



# PreKindergarten Education Implementation Committee – Meeting

April 9, 2024: 9:30 a.m. – 11:00 a.m.

Microsoft Teams Virtual  
Meeting Call In: 802-552-8456  
Conference ID: 400 249 115#  
[Meeting Link](#)

## DRAFT MEETING MINUTES

**Present:** Anne Bordonaro, Interim Deputy Secretary of Education; Sandra Cameron, Vermont School Board Association; Sherry Carlson, Let's Grow Kids; Morgan Crossman, Building Bright Futures; Jeff Francis, Vermont Superintendents Association; Sharron Harrington, VTAEYC; Korrine Harvey, family representative; Renee Kelly, Head Start Collaboration Office Director; Erika McLaughlin, Vermont Principals Association; Janet McLaughlin, Agency of Human Services Co-chair; Jeff O'Hara, prequalified private provider representative; Theresa Pollner, Vermont Curriculum Leaders Association; Pam Reed, Vermont Council of Special Education Administrators; Colin Robinson, Vermont National Education Association; Rebecca Webb, regional prekindergarten coordinator; Chris Wells, family representative

**AOE:** Molly Loomis, Facilitator; Meg Porcella; Suzanne Sprague

**Others:** Valerie Wood, Building Bright Futures; Maggie Barch, Child Development Division; Christy Swenson; Dora Levinson, Building Bright Futures; Nancy Brochu

**Absent:** Nicole Miller, Vermont Afterschool; Sheila Quenneville, prequalified private provider representative

Facilitator Molly Loomis called the meeting to order at 9:32am and briefly reviewed the meeting format for work group presentations via slide deck followed by group discussion and questions. No questions or comments were posed about the agenda.

Loomis welcomed comments from the public. No public comments were made.

Loomis requested comments, questions, or suggestions on the [draft meeting minutes from March 12](#). None were made. Sherry Carlson moved to approve the minutes and Colin Robinson seconded the motion. The motion carried.

Loomis announced that two workgroups had met since the last Committee meeting and the Systems-level Considerations Workgroup plans to meet on Friday April 5. She shared a [slide deck](#) to guide the remaining meeting, beginning with a timeline of the Committee's work. In a review of upcoming meeting tasks, Loomis reminded committee members that workgroups are researching and collecting information on their assigned considerations and reporting out to the full committee. Time at each committee meeting is reserved for all members to make connections and share insights on each workgroup's update. A similar structure is set for the May and June meetings. A

longer, in-person meeting to discuss workgroup integration and development of recommendations is being postponed from June to September to accommodate scheduling challenges. Janet McLaughlin offered that the postponement to a September meeting was suggested to accommodate ongoing legislative work and potential legislative changes that will impact recommendations.

Pam Reed recommended setting the September meeting soon to avoid further scheduling challenges. Loomis agreed to follow up the meeting with scheduling options.

### **Capacity & Funding Considerations Workgroup Report**

Sherry Carlson reported on the Capacity & Funding Considerations Workgroup with a foundational presentation on capacity data. Katie Salinas, Policy and Research Manager, from Let's Grow Kids shared an [Analysis of Vermont's Universal PreKindergarten Program Capacity](#).

- Sandra Cameron underscored that “slots” is not equal to the number of children served, as many schools offer morning and afternoon programs.
- Rebecca Webb highlighted the importance of 1:1 space when looking at school districts that offer full day programs.
- Colin Robinson asked for clarification on what the program numbers represent in the slides - schools or districts? J. McLaughlin explained that licensed pre-kindergarten programs are designated by their childcare license and licensed by site/building and not by operator. Sherry Carlson confirmed that the numbers reflected are for pre-kindergarten programs, not school districts.
- Capacity limitation cited: AOE tracks pre-kindergarten attendance only for the mandated 10 hours, and school-based programs generally offer more hours. To supplement their tracking, AOE requested TS Gold data of enrolled children by age, site and supervisory union from their data team.
- Jeff O'Hara clarified that most school programs end at 2:30 pm-3:00 pm. Programs are considered half-day or full-day programs, but a general consideration would be that a full day is 7:30am – 5pm.
- Renee Kelly asked if there is information tracked by LEAs that is not necessarily funneling up to data tracked by AOE as the SEA. Cameron confirmed that attendance is tracked by LEA. Meg Porcella clarified that enrollment is tracked, rather than attendance.
- Anne Bordonaro clarified that attendance is not tracked and reported by AOE until at least Kindergarten or grade 1, partly because the age of compulsory attendance is 6-16 and also because federal regulations do not require reporting outside K-12.
- Cameron considered that some 3–5-year-old students are being provided special services by the LEA, who are either not enrolled or may be enrolled in a childcare center or private preK program.
- Webb reported that pre-kindergarten attendance is not mandatory, and so not tracked for truancy. District based programs take attendance as part of capacity, accountability, and safety monitoring. AOE also tracks licensed teachers and the time they spend at separate programs. AOE also tracks numbers of children in half day vs full day programs on a district level. A missing data point is tracking children who attend multiple programs.

