



# PreKindergarten Education Implementation Committee – Meeting

February 13, 2024: 9:30 a.m. – 11:00 a.m.

Microsoft Teams Virtual  
Meeting Call In: 802-552-8456  
Conference ID: 400 249 115#  
[Meeting Link](#)

## DRAFT MEETING MINUTES

**Present:** **Janet McLaughlin**, co-Chair, AHS, DCF Deputy Commissioner; **Jeff Francis**, Vermont Superintendents Association; **Sandra Cameron**, Vermont School Boards Association; **Colin Robinson**, Vermont National Education Association; **Pam Reed**, Vermont Council of Special Education Administrators; **Theresa Pollner**, Vermont Curriculum Leaders Association; **Morgan Crossman**, Building Bright Futures; **Renee Kelly**, Head Start Collaboration Office; **Sherry Carlson**, Let's Grow Kids; **Nicole Miller**, Vermont Afterschool Inc. **Sharron Harrington**, Vermont Association for the Education of Young Children; **Korinne Harvey**, Building Bright Futures Appointee; **Chris Wells**, Building Bright Futures Appointee; **Sheila Quenneville**, Committee on Committees Appointee; **Rebecca Webb**, Regional Prekindergarten Coordinator; **Jeff O'Hara**, Speaker of the House Appointee

**AOE:** Suzanne Sprague; Meg Porcella

**Others:** Molly Loomis, Facilitator; Amy Emerson; Erin Gagne; Valerie Wood; Andrew Sambrook; Wendy Scott; Leslie Freedman; Tammy Bates, Amy Murphy, Thalia Garcia; Teresa Haskins

Facilitator Molly Loomis called the meeting to order at 9:32 a.m. She took a roll call and asked if there were any amendments to the [meeting agenda](#). There were none.

Loomis asked if there was any discussion about the draft meeting [minutes from January 16](#). Sandra Cameron requested that future minutes include additional detail and summarize outcomes of each area covered during the meeting. Pam Reid made a motion to approve the minutes and Teresa Pollner seconded the motion. Sherry Carlson and Nicole Miller abstained. The motion carried.

Members of the public were present and invited to be heard. Andy Sambrook, a preschool owner in Hinesburg and Underhill, asked if meeting recordings could be made public.

Loomis responded that the request is being explored but isn't currently possible due to compliance with accessibility law that requires video captions to be accurate. Meg Porcella of AOE confirmed that recordings could not be posted online but can be obtained by individuals without a FOIA request by emailing Meg Porcella (Meg.Porcella@vermont.gov) or Suzanne Sprague (Suzanne.Sprague@vermont.gov ). Sambrook asked for clarification on the specific reason for not sharing recordings publicly. Porcella clarified that because recording captions are AI generated, they aren't compliant with accessibility standards. There is not currently staff capacity to hand transcribe captions to all meetings. Facilitator Molly Loomis expressed her intention to produce written minutes with rich detail to capture the conversations during meetings.

Loomis presented the [Group Agreements](#) that the Committee agreed to at the January 16 meeting. She asked for questions or comments on the Agreements. Rebecca Webb called attention to the agreement, "Respect and make space for multiple voices and perspectives" and asked that we be aware of who we're calling in for perspectives and make sure we're not leaning too heavily on the same marginalized voices or family members that are often asked. There were no other comments or questions. Loomis asked Committee members to reflect on the group agreements and write a note to themselves about how to practice them during the meeting.

Loomis gave an update on the three Committee Workgroups. The System-level Considerations Workgroup had its first meeting on Feb. 9, Capacity and Funding will meet on Feb 20, and Program Quality will meet on Feb 23. The agenda for the next full Committee meeting on March 12 will include reports from all three Workgroups. This meeting will only have one report from the System-level Workgroup.

