



Hello!

On February 27th, 2017, the Early Learning Challenge grant management team submitted our third Annual Performance Report (APR) to our federal partners at the US Departments of Health and Human Services and Education. We will post the full APR on our website later this spring when it receives final approval. In the meantime, we wanted to share with you some highlights from our third year of grant implementation.

Data Highlights from APR 2016:

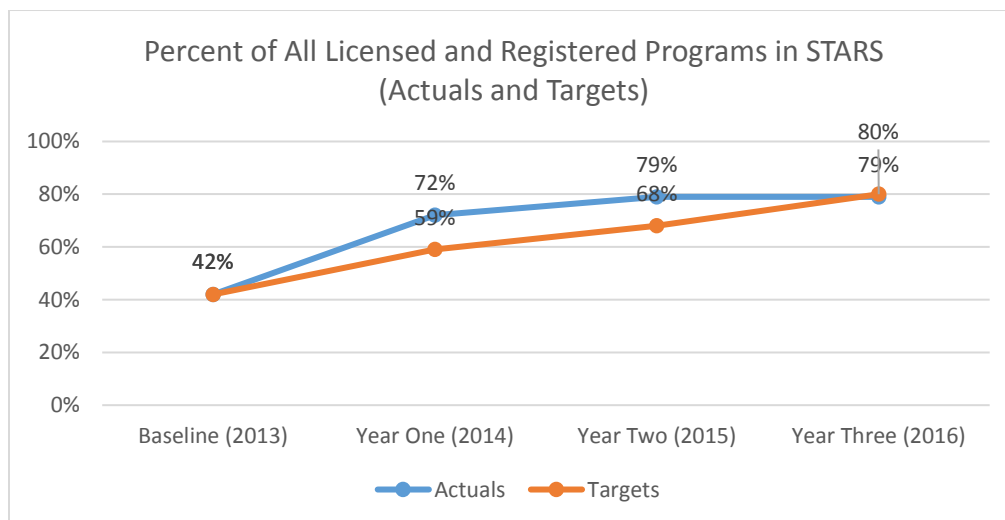
The APR requires Vermont to report on several performance measures that are uniform across all states receiving Early Learning Challenge grants. These measures include participation in the state's Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System (STARS in Vermont), the number and percentage of children with high needs in high quality early childhood programs, and the credentials of the early childhood workforce.

All these performance measures assess the strength of Vermont's early childhood system overall, and our outcomes are a result of system-wide efforts, such as Act 166, not only projects of the Early Learning Challenge grant. However, the grant gives us a unique opportunity to track our collective progress.

All the data below, except PreK enrollment, is point-in-time data from the Bright Futures Information System (BFIS) on 12/31 of each reporting year. The baseline data is point-in-time from September 2013.

