

# BUILDING VERMONT'S FUTURE FROM THE CHILD UP



12/19/17

Summit Report

This document contains an overview of the collective design studio work of Summit attendees on October 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup>, 2017.

# Building Vermont's Future From The Child Up

## SUMMIT REPORT

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

#### Background

This report provides an overview of Building Bright Future's (BBF) progress thus far in engaging diverse stakeholders in a statewide effort to explore and develop recommendations for a comprehensive integrated early care and learning system. BBF was charged with this task by Vermont's Blue Ribbon Commission on Financing High Quality, Affordable Child Care. The Blue Ribbon Commission recommended that this process should begin early in 2017, take place in a timeline that recognized the urgency of this issue, and conclude in time to deliver proposed legislation to the state legislature no later than January 2019.

#### Summit Process

In order to meet the recommendations of the Blue Ribbon Commission, Building Bright Future's has:

- Partnered with the David L. Cooperrider Center for Appreciative Inquiry at Champlain College to engage statewide, cross-sector stakeholders in a collaborative design process to identify what works best in the current early care and learning system, and how to leverage these strengths toward our future system.
- Conducted interviews with over 300 early childhood stakeholders in every Vermont county to capture their vision for the future of Vermont's early care and learning system.
- Convened over 250 stakeholders at a two-day Building Vermont's Future from the Child Up summit where participants self-selected into "design studios" to flesh out specific aspects of the future system.

#### Summit Design Ideas

Guided by the work of the Blue Ribbon Commission, summit participants considered improvements to our early care and learning system including:

- Implementing affordability
- Early care and learning delivery and capacity building
- Developing and assuring high-quality early care and learning programs for all children and families
- Developing and supporting Vermont's early care and learning workforce
- Coordinating comprehensive/wrap around services
- Identifying system efficiencies
- Financing mechanisms

A full outline of all the design ideas can be found on page seven of this report.

### Recommended Next Steps

1. The ideas generated at the Building Vermont's Future from the Child Up summit provide tangible opportunities for innovation and implementation. However, they don't represent a comprehensive blueprint for our future system, as envisioned by the Blue Ribbon Commission. Further work is needed to synthesize and sequence these ideas, and apply research and policy analysis to determine which ideas would most effectively maximize resources while ensuring high-quality experiences for all Vermont children and families.

BBF will convene a small group of stakeholders with the policy and implementation expertise needed to build on the framework provided by the Summit Report, and develop a refined, comprehensive early care and learning systems blueprint, as charged by the Blue Ribbon Commission. This group would meet in early 2018 and present a draft blueprint in summer of 2018 in order to gather stakeholder feedback before presenting final recommendations to the legislature in 2019.

2. The Blue Ribbon Commission also recommended that Vermont make immediate incremental investments in high-quality, affordable early care and learning. It is critical that action be taken on this recommendation as well. As outlined in the Commission's final report, this includes:
  - Increases and adjustments to Vermont's Child Care Financial Assistance Program (CCFAP)
  - Establishing a child care facilities fund to be maintained by the Vermont Community Loan Fund
  - Supports to strengthen the education and compensation of the early childhood workforce through scholarships and financial incentives
  - Educating employers about ways to support employees in affording quality early care and learning programs

Many of these recommendations from the Blue Ribbon Commission report align with ideas emerging from the Building Vermont's Future from the Child Up Summit.



## Introduction

In 2016, Vermont's Blue Ribbon Commission on Financing High Quality Affordable Child Care recommended that the state make immediate, incremental investments to strengthen Vermont's early care and learning system. The Commission recognized that investing in our youngest children is the key to the long-term wellbeing of Vermont's families, communities, and economy, and that making such an investment would require looking at new opportunities in the way Vermont delivers, funds and governs early care and education.

