

Vermont Community Preschool Collaborative (VCPC)/
Vermont Birth to Three (VB3) Teaching Strategies GOLD® (TSG)
2013-2014 Pilot
Mid-Point Evaluation Report

Overview of the 2013-2014 TSG Pilot

The knowledge and skills to assess a child's developmental progress, as well as the ability to *use* assessment data to support a child's developmental progress and provide individualized instruction, are recognized as essential elements of a high quality early childhood program. Accordingly, the Vermont Agency of Education (AOE) requires the use of *Teaching Strategies GOLD®* (TSG) in publicly funded pre-kindergarten and kindergarten programs.

In July 2013, the A.D. Henderson Foundation provided funding for a collaborative initiative to help strengthen and expand a state-wide system of assessment of the developmental progress of children from birth to school age, by bringing TSG to approximately 40 providers who care for Vermont's young children in private home-based and center-based child care programs. The 2013-2014 TSG Pilot Project is a partnership between the Vermont Community Preschool Collaborative (VCPC), Vermont Birth to Three (VB3), and the Vermont Agency on Education (AOE).

Aside from the key goal of improving the quality of early care that children receive, other goals of the pilot include learning about the challenges of incorporating community-based child care programs in a state-wide system of assessment and identifying the best ways for overcoming those challenges. The pilot also gives providers powerful tools for communicating with families about their children's development, providing a rich portfolio of information about each child.

Some of the anticipated outcomes of the 2013-2014 pilot include preparation of programs interested in pursuing a contract with a school district to provide publicly funded pre-kindergarten, given that TSG is a requirement of Act 62 contracts. In addition, the pilot supports increased STARS ratings, since the use of assessment and linking it to the provider's curriculum is a component of the STARS rating system.

To date, pilot participants have received (at no cost) intense training, as well as on-going access to technical assistance and informational resources. Each participant will be receiving an iPad, with accompanying advanced training, to use as a tool for observing and documenting child observations.

This report summarizes what has been learned since the program was launched, based on 3 levels of data: (1.) provider-level data, including provider applications to participate in the pilot, a pre-pilot provider survey, a mid-point provider survey, and mid-point inter-rater reliability testing of provider use of TSGOLD; (2.) Technical Assistance (TA) provider data, including a mid-point survey of TA Mentors; and (3.) administrator-level data, including administrator records and mid-point administrator survey responses. Given that this evaluation was conducted prior to the conclusion of the full cycle of administering TSGOLD, this report does not include actual child outcome data.

The report concludes with brief observations about lessons learned and recommendations for moving forward in further strengthening and expanding a state-wide system of assessment of the developmental progress of children from birth to school age.

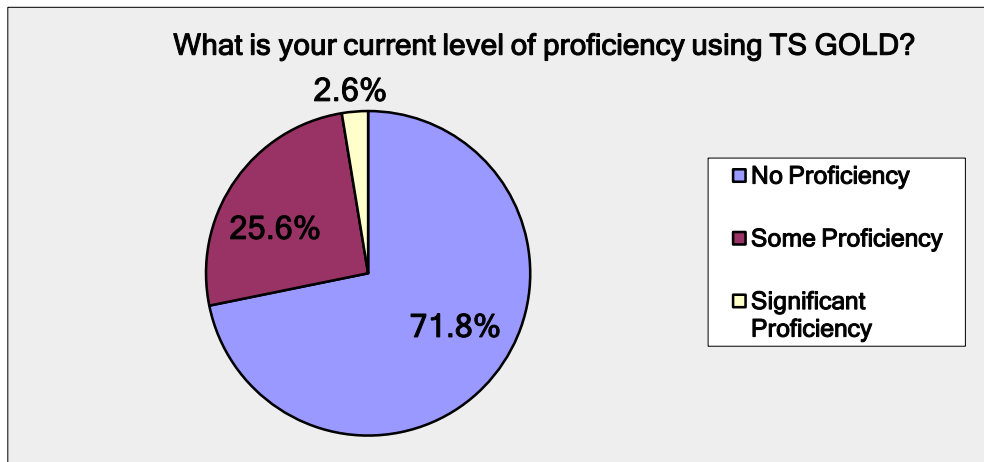
Pre-Pilot Findings

Initial interest in the pilot was strong.

