childhood education. In Vermont, these degrees are available through Vermont State University (Castleton and Northern Vermont campuses), the University of Vermont, Champlain College, and Saint Michael's College.

As previously noted, a recent publication shows a trend toward formal education among the Vermont early education workforce. "Many working in early childhood education and afterschool programs are well-educated, with 44% of all individuals in regulated child care reporting an associate degree or higher across all settings. Of that 44%, 52.9% have bachelor's degrees or beyond. The reported number of individuals holding bachelor's, master's, or associate degrees has increased 51.7% between 2018 and 2022."[124]

There are many supports and resources in place for those pursuing formal education, including these listed on the VTAEYC website[125]:

- Career Information
    - Careers in ECE Guidebook
    - College Resource Directory
    - Jump Start Your ECE Career Guide
- Career Supports
    - Student Loan Repayment Assistance Program
    - Vermont ECE Apprenticeship Program
    - Vermont ECE Youth Apprenticeship Program
    - Vermont Career and Technical Education ECE Pathways that offer dual enrollment coursework
- Scholarships, Grants, and Bonuses

- Education Gap Grant for ECEs
- Professional Development Grants and Bonuses
- T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood Scholarship Program
- The Curtis Fund Commitment Scholarship Program[126]

At the same time, we know that there are many experienced early childhood educators without formal credentials or degrees, but who have developed great expertise through their years of experience and who need flexible pathways to demonstrate their competencies. For information on how these requirements will be addressed in the transition to licensure for current, experienced early childhood educators, please see the response to Question 20.

Q16: Is supervised experience required in addition to, or instead of, formal education?

Supervised experience is required along with formal education. Under the *Unifying Framework*, as part of successfully completing an approved early childhood educator preparation program the individual will demonstrate evidence of field experience.

NAEYC's higher education accreditation standards include guidance regarding field experiences for early childhood education associate and bachelor's degree programs in Standard F: Field Experience Quality.[127] The field experience standard addresses expectations regarding the quality of field experience site, opportunities to observe and practice with a wide range of young children and across different early childhood education settings, and the quality of mentoring/supervision of students. Vermont colleges and universities are recognized and accredited by national bodies other than NAEYC.

Currently, field experience for an associate degree can be obtained through the Vermont ECE Apprenticeship Program (VTAEYC and Vermont Department of Labor)[128] or through the course Professional Field Experience (CCV).[129]

Field experience for a bachelor's degree is obtained through student teaching.

Field experience for the ECE Youth Apprenticeship Program, which accompanies coursework at CCV, is earned through an internship at a sponsoring early childhood education program.

For some, particularly non-traditional students and those working in family child care settings who are employed while pursuing coursework and accompanying supervised experience, innovative and flexible options must be available.

Q17: Is there a national examination?

There is not yet a national assessment that is used for the entire early childhood education profession, but we expect there will be within the next few years. Assessments that currently exist are not related to licensure and are not aligned with the *Unifying Framework*'s recommendations regarding professional standards and competencies for early childhood educators. We describe those here as an example of fragmentation in the current system:

- Early childhood educators working in public kindergarten through third grade settings must hold a state teaching license which typically requires passing licensure assessments such as edTPA, various Praxis exams, and/or assessments created by National Evaluation Systems. States choose which assessments they use.
- The National Occupational Competency Testing Institute (NOCTI) offers an exam that is used in some high school early childhood education career technical programs and in some early childhood education associate degree programs to evaluate beginning competency for students in the program. It is not used as a requirement by states for entry to practice. Rather, it is typically used as a type of summative assessment in the programs of study.
- The Council for Professional Recognition offers the CDA, a national initial early childhood education credential that requires individuals to complete a number of training hours and field experience hours, submitting a portfolio, and passing an exam.

The Commission on Professional Excellence in Early Childhood Education is currently working on identifying a national assessment for each ECE designation.[130] Of necessity, this will be steady, thoughtful work. Based on feedback from the early childhood education workforce, the Commission has identified guidelines to inform its exploration and identification of licensure assessments. These assessments must be unbiased, accessible, affordable, and transparent—both in how they are designed as well as in the pass rate results. The Commission is now reviewing the existing assessments described above to determine whether, with revisions, any of these assessments could serve as a national assessment, or whether new assessments should be developed.

Commission on Professional Excellence in Early Childhood Education
Contact: https://www.commissionece.org/home

While the Commission is working on establishing assessments, some early adopter states may become ready to begin implementing professional licensure. In these cases the Commission recommends a waiver of the national assessment process, if the state identifies a suitable method for early childhood educators to demonstrate their competencies. This is outlined in the model legislation, The Early Childhood Education Professional Recognition Act. The Commission has shared this model legislation with Vermont in March 2023 because the groundwork we have already laid in Vermont positions us as ready for this next level of implementation planning. OPR may request this model legislation, along with model regulations, from NAEYC as part of its consideration of this application.

Given Vermont's status as an early adopter, we need to identify a suitable method for early childhood educators to demonstrate their competencies before the Commission completes its work on assessments. In conference with the Commission, we are developing recommendations to submit to a proposed Vermont Board of Early Childhood Educators for what those suitable interim assessment methods will be, aligned with the *Unifying Framework* and receiving favorable feedback from the Commission. We expect to complete this design work on our recommendations in late 2024.

Q18: Does this profession/occupation need continuing education?

Yes. The model legislation recommends that each early childhood educator successfully complete at least 75 clock hours of continuing education in early childhood education curriculum every five years. Currently, Vermont child care regulations require 15 clock hours of annual professional development activities, which is consistent in terms of the number of clock hours over the course of five years. Northern Lights at CCV verifies and uploads all qualifications and professional development documentation for individuals working in regulated child care settings into their early childhood educator registry accounts.

Q19: Based on the criteria you proposed as a requirement to become licensed/certified/registered, estimate how many of the current practitioners will qualify.

