



Vermont's Early Learning Challenge Grant Monthly Update Volume 3

Welcome!

Happy Holidays from the Early Learning Challenge Grant team. As we wind up the first year of the grant, we are pleased with the progress we have made. We will put together our Annual Performance Report in late February of 2015 and will be sure to share our findings about the impact the grant has had on Vermont's early childhood system and the children it serves.

Please find the latest updates on the progress of the grant below. 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.

Improving Quality and Access

Project 5 – Annual STARS Awards (DCF/Jan Walker)

Update: Our STARS payments continue to support early learning and development programs that maintain and improve program quality and that provide nutritious food for their children. Over 300 awards have gone out. Anecdotal evidence suggests that these awards have been very well received by early childhood professionals. If you have more direct feedback to provide, please let us know.

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: The AOE of Education has twice posted an RFP for a PreK Monitoring System Coordinator and received no proposals. The grant team is proposing a new plan to our federal program officer that separates the design, piloting, and evaluation activities from the implementation of a new monitoring system. The design would be through an RFP and the implementation would be through a limited service coordinator position.

Why it matters: Vermont has offered publicly funded prekindergarten education (PreK) since the passage of Act 62 in 2007. PreK is offered in various settings (e.g., public schools, Head Start, center and family child care programs, private preschools) and all programs that offer PreK must meet the same quality standards. A Vermont PreK monitoring system will build on existing structures (e.g., STARS, licensing visits) and move towards ensuring high quality experiences for all Vermont children in PreK programs.

Project 11 – Evidence-Based Home Visiting (DCF/Karen Garbarino, VDH/Breena Holmes)

Update: Early Learning Challenge grant funding supports the implementation of two evidence-based home visiting models— Parents as Teacher (PAT) and the Maternal Early Childhood Sustained Home visiting model (MECSH). Vermont Parent Child Center network is moving forward with Parents As Teachers, a family support based model. The Lamoille Family Center, The Family Place, Orange County PCC, Rutland County PCC, St. Johnsbury PCC, and Newport PCC have all expressed interest in being early adopters of the model. MECSH is a nurse-based model, with three home health agencies expressing interest in being early adopters. The Child Development Division (CDD) has been working with Laura Bernard and John Burley at the Vermont Department of Health (VDH) on a system VDH IT developed to track PAT data needed to ensure model fidelity. All the existing PAT data from Chittenden County's Project LAUNCH efforts will be loaded into the new system developed by VDH, and we will be using that same system to collect data for PAT and MECSH statewide.

Why it matters: Evidence-based home visiting promotes maternal well-being, healthy birth outcomes, and optimal child physical, social and emotional development to help children achieve success in school and life.

Project 12 – Early Childhood Wellness (VDH/Breena Holmes)

Update: The Department of Health established a partnership with Building Bright Futures Council (BBF) to launch the Help Me Grow (HMG) initiative. Aligning and building on existing BBF community outreach and networking activities, the BBF Regional Coordinators will assist with implementing HMG Community Outreach.

These outreach and networking opportunities will provide real-time, on the ground, sharing and exchanges of community information/resources that will inform the Vermont 2-1-1 resource and referral system. A second HMG National staff site visit is being planned in collaboration with the BBF Regional Coordinators to be held in the southern region of the state.

Why it matters: One of the central tenets of the Early Learning Challenge grant is leveraging existing resources as we work to strengthen our early childhood system. Utilizing the BBF regional councils as critical partners in the community outreach aspect of the Help Me Grow initiative is a key example of using and strengthening the resources we have in order to improve outcomes for children and families.

Investing in People

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

Update: In mid-November, the Vermont Child Care Industry and Careers Council (VCCICC) held a graduation ceremony for the most recent round of early childhood professionals to successfully complete their apprenticeship program. All of the graduates had earned 18 college credits along with 4000 hours of supervised on-the-job work experience. We are currently registering participants for a cycle of ELC-funded Apprenticeship courses in Bennington, which will begin in January. In addition VCCICC has worked with the Community College of Vermont to provide a 5 week writers' workshop to prepare current child care providers for college level coursework.