Janet McLaughlin reported on behalf of the System-level Workgroup. The group began with thoughtful, positive discussion about each person's definition of "focus on what's best for children", including the tension between what's best for the individual and the whole, and what it means to children in their context – family, school, school system and community. The group then focused on exploring the needs of both the state and local education agencies by generating a list of questions needed to explore the consideration. One question focused on how the current system functions and the roles that various players play. The group will generate resources to address this question and will continue the conversation at their next meeting. Another question focused on how to gather information on needs and from what stakeholder groups. The group suggested identifying legal, practical and value-based needs and discussed the specific stakeholder groups each member could reach out to. In addition to state and local education agencies, the group identified family needs as an additional category to consider, as well as federal requirements. The Workgroup plans to reach out to stakeholders to complete a matrix of needs and questions before the next meeting.

McLaughlin shared that Workgroup members completed a worksheet in advance of the meeting, which was a helpful way to prepare and to engage members unable to present at the meeting. She encouraged other Committee Members to review the [Workgroup meeting minutes](#) and to reach out with ideas and suggestions. The Workgroup meeting ended with

a public comment from Meg Baker, a UPK Coordinator in Addison County who had resources to contribute to the conversation.

Loomis shared that the smaller Workgroup discussion allowed for a rich conversation and multiple perspectives to be heard, which makes her feel excited and optimistic about the Workgroup structure. Loomis asked if other Committee members had questions for the System-level Workgroup. Sandra Cameron asked if the Committee agreed that it made sense to invite people with experience and insight to attend Workgroup meetings and to speak during public comment. Janet McLaughlin suggested that we invite people with experience and insight to participate as speakers on meeting agendas instead of inviting them to public comment. Becca Webb asked if a Committee member is on a Workgroup agenda as a speaker, would they count toward the Committee quorum that Workgroup meetings must stay below. Loomis answered yes; no matter what role a Committee member plays at a workgroup meeting, they still count toward the Committee quorum. Loomis stated that each workgroup would make decisions about what questions they need to address and what resources and people to draw on in order to answer those questions.

Jeff Francis asked for clarification on how the composition of the three Workgroups was determined and if everyone was assigned just one workgroup. Loomis confirmed that everyone was assigned one workgroup and explained that Committee members ranked their choices for Workgroups and were mostly placed in their top choice. There were three exceptions of members who were asked to join their second-choice group to ensure that numbers and stakeholders were distributed across all three Workgroups. Francis suggested that we observe how the workgroup process plays out and, if we notice challenges, we can address them as they come up. Loomis agreed that, given the group agreements the Committee agreed to, we should trust Committee members to make good decisions about how and when to contribute outside of their assigned workgroups. Loomis added that, in her role as facilitator, she's working on systems to make the data, information and resources that are shared within Workgroups accessible so that Committee members can make informed and collaborative decisions.

Loomis commented that agendas for the next two workgroups will be sent shortly, along with online forms for members to complete in advance of their first meetings. She shared a slide with the types of questions workgroup members would be asked to discuss, which included:

- What does focusing on what's best for children mean to you?
- What do you have to give and what do you need from the group to ensure the Workgroup is successful?
- Which consideration should we explore first?
- What are the key questions we need to answer to address the consideration?
- What reading and resources will help us answer those questions?
- What next steps do we need to take to answer those questions?

Loomis asked for additional questions about the workgroups. There were none.

The Committee moved on to discuss the [Vermont Child Care and Early Childhood](#)

[Education Systems Analysis Final Report](#). The conversation began in Padlet, a visual tool for online discussions. The group wrote answers to three questions in Padlet, which are transcribed below.

