

## Want a brighter tomorrow? Vote with kids in mind TODAY.

### Will You Commit to Kids?

As a state and country, we are in the midst of a pivotal moment. The global coronavirus pandemic and movements for racial justice have drawn attention to deep inequities in our society that have been in place for too long. Political and economic upheaval has revealed the vulnerabilities in our systems and institutions, at a scale that demands transformation, not simply repair. Now is the time to push the needs of the over 120,000 children and youth who call Vermont home—but currently lack a vote—to the forefront of every candidate's agenda.

This voter guide provides residents of all ages—registered voters and residents who cannot vote—with a toolkit of targeted data, talking points and questions to empower them to advocate, and learn where each candidate stands on the key issues affecting Vermont children and youth today.

The winners of the upcoming elections will be in a unique position to make public policies that impact the future well-being of Vermont's children and families and the ability of our communities to thrive. As advocates for children, we have to lift up their needs and voices. We challenge you to use this Voters' Guide to become informed on the issues and be a strong voice for our children.

### Why it Matters to Voices

As Vermont's only independent, nonpartisan, multi-issue child policy research and advocacy organization, Voices is committed to enhancing the lives of children and youth through better policy. As a member of the national Kids Count network, Voices collects and analyzes data about child wellbeing. We're connected to policy experts across the state and country working to advance policies that will transform kids' lives.

**We can't succeed in this mission without champions in the legislature and administration. We need your help electing people to serve on behalf of kids.**



### Equity Matters

The future of Vermont is diverse. We all benefit from ensuring that every person in the state has what they need to thrive. As Xusana Davis, Executive Director of Racial Equity for the State of Vermont explained during a recent webinar on child protection:

*"White and Indigenous Vermonters have median ages in the mid and late 40s, respectively. But all other Vermonters of color have median ages in the 20s. What that tells us is that it's people of color who are keeping Vermont young. Redesigning and tailoring our services and our systems in a way that's culturally responsive...is critical to the survival of our state. People live in places where they feel safe, where they feel welcome, where they feel they're being served adequately."*

***"How do we create a society that is designed for our future leaders to thrive?"***

— Xusana Davis, Executive Director of Racial Equity for the State of VT

## Vote Safely - by Mail or In Person

In Vermont, all residents are automatically registered to vote when they apply for a driver's license or state ID. If you've moved recently, or are unsure about your registration status, you can check your status within seconds at [mvp.vermont.gov](https://mvp.vermont.gov). This year, due to COVID-19, all registered voters should receive a ballot in the mail between September 21st and October 1st. Vermonters can choose to vote in person or by mail, and voting can begin as soon as ballots are sent out (yes- you can vote now!). Ready to vote? Let's get to it!



### Voting by Mail

Each ballot comes with clear instructions for voting. Be sure to complete and sign the certificate on the voted ballot envelope and place the ballot inside when you are finished! Once you've completed your ballot, it's especially important to get it in the mail as early as possible, and no later than October 24th. If you want to submit in person, you may bring your ballot to your Town Clerk's Office until close of business on November 2nd, the day before Election Day (many towns have ballot drop boxes available). Otherwise, you can bring your ballot to your polling station until 7pm on Election Day (November 3rd). Once you've submitted your ballot, you can track the status at [mvp.vermont.gov](https://mvp.vermont.gov) to make sure it's been counted.



### Voting In-Person

This year, voters are being encouraged to vote by mail to reduce contact at polling places. If you do decide to vote in person, please bring your ballot with you, wear a mask, and follow social distancing guidelines. If you've lost your ballot, you may request an additional one at the polling station. You can access a list of [polling locations here](#).

## Getting Answers: Where Do Candidates Stand?

This guide is designed to help you frame questions to candidates on the issues that matter most for kids and families so you can make an informed decision. Consider asking the suggested questions during candidate forums, via candidates' social media platforms, or directly via phone, email, or website contact forms.

There are also candidate surveys you can reference, although they don't ask the same questions and candidates' answers may be limited.

### Resources:

- [VT Digger Election Guide](#) - candidate bios, basic issue survey, voting records for incumbents.
- [Action Circles](#) has compiled a guide to candidate forums including videos of past events.
- [Let's Grow Kids](#) has a very helpful toolkit for connecting with candidates.



# Economic Security

## Policy Statement

Income inequality has been growing for decades - destabilizing families, communities, and the economy as a whole, and forcing too many children to live out their most critical developmental years in poverty. Children in poverty experience diminished health and wellbeing in comparison to those who are raised with economic security. Vermont must address the structural inequities in our system if we want to eliminate poverty and its destructive effects.

