The Quality of Prekindergarten Education in Vermont

Response to

2014 Act 166 Sec 3(b)

REPORT

December 2015

Report to the House and Senate Committees on Education, the House and Senate Committees on Appropriations, the House Committee on Human Services, and the Senate Committee on Health and Welfare

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VERMONT AGENCY OF EDUCATION
AGENCY OF HUMAN SERVICES

Legislation

Act 166 of 2014. *An act relating to providing access to publicly funded prekindergarten education.*

Introduction

In January of the 2016, 2017, and 2018 legislative sessions, the Agencies shall report to the House and Senate Committees on Education and on Appropriations, the House Committee on Human Services, and the Senate Committee on Health and Welfare regarding the quality of prekindergarten education in the State.

Act 166 of 2014 has an effective date for universal prekindergarten enrollments of July 1, 2015. The law was enacted on May 10, 2014. The implementation of the law required the promulgation of administrative rules by the Vermont State Board of Education and the timeline for adoption of the rules extended through September 2015. On November 25, 2014 an AOE/AHS memo was issued allowing school districts to choose to implement Act 166 as of July 1, 2015 or to wait one (1) year with full implementation July 1, 2016. Just under a third of school districts moved forward with implementing Act 166 in the 15/16 school year.

Summary of Quality of Prekindergarten Education in Vermont

Act 166 Quality Standards include standards for both programs as well as qualified teachers. This report to the legislature covers both types of standards.

Program Standards

Act 166 legislation and Rules require that a public school or private prekindergarten education program shall be considered prequalified only if it meets all of the following criteria:

1. The public or private program receives and maintains at least one of the following quality program recognition standards::
   (A) National accreditation through the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC);
   (B) A minimum of four stars in Vermont's Step Ahead Recognition System (STARS), with at least two points in each of the five arenas; or
   (C) Three stars in Vermont STARS if the program has a plan approved by the Commissioner for the Department for Children and Families and the Secretary of Education to achieve four or more stars within two years, including at least two points in each of the five arenas, and if the program has met intermediate steps.
2. The public or private program is currently licensed or registered, as applicable, by the Department for Children and Families, and is in good regulatory standing;
3. The public or private program's curricula are aligned with the Vermont Early Learning Standards

As of Dec 31, 2015 there are 318 prequalified programs

- 40% of prequalified programs are public schools (128); 60% of prequalified programs are private/community-based (190).
- 100% of prequalified programs met all of the Act 166 program criteria (Above: 1. Program Quality Standards, 2. Licensed or registered in good standing and 3. Curricula aligned with the Vermont Early Learning Standards).
- Pre-Qualified Programs are located throughout Vermont:

- All programs meet the Program Quality Standards; only 9% have the lowest quality standard "3 Stars with a plan to get to 4 Stars".

NAEYC Accreditation 13%	5 Stars, not accredited 41%	4 Stars 37%	3 Stars/approved plan 9%
1 public school 41 private programs	71 public schools 60 private programs	44 public schools 73 private programs	12 public schools 16 private programs

Teacher Standards

Act 166 Legislation and Rules require staff in prequalified public and private prekindergarten education programs shall meet the following qualifications:

(1) Teachers in each prekindergarten classroom in a district-operated prekindergarten education program shall hold a valid Vermont educator license with an endorsement in either early childhood education or early childhood special education;

(2) Private prequalified prekindergarten education program operated in a licensed Center Based Program shall employ, or contract for the services of, at least one teacher who holds a valid Vermont educator license with an endorsement in either early childhood education or early childhood special education. Ten hours that the licensed teacher is present shall coincide with the hours of prekindergarten education paid for by tuition from districts;

(3) The operator of each registered or licensed Family Child Care Home approved as a prequalified prekindergarten education program shall ensure that one of the following requirements is met:

a. The operator holds a valid Vermont educator license with an endorsement in either early childhood education or early childhood special education; or

b. The operator employs or contracts with the services of a teacher who holds a valid Vermont educator license with an endorsement in either early childhood education or early childhood special education for at least ten hours per week for 35 weeks annually. Ten hours that the licensed teacher is present shall coincide with the hours of prekindergarten education paid for by tuition from district; or

c. The program receives regular, hands-on active training and supervision from a teacher who holds a valid Vermont educator license with an endorsement in either early childhood education or early childhood special education at least three hours per week, during each of the 35 weeks per year in which prekindergarten education is paid for by tuition from districts. The operator shall maintain appropriate written documentation of the supervision on location.

As of Dec 31, 2015 there are 421 ECE/ECSE Licensed Educators Teaching in 474 classrooms in 318 prequalified programs

- Of these ECE/ECSE Licensed Teachers: 47% are teaching in public schools (197) and 53% are teaching or mentoring in private programs (224).
- 100% of prequalified programs met the Act 166 teaching staff program-type criteria.

Teachers	**Public Schools** (#1 above) 189 classrooms in 128 schools	**Center-Based** (#2 above) 260 classrooms in 165 centers	**Home-Based** (#3 above) 25 programs/classrooms		Total
			Operator holds (#3a,b)	Mentor (#3c)	
Licensed	171	169	11	11	362
Provisionally Licensed	26	30	0	3	59
TOTAL	197	199	11	14	421

Act 166 Sec. 3. QUALITY STANDARDS

Act 166 legislation and Rules require that the two agencies examine quality standards for pre-kindergarten programs:

(a) The Agencies of Education and of Human Services shall review existing quality standards for prekindergarten education programs and may initiate rulemaking under 3 V.S.A. chapter 25 to require higher standards of quality; provided, however, that no new standards shall take effect earlier than July 1, 2016.

The agencies are engaging in several activities under our Federal Grants (Early Learning Challenge Grant and the Preschool Development and Expansion Grant) that will increase our understanding of specific aspects of quality and their impacts. In addition, the Blue Ribbon Commission on quality, affordable Child Care is also recommending a working definition of a high-quality early care and learning programs as part of their work (to be completed in fall of 2016). Finally, the implementation of Vermont's Pre-K evaluation (following SY16/17) will look specifically at how quality (both program and teacher) impacts child outcomes.

This work will give us data over the next several years on the impact of the quality characteristics of prequalified programs on child outcomes. Once we receive the results of the evaluation on the SY16/17 school year we plan to convene a work group that will use that information and other data from the federal grant outcomes to review existing quality standards for prekindergarten education programs.

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