

Framework for Vermont's Early Childhood Comprehensive Assessment System



Early Childhood Assessment System Taskforce

Vermont created an Early Childhood Assessment System Taskforce to evaluate and create this plan. This group represents a myriad of cross sector and interagency professionals including: the Vermont Agency of Education, Vermont Agency of Human Services, Vermont Department of Health, University of Vermont, Vermont Birth to Five, Building Bright Futures, Head Start, and independent education consultants throughout the State. The following professionals share a common vision of a Vermont Early Childhood Comprehensive Assessment System which integrates and aligns Vermont initiatives with the mission to enrich and sustain.

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Introduction

Mission Statement

The Framework for Vermont’s Early Childhood Comprehensive Assessment System (VECCAS) will ensure Vermont children, birth through grade three, reach their maximum learning potential by utilizing-based, developmentally, linguistically, and culturally appropriate assessment methods. The system will generate data to inform continuous and sustainable improvement in services for young children through appropriate application of screening and assessment tools and related documentation.

Purpose

The purpose of this document is to provide a framework of currently utilized assessments and current initiatives that support early childhood assessment and screening, as well as an initial plan for implementation of a statewide early childhood comprehensive assessment system for Vermont. The VECCAS framework is intended to be referenced and used over an extended period of time for reflection, self-evaluation, and improvement in early childhood (birth through grade three) efforts. This framework helps to address key questions facing those who are developing early childhood assessment approaches in their schools, districts, and communities.

From a planning and implementation perspective, the VECCAS framework helps give a more global view of early childhood work. From an evaluation perspective, Vermont’s framework helps users think about the importance of evaluation and understanding and use of research-based tools. It also makes a case for why assessment needs to be part of the birth through grade three approaches from the beginning. The VECCAS framework is an evolving document that will support local data collection, professional learning, and workforce development in the future. For over a decade, various Vermont Agencies have been working to build a unified early care health and education system with no systematic picture of a child’s growth and development through grade 3. Vermont educators and other professionals working with young children often lack a common understanding about what to assess, what tools and measures to use, and how assessment should be used. Absence of an early childhood comprehensive assessment system has made it difficult to answer key questions and make decisions, especially at the state or district/community level. These questions include:

- *Are all young children learning and developing the skills and knowledge that will set them up for success when they enter kindergarten? Which children need additional support?*
- *Are early elementary students making sufficient progress in math, reading, and social-emotional learning?*
- *What professional learning development and interventions should the state prioritize and allocate resources for in the early years, given the progress children before grade three are making in different areas of learning and development?*

Audience

The Vermont Early Childhood Comprehensive Assessment System (VECCAS) framework is designed primarily for use by schools, school districts, early learning programs, regional and community partners, and State agencies.

What is an Early Childhood Comprehensive Assessment System and Why Does It Matter?

The US Departments of Education and Health and Human Services define a comprehensive assessment system as “a coordinated and comprehensive system of multiple assessments – each of which is valid and reliable for its specified purpose and for the population with which it will be used – that organizes information about the process and context of young children’s learning and development in order to help early childhood educators make informed instructional and programmatic decisions.”

Elements of an Early Childhood Assessment System

The US Departments of Education and Health and Human Services define an Early Childhood Assessment System as including the following:

- Multiple forms of assessment of both children and early childhood programs and settings;
- Addresses the purposes and uses of data collected;
- Multiple types of assessments of children, such as screening tools, assessments of ongoing progress, diagnostic assessments, and measures that compare children’s accomplishments to standards-based benchmarks;
- Emphasizes the importance of the technical quality of assessments including their validity and reliability;
- Guides and motivates decisions at all levels, including among care givers, teachers, directors, administrators, and policy makers; and
- Tracks trends in the population of young children moving from infant/toddler settings to preschool programs, from there to kindergarten and there to the primary grades.

At a minimum, an early childhood comprehensive assessment system includes developmental screening measures, formative assessments of the child’s development, measures of environmental quality, and measures of the quality of adult-child interactions. An early childhood comprehensive assessment system supports the earlier identification of children with or at-risk of developmental delays or disabilities through appropriate screening and evaluation process. It helps improve young children’s learning experiences, including both the instruction and services they receive, by providing actionable data about the child’s needs. The system supports efforts to close the school readiness gap by using kindergarten-entry assessment results to inform decisions about practices and policies and documents the importance of high quality early childhood programs in preparing children for school.

As children progress from infancy through to school age, an early childhood comprehensive assessment system gives parents, educators, pediatricians, and others, critical information about what opportunities and supports each child needs to thrive. It also helps capture the quality of the early learning and development programs children attend, and the relationships adults and children form.

Components of Vermont's Early Childhood Comprehensive Assessment System

The birth through grade three assessments included in this document address the five domains of development that contribute to children's readiness to learn and succeed in school: physical well-being, social and emotional development, approaches to learning, language development, and cognition.

The graphic below depicts what a well-functioning early childhood comprehensive assessment system should include. Assessments are divided into two categories: Child Level, which includes Diagnostics, Developmental Surveillance and Screening, Formative Assessment, and Summative Assessment and Learning Environment which includes Environmental Quality and Quality Adult and Child Relationships. The data gathered through these assessments should be routinely compiled and made available to stakeholders including parents, teachers, instructional leaders, and policy makers. The analyzed information is then used to make informed systematic, programmatic, and instructional decisions. We recognize that the assessment components are important in reflecting on and changing teaching practices to effectively address instruction in the classroom.