- 65 applicants --
 - 29 from the Chittenden area
 - 16 from the Rutland area
 - 20 from the St. Johnsbury area
- total of 40 (62%) providers selected
 - representing 23 child care programs
 - covering 27 unique locations in the three pilot regions.

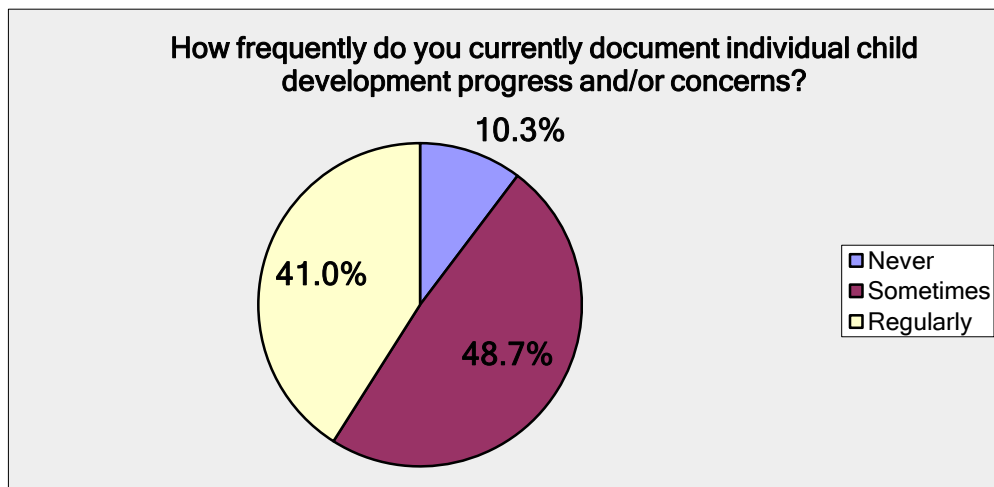
A majority of selected providers were novices with TSGOLD.

- 98% had no to only some proficiency in using TSG.



Certain practices associated with quality early care and education were not widespread among selected participants.

- Well over half (59%) were never or only sometimes documenting individual child development progress and/or concerns.



- Two-thirds of participants never or only sometimes offered formal parent-teacher conferences.

How often do you offer formal parent- teacher conferences?	
Answer Options	Response Percent
Never	35.9%
Sometimes	30.8%
Regularly	33.3%

There was a high level of enthusiasm and commitment to acquiring and applying the skills, knowledge and practices associated with quality early care and education.

- 97% wanted to
 - increase their knowledge about individual child development
 - improve their skill level in conducting child observations.
- 100% wanted to
 - increase their use of child assessment information to plan strategies and activities that support individual child development
 - increase their use of child assessment information to develop early childhood curriculum
 - increase their use of individual child assessment information when communicating with families about their child's development.

There was limited experience with offering public Pre-K.

- Almost half (49%) of providers didn't know if they were eligible to be in a Pre-K partnership with a public school (Act 62), while 39% indicated that they were eligible and 12% indicated that they were not eligible.
- 71% did not currently have a Pre-K partnership with a school district (Act 62) for the 2013-2014 school year, while 29% did have a partnership.

Mid-Pilot Findings

Initial interest in the pilot remained strong.

- 35 providers (88%) out of the original 40 providers were continuing to participate, which is a high retention rate for an entirely voluntary program requiring a considerable commitment of time and effort by participants.
- 51 additional teachers were being directly impacted by the pilot, most of whom were co-teachers or program administrators of those who were enrolled in the pilot program and some of whom were teachers added in to build capacity at participating programs.

Children were being positively impacted, as were parents, staff, and program operations.

