

**Legislative Report**

**Prekindergarten Education Implementation  
Committee**

**December 6, 2024**

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for Children and Families**

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## Executive Summary

Created through [Act 76](#), the Prekindergarten Education Implementation Committee (PEIC) was created to assist the State in improving and expanding accessible, affordable, and high-quality prekindergarten education for all four-year-old children on a full-day basis on or before July 1, 2026. Eighteen committee members representing diverse constituent groups met for sixteen months during monthly, virtual committee and subcommittee meetings. Information was gathered through surveys and interviews with constituent groups, as well as from state data and national research on best practices for high-quality prekindergarten education.

The Committee compared Vermont's prekindergarten education policies to national best practices for high-quality prekindergarten education. Vermont aligns with national best practices in its approach to access for both 3-year-olds and 4-year-olds and its use of a mixed-delivery system to ensure flexible options to meet diverse family needs. Vermont also has state-level benchmarks in place in seven of eleven nationally defined areas to ensure high-quality prekindergarten education. Vermont does not currently have state-level benchmarks in place for teacher preparation and requirements vary across prekindergarten settings. To implement an equivalent benchmark for teacher preparation across settings, Vermont will need to invest in access, support, alternative pathways and pay parity for educators. Vermont also has room for improvement in the areas of data systems, system oversight, and understanding the costs of expanding prekindergarten.

The Committee analyzed how the changes proposed by Act 76 would impact the current system. Members generally agreed with increasing the number of hours that prekindergarten education is offered to Vermont children. However, regulations regarding attendance and mandated hours for PreK through grade 2 should be reviewed to create continuity, as Kindergarten is currently not mandated by state law. Expanding prekindergarten hours also has significant implications for afterschool and summer programs, many of which are already at capacity, and would require significant changes to meet regulations for three- and four-year-olds.

Based on national research that children who attend two years of prekindergarten fare better in school than those who attend one, many committee members disagreed strongly with the proposal to transition three-year-olds to the early care and learning system. Surveyed constituents also expressed concerns about how this proposed change would impact children's access to prekindergarten and early childhood special education services; families' choices and access to continuity of care; and the financial viability of private prekindergarten programs.

Constituents, particularly school leaders, expressed both interest in expanding prekindergarten, as well as deep concern about their capacity to implement this change during this period of turbulence in public education. Constituents and committee

members cited capacity challenges with workforce, facilities and infrastructure, administrative requirements, and transition planning as obstacles to implementation.

The Committee was unable to vote on a full suite of recommendations, but had majority agreement on four foundational recommendations:

- Maintain the 10-hour/week (350 hour/year) benefit for both three-year-olds and four-year-olds.
- Expand prekindergarten, including hours and services, for four-year olds.
- Commission an analysis of Vermont's pupil weight for prekindergarten.
- Review methodology for establishing prekindergarten payments to non-school-based programs and propose updates.

The Committee discussed and offered additional considerations about creating an informed implementation plan, gathering additional information on the costs to deliver prekindergarten, and further assessing demand and capacity for the proposed expansion. There were also considerations to move toward national benchmarks for teacher preparation and coaching, improve data systems and oversight coordination, and address issues within Vermont border towns and prekindergarten special education services. These considerations are intended to reflect the Committee's discussions and inform future discussions of prekindergarten education in Vermont; they should not be considered as consensus or recommendations by the Committee.

In conclusion, the Committee agreed on the importance of maintaining the prekindergarten for 3-year-olds and expanding prekindergarten for 4-year-olds, while acknowledging the need for more data and cost analysis to recommend an implementation plan. Additionally, the Committee acknowledged that changes to prekindergarten must be considered in the context of the Commission on the Future of Public Education's policy recommendations.

## **Prekindergarten Education Implementation Committee**

The Prekindergarten Education Implementation Committee (Committee) was created through [Act 76](#) to assist the Agency of Education in improving and expanding accessible, affordable, and high-quality prekindergarten education for all four-year-old children on a full-day basis on or before July 1, 2026.

### **Powers and Duties**

The Committee was charged with examining the delivery of prekindergarten education in Vermont and making recommendations to expand access for children through the public school system or private providers under contract with the school district, or both. This included making recommendations on the changes necessary to provide prekindergarten education to all children by or through the public school system on or

before July 1, 2026, including transitioning children who are three years of age from the 10-hour prekindergarten benefit to child care and early education.

As part of its recommendations, the Committee was charged to consider:

1. The needs of both the State and local education agencies (LEAs);
2. The minimum number of hours that shall constitute a full school day for both prekindergarten and kindergarten;
3. Whether there are areas of the State where prekindergarten education can be more effectively and conveniently furnished in an adjacent state due to geographic considerations;
4. Benchmarks and best practices to ensure high-quality prekindergarten education;
5. Measures to ensure capacity is available to meet the demand for prekindergarten education;
6. Special education services for children participating in prekindergarten in public and private settings;
7. Any necessary infrastructure changes to expand prekindergarten;
8. Costs associated with expanding prekindergarten, including fiscally strategic options to sustain an expansion;
9. Recommendations for the oversight of the prekindergarten system; and
10. Any other issue the Committee deems relevant.

## Membership

The Committee was composed of the following members:

1. Heather Bouchey, interim Secretary of Education, served as co-chair; followed by Zoie Saunders, Secretary of Education, who served as co-chair at the conclusion of the Committee's work;
2. Janet McLaughlin, Deputy Commissioner of the Department for Children and Families, Child Development Division, served as co-chair;
3. Sandra Cameron, Associate Executive Director of the Vermont School Board Association;
4. Sherry Carlson, Chief Programs Officer of Let's Grow Kids;
5. Dr. Morgan Crossman, Executive Director of Building Bright Futures;
6. Jeff Francis, past Executive Director of the Vermont Superintendents Association;
7. Sharron Harrington, Executive Director of the Vermont Association for the Education of Young Children;

8. Korinne Harvey, Family representative with a prekindergarten-age child when the Committee initially convenes (appointed by the Building Bright Futures Council);
9. Renee Kelly, Head Start Collaboration Office Director;
10. Mary Lundeen, Executive Director of the Vermont Council of Special Education Administrators;
11. Erica McLaughlin, Assistant Executive Director of the Vermont Principals' Association;
12. Nicole Miller, Executive Director of Vermont Afterschool, Inc.;
13. Jeffrey O'Hara, Representative of a prequalified private provider operating a licensed center-based child care and preschool program (appointed by the Speaker of the House);
14. Theresa Pollner, Designee of the Vermont Curriculum Leaders Association;
15. Sheila Quenneville, Representative of a prequalified private provider providing prekindergarten education at a regulated family child care home (appointed by the Committee on Committees);
16. Colin Robinson, Political Director of the Vermont National Education Association;
17. Rebecca Webb, Regional Prekindergarten Coordinator (appointed by the Vermont Principals' Association); and
18. Chris Wells, Family representative with a child three years of age or younger when the Committee initially convenes (appointed by the Building Bright Futures Council).

The Law stipulated that the Committee include a member of the School Construction Aid Task Force to be appointed by the Secretary of Education. This member position was not filled.

There were several transitions in Committee membership:

- Zoie Saunders assumed the co-chair role on behalf of AOE in September, 2024. Heather Bouchey was the co-chair when the committee launched in July, 2023 and designated Meg Porcella and Ann Bordonaro to serve on behalf of AOE before Zoie Sauders assumed the co-chair.
- Donna Brown served as the Head Start designee while Renee Kelley was on leave from July through October, 2024.
- Mary Lundeen replaced Pam Reed as the designee of the Vermont Council of Special Education starting in September, 2024.

The Committee brought together members with a range of perspectives, experiences, and stakes in prekindergarten education, some of whom volunteered their time and scaled professional and logistical hurdles to participate. This composition required the Committee to focus significant time getting up to speed on the complex history, policy

and intersecting systems related to prekindergarten education. It allowed for rich conversation, shared learning and new perspectives to emerge, but did not result in a detailed implementation plan or specific legislative language. This report summarizes the significant work done by this Committee, and it is the hope of the co-chairs that this report is a meaningful contribution and valuable jumping-off point for future work to improve and expand prekindergarten education in Vermont.

## Process

Committee members met monthly from July, 2023 through November, 2024. Meetings were 90 minutes and conducted virtually on Teams, with the exception of September 10, 2024, when the Committee met for three hours in person to review and discuss the draft recommendations, and on November 12, 2024, when the committee met virtually for 2.5 hours. All meeting information is posted on the [Agency of Education's website](#).

The Agency of Education retained Molly Loomis, PhD of [Moloco LLC](#) from December, 2023 through November, 2024 to assist with process planning, meeting facilitation, data synthesis and report writing. A Planning Team, including the committee co-chairs, AOE representative Meg Porcella and facilitator Molly Loomis, met monthly to plan agendas, track progress, synthesize information, and draft the report.