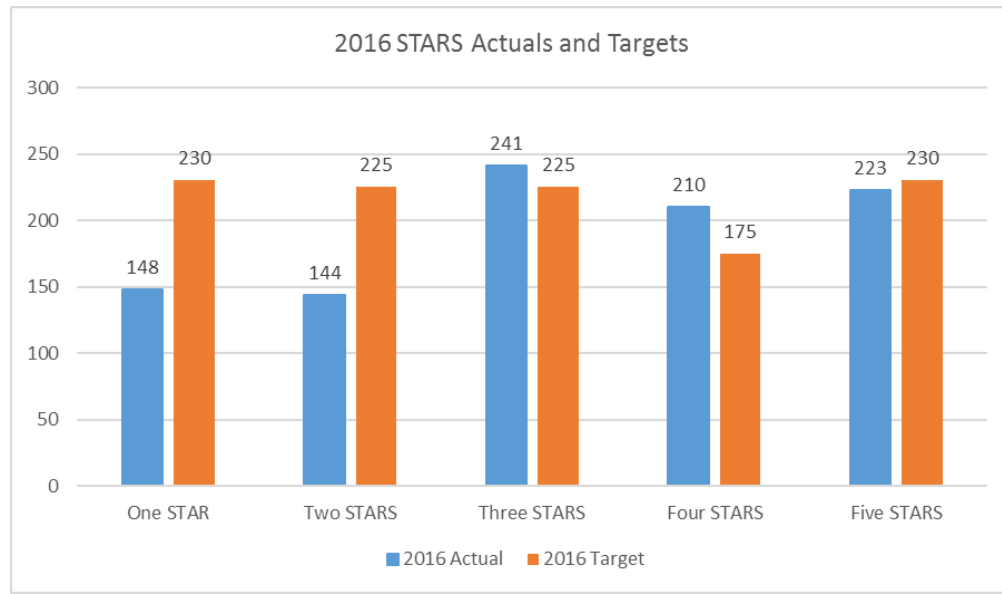
STARS Participation

After a major jump in Year One (2014) in the percentage of programs participating in STARS – Vermont's quality rating and improvement system for early learning and development programs – from 42% to 72%, Vermont has consistently maintained between 70 – 80% participation. In December 2016, 79% of all programs participated in STARS.

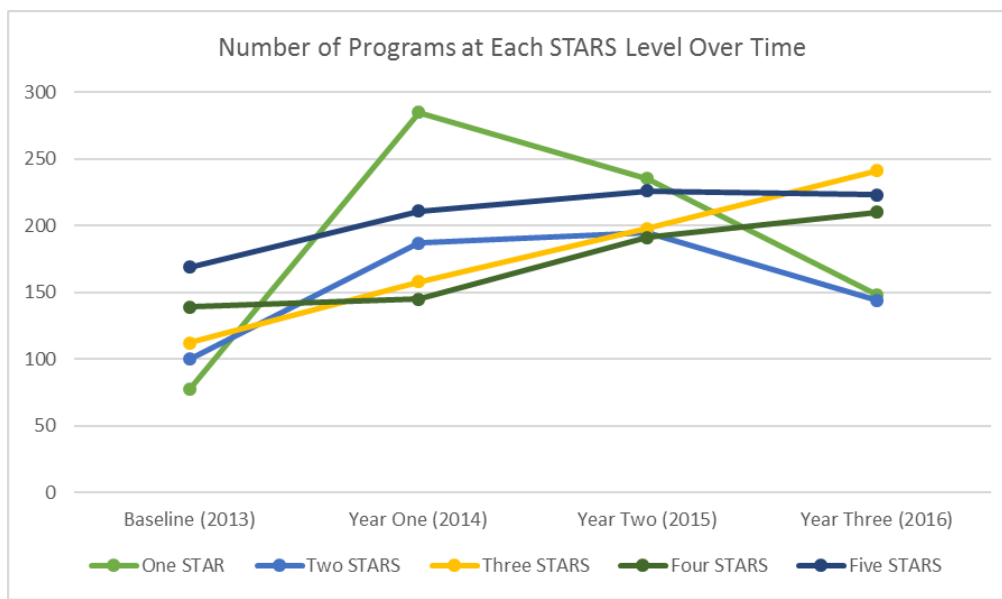




We continue to see a positive trend of more programs with ratings in the top tiers of STARS. In 2016, we exceeded our Year 3 targets for the number of programs with 3 and 4 STARS. However, we fell just short of our Year 3 target for the number of programs with 5 STARS and had three fewer 5 star programs in Year 3 than in Year 2.



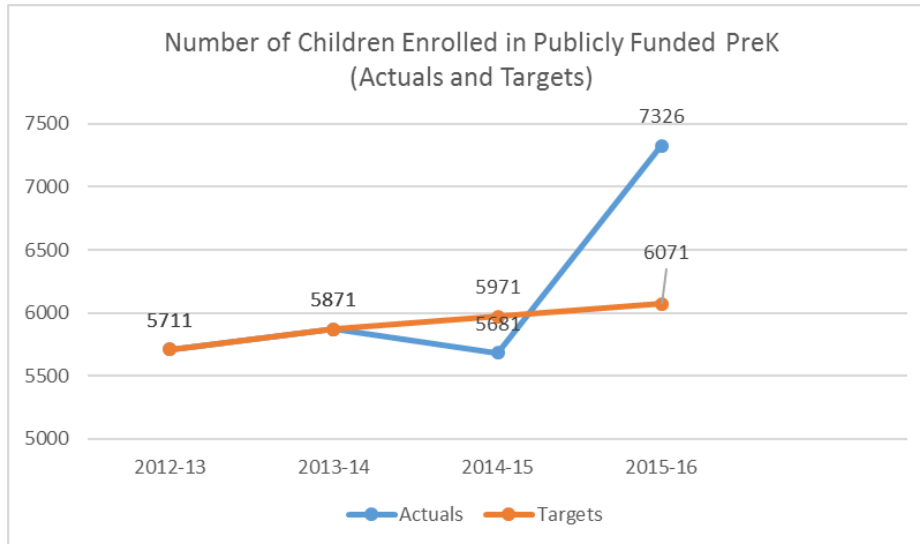
Overall, the news is good, with trends suggesting programs are moving from 1 and 2 STARS to higher levels. There are currently 254 more 3, 4, and 5 star programs than there were when we applied for the grant in September 2013, with 62 more 3 and 4 star programs in 2016 alone.





