



PreKindergarten Education Implementation Committee – Program Quality Considerations Workgroup Meeting

April 15, 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 about:

1. Benchmarks and best practices to ensure high quality prekindergarten education;
2. Recommendations for the oversight of the prekindergarten system;
3. Special education services for children participating in prekindergarten 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 Agency for the Education of Young Children; Korrine Harvey, family representative; Erika McLaughlin, Vermont Principals Association; Theresa Pollner, Vermont Curriculum Leaders Association; Sheila Quenneville; representative of a prequalified private provider; Rebecca Webb, regional prekindergarten coordinator

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

Others: Maggie Barch, CDD; Tabytha McGlynn; Chasity DeMers

Facilitator Molly Loomis called the meeting to order at 11:00 am. She reviewed the [agenda](#) for the current meeting, requesting any questions or comments. There were none.

Loomis asked for questions or comments on the [draft minutes](#) from the March 18 meeting. There were none.

Sheila Quenneville moved to approve minutes. Theresa Pollner seconded the motion. The motion was carried by unanimous vote.

Meeting members shared program quality insights that emerged since the March 18 meeting.

- Morgan Crossman shared that the March 18 meeting was useful in grounding the group in national best practice about quality and was a good introduction about how Vermont defines quality across sectors. She found the program quality matrix helpful.
- Theresa Pollner also appreciated the program quality matrix organizing quality data in one place.

- Sharon Harrington expressed how encouraged she was by the National Institute of Early Education Research's (NIEER) report and hearing about Vermont's strong measures. She reflected on educator qualifications, appreciating the robust pathways and resources Vermont offers to reach them, and suggested that ensuring quality should be linked to preparation pathways.
- Quenneville reflected on quality measured by the National Association of Family Child Care (NAFFC) accreditation and their crosswalk to the revised STARS model standards. She related that Vermont Family Child Care Homes (FCCH) are proud of their NAFCC accreditation, which placed programs at 4 or 5 STARS in the previous model. In the revised STARS, NAFCC accreditation meets certain standards but not a full STARS level.

Special Education Engagement Challenges

Rebecca Webb introduced her experience in special education; role as UPK coordinator for 10 supervisory unions, and a member of the Vermont Council of Special Education Administrators. She shared an [overview of UPK special education services](#) that outlined how the current system works with Act 166 and Act 76.

Act 166

Webb reported that Act 166 did not include special education considerations and served as a template for Act 76, which also does not address special education specifically. In Act 166, tuition money follows the child if a program meets supervisory union requirements and AOE prequalification, regardless of where that program is located in the state. Act 166 is funded by the state education fund. Supervisory unions are required to screen children identified with possible developmental concerns, to determine if evaluation is necessary, and build IEP if eligible. This often results in supervisory unions referring services within district lines, leading families to choose child care over special education services.

- Webb provided an example: for students who live in Waterbury, but attend childcare in Burlington for their universal preschool, funds must transfer from Harwood Union School District to the childcare. The special education services do not have to follow that track, which results in inequity.
- Meg Porcella noted that the Local Education Agency (LEA) determines where a child should be receiving services and if it is outside of the LEA's zone, it can be difficult to coordinate those special education services. She provided the example that if AOE advises the best place to place a child is in Waterbury, but due to family needs the child must attend programs in Burlington, the family is essentially giving up special education services, which is not the desired result.
- Porcella clarified that special education is funded federally by IDEA grant and shared [Early Childhood Special Education Services | Agency of Education \(vermont.gov\)](#)
- Webb added that the AOE link Porcella shared (above) contains important details for workgroup members to review and underscored the consideration that currently families often must choose between their child receiving special education services as determined through the IEP process and offered by the school district or forgoing special education services in order to access child care that works best for them. She provided the following example: "I have a child who's attending a childcare program and it works for my family. I have care. I can afford it. The hours work, the transportation works. I love my people. I love their curriculum. I may not be able to have my child receive special education services based on its location, and that's the inequity in it."

- Korrine Harvey related personal experience navigating special education services that included providing transportation for her children to attend an out of district public prekindergarten, coordinating consultation for her child's IEP through the local supervisory union and being fortunate to have a preschool teacher with a special education background. She underscored that there are many complicating factors to each individual family circumstance (on and off the radar), and that not all families are in a position to provide strong advocacy through the process.
- Webb considered that school districts want to provide services, and often workforce and transportation are obstacles. Teacher salaries differ and contracts are complex.
- Crossman shared a personal experience of cross district services not working for families. Her family relocated mid-COVID to a new district, and the move coincided with her child's diagnosis. According to IDEA law, students should be educated with their non disabled peers and to the maximum extent in the least restrictive environment, where they can access education and learning. In her case this would be the preschool program with services that her child attends, now unavailable because it is out of district. Her child received services in a program she had never attended with people she did not know. Transportation was also an issue. She underlined the importance of early identification and providing access to child needs as early as possible.

Act 76

Webb reported that special education is also not embedded in Act 76. Webb collected considerations from UPK coordinators (who include special educators, special service directors, superintendents and prekindergarten teachers) and programs regarding unfunded three-year-olds. Those considerations include:

- Where best to serve three-year-olds; will private/community programs that receive service now be able to maintain this model due to the number of students; where is the least restrictive environment; and what is Free and Appropriate Education?
- Will eliminating funding for three-year-olds impact supervisory/district choice to offer in-district programs and lead to three-year-olds needing a different model for level of service, inclusion, etc.
- Consider the impact on three-year-olds who do not meet special education requirements, but have a level of need that are not met by some community program resources.
- At-risk three-year-olds are served in public programs or private programs with strong public staff relationships. Will community/private public/school-based relationships be as strong?
- How to meet the needs of three-year-olds who have higher special education needs than can be provided for in community programs?

