

The St. Johnsbury School District



Margaret Ranny Bledsoe, Ph.D., Superintendent

Jen Hulse, Director of Student Support Services

Kathryn Ducharme, Business Manager

Promise Community Application Cover Sheet

Attachment 1 Application Coversheet

Attachment 2 Pledge of Commitment and Signatures- mail hard copy

Narrative on your community needs, will and impact

Attachment 1 Coversheet

Person to contact with questions about this application:

Contact person: Margaret Ranny Bledsoe, Ph.D. **Title:** Superintendent, St. Johnsbury School District

Telephone: 802-745-7392

Email: mbledsoe@stjbsd.org

Organization/agency/school submitting application

Name of Organization/Agency: St. Johnsbury School District (St. J. Early Education Collaborative)

Address: 257 Western Avenue

City: St. Johnsbury

Zip code: 05819

Name of Executive Director/ President/ CEO/ Superintendent: Margaret Ranny Bledsoe, Ph.D.

County: Caledonia

Agency of Human Service District: St. Johnsbury (JDO)

Targeted School District/ Supervisory Union: St. Johnsbury School District

Targeted School: St. Johnsbury School

Building Bright Futures Regional Coordinator: Dawn Powers

Sponsor:

Building Bright Futures Regional Coordinator or Agency of Human Services Field Director

Name: Dawn Powers

Email: dpowers@buildingbrightfutures.org

Attachment 2 Pledge of Commitment

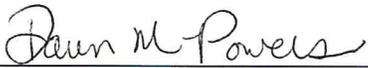
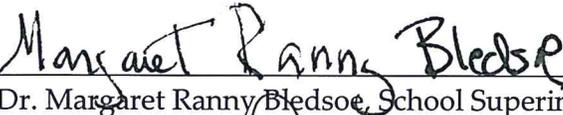
Targeted School District/ Supervisory Union: St. Johnsbury School District

Targeted School(s): St. Johnsbury School

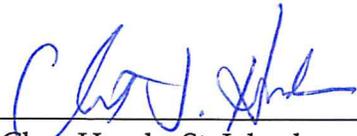
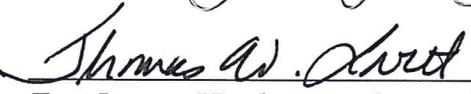
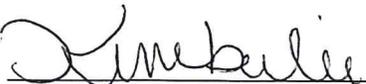
Sponsor:

We pledge to support the local community of St. Johnsbury to improve the lives of the young children in a Promise Community. To do this we will work together in a coalition of partnerships with regular meetings and communication to reach the community goals to fulfill the *promise of every child*. The goals and outcomes will be developed as part of needs assessment, strategic planning and implementation process.

This form must be signed by Building Bright Futures Regional Coordinator; targeted school principal (s); targeted school superintendent; Regional Agency of Human Services Field Director; and community child health care provider, indicating their pledge to participate as a partner in the implementation of the work plan presented in this application. Other partners are encouraged to sign as well to make a commitment to be a Promise Community.

SIGNATURE	PRINT NAME	DATE
	Dawn M. Powers	3/16/15
Dawn Powers, Building Bright Futures Regional Coordinator/CIS Regional Coordinator		
	Margaret Bledsoe	3-16-2015
Dr. Margaret Ranny Bledsoe, School Superintendent		
	Karen Patno	3/13/2015
Karyn Patno, Pediatrician, St. Johnsbury Pediatrics and Vermont Safe Kids		
	Shaun Z. Donahue	3/16/2015
Shaun Donahue, AHS Field Director		
	Jenna O'Farrell	3/17/15
Jenna O'Farrell, incoming Lower School Principal, St. Johnsbury School		
	Emily Carrier	3/16/15
Emily Carrier, Department of Children and Families		