Based on the data available from the Vermont Early Childhood Education and Afterschool Workforce Report published on January 2, 2024, and the licensure requirements proposed in Question 12B, we anticipate that 72.06% of the current field will qualify for an ECE I, II, or III license.[131] Our estimates of how current members of the early childhood education workforce might qualify for the proposed three licensure levels are shown in Table 3.

The nearly 28% of current early childhood educators who we anticipate would not qualify for a license includes many experienced practitioners. These individuals would be eligible for the transitional provisions described in Question 20 to become members of the recognized profession. The transitional provisions will provide experienced early childhood educators with flexible pathways to demonstrate their expertise and qualify for licensure. With clear, aligned preparation pathways and accompanying support, we envision that every early childhood educator will ultimately be well prepared for their skilled work with young children at the ECE I, II, or III designation.

Table 33. Estimate of Current Early Childhood Educators' Qualification Alignment with Proposed Professional Licensure Designations

Proposed Licensure Designation	Percent of Current Field Estimated to Qualify
ECE I	10.82%
ECE II	11.47%
ECE III	49.77%

Methodology notes:
It is important to note that the Vermont Child Development Division (CDD) currently has incomplete data on the educational/certificate attainment of the current early childhood education workforce. The early childhood educator registry used to gather this information is not a professional credentialing system. Rather, it is a tool to help programs verify if a member of the early childhood education workforce has up-to-date background checks and to help programs verify if an early childhood educator meets the minimum requirements specified in state and federal regulations to dependently or independently supervise children. Because the registry is not a professional regulation system and began as an optional, voluntary program, a significant number of workforce members do not have any up-to-date credentials listed in the system. Therefore, our estimates use the data that was shared through the latest early childhood education workforce report for the subset of the current workforce reporting educational attainment/credentials to extrapolate distribution of educational/credential attainment across the full early childhood education workforce for staff working in FCCHs and CBCCPPs. If the early childhood education workforce were to become a licensed profession, we would expect to be able to track credentials and disciplinary actions at the individual level as they are for licensed teachers in Vermont.

The data from the workforce report issued by the CDD includes references to Vermont's early childhood Career Ladder certificates. These certificates are issued by Northern Lights at CCV and are based on the education and training that a given early childhood educator reports to Northern Lights and Northern Lights then verifies. [132] Northern Lights Career Ladder certificates do not have reciprocity with other states.

In estimating the percentages of the workforce who would qualify for one of the three ECE licensure designations outlined in Question 12b, we grouped the current workforce data in the CDD report as indicated below. The grouping below includes the transition provisions based on the equivalence process embedded in Vermont's Northern Lights Career Ladder (see those with a *). These transition provisions are described in Question 20 and are based on the model legislation.

- ECE I Designation - Individuals have completed one of the following:
    - Current Child Development Associate (CDA) credential
    - Career Ladder Level II certificate*
    - Child Care Certificate from CCV
    - Child Care Apprenticeship Program
    - Career Ladder IIIA certificate*
- ECE II Designation - Individuals have completed one of these:
    - Associate degree in early childhood education
    - Career Ladder Level IIIB certificate *
- ECE III Designation - Individuals have completed one of these:
    - Bachelor's degree in early childhood education
    - Career Ladder IVA certificate or higher*

Q20: What transitional provisions do you propose for current practitioners to obtain licensure/certification/registration?

To implement the *Unifying Framework*, the Power to the Profession Task Force recommended phased-in implementation that honors the existing and future workforce, and made the following implementation commitments, which we support:[133]

- We will not advocate for increased educational requirements without advocating for funding to provide requisite supports and attendant compensation.
- We will not advocate for increased educational requirements without advocating for increased funding and capacity supports so that programs, institutions, and educators across all settings can implement them.
- We will not advocate for increased educational requirements without advocating to establish and implement realistic timelines that recognize the challenges faced by the existing workforce, across all settings.
- We will not advocate for increased educational requirements without advocating for implementation plans and timelines that address the particular challenges family child care and other community-based providers face, so as not to contribute to, or worsen, their widespread decline.
- We will not advocate for policies that disproportionately and negatively impact educators from communities of color.
- We will not advocate for policies that advance the early childhood education profession without doing the work to mitigate unintended consequences and create meaningful pathways for advancement.

In the transition to the profession, the *Unifying Framework* stresses the importance of "a bridge" for current practitioners, saying:

"Implementation of the *Unifying Framework* will ultimately build a bridge from the present to the future. We must both honor and include our existing field of those working across early learning settings, recognizing their diversity, dedication, and experience to ensure they are not summarily pushed out of the profession. We need policies that exempt some current educators (also known as 'grandfather' policies) as well as policies that offer flexible ways to demonstrate competence. We must ensure that appropriate new education and qualification requirements are phased in over time, accompanied by additional public investments and extensive supports that fully address the serious challenges our workforce faces in accessing degrees and credentials. And, we must rely on the tenets of implementation science to guide us and the power of the collective to stand firm together, speaking with a unified voice to policymakers on behalf of children, families, and early childhood educators." [134]

The model legislation from the Commission details elements of the bridge to professional licensure for current experienced educators. Adapted for application in Vermont, these include:

- Waiver of Requirements
    - Waiver of Assessment
      Details: Professional licensure may begin in Vermont before the Commission has completed its work on a national assessment. Until that time, the Vermont Board of Early Childhood Educators will have a method to determine if an applicant has at least the level of competency as would be demonstrated by passing an assessment for that designation.
    - Waiver for Certain Pre-K-12 Educators
      Details: The Vermont Board of Early Childhood Educators may issue an ECE III professional license to an applicant who is already duly licensed by the Vermont AOE to engage as a teacher of young children from birth through grade 3.
    - Waiver of Approved ECE I, ECE II, or ECE III Preparation Program
      Details: The Vermont Board of Early Childhood Educators may issue a professional license to an applicant who has graduated from a professional preparation program, which although not yet an approved program, has substantially equivalent requirements as the applicable ECE I, II, or III. This waiver is intended to expire once approved programs are identified.
      Details: The Vermont Board of Early Childhood Educators may issue a professional license to an applicant who has a certificate on the Northern Lights Career Ladder in which their education is deemed to be equivalent to what is required for a particular ECE designation. For example, a Career Ladder III-B certificate may be earned for an associate degree in early childhood education, or an associate degree in a related field, or an associate degree in any field with at least 21 college credits in at least three Vermont Core Knowledge Areas. During the transitional period, any of these would qualify an application for an ECE II license.
- Flexible ways to demonstrate competencies

