VERMONT strengthening families
CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF SOCIAL POLICY
A PROTECTIVE FACTORS FRAMEWORK

The Early MTSS-123 Project

FINAL REPORT

MARCH 30, 2021

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THE UNIVERSITY OF VERMONT
EDUCATION AND SOCIAL SERVICES

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Executive Summary

The Early MTSS-123 Project was developed "to implement and pilot the Early Care and Learning Practice Improvement Support Team and to provide the State with a 3-year plan to scale-up the pilot." Major activities of this project included: Piloting regional support teams, providing assistance to pilot regions to build local capacity, and developing a state-wide plan for scaling-up and sustaining implementation of an Early Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (Early MTSS) framework using The Pyramid Model for Promoting Social-Emotional Competence in Infants and Young Children (The Pyramid Model) and the Strengthening Families approach as interventions. Vermont's Preschool Development Birth through Five (PDG B-5) grant provided funding for this work from July 2020 through March 2021.

The report begins by providing an overview to the pilot highlighting activities that took place. Next, a sustainability and scale-up model plan for implementation is presented along with an estimated budget. The last section of the report outlines promising practices for implementing Early MTSS in Vermont.

Acknowledgements

None of the project's activities, or this final report, could have been accomplished without the collaboration and engagement of state leaders, regional coordinators and collaborators, project coaches, and Vermont's PDG B-5 grant manager, who represented a passionate and determined group of professionals with a broad range of expertise and knowledge to guide the work. Likewise, the project's successes are owed to the inspiring and dedicated early childhood professionals from within the project's pilot regions who served on leadership teams, engaged in multiple conversations, participated as implementation and pilot sites, participated in trainings and/or coaching, shared their information for asset mapping, and overall gave of their time and energy during one of the most troubling times in many of our lived histories. I extend my deepest gratitude to those individuals from the Franklin Grand Isle, Orleans/North Essex, and Northern Windsor/Orange regions. Similarly, as resources allowed, the project was able to extend supports and pilot activities to other professionals in the state. I thank them, and everyone, who joined in the project's activities, shared their insights, and are now poised to continue applying the information gleaned from them to create a safer, healthier, and brighter future for young children and their families in Vermont.

Introduction

The Early MTSS-123 Project was developed in response to the Request for Proposals (RFP #CDD-ECLPI-01-30-20). It had the goal "to implement and pilot the Early Care and Learning Practice Improvement Support Team and to provide the State with a 3-year plan to scale-up the pilot." Moreover, the Project focused on supporting the implementation of Vermont's Early Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (Early MTSS) framework using The Pyramid Model for Promoting Social-Emotional Competence in Infants and Young Children (The Pyramid Model) and the Strengthening Families approach as interventions.

In the Project's title, "123" represented essential features of the proposed work. That is, piloting a Support Team model that would engage and enhance **one** early childhood system that

includes a wide range of early childhood practitioners and settings in Vermont's mixed-delivery early care and learning system. It also represented the goal to support the adoption and implementation of **two** social and emotional interventions (i.e., The Pyramid Model and SF). Lastly, most importantly, it aimed to keep **three** core groups at the heart of all activities – children, families, and early childhood professionals. To achieve positive social and emotional outcomes for each and every child and family in Vermont, over an eighth month period, the Project leadership team engaged in numerous activities. This report serves as an account on those activities. Additionally, the report includes a sustainability and scale-up plan for implementing Early MTSS with a projected budget.

Project Leadership Team

To accomplish the goals of the pilot, a project leadership team was established composed of several key groups of individuals. More details about these groups and the roles that they served in the project are highlighted below.

Project Director

Dr. Lori Meyer served as the Project Director. She developed the project's work plan, guided related activities, and evaluation. The project was designed to be co-led by two principal project directors with the second person filling the role of a Professional Development Coordinator. However, due to funding constraints, it was not possible to hire a co-director. In addition to pandemic-related influences, the scope of the work plan evolved from its original conception. Salient changes that occurred will be highlighted in the report.

Regional Coordinators

Regional Coordinators were identified for each of the three pilot regions. Four regions were originally recruited to participate, but due to conflicts, one region decided against joining the project. Building Bright Futures' (BBF) Regional Coordinators served as the leaders of Regional Leadership Teams (RLTs). In this role, they identified regional stakeholders to join the RLT. In one region, the BBF Regional Coordinator transitioned to a new position. Fortunately, two project coaches were stakeholders in the region, and they agreed to take on the work of co-leading the RLT.

Regional Leadership Teams (RLTs)

Beginning mid-August, at the onset of the project's contract, Regional Coordinators began to recruit for their RLTs. Across the three regions, five to seven individuals served on each RLT. The stakeholders represented an eclectic group of individuals. Roles represented by RLT members included: Resource Advisor, Supervisory Union/School District (SU/SD) early childhood leadership, Head Start, family mental health, Early MTSS Demonstration Site leadership, maternal and child health nurse, parent child center director, family wellness coach, community outreach specialist, Children's Integrated Services (CIS) coordinator, early childhood coordinator, and early childhood mental health consultant. Whenever possible, coaches also participated in RLT meetings for the region where they were providing coaching supports. Most regions held their first RLT meeting in early to mid-September.

RLT members agreed to meet one time per month for the continuation of the project. The original project was proposed to end in December 2020. As such, much of the early project

activities were guided by the understanding that there would be four months to engage in the project's work once RLTs were established (i.e., September through December). One of the key tasks of each RLT was to identify programs to receive Early MTSS coaching and training supports, which will be discussed in further detail below.

Project Coaches and Trainers

Five professionals from the company Pyramid 802 Plus served as practice-based coaches and trainers for the project. The group of entrepreneurial women have, on average, over 30 years of experience in teaching, leading, mentoring, consulting, coaching, and training in the fields of early childhood/early childhood special education. All project coaches were well-versed in the Pyramid Model and related tools, in addition to knowledge and training on other curricula used to educate practitioners about Strengthening Families (e.g., the 17-hour Toolbox Training). Project coaches engaged in several facets of the project including: attending RLT meetings, providing virtual Pyramid Model trainings that integrated the STRONG curriculum, coaching early childhood teachers identified at regional implementation sites, and developing implementation materials.

Implementation Sites

RLT Coordinators from across the pilot regions worked with their teams to identify programs interested in joining the project as an implementation site. One of the proposed goals of the project, from the bid developers, was to implement one-year of the sustainability and scale-up plan within the first several months of the project. With this in mind, it was proposed that each identified implementation site would need to be a program or classroom that was close to becoming a demonstration site.

However, once RLTs began conversations to choose their region's implementation sites, there was a strong sentiment to choose sites in most need of help instead. RLT members expressed that sites in their regions that were further along with implementing the Pyramid Model or Strengthening Families tended to be well-resourced programs. Most members wanted the resources of this project to go to sites that were perhaps in greater need. State Advisory Group members agreed that a range of sites at various stages of implementation might be more informative for developing a realistic sustainability and scale-up plan.

In past iterations of Early MTSS work, programs that wanted to join as an Early MTSS Cohort site were required to complete a thoughtful application process. However, the desire to get training and coaching supports installed in a timely manner given the project's tight timeline, combined with the desire to help program's in the most need, an application process to identify sites was not used for the project. Instead, RLT members meet, discussed, and selected one implementation site, from their list of interested sites. Originally, it was proposed that the project's coaches would work with one program from each region. However, due to contextual, and pandemic-related features (e.g., the use of technology for virtual coaching), coaches were able to work with two sites from each region. The program types represented as implementation sites included: specialized child care, Parent-Child Center, registered/licensed family child care home, licensed center-based child care and preschool programs and SU/SD Pre-K program.