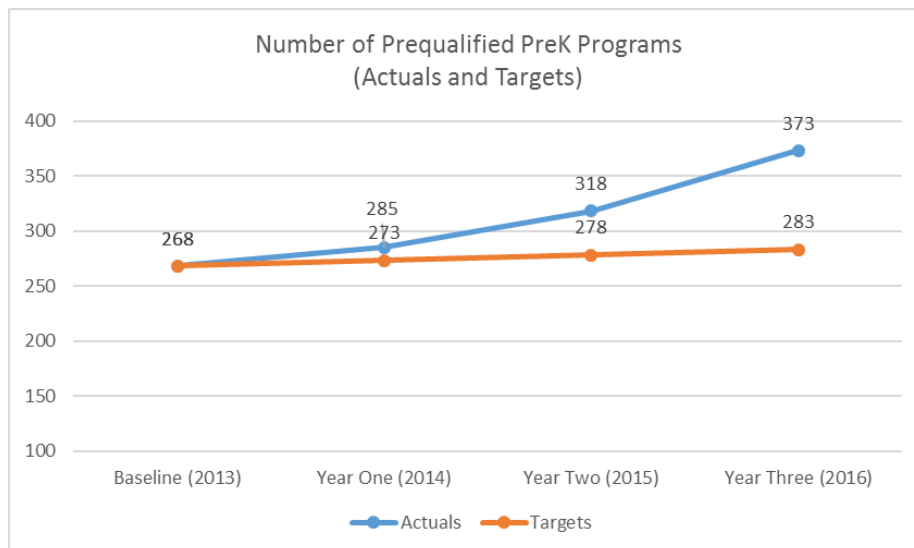
Pre-Kindergarten Enrollment and Programs

We are glad to see that more children are participating in publicly-funded PreK since the passage of Act 166. There were 1645 more children enrolled in PreK in Year 3 than in Year 2. The Year 3 comes from the 2015-2016 school year, when implementation of Act 166 was optional. We anticipate an even more significant jump in Year 4, representing full implementation of Act 166.



Data Source: School Census, October of each year, except for 2015-16 enrollment data, which comes from the FY16 PreK Evaluation Report

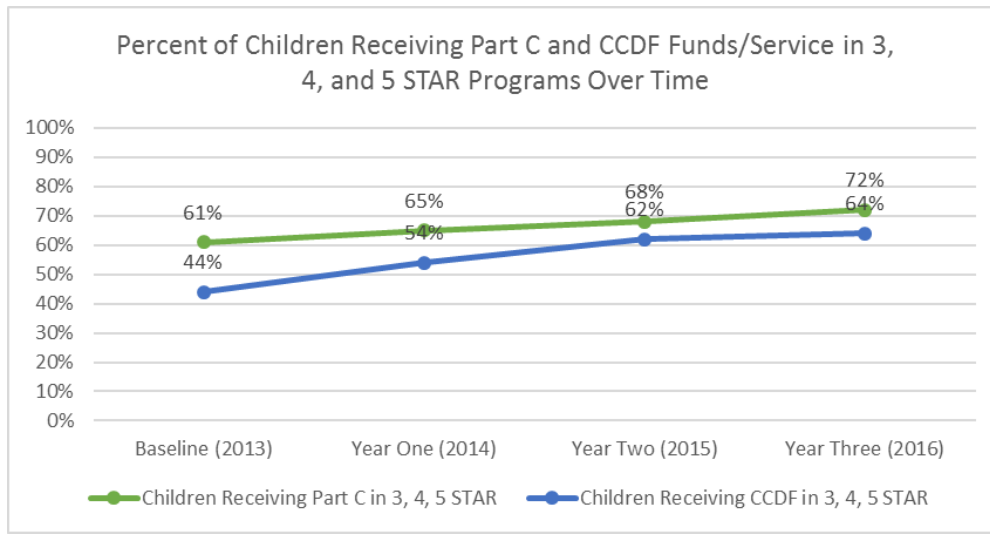
According to the Bright Futures Information System, as of December 31, 2016, there were 373 public and private programs prequalified to provide publicly funded PreK under VT's Act 166. This is 55 more programs than there were at the same time last year!





