

**Building Bright Futures  
Professional Preparation & Development (PPD) Committee**

**2019 Career Ladder Workgroup Recommendations**

**INTRODUCTION**

Between February and June 2019, a workgroup comprised of members of the PPD Committee was convened for this stated purpose:

*To create a shared vision for the future of the Early Childhood Career Ladder and identify short-term and longer-term steps toward accomplishing that vision.*

The workgroup was charged with making recommendations to the PPD Committee for its July 2019 meeting. The PPD Committee would then determine how/ whether to move those recommendations forward.

With facilitator support, the workgroup met five times, once in-person and four times virtually, for a total of 11.5 hours. The group used a strengths-based, modified SOAR approach for planning. (SOAR: Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations and Results) Consistent with PPD practice, the workgroup used Modified Consensus for decision-making.

Workgroup membership, with constituency groups, included:

- Rebecca Bishop (Head Start)
- Diane Hermann-Artim (CCV)
- Linda January (Child Care Program Director)
- Donna Lopiccolo (CDD Child Care Program Licensing Unit)
- Becky Millard (Northern Lights at CCV)
- Sonja Raymond (VTAEYC and Child Care Program Owner)
- Kati Ringer (CDD Children's Integrated Services)
- Lynne Robbins (CDD Systems Unit)
- Sue Ryan (VCCICC)
- Johanna Vaczy (STARS)
- Susan Titterton (Facilitator)

Along with perspectives of workgroup members, interviews were conducted with some additional stakeholders in order to gather broader information about current strengths in the Career Ladder and opportunities others might see for its evolution.

The workgroup encountered limitations in its capacity to accomplish its purpose, including: variable meeting attendance, limited time for tasks between meetings, a time frame that did not easily lend itself to the scope of future visioning and transformative work, and drawbacks from using a virtual meeting platform for generative work.

Additionally, the following systemic constraints and influences are noted:

- The workgroup may not make unilateral changes that would impact current licensing regulations and other interconnected systems, without changes in those systems being agreed to and initiated as well.
- The workgroup is operating in the context of a vigorous national conversation about the future direction of the early childhood education workforce—a conversation that is occurring both outside Vermont and within our state.

Nonetheless, the workgroup has developed some short-term recommendations which we feel will enhance “Vermont pathways” in early childhood education and some longer-term recommendations toward early childhood education as a “national career” approach.

## APPROACH TO RECOMMENDATIONS

The workgroup began by exploring questions in two key areas, as well as posing these same questions to a cross-section of stakeholders in brief interviews. (Lists available upon request.)

- *STRENGTHS: What are some strengths in the current Career Ladder system? What can we build upon?*
- *OPPORTUNITIES: What are some opportunities for the Career Ladder to best meet the needs of our stakeholders? What are some options and possibilities for what “could be”?*

These extensive lists were then narrowed by the workgroup, in response to the following questions. (See Appendix A: *Strengths & Opportunities Highlighted by Workgroup*)

- *What is one strength you would highlight as most essential to preserve and build upon?*
- *What is one opportunity that you find most exciting?*

Interview data was narrowed for the opportunities different groups of stakeholders perceive for the Career Ladder. (See Appendix B: *Opportunities Identified by Stakeholder Interviews*)

Building from this foundation, the workgroup conceptualized two pieces of work.

### **Short-Term Recommendations, based on Strengths & Opportunities**

- Goal: Career Ladder more accessible, clearer, more functional for users
- Actions:
  - Tweak current Career Ladder
  - Make improvements in current structures, systems and workforce career pathways
  - Include marketing
- Scope: “Vermont Pathways” aka “The Vermont Way”

### **Longer-Term Recommendations based on Aspirations & Future Vision**

- Goal: Portable credentials, aligned nationally and with other states
- Actions:
  - Create a shared vision of the future
  - Transform into something new
  - Create new structures, systems and workforce career pathways
  - Include transition planning
- Scope: “National Career”

## SHORT-TERM RECOMMENDATIONS

### **OVERARCHING GOAL**

Make the “Vermont pathways” more accessible, clearer, more functional for users.

### **Recommendation #1: Whom It Serves & Its Purpose**

**Rationale:** There is confusion in the ECE field about whom the Career Ladder is for and a lack of clarity about its purpose.

In consideration of Strengths and Opportunities, some “meta” questions arose, including:

- Who is the Career Ladder for?
- What is the purpose of the Career Ladder?

Some interviewees, when asked about the Career Ladder observed the following:

- “It’s not clear to me.”
- “It could be clearer. We get a lot of questions.”