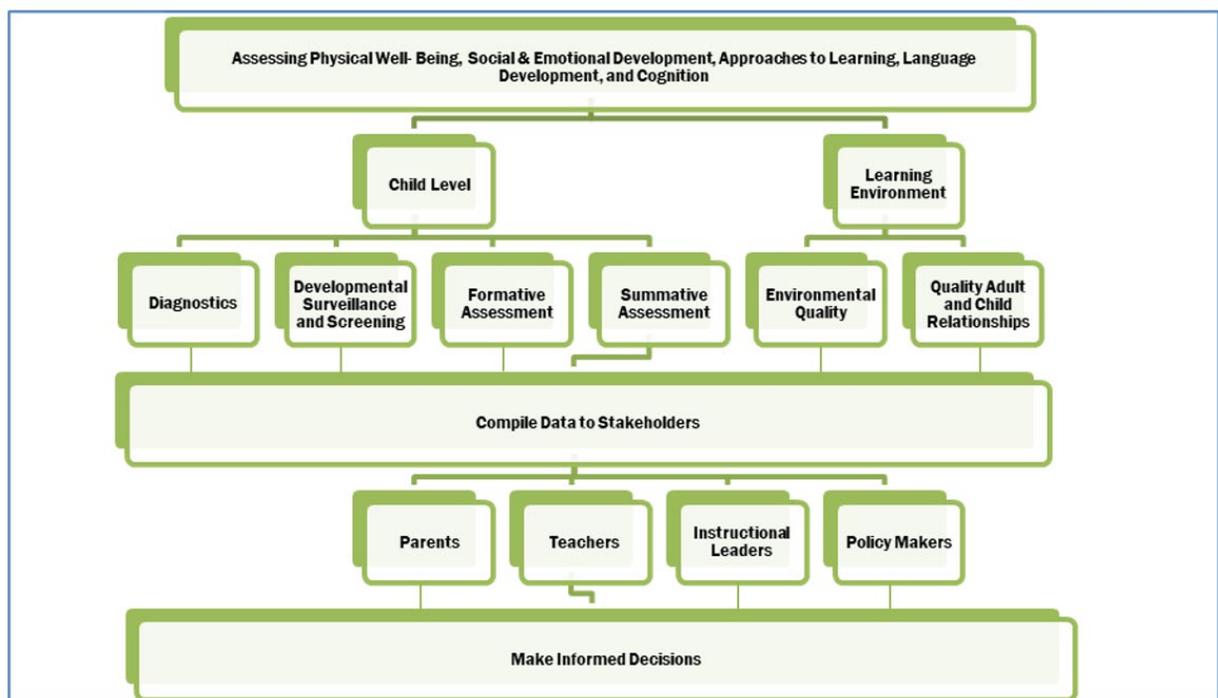


Figure 1: Components of an Early Childhood Comprehensive Assessment System

Diagnostics

Diagnostic assessment can be used to investigate and analyze learning difficulties by indicating strengths and areas of need for children. It involves the gathering and careful evaluation of detailed data using a child's knowledge and skills in a given area. The data assist educational professionals to plan and identify appropriate focus for instruction/intervention through appropriate pedagogy, supporting targeted learning, and/or to more effectively scaffold the needs of children in their care. The results lead educators to explore and identify possible effective instructional/intervention approaches.

Examples of commonly used diagnostics chosen and utilized at the local level include, but are not limited to:

The [Assessment, Evaluation, and Programming System \(AEPS™\)](#) assesses children across six major developmental areas: fine motor, gross motor, cognitive, adaptive, social communication, and social. The assessment also assesses pre-academic content areas such as pre-literacy, numeracy, and pre-writing.

The [Battelle Developmental Inventory II \(BDI II™\)](#) measures a child's progress along a developmental continuum by both the global domains and discrete skill sets.

Developmental Surveillance and Screening

Both developmental surveillance and developmental screening should be completed for all young children. Surveillance is an ongoing, longitudinal and cumulative process of recognizing children who may be at risk of developmental delays. Surveillance may occur in primary care practices, early care and education settings, or other environments applying population-based strategies for early detection of risk or problems.

Developmental screening is the use of brief and objective standardized tools to identify children at risk of developmental delay and the need for referral for evaluation. It is a formal process that occurs at defined intervals and points of entry into services and any time a child is identified at risk through surveillance. Screening may occur at a primary care practice, a mental health agency, or other early childhood or provider settings. Interpretation of screening should take into consideration other child and family contextual factors in the determination of whether one or more referrals are needed.

Developmental screening is an essential population health indicator; screening reaches vulnerable populations (children who are living in poverty, culturally and linguistically diverse, rurally isolated, etc.). Surveillance and screening promote public awareness of typical child development and advance early identification of children at risk for developmental or behavioral delays and disorders which is critical to the well-being of children and their families. Screening of all children, especially children with high needs, at regular intervals between birth and grade three, is the first step toward identifying children and their families who may need additional services and connecting them with the supports that are needed. High-

quality screening practices, in alignment with the [American Academy of Pediatrics' Bright Futures Guidelines](#), improve the validity of results and ensure that instruments are used consistently.

Examples of recommended and commonly used developmental screening instruments utilized at the local level include, but are not limited to:

The [Ages & Stages Questionnaires®, Third Edition \(ASQ-3™\)](#) pinpoints developmental progress in children between the ages of one month to 5½ years. A widely used developmental screener, ASQ-3 screens infants and young children for developmental delays in the specific categories of self-regulation, compliance, social-communication, adaptive functioning, autonomy, affect, and interaction with people, during the crucial first 5 years of life.

The [Ages & Stages Questionnaires®: Social-Emotional, Second Edition \(ASQ:SE-2™\)](#) is a parent-completed, highly reliable questionnaire focused solely on social and emotional development in young children. Accurately identifying behavior through ASQ:SE-2 paves the way for further assessment, specialized intervention, or ongoing monitoring to help children reach their fullest potential during their most formative early years.

Formative Assessment

Formative assessment refers to assessment questions, tools, and processes that are specifically designed to monitor children's progress along with the Vermont Early Learning Standards in order to guide and improve instructional practice. They should be valid and reliable for their intended purposes and their target populations. Formative assessments are assessments that are designed *for learning not of learning*.

