



PreKindergarten Education Implementation Committee – Meeting

November 12, 2024: 9:30 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

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DRAFT MEETING MINUTES

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Members Present:

Janet McLaughlin, Agency of Human Services Co-chair
Zoie Saunders, Agency of Education (AOE) Co-chair
Sandra Cameron, Vermont School Board Association
Jeff Francis, Vermont Superintendents Association;
Sharron Harrington, Vermont Agency for the Education of Young Children (VTAEYC)
Korinne Harvey, family representative
Jeff O'Hara, prequalified private provider representative
Rebecca Webb, regional prekindergarten coordinator
Theresa Pollner, Vermont Curriculum Leaders Association
Erica McLaughlin, Vermont Principals Association
Renee Kelly, Office of Head Start
Sarah Kenney, Lets Grow Kids (designee for Sherry Carlson)
Mary Lundeen, Vermont Council of Special Education Administrators
Tim Kiely, family representative (designee for Chris Wells)
Morgan Crossman, Building Bright Futures
Seth Hibbert, Vermont Afterschool (designee for Nicole Miller)
Colin Robinson, Vermont National Education Association

Facilitator: Molly Loomis

AOE: Meg Porcella; Suzanne Sprague; Wendy Scott

Other: Maggie Barch, Matt Levin, Kristin Wood, Valerie Wood, Anna Brouillette, Lee Lauber, Julie Lavine, Linda Michniewicz, Michelle Kersey, Kyle Hibbard, Christy Swenson, Debra

Absent: Sheila Quenneville, prequalified private provider representative

Facilitator Molly Loomis called the meeting to order at 9:05 am.

Agenda

Loomis reviewed the meeting agenda and presented an amended agenda with shortened time for data analysis. Becca Webb moved to approve the amended agenda. Sharon Harrington seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

Jeff Francis asked that committee co-chairs and facilitator allow for additional analysis time if necessary. Webb moved to include Francis' request, and Harrington seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

Minutes approval

Loomis reviewed PEIC meeting minutes from October 8. Members suggested a correction for two public attendees incorrectly listed as AOE-affiliated.

Renee Kelly moved to approve the minutes with those changes. Sandra Cameron seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

Model Contract

Loomis reported that Emily Simmons, AOE legal counsel, members of AOE's early education team and committee members Janet McLaughlin, Zoie Saunders, Becca Webb and Sandra Cameron met to discuss the model contract. She reported that the group identified previously approved legal language to incorporate into the next model contract revision. The group identified issues for further discussion and has not yet made recommendations.

- J. McLaughlin recommended a small, designated group with specialized skills continue to work on the model contract. She also noted that model contract recommendations would not be made before December 1, 2024.
- Sandra Cameron requested that representatives from the Vermont Association of Schools business office have an opportunity to review and provide guidance.
- Saunders noted that the group determined a need to finalize policy components before finalizing the model policy.

Data analysis

Saunders discussed data analysis from AOE. Saunders reported that AOE is validating a data report that includes enrollment and participation trends in universal prekindergarten (UPK) since 2018, access to programs across settings and regions, quality measures and heat map of UPK participation and change over the last 4 years. Saunders expressed her intent to release an advance of the report to committee members to gather their questions and areas needing clarification before publishing.

- Webb shared her appreciation for the work of AOE to gather and validate the report data.

Loomis reviewed [preliminary results](#) from the survey questions sent to principals and school board members. There were seventy-four respondents, including 62 principals and 13 school board members. Loomis thanked committee members Erica McLaughin and Sandra Cameron for drafting and disseminating the survey questions based on the interview protocol previously used with constituent focus groups. One finding from the survey showed 89% of respondents identified financial implications and funding plans as a challenge for implementation. Eighty-five percent of those surveyed reported needing funding and budget consideration support for implementation. Seventy-two percent reported an existing prekindergarten program. Forty-seven percent requested more information in order to create a plan for implementation.

Loomis also reviewed [preliminary results](#) from AOE's survey of Vermont Superintendents regarding prekindergarten implementation for four-year-olds. Forty-two superintendents responded. Seventy-six percent reported maintaining a waitlist and 63% of those reported limited space as a challenge. Eighty-eight percent reported a need to modify how prekindergarten is provided in order to accommodate implementation.