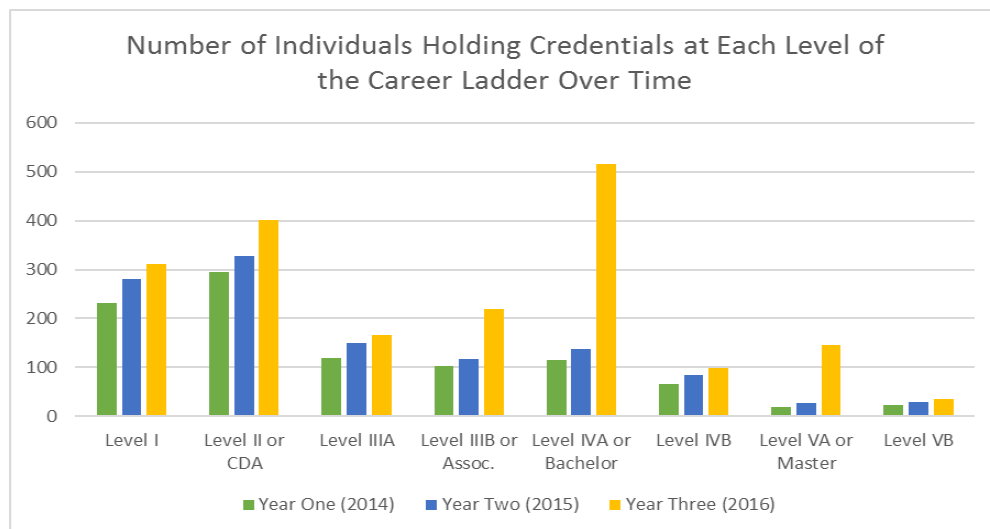
Serving More “Children with High Needs” in High Quality Programs

Another goal of the grant is to increase the percentage of children receiving IDEA Part C services and children receiving CCDF funds who are in high quality programs. We have made steady progress on both goals since the grant was implemented, but are falling short of our targets. Additionally, VT children attending Head Start programs, or receiving funding from IDEA, Part B, section 619 or Title 1, are almost always served in high quality programs.



Workforce Development

For the second year in a row, we saw an increase in the number of professionals holding a credential at every level of the career ladder. More accurate reporting in BFIS as a result of the new child care licensing regulations likely led to significant jumps in the number of professionals at several key levels of the career ladder between Year 2 and Year 3.





Excerpt from 2016 APR Executive Summary:

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Building the Backbone of Vermont's Early Childhood system:

2016 was a critical year for our Early Childhood State Advisory Council, **Building Bright Futures**, which receives significant grant funding. The executive director resigned in early January, and a talented and well-respected interim executive director stepped in. A lengthy search process ensued, which resulted in the hiring of a highly skilled executive for the position, Sarah Squirrell, in May. Sarah provides a strong and knowledgeable voice for children and families, and serves as a spokesperson for improved integration and coordination of early childhood systems, across agencies, to better support children and families. As a result, BBF has emerged as a well-respected, collaborative, unifying leader in the field of early childhood in Vermont. Importantly, she has built trust with state government agencies, legislators, philanthropy, and the non-profit sector, which bodes well for continuing sustainability post-grant.