Examples of recommended formative assessment instruments include, but are not limited to:

[Teaching Strategies™ GOLD®](#) is used to assess children from birth through Grade 3. Extensive field tests have shown it to be both valid and reliable. Available online, the system can be used with any developmentally appropriate early childhood curriculum. Grounded in 38 research based objectives that include predictors of school success and are aligned with the Common Core State Standards, Vermont Early Learning Standards, and the Head Start Child Early Learning Outcomes Framework, Teaching Strategies™ GOLD® helps teachers focus on what matters most for school readiness. It can be used to support all types of learners, including children with special needs and children with advanced knowledge and skills. Teaching Strategies™ GOLD® is a required tool in all prequalified, PreK programs in Vermont.

Vermont’s Ready for Kindergarten! Survey (R4K!S) is a readiness assessment of children entering kindergarten about students’ knowledge and skills within the first six to ten weeks of school. The effort to measure school readiness is a collaborative project of the Vermont Agency of Education (AOE), the Vermont Department for Children and Families (DCF), and the Vermont Department of Health (DH). There are many interpretations of what constitutes “readiness.” Vermont’s concept of children’s readiness is multidimensional; it includes social and emotional development, communication, physical health, as well as cognitive development, knowledge, and approaches to learning (e.g., enthusiasm for learning, persistence, curiosity). Vermont’s concept also reflects the belief that “school readiness” is interactional: children need to be ready for schools, and schools need to be ready to accommodate the diverse needs of children. Since 2000, surveys for assessing schools’ readiness have been conducted several times.

Summative Assessment

Summative assessment refers to assessment that typically documents how much learning has occurred at a point in time; its purpose is to measure the level of child, school, or program success (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2008).

An example of a recommended summative assessment measure includes, but is not limited to:

[Smarter Balanced Assessment \(SBA\)](#) As a member of the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC), Vermont joined with a cadre of other states to develop the next generation of educational tests for English Language Arts/Literacy and Mathematics. SBAC is fully aligned with the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), use state of the art computer adaptive testing and accessibility technologies, and provides a continuum of summative, interim, and formative tools that can be used for a variety of educational purposes. Testing occurs statewide in grades 3-12.

Measures of Environmental Quality

Measures of environmental quality signify valid and reliable indicators of the overall quality of the early learning environment.

Examples of recommended environmental quality instruments include but are not limited to:

[Environment Rating Scale \(ERS\)](#) includes four environment rating scales, each designed for a different segment of the early childhood field. Each one of the scales has items to evaluate: Physical Environment; Basic Care; Curriculum; Interaction; Schedule and Program Structure; and Parent and Staff Education. The scales are suitable for use in evaluating inclusive and culturally diverse programs. The scales have proven reliability and validity.

[The Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale-Revised \(ECERS-R\)](#): A thorough revision of the ECERS, designed to assess group programs for preschool-kindergarten aged children, from 2 through 5 years of age. Total scale consists of 43 items.

[The Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale-Revised \(ITERS-R\)](#): A thorough revision of the ITERS, designed to assess group programs for children from birth to 2½ years of age. Total scale consists of 39 items.

[The Family Child Care Environment Rating Scale-Revised \(FCCERS-R\)](#): A thorough revision of the Family Daycare Rating Scale (FDCRS), designed to assess family child care programs conducted in a provider’s home. Total scale consists of 38 items.

[The School-Age Care Environment Rating Scale \(SACERS\)](#): Designed to assess before and after school group care programs for school-age children, 5 to 12 years of age. The total scale consists of 49 items, including 6 supplementary items for programs enrolling children with disabilities.

[The Inclusive Classroom Profile \(ICP™\)](#): An observation rating scale designed to assess the quality of daily classroom practices that support the developmental needs of children with disabilities in early childhood settings. The ICP™ assesses 12 key practices with the strongest research base for supporting the education and development of young children in inclusive programs.

Measures of the Quality of Adult-Child Interactions

The quality of adult-child interactions are measured by a valid and reliable process for observing how teachers and caregivers interact with children. The process should be designed to promote child learning and to identify strengths and areas for improvement for early learning professionals. Examples of recommended and commonly used quality adult-child interaction instruments include, but are not limited to:

The [Classroom Assessment Scoring System \(CLASS®\)](#) is the observation tool developed to assess the adult- child interactions which impact learning and development from infant care through 12th grade. CLASS® observations are completed by Teachstone® certified CLASS® Observers who assign scores to specific teacher behaviors and responses.

The [Teaching Pyramid Observation Tool \(TPOT™\)](#) is an observation tool that measures the implementation of classroom practices specifically related to promoting young children’s social emotional competence and addressing challenging behaviors.

Assessment Instruments and their Relationship to the 2015 Vermont Early Learning Standards (VELS)

In order to support communities as they move toward accepting an early childhood comprehensive assessment system, the following section was developed to illustrate the relationship between the aforementioned assessment tool to the 2015 Vermont Early Learning Standards (VELS). This resource also includes suggestions on when to administer, as well as links to the assessments/screenings themselves.

[Assessment, Evaluation, and Programming System for Infants and Children \(AEPS®\) Second Edition](#)

(Available in English and Spanish)

Purpose: Diagnostic

Age: Divided into two levels: Birth to 36 months and 36–72 months

Time Frame: As needed to identify children’s strengths across developmental areas; identify functional goals and objectives for Individualized Family Service Plans (IFSPs) and Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) or other individualized plans; to assist in planning and guiding intervention; to monitor children’s progress; The AEPS® can also be used during the eligibility process and can produce accountability data.

Assessors: general and special educators, child care providers, interventionists, home visitors, therapists across a range of specialties (occupational therapists(OT), physical therapists (PT), Speech and Language Pathologists (SLP), psychologists, social workers, and other mental health providers.

