



PreKindergarten Education Implementation Committee – Meeting

July 9, 2024: 9:30 a.m. – 11:00 a.m.

Microsoft Teams Virtual
Meeting Call In: 802-552-8456
Conference ID: 400 249 115#
[Meeting Link](#)

DRAFT MEETING MINUTES

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Present: Sandra Cameron, Vermont School Board Association; Morgan Crossman, Building Bright Futures; Jeff Francis, Vermont Superintendents Association; Sharron Harrington, VTAEYC; Korinne Harvey, family representative; Janet McLaughlin, Agency of Human Services Co-chair; Jeff O'Hara, prequalified private provider representative; Pam Reed, Vermont Council of Special Education Administrators; Colin Robinson, Vermont National Education Association; Rebecca Webb, regional prekindergarten coordinator; Chris Wells, family representative; Nicole Miller, Vermont Afterschool; Theresa Pollner, Vermont Curriculum Leaders Association; Erika McLaughlin, Vermont Principals Association; Donna Brown, National Office of Head Start, Sherry Carlson, Lets Grow Kids

AOE: Molly Loomis, Facilitator; Meg Porcella; Suzanne Sprague; Wendy Scott; Teresa Haskins; Leslie Freedman; Thalia Garcia; Michele Johnson,

Other: Samara Mays, provider Montpelier Children's House; Meghan Meszkat, Southwest Vermont Supervisory Union; Maggie Barch, CDD; Valerie Wood, Building Bright Futures; LouAnn Beninati, Let's Grow Kids; Danielle Palmer, Central Vermont Supervisory Union; Jay Nichols, public guest; Matt Levin, public guest

Absent: Heather Bouchey, Interim Secretary of Education; Sheila Quenneville, prequalified private provider representative

Facilitator Molly Loomis called the meeting to order at 9:33 am.

Loomis welcomed members of the public and briefly reviewed the meeting agenda. No questions or comments were made about the agenda.

Loomis requested comments, questions, or suggestions on the [draft meeting minutes from June 11](#). Sherry Carlson moved to approve the minutes and Sharron Harrington seconded the motion. No members opposed, none abstained. The motion carried.

Morgan Crossman thanked members who attended BBF's [Early Childhood Grand Rounds](#) virtual seminar on the state of preschool held on Tuesday, June 18th. She reported that BBF and the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) are working together to answer follow up questions.

Loomis reminded members that she is convening a special education committee to focus on considerations for the PEIC report. The special committee includes Crossman, Korrine Harvey, representatives from AOE, CSS and a UPK coordinator for special education services.

- Pam Reed volunteered to participate.

Loomis shared two public comments, one from [Renee Hilton](#), prekindergarten coordinator and interventionist from White River Valley Supervisory Union, and one from [Nichole Walker](#), director of Apple Tree Learning Centers in Stowe.

Loomis announced the next PEIC meeting will be on August 13, when the committee will debrief on the Early Childhood Grand Rounds from June 18 and review the draft survey set to go out to school districts this summer. The Planning Committee is compiling workgroup data into a report outline that PEIC will review at the in-person meeting on September 10. Loomis reported that she hoped survey results will be available for committee review at the October meeting. The final report is due December 1, 2024.

- Jeff Francis asked if the committee will have a chance to review the survey before it goes out to school districts. Loomis confirmed that review is scheduled for August.
- Jeff O'Hara noted that a link to the public comment from Nichole Walker is missing. Suzanne Sprague confirmed that the link on the website is active.
- Matt Levin asked that the meeting dates and topics be repeated. Loomis repeated the information and Sprague confirmed that the dates are listed on the PEIC website.

Prekindergarten Provider/Educator Testimony

Loomis introduced Meghan Meszkat, president VTAEYC board, school administrator at Southwest Vermont Supervisory Union in Bennington and Samara Mays, director, owner and prekindergarten teacher at Montpelier Children's House. Both attended the meeting to share impacts on their programs of key changes proposed by Act 76, including making prekindergarten available for the full school day and full school year for all four-year-olds; removing three-year-olds from prekindergarten programs; having school districts be responsible for finding space to accommodate 4-year-olds; and making school districts responsible for deciding whether or not to partner with community based programs and which community based programs to partner with.

Meszkat shared that she is responsible for public prekindergarten (350 students) for her district and the largest special education services program in the state with the perspective of administering both programs while meeting the needs of a broad and diverse population of students. Most students are serviced within the supervisory union boundaries. Eighty percent of students attend prekindergarten in private settings, approximately 100 at Head Start programs. Public programs provide about 16 hours of instruction per week.

She shared her understanding that the public prekindergarten role is to provide families access to prekindergarten, provide an appropriate educational setting for her team to deliver adequate early childhood special education services, and create as much inclusion for children as possible.

