

# Providing Meals in Early Childhood Settings Study

ECDL 2023



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# Agenda



- Hunger in Vermont
  - The Importance of Nutrition in Early Childhood
  - Connecting Families to Food Access Resources
  - Meals in Child Care
  - *Providing Meals in Early Childhood Settings* Report & CACFP Mapping Tool Connection
  - Next Steps
-



(Niles et al., 2020)

# Hunger in Vermont

According to a recent University of Vermont study on *The Impact of Coronavirus on Vermonters Experiencing Food Insecurity*, households with children experience hunger and food insecurity at a higher rate than households without children

**30.3%**

Households  
with Children

VS

**20.7%**

Households  
without  
Children



# The Importance of Nutrition in Early Childhood

Adequate intake of nutrients is particularly important in the early years of life, when body growth and brain development are more rapid than during any other period.



# What About Meals in Childcare?



- Children in childcare may receive up to 3 of their meals + snacks throughout the childcare day
- There are many ways that children may receive meals in childcare, but the federal child nutrition program that childcare providers can participate in is called the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)
- With CACFP, participating programs receive a cash reimbursement for each qualifying meal or snack served

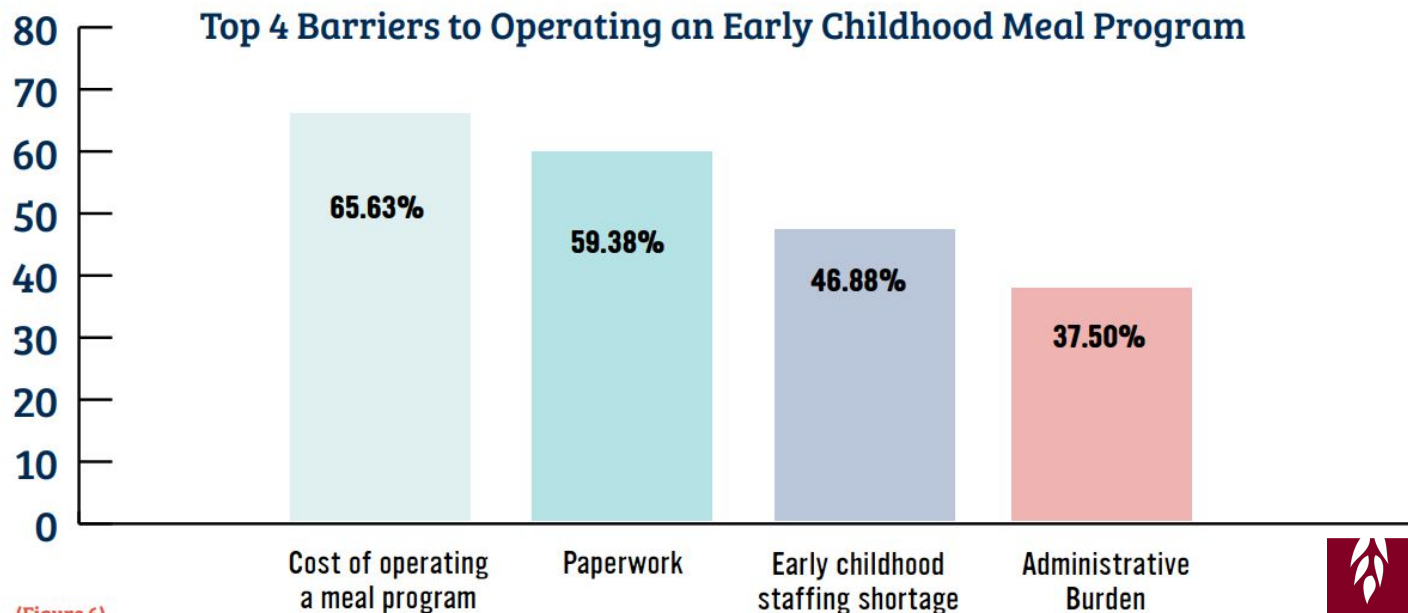
# What is the Landscape of Early Childhood Meal Programming in Vermont Childcare Programs?



- As of January, 2022, less than 39% of registered childcare programs in Vermont were participating in the CACFP
- Other ways that programs are offering meals include
  - Not Providing Meals (Parents Asked to Pack Meals)
  - Receiving meals through a School Food Authority (SFA)
  - Operating an independent meal program outside of the CACFP

# What are the Barriers to Providing Meals in Early Childhood Settings?

According to the Providing Meals in Early Childhood Settings report where we interviewed 32 registered childcare programs in Vermont...



(Figure 6)

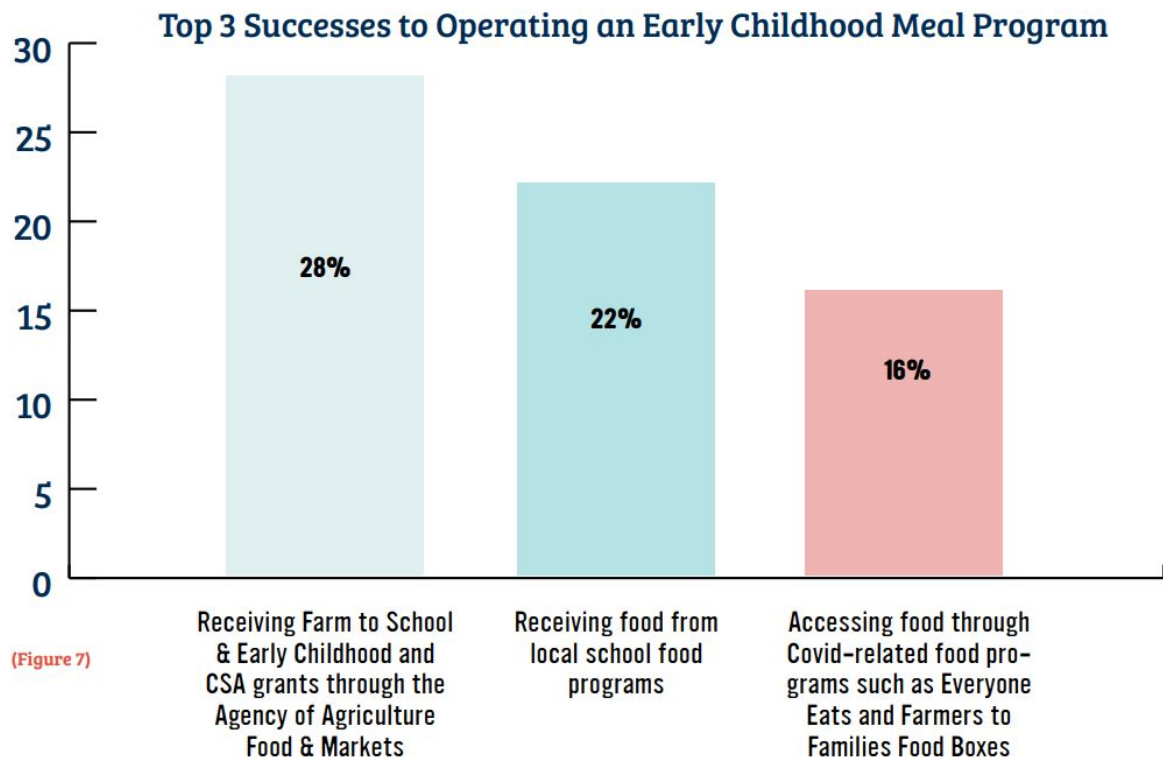


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# What are Success Stories for Providing Meals in Early Childhood Settings?

According to the Providing Meals in Early Childhood Settings report where we interviewed 32 registered childcare programs in Vermont....



(Figure 7)

# Wishlist Items - What Would You Need in Order to Operate Your Dream Meal Program?

According to the Providing Meals in Early Childhood Settings report where we interviewed 32 registered childcare programs in Vermont....

## WISHLIST- What do programs need in order to operate a successful early childhood Meal Program? *(for full data report see Table 4)*

Here is a summary list of some of the “dream program wishes” that came up the most often:

- Full-Time Cook, or a Part-Time staff member who is only in charge of the meal preparation - This request came up in every conversation in every region. When classroom teachers or program directors are expected to manage a meal program on top of the other responsibilities that are required of them, tasks arise that make it impossible for meals to be prepared and administered consistently. Not only does there need to be a specific role carved out for the staff member preparing meals, there is a considerable time requirement for administration (paperwork, etc.) of the meal program that requires consistent staff hours as well.
- Larger kitchen space
- Bulk buying power
- Universal meals in early childhood programs - this could be accomplished through proposed legislation for universally funded meals in Early Childhood Education (ECE) programs throughout Vermont
- Systems of streamlined electronic records for attendance and expense tracking
- More Farm to School & Farm to Early Childhood funding and support
- Meals delivered to early education programs as a result of partnerships with groups such as public schools food service programs, other local organizations, and businesses
- Higher CACFP per meal reimbursements
- Equipment like refrigerators (Especially in Registered and Licensed Family Child Care Homes)



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# Mapping the Child & Adult Care Food Program in Vermont, 2022



**The Vermont Farm to Early Childhood Coalition worked with Child Care Aware of America to develop a tool that maps Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) participation in Vermont.**

# CACFP Participation Statewide



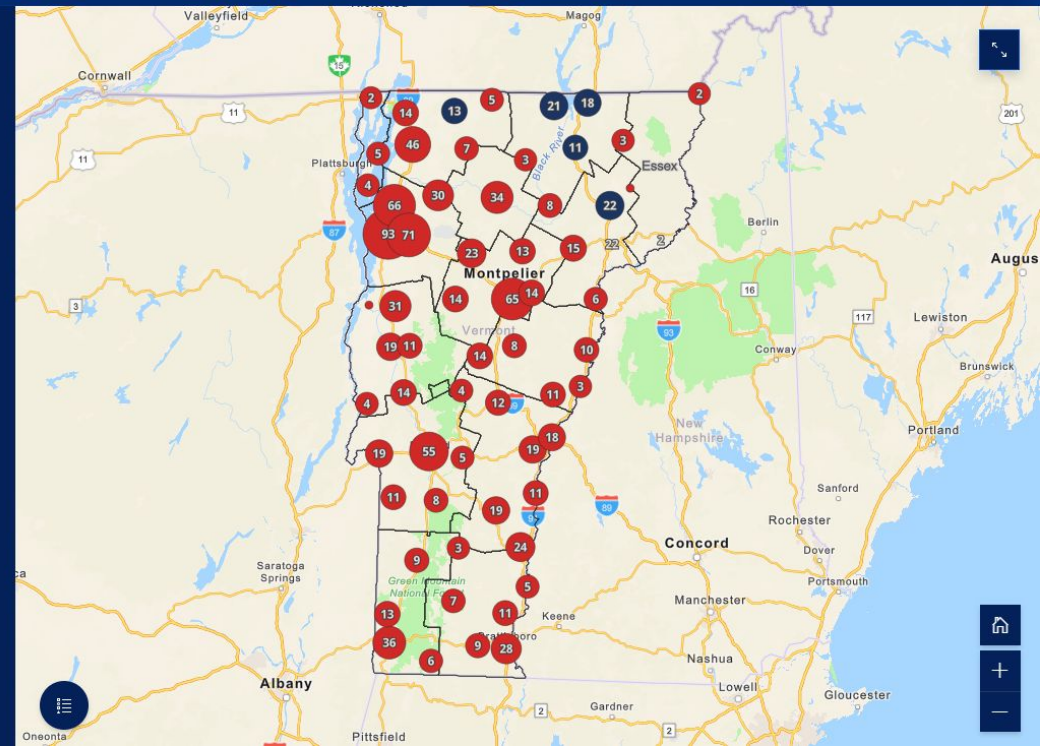
CACFP Participation in Vermont



- Introduction
- CACFP Participation
- Food Deserts
- Areas of Potential CACFP Elig...
- Food Insecurity and Poverty: A...
- The Child Opportunity Index
- Strategies for

## CACFP Participation

The map shows child care programs not participating in CACFP (in red) as the largest clusters throughout the state. Vermont has 1,111 child care programs, and 234 (21%) participate in CACFP. The majority of CACFP participating programs (65%) are licensed and registered family child care (FCC) providers, 32 percent are center-based programs (CCC) and 3 percent are afterschool child care programs.





# Food Deserts Statewide



CACFP Participation in Vermont



[Introduction](#)

[CACFP Participation](#)

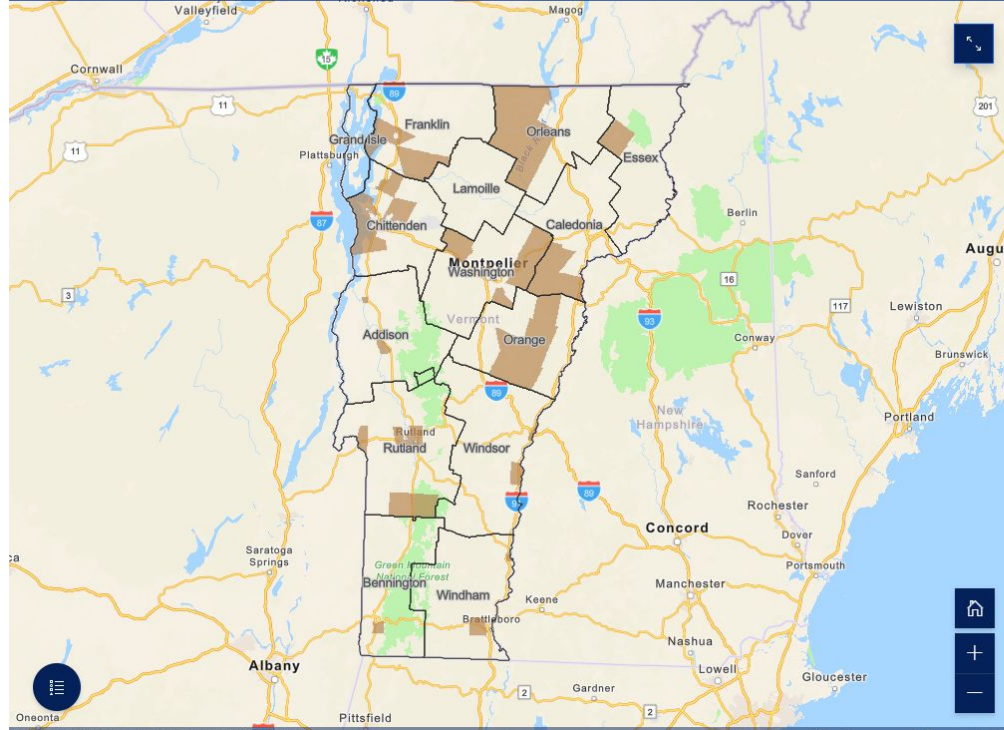
[Food Deserts](#)

[Areas of Potential CACFP Eligi...](#)

[Food Insecurity and Poverty: A...](#)

[The Child Opportunity Index](#)

[Strategies for](#)



## Food Deserts

Lack of access to healthy food options leads to a greater chance of diabetes and obesity. The USDA defines food deserts as low access to supermarkets or grocery stores. There are 39 census tracts, or neighborhoods, designated as food deserts in Vermont, meaning there is low access to healthy and nutritious food within 1 mile for urban areas and 10 miles for rural areas by census tract.