In addition to attending monthly committee meetings, each committee member participated in a Workgroup that met for 90-minutes monthly from February - June, 2024. Workgroups focused on one of three topic areas: 1) considerations related to program quality, 2) system-level considerations, and 3) considerations related to capacity and funding. Workgroup members explored data, information, and feedback related to their topic areas and [reported monthly](#) to the full Committee about their work. Workgroup conversations and analysis were captured variously through spreadsheets, matrices, and minutes posted on the [Agency of Education's website](#) and synthesized in the report below.

## Constituent Engagement

The Committee was not tasked with extensive community engagement. However, committee members gathered feedback from their constituencies in a variety of ways, which are summarized in the table below.

**Table 1: Constituent Groups and Engagement Strategies**

Constituent Group	Individuals Engaged	Committee Lead	Recruitment Strategy	Engagement Protocol
PreK teachers in Public Schools	25	Colin Robinson	VTNEA Listserv	Online Survey (Appendix A)

Constituent Group	Individuals Engaged	Committee Lead	Recruitment Strategy	Engagement Protocol
PreK teachers in private settings	4	Becca Webb	PEIC Members	Group Interview Protocol (Appendix B)
UPK Coordinators	28	Becca Webb	Standing Meeting	Group Interview Protocol
Principals	62	Erica McLaughlin	VPA Listserv	Online Survey (Appendix C)
Superintendents	9	Jeff Francis	Standing Meeting	Facilitated Conversation
Superintendents	42	Zoie Saunders/ Janet McLaughlin	AOE Listserv	Online Survey (Appendix D)
School Board Association Members	13	Sandra Cameron	VSBA Listserv	Online Survey (Appendix E)
Leaders from AOE, AHS and Governor's Office	9	Janet McLaughlin	Invitation	Group Interview Protocol
Head Start Constituents	8	Renee Kelly	Standing Meeting	Facilitated Group Interview
Special Education Constituents	8	Molly Loomis	Invitation to agency experts and constituents	2 Facilitated Conversations
Adjacent State Constituents	4	Becca Webb	Convening of Essex County constituents	Facilitated Conversation

In addition to these constituent engagement activities, members were invited to review constituent feedback and data collected prior to the Committee's launch by Building Bright Futures, including legislative testimony and memos summarizing the current status of UPK in Vermont, as well as questions and concerns of community members statewide (Appendix G).

Building Bright Future's role in the statute includes elevating family and community voices and monitoring Vermont's early childhood system by identifying and providing high-quality, up-to-date data to inform policy and decision-making.



Additionally, consistent with Vermont Public Meeting Law requirements, time for public comment was directly allocated and announced at each meeting. Members of the public were encouraged to share written feedback on all aspects of the Committee's work throughout the process. Written feedback was posted on the [Agency of Education's website](#) and reviewed by Committee members.

## Report

This report integrates workgroup findings, constituent feedback, data analysis, and member input to inform the analysis and considerations below. It is organized into the following sections:

1. *Influences on the Committee Process*. This section reviews the history, changing political and fiscal landscape, committee tensions, and limitations that impacted how and what the Committee was able to achieve during its process.
2. *Best Practices in Prekindergarten Education*. This section reviews national research and benchmarks for best practices in prekindergarten education. It uses this research to highlight Vermont's current successes and areas for improvement.
3. *Changes Proposed by Act 76*. This section is organized by the four key changes to prekindergarten education that are outlined in Section 2 of Act 76. It includes a description of the implications of each change and considerations for implementation.
4. *Recommendations*. This section presents the three core recommendations that the Committee brought to a vote.
5. *Additional Considerations*. This section offers additional considerations for improving and expanding Vermont's prekindergarten education system that were not brought to a vote.

The Planning Team drafted the initial version of this report in August 2024 for the full Committee to review and discuss in person in September. Feedback from committee members was collected through in-person discussion and through individual written submissions and integrated into a second draft that the Committee reviewed during its final meeting on November 12, 2024. The agenda for that final meeting included reviewing and voting on all the considerations from the draft report.

During its final meeting, the Committee was successful in bringing only four of the considerations to vote. The report highlights those four recommendations and includes the items not voted on as additional considerations that were developed from Committee and constituent feedback throughout the process. These considerations are reflective of the overall discussion and should not be considered consensus or endorsed by the full Committee.

It should be noted that several Committee members expressed an interest in reconvening to discuss and vote on the final report. However, the co-chairs decided against reconvening the Committee in fairness to committee members who had already exceeded the reimbursable number of meetings and in acknowledgment of the fact that core issues require significantly more time and analysis to resolve.

Committee members were invited to vote via email on whether the final report sufficiently captured the Committee process and accurately reflected the discussion all members voted. There were 16 yes votes, 0 voted no, and one abstained. Appendix H summarizes how committee members voted, along with comments that members wanted to include in the report.

## **Influences on the Committee Process**

The Committee's charge and process were influenced by a complex and changing landscape in state government, education finance, and public policy. Given these changes, as well as the resources and timeline provided, the Committee was unable to create an implementation plan for expanding prekindergarten education for four-year-olds. The following describes the factors that impacted how and what the Committee was able to achieve during its process.

## **Policy Background of Prekindergarten in Vermont**

Publicly-funded prekindergarten education in Vermont has evolved significantly in the last two decades. In 2007, Act 62 expanded publicly-funded prekindergarten education for three- and four-year-old children and supported prekindergarten programs with funding through State's Education Fund similar to K-12 education. As a result, many school districts voluntarily began offering prekindergarten, both directly and via contracts with community-based programs. Over time, most children in Vermont had some access to publicly-funded prekindergarten education. In 2014, Act 166 moved to expand access statewide by requiring all public school districts to offer or contract for state-funded Universal Prekindergarten (UPK) for three-, four-, and five-year-old children not enrolled in kindergarten for a minimum of 10 hours per week for 35 weeks annually, at the prequalified program location of the family's choosing. To standardize quality, a statewide UPK prequalification process was established for all prekindergarten education programs, including Head Start, private centers, family child care home providers, and public school-operated programs, to receive approval from the Agency of Education (AOE) and the Department for Children and Families' Child Development Division (DCF CDD) and additional requirements related to staffing, assessments, curriculum, and monitoring were added. In 2023, Act 76 mandated investments and policy changes intended to improve access and affordability to high-quality child care and prekindergarten, as well as to help stabilize the early education sector and workforce. The law also created this Committee to explore how to transition Vermont's UPK system from 10 hours per week for all three- and four-year-olds to a full school day, full school year program for four-year-olds.

## Shifting Economic and Political Landscape

When Act 76 passed in June 2023, the legislative intent focused on expanding child care access and stabilizing the early education sector. It stated, “investments and policy changes to Vermont’s child care and early learning system shall:

- Increase access to and the quality of child care services and afterschool and summer care programs throughout the State;
- Increase equitable access to and quality of prekindergarten education for children four years of age;
- Provide financial stability to child care programs;
- Stabilize Vermont’s talented child care workforce;
- Address the workforce needs of the State’s employers;
- Maintain a mixed-delivery system for prekindergarten, child care, and afterschool and summer care;
- Recognize that family child care homes are a key resource for families in rural communities and allow for ongoing financial support to:
  - a. Enable parents to choose to send their children to family child care homes; and
  - b. Provide technical assistance to family child care homes to ensure high-quality child care services are accessible throughout the State; and
- Assign school districts with the responsibility of ensuring equitable prekindergarten access for children who are four years of age on the date by which the child’s school district requires kindergarten students to have attained five years of age or who are five years of age and not yet enrolled in kindergarten” ([Act 76, Sec. 1](#)).

However, much has changed in the landscape since the General Assembly drafted this legislative intent. In 2024 the General Assembly directed the formation of a new Commission on the Future of Public Education after the state witnessed the largest system-wide defeat of local school budgets in state history. In addition, Governor Scott issued calls to school leaders to contain education spending and emphasized that this work would require collaboration between school boards and state government. Scott sees this as “an imperative – for our kids, communities and economy. It will take all of us to stabilize both spending and taxes, so we can focus on making our schools – and our education system as a whole – into the best in the nation from cradle to career” (Scott, 2024).

Also of note, alongside changes in the political and financial landscape, Vermont’s leaders across all agencies, departments, and divisions related to oversight of UPK have experienced substantial turnover since 2019, including transitions in the Secretary and Deputy Secretary for the Agency of Human Services (AHS), the Secretary and

Deputy Secretary of the Agency of Education (AOE), the Commissioner for the Department for Children and Families (DCF) and the DCF Deputy Commissioner overseeing the Child Development Division (CDD), the Director of Student Support Services (AOE), and the Manager for the Early Education Team (AOE). Such significant turnover in leadership has contributed to challenges in aligned vision, strategy, and monitoring of UPK in Vermont.

