



# PreKindergarten Education Implementation Committee – Meeting

September 10, 2024: 9:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

In-Person for Committee Members:

National Life

Dewey Building, Room 206

1 National Life Drive

Montpelier, VT 05602

Or:

Microsoft Teams Virtual Meeting

Call In: 1-802-552-8456

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## 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; Nicole Miller, Vermont Afterschool; Theresa Pollner, Vermont Curriculum Leaders Association; Erica McLaughlin, Vermont Principals Association; Donna Brown, National Office of Head Start, Sherry Carlson, Let's Grow Kids; Mary Lundeen, Vermont Council of Special Education Administrators; Heather Bouchey, AOE Co-chair, Sarah Kenney, Let's Grow Kids

**AOE:** Molly Loomis, Facilitator; Meg Porcella; Maureen Gaidys; Suzanne Sprague; Christy Swenson; Tammy Bates; Amy Murphy; Thalia Garcia; Wendy Scott; Zoie Saunders, Secretary of Education

**Other:** Maggie Barch, CDD; Valerie Wood, Building Bright Futures; Chris Case, CDD; Matt Levin, Kerri Beebe; Ashley Bessette; Jay Nichols; Matthew DeGroot; Jolie Freschette

**Absent:** Sheila Quenneville, prequalified private provider representative; Chris Wells, family representative

Facilitator Molly Loomis called the meeting to order at 9:08 am. She reviewed the meeting agenda, format, and topics for three breakout discussion groups.

Heather Bouchey commended the commitment of committee members to serving Vermont children and families. She recognized that each committee member represents important constituents,

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perspectives, and expertise and has come together to make recommendations collectively that will benefit children.

Bouche reviewed the committee's charge: to assist the Vermont Agency of Education (AOE) in improving and expanding accessible, affordable, and high-quality prekindergarten education on a full-day basis on or before July 1, 2026. She added that the law proposes four changes:

1. Make prekindergarten programs available for the full-school-day and full-school-year for all four-year-old children;
2. Transition three-year-olds from the current ten-hour prekindergarten benefit to the child care and early education system;
3. Require school districts to ensure four-year-olds whose families choose to access prekindergarten programs have access; and
4. Allow school districts to choose to provide prekindergarten programs directly within schools, through direct contracting with private programs or other public schools, or through a combination of these options.

Bouche reviewed the 10 specific considerations the committee is also tasked with:

1. The needs of both the State and local education agencies (LEAs);
2. The minimum number of hours that shall constitute a full day for both prekindergarten and Kindergarten;
3. Whether there are areas of the State where prekindergarten education can be more effectively and conveniently furnished in an adjacent state due to geographic considerations;
4. Benchmarks & best practices to ensure high quality prekindergarten education;
5. Measures to ensure capacity is available to meet the demand for prekindergarten education;
6. Special education serves for children participating in prekindergarten in public and private settings;
7. Any necessary infrastructure changes to expand prekindergarten;
8. Costs associated with expanding prekindergarten, including fiscally strategic options to sustain expansion;
9. Recommendations for the oversight of the prekindergarten system; and
10. Any other issues the Committee deems relevant. The draft report references two:
  - a. The changes necessary to transition children who are three years of age from the 10-hour prekindergarten benefit to child care and early education; and
  - b. Special education services for three-year-olds.

Bouche noted that the committee's key deliverable is a report to the legislature with recommendations on how to implement these changes.

Janet McLaughlin reviewed accomplishments of the committee to date. She noted that the committee has worked hard to level-set its collective understanding about how the prekindergarten system works in Vermont, grounded thinking in available data and research, and consulted experts, special educators, stakeholder groups. She commended committee members for making room for differing perspectives and for the work completed on a complex issue to determine what is best for children. J.

J. McLaughlin acknowledged the tools created by the committee to strengthen shared

understanding, including matrixes for quality and system oversight, an AOE survey, and a cost of care analysis. She recognized committee limitations include the groups' diverse experiences, the time spent to build shared understanding, and the lack of resources to do research analysis of stakeholder process or data collection. She noted the challenge of the committee to both meet the legislative intent of their task and respond to the changing context in the education conversation since Act 76 was implemented. She noted that where consensus is not reached on the recommendations, the committee may vote to reflect their perspective.

