

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 time to speak on behalf of the TEACH VT. The TEACH Vermont Scholarship Program, which was started with Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge Grant funds, provides scholarships, incentive bonuses, and support to teachers and assistants currently working in the field of early care and education. TEACH VT focuses on workforce professional development that leads to degrees and credentials 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 after school 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 Associates scholarship in March 2014:

- 107 have entered the Associates degree program, of which 32 have already graduated.
- Students have taken an average of 12 credits per year with an average 3.67 GPA.
- There have been 24 sponsoring center-based programs and 21 family-based programs.
- Currently, TEACH Vermont has 50 AA students with more than 20 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.

A great deal of work has been done around creating sustainability. While T.E.A.C.H. will receive support from Vermont's Child Development Division starting in FY19, the program will still need additional **\$320,000 for FY19 to sustain the current level of support that T.E.A.C.H. Vermont offers** (50 AA degree students and 20 licensure recipients) for one additional year while final plans are developed for the project's long-term sustainability and expansion.

One option for the committee to consider is supporting the Governor's budget request for a \$120,000 investment in education and training funds for early childhood care and education professionals. I would recommend that those funds be directed to the Child Development Division.

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.