Members of the workgroup see improving clarity about whom the Career Ladder is for and its purpose as linked to the opportunity to market it clearly to the early childhood education workforce.

**Actions:**

- Adopt new clarifying language to articulate clearly whom the Career Ladder serves and its purpose. (See below)
- Market this in various ways—website, printed materials, advising—to all of its users and interested other stakeholders. (See Appendix C: *Marketing*)
- Do follow-up outreach to determine whether results are successful. (See Appendix C: *Results*)

### **WHOM THE CAREER LADDER SERVES**

Vermont's Early Childhood Career Ladder is a career planning tool for individuals working in—or interested in entering—the early childhood education workforce. It is specifically for those who work with young children in regulated center-based programs and family child care homes.

The Career Ladder is most useful and relevant for the settings and roles listed in the chart below, which is based on Vermont's Child Development Division (CDD) Child Care Licensing Regulations.

In addition, there may be occasions when Level Certificates are useful for other early childhood settings and positions not referenced below, such as after school programs.

<b>Setting</b>	<b>Roles</b> (with Level Certificate referenced in Licensing Regulations)
Center-based child care & preschool programs	Program Director Teacher (Level IV-A or IV-B) Teacher Associate (Level III) Teacher Assistant (Level I or II) Classroom Aide Trainee Substitute
Registered & licensed family child care homes	Registered Family Child Care Provider (at least Level I or higher) Licensed Family Child Care Provider (Level II or III-A) Family Child Care Assistant Classroom Aide Trainee Substitute

\*Sources:

*Child Care Licensing Regulations: Center-Based Child Care and Preschool Programs, September 1, 2016*

*Child Care Licensing Regulations: Registered & Licensed Family Child Care Homes, September 1, 2016*

## **PURPOSE OF THE CAREER LADDER**

Vermont’s Early Childhood Career Ladder provides a “road map” for individuals already in—or interested in entering—the early childhood education workforce. This tool enables individuals to plan a route from where they are now to where they aspire to be in the future of their career. As with any journey, different options exist in each path along the way. There are three aspects to the Career Ladder’s purpose:

### **PRESENT**

- To describe what you have already accomplished and to celebrate the work you have done
- To show where you would enter on the Ladder with your current qualifications
- To cross-reference with Licensing Regulations descriptions of roles and settings you may now be qualified for

### **FUTURE**

- To show requirements for future career development
- To describe what you will need to meet your future career goals
- To cross-reference with Licensing Regulations descriptions of roles and settings you may be qualified for in the future

### **PATHWAYS**

- To show how to enter the Ladder
- To show how to move to the next level
- To describe options for moving from one level to the next
- To guide coursework choices based on required core knowledge areas

## **Recommendation #2: Inclusive Language**

**Rationale:** Some in the workforce—specifically with training in Montessori and Waldorf approaches—have difficulty seeing the Career Ladder as relevant to their preparation and professional development background.

**Action:** To the Career Ladder documents, add reference to Montessori and Waldorf approaches, so those practitioners see themselves as included. Such language should direct such practitioners to “contact a Northern Lights Resource Advisor to explore your experience and where it might fit on the Career Ladder.”

### **Recommendation #3: Experience Requirement**

#### **Rationale:**

- At Level 1, most providers can complete Fundamentals or one ECE course and have time to work in the field to determine if this is a career that they would pursue. Allowing new providers to get on the Career Ladder more quickly, may encourage more providers into the field, encourage them to move up the ladder more quickly, and allow their education levels to be tracked more completely.
- Most employers offer a 6-month probationary period in which an employee is onboarding and learning the requirements of their position, again allowing providers this same amount of time to determine if this is a career to pursue and apply to the Career Ladder.
- Six months seems like an appropriate amount of time for an employer to observe and onboard new staff.
- Upper levels require more education and some experience may be obtained through student teaching. Providers who pursue a traditional higher education route do not need to wait up to two years to become part of the Career Ladder.

**Action:** Reduce experience requirements across all Levels to six months. Review, and possibly revise, the bonus structure.

### **Recommendation #4: Portfolio Option**

**Rationale:** For individuals who want to achieve Level II through a non-credit route, the CDA is a currently available option and will provide them with a nationally recognized credential. For those pursuing the portfolio pathway, they need to demonstrate the equivalent of 12 college credits which is unduly burdensome to accomplish in a portfolio format.

**Action:** Eliminate the portfolio option for Level II. Rather, encourage participants to access the Prior Learning Assessment process, which provides true college credits and is, therefore, usable and transferable in other ways.