    - Details: In partnership with CCV, we are recommending Prior Learning Assessment options already in existence at CCV that will allow experienced current educators to demonstrate their competencies, receive credit for what they know in an efficient and cost-effective way, qualify for an ECE II transition license, and then have the time and supports to build on those credits, should they choose to pursue a degree. CCV's Prior Learning Assessment process already is well-established and is a model for other colleges and states across the country.
- A phased-in timeline
    - Details: The *Unifying Framework* makes implementation commitments that ensure time and supports to avoid unintended consequences and ensure everyone who chooses to meet the requirements of the profession is able to do so. Particular attention is given to the challenges faced by family child care educators and those who work in small community centers.

With guidance from the *Unifying Framework* and the model legislation, Vermont's Advancing Early Childhood Education as a Profession Task Force, Core Team, and project staff have been engaged in designing what the bridge will look like in Vermont. Activities have included conducting a pilot with current educators, gathering questions and feedback from the workforce, collaborating with Northern Lights on a plan for the equivalence built into the Career Ladder to be used toward licensure, and collaborating with CCV's Prior Learning Assessment Program on flexible options for educators to demonstrate their competencies as they move toward licensure. In all of these efforts, we are committed to the transitional provisions being workforce-informed and honoring the current workforce in centers and in family child care homes, the timeline being phased in, and to the design being aligned with the *Unifying Framework* to ensure national reciprocity.

Q21: Are there any proposed legislative bill(s) related to this request?

The Commission has developed model legislation and regulations for states working to achieve professional regulation of their respective early childhood education workforces. OPR may request copies from the Commission for purposes related to this application. Vermont is currently reviewing the model legislation and plans to work with legislators to introduce legislation during the 2025 session based on this information. The following are components included in the model legislation:

- Initial licensure qualifications for ECE I, II, and III
    - Stipulates that for every designation level, licensure applicants must complete an approved education program or professional preparation program, which includes a practicum, and pass an approved assessment to demonstrate proficiency in the *Professional Standards and Competencies*.
- Core competencies
    - Calls for a Vermont Board of Early Childhood Educators to adopt the *Professional Standards and Competencies for Early Childhood Educators*. The

components of licensure—professional preparation, field experiences and licensure assessments—will align to these standards and competencies.

- Waiver of requirements
    - Outlines circumstances that allow for certain requirements to be waived, including the completion of an approved assessment (while assessments are still being developed and/or approved) or approved education/ professional preparation program, as well as a waiver for certain licensed pre-K-12 educators.
- Transitional license
    - Accounts for those already working in the field, providing time and a process for these educators to meet licensure requirements.
- Reciprocal license
    - Outlines a clear process for licensed educators to move between states.
- Provisional license
    - Provides a provisional license for educators who have not completed an approved assessment to temporarily work under supervision.
- Licensure lattice
    - Addresses licensed educators seeking higher designations (e.g., moving from ECE II to III after completing a bachelor's degree).
- Continuing education; Licensure renewal requirements; Reinstatement of License
    - Specifies requirements and processes for maintaining, renewing, and reinstating licenses.
- Discipline
    - Includes policies and processes regarding educator discipline and enforcement, including due process, hearings, and filing complaints with the Board.
- Specializations
    - Provides that the Board may recognize specialization credentials for individuals holding an ECE I, II, or III license. Specializations are to be recognized by the Commission on Professional Excellence in Early Childhood Education.

Q22: List all interested persons or groups in favor of, or opposed to, this request. Have they been consulted?

Since 2019, VTAEYC has committed to a workforce-led, workforce-informed initiative. For that reason, Vermont's Advancing Early Childhood Education as a Profession Task Force is composed of active members of the workforce from throughout Vermont who bring perspectives from family child care home programs, center-based child care and preschool programs, public pre-kindergarten programs, and workforce preparation programs. There has been intentional, concerted outreach to engage significant numbers of the early childhood education workforce through presentations, professional development, surveys, newsletters, videos, roundtables, VTAEYC's website, and regular updates to regional groups.

Additionally, we have regularly engaged with other stakeholders in the early childhood ecosystem—agencies, higher education programs, community partners, and legislators—providing information, fielding questions, and gathering responses. This has been done

through informal updates, prepared presentations, and periodic stakeholder emails. As our outreach to both the workforce and to other stakeholders has been around the recommendations of the *Unifying Framework*, all groups have been aware of individual licensure as a key part of that framework.

In terms of consultation and support for this Sunrise Review Application, different persons and groups are listed based on the ways they have been involved, according to the following categories:

1. Reviewed This Request
    a. In Favor
    b. No Public Position
2. Consulted
    a. In Favor
    b. No Public Position
    c. Raised a Question or Concern

For names and contact information for representatives of these entities, please see the Interested Parties section of the Appendix.

Q23: Include any statistical data on disciplinary actions for this profession/occupation in other states.

To the best of our knowledge, no state currently tracks disciplinary actions for individual early childhood educators or program staff: only child care programs are tracked. Current Vermont early childhood education data systems also lack the ability to track disciplinary actions at the individual level.

However, if the early childhood education workforce were to become a licensed profession, we would expect to be able to track disciplinary actions at the individual level as is done for AOE-licensed teachers in Vermont. According to data from the Vermont Agency of Education, since 2001 the state has taken disciplinary action against 148 K-12 educators and administrators licensed in Vermont.[135]

Q24: What is the applicant seeking to gain through regulation of the occupational group? What benefit does regulation bring to members of this occupational group?