Promise Community Pledge of Commitment Signatures

SIGNATURE	PRINT NAME	DATE
	Clem J. Houde	03/16/15
Clem Houde, St. Johnsbury Police Department		
	Jason Goguen	3-16-15
Jason Goguen, BAART		
	Abby Young	3-16-15
Abby Young, MCHC		
	Thomas W. Lovett	3/17/15
Tom Lovett, Headmaster, Saint Johnsbury Academy		
	Elisa Lucozzi	3/16/15
Elisa Lucozzi, Program Manager of Advocacy Program, Umbrella		
	JUDY A. PRANSKY	3/17/15
Judy Pransky, Owner and Administrative Director, Emerson Falls PlayCare Inc.		
	PAM SMART	3/16/15
Pam Smart, Community Connections Coordinator, Northeastern Vermont Regional Hospital & Blueprint for Health		
	Linda Michniewicz	3/18/15
Linda Michniewicz, Head Start/Early Head Start Director		
	Kimberlie Buxton	3/16/15
Kim Buxton, Child Care Resource Development Specialist, Kingdom Child Care Connection		
	Director USOCC	3/16/15
Betsy Bailey, Owner and Director, Little Dippers Doodle Children's Center		

Promise Community Pledge of Commitment Signatures

SIGNATURE

PRINT NAME

DATE

Mary Ann Baker Mary Ann Baker 3-18-15
Mary Ann Baker, Owner and Director, New Beginnings Child Care Center

Heather Hudson Heather Hudson 3-18-15
Heather Hudson, Owner and Director, ABC LOL Child Care Center

Megan Bunnell Megan Bunnell 3-18-15
Megan Bunnell, Owner and Director, Kids of the Kingdom Child Care Center

Jan Rossier Jan Rossier 3-18-15
Jan Rossier, Director NEKCA (Northeast Kingdom Community Action) Lincoln St. Parent-Child Center

Carla Ciardelli Carla Ciardelli 3-18-15
Carla Ciardelli, Associate Director, Early Childhood Programs, NEKCA Lincoln St. Parent-Child Center

Anne Campbell Anne Campbell 3-16-15
Anne Campbell, Director, Catamount Arts/Head Start Arts Partnership

Suzanne Masland Suzanne Masland 3-18-15
Suzanne Masland, Northeastern Family Institute of Vermont

Cybele T. Hantman Cybele Hantman 3/14/15
Cybele Hantman, St. Johnsbury School Parent Teacher Organization

Constance S. Sandahl Constance S. Sandahl 3/16/15
Constance S. Sandahl, Executive Director, Northeast Kingdom Youth Services

Becky A. Baldauf Becky A. Baldauf 3/16/15
Becky Baldauf, St. Johnsbury Board of School Directors

A. Narrative of community addressing Community NEED, Community WILL, and impact:

St. Johnsbury is the county seat of Caledonia County in the Northeast Kingdom. With a population of 7,500, it is the largest town in the county and the 17th largest town in Vermont. St. Johnsbury was once a prosperous town with a strong tradition of philanthropy from its wealthiest citizens and for this reason, we still have many excellent resources in our community, including the St. Johnsbury Academy, the Fairbanks Museum, the St. Johnsbury Athenaeum, the St. Johnsbury Recreation Center, and Catamount Arts. However, the town has changed significantly in recent years. There are many reasons for this: the closing of some of the town’s largest businesses (Fairbanks Scales and St. Johnsbury Trucking), the changing economy of our region, the rise of drug traffic in our area, the attraction of our town for low-income families because of services that are provided, and the location of the prison here. For all of these reasons, our town is now experiencing significant economic hardship, high mobility, and the concomitant social challenges. In the following section, we present data that illustrates the needs of our families.

