



WHILE THE STATE OF VERMONT HAS ALREADY demonstrated a longstanding and significant commitment to early learning, the RTT-ELC grant will further Vermont's progress for children, particularly those with high needs. Vermont plans to use RTT-ELC to thoughtfully move its existing early learning systems, programs, services, and overall infrastructure forward in a robust, integrated manner. At the core of its reform agenda are four overarching strategies:

1. Capitalize on the deep professional linkages and relationships in the state to maximize service reach and effectiveness, and the efficient and effective implementation of the state plan.
  - Vermont will use its existing governance structure in Building Bright Futures (Vermont's early childhood state advisory council and governance body for its early care, health, and education system) to ensure broad partner and stakeholder participation and collaboration in the management and implementation of the reform agenda throughout the state.
2. Invest in people through expanded personal and professional development to drive effectiveness and where needed, change.
  - RTT-ELC funds will be used to expand a range of professional development opportunities to ensure an educated, trained early childhood workforce. Vermont will also invest in and empower families by providing additional information and by strengthening programs.
3. Improve standards, assessment, and data integration to drive increased program quality and improvement.

## **Applicant**

Office of the Governor,  
State of Vermont

## **Lead Agency**

Vermont Agency of  
Human Services

## **Contact Information**

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## **Total Federal Award**

\$36,931,076

## **Grant Period**

January 1, 2014 –  
December 31, 2017

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The Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge (RTT-ELC) discretionary grant program supports states in building statewide systems that raise the quality of early learning and development programs and increase access to high-quality programs for children with high needs, so that all children enter kindergarten ready to succeed.

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Information in this abstract is drawn from the state's RTT-ELC grant application.

- While Vermont already implements a TQRIS through its VT STARS system, RTT-ELC funds will be used to improve the rating system, revise and implement early learning standards, ensure broader use of assessments, and improve reliability and expand and better integrate early childhood data systems.
  - Vermont aims to increase the number of early learning and development programs (ELDP) participating in VT STARS to at least 95 percent by the end of the funding period (2017), including 100 percent of specialized child care services.
4. Expand supports and services to improve outcomes for children in the state's highest need rural areas.
- Implement Vermont Promise Communities, an initiative to ensure access to developmentally beneficial services for children with high needs in rural areas where there are apparent gaps in achievement and resources.
  - Vermont aims to provide 100 percent of families (particularly families with children with high needs) living in Promise Communities in rural Vermont the ability to find ELDP rated as high-quality in VT STARS in their communities.
  - Implement a PreK-3 approach to sustain early gains throughout kindergarten and the primary grades.

Vermont addressed the following focused investment areas in its application:

*Early Learning  
and  
Development  
Standards*

**(C)(1) Developing and using statewide, high-quality early learning and development standards.** The Vermont Early Learning Standards (VELS) are based on a set of principles that view the child holistically and developmentally, include readiness domains, and recognize the importance of play. Vermont will seek to further strengthen these standards by ensuring that they reflect current research on early learning, are aligned with the Head Start Child Development and Early Learning Framework, include infants and toddlers, and are aligned with the Common Core State Standards for K12.

*Comprehensive  
Assessment  
System*

**(C)(2) Supporting the effective uses of comprehensive assessment systems.** Over the last few years, Vermont has put in place aspects of a comprehensive assessment system; however, these efforts have not been as aligned, coordinated, or as widely and reliably implemented as is necessary for improving outcomes for young children (especially for those with high needs). Through the RTT-ELC agenda, Vermont will seek to improve its capacity and quality. By 2016, Vermont will have a statewide plan for a

comprehensive assessment system that aligns screenings and assessments, coordinates the implementation of assessments, describes data sharing procedures, and sets forth a professional development plan for early childhood educators across the various types of early learning and development programs, especially those programs supporting young children with high needs.

*Health  
Promotion*

**(C)(3) Identifying and addressing the health, behavioral, and developmental needs of children with high needs to improve school readiness.** Vermont will build upon existing systems to create additional supports to improve school readiness for children with high needs. These include implementing two additional evidence-based home visiting programs to enhance the existing system of home delivered services; offering child care health consultation services; implementing the Help Me Grow framework, which offers a population-based approach to the early detection of children at risk for developmental and behavioral problems and their linkage to programs and services; and implementing multiple strategies to strengthen the capacity of early care and education programs to improve the social and emotional outcomes of young children and address challenging behavior, including the implementation of an early multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS) to promote expansion and sustainability of evidence-based practices at the local, regional, and state levels.

*Support  
Workforce  
Improvement*

**(D)(2) Supporting early childhood educators in improving their knowledge, skills, and abilities.** Vermont will implement a statewide framework to identify, support, and effectively integrate mentoring, coaching, and other similar services through partnerships with the state's institutions of higher education. The state also proposes to develop and implement an early childhood leadership institute, which will provide training to 100 early childhood stakeholders during the funding period.

*Kindergarten  
Entry  
Assessment*

**(E)(1) Understanding the status of children's learning and development at kindergarten entry.** Since 2000, Vermont has gathered information on the readiness of children entering kindergarten through the Ready Kindergarteners Survey (RKS) by annually surveying all kindergarten teachers about the "readiness" of their students within the first six to ten weeks of school. Although the RKS has served the state well, there is work to be done to ensure that it reflects the latest research on predictors of school success and to verify that it is appropriate for all subgroups of kindergartners. Additionally, professional development will ensure effective use of the RKS.

*Build or  
Enhance Data  
Systems*

**(E)(2) Building or enhancing an early learning data system to improve instruction, practices, services, and policies.** For the purposes of improving instruction, practices, services, and policies that support the health, development, and learning of children and families (including children with

high needs) Vermont seeks to enhance its early learning data capacity via a coordinated, integrated 21st-century early learning data system that enhances, is aligned with, and is interoperable with the state of Vermont's statewide longitudinal data system (SLDS).

Vermont has 13,355 children, birth to kindergarten entry, from low-income families. The state reports that it is leveraging \$61,599,383 in other funding sources to support this effort.