



Vermont Association for the
Education of Young Children

Advancing Early Childhood Education as a Recognized Profession

Three Designations with Aligned Preparation Pathways
Consensus Document
April 2021

I. INTRODUCTION

In Fall 2019, VTAIEYC formed a Task Force of early childhood educators (See P. 11) to lead the exploration of advancing early childhood education (ECE) as a profession. The focus was on NAEYC's [Power to the Profession](#), a national collaboration that has defined the ECE profession by establishing a unifying framework for career pathways, knowledge and competencies, qualifications, standards and compensation. The Task Force charge was to learn: "To what extent might Vermont choose to align with Power to the Profession's unifying framework?"

This [Unifying Framework for the Early Childhood Education Profession](#) is the basis for Vermont's initiative because:

- It is research-based.
- It proposes a national profession, resulting in equity, consistency and portability.
- It emphasizes the profession itself taking the lead: "The Power to the Profession effort was established to lift up your voices, your experiences, and your expertise—and we could not have done this work without each and every one of you. We are counting on you to continue building, evolving, and improving on this work in the years, legislative sessions, and administrations to come. We know you will always bring power to this incredible profession." – *Unifying Framework* P. 38

The VTAIEYC Task Force process invites broad engagement from Vermont's ECE workforce. Consensus, in which varying perspectives are heard and understood in reaching an agreement, is central to moving forward.

1. The Task Force studies a part of the *Unifying Framework* and creates a Discussion Draft.
2. Members of the ECE workforce participate in a presentation about the Discussion Draft, engage in conversation, and provide informed feedback through a survey.
3. The Task Force studies workforce feedback, notes themes, makes any revisions, and creates a Consensus Document.
4. The Task Force returns to step 1 and studies the next part of the Unifying Framework.

The Task Force's timeline includes:

2019-[Discussion Draft: Professional Identity](#)

2020-[Consensus Document: Professional Identity](#)

2020-[Discussion Draft: Three Designations with Aligned Preparation Pathways](#)

This Consensus Document: *Three Designations with Aligned Preparation Pathways*

Currently-[Discussion Draft: Professional Compensation](#)

Next-Consensus Document: Professional Compensation

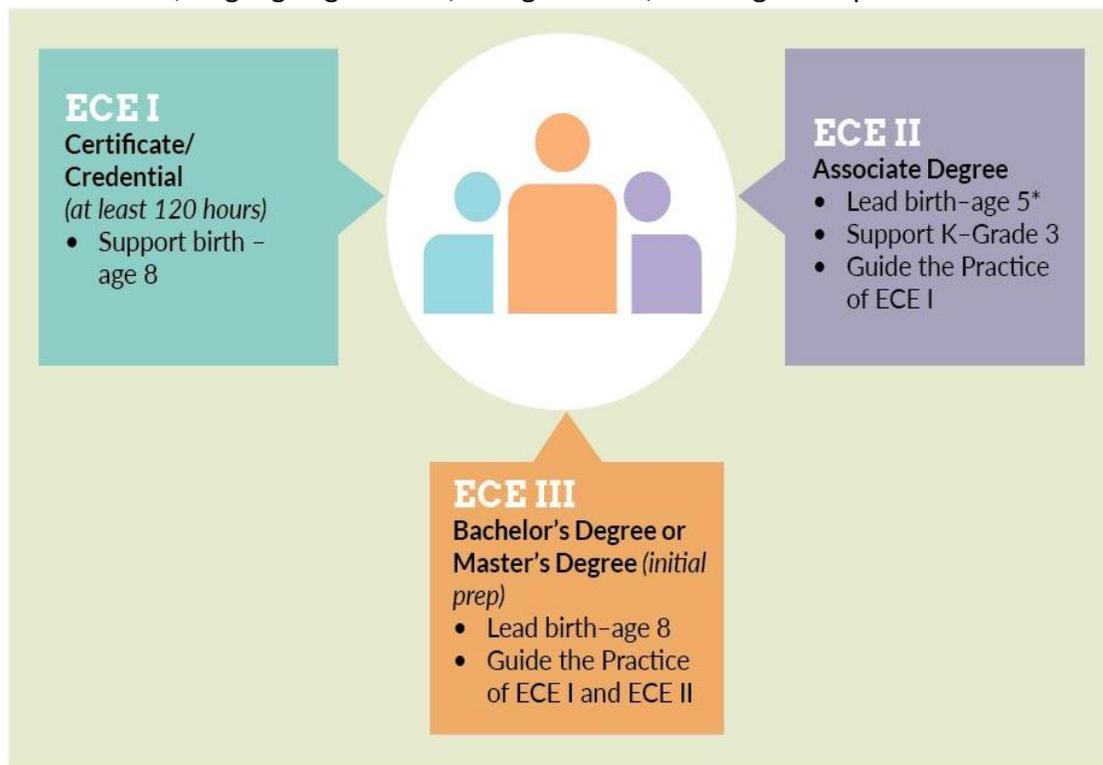
Next-Discussion Draft: Necessary Supports