Relationship to the 2015 [Vermont Early Learning Standards](#):

Developing Self: Approaches to Learning; Social-Emotional Development; Growing, Moving, and Being Healthy

Communication and Expression: Language Development; Literacy Development; Creative Arts

Learning About the World: Math; Science; Social Studies

The Battelle Developmental Inventory II (BDI II™)

(Available in English and Spanish)

Purpose: Diagnostic

Age: Birth through 7 years 11 months

Time Frame: As needed to identify children’s strengths across developmental areas; identify functional goals and objectives for Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) or other individualized plans; to assist in planning and guiding intervention; to monitor children’s progress; The BDI II™ can also be used during the eligibility process and can produce accountability data. The BDI is one of the primary tools used by school districts to determine eligibility under IDEA.

Assessors: general and special educators, interventionists, home visitors, therapists across a range of specialties (occupational therapists(OT), physical therapists (PT), Speech and Language Pathologists (SLP), psychologists, social workers, and other mental health providers.

Relationship to the Vermont Early Learning Standards:

Developing Self: Approaches to Learning; Social-Emotional Development; Growing, Moving, and Being Healthy

Communication and Expression: Language Development; Literacy Development; Creative Arts

Learning About the World: Math; Science; Social Studies

Ages & Stages Questionnaires®, Third Edition (ASQ-3)

(Available in English, Spanish, and a variety of languages which can be viewed on their website)

Purpose: Developmental Surveillance and Screening

Age: 1 month – 5½ years

Time Frame: 21 questionnaires and scoring sheets at months: 2, 4, 6, 8, 9, 10, 12, 14, 16, 18, 20, 22, 24, 27, 30, 33, 36, 42, 48, 54, and 60; Preferably every 6 months. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommendations include screening at least three times before a child’s third birthday (at the 9 month, 18 month, and 24 or 30 month).

Assessors: Parents and caregivers administer. **Scoring:** Educators; EHS/ HS Providers; CIS; home visitors: NFP, PAT, MECSH; PCPs

Relationship to the Vermont Early Learning Standards:

Developing Self: Approaches to Learning; Social-Emotional Development; Growing, Moving, and Being Healthy

Communication and Expression: Language Development; Literacy Development; Creative Arts

Learning About the World: Math; Science; Social Studies

Ages & Stages Questionnaires®: Social-Emotional, Second Edition (ASQ:SE-2™)

Available in English, Spanish and a variety of languages.

Purpose: Developmental Surveillance and Screening

Age: 1 month - 6 years

Time Frame: Nine questionnaires and scoring sheets at 2, 6, 12, 18, 24, 30, 36, 48, 60, and 72 months of age. Administer to reliably identify young children at risk for social or emotional difficulties.

Assessors: Parents and caregivers administer, scoring by Classroom/home educators; Early Head Start and Head Start Providers; CIS Providers; home visitors through NFP, PAT, MECH5H; Primary Care Physicians

Relationship to the Vermont Early Learning Standards:

Developing Self: Social-Emotional Development;

Communication and Expression: N/A

Learning About the World: Social Studies

Teaching Strategies Gold®

Available in English and Spanish.

Purpose: Formative Assessment

Age: Birth - Grade 3

Time Frame: Observation and data collection should be ongoing throughout the school year. Checkpoints are due in late fall and late spring; winter and summer checkpoints are optional. *Required for all 3, 4, and 5 year-olds not age eligible for kindergarten under Universal PreK/Act 166.*

Assessors: Trained classroom/home educators; directors/principal; observers; Head Start providers

Relationship to the Vermont Early Learning Standards:

Developing Self: Approaches to Learning; Social-Emotional Development; Growing, Moving, and Being Healthy

Communication and Expression: Language Development; Literacy Development; Creative Arts

Learning About the World: Math; Science; Social Studies

Vermont's Ready for Kindergarten! Survey

Purpose: Formative Assessment

Age: All children entering K

Time Frame: First 6 weeks of Kindergarten

Assessors: Kindergarten Teachers

Relationship to the [Vermont Early Learning Standards](#):

Developing Self: Approaches to Learning; Social-Emotional Development; Growing, Moving, and Being Healthy

Communication and Expression: Language Development; Literacy Development; Creative Arts

Learning About the World: Math; Science; Social Studies

[Smarter Balanced Assessment](#)

Purpose: Summative Assessment

Age: Grade 3-12

Time Frame: Administered in Spring

Assessors: Teachers

Relationship to the [Vermont Early Learning Standards](#):

Developing Self: N/A

Communication and Expression: Language Development; Literacy Development;

Learning About the World: Math

Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale, Revised Education (ECERS-R)

Available in English and Spanish.

Purpose: Measure of Environmental Quality

Age: 2 years – 5 years

Time Frame: N/A

Assessors: Anchor Trainers, Level 1, and Level 2 Observers (Classroom/home educators; directors/principal; observers; STAR assessors, Head Start providers)

Relationship to the Vermont Early Learning Standards:

Developing Self: Approaches to Learning; Social-Emotional Development; Growing, Moving, and Being Healthy

Communication and Expression: Language Development; Literacy Development; Creative Arts

Learning About the World: Math; Science; Social Studies

Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale – Revised (ITERS)

Purpose: Measure of Environmental Quality

Age: Birth to 2½ years of age

Time Frame: N/A

Assessors: Anchor Trainers, Level 1, and Level 2 Observers (Early Head Start providers use ITERS)

Relationship to the Vermont Early Learning Standards:

Developing Self: Approaches to Learning; Social-Emotional Development; Growing, Moving, and Being Healthy

Communication and Expression: Language Development; Literacy Development; Creative Arts

Learning About the World: Math; Science; Social Studies

The Family Child Care Environment Rating Scale (FCCERS-R)

Purpose: Measure of Environmental Quality

Age: N/A

Time Frame: N/A

Assessors: Anchor Trainers, Level 1, and Level 2 Observers

Relationship to the Vermont Early Learning Standards:

Developing Self: Approaches to Learning; Social-Emotional Development; Growing, Moving, and Being Healthy

Communication and Expression: Language Development; Literacy Development; Creative Arts

Learning About the World: Math; Science; Social Studies

The School-Age Care Environment Rating Scale (SACERS)

