

Vermillion CARES

Childcare Access, Resources, and Education Solutions

The Vermillion community proposes an innovative solution to the childcare crisis in our community that will meet the **overall goal to:** Increase accessibility to high-quality affordable childcare.

- **Accessibility** assumes that there are places available for children of all ages. There are two challenges to meet to address accessibility: a workforce shortage and available childcare options.
 - We will retain and attract a *workforce* by partnering with the University of South Dakota to hire work study students, and to seek new employees. We will also offer professional development to aid in workforce retention.
 - To increase accessibility, especially for infants and toddlers, by increasing *available childcare*, we will assist three local childcare providers to expand their slots for infants and toddlers and other programs to expand for preschool age.
- **Affordable** childcare options will be addressed with employer-sponsored programs and childcare partnerships. This will have the added benefit of contributing to expansion of available childcare.
- **High-quality** childcare will improve our childcare landscape. A partnership with the Vermillion Area Chamber and Development Company (VCDC), USD, and childcare providers will establish interactive STREAM lab classrooms with dedicated curriculum. They will incorporate teams with parents, educators, administrators, and specialists to facilitate the transition into elementary school. The partnership with a university will enable research and assessment in and of these classrooms.

This project addresses all four priorities of the GOED request and will be discussed in greater detail.

- I. Priority 1: Solutions to workforce shortage
 - a. Goal Retain and attract employees through professional development.
- II. Priority II and III: Increase accessibility to high-quality affordable childcare across early childhood, but especially for infants and toddlers.
 - a. Goal A Support three existing centers to expand slots for infants and toddlers.
 - b. Goal B Support employer-sponsored programs / childcare partnerships to expand the number of childcare slots.
- III. Priority IV: Improve the childcare landscape by addressing an 'outside of the norm' challenge.
 - a. STREAM LAB
 - b. SPROUT to STEM
 - c. STREAM Preschool/Elementary Team

VERMILLION AREA CHAMBER AND DEVELOPMENT COMPANY

The Vermillion Chamber and Development Company received a Community-Based Child Care Planning Grant in December 2023. The results of the planning grant solidified the needs and gaps in our community and provided an opportunity for in-depth analysis to support the implementation strategies that are the most beneficial and sustainable in our community. There is not one strategy that will solve the myriad of needs in the childcare sector. This implementation plan uses multiple efforts to address community needs. The VCDC is seeking \$500,000 in funding to support the implementation of these strategies. Community-members, local organizations and businesses have committed additional support.

Vermillion has strong partnerships committed to support our community in this area. In addition to the VCDC, active partners include The University of South Dakota (School of Education, Vucurevich Campus-Based Childcare and Head Start), the Boys and Girls Club of the Northern Great Plains, the Vermillion School District, United Way, SD Association for the Education of Young Children Missouri Valley chapter, representatives from major employers and individuals with expertise in serving young children (providers, parents, past principal).

The planning grant supported a comprehensive study in the Vermillion community. Addressing the concerns raised, the study recommends measures to **enhance accessibility, affordability, streamline communication, and collaborate within the childcare sector**. Furthermore, it emphasizes the importance of addressing **childcare worker pay, workforce shortage, training, and supporting low-income families** through outreach campaigns. The study advocates for action from Vermillion stakeholders to break the cycle of stagnation in childcare aiming for long-term, sustainable change.

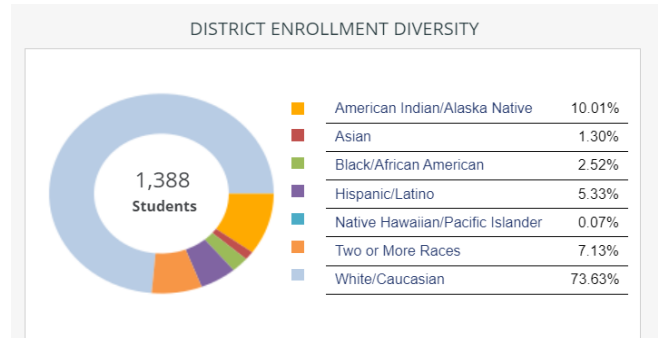
With a planning grant project, we painted the childcare landscape in Vermillion. We surveyed families in the Vermillion community, held focus groups with families at the Vermillion Food Bank and Welcome Table. We surveyed and held focus groups with childcare providers of all types including licensed, faith-based, unlicensed facilities, and home providers. We surveyed and called employers. This data provided us with the picture of the current setting, the barriers and needs of the community. It formed the basis for this proposal.