Building Bright Futures (BBF) – Vermont's early childhood public-private partnership – was tasked by the commission with engaging diverse stakeholders in a statewide effort to explore and develop recommendations for a comprehensive integrated early care and learning system. The Blue Ribbon Commission recommended that this process should begin early in 2017, take place in a timeline that recognized the urgency of this issue, and conclude in time to deliver proposed legislation to the state legislature no later than January 2019. To meet its charge, BBF partnered with the David L. Cooperrider Center for Appreciative Inquiry at Champlain College. Appreciative Inquiry is a strengths-based framework for positive change, growth, and transformation that engages all stakeholders in co-creation of the future. Guided by this framework, BBF engaged statewide, cross-sector stakeholders in a collaborative design process to identify what works best in the current early care and learning system, and how to leverages these strengths toward our future system.

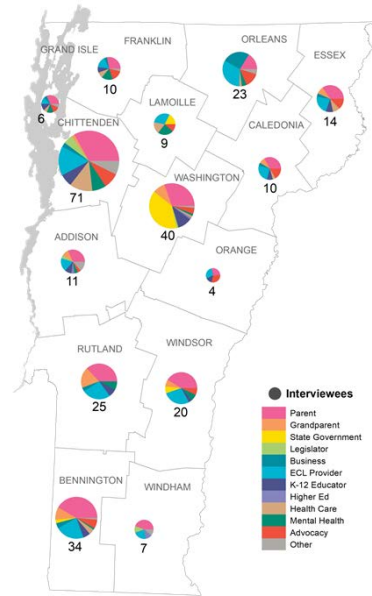
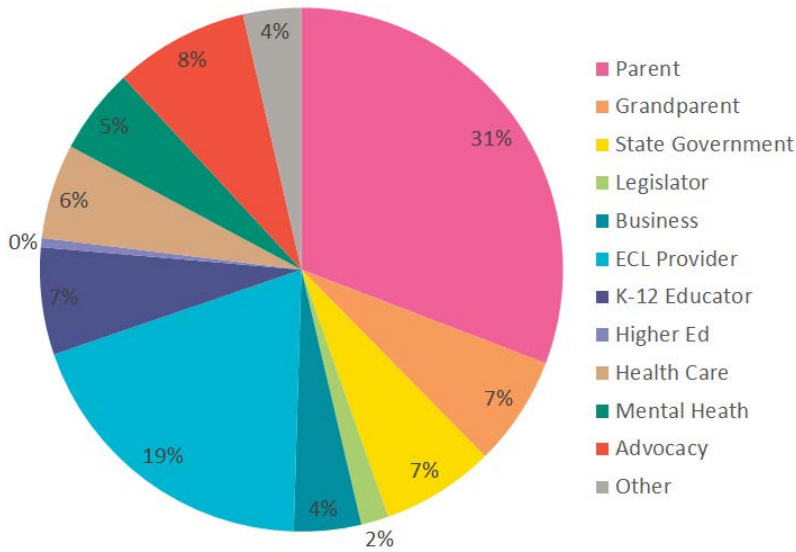
Central to this process was a two-day summit on October 3 and 4, 2017 with over 200 Vermonters participating, representing a wide variety of early childhood sectors.

## Overview of Summit Process

### *Pre-Summit Statewide Outreach*

Recognizing that many early childhood stakeholders would be unable to participate in the two-day summit, BBF engaged in a pre-summit community outreach process in the summer of 2017. BBF partnered with several other early childhood organizations to conduct 94 one-on-one and group interviews with over 300 early childhood stakeholders in every Vermont county. These interviews captured interviewees' vision for the future of Vermont's early care and learning system. Of those interviewed, 31% were parents of children five or under and 19% were early care and learning professionals. Other sectors interviewed include health care, mental health, K-12 educators, and business.