- Morgan Crossman presented BBF's three page [Act 76 Indicator Snapshot](#), part of its charge to monitor Vermont's early childhood system and measure Act 76 progress. The snapshot highlights data and data gaps for stakeholder priorities across nine themes.
- Porcella pointed out that Vermont's current 3-year-olds will be next year's 4-year-olds and suggested tracking the 2-year-old population.
- Webb suggested that COVID-19 had a large impact on pre-kindergarten enrollment and that the use of UPK slots will be in part determined by families' need for care beyond what pre-kindergarten provides. For example, families:
  - want to attend the public-school program but can't because it is 2 1/2 hours a day and does not meet their need.
  - struggle because their current program is inconsistent.
  - enroll their children into both a district and community programs to piece together their care schedule and then choose which one is going to be their designated UPK.
- Cameron cited that the variables would make accurate prediction of slots use challenging and considered that transportation and access to special education services as additional barriers.
- Crossman points out that meeting the Committee's charge will impact childcare, afterschool, and out of time care and shift the child care and education system, and asked members to consider those consequences as they move forward.

### **Program Quality Workgroup Report**

Crossman reported that the Program Quality Workgroup worked to better understand program quality and quality markers currently in place in Vermont. They consulted Lori Connors-Tatro, Senior Research Fellow at the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER), and reviewed NIEER's [State of Preschool Yearbook](#). Vermont is leading in pre-kindergarten expansion and cross sector collaboration and meeting 7 quality benchmarks. Vermont does not meet three benchmarks; teacher credentials, specialized training, and professional development. J. McLaughlin explained Vermont's teacher credential differs because Act 166 prioritized universal access and allowed for alternative experience and education outside of AOE educator licensure.

- Carlson explained that when Act 166 passed in 2014, AOE and CDD worked with stakeholders to create rules for UPK and determined that up to that point there was not always a reason to get an educator license. The intention was to prevent excluding those who chose other non-degree or non-educator pathways to work with children and to make UPK accessible by not including a licensure barrier. The interagency group intended to review rules. The interagency group worked collaboratively and made good progress, but implementation stalled with changes in leadership. As a result, the review of criteria and system were not as regular as intended. The intention was to reevaluate teacher credentials and create achievable pathways and timelines.
- Crossman acknowledged comments in the meeting chat about Vermont's shortage of licensed early childhood teachers. The expiration of provisional licenses for private UPK educators may impact this work.

Crossman continued to report that US trends tracked by NIEER showed that extended pre-kindergarten programs are having greater impact than half day programs, and better child outcomes are associated with two years of preschool compared with one, and that the benefits of

UPK programs far exceed the additional costs. The mixed delivery system was shown to increase family choice, especially in rural areas. Vermont ranks third in the US in equitable access for three-year-olds and fourth in the US for four-year-olds.

Crossman overviewed a report to the workgroup made by Porcella about AOE's Vermont Early Learning Standards (VELS), Teaching Strategies Gold, Early Multi-tiered Systems of Support, and training, mentoring and coaching for early childhood educators.

Crossman overviewed a report to the workgroup made by J. McLaughlin about CDD's quality standards in monitoring childcare licensing and UPK programs, and the quality and recognition and improvement system (QRIS) called STARS. STARS moved to a continuous quality improvement model, maintains five levels of quality, uses the CLASS assessment tool and is looking at how Vermont currently defines quality.

J. McLaughlin added that childcare licensing monitors foundational health and safety standards for physical spaces with unannounced visits from a robust team to investigate concerns and check standards across all settings. UPK programs are required to be four- or five-STARs programs where an external trained assessor observes the quality of classroom interactions.