In our extensive outreach to the early childhood education workforce and to other stakeholders in the early childhood ecosystem about advancing as a recognized profession, we have heard they anticipate the following benefits:

1. Early childhood educators feeling more respected and valued as a profession.
2. Clear pathways with standardized, aligned, and stackable professional preparation programs for those seeking a career in early childhood education.
3. Professional compensation and adequate benefits packages increasing commensurate with increased preparation and increased competency, supporting the financial stability and overall well-being early childhood educators need to consistently provide high-quality care and education for young children and their families.
4. Greater ability to attract new educators and to retain experienced educators, leading to improvement in staffing shortages and greater access to early childhood education for families.
5. Clearer professional identity and ability to communicate with families and the public about the preparation, qualifications, distinct role, and specialized responsibilities of early childhood educators.
6. A more unified profession across the mixed-delivery system of school-based programs, family home-based programs, community center-based programs and other types of settings; more consistency across the critical years of young children's growth and development, from birth through age 8; colleagues who share a set of competencies and preparation that support effective practice, regardless of setting.
7. More clarity and less confusion among the public about what the profession is, greater accountability among those in the profession, and a stronger case for increased public investment in early childhood education.
8. Demographically-speaking, becoming known as a state where there are ample, high-quality early childhood education options for families may position Vermont to attract and retain more young families to live in our state and impact its overall affordability.

Conclusion

To recap: The *Unifying Framework*'s "audacious vision" is that "Each and every child, beginning at birth, has the opportunity to benefit from high-quality early childhood education, delivered by an effective, diverse, well-prepared, and well-compensated workforce."[136]

Vermont's early childhood education workforce has signaled their agreement with this vision and their desire to move toward it. We believe that the establishment of early childhood education as a recognized profession, with all the accompanying systemic changes described in the *Unifying Framework*, is the key to realizing that vision. With the passage of Act 76, bringing increased public investment into early childhood education, the time is ripe to create a new system with the resources and infrastructure to support increased professional accountability. Based on feedback we have gathered, we believe that early childhood educators in Vermont are prepared to embrace becoming members of a recognized profession.

The single most essential element of high-quality experiences for young children has been shown to be the qualifications of the individual who is working with those children and their families. We believe that elevating early childhood educators as recognized professionals, through a system of professional licensure, is the key to what is most important—doing our best for young children and their families, and through them, to creating our best future as a state.

Appendices

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Background Information on Vermont's Early Childhood Education System

In Vermont, early childhood education takes place through a variety of settings, in addition to kindergarten through grade 3 settings where educators are serving children typically ages 5 through 8. In Vermont, early childhood educators work with young children, ages 6 weeks to 5 years of age in three types of early childhood education programs regulated by the state.[137]

Early Childhood Education Age Groups

State regulations governing the operation of child care programs group these children into three different age groups:[138]

Infants

Infants are classified as children between 6 weeks and 23 months. Because of their essential dependence on adults, infants require substantial attention, support, and individualized care. They are experiencing rapid brain, developmental, and emotional growth, making knowledge of child development, one-on-one attention, physical closeness and nurturing, and caregiver continuity important in any program serving this age group. Additionally, infants need significant physical support, such as diapering, feeding, and monitored nap time. To meet these needs, caring for infants requires a low child-to-staff ratio, which explains the expensive nature of early childhood education in these earliest years. Given the cost and space constraints of providing safe, quality infant care, many programs have capacity for only a few infants.

Toddlers

Toddlers are children aged 24 through 35 months—like infants, they also require a significant amount of intensive, skilled, emotional, cognitive, and physical care and support. During this developmental stage, children are rapidly discovering, learning, and absorbing new knowledge from their environments and within the context of strong and secure relationships. For toddlers, being read to, spoken with, having social interactions with peers, and being given engaging and safe care and learning environments are necessary features of an early childhood education program. Toddlers also require a low staff-to-child ratio to support their developmental, cognitive, social-emotional, linguistic, and physical needs.

Preschoolers

Preschoolers are children 36 months through 59 months—3- and 4-year-olds—whose early childhood education needs include developmentally appropriate play; open-ended and problem-solving activities; interaction and engagement with other peers for social and cooperative competence building; and environments that are rich in language, literacy, and mathematics modeling. As they become more socially-connected in their interactions and relationships with other children and adults, research indicates that their safety and learning can accommodate slightly higher child-to-staff ratios than infants and toddlers.

Regulated Early Childhood Education Programs

Vermont families rely on different ways to care for their infants, toddlers, and preschoolers, and may use varying types of care and learning arrangements to meet the needs of their daily lives and schedules. Some families choose to have a parent or guardian available to take care of children, opting not to work outside the home. For many families, especially families with only one parent or guardian, care by a parent or guardian is not an option. Some families with two caregivers in the labor force are able to provide care with "split shift" arrangements, so that one person is able to be home with a child at any given time. Other families rely on people outside of their family to provide care and education for their young children. These different care options can generally be described by two categories: informal child care and regulated child care. While most of this application uses the *Unifying Framework* recommended language "early childhood education," current regulatory language in Vermont uses "child care."

Informal care arrangements in Vermont can include extended family members, friends, neighbors, or nannies or au pairs. These types of caregivers are considered informal and are not regulated in Vermont. Regulated child care refers to programs that have gone through a programmatic licensing process with the Vermont Department for Children and Families Child Development Division (CDD). The licensing process requires programs to meet certain health and safety regulations and programming guidelines (such as developmentally appropriate play time and activities that promote healthy development). The licensing process also requires the state to inspect programs to make sure they provide a safe and age-appropriate space and meet other state and federal regulations and guidelines for early childhood education.[139] The three types of regulated early childhood education programs serving young children in Vermont are as follows:

Registered Family Child Care Homes (Registered FCCHs)

Also known as family providers or home-based providers, registered family child care homes provide child care in the early childhood educator's own home for children from more than two families. These home-based programs have gone through a licensing process with the CDD to certify that they meet specific regulations that promote children's health, safety, and development in order to care for a small group of children. Registered FCCHs are the most common type of regulated, home-based child care in Vermont.

