



2023 Vermont Head Start & Early Head Start Workforce Report

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The Vermont Head Start Collaboration Office is part of the Child Development Division (CDD) within the Vermont Department for Children and Families (DCF). DCF's mission is to foster the healthy development, safety, well-being, and self-sufficiency of Vermonters through the work of six Divisions that deliver programs and services to Vermonters. CDD 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.



Table of Contents

2023 Vermont Head Start & Early Head Start Workforce Report	1
Contact Information	2
Executive Summary	4
Introduction	5
Vermont Head Start & Early Head Start Workforce Data	8
Figure 1: Workforce Composition	9
Figure 2: Teaching Staff Qualifications	11
Figure 3: Professional Development Needs	14
Conclusion	17
Appendix A: VT Head Start & Early Head Start Recipients	18



Executive Summary

This report provides information about the Head Start and Early Head Start workforce in Vermont, focusing on composition, qualifications, wages and benefits, professional development, and staff turnover.

In the 2022-2023 program year, the 706 individuals in this workforce provided 1,408 children and their families with comprehensive child development services across more than 70 home-based, center-based, and family child care settings.

Data sources include the 2023 Program Information Report (PIR) and the most recent Vermont Head Start Collaboration Office Needs Assessment survey conducted in 2021.



Introduction

Head Start and Early Head Start are comprehensive early childhood education programs for children from at-risk backgrounds ages birth to five. From early math and reading skills to confidence and resilience, Head Start and Early Head Start help children build the skills they need to be successful in school and in life.

In addition to helping children prepare for kindergarten and beyond, Head Start and Early Head Start help facilitate critical health services like immunizations, and vision, dental, and hearing screenings. For parents, Head Start and Early Head Start offer job training opportunities and share information about important child development milestones, so parents can learn more ways to create encouraging home environments and enhance their relationships with their children. Each program engages parents as equal partners and works closely with the local community to adapt to what each area needs.

In Vermont, seven community organizations are funded directly by the federal Office of Head Start to administer Head Start and five are funded to administer Early Head Start services, all in alignment with federal Head Start Program Performance Standards.



Head Start

Head Start programs promote school readiness of children ages three to five from at-risk backgrounds by supporting the development of the whole child. Programs offer a variety of service models, depending on the needs of the local community. Head Start programs are based in child care centers, family child care homes and schools. Some programs offer home-based services, with staff conducting weekly visits to children in their own home in partnership with parents.

Head Start programs support children's growth and development in a positive learning environment through a variety of services, which include:

- **Early learning:** Children's readiness for school and beyond is fostered through individualized learning experiences. Through relationships with adults, play, and planned and spontaneous instruction, children grow in many aspects of development. Children progress in social skills and emotional well-being, along with language and literacy learning, and concept development
- **Health:** Each child's perceptual, motor, and physical development is supported to permit them to fully explore and function in their environment. All children receive health and development screenings, nutritious meals, oral health, and mental health support. Programs connect families with medical, dental, and mental health services to ensure that children are receiving the services they need.
- **Family well-being:** Parents and families are supported in achieving their own goals, such as housing stability, continued education, and financial security. Programs support and strengthen parent-child relationships and engage families around children's learning and development.

Early Head Start

Early Head Start programs provide family-centered services for at-risk families with very young children and are designed to nurture healthy attachments between parent and child. Services encompass the full range of a family's needs from pregnancy through a child's third birthday.

Early Head Start programs provide similar services as preschool Head Start programs, but they are tailored for the unique needs of infants and toddlers. Early Head Start programs promote the physical, cognitive, social, and emotional development of infants and toddlers through safe and developmentally enriching caregiving. This prepares children for continued growth and development and eventual success in school and life.

Following the general Head Start model, Early Head Start programs support parents in their role as primary caregivers and teachers of their children. Programs assist families



in meeting their own personal goals and achieving self-sufficiency across a wide variety of domains, such as housing stability, continued education, and financial security.