Current Childcare Landscape

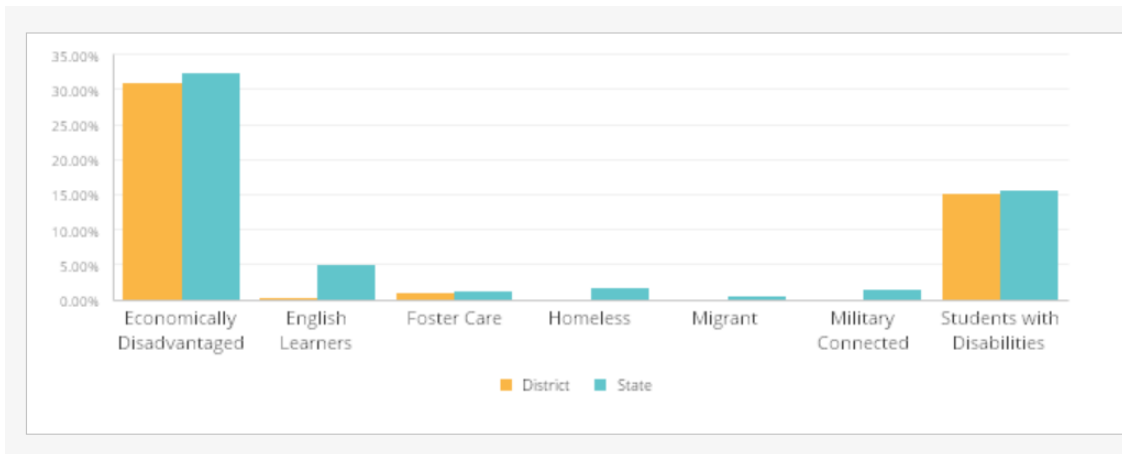
The Community. This grant will impact the Vermillion (Clay County) area. Vermillion is a high poverty area. **26%** of people in Clay County **live in poverty**. This is significantly higher than the national rate of 13%. Approximately **362 children live in poverty** in Clay County.

South Dakota has the 3rd highest rate of children under age 6 with all parents in the workforce at 74.6%. Clay County has approximately **75.2%** (487 children) **under the age of 6 with all parents in the workforce.**

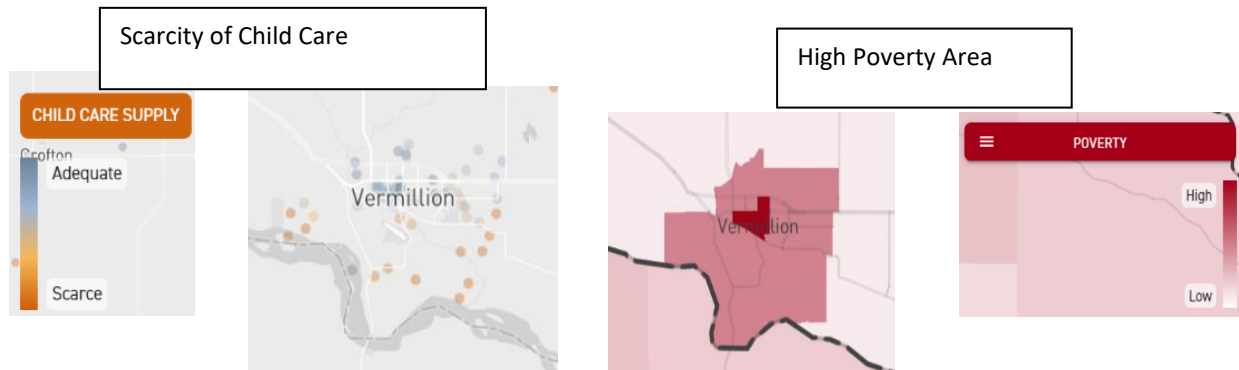
Data from the Vermillion School Districts indicate diversity in children enrolled, both in race/ethnicity and their needs.