Implementation Site Progress. Most sites received training and coaching supports from December through March. In this time period, every program increased their use of the Pyramid Model practices. One site reached the status required to be designated as implementing the practices with fidelity. Potentially, this program could become a demonstration site. Two

additional sites were very close to reaching this benchmark, and also could continue working towards demonstration site status.

Project Sites

Nine additional programs were identified across pilot regions as project sites. Project sites were programs (including home-based) that had expressed interest in participating in the project, but were not selected to receive coaching supports. Whenever possible, project training opportunities and resources were directed to these sites too. Additionally, there was one program whose leader decided they could no longer participate due to pandemic-related staffing challenges. As a result, one of the nine programs moved into being an implementation site and received direct coaching.

State Advisory Group

With assistance from the PDG B-5 grant manager, the Project Director convened a group of 12 state-level stakeholders to serve as an advisory group to the project. The advisory group met monthly from October through January and served as a sounding board for project activities provided feedback and insight into implementation challenges and successes.

Integrating the Strengthening Families Approach into Early MTSS

For a decade, Vermont has been endorsing and infusing the implementation of Strengthening Families to increase the quality of early care and learning programs. Strengthening Families is a research-informed approach to acknowledge five key Protective Factors to increase family strengths, enhance child development, and reduce the likelihood of child abuse and neglect. The five Protective Factors are parental resilience, social connections, knowledge of parenting and child development, concrete support in times of need, and social and emotional competence of children. Numerous supports are available to aid the implementation of SF from the Center for the Study of Social Policy.

A unique goal of this project was to integrate Pyramid Model and Strengthening Families approaches within Vermont's Early MTSS framework to foster young children's social and emotional development and support their families. To build project team members' capacities to accomplish this goal, Maureen Durning and Jane Zink, developers of *STRONG: Teaching the Strengthening Families Protective Factor Framework to Parents and Professionals* (STRONG) led a "train the trainers" professional development sequence for the project team.

Pilot Pyramid Model Training Combined With STRONG

The project coaches integrated key STRONG lessons into Pyramid Modules 1 and Module 2, representing an integrated approach to training early childhood professionals on the SF protective factors along with the Pyramid Model. The coaches used the updated modules for trainings provided to regional implementation and project sites. A guidance document has been developed to outline the intentional integration of the two innovations (see Appendix A). In total, nineteen early childhood professionals were trained using these materials.

Pyramid Model Training from National Experts

The Pyramid Model Consortium (PMC) is home to experts on the Pyramid Model framework and associated tools. The trainings they provide are unique as they are the only

vendor of specific Pyramid Model trainings. As such, the national experts from PMC provided several different trainings for the project to further increase Vermonters abilities to implement the Pyramid Model with fidelity. A brief description of the trainings and related outcomes are presented below.

TPOT/TPITOS

Two evidence-based tools are available that support fidelity of implementation for the Pyramid Model. Those are: the Teaching Pyramid Observation Tool (TPOT™) for Preschool Classrooms and the Teaching Pyramid Infant-Toddler Observation Scale for Infant-Toddler Classrooms (TPITOS™). PMC hosted two trainings to increase the number of early childhood professionals in Vermont who could reliably use the tools. One 2-day TPOT training was held in late November and a second TPITOS training was held in early December. Prior to the pandemic, these two trainings were always delivered in-person only. It was not until the fall, when PMC determined that they had the resources to provide both of these trainings via virtual conference technology (e.g., Zoom).

In addition to supporting the project coaches in becoming trained, or refreshed, on these two important tools, the trainings were opened to early childhood professionals in pilot regions. Additionally, due to available spaces, the trainings were opened to individuals across the state. As a result, 22 individuals reached reliability for the TPOT and 21 individuals reached reliability for the TPITOS. Being trained to assess implementation of Pyramid Model practices, using one of the fidelity tools, is a "next step" for individuals knowledgeable in actualizing the Pyramid Model framework into practice. As one attendee shared, *"I am trained in pyramid model practices and have had the TPOT done on me several times. I am hoping that I will be able to begin doing the TPOT on people in my district as part of coaching!"*

ePyramid Module Facilitation

Two, 3-hour virtual trainings took place in mid-February to support interested early childhood professionals in learning how to support teachers as they completed the online Pyramid Model modules (i.e., ePyramid Modules). The training sessions included: ePyramid Module overview, distance coaching recommendations, a *Leader Guide's to the ePyramid Module*, reviewing freely available Pyramid resources available from national technical assistance centers, discussing common challenges to supporting remote learning with the ePyramid Modules, and ideas for how to promote learner engagement in online learning. The training was marketed to Pyramid Model trainers, coaches, and leaders involved in professional development at various levels (e.g., higher education, technical centers, center-based programs, etc.).

Use of the ePyramid Modules for training purposes gained a lot of attention from RLTs during the project for several reasons. First, use of the modules provided flexibility for individuals in need of training. It allowed for individuals to engage with the material at times, and lengths of time, that worked best for them. Second, all ePyramid Modules are approved for online training professional development hours in Vermont, making it an attractive option for professional development. Third, given the nature of the current context (due to COVID-19), all trainings were being conducted virtually. With this in mind, the use of ePyramid Modules to support Pyramid Module trainings could potentially decrease the amount of time a trainer would need for training (prep/delivery). That is, to fully support learners, a trainer could facilitate their online experiences, rather than provide the full training themselves. Nineteen individuals participated in the training from across pilot regions. As one attendee shared,

"I appreciated the walk through the entire process. The resources will be a tremendous help to have available to us (on an on-going basis, to be access as needed). The immersion experience and the meta-experience of the zoom training and process was helpful."

Practice-based Coaching

Another "next step" for individuals well-versed in Pyramid Model practices is to become a mentor to other teachers looking to increase their skills and level of practice. Practice-based coaching (PBC), is a coaching approach that has been widely studied and adopted by Pyramid Model experts. During Vermont's Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge (RTT-ELC), a cadre of coaches were trained in this approach. In conversation with regional coordinators, RLTs, and project coaches, it was determined that there could be interest among regional stakeholders to participate in a PBC training. As a result, PMC hosted a 2-day training on the topic in February. There were five individuals who attended the training. Two individuals were project coaches who sought to become refreshed on the content and the three others were brand new to the coaching approach. In discussion with the project team, there were several hypothesis for the lower enrollment for this training over previous trainings. One reason could have been the difficulty of attending a February training due to other commitments over a center or school winter break period. Another thought was that a 2-day, full time (9:00 am to 4:00 pm) training was too much and unappealing for participants. Lastly, based on feedback from early childhood professionals, there was an overwhelming feeling of exhaustion, in particular "Zoom fatigue' in February. Collectively, these, and other reasons not mentioned, may have contributed to the lower than expected turnout.

Prevent-Teach-Reinforce for Young Children

Two virtual workshops on Prevent-Teach-Reinforce for Young Children (PTR-YC) were hosted for pilot region stakeholders and other interested early childhood professionals across the state in late March. The interactive workshops taught attendees about PTR-YC, a model of intervention for young children with the most persistent and severe challenging behaviors. PTR-YC is a process for use in early childhood education settings and all steps are designed for use by typical early childhood providers. PTR-YC is often thought about as the "top of the pyramid" practices, and it includes functional behavioral assessment to determine the meaning behind preschool children's behavior in classroom settings. Each session was one day, full day (9:00 am to Noon and 1:00 pm to 4:00 pm), and had the capacity to hold 30 individuals. Both sessions quickly filled along with a substantial waiting list. As of the writing of this report, early childhood professionals are still inquiring if future PTR-YC trainings will be scheduled. When asked, "What, if anything, was the most important thing you learned from the PTR-YC training?" Participants shared:

"WOW! where to start--- start to finish this workshop PTRC was so informative, hopeful, and motivating."

