



## **SPECIAL EDITION: Universal PreK (UPK) Café Issue 1 – January 31, 2024**

Dear Colleagues,

The Early Education Team is hoping you all have had a healthy, happy, and productive start to 2024! This year marks the Tenth Anniversary of the signing of Act 166 Universal PreK – 10 years! Over the next few months, the team will be sharing history and information about UPK in Vermont, how we got to where we are today and even future thoughts of where we are heading! Watch for the Special Edition UPK Cafés in your Inbox over the next few months as we share more exciting accomplishments of UPK in Vermont.

In this Special Edition of the UPK Café the Early Education team provides a historical timeline of prekindergarten education in Vermont. Long before Act 166 UPK, Vermonters prioritized initiatives to implement high-quality prekindergarten education based upon developmental standards in order to promote positive outcomes for each and every young child in Vermont.

### **Vermont Early Education Timeline**

**1982 - The Vermont Department of Education** releases the *Early Education Handbook* which includes the [Handbook for Improving Early Education](#) by James G. Lengel. This handbook encourages Vermont communities to create quality early education programs based on child development, early learning standards, and research on effective school practices.

**1987- Vermont Early Education Initiative (EEI)** establishes publicly- funded grants for early childhood services including prekindergarten education. EEI's qualifying criteria includes family income limits or if their child has an identified developmental delay.

**2003 - Vermont publicly funded prekindergarten** allows school districts to count 3-, 4-, and 5-year-old children in the school census establishing Average Daily Membership (ADM) for prekindergarten.

**2003/2004 - The first edition of the Vermont Early Learning Standards (VELS) is published.** VELS is met with widespread approval from early childhood educators, administrators, parents, and policymakers. For the first time, Vermonters share a common set of learning standards that describe young children's typically developing skills from age 3 to kindergarten entry. Having common standards leads to shared language and values for parents, educators, leaders, and policy makers. Play was featured prominently in every domain of the VELS, and



Vermonters came together around the belief that young children’s play was the foundation upon which to foster learning across all development and content area domains. We continue to hold this belief.

**2007- Act 62 Vermont Prekindergarten Education** requires prekindergarten programs to be funded by the State’s Education Fund like K-12 education. Act 62 is voluntary for schools and enrollment by families of prekindergarten-aged children. Public schools’ sub-contract with private childcare preschool providers, including Head Start, and family childcare home providers for 6-10 hours of prekindergarten education for 3-, 4-, and 5-year-olds.

**2008 - Act 62 requires a licensed early childhood educator** at each private childcare center who subcontracts with a Vermont school district. Public schools require a licensed early childhood educator in each prekindergarten classroom.

**2008 - State Professional Development Grant (SPDG) and Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge Grant (RTT).** The Agency of Education was a recipient of both federal grants to begin the implementation of the Early Multi-tiered System of Supports (Early MTSS), building on work that started in 2007 with the Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning (CSEFEL).

Early MTSS is a tiered framework of universal promotion, prevention, and intervention is the model for delivering a comprehensive range of evidence-based practices, strategies, and resources to families and early childhood practitioners to improve early learning, social and emotional well-being, and competence for Vermont’s young children birth-age 8.

**2012 - Vermont Early Learning Standards Revision** commences with a cross-section of early childhood development and education partners including higher education representatives, licensed educators, policymakers, State Agency personnel, Head Start practitioners, content area experts, early special educators, and early interventionists. The VELS committee defines early childhood as the period of human development, from birth to age 8, and decides to adopt a birth through third-grade continuum of early learning standards.

**May 28, 2014 - Governor Peter Shumlin signs Act 166 Universal Prekindergarten (UPK)** into law, phasing out Act 62 grant funding by 2016. Act 166 provides 10 hours of free prekindergarten education for Vermont 3-, 4-, and -5-year-olds not yet enrolled in kindergarten. Prekindergarten education is publicly funded by resident school district budgets and UPK tuition is paid to UPK prequalified programs. All prekindergarten education programs, including Head Start, private centers, family childcare home providers, and public school-operated programs, must apply for UPK prequalification status for approval from the Agency of Education (AOE) and the Agency of Human Services’ Department for Children and Families (DCF). Two high-quality prekindergarten education requirements of Act 166 include a licensed Early Childhood Educator or licensed Early Childhood Special Educator for each UPK prequalified program and curriculum aligned with VELS.

**2015 - [Teaching Strategies GOLD®\(TSGOLD\)](#) Assessment becomes the State approved formative assessment for UPK prequalified programs.** Act 166 requires UPK prequalified programs to conduct a child development assessment for each child enrolled using an assessment tool approved by the Agency of Education at least two times a year and report the results to the Agency of Education. TSGOLD is grounded in 38 research-based objectives that include predictors of school success and are aligned with the Common Core State Standards, the Head Start Child Early Learning Outcomes Framework, and is cross walked with the VELs.

**2015 - The State Board of Education approves the VELs and adds it to the Education Quality Standards for schools.** VELs alignment includes Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework, Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts, and Mathematics, as well as Next Generation Science Standards and National Social Studies Standards (C3).

**2016 - Agency of Education’s Vermont State Board of Education approves the Manual of Rules and Practices Series 2600- Prekindergarten Education.** The purpose of prekindergarten education is to provide young children with developmentally appropriate learning, and developmental experiences that are responsive to each child’s strengths, interests, and needs and aligned with Vermont Early Learning Standards.

**2016 - A cross-sector group collaboration** on the creation of the [Vermont Early Childhood Guiding Principles](#) establishes that each and every young child (birth through Grade 3) and family in Vermont has diverse strengths rooted in their unique culture, heritage, language, beliefs, and circumstances. They have gifts and abilities that should be celebrated and nurtured. Full participation means promoting a sense of belonging, supporting positive social relationships, and enabling families and early childhood professionals to gain the competence and confidence to positively impact the lives of each and every child and their family.

**2019 - [Act 11 Prekindergarten Education Study Report](#).** The Vermont Agency of Education (AOE), in consultation with the Agency of Human Services Child Development Division (CDD), contracted with the Education Development Center, Inc. (EDC) to conduct a study of Prekindergarten (PreK) education in Vermont. The purpose of the PreK study, as dictated by Act 11, section E.500.7, is to provide Vermont with information regarding the current UPK system and how to more effectively and efficiently provide PreK education.

**2020 - UPK monitoring system called Accountability and Continuous Improvement System (ACIS).** Act 166 requires a cross-agency collaboration between the Agency of Education Early Education Program and the Agency of Human Services’ Department for Children and Families, Child Development Division (CDD) to create a compliance monitoring system for UPK prequalified programs to promote optimal outcomes for all children.

## **Future Hopes**

Vermont's UPK is a true "universal" system as it provides access to prekindergarten education for each and every Vermont child across multiple settings. As the timeline details, the process of building Vermont's current Universal Prekindergarten system has been many years in the making. The Early Education Team recognizes the work of those who contributed to building what currently exists today. We look forward to future collaborations and educational initiatives in the future to provide equitable and inclusive high-quality early education environments for each and every young Vermont child and their families.

## **References**

[NIEER Past Reports since 2003](#)