Licensed Family Child Care Homes (Licensed FCCHs)

As with registered family child care homes, licensed family child care homes offer a regulated home-based option for early childhood education. The difference between registered family child care homes and licensed family child care homes is that licensed family child care homes typically care for more than six children with the support of an assistant. Like registered family child care homes, licensed family child care homes have received a license from the CDD to certify that they meet specific regulations that promote children's health, safety, and development. Since licensed family child care homes care for more children than registered family child care homes, they must meet additional regulations.

Licensed Center-Based Child Care and Preschool Programs (CBCCPPs)

Licensed center-based child care and preschool programs care for children in a dedicated space that is not located in a home. These programs are also regulated by the state and have two or more staff who have specific training or formal education in early childhood education. CBCCPPs offer many different types of programs, such as nature-based learning, religious-based curricula, or Montessori-based pedagogy, and may focus on a particular age group, such as preschool. CBCCPPs may operate as nonprofit or for-profit, and may be located in places including office buildings, community centers, stand-alone sites, or co-located in public school buildings. Some CBCCPPs hold what is referred to as a "non-recurring" license, which means they regularly provide early childhood education to children who attend the program on an as-needed basis. Most of Vermont's non-recurring CBCCPPs are based at ski resorts throughout the state. Most of these programs provide regular early childhood education programming for the children of employees in addition to providing as-needed programming for the children of resort guests.

Other Types of Early Childhood Education Programs

Head Start

Head Start is a federally funded program that serves children from at-risk backgrounds and their families. The Head Start program encompasses two designations: Early Head Start and Head Start.

Early Head Start provides early, continuous, and intensive child development and family support services to infants, toddlers, and their families, as well as pregnant people.[140] Early Head Start Child Care Partnerships provide these services through contracts with regulated child care programs, including FCCHs, that also meet additional Head Start standards.

Head Start works with preschoolers by supporting their growth in language and literacy, cognitive development, social and emotional functioning, and more through a high-quality preschool program. Head Start also includes health screenings and family support services.

Both Head Start and Early Head Start provide a comprehensive range of education, child development, health, nutrition, and family support services to enrolled children and their families. These services include health, education, medical, vision, and dental screenings and follow-up care for eligible children and families.[141] The federal standards required by Head Start ensure high-quality programming and services for families and children and go above and beyond Vermont's general child care regulations.

In Vermont, seven community-based organizations offer Head Start services and six offer Early Head Start services in child care centers and family child care homes. Head Start and Early Head Start serve many children and their families in partnerships with private early childhood education providers and public schools. During the 2022 Federal Fiscal Year, federal Office of Head Start funding supported 1,419 young children, pregnant mothers, and their families in Early Head Start and Head Start programs in Vermont.[142]

Universal Pre-Kindergarten

In 2014, the Vermont Legislature passed Act 166, commonly referred to as Vermont's Universal Pre-Kindergarten (UPK) law. Act 166 expanded upon efforts started in 2007 to make UPK programs, also referred to as preschool programs, available to all 3- and 4-year-olds. The program provides free tuition for 10 hours a week of UPK programming for up to 35 weeks per year (the typical length of the school year in Vermont). This is a voluntary program, and families can choose if and how their children participate.

In Vermont's UPK system, families have the option to choose a program that is operated by a public school or a community-based partner. Community-based programs, sometimes referred to as privately-operated pre-K partners, are regulated early childhood education programs that have been approved by the Vermont Agency of Education to participate in the state's UPK program. Community-based programs include family child care homes, center-based child care and preschool programs, Head Start classrooms, UPK classrooms operated by private schools, and programs operated by a CBCCPPs or Head Start but hosted in a classroom in a public school.

Both school-based and community-based programs must meet certain standards to participate in the state's universal, publicly-funded pre-K program. Pre-K programs that meet these standards can apply to receive a designation of being prequalified to participate in Vermont's UPK program. A mix of school-based and community-based programs is considered a national best practice, supporting families in choosing a program that works best for their needs and helping to ensure that families throughout the state have access to pre-K programming.[143]

Glossary of Key Terms

Advancing Early Childhood Education as a Profession (Advancing)

This initiative to advance an early childhood education profession in Vermont is led by members of Vermont's early childhood education workforce and housed at VTAEYC. Our work aligns with a future national early childhood education profession. We believe in this vision: That each and every child, beginning at birth, has the opportunity to benefit from high-quality, affordable early childhood education, delivered by an effective, diverse, well-prepared, and well-compensated workforce.

Advancing Early Childhood Education as a Profession Task Force (Advancing Task Force)

The Task Force is made up of early childhood educator leaders who represent the diversity of Vermont's regions and early childhood education settings. The Task Force, based on workforce feedback gathered through the Advancing initiative, determines how Vermont might align with The Unifying Framework for the Early Childhood Education Profession (*Unifying Framework*) and create consensus recommendations.

Building Bright Futures (BBF)

BBF is Vermont's early childhood public-private partnership, charged under state and federal law as Vermont's Early Childhood State Advisory Council (SAC) and Network, the mechanism used to advise the Governor and Legislature on the well-being of children in the prenatal period through age 8 and their families. BBF's mission is to improve the well-being of children and families in Vermont by using evidence to inform policy and bringing voices together across sectors and within regions to discuss critical challenges and problem-solve. Through Vermont's Early Childhood Action Plan (VECAP), BBF maintains the vision for Vermont's early childhood system, which is to be an integrated continuum of comprehensive, high-quality services that are equitable, accessible, and improve outcomes for each and every Vermont child in the prenatal period through age 8 and their families. BBF's Network infrastructure includes 12 Regional Councils, seven VECAP Committees, and the Early Childhood State Advisory Council.