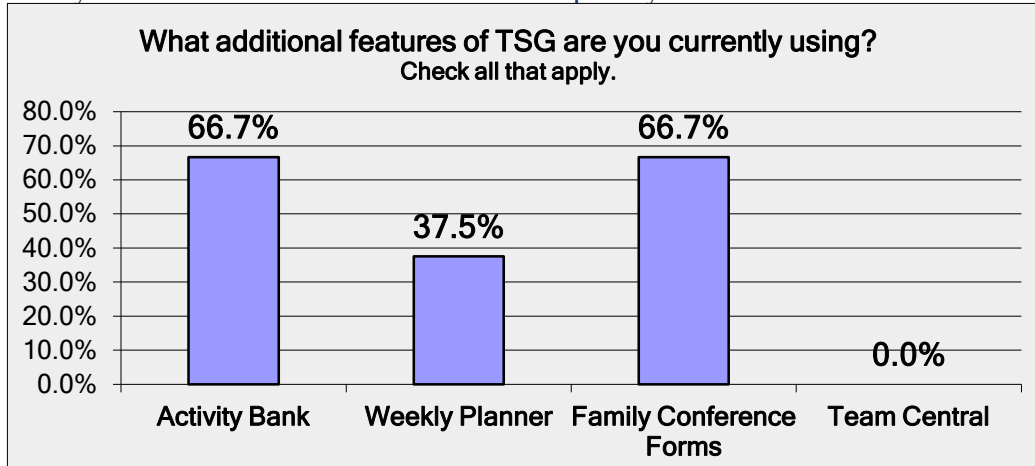
- 283 children (96%) still being assessed out of the original 295
 - 141 (95%) of the original 149 infants & toddlers were continuing to be assessed.
 - There was an average ratio of portfolios (children) to providers of about 8.
 - Several pilot program participants had additional slots paid for by other funding sources.
- 100% of providers who completed the mid-point survey indicated that using the Teaching Strategies Gold system had positively impacted their work with children.

- Provider comments about the impact of TSGOLD on their work with children varied from overwhelmingly positive to some ambivalence related to the documentation process distracting from time with children, but a common theme was the increased level of intentionality around --
 - Individual child care and instruction:
 - "It's helped me be more purposeful in planning "curriculum" helping me to have a more well rounded program. It has also helped me see some children (higher needs/spirited) in a different perspective and helped me to better support them."
 - "I haven't really changed WHAT I do with the children (I have always utilized teachable moments, and taught with a purpose), but it has made me narrow down specifically to where they are exactly developmentally."
 - Interactions with parents:
 - "It has ... given me a wonderful way to share with parents all the things we do at daycare. I also love the strength based perspective of the conference forms, and think it is a fantastic way to communicate with the parents. I've had nothing but positive feedback from the parents as well."
 - "it has made it alot easier to explain to parents. I can clearly say this is where they were, here they are now, and this is where they are heading."
 - Staff oversight & development:
 - "It's been much easier to capture the natural interests and strengths of teaching staff. Conversely, I'm better able to see where staff needs professional development in being intentional about specific domains. For example, few of my staff have been giving much attention to math skills development and that was much easier for me to see when I looked at their work on tsgold."
 - "TSG is great. I absolutely love all of the resources that are available for teachers such as the activity bank, planning forms, conference forms and the various recording tools among other things. The visual aspects of the program are great as well. Being able to look at the color banks and run reports to see if particular areas are lacking in observations is very helpful for teachers as well. We love TSG!"
 - Overall program operations:
 - "I feel it is very over whelming to do. I find I observe more but have found I have really changed some things in my care to try to make this program work."
 - "it has made me run a more well rounded program."
 - "I am not fluent in my documenting so it feels like it takes away from my classroom time. Though hopefully this improves the more I work with TSG"
 - Pilot administrators are also noticing a positive impact, sharing successes from the pilot so far:
 - "Many who would not have had access to the training and assessment system without the pilot are using it!"
 - "Seeing the confidence and skill building occurring in the providers."