Carving out the three-year-old population from prekindergarten services concerns her team, which also impacts rising three-year-olds and her ability to find educational placement to start services for them in an appropriate environment. She reviewed 2022/23 data from Teaching Strategies Gold (measures student growth) which showed significant growth for four-year-old prekindergarten students in her district, growth she attributed to students entering the preschool environment at age three. She expressed concern that limiting access to high quality prekindergarten for three-year-olds would impact the growth of the four-year-old cohort.

Meszkat noted that the schools in her district are old (built in 1950s), are at capacity, and that 80% of students receive prekindergarten services in private settings. She reported her district serves a high needs population requiring more non-traditional classroom spaces. She reported that without significant investment from the state for construction and renovation, providing all prekindergarten services within school buildings may not be feasible.

Meszkat noted her value for school districts to develop robust partnerships/partnership agreements that involve a higher level of accountability, coaching and support for preschool programs to meet a high quality standard. In the past two years, her district consolidated funding to create a universal prekindergarten coach position to support early Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (EMTSS), special education and education-based interventions. She considered work her district does in regard to curriculum, instruction and data collection could be carried down to the preschool system as the responsibility of the supervisory union through close partnership and coaching with community partners to ensure a level of quality.

- Janet McLaughlin asked how the district implements 16 hours of instruction per week and support for children who have an IEP but attend in a community-based setting. Meszkat clarified that district-based classrooms provide 16 hours of instruction, and Title I funding supports additional time. The district does not fund 16 hours in private programs, those have 10 hours of instruction.
- Francis asked if Meszkat has endorsement from leadership at the supervisory union for extending some of the traditional school services into the prekindergarten arena as she described. Meszkat clarified that the support she suggests is coaching for preschool teachers in private programs to gain extra skills and abilities to support children. She noted that coaching has been supported by leadership, but also that her district received significant grant funding, a resource that may not be available to other districts. The economy of scale makes the cost of administering student support less burdensome for larger districts.
- Reed relayed her experience facing accountability challenges for special educators providing consultation to direct service staff in terms of implementing suggestions and asked if Meszkat had similar experiences. Meszkat agreed that was also her experience and noted that accountability issues may not be specific to private settings as public teachers may also reject special education coaching suggestions. She noted that relationship building is important, as is the design of the partnership agreements. She noted a system of imbalance between partnership agreements written and signed at the district level and prequalification status coming from an agency not involved in day-to-day work with programs.
- Erika McLaughlin expressed similar concern for investing public funds into private programs without authority to manage expectations.
- Sandra Cameron asked Meszkat to speak to challenges of dual regulation. Meszkat noted the administrative challenges of maintaining records in Bright Futures Information System (BFIS), and differing guidance on suspension and expulsion and challenging behaviors.

Loomis introduced Samara Mays, director, owner and prekindergarten teacher at Montpelier Children's House. Mays reported that Montpelier Children's House has operated for 40 years and became a UPK partner as soon as the opportunity became available in order to support families financially, raise the quality of the program and build connection with public schools.

Mays noted that removing four-year-olds from her program's preschool model would affect her business model and viability of her program. Prekindergarten is a large part of her program. Mays also noted that her program treats prekindergarten as a multi-age three-to-five-year-old program that provides a developmental continuum between age groups that is of great value to their development.

Mays shared that the UPK relationship has strengthened and built capacity in her program, instigating her and a second teacher in her program to become licensed. She noted the strong relationship she has with the special education providers who come into her program. She reported that the Montpelier Children's House provides full day, full year services where there are very limited summer options for children under age five. She noted full day, full year care is essential to families in her area and provides a continuum of care. She explained that transitions are hard for preschoolers, and summer camps and other care with new caregivers may be more challenging for them.

- Webb asked what it means to families to have a licensed teacher providing care. Mays noted that licensed teachers impact families' perspectives on the quality of care. She also noted that teaching licensure raises the professionalism of the whole program. She noted that teaching licensure shows families that the program is committed to high quality education.
- J. McLaughlin asked Mays to elaborate on her program's value for connecting with public schools, noting that she may serve students from multiple districts. Mays replied that the relationship with her UPK coordinator and special education providers is stronger than her relationship with individual supervisory unions. Those relationships have built capacity and enabled her program to provide first tier supports without the need to contact districts.
- E. McLaughlin asked what the financial impact of not serving four-year-olds would be for her program. Mays replied that such a change would impact her teaching staff who focus on a developmental cohort. They may choose to follow their four-year-olds or not teach in a three-year-old only classroom. She related her experience providing single age classrooms for one year, resulting in her seeking out multi-age opportunities to provide more modeling for younger children.
- Carlson commended Mays' collaboration to provide services to families of a program that closed suddenly last fall, and how working together (Mays, the public school, CDD and other agencies, and philanthropy) resulted in a very positive impact.

O'Hara shared his perspective as a provider, suggesting that the PEIC report integrate Mays' and Meszkat's testimony. He reported that his experience demonstrates that teachers want support and value exploring coaching models that support inclusivity. He noted that children need to complete their first year of kindergarten before coming to an afterschool setting or summer camp program, leaving four-year-olds in public programs without summer services.