# Food Deserts Layered with CACFP Data Statewide



CACFP Participation in Vermont



[Introduction](#)

[CACFP Participation](#)

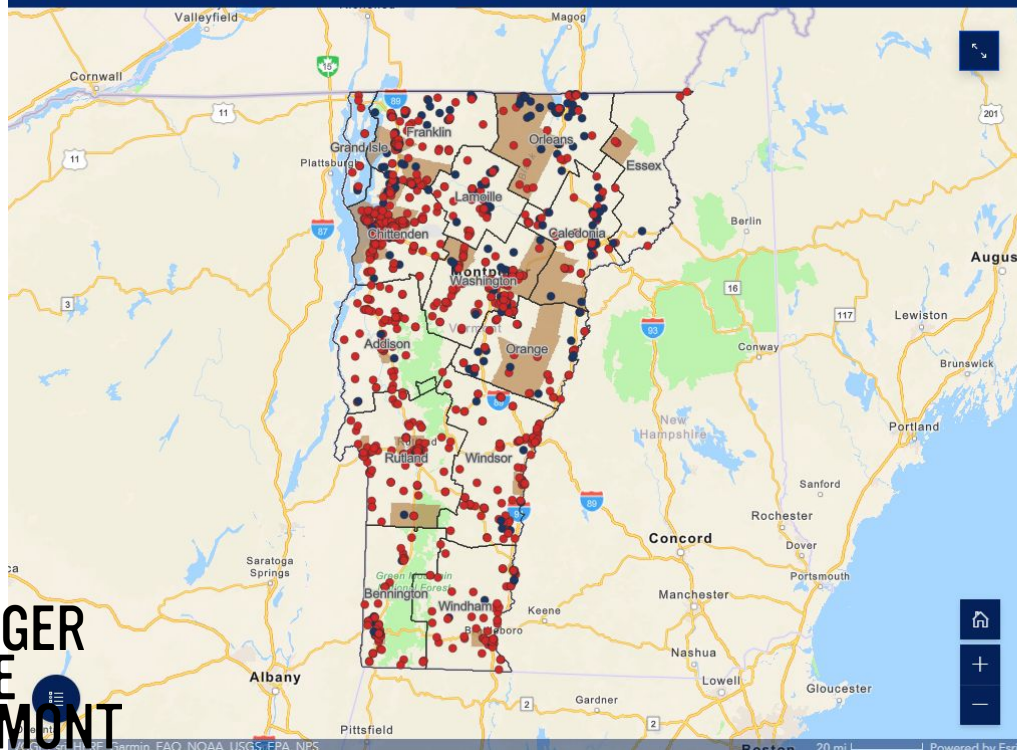
[Food Deserts](#)

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## Child Care Programs in Food Deserts

There are 308 child care programs in Vermont operating in food deserts, 249 (80%) of which do not participate in CACFP. In these communities, CACFP can support children enrolled in child care by ensuring providers are reimbursed adequately for serving nutritious meals in their programs. CACFP reimbursements further encourage providers to serve nutritious meals to children who may otherwise be unable to access daily nutrient needs.



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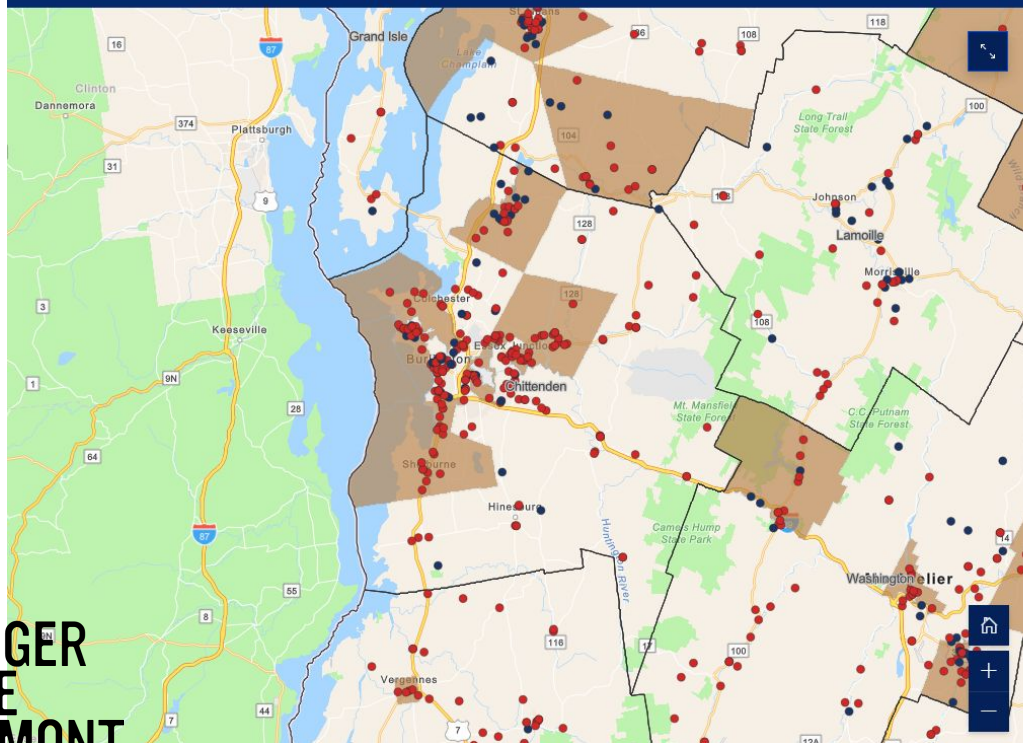
# Spotlight: Chittenden County



CACFP Participation in Vermont



Introduction CACFP Participation Food Deserts Areas of Potential CACFP Elig... Food Insecurity and Poverty: A... The Child Opportunity Index Strategies for



## Spotlight: Chittenden County

Chittenden county is home to Burlington, Vermont's largest city, and Essex, the second largest populated incorporated area in Vermont. Most of the food deserts (*census tracts highlighted in brown*) lie within parts of Burlington, South Burlington, and Essex. The map shows more child care programs not participating in CACFP (148 programs, or 87%) within or at most two miles away from the food desert tracts. Expanding CACFP participation in this area can benefit children in these food desert tracts access nutrient dense meals.



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# Spotlight: Southeastern Vermont Mapping Tool vs Report

Southeastern VT (SEVCA)	Windsor County	Registered Home		Yes	Did not provide		Did not provide
Southeastern VT (SEVCA)	Windsor County	Licensed Center	Medium (approximately 13-59 children)	Yes	Did not provide	Cost of food is budgeted for the program at \$1500/month, but usually goes over.	Did not provide

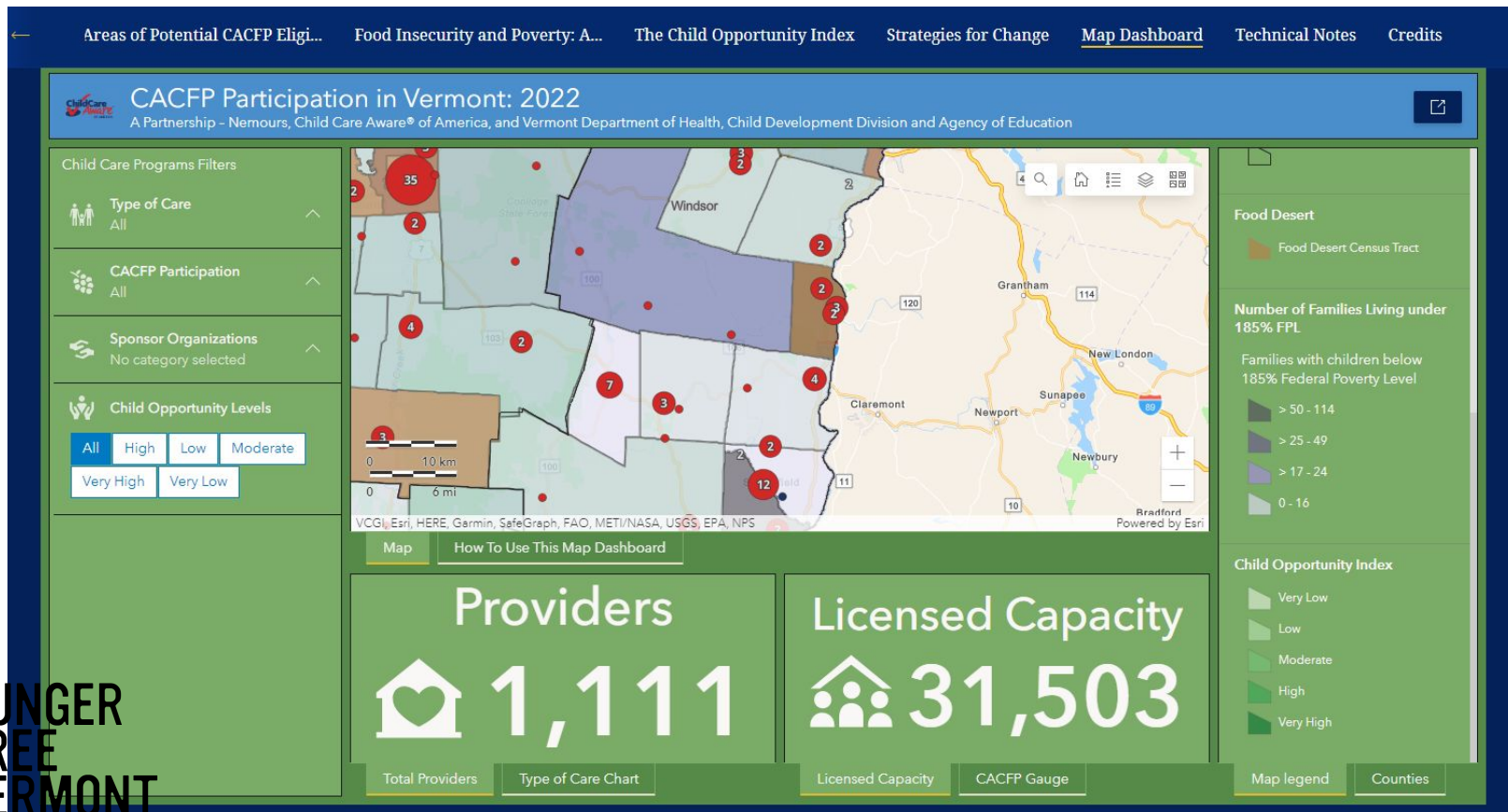


**Table 1: Cost of Operating an Early Childhood Meal Program Data** (cont.)

Head Start Region	County	Type of Early Childhood Program	Size of Program	Participates in CACFP (Yes/No)	Estimated Annual Program Cost	Insight Into Program Cost (if provided)	Estimated Annual Federal Reimbursement (if participating in CACFP)
Southeastern VT (SEVCA)	Windsor County	Registered Home		Yes	\$13,000	Has recently been traveling to Claremont NH from Springfield- Shaws in Springfield is too expensive to be able to afford the groceries. Knows of other providers having to do the same.	\$6,000



# Spotlight: Southeastern Vermont Mapping Tool vs Report





# What's Next?



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## How will this data be used by HFVT & Partners?



**The Providing Meals in Early Childhood Settings report findings will be used to advance early childhood nutrition advocacy initiatives and to expand nutrition programming in early childhood settings in coming years. Specific initiatives that this report can support include:**

***Informing*** statewide child care financing reform to include nutrition program funding support

***Helping*** to emphasize the importance of early childhood legislation support as we communicate with state legislators

***Adapting*** the technical assistance and program support that technical assistance organizations such as Hunger Free Vermont provide

***Inspiring*** future follow-up studies and data collection to further advance the ability for all children to have access to nutrition in early childhood settings

***Outlining*** new grant programs that can impact early childhood programs' ability to expand upon current nutrition programming or to access nutrition programming for the first time

# Important Links & Resources



- *Providing Meals in Early Childhood Settings* Report & Infographic
  - CACFP Mapping Tool
  - *The Impact of Coronavirus on Vermonters Experiencing Food Insecurity*, University of Vermont Study
  - [vermontfoodhelp.com](https://vermontfoodhelp.com)
-

# Contacts!

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# Thank You!

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# PROVIDING MEALS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD SETTINGS

March 2022



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

Hunger Free Vermont is grateful for the expansive and diverse network of early childhood partners who contributed to this project and its success. We want to first acknowledge the support of Rebecca Webb, the Act 166 Regional Coordinator for the Winooski Valley Superintendents Association, for the many hours spent interviewing and taking notes during these important conversations with early childhood programs and for being a direct collaborator on this final report. We also want to extend our gratitude to Cynthia Greene and the Vermont Farm to School & Early Childhood Network for coordinating the funding for the honorariums provided to participants interviewed. Finally, we want to thank the cohort of Middlebury Students who took the time to process and organize the raw data so that it could be analyzed and pulled into this report. The students supported this work as a part of their coursework. Their passion for learning more about how advocacy can positively impact nutrition programs is greatly appreciated.

## **Additional support for the Providing Meals in Early Childhood study has been provided by the following:**

- VERMONT ASSOCIATION FOR THE EDUCATION OF YOUNG CHILDREN (VTAEYC)
- VERMONT AGENCY OF EDUCATION
- VERMONT AGENCY OF AGRICULTURE FOOD AND MARKETS
- LET'S GROW KIDS
- BUILDING BRIGHT FUTURES
- VERMONT CAPSTONE COMMUNITY ACTION
- VERMONT FARM TO SCHOOL & EARLY CHILDHOOD NETWORK

## **About Hunger Free Vermont:**

Hunger Free Vermont is a statewide anti-hunger advocacy organization. Hunger Free Vermont's mission is to end the injustice of hunger and malnutrition for all Vermonters. This work is achieved through federal and state advocacy, technical assistance and support for child nutrition programs, and ensuring that adults, especially older Vermonters, have the nutrition resources they need to stay healthy. We promote and advocate for equitable policy solutions.

