



PreKindergarten Education Implementation Committee – Program Quality Considerations Workgroup Meeting

February 23, 2024: 12:00 p.m. – 1:30 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. Special education services for children participating in prek in public & private settings;
3. Special education services for children three years of age; and
4. Recommendations for the oversight of the prek system.

Draft Meeting Minutes

Present: Morgan Crossman, Building Bright Futures; Korinne Harvey, family representative; Sheila Quenneville, representative of a prequalified private provider; Pam Reed, Vermont Council of Special Education Administrators

Absent: Sharron Harrington, VT Association for the Education of Young Children; Erica McLaughlin, Vermont Principals' Association; Theresa Pollner, Vermont Curriculum Leaders Association

AOE: Suzanne Sprague

Others: Molly Loomis, Facilitator; Dawn Rouse

Facilitator Molly Loomis called the meeting to order at 12:03 p.m. and welcomed the group. She asked if there were any amendments to the [agenda](#). There were none.

Loomis shared the [Group Agreements](#) for the PreKindergarten Education Implementation Committee. The group shared their personal definitions of the first agreement, "focus on what's best for children," some of which were submitted by members in advance of the meeting. These included:

PreKindergarten Education Implementation
Committee: Program Quality Considerations
Workgroup Draft Minutes: February 23, 2024

- Putting the needs of what will make this happen and work for them before anything else or particular need of a specific personal interest group.
- Children are situated in context and their family is their first context. How do we think about the wellbeing and outcomes of the child but also their family? And the quality of their interactions within their family, in school, childcare, communities, and organizations across the system.
- I can think about all the things I think children really need, including people that care for them, interactions, safe environment, food, health care... but it has to happen with the family and community too. You can't really separate those from each other to give that kid what they need.
- There are so many different perspectives in the larger Committee about what's best for children that it's going to be hard to name what counts as "best". But globally, children need to feel safe, have their unique and individual needs met. We need to focus on growing outcomes for kids and measuring growth.
- Efficacy and accessibility - especially for groups and children who are historically underserved. What a family needs when they are living in poverty is different from what a well-resourced family needs. We need to meet these different needs.
- Research and evidence-based practices that demonstrate children's success and their ability to thrive.
- Prioritizing equitable access to developmentally appropriate learning opportunities for all of Vermont's young children.
- Children's needs and their growth remains at the forefront of every conversation. Claims are supported by evidence and we work with the mindset that we can enrich the lives of all Vermont children.
- It means that we keep the lens of what a student needs at the forefront, instead of what an adult might want.
- Vermont's Early Childhood Strategic Plan named these goals: 1) All children have a healthy start; 2) Families & communities play a leading role; 3) All children & families have access to high-quality opportunities that meet their needs; 4) The early childhood system will be integrated, well-resourced and data informed.

Loomis asked the group to summarize their shared definition of "focus on what's best for children" based on their conversation. They agreed that the goals named in Vermont's Early Childhood Strategic Plan covered it well, with the added point that the needs and context of children matter and need to be tended to by the system.

The group moved on to discuss the considerations they were charged with exploring. Based on advanced feedback from group members, they started with "benchmarks and best practices to ensure high quality prek education". The group generated a list of key questions to answer about this consideration, including:

- Are we focusing on benchmarks for quality or more broadly on benchmarks for universal prekindergarten?
- What benchmarks currently exist?
- What are some best practices that have been recommended?
- How have other states implemented this?
- What are we already using in Vermont that can help us understand – STARS rating system, VELs, Teaching Strategies, HeadStart?
- Do we have a definition for what high quality means? How does this compare to the bare minimum for quality? What do we know about this spectrum?

The group also raised questions about legislative intent for the Committee work – is it a done deal that four-year-olds will be in schools? Or are we still committed to a mixed delivery system? They clarified that the legislation states that schools will be responsible for placing four-year-olds in prek, but that those placements could be physically in schools or contracted into private settings. The group also clarified that the change has not yet taken effect and that the Committee’s role is to investigate how to implement the legislative intent.

The group discussed benchmarks and best practices for quality. They wondered about where to look for information, and if Vermont already has a definition about high quality prekindergarten. Morgan Crossman shared that Vermont has quality standards through both the Child Development Division and the Agency of Education. Vermont has taken a continuous quality improvement approach to measuring quality through [STARS](#) and [VELs](#). However, there are differences of opinion about what the best approach to quality is. Sheila Quenneville shared that keeping up with and meeting changing quality standards could be a challenge for childcare providers. The group discussed that it’s important to understand the ways Vermont currently measures quality, and what might be on the spectrum of quality, in order to understand what else we need to know about quality.

Loomis asked the group about benchmarks and best practices related to access. Korinne Harvey shared her experience as a parent of young children struggling to find spots in prekindergarten programs and wondered, given the current access and space limitations, where are these new spots going to come from? Pam Reed shared about the space and staffing obstacles that her district faces currently, which make it hard to imagine creating additional spots. Loomis pointed out that the Capacity and Funding Workgroup would be focusing on issues related to capacity, including space and staffing. Morgan Crossman suggested that this Workgroup think broadly about benchmarking across quality, program type, cost, physical infrastructure, workforce, student enrollment, equitable access, quality and fiscal implications and to look at where data exist currently and where they don’t.

Morgan Crossman shared that part of the role that Building Bright Futures (BBF) plays related to Act 76 is helping the State define benchmarks for success across nine categories. BBF has conducted surveys and focus groups to ask people across these areas what success would look like and which top three things to measure in order to know it’s successful. Crossman shared high level benchmark indicators that BBF is monitoring, including data currently collected and data gaps related to workforce, enrollment,

affordability, quality, cost, program stability, and UPK outcomes.

The group discussed how the Workgroup's approach could best intersect with BBF's efforts. Crossman recommended that they could help explore what needs to be measured and monitored to help make decisions related to prekindergarten implementation. As a first step, the group is interested in learning about what data and information are available about quality and access. Building Bright Futures will share a list of resources for the Committee to digest and discuss at the next meeting.

The group also decided to focus on recommendations for the oversight of the prek system as the next consideration.

Members of the public were present and invited to be heard. Dawn Rouse, who works for the Child Development Division, was there in her role as an early childhood education professional for over thirty years. Dawn offered resource ideas, including looking to licensing regulations to better understand bare minimum standards for early care and education. She also recommended looking at the STARS assessment to understand the range of quality from meeting to exceeding expectations, and to the National Association for the Education of Young Children to understand developmentally appropriate best practices, including a position statement on best practices for the organization.

To close the meeting, Loomis asked the group to share an insight from the meeting. The group expressed that they learned a lot from each other, especially about the resources that Building Bright Futures provides, and that they look forward to reading the resources and having the next conversation.

The meeting adjourned at 1:26 p.m.

Meeting minutes recorded by: Molly Loomis.