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Date: Fri, Sep 12, 2014 at 11:49 AM

Good morning,

I'm writing with an update regarding Vermont's Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge (RTTT-ELC) grant. You last heard from me this past legislative session, and I'm excited to bring you up to speed on our recent accomplishments!

For the programmatic management of the Early Learning Challenge grant as a whole, we hired Julie Cadwallader-Staub as the Grant Director. She will be primarily responsible for overseeing the initiative and making sure that all federal requirements are met. She came to us from the Burlington School District, where she managed several federal grants and the programs they funded. Carolyn Wesley joined Julie at the end of August, as our Project Manager. Her duties will include engagement and communication—both internal and external—as well as management and support for individual projects. Her most recent position was as Director of Constituent Services in the Governor's office.

Diane Cummings manages the accounting and finances of the grant, ably assisted by Timothy Cutler and Anne Bordonaro as the Grants and Contracts Administrators for the Child Development Division and the Agency of Education, respectively. Each brings deep knowledge and expertise in financial and grants management to their roles.

**As you may remember, the Early Learning Challenge grant is composed of four general categories: Improving Quality and Access; Investing in the Early Childhood Workforce; Empowering Communities, and Making a Difference. We've made good progress in each area!**

#### **Improving Quality and Access:**

- We awarded a grant to Mary Johnson Children's Center that will improve the quality and timeliness of Environment Rating Scale program assessments. This enhanced monitoring of early learning and development programs will become part of an overall coordinated system of program monitoring including STARS participating programs and publicly funded preschools.
- Through funding provided the Early Learning Challenge grant we have been able to increase the amount of funding available to Strengthening Families Child Care Centers and provide funding to 6 additional centers.
- We selected Vermont Birth to 3 to assist DCF-CDD with the expansion of the Strengthening Families Child Care framework to home care providers. They will use a "hub and spoke model" that will provide regional support to the participating family child care homes. The services enhanced by this Strengthening Families grant and the Strengthening Families Child Care Centers relate to the following DCF/CDD goals:
  - Children are ready for school

- Children live in stable and supported households
- We released the RFP for a rigorous independent evaluation of the Strengthening Families Child Care Programs to determine the program's efficacy as well as that of the models of support for these programs.
- We hired Rosemeryl Harple as a Child Wellness Coordinator to help guide universal developmental screening and other early child wellness efforts. Janet Kilburn was hired as a Child Development Coordinator to help implement Help Me Grow. We utilized national Technical Assistance to guide the launch of the Help Me Grow initiative.
- We selected the evidenced-based Parents As Teachers (PAT) model as our home visiting program in partnership with the Parent Child Centers and others. PAT, along with the evidence-based Maternal Early Childhood Sustained Home visiting (MECSH) model, will allow service providers to choose the most appropriate home visiting model for each Vermont family served. RTTT-ELC will provide professional development and technical assistance to increase the use of these programs throughout Vermont, increase coordination of home visiting services, and track and report on services and outcomes.
- We provided additional funding to ensure each Children's Integrated Services (CIS) region has the capacity to employ one full time CIS Child Care Coordinator. CIS Child Care Coordinators work with families and providers to help children with high needs experience success in high quality childcare.
- We contracted with Catherine Scott-Little, a national expert in early learning standards, to work with the VELS Revision Committee to update Vermont's Early Learning Standards (VELS). We are currently using Catherine's expertise to write Draft 2 of the new VELS.
- We've begun implementing the updated annual financial rewards system to STARS programs for maintaining quality and providing nutritious food.

### **Investing in a Highly Skilled Workforce:**

- Through a competitive bid process we selected Education Development Center, Inc to assist us with developing and administering a Workforce Survey to assess the characteristics, qualifications, conditions and needs of the professionals working with young children (infant – grade 3) and families in Vermont. This study will provide a baseline for measuring progress on workforce goals and plan effective cross-sector professional development strategies.
- We've awarded a grant to the Vermont Child Care Industry and Career Council, Inc. with the goal of increasing registered apprenticeship in Vermont and expanding the availability of college courses critical for apprentices and other early childhood professionals. Recruiting of apprentices and delivery of courses is currently underway.
- We've awarded a grant to the Vermont Association for the Education of Young

Children to establish and expand the Teacher Education and Compensation Help (T.E.A.C.H.® ) program in Vermont. The T.E.A.C.H project is a national, evidence-based strategy that creates access to higher education for early educators working with young children in out-of-home settings. T.E.A.C.H. provides scholarships to enable early educators to take coursework leading to credentials and degrees.