There are several important areas in which BBF demonstrated its importance as the backbone organization for early childhood in 2016. Through the State Advisory Council, BBF embraced its role in driving policy, tackling the issue of opioid and substance use disorders and their impact on young children and families. BBF strengthened the feedback loop with the regions, and used their input effectively to drive policy issues. BBF demonstrated its commitment to the Early Childhood Action Plan—which pre-dates the grant, and will continue to guide early childhood efforts statewide post-grant—by strategically utilizing ELC grant Technical Assistance funding to hire a consultant to re-launch the Action Plan during the first half of 2017. The publication of *How Are Vermont's Young Children and Families* was timed to coincide with the opening of the legislative session, and the accompanying press conference included legislators, state agency leadership, leaders in the philanthropic sector as well as representatives from the nonprofit sector. BBF has been a critical partner in the implementation of other ELC projects such as Help Me Grow, Early MTSS and Promise Communities, as each one of these projects depends upon local and regional implementation. BBF's public facing data portal, Vermont Insights, contributes to accountability of the early childhood system overall and enables Vermonters to access early childhood and related data easily through a single portal.

Accountability:

Speaking of accountability, there was major progress around building accountability into the early childhood system. In 2016, a formal structure called the **PreNatal – Grade 12 Data Governance Council** was adopted to vet, support, and analyze policy questions that cut across programs, agencies, and age spans. A “proof case” has been selected that will utilize data from Medicaid at the Agency of Human Services and PreK participation data from the Agency of Education.

Another major step was the continued implementation of the new kindergarten entry assessment (KEA). AOE issued its first report on **Ready for Kindergarten Survey (R4KIS)** in August of 2016, which provides a new, more accurate baseline for kindergarten readiness that will inform all efforts going forward. Unlike



the old KEA, this survey uses a “total score approach” which links a student’s score to overall ability. The new survey includes new and revised questions, and has six questions in the Physical Development and Health Domain. This was several years in the making, including a rigorous evaluation and two pilots, and represents a major systems-level milestone in early childhood. The FY17 report will be released spring 2017.

Along with the new R4KIS, the addition of the **Universal Developmental Screening (UDS) Registry** to the data collection and analysis at the Health Department contributes an important data element to tracking children’s access to services and overall growth and development. Part of our Health Department immunization registry, the UDS Registry provides a statewide data collection system for developmental screening results. Screening results for multiple tools are included: The Ages and Stages Questionnaire: Third Edition (ASQ - 3), Ages and Stages Questionnaire-Social Emotional (ASQ:SE), and the Modified Checklist for Autism in Toddlers (M-CHAT). The Registry screening collection system offers reporting features for primary care providers including: a screening history report, screening follow up status, children due for screening (per the American Academy of Pediatrics Bright Futures Periodicity schedule), and screening rates report. The intent is for primary care providers to use the registry features to help them improve developmental screening rates overall for children in their practice and to utilize the data to get credit for improved screening rates under the Vermont Blueprint for Health Care Reform. Four primary care practice sites have signed on to pilot the use of the Registry – and training is underway in the Lamoille region with Appleseed Pediatrics and Lamoille Valley early care and education professionals.

PreK Monitoring is another element in building a strong system of accountability in early childhood. Vermont’s Early Learning Challenge grant supports the design of a monitoring system to address the requirements of Vermont’s Act 166: Universal Pre-Kindergarten Education (PreK) for private and public PreK programs. 2016 was a very productive year, and the design of Vermont’s PreK Monitoring System is well underway. The system will utilize cross agency (AOE and AHS) existing structures such as prequalification status for PreK under Act 166, child care licensing regulations, and Step Ahead Recognition System (STARS). The monitoring system is a joint agency responsibility between the Agency of Education and Agency of Human Services.

Developmental Screening and Connecting Families to Services:

Help Me Grow Vermont (HMG VT) improves access to existing resources and services for young children and families and promotes parent-engaged developmental monitoring and screening for all Vermont children. *HMG VT* has four system components: a centralized access point, family & community outreach, provider outreach and training, and data collection and analysis.

In partnership with Vermont Birth to Five, a project of the Permanent Fund for Vermont's Children, the Vermont Child Health Improvement Program (VCHIP) expanded developmental screening training from the health sector to early care and education (ECE) professionals across the state. In 2016, over 450 ECE professionals were trained in developmental screening and conducted over 1600 screens on children in their care.



The HMG VT centralized telephone access point at Vermont 2-1-1 received 666 (incoming) calls to the HMG VT Child Development Specialists who made 504 (outgoing/follow up) calls and 827 referrals on behalf of families. We served 226 children (unduplicated count) via telephone care coordination. In Year 3, Vermont sustained progress made in increasing the number of children with high needs who receive developmental screenings, after a major jump in Year 2. With 15,317 children screened this year, we exceeded our Year 3 and 4 targets.