"The importance of realizing that behavior won't change overnight. It is a process that takes time and investment."

"The whole process of PTR-YC is important, it is important to include all involved and to take the time to talk everything out. We as adults are responsible for the outcomes."

Pilot Technology

Prior to the pandemic, the project team proposed using technology to link coaches and coachees together as one strategy to address climate change. Offering options to meet virtually, as well as face-to-face could reduce the environmental impact of carbon emissions associated with training and coaching experiences. Following the pandemic's onset, it seemed unlikely that face-to-face coaching, training, and fidelity tool implementation could take place. While, face-to-face activities did occur during the project, the use of technology was also put into place. Three project activities in which technology played a prominent role are discussed below.

ePyramid Modules

Building upon early remarks regarding the popularity among RLT members to trial and learn from the implementation of ePyramid Modules in their region, over 60 licenses were provided to pilot region stakeholders interested in using them. The ePyramid Modules currently being used in the state through project-funded support include the following modules: Birth to Five; Infant/Toddler; Preschool; Culturally Responsive Practices to Reduce Implicit Bias, Disproportionality, Suspension, and Expulsion; Trauma-Informed Care and the Pyramid Model; and Wellness: Taking Care of Yourself.

Swivls

Swivls are a recording device that when paired with an iPad allows teachers to capture their instruction, along with children's responses for later viewing. The Swivl technology was available to all pilot regions, and was trialed in two settings to support coaching activities. In addition, the project director requested, and received, an online license for the Head Start Coaching Companion (HSCC). HSCC allowed teachers to safely upload their recorded videos, so that project coaches could view them. For the coaches and teachers who trialed the devices and process, they enjoyed it. Collectively, they feel that the use of technology for coaching in Vermont, especially in rural areas, is very promising.

Strengths-based Evaluation

Vermont has a long history of being engaged in using and spreading the implementation of Pyramid Model practices across the state. Early state work was sponsored through the Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning (CSEFEL) and it was further built upon when Vermont received the RTT-ELC grant. During RTT-ELC Vermont's Early MTSS framework emphasizing implementation of the Pyramid Model was expanded. Likewise, RTT-ELC led to the expansion of implementing the Strengthening Families approach into regulated child care programs (i.e., child care centers and with family child care providers) and promoting knowledge and implementation of the five SF Protective Factors among families, programs, and local communities. As such, an assets-based approach to working with RLTs to evaluate current

and past activities related to implementing the Pyramid Model and Strengthening Families was taken to inform the implementation plan for sustainability and scale-up.

Asset Mapping

Asset mapping is a method for engaging community members in identifying, noticing, and connecting its assets. It gives communities a visual tool to help understand the nature of a community's assets as well as to learn and consider the future of how assets might be engaged to further community initiatives or goals. RLTs conducted an asset mapping process throughout the month of January to discover their communities' strengths; strengths that are the basic building blocks to a sustain and scale-up implementation of the Pyramid Model and Strengthening Families (e.g., asking questions like, "Who is trained in fidelity tool implementation?" "Where are demonstration sites located in our region?"). Ideally, an asset map could serve as a roadmap for how to scale-up in other places/regions across the state. The objectives of the Early MTSS-123 Asset Mapping project were:

1. To make this asset map as a useful tool for regional leadership teams
2. To identify and recognize the assets of individuals and communities linked to the Strengthening Families & Pyramid Model innovations
3. To use this asset map as one of the steps in planning an implementation plan localized to Vermont and based on the strengths of each region

In total, 88 individuals across the three pilot regions shared their assets with their regional leadership team. In mid-March, members from RLTs across pilot regions meet for a half-day gathering to discuss the findings from their asset maps, and share implications from the map for scaling and sustaining implementation of the Pyramid Model and Strengthening Families approaches. While space and time does not allow for a detailed description of all take-aways from the meeting, the conversation led to ideas for the final proposed implementation plan. Additionally, RLT members were excited about the possibility of using a tool like this for other region stakeholders, including families, to discover where strengths were present (e.g., "Which programs had teachers with training and experience in implementing the Pyramid Model or Strengthening Families approach?" "Where did trained coaches or fidelity assessors reside in the region?").

They also considered other available asset data that could be integrated into the map (e.g., Vermont PBIS data identifying K-12 schools using the approach). RLT members also considered what changes and data from their maps they would want to confirm or edit to best meet their region's specific needs. Collectively, there was interest in continuing to use a tool such as an asset map both for comprehending and visualizing assets, but also to strategically think about how to avail existing strengths within and across early childhood settings within a community. I am very interested in this work, and look forward to continuing the process of using, and sharing, what has been learned through the asset mapping process with others. For example, continuing to refine and add to the maps with regional stakeholders and finding ways to make the data publicly available and updatable.

Communities of Practice. There were a number of different types of assets that the RLTs collected from their community. One question in particular asked community members if they want to join a Community of Practice (CoP) on Early MTSS. Over 20% of the respondents expressed that they would like to join a CoP (n = 20) and roughly another 27% shared that they might consider joining (n = 24). Given the shared interest across regions, the project coaches

developed a survey and guide for RLTs to support the next recommended steps on progressing towards the creation of a future CoP on Early MTSS.

Support Team Considerations

An aim set forth for the Vermont Early MTSS-123 Project was to pilot the idea of an Early Care and Learning Practice Improvement Support Team. The goal for a "Support Team" was to support the implementation of Vermont's Early MTSS framework. However, prior to the project's start, there was no clear definition of who or what a "Support Team" was or could be. To begin the process of conceptualizing a "Support Team," interviews were conducted by the Project Director in October with the following individuals and groups:

1. Project leadership (e.g., regional coordinators and coaches),
2. RLT members,
3. State advisory group members for the project, and
4. Early care and education policy leaders from the Vermont Agencies of Human Services and Education.

Dr. Meyer presented the following three questions to each individual or group:

1. When you think about the development of a "Support Team" that could assist early care and learning practitioners to implement Early MTSS with fidelity, what do you imagine?
2. From your perspective, what system or systems are targeted for change in conjunction with this project's creation of an Early MTSS sustainability and scale-up plan?
3. Considering your response to question 2, is there a system of primary focus? If yes, how is this system (of primary focus) related to other systems?

What follows is a brief summary of the big ideas that came from the conversations. Please note that these findings do not capture what families think or need concerning the "Support Team" conceptualization.

- Collectively, individuals expressed that the idea of a "Support Team" was needed across all levels (e.g., local, regional, state). One individual expressed that it is likely that something new must be built (e.g., a new system within Vermont's Early Care and Learning system) to support the work of Early MTSS.

- Ideally, as expressed by several individuals, a policy solution would be created to sustain Early MTSS in the state. Careful consideration would be needed in any policy solution given that Early MTSS efforts currently intersect across agencies (e.g., AHS & AOE) and departments/divisions (e.g., Children's Integrated Services, Department of Mental Health, Department of Health).

- When discussing the systems that would be targeted for change in conjunction with a successful Early MTSS sustainability and scale-up plan, two major systems mentioned were Vermont's system of professional development and quality rating improvement system (i.e., STARS).

