



# PreKindergarten Education Implementation Committee – Program Quality Considerations Workgroup Meeting

May 20, 2024: 11:00 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.

Microsoft Teams Virtual  
Meeting Call In: 802-552-8456  
Conference ID: 415 704 886#  
[Meeting Link](#)

## DRAFT MEETING MINUTES

### Workgroup Charge:

The Program Quality Considerations Workgroup is charged with exploring, documenting and reporting back to the Committee about:

1. Benchmarks and best practices to ensure high quality prekindergarten education;
2. Recommendations for the oversight of the prekindergarten system;
3. Special education services for children participating in prekindergarten in public & private settings;
4. Special education services for children three years of age.

### Draft Meeting Minutes

**Present:** Morgan Crossman, Building Bright Futures; Sharron Harrington, VT Agency for the Education of Young Children; Korrine Harvey, family representative; Erica McLaughlin, Vermont Principals Association; Theresa Pollner, Vermont Curriculum Leaders Association; Pam Reed, Vermont Council of Special Education Administrators

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

**Others:** Maggie Barch, CDD; Christy Swenson

**Absent:** Sheila Quenneville, representative of a prequalified private provider

Facilitator Molly Loomis called the meeting to order at 11:04 am. She reviewed the agenda and requested questions or comments. There were none.

Loomis asked for questions or comments on the draft minutes from the [April 15](#) meeting. Loomis noted a change to correct the spelling on Erica McLaughlin's name.

Pam Reed moved to approve minutes with that change. Sharon Harrington seconded the motion. The motion was carried by unanimous vote.

- Harrington announced that VTAEYC applied to the Office of Professional Regulation for Early Childhood Education to be recognized as a profession in Vermont. VTAEYC is developing an FAQ document in advance of announcing the application more broadly. The application proposed three designations for ECE preparation.
- Morgan Crossman announced that BBF will hold another Early Childhood Grand Rounds series, possibly in June. BBF is considering guest speakers from the National Institute for

Early Education Research (NIER) and ZERO TO THREE to talk about national data and trends.

### **Program Quality Matrix Review**

Loomis reviewed the format of the [program quality matrix](#) and the data it represents.

- Loomis reported language changes that align with AOE feedback. She noted teacher preparation differs across settings. Loomis also reported that per AOE staff professional development requirements are the same across settings, but that schools support professional development hours. Pam Reed agreed the difference should be noted in the matrix. McLaughlin added that professional development may vary based on bargaining agreements and so may vary among districts. Theresa Pollner noted that priorities may change year to year, unintentionally.
- Loomis reported fingerprinting requirements differ across settings and asked if other safety requirements vary among settings. Crossman explained that fingerprinting is required in all settings, but does not follow staff across settings, and is limited by federal requirements. Pollner added that there are strict restrictions for staff in the prekindergarten classroom if they lack fingerprinting documentation.
- The group noted a question from Tammy Bates, AOE posed in the comments section of the document about the National Institute on Early Education Research (NIER) benchmark requiring a lead teacher to have specialized training in prekindergarten. Bates wondered where that training comes from and if it is Fundamentals. No members advised. Loomis and Meg Porcella will follow up.

### **Preliminary Recommendations for Program Quality**

Loomis directed the group to the column on the program quality matrix where they could document possible recommendations for program quality. She noted that only a few Committee members had added to this column, and the group reviewed those comments row-by-row.

#### **Early Learning and Development Standards**

- Loomis related recommendations for additional training at the director and leadership level in culturally responsive practices and for professional development about reading, using VELs.
- Crossman added a recommendation to make the matrix publicly available and used as the primary resource to guide thinking about early childhood education in Vermont.

#### **Curriculum Supports**

- Meg Porella reported both AOE and CDD promote the pyramid model as assessment-based practices. She asked for clarification on if curriculum in this context means the scope, sequence, assessments and teaching practices used or leveraging high quality instruction and intervention. She shared that mandating state curriculum is worth considering but would be challenging. Reed agreed that the state has not articulated required K-12 curriculum and considers curriculum in this case as teaching practices, assessments and resources, Porcella reported that AOE and CDD are supporting training, professional development and coaching in early MTSS through grants, but lack the capability to equitably deliver access to all programs without more funding.
- Pollner recommended the curriculum conversation consider limited resources and capacity, and not reduce opportunities for lower resourced districts with a narrow definition of

curriculum. She agreed that focusing on standards and practices align with the current system.

- McLaughlin underscored the value of prekindergarten education is alignment, and that children benefit when transitions are aligned. Porcella highlighted the transitions to prekindergarten and kindergarten. Pollner suggested more collaboration to align curriculum vertically in order to provide the best for children. Harrington recognized the commonality of curriculum standards with Vermont Early Learning Standards (VELS) and supports for programs through SPARQS. She reflected that the early childhood education (ECE) field consistently requests more coaching opportunities for VELS.

