



Vermont State Professional Development Strategies to Support Inclusive Practices for Young Children with Disabilities

EARLY CHILDHOOD INCLUSION CONTEXT IN VERMONT

Vermont's service delivery model for early childhood special education varies greatly across Local Education Agencies (LEAs).

School districts provide special education and related services in school-based classrooms and school-operated classrooms that may not be located within the school building. Some of these classrooms are separate classrooms but most are regular early education settings.

Act 166 was passed in 2014 which provides all 3-, 4-, and 5-year-olds (not age eligible for kindergarten) with public education for 10 hours per week for 35 weeks per year. **In addition to services in school-based classrooms and school-operated classrooms, children are also served in Head Start programs, licensed child care programs, private preschool and child care programs, family child care, as well as within their home.** These partnerships allow LEAs to provide more options for children with disabilities to participate in regular education settings with their same-age peers.

The challenge for Vermont is to ensure that children with disabilities are receiving an education that allows them to participate fully in a regular education setting and that provides them with necessary supports. In order to meet the challenge of providing high-quality inclusion, the State needed to determine how best to provide professional development for school-based programs as well as the local preschool programs.

EARLY MULTI-TIERED SYSTEM OF SUPPORT AND QUALITY INCLUSION

The Vermont Agency of Education has implemented a **multi-tiered system of support (MTSS)** as a major component of its school improvement and effectiveness work. MTSS is an evidence-based approach to assessing and maximizing learning opportunities for all children. The MTSS framework helps educators individualize teaching and learning.

The Vermont Agency of Education used funding from the Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge (RTT-ELC) grant and a State Professional Development Grant (SPDG) to expand and sustain the State's Foundations for Early Learning professional development initiative, which is now known as the **Early Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (Early MTSS)**. Vermont also has used special education funding and local funding to support training in the classroom.

Early MTSS aims to improve early learning, social and emotional well-being, and competence for children from birth through age 8. Using lessons learned from previous professional development efforts, Vermont Early MTSS focused on building a **two prong approach**. Early MTSS balances **building a system of support** for school-based programs, families, health providers, and community partners with **supporting evidence-based inclusion practices** in the classroom. The five inclusion goals of Vermont's Early MTSS are listed here.

In order to achieve those goals, Early MTSS adapted and adopted the **five key components** from Vermont's established K–12 MTSS program:

Early MTSS Inclusion Goals

To provide high-quality inclusion for young children with disabilities

To enhance practitioner knowledge and the use of evidence-based practices as well as practices recommended by Division for Early Childhood to support inclusion

To provide systems design to ensure program-wide implementation and the sustainability of evidence-based practices

To increase local education agencies' capacity to offer a full continuum of educational placement options

To build a sustainable statewide system of high-quality inclusive learning environments



1. **Strong system support.** A system is strongly supported by a functioning leadership team, staff commitment, and supportive systems.

2. **Partnership and collaboration.** Comprehensive partnership and collaboration include families, community-based partners, and transition support (including transition support for kindergarten through third grade).

3. **Well-designed professional development.** Professional development is designed well when staff needs are identified, support is provided, and learning and implementation are assessed.

4. **Provision of high-quality and responsive learning environments.** In high-quality and responsive learning environments, children are confident and competent in their social and emotional skills, literacy, and numeracy.

5. **Comprehensive and functional assessment system.** An assessment system is comprehensive and functional when it includes an effective problem-solving process, decision making based on data, and the promotion of ongoing improvement

EARLY MTSS SYSTEMS INVENTORY

Early MTSS offers professional development to regional leaders and early childhood practitioners based on a **tiered framework of evidence-based practices of promotion, prevention, and intervention**. This tiered framework is the model for delivering information about evidence-based practices, strategies, and resources to families and early childhood practitioners. The framework was developed by two federally funded research and training centers: the Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning (CSEFEL) and the Technical Assistance Center on Social Emotional Intervention (TACSEI).

