



PreKindergarten Education Implementation Committee – Meeting

October 8, 2024: 9:30 a.m. – 11:00 a.m.

Microsoft Teams Virtual Meeting
Call In: 1-802-552-8456
Phone Conference ID: 400 249 115#
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DRAFT MEETING MINUTES

Present: Sandra Cameron, Vermont School Board Association; Jeff Francis, Vermont Superintendents Association; Sharron Harrington, VTAEYC; Korinne Harvey, family representative; Janet McLaughlin, Agency of Human Services Co-chair; Jeff O'Hara, prequalified private provider representative; Rebecca Webb, regional prekindergarten coordinator; Theresa Pollner, Vermont Curriculum Leaders Association; Erica McLaughlin, Vermont Principals Association; Donna Brown, National Office of Head Start, Sherry Carlson, Lets Grow Kids; Mary Lundeen, Vermont Council of Special Education Administrators; Zoie Saunders, AOE Co-chair, Chris Wells, family representative, Morgan Crossman, Building Bright Futures, Colin Robinson, Vermont National Education Association

AOE: Molly Loomis, Facilitator; Meg Porcella; Maureen Gaidys; Suzanne Sprague; Christy Swenson; Tammy Bates; Amy Murphy; Thalia Garcia; Wendy Scott; Trish Scharf

Other: Maggie Barch, CDD; Matt Levin, Jay Nichols; Matthew DeGroot; Kristin Wood, Jolie Frechette, Ashley Bessette, Valerie Wood, Kate Faye, Anna Brouillette, Sarah Kenney

Absent: Sheila Quenneville, prequalified private provider representative, Nicole Miller, Vermont Afterschool

Facilitator Molly Loomis called the meeting to order at 9:05 am. She reviewed the meeting agenda.

Minutes approval

Loomis reviewed the minutes from the September 10 meeting. Morgan Crossman noted that her name was not represented on the attendance but was included in the discussion notes. She asked to be added to the attendance list. Sandra Cameron requested corrections to three statements attributed to her.

Becca Webb moved to approve the minutes with those changes. Erica McLaughlin seconded. The motion passed with Colin Robinson and Sherry Carlson abstaining.

Public to be Heard

Loomis invited comments from the public attending virtually. No member of the public commented. One written comment was emailed to members prior to the meeting.

AOE Survey

Loomis announced that AOE distributed the committee's survey to superintendents on October 3. The survey will be open through Friday, October 11, 2024.

- Webb added that Janet McLaughlin forwarded the survey to UPK Coordinators the same day it was distributed to superintendents, asking them to follow up with their district representatives.
- Meg Procella announced that four superintendents have responded to date.
 - Jeff O'Hara asked to find out who has responded and offered to follow up with his contacts.
 - Porcella noted that Jennifer Lawcewicz, Julie Regimbal, Matthew Foster and Amy Rex submitted responses.
 - Webb noted in the chat that the ten superintendents she works with are all working with her on it.

Model Contract

Loomis shared the Act 76 charge for AOE in consultation with members of the committee to develop a model contract for school districts to use for contracting with private providers for pre kindergarten education services by December 1, 2024. She shared two resources for contract development: a sample contract provided by Webb [WVSA Publicly-Funded Pre-Kindergarten Agreement 24-25 | Agency of Education \(vermont.gov\)](#) and [Universal Prekindergarten Partnership Agreement Recommendations | Agency of Education \(vermont.gov\)](#).

- Webb suggested AOE explain how they developed their partnership agreement.
 - Tammy Bates reviewed how the agreement evolved from Act 166's charge to form a UPK partnership between school districts. She reported that AOE developed a basic partnership agreement template for public schools in 2015. In 2016, the State Board of Education rules further outlined prekindergarten agreements. A 2019 study revealed a need for a universal statewide standardized form, and an initiative to develop it lost traction during the pandemic. In 2023/24 AOE developed the UPK Coordinator Handbook and prekindergarten partnership agreement recommendations. The recommendations are not exhaustive or legally binding. Bates shared the resources used to develop the recommendations.
 - Cameron noted that the recommendations are not legally binding, and asked if the contract connects school districts with a chain of liability via association of sending payment to a provider.
 - Francis noted that agency guidance suggests that an indemnification section be added at the school's discretion. He suggested it would be best practice to seek indemnification. He suggested the indemnification section be reviewed by agency and state legal counsel.
 - Wendy Scott explained that UPK coordinators supplied feedback on the agreement. She clarified that a partnership agreement within Act 166 is a binding contract, but that each school district has the right to develop their own contract. Some contracts have insurance liabilities/waivers. AOE developed recommendations due in part to gray areas regarding legal requirements. She noted a statewide contract would require legal review from many parties.