Community Interviews



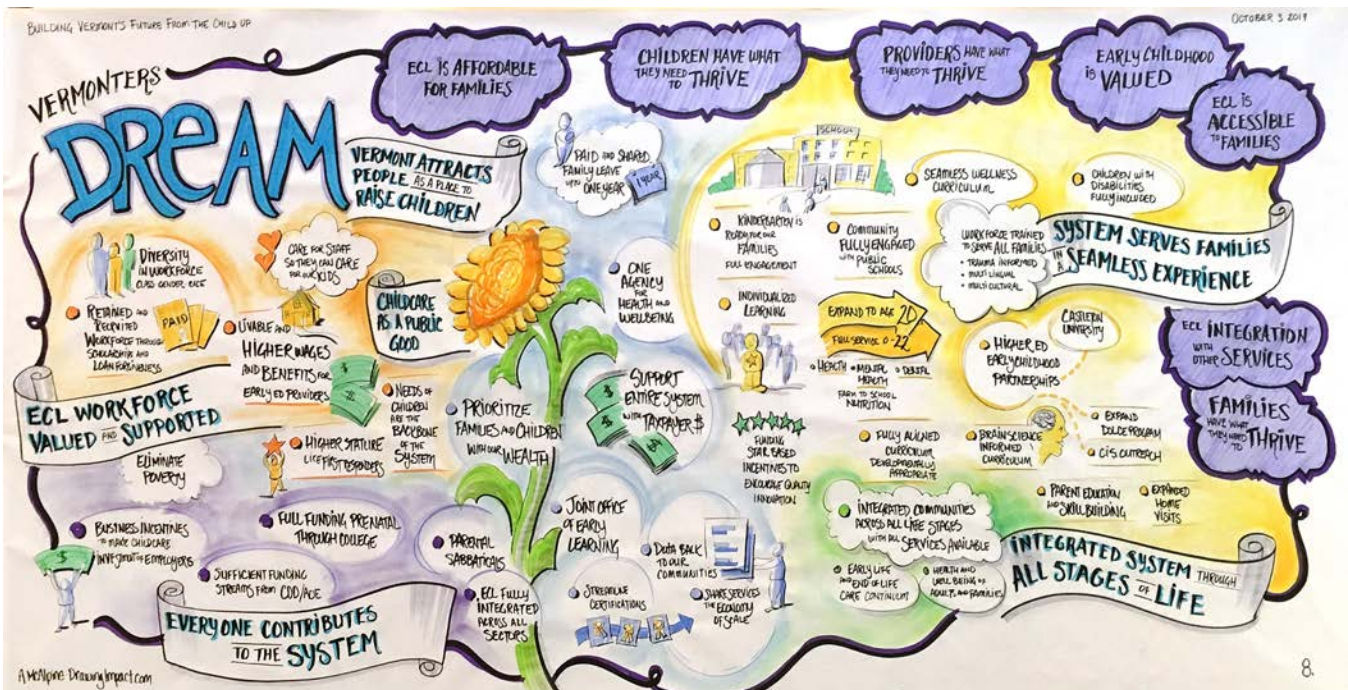
These interviews outlined a vision for a future where early childhood is valued, where children, families, and educators have the support they need to thrive, and where early childhood services are integrated, accessible, and affordable for all.



Graphic illustration by Angelique McApine of Drawing Impact

Summit, Oct 3-4, 2017

This statewide outreach laid the foundation for the two-day summit. On Day One, summit participants spent the morning reflecting on the best aspects of Vermont's current early care and learning system, as well as bright spots from around the nation and the world. Building off the information gathered in pre-summit interviews, summit participants outlined a collective vision of Vermont's early care and learning system ten years from now.



In the afternoon of Day One, and continuing into Day Two, participants self-selected into “design studios” to flesh out specific aspects of the future system. The design studio topics were:

- **Implementing affordability**  
Build from systems and programs currently in place, and consider best practices and innovations from others, to make early care and learning programs more affordable to Vermont families. Considerations could include Child Care Financial Assistance Program (CCFAP), program-offered scholarships, business-supported child care, etc.
- **Early Care and Learning Delivery and Capacity Building**  
Address the current shortage of regulated infant care and toddler care in many communities, as well as the delivery of preschool-aged child care and publicly-funded pre-K. Identify how best to leverage existing resources such as K-12 infrastructure, community buildings, etc. in order to expand capacity and strengthen and support alignment with the K-12 system.
- **Developing and Assuring High-Quality Early Care and Learning Programs for all Children and Families**  
As per the BRC’s quality recommendations, identify the infrastructure and resources that are needed to develop, maintain, and support high-quality early care and learning programs for every child and family in Vermont.

