



PreKindergarten Education Implementation Committee – Meeting

August 13, 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; 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; 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; Erica McLaughlin, Vermont Principals Association; Donna Brown, National Office of Head Start, Sherry Carlson, Lets Grow Kids; Mary Lundeen, Vermont Council of Special Education Administrators; Dora Levinson, Building Bright Futures

AOE: Molly Loomis, Facilitator; Meg Porcella; Maureen Gaidys; Suzanne Sprague; Christy Swenson

Other: Abby Fish, Kyle Hibbard; Matthew DeGroot; Maggie Barch-Pearsall; Valerie Wood; Jay Nichols; Matt Levin; Anna Brouillette

Absent: Heather Bouchey, Deputy Secretary of Education; Sheila Quenneville, prequalified private provider representative; Morgan Crossman, Building Bright Futures

Facilitator Molly Loomis called the meeting to order at 9:34 am.

Loomis welcomed members of the public and briefly reviewed the meeting agenda. Jay Nichols requested to make public comments in the chat. Loomis requested comments, questions, or suggestions on the draft meeting minutes from July 9. Erica McLaughlin requested a spelling correction to her name and moved to approve the minutes with that change. Sherry Carlson seconded the motion. No members opposed; Dora Levinson abstained. The motion carried.

September 10 PEIC Meeting

Loomis reviewed the PEIC September 10 meeting agenda. The meeting will be held in person at the Dewey Conference Room at the National Life complex in Montpelier. Members will receive a rough draft report prior to the meeting. The meeting will concentrate on report feedback and small workgroup sessions.

- Jeff Francis asked if results from capacity and demand survey (included in the meeting agenda) will be included in the Committee's report. Loomis confirmed that the survey was

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intended to inform the report. According to the timeline, the survey is set to be distributed in early fall, data analysis in October, and results review at the November PEIC meeting before incorporating findings into the report. She noted if time does not allow, the report will reference the survey and provide a timeline for its incorporation.

- Loomis answered a question in the chat about if the September 10 meeting is open to the public and if so, is there an expectation that public attend in-person or virtually. Loomis confirmed the meeting is open to the public and information about how to attend will be posted online. She noted that much of the meeting will be in small groups, and not ideal for remote attendees.
- Carlson asked how she might participate in the meeting if she is unable to attend. Loomis offered to coordinate a way to gather feedback in advance of the meeting and that there will be additional opportunities to provide written feedback. She also suggested the option of having a representative attend in place of absent members.

PEIC Special Education Subcommittee

Loomis shared an update about the PEIC Special Education Subcommittee, which met on August 7 and will meet again on August 14. The subcommittee is focused on key issues and recommendations for delivering prekindergarten special education services. Participants include parent representatives, members of PEIC, and special education service staff from AOE and CDD. The PEIC Special Education Subcommittee will integrate its work into the full report for the committee to review.

- Cameron noted the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the U.S. Department of Education joint policy statement on inclusion of children with disabilities in early childhood referenced in the August 7 meeting was not focused specifically on publicly funded prekindergarten programs. She offered that inclusion supports access to many experiences, and that the policy statement is not necessarily a misalignment with Act 76. Loomis agreed to share that note with the full committee.

Vermont Early Childhood Grand Rounds

Loomis reviewed the June 17 [Vermont Early Childhood Grand Rounds Seminar](#) featuring representatives from the National Institute of Early Education Research (NIEER) who presented findings from the State of Preschool Yearbook and Vermont's 2023 report card. She invited the group to share reflections on the Seminar presentation and Yearbook findings.

- J. McLaughlin highlighted two items of interest from the seminar: 1) NIEER's emphasis on the relationship of including three- and four-year-olds in prekindergarten education and ensuring three-year-olds have two years of prekindergarten education to improved results. and 2) She valued examples from other states of transition plans that support a multiyear approach and workforce development. She cautioned that meeting an ideal standard without a transition plan may mean less access for children to prekindergarten experiences.
- E. McLaughlin emphasized NIEER's recommendation that certified teachers elevate the educational experience for prekindergarten students.
- Carlson noted the importance that Seminar experts placed on state responsibility to provide resource pathways that help create a diverse workforce in the UPK and early childhood system. She related her disappointment over the cancellation of a provisional licensure project that provided those pathways and were based on best practice to support increased

participation with three-year-olds. She noted her desire for private sector educators to achieve licensure and remain in the private sector and a shortage of staff with early educator endorsements. She considered that removing three-year-olds from public-funded prekindergarten is a move backwards.