Loomis gave an introduction to the report that the committee members had received in advance of the meeting. Loomis was the primary author on the first draft, with input from the Committee Co-Chairs and technical support from Building Bright Futures and the National Institute for Early Education Research. The draft synthesized the research, conversations and other work that took place across full committee, subcommittee and workgroup sessions. Loomis noted that it was the first of three drafts for review by the committee – all of which would have opportunities for group conversation and written feedback. The final report will be submitted by AOE to the legislature on December 1, 2024.

- Loomis recognized a comment from Sandra Cameron that the report uses the language of “consensus” where further discussion is required.

Loomis reviewed the committee's group agreements (approved January 16, 2023):

- Focus on what's best for children
- Respect and make space for multiple voices and perspectives
- Ground decisions in research, data and experience
- Normalize and expect disagreement
- Speak plainly, directly and honestly

Loomis invited committee members to reflect on the group agreements and consider which agreement they might focus on during the meeting.

- Jeff Francis asked if the committee had a definition for ‘what is best for children’, especially given the present contextual dynamic of the public education delivery system.
- Loomis noted that committee members shared their individual definitions of ‘focus on what's best for children’, synthesized these in workgroups, and reviewed the common and divergent perspectives as a committee. She noted that the group did not attempt consensus on a definition.

## **Breakout Discussion Groups**

Loomis announced two rounds of small group discussions. Three topics were selected through an electronic survey sent in advance to committee members:

1. Benchmarks & best practices to ensure high-quality PreK education,
2. Measures to ensure capacity is available to meet the demand for prekindergarten education, and
3. Costs are associated with expanding prekindergarten.

Each committee member participated in a small group discussion about two of the three topics.

Discussion group 1: Benchmarks & best practices to ensure high-quality PreK education, facilitated by Valerie Wood:

- Agreement that the draft report table format is clear and an effective communication tool useful for various purposes
- A strength of the report is how it centers recommendations from national organizations
- Appreciation for how workgroup efforts are represented in the report
- Request to elevate and strengthen coaching as a recommendation
- Suggestion to revise language to a strength-based perspective and address discrepancies
- Suggestion to clarify teacher/assistant teacher degree and professional development for family child care providers
- Appreciation for links within the report table to Vermont work that is successful
- Suggestion to lay out future actions plans with low cost, short term and long term, complex solutions
- Suggestion to elevate that significant investment has been made in the workforce and consider a timeline for return on that investment.

Discussion group 2: Measures to ensure capacity is available to meet the demand for prekindergarten education, facilitated by Meg Porcella:

- Suggestion to pull key elements from links in the report and spell them out in greater detail to support better comprehension
- Suggestion to elevate unintended consequences for families, schools, and programs
- Suggestion to consult with the Construction Task Force
- Elevate and acknowledgement that regulations defining capacity may need to change, explicitly define full-day, full-year.

Discussion group 3: Costs are associated with expanding prekindergarten, facilitated by Chris Case:

- Suggestions to provide additional context, history of efforts to collect data, and to create an estimate of return of investment
- The complexity of the issue is a challenge, such as factoring additional oversight that supports school districts and does not impact other infrastructure
- Preliminary recommendations included a hesitancy for using cost of care in recommendations and addressing how to leverage different funding sources to meet gaps.

### **Full Group Discussion**

Loomis called the full group back together at 10:50. Group facilitators reported discussion highlights, then the full committee was invited to reflect on these conversations and the draft report.

- Cameron noted that the committee lacked a strong voice from local education agencies (LEA).
  - Loomis agreed, noting that outreach was conducted by the “systems-level considerations workgroup” but was dependent on individual committee members’ availability to gather data from their constituents. Data were collected from Agency leaders, representatives from the VTNEA, Prekindergarten Coordinators, Head Start/private educators, and a group of superintendents.
- Nicole Miller asked if a survey would be distributed to gather information on whether capacity is available to meet the demand for prekindergarten education, and if results will be considered given the projected timeline.
  - Loomis noted that a survey had been drafted and was in process at AOE.
  - Zoie Saunders noted the interdependency of the survey and reported she asked for time to evaluate feedback from different stakeholders, align with

AOE work in the field, and streamline the survey to not overburden the field. She expected the survey may go out this week.