- **Developing and supporting Vermont's ECL workforce**  
The BRC's report recommended several short-term and long-term programs and policies to be implemented to better support Vermont's early care and learning workforce, including how to support individuals to enter into and remain in the workforce.
- **Coordinating comprehensive/wrap around services**  
Consider the many services currently integrated into early care and learning programs and opportunities to strengthen the integration/coordination of comprehensive services, including mental health, dental health, physical health, speech therapy, OT, PT, behavioral support, etc., for children in early care and learning programs.
- **Identify System efficiencies**  
The BRC's report noted opportunities to identify efficiencies within the current early care and learning system, such as exploring the expansion of shared services; identifying IT/data management efficiency opportunities; identifying opportunities for program alignment across community-based and agency-based programmatic structures, etc.
- **Financing mechanisms**  
Consider how to pay for VT's future early care and learning system, building off of the BRC's analysis of the current system's financial inputs and potential funding mechanisms, as well as best practices and financing innovations from others.

At the end of Day Two, each design studio created a deployment document, outlining key aspects of their design, including next steps. The next section of the report outlines the proposals coming out of the design studios.



## Summit Design Ideas

### *Framing*

The descriptions below represent the ideas emerging from summit design studios that will help move Vermont forward in its vision of a future early care and learning system. These ideas reflect that systems-building is complex, ongoing, iterative work where strategies build on one another and are regularly refined and revised in response to changing context and need. They provide opportunity for immediate innovation and implementation, and create a framework for a more comprehensive blueprint for Vermont's early care and learning system.

However, they do not represent a comprehensive system design, as envisioned by the Blue Ribbon Commission. Further work is needed to synthesize and sequence these ideas, as well as more rigorous research and policy analysis to determine which of these ideas would most effectively maximize resources while ensuring high-quality experience for all Vermont children and families.

### *Design Studio Recommendations*

## IMPLEMENTING AFFORDABILITY

Throughout the summit, a bold yet pragmatic vision for the future of early care and learning in Vermont clearly emerged. The vision was captured succinctly by the "Implementing Affordability" design studio:

- Early care and learning for all
  - The new system builds on the intentions, approaches, and structures, of Vermont's universal pre-K system to ensure that all children birth to five have access to high quality early care and learning options through a mixed-delivery system that is publicly funded and includes paid family leave. This universal system would be designed to create savings in program administration that could be reinvested in quality improvement, including increasing the wages and compensation for early care and learning professionals. Funding for this early care and learning system would include a dedicated public revenue stream (ideas include: income tax, lottery, sin tax, plastic bottle returns); an option for employer contribution (employer tax, payroll tax, tax-free employee contributions to be used for child care); and a modest parent tuition on a sliding-scale based on ability to pay.

## EARLY CARE AND LEARNING DELIVERY AND CAPACITY BUILDING

- Early Care and Learning Business Development and Support through Shared Services Hub
  - Building on existing Shared Services pilots in Vermont, centralized hubs should provide "back office" business and administrative supports for early care and learning programs. These hubs would employ skilled professionals such as a business manager, accountant, property manager, etc. as well as a mentor/coach to support all the early care and learning programs connected to the hub. This model could be used to recruit people who are likely to be



interested in early care and learning as a profession, by providing the administrative support they need and making it easier to start a new program. It could also be used to partner with existing service providers that operate 24/7 like hospitals and nursing homes, to provide flexible ECL programming at non-traditional hours.

**OPPORTUNITY FOR INNOVATION:** Supporting many childcare programs through this hub model will require business management software and database development. Vermont should explore how to create new, or build upon existing, IT tools to support shared services.