Webb highlighted considerations for funding models and capacity for private programs for special education, inclusion, suspension/exclusion and how the system supports all student needs. She asked the workgroup to consider four-year-olds who might be provided special education services and two-year-olds who transitioned mid-year.

- Porcella clarified that special education services for 2-year-olds are funded by IDEA, but not part of UPK funding.

- Webb considered that prekindergarten and special education works well when aligned, but they are separate pieces. She identified the potential gap for young children transitioning to fall under school district responsibility.

Loomis requested reflections from the group.

- Webb requested the workgroup consider recommending more support for training and professional development capacity-building.
- Harvey recognized that a mixed delivery system is good but that school-based care was best for her family. She suggested that one need is increased access in the school system and expressed concern over school system stability. She also underscored the importance of transportation in access to services.
- Sharron Harrington expressed value in the onsite modeling she received from special educators in her classrooms. She recognized that the need for special educators outweighs the current workforce resources. She also noted that early intervention is important, especially for vulnerable populations, and will lower special education costs in the future.
- Webb shared that some Vermont regions have successful prekindergarten and special education alignment, and she can connect committee members to learn more.
- Quenneville considered the value of community resources in special education. She also expressed concern for reaching children in unregistered programs.
- Crossman offered to share Building Bright Futures' information, testimony on statewide successes, mechanism of success, barriers/challenges and considerations for policy gathered statewide on Universal Prekindergarten Education. She expressed a need to expand support and address barriers to service provision.
 - State Advisory Council Policy Recommendations Renewed Policy Recommendation (2022): Universal Pre-K Access and Equity
 Within the Universal Pre-K Implementation Committee mandated under Act 76, center equity of access by examining and making recommendations on how best to implement a full school-day, school-year prekindergarten education program and ensuring that the vision of universal, high-quality, equitable, mixed-delivery, inclusive education for all 3-, 4-, and 5-year-olds not yet enrolled in kindergarten is maintained. The committee should specifically address the following related to equity in access:
 - Determining how best to expand prekindergarten access from 10 hours per week to 35 hours per week while ensuring sufficient access to year-round services for children 0-8, including early childhood education, afterschool, and summer care.
 - Determining appropriate weighting for full school-day pre-K students in regards to education funding.
 - Examining parity between the quality, workforce qualifications, governing rules, and compensation in school-based and private program-based pre-K programs, including comparisons to national best practices.
 - Ensuring that 3-year-olds are able to access Early Childhood Special Education services.
 - Ensuring that funds for ECSE follow the child, even outside of their home district, to improve access and reduce barriers/burdens on families

- Examining how best to provide a continuity of pre-K and related services for children in rural regions and border regions, some of whom go on to attend kindergarten in bordering states.
- Theresa Pollner expressed her school-based perspective on the challenging size of the Workgroup's charge to make recommendations on prekindergarten special education services and the benefit of taking a closer look at successful situations.
- Erika McLaughlin shared her value for working with special educators as a principal for 17 years, her reliance on outside providers in addition to school staff, some who provided in-home support. She recognized the need for specialized support, that her school-based experience was dense with support opportunities, and that special education is intertwined with continuity of service, curriculum, scope and sequence, training, and oversight.

Loomis suggested a small team meet before the next workgroup session to synthesize challenges and opportunities and gather success stories.

Loomis shared and reviewed the draft [program quality matrix](#) representing program quality indicators from NIEER and NAEYC, and how Vermont is meeting benchmarks. She asked the committee to consider if Head Start standards should be added. She noted the matrix highlights differences across regulated home-based, center-based and school-based programs, including differences in standards for teacher preparation and professional development. She is looking into health, safety and fire standards that may differ from what CDD regulates and NIEER measures. She requested members review the document and fill in the opportunities section with recommendations for moving forward.

- Porcella asked if the matrix included professional development requirements or what PD is offered. Loomis clarified that it only included requirements.
- Crossman reflected how the matrix demonstrates how many program quality standards Vermont already has in place.
- Quenneville asked if the Ages and Stages Questionnaire for developmental screening is included in the matrix. Loomis agreed to follow up. Crossman suggested ASQ be added to special education standards and that Janet McLaughlin will have information about how it aligns with STARS.

Loomis invited members of the public to be heard. Tabitha McGlynn, a public participant and early childhood and family mental health coordinator for Washington county, reported that she fields requests for children with complicated emotional and medical needs who are transitioning to prekindergarten, and the committee's conversation accurately represents families' challenges. She reported that communication from specialized service in schools differs from early intervention, and that parent training and knowledge is an additional factor. She cites a need for parent education to support their children.

- Porcella welcomed McGlynn to reach out to Katie McCarthy at AOE as a resource.

Loomis reviewed the next steps for the Workgroup: synthesizing data collected, identifying success stories for committee analysis, opportunities to move forward, recommendations for oversight, questions and clarifications. Loomis will share a document outlining current oversight in the prek system.

- Pollner volunteered for a small group conversation about special education.

- Harrington volunteered to engage former directors on the SPARQS team to review the program quality matrix and cultivate success stories.
- Harvey volunteered to engage parents and others through parent child advocacy groups.
- Crossman offered to compile existing documentation from 2020 and 2021, State Advisory Council recommendations and Policy Playbook and Family Needs Assessment from the last year.
- E. McLaughlin volunteered to engage colleagues to review the program quality matrix.
- Crossman volunteered to report out on the Workgroup's progress at the next full Committee meeting.
- E. McLaughlin suggested connecting with Pam Reed and Loomis agreed to follow up.

Loomis invited other comments from the public to be heard. There were none.
The meeting adjourned at 12:23pm.