Why it matters: ELC funding enables the enhanced promotion and statewide 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 16 - T.E.A.C.H., Higher Education, and Advanced Professional Learning Opportunities

Update: As part of the “Advanced Professional Learning Opportunities” activities of this project, the AOE has contracted with the VT Higher Education Collaborative to offer an ELC-funded 3-part series of day-long workshops entitled Each & Every Child and Family at a reduced cost of just \$40/workshop starting in early December. The series focuses on supporting all children, especially those who are most at-risk, in inclusive early childhood settings. As part of the “Higher Education” aspect of the project, the AOE has posted an RFP for an Early Childhood Higher Education Consultant, which can be found [here](#).

Why it matters: This project establishes a standing Higher Education Work Group to solve some of the challenges early childhood professionals face when trying to pursue degrees and credentials. Additionally, the project recognizes that professional

development needs run the entire Career Ladder. It funds the development of no- or low-cost advanced learning opportunities to make sure that even our highest quality professionals continue to develop their ability to support high needs children.

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

Update: On December 8 our Early Childhood Workforce Survey team will hold a kick-off meeting of their stakeholder advisory group to help determine the scope of survey (what professionals or otherwise are

included), generate survey topics and questions, and discuss outreach to maximize unduplicated survey responses. The stakeholder group has broad and diverse representation. This will be the first of several meetings of the advisory committee.

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: Building Bright Futures (BBF) has hired Beth Truzansky as the Chittenden Regional Council Coordinator. BBF is also in the process of re-hiring the Springfield Regional Council Coordinator. All twelve Regional Council Coordinators will now report to BBF – the Chittenden position was previously housed under the Project LAUNCH grant. A working group of Regional Coordinators met with Regions Manager Deb McLaughlin on November 25 to do a crosswalk of the draft BBF Regional Coordinator Scope of Work with the ELC grant deliverables directly tied to BBF and the Vermont Early Childhood Action Plan. This crosswalk will be shared and vetted at a meeting of all the BBF Regional Coordinators to be held on December 5 to finalize their FY15 Scope of Work. BBF Regional Coordinators have also received statewide lists of key stakeholder groups with regional contacts to help them diversify the membership of the Regional Councils. This information is part of the asset mapping training and support they have received through ELC funding.

Why it matters: Coordination and close collaboration between all twelve regions helps strengthen the infrastructure of the Building Bright Futures state/regional system and allows the Regional Councils to be key advocates for young children in their communities. Diverse perspectives on regional councils will help ensure the councils are comprehensive in their regional action planning processes to ensure young children and families' needs are fully considered.

Project 3 – Building Early Childhood Leadership (GOV/Julie CadwalladerStaub)

Update: We have created an Early Childhood Leadership Institute Advisory team, whose membership includes leaders from the early childhood field as well as members of the Board and staff of the Snelling Center for Government. They held their first meeting in November and identified key concepts of leadership development that will guide the creation of the institute. The group also began to discuss recruitment for the first cohort of participants, and will continue the discussion in anticipation of starting recruitment in January 2015.

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

Project 23 – Sustaining Program Effectiveness

Update: Vermont contracted with FirstSchool to pilot a PreK through Grade 3 (PreK-3) system that supports children’s early learning and development by integrating and coordinating the early childhood birth-5 system with the K-3 system. A small number of school communities will be part of a three-way partnership with FirstSchool and state agencies. In addition to receiving support on PreK-3 aligned practices from FirstSchool, these pilot school communities will also receive professional development on the new Vermont Early Learning Standards (VELS) for infants through grade 3, the expanded PreK-3 Teaching Strategies GOLD, and the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) all of which help track children’s development from PreK through third grade.