The Vermont Department for Children and Families' Child Development Division (CDD)

The Child Development Division strives to improve the well-being of Vermont's children by working in partnership with families, early childhood and afterschool program staff, community members, and state and federal entities to increase statewide, client-centered access to developmentally-appropriate and equitable child development services.

Child Care Development Fund (CCDF)

The CCDF is a federal and state partnership program authorized under the federal Child Care and Development Block Grant Act (CCDBG). States, tribes, and territories use CCDF to provide financial assistance to low-income families to access child care so they can work, participate in a job training program, or seek their initial associate or bachelor's degree.

Child Care Financial Assistance Program (CCFAP)

CCFAP is Vermont's child care subsidy program, funded through state and federal dollars, including CCDF. Currently, families with children under the age of 13 (or age 19 if a child has special needs) who earn up to 400% of the federal poverty level and who meet at least one of the program's accepted services needs are eligible to receive financial assistance with child care.

Commission on Professional Excellence in Early Childhood Education (the Commission)

This body is composed of 15 early childhood education national organizations and 11 individual educators who represent those working with children from birth through age 8 and across all early childhood education settings. All members, organizational and individual, have equal voting rights. The Commission provides support for implementation efforts that advance the recommendations of the *Unifying Framework*, and it also advances the long-term sustainability of the early childhood education profession. The *Unifying Framework* called for the creation of this body with three primary responsibilities: designate the core guidelines of the early childhood education profession, set the parameters for quality assurance of individuals and professional preparation programs within the early childhood education profession, and serve as a liaison and collaborator with state and federal agencies and regulatory bodies on behalf of the early childhood education profession. The Commission is a semi-autonomous body housed at the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC).

Early Childhood Educators (ECE, ECEs, Educators)

Early childhood educators provide direct service to children from birth through age 8 and are responsible for meeting the guidelines of the early childhood education profession. They are the primary focus of the Unifying Framework.

The Early Childhood Education Profession within the Early Childhood Field

The early childhood education profession includes three categories: early childhood educators, professional preparation faculty and trainers, and pedagogical or instructional administrators. While the latter two are not the focus of the *Unifying Framework*—early childhood educators are the focus—these other two groups ultimately will be included in meeting the guidelines of the early childhood profession, as they are responsible for preparing aspiring early childhood educators and oversight of their practice.

The early childhood field includes those who support the learning and development of young children, in the context of their families and communities. This complex, demanding, and valuable work is performed by many individuals in many occupations, with many names, titles, and roles—all important, but members of their own professions or occupations and not held responsible for meeting the guidelines of the early childhood education profession. Early childhood educators are one part of the early childhood field along with these other roles:

- Business or operations consultants
- Mental health consultants
- Children's librarians

- Policy or advocacy specialists
- Pediatricians
- Home visitors
- Nurses
- Occupational therapists
- Social workers
- Individuals not meeting professional qualifications

Let's Grow Kids

Let's Grow Kids is a nonprofit organization on a mission to ensure affordable access to high quality child care for all Vermont families by 2025. With nearly 40,000 supporters, Let's Grow Kids, in partnership with Let's Grow Kids Action Network, is empowering Vermonters to advocate for sustainable child care policy change.

National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) is a professional membership organization that works to promote high-quality early learning for all young children, birth through age 8, by connecting early childhood practice, policy, and research. NAEYC advances a diverse, dynamic early childhood education profession and supports all who care for, educate, and work on behalf of young children. The association comprises nearly 60,000 individual members of the early childhood community and 52 affiliates, all committed to delivering on the promise of high-quality early learning. Together, they work to achieve a collective vision: that all young children thrive and learn in a society dedicated to ensuring they reach their full potential.

Northern Lights at Community College of Vermont (Northern Lights, Northern Lights at CCV)

Northern Lights at CCV is the professional development system hub for the early childhood education and afterschool workforces in Vermont. Northern Lights works closely with key partners to improve and enhance a unified, statewide system of professional development for members of the early childhood education and afterschool workforces. Northern Lights offers training, career advising, technical assistance, and support to assist with early childhood educators' and afterschool staff's professional development goals.

Power to the Profession (P2P)

Power to the Profession was established in 2017 as a national collaboration to define the early childhood education profession, serving children birth through age 8, across states and settings, by establishing a framework for career pathways knowledge and competencies, qualifications, standards, accountability supports, and compensation to define the early childhood education profession. A broad-based task force of leaders from 15 national organizations that represent members of the early childhood education field convened to systematically and sequentially work to establish the *Unifying Framework for the Early Childhood Education Profession* and set a vision for how to drive the significant and sustained

public investment that will allow all children, birth through age 8, to benefit from high-quality early childhood education provided by well-prepared, diverse, supported, and compensated professionals.

Professional Standards and Competencies for Early Childhood Educators

Held as a publication, these are the essential body of knowledge, skills, dispositions, and practices required of all early childhood educators working with children from birth through age 8, across all early learning settings. The *Unifying Framework for the Early Childhood Education Profession* designates these as the core competencies for the early childhood education profession, and they are created and held on behalf of the profession by NAEYC. The standards address six areas:

- Child Development and Learning in Context
- Family-Teacher Partnerships and Community Connections
- Child Observation, Documentation and Assessment
- Developmentally, Culturally, and Linguistically Appropriate Teaching Practice
- Knowledge, Application and Integration of Academic Content in the Early Childhood Curriculum
- Professionalism as an Early Childhood Educator

The Unifying Framework for the Early Childhood Education Profession (Unifying Framework)

The Power to the Profession initiative resulted in the creation of the *Unifying Framework*. It reflects consensus by educators across states and settings, administrators, employers, and higher education, about educator roles and responsibilities, aligned preparation pathways, professional compensation, and a supportive infrastructure with shared accountability. It also calls for significant increases in federal and state investments to help ensure the 40 million U.S. children, from birth to age 8, are well-served by an effective, diverse, and fairly compensated workforce of professionals.

