

Hi my name is Sonja Raymond. I am the ED for Vermont Association for the Education of Young Children and the owner of Apple Tree Learning Centers in Stowe. Thank you for giving me a few moments to speak on behalf of the TEACH VT program. The TEACH Vermont Pilot Program, which was started with Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge Grant funds, provides scholarships, incentive bonuses, and support to non-traditional students seeking early education degrees. TEACH VT focuses on workforce professional development and increasing retention rates.

Vermont's new licensing regulations require a Teacher in center-based programs to have a minimum of a bachelor's degree and a Teacher Associate to have an associate's degree, Childcare Apprenticeship Certificate or 21 credits with early childhood or afterschool focus no matter what age group they work with. Additionally, with the implementation of Act 166 Public Pre-K, programs that partner with school districts are required to have a minimum of one licensed preschool teacher. What all of these changes have meant is that Vermont is facing a serious shortage of available, qualified early childhood educators. It has become imperative that those working in early care and education programs have an affordable path to attaining the degrees and credentials required.

Since TEACH Vermont's inception with the launch of the pilot Associates program in March 2014:

- 68 have entered the Associates degree program, of which 17 have already graduated.
- Students have taken an average of 12 credits per year with an average 3.61 GPA.
- There have been 28 sponsoring center-based programs and 19 family-based programs.
- Currently, TEACH Vermont has 50 AA students with more than 15 on the wait list.

TEACH Vermont's Licensure program began in December 2015:

- Funding 30 teachers who were using the Peer Review or Transcript Review path to attain their teaching license in early education or early special education.

The TEACH Vermont Pilot Program has been so successful and is in such high demand that we are now looking to expand it to support Bachelor's degree students, so that teachers have a full continuum from Associate's to Bachelor's to licensure. We hope to build on our success by transitioning the pilot effort into a permanent program.

To assure quality and affordability of Vermont's early care and education system, it is important that Vermont invest in its workforce. Without TEACH Vermont, most of these students would have no affordable pathway to getting their degree.

The Blue Ribbon Commission report supports investment in workforce development and professional development for the early care and education field. By highlighting the need, the report brings more attention to the urgency and importance of the issue. With the added attention and the ending of funding for the pilot program less than a year away, now is the time *to act*.