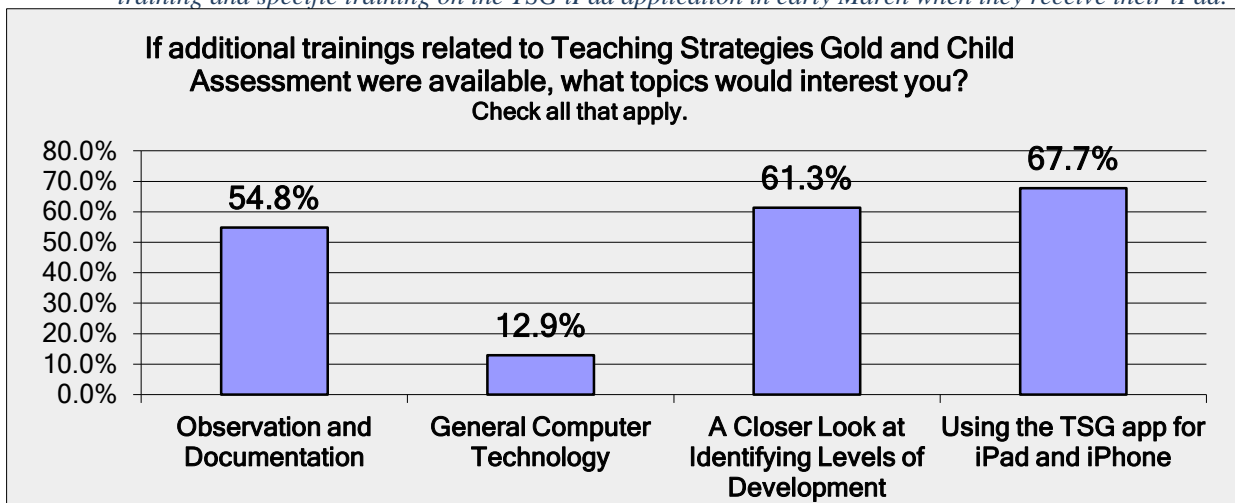
Pilot participants continued to demonstrate a high level of enthusiasm and commitment to acquiring and applying the skills, knowledge and practices associated with quality early care and education.

- Almost 8,200 unique pieces of child observation documentation had been collected since the inception of the pilot, some of which had been voluntarily submitted by providers (not required by pilot).
- 22 of the 23 participating programs had completed fall check points.

- Use of TSGOLD features
 - Of those providers who were using additional features of TSGOLD, the Activity Bank and Family Conference Forms were the most frequently used.



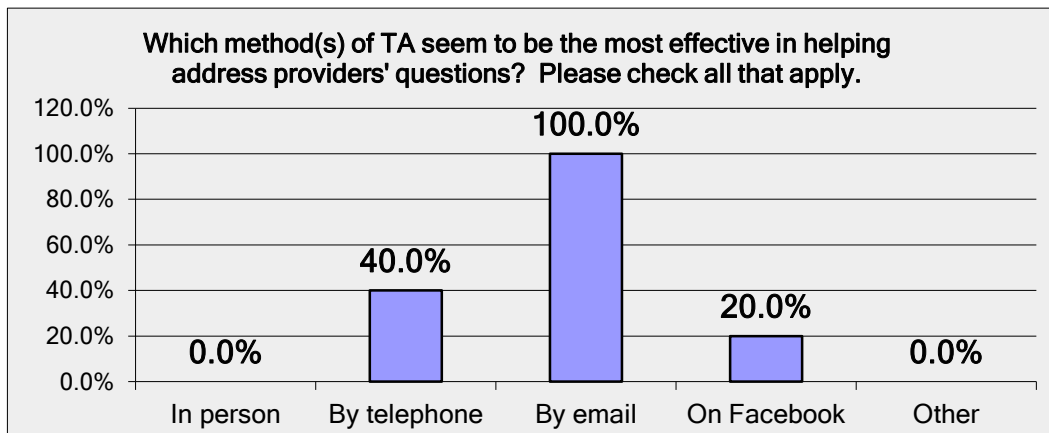
- *61% of providers were using the TSG app for iPad or iPhone.
 *NOTE: As part of the 2013-2014 pilot, the 35 participating providers will receive iPads, general iPad training, and specific training on the TSG iPad application in early March, which may then increase the rate at which providers are using the TSG app.
- An overwhelming majority of providers found their training to be helpful and wanted more training --
 - 93.5% found the initial 12-hour training presented by Teaching Strategies in very helpful, while the remaining 6.5% found it somewhat helpful:
 - "Since I didn't have any experience with TSG, this was great."
 - "Wish I could get all my staff to this type of training. Very useful"
 - "Excellent! Thank you!"
 - "the first day was good but the second day it was a lot of information and I felt very very overwhelmed"
 - 100% of providers who responded to the mid-point survey had an interest in one or more additional trainings related to TSGOLD and Child Assessment, if made available, with ***"Using the TSG app for iPad and iPhone" ranked highest as a potential training topic, followed by "A Closer Look at Identifying Levels of Development," "Observation and Documentation," and "General Computer Technology."
 **NOTE: As part of the 2013-2014 pilot, the 35 participating providers will receive general iPad training and specific training on the TSG iPad application in early March when they receive their iPad.