- Webb requested the PEIC report consider before and aftercare as part of their recommendations. She noted that eliminating a transition in the middle of a developmental continuum may not entirely solve issues for many families and may require changes in regulation. She also noted the testimony touched on the importance of regional collaboration.

- O’Hara agreed that taking four-year-olds out of private settings may result in the unintended consequence of reducing their opportunity for extended child care. He noted that the number of children in private settings may not change, as more three-year-olds may be served, but that those three-year-olds would fill extended care slots.
- Webb also noted that public programs serve children for about 175 days/year and private program centers are open approximately 225 days/year.
- Nicole Miller added that snow days, in-service days and summer would all be a challenge to serve four-year-olds in after school care.
- Mays noted that due to the developmental stages of children under 5, opportunities for summer camps and extended care must differ from those for school age children. She urged that developmentally appropriate solutions should be considered when patching together more care hours for young children.
- Meszkat noted that providing special education services to three-year-olds wherever they are will remain a district responsibility if four-year-olds move to public settings. She suggested the PEIC recommendations explain that piece for those who may not understand that responsibility. She also noted that creating a system where public and private programs work together may be the better option to provide those services. Meszkat also noted that her community has a very robust Head Start program. This change would mean a loss of funding for these programs, but she believed that many children would remain in Head Start because of the wrap around supports they receive. She noted that those children would not be tracked by the supervisory union.
- Chris Wells asked to clarify if funding for three-year-olds would be lost. He noted that they receive funding for 10 hours a week. He asked to confirm if families who could afford to pay private programs would still have that opportunity.
 - Webb questioned if there would be a percentage to families who can not afford a preschool experience for their three-year-old child. She noted the gap between CCFAP and funding through schools, and related that many of the families she serves across districts use both. She wondered if this potential change would eliminate choices for three-year-olds who may only have this opportunity for a prekindergarten experience.
 - Mays noted that UPK funds are essential for families and is part of why her program chose to offer UPK—to support families struggling financially. She noted the gap in funding results in families choosing not to enroll in summer care. She also noted that the change would also result in fewer licensed teachers for three-year-olds, which would affect the quality of care. She noted that her program is full day, full year and that children receive the 10 hours of funded instruction and also attend the full day because 10 hours/week does not meet families’ care needs.
 - O’Hara added that CCFAP qualifies families for a certain number of hours and together with UPK’s 10 funded hours, financial support can go to those most in need and allows them to attend from 7:30am - 5:30pm. Without UPK funds, private programs may have to absorb those costs or reduce the time available to those families because they qualify for three days, for example.

- Carlson noted that families must qualify for CCFAP, it is not universal.
- J. McLaughlin noted that some programs specialize in only serving prekindergarten students. The families in those programs may not qualify for child care assistance or may not need full time care, but enrollment in these programs may be the child's only opportunity for early childhood education before starting kindergarten. She noted that the recent testimony demonstrates that the state's current system allows for districts and programs to work creatively to provide families with flexibility, but also highlights where accountability and support can be improved. She asked Meszkat to elaborate on the tools that districts use that can be shared with private prekindergarten programs.
 - Carlson shared that King Street Center in Burlington is a good example of the type of program J. McLaughlin mentioned.
 - Sandra Cameron asked how the committee might meet the charge, "The purpose is to assist the AOE in improving and expanding accessible, affordable, and high-quality prekindergarten education for children on a full-day basis on or before July 1, 2026."
 - Meszkat shared that support like EMTSS from AOE, and the idea of using data to make decisions and using data collection tools has been incredibly helpful as it is similar to how decisions are made in the K-12 system. She noted that the new STARS model offers continuous quality improvement for early education programs similar to AOE, but also adds the CLASS observation as a valuable outside assessment of program level that is not present in the public education system. In public education, student testing is used to measure school performance, rather than an assessment of how teachers teach. Meszkat noted her interest in EMTSS and pyramid model practices as goals for how she'd like her program to operate. She shared that the school district would support those practices and bring them to community programs.
 - Webb noted that she works with many supervisory unions on their STARS CQI and kindergarten teams are curious about how it is related to the (PK) – 12 CQI plan.
- Francis asked Loomis to repeat the four charges that Meszkat and Mays were answering in their testimony, and if they were a summary of the committee's charges.
 - Loomis confirmed that they were a summary of the committee's charges:
 - Full school-day, full-school year
 - One year of eligibility (4-year-olds and 5-year olds not yet enrolled in kindergarten)
 - School district assigned responsibility of providing space for all eligible children
 - School district choice about partnering with private programs or other public schools
 - R Webb added that those items were the four changes were identified in a presentation at a PEIC meeting last fall.
 - J McLaughlin shared the [presentation slides](#) that CDD and AOE developed for the PEIC meeting on October 24, 2023.

- Colin Robinson noted that when considering education funding, increased investment in four-year-olds does not necessarily have to come at the expense of three-year-olds.

Loomis welcomed comments from the public. There were none.
Loomis adjourned the meeting at 11:01am.

Meeting minutes recorded by Maggie Barch.