For more information, visit us at [www.hungerfreevt.org](http://www.hungerfreevt.org) or sign up for our **e-news**.



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# ABSTRACT

**Executive Summary:** Children aged 0-5 years old go through physical and emotional development at a faster pace than any other time in their lives. Because of this, it is imperative that young children receive proper nutrition and enough food for proper development. We know that the nutrition and physical activity habits formed during early childhood are often lifelong habits. Providing nourishing meals and snacks in early childhood programs, such as childcare and after school programs, is an essential component of quality early childhood programming. We interviewed representatives from thirty-two (32) early childhood programs across Vermont to learn more about how much it costs to provide meals in an early childhood setting, what barriers early education programs encounter in operating a meal program, and how programs have successfully provided meals and snacks to children enrolled in their early childhood programs. We conducted all of the focus groups between September and December, 2021.

## **Key Findings:**

The top four barriers to providing meals and snacks in early childhood programs were identified as:

### **Cost:**

65.63% of participating early childhood programs identified cost as being one of the primary barriers to operating any type of meal program in their early childhood program

### **Paperwork:**

59.38% of participating early childhood programs identified the amount of paperwork involved in operating a meal program as a barrier to being able to provide meals and snacks to the children enrolled in their early childhood program

### **Staffing Shortages:**

46.88% of participating early childhood programs identified lack of staff as a barrier to operating a meal program. Many programs lack staff capacity for

procuring food, preparing meals and snacks, and administering the federal Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP).

### **Time:**

37.50% of participating early childhood programs identified the time it takes to operate any type of meal program as a barrier to being able to provide snacks and meals. Time refers to the time it takes to procure food, prepare food, serve food, and to complete the necessary meal counts and other meal program requirements.

### The top three successes for early childhood meal programs were identified as:

- Receiving Farm to School & Early Childhood and CSA grants through the Agency of Agriculture Food & Markets: 28% of participating early childhood programs identified the accessibility of these state grants as directly related to the success and/or expansion of their meal program.
- Receiving food through local school food programs: 22% of participating early childhood programs identified being able to receive meals from local school food programs as directly related to the success and viability of their meal program. Early childhood programs can receive meals from local food service programs through the Child and Adult Care Food Program or through the National School Lunch Program (NSLP). It should be noted that the National School Lunch program is not meant to serve children who are not of school age.
- Accessing Food through COVID-19-related food programs, such as Everyone Eats and Farmers to Families Foodboxes: 16% of participating early childhood

programs reported these pandemic-response food programs as contributing to their food program success. Many of the participating early childhood programs were also able to provide families with food and meals due to these pandemic-related food access programs.

### List of what programs require in order to operate a successful early childhood meal program:

- Full-Time Cook, or a Part-Time staff member that is only in charge of the meal preparation - this came up in every conversation in every region
- Larger kitchen space
- Universal meals in early childhood programs
- Systems of shared electronic records for attendance and expense tracking
- More Farm to School & Farm to Early Childhood funding and support
- Meals delivered to early education programs as a result of partnerships with groups such as public school food service programs, other local organizations, or businesses

- Bulk buying power
- Higher CACFP reimbursements
- Equipment like refrigerators (Especially in Registered and Licensed Family Child Care Homes)

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## HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE HUNGER FREE VERMONT EARLY CHILDHOOD COST SURVEY OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

**32 Early Childhood programs serving over 1,200 children from all around Vermont were all asked the same set of questions about their experience operating a meal program:**

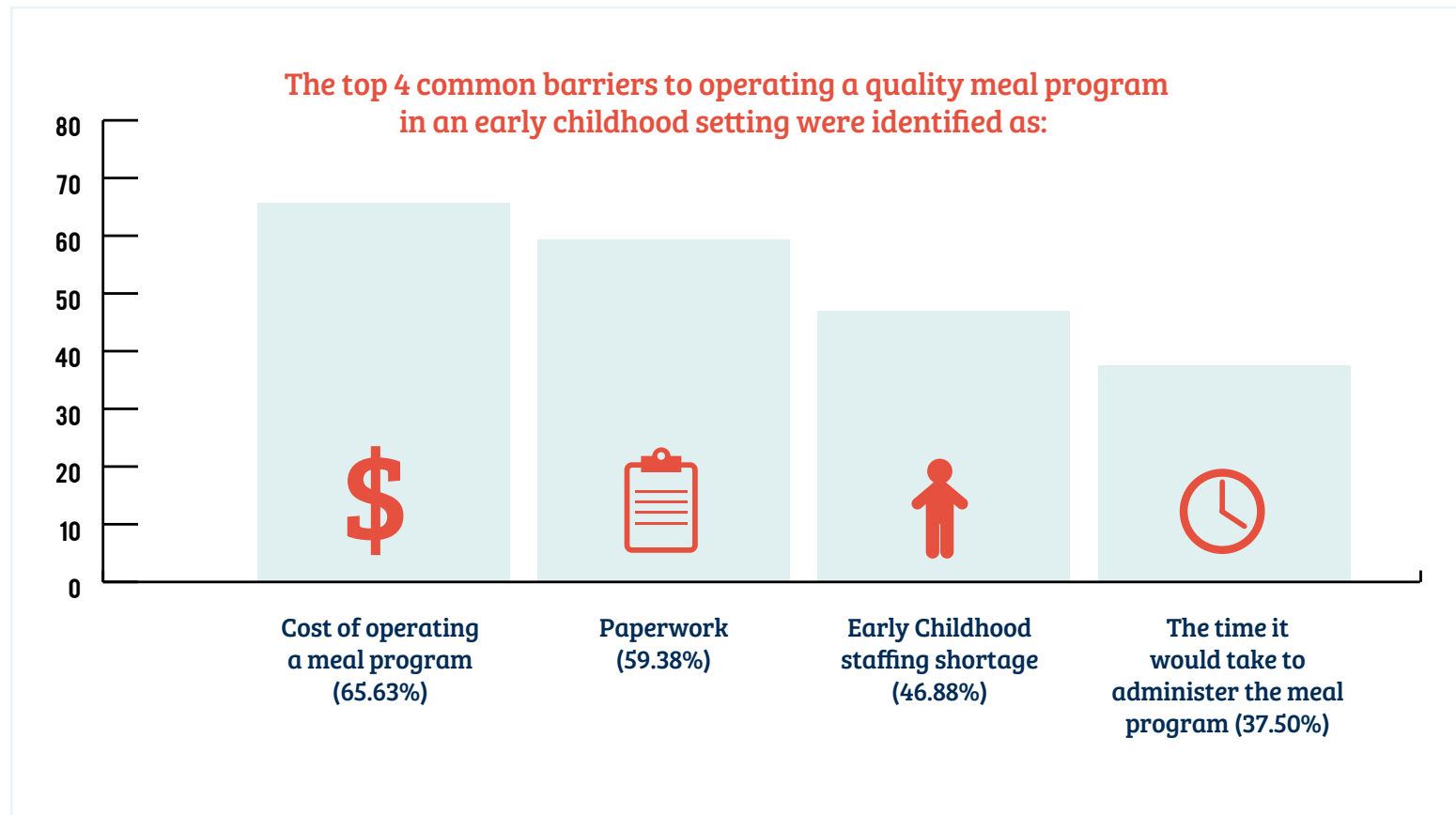
- What is the cost of operating your meal program, if you have one?
- What are barriers to operating a successful meal program in an early childhood settings?
- What are the successes you've experienced operating your early childhood meal program?
- What are things you would need in order to operate your dream program?

### What will this data be used for?

The hope is that the information gleaned from these important conversations will be used to better advocate for and support early childhood programs across Vermont in many ways. We can use this data and these personal narratives to provide more intentional technical assistance, and to advocate for program flexibilities and expansion at the federal level to make the federal meal program more accessible for early childhood programs. All children deserve equitable access to quality nutrition, whether they are at home, at school, or enrolled in an early childhood program.

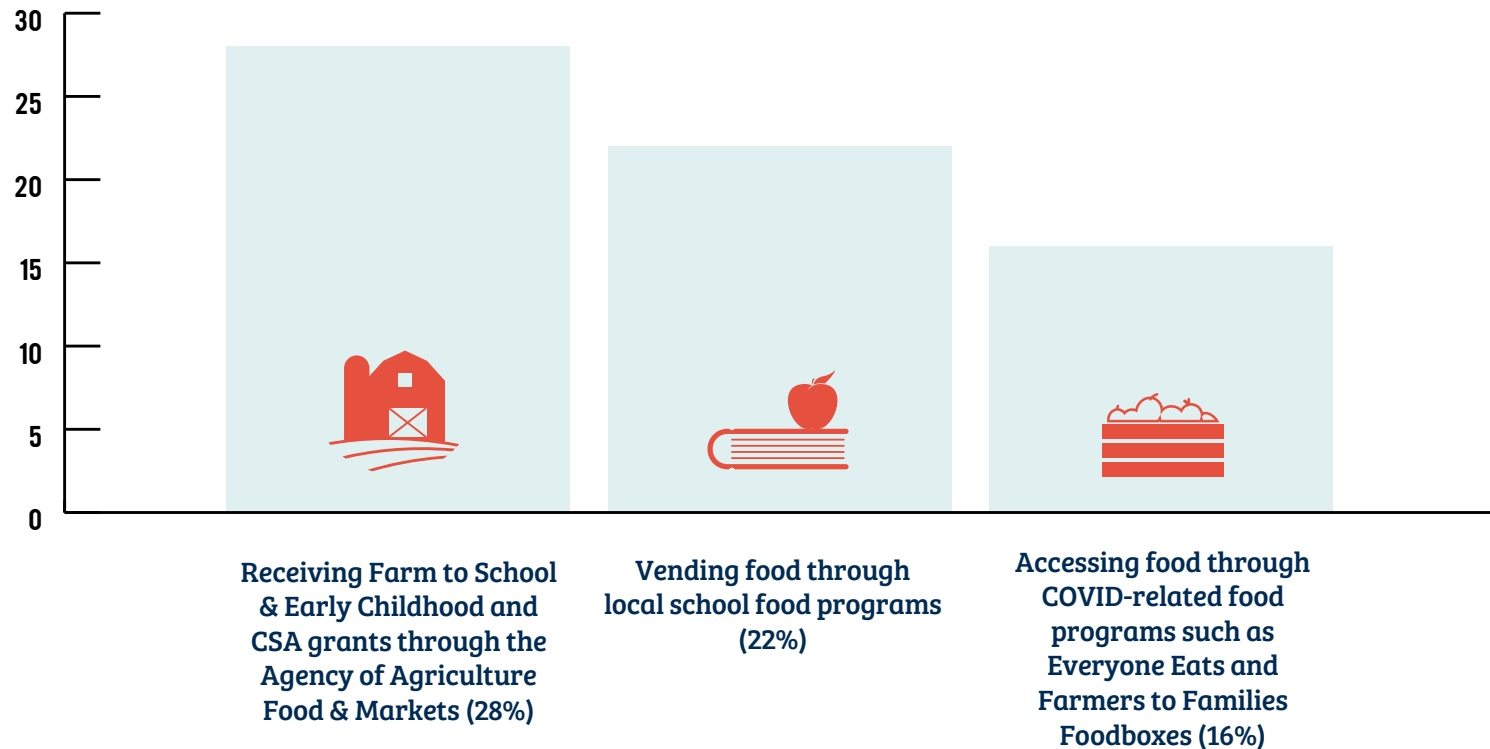


## OUT OF THE 32 EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS WHO PARTICIPATED IN THIS STUDY...

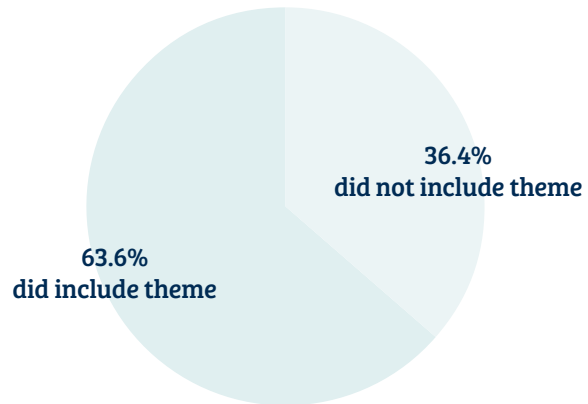




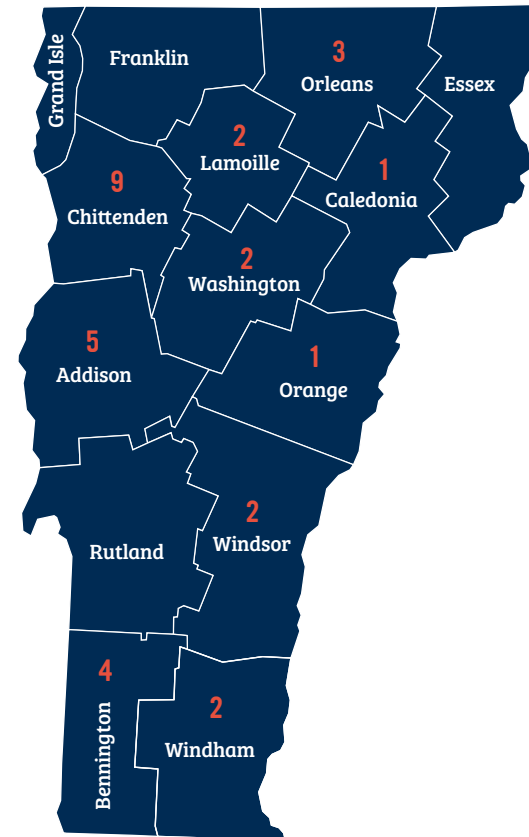
**The top three most commonly mentioned successes included:**



63.6% of the conversations included themes of Farm to School & Early Childhood



### Demographics by county:



# INTRODUCTION

**With national and state-wide spotlights on early childhood programming, there has never been a more essential time for us to hear directly from early childhood program staff. As work continues to transform Vermont's early childhood system, we want to make sure that nutrition in early childhood programs remains a part of the conversation. In order to make positive early childhood nutrition and meal program reform with the necessary supports and financing to sustain commitment to whole child development, we need to have discussions with the folks operating in the field.**

## **Purpose:**

The purpose of the study was to examine the average cost of providing food (meals and snacks) in early childhood and early learning locations. We also wanted to get a deeper understanding of what barriers early childhood programs encounter when trying to provide meals in their programs, as well as examples of programs who have experienced successes when providing food

to children. We hope to use the testimonies and recommendations collected directly from early childhood programs to facilitate regional and statewide communities of practice to support early childhood programs and to make sure that all children have access to quality nutrition in early childhood. We intend to use this report and accompanying infographic as tools for state-level and federal nutrition program advocacy efforts and to inform support of high quality early childhood programming. The results presented in this report demonstrate deep fractures in the current food system that early childhood programs are navigating, and a need for immediate legislative action.

