



PreKindergarten Education Implementation Committee – System-Level Workgroup Meeting

April 12, 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

Workgroup Charge

The System-level Considerations Workgroup is charged with exploring, documenting and reporting back to the Committee about:

1. Needs of both the State and local education agencies;
2. Whether there are areas of the State where prek education can be more effectively & conveniently furnished in an adjacent state due to geographic considerations;
3. Changes necessary to transition children who are three years of age from to 10-hour prek benefit to child care & early education; and
4. Recommendations for the oversight of the prek system.

Present: Renee Kelly, Head Start Collaboration Office; Janet McLaughlin, co-Chair, Agency of Human Services Co-chair; Colin Robinson, Vermont National Education Association; Rebecca Webb, Regional Prekindergarten Coordinator

AOE representatives: Molly Loomis, Facilitator; Suzanne Sprague

Absent: Jeff Francis, Vermont Superintendents Association

Facilitator Molly Loomis called the meeting to order at 1:03 p.m. Loomis asked if there were any changes to the [agenda](#). There were none.

Loomis asked if there was any discussion about the draft [minutes from 3.8.24](#). A suggestion was made to correct a spelling error. Renee Kelly made a motion to amend the minutes to correct the error and Rebecca Webb seconded the motion. The motion carried.

The group warmed up by sharing any insights about prekindergarten that they'd had over the week. Insights included seeing the benefits of Act 76 in practice in a child care setting, participating in rich conversations from the last [full Committee meeting](#), thinking through system-level oversight of prek insurance, and considering the potential impacts of conversations in the legislature about the education funding system.

Janet McLaughlin and Rebecca Webb shared a [document](#) outlining roles in Vermont's current universal prekindergarten (UPK) system, including the responsibilities of the Child Development Division, Agency of Education, State Board of Education, School Districts & Supervisory Unions, and Building Bright Futures. McLaughlin highlighted:

- With Act 166, the Agency of Education (AOE) and Child Development Division (CDD) worked together to recommend rules to the State Board of Education and to develop and implement a UPK monitoring system. In this process, they divided up roles & responsibilities.
- The Vermont Early Learning Standards, which apply to children aged 0 to 8, are a framework for grade-level expectations and used by both agencies, with CDD focused on 0 to 3, AOE focused on 5+, and both focused on preschoolers aged 3 to 5.
- AOE & CDD have complementary roles supporting prekindergarten program quality through professional development.
- The State Board of Education approved UPK roles in 2016 but has not been actively involved since.
- CDD licenses and monitors programs through child care licensing, which includes foundational health, safety, and quality standards. These are applicable to all UPK settings - school-based and community-based.
- CDD develops and implements the STARS quality recognition program. To become a UPK partner, child care programs must score 4 or 5 STARS or be accredited by NAEYC or Head Start – all assessed through external assessments.
- CDD & AOE partner on supporting quality through MTSS trainings on the Vermont Early Learning Standards, professional development through CCV and scholarships for credentialing.
- CDD hosts Children's Integrated services, including IDEA Part C services and works closely with AOE to support children identified for special health needs.
- AOE & CDD partner on UPK system compliance and program compliance. AOE is focused on compliance related to the prequalification process, including program applications and annual assurance forms, educator licensure, exclusionary discipline & special education.
- AOE holds specific data including Kindergarten readiness.
- AOE sets the statewide UPK tuition rate annually using a proscribed process.
- AOE leads IDEA Part B and works in partnership with school districts.
- AOE holds the license for Teaching Strategies Gold. UPK programs are required to conduct student assessments twice annually. The State has access to data on all UPK-enrolled children. Individual programs can view data on children enrolled in their program.
- Renee Kelly added that Head Start programs use Teaching Strategies Gold outside of UPK and are federally required to conduct assessments three times annually.
- AOE leads teacher licensure and has a process for providing provisional teaching licenses to educators in private settings.
- AOE is the lead communicator with programs on UPK related information.

Webb continued to discuss the [document](#) outlining roles in Vermont's current universal prekindergarten (UPK) system by highlighting role of school districts and supervisory unions:

- The law requires that every school district has one contact person to address UPK questions across the district as a UPK coordinator. This position varies across the state in

terms of hours and roles – it can be a curriculum director, principal, special education coordinator, or other position. Districts are not required to have an early education coordinator, which might be a consideration for the Committee’s recommendations.

- School districts have financial and contract-related responsibilities for UPK. Each district is responsible for incorporating UPK into its budget and to identify a process for paying an annual percentage of UPK.
- Act 76, like Act 166, does not include any legal language about special education services. School districts are responsible for providing special education services. Special education funding is completely separate from UPK funding, which can mean that special education services don’t always align with children’s program settings. This can be an equity issue for families.

McLaughlin shared that Building Bright Futures does not have a formal role written into UPK law but their role has been to monitor early childhood systems and track and report data.

