



# PreKindergarten Education Implementation Committee – Capacity and Funding Considerations Workgroup Meeting

April 16, 2024: 9:30 a.m. – 11:00 a.m.

Microsoft Teams Virtual  
Meeting Call In: 802-552-8456  
Conference ID: 386 374 430#  
[Meeting Link](#)

## DRAFT MEETING MINUTES

### Workgroup Charge

The Capacity & Funding Considerations Workgroup is charged with exploring, documenting and reporting back to the Committee about:

1. Measures to ensure capacity is available to meet demand for prekindergarten
2. The min # of hours that shall constitute a full school day for both prekindergarten and kindergarten;
3. Any necessary infrastructure changes to expand prekindergarten;
4. Costs associated with expanding prekindergarten, incl. fiscally strategic options to sustain expansion;
5. Recommendations for the oversight of the prekindergarten system.

### Meeting Minutes

**Present:** Anne Bordonaro, Interim Deputy Secretary of Education; Sherry Carlson, Let's Grow Kids, Nicole Miller, Vermont Afterschool; Jeff O'Hara, representative of a prequalified private provider; Chris Wells, family representative

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

**Others:** Maggie Barch, CDD

Facilitator Molly Loomis called the meeting to order at 9:32 am. 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 March 19 meeting. There were none.

Sherry Carlson moved to approve the March 19 minutes. Nicole Miller seconded the motion. The motion was carried with one abstention from Jeff O'Hara.

Meeting members shared program quality insights that emerged since the March 19 meeting.

- O'Hara shared the significant challenge of maintaining focus on four-year-old capacity to meet the workgroup charge without considering impacts on other aged children. He considered the charge may be unanswerable as set forth, as he shared his opinion that Vermont does have capacity for four-year-olds in schools and private settings, but not without significant cost to three-year-olds or five-year-olds.
- Sherry Carlson also noted the challenge of a singular focus on four-year-olds suggested for instance the charge could be met by not serving seniors or providing waivers and provisional licenses for all needed staff. Meeting the charge will have impacts.
- Anne Bordonaro shared that the fiscal climate has changed since the charge was set. She expressed serious concerns about qualified teacher capacity and agreed that program space exists but is hindered by workforce challenges. She shared her preference not to expand services at the expense of quality, relating quality is a ratio to qualified staff, physical infrastructure, parent involvement, and workforce capacity. She agreed with sentiments shared from the last meeting about building alternative pathways to building workforce (e.g. via local tech centers) over the long term.
- Chris Wells considered understanding current kindergarten requirements and using them as a foundation.
- Bordonaro commented that kindergarten is not compulsory.
- Meg Porcella commented that Vermont does not have a statewide formula for kindergarten, in addition to prekindergarten.
- Nicole Miller suggested the Committee outline cost benefits and potential issues, rather than recommendations, as she agreed with other group members on the difficulty of isolating prekindergarten from the current system.
- Carlson asked if kindergarten enrollment can be used to estimate the number of needed spaces/classrooms, number of needed educators, other costs and space considerations like transportation, playground equipment, etc.

Loomis reminded the workgroup that the Committee is tasked not with a large-scale research or community outreach project but with making recommendations that best represent each member's stakeholder group. She suggested that pointing out areas where more information is needed could be a recommendation. She shared that CDD compiled a draft of [current UPK enrollment data](#) for Committee analysis and AOE is reviewing Teaching Strategies Gold data.

The workgroup discussed possible duplications and errors in the enrollment data and suggested further review before analysis.

- Porcella noted that AOE's data collection was not designed for comparative analysis and will consider changes to meet that need.
- Porcella noted that TS Gold data will break down the number of three-year-olds, number of four-year-olds, disability status, and home district, and those attending programs outside their home district.
- Bordonaro commented that CCFAP subsidy rate increases may significantly impact family choices in child care and preschool enrollment.

Loomis set the next steps for CDD to work on enrollment data, the workgroup to use the

data to identify gaps and discuss risks and benefits of a focus on four-year-old capacity. She directed the workgroup discussion to the length of school day charge. Loomis shared compiled information on [minimum hours for school day](#) in prekindergarten and kindergarten from Act 166, Act 76, and k- 3<sup>rd</sup> grade data. She noted key questions for the Committee include continuity, developmentally appropriate hours for prekindergarten, flexibility (considering hours per week rather than hours per day), and financial implications of full day instruction (e.g., admin percentages).