2022-Consensus Document: Necessary Supports

In the Discussion Draft upon which this Consensus Document is based, the Task Force described the *Unifying Framework* recommendations for one profession, Early Childhood Education, with three distinct designations. (See chart below) In addition, the Task Force expressed the importance of *Unifying Framework* recommendations for:

- Phased-in implementation
- Short-term exemption policies and flexible ways for the existing workforce to demonstrate competencies
- The profession itself taking the lead in defining what supports are needed

This Discussion Document is the basis of professional development sessions and follow-up surveys offered to the ECE workforce throughout Vermont - to provide information on the recommendations, to gauge agreement/ disagreement, and to gather questions and concerns.



* In states with state-funded preK programs provided in mixed-delivery settings and explicitly aligned with the K-12 public school system, ECE III plays a lead role and ECE II plays a support educator role.

II. WORKFORCE OUTREACH

Do we have credible results?

To have confidence in what the Task Force heard from the workforce on these recommendations, we must answer two key questions:

- Did we engage enough of the workforce in presentations and conversations?
- Did we gather enough workforce responses to the survey?

Presentations & Conversations

Between October 2020-February 2021, online, real-time professional development sessions were provided to 13 groups, ranging in number from 12 to 60 participants. Each session began with a presentation, followed by structured, small-group conversations. A total of 318 members of the ECE workforce participated. Following each conversation, the facilitator summarized the group's feedback on the recommendations and those summaries were analyzed for themes.

We can have confidence that we engaged enough of the workforce because:

- Outreach efforts through newsletters, social media, flyers and personal approach ensured the members of the ECE workforce had the opportunity to participate.
- Some PD sessions were open to participants from around the state, while others were tailored to fit into staff meetings of center-based programs.
- Conversation participants were well-distributed across key roles - teachers, directors and family child care providers.
- Facilitator summaries showed consistent results across groups; it is unlikely that larger numbers would have changed the feedback.

We do note the impact COVID-19 challenges had on workforce capacity to engage in PD sessions during this time frame. Despite energetic outreach efforts, workforce numbers were lower than for "Professional Identity." In contrast, as the next round of outreach on "Professional Compensation" has begun, workforce response is tremendous, with 20 sessions scheduled from March to May. Clearly, interest in this work continues and is growing.

Follow-Up Survey

The survey was distributed to everyone who participated in professional development sessions. In addition, a 15-minute video, including a brief overview of the presentation with attached survey, was made available through e-newsletters and on VTAEYC's website, so that those who might not have been able to attend a PD session could be informed and complete the survey. In all, 203 members of the workforce responded to the survey.

We can have confidence that we gathered enough response to the survey because:

- There was a very robust 64% response rate from PD session participants.
- There was a good representation of roles, education and experience. (See Appendix A)
- Responses were consistent within and across subgroups.

One limitation is, despite targeted outreach efforts, the low participation rate of those who work in public school settings. In the next round of workforce outreach, we are exploring the use of a focused group strategy to increase engagement and get feedback from that subgroup.

III. WORKFORCE FEEDBACK ON RECOMMENDATIONS

Do respondents support the recommendations from the *Unifying Framework*?