## Committee Perspectives

Leading up to the passage of Act 76, invested parties offered differing views on the future of public prekindergarten. The Administration did not support all components of the bill and significant negotiations between Education and Human Services committees occurred before its passage. In many ways, this mirrored long standing differences between the perspectives of the child care and early education sector and those of the public education system that were not resolved before Act 76 became law. The work of this Committee served an important role in bringing together multiple constituents and visions for the future and highlighted some of the ongoing tensions that impact the implementation of public prekindergarten in Vermont.

Committee members had differing perspectives on the scope and purpose of the Committee's charge. Some members considered the charge to be an opportunity for major systemic change, to better leverage underutilized resources of public schools, and to create a prekindergarten-12 system that “decouples” AOE and CDD oversight of prekindergarten. These committee members focused on the law’s language around expanding to all four-year-olds and transitioning three-year-old children to child care and early education. They worried about just “maintaining the status quo” of the current prekindergarten system and expressed concerns about a missed opportunity to contain spending by promoting greater efficiency.

Other members considered the law as an opportunity to identify, elevate, and support what is working in the current prekindergarten system. They focused on the legislative intent to expand access to prekindergarten education, stabilize the child care sector and workforce, and maintain a mixed delivery system. They were frustrated by pressure to dismantle the prekindergarten system and worried that major structural change could further destabilize the child care system and workforce. As one member put it, “We are not far off from improving the system; flipping the system would put us two steps back.”

Relatedly, members disagreed over definitions of system affordability. Although affordability wasn’t a topic the full Committee explicitly discussed, assumptions about what constitutes affordability underlay member disagreements. For example, some Committee members advocated for “economies of scale” to leverage public education resources, such as building infrastructure, administrative capacity, teaching staff, and student services to meet the demand for expanded access to prekindergarten, while others pointed to the cost-effectiveness of embedding prekindergarten education in

existing high-quality child care or preschool programs already serving prekindergarten-aged children.

Additionally, members pointed to the unknown costs of expanding prekindergarten to a full-school-day program for four-year-olds and the potential negative impacts a PreK-12 system would have on the stability of the early care and learning system. Without a more detailed analysis of current Universal Prekindergarten offerings and readiness for change, members pointed out that it was impossible to know how much full-school-day and full-school-year prekindergarten for four-year-olds would cost school districts for start-up infrastructure and ongoing costs. In addition, given the long history of community-based programs offering preschool to three- and four-year-old children on both full- and part-time bases, it was unclear how community-based early care and learning providers could or would adjust to serving more three-year-olds and potentially fewer four-year-olds.

### **Committee Resources**

Finally, the Committee faced structural and resource limitations to its work. The diversity of experience represented by Committee members was an advantage to rich learning but reduced the Committee's capacity to engage in implementation planning. Although tasked with making recommendations on infrastructure needs, costs, and measures to ensure capacity is available to meet the demand for prekindergarten education in Vermont, these data were unavailable or easily obtainable. Committee members gathered feedback from constituents but were not resourced to conduct the scale of study required to make informed recommendations on the costs or needs of the changes proposed by Act 76. Similarly, although asked to represent the needs of both the State and local education agencies, and to consult with necessary constituents to accomplish its charge, the Committee was not resourced to conduct broad community engagement and so relied on the volunteer time of individual members.

Critical data and data analysis required to address the Committee's charge were unavailable or accessible to the Committee when needed. In part, this stemmed from leadership turnover at the Agency of Education, where some of the data and information was housed. Since Zoie Saunders joined the Committee in September 2024, substantial efforts have been made to inventory, coordinate, and analyze prekindergarten data to address these deficits. Upcoming data reporting will be validated by the committee and used to positively impact decisions about designing and implementing prekindergarten expansion. However, as Building Bright Futures noted in their 2023 inventory of Data Needed for PreK Decision Making, many areas remain where data are insufficient or non-existent.

### **Summary of Influences on the Committee Process**

The Committee's charge and process were influenced by a complex and changing landscape in both the early care and education and public education sectors.

Committee members agreed on the charge to expand access to high-quality

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prekindergarten education and saw prekindergarten expansion as a pathway to address workforce, infrastructure, and student success goals. However, committee members saw conflicting potential – on the one hand, to strengthen the early education sector overall and bolster the current mixed-delivery UPK system; on the other hand, to address enrollment and funding challenges in the PreK-12 public education system. The Committee was unable to reconcile these differing perspectives on the purpose and potential of prekindergarten expansion. Combined with insufficient information to make informed decisions and inadequate resources to conduct research, this tension created a process focused on building shared understanding, articulating key tensions, and identifying areas for further consideration. The Committee was unable to create an implementation plan for expanding prekindergarten education to all four-year-olds.

## Best Practices in Prekindergarten Education

The past decade has seen a robust body of research on best practices in prekindergarten education based on the many states who, alongside Vermont, have invested significantly in universal prekindergarten programming. Led by the Committee workgroup on program quality considerations, and with the ongoing technical assistance of the [National Institute of Early Education Research](#) (NIEER), the Committee reviewed national best practices on what works for prekindergarten education and compared that to current practice in Vermont.

## National Research

The research is unambiguous – attending high-quality preschool can have profound positive impacts on children’s success in kindergarten and support their later success in school and life (Minervino, 2014; Phillips et al., 2017; Yoshikawa et al., 2013). Children who attend high-quality prekindergarten are better prepared for school and are less likely to be identified as having special needs or to be held back in elementary school than children who did not attend preschool (Meloy et al., 2019). The more time children spend in high-quality prekindergarten programs, the larger the gains. Children who attend two years of prekindergarten fare better in school than those who attend one (Reynolds, 1995; Wen et al., 2012), and children in full-day programs (6-8 hours) make larger gains than children in programs lasting fewer than three hours (Atteberry et al., 2019).

Not all early education environments lead to positive outcomes, however. Long-term benefits from preschool are tied to specific factors that characterize high-quality early education (Weiland, 2018), including comprehensive learning and development standards that are developmentally appropriate and culturally aligned (Friedman-Krauss et al., 2024); research-based curriculum focused on key domains of language, literacy, mathematics, and social-emotional development; and curriculum supports such as professional development and additional resources (Bredenkamp et al., 2024). Smaller class sizes (maximum of 20 per classroom) and fewer children per teacher (staff-child



ratio 1:10 or lower) are also a critical component of young children’s achievement and educational success (Friedman-Krauss et al., 2024; Nye et al., 1999).

Positive adult-child relationships are also important to the healthy development of young children (National Research Council et al., 2015). Children thrive in nurturing relationships and interactions with adults who are attuned to their learning and responsive to their individual needs (Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, 2016). Therefore, investing in a well-prepared and supported early childhood workforce – including teacher preparation, specialized training in early education, ongoing professional development, coaching, continuous quality improvement – plays a crucial role in outcomes for children (NIEER, 2024).

These findings on the positive outcomes associated with access to high-quality prekindergarten education offer important guidance as Vermont considers how to expand its current public prekindergarten programming. As described below, Vermont is already successful in its approach to access, standards and curriculum, class sizes and ratios, safety and referral services. Vermont has room for improvement in teacher preparation, data access and coordination, and system oversight and coordination.

## **Vermont’s Successes**

Vermont aligns with national research on best practices for prekindergarten education in providing access and meeting national benchmarks for early learning and development standards, curriculum supports, appropriate class size, and teacher-student ratios.

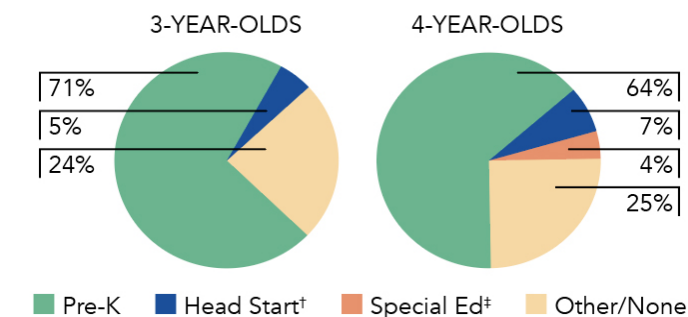
## **Access to Prekindergarten**

Vermont is a leader in access to publicly-funded prekindergarten for three- and four-year-olds. The state rates second in the nation for the percentage of three-year-olds (71%) enrolled in prekindergarten (NIEER, 2024)<sup>1</sup>. Vermont has also been recognized for having a “truly universal program” because there is no income threshold for participation in prekindergarten (Barnett et al., 2024).

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<sup>1</sup> The percentage of 4-year-olds enrolled in public PreK was higher until the 2022/2023 school year. It is assumed that the drop was related to COVID-era arrangements already in place for those children.

## PERCENT OF POPULATION ENROLLED IN PUBLIC ECE



† Some Head Start children may also be counted in state pre-K.  
‡ Estimates children in special education not also enrolled in state pre-K or Head Start.

From <https://nieer.org/yearbook/2023/state-profiles/vermont>.