- Webb noted that the preliminary results from both surveys lined up with what she'd heard from a previous focus group with 28 UPK coordinators.
- Webb also reported that she'd heard from UPK coordinators that more districts would have responded to the Superintendent Survey if they had more time to connect with business offices and special educators.
- Renee Kelly observed that the feedback from the surveys with school leaders revealed the perception that schools would take full responsibility for the prekindergarten expansion, including staffing new classrooms and building new programs. She noted that it would be overwhelming if schools took on the whole expansion rather than partnering with existing private prekindergarten providers through the mixed-delivery system. She also noted that private providers (not included in the survey) would be worried about losing staff and program capacity.

Report Structure

Loomis reviewed the structure of the [draft report](#) and noted how it incorporated feedback from committee members and differed from the previous draft. Loomis also suggested a protocol for discussing priority issues in the report and voting on each slate of recommendations.

Transition 3-Year-Olds From Benefit

Loomis reported informal committee straw poll results for the question "Should the report

recommend transitioning 3-year-olds out of the 10-hour prekindergarten benefit into child care and early education?” Loomis reported that 70.6% (12 members) voted no, 29.4% (5 members) voted undecided.

- Robinson requested clarification that the committee’s charge to implement UPK for all four-year-olds is at the exclusion of the 10-hour benefit for 3-year-olds.
- J. McLaughlin cited language from Act 76 stating the charge as “transitioning children who are three years of age from the 10 hour prekindergarten benefit to the child care and early education system.” She noted that some members and stakeholders want to respond directly to the law’s specific request.
- Cameron noted that she couldn’t answer the question because the committee spent time talking about whether or not to transition three-year-olds rather than diving into how.
- Webb expressed her special education perspective on how the proposed change would affect the way three-year-olds with special needs are served. She noted that school-based programs will lack capacity to serve three-year-olds with special needs and a system is not in place to serve them through many community-based programs.
- Morgan Crossman noted data on partner and community feedback show that access for three-year-olds was a major point of contention debated by the legislature. She related that the responsibility of the committee is to hold Vermont accountable for doing what is best on behalf of children and families based on research and best practice, and to relate collective agreement about maintaining services for three-year-olds.
- Francis noted that Act 76 used the term “benefit” and Act 166 created an “entitlement” for prekindergarten education and that the two terms have different meanings. He related that expanding a response beyond the charge creates a contest between three- and four-year-olds and reveals the fact that the committee lacks an implementation plan for four-year-olds. He stated that he does not want to see a diminishment of access to prekindergarten education three-year-olds but wants to create an implementation plan to expand access to four-year-olds.
- Cameron noted that Act 76 requires expansion of UPK to four-year-olds by 2026.
- L. McLaughlin suggested the committee recommend maintaining services to three-year-olds and increasing access and services to four-year-olds.
- Webb suggested dividing the recommendation into two parts: 1) maintaining services for three-year-olds, and 2) increase hours, access and services to four-year-olds.
- O’Hara noted that an unintended consequence of increasing access to four-year-olds in schools could be at the expense of access to three-year-olds.
- Cameron noted that Act 76 allows districts to partner with private providers to provide increased services.

- Saunders expressed that the issue may be addressed in separate recommendations. She suggested recommending maintaining the three-year-old and four-year old benefit and also expanding hours and services for four-year-olds. She suggested that recommendations for operational models on how to expand may be a separate item.

Crossman moved to recommend maintaining the 10-hour benefit for three-year-olds and a second recommendation for improving access and services to four-year-olds. Kelly seconded the motion. Committee members voted by roll call and approved the motion

- Francis noted his abstention was related to the use of “benefit” rather than “entitlement”.
- Cameron noted her abstention was related to the pressure of increased costs on school boards.

Vote Results

Yea: Saunders, McLaughlin, McLaughlin, Robinson, Lundeen, Pollner, Crossman, O’Hara, Kelly, Kenney, Hibbert, Harrington, Webb, Harvey, Keily

Abstain: Francis, Cameron

Absent: Quenneville

Capacity and Implementation

Loomis reviewed committee straw poll results on the question “Do you think that it’s feasible for all school districts to implement full school day, full school year access for all four-year-olds (by directly offering and/or through contracts) by July 1, 2026?” She reported that eight committee members voted no, six voted yes, and three were undecided. Loomis summarized the draft report’s section on capacity, which discussed a lack of information to inform decision-making and constituent concerns about the resources, planning and time required, and recommended additional research.