PRESENTING OUR COMMUNITY NEED THROUGH DATA

Economics:

- The percentage of students on free and reduced lunch (FRL) in St. Johnsbury grew from 58% to 73% between 2008 and 2012. In comparison, the increase of students on free and reduced lunch in the state grew from 35% to 45% during the same period. **We have the second highest FRL percentage of any school district in the state.**
- 9.72% of families in Caledonia County live under the poverty line, the fourth highest value for the state. The state average is 7.33%.
- 35.5% of families in Caledonia County live under 200% of the poverty line, the 3rd highest value in the state. The state average is 28.8%.
- Caledonia County is fourth in the state for the percentage of children under 6 living below 200% of the poverty level. Our percentage is 50.5% compared to a state average of 41.0%.
- 4.7% of families in Caledonia County are on public assistance, compared to a 4.0% value for the state. Our county has the third highest percentage of families on public assistance.
- Caledonia County has the highest percentage in the state of children under 6 who have all parents in labor force. Our percentage is 78.6%, compared to a state average of 71.7%.
- 51% of renters in Caledonia County pay over 30% of their incomes on rent, the second highest value in the state.

While most of the economic data reported is for Caledonia County as a whole and demonstrates a county-wide need, it is important to note that St. Johnsbury’s economic predicament is even greater than the rest of the county. The table at the right provides economic data for St. Johnsbury and Caledonia County from the 2010 census. St. Johnsbury is below the county in every economic indicator, and several of the values merit special attention:

- The median household income in St. Johnsbury is 58% of the average for Caledonia County;
- The percent of households and families in poverty is significantly higher in St. Johnsbury than in the county;
- **The percentage of children (under 18) in poverty in St. Johnsbury is 2.4 times the value of Caledonia County.** This is an astonishing statistic and points to the enormous need for support for children in our town.

Data from 2010 US Census	St. J.	Caledonia
Number of people	7,571	29,702
Number of households	3,197	11,663
Number of families	1,917	7,895
Median household income	\$20,269	\$34,800
Median family income	\$41,961	\$42,215
Per capita income	\$16,807	\$16,976
% people below poverty line	14.7%	12.3%
% families below poverty line	12%	9%
% children under 18 in poverty	37.8%	16.6%
% adults over 65 in poverty	11.1%	10%

Abuse and Neglect:

St. Johnsbury also has very high numbers of children investigated for abuse and neglect. Here are some relevant statistics from our local Department of Children and Families (DCF):

- While St. Johnsbury comprises 1.2% of the population of the state, we currently have 12.8% (43/336) of all children under 6 in DCF custody in the state. This is 10 times what we would have if our averages were proportional to our population compared to the state;
- From 9/20/2013 to 9/19/2014 the number of pending CHINS (Child in Need of Care or Supervision) petitions jumped from 11 to 31. Our neighbors, Lamoille and Orleans, had 16 and 13 petitions respectively 9/19/2014. This is a huge difference, given that DCF staffing in the St. Johnsbury, Lamoille and Orleans office is similar;
- St. Johnsbury DCF office is one of the top three in the state for number of children per 10,000 who are subject to maltreatment investigations;
- St. Johnsbury DCF office is second in the state for number of children per 10,000 who are subject to maltreatment reports (reports of abuse/neglect to DCF);
- St. Johnsbury DCF office ranks third in children subject to alternative response per 10,000;
- St. Johnsbury ranks second in the state regarding reports of abuse and neglect that the Department has substantiated per 10,000 children.

Substance Abuse:

The State of Vermont has one of the highest rates of drug-use in the nation, and the Northeast Kingdom is a hub for substance abuse and for drug trafficking, as has been documented in two important documentaries, [Here Today](#) and [The Hungry Heart](#). It is difficult to find a great deal of data on substance abuse that is disaggregated by region. The Vermont Department of Health's BRFSS (Behavior Risk Factor Surveillance System) 2011-2012 data reports that St. Johnsbury scored above Vermont in most risk factors, including smoking, marijuana use, heavy drinking and driving without a seatbelt. In addition, the following data from Bay Area Addiction and Research Treatment (BAART), our local substance abuse treatment providers, gives evidence of how seriously this problem impacts our community, and in particular, the parents of our children.

