



# PEIC: Special Education Subcommittee–Meeting

August 14, 2024: 11:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

Microsoft Teams Virtual  
Meeting Call In: 802-552-8456  
Conference ID: 965 381 108#  
[Meeting Link](#)

## DRAFT MEETING MINUTES

**Present:** Sandra Cameron, Vermont School Board Association; Steph Ripley, Maple Run School District, Meg Porcella, AOE; Morgan Crossman, BBF; Keith Williams, CDD; Katie McCarthy, AOE; Janet McLaughlin, Agency of Human Services Co-chair; Korrine Harvey, family representative; Mary Lundgreen, VCSEA; Wendy Scott, AOE, Molly Loomis, facilitator

**AOE:** Suzanne Sprague

**Other:** Maggie Barch, CDD

**Absent:** None

Facilitator Molly Loomis called the meeting to order at 11:03 am.

Loomis reviewed the meeting agenda. No questions or comments were made about the agenda. Loomis requested comments, questions, or suggestions on the [draft meeting minutes from August 7](#). Katie McCarthy requested to submit a change to her comment about inclusive classrooms. Mary Lundeen requested a change to clarify that technology is used and may be considered reasonable (though not ideal) when considering services for a child. Loomis noted a link correction to the discussion notes. Lundeen moved to approve the minutes with those changes. Steph Ripley seconded. The motion passed with none opposed.

### Group Discussion

Loomis asked the subcommittee to reflect on the key issues & challenges from the previous meeting and to share thoughts on ideas & solutions to improve access to high-quality special education services for prekindergarten children.

- Ripley noted that current tensions include decision-makers' confusion and families' confusion which highlights the need to communicate resources and pathways more effectively. She offered that the responsibility of special education should not fall fully on schools but be shared with other agencies that provide wraparound services in collaboration. She recommended clearer guidelines for what schools provide and what resources are available through local mental health agencies and private insurance.
  - Sandra Cameron noted that Children's Integrated Services (CIS) offers family services supports for children over three-years-old, and asked Keith Williams to confirm.

- Williams confirmed that family support is a component of Strong Families. He noted that Vermont Home Visiting and early childhood family health extend to a child's 6<sup>th</sup> birthday, and further clarified that those services are Medicaid-active. Families with children not covered by Medicaid have some barriers.
- Morgan Crossman highlighted issues brought up by McCarthy at the previous meeting about the differences in state and federal laws that affect the intersection of prekindergarten and special education. She clarified that federal regulations and rules prohibit potential changes and where Vermont has control to make changes.
- Cameron noted Vermont's obligation to provide support for children not enrolled in prekindergarten.
  - Crossman agreed, citing McCarthy's explanation that IDEA has requirements for supporting children with disabilities and special healthcare needs regardless of whether or not they are enrolled in public and private settings.
- Ripley expounded on the challenges of inconsistent oversight of special education services across the mixed delivery system and the challenge to recruit and train sufficient staff. She noted that cost is an important consideration. She also noted that differences in CDD and AOE requirements are a burden to programs. She noted that school districts pay for training that private staff must pay for themselves. She suggested that having oversight from one agency that is similar to the oversight of the K-8 system would reduce costs, as staff may be utilized in different classrooms.
  - McLaughlin asked to clarify if the fact that staff qualifications in child care licensing do not intersect with other school staff and school processes is a complication.
  - Ripley confirmed and provided an example. Early childhood education requires professional development in Foundations, which are out-of-building requirements that staff must complete on their own time in order to be paraeducators; time for which they are not paid.
  - Cameron agreed noting frequent conflicts on negotiated contracts with unions. She agreed that from a systems perspective, there is much efficiency to be gained by having single agency oversight.
  - Lundeen added another example noting that there are different requirements for paraeducators working in a classroom supporting three- to five-year-olds than for paraeducators in a kindergarten classroom down the hall. Because of that, a paraeducator in the kindergarten classroom cannot cover lunch or restroom breaks in the prekindergarten classroom. She suggested single agency oversight would relieve some of that system pressure.
  - Ripley noted that easing transitions for children and families and having familiar adults in place are goals of early childhood education. She suggested flexibility to have all the teachers in a building be the teachers for all of the children would support those goals.

