



Date: August 12, 2021
To: Members of the Task Force on the Implementation of the Pupil Weighting Factors Report
From: Dr. Morgan Crossman, Executive Director, Building Bright Futures and Dora Levinson, Research and Data Director, Building Bright Futures
Re: Task Force on the Implementation of the Pupil Weighting Factors Report: Prekindergarten Education

My name is Dr. Morgan Crossman, the Executive Director of [Building Bright Futures](#) (BBF) and I'm joined by Dora Levinson, BBF's Research and Data Director. Thank you for the invitation to provide testimony to your Task Force with regard to BBF's role in supporting the success of children, families and the early childhood service system. Today's testimony will include a brief overview of BBF's role and infrastructure, and outline BBF's role in providing evidence and data to inform policy specifically around Universal Prekindergarten Education (UPK).

Building Bright Futures' Role in Vermont's Early Childhood System

BBF is Vermont's early childhood public-private partnership charged under Title 33, Chapter 46 to serve as Vermont's Early Childhood State Advisory Council, the mechanism used to advise the Governor and legislature on the status of children in the prenatal period through age eight 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. BBF is the only organization in Vermont with the infrastructure necessary to adapt to emerging legislative, community, public and private needs, and support the system to address the complex health, education, behavioral health, and safety conditions surrounding all children from the prenatal period to age eight and their families. The BBF infrastructure provides a united vision for Vermont's early childhood system and holds the Vermont Early Childhood Action Plan (VECAP) to achieve it. The infrastructure includes:

- A network of 12 Regional Councils;
- 7 Vermont Early Childhood Action Plan (VECAP) committees upholding and monitoring the Early Childhood vision and strategic plan for Vermont;
- The State Advisory Council (SAC) brings together cross-sector early childhood leaders to issue recommendations, increase coordination to advance a connected and evolving early childhood system, and advise the Governor and Legislature.

The Building Bright Futures State Advisory Council (SAC) does not directly support or oppose any specific proposal or bill. Instead, our role is to provide the most up-to-date, high quality evidence and data to decision-makers and provide recommendations that move the early childhood system toward the 4 goals identified in Vermont's Early Childhood Action Plan



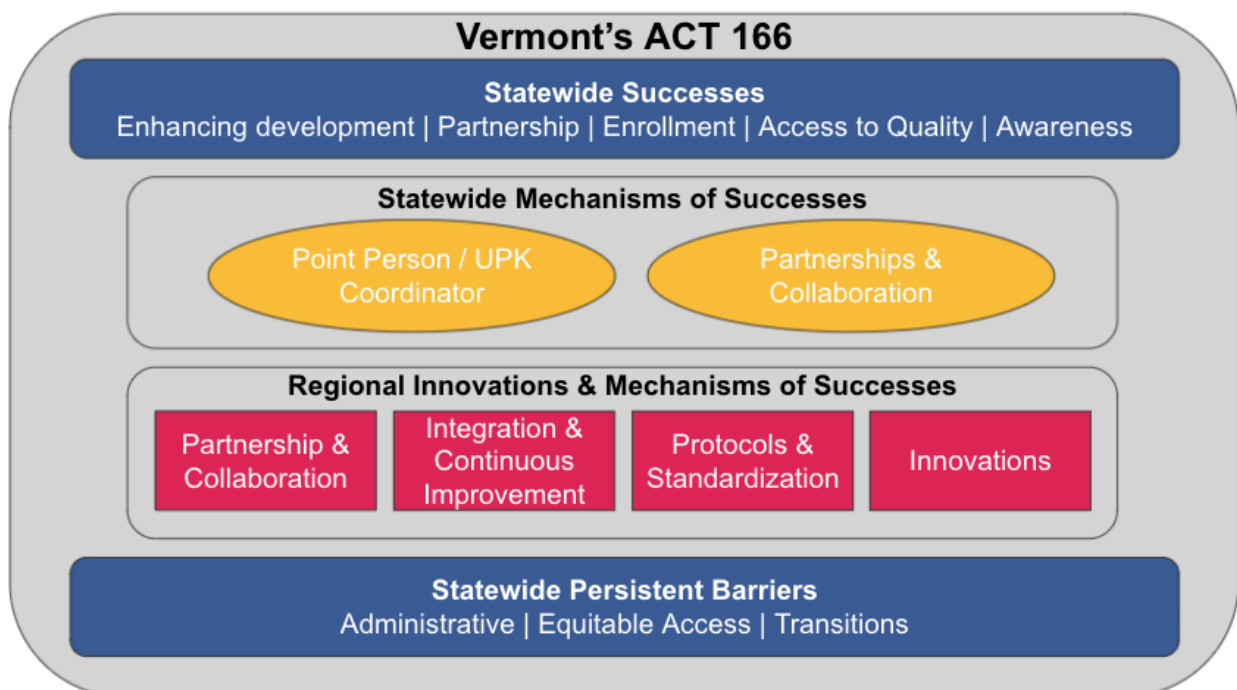
(VECAP). The most recent recommendations can be found [here](#) and in the 2020 How are Vermont’s Young Children and Families Report.