Vermont has developed an **Early MTSS Program Inventory**, which is a tool for evaluating the effectiveness of a program in regard to the five key components. Local Education Agencies (LEAs) are able to use the Program Inventory to assess whether each of the components of the Early MTSS initiative is implemented with fidelity, is sustainable, and benefits children and families.

The professional development component of this initiative is emblematic of Vermont's philosophy that the State should support teachers in the ways they need to be supported to accomplish the goals set by the State. The professional development component of the Program Inventor (below) allows program leaders to:

- Identify staff needs;
- Provide systemic staff support;
- Assess professional development learning; and
- Assess how well the professionals have implemented what they have learned.

This inventory includes a rating system as well as a place to identify priority areas for improvement. A separate document, the **Early MTSS DATA Summary Improvement Tool** allows leaders to set goals based on the results of the Program Inventory.

Early MTSS Systems Inventory

Critical Elements	Early MTSS Program Inventory	Check One*				Supporting Evidence
		0	1	2	3	
3. Well-designed Professional Development						
Identification of Staff Need	30. Individualized professional development plans are developed with all staff on an annual basis and reviewed periodically.					Identification of Staff Need:
	31. An initial and periodic needs assessment is conducted with all staff to determine training needs on the adoption of the Early MTSS Model.					
TOTALS						/2= AVERAGE FOR CLUSTER
Provision of PD supports	32. A Practice Coach* is identified and supported by the program (e.g., resources are built into program budget) to participate in Early MTSS trainings and meetings and sustain the Early MTSS model.					Provision of PD supports:
	33. The Leadership Team develops a plan for coaching, including a rationale for coaching and logistics (e.g. when, where, with whom).					
	34. A multi-year implementation plan is developed for each classroom/home visitor.					
	35. A plan for providing ongoing support and training on the Early MTSS Model and practices is developed and implemented.					
	36. Group and individualized training strategies/supports are identified and implemented.					
	37. Plans for training new staff are identified and developed.					
	38. Staff responsible for facilitating behavior support processes are identified and trained in Early MTSS. This includes Mental Health consultation when necessary.					
	39. Professional Development opportunities: a. Address the role of families in the implementation of early MTSS b. Are inclusive of all children with diverse needs and abilities.					
40. Staff actively participates in regional cross-agency PD Communities.					/10= AVERAGE FOR CLUSTER	
TOTALS						
Assessment of Learning and Implementation	41. Evaluation and supervision processes promote critical reflection and professional learning for all staff.					Assessment of Learning and Implementation:
	42. Program administration arrange for ongoing support of and feedback to the program's practice coaches*.					
	43. Practice coaches* who are trained in reliable administration of measures conduct Pre and Post fidelity evaluations.					
	44. A data-driven coaching model is used to assist classroom teachers/home-visitors with implementing Early MTSS practices to fidelity.					
	45. Practice based coaches use ongoing and multiple sources of data to provide feedback to practitioners on Early MTSS evidenced based practices.					
	46. Teachers receive training and ongoing support in how to collect, interpret and use data on child's development and outcomes.					

*Rating: 0 – Not Yet; 1 – Developing; 2 –Implementing; 3 –Sustaining

EARLY MTSS INCLUSION PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT COMPONENTS

There are many steps with multiple opportunities for feedback and support in the process of implementing an Early MTSS Inclusion Professional Development System.