Vermont Association for the Education of Young Children (VTAEYC)

VTAEYC advances excellence and equity in early childhood education as the state's largest membership organization for early childhood educators and is the state affiliate of NAEYC. As a nonprofit organization formed by grassroots effort more than 50 years ago, VTAEYC offers advocacy, workforce development, professional development, quality supports, and other resources to its membership and others in the early childhood education field. With a dedicated staff and board and a collaborative approach, VTAEYC aims to meet the needs of today's early childhood education workforce and create a stronger, more equitable early childhood education system for the future.

Interested Parties

Reviewed Request

In Favor

Vermont's Advancing Early Childhood Education as a Recognized Profession Initiative

The Advancing Early Childhood Education as a Recognized Profession team includes the Task Force and Core Team.

Current Task Force Members

- Beth Traver Adolphus, Executive Director, Oak Hill Children's Center, Pownal, btraveradolphus@gmail.com
- Cadence DiMasi, Early Childhood Educator, Pine Forest Children's Center, Burlington, piecesazul@gmail.com
- Christina Goodwin, Executive Director, Pine Forest Children's Center, Burlington, christina@thepineforest.org
- Jen Olson, Preschool Teacher, Wren's Nest Forest Preschool, New Haven, jen.olsonvt@gmail.com
- Kelly Hayes, Regional Manager, Building Bright Futures, Central Vermont and Lamoille Valley, hayes3@gmavt.net
- Kim Freeman, ECE Career and Technical Educator, Windham Career and Technical Education Center, kfreeman@wsesdvt.org
- Laura Butler, Owner/ Educator, Imagination Island, Milton, mbutler52@comcast.net
- Laurie Metcalfe, Executive Director, Northshire Day School, Manchester Center, lmetcalfe@northshiredayschool.org
- Lisa Pike, Director, VCP Children's Center, Bradford, lisa@vcpreschool.net
- Meghan Meszkat, Coordinator Early Education Services/ Head Start, Bennington, meghanmeszkat@gmail.com
- Nicole Walker, Director, Apple Tree Learning Centers, Stowe, nicole@appletreelc.com
- Staci Otis, Little All Stars Childcare and Preschool, Springfield, stacijo12@yahoo.com
- Su White, Director, Quarry Hill Preschool, Middlebury, suwhite60@gmail.com
- Susan Torncello, Educator Emeritus Faculty, University of Vermont, Burlington, susanvt1028@gmail.com
- Tammie Hazlett, Owner/ Educator, Tammie's Early Care and Education, Thetford Center, tammieabh@gmail.com

Current Core Team Members

- Becky Millard, Director, Northern Lights at CCV, Burlington/Montpelier, becky.millard@ccv.edu
- Beth Wallace, Director of ECE Engagement, VTAEYC, North Bennington, beth.wallace@vtaeyc.org
- Katie Titterton, Consultant, Clear Spot Communications, Richmond, katie@clearspotvt.com
- Kaitlin Northey, Assistant Professor, Education Department, Early Childhood Education Program, University of Vermont (currently on research leave), kaitlin.northey@uvm.edu

- Leslie Johnson, Associate Academic Dean, Community College of Vermont, Winooski, leslie.johnson@ccv.edu
- Maria Estlund, States Policy Coordinator, NAEYC, mestlund@naeyc.org
- Paula Nadeau, ECE Workforce Development Specialist, VTAEYC, Waterbury, paula.nadeau@vtaeyc.org
- Rachel Hunter, Outreach Coordinator, VTAEYC, Springfield, hunner1@gmail.com
- Sharron Harrington, Executive Director, VTAEYC, Arlington, sharron.harrington@vtaeyc.org
- Sherry Carlson, Chief Programs Officer, Let's Grow Kids, Ferrisburgh, sherry@letsgrowkids.org
- Susan Titterton, Project Coordinator, VTAEYC, Elmore, sstitterton@gmail.com

Past Task Force Members

- Alyson Gryzb, Director, Bennington Early Childhood Center, alyruby@gmail.com
- April Zajko, April's Teaching Tree, Saint Johnsbury, aprilzajko@gmail.com
- Stacie Curtis, Director of Early Education, Burlington School District, scurtis@bsdvt.org

Alliance for Early Success

- The Alliance for Early Success is a national nonprofit that works in all 50 states to ensure that every child, birth through age 8, has an equal opportunity to learn, grow, and succeed. The Alliance provides technical assistance to VTAEYC and Let's Grow Kids.
- Point of contact: Albert Wat, Senior Policy Director, awat@earlysuccess.org
- Website: www.earlysuccess.org

Building Bright Futures

- Building Bright Futures is Vermont's public-private partnership for early childhood, as designated by state and federal statute. BBF supports this proposal.
- Point of contact: Morgan Crossman, Executive Director, mcrossman@buildingbrightfutures.org
- Website: www.buildingbrightfutures.org

Let's Grow Kids

- Multiple staff members reviewed this request. Jen Horwitz, Policy & Research Director, is one of the authors of this application and Sherry Carlson, Chief Programs Officer, is a member of the Advancing Core Team. The organization fully supports this proposal.
- Point of contact: Aly Richards, Chief Executive Officer, aly@letsgrowkids.org
- Website: www.letsgrowkids.org

Vermont Association for the Education of Young Children Board of Directors

- The Executive Committee of the Board conducted a review, held a vote, and subsequently recommended to the full Board that they support this request.
- Point of contact: Christina Goodwin, President, christina@thepineforest.org
- Point of contact: Meghan Meszkat, Vice President, meghanmeszkat@gmail.com
- Point of contact: Johanna Vaczy, Past President, vtaeycpastpresident@gmail.com

National Association for the Education of Young Children

- Multiple staff members reviewed this request, and the organization is in favor.
- Michelle Kang, Chief Executive Officer, mkang@naeyc.org
- Website: www.naeyc.org