- Colin noted the poll also asked if an alternative extended timeline would be preferred and expressed appreciation for that question on the survey.
- Loomis reported that poll results showed 14 of 17 members selected including an extended timeline as an alternative to full implementation by July 1, 2026.
- Webb agreed with an extended timeline as an option due to the fact tht school districts are currently writing budgets for 2026. She noted that some districts are not ready to accommodate increased prekindergarten capacity or do not offer prekindergarten programs. She noted that while she supports a mixed delivery system, her opinion is not shared by all UPK coordinators. She also noted that in some parts of Vermont the school district is the only option for prekindergarten opportunities and that there is significant disparity in regional readiness to meet the charge.
- Sandra disagreed with one proposed recommendation from the report that requires school districts to articulate implementation plans, including needs and timelines.

- Francis related his lack of support for more research on demand and capacity over concern that it may stall progress. He preferred the responsibility for implementation plans and timelines fall on the state and not the districts.
- Cameron agreed that a statewide approach to implementation plans and timelines would be the best use of resources.
- Theresa Pollner agreed with Francis on a statewide approach.
- Sarah Kenney suggested adding language for the plan to be developed in collaboration with districts to ensure plans are informed about the range of district readiness.
- Saunders suggested the report frame suggestions around how to best and most equitably deliver education statewide.
- Robinson noted his appreciation for including collaboration with the School Construction Aid Task Force. He suggested that a timeline extension should include a date as a benchmark to strive for.
- J. McLaughlin suggested that the state and districts partner to determine demand, capacity, needs, timelines and implementation plans in a shared effort.
- Crossman expressed that she valued data driven decision making but did not think a separate recommendation was necessary. She suggested merging efforts from state and districts as mentioned by J. McLaughlin or shifting responsibility to entities responsible for systems monitoring.
- Loomis suggested a vote on the item for collaborating with the School Construction Task Force and amending the other recommendations to require the state to work with school districts as part of the Commission on the Future of Public Education to articulate timelines, capacity and needs.
- Kelly noted again that the conversation didn't refer to partnership within the mixed delivery system and requested that the recommendation include language about community partnerships with other capacity-building options.
- Crossman agreed with Kelly. She noted that Act 76 required the committee to consider ways to maintain Vermont's mixed delivery model.
- Saunders noted that the core of the recommendation is that the state should prioritize meeting capacity demands for preschool in a variety of ways.
- Cameron added that the recommendation is making sure that any school construction projects are considering the district's responsibility to provide equitable access.
- Pollner noted that the use of "state requires" does not sound collaborative.
- J. McLaughlin shared language from Act 76, "provide prekindergarten education to all children within the district in either a public school or by contract with private providers, or both" and suggested adding Kelly's suggestion that prekindergarten service may be from private and public providers.

- Saunders suggested language for the recommendation: “Ensure that the state collaborates with local districts, community providers, and relevant statewide committees to address the capacity needs of expanded prekindergarten spots.”
- Kenney suggested: “Require the state to articulate an implementation plan, in collaboration with local districts and the Commission on the Future of Public Education, including additional research on demand and capacity, school district needs, and specific implementation timelines.”
- Cameron suggested adding the School Construction Task Force as a collaborator and noted that Act 76 requires that schools ensure equitable access as a responsibility.
- Robinson suggested including the recommendation for more research on demand and capacity with the recommendation to articulate implementation plans with needs and timelines.
- Webb considered that UPK coordinators think about capacity in terms of number of children and noted that Vermont does not effectively track birth rates within local communities. She suggested specifically identifying how many students will need to be served, how many physical spaces we have across our mixed delivery system and the staffing capacity for licensed teachers.
- Cameron recommended making the recommendation time bound.
- Crossman suggested an amendment to Kenney's language: “Require the state to articulate an implementation plan, in collaboration with local districts, the School Construction Task Force, relevant statewide committees and the Commission on the Future of Public Education, including additional research on demand and capacity, school district needs, and specific implementation timelines.”
- Seth Hibbert suggested the recommendation should recognize the mixed delivery system.
- Cameron suggested the recommendation should recognize repurposing existing spaces.
- J. McLaughlin agreed that a stand-alone recommendation to collaborate with the School Construction Task Force is not necessary, and that a direct reference to Vermont’s mixed delivery system should be included. She noted challenges to set a timeline and expressed her hesitancy for the committee to determine a timeline without knowing upcoming legislative and funding priorities.
- Saunders suggested that the committee should quantify the cost of building infrastructure to serve more four-year-olds.
- Francis advocated adding a timeline to the recommendation to reflect its importance and suggested that the General Assembly may adjust the timeline as needed.
- Kelly shared that capacity should include workforce along with infrastructure.
- Loomis suggested moving on to review other recommendations that may inform the conversation about capacity and timeline for an implementation plan.