Evidence and Data to Support UPK Policy in Vermont

BBF commits to using evidence and data to support decision-making throughout Vermont’s Early Childhood System. A range of evidence exists to support understanding of Universal Prekindergarten Education outlined below.

BBF’s 2020 UPK Information Gathering Efforts and Findings (February 2020)

In 2019-2020, recognizing the importance of supporting the Legislature and the administration in making key decisions about how to move forward with Act 166, BBF designed a statewide information gathering effort including in-person forums, and an online survey. Information gathered specifically focused on successes since the enactment of Act 166, mechanisms of success, persistent challenges, and ways to improve. Forums were designed to complement the [Prekindergarten Education Study](#) report prepared by the Education Development Center (EDC) and [Early Care and Learning Household Study](#) (also known as the Demand Study). The desired outcome of the information gathering effort was to deepen our understanding of the landscape of Vermont’s UPK administration, implementation, partnerships and systems in order to inform policy and decision makers. **Major findings are shown below in Figure 1, with expanded findings related to equitable access to educational opportunities.** The webinar and full findings can be found here: [BBF’s Universal Prekindergarten \(UPK\) Webinar - February 2020](#)





**Select findings regarding equitable access to educational opportunities and costs*

Equitable Access & Cost

- Regional and local variability both in capacity and program type was identified as a common theme from participants.
- The mandated 10 hours of UPK was discussed throughout the forums as a barrier to families who do not have the resources to pay for additional hours of child care. Scheduling, transportation, and disruptions due to transitions between settings may prevent children from accessing UPK. There was no consensus from participants on the desired number of UPK hours, however, there was agreement that 10 hours was not enough to meet the needs of children.
- Specific sub-groups of the larger population are struggling to access UPK
 - Children with special health care needs, religious affiliations, and residing in families in poverty
- The inconsistent messaging of UPK across the state arose as a barrier to equitable access.
- The costs associated with the requirements of UPK beyond providing high quality early care and education which cannot be covered by the .46 ADM per pupil also arose. These include employing or contracting with a licensed teacher, conducting child development assessments using Teaching Strategies Gold (TSGold) two times per year for each student, and additional administrative tasks for programs and SU/SDs.
- Variation in financial management and pay equity between school based and private programs were named as prominent barriers
- Another challenge identified with Act 166 is the lack of data, prohibiting the ability to truly monitor and evaluate the impact of the program

[Additional Resources to Inform UPK Policy](#)

Regional UPK Variations (Requested by Task Force)

To assist in quantifying the theme of regional variation in access for this Task Force, BBF performed preliminary analysis¹. If requested, formal analysis can be performed in collaboration with the Vermont Agency of Education and the Child Development Division. Analysis revealed that:

¹ Capacity data were pulled from publicly available [Vermont Child Care Provider Data](#) retrieved quarterly from the Bright Futures Information System (BFIS) through the Child Development Division and the most recent (2019) population estimates were pulled from the [Vermont Department of Health](#).



- Capacity of any UPK program varies by county (17%-51%) with approximately 27% fewer regulated slots than the population of 3 and 4 year olds for the state as a whole assuming 100% demand.
- Of UPK capacity, the percent of school based programs compared to private programs also varies by county (20%-74%) with 40% of capacity in school based programs across the state. This is important because while all prequalified prekindergarten programs have the same requirements, there may be differences in additional benefits including expanded hours (full school day vs. 10 hours) and access to early childhood special education.