- BAART in St Johnsbury has had a 330% increase in the number of clients for their drug addiction treatment programs in the last 15 months, from 75 to 248 clients. The program has a wait list of 38 at this time.
- Currently there are 16 pregnant women in St Johnsbury being treated for opiate addiction. Of these, 11 are engaged with the BAART program and 5 are being served by private providers.
- Of the 248 clients served, over 45% have children between 0 and 6. This means that 111 parents of children under 7 in our region are being treated for a drug addiction problem. This is a staggering statistic, particularly in light of the fact that much addiction goes untreated.

PreK-8 Education:

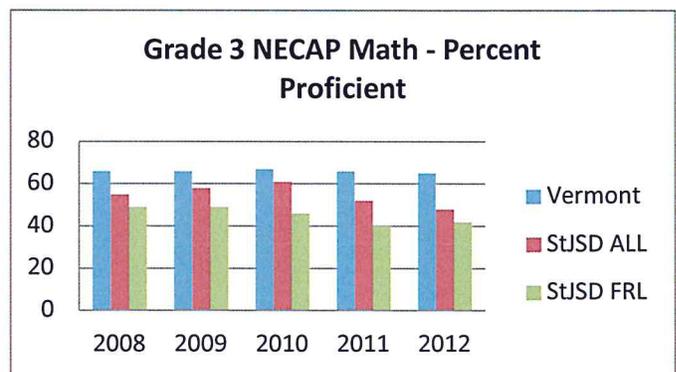
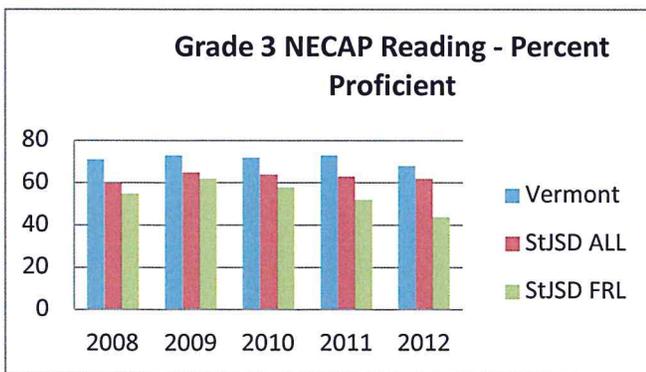
The St. Johnsbury School District serves the town of St. Johnsbury in the Northeast Kingdom. We tuition 370 students into high school and operate a PreK-8 school of over 680 students. Because we are a town with a single PreK-8 public school, we can focus our improvement efforts on one building with one staff. Moreover, the Superintendent has identified early education as a priority of the District, and school and District are taking an active role in strengthening early education in our town. For these reasons, we will provide an in-depth report of the data that reflects the challenges we face in our school. In addition to St. Johnsbury School, Good Shepherd School is a PreK-8 Catholic school serving 150 students; its population is 4.8% FRL. St. Johnsbury is also home to the Cornerstone School, an independent school for students who need supports beyond what our public school can offer; it has 30 students and is

86% FRL. We also work very closely with our six child care centers and our home care providers to coordinate and align our PreK education with the St. Johnsbury School, something we will describe in detail in our section on Community Will.

- Kindergarten Readiness:** Our overall Kindergarten Readiness scores are high, but we do not believe that they are accurate. Our evidence for this lies in the low performance of our children three years later on the NECAP presented below, and on the other data we have presented (reading loss, behavioral data, and special education referrals). We believe that the inaccuracy of these scores is due to the test – it is based on teacher perceptions of how ready each child is for kindergarten. This is something that will vary widely from teacher to teacher and from school to school. In a school like ours, in which the majority of students struggle, teachers’ expectations for children can be lower – what is considered lack of preparation in another school may be above average for our school. If considered an example of the way expectations can be lowered in a school with a higher proportion of children in need, this in itself is a great concern.