### **Recommendation #5: Reorganizing Level III**

**Rationale:** From Level III-A to III-B, requirements take a large leap, so that these do not represent two parts of the same level.

**Action:** Reorganize levels so that Level III-A becomes III and Level III-B becomes IV. Higher levels will also be renumbered for a logical sequence. As level certificates are specifically referenced in child care program licensing, STARS, and other connected systems, this change must be aligned, not unilateral. Other parts of the current system, such as already-issued level certificates, may also need to be reconciled. Even with these constraints, the workgroup encourages that these changes happen as soon as possible.

## Recommendation #6: Data Collection

**Rationale:** Good data is important to making good decisions. Regularly, questions arose to which no data currently exists, or what does exist is difficult to access, for example:

- How do we know if members of the current workforce are qualified for their positions? Level certificates are not required, so we only know about those who choose to use the Career Ladder.
- Since 2016, it has been required to upload data into the BFIS system. What do we know about whether people are doing it?
- How are people using the Career Ladder now?
  - How many are using it to figure out where they would enter?
  - How many use it to move to the next level?
  - How many are using it to make coursework choices?
  - How many are using it to plan for their future?

**Action:** In addition to examples above, identify what data about the Career Ladder is needed and create a plan to enhance, better collect and more effectively share that data. Data sources that may be important to include are stakeholder surveys and interviews. This work is likely to cross over from the short-term to the mid- and longer-term, particularly as the shared vision for the future evolves.

## LONGER-TERM RECOMMENDATIONS

### OVERARCHING GOAL

Align Vermont with “national career” approach as it evolves.

## Recommendation #7: Shared Vision

**Action:** Develop a shared vision for the future of the Career Ladder that integrates Recommendations #7-9. In this work, ensure that there is significant, authentic engagement from the ECE workforce. Although now is not the time to rename the Career Ladder, as a future vision is created it is recommended to revisit the question of what its new name should be.

## Recommendation #8: Alignment of Levels

**Action:** As *Power to the Profession* work reaches completion, decide whether to build a transition for alignment with this national work. At present, we note that *Power to the Profession* proposes a model for three levels—ECE-I, ECE-II and ECE-III—including education/ preparation needed, scopes of practice and comparative compensation. It would be helpful to look at this side-by-side with the BBF Think Tank’s

recommendations for a high-quality workforce. (See Appendix D: *Power to the Profession Levels*. See Appendix E: *BBF Think Tank Recommendation*)

### **Recommendation #9: National Landscape**

**Action:** As we create the future system, look beyond the borders of Vermont in order to research and align with the national landscape. Include national best practices and portable, nationally-recognized credentials. (See Appendix F: *Examples of National Resources*)

## CLOSING

The members of the Career Ladder Workgroup have appreciated this opportunity to explore the strengths and opportunities of this current structure in Vermont's early childhood system, as well as to begin to sketch a future direction.

As work toward the future unfolds, we believe it is important that the workforce be authentically engaged in helping to envision and create that future and, equally important, that supports be put in place to help people to move to that aspired future.



## APPENDICES

## APPENDIX A

**Strengths & Opportunities Highlighted by Workgroup**

*STRENGTHS: What is one strength from our first meeting that you would highlight as most essential to preserve and to build on?*

1. Organization of Levels I-III A
  - a) Clear entry points, clear paths, are well-laid out, have lots of detail and are very accessible for those entering.
  - b) Flexibility; multiple options for movement into and across these levels including prior learning assessments that accommodate non-credit routes, as well as a blend of college credit and workshops.
2. Continuity across levels
  - a) Works as a true progression from early to advanced levels
  - b) Can enter from many different starting points
  - c) Importance of college credit is reflected across all levels
3. Aligned with other systems and structures
  - a) Licensing
  - b) STARS

*OPPORTUNITIES: What is one opportunity from our first meeting that you find most exciting?*

- Revisit and articulate clearly who the Career Ladder is for and its purpose
- Market the Career Ladder more clearly
- Use data about the workforce and their access of the Career Ladder to make decisions
- Ensure each level is relevant to the sub-groups who might access it
- Balance flexibility (options, adaptability) with clarity (well-defined activities & pathways)
- Enhance alignment within Vermont (w/ Licensing terms; terms used for “credentials”)
- Explore portability across state lines; consider developments at national level

## **APPENDIX B**

### **Opportunities Identified by Stakeholder Interviews**

#### School-based (2 interviewees)

- AOE take over licensing regulations to make more relevant for school-based programs; streamline efforts and make relevant to AOE license; don't duplicate efforts
- Coordinate and show how everything fits together (CDD, BFIS, Northern Lights Career Ladder)
- Focus on private providers, home-based providers and school-age providers
- Clarify who Career Ladder is for; many school-based people don't know about it

#### Home providers (3 interviewees)

- At higher levels, build in more flexibility; allow credit for other than college work
- Build in other credential options (Director, Ivy League EC certificate programs, mental health or special education certificates)
- Clarify which classes are accepted and have a review process to add to that list

#### Center-based teacher (1 interviewee, currently at Level II)

- Allow workshop hours to count toward career ladder credential, without having to obtain another title (i.e. AA, CDA)
- Up the pay scale (meaning bonuses?)