- Early Care and Learning Capacity Forecasting System
  - Using technology solutions, such as Vermont Insights, and state and regional planning resources, Vermont should establish an early care and learning forecasting model to understand and anticipate regional early care and learning needs and support the strategic deployment of resources accordingly. In such a system, Vermont would leverage robust information about current ECL capacity (which is currently housed in the state's Bright Futures Information System), combined with information on population changes, to develop projections of the future short and long-term needs for early care and learning, compared to how many slots may exist, for each region of the state. This analysis would then inform a statewide strategy to support capacity development or resource allocation in target communities.

**OPPORTUNITY FOR INNOVATION:** One idea coming out of this design studio was that mobile child care classrooms could be developed to deploy to rural areas to provide care for a small 0 – 5 population that wouldn't support a permanent child care program. There is an opportunity to pilot innovative, high-quality, cost-effective delivery for rural populations.

## DEVELOPING AND ASSURING HIGH-QUALITY EARLY CARE AND LEARNING PROGRAMS FOR ALL CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

- Child Health and Safety Systems and Assurances
  - In an effort to improve current health and safety issues and practices in our early childhood system, Vermont should expand on strengths-based technical assistance and shared professional accountability to ensure that all Vermont children receive great care that parents can trust. This would involve building upon data that is already being captured in the licensing process to identify our most urgent health and safety issues. We could build upon existing elements of our system, such as licensing and the M.A.T.C.H. registry to create a strengths-based relationship between licensers, providers, and coaches who can help improve practice related to health and safety. This would include the creation of universal best practice Health and Safety standards, informed by current Head Start, NAEYC, STARS, and licensing standards. Standards around food and nutrition would support the healthy development of all children, along with technical assistance and resources such as Farm to School, Child and Adult Care Food Program, WIC, and SNAP to help every program provide healthy food.

**OPPORTUNITY FOR INNOVATION:** This design studio considered the need to pilot shared, developmentally-appropriate transportation services that support a region, as well as dedicated funds to update child care facilities.

**OPPORTUNITY FOR INNOVATION:** This group envisioned a program/app that would help manage the deployment of technical assistance and training, making it easy and accessible for providers to know how to get quality improvement support.

- ESTEEM (Emotional Supports Through Early Education Methods)
  - All ECL programs and providers should participate in high-quality social and emotional learning (SEL) through a statewide SEL curriculum for providers, combining various best practices and tools, including Early Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (the Pyramid Model) and the Strengthening Families framework. This would be a strategy to address the impacts of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and reduce expulsion in early care and learning programs. The curriculum to train providers to give parents tools for fostering social and emotional learning in homes. Participation in the curriculum would be required through STARS and licensing. Next steps include the creation of committee to develop a comprehensive social and emotional development and learning curriculum, the implementation of that curriculum through the new CCV professional development system and other institutes of higher education, and the creation of coaching teams to support providers in this work.
  
- Vermont Early Childhood Coaching Consortium
  - Many summit design studios highlighted the need for coaching to support excellent ECL providers and programs. Vermont should create a statewide consortium that will provide on-going coaching to teachers and care providers working in the ECL field to raise the quality of early learning experiences. Coaching will be provided by a select group of ECL educators and practitioners. The goals of this coaching include: developing ECL programs that are learning communities involving children, families, teachers, staff, and community members; support teachers in being researchers and co-learners; identifying and implementing best-practices; supporting ACES/trauma-informed practices; and promoting play to extend children's learning. A first step would include the identification of an implementation group to research other successful coaching models.
  
- Every child and families is included and valued
  - Vermont should develop a statewide professional preparation standard around diversity, equity, and inclusion, building on our state's Guiding Principles, to ensure that our early childhood workforce is prepared to serve all families, keeping in mind future US demographic trends (race, gender, socio-economic status, gender, sexual orientation, religion, etc.). It also identifies the need for curriculum, and community and family engagement that are inclusive and multicultural. Currently, many VT ECL programs are reactive to meeting the needs of diverse families (cultural, linguistic, etc.) who enroll. The intention of this prototype is proactive preparation. The goal of this work is to create an ECL system in which every child and family

is included and valued within their community (classroom, program, neighborhood, town, region, etc.).

