

Prekindergarten Education Implementation Committee (PEIC) Program Quality Workgroup
Notes from PreK Special Education Services Discussion

The Program Quality Workgroup was charged with considering special education services for children participating in prekindergarten in both public and private settings, as well as for three-year-olds and four-year olds. These notes synthesize their conversations in the spring of 2024.

How do prekindergarten special education services work now??

- Funded through the state education fund
- Special Education considerations not outlined by Act 166 or Act 76
- Special Education services funded through local tax money and IDEA-B federal funding
- While special education funding is a set reimb. Amount; SU employee costs vary across the state.
- If program meets SU's requirements & AOE prequalification the \$ follows the child regardless of where in the state they attend.
- When there are concerns about a child's development the SU is required to screen, determine if an evaluation is necessary, and to develop an IEP if eligible. Services are based on the SU recommendation for the needs of a child. Often this leads to SUs not providing services outside of district lines.
- Leads families to need to choose childcare vs special education services.
- Every school must have a "contact person" for UPK (often don't have any experience with early ed)

What key issues do we need to consider for the PEIC report?

- How do you solve for insufficient resources – funding and people – to support prek special education needs?
- If we served all 4 year olds, there would be more kids in schools and we might do a better job with child find - more kids identified early
 - However, increased costs associated with this
 - Fewer special educators going into community programs
 - Fewer 3 yos in schools
- Schools won't be able to afford increased demands for special education services
 - What's the cost of increasing school-based programs to our school budgets?
 - What's the increased cost needed to support those programs with special education services?
 - Schools need private providers for classroom space, but that means limited quality oversight
- If the school district is responsible for special education for kids, they need oversight - same as it is now and might be amplified
 - Can't host all 4yos in schools
 - Can't have oversight of private settings,
- Equity & Inclusion
 - Can private providers expel children?

- New law in effect - exclusionary discipline is not allowed for kids <8 across settings
 - <https://education.vermont.gov/sites/aoe/files/documents/edu-memo-french-suspension-expulsion-students-under-eight.pdf>
 - CDD & AOE working hard together on clear, consistent guidance on this
 - Very complicated issue - what's best for child's needs vs. what's exclusionary – accommodation versus expulsion
- Kids who need special services have to go to school to get their child care
- 3s who need services may need to be in classrooms w 4s?
- Family choice is really important
- Implications of separating 3 and 4 year olds
 - Where to serve 3 year olds? Will community/private programs which currently receive services be able to keep this model due to the number of students? Where is the least restrictive environment? What is a Free and Appropriate Education?
 - Will elimination of funding for 3s impact SU/SD choice to offer in district programs leading to 3s needing a model different from in-district (level of service? funding?space if need all 4s? Inclusion model?)
 - What about 3s who might not meet special education requirements have a level of need where a community program doesn't have the resources to support them?
 - 3s at risk are often served in public programs now and/or private programs who have relationships with public programs/staff. Would those community/private public/school based relationships be as strong?
 - What about 3s who have higher special education needs than can be provided in community programs due to the level of need, services available?

Where are UPK special education services currently working well?

- Megan Mezcat (principal, UPK Coor, S. Vermont)
 - Strong community-based UPK programs within SU boundaries
 - Parents don't have to travel (have care where they work, in their SU)
 - Adequate staffing to do this
 - District early ed coordinator (tagged with this job) in a SU at an admin level

What preliminary recommendations might we consider?

- Capacity building for private programs for special education, inclusion, suspension/expulsion– how do we as a system provide an inclusionary program/system that supports all student needs?
- Each SU needs a person that oversees pre-k special education
- SU needs qualified person to provide early education oversight -who has knowledge, & relationships & can speak early childhood (can include the role of UPK Coordinator too)
 - Issues: no early childhood admin endorsement, so recommendation needs to focus on responsibilities not endorsement
 - Concern about creating too many siloed director position rather than focusing on collaboration
 - Is this defined per # of kids?

- Cost of special education for prek is MORE than k-2 student (can't do more without increasing cost)
- More analysis on how we're going to fund this. Schools are struggling to pass k-12 budgets, how would we find funds for prek?
- Missed opportunity to build special education into prek bill.
- Early identification of 3 year olds is critical – possibly re-think removing 3 year olds from UPK

Stakeholder Feedback

Becca's Conversation & Private Providers:

- And more children who could use **additional supports** will be identified an entire year later—and this of course is not best practice. – **inclusion, diversity in student needs**
- Children with specialized or high education needs (e.g. disabilities, high behavioral needs). How do we support 3s with those needs in private programs? Who provides the supports? Does it still come from public school staff? How will schools be able to support private programs with fewer children? We see this issue now - including with children in afterschool programs who have 1:1 support in school. Puts pressure on private programs and **creates inequity in access for children with higher needs.**
- If LEA's are given the opportunity to decide if they preserve mixed delivery and with what programs they partner—access will be inequitable and whether you participate in UPK will be dependent on where you live.-- **Equity issue; Does this negate some of the purpose of the legislation intent in making statewide access?**
- If the focus shifts to 4s only, then some 3s will come in with **NO exposure to a group setting and that can be devastating for children with additional needs (this happened some during Covid and we are still seeing those impacts).** –General Ed and unidentified special education needs.
- Level of need at the public schools is often higher at the public schools, but the levels of support available in those settings is also higher. How do we increase the **capacity of all settings to equitably support children** with needs? How can we support this for both 3s and 4s (as required by ECSE)?

Pam's conversation with Early Education Committee at the VCSEA

- Having a hard time supporting for-profit org benefitting from public \$
- Don't have oversight of staff of private providers. Program Quality oversight is needed across settings
- Limit inclusion if 3 yos isn't in school - equity issue
- Child care funding more available generally (CCFAP) if UPK is paid for
- Transitions are an issue if UPK4 ends at 3pm (after care)
- Match consultation from service providers with where they are receiving consultation
 - Private settings need additional support beyond what school-based settings need, including coaching, resources, ongoing support for implementation