

# Recognizing Early Childhood Education as a Licensed Profession in Vermont

## Application for Preliminary Sunrise Review Assessment Executive Summary

### Introduction

In 2015, the National Academy of Medicine released [\*Transforming the Workforce for Young Children Birth Through Age 8: A Unifying Foundation\*](#), highlighting the science of early brain development, the central role of early childhood educators in supporting this critical development, and the urgent need to address the fragmented workforce by establishing early childhood education (ECE) as a recognized profession.

In 2020, the national [\*Power to the Profession Task Force\*](#) published a consensus blueprint, the [\*Unifying Framework for the Early Childhood Education Profession\*](#), with recommendations for a national profession based 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.”

Beginning in 2020, VTAEYC’s workforce-led [\*Advancing Early Childhood Education as a Profession\*](#) Task Force engaged in grassroots outreach to the ECE workforce in all regions of Vermont to answer the question: “Will Vermont early childhood educators choose to align with the *Unifying Framework*?” The overwhelming consensus was support for a profession based on recommendations in the *Unifying Framework* for these elements ([\*Sunrise Review Application\*](#) pages 6-7 and [vtaeyc.org](http://vtaeyc.org)):

- [Professional Identity](#): name of the profession, with a distinct role and skilled responsibilities
- [Three Designations](#): Early Childhood Educator I, II, and III
- [Aligned Preparation Pathways](#): preparation program of minimum 120 clock hours (ECE I); associate degree in ECE (ECE II); bachelor’s degree in ECE (ECE III)
- [Professional Compensation](#): comparable to public school, across all age groups, with benefits
- [Professional Licensure](#): individual licensure as an Early Childhood Educator I, II, or III

There have been many important efforts to improve Vermont’s early childhood education system, most recently the passage of [\*Act 76\*](#). Positive returns on this investment rely on the most powerful determinant of high quality—the individuals working with young children and their families. Recognition for early childhood educators as a profession by the State of Vermont is a necessary next step.

### Proposal for Recognition of the Profession Through Licensure

We are proposing that individual educators who hold primary responsibility for the learning and development of young children during the critical years of birth through age 8 be individually licensed by a standalone 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.

# The Case for Recognition of the Profession Through Licensure

## **BENEFITS of establishing a regulated profession** ([Sunrise Review Application](#) pages 26-29):

- **For children and families**
  - Improved outcomes for children: more continuity and ensured high quality experiences
  - Increased equity: greater accessibility and quality across ages, settings, and regions
  - Individual accountability: all educators are well-prepared, accountable professionals
- **For the general public**
  - Businesses: greater program access for the Vermont workforce and their children
  - Businesses: improved child outcomes for the future Vermont workforce
  - Population: attracting young families with greater availability and reliable high quality
- **For the ECE workforce**
  - Sustainable career: increased wages with benefits; increased recruitment and retention
  - Clear pathways: standardized, transferable, stackable credits
  - For program directors and administrators: accessible, transferable, individual data

## **POTENTIAL HARM, if the profession remains unregulated** ([Sunrise Review Application](#) pages 18-25):

- **For children and families**
  - Suboptimal outcomes for children: turnover, inconsistent quality
  - Financial harm to families: inconsistent preparation and quality
  - Lack of individual accountability: little recourse, short of criminal charges
- **For the general public**
  - Diminished outcomes: due to staffing shortages and inconsistent quality
  - Economic harm: due to lack of individual accountability for high-quality practice
- **For the ECE workforce**
  - Financial harm: inadequate compensation, lack of benefits
  - Personal harm: burnout, diminished well-being, inadequate preparation
  - Career pathways: lack of standardized, transferable, stackable credits

## **The NEED FOR REGULATION of this profession** ([Sunrise Review Application](#) page 30):

- Disciplinary actions are tracked at the program level, not the individual level
- Substantial gap between background checks and criminal prosecution
- Without individual licensure, there is no way to revoke a license when necessary
- “Word of mouth” about unprofessional practice is an inequitable and insufficient safeguard
- Young children—infants, toddlers, and preschoolers—are a particularly vulnerable population

## **BENEFITS TO THE PROFESSION from regulation** ([Sunrise Review Application](#) page 45):

- Professional identity and recognition for early childhood educators
- Clear pathways for a career in early childhood education
- Professional compensation befitting high quality practice and bringing financial stability
- Ability to attract and retain qualified early childhood educators for more stable staffing
- A unified profession across a mixed delivery system, settings, age groups, and regions
- Greater accountability making a stronger case for increased public investment

## Frequently Asked Questions

**Q: What is the relationship between the ECE III designation and licensure by the Agency of Education (AOE) as a Vermont Educator with an early childhood education endorsement?**

**A:** The ECE III designation is intended to be compatible and complementary, not duplicative:

- Both rely on [NAEYC Professional Standards and Competencies for Early Childhood Educators](#).
- Educators with an AOE license with an early childhood educator endorsement are already deemed qualified for their work with young children. They would not also need an ECE III license.
- If an AOE-licensed educator wished the option of also holding an ECE III license, the steps for ECE III licensure for that individual should be waived.
- The reverse would not be true. The process for an ECE III to become an AOE-licensed educator would be determined by the AOE and Vermont Standards Board for Professional Educators.
- ECE III is complementary; it extends to a broader population of early childhood educators, increases equity for infants and toddlers, provides recognition for educators in private settings and Head Start, and is part of a national framework for the profession.
- For more, see Sunrise Review Application [pages 9, pages 31-32](#), and VTAEYC explainer document [“The Need for a Comprehensive Range of Licenses to Practice ECE.”](#)

**Q: How will professional licensure work for the current workforce, who have expertise built from years of experience, but may not have the academic credentials proposed for the new profession?**

**A:** Essential to this proposal is a bridge to licensure that honors the current workforce for their diversity, dedication, and experience, and ensures no one is summarily pushed out of the profession, meaning:

- Policies that offer some exemptions and flexible ways to demonstrate competence
- Necessary resources and support
- Qualification requirements phased in over time
- Early childhood educators having a voice in implementation
- For more, see [Sunrise Review Application “Transitional Provisions,”](#) pages 40-42.

## Conclusion

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

## Sources and More Information

[Advancing Early Childhood Education as a Profession](#), [vtaeyc.org](http://vtaeyc.org)

[Sunrise Review Application: Recognizing Early Childhood Education as a Profession in Vermont](#)

[Early Childhood Education Professional Recognition Act](#), Commission on Professional Excellence in ECE

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