Financing

Loomis reviewed the section of the report focused on financing. Act 76 charged the committee with estimating the cost for prekindergarten expansion; however, there was no uniform methodology to report or estimate the cost at the state, district, or program level. As the report describes, the committee looked to national models to understand costs but they didn't offer the specificity needed. The committee also discussed and agreed that the pupil weight for a full-school day, full-school-year prekindergarten education student would need to be at least 1.0, and discussed that the tuition rate paid to private prekindergarten providers is not aligned with the actual costs that they're facing. The report proposed three recommendations related to financing: 1) Commission analysis of Vermont's pupil weight for prekindergarten; 2) Use the cost-of-care analysis commissioned by CDD to create a new methodology to establish and update prekindergarten payments made to non-school-based prekindergarten programs for the 25/26 school year and beyond; and 3) Model anticipated systems-level costs for prekindergarten at various hours and delivery models before making major changes to prekindergarten.

- Robinson noted that the recommendation to use a cost of care analysis to create a new methodology for prekindergarten payments for non-school-based programs is too definitive when compared to the two other exploratory recommendations for analyses of pupil weight and model changes.
- J. McLaughlin responded that the recommendations are relative to Vermont-specific data analyses and acknowledged the language may be too specific. She suggested rephrasing to "create a new methodology to establish an update to prekindergarten payments." She noted the analyses are underway with methods used by other states.
- Francis considered the new methodology recommendation too vague and beyond the scope of the committee.
- Webb noted that the recommendation to create a new methodology to establish prekindergarten payments recognizes tensions for school districts working on their fiscal 2026 plans. She approved of increasing payments and noted that work may require expertise in school finance.
- Kenney asked if methodology is established through rule, should it be phrased to "propose" a new methodology?
- Cameron confirmed that the committee does not have authority to change School Board of Education rules. She also suggested that the ongoing tuition rate analysis by the Commission on the Future of Public Education should be part of the analysis.
- Crossman agreed on language to "propose" a new methodology. She noted the importance of understanding the true cost of care regardless of setting. She also suggested that the committee agree that the pupil weights are no less than 1.0 average daily membership (ADM).

- J. McLaughlin explained that the recommendation should not specify the outcome of the analysis. She agreed that the analysis should yield a systems-level recommendation.
- Saunders noted that the approach of the Commission on the Future of Public Education is to incorporate recommendations from existing committees and the recommendations from this committee could help that commission make recommendations that are inclusive of early childhood.

Pupil Weight Analysis

Committee members voted on and approved the recommendation, “commission analysis of Vermont’s pupil weight for prekindergarten”.

Vote results

Yea: Saunders, J. McLaughlin, Francis, Robinson, Pollner, Crossman, O’Hara, Kelly, Kenney, Harrington, Webb, Harvey

Nay: E. McLaughlin

Abstain: Cameron, Lundeen

Absent: Quenneville, Hibbert, Kiely

- Cameron and Lundeen shared that she abstained because the recommendation does not acknowledge the minimum of 1.0 ADM and noted that some schools already provide full day prekindergarten.
- E. McLaughlin noted that she voted against the motion for the same reason.

Cost of Care Analysis

Committee members reviewed the recommendation “use the cost-of-care analysis commissioned by CDD to create a new methodology to establish and update prekindergarten payments made to non-school-based prekindergarten programs for the 25/26 school year and beyond”.

- Robinson noted that making a recommendation for the legislature to adopt changes based on cost of care analysis is inconsistent with its recommendation to analyze pupil weight, which does not set an action.
- Saunders noted that the committee established a need to make financial modeling recommendations inclusive of the considerations under discussion.
- Cameron asked if the cost of care analysis commissioned by CDD can be applied to a cost of education analysis of setting and group size not under the Agency of Education.
- Crossman shared her value for a complete picture of pupil weight and the true cost of prekindergarten education across the mixed delivery system to best education costs and funding needs.