Early Head Start Child Care Partnerships

Launched nationally in 2015, the Early Head Start-Child Care Partnerships (EHS-CCP) Program is designed to bring together the best of Early Head Start and child care programs by layering Early Head Start, child care, and other funding streams to provide comprehensive and continuous services to at-risk infants, toddlers, and their families. The EHS-CCP Program enhances and supports early learning settings to provide full-day, full-year, seamless, and comprehensive services that meet the needs of working families and those in school; increase access to high-quality, full-day child care (including family child care); support the development of infants and toddlers through strong relationship-based experiences; and prepare them for the transition into Head Start and other preschool settings.

Vermont's Head Start Collaboration Office

Head Start Collaboration Offices exist to facilitate partnerships between Head Start agencies and other state entities that provide services to benefit children from at-risk backgrounds and their families. They provide a structure and a process for the federal Office of Head Start to work and partner with state agencies and local entities. Together, these partners work to leverage their common interests around young children and their families to formulate, implement, and improve state and local policy and practices. These partnerships are intended to:

- Assist in building early childhood systems.
- Provide access to comprehensive services and support for all children from at-risk backgrounds.
- Encourage widespread collaboration between Head Start and other appropriate programs, services, and initiatives.
- Augment Head Start's capacity to be a partner in state initiatives on behalf of children and their families.
- Facilitate the involvement of Head Start in state policies, plans, processes, and decisions affecting target populations and other families at-risk.



Vermont Head Start & Early Head Start Workforce Data

The Head Start and Early Head Start Workforce

The Head Start and Early Head Start workforce consists of professionals who are primarily engaged in providing comprehensive early childhood education, health, nutrition, and parent engagement services to young children from at-risk backgrounds and their families. It includes preschool teachers, infant and toddler teachers, teacher assistants, family service workers, and health and mental health professionals, among others. These professionals undergo specialized training to ensure they can effectively meet the unique developmental and educational needs of children ages 0-5 years.

Head Start recipients must ensure all staff, consultants, and contractors engaged in the delivery of program services have sufficient knowledge, training and experience, and competencies to fulfill the roles and responsibilities of their positions and to ensure high-quality service delivery in accordance with the program performance standards. Head Start recipients also must provide ongoing training and professional development to support staff in fulfilling their roles and responsibilities.

According to the 2023 Program Information Report, 706 individuals were employed or contracted by Vermont Head Start and Early Head Start programs with 18% being current or former Head Start or Early Head Start parents. The direct service workforce is composed primarily of Infant/Toddler Classroom Teachers (13%), Preschool Classroom Teachers (12%), and Assistant Teachers (12%). Family & Community Partnership Staff account for 5% of the Head Start/Early Head Start-employed workforce and 3% are Home Visitors (See Figure 1: Workforce Composition).