- Provider comments on additional trainings included --
 - Providing opportunities for reflective practice:
 - "I would also love to see chunking of tools on the program then go back and use the tools trained on and report back."
 - Requesting more training on reports and other administrative features:
 - "I was under the impression that the second part of the training that was titled: Beyond the Basics was going to be more about the reports and their uses. I was disappointed that most of the class was a review of what the Fall training was about. SO I would like to have a more indepth training on the administrative side of things. Report, things to look for in following up on people, etc "
 - "Understanding and utilizing the reports"
 - Wanting a follow-up pilot (and training) on Creative Curriculum:
 - "I would absolutely LOVE it if there could be a creative curriculum pilot program to follow this one!!!"

Providers were being offered and were highly utilizing a strong system of support.

- 5 TA mentors were based in the 3 geographical areas of the pilot, with one of the TA Mentors also providing technical support throughout the 3 regions --
 - 2 TA Mentors were providing support only in center-based settings, 1 TA Mentor was supporting only home-based providers, and 2 TA Mentors were providing support in both settings.
 - Explanatory comments offered about providing TA in one setting more than another suggested that TA provided to homes was occurring mostly through remote means (email, Facebook, phone).
- TA Mentors reported spending an ***average of roughly 4.75 hours per TA Mentor per month.
 - ***NOTE: *There was too much variance in how TA Mentors responded to this survey question (e.g., narrative versus numeric responses provided) to come up with precise overall numeric average.*
 - Time spent providing TA seemed to vary based on the child care setting, although that could be due to caseload size (not necessarily due to setting).
 - The highest monthly amount of time was cited by a TA Mentor who is working in both home-based and center-based settings.
- All of the TA Mentors indicated that e-mail was one of the most effective methods for addressing providers' questions, followed by telephone and Facebook.



- Similarly, e-mail was the type of contact that received the highest number of responses (77%) by providers regarding their communication with their assigned TA Mentor, followed by phone (32%), Facebook (23%), and in person (6.5%), while 1 provider reported not having any contact.
- 4 (80%) out of the 5 TA Mentors indicated they were not encountering any challenges with supporting providers in either home-based or center-based settings, while one TA Mentor noted encountering the same issues in both settings.
- TA Mentors reported experiencing the following successes, best practices and winning moments --
 - The Facebook page has been useful for contact among providers and in providers connecting with TA Mentors.
 - The pilot was seen as a rewarding collegial effort to improve child care quality.
 - TA has involved a range of focus areas, from time management to information management.
- 90% of providers have been in contact with their assigned TA Mentor at least occasionally (1-3 times), if not frequently (more than 3 times), while the rest have had no contact.
- 87% of providers reported that the pilot's account technical support provider (Becca Webb) has been very helpful, with the remaining 13% reporting she's been somewhat helpful.
- Over half (52%) of providers rated their assigned TA Mentor as very helpful, while 19% rated their TA Mentor as somewhat helpful.
- 77% of providers had not accessed TSGOLD Tech [support] directly, but of the 23% who had, 86% found it very helpful and the remaining 14% found it somewhat helpful --
 - "I talked to them very early on- before the Sept. training to see about merging my preK and vb3 account."
 - "I participated in a webinar on investigations which was good and helpful."

Mid-Pilot Inter-Rater Reliability Testing

The TSGOLD Inter-Rater Reliability Certification Test was administered with the 35 child care providers participating as of the mid-point of the pilot, in order to guide any restructuring of training and TA efforts going forward in the current 2013-2014 pilot and to guide the design of future TSGOLD pilots.

Most providers completed the reliability testing in a timely fashion.

- Out of 35 providers, scores were available from 29 (83%) providers, as of the compilation of this report.
- With the remaining 6 providers, either they had not yet completed the reliability testing process or their scores had not yet been shared with VCPC/VB3 (relevant to providers being funded by other sources), and efforts were underway to achieve 100% completion of testing and compilation of scores.