Quality Improvement and Professional Development:

2016 saw a continuing increase in the number of **Specialized Child Care (SCC)** providers – those providers who care for children most at risk - participating in STARS, in part due a new requirement that any new specialized child care provider have at least a 3 star rating. As of August 2016, 68% of SCC providers were at the 3 star level or higher, up from 54% in December of 2013! We expect to see this trend continue, as new regulations require existing providers will also need to attain the 3, 4 or 5 star level in 2018.

In 2016, we witnessed a growing cohesion of efforts to **strengthen families**, as our projects that work directly with children and families embraced the common framework of the five protective factors for families. The five protective factors are part of Strengthening Families, a research-informed framework that builds upon family strengths, enhances child development, and reduces the likelihood of child abuse and neglect. Vermont Birth to Five is using ELC funds to build hub-and-spoke networks where home-based providers receive extensive training to build protective factors, make a strong connection to community resources, and connect families to needed supports and services. The project has been successful in enhancing provider engagement with families and the quality of care for children. It also provides concrete support for families in times of need. Highlights from 2016 include:

- 560 children from 413 families enrolled at participating family child care programs
- 31 (51%) participating programs at 4/5 stars, compared to 19 (29%) programs at the beginning of the project.
- 23 (42%) participating programs at 3 stars, compared to 20 (32%) at the beginning of the project.
- Families enrolled in participating programs received a total of \$54,929 for emergency needs including: alternative child care, groceries, electric bill, school clothes and supplies, car repair, lice treatment, diapers, stroller, special education equipment, rental deposit, winter clothing, car seat, heat after fuel assistance funds were exhausted/propane, wood, oil.

The five protective factors have also been incorporated into many other ELC projects, including Help Me Grow (HMG), which is running two pilots to promote use of the framework with primary care doctors and Child Development Specialists at the HMG contact center. Participants in our Promise Communities cohorts receive training in the protective factors. The protective factors are incorporated into the STARS rating system and the two evidence-based Home Visiting models that are being implemented statewide.



In 2016 we worked to disseminate the new **Vermont Early Learning Standards (VELS)** throughout our early childhood system. A major highlight of 2016 was the VELS Institute, which took place June 20-24, 2016 at Champlain College. Through presentations, connections with other colleagues, conversations, and reflection, over 200 participants left better prepared to use the VELS to:

- Support the continuum of learning and development from birth through third grade;
- Support each young child, with emphasis on children who are culturally, linguistically, and individually diverse;
- Build inclusive programs and practices;
- Help families discover a tool to support their child’s learning and development; and
- Encourage and support family engagement.

The VELS are posted on the Agency of Education website and can be accessed online at <http://education.vermont.gov/early-education/early-learning-standards>. More progress will be made during 2017 to complete this interactive web platform. VELS’ “The Right Stuff” was designed and fully implemented beginning Fall 2016. The Right Stuff is an ongoing monthly VELS resource-sharing newsletter that reaches over 400 early childhood educators and leaders across Vermont. “The Right Stuff” highlights one domain of the VELS each month and is located for your review at <http://fpg.unc.edu/presentations/right-stuff>.

The work of the **Early Childhood Higher Ed Consortium** is another example of integration and collaboration. Act 166 and the new Child Care regulations fueled increasing interest in, and need for, coursework in higher education to meet requirements for licensure; this resulted in a sense of urgency among IHEs and other providers of professional development to provide needed coursework and training, particularly for those in the private sector. Collaborating around the shared goal of better supporting the early childhood workforce to meet these new requirements, the Consortium developed an Early Childhood Summit for the summer of 2017, to provide ten simultaneous classes, offered by ten different Vermont institutions, through Castleton University’s Center for Schools. The courses are designed to promote Vermont’s core values for early education and to meet the needs of teachers from the AA to the MA level. A strong emphasis is placed on courses that assist teachers in obtaining or retaining licenses and endorsements. All the courses adhere to a set of guidelines that include VELS, the protective factors and the guiding principles of meeting the needs of each and every child.