There appears to be broad support for the recommendations, based on the following:

- The percentage of respondents who “agree” (strongly or somewhat) with survey items ranges from 91% to 98%.
- The percentage who “disagree” (strongly or somewhat) ranges from 2% to 9%.
- Analysis of subgroup differences – by role, education, and experience – shows similar results to the total picture. While there were small differences, a large majority of each subgroup agreed with the survey items.
- Many survey respondents added comments elaborating on their agreement.

SURVEY QUESTIONS

**“To what extent do you agree/disagree
with each the following from the *Unifying Framework?*”**

Q8: Three designations - Early Childhood Educator I, Early Childhood Educator II, and Early Childhood Educator III

Agree:	98%	Strongly 54% + Somewhat 44%
Disagree:	2%	Strongly <1% + Somewhat 2%

Q9: These professionals will be prepared to work as part of a teaching team, with unique roles & responsibilities, including a support role, a lead role, and a role to guide the practice of others.

Agree:	96%	Strongly 56% + Somewhat 40%
Disagree:	4%	Strongly 2% + Somewhat 2%

Q10: Compensation and responsibilities will increase as individuals increase the depth and scope of their expertise, regardless of the setting of their job.

Agree:	96%	Strongly 66% + Somewhat 30%
Disagree:	4%	Strongly 1% + Somewhat 3%

Q11: Aligned preparation pathways: each must be in a recognized program in early childhood education. ECE I - 120 clock hours; ECE II - Associate degree; ECE III - Bachelor's degree (or initial Master's degree)

Agree:	91%	Strongly 44% + Somewhat 47%
Disagree:	9%	Strongly 1% + Somewhat 8%

Q12: These aligned preparation pathways must include work to eliminate barriers to higher education and to encourage innovative models that maintain a commitment to quality.

Agree:	95%	Strongly 70% + Somewhat 25%
Disagree:	5%	Strongly 1% + Somewhat 4%

Q13: Getting from where we are to where we want to go requires a bridge that embraces the future workforce and honors the existing workforce.

Agree:	98%	Strongly 74% + Somewhat 24%
Disagree:	2%	Strongly 1% + Somewhat 1%

Q14: As we advocate for the Unifying Framework, we also commit to advocating for:

- 1) Funding for necessary supports & increased compensation
- 2) Realistic implementation timelines that recognize the challenges faced by the existing workforce
- 3) Implementation plans & timelines that recognize the particular challenges that family child care and other community-based providers face

Agree:	98%	Strongly 75% + Somewhat 23%
Disagree:	2%	Strongly 1% + Somewhat 1%

**ANALYSIS - Subgroup Differences
(See Appendix B for more)**

- **Role:** “Agree” (strongly or somewhat) across the different survey questions ranged from 88%-97% for family child care providers and 90%-100% for center-based providers.
- **Education:** “Agree” (strongly or somewhat) across the different survey questions ranged from 87%-100% across all levels of education.
- **Experience:** “Agree” (strongly or somewhat) across the different survey questions ranges from 82%-100% across all years of experience.

SAMPLING OF COMMENTS – “Agree”

- Designations are clear, and each is a step to the next.
- Education is very important.
- Things align well.
- It will be easier for those entering the profession.
- You’ll know where you are and how to grow.
- If we are unified and seen as the same in one state as another there would be more people in the profession and more pay.
- Having the roles of each title clearly established makes it easier for teachers to see the difference and understand that regardless of where they stand they are valued.
- There needs to be compensation for the educational accomplishments of those who have committed themselves to the field
- Just like the nursing profession or any other recognized profession, training is a must.
- This seems attainable for most.
- I'm excited that there will be consistency in professional development and criteria.
- A bridge is a perfect image of what needs to happen to get to where we want to be. We cannot get there without acknowledging where we are today and providing support along the way to get to where we ultimately want to be.
- We should be able to accomplish all of this within the next few years, that way those who are already well into their field and education can be compensated and appreciated the way they deserve.
- I applaud the work that has been done and hope the proposed model becomes the norm.
- Be kind. Recognize that what we are asking is hard, and help people to get there.

What questions and concerns are raised most often about the recommendations?