## **Method:**

We used Google Forms to recruit early childhood programs and we also used Google Forms to collect program information and demographics. We chose to use Google Forms due to the accessibility and familiarity that early childhood programs tend to have with

the Google platform. It also allowed for greater collaboration with partners as we worked to collect and analyze the resulting information.

We wanted to make sure we were hearing from programs who participate in the federal **Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)**, programs who are either providing meals and snacks through an alternative method, and early childhood programs who do not provide food at all. We recruited a representative sample of thirty-two (32) early childhood programs across the state of Vermont and formed six (6) statewide focus groups as a way of convening these conversations.

In order to ensure representation from a variety of programs we enlisted the help of established early childhood networks, organizations, and contacts to help with recruitment. Focus groups with early care and education providers were held virtually (via Zoom) for each region.

Due to the operating hours of early childhood programs and known staffing shortages, we implemented study practices to maximize participation. These practices included holding conversations combining multiple regions and scheduling individual conversations with programs at a different time in order for them to be able to participate. Our ability to remain flexible meant that we could secure more programs' participation. Often we had to meet with participants early in the morning, during nap time, or in the evening to ensure we were not interrupting program operations. We conducted all of the focus groups between September through December, 2021.

We asked four (4) questions of each early childhood program. The questions we asked were carefully and intentionally developed by a workgroup that included members as listed in the acknowledgements. Participants were given these questions ahead of the conversation and encouraged to connect with their colleagues to bring prepared information to the conversation.

1. **What is your perceived cost of your meal program?** This number would include cost of food, cost of

infrastructure (supplies, cooking space, etc.) and cost of labor. This might be easiest to calculate with a weekly or monthly snapshot.

2. **What are the barriers to operating your dream meal program?** Examples of barriers could be administrative burden, cost, etc.
3. **What are stories of success you've had with your meal program?** Examples could be a collaboration with local schools or stakeholders, connections made with families, resources that have made an impact, and more. These successes may help to encourage other early childhood programs to expand and increase access within their own organizations.
4. **What does or would your dream nutrition and/or meal programming look like in your early childhood setting?**

The qualitative data that we collected and program demographics are recorded in the following report.

**Funding:** For participating in these focus groups, early childhood educators received a \$50 honorarium in the form of a check. These honorariums were offered by the

Vermont Farm to Early Childhood Coalition with support from ASPHN and the FIG Grant.

**Limitations:** Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we were unable to move forward with our intention of in-person recruitment and focus groups. Technology was a barrier for some, but for the most part early childhood programs have gotten used to attending meetings virtually. This could explain a lower than anticipated response rate. The programs who participated in this study were recruited through well-established early childhood networks in the state, which meant that programs who have access to such networks are the programs that saw the opportunity and had the ability to opt-in.

There is currently no updated research on this topic outside of this siloed study. A lack of understanding about what these programs looked like prior to the pandemic made it difficult to understand the context of meal program cost, successes, and barriers without looking through the lens of COVID-19.

Only two people were responsible for leading the focus group conversations, which contributed to time and scheduling limitations.

# PART 1: Current Child Care Demographics In Vermont

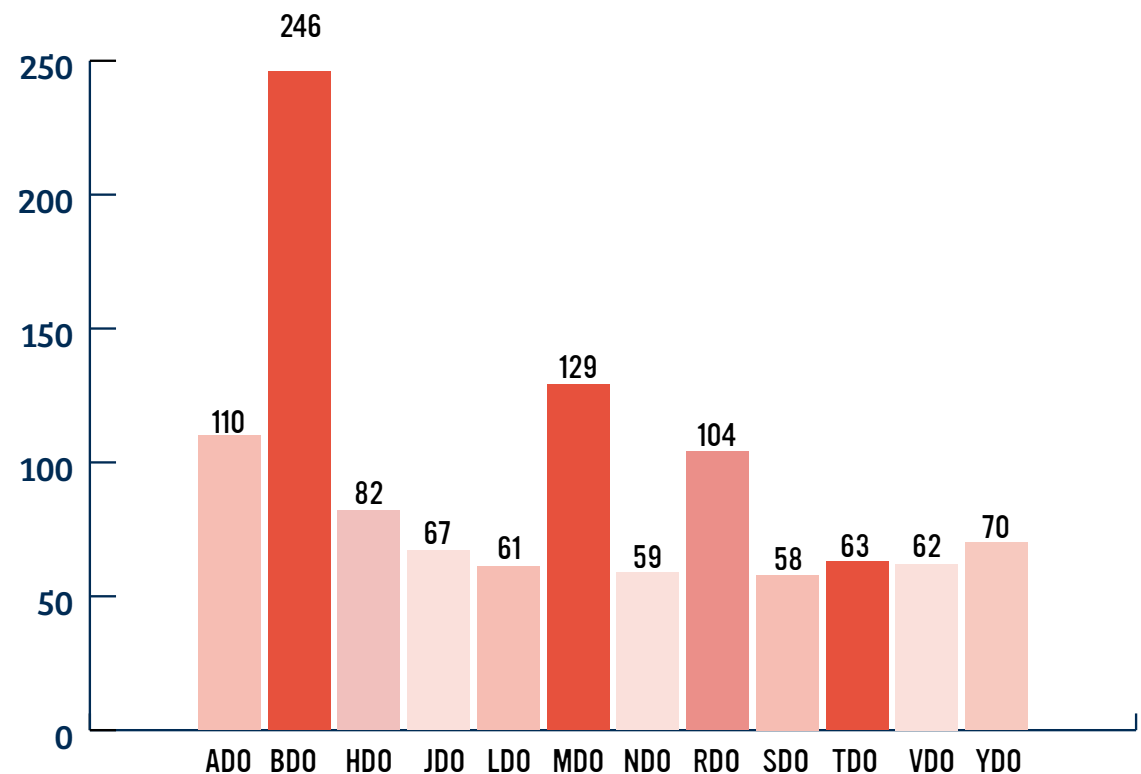
The total number of early childhood programs in Vermont as of February, 2022, is **1,111** (Vermont Child Development Division)

\*The Agency of Human Services administers regional programs across the state of Vermont based out of 12 districts. The AHS districts are co-located with the 12 Economic Services Division (ESD) district offices, organizing the counties in Vermont under each of the 12 offices. A description of the towns that are in each district can be found in the above link.

## AHS District Region Abbreviation List:

ADO St. Albans	JDO St. Johnsbury
NDO Newport	TDO Bennington
BDO Burlington	LDO Brattleboro
RDO Rutland	VDO Bennington
HDO Hartford	MDO Barre
SDO Springfield	YDO Middlebury

Number of Early Childhood Programs by AHS District





## PART 2: Food Mapping

State food program data as collected from Vermont Department of Children and Families, Child Development Division, and the Vermont Agency of Education.

### Vermont Department of Children and Families, Child Development Division

**Data:** Out of the 1,111 child care programs operating in the state of Vermont, **188 programs (or ~17% of total Vermont programs) have self-identified** in Vermont's Bright Futures Information System (BFIS) that they provide a food program. BFIS is the statewide child care information system that supports licensing, professional development, child care financial assistance (subsidy), and more. It should be noted that the CDD does not define "Food Program Participation" as participating in the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP), so when a program says they operate a food program, it does not necessarily mean that they participate in the CACFP according to this data. It should also be noted that, while it is recommended that programs update their information regularly after they are onboarded, it is not required

that they update their data. This could be a reason for the disparity we see between the CDD's meal program data and the meal program data we received from the Agency of Education, which administers the CACFP in Vermont.

\*According to the Vermont Agency of Human Services Department for Children and Families, "Programs providing child care services to non-recurring clientele are considered Center Based Child Care and Preschool Programs." Non-recurring programs are meant to meet short-term and temporary child care needs and, as a result, are exempt from certain rules outlined in state regulations.

Self-Reported Food Program Participation <i>Vermont Child Care Provider Data</i>	
Type of Program	Number of Programs Participating in Food Program
Licensed Family Child Care Homes (FCCH)	3
Registered Family Child Care Homes (FCCH)	29
Afterschool Child Care Program	0
Center Based Child Care and Preschool Program (CBCCPP)	153
CBCCPP non-recurring*	3
<b>Total:</b>	<b>188</b>

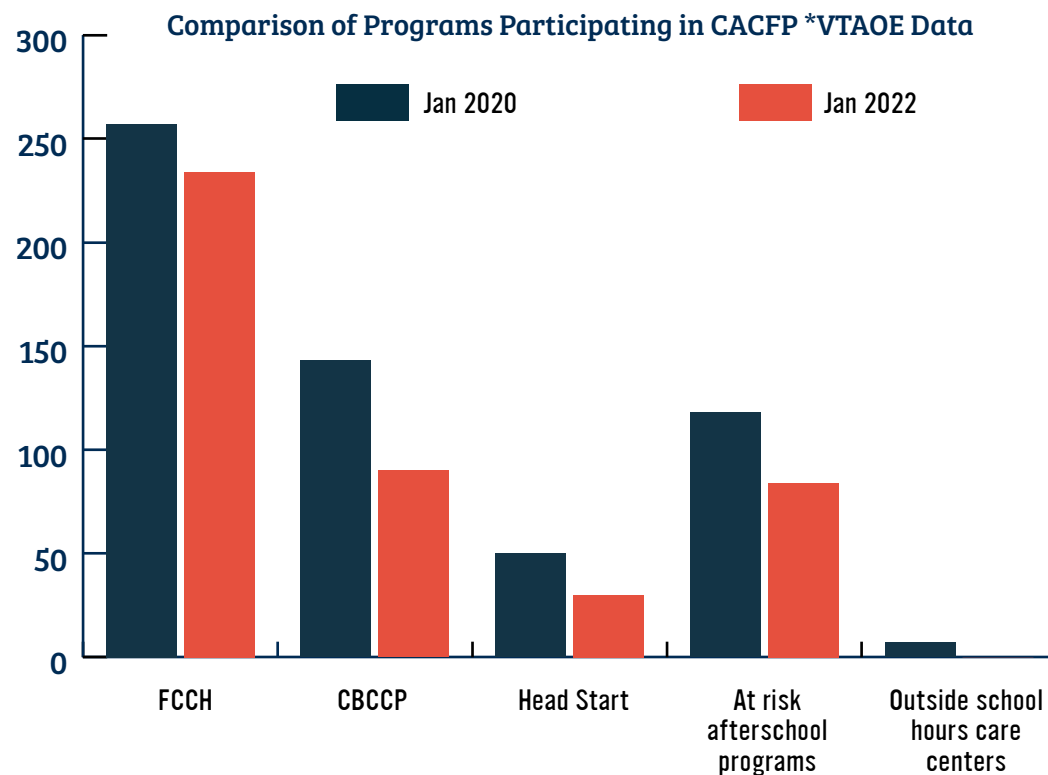
### Vermont Agency of Education Data:

The Vermont Agency of Education administers the federal child nutrition program, the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP). Out of the 1,111 child care programs operating in the state of Vermont, **438 early childhood programs (or ~39%) are recorded as participating in the CACFP** as of March, 2022. These are reported numbers based on participation in the federal Child and Adult Care Food Program and do not include other alternative meal program models. It is clear from this data that there are gaps in childrens' ability to access equitable nutrition in child care in Vermont. It can be seen in the data below that there was a significant decline in the number of early childhood programs participating in the CACFP prior to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic versus the current (January 2022) number of programs participating in the CACFP. Prior to the pandemic (January 2020), 137 more early childhood programs were serving children meals and snacks through the CACFP.

In January 2020 five hundred seventy five (575) Vermont early education programs were enrolled in CACFP, while in January 2022 that number decreased to four hundred thirty eight (438) programs.

This decrease can be attributed partially to program closures resulting from the pandemic. The decrease could also be due to early childhood programs in communities most impacted by hunger being disproportionately affected by the pandemic and not being able to access the resources necessary to continue operating a meal program.

For early childhood programs existing in areas defined as food deserts or where there are less community support programs, mainly in the extremely rural corners of our state such as Windsor and Essex/Orleans counties, it is that much more difficult to access resources.



### A Note on Differences in Data:

For years it has been apparent that Vermont's early childhood data systems are antiquated, siloed, and duplicative. **A 2020 needs assessment done by Building Bright Futures** found that data infrastructure and resources are necessary to facilitate data integration. The lack of data integration causes unnecessary process duplication for early childhood programs and it creates variation in data across systems, as seen here. Data infrastructure would also help to close data gaps and promote data informed decision making across early childhood sectors in Vermont.

This data gap is apparent in the numbers expressed above. The Child Development Division does not offer a definition of “food program” for the early childhood field. It is unclear when looking at the Bright Futures Information System (BFIS) how early childhood providers are entering their food program information, how they interpreted the question, or if the provider participates in a federal meal program or offers more informal nutritional services. The data provided through the Agency of Education is a regularly updated number of programs in the state of Vermont who participate in the CACFP. The difference in the information impacts the story of

nutrition within Vermont's early education programs.