Execution and Implementation:

The Implementation Team of the Early Learning Challenge grant has continued to function effectively. It fosters collaboration and trust by bringing leaders of relevant state agencies together to discuss significant issues of implementation, coordination and problem-solving at the systems-level. Working together on the fifth year application has been an important element of our discussions during 2016, as we conceptualize the fifth year application as a “launching pad” for sustainability for the system as a whole. As a result, we have carefully reviewed project implementation, integration across projects, data, and potential for sustainability. As was the case in 2015, the infrastructure for managing the Early Learning Challenge grant continued to function effectively. The State Advisory Committee, the Implementation Team, and the Early Childhood Interagency Coordinating Team supported



implementation of ELC's projects throughout the state and across agencies. The continued smooth functioning of these structures helps to increase coordination between agencies and expedite implementation of projects across agencies, which strengthen the early childhood system overall.

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ANNOUNCEMENT: We are excited to announce that Carolyn Wesley, who has served as Project Manager for the Early Learning Challenge grant since 2014, has accepted a position as Deputy Director at Building Bright Futures starting April 3rd, 2017. Carolyn has done a great job in helping to launch this grant, communicate about it, and keep it organized, and we are excited to see what she will contribute to BBF's next chapter. We will be seeking a new Project Manager for the grant this spring.

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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.cadwalladerstaub@vermont.gov.

For more information on the grant visit <http://buildingbrightfutures.org/early-learning-challenge/>.

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

Grant Contacts:

Julie Cadwallader Staub, Grant Director, Vermont Early Learning Challenge – Race to the Top Grant
Julie.cadwalladerStaub@vermont.gov Cell: 802-734-7540

Diane Cummings, Financial Manager II, VT Agency of Human Services
Diane.Cummings@vermont.gov Tel: 802-871-3079

Karin Edwards, Director of Integrated Support and Learning, PreK – Middle School, VT Agency of Education
karin.edwards@vermont.gov Tel: 802-479-1407

Eddie Gale, Program Director, The A.D. Henderson Foundation
egale@hendersonfdn.org Tel: 802-888-1188

Breana Holmes, Maternal and Child Health Director, VT Dept. of Health
Breana.holmes@vermont.gov Tel: 802-863-7347 Cell: 802-585-6265

Kim Keiser, VT Project Director, The Turrell Fund
keiserkim@gmail.com Tel: 802-496-4844 Cell: 802- 349-4328



Reeva Murphy, Deputy Commissioner, Child Development Division, Department for Children and Families Reeva.murphy@vermont.gov Tel: 802-241-1209 Cell: 802-760-0792

Julianne Nickerson, Promise Communities Director, Child Development Division, Department for Children and Families, julianne.nickerson@vermont.gov Tel: 802-241-0820

Aly Richards, Chief Executive Officer, The Permanent Fund for Vermont's Children
aly@permanentfund.org Cell: 802-371-9750

Melissa Riegel-Garrett, Director, Statewide Systems and Community Collaboration, Child Development Division, VT Dept. for Children and Families Melissa.Riegel-Garrett@vermont.gov Tel: 802-769-6426

Kate Rogers, Early Childhood Special Education/IDEA 619 Coordinator, VT Agency of Education
Kate.rogers@vermont.gov Tel: 802-479-1454

Sarah Squirrel Executive Director, Building Bright Futures
squirrel@buildingbrightfutures.org Tel: 802-876-5010

Carolyn Wesley, Project Manager, Vermont Early Learning Challenge – Race to the Top Grant
Carolyn.wesley@vermont.gov Cell: 802-793-4405

GLOSSARY:

AHS – Agency of Human Services

AOE – Agency of Education

ASQ – Ages and Stages Questionnaire (developmental screening, Projects 11, 12, 13)

ASQ-SE – Ages and Stages Questionnaire – Social and Emotional

BBF – Building Bright Futures

CDD – Child Development Division (within CDD)

CIS – Children's Integrated Services (within CDD)

CLASS – Classroom Assessment Scoring System (Project 10)

DCF – Department for Children and Families (within AHS)

ECLI – Early Childhood Leadership Institute (Project 3)

ELC – Early Learning Challenge Grant

ERS – Environmental Rating Scales (Projects 7 and 10)

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)

TS Gold – Teaching Strategies Gold (Formative assessment under Project 10)



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