Providers opted to complete the reliability testing using a range of age ranges.

- 1 (3%) of the providers selected birth through age 2
- 8 (28%) selected age 3 through kindergarten
- 3 (10%) selected preschool, including children with disabilities
- 17 (59%) selected mixed ages.

Overall, providers achieved good average scores across all domains and within each domain of the reliability test.

- The overall average score for all attempts at the test among all providers across all six domains was 89.5% (out of a maximum of 100%), with the lowest average score being 67%, the highest average score being 100% (perfect score), and the most commonly occurring average score (mode) being 89%.
- Among all six domains, the overall average number of attempts providers had to make in order to achieve a passing score of 80% was 1.3 times, with the minimum number of attempts being 1, the highest number of attempts being 7, and the most commonly occurring number of attempts being 1. [NOTE: Providers were allowed to make an unlimited number of attempts in any domain(s) for which they did not get a passing score, with each round of testing giving a different set of observations to score and a different set of 3 children.]
- Mathematics had the highest average score (92.3%), followed by Literacy (90.7%), Physical and Health Development (89.6%), Cognitive Development (89.3%), Language (89.1%) and Social and Emotional Development (85.9%).
- The Mathematics and Physical Health and Development domains required the fewest average number of attempts to pass (1.1), followed by the Cognitive Development and Literacy domains both requiring an average of 1.2 attempts to pass, Language requiring an average of 1.4 attempts and Social and Emotional Development requiring an average of 1.5 attempts.
- Overall, using TSGOLD to assess Mathematics acquisition seemed to be the area of strongest competency for providers, while using the instrument to assess Social and Emotional Development seemed to provide the most challenges.
- There was an inverse correlation between overall average scores and the average number of attempts to pass, with the highest scores correlated with the fewest attempts to pass.

AVERAGE SCORES	Soc/Emo Score	Physical Score	Language Score	Cognitive Score	Literacy Score	Math Score	Overall Average Score Across All 6 Domains for All Providers
AVERAGE =	85.9%	89.6%	89.1%	89.3%	90.7%	92.3%	89.5%
MIN =	67%	77%	70%	78.3%	71.3%	71.8%	67.0%
MAX =	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100.0%
MODE =	89%	94%	96%	94%	89%	100%	89.0%

ATTEMPTS TO PASS	Soc/Emo Average # Attempts to Pass	Physical Average # Attempts to Pass	Language Average # Attempts to Pass	Cognitive Average # Attempts to Pass	Literacy Average # Attempts to Pass	Math Average # Attempts to Pass	Overall Average # of Attempts to Pass Across All 6 Domains for All Providers
AVERAGE =	1.5	1.1	1.4	1.2	1.2	1.1	1.3
MIN =	1	1	1	1	1	1	1.0
MAX =	4	2	7	3	4	4	7.0
MODE =	1	1	1	1	1	1	1.0

Mid-Pilot Findings & Recommendations

THE FINDINGS: Summary of key mid-point observations

Information compiled and analyses conducted for the pilot's mid-point evaluation indicate the following key findings:

1. Initial interest in the pilot was initially strong (only 62% of applicants could be selected) and has remained strong, as evidenced by the high on-going rate of participation (88%).
2. Prior to the pilot, a majority (98%) of selected providers were novices with TSGOLD and had limited to no experience with offering public Pre-K.
3. Also prior to the pilot, certain practices associated with *quality* early care and education were not widespread among selected participants, with over half (59%) never or only sometimes documenting individual child development progress/concerns and two-thirds never or only sometimes offering formal parent-teacher conferences.
4. Both prior to and at the mid-point of the pilot, pilot participants demonstrated a high level of enthusiasm and commitment to acquiring and applying the skills, knowledge and practices associated with *quality* early care and education.
5. At the pilot's mid-point, positive impacts were reported for children, parents, program staff, and overall program operations.
6. Throughout the pilot, providers have been offered and have utilized a strong system of training and on-going support, with providers and TA Mentors offering key insights on ways to improve supports and the inter-rater reliability certification process offering guidance in how to target supports more strategically.