- J McLaughlin noted that there have been conversations about insurance requirements since these recommendations were developed. She suggested current guidance from AOE and CDD be considered in the model contract. She shared two additional areas to address in the document: attendance collection/monitoring and payment provisions – both of which vary by policy across school districts.
- Francis shared that the comments were consistent with his thinking. He noted that UPK coordinators did a great job with the contract recommendations. He also advised the committee to not recommend a model contract without legal review from AOE, CDD, School Boards Assoc, and insurance trust. He also confirmed the need to update language, particularly around sexual abuse and molestation.
- Webb clarified that the Winooski Valley Superintendents Association agreement was updated to reflect the most recent language and went through legal review. It also added info about collecting documents required under universal prek.
- Zoie Saunders confirmed that legal counsel would need to weigh in on a model contract. She wondered about the timing of the process and noted that the committee may recommend a contract pending legal review.
- Loomis asked who would like to be involved in a subcommittee to draft the template and noted the Co-chairs, Cameron, Webb, and representatives from AOE will be involved.

Report Feedback and Discussion

Loomis thanked the committee for feedback she received on the first draft of the report. Feedback was collected through group discussions during the Sept 10 meeting, written feedback submitted by individual committee members, and through submissions to a google form. She shared a [slide deck](#) synthesizing the key areas of this feedback:

- Tension between addressing the committee’s charge to redesign VT’s prek system vs. building on the current system. Loomis noted that some committee members see an opportunity for significant change to prek that leverages the public schools for system efficiency & effectiveness. Others see an opportunity to enhance the elements of VT’s prek system that are already working well and note the negative consequences of significant change. Several committee members also requested that the report clarify and emphasize what Vermont prek does well and where there are gaps.
- Feedback on how to integrate data, research & experience. There was frustration about the committee not having sufficient research, access to data, or capacity for data analysis to address key questions posed by Act 76. The committee was not resourced to conduct extensive stakeholder feedback and so relied on existing stakeholder feedback collected by BBF, as well as focus groups conducted by members of the system level workgroup subcommittee.
 - Loomis shared a chart detailing the stakeholder groups and numbers of individuals that participated in focus groups. She described the interview protocol developed by the subcommittee and the thematic analysis conducted on stakeholder feedback. The report will include a section that details the limitations of the stakeholder engagement.
 - E. McLaughlin asked about why committee members’ disagreement with the Act 76 charge should interfere with the work of implementing that charge.
 - Loomis noted that she’d heard feedback from committee members that there are areas of the current prek system that function very well and that a system overhaul

could have negative consequences on the stability and benefits of the current system.

- J. McLaughlin responded that the Act 76 charge does include identifying the considerations associated with transitioning 3-year-olds to not having access to publicly funding prek. She acknowledged that the committee process was focused on following the lead of committee members rather than implementing the specific charge.
- Francis stated that he appreciated the previous points, as well as the tension between strengthening the system and redesigning the system. He suggested that the draft report's focus on strengthening the existing system was a natural result given the makeup of the committee, but that the committee should still respond to the charge of preparing the PreK-12 delivery system for implementation by July, 2026. He suggested that the recommendations currently in the draft report are legitimate but that the report needs to also respond directly to the Act 76 charge.
- Crossman reminded the committee that legislators asked them to come together to do a lot of work in a short time period with limited resources and without the data needed to succeed. She noted that, even with the committee's best efforts to compile existing data across the sector and engage stakeholders through interviews and a survey, the committee won't have the data needed to make decisions. She suggested that the report clarify the large amount of work that was completed by the committee, as well as identify the work and time needed beyond the report.
- Camerson agreed that there will be work beyond the committee's report and suggested that the Commission on the Future of Public Education should continue it.
- O'hara wondered about how the committee should handle the challenge of being asked to answer a question that isn't the right question. He likened it to when leaders pose a question and then discover, through exploration, that they need to be asking a different question. He asked about how other committees have handled it when a question seems out of line with what the committee can do.
- Crossman appreciated O'Hara's question about how to respond to the Act 76 charge. She thinks the committee's responsibility is to name for the legislature what has changed since they framed this charge during the last legislative session. Since then, there have been significant shifts in the landscape, especially regarding public education funding. There is simultaneous work happening with the Commission on the Future of Public education and the Secretary of Education's listen & learn tour that will impact prek. She suggested that the committee do its best to answer the questions posed by Act 76 but also to lay out the competing tensions and make sure this report isn't siloed from the other efforts and reports being developed at the intersection of complex systems. The report does a great job answering the questions to the best of the committee's ability, sharing the best evidence we have, and outlining the areas of agreement and disagreement. It shows where we've landed given the time and resources we had to work with.
- Loomis shared the information that the committee has been able to assemble and analyze, including program quality, system oversight, and feedback from superintendents (pending survey results), despite not having access to some of the data needed to answer questions posed by Act 76.
- Loomis shared that the report is grounded in robust national research on how best practices in prekindergarten impact positive outcomes for children, including time and access to prek, teacher preparation, comprehensive early learning standards and curriculum supports, and

class size and rations. The report uses these findings to ground the committee's recommendations for prek.

