



PreKindergarten Education Implementation Committee – System-Level Workgroup Meeting

June 14, 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; Rebecca Webb, Regional Prekindergarten Coordinator; Renee Kelly, CDD Head Start; Heather Bouchey, Interim Secretary of Education;

Absent: Colin Robinson, Vermont National Education Association

AOE: Molly Loomis, Facilitator; Suzanne Sprague

Other: Donna Brown Head Start, Maggie Barch, CDD

Facilitator Molly Loomis called the meeting to order at 1:02 pm. She reviewed the agenda for the current meeting and suggested a revision to begin the meeting with cross-border issues and follow with stakeholder feedback. Becca Webb moved to approve the agenda with that change. Jeff Francis seconded. The motion passed.

Loomis asked for questions or comments on the draft minutes from the May 10 meeting. Webb requested two changes to correctly identify Winooski Valley Superintendents Association mislabeled as Winooski School District. McLaughlin moved to approve the May 10 minutes with that change. Francis seconded the motion. Renee Kelley abstained. The motion was carried.

The workgroup members introduced themselves to a new member, Donna Brown from Head Start,

who will be covering for Renee Kelly over the summer.

Prekindergarten in Vermont Border Regions

Webb reported on an Orleans County convening of interested parents and school board members about cross border issues and Act 166. She shared three documents, [conversations notes](#) and [parent letter](#) and [NEK Choice SD](#) map and referenced a list of NEK Students by Town and Grade. On the map, percentages represent K-12 students who receive their education in New Hampshire. The map represents a choice district that does not have elementary schools (with the exception of Cannan) and the K-12 system receives tuition funding from Vermont to attend New Hampshire programs. Orleans County has a high poverty rate, low employment, low access to resources, challenging K-12 tuition system, with health services divided between St. Johnsbury and Newport. She highlighted themes from the conversation:

- The region is a childcare desert, with few early childhood education opportunities where most families access opportunities in New Hampshire. Webb gathered information from BFIS to find two family childcare homes listed among these towns; one program with capacity for 6 children (3 preschool age) and a new program that opened in April (capacity information was not available). Neither program meets current UPK prequalification.
- Regarding equity, Vermont families are paying full tuition for children attending childcare in New Hampshire and are not receiving the UPK benefit of \$3884/year. Not all families can afford full tuition. Some children are driven to St. Johnsbury to attend prekindergarten and childcare, the opposite direction of family employment, a noted burden. Many of these children receive health care in and were born in New Hampshire, creating data gaps that impact planning and identifying children with special needs. Webb noted the inequity of families paying into the Education Fund but unable to access benefits.
- The Orleans convening participants highlighted the importance of prekindergarten opportunities for three-year-olds and discussed the impact of preschool enrollment subsidizing infant and toddler care.
 - Francis asked about capacity in New Hampshire. Webb reported an interstate agreement with New Hampshire schools accounts for projected Vermont children. Participants reported that New Hampshire community programs (Vermont's equivalent to UPK programs) rely on Vermont's prekindergarten children to meet their enrollment needs and would be impacted or close without them.
 - Francis asked if the convening group was asking for Northeast Kingdom choice families to receive subsidized tuition just as they would if they lived in any other part of the state and engaged in in-state early education services. Webb confirmed Francis' understanding.
 - McLaughlin added that the cross-border tuition issue should account for families who cannot afford private tuition and are foregoing prekindergarten education. She noted the barrier impacts early identification and services for special education needs.
 - Webb noted that these issues are not specific to the Northeast Kingdom and are also faced by other border communities such as Bennington.
 - Kelly noted that New Hampshire does not currently have a universal prekindergarten system, and that services are provided on a more local, district level.
 - Brown affirmed Kelly's note adding that New Hampshire program quality is lagging behind the rest of the country and Vermont's current standards.

- Webb added that her understanding is that NH early learning standards are similar to Vermont and used by public schools. She was not sure if standards are mandated (licensing) for community programs.
- Webb asked if committee members could explain Act 166 limitations that prevent Vermont from paying across its border.
 - Bouchey noted the issue is not limited to prekindergarten but impacts prekindergarten-16. Statute allows for interstate districts with New Hampshire and New York, and they could include prekindergarten, but don't necessarily have to. The challenge is that a school board or superintendent would have to create an interstate district, which is a lot of work, would require agreement from both states, and would need to consider regulation and monitoring. The US Department of Education is also involved with boundaries and federal payments.
 - Loomis shared Vermont statutes:
 - <https://legislature.vermont.gov/statutes/section/16/021/00829>
 - <https://legislature.vermont.gov/statutes/chapter/16/017>
 - <https://legislature.vermont.gov/statutes/chapter/16/015>
- McLaughlin noted that creating interstate school districts may be needed, but wondered if tuition could be handled in the same way as a partnership agreement between school districts, or between a school district and a pre-qualified community-based partner.
- Bouchey explained that scenario would require New Hampshire programs to agree to be prequalified for Vermont. She considered it may be an option requiring planning and preparation. She shared a potential solution with the new [BOCES](#) bill framed around an easier path for Vermont districts and supervisory unions to integrate as a separate body to provide services to more than one district or supervisory union. She noted the work of the committee may require statutory change. She suggested discussing creative governance models with general counsel.
- Francis asked if committee members could speak about the quality of New Hampshire programs in proximity to NEK. He suggested a problem-solving exercise should be how to assure the quality of the destination where these students are landing and cut through as much red tape as possible in order to get them there. He acknowledged the need to navigate bureaucratic barriers in order to accomplish success but deemed it worthwhile and necessary.
- Webb noted the need to compare Vermont and New Hampshire early learning standards, and noted AOE may have already done that. She also noted the need to compare the two states' childcare licensing regulations and asked if CDD has made that comparison.
- McLaughlin noted that she believes some students attend public school in New Hampshire and those public schools offer prekindergarten. She suggested that Vermont has decided public school in New Hampshire is good enough for kindergarten, so why would it not be good enough for prekindergarten? She offered that using alternative or national quality standards and creating an alternative pre-qualification process for New Hampshire programs is possible. She advised that the