## Questions for Candidates:

- › With about 11,000 kids living in poverty in VT—before the recent pandemic and its economic impacts—what role do you think the state can play to help families meet their basic needs?
- › Reach Up, Vermont's cash assistance program for very low-income children and families, currently provides less than 40% of the estimated *subsistence* income. Would you support increasing this benefit so that it prevents damaging hardship by meeting children's basic needs?
- › Due to historical legal and policy exclusions, people of color living in Vermont continue to face barriers. What would you do to close those gaps and help ensure every Vermont child can fulfill their potential?
- › Would you be willing to raise taxes on those who can afford to pay more so our children, families and the state can thrive now and in the future?
- › Do you support an equitable paid leave program that would be publicly administered, cover all workers and all kinds of families, and able to be used for all kinds of leave, including caring for a new child, a personal injury or illness, or a family illness?



## Quick Facts

**1 in 3 VT kids live in families with low-incomes**

**A family of 3 on Reach Up receives just \$700/mo\* to meet their basic needs, including housing.**

**VT households with children are twice as likely to report experiencing food insecurity as those without children.**

(2020 UVM study)

**Nearly half of all households with children experienced loss of employment income**

(Census Pulse Survey)

\*plus nutrition benefits through 3SquaresVT

# Education

## Policy Statement

Our schools and communities must have the necessary resources to provide all young people, regardless of income, where they live, or background, with the education they need to support a life with dignity, hope and meaning.

Vermont has one of the most equitable education-funding systems in the country. But the system is complicated. Our elected representatives should improve upon the current level of equity by eliminating the school property tax altogether on primary residences and taxing all Vermont residents based on income. This would create a fairer, simpler system for Vermonters.

In addition, the system adds an increase or “weight” to the number of students for whom education costs more to deliver. Education for high school students or students living in low-income households, cost more than the state average, for example, so each of these students is counted as more than one student, say 1.25. In this way, the state delivers more resources to school districts based on their number of students in the weighted categories. A [recent study](#) by the Agency of Education and UVM found that schools need greater investment to meet the needs of students from low-income households than the current weighting system provides. Whether by adjustments to the weighting system or another means of directing additional funds, the Legislature needs to act to correct this situation.

## Questions for Candidates:

- › Do you support Vermont’s current education funding system? If not, why not?
- › Will you support improving Vermont’s school funding system by replacing the education property tax on primary residences with an income tax to ensure that everyone pays their fair share?
- › Will you take action on the weighting study so that our schools and students get the resources they need?



## Quick Facts

**About 70% of education tax payers already pay based on income - but the wealthiest Vermonters do not.** (Joint Fiscal Office)

**Existing weights for economically-disadvantaged and ELL students in the funding formula fall far short of appropriately adjusting for the cost of educating these students.** (AoE/UVM weighting study)



# Child & Family Supports

## Policy Statement

Child and youth well-being is inextricably linked to the wellbeing of families and communities. Expecting under-resourced families operating within inequitable systems to achieve positive outcomes is magical thinking. It is incumbent on us as a state to ensure that families have equitable access to safe and affordable housing, substance misuse treatment, family support services, healthcare, and nutritious food.

Vermont also needs to improve transition support to young adults, especially those launching into adulthood with the deck stacked against them: former foster youth, BIPOC, LGBTQI+, and those raised in economically disadvantaged families. One strategy is to uncouple Vermont's Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) from the federal EITC and lower the eligibility age for childless adults from 25 to 18.

Most states in the country have an independent oversight body to investigate concerns and complaints about the child protection system as well as collect and analyze child protection data to improve the system response to children and families. Vermont is the only state in New England without an Office of the Child Advocate (or equivalent).

## Questions for Candidates:

- › Do you support the establishment of an Office of the Child Advocate to provide child-centered, independent oversight for the child protection system?
- › Vermonters continue to report difficulty access their records from the child protection system. This creates a lack of transparency and trust for those impacted by the system as well as a lack of insight and closure for youth who have been separated from their parents. Will you invest in a data system that prioritizes access to records?
- › Young adults without children do not currently qualify for the Earned Income Tax Credit. Would you support a proposal to expand eligibility for the VT EITC to ages 18+ for workers without a qualifying child?



## Quick Facts

**Vermont consistently has one of the highest child protection out-of-home placement rates in the country. We have roughly the same # of kids in care as NH, which has double our population.**

**The Department for Children and Families' unstable, antiquated data system is older than the world wide web.**

**24% of Vermonters ages 18-24 live in poverty, the highest rate of any age group.** (KidsCount, 2019)