



Welcome!

September and October have been busy months in the implementation of Vermont's Early Learning Challenge Race to the Top Grant (ELC). We have filled most of the remaining grant-funded positions, organized trainings and stakeholder advisory meetings to get projects off the ground, and the grant Implementation Team continues to work closely together to ensure that grant efforts progress in a collaborative and transparent manner. Some projects are already off and running, most notably:

- The updated annual STARS awards, which provide financial incentives both to providers who improve their STARS level, and, thanks to ELC funds, to those who maintain their current STARS level.
- The ELC-funded expansion of the Early Childhood Apprenticeship Program which offers free college courses and mentoring to providers wishing to develop in the field of early childhood care and education.
- A partnership between ELC and the United Ways of Vermont to eventually develop 2-1-1 as a "go-to" place for family members and providers seeking information, support, community resources and referrals in the world of early childhood as part of our implementation of the national Help Me Grow Model.

Going forward, we will release Monthly Updates on the progress of the grant to Vermont's early childhood community through existing agency websites, listservs, and newsletters. These updates are meant to be responsive, and contact information for the grant Implementation Team can be found at the end of each update. We have grouped the updates into four main grant strategies: Improving Quality and Access, Investing in People, Empowering Communities, and Ensuring We Are Making a Difference. We also listed updates by project number, project name, and project lead to help you gain greater familiarity with the twenty-four projects of the grant.

What's in a Name? The Early Learning Challenge Grant

As you may know, Race to the Top is a federal initiative to spur innovative education reform at the state level. The K-12 Race to the Top grants had strict requirements related to standardized testing, and, because of this, Vermont intentionally decided not to apply for a K-12 Race to the Top grant. The Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge grants, jointly administered by the US DOE and Health and Human Services, do not have prescriptive requirements that conflict with Vermont's philosophy around early care and education. Many Vermonters know that the state decided not to pursue a K-12 Race to the Top grant and associate Race to the Top with standardized testing requirements. It can be confusing, then, to hear that Vermont has a Race to the Top grant.

As a result, we ask our partners and the early childhood community to refer to our grant as the Early Learning Challenge grant. In writing we have started listing Early Learning Challenge first in the whole



title and abbreviating the grant as ELC. In speaking, we ask that people either say both “Early Learning Challenge – Race to the Top” or “Early Learning Challenge” but never just “Race to the Top.” The intentional use of “Early Learning Challenge” helps clarify the goal of the grant: to improve kindergarten readiness for high needs children in Vermont

Improving Quality and Access

- Project 4 – Expand Strengthening Families Child Care Program (DCF/Jan Walker)
Update: The Child Development Division and Vermont Birth to Three met October 8, 2014 to review steps to implement a “Hub and Spoke” model to help expand the Strengthening Families Child Care model to home care settings. Applications are due November 15 for agencies/programs who would like to apply to be a “hub” that will provide support to a network of 10 family child care providers to implement Strengthening Families informed programs. For more information contact LouAnn Beninati at lbeninati@gmail.com. Additionally, CDD has selected Education Development Center, Inc. to evaluate the impact of the Strengthening Families approach on children and families in Vermont's Strengthening Families programs.
Why it matters: The Strengthening Families model helps providers link families with comprehensive services and empower them to understand and meet the developmental needs of their children.
- Project 5 – Annual STARS Awards (DCF/Jan Walker)
Update: As of October 14, 2014, CDD has processed 210 annual STARS payments. This means the STARS Office reviewed and approved the requests and made payments through the CDD payment system.
Why it matters: ELC funds build upon the practice of awarding one time incentive payments to programs who achieve a new star level by providing 80% of the award amount annually to programs that maintain their STARS level. This helps to ensure that higher quality programs maintain their status so that children continue to benefit from the excellent early learning and development opportunities they provide.
- Project 7 – Rating and Monitoring Early Learning and Development Programs (DCF/Jan Walker, AOE/Manuela Fonseca)
Update: As part of an ELC-funded grant to improve the quality and timeliness of Environment Rating Scale (ERS) program assessments, the Mary Johnson Children’s Center hired two assessors to be trained in ERS and will support them in implementing an effective system of providing valid and reliable program assessments.
Why it matters: The ERS provides a mechanism for early childhood professionals to improve their settings and curriculum to better meet the needs of the children in their care.