**Question 1. How might the report inform our process for making recommendations on system oversight?**

- Consider it as one piece of information among other pieces, inc. national research.
- Offers list of elements to aspire to, and list of mistakes/concerns to avoid/fix/address in the future
- The systems report really recognizes that there are fundamental questions about how the current oversight runs-- Dual presents issues for schools who must follow AOE K-12, CDD, and prek specific
- We need to really recognize that all these studies and data are commissioned for specific purposes and so don't answer all the possible questions but this doesn't mean they're not valid/valuable
- Offers insight from those working within the system which is essential to creating workable plan (3 people liked this comment)
- "no single elevated leader feels accountable to all the groups needed for a successful early childhood system" - Fixing this seems essential for UPK implementation and other ECE services (4 people liked this comment)
- It can help us understand system dynamics, identify strengths and challenges related to programming and administration, and continue thinking about access and equity and meeting the needs of children and families.
- When I reviewed the report last night, my inclination was to ask for a meeting devoted exclusively to the contents of the report. I found it to be a substantive reflection of where I believe the delivery system is currently - particularly with respect to the problem statements more so than the recommendations
- This report acknowledges similar tensions we have discussed as a committee which are reflected in UPK and our charge. Specifically differing oversight and expectations AOE/AHS. This report offers insight for our consideration

**Question 2. What challenges & limitations do you see in the report?**

- I think that we need to combine this information with the information from the finance report-- together they combine to answer most of the questions that the field asked.
- There is no consideration/recommendation about pupil weights or the fact that SDs are limited to a count of .46 regardless of whether they are providing 10 or 35 hours/week with a licensed teacher.
- What states have the best models for universal design and economies of scale?
- There have been changes at both CDD and AOE that may have started to address some of issues highlighted.
- Does not reflect national best practices, as outlined by NIEER

- I think that one limitation may be that it is an analysis reflective of an array of viewpoints - that by nature will have folks perhaps concerned about the findings and recommendations - I think that the report is really license to get past that and accept the report as an accurate characterization of where we are
- There seems to be a voice or two on the committee who question every single thing BBF data attempts to contribute, and I'm finding it distracting as an "outsider" to much of the bigger issues here. Contracting professionals seems best to offer transparent and fair recommendations.
- It was done primarily within the context of early care and education and its scope did not allow further exploration with LEA stakeholders and/or consideration of how this piece of the ECE system intersects with the larger education system.
- Scope and depth of analysis, broader stakeholder engagement, policy/contextual factors, interpretation and bias...
- It's focused on systems - not on program quality or financing.
- The needs of children post-pandemic are enormous - not reflected in a report from 2 years ago

**Question 3. What questions do you have about prek system oversight?**

- Has anything been implemented yet as a result of this report?
- CIS - some services extend to age 6 - is there a good understanding of service provision birth-through age 6?
- What is the true capacity in each district? Lots of assumptions, but no real data (4 people liked this comment)
- What is the ACTUAL vs perceived capacity of our 2 agencies-- ex. AOE early ed team is small at ~4-5 staff and CDD licensing team/funding grants etc. Do we have people to do the work?? (4 people liked this comment)
- Can we get data driven expertly informed information about the cost of a mixed delivery system in all of the contexts of "cost"?
- Should we construe the Administration's position as reflecting a political stance or a policy stance?
- One observation I had looking at people interviewed for the report was there were no family child program owners
- We may as a committee want to look at research studies about the contribution of a licensed teacher-- there is mixed RESEARCH about if having a licensed teacher is a pro or con--- this also is part of the dosage hours of UPK

Loomis asked Morgan Crossman to share context for the report. Crossman explained that Building Bright Futures (BBF) was named to oversee the Vermont childcare and early childhood systems analysis, which launched in August, 2021 and was finalized in July, 2022. The goal of the analysis was to examine the systems that govern and administer child care and early childhood education and make recommendations on how to improve

the system to support optimal outcomes for children and families. BBF's role was developing a rigorous process to identify contractors, then selecting and contracting with national experts Foresight Law & Policy and Watershed Advisory to support the analysis process and report. The project had many phases including a landscape analysis, an advisory committee of forty-four public and private partners to oversee the work, and cross-sector stakeholder engagement through focus groups, interviews and surveys. Crossman shared links to the [summaries and documentation](#) related to the report, as well as the [Vermont Early Care and Education Finance Study](#). Crossman noted that the system analysis report offered five different options for governance and polled stakeholders for feedback on those options. When the report was presented to the Legislature, they did not agree on how to move forward and therefore tasked this Prekindergarten Education Implementation Committee to make recommendations.