The current early childhood data infrastructure in Vermont is outdated and data systems don't talk to each other or are disconnected from each other. This feedback is highlighted in some of the raw data we collected (see Tables 1-4), and creates barriers to equitable access and creates administrative burdens for both families and early childhood providers. One of the most commonly mentioned barriers to participating in the CACFP is the fact that early childhood providers have to take attendance for the meal program separately from all of the other programs they have to take attendance for on a day-to-day basis. Attendance collection duplication contributes to the amount of time it takes to administer the meal program, and was captured as one of the top four most commonly mentioned barriers to being able to provide meals and snacks in early childhood settings. When there is unnecessary duplication of data collection, systems that are not required are dropped due to lack of time and staffing shortages. Since it is not required that an early childhood program provides meals and snacks, meal programs are often the first to get left behind due to this barrier created by a lack of efficiency

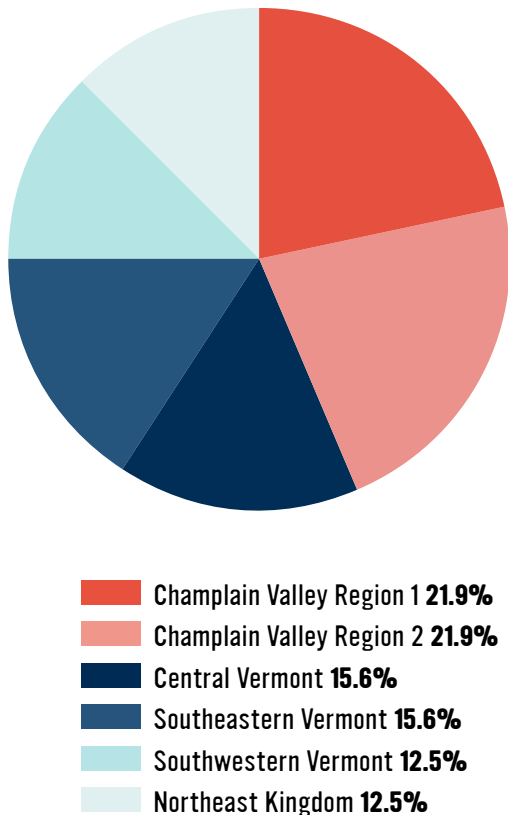
and streamlining in early childhood data collection systems.

The immediate need for reform within the early childhood data systems in Vermont is clear. Until early childhood data systems are properly funded and systematized, families and early childhood programs will continue to be negatively impacted by inequitable access to necessary services and resources. There must be immediate legislative advocacy that supports streamlining early childhood data systems in Vermont.



## PART 3: Who We Heard From:

Participation by State Region



14 programs were from the Champlain Valley Region of VT\* (Addison, Chittenden, Franklin & Grand Isle Counties)

5 programs were from Central VT (Washington, Lamoille, and Orange Counties)

5 programs were from Southeastern VT (Windham and Windsor Counties)

4 programs were from Southwestern VT (Rutland/Bennington Counties)

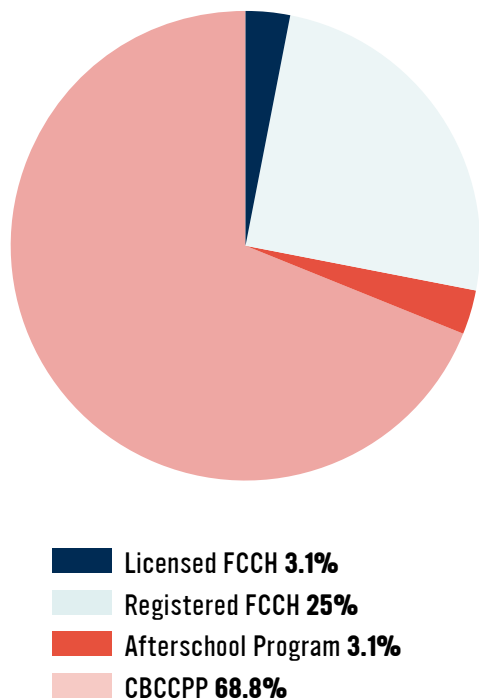
4 programs were from the Northeast Kingdom of VT (Caledonia, Essex, and Orleans Counties)

\*Due to population and program density in the Champlain Valley Region we recruited more programs to interview in order to achieve accurate representation.

\*\*Two (2) programs that we talked to have sites operating in two (2) or more AHS districts.



### Types of Early Childhood Programs who participated in this study.



### Center Based Child Care and Preschool Programs (CBCCPP):

According to the Vermont Child Care Center Based Child Care and Preschool Programs Licensing Regulations “A Center Based Child Care and Preschool Program provides developmentally appropriate care, education, protection, and supervision that are designed to ensure wholesome growth and educational experiences for children outside of their own homes for periods of less than twenty-four (24) hours per day. A Center Based Child Care and Preschool Program operates as a business or service on a regular or continuous basis, whether or not for compensation. Prekindergarten programs operated by public and private schools are considered Center Based Child Care and Preschool Programs. Programs providing child care services to non-recurring clientele are considered Center Based Child Care and Preschool Programs”

### Registered and Licensed Family Child Care Homes ( Registered and Licensed FCCH):

According to Vermont Child Care Family Childcare Home Licensing Regulations “A Family Child Care Home provides care for children from more than two (2) families other than their own.” These programs must be registered or licensed and the differentiation between these two terms is dependent on the number of children which the program is licensed to care for.

### Public School Operated Pre-K Program

According to the Vermont Child Care Licensing Regulations “Public School Pre-kindergarten Program” referred to as “PSPP” in these regulations, means a licensed CBCCPP for which the licensee is a public school system also overseen by the Vermont Agency of Education.

### Afterschool Program

According to the Vermont Afterschool Child Care Licensing Regulations “An Afterschool Child Care Program is any place operated as a business or service on a regular or continuous basis, whether or not for compensation. This child care service is provided by an entity or person other than the child’s own parent, guardian or relative.”



## PART 4: Types of Meal Service Models Reported by Participants in this Study:

**The Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP):** The federal Child Nutrition Program that early childhood programs can opt into is the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP).

**Receiving Meals and Snacks from a School District:** Some early childhood programs do not have the infrastructure, staff capacity, or time to prepare meals for the children in their program. Programs facing these challenges have recently started partnering with their local school's school food service programs to ensure that children still receive adequate nutrition during the care day, despite the barriers the early childhood program faces to providing meals and snacks themselves. Some early childhood programs we talked to in this study work with schools through the CACFP, while others have been using COVID-19 child nutrition waivers. These waivers have allowed school food service programs to serve all children 18 and under free meals during the pandemic. Although the waivers allowing schools to serve all children 18 and under for free ended in June of 2022,

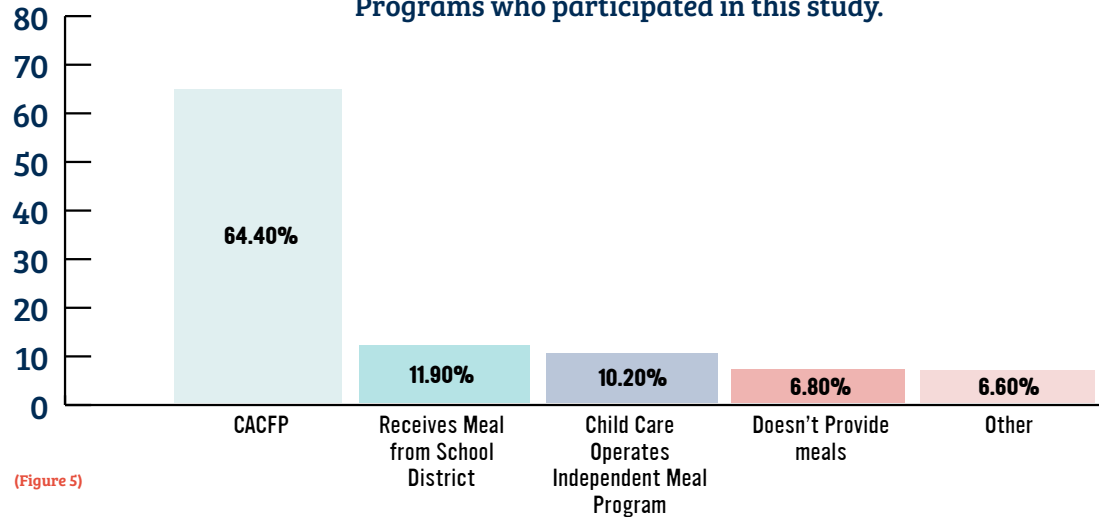
schools have always been permitted to vend meals to early childhood programs through the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP). The Vermont Agency of Education has worked hard to create a vending agreement template to help support partnerships between school food service programs and early childhood programs wanting to vend meals.

**Child Care Program Operating an Independent Meal Program:** There are early childhood programs in Vermont who do not participate in the CACFP, and yet they still provide breakfast, lunch, dinner and/or snacks or a combination of meals and snacks to the children enrolled in the program. Programs operating an independent meal program do not receive federal reimbursements, and therefore have to fund the meal program either completely out of tuition funds or some other funding source. Early childhood programs operating an independent meal program are still required to follow nutrition guidelines similar to those in the CACFP.

**Child Care Program Not Providing Meals or Snacks:** There are early childhood programs in the state and amongst the participants in this study who do not or are unable to provide meals and snacks funded by their program. In these cases families are often required to send food in with their children.



**Types of Meal Programs Operated by Early Childhood Programs who participated in this study.**



(Figure 5)



**CACFP Numbers as reported by the Vermont Agency of Education vs representation in this report:**

It should be noted that the percentage of programs who participate in the CACFP in the state versus within this report are vastly different. You can see from figure 5 above that 64.4% programs who participated in the Providing Meals in Early Childhood Settings study participate in the CACFP, while only 39% of early childhood programs in the state of Vermont participate in the CACFP.

While this skews the representation of early childhood programs in Vermont, this response bias could be a result of a couple of factors:

- Programs participating in the federal child nutrition program are provided with more resources (CACFP sponsors, email networks, etc.) that could have aided in making them aware of this study and the opportunity to participate.
- Programs who have capacity and infrastructure to participate in the meal program may be more likely to have the time to participate in focus groups such as the ones held for this study.
- Programs who participate in the CACFP might have seen this study as an important opportunity to voice their concerns regarding the current parameters of the federal meal program and chose to make time to participate in this study so they could share their stories.

The contrast in program demographics at the state level versus within this report should be noted and kept in mind as we reflect on the outcome of this study.

## PART 5: Key Questions

### Key questions asked during focus groups:

- 1. What is your perceived cost of your meal program?** This number would include cost of food, cost of infrastructure (supplies, cooking space, etc.) and cost of labor. This might be easiest to calculate with a weekly or monthly snapshot.
- 2. What are the barriers to operating your dream meal program?**
- 3. What are stories of success you've had with your meal program?** Examples could be collaboration with local schools or stakeholders, connections made with families, resources that have made an impact, and more. These successes may help to encourage other early childhood programs to expand and increase access within their own organizations.
- 4. What does or would your dream nutrition and/or meal programming look like in your early childhood setting?**

### Insight into cost per year:

Due to the large variety of sizes and types of programs interviewed, it was difficult to determine a cost average. What we found is that when early childhood programs participate in the federal meal program where they receive reimbursements, those reimbursements often only cover the cost of procuring food. We also heard from many early childhood programs that with increasing food costs and staffing shortages reimbursements need to be higher overall and should not be based on income tiers. Income tiers affect the level of reimbursement that a program participating in the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) will receive per meal served. There are two levels of reimbursement, Tier 1 and Tier 2. CACFP reimbursement rates are higher for Tier 1 programs, which reflect low income areas and programs reported as having higher needs. Pandemic waivers have allowed all programs participating in the CACFP to receive Tier 1 reimbursement levels, which study participants reported as having a huge impact on their ability to continue with the meal program during the pandemic. Although the waivers

allowing all programs to receive Tier 1 reimbursement levels will end, we must continue to advocate for all programs to receive the same, higher reimbursement levels regardless of income area eligibility.

### Summary insight into program costs and reimbursement from a variety of program types *(for full data report see Table 1):*

For the purpose of understanding the context of these pricing comparisons, we have grouped programs by licensure size. Depending on the capacity of the program and staff-to-student ratio, different programs are licensed for a specific enrollment capacity.

Program sizes are defined as:

**Small (approximately 6-12 children)**

**Medium (approximately 13-59 children)**

**Large (approximately 60+ children)**

An example from a Head Start program with sites in Central Vermont and Lamoille regions calculated that their annual meal program cost for one year was \$119,572, and they received \$70,000 in reimbursement through the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP). The \$70,000 covers annual food costs, but does not cover other program nutrition expenses. It should be noted that this is a Licensed Program that identifies as a “Large (approximately 60+ children)” program.

A “Medium (approximately 13-59 children)” Licensed Center from the Central VT region calculated that their annual meal program cost for one year was \$24,000, and that their annual reimbursement through CACFP was \$10,000- \$12,000. They make note that all of their federal reimbursement dollars go toward their food budget, similar to the above-mentioned larger licensed center in that region.

A “Medium (approximately 13-59 children)” Licensed Center from the Champlain Valley region that only serves breakfast and snacks to 40 children daily calculated that their annual meal program cost for one year was \$15,000 and that their federal reimbursement through CACFP was about \$4,800. This program noted that the

reimbursement consistently covers less than half of the cost of operating a meal program. Additional costs, above what can be covered by tuition and CCFAP reimbursements, are currently grant funded

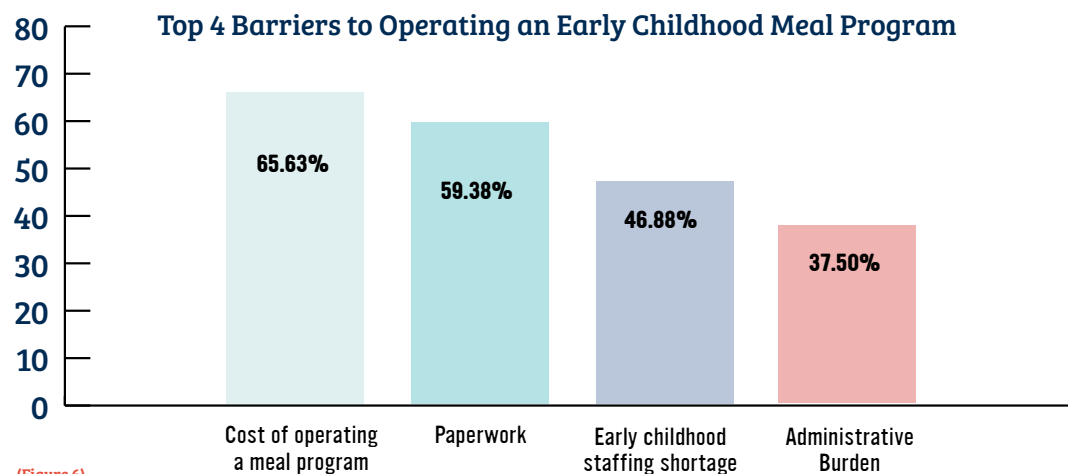
Another “Medium (approximately 13-59 children)” Licensed Center from the Champlain Valley region that does not participate in the federal child nutrition program (CACFP) and that only serves snacks calculated that their annual program meal costs were approximately \$5,200 and that families contribute/pay a total of approximately \$2,080 yearly for food costs. For families who cannot afford the cost of the snack program, this early childhood center offers stipends through a program-operated subsidy. The remaining meal costs come out of the program budget. This is a funding model we saw across all programs that participated in study discussions.