VERMILLION SCHOOL DISTRICT STUDENT DATA



Childcare in the community. This community has been identified as a childcare desert (childcaredeserts.org). Although there is some adequate availability in both center-based and home-based services in specific areas, there is also identified scarcity, particularly in meeting family needs for infant and toddler care.



Vermillion has the licensed capacity in childcare to serve 280 children under 5 and 300 children ages 5+. However, providers are unable to meet this capacity due to the barriers of a workforce shortage, and the costs to provide high quality and safe environments. In addition, the childcare landscape in Vermillion changed in 2023, with the loss of a licensed for-profit facility. While a new faith-based center opened, it had lower capacity.

Three home care providers are registered with the City of Vermillion, but not registered with the state. According to the Census Bureau Economic Survey, Clay County has 28 home providers who report they earn income from home-based childcare. This survey also reports only 17% of home care providers state-wide are registered with the state. Clay County has a lower registration rate, with only **10% of family care providers registered** with the state.

Provider (Licensed Capacity)	Actual Counts			
	Infant/Toddler Childcare	Preschool Age Childcare	Preschool Only (Part-day)	OST Care
Boys and Girls Club (120)	0	0	0	120
Center for Children and Families (132)	32	20	0	0
Pulse of Life (43)	9	8	0	2
St. Agnes (180)	0	42	0	34
USD Vucurevich (81)	32	12	0	0
Karen Hansen (12)	5	3		
Ashley Bouck-Moeller (12)	unknown	unknown	unknown	unknown
Vermillion School District* unlicensed	0	0	48	0
Head Start *unlicensed	30 home-based	23	34	0
TOTAL	78	108	82	156

Partnerships currently exist between the Head Start and (1) USD licensed childcare center and (1) not-for profit licensed childcare center for wrap-around care. The Head Start program offers home-based services for expectant women and children and classroom settings for children ages 3-5.

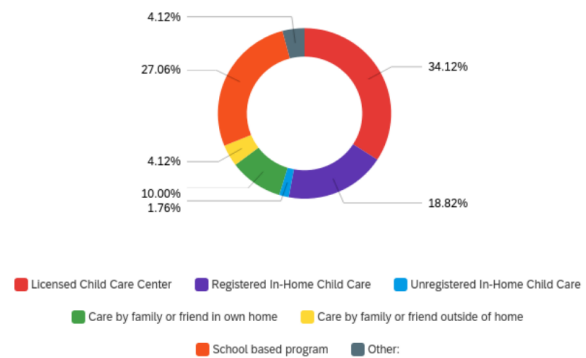
The Vermillion School District offers part-day preschool programming and separate classrooms for early childhood special education services. A new elementary school (consolidating 2 existing elementary schools) is expected to open for the 24-25 school year.

Access to Childcare. We surveyed area community families in winter 2023 with the GOED planning grant. The majority of survey respondents indicate a licensed childcare center as their preferred choice of care. Barriers of cost of care for families is an additional burden on meeting capacity.

Survey respondents in the Planning Grant survey indicated the top obstacles in obtaining childcare include cost (27.6%), scheduling conflicts (9.69%) and transportation (8.3%).

Respondents were asked to rank 6 different characteristics relating to their childcare needs. The **cost of care was found to be the most important factor** to most respondents and finding extended hours of care providers being the least important. The largest portion of respondents reported spending **\$200/week** or above (20.31%)

Figure 3 Preferred utilization of childcare types (n=171)



Information below illustrates the burden of cost of care for families in Vermillion:

Income

\$24,781

Per capita income

about 80 percent of the amount in the Vermillion, SD Micro Area: \$30,033

about two-thirds of the amount in South Dakota: \$36,850

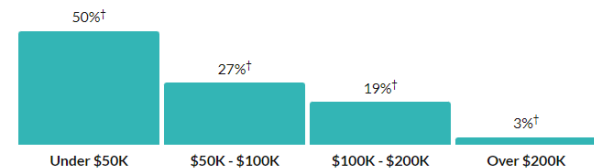
\$47,813

Median household income

about 80 percent of the amount in the Vermillion, SD Micro Area: \$55,963 †

about two-thirds of the amount in South Dakota: \$69,457

Household income



Source: Census

The cost of full-time care (50 weeks) for infants and toddlers in Vermillion is between \$8,600 and \$10,300 annually (average \$9,450) or approximately \$4.73 per hour. The current market rate reimbursement for childcare assistance is \$4.20 per hour. With the medium household income in Clay County at \$47.81, the **cost of childcare takes almost 20% of that income**. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services considers 7% of income to be affordable for childcare. A single household income at the SD minimum wage (\$23,296) who does not qualify for childcare assistance will **expend 40% of their income on childcare**.