Loomis reviewed comments that Committee members had written in Padlet and noted that some questions be posed to the [National Institute for Early Education Research](#) (NIEER), which conducts research and collates resources at a national level. Loomis asked Committee members to share reflections on the comments posted by fellow members. Janet McLaughlin noted that the report focuses on early childhood systems overall but that the Committee is charged with recommendations for prekindergarten, so we should pull ideas from the report that are relevant to that charge rather than considering reorganizing state government. Colin Robinson commented that laws and conversations about early education and universal prekindergarten have evolved since the report was completed. Loomis asked Morgan Crossman to comment on changes that might impact the implications of the report. Crossman replied that there has been significant agency transitions across the board in state leadership and roles and that, regardless of leadership in place, it's important to support the infrastructure of the system.

Loomis called attention to and asked for clarification on a comment stating that the report did not reflect national best practices outlined by NIEER. Sandra Cameron replied that Vermont does not earn points for benchmarks related to teacher licensing, qualifications, ongoing training and mentoring in NIEER's annual report, which wasn't mentioned in this report. Janet McLaughlin responded that she did see the NIEER recommendations related to teacher qualifications in the report and pointed out that NIEER does not have best practices related to system-level oversight or access. McLaughlin noted the challenge of balancing best practices for quality, equity, and access for families and that she struggles to see how the report does not reflect best practices. Loomis appreciated both Committee members for sharing perspectives on one of the tensions underlying the Committee's work to balance individual and system needs.

Loomis called attention to an additional comment that wondered about why one or two voices question BBF's contributions to the Committee. Loomis framed this as a good way to explore the group agreement to "ground decisions in data, research and experience" by identifying differing ideas of what counts as data, research and experience. Loomis asked for comments and acknowledged that it was an uncomfortable conversation to have. Becca Webb responded that nationally, early education has not done the same types of research on curriculum and specialized outcomes that the K-12 age range has. Nationally and in

Vermont we commission studies that result in great reports with limitations. We don't often spend time thinking about what the report actually says or how we can use the reported information. Webb appreciated that the conversation was doing that and noted that other reports might also warrant deeper conversations.

Loomis summarized that any study has limitations and that we need to build a resource list that pulls from multiple sources to answer the questions the Committee is raising. She called attention to a comment about stakeholder feedback in the report and asked Committee members to comment on how the report might inform our committee work with stakeholders. Janet McLaughlin responded that there are multiple approaches to public policy making, including engaging stakeholders in robust outreach processes; policy makers making decisions without stakeholder feedback; or the middle ground of a committee with members who represent stakeholder groups. McLaughlin encouraged the Committee to engage with the process the way it is and draw on existing resources to accomplish their charge.

Loomis drew attention to a comment on the Padlet, "Has anything been implemented as a result of this report?", and posed this question to the group. Janet McLaughlin responded that the Legislature considered the report but decided not to follow the recommendation of assigning a single entity for oversight. Instead, in Act 76, they asked for reports from both the Agency of Education and the Agency of Human Services about how to create more elevated positions overseeing early childhood related issues within each agency separately, which are due after the PEIC report is due. The Legislature implemented this Committee as a result of this report to figure out how to separate 3-year-olds in early childhood education and 4-year-olds in prek.

