

UPK in Essex County Conversation

May 31, 2024

Present for conversation:

Becca Webb (Systems oversight committee member)

Stakeholders: Linda Michniewicz (Building Bright Futures- convener), Lyn

Schmucker, Maidstone- NEK Choice Board Member; Sharon Ellingwood White, Lemington-NEK Choice Board Member; Patty Brown, Guildhall-NEK Choice Board Member.

Background:

Essex County is an area of the state where it is challenging, if not impossible, for 3, 4, and 5 year olds to participate in the current Act 166 model. ***Public school for this area is through school choice K-12. What would it take to be able to expand this to preschool?***

Towns in the region include:

Bloomfield

Brunswick

East Haven

Granby

Guildhall

Kirby

Lemington

Maidstone

Norton

Victory

Programs in this region:

This school district is located in a child care desert. According to BFIS data (6-3-24) there are no programs that provide Universal Preschool. There are two family child care homes listed within the towns in this region. One has a capacity of 6 with 3 as preschoolers and one is a new program as of April 2024 and information on capacity is not listed in BFIS at this time.

Equity:

- Families from this area are paying full tuition for early care and education to New Hampshire Programs.
- Not all families can afford private pay especially in this area of the state with higher poverty rates.
- To participate in the few programs located in this area, many families would need to drive in the opposite direction from their worksites.

School Impact:

- Children in this region tend to be both born and receive their primary healthcare in New Hampshire. Due to the rural nature of the school district and the factors listed above, it is hard for public school planning.

- Data is often missing about the incoming kindergarten classes and there are challenges to identifying and serving children with disabilities.
- It is a tax impact to our tiny towns when we have even 2 unanticipated students “show up” when we can’t predict when we are getting new students. If they were in Pre K we would know. If we knew they were born and could get data on births, or Medicaid enrollment we would know. The VT DOH breaks our district down in into Essex North (Newport service area) and Essex South (St J service area). Many of these same Pre K kids born in NH also use NH based primary care. It causes a lot of problems for our counts and impacts our budgets. This impacts taxpayers in addition to the student.
- Most of our towns top the list in a lack of capacity in the VT Community Index and no one can afford the ramifications at any age.

Other:

- This group of stakeholders would like to keep preschool accessible to three year olds.
- Infant and toddler care is often subsidized by preschool students. This is true across Vermont’s early care and education system.
- These children are already going to NH for K to 12. We must get them in those delivery systems as early as possible (for Pre K). Early intervention assists the children’s outcomes sooner.
- Missing these early intervention years w/no Pre K brings a cost to our taxpayers in an area with high poverty and is a total Catch - 22.
- Lyn highlighted the difficulties and financial burden faced by families in Vermont due to the lack of accessible childcare services.
- Patricia and Sharon added that the absence of daycare and pre-K services not only impact children but also contribute to local economic issues, generational poverty, and lower outcomes.
- Sharon emphasized the need for better access to data to anticipate and prepare for the number of students, highlighting the current system's layered complexity.