



PreKindergarten Education Implementation Committee – System-Level Workgroup Meeting

May 10, 2024: 1:00 p.m. – 2:30 p.m.

Microsoft Teams Virtual
Meeting Call In: 802-552-8456
Conference ID: 558 242 839#
[Meeting Link](#)

DRAFT MEETING MINUTES

Workgroup Charge

The System-level Considerations Workgroup is charged with exploring, documenting and reporting back to the Committee about:

1. Needs of both the State and local education agencies;
2. Whether there are areas of the State where prek education can be more effectively & conveniently furnished in an adjacent state due to geographic considerations;
3. Changes necessary to transition children who are three years of age from to 10-hour prek benefit to child care & early education; and
4. Recommendations for the oversight of the prek system.

DRAFT MEETING MINUTES

Present: Jeff Francis, Vermont Superintendents Association; Janet McLaughlin, Agency of Human Resources, Colin Robinson, Vermont National Education Association, Rebecca Webb, Regional Prekindergarten Coordinator

AOE: Molly Loomis, Facilitator; Suzanne Sprague

Absent: Renee Kelly, Head Start Collaboration Office

Facilitator Molly Loomis called the meeting to order at 1:00 pm. She reviewed the agenda for the current meeting, requesting any questions or comments. There were none.

Loomis asked for questions or comments on the draft minutes from the April 12 meeting. Janet McLaughlin requested to amend the meeting notes to clarify her statement that Building Bright Futures' (BBF) role is unrepresented in Vermont UPK law was later corrected to recognize BBF's role is related to prekindergarten regions.

McLaughlin moved to approve the April 12 minutes with that change. Colin Robinson seconded the motion. The motion was carried with none opposed.

Meeting members shared systems level insights and related work that occurred since the April 12

meeting.

- Becca Webb reported that her UPK agreement is nearly complete and will be sent to partners.
- McLaughlin relayed her discussions with Head Start Association to gather experience and questions. They identified challenges including definitions of expulsion and suspension, implications of housing insecurity and accessing special education services, and timely fingerprinting. McLaughlin reported that she is also exploring options to help FCCH meet federal standards for insurance requirements not currently available in the Vermont market.
- Jeff Francis shared that the current legislative session and workforce stability have been an obstacle to gathering stakeholder feedback.
- Robinson reported a 20% response rate to his early educator and early special educator member survey.

Loomis opened the discussion for workgroup members to share stakeholder feedback.

- Robinson reported that survey respondents were evenly split between classroom teachers and special education instructors half with over 15 years' experience. He inadvertently missed Rutland County members in the survey. Respondents reported the value of supporting education for three- and four-year-olds in its high impact on kindergarten readiness and with consideration for equity and a lower focus on academics. Respondents reported fingerprinting challenges, concerns about prekindergarten dual oversight and increasing capacity, and the value for making prekindergarten noncompulsory. One consideration addressed staff with dual licenses (special educator and teacher) and their capacity to engage in both roles. Some districts provide prekindergarten services and respondents noted positive impacts for children who participate. Results also addressed practical needs associated with expansion, including transportation. Legal concerns focused on special education, IEP requirements and equity. System oversight themes focused on dual oversight, meeting differing needs of the three-and four-year-old age group, and licensure.
 - Webb shared her perspective on staff who hold a dual special educator /teacher license. She explained that in smaller, less-resourced programs the special education teacher may also be the general education teacher, which is a challenging role. The concern of those educators is how increased enrollment will affect administrative time, number of students on the special education caseload, and the capacity to provide supports to those children. Robinson confirmed her interpretation.
 - McLaughlin asked if paraeducators are represented in Vermont National Education Association (VTNEA) membership. Robinson confirmed paraeducators are part of membership, but not included in the survey due to their fluid assignments and the VTNEA data system.
- Francis conducted an in-person meeting with Winooski district superintendents to discuss questions he provided in advance. He noted that each superintendent has different levels of UPK involvement and different leadership styles that shaped their answers. Themes included support for full day, five-day-week prekindergarten in public or private entities. The

group acknowledged challenges in providing age-appropriate public (in-school) prekindergarten in the long term and identified the dual system of monitoring and regulation as an area of concern. The group also set a demarcation between childhood education and child care at age three, identifying birth – three needs as different from services for four-year-olds. Participants cited insufficient child care opportunities as a challenge for their employees. Regarding capacity and workforce, four of the eight participating superintendents reported they could accommodate full day, five-day-week prekindergarten education to four-year-olds within 2 years. Francis encouraged the workgroup to consider if gathering this data from a larger audience would be helpful. The conversation also touched on wait lists, funding, professional learning, workforce compensation, special education and equity.