- There was also a strong desire to understand regions' current capacity to do the work associated with Early MTSS (e.g., practice-based coaches, trainers). Simultaneously this led to a conversation about also understanding regional professional development and training needs. A promising model that several individuals mentioned was the use of Communities of Practice (CoPs). A specific CoP idea shared was establishing one for program directors to connect and engage together in the systematic program-level work linked to implementing Early MTSS well. While not mentioned as a CoP, individuals said how there might be confusion over Early MTSS and suggested offering background sessions on Early MTSS.

- In terms of professional development for Early MTSS, some individuals discussed the role of training, their importance, and during the current time of a pandemic, the role that flexible, asynchronous, recorded training could provide for providers.

- The role of coaching was also discussed by several individuals and the need to scale-up coaching supports across Vermont's mixed-delivery early care and learning system. It was noticed by several that practice-based coaching is an expensive and time-intensive support albeit an essential support to ensure the implementation of Early MTSS beyond training. There was an expressed desire to understand how to best support coaching in regions. An additional desired "Support Team" action included supporting regional demonstration sites to build motivation among the community to engage in Early MTSS.

- When discussing the characteristics of "Support Team" members, individuals interviewed shared that they sought individuals who create safe spaces, are supportive, approach their work from a relationship-based perspective, help to find answers, knows where to direct you, and "someone who has the time to help you get answers." It was also mentioned that having someone on the "Support Team" who has experienced implementing Early MTSS would be beneficial.

- To highlight a theme heard across participants, it was expressed that whoever constituted the "Support Team," this work (i.e., supporting the implementation of Early MTSS) would be their primary focus. They would guide work that encompassed Early MTSS, including helping and supporting programs to collect & use data, organizing trainers, coaches, system coaches, and managing related experts across various associated fields (e.g., early childhood mental health, pediatricians).

Sustainability and Scale-up Implementation Plan

The proposed 3-year sustainability and scale-up plan was submitted in November 2020. That plan has evolved reflecting lessons learned from all activities throughout the project period, and is presented here (see Appendix B). What is presented next is an overview of the plan, including key roles, responsibilities, and an estimated budget associated with sustainability and scaling-up activities. Please note that it is recommended for sustainability and scale-up plans to encompass a period of four to five years. However, the plan provided here is for three years, as requested in the original RFP. If future implementation work is conducted from this plan, I recommend revisiting and extending it for two or more years.

Additionally, the conditions under which the pilot took place where less than ideal. First and foremost, were the complications that arose due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Not only did many of the proposed project activities require major adjustment, but also the timeline for which to implement the project was continually influx. The project team has been grateful for the project extensions to carry-out and learn from additional implementation activities through the end of March. Yet, the shifting timeline did have ramifications for the pilot project itself. For example, as stated earlier the recommended practice of affirming the buy-in and readiness of pilot implementation sites before their engagement in the project did not take place due to time constraints. Some of the frustrations felt by implementation sites in regards to features of the training or coaching process could possibly be linked to foregoing that process. As a result, what is featured below are recommendations and realistic expectations for achieving high-quality implementation based on the best available evidence from implementation science.

State Team for Training and Technical Assistance on Early MTSS

It is recommended that a state team is established to promote training and technical assistance (T/TA) specific to implementing Early MTSS with fidelity in Vermont. The team would be composed of three individuals: a Project Director, a Professional Development Coordinator, and an Office Project Manager. The roles of these individuals is provided in more detail below.

Project Director. The Project Director would lead the Early MTSS State Team for T/TA. Duties may include: supporting the State Leadership Team in their work, being a liaison with the primary contact from the State Leadership Team, supporting the implementation and systems capacity building work of the Regional Leadership Teams, and guiding the evaluation and data collection at implementation and demonstration sites.

Professional Development Coordinator. The Professional Development Coordinator can work to oversee the establishment and sustainability of a cadre of state-affiliated, practice-based coaches. The PD coordinator would provide trainings for state-affiliated coaches, coordinate an annual training calendar that is populated with trainings provided by national-level trainers and state-affiliated coaches, and support the activities of demonstration sites.

Office Project Manager. The Office Project Manager would be responsible for the State T/TA Team's budget, employee contracts, managing the website, and handling logistics related to trainings.

State Leadership Team (SLT)

In order to appropriately plan for scaling and sustaining Early MTSS in Vermont, it is necessary to establish a cross-sector team that can embed, integrate, and align Early MTSS within on-going systems, policies, and salient initiatives. The State Leadership Team (SLT) would be chaired by a primary lead who could facilitate the team's engagement in assessing and planning for state-wide Early MTSS implementation. A tool developed by the National Center on Pyramid Model Innovation's (NCPMI), the State Leadership Team Benchmarks of Quality: Implementing the Pyramid Model Statewide provides a good representation of the type of activities a State Leadership Team would undertake. Additional tools to support State Leadership Teams can be found on the NCPMI website. Recommendation: The goal of implementing Early MTSS with fidelity is embedded several times within Vermont's Early Childhood Action Plan (VECAP). As such, SLT members may be chosen from one or more of the standing VECAP committees.

Regional Leadership Teams (RLTs)

Regional coordinators. Regional Coordinators can assist programs in their region to explore whether Early MTSS is right for them and use targeted implementation science tools and strategies in the process (see an example of implementation science influenced tools and materials for the Pyramid Model that are currently used in Colorado). Having BBF Regional Coordinators as Regional Coordinators for this project was an absolute strength as they are very knowledgeable and connected within their regions. Recommendation: In future iterations of this work, it might be beneficial to have Regional Coordinators who are well-versed in all aspects of the Early MTSS innovations as well as related tools and implementation science processes. However, an openness to learn about these things, as well as holding region-specific knowledge is also very important. Other individuals who might be well-suited for the position might be those with a behavioral specialist background or someone trained as a TPOT/TPITOS assessor. In this way, they could directly consult with programs in their region when those programs are experiencing challenges related to children's social emotional development. Subsequently, providing an opportunity to highlight the benefits of installing Early MTSS practices.

RLT members. Regional stakeholders who composed the RLTs for the project were invaluable members guiding and growing the capacity of their neighbors to implement Early MTSS with fidelity. In conversations with past implementation and demonstration sites (e.g., under the RTT-ELC grant), it was noted that one of the most difficult things to sustain over time was their program leadership team. Recommendation: To ensure that everyone in Vermont's mixed-delivery system can participate in Early MTSS, it is recommended that RLTs take on the role and activities of a program leadership team. Vermont has an Early MTSS System Inventory guide that establishes critical elements and activities for a program leadership team. While the Vermont Early MTSS System Inventory is not available online, a tool with a similar structure and elements can be explored from the NCPMI website.

Moving the work of a program leadership team to the regional level may also encourage the use of memorandums of understanding (MOUs) between programs and providers to share implementation resources and supports (e.g., sharing coaches, TPOT/TPITOS assessors, etc.). The Regional Shared Services Networks sponsored by Vermont's Let's Grow Kids might also be helpful in sharing Early MTSS expertise. Lastly, due to the complexity of the work, and the time likely needed, it is also recommended that RLT members be compensated. Of special note is the difficultly some RLTs experienced recruiting family members to join them during the project's pilot period. It is not surprising, especially given the stressing context of the pandemic. Even so, some RLT members expressed that recruiting family engagement for this type of work has been difficult at other times too. As such, it may not be necessary to include a family member on the RLT. However, RLTs should intentionally think of ways to include families' voices, needs, and strengths in their regional implementation activities as much as possible.