- Project 8 – Children’s Integrated Services (CIS) Specialized Child Care Services (DCF/Karen Garbarino)
Update: CDD is pulling together an advisory team to review the standards for Specialized Childcare Providers and offer recommendations about future qualifications. If you are interested in being involved with this process, contact Jill Pearl at Jill.Pearl@state.vt.us.
Why it matters: Specialized Child Care Providers care for our children who are most at risk; giving these providers the training and support they need will result in better outcomes for these children.
- Project 9 – Vermont Early Learning Standards (AOE/Manuela Fonseca)
Update: The VELS Revision Committee designated two writers to review feedback from national expert Catherine Scott-Little and to incorporate it into a final draft. The Agency of Education is looking to contract out final editing and layout of the updated VELS based on this final draft.
Why it matters: VELS is set of research-based early learning and development standards that serves as the foundation for high quality early learning and development opportunities. We are revising VELS to reflect a full birth through grade 3 continuum so that children have smoother transitions between their experiences before kindergarten and across K-3. The revisions also ensure that VELS better supports children with high needs.
- Project 10: Comprehensive Assessment (AOE/Manuela Fonseca)
Update: AOE hired Katie McCarthy as a .5 FTE EC Assessment Consultant. She is studying the grant proposal and Project 10 Scope of Work, as well as familiarizing herself with the targeted assessments that will form the early childhood comprehensive assessment system.
Why it matters: A balanced and effective comprehensive system of developmentally appropriate assessments provides critical information on children's learning and development, and the quality of the early learning and development programs they attend, so we can ensure success for all.
- Project 12 – Early Childhood Wellness (VDH/Breena Holmes)
Update: The Vermont Department of Health (VDH) has scheduled a retreat for the Early Childhood Wellness Team and Child Care Wellness Consultants (CCWC) on November 15, 2014 at Dartmouth Hitchcock Medical Center. The retreat will include updates and resources for nutrition and physical activity enhancements in child care settings. Rosemeryl Harple, CCWC Coordinator, has been working with programs throughout the Vermont Department of Health and Children’s Integrated Services, to ensure that resources used by CCWCs align with current programs. She has also trained the VDH District Office Maternal Child Health Coordinators on the CCWC program.
Why it matters: Child Care Wellness Consultants provide early childhood providers with onsite technical assistance, health training opportunities, and support in developing policies and



environments to promote children's health and development with special attention to nutritional and physical activity standards. This training helps ensure that high quality programs address the health and safety needs of all children.

Update: The Help Me Grow (HMG) National Center consultation team will provide on-site technical assistance on November 3 -4, 2014 to support the launch of Help Me Grow in Vermont. HMG presentations will be held in collaboration with Vermont 2-1-1 and the Building Bright Futures Council. The Vermont 2-1-1 presentation will focus on the nuts and bolts of implementing a HMG Central Access Point of Entry: a "go-to" place for family members and providers seeking information, support, community resources and referrals that is cost effective and efficient. For more information visit <http://www.helpmegrownational.org>.

Why it matters: The HMG Central Access Point is designed to provide universal access and link high needs children (and those at risk of developmental and behavioral delays) and their families with developmentally enhancing, community-based, resources and programs that support school readiness. Targeted HMG technical assistance for this project will help build cross-sector partnerships across early childhood systems, key for the successful establishment of a HMG Central Access Point.