In reviewing the data for the last few years, it is interesting to note that the lowest scores on the St. Johnsbury Kindergarten Readiness surveys were in the cognitive domain. For example, each year our students were scored well below the state in the area “Can recall and explain a sequence of events” – in 2012-2013 we scored 15.7% below state averages, in 2011-2012 we scored 13.6% below state averages, and in 2010-2011 we scored 11% below state averages. We were also below the state in awareness of books, using scribbles/symbols/letters to write or represent ideas, and the identification of geometric shapes. These are all indicators of cognitive delays in our early learners that are reflected in student performance on the NECAP.

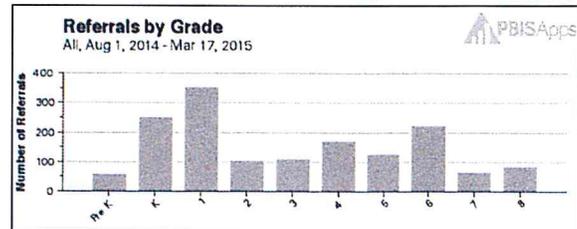
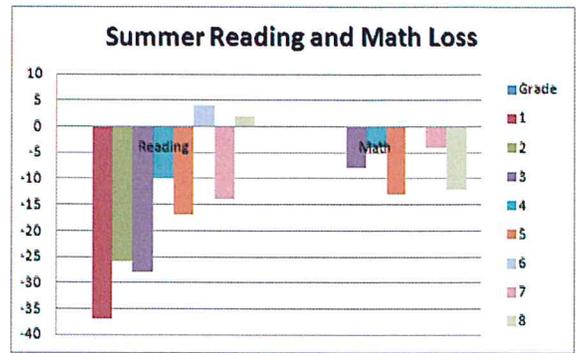
- 3rd Grade NECAP Scores:** The charts below illustrate the St. Johnsbury School proficiency scores in 3rd Grade reading and math on the NECAP as compared to the State of Vermont. We are significantly below the state in both reading and math, and our high poverty students show even greater needs for improvement. Because of our NECAP scores, we were in the first cohort of schools named as Tier I schools in 2010. While we are working hard as a school to strengthen our instruction, and we do show improvement over time (each year, our 8th Grade NECAP scores are much closer to the state than our 3rd grade scores), we are still not showing the improvement that we need in order to meet our goal of preparing every child for success beyond 8th grade.



- School Funding:** One way in which our town’s low economic indicators affect our school is the fact that the school budgets supported by our town are significantly lower than those in the rest of the state. St. Johnsbury School District ranks 240th out of 269 towns in per-student funding and our FY 2014 per-student funding was 22% less than the average for Caledonia County. This, combined with a high proportion of families that we serve who have significant social and economic needs, has presented a major challenge for our school.

- **Additional Data:** We will round out this section by presenting four other important pieces of data that emphasize our challenge at the St. Johnsbury school:

1. **Summer academic loss data:** The top graph at the right shows the percent of reading and math loss during the summer of 2014 as measured by the STAR assessment. We see enormous reading loss in the early grades, which we attribute to the absence of academic supports in the home.
2. **Behavioral data:** Our behavioral data presents similar concerns; the graph below shows the number of behavioral incidents at the St. Johnsbury school by grade. This year, we have had over twice as many referrals in the Lower School (PK-4) as the upper school. This data is unusual and we view it as illustrative of the need for additional social and emotional supports for children in the early grades.
3. **Special Education data:** Our Special Education numbers in the early grades, run at about 15-20% of our student population, and our need for speech services, is particularly high. Currently we have 28 Pre-K students out of 113 requiring the services of a speech pathologist. Much of this is due to developmental delay.
4. **Mobility Rate:** Our mobility rate (changes in student population by year) is over 27%, which is extremely high.



The conclusion we draw from our educational data is that we need to provide significantly more academic and social-emotional supports for children in the early years. We are beginning to address this at our school through a school restructuring that provides stronger supports at the early grades, but our resources are limited. We need additional help, and we hope that the opportunity to be a Promise Community will be part of our solution.