Figure 1: Workforce Composition

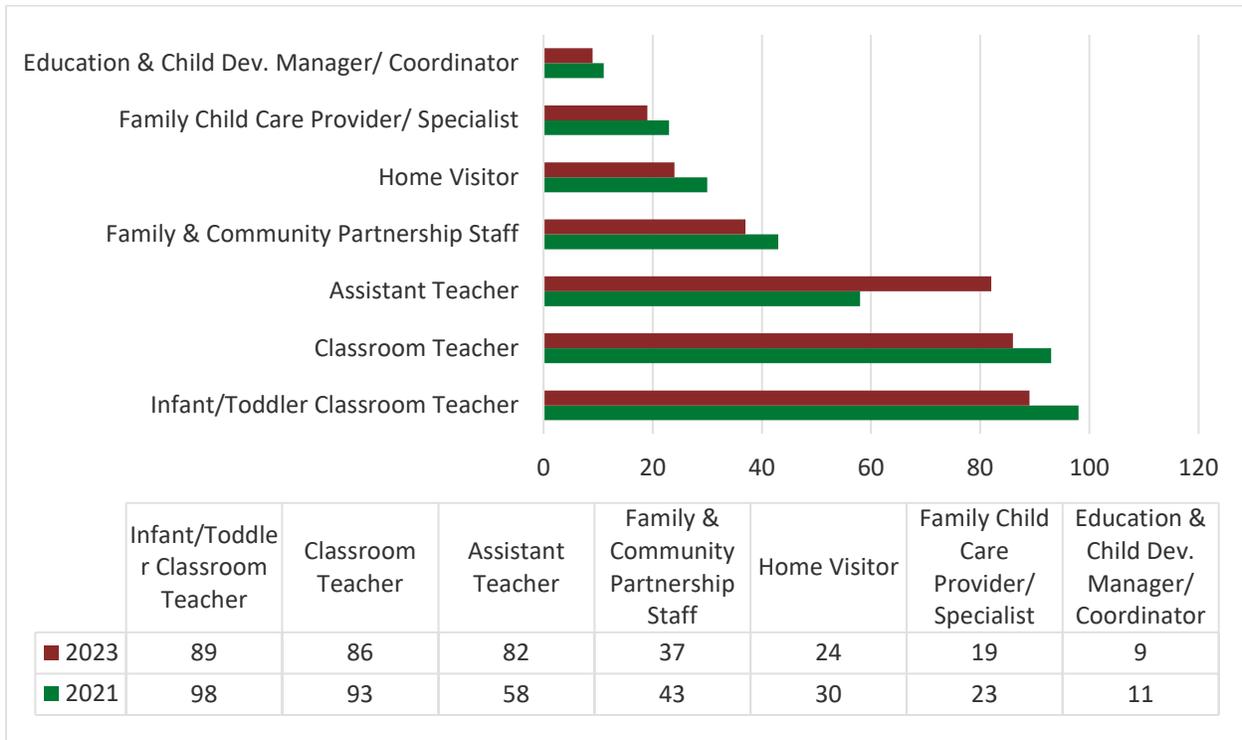


Figure 1: Composition of the 2022-2023 Head Start & Early Head Start workforce.

It is important to note that between 2021 and 2023, the number of Assistant Teachers working in Head Start grew (48% increase), while all other direct service positions declined.

Head Start and Early Head Start Qualifications

Head Start Program Performance Standard (HSPPS) §1302.91 Staff Qualifications and Competency Requirements dictates qualification requirements for all Head Start positions:

- Head Start center-based teachers must have an associate’s or bachelor’s degree in child development or early childhood education, or equivalent coursework.
- Head Start assistant teachers must have, at minimum, a CDA credential or a state-awarded certificate that meets or exceeds the requirements for a CDA credential, be enrolled in a program that will lead to an associate or baccalaureate degree, or be enrolled in a CDA credential program to be completed within two years of the time of hire.



- Early Head Start center-based teachers must have a minimum of a CDA credential or comparable credential, and be trained in or have equivalent coursework in early childhood development with a focus on infant and toddler development.
- Family Child Care Providers must have previous early child care experience and, at a minimum, be enrolled in a Family Child Care CDA program or state equivalent, or an associate's or baccalaureate degree program in child development or early childhood education prior to beginning service provision, and for the credential acquire it within 18 months of beginning to provide services.
- Home Visitors must have a minimum of a home-based CDA credential or comparable credential, or equivalent coursework as part of an associate's or bachelor's degree.
- Family Services Staff must have, within 18 months of hire, at a minimum, a credential or certification in social work, human services, family services, counseling, or a related field.
- Education & Child Development Management must have a baccalaureate or advanced degree in early childhood education, or a baccalaureate or advanced degree and equivalent coursework in early childhood education with early education teaching experience.
- Family, Health, and Disabilities Management must have, at a minimum, a baccalaureate degree, preferable related to one or more of the disciplines they oversee.

All center-based teachers, assistant teachers, family child care providers, and home visitors must also demonstrate competency to provide effective and nurturing teacher-child interactions, plan and implement learning experiences that ensure effective curriculum implementation, use of assessment and promote children's progress across the Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework and the Vermont Early Learning Standards.