Vermont’s strides in universal access align with research on the benefits of spending time in high-quality prekindergarten. Children who attend two years of prekindergarten fare better in school than those who attend one year (Reynolds, 1995; Wen et al., 2012), and children in full-day programs (6-8 hours) make larger gains than children in programs lasting fewer than three hours (Atteberry et al., 2019). In Vermont, many children access two years of UPK, and some children access three years of UPK because five-year-old children not yet enrolled in kindergarten can access the prekindergarten benefit.

Vermont’s prekindergarten education system uses a mixed-delivery approach, which leverages the capacity of existing preschool providers in center-based, home child care, and public-school settings and coordinates federal, state, and local funding to meet the demand for prekindergarten. In 2023, most of these children (60%) were enrolled in center-based or home child care prekindergarten programs, and 40% were enrolled in school-based programs (*Vermont’s Early Childhood Data Portal*, 2024). The mixed-delivery approach aligns with recommendations from the National Institute for Early Education Research and from the U.S. Department of Education and Administration for Children and Families. In a 2024 letter to education colleagues, these Federal agencies urged state-level agencies, early childhood education professionals, and local school districts to coordinate their efforts to improve access to high-quality preschool experiences that meet the needs of more children and families. They recommended mixed delivery as an effective approach to expand access, improve quality, ensure flexible options to meet diverse family needs and support smooth transitions between preschool and kindergarten (U.S. Department of Education and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2024).

### Benchmarks for High-Quality Prekindergarten

Vermont meets the majority of national benchmarks for high-quality prekindergarten education. To assess this, the Committee reviewed three nationally regarded tools for assessing high-quality prekindergarten education: the [National Institute for Early](#)



[Education Research \(NIEER\) Benchmarks](#), the [National Association for the Education of Young Children \(NAEYC\) Program Standards](#) and [Unifying Framework](#), and the [Head Start Performance Standards](#). We compared the quality standards of each tool with Vermont’s state-level policy requirements (Table 2), as well as how these standards vary across Vermont’s public school, center-based, family child care prekindergarten education settings (Table 3).

**Table 2. Comparison of Vermont’s State-level Prekindergarten Requirements and National Quality Standards**

PreK Policy	Vermont Requirement	National Quality Standard
<b>Early Learning and Development Standards</b>	Vermont requires all PreK programs to use Vermont Early Learning Standards ( <a href="#">VELS</a> ), which align with national benchmarks, and to conduct aligned child-level assessments 2x/year using TS GOLD.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ <b>NIEER:</b> Comprehensive, aligned, supported, culturally sensitive</li> <li>✓ <b>NAEYC:</b> Aligned, promotes learning in: social, emotional, physical, language and cognitive</li> <li>✓ <b>Head Start:</b> Research-based, comprehensive, inclusive, focused on social and emotional development, language and literacy, cognition and physical development</li> </ul>
<b>Curriculum Supports</b>	Vermont requires locally-selected curricula to be evidence-based and aligned with VELs; the state provides guidance, materials and technical support and monitors compliance.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ <b>NIEER:</b> Approval process or guidance and supports for implementation</li> <li>✓ <b>NAEYC:</b> Developmentally, culturally and linguistically appropriate; effective teaching approaches for child’s goals</li> <li>✓ <b>Head Start:</b> Standardized training; materials for implementation</li> </ul>

PreK Policy	Vermont Requirement	National Quality Standard
<p><b>Lead (Classroom) Teacher Degree</b></p>	<p>Vermont’s requirements for lead (classroom) teacher vary across settings. Public school programs require an AOE-licensed educator to provide all instruction. Center-based programs are required to have an AOE-licensed teacher onsite during UPK hours. Family child care settings are required to have an AOE- licensed teacher as a mentor 3 hours/week.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>☒ <b>NIEER:</b> BA at minimum</li> <li>☒ <b>NAEYC:</b> AA in ECE at minimum</li> <li>☒ <b>Head Start:</b> No less than 50% of teachers must have a BA in ECE, CDA (Child Development Associate credential), or equivalent</li> </ul>
<p><b>Assistant Teacher Degree</b></p>	<p>Vermont requires assistant teachers or paraprofessionals in PreK classrooms to have specialized training in ECE; however some training pathways may not be equivalent to a CDA.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>☒ <b>NIEER:</b> CDA or equivalent</li> <li>☒ <b>NAEYC:</b> CDA or equivalent</li> <li>☒ <b>Head Start:</b> Preschool CDA</li> </ul>
<p><b>Teacher Specialized Training</b></p>	<p>Vermont requires that lead (classroom) teachers have specialized training in early childhood education and/or child development, such as ECE, CDA, Elem. Ed with ECE, ECE SpEd.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ <b>NIEER:</b> Specializing in PreK (ECE or child development)</li> <li>✓ <b>NAEYC:</b> At least 120 hours of ECE Training</li> <li>✓ <b>Head Start:</b> At least an AA in ECE, CD, or equivalent</li> </ul>

PreK Policy	Vermont Requirement	National Quality Standard
<b>Staff Professional Development and Coaching</b>	Child care licensing and AOE licensing require at least 15 hours/year and annual individualized PD plans. Although programs involve coaching across settings, this is not a coordinated state-level policy and state-level supports are not universally available.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>☒ <b>NIEER:</b> For all staff, at least 15 hours/year; annual individualized PD plan, coaching</li> <li>✓ <b>NAEYC:</b> Ongoing staff development, including orientation and continuing education</li> <li>☒ <b>Head Start:</b> At least 16 hours/year; individualized PD plan, coaching</li> </ul>
<b>Staff: Child Ratio</b>	1:10 (three- and four-year-olds)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ <b>NIEER:</b> 1:10</li> <li>✓ <b>NAEYC:</b> 1:10</li> <li>✓ <b>Head Start:</b> 1:10</li> </ul>
<b>Screening and Referral</b>	Child care licensing and SU/SD policies for enrollment require documentation of screenings for vision, hearing and other health interventions; referral required if child presents with an issue.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ <b>NIEER:</b> Vision, hearing and health screenings and referral</li> <li>✓ <b>NAEYC:</b> Promotes nutrition and health; protect children and staff from illness</li> <li>✓ <b>Head Start:</b> Vision, hearing and health screenings, referral and support</li> </ul>
<b>Continuous Quality Improvement System</b>	Vermont’s PreK programs must achieve 4 or 5 stars through STARS, which includes a formal portfolio and an onsite observation using an evidence-based assessment tool.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ <b>NIEER:</b> Structured classroom observations; data used for program improvement</li> <li>✓ <b>NAEYC:</b> Formal and informal assessment; child data</li> <li>✓ <b>Head Start:</b> Annual self-assessment; data used for program improvement; child data</li> </ul>

PreK Policy	Vermont Requirement	National Quality Standard
<b>Safety</b>	AOE's and CDD's Child Care Licensing Regulations require age-appropriate safety protocols re: physical program location, supervision of children, emergency planning.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ <b>NAEYC:</b> Regulations re: facility, furnishings, supervision, sanitation and emergency plans</li> <li>✓ <b>Head Start:</b> Regular safety checks, staff safety training, emergency response plan, background checks</li> </ul>
<b>Relationships</b>	VELS focuses on adult-child relationships; CLASS tool assesses adult-child interactions; STARS includes family engagement; Title 1 schools follow requirements for parent and family engagement; Child care licensing focus on adult, child and family relationships.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ <b>NAEYC:</b> Positive adult-child relationships; collaborative and responsive family engagement</li> <li>✓ <b>Head Start:</b> Inclusive and responsive family engagement; family participation in program; information transparency</li> </ul>

The table above shows that Vermont has state-level benchmarks in place in seven of eleven nationally defined areas to ensure high-quality prekindergarten education, including early learning and development standards, curriculum supports, teacher specialized training, class size and ratios, screenings and referrals, continuous quality improvements, safety standards and relationships.

Vermont's bright spots include its use of the Vermont Early Learning Standards (VELS) across prekindergarten settings. VELs offer comprehensive standards for learning and development from birth through third grade and are included in Vermont's Educational Quality Standards. In place since 2002, VELs were expanded to include K-3 and approved by the State Board of Education in 2015. In addition to meeting NIEER, NAEYC and Head Start standards, the VELs also align with the K-3 Common Core State Standards for English LA and Math, Next Generation Science Standards, VT's Grade Level Expectations, Early MTSS Framework and Pyramid Model of Practices, Division of Early Childhood (DEC) recommended practices and the Teaching Strategies Gold assessment required for UPK.

Additionally, all Vermont state prekindergarten programs – including licensed family child care homes, center-based child care, public school programs, and afterschool programs – are required to attain at least four of five stars in Vermont's Quality

Recognition and Improvement System (QRIS), STARS. Vermont revised STARS in 2023 to focus more closely on positive outcomes for children and engagement with families and to more directly promote continuous quality improvement. STARS has embedded structured observations of classroom quality using CLASS (The Classroom Assessment Scoring System®) a validated, research-based tool which can be used across prekindergarten education settings. The accompanying SPARQS program provides quality support specialists to offer consultation, coaching, mentoring, and technical assistance for continuous quality improvement.