- J. McLaughlin noted that NIEER's recommendation for certification is not that teachers should have state teaching licenses, but rather that early childhood educators should have a bachelor's degree with specific early childhood education expertise and training. She made the distinction because the two certifications are often conflated or used interchangeably, but they are not the same.
- Cameron agreed, noting that the title 'licensed early childhood educator' is applied to people who are not licensed, which leads to confusion.
- Jeff Francis asked for clarification on the different ways 'licensed educator' is used in Vermont.
 - J. McLaughlin explained that the term licensed is used in different contexts. A child care program may be licensed, which is different from an individual being licensed. Individuals can hold an AOE state teaching license. That license differs from holding a bachelor's or master's degree or having advanced credentials within early childhood education. There is a national and Vermont effort underway around creating a professional license for early childhood educators. That initiative would be an additional way to demonstrate the professional competence of staff working in programs, especially those working as teaching assistants and lead teachers. She noted that similar to other professions, like nursing or speech and language pathology, individuals hold a degree and also receive a professional license.
 - Robinson clarified that duly licensed teachers are licensed by the state of Vermont, and nurses and speech and language pathologists are regulated by the Secretary of State's Office (SOS).
 - Cameron added the SOS and AOE are licensing educators. She noted that two systems of credentialing, but the field uses early childhood educator as an umbrella term which leads to confusion.
 - Francis requested additional clarification of how the different pathways to the early childhood educator credential relate to one another in the prekindergarten delivery system. Loomis offered to share notes from the Program Quality Workgroup and presentations from field experts on Vermont licensure.
 - J. McLaughlin shared [national work on the early childhood education profession](#) and [Vermont's efforts on advancing the ECE profession](#). She also highlighted that the high ratios in early childhood classrooms mean that there are many paraprofessionals and assistants for which there are no definitions or requirements. She noted this topic is not specific to prekindergarten but affects all people who lead groups of children in an early childhood education setting and the discussion includes all of these professionals with the intention of improving the quality of education for children using best practice.
 - Lundeen asked to clarify that a licensed teacher has engaged in a preparatory program to learn about pedagogy and child development and engaged in a teaching

practicum under a licensed teacher. She also asked to clarify that a person could also work as an early childhood educator if they hold a bachelor's degree in psychology or human development.

- Becca Webb confirmed that Lundeen was correct and added that early childhood education is unique developmental stage. She noted that she worked through peer review and has recommended people for provisional status to gain their license. She explained that when people in early education talk about early childhood educators, they are talking about the group of people who are educating the whole child: that entire development is not necessarily just the academics. When we talk about licensed early childhood educators or licensed early childhood special educators we are referring to the endorsement levels through the Agency of Education. She offered that the question for the committee to answer is whether to make recommendations along NIEER standards which call for high qualifications for early childhood educators or to make recommendations that a licensed teacher is a person with an AOE endorsement. She noted that in Vermont there is a lack of educator preparation.
- Carlson highlighted that an important indicator of child outcomes is the level of preparation and ongoing training for a person working with children, which is what the national and state level work to advance the profession is focused on at the birth-five age group. The effort is about using standards, competencies and levels of preparation to identify the roles for people working with young children. She emphasized that the goal of the effort is to support progression not regression. She also highlighted that research has been completed on the impact of bachelor's level early childhood training on the quality of early childhood education, but not on teacher licensure.
- Webb shared links to [Rules Governing the Licensing of Educators and the Preparation of Educational Professionals](#) and [Vermont Core Teaching Standards](#).
- O'Hara added that in the private world, it's also important to outline the amount of time a licensed teacher needs to be in front of students. With the limited number of professionals with this certification (licensure), we often share a licensed teacher between classrooms.
 - Cameron replied that is a difference in rules. Public schools must have licensed teacher with students at all times, even beyond the 10 hours. Webb noted that her interpretation of the rules differed and asked for clarification from Porcella, highlighting that even in public schools only the 10 hours is UPK funded.

AOE Survey: Current Capacity and Structure of Public Prekindergarten

Loomis shared a [draft survey questions](#) to collect data from school districts about current UPK programs and capacity to meet proposed demands. The survey came out of the Capacity and Funding Considerations Workgroup's effort to understand Vermont's capacity and to measure the resources available to meet demands resulting from a change in UPK legislation. AOE developed this first draft of the survey questions. Porcella noted that the survey is seeking to know how removing three-year-olds from UPK will impact Vermont's systems. She requested feedback from the committee about what might need to be reframed or is missing.