Figure 2: Teaching Staff Qualifications

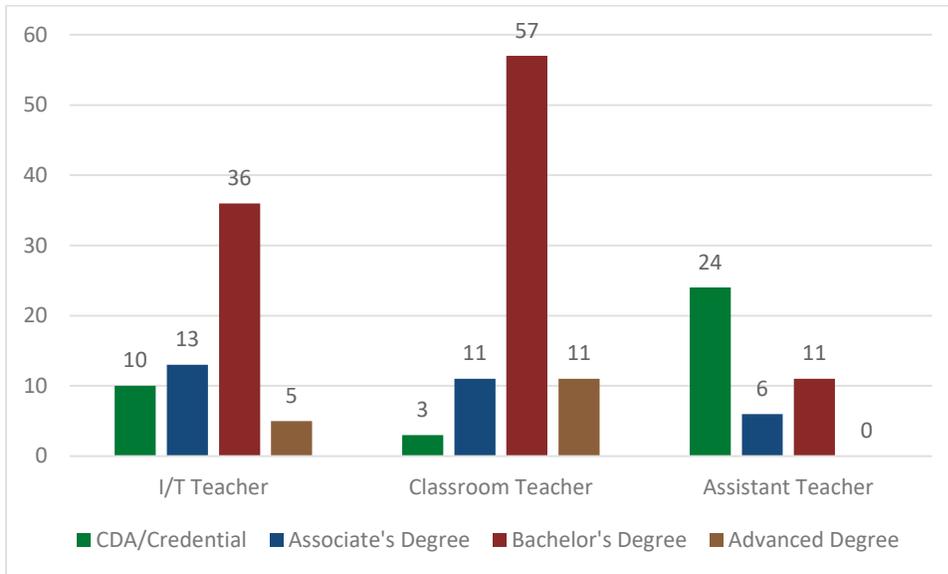


Figure 2: Qualifications of 2022-2023 Head Start & Early Head Start teaching staff

Overall, 83% of Vermont Head Start classroom teachers meet the Head Start Program Performance Standards degree requirements. However, with the majority of Assistant Teachers holding a CDA, supporting these professionals in earning associate’s and bachelor’s-level degrees emerges as a priority.

Staff Turnover

A total of 119 staff left their Head Start/Early Head Start program during the 2022-2023 program year. This is a 49% increase from the 80 staff who left in 2021. Less than half (44%) of the staff that left were replaced and two-thirds of those who left were teachers, assistant teachers, and home visitors (61%). 25% of vacancies remained unfilled for a period of three months or longer.

When asked about reasons for leaving, 22% of staff reported they left for higher compensation. 7% of staff retired or relocated and 4% were involuntary separations. However, 67% of staff leaving a program did not provide a reason.

Wages and Benefits

Employee compensation is an important component of any program’s ability to maintain a skilled and motivated workforce. To establish and maintain high-quality program operations and services, Head Start and Early Head Start programs must attract and



retain qualified personnel. Although there are no specific requirements for Head Start wage and salary plans, there is regulatory language regarding employee compensation.

The Head Start Act, Section 653 requires that Head Start programs not pay less than the minimum wage rate prescribed in section 6(a)(1) of the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 and encourages Head Start agencies to provide compensation according to salary scales that are based on training and experience. Sec. 640(a)(5)(A) - Allotment of Funds; Limitations on Assistance requires that funds be reserved to carry out quality improvement activities, including compensation and benefits of educational personnel, family service workers, and child counselors to:

- ensure that compensation is adequate to attract and retain qualified staff for the programs involved in order to enhance program quality;
- improve staff qualifications and assist with the implementation of career development programs for staff that support ongoing improvement of their skills and expertise; and
- provide education and professional development to enable teachers to be fully competent to meet the professional standards established under section 648A(a)(1), including:
 - providing assistance to complete postsecondary course work
 - improving the qualifications and skills of educational personnel to become certified and licensed as bilingual education teachers, or as teachers of English as a second language; and
 - improving the qualifications and skills of educational personnel to teach and provide services to children with disabilities.

To support Vermont Head Start recipients in meeting these regulations, in Summer 2020 the VHSCO contracted with School Readiness Consulting (SRC) to conduct the Vermont Early Childhood Wage and Fringe Benefit Comparability Study. A wage and fringe benefits comparability survey is an analysis of employee compensation in comparison to similar organizations that offer parallel services. The aims of the study were to define and classify the key positions held by members of Vermont's early childhood workforce and collect data via survey to describe and compare wages and fringe benefits of this workforce. The study included several service delivery settings, including public/private center-, school-, and home-based, as well as afterschool programs. In 2020 and 2021, SRC worked in partnership with VHSCO and an Advisory Group, comprised of representatives from multiple agencies and delivery settings, to develop position classifications and a survey instrument that align with the workforce landscape and project needs in Vermont.