Program Quality Workgroup discussions included the different licensing/regulatory site visits and how to structure that work with AHS and AOE, career pathways for early childhood educators and engaging the Early Childhood Education Consortium, engaging partners in post-secondary education on teacher training programs while considering enrollment rates, AOE's provisional license program, EMTSS and professional development programs, and creating a crosswalk of these issues in relation to program quality. Goals include gathering input from the whole committee on where there is agreement on program quality, discussing UPK oversight, and focusing on serving the most young and vulnerable children.

- Carlson suggested that framing the work of the Committee for Implementation and rules for UPK as focused on capacity is incorrect. A capacity focus would not incorporate a requirement for licensed educators. Not requiring an educator license allowed for people with other training and expertise in early childhood development or family services. More time was needed to determine consistent qualifications across all settings. The committee held high intent to situate well prepared educators to work with young children.
- Loomis acknowledged that synthesizing workgroup progress to inform the whole Committee is a challenge. She posed a question about the correct division of labor between state and local levels regarding program quality and system oversight.

Renee Kelly reported the Systems-level Considerations Workgroup will defer their update to the next meeting, as they are scheduled to meet later this week.

- Kelly asked if the Quality Workgroup will review Head Start program performance status standards or consider the NAEYC developmentally appropriate standards and the equivalent specialized standards quality standards.
- Cameron suggested making a comprehensive list of items to be addressed after the report on the implementation of four-year-old pre-kindergarten to the legislature.
- O'Hara considered the impact regarding availability of licensed teachers.
- Carlson reported that the future of licensure programs and state colleges is unstable, with one program ending abruptly.

- Korinne Harvey asked what ended abruptly, Carlson clarified the Standards Board license ended the provisional license waiver. Porcella added that some people who are currently in the pipeline are supported through PDG.
- Erika McLaughlin commented on her preference to maintain a high bar and not to compromise due to circumstances. The bar is set to provide the greatest impact for children.
- Sharon Harrington reported there are 14 provisional candidates in the pipeline - no new candidates accepted after April 1.
- Webb reported she currently mentors an additional 9 candidates above what VTAEYC is supporting under PDG. Several programs mentor their own employees under the provisional track.
- Carlson reported three requests for her formal support of preserving Higher Ed preparation programs VT at VT institutions.
- Kelly suggested building 'bridges' that allow standards re: high educator qualifications high, but provide reasonable time and accessible, affordable pathways. Examples can be seen within HSPPS for workforce qualifications.
- Webb asked if the state has research that supports how licensed teachers equate higher quality.
- Carlson recalled research on the level of preparation of the adult working with young children is an important indicator of the quality experience for young children, not to specific educator license.
- Loomis suggested NEER as a resource for the qualification conversation; the NEER presentation included states that are revising benchmarks for teacher degrees and teacher compensation.
- J. McLaughlin reinforced the Committee goal of building a system that provides pre-kindergarten education to 95% of four-year-olds.
- Crossman reinforced the importance of serving the youngest and most vulnerable children and their families and considered the Committee recommendations should encompass the comprehensive system including unintended consequences.
- Bordonaro shared that given limited funding a focus on eliminating barriers (transportation, income, disabilities) for vulnerable populations should be a priority.
- Carlson suggested the way to mitigate unintended consequences is to preserve Vermont's mixed delivery system.
- Webb reflected on the challenge of discussing UPK the context that kindergarten isn't mandated.
- Carlson cited the fragility of early childhood program in higher education as a primary concern.
- O'Hara considered that early childhood education may start as internships in high school and welcomes discussion on that topic.
- Francis shared the Act 76 charge, "Committee shall examine and make recommendations on the changes necessary to provide prekindergarten education to all children by or through the public school system on or before July 1, 2026, including transitioning children who are three years of age from the 10-hour prekindergarten benefit to childcare and early

education.” He suggested the conversation is important, but a focus on the specific charge drive the work of the Committee.

- Kelly pointed out that the aspiration is to have UPK access for all children, though limited resources should be concentrated on equity to provide additional supports to the most vulnerable.

Loomis adjourned the meeting at 11:00am  
Meeting minutes recorded by Maggie Barch.