### Common Barriers to Operating a Meal Program in Early Childhood Settings

(for full data report see Table 2)

It is important to understand the barriers and challenges that exist to implementing a meal program in an early childhood setting. When we can understand the true barriers identified by the people in the field operating the programs we can make informed decisions on advocacy efforts and we can tailor the technical assistance and support services and resources that we offer to early childhood programs regarding nutrition. We asked a series of open ended questions about what challenges exist to operating an early childhood meal program, and early childhood providers were able to list all of the barriers that they face. Out of all of the conversations, we were able to highlight the top four most commonly identified barriers mentioned by participants. Figure 6 highlights the data we collected regarding the largest barriers to operating an early childhood meal program.



(Figure 6)

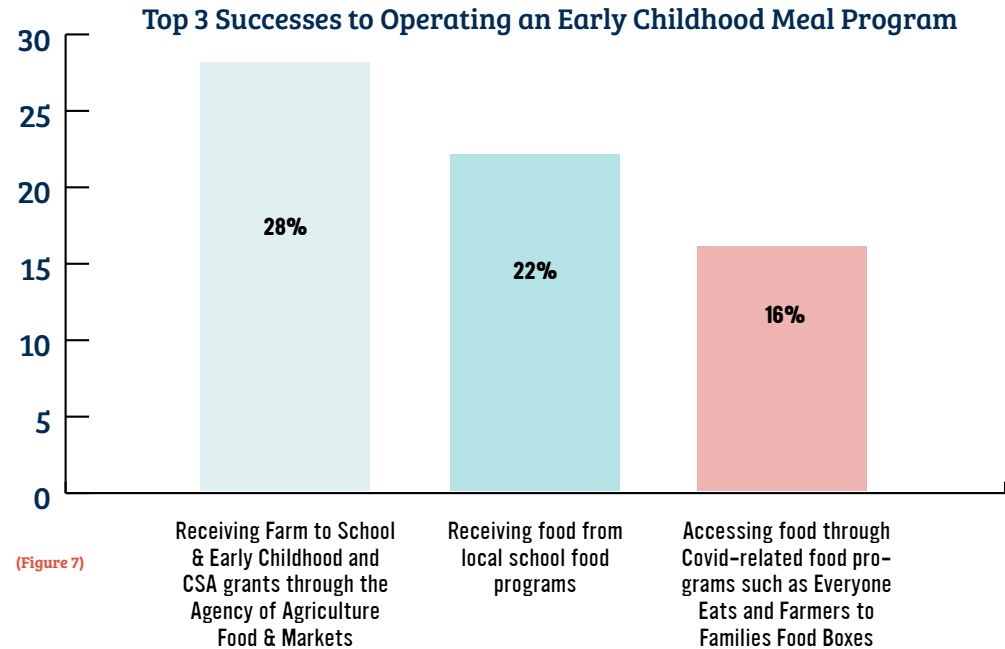


## Early Childhood Meal Program Successes

(for full data report see Table 3)

It is also important to understand how early childhood programs across the state have successfully navigated the nuances of feeding children, in order to build upon what is working. Given the unique landscape of child care across Vermont, we anticipated that there were some creative ways that early childhood programs have made it possible to provide nourishing meals to the children they serve. Out of all of the conversations, we were able to highlight the top three most commonly identified successes mentioned by participants.

Figure 7 highlights the data we collected regarding the most commonly mentioned successes related to operating an early childhood meal program.



(Figure 7)

## WISHLIST– What do programs need in order to operate a successful early childhood Meal Program? *(for full data report see Table 4)*

### Here is a summary list of some of the “dream program wishes” that came up the most often:

- Full-Time Cook, or a Part-Time staff member who is only in charge of the meal preparation - This request came up in every conversation in every region. When classroom teachers or program directors are expected to manage a meal program on top of the other responsibilities that are required of them, tasks arise that make it impossible for meals to be prepared and administered consistently. Not only does there need to be a specific role carved out for the staff member preparing meals, there is a considerable time requirement for administration (paperwork, etc.) of the meal program that requires consistent staff hours as well.
- Larger kitchen space
- Bulk buying power
- Universal meals in early childhood programs - this could be accomplished through proposed legislation for universally funded meals in Early Childhood Education (ECE) programs throughout Vermont
- Systems of streamlined electronic records for attendance and expense tracking
- More Farm to School & Farm to Early Childhood funding and support
- Meals delivered to early education programs as a result of partnerships with groups such as public schools food service programs, other local organizations, and businesses
- Higher CACFP per meal reimbursements
- Equipment like refrigerators (Especially in Registered and Licensed Family Child Care Homes)

## PART 6: COVID-19 IMPACT

Our initial goal was to recruit ten (10) early childhood programs from each of the six (6) state regions, for a total of sixty (60) programs to be interviewed. Due to the lack of program staffing and the inconsistencies in enrollment directly impacted by COVID-19, we were unable to connect with 60 programs. However, 32 early childhood programs across the state of Vermont were able to participate in conversations. We are thankful for the participants who were willing to take the time to participate in their regional focus group and share their experiences, sensitive program information and stories.

While we did not specifically ask about Covid-19, the pandemic has absolutely impacted the viability of meal programs in early care and education settings, and highlighted the fragility of these programs. Due to the timeframe in which this study was completed, every question we asked was answered through the lens of the current pandemic operations. We tried to be clear in the data to identify when programs were discussing barriers and successes directly related to COVID-19 and when participants were discussing ongoing concerns.



## PART 7: SUMMARY

**We hope that the results from this study and the related reports can be used as a tool in many different ways.**

### **Advocacy:**

There are many ways we can use the results of these focus group discussions to advocate for early childhood meal programs. At the state level, we can use these results as a tool when engaging with legislators and advocating for child nutrition legislation. We envision that this survey can inform policy development at the organizational and legislative levels. For example, Vermont's Childcare is Essential bill (Act 45) should include nutrition services as an essential component of high quality early childcare. Educational and investment advocacy on this point can support early childhood providers in offering nutritional services in their early childhood settings. At the federal level, advocacy organizations, such as Hunger Free Vermont, hope to use this information as we make recommendations for the Child Nutrition Reauthorization,

which affects the administration of federal child nutrition programs.

### **Systems Impact:**

Technology- given the discrepancies across data platforms, it is evident that there is a need for streamlining and correcting existing discrepancies in early childhood data.

### **Program Support and Technical Assistance:**

- Feedback provided through these conversations helped us to learn about funding needs and what have been models of success when providing meals for early childhood programs. We learned that the Agency of Agriculture Food and Markets CSA grant feels accessible for ECE programs, whereas other grants feel inaccessible for programs like Family Child Care programs who don't have staff members to write grant applications and grant reports. We will use feedback to expand other related grants, to make them feel more accessible as well.

- Hunger Free Vermont as an organization provides program support and technical assistance to early childhood programs to expand food access reach to children and families. Understanding the existing barriers to providing meals and snacks and the needs of the ECE programs helps us to be able to provide essential and impactful resources and support.

### **To Inspire More Research and Follow-Up Studies:**

This report captured data about food access and meal programming in early childhood settings that has not been reported on in the past. The information gleaned from these focus group conversations will hopefully give the early childhood field a starting point to dig deeper into with further research. Through these efforts we will work to expand access to meal programming in early childhood settings, which we know to be an equitable intervention to childhood food insecurity.

**Table 1: Cost of Operating an Early Childhood Meal Program Data**

Head Start Region	County	Type of Early Childhood Program	Size of Program	Participates in CACFP (Yes/No)	Estimated Annual Program Cost	Insight Into Program Cost (if provided)	Estimated Annual Federal Reimbursement (if participating in CACFP)
Central VT (CCA)	Lamoille County	Licensed Center	Medium (approximately 13-59 children)	No	\$150,000		N/A
Central VT (CCA)	Orange County	Licensed Center	Medium (approximately 13-59 children)	Yes	\$24,000		About half of costs—\$12,000 a year
Central VT (CCA)	Washington County	Licensed Center	Medium (approximately 13-59 children)	Yes	Did not provide	No costs mentioned in conversation. However, had to move from prepared foods to scratch kitchen because of high costs.	Did not provide
Central VT (CCA)	Washington County	Licensed Center	Medium (approximately 13-59 children)	Yes	Did not provide	No specific numbers, but it looks like there's a deficit. They get lunches from the independent school they are attached to	Did not provide reimbursement amount. However, the agency pays Independent School this money
Central VT (CCA)	Lamoille County, Orange County, Washington County	Licensed Center	Large (approximately 60+ children)	Yes	\$119,572	Head Start pays the gap between program cost and the federal reimbursement (~\$49,572)	\$70,000 expected in reimbursement
Champlain Valley (CVOEO)	Addison County	Licensed Center	Medium (approximately 13-59 children)	Yes	\$200,000	This program calculated that their food costs for their meal program alone are over \$30,000. This shows that the federal program reimbursements are not even covering the current costs of food.	\$22,000
Champlain Valley (CVOEO)	Addison County	Licensed Center	Medium (approximately 13-59 children)	Yes	\$15,000		\$4,800
Champlain Valley (CVOEO)	Addison County	Licensed Center	Medium (approximately 13-59 children)	Yes	\$14,400	It should be noted that during the pandemic this program has been utilizing free meals delivered by their local school district; these numbers are for before the COVID-19 pandemic began.	\$3,600
Champlain Valley (CVOEO)	Chittenden County	Licensed Center	Large (approximately 60+ children)	Yes	\$48,000-60,000		\$12,000-24,000
Champlain Valley (CVOEO)	Chittenden County	Licensed home		Yes	\$47,500	Average reimbursement deficit of \$39,100	\$7,200-9,600
Champlain Valley (CVOEO)	Chittenden County	Licensed Center	Large (approximately 60+ children)	No	\$18,000-24,000	It should be noted that this program provides snacks and milk	N/A
Champlain Valley (CVOEO)	Chittenden County	Licensed Center	Medium (approximately 13-59 children)	No	\$5,200	"It should be noted that this program does not operate lunch service. Charge \$1.50 for 20 years now and scholarshipped for many families (subsidy families don't pay). Families contribute \$40/week (covering costs comes out of overall program budget)	



**Table 1: Cost of Operating an Early Childhood Meal Program Data** (cont.)

Head Start Region	County	Type of Early Childhood Program	Size of Program	Participates in CACFP (Yes/No)	Estimated Annual Program Cost	Insight Into Program Cost (if provided)	Estimated Annual Federal Reimbursement (if participating in CACFP)
Champlain Valley (CVOEO)	Chittenden County	Licensed Center	Small (approximately 12 children)	No	Did not provide	The program receives enough food to provide breakfast and lunch through collaboration with the VT Foodbank and local producers strictly through grant funding. Budget for food ~\$12,000/year	N/A
Champlain Valley (CVOEO)	Chittenden County	Licensed Center	Large (approximately 60+ children)	No	\$1,800–2,400		N/A
Champlain Valley (CVOEO)	Chittenden County	Registered Home		Yes	\$3,221.80		\$528
Champlain Valley (CVOEO)	Chittenden County, Franklin County	Licensed Center	Medium (approximately 13–59 children)	No	\$0	Works with local school district to procure free meals during the COVID-19 pandemic, due to child nutrition program waivers at the federal level.	N/A
Champlain Valley (CVOEO)	Chittenden County	Licensed Center	Large (approximately 60+ children)	No	\$0	Works with local school district to procure free meals during the COVID-19 pandemic, due to child nutrition program waivers at the federal level.	N/A
Champlain Valley (CVOEO)	Addison County	Licensed Center	Medium (approximately 13–59 children)	No	\$3,380	"This program provides breakfasts and sacks. They get in-kind parent food contributions. It is optional for parent participation, but really important about forming a community–	N/A
Champlain Valley (CVOEO)	Addison County	Licensed Center	Medium (approximately 13–59 children)	No	\$8,300	Parents pack lunches, program provides only snacks	N/A
Northeast Kingdom (NEKCA)	Caledonia County	Registered Home		Yes	Did not provide	Reimbursement costs don't cover the true cost.	Did not provide
Northeast Kingdom (NEKCA)	Orleans County	Registered Home		Yes	Did not provide	Reimbursement costs don't cover the true cost.	Did not provide
Northeast Kingdom (NEKCA)	Orleans County	Registered Home		Yes	Did not provide	Reimbursement costs don't cover the true cost.	Did not provide
Northeast Kingdom (NEKCA)	Orleans County	Licensed home (more than registered)		Yes	Did not provide	Reimbursement costs don't cover the true cost.	Did not provide
Southeastern VT (SEVCA)	Windsor County	Registered Home		Yes	Did not provide		Did not provide
Southeastern VT (SEVCA)	Windsor County	Licensed Center	Medium (approximately 13–59 children)	Yes	Did not provide	Cost of food is budgeted for the program at \$1500/month, but usually goes over.	Did not provide

**Table 1: Cost of Operating an Early Childhood Meal Program Data** (cont.)

Head Start Region	County	Type of Early Childhood Program	Size of Program	Participates in CACFP (Yes/No)	Estimated Annual Program Cost	Insight Into Program Cost (if provided)	Estimated Annual Federal Reimbursement (if participating in CACFP)
Southeastern VT (SEVCA)	Windsor County	Registered Home		Yes	\$13,000	Has recently been traveling to Claremont NH from Springfield- Shaws in Springfield is too expensive to be able to afford the groceries. Knows of other providers having to do the same.	\$6,000
Southeastern VT (SEVCA)	Windham County	Licensed Center	We typically serve 60+ when we are fully staffed with 6 classrooms, we are down to only 4 classrooms and 38 children	Yes	\$4,800	It should be noted that this program's budgeted costs are only for the snacks they are providing through CACFP and receiving federal reimbursement for. They are accessing free meals through their local Supervisory Union since the COVID-19 pandemic began and child nutrition waivers allowed schools to serve all children 18 and under for free.	The federal reimbursement completely covers the cost of food for the snack program
Southeastern VT (SEVCA)	Windham County	Registered Home		Yes	Did not provide		Did not provide
Southwestern VT (BROC)	Bennington County	Community based program (serving children 5-18)		No	\$26,000	It should be noted that the budget for this program is for the months of June/July/August for summer enrichment	N/A
Southwestern VT (BROC)	Bennington County	Licensed Center	Medium (approximately 13-59 children)	Yes	\$20,400	Serve breakfast and afternoon snack- children bring their own lunches, property is on a septic system so the wastewater permit says they cannot serve lunch. Parents bring lunches for children.	\$6,000
Southwestern VT (BROC)	Bennington County	Licensed Center	Large (approximately 60+ children)	Yes	\$17,589.93	"This program stated that their federal reimbursement does cover cost of food and part of labour	Did not provide
Southwestern VT (BROC)	Bennington County	Licensed Center	Large (approximately 60+ children)	Yes	\$75,368	Also received a Farm to School Grant for \$950 that contributed to the food program.	\$3,700