## BUILDING AND SUPPORTING VERMONT'S ECL WORKFORCE

- Support Early Childhood Professional Pathways and Compensation
  - Vermont should establish the financial and structural supports needed to develop and retain high quality early childhood professionals. This includes dedicated scholarships, grants, and flexible pathways to early childhood degrees and certificates. It would also include loan forgiveness for people committing to work in early childhood programs in Vermont. We also need a system that creates wage and compensation parity between early childhood providers and public school employees. T.E.A.C.H should be expanded as an innovative and nationally-tested model for supporting scholarships and degree attainment. Vermont should also implement Child Care WAGE\$, a related national model that awards salary supplements based on incremental educational accomplishments and continuity of care. WAGE\$ would be a short term strategy while working toward a funding mechanism that allows for pay parity.
  
- Explore Power to the Profession
  - Vermont should engage in a national conversations around organizing ECL educators into a recognized, respected, valued, and well-resourced profession gathered around a shared noble purpose. This would include the creation of scopes of practice, accountability structures, and professional competencies are designed to ensure high standards are met. It builds off current regulations for higher professional standards and the work of other professionalized sectors (doctors, nurses, etc.). As a recognized profession, subsidies and public investments would potentially increase, supporting affordability for families and fair compensation for early childhood professionals. The next step for this work is to engage the early childhood workforce in intentional conversations about the interest and readiness to professionalize.
  
- Develop a statewide calendar for B-G12 in Vermont
  - In order to align professional development across the full birth to age eight continuum, and support quality of life of early childhood educators and Vermont families, a statewide calendar should be adopted across all state-regulated programs (ECL and PreK-12) to synchronize in-service days, vacation days, holidays, and professional development. By having standardized, set days for in-service, weekend and evening professional development needs for ECL providers will be reduced. This would allow for better alignment between 0 – 5 and K – 12 educators, and better unifying of professional development systems. It would also support staff retention by reducing burnout and creating better work-life balance.

## COORDINATING COMPREHENSIVE SERVICES

- Addressing family well-being at each early care and learning program
  - Communities coordinate the delivery of comprehensive, wrap-around services where the child is, at early care and learning programs. This would include a navigator at each program to

help connect families to services, as well as consultative services (OT, PT, ST, mental health) delivered in the program. This would be funded through unrestricted bundled payments that would allow programs and community service providers to do more with less.

- An emergent idea across multiple design teams-- the “one-stop shop” or “hub model.”
  - Communities recognize the need for greater connection, destigmatizing of services, and efficiency of resource provision. By establishing neutral community centers-- with wrap around community services-- children, families, and elders can connect with each other while meeting their needs. These community hubs can be as small as a converted one room school house, or integrated with a regional hospital, but are sited and situated by the communities they serve. Each hub offers early care and learning, healthy food and activities, preventative health care, and connects families and community members with one another. It also connects to other early care and learning providers in the community. By providing each of the Strengthening Families-Protective Factors in one location-- communities strengthen each other as well as their ties to the hub. Through economies of scale, hubs provide specialized service providers at a single comfortable location.

## IDENTIFYING SYSTEM EFFICIENCIES

- Integrate Services
  - A vision of “no wrong door” or a seamless system for families, is embraced by administrators and families alike. In this vision for an integrated system for families, prenatal to age 22, administrators will ensure that efficient systems are in place to support children, youth, and families, working in concert to support their health growth, development, and education. In addition, by assigning a case manager to families for ages birth to 22, to be a systems navigator and utilizing a shared database, providers will ensure that there are no cliffs, cutoff points, or transfers, for families in social service programs. By utilizing both shared data, and a navigator, families should experience a seamless system, where services are geared towards whole client populations, rather than funding streams or service systems. Additionally, the navigators and comprehensive data systems should illuminate further opportunities for internal systems alignment as they will each have a broad, un-siloed view. Central to this vision of efficient systems is promoting shared services in child care programs, and supporting shared services infrastructure at the state level.

