



PreKindergarten Education Implementation Committee – Capacity & Funding Considerations Workgroup

May 21, 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 on issues, perspectives and possibilities related to:

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.

DRAFT MEETING MINUTES

Present: Heather Bouchey, Deputy Secretary of Education; Anne Bordonaro, Agency 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; Sandra Cameron, Vermont School Board Association

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 and requested questions or comments. There were none.

Loomis asked for questions or comments on the draft minutes from the [April 16](#) meeting. There were none.

Nicole Miller moved to approve the April 16 minutes. Sheri Carlson seconded the motion. The motion carried with abstentions from Sandra Cameron and Heather Bouchey.

Calculating Capacity and Demand

Loomis reported her request to the National Institute on Early Education Research (NIEER) for sample methodologies and guidance on what key information should be collected to calc capacity and demand. Meg Porcella and Heather Bouchey are looking into including a member of the construction task force in the workgroup conversation.

Costs Associated with Prekindergarten Expansion

Loomis announced that prior to the meeting she emailed workgroup members background information documents including AOE's 2023 [Prekindergarten Pupil Weights Report](#), a [cost calculator tool](#), and the 2023 [Vermont Early Care and Education Financing Study](#). She asked the workgroup to share observations and questions about the Prekindergarten Pupil Weights Report and the cost categories it outlines.

- Jeff O'Hara noted a wide range of estimates for annual cost per child on the weighted pupil report and asked for clarification on the significant difference between teaching staff and non-teaching staff salaries and benefits. Bouchey volunteered to follow up on how those estimates were calculated. Sherry Carlson suggested the workgroup clarify the report's definition of non-teaching staff. Miller noted that special education costs are not included in the report and wondered if paraeducators fall under that category. Anne Bordonaro agreed that NIEER's clarification is critical to understanding the analysis. Meg Porcella noted that program time may also be a factor in the report estimate and considered that support staff may be paid for a 2-hour prekindergarten day.
- O'Hara noted length of day information is missing from the report, making it difficult to interpret what is included in the \$15,000 to \$28,000 range and how the workgroup length of day recommendations will impact costs. Anne Bordonaro described her experience with universal meals and value for setting high estimates for costs to accommodate the range of variables the workgroup is considering.
- Sandra Cameron interpreted the range in the report to represent school's equalized spending rather than the amount spent on prekindergarten. She shared Barre's per pupil spending is \$12,000, and that per pupil cost may be lower than represented in the report.
- Bouchey noted similar ranges in local K-12 per pupil expenditures and wondered if this report is just tracking the K-12 system. She also noted that school budget challenges are a consideration.
- O'Hara asked for clarification regarding the prekindergarten estimate, \$13,626, and range for other grades, \$15,900–\$ 28,700. Bouchey noted the prekindergarten estimate is low and clarified the recommendation for the cost per pupil for prekindergarten be at minimum equal to the cost for K-12 grade students.
- Cameron noted that a teacher student ratio of 1:4 for prekindergarten would be more expensive than a 1:12-15 ratio for other grades. She asked for clarification on how special education is included in that cost range. She noted that taxpayers may control school budgets through voting, and that assigning a cost per pupil will limit the public's ability to affect how much is being spent.

- Loomis reported that across workgroups, there is discussion that the Average Daily Membership (ADM) for prekindergarten should be higher than 1.0, which is also the recommendation in AOE's Prekindergarten Pupil Weights Report.
- Carlson confirmed that licensing sets group size as no more than 20 students and that teacher-child ratios are 1:10. O'Hara confirmed that licensing regulates group size and ratios for prekindergarten, but not for kindergarten. Cameron explained that kindergarten does not fall under child care licensing but does follow AOE class size recommendations. O'Hara asked if AOE class size was recommended or mandated. Bouchey confirmed that K-12 class size is set in State Board of Education Rules. She recognized programs are struggling with staffing. O'Hara noted that under AOE class size for kindergarten is 23 students, and voiced concern that AOE rules may result in a 1:23 ratio when licensing would require three teachers in that same classroom. Bouchey agreed that the scenario is possible but unlikely due to kindergarten enrollment numbers in most districts. Bordonaro clarified that regulations refer to averages across classrooms, and that Vermont averages are lower and noted that younger children need higher ratios, which will cost more.
- Miller reported Afterschool licensing regulations: "The staff/child ratio shall not exceed 1:13. When the number of children exceeds 10, another identified Staff person shall be available within immediate proximity on site in order to provide prompt assistance in the event of an emergency."
- Bouchey noted the discussion reveals Vermont's regulations could use more fleshing out, and that the committee is not limited from making recommendations for kindergarten that are developmentally appropriate.
- Loomis reviewed areas where the group requested clarification: special education costs, non-teaching staff costs, reasons for the wide range in per pupil expenditures, how ratios are calculated in the report, and noting that higher ratios will cost more.
- Chris Wells suggested transportation be added to the list of costs.
- Bouchey suggested considering special curricular materials and specialized furnishings. Porcella suggested that curricula is not set, but that costs for professional development are important considerations. O'Hara reported fixup costs are significant. Cameron noted that fit up costs will be difficult to estimate as not all programs need full fit up, and some program types, like outdoor programs, have different needs. Carlson noted that play structures are usually rated age 5+, which is a consideration for special equipment. Loomis noted regulations for facilities and play spaces. Loomis suggested a consideration for mixed delivery system costs to support non-public settings.
- Carlson suggested that construction vendors work with Fire Marshalls to meet fire safety guidelines for younger children.
- O'Hara reported a recent fit up at Camel's Hump Middle School to renovate 2 classrooms to prekindergarten classrooms and a new fit up in Shelburne, a private setting and a public setting.
- Cameron noted the challenge of variables in enrollment and needed spaces. Loomis reported she will draft a list of variables.
- Carlson suggests sprinkler systems be considered

