



Vermont Association for the
Education of Young Children

Professional Identity - Consensus Document April 2020

INTRODUCTION

In Fall 2019, VTAEYC formed a Task Force of Vermont early childhood educators (see p. 11) to lead the exploration of advancing as a profession, as laid out in NAEYC's [Power to the Profession](#) initiative. The Task Force was to answer: "To what extent might Vermont choose to align with the Power to the Profession's unifying framework?"

Power to the Profession's unifying framework was chosen as the basis for this work because:

- It is research-based. It builds on the Institute of Medicine's seminal report [Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth through Age Eight: A Unifying Document](#) (2015).
- Its recommendations were drafted by a diverse task force of fifteen national organizations and then shaped by engagement of over 11,000 early childhood educators in 47 states and territories.
- Professions are national in scope, leading to consistency and portability.
- Its stated emphasis is on "...the profession itself taking the lead in defining who early childhood educators are, what we do, what we will be held accountable for, and what supports we need to ensure our success."
- The unifying framework is built on:
 - Shared accountability among all sectors of the ECE ecosystem
 - Phased in implementation that honors the existing and future workforce
 - An approach aimed at addressing fragmentation, uneven quality and building the necessary resources and infrastructure
 - Inclusive, collaborative engagement at the national, state and workforce levels

The VTAEYC Task Force uses a process designed to invite broad engagement from Vermont's ECE workforce. Decisions are made by consensus, in which everyone's opinions are heard and understood, and a decision is made that respects those opinions. The consensus reflects a sense of what the group is willing to support. The Task Force goes through the following steps:

- 1) Task Force studies a component in the Power to the Profession framework
- 2) Task Force creates a Discussion Draft on that component
- 3) The ECE workforce is engaged in facilitated conversations in which all voices are heard, followed by surveys to gather feedback on the Discussion Draft
- 4) Task Force studies workforce feedback and revises the draft, as needed
- 5) Task Force creates and broadly shares a Consensus Document on that component
- 6) Task Force returns to 1) and studies next component

Power to the Profession’s [Professional Identity & Boundary](#) was the first component the Task Force studied in December 2019, then putting out a [Discussion Draft](#) for workforce consideration. From January to March 2020, workforce conversations and surveys gathered feedback on the draft. In April, the Task Force reviewed feedback, made revisions and created this Consensus Document on “Professional Identity”.

The next component for Task Force study and workforce consideration will be “Three Meaningful Designations” as described in [Pathways, Preparation & Compensation](#).

CREDIBLE RESULTS

To have confidence in the workforce feedback we gathered, there are two questions:

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

Facilitated Regional Conversations

Between October 2019-March 2020, there were 34 group conversations and presentations attended by a total of 481 members of the ECE workforce, across all regions of the state. Of those, 356 participants gave feedback specifically on the “Professional Identity Discussion Draft” during the two months from January 13-March 12. Following each conversation, the facilitator summarized the group’s feedback on each part of the draft.

While our aim was to engage an even greater number in conversations about “Professional Identity”, many groups’ agendas were committed to other topics in January and the March calendar was upended by changes in response to COVID-19.

Nonetheless, we can have confidence in what we learned from conversations because:

- Outreach efforts through newsletters, social media, flyers and personal approach ensured that opportunities to participate was widely-advertised and provided
- Conversation participants were well-distributed across key roles - teachers, directors and family child care providers, etc.
- Facilitator summaries showed consistent results across groups; it is unlikely that larger numbers would have changed the feedback
- Given the limited window of time for conversations, our numbers were proportional to those in Chapter One of this work (2018-19), where 12% of the total workforce (715) participated over the course of six months

One limitation the Task Force notes is not knowing enough about those who did not choose to participate in this round of conversations. As we move to the next Power to the Profession component and workforce engagement around the next Discussion Draft, the Task Force is committed to creating additional outreach strategies to ensure our practice of authentic engagement with the ECE workforce continues. One strategy underway is for future conversations to be designed as professional development sessions, thereby providing additional incentive to participate; another is to offer some virtual conversations for greater accessibility.