A foundational piece of work for this study was crafting a plan for identifying and classifying key position types in the ECE field. SRC reviewed extant data from multiple sources, including existing job descriptions, state regulations, and program standards to compile a comprehensive list of position types for inclusion in the survey. The goal of



this classification plan was to create a mutual understanding of the wide variety of roles in the field and facilitate reasonable comparisons between job types and delivery settings during analysis.

The final report presents the study findings about compensation of the ECE workforce in Vermont and provides recommendations and next steps. The report uses data from a web-based survey that collected employee compensation data from a random sample of programs in Vermont, including Head Start and Early Head Start, other center-based early childhood programs, FCCHs, CIS, and afterschool programs. The report describes wages and fringe benefits of the employees in each program type, by position type and concludes with takeaways summarizing the key findings, a series of recommendations that align with current efforts around the early childhood system in Vermont and suggested next steps for the state.

The final [Vermont Early Childhood Wage and Benefit Comparability Study report can be found here](#).

Professional Development Needs

The 2020-2021 Needs Assessment Survey asked Head Start and Early Head Start recipients to indicate which professional development organizations their staff accessed throughout the past year. Head Start recipients reported high levels of involvement with the National Head Start Association, the New England Head Start Association, the OHS Region I Training/Technical Assistance Network at UMass Donahue Institute, Northern Lights at CCV, Children's Integrated Services, and the Vermont Department of Health. High levels of involvement with the Vermont Agency of Human Services, Office of Economic Opportunity, and Institutions of Higher Education were also reported by a majority of recipients. Lower levels of involvement were reported for the Office of Child Care State Capacity Building Center, the National OHS T/TA Centers, and the Stern Center for Language and Literacy.

COVID-19 relief monies lessened the financial burden on individuals and programs needing access to higher levels of professional development and credentials (most recipients responded that accessing scholarships and other financial supports for professional development programs/activities was not at all difficult). However, other difficulties were still experienced by recipients. These included transferring credits between public institutions of learning, accessing baccalaureate degree programs in ECE and ECESE with recommendation for licensure, accessing early childhood education degree programs in the community, exchanging information on roles and resources with other providers/organizations regarding professional development, obtaining staff release time to attend PD activities, and accessing online professional development opportunities. Connecting recipients with institutions of higher education



and assisting recipients with understanding and navigating the statewide professional development system were identified by recipients as important areas for the VHSCO to focus on in the coming years to help alleviate these challenges.

The VHSCO also asked Head Start and Early Head Start recipients to identify their program’s top three professional development needs. All recipients indicated a need for additional professional development on behavior management strategies, trauma-informed care, and supporting children with disabilities. Family engagement, supporting dual-language learners, reflective supervision, and data-informed decision making were also a need identified by a majority of recipients (See Figure 3).

Figure 3: Professional Development Needs



Figure 3: Professional development needs of the Head Start & Early Head Start workforce.

Coaching and Mentoring

As the early childhood field has broadened its scope of approaches to professional development delivery, research has found that coaching is very effective (Joyce & Showers, 2002). Coaching is defined as a relationship-based process led by an expert with specialized and adult learning, knowledge and skills, who often serves in a different professional role than the recipient(s). Coaching is designed to build capacity for specific professional dispositions, skills, and behaviors and is focused on goal-setting and achievement for an individual or group (NAEYC & NACCRRA, 2011). Coaching has been so effective that Head Start included it in the 2016 Head Start Program Performance Standards.



Here in Vermont, Head Start recipients are implementing Practice-Based Coaching (PBC), a research-based coaching model developed under the auspices of the ACF Early Childhood Training and Technical Assistance System. PBC is a professional development approach used by early childhood education staff to help teachers use effective practices that lead to positive outcomes for children. It is made up of three components – planning goals and action steps, engaging in focused observation, and reflecting on and sharing feedback about teaching practices. The overall goal is to improve knowledge and practice by providing a robust body of materials and T/TA services that increase fidelity and effectiveness of PBC implementation.