The number of families accessing childcare assistance benefits in South Dakota dropped by 41% over the last 10 years.

Childcare providers commented on rates in the area and how to address the goal to provide affordable childcare that maintains quality standards.

Childcare providers who serve infants/toddlers in a childcare setting are not making enough revenue for long-term sustainability. They depend on the revenue generated from preschool care for 3–5-year-olds to make ends meet.

Staffing 1:5 Ratio	\$13.00 x 55 hrs. week salary \$200/wk. benefits	\$915
Overall Admin Costs pro-rated per child: Director/Kitchen/Maintenance Salaries, Food Costs, Mortgage/Utilities, Staff Development, Insurance, Supplies/Equipment	\$45/week per child x 5 children	\$225
Total Weekly Costs		\$1,140
Weekly Revenue	5 children x 4.20/hr. x 55	\$1,155
	Classroom Revenue	\$15/wk.

I would like people who work on childcare access issues in this area to be aware of the financial struggles many families face in the area regarding affording childcare and the financial struggles that daycare centers face when trying to provide affordable rates while staying in business and paying their staff. While families can be approved for CCA, the hourly rate that CCA pays is often only half of what daycare center rates are. Therefore, families with financial needs still must pay for a decent amount of their childcare.

–Vermillion Childcare Provider

Childcare providers also work to address a high turnover in staff. A Cost of Child Care Study (2022) by the SD Department of Social Services reported an 88% turnover rate in Direct Care staff in childcare. Consistency and retention of staff is an important aspect of quality care.

We also surveyed childcare providers and held focus groups in our planning grant project. Most of the respondents in the survey (52.9%) indicated that they “definitely” would hope to continue working in childcare. An additional 29.1% said that they would probably continue in this industry, while 17.7% responded that they would “probably not”

continue in childcare. No respondents said they would “definitely not” continue in this line of work. These responses are similar to those reported by SD DSS.

The education system and support provided to teachers and childcare workers are both poor. It may not be feasible to work in this profession eventually –Vermillion Childcare Provider in a focus group.

Childcare Quality. Family respondents in the planning grant survey were mostly satisfied with their childcare. They were asked to check options they preferred from a list of suggested childcare quality improvements: 27.27% wanted **more educational/learning opportunities**, followed by more nutritious snacks/meals at 13.99%, better ratio of staff to children at 12.59%, better ratio of indoor to outdoor play and better staff training and background both at 12.24%, and better communication between provider and family at 11.19%. The last two improvements saw less interest, with a safer and well-maintained environment selected by 7.69% of respondents, and more age-appropriate toys selected by 2.80%.

We also asked employers about concerns expressed by their employees regarding childcare. **Cost concerns** and scheduling concerns were most prevalent, followed by lack of capacity.

Table 13 Employee Concerns Regarding Child Care (n=37)

Have employees ever expressed any of the following concerns or challenges related to childcare? (select all that apply)	
Concerns/Challenges	Count
Lack of infant openings	5
Lack of pre-school openings	1
Lack of openings generally or unspecified	6
Lack of quality care	6
Cost concerns	9
Scheduling concerns	8
Transportation concerns	2
Safety concerns	0
Total	37

Vermillion CARES

Childcare Access, Resources, and Education Solutions

Based on the Results of the Planning Grant

Why is it necessary?

- I. The Vermillion childcare community has a high workforce turnover.
- II. The Vermillion community is a high-poverty community.
- III. The Vermillion community is a childcare desert.
- IV. The Vermillion community currently lacks capacity for all ages of childcare.
- V. The Vermillion community spoke out for more, affordable, and high-quality childcare.

What do we need?