Purpose: Measure of Environmental Quality

Age: 5 years to 12 years

Time Frame: N/A

Assessors: Anchor Trainers, Level 1, and Level 2 Observers (Classroom teachers/administrators)

Relationship to the Vermont Early Learning Standards:

Developing Self: Approaches to Learning; Social-Emotional Development; Growing, Moving, and Being Healthy

Communication and Expression: Language Development; Literacy Development; Creative Arts

Learning About the World: Math; Science; Social Studies

Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS®)

Purpose: Measure of Environmental Quality; Quality of Adult-Child Interactions

Age: Infant, Toddler, PreK, and K-3

Time Frame: Baseline data – fall and final data late spring (minimum)

Assessors: Certified CLASS Observers (administrators, directors, and coordinators)

Relationship to the Vermont Early Learning Standards:

Developing Self: Approaches to Learning; Social-Emotional Development

Communication and Expression: N/A

Learning About the World: N/A

Teaching Pyramid Observation Tool (TPOT™)

Purpose: Measure of Environmental Quality; Quality of Adult-Child Interactions

Age: PreK

Time Frame: Biannually (beginning and end of year)

Assessors: Certified TPOT coaches (Early MTSS coaches)

Relationship to the Vermont Early Learning Standards:

Developing Self: Approaches to Learning; Social-Emotional Development; Growing, Moving, and Being Healthy

Communication and Expression: N/A

Learning About the World: N/A

The Inclusive Classroom Profile (ICP™)

Purpose: Measure of Environmental Quality; Quality of Adult-Child Interactions

Age: Ages 2 - 5

Time Frame: Baseline data – fall and end of year

Assessors: Certified ICP Trainer or Coach

Relationship to the Vermont Early Learning Standards:

Developing Self: Approaches to Learning; Social-Emotional Development; Growing, Moving, and Being Healthy

Communication and Expression: N/A

Learning About the World: N/A

Moving Forward with Implementation

The Early Childhood Comprehensive Assessment System Task Force stresses the importance of current and future collaboration of a variety of stakeholders committed to providing the types of supports and tools necessary to assist communities and practitioners to develop an early childhood comprehensive assessment system. The sections below provide details about the status and future plans for the VECCAS framework.

Sustainability

Future considerations to ensure the successful implementation of Vermont's Early Childhood Comprehensive Assessment System include:

- Developing planning tools for implementation
- Coordinating the use of universal screening
- Developing ongoing supports for teachers, principals, district leaders and program directors
- Coordinating with higher education
- Helping teachers and leaders use assessment data within the context of the quality of environments
- Establishing and maintaining communities of practice
- Fostering a professional learning system and aligning professional learning
- Outlining policies regarding collecting and sharing of data
- Setting the timing and coordination of assessments
- Fostering stakeholder engagement and investment
- Cultivating a plan for sustainability, including personnel and financial capacity, beyond the grant
- Providing teacher and education leaders with time and support to collect, analyze, and use data and engage parents
- Embedding the use of assessment knowledge in licensure, pre-service, and in-service trainings

Professional Learning

To make the VECCAS work, teachers and education leaders need the knowledge and skills to conduct assessments and to use the results appropriately and effectively. A system must be put in place that stresses the intentional use of pre-service, in-service, and communities of practice, to enhance teachers' and leaders' capacity to use assessment to serve children. Professional learning will focus on building teachers' and leaders' capacity to use assessment to support learning and development and improve practice. Public and private partners will collaborate to support pre-service as well as ongoing, accessible training and professional learning on administration of assessment instruments, observation skills, compiling/analyzing data, data driven decision making, and communication of information. This professional learning will be aligned with existing systems including the AOE's educator licensing process, to ensure sustainability, including alignment. Professional learning will be embedded into curricula at Vermont institutes of higher education and aligned with the [Early Childhood Career Ladder](#), as well as with child care licensing, the [Vermont STep Ahead Recognition System \(STARS\)](#) program, and accreditation processes.

Compiling, Sharing, and Use of The Data

For the VECCAS to improve outcomes for Vermont’s children, there needs to be a clear approach to collecting, sharing, and using data. Having this data will inform early childhood program activities, instruction, and quality improvements, and will support early educators in engaging with, educating, and supporting families. In addition, it will also help promote informed policy making across sectors that supports children’s optimal development. Input will occur from the Data and Evaluation committee of the Building Bright Futures State Advisory Council. Data sharing and transparency is paramount. The State’s Data Governance Council will develop protocols for data sharing across agencies.

The Vermont Agency of Education (AOE), through funding from a 4.9 million dollar grant from the U.S. Department of Education, is in the final stages of developing and implementing a Statewide Longitudinal Data System (SLDS) to support the work of the AOE and Vermont school districts. A significant portion of the federal award supports the creation of a system to automate education data submissions to the state from Supervisory Unions / Supervisory Districts (SU/SD), known as Vertical Reporting.

The SLDS is intended to enhance the ability of Vermont to efficiently and accurately manage, analyze, and use education data. The SLDS should help all Vermont education stakeholders to make data-informed decisions to improve student learning and outcomes; as well as to facilitate research to increase student achievement and close achievement gaps. The SLDS also supports state and federal reporting requirements.

Ultimately, the critical measure of whether a comprehensive assessment system is effective is by how well it works to improve outcomes for each and every young child and their families. To assure families are partners in our efforts, the Early Childhood Comprehensive Assessment System should ultimately include evidence-based recommendations for sharing information gleaned from the implementation of the comprehensive assessments with families.

A system of support for regular training and observation of assessment use needs to be set in place. Administrators, teachers, parents, and other stakeholders must be provided training and/or professional learning to reliably collect and/or interpret data. Such training and professional learning should present a detailed and appropriate level of understanding of the purposes and processes of birth through grade three assessment systems.

Fostering an understanding of assessment can improve comfort with the system as well as reliability. However, this involves adequate time and resources. To be useful to teachers, it is important that time is allocated, both in pre-service and in-service training, to interpret and reflect on the meaning of the findings to help inform and improve practice.