The Task Force analyzed survey comments to understand what questions and concerns respondents have, even as they express support for the recommendations. The top three concerns with a sampling of comments are these:

1. How will the **EXPERIENCE** of the existing workforce be valued?

- We don't want to lose anyone or push people out; we want to grow capacity.
- Years of experience and professional development should count.
- I don't want to be "knocked back" from where I am now.
- What about those who got their degrees in other fields?
- Experience is at least as important as formal education, maybe more so.
- How will it impact the desire of the current workforce to stay, if they have to do the work over again to get where they are now?
- Will there be an exemption policy for those with years of experience? What will the "bridge" look like?

2. How will the particular challenges faced by **FAMILY CHILD CARE PROVIDERS** be addressed?

- How does a provider who works alone fit with the support and lead roles in the three designations?
- Given the time, energy and finances of running a family child care program, how can they meet new educational requirements?
- (Many questions and concerns were the same ones listed under EXPERIENCE.)

3. Should there be **ADDITIONAL DESIGNATIONS**?

- What about a pre-ECE I, or "pipeline?"
- It seems like a big leap from 120 clock hours to an Associate degree.
- Is there room to grow beyond ECE III?
- What about people who earn specialized credentials?
- How will this connect with our Career Ladder?

The Task Force went back to the source document, the *Unifying Framework*, to learn what guidance it provides on these concerns and questions. That guidance is shared in boxes below. In addition, there is a message below from the Task Force that speaks to each area of concern. We also reference these concerns in Task Force recommendations for next steps.

1. EXPERIENCE

Guidance from the *Unifying Framework*

“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 that they are not summarily pushed out of the profession. We need policies that exempt some current educators, as well as policies that offer flexible approaches 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.” - P. 5-6

“In addition, this framework recognizes the meaningful, valuable, and necessary places in our profession for educators who have acquired their competencies through such opportunities as a CDA credential or non-early childhood education degrees and training, as well as for those who have gained deep knowledge and expertise through experience.” - P. 27

Message from the Task Force

We hear your concern about experience. We, on the Task Force, are your colleagues in the workforce doing the same important work you do. We know that experience working with young children and their families matters, as does professional development over the years. As the “bridge” to the three designations is built for our existing workforce, knowledge and expertise must be acknowledged and honored. In our reading of the *Unifying Framework*, we have confidence that valuing the experience of the existing workforce is the intent of what is being recommended.

2. FAMILY CHILD CARE PROVIDERS

Guidance from the *Unifying Framework*

“We will not advocate for new regulations or requirements for early childhood educators without advocating for implementation plans and timelines that recognize the particular challenges that family child care and other community-based providers face, so as not to contribute to or worsen their widespread decline.” – P. 5

“Educators must have access to release time to take courses and complete required field experiences, as well as conditions that support their well-being and the implementation of effective practice. This must include taking into consideration the additional burden of costs, time, and location of coursework for family child care and small business owners who may already be fulfilling multiple roles in their work settings.” P. 23

“Some early childhood educators are self-employed, such as those working in family child care or small independent settings. In these cases, the early childhood educator serves as both the employer and the early childhood educator in ensuring the early learning setting is optimal for meeting the responsibilities of the profession. Family child care and self-employed early childhood educators may benefit from additional supports such as peer learning networks or innovations in supervision. These innovations and other revised and realigned structures and specializations will also be necessary to support educators working in family child care who are working non-traditional hours to support working families and serving children in mixed age groups, including those older than 8, often during out-of-school time hours.” - P. 30

Message from the Task Force

Some of us on the Task Force work in family child care home settings. All of us believe that early childhood educators in home-based settings deserve consideration. These educators bring unique gifts, deep knowledge and expertise and they have unique challenges and barriers. The standards may be the same, but the approach to get there may differ. This is about taking down barriers and placing supports. We see this commitment reflected in the *Unifying Framework* and believe that the new system will lead to a lasting change -- for a new, respected, valued, stable profession, not a change every three years.