- I. Solutions for a workforce shortage and workforce retention.
- II. Added capacity for infants and toddlers.
- III. Added capacity for preschool age.
- IV. Solutions to cost barriers.
- V. Increased educational/learning opportunities.

Goal: Increase accessibility to high-quality affordable childcare.

Accessible

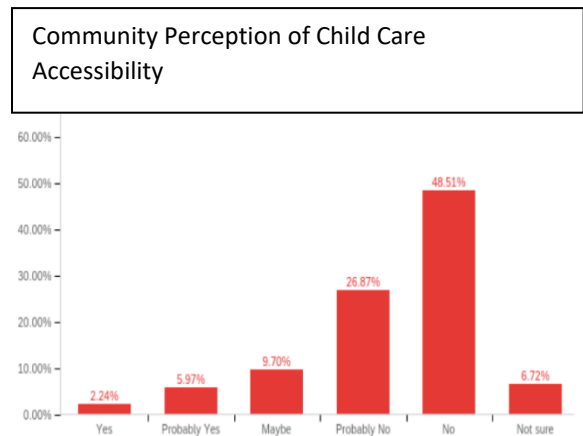
- I. Meets GOED Priority II and III: Increase accessibility to high-quality affordable childcare across early childhood, but especially for infants and toddlers.
 - b. Goal Support three existing centers to expand slots for infants and toddlers.

We are seeking \$209,276 in funding to support three existing licensed childcare centers to expand their infant/toddler slots.

- Center for Children and Families - increase by 8 slots
- Pulse Child Care - increase by 5 slots.
- Community Childcare - increase by 16 slots

- An Additional 46 pre school slots addressed next section.

Respondents of the survey were happy with the existing quality of care – which supports this grant’s efforts to support existing providers rather than the need to open a new center. This expansion will make an **additional 29 infant/toddler spots available - almost a 40% increase**. Funding requests of \$156,891 support payroll/benefits for 6 months. As illustrated earlier, quality infant-toddler care is expensive to operate and the support of reimbursement of payroll and benefits for 6 months for infant-toddler program staff will allow time for childcare providers to adjust program budgets and services to be sustainable after the grant funds end. We are requesting \$52,385 in supplies and equipment needed to support this expansion (see detailed budget). We also create teacher bank/agency that may move to another site when teacher is absent.



Measurable Objectives: Number of infant/toddler slots filled. Length of time infants/toddlers on waiting list for services.

Expected Outcomes: Families who need infant/toddler care can access care.

Affordable

- II. Meets GOED Priority 3: Support and employer-sponsored program or childcare partnership.

- b. Goal Support employer-sponsored programs / childcare partnerships to expand the number of childcare slots and support families in need of affordable care.

We are seeking \$3,000 funding to support marketing efforts toward our strategies below.

All ten major employees surveyed indicated that the **availability of childcare options in Vermillion affected their ability to recruit employees** with four reporting definitely yes and six reporting probably yes. Nine respondents indicated that the availability of childcare options in Vermillion affected their ability to retain employees with four reporting definitely yes and five reporting probably yes. One employer responded that childcare options in Vermillion probably did not affect their ability to retain employees.

United Way has become a partner in addressing this challenge. They have agreed to support a childcare line item in their requests for funding – employers, as well as individuals, can donate to this fund. This model will operate like a tri-share model offered in other communities and states, with the United Way childcare fund paying a portion of the childcare costs (up to 20% if funding available). The typical cost for 50 weeks of infant/toddler care in our community is between \$8,600 and \$10,300 annually. The GOED implementation team will continue to look for other sources of funding to cover another portion of a childcare bill, and the parents will be responsible for a portion. Payment will be made directly to the provider based on proof of child enrollment at that site. The goal for sustainability would be a 33% split between grant/foundation or state funds, United Way funding and parent payments. Low-income families of infants and toddlers who do not qualify for state childcare assistance will be first priority.

Measurable Objectives: Amount of funding received. Number of families receiving financial support.

Expected Outcomes: Families who need infant/toddler care can access care.