#### Teacher Preparation

- McLaughlin recommended certified licensed teachers from AEO in all prekindergarten environments with an alternate route to certification (from NIEER). Porcella noted that alternative routes to certification should have funding priority.
- Harrington agreed Vermont needs high quality prepared leaders in classrooms, noted her knowledge gap about the specific difference between an AOE endorsement and a child education degree. She suggested the workgroup hear from experts on the topic. She highlighted that terminology needs clarification on a national level, not just in Vermont. Harrington proposed that should VTAEYC's application move forward, it brings a more prepared workforce and individual alignment in early childhood education. She added an AOE endorsement would earn ECE III designation automatically and provided background information on [ECE License to Practice](#). McLaughlin agreed on the need for clarification on the difference between AOE enforcement and ECE degree.
- Porcella asked if there is a statute or regulation in place that guides teacher preparation.
- Loomis will connect with Harrington and Porcella to identify experts to present to the group.
- McLaughlin noted that Vermont does not meet NIER's benchmark for teacher preparation and requested NIER's perspective on to how to meet their benchmarks. Loomis remarked that NEIR will provide examples of alternative pathways from other states next week.
- Crossman underlined the funding component and sustainability conversation to maintain teacher preparation and other prekindergarten considerations. Loomis announced that she will add this consideration to the Capacity and Funding Workgroup's agenda this week.

#### Teacher Specialized Training

- Porcella noted that specialized training related to Bates' question from the document's comments on requiring a lead teacher to have specialized training in prekindergarten. She will follow up.

#### Staff Professional Development

- Loomis shared a recommendation for AOE to be more involved in professional development and building internal capacity for leadership and coaches to support quality.
- Porcella stated that AOE would like to provide more professional development but is limited by funding.
- Pollner suggested that recommendations consider AOE capacity.
- Reed considered that AOE facilitated oversight for professional development may be reviewed by standards boards for licensing and credit hours.

- Harrington noted inconsistencies in mixed delivery professional development opportunities. Some districts include partners and others do not. Loomis suggested a recommendation to create greater consistency across sites. McLaughlin questioned where the financial responsibility would fall for programs offering professional development where non staff attend. Pollner added that districts cannot mandate professional development involvement for partners, and that schedules for partner staff do not align well for professional development opportunities. Holding training during non-contract hours may require additional reimbursement for staff. Harrington noted past conversations about coordinating ECE professional development schedules.

#### Continuous Quality Improvement Systems

- Loomis reviewed recommendations to make assessment tools and staff assessment training accessible, state-hosted formal TS gold training, AOE capacity to conduct ongoing classroom assessments, and considerations for how QRIS works across private and public settings, and who holds responsibility for quality monitoring.
- Crossman questioned the capacity and funding for AOE to manage CQI systems.
- Reed reported that Vermont does not have a common assessment tool, and assessments vary by district and sometimes by school. McLaughlin reported that the prekindergarten director may provide consistency in quality observation and review. Reed noted that staff supervision is lost for programs that work with outside partners.
- Pollner valued making more common connections that align professional development opportunities with what is best for students rather than considering separate requirements. Loomis noted that other workgroups report how strong prekindergarten coordinators aid alignment, and that one recommendation may be for all districts have access to that resource. Pollner, Korrine Harvey, and Crossman shared perspectives to support that recommendation. McLaughlin prefers a designee or 'point person' role as unfunded programs may not have capacity to support the coordinator position. Porcella noted that regional coordinators impact alignment positively. Reed suggested recommendation wording should relate a requirement for a designated point person rather than requiring an additional position.

#### Special Education Considerations

Loomis transitioned the group to discuss the consideration of how to implement special education services for children participating in prekindergarten and for children three years of age.

- Porcella noted that IDEA law sets special education services. Supervisory unions are responsible for following IEPs and AOE is responsible for assuring LEAs follow IEPs. Cross district services pose a challenge because funds follow the child. The intention is to work more closely with the supervisory union on better collaboration.
- Loomis, Reed, Webb, and Pollner reported on their meeting to synthesize big ideas. More four-year-olds in schools may improve [Child Find](#), may increase costs, may reduce early identification for three-year-olds, and costs are a consideration. Procella noted that services are required despite the cost.
- Reed noted special education costs would look different with UPK classrooms in each school or enough UPK slots in communities to accommodate services.

- Porcella noted that transportation is an unfair burden. Harvey supported the transportation burden from her family perspective. Crossman shared her personal cross-district service experience: the success of early identification and effective services and the challenge of managing out of district service.
- McLaughlin asked for clarification on suspension and expulsion in private settings. Crossman explained that new rules prohibit expulsion under age eight in public and private settings. Porcella shared an AOE memo on [suspension and expulsion](#), and noted that AOE and CDD are working to create clear guidance. Reed asked to clarify if that guidance applies to all ECE providers. Porcella stated that expulsions should not occur, especially for a child with an IEP. Extenuating circumstances occur in a range of settings. AOE and CDD legal teams have determined that universal prekindergarten is bound by the guidance. Harrington noted an extenuating circumstance may be the number of hours a child is in program.

### **Preliminary Recommendations for Special Education**

Loomis opened the conversation to a brainstorm of preliminary recommendations for the report.

- Harrington suggested considering the impact of a reduction in early identification, costs associated, and a recommendation to rethink the workgroup's focus on four-year olds. McLaughlin noted the role of the Child Find requirement. Reed related that Child Find sets a responsibility to identify students with needs for special education support. Service providers in independent programs aid identification. If prekindergarten serves all four-year-olds, Child Find would access more children at that age.

No members of the public attended.  
The meeting adjourned at 12:33pm.