



SPECIAL EDITION: Universal PreK (UPK) Café

Issue 3 – March 26, 2024

Dear Colleagues,

During this third month of 2024, the Early Education Team would like to continue with our theme of sharing historical insights into Our 10th Anniversary of Act 166. We hope you enjoy this special edition of the UPK Café, featuring the history of the Vermont Early Learning Standards (VELS).

The Vermont Early Learning Standards

The Vermont Early Learning Standards (VELS) 2015 is a resource for families, teachers, caregivers, administrators, policymakers, and more. The VELS represents common goals for development and learning across the early childhood years in all settings. The VELS is a resource tool which outlines these goals for adults, guides their practices, and supports each and every child to make progress toward or achieve these goals. This includes making adaptations and accommodations for children's unique circumstances, whether they are typically developing or have diverse abilities.

History of Vermont Early Learning Standards

The State Board of Education approved 2015 VELS was developed by a cross-section of early childhood development and education partners and approved to better capture the essential areas of development from birth through grade three. VELS is aligned with the Division of Early Childhood Recommended Practices, Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework, the Common Core State Standards in English Language Arts and Mathematics, as well as Next Generation Science Standards.

2003-2004 - The first edition of the 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 three to kindergarten entry.

2012-2016 - VELS 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 eight, and decides to adopt a birth through third-grade continuum of early learning standards. In 2015, The State Board of Education approves the VELS and adds it to the Education Quality Standards for Schools. In 2016, the VELS revisions were finalized.



VELS in Practice

For early childhood educators, VELS is the framework for planning, developing, and implementing age-appropriate curriculum, instruction, and supports. By integrating these standards into lesson planning, teachers can address the unique needs of each and every child, fostering a supportive learning environment that promotes curiosity, collaboration, and skill acquisition across various domains. Regular assessments based on the standards help track individual progress and inform instructional adjustments, ensuring a responsive and effective early childhood education experience.

VELS and Children with Diverse Learning Needs

Children with disabilities or developmental delays may follow a course of development that differs from their typically developing peers; their abilities may be delayed in one area, but they may also be very strong in another area. Some children learn English and another language at home or start learning English when they begin preschool or formal schooling. Appropriately, meeting the language, learning, and cultural needs of Dual Language Learners (DLL) requires special attention. Acknowledging these differences does not diminish the importance of early learning standards to guide early childhood education and practice for every child. Rather, it invites us to have a deep understanding of individual children, family culture, and adaptations and accommodations that are needed for children who develop differently.

Incorporating VELS into Student IEP's

Individualized Education Program (IEP) goals on the Early Childhood Special Education ([ECSE IEP](#)) should be SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and results oriented, and timebound). When you incorporate the VELS into your student's goals, you are focusing on the content and the student's individual needs. Because the VELS provides a roadmap for intentional teaching by describing in detail our goals for the knowledge and skills children will gain through the early childhood years, it is a logical and necessary step when writing and implementing individual goals that address children's developmental and educational needs. This helps to ensure a child's equitable access and participation (given supports necessary) with their same age peers, within a fully inclusive high quality, learning environment.

VELS Domains of Learning

The VELS begin with an introduction, explanations for how to use the VELS, and background information about what is unique to Vermonters' passions which underpin the early childhood years. The introduction is followed by the Standards themselves, which are arranged into three major sections. Each major section is further divided into Domains of Learning. Domains are broad areas of growth, development and learning that focus on developmental and educational milestones in the years from birth through Grade 3.

I. Developing Self

Approaches to Learning, Social-Emotional Development, and Growing Moving and Being Healthy

II. Communication and Expression

Language Development, Literacy Development, and Creative Arts and Expression

III. Learning about the World

Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies

The Importance of Play

Play is featured prominently in every domain of the VELS, understanding the belief that young children's play is the foundation upon which to foster learning across all development and content area domains. Therefore, the inclusion of play is paramount when planning for and implementing curriculum, goals, and instruction.

Resources: [The Power of Play: A Pediatric Role in Enhancing Development in Young Children](#), Pediatrics, American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP)

[Making Learning More Playful](#), Edutopia

Common Core and Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS)

Revised in 2015, the VELS incorporates the Common Core standards in [Mathematics](#) and [English Language Arts/Literacy](#) kindergarten through grade three. In addition, the VELS birth through PreK standards were created and aligned with the Common Core for Mathematics and English Language Arts/ Literacy and NGSS.

The VELS and National Standards

The VELS and national standards extend the standards from birth through grade three.

[The National Association for the Education of Young Children \(NAEYC\)](#)

[The 2015 Federal Office of Head Start's Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework \(Ages Birth to Five\)](#)

[The Next Generation Science Standards \(K-3\)](#)

[The National Core Art Standards](#)

[The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning \(CASEL\)](#)

[College, Career, and Civic Life Framework for Social Studies State Standards \(NCSS\)](#)

VELS and TSGOLD

The VELS is the early learning standards. Teaching Strategies GOLD (TSGOLD) is the UPK state approved developmental assessment. A crosswalk showing the alignment of the VELS with TSGOLD informs teacher practices for better learning outcomes for each and every child.

Resource: [Vermont: Birth – 3rd Grade to GOLD](#), Teaching Strategies GOLD
(10/22/2018)

VELS News

The Early Education team is excited to offer in the near future a VELS in practice manual, and re-issue of the VELS manual (hard copies) and the VELS family calendar. In addition, the release of the VELS online learning modules will roll out later this year!