



PreKindergarten Education Implementation Committee – Program Quality Considerations Workgroup Meeting

March 18, 2024: 11:00 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.

Microsoft Teams Virtual
Meeting Call In: 802-552-8456
Conference ID: 415 704 886#
[Meeting Link](#)

DRAFT MEETING MINUTES

Workgroup Charge:

The Program Quality Considerations Workgroup is charged with exploring, documenting and reporting back to the Committee on issues, perspectives and possibilities related to:

1. Benchmarks and best practices to ensure high quality prek education;
2. Recommendations for the oversight of the prek system;
3. Special education services for children participating in prek in public & private settings;
4. Special education services for children three years of age.

Draft Meeting Minutes

Present: Morgan Crossman, Building Bright Futures; Sharron Harrington, VT Association for the Education of Young Children; Korinne Harvey, family representative; Erica McLaughlin, Vermont Principals' Association; Janet McLaughlin, Child Development Division; Theresa Pollner, Vermont Curriculum Leaders Association; Sheila Quenneville, representative of a prequalified private provider; Pam Reed, Vermont Council of Special Education Administrators

AOE Representatives: Molly Loomis, Facilitator; Meg Porcella, Suzanne Sprague

Others: Lori Connors-Tadros, National Institute for Early Education Research; Justin Lee; other unnamed guests

Facilitator Molly Loomis called the meeting to order at 11:02 a.m. and welcomed the group. She asked if there were any amendments to the agenda. There were none.

Loomis asked if there were any amendments to the minutes from February 23. There were none. Morgan Crossman made a motion to approve the minutes and Pam Reed seconded the motion. Erika McLaughlin, Sharron Harrington and Theresa Pollner abstained. The motion carried.

The group warmed up by sharing why they each selected the Program Quality Considerations as the Workgroup they wanted to participate in.

Loomis welcomed Lori Connors-Tadros, Senior Research Fellow at the National Institute for Early

Education Research (NIEER) to share a national perspective on best practice in program quality in early education. Connors-Tadros introduced herself as a longtime professional in early education who currently provides technical assistance to support the expansion of high-quality prekindergarten. Connors-Tadros spoke about the [Memo for best practices in program quality](#) that she prepared for the Workgroup. She highlighted the importance of NIEER's ten quality benchmarks in early childhood education. She acknowledged Vermont's leadership in prekindergarten expansion, cross-sector collaboration, and meeting many of the quality benchmarks. She also identified the three benchmarks Vermont has not yet met, including requiring a bachelor's degree for teachers, specialized training for teachers, and staff professional development. Connors-Tadros acknowledged the workforce challenges that have made it difficult for Vermont to meet those benchmarks. She shared that some states are addressing teacher degree requirements through competency-based credentials and continuous quality improvement systems, while acknowledging the need for more research on the effectiveness of these approaches.

Connors-Tadros highlighted successes in two states: Michigan and Virginia. Michigan has for many years delivered high quality preschool with high standards through a mixed delivery system with strong data on their impact. They are considering expanding access, revising benchmarks for teacher degrees and implementing coaching and accountability measures to improve teacher quality. Michigan also newly provides differentiated supports for early childhood educators based on their performance, rather than lowering standards. In Virginia, they've committed to increasing compensation before requiring increases in competencies or credentials. At the same time, Virginia is setting up a rigorous accountability system that requires all providers who take public money to enroll in their revamped quality improvement rating system.

Erica McLaughlin asked Connors-Tadros to share more about how Michigan has supported teachers while changing credentialing expectations. Connors-Tadros responded that they allow teachers to apply for a waiver to extend the timeline or take an alternative pathway to meet the requirement. At the same time, Michigan is institutionalizing a six-year alternative pathway for early educators to get degrees that also includes a robust and comprehensive professional improvement plan. The system includes an intermediate school district structure with various hubs and a public-private entity providing professional development and coaching through a quality rating system.

Sheila Quenneville described the military model of supporting home child care providers through a network of training and other services. She wondered if a network system like that could connect family care providers, child care centers, and schools with training, support and special services. Connors-Tadros agreed that this was a valuable model to consider and pointed to some of the shared-services work Vermont has already implemented for child care providers. She also offered to share a recent paper on the conditions for success for family child care providers.