**Table 2: All Of The Reported Barriers To Operating An Early Childhood Meal Program**

Head Start Region	County	Type of Early Childhood Program	Size of Program	Participates in CACFP (Yes/No)	Barriers to Operating an Early Childhood Meal Program
Central VT (CCA)	Lamoille County	Licensed Center	Medium (approximately 13-59 children)	No	Paperwork/Administrative Burden, Staffing Shortage
Central VT (CCA)	Orange County	Licensed Center	Medium (approximately 13-59 children)	Yes	Time it would take to administer the program, Staffing Shortage
Central VT (CCA)	Washington County	Licensed Center	Medium (approximately 13-59 children)	Yes	Cost, Paperwork/Administrative Burden, Staffing Shortage
Central VT (CCA)	Washington County	Licensed Center	Medium (approximately 13-59 children)	Yes	Cost, Staffing Shortage
Central VT (CCA)	Lamoille County, Orange County, Washington County	Licensed Center	Large (approximately 60+ children)	Yes	Cost, Paperwork/Administrative Burden, Staffing Shortage
Champlain Valley (CVOEO)	Addison County	Licensed Center	Medium (approximately 13-59 children)	Yes	Cost, Paperwork/Administrative Burden, Time it would take to administer the program, Staffing Shortage, Relationship disconnect between meal programs, require to provide infant meals so not violating civil rights, eligibility percentage, space, can't pick what food/ amount, food waste, what to buy
Champlain Valley (CVOEO)	Addison County	Licensed Center	Medium (approximately 13-59 children)	Yes	Cost, Time it would take to administer the program, Staffing Shortage, Transportation
Champlain Valley (CVOEO)	Addison County	Licensed Center	Medium (approximately 13-59 children)	Yes	trays fall apart (receiving meals from school), lack of storage, COVID, federal meal plan guidelines, picky eaters, allergies/intolerances, staff buy-in
Champlain Valley (CVOEO)	Chittenden County	Licensed Center	Large (approximately 60+ children)	Yes	Cost, Paperwork/Administrative Burden, Staffing Shortage, COVID, supply availability
Champlain Valley (CVOEO)	Chittenden County	Licensed home		Yes	Federal program regulations, food access, preference for local food
Champlain Valley (CVOEO)	Chittenden County	Licensed Center	Large (approximately 60+ children)	No	Cost, Time it would take to administer the program, Staffing Shortage, COVID, nutrition
Champlain Valley (CVOEO)	Chittenden County	Licensed Center	Medium (approximately 13-59 children)	No	Cost, Paperwork/Administrative Burden, Staffing Shortage
Champlain Valley (CVOEO)	Chittenden County	Licensed Center	Small (approximately 12 children)	No	Cost, Paperwork/Administrative Burden, Time it would take to administer the program
Champlain Valley (CVOEO)	Chittenden County	Licensed Center	Large (approximately 60+ children)	No	Cost, Paperwork/Administrative Burden, Staffing Shortage
Champlain Valley (CVOEO)	Chittenden County	Registered Home		Yes	Cost, Fresh foods are very expensive, and there are not enough grants out there to support the program.
Champlain Valley (CVOEO)	Chittenden County, Franklin County	Licensed Center	Medium (approximately 13-59 children)	No	Staffing Shortage, picking up meals from the school they get meals vended from

**Table 2: All Of The Reported Barriers To Operating An Early Childhood Meal Program** (cont.)

Head Start Region	County	Type of Early Childhood Program	Size of Program	Participates in CACFP (Yes/No)	Barriers to Operating an Early Childhood Meal Program
Champlain Valley (CVOEO)	Chittenden County	Licensed Center	Large (approximately 60+ children)	No	Paperwork/Administrative Burden, Time it would take to administer the program
Champlain Valley (CVOEO)	Addison County	Licensed Center	Medium (approximately 13-59 children)	No	"when they were on the food program it was more administrative that was cumbersome to operate. Specific manufacturer barriers- when Annie's stopped being accepted because it wasn't enriched they stopped using, Cabot vs Kraft."
Champlain Valley (CVOEO)	Addison County	Licensed Center	Medium (approximately 13-59 children)	No	Cost, Paperwork/Administrative Burden, Time it would take to administer the program, Staffing Shortage, Cannot provide whole milk
Northeast Kingdom (NEKCA)	Caledonia County	Registered Home		Yes	Cost, Paperwork/Administrative Burden, Time it would take to administer the program
Northeast Kingdom (NEKCA)	Orleans County	Registered Home		Yes	Cost, Paperwork/Administrative Burden, Food cost specifically - Pandemic-related
Northeast Kingdom (NEKCA)	Orleans County	Registered Home		Yes	Cost
Northeast Kingdom (NEKCA)	Orleans County	Licensed home (more then registered)		Yes	Cost, Paperwork/Administrative Burden, Time it would take to administer the program
Southeastern VT (SEVCA)	Windsor County	Registered Home		Yes	Paperwork/Administrative Burden, Meal times
Southeastern VT (SEVCA)	Windsor County	Licensed Center	Medium (approximately 13-59 children)	Yes	Cost
Southeastern VT (SEVCA)	Windsor County	Registered Home		Yes	Cost
Southeastern VT (SEVCA)	Windham County	Licensed Center	We typically serve 60+ when we are fully staffed with 6 classrooms, we are down to only 4 classrooms and 38 children	Yes	Cost, Paperwork/Administrative Burden, Staffing Shortage, It feels like they are constantly having to "sell" the meal program's benefits to directors of the early childhood program, federal guidelines,
Southeastern VT (SEVCA)	Windham County	Registered Home		Yes	Cost, Paperwork/Administrative Burden
Southwestern VT (BROC)	Bennington County	Community based program (serving children 5-18)		No	Cost, Staffing Shortage
Southwestern VT (BROC)	Bennington County	Licensed Center	Medium (approximately 13-59 children)	Yes	Cost, Paperwork/Administrative Burden, Limited space
Southwestern VT (BROC)	Bennington County	Licensed Center	Large (approximately 60+ children)	Yes	Correct permit; cannot get a wastewater permit
Southwestern VT (BROC)	Bennington County	Licensed Center	Large (approximately 60+ children)	Yes	"Cost, Staffing Shortage lack of space at program - have to partner with another program who has kitchen space"

**Table 3: Reported Successes To Operating An Early Childhood Meal Program**

Head Start Region	County	Type of Early Childhood Program	Size of Program	Participates in CACFP (Yes/No)	Successes when Operating an Early Childhood Meal Program
Central VT (CCA)	Lamoille County	Licensed Center	Medium (approximately 13-59 children)	No	Did not provide
Central VT (CCA)	Orange County	Licensed Center	Medium (approximately 13-59 children)	Yes	The kids enjoy pre-plating and family style serving, and it allows more time for conversations. They also have a 5-week menu cycle that allows for variety.
Central VT (CCA)	Washington County	Licensed Center	Medium (approximately 13-59 children)	Yes	farm to school grants, food bank has grants for equipment
Central VT (CCA)	Washington County	Licensed Center	Medium (approximately 13-59 children)	Yes	They get free meals from Independent School and because Barre City has been labeled as "low income."
Central VT (CCA)	Lamoille County, Orange County, Washington County	Licensed Center	Large (approximately 60+ children)	Yes	children are getting 3 hot nutritious meals/day- for some of them we know that this is the only meals, We're getting some reimbursement
Champlain Valley (CVOEO)	Addison County	Licensed Center	Medium (approximately 13-59 children)	Yes	Provide healthy food, extra food during pandemic, shared services
Champlain Valley (CVOEO)	Addison County	Licensed Center	Medium (approximately 13-59 children)	Yes	"Family centered meals -- helps with fine motor, math, language, self-help, peer interactions, etc.. CSA with local farmstand. Weekly box pick-up. Kids get variety. Center garden: veggies eaten straight out of garden"
Champlain Valley (CVOEO)	Addison County	Licensed Center	Medium (approximately 13-59 children)	Yes	"Close access to the school, The school delivered meals in their school van during the summer --- convenient; Family style meals work well for picky eaters; School meals in early childcare helps the transition to Kindergarten; Staff has participated in FTECE training through Shelburne Farms; Consistent farm field trips"
Champlain Valley (CVOEO)	Chittenden County	Licensed Center	Large (approximately 60+ children)	Yes	Community meals... Connection impact- provided connection and support for parents
Champlain Valley (CVOEO)	Chittenden County	Licensed home		Yes	Connections with local farmers and producers, meal program, cooking, meal planning with staff and kids, professional development, prep on weekends, baking, cooking with the kids, started a garden, serving food in general
Champlain Valley (CVOEO)	Chittenden County	Licensed Center	Large (approximately 60+ children)	No	When children experienced new foods/ experiences, families receive school meals during covid
Champlain Valley (CVOEO)	Chittenden County	Licensed Center	Medium (approximately 13-59 children)	No	Pilot CSA program, Everybody Eats meal boxes, full kitchen on site
Champlain Valley (CVOEO)	Chittenden County	Licensed Center	Small (approximately 12 children)	No	This program receives all of the food for their meal program through grants and gleaned foods, A grant allowed them to buy a walk in cooler that families can have access to, there is a wide variety of cultural backgrounds for the children served in this program so the kitchen staff (2 Staff members) work with/ listen to families to make sure they are making foods that the kids will want to eat and that have cultural relevance ** very important, there is a lot of parent engagement and buy-in with this meal program



**Table 3: Reported Successes To Operating An Early Childhood Meal Program** (cont.)

Head Start Region	County	Type of Early Childhood Program	Size of Program	Participates in CACFP (Yes/No)	Successes when Operating an Early Childhood Meal Program
Champlain Valley (CVOEO)	Chittenden County	Licensed Center	Large (approximately 60+ children)	No	They took a field trip to Hannaford and Healthy Living.
Champlain Valley (CVOEO)	Chittenden County	Registered Home		Yes	The program received CSA grants. Also, Laura's program had a strong connection with schools that helps make sure everyone's needs are met.
Champlain Valley (CVOEO)	Chittenden County, Franklin County	Licensed Center	Medium (approximately 13-59 children)	No	Next Generation opened multiple Chittenden County campuses during the pandemic, the program is able to collaborate with the school food service programs they work with to menu plan and plan around food restrictions/allergies, when working with the schools to vend CACFP meals, the only administrative piece NG was responsible for was daily meal counts
Champlain Valley (CVOEO)	Chittenden County	Licensed Center	Large (approximately 60+ children)	No	They already have a refrigerator/freezer that they received from a grant, and before Covid, the school drafted a contract for parents to sign and this took a huge administrative burden off the shoulders of this organization.
Champlain Valley (CVOEO)	Addison County	Licensed Center	Medium (approximately 13-59 children)	No	"Farm to school, Covid funding, establishing culture of nutrition as a value, curriculum link to food, standard ask letter to community resource"
Champlain Valley (CVOEO)	Addison County	Licensed Center	Medium (approximately 13-59 children)	No	The program is able to fund two snacks per day. Also, this program is located on a farm, so there is a lot of opportunity to incorporate fresh, local food into the meal program. Also, the waiver that allows families to have the school feed their child for free has been a really great resource for families.
Northeast Kingdom (NEKCA)	Caledonia County	Registered Home		Yes	Children in care experience a larger variety of food than they would if she wasn't feeding them. Balanced meals both in program and also the social-food balance that families can't do at the end of the day.
Northeast Kingdom (NEKCA)	Orleans County	Registered Home		Yes	"During covid- one home program would drop families program made food boxes-- so that they could access food -- families didn't know where next meal was coming from/next shopping trip. They prepared the boxes according to what they would have had for the meals served if the program was fully open."
Northeast Kingdom (NEKCA)	Orleans County	Registered Home		Yes	There is cooking activity during curriculum so kids are making own afternoon snack during more activities.
Northeast Kingdom (NEKCA)	Orleans County	Licensed home (more than registered)		Yes	Did not provide
Southeastern VT (SEVCA)	Windsor County	Registered Home		Yes	extra help coming in from Covid times, springfield has more reimbursement
Southeastern VT (SEVCA)	Windsor County	Licensed Center	Medium (approximately 13-59 children)	Yes	Did not provide
Southeastern VT (SEVCA)	Windsor County	Registered Home		Yes	with parents knowing about reimbursement, they take home food more because it's not charity

**Table 3: Reported Successes To Operating An Early Childhood Meal Program** (cont.)

Head Start Region	County	Type of Early Childhood Program	Size of Program	Participates in CACFP (Yes/No)	Successes when Operating an Early Childhood Meal Program
Southeastern VT (SEVCA)	Windham County	Licensed Center	We typically serve 60+ when we are fully staffed with 6 classrooms, we are down to only 4 classrooms and 38 children	Yes	Gardening program, food/nutrition education, FTS virtual training, grants, staff passion,
Southeastern VT (SEVCA)	Windham County	Registered Home		Yes	higher reimbursements due to being in Springfield area as designated area. General feeling that receiving a higher reimbursement rate is what makes the difference for participation in the program.
Southwestern VT (BROC)	Bennington County	Community based program (serving children 5-18)		No	Visited three low income communities in Bennington and anyone who would sign up would have it delivered to their doors, During school year- deliveries were able to be made by school buses to community locations, Philadelphia program was able to use grant money to hire nutritionist, borrowed a van to increase delivery capacity which decreased issues with transportation of meals
Southwestern VT (BROC)	Bennington County	Licensed Center	Medium (approximately 13-59 children)	Yes	Relationships! (Food contractors- Abbey group and Mighty Food Farms, families)
Southwestern VT (BROC)	Bennington County	Licensed Center	Large (approximately 60+ children)	Yes	Family support (CSA membership gift with online store allowing them to choose items weekly, families take turns picking up), Veggie Van Go access, longtime staff move to kitchen position
Southwestern VT (BROC)	Bennington County	Licensed Center	Large (approximately 60+ children)	Yes	"Lots of community support. Businesses from the community donated a laptop so that the administrative pieces don't need to be delayed due to waiting to use technology. Feels that there is more support during covid than before. To pivot due to Covid wasn't as hard for them. They provided meals to children of essential workers and to families to go. Would take van and drive to families who couldn't pick up"