Timing and Coordination

Further guidance should be developed about key points in time when each assessment should be conducted, and by whom. Systems need to be in place and awareness needs to be built on how data moves and where it lives.

Stakeholder Engagement is Key To Success

For this system to work, everyone who plays a role in the system needs to be actively engaged in the implementation process and understand how the system supports its stakeholders. Families need to understand the information each assessment and/or screening provides about their child's progress and be actively involved in decision making about how best to support their child moving forward. Likewise, parents' and guardians' understanding how to access available resources to support their child, is paramount. Teachers, principals, and administrators need time and training to understand the data in each assessment and how to use it to engage with families and drive decision-making. They also need support in balancing a variety of assessments and screening tools. Physicians and community providers need to understand their vital role in detection, and that increased communication and coordination is essential. Finally, it is important that state policymakers learn about the VECCAS and be able to reflect on the meaning of data findings to make informed policy decisions.

Specialized Assessment Considerations

The assessments in the VECCAS framework operate in concert with other state and local assessments that are used throughout Vermont on a regular and consistent basis. These individual assessments should be used in conjunction with several other sources of evidence, as instructional decisions are best based on multiple sources of substantiation. This is not intended to be an all-inclusive list of administered assessments. Further, the following list is *not a recommended or endorsed list*; rather, it is a list of commonly used assessments across early childhood settings.

Currently and Consistently in Place Throughout the State

[Modified Checklist for Autism for Toddlers \(M-CHAT\): Modified Checklist for Autism for Toddlers Revised with Follow-Up \(M-CHAT- R/F\)](#) is a 2-stage parent-report screening tool to assess risk for Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). The M-CHAT-R/F is an autism-screening tool designed to identify children 16 to 30 months of age who should receive a more thorough assessment for possible early signs of autism spectrum disorder (ASD) or developmental delay. The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends that all children receive autism-specific screening at 18 and 24 months of age, in addition to broad developmental screening at 9, 18, and 24 months. The M-CHAT-R/F, one of the AAP recommended tools, can be administered at these well-child visits.

[ACCESS for ELLs \(Assessing Comprehension and Communication in English State-to-State for English Language Learners\)](#) is a secure large-scale English language proficiency assessment given to Kindergarten through 12th graders who have been identified as English language learners (ELLs). It is given annually in WIDA Consortium member states, such as Vermont, to monitor students' progress in acquiring academic English.

Piloted Assessments

[The Mid-Level Developmental Assessment \(MLDA\)](#) is a feasible and effective, evidence-based model for the timely assessment of children (ages 0-6 years) suspected of developmental delay based on surveillance and screening. Children with mild/moderate developmental and behavioral concerns are efficiently linked to programs and services, while facilitated access is coordinated for children with more severe delays to additional comprehensive assessment and services. After an initial pilot, the Health Department Child Development Clinic (CDC) has adapted the MLDA model to accommodate the CDC protocols. The MLDA-plus model supports streamlined assessment practices, well suited for CDC's statewide travel clinics. With training and consultation from the *Help Me Grow* National Center, early educators have started piloting the MLDA in Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) programs to support quality improvements in their current screening and assessment protocols.

Teaching Strategies™ GOLD®: Birth through Third Grade was piloted in several Vermont schools in 2016. As part of the extension through third grade, the Common Core State Standards are embedded in Teaching Strategies™ GOLD® for grades K-three. Teachers using the tool for kindergarten through third grade can assess directly on the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts and Mathematics, in addition to the other Teaching Strategies™ GOLD® domains. With progressions of development and learning that extend as far back as birth, Teaching Strategies™ GOLD® helps birth through third grade teachers identify where children are in their development and learning and how to support their continued growth, in addition to determining where they are in meeting end-of-year expectations specified by the Common Core State Standards. Teaching Strategies™ GOLD® birth through third grade is aligned with the Vermont Early Learning Standards (VELS).

Appendix

Background Information

Several birth through grade three initiatives, programs, services, and initiatives are in place to support the system including Universal PreK (Act 166), The Vermont Early Learning Standards (VELS), *Supporting Each and Every Young Child's Full and Equitable Participation: GUIDING PRINCIPLES*, Early Multi-Tiered System of Supports (Early MTSS), Multi-Tiered System of Supports K-12 (MTSS), Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE), Special Education 6-21, Children's Integrated Services/ Early Intervention (CIS/EI), *Help Me Grow VT*, and Vermont's Child Health Improvement Program. *See Terms below for more details.*

Vermont's existing education system also includes a focus on alignment through the [Common Core State Standards in English Language Arts/Literacy](#) and [Mathematics](#), the [Next Generation Science Standards](#), and the Social Emotional Standards, which are being implemented in K-12 classrooms across the state resulting in changes to curriculum instruction and assessment. The [Vermont Early Learning Standards](#) (VELS) were revised in 2015 to better capture the essential areas of development and learning in the early childhood years from infancy through grade three. VELS is aligned with the [Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework](#), Common Core State Standards in English Language Arts/Literacy and Mathematics, as well as Next Generation Science Standards. The purpose of these alignment efforts is to ensure a clear focus on skills and deeper knowledge that prepare all children for success in college and careers.

Finally, there is a greater emphasis on finding valid and reliable ways to assess young children's learning. Vermont's Universal PreK programs share a common research-based assessment system, Teaching Strategies® GOLD™, which solidifies, for early educators, the link between instruction and learning. Multi-tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) acknowledges meeting children where they are with universal high-quality instruction, supportive environments, and building relationships for all children. MTSS and Early MTSS (for young children prior to kindergarten) provide targeted teaching and support for those children who need more instruction to gain skills, with intensive interventions available for children whose academic and social-emotional needs are the greatest.