Length of Prekindergarten Day

Loomis shared a [document](#) with notes on the Workgroup's previous conversations about the length of the day for prekindergarten day.

- Cameron reported the definition of “instructional hours” from the AOE website: “What is High-Quality, Effective Prekindergarten Education? What defines Vermont Universal Prekindergarten Education is the implementation of high quality, effective instruction by licensed educators who use evidence-based practices with intentionally designed early learning environments. Early educators align curriculum with the Vermont Early Learning Standards while adapting experiences to support the full participation of each and every child to realize their full potential and promote successful outcomes.”
- Loomis noted that the Committee’s charge was to make recommendations on the minimum number of hours for both prekindergarten and kindergarten, and that they could also recommend that these minimums align with other grades.
- Miller suggested that full day kindergarten be higher and align more with grades 1 and 2.
- O’Hara suggested a recommendation for 6.5 hours per day for prekindergarten and that kindergarten would fall in line with those recommendations, and for consistency, hours from 8am-2:30pm, five days a week.
- Carlson recommended that prekindergarten, kindergarten and grade 1 be aligned.
- Bouchey asked for clarification if committee recommendations would be mandated in law. Carlson suggested they are two separate questions, “What do we want to mandate for schools to offer?” and “What is mandated for students to attend?” Loomis interpreted the questions to be, “What do we want to mandate for schools to offer?” Bouchey asked if parents would engage in 6 hours of prekindergarten.
- Bordonaro reported that AOE reports full time kindergarten, but reports show that children do not attend full day and that the interpretation may be that the room is occupied for a full day.
- Cameron asked to clarify instructional hours, and whether to include rest time, library, lunch. Bouchey suggested program time be considered instructional time, and that developmentally appropriate practice impacts the definition.
- Miller considered how to align transportation logistics for multiple ages and if it is appropriate for mixed ages to share transportation. Cameron reported on a range of how systems currently manage transportation, some run just preschool transportation, smaller systems run prekindergarten through grade 6. Bouchey reported that districts are not required to offer transportation and that broad ages require additional staff. Carlson reported that if transportation is provided, ratios must be maintained for four-year-olds per regulations. Cameron reported that transportation is required for children with IEPs and suggested every system will have to look at it uniquely.
- Cameron reported that compulsory attendance is required in Vermont at age 6, regardless of grade level.
- Bordonaro suggested no sweeping recommendation for mandatory attendance for prekindergarten.
- Bouchey reported another support for not mandating attendance is that superintendents relate space limitations are a challenge for mandatory attendance for 4 years old.
- Bordonaro suggested the report will fall at a good time when many of these questions are being investigated and at a time when there is openness to accommodating the system to what is needed rather than fitting it to the resources presently available.

Additional Considerations

- Cameron considered the implications of the Governor's plan to veto the Yield Bill and how that will impact the committee's recommendations.
- O'Hara suggested that the committee consider service for three-year-olds as critical to conversation. Loomis reported that three-year-olds have been part of the conversations of all workgroups.
- Carlson requested the workgroup engage O'Hara's offer for anecdotal data on fit up costs. O'Hara reported his request for information revealed the following data: \$37,000 was needed to renovate two middle school classrooms (per licensing, not including any furniture (professional services \$10,000, general supplies \$1000, building improvements \$26,000).
- Bordonaro suggested considering how declining enrollment affects recommendations.
- Wells asked if oversight is a consideration for this workgroup. Loomis confirmed that it is and that oversight is part of the large committee agenda. Porcella asked for clarification on who at AOE has given feedback on oversight. Loomis will follow up. Porcella suggested that the early education team have an opportunity to review.

Loomis confirmed that the next workgroup meeting is on June 11.

No member of the public attended.

The meeting adjourned at 10:56 am.