- Bordonaro suggested that adult/child, teacher/student ratios may slightly differ for grade levels and that data challenges are similar for after school and summer programs.
- Carlson asked for clarification on the meaning of “practical length of school day.” Loomis explained it was her language to distinguish instructional hours versus hours attending the program, and considered a better term might be “typical.”
- Bordonaro noted that state board rules are set for “instructional” hours, and kindergarten may provide two hours of instruction during the seven-hour school day, and may disregard play, which is instructional. She suggested one recommendation could be that play be considered instructional.
- Chris Wells asked if “instructional” was defined in the State Board of Education rule. Porcella replied that she did not think it was.
- O’Hara suggested starting recommendations with a universal standard for five-year-olds’ instructional hours and time in school and work backward to set standards for younger children. He suggested instructional hours likely means instruction with a licensed teacher present.
- O’Hara considered the rules may have been written to accommodate schools to run two half-day kindergarten sessions.
- Carlson noted that the data underscores the conflict of focusing on 4-year-olds in a prekindergarten – 12 system.
- Wells reminded the workgroup of the charge to recommend length of school day for kindergarten in addition to prekindergarten.
- O’Hara related length of day is also a capacity question, noting the ideal kindergarten day would be the entire full day program (7:30 am – 5 pm) to meet family needs. He asked if the Committee should consider the fiscal responsibilities of their recommendations.
- Loomis suggested the Committee not consider restraints and focus on best case scenario.
- Bordonaro suggested full day kindergarten faces funding and capacity challenges, but also that some families would not want mandated full day services. She suggested that matching full day kindergarten to the standards set for first grade and reducing the compulsory age to five would bring additional children into the public system. She noted that most five-year-olds attend kindergarten currently. She noted gaps would still exist for after school care and summer care.
- O’Hara noted he did not recommend the workgroup consider kindergarten mandatory. Carlson suggested voluntary participation, mandatory opportunity provided.
- Loomis noted a frequent question is how many schools offer full day prekindergarten. Miller noted the same question for kindergarten and half-day

prekindergarten programs. Bordonaro will request this information from the data director. Porcella suggested TS Gold data could provide this information. Carlson suggested kindergarten uptake rate as a good data point.

- Carlson noted that kindergarten programs run four and a half days but may report they provide full day services.

Loomis reviewed the workgroup charges and next steps: make recommendation or present data on capacity; small group work to collect potential implications to outline for group; determine infrastructure changes need to expand prekindergarten, cost associated with expanding prekindergarten, and recommendation for oversight. She requested action steps from members.

- Carlson suggested using the number of programs (school-based and private providers) offering full day prekindergarten to estimate costs and capacity.
- Wells agreed, noting that prekindergarten and kindergarten are voluntary.
- O'Hara noted that for planning purposes, the Committee should assume every family will participate and collect data on the number of three-year-olds in the state by county, and how many five-year-olds do not participate. He suggested using birth rates data.
- Carlson asked if the data would include children who access prekindergarten through contracts.
- Bordonaro suggested the agency collect data without adding burden to schools and programs and considered that more variables exist for prekindergarten participation than for universal meals.
- Porcella suggested that census and TS Gold data may provide the needed information.
- Carlson reported 4100 Vermont three-year-olds participated in prekindergarten in 2023.
- Wells asked if the Committee should consider the budget needed to fund public universal prekindergarten and who mandates the budget for kindergarten. Loomis responded that the state board rule mandates the budget and suggested collecting data on the costs associated with offering kindergarten. Porcella notes that AOE budgets per pupil, not by age or grade.
- O'Hara suggested that the workgroup create a list of considerations with associated concerns and potential impacts. Loomis agreed to create a spreadsheet for members to fill in.
- Carlson suggested requesting cost modeling from willing schools. O'Hara suggested multiplying the cost per pupil by number of 4-year-olds, as it factors in costs for teachers, transportation and support staff.
- Bordonaro noted that cost per pupil will vary among areas.
- Porcella shared AOE's data on [district spending per pupil](#).
- Carlson asked if the workgroup has access to the funding used to set 10 hours for prekindergarten. Loomis shared the [funding methodology from Act 166](#).
- Bordonaro suggested the workgroup focus on what is needed and what should be done, rather than what is most feasible; also noting the legislature may choose not to move on recommendations. Carlson and Miller agreed, Miller noted that financial projections may be too fluid to predict.

- O'Hara and Wells noted that a model for universal prekindergarten shifts the funding burden from child care subsidy to taxpayer supported public school.
- Carlson noted that child care subsidy is not universal and excludes some populations the state most wants to serve (farmers are excluded due to land value).
- Bordonaro asked if universal prekindergarten is funded by the Education Fund. Carlson confirmed that it is. Bordonaro noted a limitation of universal prekindergarten is lack of family choice.
- O'Hara asked if other workgroups are experiencing the same challenges to frame recommendations. Loomis offered that the Capacity and Funding Considerations Workgroup challenges are greater due to lack of available information and considerable variables.
- Carlson asked if the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) has national data on the cost of full day prekindergarten and if they might provide technical assistance around national figures and strategies. Loomis agreed to contact NIEER for that data point and to discuss workgroup support.

Carlson volunteered to report workgroup progress to the full Committee at the next meeting.

No member of the public attended.

The meeting adjourned at 10:53 am.