



Universal PreK (UPK) Café Issue 1 - August 28, 2024

As we welcome you back after the summer break, we are excited to embark on a new school year together, continuing Vermont's tradition of excellence in Universal PreK. The Early Education Team would like to express our gratitude for your dedication, and contributions to early education over the past decade, and look forward to another year of growth and learning.

Vermont's UPK remains a truly universal system, providing access to prekindergarten education for each and every Vermont child across settings. We recognize and appreciate the hard work of those who have contributed to building our robust Universal Prekindergarten system. We are excited to collaborate and engage in educational initiatives that continue to provide equitable, inclusive, and high-quality early education environments for every young child.

In our first issue of UPK Cafe of the school year, we have some announcements that we wanted to share with you.

Introductions and A Farewell

Below are the current members of the Early Education Team, titles, and contact information.

Tammy Bates, Early Education Team Manager, tammy.bates@vermont.gov

Wendy Scott, Universal Prekindergarten State Coordinator, wendy.scott@vermont.gov

Michele Johnson, Early Education Monitoring and Teaching Strategies, michele.johnson@vermont.gov

Teresa Haskins, Education Programs Coordinator, teresa.haskins@vermont.gov

Katie McCarthy, Early Childhood Special Education Team Manager (**IDEA Part B 619**), katie.mccarthy@vermont.gov

Amy Murphy, Early Education Inclusion Coordinator, amy.murphy@vermont.gov

Thalia Garcia, Early Multi-tiered Systems of Support Coordinator, thalia.garcia@vermont.gov

Farewell to Leslie Freedman

It is with mixed emotions that we announce our colleague, Leslie Freedman, is leaving the Agency of Education (AOE) after eight plus years of service on the early education team. Leslie was key in implementing the accountability and continuous improvement system (ACIS) monitoring of UPK



prequalified programs and was the Teaching Strategies State Coordinator. We will miss her humor and congeniality, but we wish her all the best in her new position as Early MTSS Coordinator for Mount Mansfield Unified School District.

Universal Prekindergarten (UPK) Education

New Early Education Team Purpose Statement

Each and every young child and their family are diverse in culture, language, geography, values, beliefs and circumstances. To support individual growth, development, and continuous learning over their lifetime, the AOE is committed to fully including each and every child in a continuum of high quality, evidence-based early learning experiences from birth through grade three.

New Welcome Visits for New UPK Programs

Scheduled visits for sharing resources and information listed in this UPK Cafe issue.

Resources

NEW [Universal PreK Program Handbook](#)

NEW [Vermont Universal Prekindergarten \(padlet.com\)](#)

[Act 166 Universal Prekindergarten: Changes to Prequalified Program](#)

[Vermont Agency of Education Early Education webpage](#)

[UPK Cafe](#)

Vermont Early Learning Standards (VELS)

[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.

Resources

New - The [VELS Manual](#) companion resource to the VELS booklet with the intention of supporting and implementing developmentally appropriate practices across Vermont early learning environments and settings. The purpose of this manual is to effectively use the VELS in daily practice and how to align curricula in order to provide high-quality education for each and every child. The VELS manual is a fluid document which will be informed by changes in standards, research, and requirements and updated by the Vermont's Agency of Education Early Education team.

[UPK Cafe: Special Edition Issue 3 - March 29, 2024](#)

In celebration of Act 166 Tenth Anniversary this UPK Cafe Special Edition gives an overview of the Vermont Early Learning Standards (VELS) and upcoming projects.

Inclusion

The policy statement below is from the U.S. Departments of Education (ED) and Health and Human Services (HHS) (the Departments) that builds upon the previously issued 2015 policy statement.

All young children with disabilities should have access to high-quality inclusive early childhood programs that provide individualized and appropriate support so they can fully participate alongside their peers without disabilities, meet high expectations, and achieve their full potential. The responsibility to ensure that young children with disabilities and their families are included in high-quality early childhood programs is shared by federal, State, and local governments, early childhood systems, early childhood programs and providers, local educational agencies (LEAs), and schools.