- Webb added that the Winooski district group is made up of a broad range of rural and urban programs that differ in size and may be a good representation of statewide feedback. She pointed out that she supports the Winooski district as a regional coordinator and would be interested in hearing from superintendents who do not have similar UPK mediation on a systems level.
 - Loomis noted that the task of the workgroup is to identify partner needs and represent their perspectives and ideas.
 - McLaughlin noted the alignment of the feedback shared. She asked for clarification about the group’s demarcation between three- and four-year-olds, sharing that birth to age three is 0-36 months which leaves out children aged 37 – 47 months. She wondered if the group preferred a public system that served four-year-olds only. Francis explained that the conversation did not cover that detail and would have to return to the group to ask more specifically to answer accurately. Webb noted that the range of programs in the group currently covered several models of service to three- and four-year-olds.
 - McLaughlin asked for clarification on concerns about dual monitoring and regulation. Francis related that the concerns were not negative but acknowledged the challenge of working “in two worlds.” He suggested gathering more information on the topic. He also suggested value in gathering information from principals.
- Webb met with other Committee members – Sheila Quenneville, prequalified private provider representative, Jeff O'Hara, prequalified private provider representative, Sharon Harrington, VTAEYC, and collected written feedback from Shari Carlson, Let’s Grow Kids – to consider the private provider perspective. Equity, access, and systems monitoring was a consideration in terms of removing the midday transition for early morning care and afternoon care. They identified a need to determine what regulations would govern the early morning and afterschool care outside the school day education hours. Webb asked the workgroup to consider child care business implications for three- and four-year olds that need to shift location, considering that family child care home providers cannot add infant and toddler spaces. The group discussed equity and inclusion around how special education serves three-year-olds in a private program, and how it might impact early identification of child needs. Other considerations included Act 76 changes that impact the early child care

landscape and parent choice and involvement to access a school district program that does not cover summer and vacation.

Loomis asked the workgroup to identify next steps. She reported that she will begin to synthesize and frame a report based on considerations and recommendations.

- Francis volunteered to gather data from a larger sample of superintendents and include principals in a survey.
- Webb suggested collaborating with Francis on reaching principals for systems monitoring feedback.
- McLaughlin suggested straw polling districts about capacity and facilities to accommodate UPK in two years.
- Robinson flagged legislative conversations about the physical footprint of Vermont's public education system are also evolving and relevant.

Loomis directed the workgroup members to consider recommendations for future system oversight and shared the [draft summary of UPK Oversight Matrix](#).

- Webb recommended including a representative who understands UPK developmentally and financially.
- McLaughlin suggested defining the role of the UPK Coordinator requirement listed under future UPK system oversight to meet Webb's recommendation.
- Webb recommended tying program monitoring to regulation by requiring a staff person at the district level who has the responsibility and expertise to oversee UPK classrooms, similar to a Curriculum Director or Special Education Director.
- Robinson reported the legislature passed H630 to support boards of cooperative education services (BOCES) that may have a greater regional footprint and serve as monitoring/regulation solution.
- McLaughlin asked to clarify if the workgroup is recommending that districts designate a staff person to oversee UPK classrooms or to require a UPK Coordinator. She agreed with the suggestion to align with BOCES.
- Webb suggested that each supervisory union/district should have a designated person who is knowledgeable in early education on the SU/SD leadership team. The role should coordinate school-based programs as well as be a contact for private programs providing publicly funded preschool through prekindergarten contracts.
- Francis focused on efficacy, structure, culture, alignment, performance, and allegiance. He suggested that the matrix could support better system efficacy by understanding the culture of the community partners, and that the division of responsibilities among agencies may lead to lack of efficacy. He suggested the workgroup discuss the matrix at a later time in terms of bias, silos, better appreciating community partners, and culture of organizations.

Loomis agreed to add discussing the matrix further as an agenda item for this summer.

No member of the public attended.

The meeting adjourned at 2:35 pm. Meeting minutes recorded by Maggie Barch.