Demonstration Sites

An important part of the 3-year sustainability & scale-up model plan, as well as the marketing plan, is to disseminate implementation discoveries, lessons learned, and information about demonstration sites to the broader early childhood community within Vermont. With this in mind, funding is provided within the plan to help demonstration sites host visits, connect with interested programs who are exploring Early MTSS as an innovation to implement, and be

available to lend their expertise to their RLT. Recommendation: One demonstration site from each region should be identified and supported.

State-affiliated, Practice-Based Coaches

A cadre of state-affiliated, practice-based coaches are essential to statewide implementation of Early MTSS. The State T/TA Team can provide ongoing opportunities to strengthen the skills of existing coaches, and recruit/train future coaches. Additionally, coaches can share their expertise and contribute to the state's annual calendar of Early MTSS trainings. Recommendation: Coaches should have at least four hours a week available to coach an implementation site that requires more intensive training (see this guide for additional information about a coach's scope of work).

Implementation Sites

One of the most essential features of scaling is to increase the number of programs that are implementing Early MTSS. As such, programs need access to funding to support their work. A challenge of the current pilot project was to manage the coaching and training supports provided directly to programs. Recommendation: In order to empower implementation sites in exploring and determining the best use of funds for their training and coaching needs, it is recommended that funds be made available yearly for the number of implementation sites sought for recruitment. Sites could work with their Regional Coordinator to develop an implementation plan, including the training and coaching supports that might best meet their needs and build upon their strengths. Regional Coordinators could support an implementation site's application to the State T/TA Team to draw upon funds made available to them. This process is akin to the funding support that is available at the K-12 level through BEST/ACT 230 grant opportunities.

Estimated Budget

An estimated budget to match the implementation plan is presented in Appendix C. It is difficult to project a budget when the pilot occurred during such a challenging time, and when most trainings were delivered virtually. However, there were many lessons learned that were applied to estimating a potential budget to sustain and scale-up Early MTSS in Vermont.

Promising Practices

There are many promising practices and directions that the project's work can take in the future. I will highlight two here.

Group Coaching with application of ePyrmaid Modules

At the onset of the project, none of the affiliated coaches felt comfortable engaging in group coaching. Yet, scientific support for group coaching is growing (see Fettig & Artman-Meeker, 2016). Within the cutting edge models of group coaching, an additional element is tailoring coaching and training supports based on teachers' TPOT/TPITOS scores. For example, a teacher who is close to implementing Pyramid Model with fidelity will need less intensive coaching supports than someone who is further from implementing with fidelity. Similar, group coaching, especially at a distance, is complemented by the integration of the ePyramid Modules. Given the increasing interest in these modules across the pilot regions, and the increasing interest in applying group coaching, one of the project's coaches was supported to attend a group

coaching training. She provided for the final report a brief snapshot of advantages and challenges to group coaching:

Advantages

- Same advantages that 1:1 coaching provides
- 6-8 people can be coached at a time
- Information, ideas, and feedback come from multiple people who provide consistent feedback to each other to improve teaching practices
- Can be used across different types of programs and ages
- Classroom observations are done using video and allow participants to reflect on their implementation of the practices as the practitioner (after completed lesson) and observer (during video review), and during a group session
- Create safe peer communities where teachers can discuss experiences
- Less coach travel time needed - travel to the meeting site for group sessions
- Coaching a group has the potential for more teachers to be coached

Challenges

- Having appropriate technology to record and share video
- Finding common coaching time for all participants
- Coaching meeting often longer - at least 1.5 hours is ideal

Taken together, group coaching may be of interest for future iterations, and implementation, of Early MTSS in the state. With this in mind, three SWIVL video-capturing devices and three iPads were included in the budget. The project used the SWIVL devices with success, and with additional time and resources, they could be implemented to an larger extent along with group coaching practices.

Blending the Pyramid Model with Strengthening Families

One of the challenges discovered when attempting to blend the Pyramid Model with Strengthening Families, especially during coaching is that there are currently no fidelity of implementation tools for Strengthening Families. As such, to increase the implementation fidelity of Strengthening Families, Brenda Schramm interviewed five early childhood professionals from pilot regions who use Strengthening Families. The information gleaned from these regional stakeholders is the first step to developing a practice profile for Strengthening Families that can be used for coaching teachers to fidelity on the approach (see Metz, 2016 for more information on practice profiles). Further development of this profile could be very supportive to implementing Early MTSS in Vermont when blending the Pyramid Model with Strengthening Families.

Conclusion

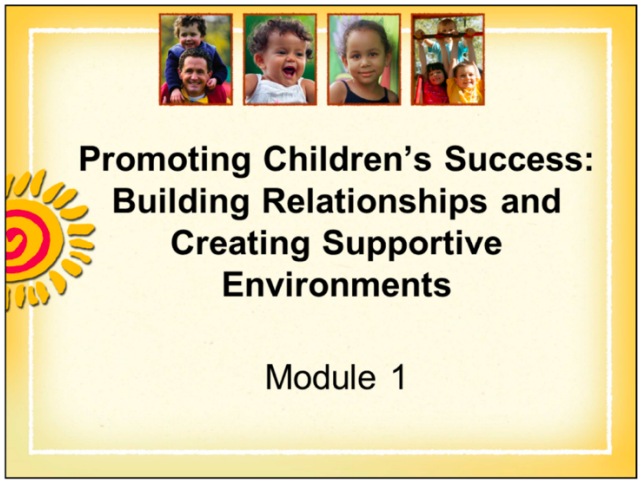
It was an immense joy to work on this project, meeting and learning from many, many others who care deeply about young children's social emotional well-being and their families. I genuinely hope that the report's information, especially the implementation plan and budget, helps to further implement Early MTSS within our state for a brighter, stronger, and healthier future for our youngest Vermonters!

Appendix A
Embedding STRONG within Pyramid Model Trainings

This guidance document is designed for Pyramid Model trainers who have also been trained in STRONG: Teaching the Strengthening Families Protective Factor Framework to Parents and Professionals curriculum developed by Maureen Durning and Jane Zink (STRONG; 2017). The slides seen here are from the Pyramid Model Preschool Training Modules from the Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning: Module 1. These module slides, including presenter scripts, are available for free through the Center's website. Throughout the document, references are made to the STRONG curriculum and linkages to Pyramid Model content and STRONG lessons.

STRONG lessons and discussion about protective factors are easily integrated Pyramid Model Module 1 and 2 trainings. Module 1 is about the base of the pyramid which emphasizes building relationships with children, families and co-workers. In Module 2, links between STRONG and the Pyramid model are greatest on the topic of partnering with families. STRONG offers many activities that may be embedded into Pyramid Model Module 1 and 2 trainings as in-class small group work or home work.

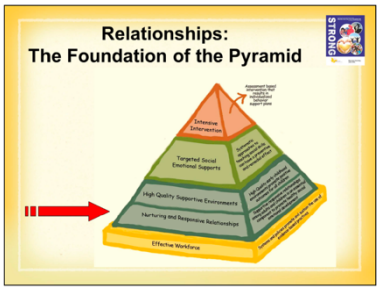
The ideas proposed here were developed by coaches working with the Vermont Early MTSS-123 Project.