In 2015, the document, [Strengthening and Streamlining Local Comprehensive Assessment Systems: Guidelines and Support for Leadership Teams](#), was developed collaboratively by a team of Vermont educators and Agency of Education consultants and coordinators to provide guidelines to help supervisory unions streamline and strengthen their local comprehensive assessment systems for all students. The document serves as a companion to the VECCAS framework.

While many of the requisite tools and components needed to support a comprehensive system have been developed and a wide range of effective programs for families and children exists, Vermont recognized the need to eliminate overlap, inequities, and fragmentation.

Vermont identified the potential to help bring the patchwork of systems and programs together through the inclusion of a comprehensive assessment project in Vermont's Race to the Top - Early Learning Challenge (ELC) grant. The grant supported the creation of an early childhood comprehensive assessment system framework that encourages informed data collection and knowledge about the process of a child's early learning and development to help early childhood professionals make informed decisions regarding how best to support each and every child. This framework supports the ELC grant's overall goal of building a high quality, accessible, and connected early childhood system in Vermont so that all young children will be ready to succeed in kindergarten and beyond.

Commonly Used Acronyms

[AHS](#) – Vermont Agency of Human Services

[AOE](#) – Vermont Agency of Education

[BBF](#) – Building Bright Futures

[CDD](#) – Child Development Division (within AHS)

[CIS](#) – Children's Integrated Services (within CDD)

[DCF](#) – Department for Children and Families (within AHS)

EHS – Early Head Start

[ELC](#) – Early Learning Challenge Grant

[Early MTSS](#) – Early Multi-Tiered System of Support

HS – Head Start

[HMG](#) – *Help Me Grow*

R4K!S – Ready for Kindergarten! Survey

[M.A.T.C.H.](#) – Mentoring, Advising, Teaching, Coaching, Consulting, and Helping

[MECSH](#) – Maternal Early Childhood Sustained Home Visiting

[NFP](#) – Nurse Family Partnership

PCP – Primary Care Physician

[T.E.A.C.H.](#) – Teacher Education and Compensation Helps

[VDH](#) – Vermont Department of Health (within AHS)

[VELS](#) – Vermont Early Learning Standards

[vtaeyc](#) - Vermont Association for the Education of Young Children

Terms

[Bright Futures](#) is a national health promotion and prevention initiative, led by the American Academy of Pediatrics and supported by the Maternal and Child Health Bureau, Health Resources and Services Administration. The *Bright Futures Guidelines* provide theory-based and evidence-driven guidance for all preventive care screenings and well-child visits. Bright Futures content can be incorporated into many public health programs such as home visiting, childcare, school-based health clinics, and many others. Materials developed especially for families are also available.

[Building Bright Futures State Advisory Council, \(BBF SAC\)](#): BBF SAC is the statewide nonprofit, public-private partnership focused on improving the well-being of young children and families by improving the system that serves them. BBF SAC improves child and family well-being through three program areas: Community, Data and Policy.

[Building Bright Futures State Advisory Council \(BBF SAC\) Data and Evaluation Committee](#): The Data and Evaluation Committee is one of the BBF SAC's committees and works to ensure on behalf of the Building Bright Futures State Council Vermont early childhood system is aligned around a clear set of policy questions and has data available (at the child, family, community, as well as program, workforce and systems levels) that can stimulate informed dialogue, learning and acting around these policy questions. The policy questions address the well-being of children as young children (short-term) through their years entering adulthood (long-term). The intent is that the data is available to and used by all stakeholders, parents, practitioners, policy makers, and community.

[Child Find](#): Vermont's comprehensive Child Find system includes policies and procedures that are also coordinated with all other major efforts by other state agencies responsible for administering the various health, social service programs, and education to ensure that each and every child who may be eligible for services under Part C (birth through age three) and Part B (ages three through twenty-one) are identified, located, screened, referred and evaluated. Child Find means the methods and procedures used by Part C Children's Integrated Services and Early Intervention (CIS/EI) or Part B school district personnel and other entities as defined in rule to locate children birth to age twenty-one who are in need of, or potentially in need of, early intervention services or special education and related services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Child Find activities include a variety of public awareness activities, outreach strategies, developmental screening, ongoing assessment, and evaluation.

[Child Level](#): In *Figure 1*, Child Level refers to assessments that are administered to learn more about the child's learning and knowledge. They include Diagnostics, Developmental Surveillance and Screening, Formative and Summative Assessment.

[Children's Integrated Services \(CIS\)/Early Intervention \(EI\)](#) offers early intervention, family support, and prevention services that help ensure the healthy development and well-being of children, pre-birth to age 5 for CIS and birth to age 3 for EI. Services are available at low or no cost to families.

Each and Every Child: As used in this framework, “each and every child” is addressed no matter the child’s family income or circumstances, race, ethnicity, culture, creed, disability or other circumstances, and regardless of developmental level.

Early Childhood: The period of development covering birth through grade three.

Early Childhood Career Ladder is a tool for tracking and planning professional growth. The Ladder organizes coursework, credentials, degrees and licensure into one Northern Lights (NL) Professional Development System. Each of the six levels requires education, a current Individual Professional Development Plan (IPDP) and professional experience with children and families. Levels I - III also require the applicant to be observed working with children.

Early Childhood Special Education: See IDEA Part B (Section 619) and Part C.

Early Learning Challenge: Vermont’s Early Learning Challenge – Race to the Top grant (ELC) is a \$36.9 million, federally funded, four-year grant to help build a high-quality and accessible early childhood system in the state so that all young children will be ready to succeed in kindergarten and beyond.

Early Multi-Tiered System of Supports (Early MTSS): A professional development initiative, led by the Vermont Agency of Education. Early MTSS is an evidence-based framework that focuses on building the necessary systems at the state, regional, local and program level to ensure that evidence-based practices for promoting social emotional, early literacy and numeracy competence of young children birth to six are being implemented to fidelity. It is the basis for all technical assistance and professional development provided by the Agency of Education to schools. However, it is designed to include all early childhood educators and providers, not just school personnel. Early MTSS also has family education and home-visiting components. Early MTSS aligns with K-12 VTmtss to provide a full continuum of comprehensive and systemic supports for all children birth through age twenty-two.