- J. McLaughlin noted that the current methodology was established 10 years ago, has been updated on index since that time, and that cost-drivers have changed. She considered a recommendation for analysis and revision is within the responsibility of the committee, but can be less specific.
- Francis shared his reluctance to vote on a cost of care analysis he does not know enough about and that may not consider efficiency and economy revealed in the PIES/PICAS? report.
- Kenney emphasized the importance of delineating between pupil weight cost to provide prekindergarten services through non-school based programs.
- Saunders asked what the rationale was for not modeling different hours in different delivery models, and why it is not included in the recommendation.
- Robinson related his reluctance to recommend specific actions and noted the PIES report assumed a public school context.
- Crossman suggested that the committee can move forward a commission and analysis of pupil weight and finalization of the cost of care analysis commissioned by the CDD and require the legislature to use these analyses to inform decision making.
- Webb asked Loomis if NIEER has language about what is needed for updating.
- J. McLaughlin suggested the recommendation be revised to “review methodology for establishing prekindergarten payments to non-school-based programs and propose updates.”
- Francis suggested a revision to J. McLaughlin’s language, “revised methodology for establishing prekindergarten payments to non-school based programs and proposed updates with an emphasis on efficiency and effectiveness.”
- Saunders responded that models for efficiency and effectiveness may differ in operational models.
- Kenney suggested amended language for the recommendation to add “efficiency and effectiveness in meeting the needs of children.”
- Francis noted that the committee has not established a definition for the needs of children. He also noted that, if his suggestion to add “efficiency and effectiveness” wasn’t accepted, he would propose it as an amendment, which would require the committee to vote on it.
- J. McLaughlin noted that she supported efficiency and effectiveness but thought it would be better integrated into a recommendation for analysis across settings.
- Saunders reflected that efficiency and effectiveness are aligned with the recommendation for modeling various hours and delivery models. She considered the rate recommendation to be based on service delivery and efficiency and effectiveness to be based on different modeling.

Hibbert moved to vote on an amended recommendation, “Review methodology for

establishing prekindergarten payments to non-school-based programs and propose updates with an emphasis on efficiency and effectiveness in meeting the needs of children.”

- J. McLaughlin reiterated that efficiency and effectiveness should be applied to a recommendation of systems analysis.
- Kelly agreed, noting that rate setting addresses costs to provide service and efficiency and effectiveness address how well funds are used.

O’Hara moved to vote on the amended recommendation, “Review methodology for establishing prekindergarten payments to non-school-based programs and propose updates.” Francis moved to vote on the recommendation with an amendment, “Review methodology for establishing prekindergarten payments to non-school-based programs and propose updates, *with an emphasis on efficiency and effectiveness.*” Cameron seconded the amended motion. The motion did not pass.

Vote results

Yea: E. McLaughlin, Francis, Cameron, Robinson, Lundeen

Nay: Saunders, J. McLaughlin, Crossman, O’Hara, Kelly, Kenney, Hibbert, Harrington, Kiely

Abstain: Pollner, Webb, Harvey

Absent: Quenneville

- Kenney shared that she did not support the recommendation because it did not embed efficiency and effectiveness in all models across settings.

Crossman seconded O’Hara’s initial motion to vote on the recommendation, “Review methodology for establishing prekindergarten payments to non-school-based programs and propose updates.” The motion passed.

Vote results

Yea: Saunders, J. McLaughlin, Crossman, O’Hara, Kelly, Kenney, Hibbert, Harrington, Webb, Kiely

Nay: E. McLaughlin, Francis, Cameron, Robinson, Lundeen, Pollner

Abstain: Harvey

Absent: Quenneville

- Saunders suggested that language about efficiency and effectiveness be added to the recommendation for modeling various hours and delivery methods.

Closing

Loomis stated that the meeting would have to end to make time for public comment. She noted that the group hadn’t gotten as far on discussing the draft recommendations as

they'd hoped and said she'd follow up with next steps. She thanked the committee for their time and commitment to the committee process.

Public Comment

No members of the public commented.

The meeting adjourned at 12:02 p.m.