- Over the summer, eight early childhood professionals became accredited Teaching Strategies GOLD trainers. Starting this fall, these accredited trainers will offer the 2-day introductory training and the more advanced Step 2, Step 3, and Step 4 trainings to early childhood educators across the state. These are free trainings. TS Gold is an effective formative assessment for children birth to grade 3 that provides good information on children's early learning and development strengths and challenges and can be used by providers to inform practices.
- Also this fall, through a partnership with the Higher Education Collaborative, we will offer a series of three related workshops entitled, Each and Every Child and Family. The focus is on supporting infants through preschoolers who are at-risk and/or have special needs. This series will be offered free to early childhood educators; it will be offered in the northern part of the state and repeated in the southern part. Details on when and where will be released soon.
- Early Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (Early MTSS) is currently seeking a project coordinator through the RFP process. Early MTSS will launch cohort 1 pilot site trainings this fall. Cohort 1 region include pilots sites located in Chittenden and Franklin Counties as well as the Northeast Kingdom. A state cadre of trainers and coaches has been established and is being trained by national experts in systems design and practice-based coaching.
- We released a Request for Proposals for a consultant to convene, facilitate and support a reinvigorated early Childhood Higher Education Work Group to help improve pre- and in-service professional development and work on eliminating barriers to professional certification and licensure.

### **Empowering Communities:**

- We've hired 11 coordinators for the Building Bright Futures regional councils as part of our efforts to leverage and strengthen the existing governance structure in Building Bright Futures. These new coordinators will help to assure broad partner and stakeholder participation and collaboration in the management and implementation of the reform agenda throughout the State. **See [www.buildingbrightfutures.org](http://www.buildingbrightfutures.org) for more information about each coordinator!**
- We've hired Julianne Nickerson as the Director of the Promise Communities program. Her previous position was as a regional coordinator for BBF in Chittenden County. In her new role, she will oversee the Promise Communities program, to support rural communities in addressing opportunity gaps for children by working to improve the environment in which they grew up.
- Plans are underway for the creator and staff from FirstSchool, a national and international expert on implementing a comprehensive PreK-Grade 3 (PreK-3) approach to

education, to come to Vermont to present an orientation to their PreK –3 approach, and to recruit school districts and their community partners to become part of the Vermont’s RTT-ELC PreK-3 Pilot which starts Summer of 2015.

### **Ensuring that we are Making a Difference:**

- Building Bright Futures Early Childhood Data Reporting System (ECDRS) working prototype version 1.3 is now available for your use and feedback. Go to <http://www.bbfddata.com>. Our vision is that ECDRS will be an integrated online toolbox that equips Vermonters (policymakers, practitioners, parents and others) to contribute, access, and use meaningful data for the well-being of children, families and communities.
- We are finalizing revisions to the Kindergarten Readiness Survey (KRS) to more accurately record children’s kindergarten readiness. 100 kindergarten teachers will pilot the revised KRS this fall, along with administering the original survey. With support from A.D. Henderson Foundation, the American Institute for Research will analyze the results of the pilot data to ensure the new assessment is valid and reliable.

### **IN RELATED NEWS**

- All our grant work continues to be closely aligned with Vermont’s Early Child Framework and Action Plan. Building Bright Futures hosted a retreat in July to finalize current priorities and decide which stakeholders will lead on each priority.
- The passage of Universal Pre-K in Act 166 presents an exciting opportunity for Vermont’s early childhood community. The Act is in the rulemaking process, which will be initiated by the State Board of Education at their September 16 meeting. There will be an opportunity to provide feedback on the draft rules during a public comment period that will likely run from October to December.
- We are also in the process of applying for a federal Pre-K Expansion grant using the largely the same team (including the same grant writer) that put together RTTT-ELC application. We are eligible to apply for up to \$10 million a year for up to four years as a state that has already received RTTT funding. This is a highly competitive grant opportunity and is due October 14. Unlike RTTT-ELC, 95% of the expansion grant funding will go directly to communities to increase the hours and improve the quality of Pre-K in their towns.

For more information, please visit the website: <http://governor.vermont.gov/race-to-the-top>. To send a comment or question to the grant Implementation Team, please email: [carolyn.wesley@state.vt.us](mailto:carolyn.wesley@state.vt.us).

If you or the organization with which you are affiliated would like more information or would like to discuss the grant with grant leadership directly, please let me know and we can set up a conference call or a meeting.

Hope you are well and thanks for your continued interest in supporting our youngest Vermonters!

Best,  
Aly

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