Colin Robinson asked if prequalified prekindergarten regions still exist. Webb provided context that, because some school districts weren’t prepared to fully implement UPK in 2014-2015, they could apply to AOE to limit their service area geographically. Although this option still exists, there is only one [prequalified prekindergarten region](#) in the State.

Robinson also asked clarifying questions about alignment of UPK payments and school district payments from the Education Fund, as well as attendance tracking across UPK programs. The group discussed inconsistent attendance tracking and reporting in the UPK system and noted that this could be an area in which to recommend improvement.

Loomis transitioned the group to the next agenda item by sharing a [Stakeholder Interview Questions & Feedback](#) document where the group has been collecting input from stakeholders. Group members shared quick updates on their stakeholder outreach and discussed expanding outreach beyond understanding the “needs of both the State and local education agencies” (as written in the law) to include community-based providers, partners and families.

Renee Kelly gave an overview of the feedback she collected with Vermont Head Start Association directors. Kelly reported:

- They identified four themes related to value needs: the importance of family choice, supporting collaboration over competition, equity and access for the most vulnerable families in Vermont, and innovation and opportunity to think creatively about how to meet the needs of families.
- The group discussed the impact that the law will have on enrollment composition, particularly if 3-year-olds will no longer be eligible for UPK funding . They are concerned about the domino effect that this could have on funding and thus Head Start’s ability to serve other populations. Head Start programs have to match federal funding with a non-federal match and removing 3-year-olds could have implications for this funding.
- There was concern that changing the structure of UPK could impact access to other services. Head Start provides access to comprehensive services, in addition to child care, which support kids to be successful within families.
- The group needed reassurance that the law would still support contracts with private child care providers rather than relocating all UPK into school classrooms. They expressed fear

that ambiguity in the law allowing community choice could translate into inequitable access for families. They recommended that changes to the UPK system should be consistent across communities.

- Head Start Program Performance Standards are national standards within statute that are highly researched to support high quality. The law offers an opportunity to align standards across settings without duplicating efforts.
- Head Start looks different across communities because programs are structured to respond and adapt to community needs. This makes it important to have strong communication channels across the collaboration and systems.
- Because changes to UPK will likely result in increased demand for qualified teachers, there were concerns around workforce and competing with public schools for effective compensation.
- The group's conversations about legal needs focused on IDEA and the provision of special education services. They expressed concerns that children whose families chose to remain in a Head Start setting might experience reduced access to special education services because these are not tied to UPK funding.
- UPK funding has created the perception that kids have \$ signs on kids backs, which has led to competition for limited resources and negative impacts for families.
- Even if UPK transitions to full school day, there will still be unmet needs for working parents, including after care and summer care. Transportation across settings can be disruptive to families and children.
- The group made recommendations on how to promote stronger system oversight, including developing standardized reporting and data collection processes and clarifying joint oversight. Head Start already experiences joint oversight from state and federal leaders.
- There were concerns that if Head Start families move to school-based UPK they may not have access to the comprehensive services and culturally responsive and inclusive programming that they get through Head Start. Head Start may need to expand its work with the public education system on engaging and supporting vulnerable families of this age group.
- The Region 1 Federal Head Start Office was difficult to coordinate but Kelly will gather feedback from them over the next month.

Webb shared feedback from a rich and interesting conversation with UPK Coordinators. It included 28 people from 24 districts, as well as online contributions. Conversation highlights included (and details are recorded in the [Stakeholder Interview Questions & Feedback](#) document):

- The group felt they could offer stronger feedback if they had a model to respond to.
- They wondered if the planned changes to the UPK program are focused on addressing children's needs or adult needs.
- The language used to describe the 3-5 year old programming is important to pay attention to.
- Licensing regulations are an administrative burden for programs, but also ground them in necessary health and safety standards.
- Regardless of setting, prek classrooms should focus on developmentally appropriate practice and learning through play. Ages 3-5 are a protected growth period for children.

- There is no required curriculum in the UPK system; curriculum is decided at the school level. The group discussed questions about who controls curriculum choices and if there are opportunities to make recommendations about curriculum use and structure.
- Consistent adult-child relationships are very important to this age range. This could be problematic for children who have to transition across different programs to meet their needs. Transportation of preschoolers also requires special supervision.
- The group discussed the purpose of prek - to provide high-quality learning? Prepare for kindergarten? Prepare school for kindergarteners?
- The field is currently struggling to meet staffing requirements and is concerned about how increased demand will be impacted by workforce pipeline issues.
- The group spent a long time discussing special education, including FAPE & LRE. They discussed what is educationally necessary, what is required versus what actually happens, and the reality of crossing district lines the way the system is currently funded.
- When considering the length of a prek day, it's important to consider what works for children (from a developmental perspective) and what works for adults (from a staffing perspective).

The group discussed ideas for storing and sharing stakeholder data. Loomis identified next steps for the group, which focused on collecting additional feedback from stakeholders.

There were no members of the public to be heard.

The meeting adjourned at 2:31 pm.

Meeting minutes recorded by: Molly Loomis.