High-Quality

- I. Meets GOED Priority IV. Improve the childcare landscape by addressing an ‘outside of the norm’ challenge.
 - c. Goal Add a STREAM Lab
 - d. Goal Add a SPROUT to STEM Program
 - e. Goal Add STREAM Preschool/Elementary Team

We are seeking \$50,864 in funding to support the addition of preschool/childcare options for children ages 3-5 by utilizing an existing building to house multiple programs (preschool, licensed childcare and Head Start, OST). The Vermillion School District has gifted a soon-to-be vacated elementary school to the Boys and Girls Club and is exploring adding an additional bus route at district cost to support transportation for Out of School Time care. **This expansion will make an additional 46 preschool or preschool**

childcare slots for children ages 3-5 available in the community. Funds are requested to complete minor renovations (sprinkler system installation - the existing school building does not have one and in order to utilize this building as licensed care - needs to be installed -\$170,00), and \$69,860 for equipment and supplies for preschool-age classrooms (see detailed budget).

This proposal seeks funding to elevate the overall quality of Vermillion's preschool education, focusing on the most vulnerable children in our community. Our community is dedicated to cultivating a culture that values differences, allowing each person's story to be heard through interactions. We embrace every child's unique skill and interest, demonstrating our commitment to valuing their identities, abilities, and perspectives. Based on our community needs-based assessment, it was identified that 52% of respondents expressed a keen interest in specific quality improvements: more educational/learning opportunities (27.27%), a better ratio of indoor to outdoor play (12.59%), and staff with improved training and background in childcare (12.24%). Funds of \$13,864 will support a research position as a pilot in one of the classrooms. \$30,000 will support the needed curriculum resources. The primary goal is to implement a high-quality STREAM (Science, Technology, Reading, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics) early childhood program integrated into the existing Creative Curriculum for Preschool. Grant funds are also requested in the amount of \$5000 to provide partial support toward the purchase of The Creative Curricula for ages 3-5. This approach will be informed by the latest research findings and best practices recommended by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). A partnership with the University of South Dakota School of Education will assist in providing research, curriculum, training, and staff.

In addition to the focused STREAM project, the preschool classrooms will serve as lab schools for several University of South Dakota students from a variety of disciplines which may include education, special education, kinesiology, occupational therapy, physical therapy, nursing, social work, dental hygiene. The opportunity to work with preschool-age children will provide additional support for children and provide a rich educational hands-on experiential learning environment for USD students. Parent educational events will also support parents as their child's first and best teachers.

Project Components:

1. Preschool STREAM Lab Classroom
 - a. Establish a dedicated Preschool STREAM Lab Classroom designed as an interactive classroom that will increase background knowledge.
 - b. Facilitate sustainable Making and Tinkering activities with STEM Solving Design Challenges for young children, ensuring engagement in a minimum of ten activities per calendar year.
 - c. Utilize the research and findings, with assistance of partnership with University of South Dakota School of Education, to create a model that can be shared with other preschools in the surrounding area, fostering collaboration and professional development.

2. SPROUT (Super Powers Reveal Our Understanding & Thinking) TO STEM Program

- a. The SPROUT to STEM program aims to reveal children's superpowers in thinking and understanding through staff development and implementation.
- b. The Preschool STREAM Lab Classroom will utilize six SPROUT to STEM Play Kits, offering a framework to nurture innate curiosity and construct foundational thinking blocks for children. This empowers them to create and discover in their unique way.
- c. Develop high-quality, research-based learning strategies that can be shared with other preschools.

3. STREAM Preschool/Elementary Team

- a. Form a dedicated team comprising parents, educators, administrators, and specialists to design and implement a successful transition program.
- b. Develop a communication strategy to facilitate the seamless transition of children from preschool to elementary education.
- c. Ensuring ongoing collaboration between preschools and elementary schools to address any challenges and enhance the overall learning experience.
- d. Partner with University of South Dakota professionals to engage in research and assessment of SPROUT to STEM program and STREAM classrooms.

Measurable Objective: Improve children's learning outcomes. Number of staff receiving training.

Expected Outcomes: Improve the quality of preschool education in Vermillion. Increase active engagement and background knowledge in STREAM activities, fostering confidence and a love for learning. Successful transition of children from preschool to elementary education.

Grant Implementation

The Vermillion Area Chamber and Development Company (VCDC) will disburse funding to the 4 childcare partners via a Micro Grant application process.