### Vermont’s Areas for Improvement

Vermont’s prekindergarten education system has room for improvement in teacher preparation, operationalizing special education services, data access and coordination, and system oversight and coordination.

### Teacher Preparation

There are three areas where Vermont does not currently meet national standards: teacher degree, assistant teacher degree, and staff professional development. The table below outlines how Vermont’s requirements for each of these areas vary across program settings.

**Table 3: Vermont’s Prekindergarten Teacher Preparation Requirements Across Settings**

**Lead (Classroom) Teacher Degree Requirements in Vermont Prekindergarten Settings**

Vermont Requirement	National Quality Standard
<p><b>Public school programs:</b> Each PreK classroom and all PreK education programming must be directly led by a teacher with an AOE-issued Vermont Educator license with an Early Childhood Education or Early Childhood Special Education endorsement.</p>	<p>✓ Public school programs exceed national benchmark of BA plus specialized training in PreK</p>

Vermont Requirement	National Quality Standard
<p><b>Center-based programs:</b> Center-based prekindergarten education programs are required to have an AOE-licensed teacher onsite for 10 hours per week, coinciding with the hours of prekindergarten education paid for by tuition from districts during UPK hours, but are not required to have an AOE-licensed teacher in each classroom. Lead (classroom) teachers are required to have a minimum of 21 early childhood-related college credits plus a year of experience (or other equivalent options laid out in rule 7.3.2.2 in Vermont child care licensing regulations).</p>	<p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Center-based programs are not required to meet national benchmark of BA plus specialized training in PreK</p>
<p><b>Family child care programs:</b> Family child care providers are required to either be an AOE-licensed teacher with ECE or ECSE endorsement or have an AOE- licensed teacher as a mentor for 3 hours/week. Registered family child care providers are required to have specialized training in PreK; however, it may not be equivalent to a CDA. Licensed family child care programs are required to have a Child Development Associate (CDA) or equivalent. Many family child care providers exceed the minimum standards.</p>	<p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Family child care programs are not required to meet national benchmark of BA plus specialized training in PreK</p>

## Assistant Teacher Degree Requirements in Vermont Prekindergarten Settings

Vermont Requirement	National Quality Standard
<p><b>Public school programs:</b> Vermont does not detail requirements for paraprofessionals across schools in general, and for PreK, beyond the requirements for child care licensing. Per licensing, all assistant teachers or paraprofessionals in PreK classrooms are required to have specialized training in ECE; however some training pathways may not be equivalent to a CDA. In schools with Title IA funding, instructional paraprofessionals must have completed 2 years of study at an institution of higher education; obtained an AA at minimum, or equivalent; however, they are not required to have specialized training in ECE.</p>	<p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Public school programs are not required to meet national benchmark of specialized training in ECE equivalent to CDA or more</p>
<p><b>Center-based programs:</b> Per licensing, all assistant teachers or paraprofessionals in PreK classrooms are required to have specialized training in ECE; however some training pathways may not be equivalent to a CDA.</p>	<p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Center-based programs are not required to meet national benchmark of a CDA or equivalent</p>
<p><b>Family child care programs:</b> Per licensing, assistant teachers are required to have specialized training in ECE; however some training pathways may not be equivalent to a CDA. Registered family child care homes typically would not have assistant teachers, while licensed family child care homes would.</p>	<p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Family child care programs are not required to not national benchmark of a CDA or equivalent</p>

Vermont Requirement	National Quality Standard
<p><b>Public school programs:</b> AOE regulations for teachers plus child care licensing requirements for other staff meet the benchmark for ongoing professional development and individualized professional development plans for prekindergarten teachers and staff . However, the standards related to practice-based coaching and mentoring are locally determined. Educator evaluation and coaching, as well as mentoring described by the State Board Rules may meet the coaching benchmark, but it is not documented.</p>	<p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> May not meet national benchmark of least 15 hours/year, individualized PD plans and coaching</p>
<p><b>Center-based programs:</b> Child care licensing regulations meet the benchmark for ongoing professional development and individualized professional development plans for prekindergarten teachers and staff . However, there are not standards related to practice-based coaching or resources allocated to support that coaching. The oversight provided by the onsite AOE-licensed teacher to lead teachers may meet the coaching benchmark, but it is not documented.</p>	<p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> May not meet national benchmark of least 15 hours/year, individualized PD plans and coaching</p>
<p><b>Family child care programs:</b> Child care licensing regulations meet the benchmark for ongoing professional development and an individualized professional development plan. Family child care programs that use an AOE- licensed teacher as a mentor for 3 hours/week do meet the benchmark for coaching. Family child care programs in which the licensee themselves is an AOE-licensed educator do not necessarily meet the standard since there is no formal requirement for coaching.</p>	<p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Meets national benchmark of at least 15 hours/year; individualized PD plans and coaching</p>

As the table above shows, requirements for teacher preparation vary across prekindergarten settings. Most notably, public schools exceed the national benchmark that all lead (classroom) prekindergarten teachers have a BA and specialized training, but center-based and family child care programs may not. This variation reflects



Vermont's history of early childhood education as a field that has operated outside of public education for many decades.

When publicly-funded Universal Prekindergarten was established in Vermont, there was recognition that educational pathways and credentials varied significantly across settings. In addition, there was recognition that engagement from an AOE-licensed educator is an important part of Vermont's approach to high-quality universal prekindergarten. Vermont's current prekindergarten standards were an attempt to balance the realities of 2014 while also ensuring widespread, or "universal," access to prekindergarten education by including the varied settings where prekindergarten-aged children already were. The differences in educator qualifications across settings was the subject of multiple conversations within committee and subcommittee meetings; some committee members urged for consistent standards right away while others were concerned about the implications for access and the need for Vermont data to drive changes in quality standards.

Based on current minimum standards for assistant teachers or paraprofessionals, no prekindergarten program setting consistently meets the benchmark of a Child Development Associate (CDA) credential or equivalent as the standard for specialized training in early childhood education. Per child care licensing, Vermont requires all assistant teachers or paraprofessionals to have specialized training in ECE; however some training pathways may not be equivalent to a CDA. Public school prekindergarten programs utilizing Title 1 Instructional Paraprofessionals surpass the credential requirement but don't require specialized training in ECE. Many assistant teachers and paraeducators may meet or exceed these benchmarks in practice. Committee members discussed assessing the current qualifications of the field and developing additional supportive training pathways for those entering the field.

Vermont does not meet the standard for professional development and coaching because we lack state-level definitions and resources for coaching. All settings meet the national benchmarks for minimum professional development hours and annual individualized PD plans for all prekindergarten staff. However, only family child care settings that utilize the model of being mentored by an AOE-licensed teacher currently meet the benchmark for ongoing, classroom-embedded support (coaching or mentoring). Although public-school and center-based prekindergarten settings also offer embedded support, frequency is determined locally, making implementation variable and therefore does not meet the national benchmark.

Educator preparation is a critical component of high-quality prekindergarten and essential to achieving positive, sustained outcomes for young children (NIEER, 2021). In the initial decade of Universal Prekindergarten, Vermont implemented a number of supports and programs to assist educators in achieving increased qualifications. Supported by AOE, CDD, and federal grants, these supports offered grants and scholarships for college-level coursework and degrees; grants for fees associated with

alternate pathways to teacher licensure; and state-level programs to support the attainment of AOE educator licenses for those working in non-school-based settings<sup>2</sup>.

These programs are especially important given the chronically low compensation in center-based and family child care programs and have successfully supported many educators to earn degrees and AOE-issued educator licenses. They have also supported those working in assistant teacher or paraprofessional roles to increase their training and credentials. At the same time, Vermont's workforce as a whole - and educational workforce specifically - has been challenged by demographic shifts, by COVID-related changes to work, and by pressures on higher education resulting in shortages of qualified professionals for many key roles. As a result, the state needs significant and focused investment for Vermont to meet the national benchmark for teacher preparation across all settings.

Systems that have successfully increased educator qualifications, "create on-ramps for the existing workforce and for the folks who are not necessarily on the path to a four-year degree and... develop pathways and supports for them to get the higher education that they need" (Barnett, 2024). For example, New Jersey preschool teachers in public schools and community-based settings have equivalent requirements: a bachelor's degree in early childhood education and a Preschool–3rd grade certification. To achieve this, the state supported teachers to obtain the required credentials over a six-year period through scholarship funding, supporting colleges to establish satellite classrooms convenient for teachers, and granting extra time for teachers who were making steady progress toward certification (Garver et al., 2023). Other states have implemented equivalent standards for community-based prekindergarten teachers by offering multiple pathways toward certification, including [giving credit for prior learning](#) to reflect extensive experience in prekindergarten classrooms prior to their PreK internship, providing [scholarships and financial incentives](#), using data to target recruitment, implementing TEACH [apprenticeship models](#), offering alternatives such as an [early childhood ancillary certificate](#) and offering [targeted support for credential completion](#) (Connors-Tadros, 2024).