Access to high quality childcare/Capacity and vacancies of regulated Child Care Programs:

As noted in the data provided with the original Promise Community invitation, St. Johnsbury currently has a total of 22 regulated child care programs (including Head Start, After School, Registered Home, and Licensed Centers). Among all of those programs there is a 20% vacancy rate. The Promise Community guidelines identify that 4 or 5 STAR providers are considered high quality. Currently, 22.73% of the programs in St. Johnsbury meet the high quality benchmark. The state average is 24% of child care programs having 4 or 5 STARS. St. Johnsbury is close to meeting the state average for high quality programs meeting the 4 or 5 STAR benchmark. The child care resource and referral agency in St. Johnsbury, Kingdom Child Care Connection at Umbrella, Inc. continuously works with the child care providers in the region to improve upon their quality practices and their STAR ratings. Kingdom Child Care Connection hopes in the future, not only to meet, but to surpass the state average of the number of high quality providers and has set this as a priority. While a 20% vacancy rate may seem to indicate that there are openings for children of all ages, this is not the case. The St. Johnsbury area is experiencing a lack of openings for infants (children birth-2 years of age) across the registered home and licensed center programs. This is a common problem in our state.

OUR COMMUNITY STORY

St. Johnsbury is a once-prosperous town that retains many remarkable features. We have one of the most beautiful downtown areas in Vermont and an astonishing array of cultural institutions for such a small town: the Athenaeum, Catamount Arts, the Fairbanks Museum, as well as a host of smaller but important organizations. St. Johnsbury Academy, our town’s independent high school, has a strong reputation and an admirable record of success. Our area

was named the most desirable place to visit in the US in 2006, and the ninth most desirable place to visit in the world. In 2006, we were named the Best Small Town for Adventure by Outdoor magazine, and in 2009, Catamount Arts was awarded the "Best Community Arts Organization in New England" by Yankee Magazine.

And yet, with all of these positive qualities, St. Johnsbury is in trouble. Here are the opening sentences of a series of articles on the Northeast Kingdom written by Bethany Knight of Glover, Vermont, for the Caledonian Record in 2012: *"Vermont's late U.S. Sen. George Aiken christened this lush green corner of Vermont the "Northeast Kingdom" some 60 years ago, when active farms, granite sheds, water-powered mills and passenger railroads wove through the woods. But today, the Northeast Kingdom suffers from a triple whammy: It has the highest unemployment rate in Vermont, the lowest wages in the state and is home to prisons in its two largest communities. The Northeast Kingdom has become Vermont's deadend, where old tires and broken appliances are dumped at night. If the Moretown landfill closes, it will be home to the state's last operating public landfill. All but a few barns are empty. Downtowns host empty storefronts. Trucking companies have come and gone. Ethan Allen has one last factory operating. Fairbanks Scales in St. Johnsbury is a shadow of its former self. Newport City ski-related industries, where so many men and women earned a decent living, are no more. Manufacturing jobs are in New Hampshire. Only Vermont prisons are hiring. Seems more like the "Northeast Kingdump" now."*

Business closings and the loss of white collar employment opportunities have led to a migration of the middle class out of St. Johnsbury, resulting in lowered property values and a plethora of fine homes on the market. At the same time, there has been a huge increase in the number of low income families in our town. One of the reasons for this is that most low-income subsidized housing units in Caledonia/southern Essex counties are located in St. Johnsbury. In addition, homeless families are attracted to St. Johnsbury because it is the hub for services they need; they then stay on once they get assistance in finding housing. Because of this, St. Johnsbury has a high percentage of families with scarce financial resources who struggle to meet the basic needs of food, shelter, heat and transportation.