ADDITIONAL DESIGNATIONS

Guidance from the *Unifying Framework*

“The current early childhood education field is fragmented across multiple dimensions, including age band, setting, role, state, and funding stream. This *Unifying Framework* creates a structure that lessens that fragmentation and, where it continues to exist, makes it increasingly intentional and responsive to existing strengths, research, and requirements. As such, within this first edition of the *Unifying Framework*, and with a focus on the “educator” circle, we recommend a structure in which the cacophony of labels and roles is reduced to three distinct and meaningful designations.” – P. 13

“Because the *Unifying Framework* has established three designations of early childhood educators within the profession, it is also critical to clearly establish the depth and breadth of the competencies required at these different designations. The leveling of the competencies so that they are aligned with the ECE I, ECE II, and ECE III scopes of practice aims to provide transparency and clarity—for families, educators, professional preparation providers, and policymakers—about what skills, knowledge, and expertise any given early childhood educator should possess and be able to demonstrate in any given role and what kinds of outcomes they can therefore be held accountable for achieving.” – P. 19

“Compensation will increase commensurate with increased preparation and increased competency. The simplified structure of ECE I, II, and III establishes the foundation for a stable wage growth trajectory that parallels professional advancement.” – P.23

Response from Task Force

The *Unifying Framework* structures the three designations to be built upon the Professional Standards & Competencies, which have three levels of increasing breadth and depth, aligned with the three designations. In addition, the three professional preparation pathways, each with its own credential, are aligned with the three designations. We believe that adding more professional designations would undo that alignment, the benefits of which are less fragmentation, a unified national profession, and clear professional development pathways.

We acknowledge the “pipeline” concern given the need to attract more individuals to a career in early childhood education. We note that programs in Vermont already hire “trainees” and assist in their career development. While these individuals are not yet qualified to be part of the profession, it seems important to have that pipeline and their career development align seamlessly with ECE I, to ease their way in becoming qualified to enter the profession.

IV. SUMMARY

Based on workforce feedback, the Task Force concludes the consensus is as follows:

1. Support for the **three designations**
 - a. ECE I, II, and III (98%)
 - b. Prepared to work as a team with specific roles to support, lead, guide (96%)
 - c. With compensation and responsibilities increasing as expertise increases (96%)

2. Support for the **aligned ECE preparation pathways**
 - a. 120 clock hours (e.g. CDA), Associate degree, Bachelor’s degree (91%)
 - b. Eliminating barriers to higher education, encouraging innovative programs (95%)

3. Support for the **implementation commitments**
 - a. A “bridge” that honors the existing workforce (98%)
 - b. Funding for supports and for compensation, realistic implementation timelines, recognition of the particular challenges family child care providers and other community-based programs face (98%)

4. Key **questions and concerns** must be addressed
 - a. The important role of experience in determining a designation
 - b. Support for the particular challenges faced by family child care providers
 - c. Along with the three designations, a plan for a “pipeline” and also a plan for how ongoing professional development and expertise will be recognized

The Task Force believes that sustaining workforce support for recommendations around “Three Designations with Aligned Preparation Pathways” will depend on how everything unfolds. Beyond the words of this Consensus Document, planning and the details will matter going forward. The Task Force recommends the following:

- a. To be workforce-led, the voices of the current ECE workforce must be central in implementation design, so that their questions and concerns inform planning.
- b. Design work should begin soon on the “bridge that embraces the future workforce and honors the existing workforce,” to bring clarity to those words.
- c. As an exemption policy is developed, it must factor in the experience and professional growth of the existing workforce in assessing competency and determining professional designation.
- d. Respondents in various roles express concern about how family child care providers will fit in the new system, suggesting a valuing of Vermont’s mixed delivery system. Family child care providers should be tapped for their knowledge about helpful supports for moving forward.
- e. In considering additional aspects to the three designations, Vermont should access guidance from NAEYC and also look at what other states are doing, to ensure alignment as a national profession.

VTAEYC Advancing as a Profession Task Force Members

We unanimously support this Consensus Document.