Survey

The survey was distributed to everyone who participated in conversations in Chapter One of this work (October 2018-June 2019), everyone who participated in conversations in Chapter Two (October 2019-March 2020) and was also made available to interested others through the VTAEYC newsletter and FaceBook pages of early childhood educators and other stakeholders. The aim was to provide broad access to weigh in, regardless of one's ability to participate in a regional conversation. As with conversations, the survey window was abbreviated by the upheaval caused by COVID-19. There were 167 responses from a wide range of roles, settings and backgrounds, as shown in the tables below:

Role

Teacher/ licensed teacher	35%
Program director/ administrator	27%
Family child care provider	20%
Assistant/ associate teacher	4%
Other ECE workforce roles	6%
Other EC stakeholder roles	8%

Setting

Center-based program (not public school)	59%
Family childcare home-based program	19%
Head Start program	10%
Public school-based program	5%
Other	7%

Years of Experience

less than 4	4%
5-10	22%
11-16	19%
17-22	19%
23-28	14%
28-33	11%

more than 33	9%
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Highest level of education completed

High school or GED	2%
Fundamentals	3%
CDA	3%
Apprenticeship	5%
Associate's degree	11%
Bachelor's degree	49%
Master's degree	18%
Beyond Master's degree	7%
Other	3%

In terms of participation, 86% of survey respondents reported having participated in a conversation and/or a presentation. In terms of awareness of the work on advancing as a profession, 35% reported being “well-informed” and 52% “somewhat informed”.

While our aim was to engage higher numbers of the ECE workforce in responding to the survey, we can have some confidence in the results for the following reasons:

- The survey was widely distributed, including to those who may not have had the opportunity to participate in a regional conversation
- Of the 357 members of the workforce who did participate in conversations about “Professional Identity”, 40% responded to the survey
- Survey respondents came from diverse roles, settings and backgrounds
- The vast majority responded in a similar way; more responses were unlikely to shift the results in a meaningful way
- The content of comments in the survey are consistent with the comments expressed in the regional conversations

As with broadening participation in conversations, the Task Force is committed to engaging an even larger workforce survey response to the next Power to the Profession component. One idea under exploration is to enable conversation participants to complete the survey as part of the conversation session, rather than receiving the survey later via email.

WORKFORCE FEEDBACK

Question: Do you agree with these names?

Name of the Professional - Early Childhood Educator

Name of the Profession - Early Childhood Education Profession

RESPONSES: Yes - 90% No - 10%

COMMON THEMES IN COMMENTS:

- Agree with the names; seem accurate; will help to gain recognition and respect
- Having “Profession” at the end of the name seems unnecessary and unwieldy

TASK FORCE REVISION: Drop “Profession” from the end of the name

Question: To what extent do you agree with the description of Role and Responsibilities?

RESPONSES: Strongly agree 80%
Somewhat agree 18%
Somewhat disagree 1%
Strongly disagree <1%

COMMON THEMES IN COMMENTS:

- Sounds accurate; clear, concise, compelling and inclusive
- Language about accountability is important
- Inclusion of “play-based” is important
- The item on “disposition” is problematic
- “Code of ethics for professional conduct” important; reference NAEYC code
- Add something about “trauma-informed”
- So much responsibility and we’re paid so little

TASK FORCE REVISIONS (see p. 7-8)

- Drop item on “disposition”
- Link to NAEYC “code of ethics for professional conduct”
- Add “..stay current with new research and updated practice (such as trauma-informed)”
- Add “..profession that is well-compensated”

Question: To what extent do you agree with the age range of birth through age 8?

RESPONSES:	Strongly agree	52%
	Somewhat agree	32%
	Somewhat disagree	13%
	Strongly disagree	3%

COMMON THEMES IN COMMENTS:

- Fits with what we know about brain development
- Fits developmentally appropriate practice
- Consistent with endorsement range in the state
- Our system isn't currently set up for birth through age eight
- Accustomed to it being birth through age five
- Not sure K-3 teachers want to call themselves early childhood educators
- This has implications for after school programs

TASK FORCE REVISIONS (see p. 8)

The Task Force chose to affirm the age range birth through age eight, based on their sense of the consensus in the comments.

Question: To what extent do you agree with the distinction between the early childhood education profession and the early childhood field?