Update: The Vermont Department of Health (VDH) IT department is moving along with the creation of a developmental screening repository that will include screening results for the Ages and Stages Questionnaire(ASQ), Ages and Stages Questionnaire-Social Emotional (ASQ-SE), and Modified Checklist for Autism in Toddlers (M-CHAT). The Vermont Child Health Information Program (VCHIP) staff has been assisting with development and will help train several pilot programs and providers (under Project LAUNCH). Additionally, VDH will import developmental screening data from Early Head Start programs, beginning with Champlain Valley Head Start.

Why it matters: Well-organized developmental screening data is a critical part of an efficient system of comprehensive assessment to help ensure a child is developing appropriately and track her development across health, education, and care settings.

Investing in People

- Project 13 – Early Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (Early MTSS)(AOE/Kate Rogers)

Update: AOE released an RFP for a project coordinator for the Early MTSS project. They are in negotiations with the University of Florida and developing a Scope of Work to provide training in practiced-based coaching in Vermont. Systems coach training for Early MTSS trainers will take place on November 12 and 13 with staff from the Cohort 1 pilot sites in Chittenden County, Franklin County, and the North East Kingdom attending the second day.

Why it matters: Providers trained in Early MTSS will be better able to assess, assist and refer as appropriate to ensure program quality and that young children receive the services they need.



- Project 14 – Expand Child Care Apprenticeship (DCF/Jan Walker)

Update: Current Child Care Apprenticeship courses are at the mid-term mark and evaluations of courses and instructors are underway. Between now and January 10, 2015, a public outreach campaign on VPR will advertise the apprenticeship program offered through the Vermont Child Care Industry & Careers Council (VCCICC). A cycle of ELC-funded courses in Bennington will begin in January. In addition VCCICC has worked with CCV to provide a 5 week writers' workshop to prepare current child care providers for college level coursework. This is the first time this workshop is being delivered through VCCICC and will be offered in Bennington in November. For more information contact Sue Ryan at (802) 985-2700 or sue@vtchildcareindustry.org

Why it matters: ELC funding enables the enhanced promotion and availability of apprenticeship courses. This will result in increased education of the early childhood workforce, movement on the career ladder, and higher quality opportunities for children.

- Project 15 – Implement and Evaluate M.A.T.C.H (Mentoring, Advising, Teaching, Coaching, Consulting, and Helping) (DCF/Jan Walker)

Update: The M.A.T.C.H. project creates a registry of professionals who provide on-site training, one on one mentoring, and relationship-based professional development to child care providers in order to better connect them to providers in need of professional development. CDD has selected Education Development Center, Inc. to provide expert assistance in the implementation of M.A.T.C.H.

Why it matters: Relationship-based PD has proved particularly effective for busy providers in getting the skills and training they need to provide high quality care and education for children.

- Project 17 – Early Childhood Workforce Survey (DCF/Jan Walker)

Update: Education Development Center, Inc., which was selected to develop and administer a Workforce Survey to assess the characteristics, qualifications, conditions, and needs of Vermont's early childhood workforce, has begun consulting on the project. CDD is creating a list of stakeholders to advise and provide input into the workforce study and customized invitations will be sent. For more information on this process contact Lynn Robbins at lynn.robbs@state.vt.us or Ben Allen at ben.allen@state.vt.us.

Why it matters: The survey will offer objective evidence regarding the educational level, compensation and retention rates of child care professionals in Vermont and identify gaps in the professional development system across the state. This information will help us chart a course to build a stronger workforce.

Empowering Communities

- Project 2 – Building Bright Futures: Empowering 12 Regional Councils (BBF/Julie Coffey)

Update: BBF has hired full-time Regional Council Coordinators for all 12 regions and held a Regional Council Coordinators retreat on Oct 21. The coordinators are reviewing existing



regional action plans with help from Theory of Change expert Helene Clarke, with the goal of revising them to align with the state Early Childhood Action Plan and incorporating any new regional needs. They also engaged in asset mapping with the consultant group Youth Catalytics. In a significant step toward strengthening a cohesive system, all 12 regions have voted on a uniform set of names.

Why it matters: As the 12 regional councils develop capacity to impact services in their local communities, their strength, diversity, and unity will support successful implementation of this grant and the larger statewide framework/action plan.