Implementation of PBC varies throughout the state. Some Head Start recipients hire and train coaches while others subcontract. When asked to describe how their programs use a coaching model, Head Start recipients noted:

- “We have coaching available to all teaching and home visiting staff, if they wish to participate.”
- “We have a practice-based coach that works with a coachee from each of our centers on goals they have set collaboratively. The coach also helps to develop instructional plans to support challenging behaviors in the classroom.”
- “We hire a practice-based coach, assess education staff annually, develop coaching plans, and track progress.”
- “We currently contract out to a program that comes to coach our lead teachers. Then we have two Education Coordinators who provide group coaching for the remainder of our staff.”
- “We utilize a consultant to provide practice-based coaching, who individualizes their approach based on self-assessments completed by staff.”
- “We use coaching exclusively in the educational component of our programming. We have trained coaches who mentor newer teachers who wish to be coached, or we appoint new staff to be coached.”

When asked about ideas for leveraging the Head Start coaching model in support of the broader state early childhood system, recipients acknowledged, “This is a critical concern and one that needs to be addressed now,” while suggesting more coach training opportunities and stipends to support coaching work. One recipient also noted that although Head Start is actively implementing practice-based coaching with their education staff (teachers and home visitors), the need for additional coaching supports for other staff, such as Family Services Staff, still exists. Another recipient noted the importance of respecting the uniqueness of each community and ensuring that any type of statewide approach would offer flexibility to account for the need to individualize approaches.

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backgrounds and their families. They provide a structure and a process for the federal Office of Head Start to work and partner with state agencies and local entities. Together, these partners work to leverage their common interests around young children and their families to formulate, implement, and improve state and local policy and practices. These partnerships are intended to:

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Conclusion

The examination of Vermont's Head Start and Early Head Start workforce data highlights implications for the state's broader early childhood system.

The pressing issues surrounding staff turnover, compensation, qualifications, and professional development underscore the need for comprehensive strategies across the entire early childhood field. Tackling these challenges requires a collaborative effort to establish robust retention practices and innovative recruitment approaches to ensure a skilled and stable workforce. Moreover, the identified focus areas for professional development (behavior management, trauma-informed care, and support for children with disabilities), emphasize the necessity for a coordinated and inclusive approach to training, coaching, and mentoring initiatives within the broader early childhood system. The successful adoption of the Practice-Based Coaching (PBC) model in Vermont's Head Start programs serves as a promising model for fostering effective teaching practices and positive child outcomes, indicating the potential for broader implementation and integration within the larger early childhood framework.

Considering these implications, it is imperative for stakeholders within the early childhood system to collaborate and strategize collectively to support the well-being of Vermont's early childhood workforce and the children and families they serve. Such a collaborative approach will ultimately nurture a more resilient and impactful early childhood system for the benefit of communities at large.



Appendix A: VT Head Start & Early Head Start Recipients

**Windham Southeast School District -
Early Education Services – Head
Start & Early Head Start**

130 Birge St.
Brattleboro, VT 05301
802-254-3742
County Served: Windham

**Rutland Community Programs, Inc.
(Rutland County Head Start & Early
Head Start)**

78 Meadow Street, P.O. Box 222
Rutland, VT 05702
802-665-2620
County Served: Rutland

**Capstone Community Action Head
Start & Early Head Start**

20 Gable Place
Barre, VT 05641
802-479-1053
Counties Served: Lamoille, Orange,
Washington

**Southeastern Vermont Community
Action Head Start**

107 Park Street, Suite 1
Springfield, VT 05156
802-885-6669
County Served: Windsor

**Champlain Valley Office of Economic
Opportunity Head Start and Early
Head Start**

431 Pine Street
Burlington, VT 05401
802-651-4180
Counties Served: Addison, Chittenden,
Franklin, Grand Isle

**United Children’s Service of
Bennington County Head Start and
Early Head Start**

P.O. Box 588
Bennington, VT 05201
802-442-3686
County Served: Bennington

**Northeast Kingdom Community
Action, Inc. Head Start and Early
Head Start**

191 High Street
Barton, VT 05822
802-525-3362
Counties Served: Essex,
Orleans, Caledonia