- Loomis also received feedback that there was insufficient time for the full committee to discuss the report's recommendations. She agreed that this was a process challenge due in part to the committee not being resourced to conduct research, outreach and analysis required to make strong recommendations. The committee spent much of its time getting its diverse representatives up to speed with Vermont's current system, the context of the charge, and understanding their differing perspectives.
- Loomis noted feedback about topics that may need further exploration, such as how to define "affordability", what counts as coaching, and whether to recommend pilot programs as a path towards prek expansion.

Legislative Language

Loomis noted that the report needs to include draft legislative language to support the recommendations. She asked for volunteers to review existing prekindergarten statutes and offer language upgrades to be included in the report. The committee co-chairs, along with any interested committee members, will move that forward.

- Robinson asked if there was a process for developing legislative language.
- Webb reminded the committee that, at an early committee meeting, the group discussed that drafting legislative language might not be realistic for the committee.
- Meg Porcella suggested that a subcommittee work on this.
- J. McLaughlin suggested that the Administration has people who could support the development of draft legislation. She noted that the committee might not be ready to vote on legislative language but the report could highlight areas of statute that need to be addressed.

Possible Recommendations

- Saunders stated that, as a newcomer to the committee, she appreciates the complicated nature of the topic and the robust conversation and work of the committee. She recognizes that it's healthy for the committee to debate ideas that could result in major policy changes and impacts on students. She sees it as part of the committee's responsibility to bring forward recommendations that are based on what is known from data and research. She acknowledged the limitations of evaluating the current state of prekindergarten in Vermont and of making recommendations during a time of flux when the state is reimagining the public education system. She stated that it's healthy to call out questions about how recommendations relate to a cradle-to-career system. She recommended highlighting other areas of inquiry to pursue before making final changes to the legislation. She noted that it's important to name that there may need to be further engagement and dialog to come to consensus on big policy changes.
- Loomis shared a list of possible recommendations for the committee to discuss and possibly put to a vote. These included:
 - Retain the 10-hour prekindergarten benefit for three year olds.
 - Robinson noted that there was limited time left in the meeting to discuss and vote on the recommendations. He stated that expanding access to 4-year-olds does not have to mean removing access for 3-year-olds and did not believe anyone advocated for removing it.
 - Webb noted that research shows that the more time children have in prekindergarten, the better the outcomes. She also feels strongly that 3-year-olds with intensive identified needs or challenging behaviors need access to school-based prekindergarten when community placements don't work. She

worries that schools may not be able to serve them without funding for 3-year-olds.

- J. McLaughlin responded to Robinson that Act 76 explicitly states the intent to transition 3-year-olds out of the prekindergarten benefit. If the committee does not agree that 3-year-olds should be transitioned out of prekindergarten, she suggests stating that explicitly in the report.
- Meet all 10 NIEER benchmarks across prekindergarten settings.
- Amend prek pupil weights to at least 1.0FTA, while examining if 1.0 FTE is sufficient for prek students.
- Retain joint agency oversight (AOE and CDD) while developing a plan to strengthen system-level monitoring and enhance coordination across agencies and school districts.
- Formalize the role of regional prekindergarten coordinator, including defining the expertise and time commitment required to benefit families, districts and the prek system.
- Loomis asked for comments on the possible recommendations.
 - Carlson asked if she would have the option to vote if she is absent from the November meeting.
 - Loomis agreed to gather information on the legal requirements for voting in open meeting law.
 - E. McLaughlin suggested adding a recommendation about strengthening systems and reducing redundancies under joint oversight.
 - Francis stated concern about sufficient time for the committee to discuss these recommendations or to bring forward new or disagreeing recommendations.
 - Loomis agreed that more time would be helpful and that the committee is challenged to balance the volunteer time of members with the committee's outstanding work.
 - Theresa Pollner asked about the timing of the next draft report and expressed concern about having sufficient time for her constituents to review it.
 - Carlson asked if votes could be collected via survey on the recommendations under consideration. She noted that it felt like the committee had ample time to discuss some of the recommendations.
 - Donna Brown suggested that the committee consider launching a pilot program, which other states have done successfully in order to test and refine prekindergarten rollout.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:30 am.