**Table 4: What Programs Need in Order to Operate a Successful Early Childhood Meal Program**

Head Start Region	County	Type of Early Childhood Program	Size of Program	Participates in CACFP (Yes/No)	What Programs Need in Order to Operate a Successful early childhood Meal Program
Central VT (CCA)	Lamoille County	Licensed Center	Medium (approximately 13-59 children)	No	wants to learn more about receiving reimbursement and researching grants, but it is difficult to know where to start. would like to receive grants.
Central VT (CCA)	Orange County	Licensed Center	Medium (approximately 13-59 children)	Yes	To hire a cook, get a bigger kitchen, and start a small garden from a Farm to School Program.
Central VT (CCA)	Washington County	Licensed Center	Medium (approximately 13-59 children)	Yes	Universal Meals for children, if CACFP used enrollment instead of attendance, electronic attendance
Central VT (CCA)	Washington County	Licensed Center	Medium (approximately 13-59 children)	Yes	Being able to access farm to school, easier application, and more variety in foods served.
Central VT (CCA)	Lamoille County, Orange County, Washington County	Licensed Center	Large (approximately 60+ children)	Yes	"Children get 3 hot nutritious meals per day. Get some reimbursement. Electronic records are accepted"
Champlain Valley (CVOEO)	Addison County	Licensed Center	Medium (approximately 13-59 children)	Yes	Teachers not doing meal prep, more time to teach the kids cooking, pancake breakfast, space, nutrition/ food access hub, family cooking lessons
Champlain Valley (CVOEO)	Addison County	Licensed Center	Medium (approximately 13-59 children)	Yes	Onsite cooking, all fresh organic food, expanding garden, staff training on gardening, more cooking and baking projects, beautiful kitchen
Champlain Valley (CVOEO)	Addison County	Licensed Center	Medium (approximately 13-59 children)	Yes	Food delivery, more snacks, full reimbursement, more local purchasing, refrigeration, teach family style meals, nutrition/food access professional development
Champlain Valley (CVOEO)	Chittenden County	Licensed Center	Large (approximately 60+ children)	Yes	Monthly parent learning classes. nutrition, budgeting, cooking, recipes, surveys how to support more, collaboration with similar size programs
Champlain Valley (CVOEO)	Chittenden County	Licensed home		Yes	"Having a permanent cooking teacher position that is totally dedicated to nutrition; More farmer connections; More buying power; food delivery; List of all local producers who we support as distributors "
Champlain Valley (CVOEO)	Chittenden County	Licensed Center	Large (approximately 60+ children)	No	"Access to stuff, pick up all at one location; Ideas included for how to use, safe for little kids to eat. Storage; Money; Can work on some of these like storage, but need \$ to make it work; Can't add anything else onto the existing workforce- strapped can't add anything else onto the list. Capacity and Burn-out---- need to make any add ons to be streamlined and delivery
Champlain Valley (CVOEO)	Chittenden County	Licensed Center	Medium (approximately 13-59 children)	No	"Dedicated meal/nutrition program staffing, more variety and food selection/access to fresh foods, would like to expand to lunch, organic and food sensitive focused - farm to table, coordinated food/nutrition supports from partner organizations, ensure nutrition is a valued component of high quality childcare which is integrated into cost of care and they QRIS/ECE PD systems"
Champlain Valley (CVOEO)	Chittenden County	Licensed Center	Small (approximately 12 children)	No	Donation manager/food coordinator to help organize and facilitate food donations and to mitigate food waste and more food access training for staff and families
Champlain Valley (CVOEO)	Chittenden County	Licensed Center	Large (approximately 60+ children)	No	More people to manage the program, being able to overcome costs, Families would have the understanding of importance and engagement, Better training for new hires, better access to school meals
Champlain Valley (CVOEO)	Chittenden County	Registered Home		Yes	Having a chef would create more time for the director and make the meals more creative and healthy. Also, a freezer and kid-friendly knives. She would love to be able to provide food for 1-2 families per week. Finally, she wants an indoor garden grant to grow greens even in the winter.

**Table 4: What Programs Need in Order to Operate a Successful Early Childhood Meal Program** (cont.)

Head Start Region	County	Type of Early Childhood Program	Size of Program	Participates in CACFP (Yes/No)	What Programs Need in Order to Operate a Successful early childhood Meal Program
Champlain Valley (CVOEO)	Chittenden County, Franklin County	Licensed Center	Medium (approximately 13-59 children)	No	"Delivery of all meals (this would be super helpful for them) but overall the Williston site is already a dream program model due to meal quality and willingness to collaborate"
Champlain Valley (CVOEO)	Chittenden County	Licensed Center	Large (approximately 60+ children)	No	Staff member whose only job for 2.5 hours/day is to help prep and serve the meals provided by the school
Champlain Valley (CVOEO)	Addison County	Licensed Center	Medium (approximately 13-59 children)	No	"Additional supports/purchase, full time chef to put in the level of care and love that you want them to carry, another part time education role that is forward facing and they go shopping"
Champlain Valley (CVOEO)	Addison County	Licensed Center	Medium (approximately 13-59 children)	No	More professional training and staff to prepare meals, tapping into the federal meal program or offering family style meals, and incorporating Americorps members into the program to expand capacity.
Northeast Kingdom (NEKCA)	Caledonia County	Registered Home		Yes	Larger refridgerator/storage and separation of home/program.
Northeast Kingdom (NEKCA)	Orleans County	Registered Home		Yes	Connecting with shool food service programs and School Food Authorities or restaurants to affordably vend meals
Northeast Kingdom (NEKCA)	Orleans County	Registerd Home		Yes	Connection with local schools or with another organization in order to deliver the meals
Northeast Kingdom (NEKCA)	Orleans County	Licensed home (more then registered)		Yes	Did not provide
Southeastern VT (SEVCA)	Windsor County	Registered Home		Yes	more flexibility in times for reimbursement, extra freezer, fresh produce, a cook
Southeastern VT (SEVCA)	Windsor County	Licensed Center	Medium (approximately 13-59 children)	Yes	increase outreach for food sourcing options
Southeastern VT (SEVCA)	Windsor County	Registered Home		Yes	more money, fresh produce, extra freezer
Southeastern VT (SEVCA)	Windham County	Licensed Center	We typically serve 60+ when we are fully staffed with 6 classrooms, we are down to only 4 classrooms and 38 children	Yes	Hiring a full time cook/CACFP coordinator who would also be connected to the Farm to School/Early Childhood effort
Southeastern VT (SEVCA)	Windham County	Registered Home		Yes	extra freezer, more money, a cook, fresh produce

**Table 4: What Programs Need in Order to Operate a Successful Early Childhood Meal Program** (cont.)

Head Start Region	County	Type of Early Childhood Program	Size of Program	Participates in CACFP (Yes/No)	What Programs Need in Order to Operate a Successful early childhood Meal Program
Southwestern VT (BROC)	Bennington County	Community based program (serving children 5-18)		No	Staff, nutritionist, van vs personal vehicle
Southwestern VT (BROC)	Bennington County	Licensed Center	Medium (approximately 13-59 children)	Yes	Walk in freezer and cooler- storage is a barrier
Southwestern VT (BROC)	Bennington County	Licensed Center	Large (approximately 60+ children)	Yes	Being able to offer full meal service including lunch and being able to expand to full time cook for this time.
Southwestern VT (BROC)	Bennington County	Licensed Center	Large (approximately 60+ children)	Yes	"Universal school meals- to benefit early childhood education; Regulations changed for healthy and more DAP meals; Equipment- they just opened a new center in town-- hard to judge if this will be enough for needs--"



## HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE HUNGER FREE VERMONT EARLY CHILDHOOD COST SURVEY OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

**32 Early Childhood programs serving over 1,200 children from all around Vermont were all asked the same set of questions about their experience operating a meal program:**

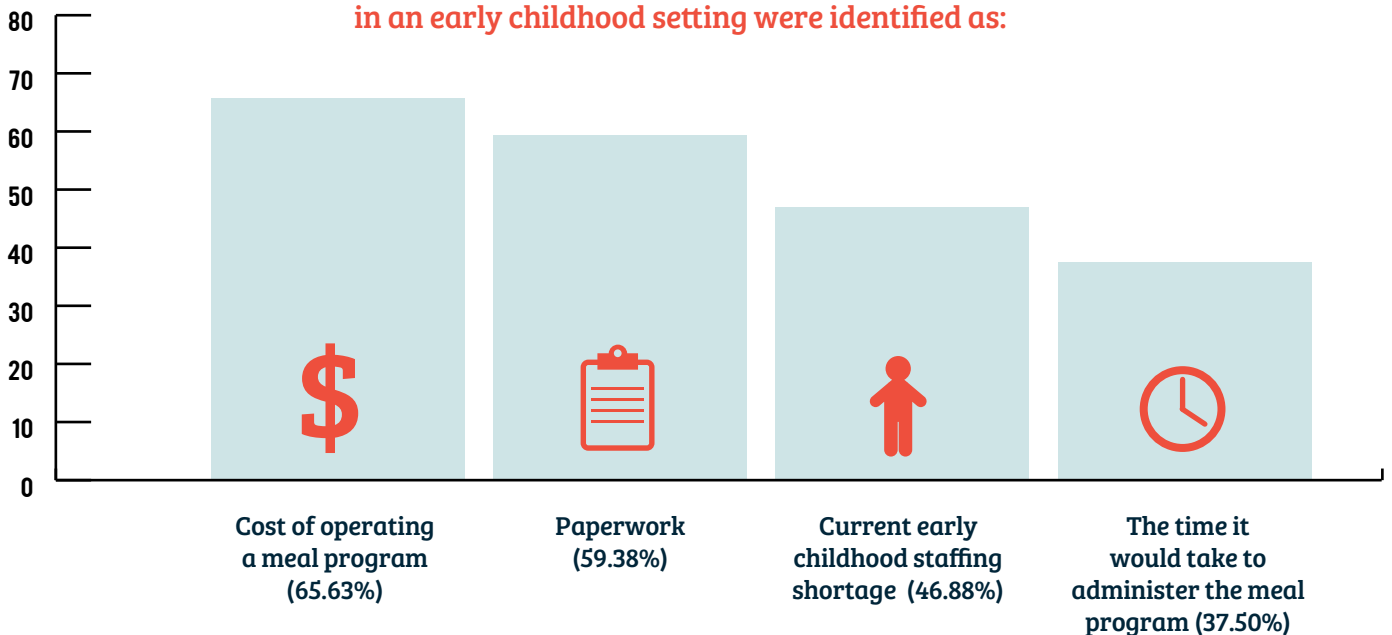
- What is the cost of operating your meal program, if you have one?
- What are barriers to operating a successful meal program in early childhood settings?
- What are the successes you've experienced operating your early childhood meal program?
- What are things you would need in order to operate your dream program?

### What will this data be used for?

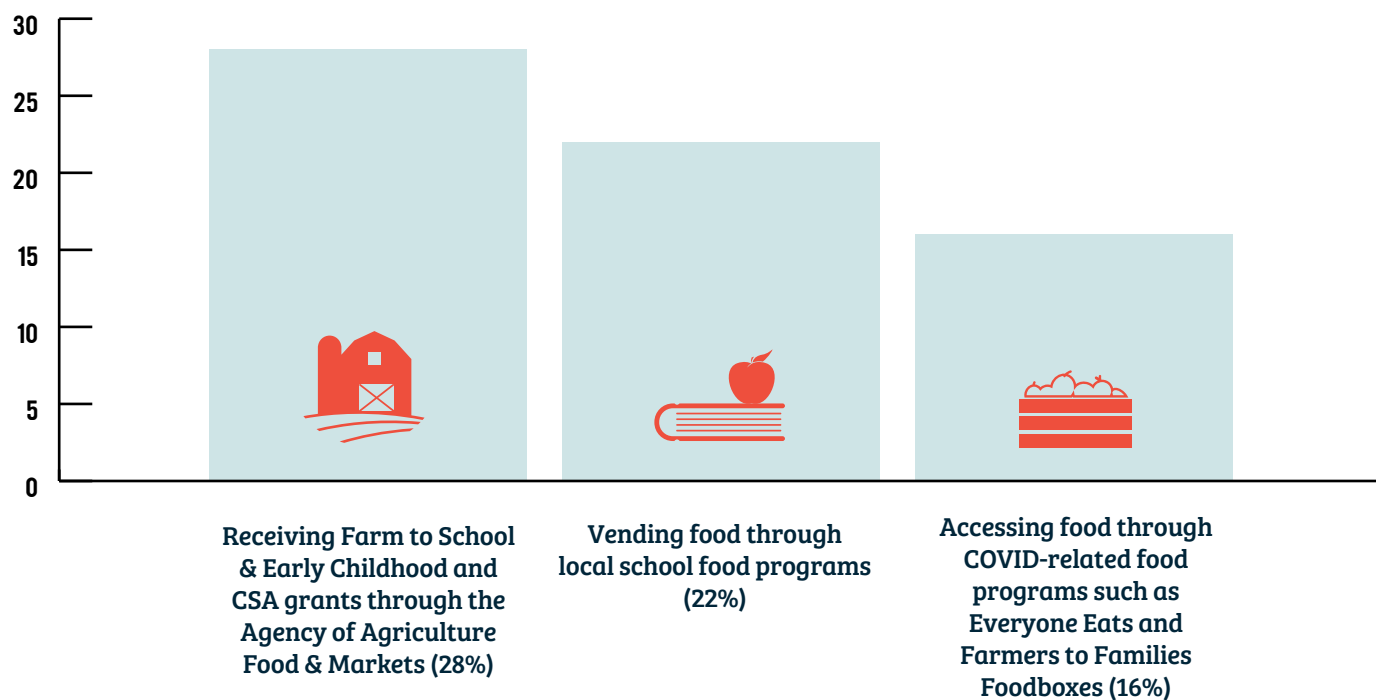
The hope is that the information gleaned from these important conversations will be used to better advocate for and support early childhood programs across Vermont in many ways. We can use this data and these personal narratives to provide more intentional technical assistance, and to advocate for program flexibilities and expansion at the federal level to make the federal meal program more accessible for early childhood programs. All children deserve equitable access to quality nutrition, whether they are at home, at school, or enrolled in an early childhood program.

## OUT OF THE 32 EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS WHO PARTICIPATED IN THIS STUDY...

**The top 4 common barriers to operating a quality meal program in an early childhood setting were identified as:**



### The top three most commonly mentioned successes included:



### Demographics by county:

63.6% of the conversations included themes of Farm to School & Early Childhood