#### Head Start and Early Head Start managers (7 interviewees)

- Add to accepted content (i.e. early intervention, early childhood special education)
- Allow equivalency to college course work for Montessori and Waldorf training hours
- Balance the push for degrees with alternative pathways, to ensure a growing workforce

#### Starting Points Leadership Network, local directors (8 interviewees)

- Take sub-groups into account
  - School-based: don't know about the Career Ladder, don't use it
  - Center-based: require staff to apply for Level certificates, to have IPDPs
- Keep some levels you can reach without a degree; gives a sense of progress
- Continue bonuses as incentives, as financial support
- Consider move to "professionalize" workforce in future and possibility of someday making requirements higher (i.e. Level I is an AA)
- Consider change carefully; some are just getting to understand the Career Ladder

#### CCV advisors (3 interviewees) and Northern Lights RA (1 interviewee)

- For those wishing to enter the workforce at Level I, revisit the requirement for experience and the interplay between experience and education

- Review the credentials at each level; for example, while AA dovetails well with Level II, CDA does not seem equivalent to 12 college credits
- Work for clarity, ease of navigation; can be complicated, confusing for students
- Relook at the transition from Level III to Level IV; seems like a big jump

#### Higher Education (1 interviewee)

- Consider an integrated marketing campaign including:
  - Career Ladder as standard addendum to all sorts of communications; from all entities in the field; through flyers, emails, brochures, etc.
  - Identify partners and their contribution (NL, CCV, other PD providers, higher education consortium members)
  - Well-advertised and well-described supports (PLA, VSAC, CDD grants, TEACH scholarships, Apprenticeships, etc.)
  - Include outreach to high schools and the next generation of ECE workforce

### **APPENDIX C**

#### **Marketing Career Ladder & Measuring Results**

##### Ideas for Marketing Career Ladder Description—*Whom it serves and its purpose*

Note: Marketing of the Career Ladder has not been done for a long time.

- Vermont Agency of Education weekly field memo & website
- CDD Child Care Licensing newsletter & website
- Guidance counselors at high school tech education centers
- BBF Early Learning & Development Committee sub-group
- CCV advisors
- Program Director Credential (embed in credential courses)
- Early childhood higher education faculty (embed in relevant courses)
- Find ways to market the Career Ladder to folks who have been in the field for a long time, helping them see themselves in it; connect to the portfolio option at Level 1 as one way these folks can achieve a level certificate

##### Ideas for Measuring Results—*Is the Career Ladder clearer & more easily understood?*

- Track whether more level certificates are applied for
- Track over time of how many folks have their information in BFIS quality and credential accounts
- Gather feedback from Resource Advisors and CCV advisors
- Poll CCV students
- Poll tech education center counselors & teachers
- Poll Fundamentals instructors
- Create a survey

**APPENDIX D**

***Power to the Profession Discussion Draft 2—Decision Cycles 3, 4, 5 +6  
December 2018***

**Link:** [https://www.naeyc.org/sites/default/files/globally-shared/downloads/PDFs/our-work/initiatives/power\\_to\\_the\\_profession\\_01302019.pdf](https://www.naeyc.org/sites/default/files/globally-shared/downloads/PDFs/our-work/initiatives/power_to_the_profession_01302019.pdf)

**Summary of Draft 2 Recommendations**

**1. MEANINGFUL DIFFERENTIATION**

Where we are now: An incoherent and inconsistent system that fails to recognize differences in preparation, skills, and experience

Task Force recommendation: Create one early childhood education profession with three distinct and meaningful designations (ECE-I, ECE-II and ECE-III)

**2. COHERENT, QUALITY PREPARATION PROGRAMS**

Where we are now: A hodge-podge of preparation programs of uneven quality

Task Force recommendation: Establish the primary set of preparation programs (ECE-I 120 hours, ECE-II Associates degree, ECE-III Bachelor's or Master's degree)

**3. STRUCTURED SPECIALIZATIONS**

Where we are now: Specializations that reinforce fragmentation without agreed-upon competencies