Theresa Pollner asked for a clarification on what child care settings are included in a mixed delivery system. Connors-Tadros responded that it varies by state. Some states consider center- and school-based settings to be components of the mixed delivery system whereas others consider family child care settings to be a critical part of prekindergarten expansion.

Loomis then welcomed Meg Porcella, Director of the Student Support Services Division at the Vermont Agency of Education to discuss program quality from AOE perspective. Porcella shared several components of program quality, including:

- [Vermont's Early Learning Standards](#) (VELS) are early care and learning standards for birth through grade three that came out in 2015.
- [Teaching Strategies Gold](#) (TSGOLD) is Vermont's universal prekindergarten monitoring assessment tool.
- Early MTSS Framework (similar to the Vermont MTSS) has standards for program success including systemic support, effective collaboration, well-designed professional development, high-quality responsive learning environments and a comprehensive assessment system.
- AOE provides professional development for early educators through the State Personnel Development Grant and the Preschool Development Grant. This provides training, mentoring and coaching related to the MTSS Pyramid Model Practices.

Loomis welcomed Janet McLaughlin, Deputy Commissioner of the Child Development Division, Vermont Department for Children & Families. McLaughlin noted that it's important to consider access when talking about program quality. She offered that the Michigan universal prekindergarten program is outstanding in program quality but has income requirements for participation, which limits access to the program. She emphasized that conversations about quality must be tied to conversations about access, cost and consistency of experience.

McLaughlin shared the [licensing requirements for child care](#) as a fundamental part of ensuring quality in Vermont's current prekindergarten system. Vermont's licensing standards are some of the most rigorous in the nation. She pointed to robust guidance around health, safety and nutrition, parent/family engagement, developmentally appropriate curriculum and nondiscriminatory enrollment. The Child Development Division has a team of licensors who address complaints and conduct unannounced annual site visits for all regulated programs. McLaughlin also observed that licensing guidelines for physical infrastructure are not always aligned across child care centers and public schools, which is a question for the Committee to explore.

McLaughlin introduced Vermont's Quality Recognition and Improvement System through the [STARS Guidance Manual](#), which was recently updated and designed around adult-child interactions, family and youth engagement and responsive practices. McLaughlin highlighted the five levels of program quality in Vermont. To be a universal prekindergarten partner, you need to be at the four or five stars. Programs at those levels are also required to implement the [CLASS](#) assessment tool.

Loomis thanked the three presenters and reminded the group that the goal for the meeting was to develop a shared understanding of current best practices in order to report back to the full Committee on benchmarks and best practices to ensure high quality prekindergarten education under Act 76. She invited Workgroup members to share their questions, insights and next steps for the Workgroup. These included:

- How do we share the baseline understanding the Workgroup now has about best practices with the full Committee? The Workgroup materials provided a strong foundation. Could we share those? We want to make sure we're digesting the materials for the Committee so that the Committee doesn't have to repeat the same conversations the Workgroup has had.
 - We're not reinventing the wheel because there are some strong quality standards build into Vermont's system:
 - Vermont already defines high-quality as 4/5 STARS.
 - Licensing site visit assessments are already happening to all regulated programs.
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- Are there opportunities for alignment with STARS?

- Models for providing alternative pathways for credentialing early educators
- Existing private sector work on supporting career pathways and advancement and accountability for early childhood educators
- Early childhood higher education consortium that discusses what's available and needed in Vermont
- Vermont State University's highly-enrolled online A.A. to B.A. program
- AOE's provisional licensure program for candidates working with community based programs.
- Current MTSS professional development programs, including materials and support for a cadre of coaches to help implement learning around the state
- More discussion and learning is desired as a next step, as well as:
 - Identify the pros and cons of variation by different program types
 - Discuss the right division of labor between state and local level for program quality
 - Leverage regional entities to pool resources for professional development
 - Create a crosswalk of program commonality and differences
 - Discuss if/how Workgroup members agree on program quality
 - Follow up with Lori Connors-Tadros for information on alternative pathways to teacher credentialing and costs of including family childcare providers in state pre-K.

Loomis invited members of the public to be heard. There were none.

The meeting adjourned at 12:32 p.m.

Meeting minutes recorded by: Molly Loomis.