

## QUALITY MATTERS CAMPAIGN

### Increasing Professional Development Opportunities for the Early Childhood and Afterschool Care Workforce

#### *The Next Generation Initiative of Workforce Development*

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#### Why The Early Years Matter

**Vermont's prosperous history is linked to a business community that excels at innovative solutions and wise use of our natural resources.** One of Vermont's most precious resources is our workforce—today's workforce and the young children who will fill the shoes of their parents as they enter the workforce in the not so distant future.

**Child development is a foundation for community and economic development, as capable children become the basis of a prosperous and sustainable Vermont.** Science tells us that the early years of life matter because early experiences build the architecture of a child's developing brain. The support and interaction of trusted adults shapes a child's brain circuits, affecting academic performance and interpersonal skills later in life. The quality of the early care and education programs available is also critical to the future of Vermont's economy. Research proves that children who attend quality programs have greater success in school, require fewer special education supports, are less likely to drop out before graduation, are more likely to find and keep employment and less likely to require social service assistance as adults. Staff development for early care and education employees is identified as critical to quality.

#### Professional Development: A Challenge

High-quality early care and education outside the home can contribute to children's healthy child development. Ensuring a well-trained and well-educated early childhood and afterschool workforce is a key component to quality. **However, "access to even basic skills development for many people working in the field is limited by cost, time and availability of training—**particularly in more rural areas, and especially if the provider wants to continue working while receiving training."<sup>i</sup> The cost of staff development is always difficult for early education and afterschool care employers to cover. Staff development that includes college credit is especially difficult to pay for. However, credentials that include Associates and Bachelor's degrees are becoming the standard for quality programs.

## One Solution

**One solution involves Vermont's Workforce Education and Training Fund (WETF), which was established by the Vermont legislature in 2007 (Act 46).** The legislation which created the WETF, called *the Next Generation Initiative of Workforce Development*, focuses on "ensuring opportunities for and access to education, training and re-training for unemployed and under-employed workers and workers in transition" (p. 2). To be eligible, workforce and training programs must be a "...collaboration between employees and businesses, including private, public, and nonprofit entities, institutions of higher education, technical centers, and workforce development programs" (p. 8). Applications must be submitted to and reviewed by the local Workforce Investment Board, which then forwards applications to the Commissioner of Labor.

**The Kids Are Priority One Coalition is calling on the Vermont legislature to amend Act 46 to:**

- Designate the early education/after-school care workforce as a priority area;
- Allocate 10% of available funds annually for professional development for the early education/after-school care workforce; and
- Waive the requirement for the early childhood/afterschool workforce that training programs supported by workforce development funds lead to jobs paying at least 200% of the current minimum wage or at least 150% if benefits are included.

**These changes would:**

- Increase access by early childhood and afterschool educators to more professional development opportunities, thus enhancing the quality of early care and education in Vermont;
- Provide employers and other entities with much-needed resources to expand workforce training options;
- Support Vermont's parents who are employed or in job training programs and rely on quality child care to work or participate in job training;
- Increase Vermont's long-term investment in a healthy economy by promoting children's healthy development.

While Act 46 does permit a waiver of the requirement regarding the level of pay upon completion of a program funded by the WETF, experiences in communities across the state suggest that this is the biggest impediment to accessing WET funds for professional development of the early childhood and afterschool care workforce. **When the average annual income of a child care worker in Vermont is \$19,720,<sup>ii</sup> there is little hope—at least right now—of regularly assuring a pay increase upon completion of an academic or training program that would be equal to or higher than 200% of the minimum wage.** At \$19,720, early childhood educators only earn \$9.48 per hour, whereas 200% of minimum wage is \$16.92 an hour.

## For More Information

For more information about *workforce development grants* awarded by the Vermont Department of Labor, go to [www.labor.vermont.gov/Default.aspx?tabid=1540](http://www.labor.vermont.gov/Default.aspx?tabid=1540).

For more information about the *Kids Are Priority One Coalition's work on this issue*, contact Kim Friedman, Campaign Director, at (802) 348-9879 or [kfriedman@svcable.net](mailto:kfriedman@svcable.net).

*Kids Are Priority One is Vermont's statewide early childhood coalition that mobilizes organizations, businesses and individuals to ensure every child gets a good start.*

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<sup>i</sup> The Permanent Fund for the Well-Being of Vermont Children, A.D. Henderson Foundation, The Vermont Community Foundation, Early Care and Education: Investing in Babies, Toddlers and Preschoolers, 2010, p. 12.

<sup>ii</sup> Ibid, p. 13.