Nationally, preschool teachers tend to earn less than K–12 teachers, and preschool teachers in community-based settings earn less than those in public schools (Garver et al., 2023). This pay differential makes it difficult to recruit and hire qualified prekindergarten educators. Increasing certification requirements for prekindergarten educators may exacerbate these workforce challenges. Therefore, working toward pay parity must be included in efforts toward greater teacher credentials (McClellan et al., 2017). Alabama and New Jersey addressed this issue by requiring that state-funded preschool teachers in community-based settings receive salaries commensurate with their peers in LEA settings and provide funding to meet this requirement (Garver et al.,

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<sup>2</sup> The current program that includes sponsorship of provisional educators' licenses by AOE is currently set to expire in June 2025.

2023). In all cases, these efforts have required targeted resources and five- to ten-year transition plans to see success.

## Data Systems

Vermont's vision is to use high-quality, up-to-date data to inform policy and programmatic decisions to improve equitable access to and quality of services, resources, and supports for young children, their families, and the early childhood system. This vision for data integration is held as a national best practice (Child Trends, 2017; Garver, 2024; Regenstein, 2022) and remains a priority in Vermont. The entity responsible for holding the vision and strategy for early childhood data integration and alignment efforts in Vermont is Building Bright Futures, in partnership with each agency, department, and division supporting children and families. The full overview of [Vermont's Vision for Early Childhood Data Integration and Data-Driven Decision-Making](#) can be found within [Vermont's Early Childhood Data and Policy Center](#).

Although Vermont has made progress in data-driven decision-making, there are significant challenges to achieving this vision (Building Bright Futures, 2020; Vermont Early Childhood Data and Policy Center, 2022). Early childhood constituents have reported that Vermont currently lacks the information and resources to sufficiently collect data that answer key policy and program questions. For example, Vermont lacks access to basic early childhood data, has limited ability to examine inequities across the early childhood system, lacks alignment in definitions and reporting periods, and experienced disruptions in data collection due to COVID-19 and measurement changes.

Additionally, Vermont's technological infrastructure is antiquated, and there are limited people and time to collect and analyze data. Data literacy is not promoted across the early childhood system, nor is the collection and use of data prioritized cross-sector collaboration. Data infrastructure and resources are primary drivers that could facilitate progress on data integration, close data gaps, and promote data informed decision making across sectors, and across the themes in this report.

As a result, throughout this process, the Committee encountered challenges with access and coordination of data related to prekindergarten education. Work has been done to examine Vermont's prekindergarten education system over the last ten years; however there remain significant gaps and limitations in the state's understanding of the current system (Crossman et al., 2023; Brouillette et al., 2023; [Appendix G](#)).

## Prekindergarten Oversight

The Committee focused their efforts on understanding how oversight of the prekindergarten system currently works. We developed a [UPK Oversight Matrix](#) to outline the system-level oversight roles of various organizations and agencies, including CDD, AOE, LEAs, SBE and BBF.

In legislation and in practice, Vermont’s prekindergarten system is overseen jointly by AOE and CDD. Together, state staff worked to develop the prekindergarten rules and VELs, develop prekindergarten implementation policies and materials, implement the Accountability and Continuous Improvement System (ACIS) to ensure compliance with UPK standards, and support school and program staff. AOE leads the program prequalification process, monitors multiple areas of program-level compliance, provides communication and support, leads state-level Early Childhood Special Education functions, supports Teaching Strategies GOLD implementation; publishes the Ready for K Survey, and supports inclusion through Early MTSS and other quality support efforts. CDD implements child care licensing and the STARS system, partners with AOE to monitor program-level compliance via the ACIS system, collaborates with LEAs to support identified children’s transitions from Early Intervention to school districts for special education, and supports multiple workforce development projects to increase credentials and professional support projects to improve quality and support inclusion.

Various research has found that having one, separate oversight body is highly effective for streamlining and amplifying the impact of prekindergarten. This recommendation is typically accompanied by a call for vision, leadership, and accountability for outcomes. A 2022 analysis conducted on Vermont’s early childhood system (inclusive of child care, prekindergarten education, and other supports and services targeted to children five and under) recommended “a new unit of state government that is focused entirely on early childhood, and that is not administered solely by either the Agency of Human Services or the Agency of Education” ([Regenstein and Patel, 2022](#)). This recommendation reflected complementary expertise and relationships held by both AOE and AHS. NIEER also highlighted Michigan’s creation of a new Michigan Department of Lifelong Education, Advancement, and Potential, which addresses early childhood education, higher education, and other extended learning programs. Additionally, NIEER commends West Virginia’s shared oversight for its long-standing WV Universal PreK Collaborative System that includes state and county level collaborative teams that include commissioning analysis used for other grades on each team.

Constituents interviewed about oversight described inconsistencies across the prekindergarten system that are associated with joint oversight across CDD and AOE. They specifically called out duplication and administrative burden in accounting and reporting requirements, as well as duplication of fingerprint supported background checks for public school staff. Superintendents, principals and school board members surveyed by the Committee identified streamlining joint oversight of their top considerations for expanding prekindergarten access as well as a top need for support for system oversight. As one survey respondent noted, “the regulations of a child care facility inside a public elementary school is a huge burden to the operation of the school for a majority of the student population served in a PK-6 setting.”

Head Start constituents reported on the particular challenges their programs face to comply with requirements of state agencies as well as federal program performance standards, fiscal accountability measures, and eligibility criteria. Protocols for

fingerprinting vary across entities and, because records are not allowed to be shared based on federal standards, the administrative burden of these protocols often falls to staff. They noted the importance of strong continuity, consistency and collaboration across the systems, as well as a shared focus on child outcomes across the prekindergarten system. State agency leaders agreed with the focus on child outcomes and reported that some difficulties or inconsistencies were due to implementation concerns at the SD/SU-level while other challenges are related to joint oversight.

Multiple constituent groups noted that Prekindergarten Coordinators help build capacity, bring consistency and play critical roles in liaising and coordinating across prekindergarten audiences, agencies and policies. Although all districts are required to designate a prekindergarten contact, there is no guidance on the expertise or time commitment required of this position. In districts that have formalized this role, some constituents identified significant benefits to families and programs as well as to the PreK-grade 12 education system.

## Financing

A fundamental piece of the Committee's charge was to understand the costs associated with expanding and sustaining prekindergarten. The Committee's discussion focused on the information needed to determine the costs of implementing prekindergarten as envisioned in Act 76, the difference between current costs and costs of that new model, and implications for the funding methodology. However, there remain gaps and next steps before Vermont has a full picture of the cost of expansion or can identify fiscally strategic options to sustain the expansion envisioned by Act 76.

In Fall 2023, the Committee reviewed cost and funding information and models to prepare a report on prekindergarten pupil weight as directed in Sec 26 of Act 76; [this report](#) was submitted to the legislature in December 2023 . The report explained that, while the Uniform Chart of Accounts collects data on prekindergarten costs at the school level, there is not a uniform methodology for allocating and reporting costs nor associated information on how many hours of prekindergarten education was provided. Thus, the state does not have an estimate for the current cost of prekindergarten education at the state, district, or program-level.

AOE and CDD consulted with NIEER on whether national research could provide an estimate on the cost of prekindergarten education in Vermont; NIEER provided an estimate in November 2023 that the cost of providing high-quality prekindergarten education in Vermont is \$13,626 per child/student; this is for 6 hours/day and 180 days/year, at NIEER quality standards, and with all teaching staff paid on par with public school educators . However, this does not include costs for construction or fit-up (including dedicated playgrounds), special education, or school/district-level administration including resources to manage partnerships with community-based Universal Prekindergarten programs.



Based on review of this information, the committee was unanimous in their belief that the pupil weight for a full-school-day, full-school-year prekindergarten education student would be at least 1.0 and most likely be more. The report recommended updating the Pupil Weighting Factors Report to include prekindergarten. In addition, it highlighted the need to address cost differences by program setting, student-teacher ratios, and staff qualifications.

The committee also discussed the methodology used to set the tuition rate paid to community-based prekindergarten providers. The statewide prekindergarten tuition rate for the 24/25 school year was \$3,884.00 to cover 10 hours per week, for 35 weeks during the academic year. As explained in [this memo](#), this amount is based on NIERR cost estimates in 2015 and increased each year based on the New England Economic Project cumulative price index. Members of the committee highlighted costs - such as staffing and insurance - that have increased more significantly than other costs in recent years. CDD shared that it planned to contract for a cost-of-care analysis for child care in early childhood and afterschool programs, and would request the analysis to include cost estimates for Universal Prekindergarten that could be adjusted for age, setting, and quality factors. Several committee members noted this analysis would be useful for determining an updated tuition formula for Universal Prekindergarten.