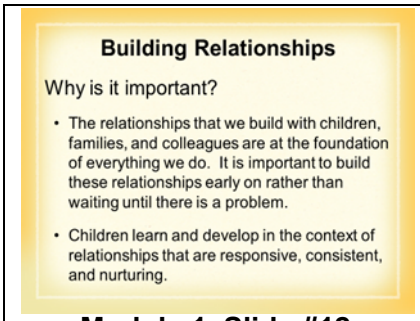


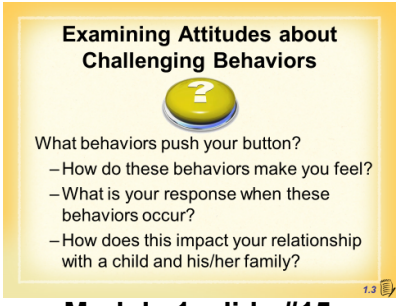
Trainer Tips:

Module 1, slide #5	

	Trainer Tips: Discuss how the Pyramid Model aligns well with the five protective factors of Strengthening Families, now known as STRONG. These protective factors support the resilience of families and help them to manage in times of stress. Childcare providers are in a unique position to help families develop these protective factors 1. Parental Resilience – Parents are able to bounce back from stress 2. Understanding Child Development – Helps parents to know when child behavior is developmentally appropriate and how to respond rather than react 3. Understanding Social and Emotional Development – This is the crux of Pyramid Model, but the key is making sure you share the knowledge with families 4. Concrete Supports in times of Need – Having the information about community resources to support parents in times of need 5. Social Supports – Connecting the families of children in your care to each other, as well as helping them recognize who their other social supports are in their sphere.

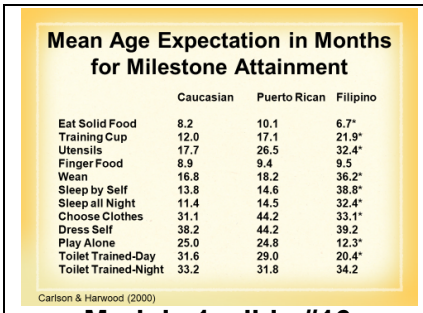
 **Module 1, slide #10**	**Trainer Tip:** The foundation of the pyramid connects to the STRONG activity "It's All About Relationships" activity in Chapter 3 on page 93.

 **Module 1, Slide #12**	**Trainer Tip:** The next 3 slides connect with the STRONG Art Activity Resilience Questions, Chapter 2, p. 43 STRONG activity Signs of Stress p. 29



Module 1, slide #15

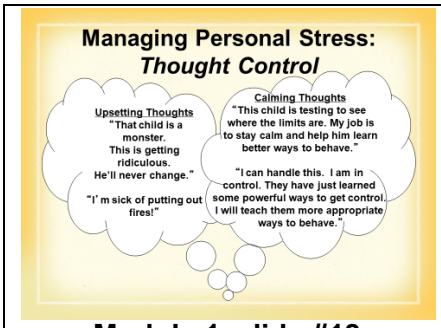
Trainer Tip:
STRONG Art Activity –
Resilience Questions Chapter 2, p. 43
Connections in Ch. 5 to Skill 7 – Parental behaviors that lead to early and secure attachments.
Activities
1. Filling our Wells worksheet. Chapter 2, p. 25
How will you fill your bucket with coworkers, children and families? Worksheet p. 65 can be distributed or be done as homework.
2. Icebreakers and Beyond, Ch. 3, p. 87 – managing stress and functioning well



	Caucasian	Puerto Rican	Filipino
Eat Solid Food	8.2	10.1	6.7*
Training Cup	12.0	17.1	21.9*
Utensils	17.7	26.5	32.4*
Finger Food	8.9	9.4	9.5
Wean	16.8	18.2	36.2*
Sleep by Self	13.8	14.6	38.8*
Sleep all Night	11.4	14.5	32.4*
Choose Clothes	31.1	44.2	33.1*
Dress Self	38.2	44.2	39.2
Play Alone	25.0	24.8	12.3*
Toilet Trained-Day	31.6	29.0	20.4*
Toilet Trained-Night	33.2	31.8	34.2

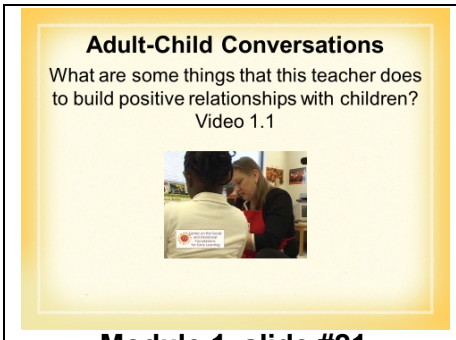
Module 1, slide #16

Trainer Tip:
STRONG connects to the PF of Understanding child development Chapter 1 Protective Factor 5



Module 1, slide #18

Trainer Tip:
Wheel of Life, Chapter 2, pp. 71-72
What can I do, could do…?? Reflection/Action plan on p. 81

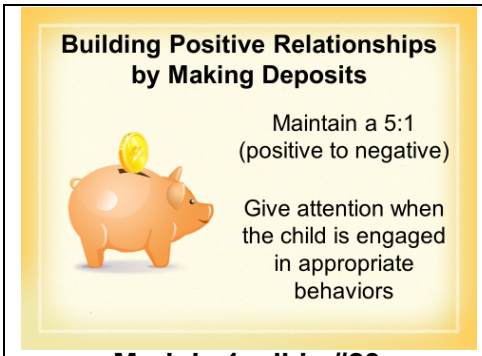


Module 1, slide #21

Trainer Tip:
This section aligns with Chapter 5, Skill 2 of STRONG about Being nurturing, responsive and reliable.

Module 1, slide #22

Trainer Tip:
STRONG: Art Activity – Social Connection Chapter 3, p. 85



Module 1, slide #23

Trainer Tip:
STRONG: Connection to Ch. 5 Skill 7 – Parental behaviors that lead to early and secure attachments.
Activities
1. Filling our Wells worksheet. Chapter 2, p. 25
How will you fill your bucket with coworkers, children and families? Worksheet p. 65 can be distributed or be done as homework.

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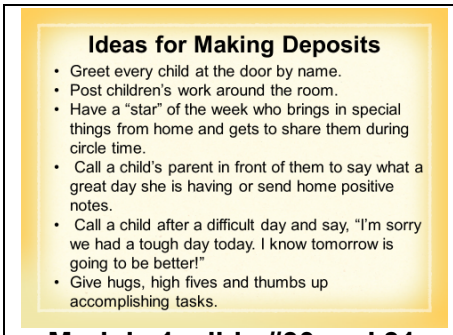
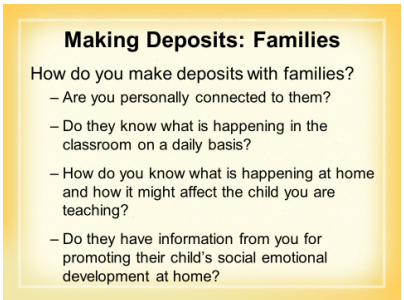


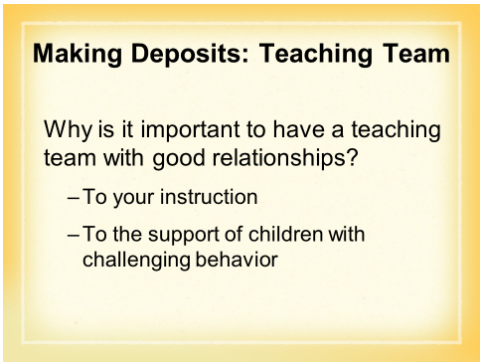
Module 1, slide #30 and 31

Trainer Tip:
STRONG:
2. Icebreakers and Beyond, Ch. 3, p. 87
refers to managing stress and functioning well when we are faced with challenges, adversity, and trauma