As a result, social differences are evident throughout the St. Johnsbury community. Residents who remember the old St. Johnsbury despair that we have lost our former glory. As our Chamber of Commerce seeks to restore the downtown and feature our unique architectural buildings to attract both visitors and permanent middle class residents, it must work around Depot Square, a 47-unit low-rent apartment complex in a beautiful but neglected building in the heart of downtown that is widely known for bedbug infestations and a high volume of drug trade. The town's public school, because it serves students of our poorer families with diverse and challenging needs, is not regarded with great favor by the community at large. Many of our town's residents, perceiving distinctions between their children and children from impoverished families--in educational preparedness, in the achievement level of caregivers, in drug abuse and neglect--send their children to private schools in the area, thus exacerbating the differences they perceive.

Moreover, in the conversation about a changing St. Johnsbury, the voice of the poor is absent. As described in "Improving the Odds for our Kids," published by the Vermont Child Poverty Council January 29, 2009: *"Low income families are largely out of sight. They are often not part of the mainstream of Vermont life. They are families who care deeply about the needs of their children, but are often distracted by the challenges of day-to-day life. They do not have the luxury to pursue our cherished Vermont values of community and quality of life. They concentrate on simply surviving."* This means that our neediest families do not advocate for the supports that they need in order to be successful. An example of this is the voting for our school budgets last year. While we have one of the lowest per pupil budgets in the state and the lowest per-pupil budget in our county, our budget was not passed by the voters until June of 2014, at which time we had cut over \$350,000 from the PreK-8 budget. In the course of this process, we learned that only 48% of our 793 parents are registered to vote. Less than 10% of our parents voted in all of the first three budget votes last year, and only 27% of our parents voted in at least one of the first three votes. By comparison, consider the case of our older citizens (over 65): this group makes up 18% of our town but 25% of our registered voters, and 39% of the votes in the March 2014 election were cast by voters over 65.

OUR COMMUNITY WILL

In October of 2013, our local newspaper published a story on “unruly toddlers” at the St. Johnsbury School. This was in response to a presentation the Superintendent had made to the Board regarding the behavioral challenges of our youngest students, as reported above. In response to this, a meeting was held for all of our local child care and service providers regarding the challenges of our early learners. From that beginning, The St. Johnsbury Early Education Collaborative was formed. Since then, we have been working as a team to improve the supports that we offer for children and families. We strive to strengthen families by developing protective factors, shared curriculum and common behavioral practices (see page from our brochure, below). The Early Education Collaborative meets on a monthly basis and works to strengthen and align the services we provide to our town’s youngest children. We held holiday dinners for our families in December of 2013 and 2014, and a back to school event in August of 2014. Through this Collaborative, we will be working to support all of the children and families in our community that will participate in PreKindergarten and Kindergarten. We contact families through coordinated information shared by all of the centers and organizations in the Collaborative, public service announcements and our community events. On March 20, we will hold an all-day PreK Summit for all organizations that will be providing PreK next year. At this session, we will initiate a program of common professional development and support for all PreK and K teachers in our area, and also develop our roll-out plan for PreK next year, including the way that we will inform all parents of their choices. In addition, Lisa Guerrero, a well-known Vermont early childhood educator, will present to staff about learning through play. At our March 21st Dabble Day, co-sponsored by Building Bright Futures, we will host developmentally appropriate activities for parents to engage in with their children and provide information regarding Universal PreK to parents and local representatives who attend Dabble Day.

Who We Are

The St. Johnsbury Early Education Collaborative was formed in October of 2013 with the goal of coordinating, aligning and strengthening our support for young children and their families. Our work is aligned with the state and regional Building Bright Futures Councils and other local organizations serving children and families.

Our goals include:

- Developing aligned curriculum in literacy, numeracy and social skills for all early childhood centers;
- Strengthening the transition between early childhood programs and the St. Johnsbury School;
- Developing early intervention programs for children who need them and their parents;
- Increasing parent, family and community support for early childhood education.



The need for strong supports for children in their early years is clear from the numbers:

- National studies repeatedly show a return on investment between \$2 and \$7 for every \$1 invested in early education.
- 80% of the brain develops by age three and 90% by age five.
- There is an 8 million word gap between children from government assisted families and children nationwide. This is the precursor to the “achievement gap” between students from low-income families and students from middle and upper middle-class families.
- In 2014, only 49% of Vermont’s children arrived at kindergarten meeting the criteria of readiness defined by the Vermont AOE.