Concerns about the resources required for prekindergarten expansion was a top issue for superintendents, principals and school board members surveyed by the Committee. Most school leaders indicated the need for increased funding and cited concerns about the financial resources required, and the impact on school budgets overall. In the words of one school leader:

*This change to the publicly-funded Pre-K model will have a positive impact on the well-being of Vermont's children. With that said, in a time when schools are facing staffing, facilities and budget challenges, this change will have many unintended consequences that will impact the efficacy and financial stability of public education in our state.*

School leaders also outlined additional resource needs required to expand prekindergarten education to all four-year-olds, including staff planning and implementation time, physical infrastructure and materials, workforce capacity, training and support, transportation and technology upgrades.

Finally, several members of the committee pointed out the potential of financial benefits from a more school-driven four-year-old only model that may be able to leverage under-utilized classrooms, administrative capacity, and staffing in schools.

## Summary of Best Practices in Prekindergarten Education

Vermont currently aligns with national research on best practices in its approach to access for both 3-year-olds and 4-year-olds and use of a mixed-delivery system to ensure flexible options to meet diverse family needs. Vermont also has state-level benchmarks in place in seven of eleven nationally defined areas to ensure high-quality

prekindergarten education, including early learning and development standards, curriculum supports, teacher specialized training, class size and ratios, screenings and referrals, continuous quality improvements, safety standards and relationships.

Vermont has room for improvement in teacher preparation, data systems, system oversight and understanding the costs associated with expanding prekindergarten. Requirements for teacher preparation vary across prekindergarten settings, which reflects the challenges Vermont has faced to meet prekindergarten needs given shortages in the early childhood education workforce. To successfully move the benchmark for teacher preparation to be equivalent across settings, Vermont will need to invest in access, supports, alternative pathways and pay parity for prekindergarten educators.

Although work has been done to examine Vermont's prekindergarten education system, there remain significant gaps and limitations in the state's understanding of prekindergarten. Vermont's joint oversight structure of prekindergarten also leaves room for improvement in coordination and streamlining of cross-agency communication, regulation and monitoring. Finally, the Committee and constituents emphasized that Vermont is lacking key information about the costs of delivering prekindergarten and the resources required to successfully expand for four-year-olds.

## **Changes Proposed by Act 76**

In order to make recommendations on the changes necessary to provide prekindergarten education to all children through the public school system, through contracts with private providers, or both, the Committee needed clarity on how the changes proposed by Act 76 would impact the current system. Therefore, the considerations below are organized by four key changes to the prekindergarten system:

1. Make prekindergarten programs available for the full-school-day and full-school-year for all four-year-old children;
2. Transition three-year-olds from the current 10-hour prekindergarten benefit to the child care and early education system;
3. Require school districts to ensure four-year-olds whose families choose to access prekindergarten programs have access; and
4. Allow school districts to choose to provide prekindergarten programs directly within schools, through direct contracting with private programs or other public schools, or through a combination of these options.

The sections below describe the Committee's analysis of the implications of these proposed changes.

## **Make prekindergarten programs available for the full-school-day and full-school-year for all four-year-old children**

The Law charges Vermont to expand the current 350-hour/year state-funded prekindergarten benefit to a full-school-day and full-school-year schedule for all four-year-olds. This charge has implications for alignment with K-2 regulations and out-of-school care for families.

Overall, the Committee affirmed the desire to increase the number of hours that prekindergarten education is offered to Vermont children. Given national research that demonstrates that most children benefit from more hours (Atteberry et al., 2019; Reynolds, 1995), increasing the amount of high-quality prekindergarten education was a shared goal of committee members, though cost remained a concern.

Some committee members and constituents emphasized the need for and benefits of family choice, indicating that some families prefer a part-day program and may not opt into full-time programs. Others pointed out that many four-year-olds still need naps mid-day and it may not be cost-effective to include those in a prekindergarten model.

Other committee members highlighted benefits of more four-year-olds attending prekindergarten in the full-school-day model, including decreased transitions for some four-year-olds, and – if more students are served in school-based programs – the potential for increased oversight of instruction and increased access to school-based, wrap-around services and resources such as curriculum supports, professional development and coaching, special education services, and transportation.

### **Alignment with K-2 Regulations**

The Committee was charged to consider the minimum number of hours that shall constitute a full school day for both prekindergarten and kindergarten. To understand this change, the Committee explored the current State Board of Education regulations related to attendance and length of day for [prekindergarten](#) and [kindergarten through grade 2](#). Vermont does not mandate school attendance before age six, nor does it mandate full day kindergarten; though this is what Vermont experiences on the whole. The State Board rules define the length of school day for kindergarten as a minimum of two instructional hours. However, in any calendar week, five school days may be counted if the total number of hours of instructional time is equal to or exceeds 10 hours per week. Although most of Vermont's kindergartens report that they provide full-day programs, these data do not differentiate whether children are present for a full day or whether the program is open a full day for multiple classes. It is therefore difficult even to assess the current common practices across Vermont's kindergartens.

For grades 1-2, State Board rules define the length of a full school day as a minimum of four instructional hours including recess, excluding lunch. However, in any calendar week, five school days may be counted if the total number of hours of instructional time is equal to or exceeds 20 hours, including recess, excluding lunch. The term



“instructional time” used in these rules may not be applicable to prekindergarten, where “instruction” cannot be differentiated from play, and physical activity and rest are developmental requirements.

## Out-of-School Care

If state-funded prekindergarten programs become full-school-day and full-school-year, a new population of prekindergarten students will need afterschool and summer programs. While some children will likely still be served in full-day, full-year community-based prekindergarten partner programs, many will be more likely to be served at school-based programs. As a result, Vermont’s afterschool and summer programs will need to have capacity for four-year-olds and/or more early childhood child care programs will need to provide afterschool and summer care. These changes would typically require significant modifications to a program’s offerings and financial model. Currently, prekindergarten offered in center-based and home child care settings provides flexibility by offering a spot that seamlessly transitions from the ten hours per week of state-funded prekindergarten to full-day and full-year care when needed. There are also examples of public-school prekindergartens that partner with community-based providers to operate a program at the school, which can also alleviate transition concerns.

Vermont is currently developing capacity targets for universal afterschool and summer programming, and would need to adjust those targets if four-year-olds are to be included in the model. A recent analysis conducted by The Learning Agenda at the request of the Afterschool and Summer Learning Advisory Council found afterschool and summer program capacity for children K-12 could accommodate only 42% of K-5 students, with capacity by county varying widely from as low as 15% to as high as 73% (The Learning Agenda, 2024). The gaps will grow if more prekindergarten children need summer and afterschool care.

Presently, programs that provide care and education for Vermont’s three- and four-year-olds follow the Licensing Regulations for Center-Based Child Care and Preschool Programs. These include age-appropriate safety and best practices for those age groups. Out-of-school time programs that do not yet serve three- and/or four-year-olds would likely need to make significant changes to follow these regulations, as they currently follow the Afterschool Child Care Program regulations, designed to support children and youth in Kindergarten through early middle school. While many of the regulations are the same, there are differences in safety (equipment age rating), staff qualifications, ratios, supervision and movement within the licensed space (i.e. with or without a buddy, depending on age, brief period for which children and youth may be out of direct supervision by staff, not more than 10 minutes), curriculum and program implementation, sleep and rest accommodations, and facilities (child-sized toilets) that are reflect safety and quality standards.

Some committee members noted that many schools offer before- and after-school care, as well as vacation weeks and summer programming. They suggested removing the CDD Child Care Licensing requirements for Afterschool programs, which cause additional burden to school staff.

Committee members also noted that most afterschool and summer programs would still need to follow the appropriate Child Care Licensing regulations during those non-school hours. These programs participate in the Child Care Financial Assistance Program (CCFAP) to support affordable access to their programming for families and cannot lose access to that critical funding only available to regulated afterschool and summer programs.

### **Transition three-year-olds to the child care and early education system**

Under Vermont’s current Universal Prekindergarten law 16 V.S.A. § 829.b.3, both three-year-old and four-year-old children are entitled to prekindergarten education and the benefit level has been defined as at least 10 hours/week for 35 weeks. Section 2 of Act 76 charges Vermont to “transition three-year-olds out of the current prekindergarten benefit and into the child care and early education systems.” This change would have implications on access for three-year olds to prekindergarten education and, for those that need them, access to early childhood special education.

### **Access for Three-Year-Olds**

Children who attend two years of prekindergarten fare better in school than those who attend one year (Reynolds, 1995; Wen et al., 2012). Given this national research, many committee members disagreed strongly with this aspect of Act 76. Similarly, during interviews, constituents expressed concerns about the potential negative impacts that transitioning three-year-olds out of prekindergarten would have on children and families.