Module 1, slide #33 and 34

Trainer Tip:
This connects to the protective factor Social Connections for families. Protective factor #2 Page 83
Families often find themselves isolated and need to make connections. This has been so true through the pandemic. Childcare providers and teachers have learned new ways to help parents feel connected to their children through a variety of virtual mediums. To make this a priority, teachers and providers must build relationships with families and connect in a manner that works for them. Activities:
1. Filling our Wells worksheet, Ch. 2, p. 65
2. It's All About Relationships, Ch.3, p. 93
3. The Power of Accepting, Ch. 4, p. 165

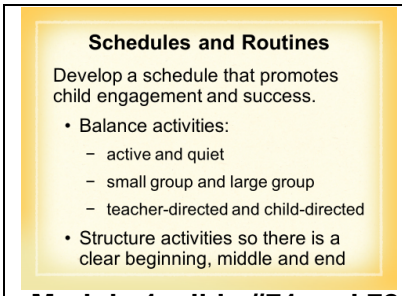


Module 1, slide #35 and 36

Trainer Tip:
STRONG:
Activity: Our Wheel of Life p 71
List: Roles you play in life: Husband/wife, father/mother, teacher, early childhood professional, colleague, team member, sports player, volunteer, community leader, friend, etc. Areas of life that are important to you: artistic expression, positive attitude, career, education, religion, family, friends, financial freedom, physical challenge, pleasure, spiritual fulfillment, personal growth, health, public service. Your own combination of these or others: that reflect the things that are priority in your life.
Use a paper palate and divide into 8 sections. (like a wagon wheel) Choose 8 dimensions and add them to your wheel
Weigh each one of your roles and determine which weighs the most. How can you find a balance?

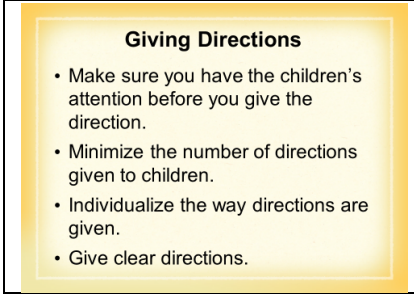
Module 1, slide #40

Trainer Tip:
STRONG Connection to Ch. 5, Skill 5 – Physical and emotional safe environment for children to thrive.



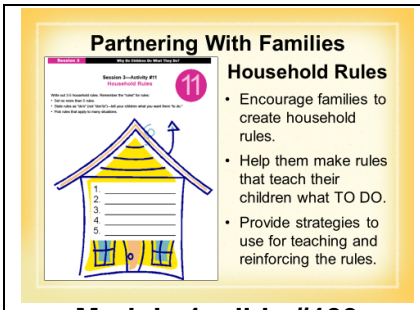
Module 1, slide #71 and 72

Trainer Tip:
STRONG Connection to Chapter 5, Skill 3 – Regular, predictable consistent routines.



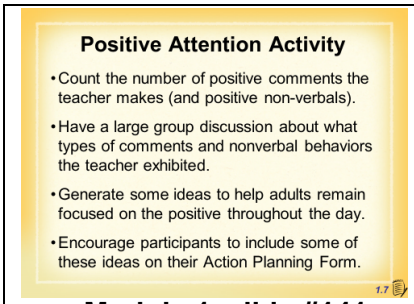
Trainer Tip:
STRONG Connection to Skill 5 in Chapter 5 – Positive discipline techniques.

Module 1, slide #115 and 116	



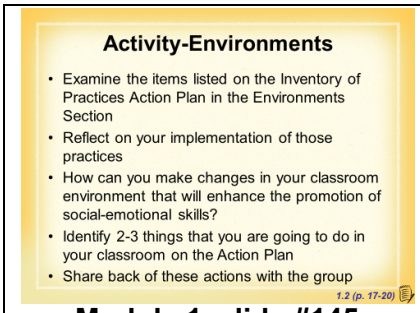
Module 1, slide #139

Trainer Tip:
STRONG Connection – to skill 3 chapter 5 – creating regular, predictable, consistent routines.



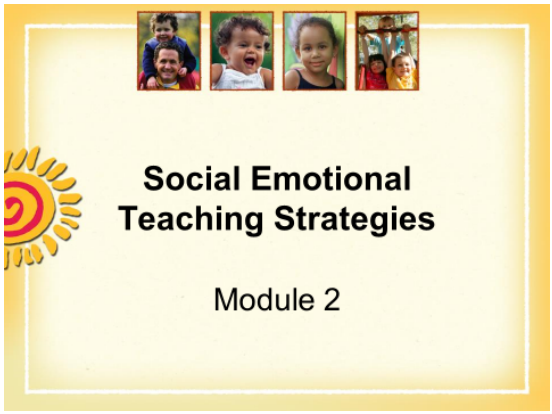
Module 1, slide #141

Trainer Tip:
STRONG – Activity: Finding Strengths, Ch 1, p. 17
This is the activity that you read a scenario that is not generally looked at as positive, but then you find the strengths in the roles presented in the scenario.

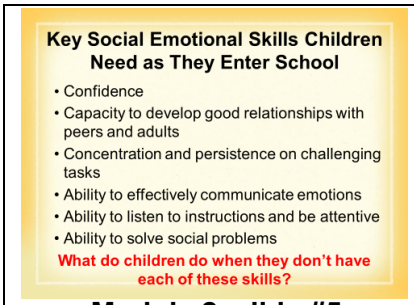


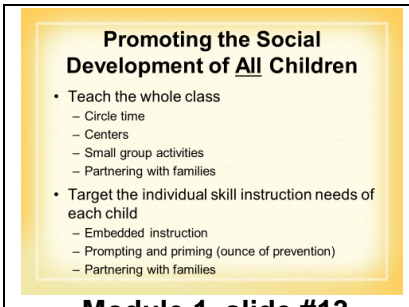
Module 1, slide #145

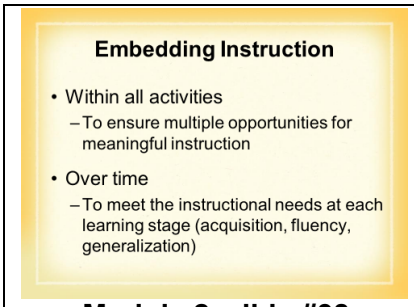
Trainer Tip:
STRONG Action Planning
p.13 *Keep–Change–Add* form. This could be homework and shared at the top of Module 2.



Module 2, slide #2	**Trainer Tip:**

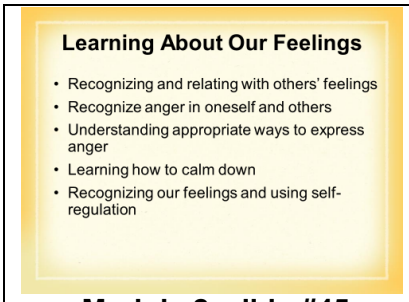
 **Module 2, slide #5**	**Trainer Tip:** STRONG Include/discuss S/E skills from Chapter 3, p. 83-141. Activity: Social Connections p. 141. (Could be homework) Chapter 6 Intro for parents/children p. 271-72

 **Module 1, slide #13**	**Trainer Tip:** STRONG: Chapter 2 Art Activity- Resilience Questions p. 43 Line Up Activity: Protective Factor #2 (Chapter 1 p. 25)



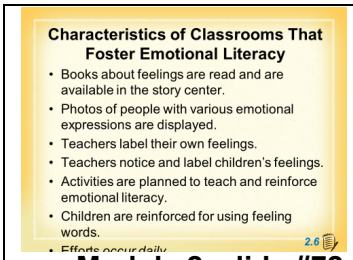
Module 2, slide #38

Trainer Tip:
STRONG:
Chapter 5: Art activity p. 187 ; Play-Work-Learn p. Read poem