- Cameron noted positive aspects of having prekindergarten children in classrooms for more than 10 hours per week with hours that align with kindergarten include fewer transitions, decreased transportation in the middle of the day, and more opportunity for kindergarten and prekindergarten teachers to collaborate.
- Loomis recognized that the public-school perspective is well represented within the subcommittee and that there are other perspectives to consider.
- Porcella noted one tension is separating or removing three-year-olds from prekindergarten.
  - McCarthy noted one inequity related to removing three-year-olds is that they may not have a licensed educator in the classroom.
- McLaughlin shared support for further discussions about the role of child care licensing within public schools, but considered it part of the broader prekindergarten discussion, rather than specific to special education. She noted families' need for full workday, summer and other out-of-school time care.
- Ripley considered the value of mixed age classrooms to provide peer support for a wide range of development. She valued the opportunity to grow programs slowly, extending days, and considering how to serve two- and three-year olds in their least restrictive environment.
- Loomis reminded the subcommittee to focus on recommendations to improve special education services to prekindergarten children.
- Williams shared a consideration regarding the exclusion of three-year-olds. States may extend early intervention Part C services beyond a child's 3rd birthday. He noted that such an extension would be an enormous undertaking with many decision points, cooperation within Parts A and C, and provider participation. This option would ensure that three-year-olds are served in a way that minimizes disruption and addresses some of the concerns around transitions. He noted a lack of Child Find in that age group. He highlighted that cost would be an issue because federal allocation is inconsistent in this model.
  - McCarthy noted a main concern for that option is three-year-olds giving up free and appropriate public education. She also directed the subcommittee members to the policy statement of inclusion for children with disabilities which includes 10 recommendations for state action. One recommendation is to ensure a cross-sector state leadership team to implement a shared vision for inclusion. She suggested that one recommendation should be promoting a mixed delivery system of high quality inclusive early learning opportunities through partnerships with CIS providers, LEA, schools and community-based early learning programs. She pointed out that Vermont stands out in regard to its mixed delivery system, and removing three-year-olds is at odds with that strength.
  - Crossman noted that this option was a discussion point in MA 5 years ago. Instead of this option, the system focused on building the partnership across agencies, improving the narrative about supporting children and families in both agencies

(breaking down the preconceived notions of the approach of school systems and challenging the way it's implemented in a partnered approach), relationships with pediatricians/medical professionals about eligibility assessments across Part C and Part B and public and private programs. She noted the challenges for families, transitions from Part C to B, and state and federal level controls. She noted the importance of building partnerships to support this transition period. She noted an important consideration is the family focus of early intervention and special education that shifts when children enter school. She suggested work to break down tensions about the support that can be provided to families in a different way. She noted the challenge of early identification, difference in eligibility across public and private settings, crossing district lines.

- McCarthy noted that one of the state recommendations in the policy statement is engaging families as essential partners.
- Crossman asked what can be done differently to help local school districts through those barriers.
- Porcella considered if barriers are a universal issue or mostly experienced by a few districts that need additional help.
- McCarthy shared that AOE provides special education monitoring and follow-up with school districts, reaches out when needs are identified, and provides training. She noted that school districts are concerned that setting precedent limits the individualized nature of IEPs.
- Lundeen noted a rule that intersects with UPK is around parentally placed students, which applies to private prekindergarten. School districts may decide to provide services through a service plan. She noted that special education is considered a service, not a placement.

#### Concluding Thoughts

- Ripley highlighted that decision-makers should know that special education cannot be untied from prekindergarten. She also recommended that responsibility for cross district services should not fall on districts but be shared through contracted services or other solutions.
- Williams noted that three- to five-year-olds are the age group most needing CDD's Special Accommodation Grants (SAG provides opportunities to meaningfully include young children and a variety of environments).
- Lundeen noted that school districts want to serve children, but capacity and travel are barriers to cross-border services.
- McCarthy noted an example itinerant model for inclusion from NYC. She also noted that UPK is an unfunded mandate, and a consideration as schools struggle with budget issues.
- Crossman confirmed her recommendation that Vermont maintain access for three-year-olds, improve transitions around special education and maintain access across those transitions

across settings, and reduce tensions between public/ private and local/state in order to better improve outcomes.

- Korinne Harvey commended the tenacity of the committee members working to find solutions.
- McLaughlin valued the participation of multiple agencies to collect resources and perspectives to build partnership.
- Porcella shared her value for creating a positive experience for Vermont families.

The meeting concluded at 12:00pm.