Task Force recommendation: Generalize first, then specialize

**4. COMPARABLE COMPENSATION**

Where we are now: Undervalued, underfunded, and inequitable

Task Force recommendation: Establish comparable compensation (including benefits) for comparable qualifications, experience and responsibilities

**APPENDIX E**

**Building Bright Futures—Building Vermont from the Child Up  
2018 Think Tank Recommendations**

**Link:** [http://buildingbrightfutures.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/BBF-2018-ThinkTank-Report\\_FINAL-Singles.pdf](http://buildingbrightfutures.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/BBF-2018-ThinkTank-Report_FINAL-Singles.pdf)

Under *Recommendation 2: Professionalized Workforce and Professional Wages*,  
See “Required Preparation / Education / Qualifications” on pages 13-14.

**APPENDIX F**

**Examples of National Resources**  
(With comments from Lynne Robbins)

**1. DRAFT Professional Standards and Competencies for Early  
Childhood Educators**

[https://www.naeyc.org/sites/default/files/globally-shared/downloads/PDFs/our-work/higher-ed/final\\_public\\_draft\\_2.pdf](https://www.naeyc.org/sites/default/files/globally-shared/downloads/PDFs/our-work/higher-ed/final_public_draft_2.pdf)

There is information on pathways in here, although there is no proposal on what articulated pathways would look like. Regarding pathways, the draft states:

*Support professional preparation programs designated and accredited by the early childhood education profession as the core pathway for individuals to be prepared in the competencies. Policies should identify the professional preparation programs that are designated by the profession, (will included citation for P2P Decision Cycle 7/8 here) as the core pathway for individuals preparing to be early childhood educators or who are advancing their early childhood education credentials. Given the breadth and depth of the competencies and the need for early childhood educators to have deep knowledge and understanding as well as applied practice with the competencies, these pathways are best positioned to prepare early childhood educators. This may happen in partnership with professional development schools, teacher residencies and apprenticeships or prior to post-baccalaureate preparation for specialized roles. Policies and resources should ensure that all individuals are provided equitable opportunities to access and progress seamlessly through this core pathway.*

2. The Department of Labor conducted a study called **Career Pathways in Early Care and Education** which was published in 2018.  
<https://www.dol.gov/asp/evaluation/completed-studies/Career-Pathways-Design-Study/4-Career-Pathways-in-Early-Care-and-Education-Report.pdf>

There is good information in here that we can use when we work on our longer document, although no proposal for a pathway here either. Section 1.2 discusses career pathways and provides the following information:

*Career pathways system-level initiative—those generally addressing the six career pathways systems elements to reduce barriers and create opportunities for individuals to advance within specific fields described by DOL (n.d.) in its Career Pathways Toolkit: (1) build cross-agency partnerships and clarify roles, (2) identify industry sectors and engage employers, (3) design education and training programs, (4) identify funding needs and sources, (5) align policies and programs, and (6) measure systems change and performance.*

3. **Early Learning Career Pathways Initiative: Credentialing in the Early Care and Education Field**  
<https://www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop-earlylearningchallenge/pathways/elpathways.pdf>

This is another study done with funding from the Department of Education through Race to the Top funds. They define career pathways on page 5.

4. In terms of an example of a career pathway, I received the following email from Cynthia Greene in May, as follows:

*At the TEACH Symposium last week I attended an excellent workshop hosted by Wisconsin folk focused on their Registry (Northern Lights/BFIS) and Career Levels, with supporting partners TEACH and one college in particular—Whitewater University—which has designed an amazing program for flexible pathways through their career levels.*

*There is a ton of information to unpack. I wanted to pass along to you all the link to their career level form and explanations. (Link [here](#)) When you open this page it has the levels broken up with explanations in between for reference. If you want to take a look at the full "lattice" on one page, click [here](#).*

*What I love about this is the detail; no one can get lost. It includes stackable and portable credentials, starting with training-based credentials, then credit-based credentials, then up through degree programs including*

*licensure. It also makes accommodations for folks coming in to ECE who started outside of the field (everything in dark blue).*

*While it can feel busy at first blush, their program is amazing. Coupled with the university efforts to be flexible on where/how credits are obtained, financial aid following the student (not the college), and promoting 4-year degrees for infant/toddler teachers without necessarily being licensed—it's a complete package.*

*I thought this might be helpful for the PPD as it considers its career ladder work. I'd be happy to explain some of what I learned in more detail if anyone is interested, and I made a couple of connections with the presenters in case Vermont wanted to learn more about this incredible collaboration.*