Equitable: Distribution of resources based on a transparent and rational formula that reflects common principles and community needs as identified in a regional plan

Evidence-based Practice means integrating individual clinical expertise with the best available external clinical **evidence** from systematic research.” (Sackett D, 1996) EBP is the integration of clinical expertise, patient values, and the best research **evidence** into the decision-making process for patient care.

[Help Me Grow \(HMG\)](#) is a system change strategy focused on promoting all children’s healthy development. The *Help Me Grow* framework integrates child health and mental health, early care and education and family support services in order to advance developmental promotion, early identification and linkage of young children and families to services. Four core components comprise the *HMG* system: a centralized telephone entry point, child provider outreach, community outreach, and data collection and analysis. Research shows that referrals to *HMG* and subsequent linkages to community-based programs and resources enhance protective factors (Strengthening Families Protective Factors Framework). The *HMG* national model began in Connecticut and, to date, has been implemented in 24 affiliate states. [Help Me Grow Vermont](#), a statewide system that helps identify at-risk children through universal developmental surveillance, screening and detection for all children through age eight, and then links those children and their families to existing community-based services. *Help Me Grow* Vermont expands the reach of CIS through a “no wrong doors” centralized telephone access entry point provided by *Help Me Grow* Vermont 2-1-1 Child Development Specialists. Comprehensive outreach assures that child health and mental health providers, early care and education providers, family support workers and the community are involved in the system.

High Quality Instruction (Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment) is:

- Engaging and differentiated through the principles of [Universal Design for Learning](#)
- Standards-based
- Data driven
- Research and evidence-based
- Curriculum, instruction, and assessment that are grounded in the culturally responsive practices of relevance, identity, belonging and community will serve to best engage all students. High-quality curriculum and instruction should be culturally appropriate for the students being served and prepare all students for a multicultural world.

High Quality, Effective Prekindergarten Education: What defines Vermont Universal Prekindergarten Education is the implementation of high-quality, effective instruction by licensed educators who use evidence-based practices within intentionally designed early learning environments. Early educators align curriculum with the Vermont Early Learning Standards while adapting experiences to support the full participation of each and every child to realize their full potential and promote successful outcomes.

Home Visiting: Home visiting is a way of delivering an array of services in the home. The type of home visiting referred to in this Action Plan involves serving children, families and caregivers during the window of time from pregnancy through age five, with a series of visits made on a regular basis, such as weekly. These home visits are geared toward improving maternal and child outcomes, which, in turn, contribute to multiple benefits to the child during his or her lifetime.

IDEA Part B: The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is a four-part (A-D) piece of federal legislation that ensures students with a disability are provided with Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) that is tailored to their individual needs. Part B of IDEA ensures students Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) beginning at age 3 up to age 22. Part B 619 covers children 3 through 5.

IDEA Part C: The Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA): Part C – Early Intervention program for infants and toddlers provides a broad array of services to children with special needs, birth to three years of age, and their families. In Vermont, Part C of IDEA is known as Children’s Integrated Services/Early Intervention.

Inter-rater Reliability measures the degree to which different evaluators or raters consistently agree in their assessment decisions. Inter-rater reliability is useful because human observers will not necessarily interpret answers the same way; raters may disagree as to how well certain responses or material demonstrate knowledge of the construct or skill being assessed.

Learning Environment: In *Figure 1*, Learning Environment refers to assessments that are administered to learn more about the child’s learning environment. This includes Measures of Environmental Quality and Measures of Quality Adult and Child Relationships.

Preschool Development Expansion Grant (PDEG): The purpose of PDEG is to “to support state and local efforts to build, develop, and expand high-quality preschool programs so that more children from low- and moderate-income families enter kindergarten ready to succeed in school and in life.”

Reliability is the degree to which an assessment tool produces stable and consistent results. While reliability is necessary, it alone is not sufficient. For a test to be reliable, it also needs to be valid.

Social and Emotional Development: Social development refers to the child interacting with others and the development of relationships. Emotional development refers to the child’s sense of self and personhood. These are different areas that are often combined because of how much one affects the other.

[Supporting Each and Every Young Child’s Full and Equitable Participation: GUIDING PRINCIPLES \(2017\)](#): This document describes what individuals, organizations, and communities understand and do to realize the promise of each and every young Vermont child. They highlight explicit, intentional, and strengths-based practices that are respectful of and responsive to child, family, and community values, priorities, and beliefs. They are consistent with relevant state and national laws and policies. These principles articulate Vermont’s commitment to fully include each and every child and their family in a continuum of meaningful experiences to ensure their physical health, mental health, safety, happiness, and success now and into the future.

Surveillance: The ongoing, longitudinal, cumulative process of recognizing children who may be at risk of developmental delays. Surveillance may occur in primary care practices, early learning and development settings or other environments applying population-based strategies for early detection of risk or problems.

Universal Prekindergarten (Act 166): is a universally accessible, publicly funded prekindergarten education program for all 3, 4, and 5-year-olds (not age eligible to be enrolled in kindergarten) throughout the state of Vermont. A child in a prequalified public or private PreK may be educated in a school-operated preschool, a high-quality community-based preschool, Head Start, childcare center, or family home-based program. Universal PreK was signed into law in 2014 and went into full effect on July 1, 2016.

Validity refers to how well a test measures what it is purported to measure.

VELS: The Vermont Early Learning Standards (VELS) help inform families about the development and capabilities of children from birth through grade 3 and guide educators in the development and selection of program-wide curriculum and educational strategies for children from birth through grade 3. These standards are central to the shared vision of what we want for young children in Vermont; and highlight the importance of high quality early childhood experiences as the foundation for school success and lifelong learning. Plainly said, early experiences matter.

WIDA: The WIDA Consortium is a non-profit cooperative group whose purpose is to develop standards and assessments and promote educational equity for English language learners.