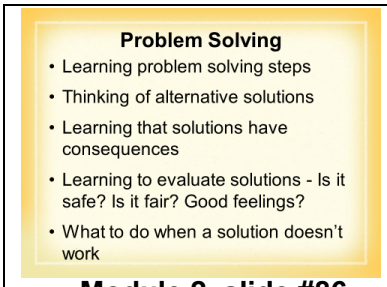
Module 2, slide #45

Trainer Tip:
STRONG: Chapter 2 Art Activity p 43
Line Up Activity: Protective Factor # 5 (Chapter 1 p. 25)



Module 2, slide #72

Trainer Tip:
STRONG: Chapter 3 p 107 I Feel Statements

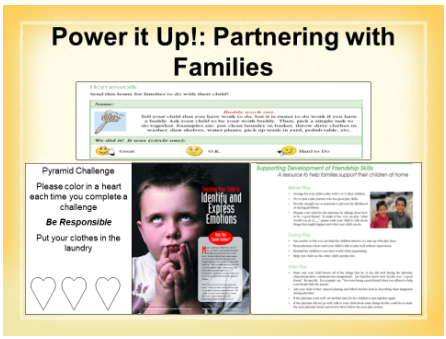


Module 2, slide #86

Trainer Tip:
STRONG: Chapter 3 p. 115 Win-Win Problem Solving

Trainer Tip:
STRONG: Protective Factor #2 Social Connections, Chapter 3 p 83. Protective Factor # 4 Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development, Chapter 5 p.183

Module 2, slide #94	



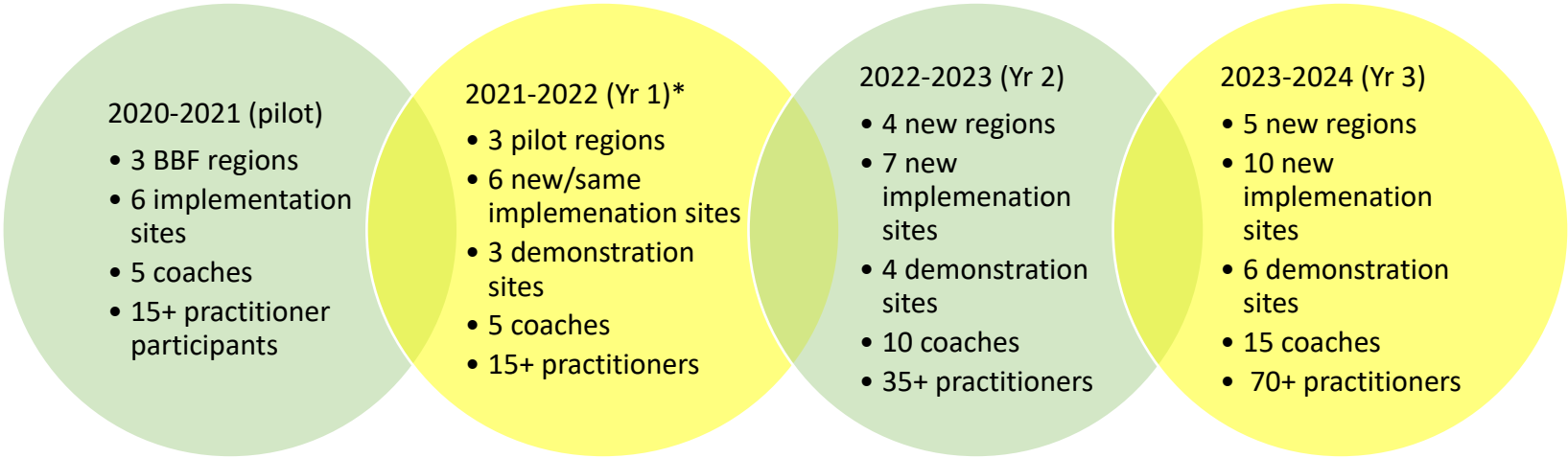
Module 2, slide #112

Trainer Tip:
STRIONG Connections:
Chapter 6 p. 313 Relentless Compassion
Chapter 4 p. 148 Art Activity- Asking for/Receiving Help
Chapter 5 p. 187 Art Activity – Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development
Chapter 1 Activity - Is it True p. 35 ^
Chapter 1 Finding Strengths
Protective Factor #1 Resilience: resilient families are future-oriented, hopeful.
Chapter 2 p. 57+ Activity - I Have, I Am I Can

Keep-Change-Add form may also work for this activity. P 13

Appendix B

Sustainability & Scale-up Implementation Plan



*Since the 2021 year has already begun, the timeline may need to be adjusted to acknowledge whatever date accurately represents the start of the implementation plan.

Appendix C

Estimated Budget (Year 1)

Item	Brief Description	Budgeted Amount
State Team for T/TA • Project Director (.5 FTE) • Professional Development Coordinator (.5 FTE) • Office Project Manager (.5 FTE)	Oversees T/TA Trains RLTs & Coaches Links between RLTs and SLT	**$100,000**
Regional Leadership Team • Coordinator (.5 FTE) • Year 1 = 3 coordinators	1 coordinator for each region to oversees and guides the work of the RLT, implementation sites, and potential implementation sites.	$30,000 estimated for each coordinator **$90,000**
Regional Leadership Team Members • 5 members per region/12 meetings a year • Year 1 = 3 teams	Functions like a program leadership team, but serves the region. Contributes to building implementation capacity in the region and linking regional programs to T/TA.	Each team member receives yearly stipend of $1,200 for their work on the RLT. Rate = $50.00 an hour Year 1 (15 RLT members) = **$18,000**
Implementation Sites • 6 sites per region • Year 1 = 18 sites	Works with RLT and coaches to install the Pyramid Model and Strengthening Families Innovations in their site.	Each site has access to $7,000 in funds that can be used to cover training, coaching, and teacher coverage, as needed, to specifically meet the implementation needs of their program. **$126,000**
Demonstration Sites • Support one site per region • Year 1 = 3 regions	Hosts visitors, virtual and in-person, sharing materials, expertise with other interested programs, helps to promote and increase awareness of the practices	$1,500 to support work/release time towards demonstration site responsibilities **$4,500**
State-affiliated coaches • Year 1 = 5 coaches	Receive training from State T/TA team (2x a yr), Provide state-wide training(s) on identified areas of need, meet	Rate = $70/hr Attend monthly RLT meetings (24 hrs), two, full-day State

	monthly with an RLT (not included in above RLT fund)	T/TA trainings (16 hours), provide two, half-day trainings, or the equivalent (8 hours) [48 hours total, includes prep/travel] Total per coach = $3,360 **$16,800**
Expert-led Trainings • TPOT/TPITOS (1x each) • PTR-YC (3x a year) • Practice-based coaching (1x)	A yearly training calendar that includes these trainings (estimated at a virtual cost)	**$24,000**
National T/TA Conferences • Project Director & PD Coordinator attends	Pyramid Model National Training Institute, as example	**$6,000**
Technology • 3 SWIVL devices to support distance coaching • 3 mini iPads	Device, floor stand, expanded camera lens	**$4,000**
Early MTSS Community of Practice • Year 1 = 20 individuals	Meets monthly, grass-roots organization with RLT involvement to support	Estimated $50 per person to support PD specific to the CoP's interests **$1,000**
Material costs • Printing/Mailing		**$2,000**
Total Budget		**$392,300**