Why it matters: Coordinating children’s PreK-3 experiences helps high needs children and families navigate the gulf between the birth-5 and K-3 learning experiences successfully. Aligned practices between the two systems helps sustain positive child and family outcomes into the primary grades. A PreK-3 approach focuses attention on seamless transitions from home to school, one grade level to the other, and throughout each school day and year.

Project 24 – Promise Communities (DCF/Karen Garbarino)

Update: We hired Shannon Hottinger, Mark McMillen, and Emilie Kornheiser as Promise Communities Coaches. They will be supporting the various communities around the state in implementing the Promise Communities initiative. The three coaches represent Vermont’s geographic diversity so that we can support Promise Communities throughout the state. In addition, the Child Development Division released an RFP for an Evaluation of the Promise Communities initiative, which can be found [here](#).

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.

Project 6 – Evaluate STARS (DCF/Jan Walker)

Update: The [RFP](#) for the STARS evaluation closes December 8. Several organizations have submitted questions and the Child Development Division is hoping for a robust group of proposals.

Why it matters: This evaluation will ensure that our system for rating high quality programs is effective.

Project 18 – Measuring Kindergarten Readiness

Update: The revised Kindergarten Readiness Survey (KRS) was piloted last month and the results will be analyzed by the American Institutes of Research (AIR). Approximately 100 kindergarten teachers participated in the pilot. These teachers also administered the current KRS. This will enable AIR to compare results for the same children. Preliminary analysis on the current KRS results indicates an increase in the percentage of children who are ready from last year in all 5 domains of the survey.

Why it matters: The Kindergarten Readiness Survey is one of the key measures of success of Vermont's early childhood system, as well as of the grant. Having a valid and reliable assessment is critical to making sure we know that all Vermont's children are ready to succeed in kindergarten and beyond.

Project 19 – CIS Data System

Update: The CIS data system will be a part of the bigger Medicaid Management Information System (MMIS) Care Management project. The vendor orals are complete and the Proposal Review Team will submit a vendor recommendation this week. We expect about a month of contract negotiations, after which, Joint Application Design (JAD) sessions will begin.

Why it matters: The CIS data system will allow for tracking of client information, including outcome measures, so we can measure the success of our promotion and early intervention services.

Project 20 – Vermont Insights (Formerly the Early Childhood Data Reporting System (ECDRS))(BBF/Julie Coffey)

Update: On November 20, Building Bright Futures held a Data Stakeholder and Steward Summit to unveil the new Vermont Insights – the updated version of the Early Childhood Data Reporting System. The meeting was framed using the early childhood integrated data system (ECIDS) guidelines. In addition they announced a partnership with the State Data Center at the Center for Rural Studies at UVM. A wide variety of stakeholders attended to learn about the possibilities of this new system to track the well-being of children, families, and communities across

Vermont. The meeting received press coverage on VT Digger. Read the story [here](#). To learn more visit <http://www.vermontinsights.org/>.

Why it matters: Vermont Insights 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.

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GLOSSARY:

AHS – Agency of Human Services

AOE – Agency of Education

BBF – Building Bright Futures

CDD – Child Development Division (within CDD)

CIS – Children's Integrated Services (within CDD)

DCF – Department for Children and Families (within AHS)

ECLI – Early Childhood Leadership Institute (Project 3)

ELC – Early Learning Challenge Grant

GOV – Governor's Office

HMG – Help Me Grow (Project 12)

KRS – Kindergarten Readiness Survey (Project 18)

M.A.T.C.H. – Mentoring, Advising, Teaching, Coaching, Consulting, and Helping
(Project 15)

PAT – Parents As Teachers (Project 11)

RBA – Results Based Accountability

RFP – Request for Proposals

T.E.A.C.H. - Teacher Education And Compensation Helps (Project 16)

VCCICC – Vermont Child Care Industry and Careers Council

VAEYC – Vermont Association for the Education of Young Children

VDH – Vermont Department of Health (within AHS)

VELS – Vermont Early Learning Standards