- The Phase 1 Micro Grant will initially cover supplies and equipment needed to start expansion services – payment will be made based on received invoice of items ordered.
- A second Phase 2 Micro Grant will be available to support 6 months of personnel/benefits costs – payment will be reimbursed based on payroll/benefits proof.
- The VCDC will purchase \$5000 in Vermillion Bucks/Gift Certificates and will disburse to training attendees upon signed proof of attendance at training events.
- The VCDC will provide funding for curricula resources based on invoices provided.
- The VCDC will provide funding for awareness/marketing efforts based on invoices provided.
- The VDDC will provide reimbursement for the sprinkler system after competitive quotes are obtained and completion of activity.

Projected Grant Timelines

Timeline	Activity Beginning	Implementation Date
Notice of Award	March 2024	Funds Expended by 9/2024
Partners Order Supplies/Equipment & Apply for Micro Grant	April 2024	Micro Grants reviewed and payment provided by May 2024
Hiring Begins	April 2024	ongoing
Sprinkler Installation at Austin Elementary	June 2024	<i>Projected completion 7/24</i>
Infant Services (8 slots CFCF)	May 2024	Services will begin as soon as the environment set up is complete and staffing is obtained. No later than Fall 2024.
Toddler Services (8 slots COMM.)	May 2024	Services will begin as soon as the environment set up is complete and staffing is obtained. No later than Fall 2024.
Infant Services (5 slots Pulse)	May 2024	Services will begin as soon as the environment setup is complete, and staffing is obtained. No later than Fall 2024
Infant Services (8 slots COMM.)	Fall 2024	<i>Start-up is dependent on when preschool services can move to Austin.</i>
Preschool Services (30 slots) COMM. Austin	Fall 2024	<i>Start-up is dependent on when preschool service can move to Austin.</i>
3-5 Childcare Services (16 B&G at Austin)	Fall 2024	<i>Start-up is dependent on when preschool service can move to Austin.</i>
32 Head Start slots to Austin	Fall 2024	<i>Start-up is dependent on when preschool service can move to Austin.</i>
2 ND Round Micro Grant to reimburse 6 months staffing	Feb 2024	ongoing - based on when services start
Child Care Training	September 2024	Ongoing - sustainable
United Way Campaign	April 2024	Ongoing - sustainable
United Way Awards to Offset Childcare	September 2024	ongoing
Research for 3-5 Pilot	Hiring Begins Summer 2024	Fall 2024
Job Share Directory	August 2024	ongoing - sustainable
Outreach to Families Regarding Child Care Assistance	April 2024	ongoing - sustainable
Outreach to Home-Based Providers regarding Registration	April 2024	ongoing - sustainable

Other Local Priorities (No Funding Requested – Funds Provided by Local Support)

- High School CDA initiative to encourage the Vermillion School District to have a high school student earn their CDA while in high school. Local preschool and childcare programs are willing to allow the student to complete their required hours on site – no funding is being requested for this initiative.
- Preschool Programming Utilizes SD School Administrators of SD Preschool Levels of Excellence
- Vermillion community explore becoming an Early Learning Community from the SD Association of Young Children Early Learner initiative.

The planning study concluded its report by offering three strategies and recommendations to policymakers and stakeholders. First, the report calls for improved wages for providers and workers in childcare. Second, there needs to be much more support for workers in the childcare workforce. This implementation grant offers solutions to these recommendations. Third, the state must make Child Care Assistance much more accessible for families. Finally, the study recommends that to move the needle on childcare in South Dakota, there needs to be more investment from the state.

The VCDC and community partners thank you for this opportunity to invest in our community and urge you to fund this implementation grant application to support children, families, and the early childhood workforce in our community.

Assessment and Evaluation

The Vermillion Chamber and Development Company will annually collect capacity and totals of children, by age, at childcare providers to determine increases.

The Vermillion Chamber and Development Company will collect numbers of United Way vouchers from UW and number/\$ amount/ and location of employer-sponsored childcare slots added each year.

The University of South Dakota School of Education will conduct research on STREAM lab curriculum and classrooms for teacher implementation, student learning, and student engagement.

Boys and Girls Club of Vermillion will annually collect information on attendance, enrollment, and participation.