committee not let perfection and process prevent access to services. Regarding CCFAP payments, she noted Vermont can pay on behalf of those families to New Hampshire programs.

- Bouchey confirmed with McLaughlin that CCFAP money can go to New Hampshire and suggested she does not think federal education dollars can cross borders.
- Webb noted the National Institute of Educational Research (NIER) standards may be appropriately used as the alternative standards McLaughlin suggested.
- Brown suggested that Head Start is also a national model and their standards are the same in New Hampshire and Vermont and does not prohibit cross border enrollment. She noted Vermont has a Head Start program in the Northeast Kingdom that is struggling financially. She asked if Vermont might consider funding such small programs in rural areas.
- Bouchey considered the regulatory perspective and all cross-border situations and will connect with general counsel to draft some language for the committee to review. She also considered that some prekindergarten programs in Vermont do not meet UPK qualifications and may consider it unfair that lower quality programs in other states have access to UPK money.
- Loomis confirmed with Webb to collaborate on a comparison of licensing and early learning standards in Vermont and New Hampshire.
- Francis signaled that the whole tuition framework in Vermont is fraught with political implications and that it will be challenging to navigate the complicated policy environment.

Stakeholder Feedback

Loomis shared a [spreadsheet of stakeholder feedback](#) generated by the group and reviewed the format and themes. Cross group themes for the “value needs” category included preserving the mixed delivery system, ensuring support for family choice, agreement for considering developmentally appropriate practice, importance of play, integrating family, adult child relationships, reducing transitions for young children, program quality standards, equity, continuity of care and access to special education. Common themes also included aligning the financial model to any recommended changes. Common themes for the “practical needs” category included transportation, hours and aftercare issues, and access to comprehensive services. Loomis noted operational alignment with K-12 and afterschool systems include length of day, attendance, truancy, ratios, accountability and safety. In the “legal needs” category, transportation, federal requirements and special education were identified. She reported that embedding UPK Coordinators was a theme in the systems oversight category, and specific recommendations focused on reducing administrative burden, reducing duplication, ensuring developmental approach, improving collaboration between CDD and AOE, and delineating oversight. She noted all groups, with the exception of superintendents, held agreement on the negative implications of removing three-year-olds from UPK family choice. Loomis announced that she will share the stakeholder feedback document with workgroup members to make edits or email suggestions to her.

- Webb asked if considering minimum hours required for prekindergarten was part of this workgroup’s charge.
 - Loomis confirmed that the topic is being covered by the capacity and funding workgroup.

- McLaughlin noted that Vermont values a mixed delivery system in order to provide universal access for all children, not because the system already exists.
- Loomis noted that she will work on gathering more stakeholder feedback over the summer and that the capacity and funding workgroup may conduct a school district survey over the summer.

Loomis shared the [UPK Oversight Matrix](#) and reviewed recommendations under discussion. She asked workgroup members to review and add recommendations or comments. She explained that she is collecting input for synthesis and is not seeking consensus at this point.

- Webb requested Bouchey's list of statutes.

Loomis asked group members to share points to carry forward to the PEIC meetings:

- Webb expressed her readiness to move into recommendations, recognized that there is still much to do, and recommended meeting again as a workgroup this summer. She noted that school funding is a complex issue.
- Kelly noted that PEIC has engaged in a rapid process and is in a better place than where it started. She is confident that the committee has done its due diligence but remains trepidatious about transitioning to recommendations.
- Francis hoped the committee creates space to contend with the most challenges aspects of the project for both process and product, the committee continues to make space for contributions to these efforts, committee members end up as closer colleagues, and the work results in an improved system for Vermonters. He announced that August 2, 2024, is his last day as executive director of VSA but will continue his work on the committee through its completion
- McLaughlin reflected on the committee's focus on what is best for children and the challenging balance needed to consider the health of the system as a whole.
- Bouchey offered her view that the tone, tenor, and collaboration has improved over the process. She shared that this was a hard body of work to begin. She expressed her pride in the committee's work. She expressed her gratitude to Loomis for her work.
- Brown also commended Loomis and commended the group for putting children and families at the center of this work. She noted that no state has fully figured out prekindergarten implementation and this work contributes to the progress and is impactful.

Loomis requested suggestions from the workgroup for families and partners who might like to share their perspectives at the July meeting.

No member of the public attended.

The meeting adjourned at 2:32 pm.

Meeting minutes recorded by Maggie Barch