



Document Type

Prekindergarten Pupil Weight

Subtitle

DRAFT

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Issued by the Vermont Agency of Education Secretary's Office

Background

This report has been prepared and submitted as required by Sec. 2b of Act 76 of 2023.

Introduction

The Agency of Education (AOE), in consultation with the Prekindergarten Education Implementation Committee, has been tasked with analyzing and issuing a written report to the General Assembly regarding whether the cost of educating a prekindergarten (PreK) student is the same as educating a kindergarten student in the context of a full school day. One of the report's goals is a recommendation of an "average daily membership" or ADM "weight" for a PreK child. Additionally, the AOE was to include draft legislative language to support the recommended prekindergarten pupil weight and implementation plan.

Factors

AOE does not collect cost data at a level detailed enough to isolate the costs of educating kindergarten students nor any other grade level. The Uniform Chart of Accounts (UCOA) collects data at the school level per federal requirements, but the UCOA does not collect data at the specific grade level. Instead, grade levels are grouped into the broader categories of elementary and secondary, grades K-6 and 7-12, respectively.

The UCOA does have a prekindergarten level so costs identified as prekindergarten can be isolated. However, depending on the reporting entity, prekindergarten costs may be spread over a wide spectrum of cost centers other than direct instruction, such as administration, business office, legal services, debt service, etc. While entities not reporting prekindergarten costs in a uniform methodology creates problems, reporting prekindergarten costs over various cost centers also makes it difficult to ascertain the actual cost of educating a prekindergarten student.

An additional complicating factor in determining the cost of educating a prekindergarten student is that prekindergarten programs may be provided at either an approved private provider or in a public-school setting, both at public cost to the resident school district. However, while some school districts choose to pay for more hours than the mandated publicly funded 10 hours per week within public-school-operated prekindergarten programs, districts pay only the statewide rate for 10 hours per week to private providers. This statewide Prekindergarten tuition rate for the 23/24 school year is \$3,764.00 to cover 10 hours per week for 35 weeks during the academic year. This statewide rate would likely skew an overall prekindergarten cost when combined with the public-school prekindergarten costs. Additionally, AOE does not collect information on how the school districts determine their prekindergarten costs for in-house programs.

The lack of these data prompted the AOE to consult with the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER).

In October 2023, Janet McLaughlin, Deputy Commissioner, Department of Children and Families along with Meg Porcella, Director, Student Support Services met with Karin Garver and Lori Connors-Tadros from NIEER. They agreed that the timeframe for conducting the necessary studies would require more time than had been allotted. Additionally, they provided national research on the costs of educating PreK children in line with NIEER PreKindergarten quality standards.

NIEER provided an estimate in November 2023 that the cost of providing high-quality PreK education in Vermont is \$13,626 per student; this is for 6 hours/day and 180 days/year, at NIEER quality standards, and with all teaching staff paid on par with public school educators. This includes:

- Teaching Staff Salaries & Benefits: \$9,745
- Non-Teaching Staff Salaries & Benefits: \$864
- Staff Professional Learning & Support: \$25
- Child Assessments and Screening: \$378
- Child Transportation: \$279
- Facilities Costs: \$1,106
- Education Supplies and Equipment: \$377
- Office Supplies and Equipment: \$244
- State-Level Administration: \$608

This does not include costs for construction or fit-up (including dedicated playgrounds), special education, or school/district-level administration. NIERR also suggested variables that will affect the cost of educating a PreK student such as quality of the program, the program setting, and geographic accessibility.

Conclusion:

Given what is known, the cost of educating a PreK child for a full school day will not be less than that of a kindergartener.

To develop a more precise estimate, the AOE recommends reopening the [Pupil Weighting Factors Report](#) (2019) to add PreK children.