



PreKindergarten Education Implementation Committee – Capacity and Funding Considerations Workgroup Meeting

February 20, 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 Prekindergarten Education Implementation Committee on issues, perspectives and possibilities related to:

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

Draft Meeting Minutes

Present: Heather Bouchey, Interim Secretary of Education; Sandra Cameron, Vermont School Board Association; Sherry Carlson, Let's Grow Kids; Nicole Miller, Vermont Afterschool; Jeff O'Hara, representative of a prequalified private provider; Chris Wells, family representative

AOE: Meg Porcella; Suzanne Sprague

Others: Molly Loomis, Facilitator

Facilitator Molly Loomis called the meeting to order at 9:33 a.m and welcomed the group. She asked if there were any amendments to the [agenda](#). There were none. Loomis shared the [Group Agreements](#) that the PreKindergarten Education Implementation Committee agreed to at their February 16 meeting.

Loomis reviewed group members' personal definitions of the first agreement, "focus on what's best for children," which they submitted in advance of the meeting. These included:

- As the question is stated, it simply means to keep students at the center of all of our decisions. If the question is really trying to decipher "what's best for children," that is a more nuanced answer. In my opinion, having a dedicated, safe, caring, and nurturing environment guaranteed for every child in Vermont is what's best for all children. What this environment is could be quite different depending on family circumstances. Obviously, to parse this information out would be next to impossible, so providing a dedicated space in a high quality preschool program is the best universal option.
- Setting aside our personal or professional biases and acknowledging our blind spots to center specifically on what children need.
- Ensuring that all prek students, 3- and 4-year-olds, have high-quality PreK programs available to them.
- Choosing children over cost, logistics, and parent and teacher needs when possible.
- A fully inclusive setting, where staff are trained to support a variety of needs of children and have access to specialists with unique training/skillsets. From NAEYC, "... early childhood educators must intentionally design and adapt the learning environment based on children's diverse and unique assets, strengths, abilities, and needs." A setting where the early educators are able to freely communicate with the educators in kindergarten (regular ed and special ed) in order to develop the most successful transition plans.
- It means using what we know about child development, best practice, information about Vermont families, and data about the current UPK system to make recommendations.

The group discussed areas of overlap across their comments. Members pointed out common themes around focusing on children, families, and the environment they're in. The focus on each and every child, differing family needs, and flexibility and inclusivity of settings were also pointed out.

The group then discussed the differences across comments. A member noted that there might be differing perspectives on what counts as good data about the current UPK system. Another raised a question about how the Committee's scope intersects with the definition of "focus on what's best for children," and specifically about whether focusing on 3 year olds was beyond the scope of the group. It was noted that transitioning three year olds out of the prek benefit is part of the stated Committee charge, but that members may have differing opinions on whether three year olds should be included in UPK. Concerns were raised that focusing on four year olds does not align with a developmental approach to early care and education. The group could agree that high quality programs should be available to all kids regardless of age; but disagreed about the extent to which the Committee should focus only on four year olds.

Loomis asked the group to summarize their shared definition of "focus on what's best for children", based on their conversation. Written comments were submitted online through

Mentimeter and included:

- A system that is inclusive and responsive to differing needs of both children and families.
- Ensuring a high quality program is available for all children, but specifically four year olds (because of our charge). With that, providing clear communication as children transition.
- Keeping the children at the center of the discussion and recommendations, including developmental considerations for all pk-grade 1 children.
- Ensuring high-quality access
- Providing necessary resources to preK educators and centers so they can focus on children's needs
- Supporting four year olds within the context of a public education system which provides the environment and professionals that support each and every child as part of their developmental continuum.
- Keeping the children at the center of the discussion and recommendations
- Keeping the children at the center of the discussion and recommendations, including developmental considerations for all pk-grade 1 children.

Loomis shared the updated [Workgroup Guidelines](#) and reviewed the considerations that they will focus on as part of the Capacity & Funding Considerations Workgroup:

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

The group discussed the responses to the planning form that they each submitted in advance of the meeting, including what each member needs and has to offer to ensure the Workgroup is successful.

Based on advanced feedback from the Workgroup members, the group focused on "measures to ensure capacity is available to meet demand for prek" as the first consideration to explore. The group generated a list of components related to capacity.

These included:

- Geographic capacity - Are there parts of the State struggling to serve prek students more than others?
- Physical capacity - What physical space is needed and available to serve students?
- Staffing capacity - What are staffing and training needs of educators? How do we ensure that we have high quality instruction?
- Numbers of students - What is the capacity to serve three-year-olds, four-year-olds, as well as kindergarteners

- Transportation - What is the family capacity to get kids to programs?
- Financial capacity
- State capacity - What does the state need in order to support a viable prek program? (The system-level Workgroup is focused on this consideration)
- Local capacity - What is needed at local level to support viable prek programs? What's the capacity to streamline transitions across local programs? (The system-level Workgroup is focused on this consideration)
- Accessibility - What's the capacity to serve families with additional and specialized services they need? What's the capacity to serve all kids?
 - Note: prek is not mandatory. There is no compulsory attendance of four-year-olds and five year olds in schools, so families will choose if they want to enroll

The group also identified additional questions related to capacity, including:

- How do we anticipate the need for prek if all we have is current enrollment data? Do we assume that the number will go up if free, full day care becomes available?
- How do we ask about capacity? If programs are currently serving three- and four-year-olds are we asking what capacity would be if they only served four-year-olds?
- What are the needs of 4-year-olds in non-school time (after school, summer, inservice days). Do we have the capacity in other programs to make sure those needs are met?
- Can we use the definition of capacity for Kindergarteners to help define the capacity for prek?
- When looking at capacity, are we looking at all available capacity – public and private together?

The group considered what next steps might help them answer these questions about capacity.

- Draft a survey to ask school districts - Who are you currently serving? Do you have waitlists? If this transition happened, how would your system respond? What space is available? Do you partner with private providers?
- Identify where children are currently served, based on enrollment data from fall 2023, through the Let's Grow Kids Stalled at the Start Report and AOE has census data on kids accessing tuition.

Loomis asked individuals to share their thoughts on a next step for the Workgroup, as well as how they could contribute before the next meeting on March 19. These included:

- Sandra Cameron - Help draft survey questions for schools and think about stakeholders it should go to.
- Sherry Carlson - Help identify the most essential information to ask and best ways to gather information. Identify and share available information about where kids are being served and what settings they're served in.

- Nicole Miller - Help draft questions. It's important to connect with prek coordinators in each district.
- Jeff O'Hara - Help clarify the components of capacity; help draft survey questions.
- Chris Wells - Continue work on capacity definition and keep focused on our charge.
- Meg Porcella - Identify AOE data to pull together; help with logistical work of getting the survey out the door.

There were no members of the public present to be heard.
The meeting adjourned at 11:02 a.m.

Meeting minutes recorded by: Molly Loomis.