- Becca Webb highlighted that the team compiling the report all have early childhood expertise not shared by the primary reading audience. She suggested the report use plain language and explain with thoroughness.
- Jeff O'Hara suggested a backward approach to the report, starting by asking what committee members want the legislature (and others) to understand after they read the report and to design the report to present that information first. He suggested removing bias and expertise to consider if all readers will understand the intent of the report.
- Cameron stated that the draft report included statements that were not discussed in large committee group, and asked how the comments will be synthesized.
  - Loomis agreed the report integrated work conducted across multiple meetings, including full committee, subcommittee and workgroups. She noted opportunities to share feedback on report content over the following two months.
  - Sharon Harrington voiced approval for the report's representation of her workgroup and noted limited time to investigate all the details as a larger committee required committing trust to each workgroup's discovery efforts.
  - Jeff Francis recommended that workgroup sections have full committee discussion and agreement. He also recommended an in-person meeting for the October session.
  - Loomis agreed to investigate options for an October in-person meeting and noted that the report should highlight areas of consensus and dissent.
  - E. McLaughlin agreed with Cameron and highlighted reflections in the report that were not part of full group conversation.
  - Cameron cited an example requiring further discussion on page 24 of the report regarding a recommendation for costs associated with expanding kindergarten.
  - Webb noted that the large committee will struggle with consensus, and that workgroups intentionally invited experts and stakeholders to represent constituents.
  - O'Hara suggested the report reflect and record non consensus for further discussion.
- Korrine Harvey recognized that the mixed delivery system is an important asset which makes the prekindergarten system more complicated. As a parent, she described how important it was for her family to have choice in prekindergarten settings. She noted that the discussion touched on the lack of universal kindergarten in Vermont and how important the work of the committee was.
- O'Hara shared Sheila Quenneville's reflections in her absence. Quenneville commended the quality of the report and recommended a more collaborative approach to professional development and alternative avenues to licensure.
- Sarah Kenney suggested that the report format more directly answer the four changes proposed by the law and that it embed considerations and recommendations under each change. She agreed with Webb to err on the side of detailed explanations and with O'Hara's suggestion for framing the report by planning backward.

- E. McLaughlin stated that editorializing does not properly represent the perspectives. She suggested deviating from the charge may cause confusion for legislative readers and referenced the report's recommendation against the charge of transitioning three-year-olds from the current 10-hour prekindergarten benefit.
  - Loomis considered it relevant to deviate on that charge given the number of committee members and stakeholders who advised on its negative consequences.
- Webb asked how the committee can elevate other priorities highlighted by this investigation. She pointed to setting the number of kindergarten hours as an example.
- Colin Robinson suggested that the next meeting focus on set areas of contention. He agreed with O'Hara and Kenney on report format. He also shared that consensus on the report is not required, nor are signatures from each member. He related that the committee should try to present a report to the legislature that meets these charges and is resonant in word and context with as many of the members as possible.
- J. McLaughlin suggested the end goal of the report is an accurate reflection of the committee's conversation and the next steps it can recommend. She offered that the report will not look like an implementation plan.
- Saunders reflected that the committee's goal is broad within a complex environment. She suggested that committee members categorize their feedback on the report as related to financial, operation, or substantive categories to help build consensus.

### **Comments from the public**

Loomis invited comments from the public attending virtually and in person.

- Jay Nichols reported his appreciation for the committee putting children's interest ahead of adults' and private economic interests. From his principal's perspective, the average daily membership (ADM) conversation is very important. He suggested that school boards and communities will lean into ADM, especially in rural communities that do not have private programs to fill that service. He noted that rural schools currently offering prekindergarten receive a lot of pressure from the community. He suggested if a law mandated a prekindergarten option with an ADM for offering full-day, full-school year preschool, many students would benefit. He added that more children would also have access to a licensed instructor. He noted that he has been advocating for universal prekindergarten in public schools for 20 years.

### **Minutes approval**

Loomis reviewed the minutes from August. She noted a written request from Sherry Carlson to correct a comment about the cancelation of a provisional licensure project. She also noted a correction identified by Webb to correct the spelling for "principal".

There was conversation among the group about amending the minutes to clarify the number of hours required for a licensed teacher in public schools. There were differing interpretations of State Board Rules on this issue. It was decided that the conversation required further action and would be taken up at a later time.

Webb moved to approve the minutes with the two corrections. Harvey seconded. The motion passed with Kenney, Bouchey, Cameron, Crossman, and E. McLaughlin abstaining.

The meeting adjourned at 12:01 p.m.