1. Alyson Gryzb Director, Bennington Early Childhood Center

2. April Zajko Early Childhood Consultant, St. Johnsbury
3. Christina Goodwin Director, Pine Forest Children's Center, Burlington
4. Jen Olson Preschool Teacher, Wren's Nest Forest Preschool, New Haven
5. Kelly Hayes Owner/Director, Learning Garden, Moretown
6. Kim Freeman Early Childhood Education Instructor, Windham Regional Career Center
7. Laura Butler Owner, Imagination Island Child Care, Milton
8. Meghan Meszkat Interim Director, Early Education, Southwestern VT SU, Bennington
9. Staci Otis Owner, Little Allstars Child Care & Preschool, Springfield
10. Stacie Curtis Director of Early Education, Burlington School District
11. Su White Teacher Director, Quarry Hill School, Middlebury
12. Susan Torncello Faculty, Early Childhood Education, UVM, Burlington
13. Tammie Hazlett Family Child Care Provider, Thetford

APPENDIX A – SUBGROUPS

ROLES

Teacher/ licensed teacher/lead teacher	22%
Assistant/ associate teacher	21%
Program director/ administrator	25%
*Family child care provider/ teacher/ owner	18%
Other roles	14%

*Family child care providers are over-represented in the survey

Total FCCP in workforce (LGK estimate): 470 (7.83%)

Total FCCP who responded to survey: 36 (18%)

YEARS OF EXPERIENCE

less than 4	16%
5-10	15%
11-16	20%
17-22	17%
23-28	10%
28-33	12%
more than 33	10%

SETTINGS

Center-based program (not public school)	60%
Family childcare home-based program	19%
Head Start program	10%
**Public school-based program	3%
Other	8%

**Public school-based workforce are under-represented in the survey; additional outreach strategies are planned, going forward

HIGHEST LEVEL OF EDUCATION COMPLETED

High school or GED	10%
Fundamentals	4%
CDA	6%
Apprenticeship	7%
Associate's degree	16%
Bachelor's degree	35%
Master's degree	14%
Beyond Master's degree	5%
Other	3%

APPENDIX B – Sub-group comparisons**Family Child Care Providers & Center-Based Child Care Providers - % “Agree”**

QUESTION	FCCP	CBCCP
8. 3 Designations	97%	98%
9. Team; support, lead, guide	97%	95%
10. Compensation & responsibility Increase as expertise increases	94%	95%
11. Aligned preparation pathways in approved ECE preparation programs– minimum 120 clock hours (like CDA), Associate degree, Bachelor’s degree	88%	90%
12. Eliminate barriers to higher education	94%	93%
13. “Bridge” that honors existing workforce and embraces future	94%	100%
14, Commitments: Necessary supports, phased-in implementation & timelines, attention to challenges of FCCH and other community-based programs	97%	98%

Responses by Level of Education - % “Agree”

QUESTION	HS/GED Fundament.	CDA Apprentice	Associate	Bachelor’ s	ALL 203
8. 3 Designations	92%	95%	100%	97%	98%
9. Team; support, lead, guide	92%	100%	96%	97%	96%
10. Compensation & responsibility Increase as expertise increases	91%	90%	96%	97%	96%
11. Aligned prep pathways	92%	86%	89%	90%	91%
12. Eliminate barriers to higher education	88%	95%	93%	95%	95%
13. “Bridge” that honors existing workforce and embraces future	87%	100%	100%	100%	98%
14, Commitments: Necessary supports, phased-in implementation & timelines, attention to challenges of FCCH and other community-based programs	87%	100%	100%	98%	98%

Responses by Years of Experience - % “Agree”

QUESTION	<4	5-10	11-16	17-22	23-28	28-33	33+	ALL
8. 3 Designations	100	100	97	92	100	95	94	98%
9. Team; support, lead, guide	100	100	97	96	100	95	82	96%
10. Compensation & responsibility increase as expertise increases	100	92	97	92	94	95	88	96%
11. Aligned prep pathways	96	100	89	84	100	81	94	91%
12. Eliminate barriers to higher education	96	100	91	96	100	100	82	95%
13. "Bridge" honors existing workforce & embraces future workforce	96	100	97	100	100	100	94	98%
14. Commitments: Necessary supports, phased-in implementation & timelines, attention to challenges of FCCH and other community-based programs	96	100	97	100	100	100	88	98%