



PreKindergarten Education Implementation Committee – System-Level Workgroup Meeting

February 9, 2024: 1:00 p.m. – 2:30 p.m.

Microsoft Teams Virtual
Meeting Call In: 802-552-8456
Conference ID: 558 242 839#
[Meeting Link](#)

DRAFT MEETING MINUTES

Members: Janet McLaughlin, co-Chair, AHS, DCF Deputy Commissioner; Jeff Francis, Vermont Superintendents Association; Colin Robinson, Vermont National Education Association; Renee Kelly, Head Start Collaboration Office; Rebecca Webb, Regional Prekindergarten Coordinator

AOE: Suzanne Sprague

Others: Molly Loomis, Facilitator; Meg Baker

Facilitator Molly Loomis called the meeting to order at 1:03 p.m. after asking if there were any changes to the [agenda](#). There were none. Loomis shared the [Group Agreements](#) that the PreKindergarten Education Implementation Committee agreed to at their February 16 meeting, which were:

- Focus on what's best for children;
- Respect and make space for multiple voices and perspectives;
- Ground our decisions in data, research, and experience;
- Normalize and expect disagreement in our process;
- To speak plainly, directly, and honestly.

There was discussion about how subjective the first agreement is and Loomis noted that the group would explore this together. Loomis shared the goal of holding each other accountable to these agreements during both Workgroup and PreKindergarten Education Implementation Committee meetings, and asked group members to set an intention for themselves to focus on the agreements during the meeting.

The group discussed what the first agreement, "focus on what's best for children," meant to them by each submitting comments online through Mentimeter. Comments included:

- Kids are situated in their context - family, community/school program;

- It means considering children and families' identities and what they need to be successful, listening to families and trusting that they know their children best;
- Focusing on what is developmentally appropriate for the whole and for individual children;
- Considering access, quality and equity together, and recognizing that the values sometimes conflict in the real world;
- Equity and opportunity for all children- equity of opportunity for all children. Societal attention and commitment to the systems through which we serve children in a manner that ensures the above.

The group discussed areas of overlap across their comments. Renee Kelly suggested that children don't stand alone and that they are within the context of families/communities. Jeff Francis noted conflicts that come with balancing the good of the individual vs the good of the whole. Janet McLaughlin discussed the tension between quality and access in public policy. Renee Kelly expressed the need to listen to what families need. Loomis summarized that questions about the combination of what is easiest for the system and what's best for families aren't always clearly defined. Jeff Francis noted Ray McNulty's principle of serving many communities and serving them well. There is a need for a clear delineation of what is "well".

Molly Loomis asked the group to summarize their shared definition of "focus on what's best for children", based on their conversation about overlap across comments. Written comments were submitted online through Mentimeter and included:

- Understanding the children in the context of their families and communities, acknowledging various levels of needs and resources to address those needs while striving towards equity of opportunity for all;
- Balance the needs of the whole with the needs of individuals. Consider context family/community, program, school, and systems that serve them beyond/in addition to pre-K;
- We should be doing what we can to honor family interests concerning children and our best to do that equitably, in a manner that uses systems and resources in a responsive and efficient manner.

The group agreed that the thoughts above capture the tensions well and agreed that Loomis could share with the full Prekindergarten Education Implementation Committee.

Loomis shared the updated [Workgroup Guidelines](#) and highlighted the roles and timeline of the Workgroups. The group reviewed the considerations that they will focus on as part of the System-level Considerations Workgroup:

- Needs of both state and local agencies;
- Whether there are more effective ways to work across states;
- Changes for transitioning kids who are three years old out of the Universal Pre-K program;
- Recommendations for the oversight of the program.

The group discussed the [Workgroup Planning Template](#) that they each completed in advance of the meeting. Members found it to be a helpful guide to gather their thoughts ahead of time. The group discussed their definition of success for the Workgroup, which included open-mindedness, being able to listen, clarity, taking advantage of the facilitator, and being fully present.

The group discussed the first consideration for the Workgroup: the needs of both the State and local education agencies. Loomis asked members to present questions that need to be answered in order to address this consideration. Janet McLaughlin noted the shared need across agencies that kids are ready for Kindergarten and asked what information state and local agencies need related to this. She suggested asking stakeholders to define their needs and understand the available tools to get these needs met. Colin Robinson and Jeff Francis asked about how the current early care & education systems functions, including who does what, in what capacity, and how is it measured? What is the interplay among AOE, AHS, Building Bright Futures, and the various rulemaking authorities, including the State Board of Education? Robinson proposed that the group could look at the legal, practical and value needs that each stakeholder group has. Renee Kelly asked how to operationalize needs and how deep to go in understanding stakeholder needs and connections across systems. Loomis relayed questions that Rebecca Webb submitted in advance of the meeting regarding where dual oversight might be helpful vs. where it presents barriers, how to address special education in Act 166, and how to clarify roles of UPK Coordinators.

The group further discussed how to identify stakeholder needs. Janet McLaughlin suggested adding families' needs as to the list of needs to explore. Jeff Francis asked for clarity about what constitutes a need of a certain entity or group. Renee Kelly offered that, because HeadStart intersects with federal agencies, it might also be helpful to gather information from federal partners. Loomis summarized the list of needs brought up by the group: State Agency needs, LEA needs, federal needs, and family or other stakeholder needs. She suggested creating a matrix of stakeholders alongside their legal, practical, and value needs.

Loomis summarized two of the big areas discussed – audience needs and how the current system functions – and asked the group to consider how they might answer the questions they generated. Possibilities included looking at national research through [NIEER](#), consulting state or local data sources, and outreach to stakeholders. The group brainstormed ideas for next steps, including resources to help understand the current early care and education system, specific questions to ask NIEER, and what questions to pose to stakeholders. Colin Robinson suggested that the group understand how much is expended on 166 out of the Education Fund.

Members of the public were present and invited to be heard. Meg Baker thanked the group for being thoughtful in digging into this complex topic of what is in the best interests of children and families. She offered to share a 1-page overview of Act 166 and to answer any questions offline. Baker shared her perspective as a Universal Pre-K Coordinator for 3

school districts in Addison County, where she sees UPK working very well. She acknowledged that needs and programs are variable regionally and that quality and access may differ statewide.

The group returned to the intentions that they set at the start of the meeting. All members gave themselves a 5 out of 5 in terms of success practicing the group agreements during the meeting.

The group discussed their commitments following the meeting and in advance of the next meeting on March 8. These included:

- Colin Robinson - conversations with Pre-K Teacher members to understand their experiences in the field;
- Janet McLaughli - create a 1 pager from AOE and AHS to gather needs from the State's perspective;
- Jeff Francis - contact constituents from the field using questions generated by the Workgroup;
- Renee Kelly - gather feedback from Head Start Directors;
- Molly Loomis - send research questions to NIEER

Molly Loomis will follow up with the group with notes, next steps, and a request for someone to share a 5-minute overview of this meeting during the Feb. 13 Prekindergarten Education Implementation Committee meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 2:31 p.m.

Meeting minutes recorded by: Molly Loomis.