

## INTRO:

- Melissa Riegel-Garrett, I live in Washington County
- Work as the executive director for a statewide organization, the Vermont Association for the Education of Young Children.
- I also serve as an appointed member of the Building Bright Futures Early Childhood Council, and serve on its Professional Preparation and development committee.
- Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you this morning on early childhood day at the legislature.

In today's world, whether a high school graduate goes on to college, technical school or directly into the workforce, they need the content knowledge and skills to be successful. We are facing a workforce dilemma in our state, and we are not alone, it is a nation-wide issue as well. Our schools are not producing graduates who have the skills needed for today's workplace. For some jobs, more understanding of math and science is needed to run technological machinery, for other jobs, creativity and problem solving skills are needed, and in most jobs, the ability to communicate effectively—verbally and writing. Much is being done to address this—in VT the pre-k-16 council was created, in part, to look at the issue of high school drop outs and successful transition and completion of college and into the workplace. H-852, just passed out of committee includes WETfund and VT training fund, specifically designed to address the need to train today's workforce to meet the demands of current employers. In the education world, we now have the Common Core, a set of standards designed with present day outcomes in mind.

But for all we are doing, our schools are still producing graduates who do not have the knowledge and skills to maintain “good-paying” jobs. H-852 is needed because of this fact. I see it in the students I teach early childhood to at CCV and even Champlain College. Their in-ability to effectively communicate both in writing and verbally hinders my ability to teach them content.

I am here today to share an idea for part of a solution. Let's start early, and get it right. Children in early childhood are learning foundational skills and attitudes that are the very same ones employers are seeking to fill well-paying / livable wage jobs.

I could focus my time on the obvious hot topic of the day, the content area of math and science and how young children learn foundational knowledge about Newton's laws on force and motion while exploring blocks, ramps and trucks or balls. But instead I am going to focus on attitudes that can be fostered in young children...attitudes that are pivotal to their future learning during their formal schooling as well as needed in today's workplace, and in LIFE.

Children's habits can be fostered, if they can be recognized and appreciated: Capacity to Communicate, Curiosity, Persistence, Problem-Solving Skills, Empathy for others and Self-Confidence. These are the habits that foster intrinsic motivation...and all of these are what employers

are saying is needed in any modern workplace. So how is this done? Let's look a little more closely at the brain science:

- Brain science tells us that the **early years of life matter because early experiences affect the architecture of the brain which can establish either a sturdy or a fragile foundation for all of the development and behavior that follows.**
- **Healthy brains are built through intentional interactions between caregivers and children—much like the serve and return of a tennis match.** Just as in a successful tennis volley, the player doesn't randomly whack at the ball—instead knowledge and skills have been developed to make for a successful serve and return.
- **Because of the pivotal role they play in successful serve and return interactions, the early education workforce has a central role in the building of healthy brain architecture, learning habits, and content knowledge.**
- **Investing in this workforce has huge multigenerational returns. When the early childhood workforce has the knowledge and skills they need, children in their programs experience better learning environments. This impact benefits multiple cohorts of children over time.**

There is an immediate action that can be taken by the legislature:

- H-852. While this bill has already passed out of this committee, and I acknowledge our advocacy efforts are a late to the party, I suggest that 3 adjustments would strengthen that bill in terms of the Early childhood workforce:
  - There should be 2 seats on the Vermont workforce investment board for representatives of businesses and organizations who have experience with respect the Vermont early childhood workforce.
  - In Section J of the Vermont Training Fund, add the Vermont Child Care Apprenticeship program to those already listed for the set-aside for journeymen, master electricians or plumbers.
  - For both the Vermont Training Program and the Workforce Education and Training Fund include in statute a 3 -year waiver for the end of training compensation requirements (2x minimum wage) for proposals that target training of the early childhood workforce.

These changes will have a significant impact on the thinking that goes into statewide workforce development planning, and will address barriers our workforce faces in accessing current available funds.

On the medium term, we have in VT a proven, effective strategy to support the early childhood workforce in attaining degrees. I would like the opportunity to share the details of this program with you.

- It is a scholarship program called T.E.A.C.H. early childhood VT and we will launch our first scholarships for AA degree students in the fall of 2014.
- Funding for 31 scholars is available through YEAR 1 of the RTT/ELCG.

- Funds are needed if we want to expand the number of recipients and/or include other degrees such as a bachelor's degree or teacher licensure. In addition, we will need funding for when RTT/ELG is over.

Knowing that investments made in this workforce can reap benefits for generations of Vermonters a longer-term action that could be taken by the legislature involves learning more about the early childhood workforce.

- What are the strategic investments that can be made in this workforce and what are the best delivery mechanisms?
  - What does the workforce need to know?
  - What are the barriers faced by this workforce?
  - What are the best strategies for addressing this?
- RTT/ELCG is funding a comprehensive workforce study that will inform these questions. Could this committee help with a presentation to the legislature once we have the results? Or at least a joint committee presentation?

Thank you for your time, I look forward to working with this committee in the future.