MBST Solutions

- Mary Beth Salomone Testa is one of the leading experts on family child care in the United States. Mary Beth reviewed and provided feedback on this application and is supportive of the proposal.
- Point of contact: Mary Beth Salomone Testa, Consultant, marybeth@mbstsolutions.com

No Position

Vermont Head Start Collaboration Office

- The Vermont Head Start Collaboration Office reviewed this application and provided feedback.
- Point of contact: Renee Kelly, Director, renee.kelly@vermont.gov

First Children's Finance - Vermont

- First Children's Finance's Vermont office reviewed this application and provided feedback.
- Point of contact: Erin Roche, Vermont State Director, erinr@firstchildrensfinance.org

Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, UC Berkeley

- Staff from CSCCE reviewed this application and provided feedback. CSCCE has also provided technical assistance to the Advancing initiative via Let's Grow Kids for several years.
- Point of contact: Jenna Knight, Research and Policy Associate, jenna.knight@berkeley.edu

Consulted

In Favor

Early Childhood Education Workforce Who Engaged with Advancing Early Childhood Education as a Profession

- 20 Project Ambassadors (contacts available upon request)
- Over 2,000 registrants in sessions about the *Unifying Framework*
- Over 800 survey participants
- Over 650 who have signed "I'm In for the *Unifying Framework*!" pledges

Northern Lights at Community College of Vermont

- Resource Advisors attended a presentation in February 2024
- Point of contact: Becky Millard, Director, becky.millard@ccv.edu

ECE Preparation Pathways Study Group

- The group operated from 2020-2022 and focused on aligning higher education early childhood education preparation programs with the *Unifying Framework*'s professional standards and competencies. [144]
- The study group included representatives from programs that prepare early childhood educators in Vermont, including the Community College of Vermont, Castleton University, Champlain College, Northern Vermont University, Saint Michael's College, and the University of Vermont.

Vermont Early Childhood Education Higher Education Consortium

- Point of contact: Heather Duhamel, Vermont State University Assistant Professor and Program Director ECE Online, heather.duhamel@vermontstate.edu
- Community College of Vermont
    - Dr. Leslie Johnson, Associate Academic Dean, leslie.johnson@ccv.edu
- Springfield College
    - Dr. John Cipora, Assistant Professor of Human Services, njcipora@springfieldcollege.edu
- University of Vermont
    - Dr. Kaitlin Northey, Assistant Professor (currently on research leave), kaitlin.northey@uvm.edu
    - Susan Torncello, Lecturer of Early Childhood Education Emerita, susanvt1028@gmail.com
- Vermont Child Development Division
    - Lynne Robbins, Early Childhood and Afterschool Systems Specialist, lynne.robbins@vermont.gov
- Vermont State University
    - Dr. Richard (Ric) Reardon, Director, School of Education, richard.reardon@vermontstate.edu
    - Dr. Angela Sillars, Assistant Professor, angela.sillars@vermontstate.edu

Commission on Professional Excellence in Early Childhood Education

- Point of contact: Shyrelle Eubanks, Chair-Person, sheubanks@nea.org
- Organizational Members
    - Associate Degree Early Childhood Teacher Educators
    - Child Care Aware of America
    - Child Care Services Association (CCSA), T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood National Center
    - Council for Professional Recognition
    - Division for Early Childhood of the Council for Exceptional Children
    - Early Care and Education Consortium
    - McCormick Center for Early Childhood Leadership
    - National Association for Family Child Care
    - National Association for the Education of Young Children
    - National Association of Early Childhood Teacher Educators

    - National Black Child Development Institute
    - National Education Association
    - National Indian Child Care Association
    - National Workforce Registry Alliance
    - ZERO TO THREE
- Educator Members
    - Cera Alber
    - Bridget Barden
    - Quentin Brown
    - Doris Dupuy
    - Dominique Foster
    - Tamara Johnson
    - Shelly Potter
    - Tessie Ragan
    - LaTonya Sibley
    - Pamela Truelove-Walker
    - Shucrea Victor-Cameron

National Association of Early Childhood Teacher Educators (NAECTE)

- Point of contact: Pamela Evanshen, Past President, evanshep@etsu.edu

No Position

Vermont Early Childhood Action Plan Committees

- Early Learning and Development Committee
    - Point of contact: Sherry Carlson, Chair, sherry@letsgrowkids.org
- Preparation and Professional Development Committee
    - Point of contact: Chairs Becky Millard becky.millard@ccv.edu and Lynne Robbins, lynne.robbins@vermont.gov

Child Development Division, Department for Children and Families, Vermont Agency of Human Services

- Update presentation about this request and discussion with 33 staff members on February 20, 2024. Dawn Rouse, Director of Statewide Systems, reviewed this request.
- Point of contact: Janet McLaughlin, Deputy Commissioner, janet.mclaughlin@vermont.gov

Vermont Afterschool

- The Advancing team has been in regular contact with Vermont Afterschool over the course of the initiative, with the latest conversation taking place in March 2024.
- Point of contact: Nicole Miller, Executive Director, nicole@vermontafterschool.org

Families

- Families throughout the state were consulted on early childhood education professional identity and the distinct role and responsibilities of a potential early childhood education profession.
- Examples of dialogue with families in the Professional Identity Toolkit:[145]
    - Pine Forest Children's Center in Burlington
    - YMCA Early Child Care Program in Burlington
    - Tammie's Early Care and Education Program in Thetford

Raised a Question or Concern

Vermont Agency of Education

- AOE has expressed a concern about terminology—specifically, use of "educator," "early childhood educator," and "licensure" as potentially confusing and duplicative.
- The Advancing team has provided updates to AOE staff over the course of the initiative. The most recent update presentation and discussion was held with 12 staff members in March 2024.
- Point of contact:
    - Meg Porcella, Assistant Director, Student Support Services Division, meg.procella@vermont.gov
    - Andrew Prowten, Assistant Director of Education Quality, andrew.prowten@vermont.gov

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