Vermont’s Early Childhood Needs Assessment

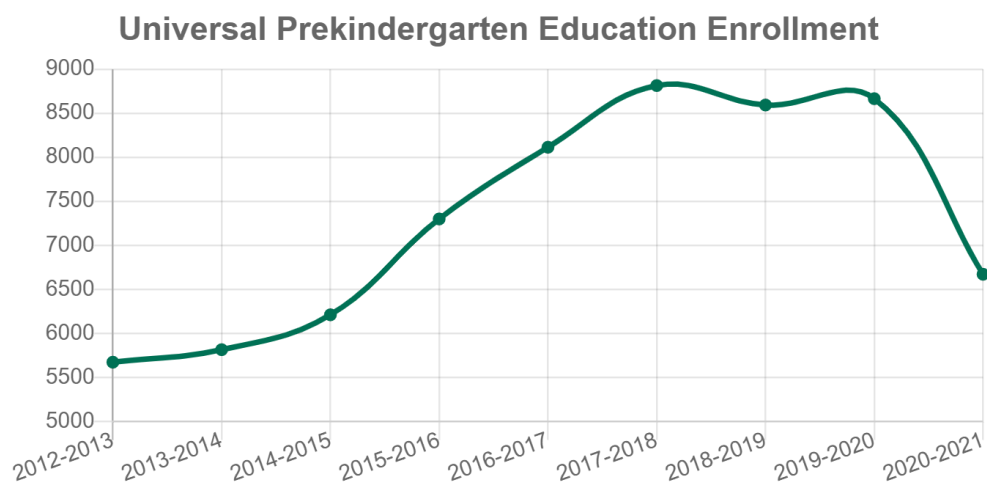
[Vermont’s 2020 Early Childhood Needs Assessment](#) highlighted the conditions of the early care and education system for Vermont’s 35,769 children birth through age 5, examining the strengths and opportunities for the EC system at this critical time. This is an 80-paged resource including a 10-page data gaps table. Page 23 outlines the current state of Vermont’s UPK system.

Vermont’s Early Childhood Resource, Data, and Policy Center

Vermont’s legislature, statewide Early Childhood partners, and the Early Childhood Needs Assessment have repeatedly highlighted the need for data to be centralized, accessible and understandable to inform policy. Building Bright Futures created Vermont’s Early Childhood Resource, Data, and Policy Center to meet this need. The following sections include data and information on UPK:

Data

- [Vermont Early Childhood Action Plan Data Dashboard](#)
- [The number of children enrolled in Universal Prekindergarten Education](#) (Goal 3, Development and Education Outcomes)





- A link to the Vermont Agency of Education's [Enrollment Dashboard](#)
- A link to a UPK [GIS mapping tool developed by AIR](#)

Resources

- [BBF's Universal Prekindergarten \(UPK\) Webinar - February 2020](#)
- [Guiding Principles and Equity Resources](#)

Vermont Specific Publications

- [2019 and 2020 How are Vermont's Young Children and Families Reports - Building Bright Futures](#)
- [Characteristics of Approved Universal Prekindergarten Programs in Vermont in 2018/19](#) - A Publication of the National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance at IES, Regional Educational Laboratory Northeast & Islands At Education Development Center, January 2021
- [Enrollment rates of children in universal prekindergarten programs in Vermont in 2016/17](#) - A Publication of the National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance at IES, Regional Educational Laboratory Northeast & Islands At Education Development Center, January 2020
- [Pupil Weighting Factors Report: Report to the House and Senate Committees on Education, the House Committee on Ways and Means, and the Senate Committee on Finance](#) - Vermont Agency of Education, December 2019
- [Prekindergarten Education Study: Final Report](#) - Vermont Agency of Education, July 2019

National Publications

- [The State of Preschool Yearbook 2020](#) - National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER)
- [Special Report: The COVID-19 Pandemic's Impact on Preschool](#) - National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER)
- [Seven Impacts of the Pandemic on Young Children and their Parents: Initial Findings from NIEER's December 2020 Preschool Learning Activities Survey](#) - National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER)
- [Guide to Support Pre-K Expansion: Ensuring Adequate Resources for Expanding High Quality Pre-K](#): National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER)
- [Universal Pre-K: 5 FAQs](#) - National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER)



Upcoming Initiatives related to UPK

[Vermont's Child Care and Early Childhood Education Systems Analysis](#): The goal of this analysis is to examine systems that govern and administer child care and early childhood education and use this information to make recommendations for Vermont's approaches to improve functionality of services and systems that will promote optimal outcomes for children and families.

The BBF team is honored to serve as a resource to the legislature, families and early childhood partners. BBF is committed to providing the most up-to-date, high-quality information, context, and data to inform decision-making at all times. The BBF team is available to further support the Task Force on the Implementation of the Pupil Weighting Factors Report by addressing additional questions, responding to information and data requests, and making connections with content experts and professionals.

Thank you for continuing to keep children and families at the center of our decision-making.

Sincerely,

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