## FINANCING THE FUTURE ECL SYSTEM

- Per-child payments to highly-qualified providers through the ACO model
  - As Vermont's health care system moves from fee-for-service to paying for outcomes, health care dollars should systematically and sustainably fund high quality affordable child care as a prevention strategy for improved population health. This could be achieved through a per-child payment from an ACO to child care providers who are qualified and credentialed. The success of such a funding model is dependent on other innovations and system changes

including: Shared services, integrating services in child care settings as a one-stop shop for services, and establishing a highly-qualified and compensated workforce. The model must include built in outcome measures to show health care savings, either directly or by proxy. Next steps include identifying a group to be charge with implementation, outreach and engagement with an ACO, and identifying a possible location for a pilot.

- Establish an early care and learning fund within the Vermont budget
  - As states have worked to strengthen their child care and early learning systems, many have established specific funds within their budgets to finance their early care and learning systems. This approach mirrors how Vermont currently operates a dedicated education fund that supports the operation of Vermont's public education system. Such an early care and learning fund could be financed through existing early care and learning revenue streams as well as through new mechanisms including a sugar-sweetened beverage tax (currently used in Philadelphia and several other locations to finance early learning programs), a tax on beer purchased at retailers for consumption at home, and, if the distribution and sale of marijuana is legalized, tax revenue from such a system.



**Other considerations**

Several other ideas emerged throughout the summit that fell outside the scope of the Blue Ribbon Commission's charge, but provide an opportunity for high-level reflection beyond the early care and learning system:

- The critical importance of Paid Family Leave as one piece of the puzzle for how we support families and provide care for infants in Vermont.
- The need to streamline and integrate governance, including combining the Agency of Human Services and the Agency of Education, or creating a new Agency of Children, Youth, and Families.
- Integrating community services to foster greater connection, destigmatize services, and efficiently provide resources.
- The opportunity to look at our cradle to career delivery system broadly and consider transformative changes that would allow for more investment in the younger years.
- The value of tuition free college for all in supporting Vermont's early childhood workforce.



## Next Steps

### *Meeting Building Bright Futures' charge from the Blue Ribbon Commission*

The ideas generated at the Building Vermont's Future from the Child Up summit provide tangible opportunities for next steps and implementation. Existing organizations and groups, including BBF Action Plan Committees, are already taking up ideas generated at the summit for further research, pilot development, and exploration of programs that could be scaled up.

However, as mentioned above, more rigorous research and policy analysis is needed to determine which of these ideas would most effectively maximize resources while ensuring high-quality experience for all Vermont children and families, in order to develop recommendations for a comprehensive integrated early care and learning system.

BBF will convene a small group of stakeholders with the policy and implementation expertise needed to build on the framework provided by this Summit Report, and develop a refined, comprehensive early care and learning systems blueprint, as charged by the Blue Ribbon Commission.

This group would meet in early 2018 and present a draft blueprint in summer of 2018 in order to gather stakeholder feedback before presenting a final proposal to the legislature in 2019.

### *Making immediate incremental investments in high quality, affordable, early care and learning*

Building Bright Futures has made significant progress toward meeting its recommendation from the Blue Ribbon Commission on Financing High Quality, Affordable Child Care. The Commission also recommended that Vermont make immediate incremental investments in high-quality, affordable early care and learning. It is critical that action be taken on this recommendation as well. As outlined in the Blue Ribbon Commission's final report, this recommendation includes:

- Increases and adjustments to Vermont's Child Care Financial Assistance Program (CCFAP)
- Establishing a child care facilities fund to be maintained by the Vermont Community Loan Fund
- Supports to strengthen the education and compensation of the early childhood workforce through scholarships and financial incentives
- Educating employers about ways to support employees in affording quality early care and learning programs

Many of these recommendations from the Blue Ribbon Commission report align with ideas emerging from the Building Vermont's Future from the Child Up Summit.

The entire Blue Ribbon Commission Report, including more information on the specifics of the above recommendations can be found at <http://buildingbrightfutures.org/blue-ribbon-commission/>.