- E. McLaughlin noted that the questions seem deficit focused, and do not leave room for programs who are already incorporating changes to describe the expense and time they have already made on these efforts. Porcella agreed to review and remove that assumption.
- Robinson suggested AOE add a header paragraph to provide context about both the data and the forward-thinking solutions they survey hopes to collect. He expressed concern about the timing of the survey, noting that the start of the school year is a busy time for leaders and administrators. He suggested sharing the survey no sooner than mid-September in order to gather substantive responses. Robinson also highlighted ongoing work on the School Facilities Working Group, and recent meetings of the legislature and the [Commission on the Future of Public Education in Vermont](#).
- Loomis encouraged committee members to also submit written feedback on the survey.
- Cameron asked if survey planning discussions considered if the data should record this point in time or be gathered in an ongoing way and addressed in the data dashboard. Porcella replied that she was not aware if data would be gathered ongoing. Cameron noted that she does not believe the state is gathering data on some details such as the number of three- and four-year olds being served and number of program hours. Porcella stated that preapproved qualified sites report information including their UPK hours to AOE, but that the data is not easily accessible. She noted that AOE also collects data via Teaching Strategies Gold. Porcella also noted that for the purpose of the PEIC report, she believes this survey serves as a one-time data collection. Cameron further advocated for ongoing collection due to the fluid nature of the data. Cameron offered that she believes superintendents and school boards have the knowledge of lived experience regarding education systems, noting they are responsible for visioning. She suggested that the survey collect context about how leaders of education systems envision transformation amid their ongoing work to improve efficiency.
- Loomis noted the value for collecting data from a broad range of audiences.
- Lundeen suggested the survey ask questions about what is going well with the implementation they are already engaged in. She agreed with Robinson's concerns about the survey timing and suggested it might align with the October deadline that school have for census data.
 - Loomis noted that the report will request additional research, the timing of this survey will provide data for the PEIC report, and subsequent surveys may coordinate better with ongoing data collection.
- Levinson agreed there is a need for ongoing data collection. She asked if the administrative data collected by AOE could be used as a proxy for the number of children served. She also noted that AOE surveys tend to go out in late October.
 - Loomis noted that part of the data challenge was the capacity to analyze across datasets and synthesize into meaningful guidance. The committee decided to seek specific data in order to incorporate it into the report. She agreed on the value of aligning data collection for the future.
- E. McLaughlin highlighted that survey data should come from superintendents and boards, rather than UPK coordinators and principles to avoid fragmented data.

- Francis suggested that the context for the survey be the literal explanation of Act 76. He noted that the survey audience should include those in possession of the data. He noted that the work of the PEIC should inform the Commission on the Future of Education in Vermont. He suggests that the data from the survey play a major role in informing the report, rather than be an appendix.
 - Loomis noted that the PEIC was not funded to do extensive research, but will identify areas of needed research, questions and issues.
- J. McLaughlin noted that the survey questions in the second sections are about visioning for the future. She agreed that the survey should reach people on the ground to capture the nuance of, for example, class versus classroom.
- Webb requested that the survey go to superintendents, and that Act 166 and UPK staff are copied on it to encourage their support of superintendents completing the survey. She shared data from the statewide [UPK Coordinator Community of Practice](#).
- O'Hara added that he is surprised there is not an annual survey to all schools/school districts to ensure equity across the state and suggested an annual audit of school systems which includes UPK.
- Robinson agreed on the need for annual data collection.
- Cameron voiced her agreement with E. McLaughlin on the survey audience. She noted that people on the ground can help inform education leaders, but systems & visioning is the responsibility of the board and superintendent.
- Francis asked how Vermont may deal with the disparities in terms of where systems are? Will the places that are prepared to move ahead be able to move ahead?
 - Robinson agreed asking if UPK changes need to be a full state-wide system change or could there be flexibility for districts to opt-in when ready.
 - Webb added that some districts have capacity, and some are just starting to think about a PreK-12 system. She noted her conversations with districts new to Act 166 funding, partnerships, and in-house programs.
 - O'Hara noted that MMUUSD is a model site for allowing full flexibility.
- Cameron shared that compulsory attendance applies at age 6; parents will have the option to enroll or not. In PreK, families who attend less are addressed from the perspective of the child benefiting from consistency and all opportunity to access peers and learning opportunities.
- O'Hara noted that afterschool is available for all three- and four-year-olds for the parents that need full day 7:30-5:30.
- Loomis underscored agreement to refine the survey audience and timeline, match the tone of the survey to the selected audience, and to add context.

Public Comments

Nichols submitted the following comment in the meeting chat: "I want to remind the committee again that they are an Implementation Committee; as such they should be looking at how best to implement the law. I often feel as though many members of the committee are pushing for continuance of the status quo and looking for barriers to implementation. We have a chance to reinvent our system and follow the research about licensed teachers providing high quality instruction - moving from our current system of 10 hours a week to a system that truly meets the

needs of all 4-year-olds in a prekindergarten model with service within the public school or in an approved partnership between a LEA and a private provider or another public school. We should be looking for the same rules for 4- and 5-year-olds with full day ADM under the oversight of the Agency of Education. We need to frame this as a It is Going to Happen and what do we do to make it work for children and schools. This is the time to do it, we are looking at major changes to our public education system and implementing 4-year-old PreK needs to be a foundational part of that.”

Abby Fish inquired if school consolidation has been part of PEIC conversations. She asked if this survey will be a useful tool in understanding what districts faced with consolidation are dealing with, how will consolidation affect UPK implementation, and what recommendations can be made for programs facing consolidation.

Kyle Hibbard shared that Mount Mansfield school district offers 4 full days for four-year-olds, and created a system that is flexible because not all families want their four-year-olds in PreK five full days a week. He asked if the committee has considered if families who do not want five full days of PreK will be pushed out of the school system.

Valerie Wood noted that some families are not participating in public or private UPK. In regard to the survey, she asked how best to capture that potential demand for families that may choose to participate in the future.

Loomis adjourned the meeting at 10:59 am