- Cohort sites establish a leadership team and complete the systems inventory and goal setting tool.
- Cohort sites receive a designated External Systems Coach. This coach supports the leadership team as it completes the inventory tool to identify strengths and areas for improvement.
- Cohort sites identify an 'internal' systems coach to train with State-level systems coach in order to build capacity and sustainability.
- A Practice-Based Coach is designated for each cohort site. The practice-based coach supports classroom staff in identifying strengths and areas for improvement. The practice-based coach conducts observations of classroom practices on inclusion. The Inclusive Classroom Profile (ICP) and Teaching Pyramid Observation tool (TPOT) is used for pre/post and on-going data collection on practice implementation.
- All cohort site staff receive training on Pyramid Model practices and other evidence-based practices to support knowledge and increase use of evidence-based practices in classrooms.
- Training includes a focus on family partnership and resources.
- Evaluation is three pronged:
 - Building Systems-Systems Inventory (includes family partnerships)
 - Teacher Practice -TPOT, ICP, beginning to use Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS)
 - Child Progress Data - Special Services Information System (SSIS), IE

RELATED RESOURCES

Webinar: *Inclusion of Young Children with Disabilities, Session 3: State Professional Development Strategies to Support Inclusive Practices*

Presentation slides: <http://ectacenter.org/~calls/2014/inclusion/inclusion.asp - session3>

Webinar recording: <http://ectacenter.org/~stream/calls/2015/inclusion-2015-06-02/>

Webinar Summary: *Inclusion of Young Children with Disabilities, Session 1: Challenges and Strategies from the 2014 Preschool Inclusion Survey* <https://elc.grads360.org/#communities/pdc/documents/7578>

Webinar Summary: *Inclusion of Young Children with Disabilities, Session 2: State Strategies to Promote Inclusive Practices* <https://elc.grads360.org/ - communities/pdc/documents/7922>

CITED RESOURCES

Centers

Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning <http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/>

The Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center. <http://ectacenter.org/>

Technical Assistance Center on Social Emotional Intervention <http://challengingbehavior.fmhi.usf.edu/>

Publications

CONNECT: The Center to Mobilize Early Childhood Knowledge. *The 5-Step Learning Cycle*TM

<http://community.fpg.unc.edu/connect-modules/5-step-learning-cycle>

Division for Early Childhood of the Council for Exceptional Children (DEC). *Recommended Practices*

<http://www.dec-sped.org/recommendedpractices>

DEC and the National Association for the Education of Young Children. *Joint Position Paper: Early Childhood Inclusion*. 2009. http://www.naeyc.org/files/naeyc/file/positions/DEC_NAEYC_EC_updatedKS.pdf

The Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center. *Planning Guide to Statewide Implementation, Scale-Up, And Sustainability of Recommended Practice* http://ectacenter.org/~pdfs/implement_ebp/ECTA_RP_StateGuide_2-2015.pdf

Elena P. Soukakou. *Inclusive Classroom Profile* http://ectacenter.org/~pdfs/meetings/inclusionMtg2012/Soukakou_ICP-handout.pdf

National Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center. *Quality Indicators of Inclusive Early Childhood Programs/Practices: A Compilation of Selected Resources*. <http://www.nectac.org/~pdfs/pubs/qualityindicatorsinclusion.pdf>

Pyramid Plus Fact Sheets Fact Sheet of Research on Preschool Inclusion

<http://www.pyramidplus.org/sites/default/files/images/Inclusion%20Fact%20Sheet%202014.pdf>

Brief Summary: Fact Sheet of Research on Preschool Inclusion

[http://www.pyramidplus.org/sites/default/files/images/Brief Inclusion Fact Sheet .pdf](http://www.pyramidplus.org/sites/default/files/images/Brief%20Inclusion%20Fact%20Sheet.pdf)

Inclusion for Preschool Children with Disabilities: What We Know and What We Should Be Doing

[http://www.pyramidplus.org/sites/default/files/images/STRAIN%20PtrYC%20what%20we%20know%20\(2\).pdf](http://www.pyramidplus.org/sites/default/files/images/STRAIN%20PtrYC%20what%20we%20know%20(2).pdf)

IDEA Provisions Supporting Preschool Inclusion [http://www.pyramidplus.org/sites/default/files/images/IDEA Provisions Supporting Preschool Inclusion.pdf](http://www.pyramidplus.org/sites/default/files/images/IDEA%20Provisions%20Supporting%20Preschool%20Inclusion.pdf)