THE CONTEXT: Current Child Assessment Landscape

Key findings from the mid-point evaluation are particularly relevant in the current child assessment landscape. In the most immediate landscape, VCPC and VB3 are already preparing to roll out another TSGOLD pilot for 2014-2015, which will greatly benefit from lessons learned from the current pilot. In the larger statewide landscape, Vermont's Federal Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge (RTT-ELC) Grant program will include the institution of a statewide plan for a Comprehensive Assessment System by 2016, with TSGOLD playing an integral role in that plan, as well as playing a role in other RTT-ELC initiatives. On the national landscape, there is a new Teaching Strategies assessment product being developed that could be used in tandem with the birth to 6 GOLD tool, which would expand assessment coverage to up to 8 years old (3rd grade) and may be something Vermont could consider implementing so as to have a consistent system of assessment for the entire early childhood spectrum. In the even broader national early childhood research and policy landscapes, increased focus is being placed by the Federal government and other key early childhood care and education (ECE) stakeholders on *quality* of early care and education, with individual child assessment viewed as an essential component of quality. These contextual factors are conspiring to create an environment that is rich with opportunities and responsibilities to continue implementing and evaluating child assessment initiatives in Vermont, and the current child assessment landscape shaped the recommendations cited below.

THE RECOMMENDATIONS: Continuity, Support, Training and Tweaking

Within the context just described, the three administrators of the 2013-2014 TSGOLD Pilot project collectively formulated recommendations going forward, in terms of the current and planned pilot, as well as for Vermont as a whole.

- A. CONTINUITY OF INDIVIDUAL CHILD ASSESSMENT -- A number of measures might be considered for ensuring the continuity of assessment of individual children:

- i. In center-based settings, establishing strong institutional knowledge of TSG via cross-training of several staff members is imperative so that each child can continue being assessed, even when there is personnel turn-over.
 - ii. In home-based settings, it is imperative to have provider protocols in place and signed parent authorization & release forms on file so that, if a provider closes their program, the child's portfolio can travel with him or her to their new child care setting.
 - iii. In all early child care and education settings, effective portfolio management is essential to ensuring the uninterrupted use of TSG, and consideration should be given to making TSG portfolios part of the child's school record. This would be an especially important consideration, if Vermont ever established a uniform system of assessment from birth through 3rd grade.
- B. TECHNICAL SUPPORT -- TSG requires a multi-layered system of technical support:
- i. Establishing the most effective means (the right "who" and "how") of providing technical support on TSG is essential to effective child assessment processes, with early care and education practitioners needing to receive clear instruction up-front (and follow-up reminders) on how to access human and informational resources.
 - ii. Technical support provided to end-users (ECE practitioners) should not be limited only to TSG-related questions, but also should extend to questions that arise related to Vermont early childhood care and education.
 - iii. A tutorial should be created to equip ECE practitioners and administrators to review, interpret and apply assessment report findings.
 - iv. A system of technical support needs to be established to ensure assessment data are accurate and reliable.
 - v. Training and other assistance should be provided to equip providers with the skills and resources for sustained usage of TSG after pilot support ends, as well as helping providers become facile in directly accessing AOE and Teaching Strategies support on an on-going basis.
- C. STATEWIDE TRAINING PLAN -- It would be helpful to establish an on-going, more robust, sequential system of training in Vermont:
- i. High quality introductory training needs to be available throughout the state each summer/fall.
 - ii. A follow-up training in October related to finalizing checkpoints might be helpful. That content gets covered in the initial training, but might get lost amid all of the information presented and in the delay in applying that knowledge.
 - iii. Second- and third-level training needs to be available state-wide annually on an on-going basis.
 - iv. It can be powerful to have a TSG Trainer come from out of state for certain trainings.
 - v. For the planned 2014-2015 pilot (and, perhaps, for a state-wide system of assessment), it may be helpful to offer some additional trainings.
- D. ADMINISTRATIVE PROCESSES -- For the planned VCPC/VB3 pilot in 2014-2015, minor adjustments to the following administrative processes would support more efficient and effective operations:
- i. Pilot announcement
 - ii. Pilot description
 - iii. Application process
 - iv. Time-line
 - v. Participant commitments
 - vi. Inter-rater reliability testing parameters.