



State of Vermont
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

Early Childhood: On the Move in Vermont

September 2013

Governor Peter Shumlin is committed to realizing the promise of every Vermont child. He knows that if we want Vermont's future to be in good hands, we need to develop a strong generation of solid young people who can lead our communities and grow our economy. The latest science says the best way to do this is to provide children with enriching experiences that literally build the architecture of the maturing brain, establishing the foundation for all future development. But not all children have such opportunity, whether due to violence, poverty or other chronic challenges.

As a father, business owner, and Governor, he knows that leadership from his office is essential to creating a collaborative environment that will allow likely and unlikely allies to come together to build a strong early care, health and education system in the state. By charting a clear course, there is a great opportunity for Vermonters to unify our message and efforts on behalf of young children and their families.

With this in mind, the Governor's office is partnering with the Agency of Human Services (AHS), the Agency of Education (AOE), Building Bright Futures, private foundations, advocates, early childhood service providers, state agencies, parents and others on two related initiatives: The Governor's Early Childhood Summit and the Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge Grant. Staff from the Governor's Office, the Agency of Human Services and the Agency of Education are serving as the hub for these historic efforts in the state to ensure that the work is coordinated and one effort is building on another.

Governor's Early Childhood Summit

Governor Shumlin announced an early childhood summit in his inaugural address on January 6th as part of his platform to promote healthy early childhood development. He charged AHS Secretary Doug Racine with organizing the effort with the help of consultant Kim Friedman, Aly Richards from the Governor's Office, Monica Hutt from AHS, and a Summit Planning Committee of 17 community, business and industry leaders from the private and public sector.

That committee recommended that the Summit take place in late October to allow enough time for comprehensive planning to inform the event. One of the concrete outcomes of the Summit will be to create Vermont's first-ever Early Childhood Framework. This Framework will lay out the goals for strengthening Vermont's network of child development services and craft recommendations and agreements about how this can be done. The Framework will be accompanied by a statewide Action Plan. Work on the Action Plan will begin at the Summit and will conclude by January 31, 2014.

Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge Grant

The Obama Administration is awarding another round of Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge (RTTT-ELC) early childhood grants to between 3 and 8 states. If selected, VT is eligible to receive up to \$37.5 million divided over four years. These funds are to be used for one-time investments aimed at strengthening and expanding states' early childhood systems, with a focus on improving the quality of early care and education and increasing access to child development services. The Governor has convened a drafting team to prepare Vermont's application. Deliberately, a majority of the members of the drafting team also sit on the Summit Planning Committee. This cross-pollination of thinking and ideas creates many opportunities for collaboration and consistency of thinking. Vermont's RTTT-ELC application will echo and reinforce the emerging Early Childhood Framework, which will be reflected in the preparation of the RTTT-ELC application. Vermont's application is due October 16, so the drafting team is working quickly to collect input, decide on goals and actions, and draft the application for submission.

Listening to Vermonters' Views on What Matters in Early Childhood

Governor Shumlin and his partners in both efforts know that Vermont's Early Childhood Framework and our state's Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge application will best help promote the healthy development of Vermont's youngest citizens if Vermonters' views are solicited and their ideas are reflected in both documents. For this reason, the Governor's Early Childhood Summit Planning Committee has embarked on an ambitious series of public "focus sessions" to gather ideas from Vermonters about what is needed to ensure that all children have a strong foundation for lifelong learning. The ideas that come out of the sessions will shape the Early Childhood Framework. The Summit web page also provides an opportunity for those who cannot attend any of the focus sessions to share their views.

The RTTT-ELC drafting team is soliciting public input through attendance at community meetings, its web page, email address, a series of open conference calls and virtual public forums. A draft will be available for final comments on October 2nd.

Linking to Other Initiatives

Because of our commitment to investing in the future, there is a great deal of activity related to early childhood in Vermont—something to celebrate given the importance of the early years in establishing either a sturdy or fragile foundation for all future growth and development. Vermont’s first-ever Early Childhood Framework will set overall priorities that will help ensure that our efforts are coordinated and building on each other in a logical way. The Action Plan will identify strategies for how to get there and benchmarks to know how we’re doing. Both the Framework and the Action Plan will help us link what’s already working well—the many “bright spots” in early childhood services in Vermont—with areas that need more attention. More importantly, it will help us build a unified and integrated early care, health and education system in Vermont. These documents will help us stay more focused in our future policy and advocacy work and ensure that early childhood stakeholders can identify where they and their efforts fit into the larger picture.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more information about the Governor’s Early Childhood Summit, including a list of Summit Planning Committee members, go to <http://governor.vermont.gov/blog-governors-early-childhood-summit>. If you have additional questions about Summit, contact Kim Friedman, Summit Planner, at kfriedman@svcable.net or 802-348-9879.

For more information about the RTTT-ELC, including members of the drafting team, go to <http://governor.vermont.gov/race-to-the-top>. If you have additional questions about RTTT-ELC, contact Aly Richards, Director of Special Projects & Intergovernmental Affairs in Governor Shumlin’s office, at Alyson.Richards@state.vt.us or (802) 828-6403.