Our Mission

The Mission of the St. Johnsbury Early Education Collaborative is to offer the best available educational and social services to the youngest members of our community and their families. We do this by working as a professional community that reaches out to parents, children, and agencies providing support for early education.



There can be no keener revelation
of a society's soul
than the way in which it treats its children.
Nelson Mandela

What We Do



Currently we meet on a monthly basis to develop our infrastructure and support system. Our specific activities in the last year include:

- A needs assessment of the challenges and strengths of our region in the area of early childhood programs and support for families;
- Preparation for the implementation of Universal PreK in 2015/2016;
- Holiday dinners for early childhood residents and their families in December 2013 and 2014;
- A Back-to-School event for families in September of 2014;
- Developing grant proposals for additional state, federal and private support for early childhood in our region.

While our Promise Community application is being formally made by the St. Johnsbury School District, it has been signed by all of the participants in the Early Education Collaborative. If we are selected as a Promise Community, we will research our community and develop our plan for improving outcomes for our youngest residents as a Promise Community team. Because we are the county seat and a larger town, St. Johnsbury houses a larger number of service agencies than other towns in the Northeast Kingdom, and these agencies have also come to the table to support our Promise Community Application. In particular, our application for a Promise Community is aligned to recent work in our town on developing the five protective factors in the strengthening families model used by Vermont Birth to Three; we are a hub for the strengthening families pilot project. St. Johnsbury currently has three strengthening family trainers and three local strengthening families child care centers in our region. We will also rely on the support of other strong initiatives addressing community challenges, such as DART (Drug Abuse Resistance Task Force). We will also make use of our advantage of being a district with a single school in a town with multiple support services, so that all of our PreK-8 students are housed in the same building with excellent access to community resources.

Our application to be considered as a Promise Community is part of a larger initiative to engage and support young children and their families. This includes the fact that we are early adopters of Universal PreK and are also part of the state's PreK expansion grant. We are applying for support through VCPC for an Early Education Coordinator and to the Children's Trust Fund for a common social-emotional curriculum for all of our town's PreK programs next year. We are also applying to be a First School cohort, which would strengthen our schools PreK-3 programs. We believe that the work we are doing with our youngest students is the key to the future of our children, and thus of our town.

ANTICIPATED IMPACT

It is our hope that the Promise Community grant opportunity would serve all of the children in town that are 6 years of age and younger, and their families. Currently, the public school population is 310 from prek-3rd grade and there are an estimated 550 children under 7 in the town of St. Johnsbury. Our child care programs have a capacity to serve approximately 507 children at this time, and serve the entire Essex-Calendonia region. Many key stakeholders from various agencies have pledged their time and energy to this project and will work to ensure that the results of the efforts reach the highest number of residents possible, across all of the sectors of the service agencies and resources in our community.

CONCLUSION

The opportunity to be a Promise Community comes at a propitious time for our community and for our children. St. Johnsbury is a town that has been through some difficult years, and the St. Johnsbury School has struggled along with our town. But we have begun the work of providing more support to our youngest learners, and are excited about the future. In the school, we are organizing for improvement. With the support of the Early Education Collaborative, we have made a substantial commitment to PreK, including our early adoption of Universal PreK and our participation in PreK Extension. In the town, there are also signs of renewed collaboration and hope, an example of which is the collaboration and support that went into this application.

If we are selected as a Promise Community, we will include parents in every stage of our planning process. This will reflect the paradigm shift that has occurred with local child care programs and resource providers in St. Johnsbury. We have become much more family focused, and our work as a Promise Community would build upon that foundation. We believe that parents are necessary partners and a conduit for the success of our children and our community. In addition to parents, partners in this work will be all of the organizations supporting our application. The support we will receive as a Promise Community is an essential part of the work we need to do, and we hope that you will support us.