Loomis asked each member of the Committee to share what they hope the group takes forward from the report and conversation. Responses included:

- Becca Web: It's important to recognize that we're not responsible for reorganizing state government but we need to be open and continue to explore it as an option. The report was commissioned with a specific purpose and that drove the answers that came out of the research.
- Jeff O'Hara: We have a lot of smart people in this group that may have the answers we're looking for. We can use the available research and resources to back up our thoughts on what counts as best practice.
- Colin Robinson: There are going to be broader conversations about the Prek-12 education system structures, funding and transitions moving forward. We're having a compartmentalized conversation about one specific component of the entire public education system.
- Sheila Quenneville: I hadn't read the report before and I thought there was a lot of good information in there. I think we should use the resources we already have and appreciate people listening to each other.
- Chris Wells: This was my first time looking at the report and there are areas I don't have experience with but it's interesting to consider the system challenges of the



government. Our task is to figure out what's needed for prek but this report makes it clear that we need to consider what system-level changes might be required for implementation.

- Korinne Harvey: It's been amazing to be part of this process and see all the moving pieces in the process and how our work is part of a bigger and longer-term effort. In my opinion, all this data is very valid and credible. My assumption is that any data collected prior to or during the start of Covid is going to be significantly worse. I don't think we need another study to prove that.
- Sharron Harrington: It's clear that we have varying perspectives and this report elevates the voices of families and those providing services to children and families in a way that's hard to capture. It mirrors what families and service providers experience navigating our fragmented system. We have the opportunity to think about the elements of quality and teacher qualifications as part of a continuum. Each of the reports that we have access to are worthwhile for us to consider to help guide our decision making moving forward.
- Nicole Miller: I'm thinking about where the tensions and complexity exist within the system from the localized level all the way up to the state. Where can this diverse group representing very local and state level approaches find some common agreement to do what's best for children and youth in Vermont?
- Sherry Carson: Let's utilize the resources we have, including the stakeholder group that was put together and public comment. We could debate the resources and the limitations on any resource, but I'd prefer to focus our time on the charge of the Committee, which is recommendations around implementing universal prek.
- Renee Kelley: I also don't want to spend time discussing the merits of different reports. I think it's helpful to identify the questions that we can answer from the documents we have. We should not be using this report to decide how to change the structure of state government but there might be other pointed research questions that do fall into the scope of this Committee and can be addressed through this report. Some of the questions we raised about system oversight are also related to capacity, funding and quality, so I'd like to make sure each Workgroup is using the report to answer those questions. I want us to remember that our high quality prek system was built on a national concept of a QRIS rating system for early care and education. I want us to keep thinking about issues of workforce when we talk about qualifications and how we measure what high quality looks like for children. There is a workforce issue here and the system needs to meet the needs of the workforce and our economies in the same way it meets the needs of kids and families.
- Morgan Crossman: We are tackling one of the biggest challenges of the last ten years by trying to create systems change to improve the well-being of kids and families. The state is looking to this group to make recommendations in areas where it's been stuck. I hope this group and the smaller workgroups can use stakeholder



engagement and the data we do have to create shared perspectives and move in the direction of problem solving. We have the opportunity to move the needle on prek in a powerful way.

- Theresa Pollner: I appreciate and echo many of the reflections shared. I also bring a broader and longer-term perspective on prek-12 education. The reports and all the information shared have been very informative for me to help me gain knowledge for my participation.
- Pam Reed: My thoughts are swirling about capacity, from oversight to implementation from state agencies to high quality staff.
- Sandra Cameron: I want to remind us that the charge of this group is to assist the AOE in improving and expanding access to affordable, high quality prek education for children on a full day basis. I would like the AOE to be here. If the Secretary can't be here, perhaps there's someone else on the early education team that can have a presence and contribute to this conversation.
- Janet McLaughlin: There are some useful buckets and organizing principles in the report that may be helpful for us as we're thinking about systems-level considerations.
- Meg Porcella: There was a theme around the context of the reports and information that I think is key for us to keep what's helpful and leave what doesn't serve us in this moment as a Committee.

Loomis thanked everyone for engaging in a hard conversation together and for contributing their individual reflections. She will follow up with a questionnaire for Committee members to share their feedback on facilitation and unanswered questions.

The meeting adjourned at 11:03 a.m.

Meeting minutes recorded by: Molly Loomis.