Resources

[Policy Statement on Inclusion of Children with Disabilities in Early Childhood Programs, 2023](#)

[National Association for the Education of Young Children \(NAEYC Position Statement on Equity, April 2019\).](#)

[Vermont Agency of Education - Vermont Guiding Principles](#)

[Early Care and Education Environment Indicators and Elements of High-Quality Inclusion](#)

[Division for Early Childhood Recommended Practices](#)

[National Center for Pyramid Model Innovations](#)

[Staas, C., Capatosto, K., Wright, R. A., and Jackson, V. M. \(2016\). State of the Science: Implicit Bias Review. Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity](#)

[UPK Cafe: Special Edition Issue 4 - April 29, 2024](#)

During this fourth 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 Cafe, featuring Equity and Inclusion in Vermont.

Early Multi-Tiered System of Support (Early MTSS)

Vermont's Early MTSS is an innovation neutral framework that wraps around The Pyramid Model Framework designed to build each and every child's social and emotional skills, competencies, and development. Early MTSS also supports initiatives in early literacy, mathematics, science, arts and expression, and social studies, utilizing a two-prong approach: implementing equitable and inclusive high quality evidence practices while building system capacity.

New Professional Development Opportunity

[*Promoting Social and Emotional Competence in the Preschool Classroom*](#)

These six modules provide the training content for implementing the preschool Pyramid Model practices within classrooms for young children ages 2-5 years.

To sign up for this training visit the [Northern Lights training calendar](#).

Resources

[Early MTSS Padlet](#)

[UPK Cafe: Special Edition Issue 2 - February 28, 2024](#)

In this Act 166 Tenth Anniversary Special Edition the Early Education team provides a detailed overview of Vermont's Early Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (Early MTSS).

Teaching Strategies (Formerly TS Gold)

[Teaching Strategies \(TS\)](#): The Vermont State Board of Education created administrative rules to guide Act 166 implementation by the Agency of Education and the Agency of Human Services. Teaching Strategies falls under Act 166 requirements of establishing a process for documenting the progress of children enrolled in prekindergarten education programs. UPK prequalified programs are required to use the Teaching Strategies assessment to individualize instruction, improve program practice; and collect and report child progress data to the AOE. UPK programs should have minimum of 85% student data reported in TS prior to the checkpoints.

Rule 2606 (d) conduct child development assessments of each child enrolled using the assessment tool approved by the AOE at least two times a year, (December 15th and June 15th) and reports the results of those assessments to the AOE.

Teaching Strategies Interrater Reliability (IRR)

It is required that based on State rules of Act 166, administrators of prequalified prekindergarten education public and private programs maintain IRR certification records for all staff to ensure the validity and reliability of Teaching Strategies data. Educators and administrators demonstrate reliability by scoring at least 80% on the Teaching Strategies Interrater Reliability (IRR) online test in their My Teaching Strategies® portal. Each school district and/or program administrator should verify that all designated school district staff and contractual partners achieve interrater reliability and certification by Teaching Strategies™. This verification should occur before the completion of the annual fall and spring AOE reporting checkpoints (December 15th and June 15th).

Please note: There is no cost for IRR certification, and it is valid for three years. IRR certification is different than TSG Professional Development.

For support and/or questions please contact via email Michele Johnson, Early Education Consultant at michele.johnson@vermont.gov.

Resources

[Managing Child Records in SmartTeach \(for teachers\)](#)

[Editing Children in SmartTeach Teachers](#)

[What is Interrater Reliability Certification?](#)

[Teaching Strategies: Alignment With Vermont Early Learning Standards - Birth Through Third Grade](#)

[Teaching Strategies Padlet](#)

[UPK Cafe: Special Edition 5 - May 31, 2024](#)

Continuing the Early Education Team theme of sharing historical insights for the 10th Anniversary of Act 166, this special edition of the UPK Café features the history of UPK assessment, Teaching Strategies (formerly known as TS Gold).

[An Early Childhood Educator's Guide to a Whole-Child Approach](#)

TS E-book free resource from NAEYC.

An Exciting Year Ahead

We look forward to the exciting opportunities this new school year will bring. Stay tuned for upcoming announcements about Professional Development opportunities, resources, and collaboration from the Early Education Team.

If you have a resource you would like to share on **UPK Café** or have been forwarded this issue and would like to be added to our mailing list, please contact us at aoe.upk@vermont.gov.

Thank you!

Welcome back, and here's to a successful year ahead!

Tammy, Katie, Amy, Wendy, Michele, Teresa and Thalia