RESPONSES:	Strongly agree	61%
	Somewhat agree	32%
	Somewhat disagree	5%
	Strongly disagree	1%

COMMON THEMES:

- Makes sense; these distinctions need to be delineated
- Curious about how those in the Early Childhood Field might view this
- The colored circles graphic is confusing and needs to be clarified or revised

TASK FORCE REVISIONS (see p. 8-10)

- Revise language to make it clearer
- Use updated graphic from Power to the Profession's "Unifying Framework"
- Consider revisiting this graphic and creating other tools, if confusion continues

CONSENSUS DOCUMENT ON PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY

Name of the Professional: **Early Childhood Educator**
 Name of the Profession: **Early Childhood Education**

Role and Responsibilities of the Early Childhood Education Profession

The **distinct role** of the early childhood education profession is to care for and promote the learning, development and well-being of children from birth through age eight to establish a foundation for lifelong learning and development. This foundation for learning is built through reciprocal relationships between early childhood educators and the children they serve. Reciprocal relationships require attention to family and child diversity – including race, ethnicity, language, culture, social class, immigrant status, family structure, special needs, and learner characteristics – which is one of the multiple influences on children’s development and learning.

Members of the early childhood education profession, a distinct profession in the early childhood field, are prepared to be accountable for the following **responsibilities**:

1. Planning and implementing intentional, developmentally appropriate learning experiences - including play-based learning experiences - that promote the social-emotional development, physical development and health, cognitive development, and general learning competencies of each child served;
2. Establishing and maintaining a safe, caring, inclusive, and healthy learning environment;
3. Observing, documenting, and assessing children’s learning and development using guidelines established by the profession;
4. Developing reciprocal, culturally responsive relationships with families and communities;
5. Advocating for the needs of children and their families;
6. Advancing and advocating for an equitable, diverse, and effective early childhood education profession that is well-compensated;
7. Staying current with new research and updated practice (such as trauma-informed);

8. Engaging in reflective practice and continuous learning; and
9. Following a [Code of Ethics](#) for professional conduct

These responsibilities are consistent across all early childhood education settings that support young children from birth through age eight.

The Early Childhood Education Profession within the Early Childhood Field

Click on [\(graphic\)](#) or see p. 10

Supporting the learning and development of young children requires complex, demanding, and valuable work that is performed by many individuals in many different roles. It is important to recognize and value the complementary, yet distinct roles in the broad early childhood field and also to understand the particular place the early childhood profession holds in that field.

Early Childhood Education Profession

Members of the early childhood education profession meet the guidelines established for the profession and are prepared to be accountable for everything outlined in the section entitled Role and Responsibilities. These individuals are **early childhood educators**. They have mastery of specialized knowledge, skills and competencies and are accountable to the standards of the profession. Individuals in some settings may hold multiple roles, such as in family child care or small community-based programs, where directors or owners serve as business/operations administrators and pedagogical/ instructional supervisors, as well as working directly with children. By meeting the guidelines established for the profession, these individuals would also be early childhood educators.

Additional, important roles in the early childhood education profession include:

- (1) **professional preparation faculty and trainers** who instruct, monitor, and observe the practice of aspiring early childhood educators, and
- (2) **pedagogical or instructional administrators** who guide the practice of early childhood educators in early childhood program settings.

It is anticipated that these individuals must be prepared as early childhood educators before assuming their responsibilities in guiding others in that role.

The Early Childhood Field

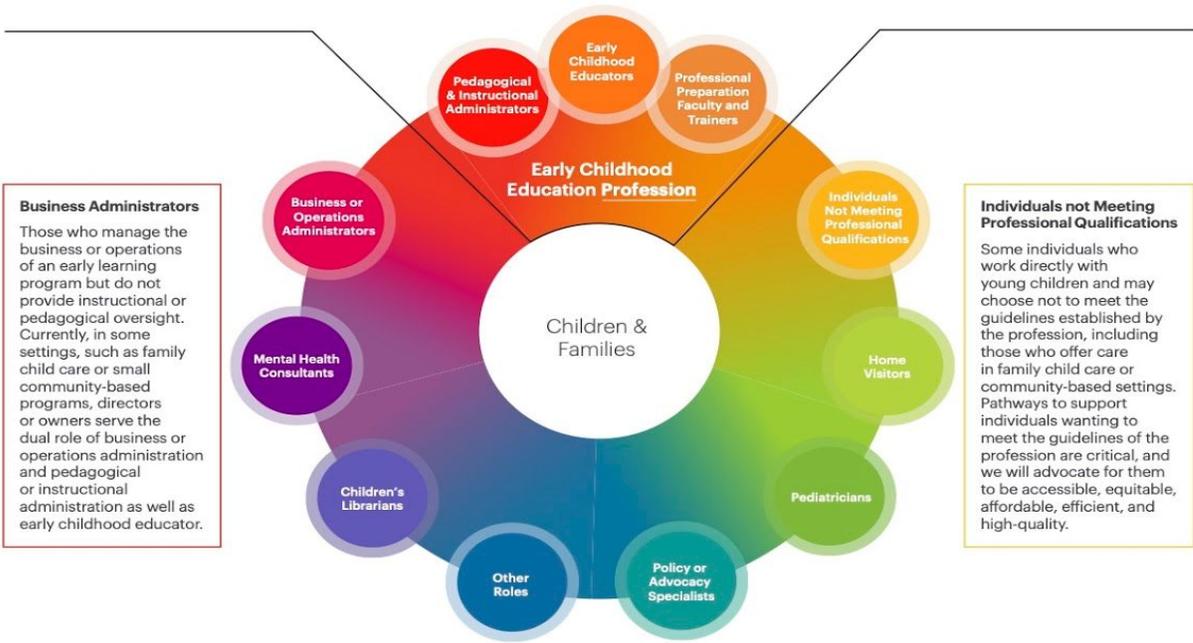
The early childhood field includes **other roles** that are not accountable for all of the responsibilities outlined in Roles and Responsibilities. Other roles are related occupations and professions in the early childhood field, such as mental health consultants, social workers, child psychologists, home visitors and others who often work closely with early childhood educators.