- Project 3 – Building Early Childhood Leadership (GOV/Julie Cadwallader-Staub)

Update: We awarded a grant to the Snelling Center to launch an Early Childhood Leadership Institute (ECLI), modeled after the successful Vermont Leadership Institute. You can find a press release announcing the partnership [here](#). Recruitment for the first cohort of 25 participants will begin in January.

Why it matters: The ECLI will train a diverse group of Vermonters to be knowledgeable advocates for early childhood policies and programs.

- Project 24 – Promise Communities (DCF/Karen Garbarino)

Update: Julianne Nickerson has made great headway as the director of this exciting new program modeled, in part, after Geoffrey Canada's Harlem Children's Zone. We are hiring three Promise Community Coaches to help engage rural communities in Vermont in planning to support better outcomes for young children. In addition, the newly formed Promise Communities state advisory team held their first meeting Oct 29 to discuss the criteria and processes for selecting Promise Communities. The meeting was well-attended and brought many non-traditional partners to the table to discuss all the ways in which communities affect young children.

Why it matters: This project will mobilize rural communities with a concentration of children with high needs to work towards the transformation of every aspect of the environment that supports young children and families in order to achieve a high level of school readiness and success.

Ensuring We Are Making a Difference

- Project 6 – Evaluate STARS (DCF/Jan Walker)

Update: STARS, Vermont's tiered quality rating and improvement system for early learning and development programs, has been in place for the last ten years. While CDD has made ongoing improvements to the program over the years, ELC funds allow for an independent expert evaluation of STARS efficacy to be conducted over the next few years. The RFP for the evaluation can be found [here](#).



Why it matters: This evaluation will ensure that our system for rating high quality programs is effective and that Vermont children are truly accessing the best opportunities.

- Project 19 – CIS Data System (DCF/Karen Garbarino)

Update: ELC supports the upgrade of Children’s Integrated Services (CIS) paper-based case management system into the 21st century. This effort will be tied with the state’s work to create a modern Medicaid Management Information System (MMIS). The MMIS proposal includes a case management system for the Vermont Chronic Care Initiative that can be tailored to meet CIS’ needs. Proposals for the MMIS data system are in and a contractor should be selected by mid-December.

Why it matters: This work will help make sure Vermont’s young children are getting the services they need to thrive and that we are better able to measure outcomes and use accurate data to inform policy.

- Project 20 – Early Childhood Data Reporting System (ECDRS) (BBF/Julie Coffey)

Update: On November 20, 2014 Building Bright Futures will be hosting their 4th Annual Data Stewards and Stakeholders meeting to explore the production ready ECDRS system v1.0. and what lays ahead for the project over the next 12 months. For more information contact Katie Mobbs, kmobbs@buildingbrightfutures.org.

Why it matters: The Building Bright Future-Early Childhood Data Reporting System will be an integrated online toolbox that equips Vermonters to leverage meaningful data to guide policies that improve the well-being of children, families and communities.

- Project 21 – Data Governance Structure (GOV/Julie Cadwallader-Staub)

Update: The second meeting of the ad hoc inter-agency data governance team took place Oct 31, with the goal of reviewing RFPs from other ELC states for a data governance contractor. This team is charged with hiring a data governance contractor to support the work of the yet-to-be-established Pre-Natal – 12 Data Governance Council.

Why it matters: Each of these data-related efforts will create the foundation for a broader understanding of the health and development of our youngest Vermonters.

Other News:

The BBF State Advisory Council has agreed to serve as the Early Learning Challenge Grant State Advisory Council with the addition of several members representing groups not already at the table. The first meeting of the expanded advisory council was held on Oct 27. These meetings will take place quarterly and are open to the public. The next meeting will take place on January 26, 2015 at the Vermont Family Network conference room in Williston.

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 contact Julie.cadwallader-staub@state.vt.us.



Thank you for your continued interest in supporting our youngest Vermonters!

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