They may be prepared within an allied profession. Employers or funders may require that individuals serving in other roles be qualified as early childhood educators. That is at the discretion of the employer or funder and doesn't make that role part of the profession. For example, a particular home visiting program may require its home visitors to be qualified as early childhood educators, but that doesn't make all home visitors part of the profession.

The early childhood field also includes **individuals not meeting professional qualifications** established by the early childhood education profession. They may choose not to meet the qualifications for the profession. They may be employed in programs that do not require them to meet the qualifications. They may hold other credentials outside of the early childhood education profession, such as teacher licensure through the Agency of Education. While these members of the early childhood field can be valuable collaborative partners, they are not considered members of the early childhood education profession. Pathways for any of these individuals wanting to meet qualifications for the early childhood education profession should be accessible, equitable, and supportive.

The Early Childhood Education Profession within the Early Childhood Field

<p>Pedagogical or Instructional Administrators</p> <p>Pedagogical or instructional administrators guiding the practice of early childhood educators will need to meet the guidelines established by the Professional Governance Board.</p> <hr/> <p>Currently, in some contexts, these individuals may be referred to as directors, assistant directors, principals, education managers, supervisors, mentors, or training and technical assistance providers.</p>	<p>Early Childhood Educators</p> <p>Early childhood educators providing direct service to children birth through age 8 are responsible for meeting the guidelines of the early childhood education profession. They are the primary, but not singular, focus of the <i>Unifying Framework</i>.</p>	<p>Professional Preparation Faculty and Trainers</p> <p>A subset of higher education faculty and professional development staff (in the case of some ECE I programs) instructing, observing, and monitoring the practice of aspiring early childhood educators will also need to meet the guidelines established by the profession in future versions of the Unifying Framework.</p> <hr/> <p>Currently, in some contexts, these individuals may be referred to as teacher educators, clinical faculty, or professional development trainers/specialists. These are often the faculty responsible for teaching methods courses and supervising field experiences.</p>
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Business Administrators

Those who manage the business or operations of an early learning program but do not provide instructional or pedagogical oversight. Currently, in some settings, such as family child care or small community-based programs, directors or owners serve the dual role of business or operations administration and pedagogical or instructional administration as well as early childhood educator.

Individuals not Meeting Professional Qualifications

Some individuals who work directly with young children and may choose not to meet the guidelines established by the profession, including those who offer care in family child care or community-based settings. Pathways to support individuals wanting to meet the guidelines of the profession are critical, and we will advocate for them to be accessible, equitable, affordable, efficient, and high-quality.

Other Roles

Members of professions and occupations within the early childhood field, including those named here, such as mental health consultants, pediatricians, and home visitors, as well as others not named here, such as nurses, occupational therapists and social workers, often work closely with early childhood educators. They are not, however, part of the early childhood education profession because they are not held responsible for meeting the guidelines of that profession, just as early childhood educators aren't responsible for meeting the guidelines of their respective professions.

PowerToTheProfession.org

VTAEYC's Advancing as a Profession Task Force unanimously supports this document.

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