Committee members and constituents worried that, without access to state-funded prekindergarten, fewer three-year-olds would have access to any early care and learning programs before they were an age-eligible four-year-old. Committee members expressed concern about whether families would be able to afford group-based early care and learning experiences even with the expanded income eligibility for Child Care Financial Assistance since there are still significant family co-pays for most families; other families may not qualify at all if they do not have an accepted reason for needing child care. According to a [2019 study of PreK in Vermont](#), that interviewed a sample of parents:

*When asked what they would do if publicly-funded PreK were not available, about a third of parents reported that this would not affect their early education arrangements, another third would send their child to a different program or for fewer hours, and another third would not send their child to an early education or child care program at all. This alternative of not sending a child to any early education program was significantly more common for households with a full-*

*time caregiver (50%), and for low and mid-income families (48% and 41%, respectively). This suggests that for some children, access to Vermont’s publicly-funded PreK is the only exposure they have to high-quality early learning environments prior to kindergarten entry and, more importantly, they may go without any early education without Act 166.*

In addition, committee members and constituents were concerned that options may be limited for families seeking part time programs for three-year-olds because many child care programs are oriented to full-time care. Some constituents were concerned that fewer children would be identified early for specialized needs or developmental concerns thus compressing their services into one year before kindergarten. One principal surveyed by the Committee, for example, shared:

*I am incredibly disappointed that opportunities are going to be taken away from 3-year-old children. Our data supports great success from students receiving 2 years of high-quality PreK education. Particularly our children with disabilities benefit from 2 years in a consistent classroom setting. Removing 3-year-olds from the conversation continues to cause me concern and I fear that it will result in reduced outcomes for children.*

Constituents also worried about the continuity of care for young children who will have to transition to a school-based program at age four and need after care and summer care, and may have siblings in different programs.

During interviews with constituents, Committee members heard that “losing four-year-olds to public schools” could have devastating consequences for community-based prekindergarten programs’ educational and financial models and therefore for the system more broadly. Because early education varies across age groups – with younger children being more resource-intensive – these programs could not simply replace older children by filling slots with younger children. They also worried about a loss of age diversity that supports a healthy early learning environment and consistent educational experience for a child during a key developmental phase. Head Start programs identified a potential strain on their program resources and infrastructure as the program model is based on serving both three- and four-year-olds. If three-year-olds are no longer eligible for prekindergarten, Vermont’s Head Start programs may require additional funding and support to maintain program quality, effectiveness, and reach.

Constituents also suggested that focusing access on four-year-olds could limit investment in the existing mixed delivery system and reduce opportunities for deeper partnerships between school and community-based child care programs. They noted concerns about maintaining program stability and continuity amidst changes to prekindergarten, particularly in a system with considerable existing challenges with resources. Constituents cited the importance of collaboration and communication between oversight agencies, the need for alignment and coordination in transition planning, and the need for ongoing assessment and evaluation to monitor the impact of proposed changes in prekindergarten access.

## Access to Early Childhood Special Education for Three-Year-Olds

By federal law, school districts are responsible for finding, evaluating, and providing early childhood special education services for all students who are eligible within their geographic boundaries of the district. When a child three to six years of age qualifies for special education services, the funding and provision of services is articulated in an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) and “follow the child,” regardless of whether they are enrolled in a universal prekindergarten program and no matter what setting they attend for prekindergarten education.

Although federal law requires that children receive services regardless of whether or where they are enrolled in prekindergarten, prekindergarten participation is not mandated and the services not required to be offered in conjunction with the child’s prekindergarten education. Sometimes special education services are provided in the school setting but not within a prekindergarten classroom setting, and sometimes special education services are provided outside of the public school settings either at the child’s home or their community-based prekindergarten program. Parents choose where to enroll their child(ren) in early childhood programs and IEP teams determine the least restrictive learning environment (LRE) for the child where the school can offer special education services. If three-year-olds are removed from public-funded prekindergarten, a core resource to support school districts in providing mandated special education services to three-year-olds will be removed.

The committee and subcommittees also heard from parents and discussed experiences when the setting identified as the least restrictive learning environment for special education services was in conflict with the family’s choice for prekindergarten. When a parent enrolls their child in a setting outside of the school district geographic boundary, they may forgo special education services or take on responsibility of transporting their child to services away from their prekindergarten program. This complexity, combined with resource shortages in school districts, can result in families having to choose between the prekindergarten program that works for their family and accessing special education services.

For a system that is already stretched and struggling to meet demand for special education services, the unknown impact of dramatic changes to prekindergarten through Act 76 worried many constituents. Even when school districts develop creative solutions, resource constraints make it difficult to provide early childhood special education services outside of public school settings. Vermont Head Start directors reported that they perceived a reduction in early childhood special education services within the Head Start setting since the enactment of Act 166 (2014). They described this as a hardship for families who then need to manage transportation for their child to and from public school buildings mid-day, and is disruptive to children who need consistency and routines to be successful, particularly children on the autism spectrum, with social-emotional and behavioral challenges, or with substantial developmental delays.

In the Committee’s survey of superintendents, twenty-nine of forty-two (69%) reported their school district would need to modify the provision of special education services if three-year olds could no longer enroll in prekindergarten. District concerns focused on the need for dedicated classrooms or spaces to provide required early childhood special education services for 3-years-olds; the staffing and time required to provide more community- and home-based services and/or to support transportation for children and families; and worries about transition planning for three-year-olds as they move from early intervention services into the public school system with fewer classrooms and resources to support them before they are able to enroll in prekindergarten. Concerns about the impact on three-year-olds and their families were also prevalent, including negative impacts on the most vulnerable children (children with disabilities, special health care needs, English language learners, historically marginalized populations); and worries that three-year-olds would have less time in an early childhood education setting, negatively impacting socialization and family wellness.

Finally, described above, Vermont is experiencing a significant workforce gap in the education sector, which includes special educators serving the PreK-12 system. Recruitment and retention are some of the biggest challenges and may be associated with the high rates of mental health, behavioral challenges, disabilities, and special health care needs of children. Finding more special educators who are trained specifically to provide services for the very youngest learners will present an even greater challenge. And the increased strain on existing resources, constituents worried, may also mean there are fewer special educators available to service children in community-based programs and less support and oversight of special educators in community environments.

## **Require School Districts to Ensure Four-Year-Olds Whose Families Choose to Access Prekindergarten Programs Have Access**

The Law charges school districts with the responsibility of ensuring there is sufficient access to prekindergarten programs to meet the demand of four-year-olds who enroll in the expanded state-funded programs. This charge has capacity implications for infrastructure, workforce and Vermont border towns.

### **Capacity**

The Committee’s surveys of Vermont school leaders gathered feedback from 42 superintendents, 62 principals, and 13 school board members about how they would create capacity to ensure prekindergarten to all four-year-olds. Overarchingly, survey feedback from school leaders revealed interest and support for expanding to all four-year-olds, along with deep concerns about capacity for implementing the change. One school leader shared, for example, “it would require many hours of thoughtful planning to make this work for our district”; another asked, “Is this really the right time to add an additional burden on struggling school districts?”. Still another summarized the tension like this:



*This change to the publicly-funded Pre-K model will have a positive impact on the well-being of Vermont's children. With that said, in a time when schools are facing staffing, facilities and budget challenges, this change will have many unintended consequences that will impact the efficacy and financial stability of public education in our state.*

Although there is no analysis on exactly how many schools would need to make physical changes to their building(s), concerns about facilities and physical infrastructure requirements prevailed among respondents. School leaders identified needs to retrofit existing classrooms or create new developmentally appropriate physical spaces for four-year-olds (including bathrooms, sinks, playgrounds, roofing/plumbing, running water, heating/cooling, furniture, and materials, etc.), as well as to address deferred maintenance, create playground space, purchase equipment, furniture, supplies, organization and storage materials, invest in safety, health, compliance infrastructure and space, accommodate food service infrastructure, and address ADA compliance.

The infrastructure challenges were identified by both large and small school districts. Whereas one school administrator wondered, “larger school districts do not have the space or budget to add 7-8 additional classrooms with staffing in order to implement Act 76. I wonder how the state will be able to support this legislation financially?”; another asked “I think that this would be difficult to accomplish in smaller communities where infrastructure can and will be a problem. Where will the classrooms be and how will buildings change to accommodate these new rooms?” The Committee did not have access to a representative from the School Construction Aid Task Force but noted a strong desire to have prekindergarten capacity included in any statewide school construction analysis and initiatives.

School leaders also identified concerns about workforce shortages across sectors. One principal described this challenge:

*It is increasingly difficult to find quality, licensed Early Educators in our area. The last time we hired a PreK teacher we had just one applicant. If we have to provide classroom space for all of our district 4-year-olds then we will need to hire at least 2 more licensed early educators and at least 2 more classroom paras.*

Respondents named a wide range of workforce capacity needs that would result from the change, including leadership/directors, qualified ECEs with licenses, ECSE and support staff (Paras, speech, OT, PT, etc.), afterschool providers, UPK Coordinators/point person within SDs/regions, administrative staff and support positions, bus drivers and custodial and food service staff. One superintendent described the workforce complexity in this way:

*Our program currently runs Monday through Thursday. Expanding PreK capacity would mean we would need additional funding to pay teaching assistants for 5 days a week as well as more teaching assistants. We have found from our*

*experience that having 3 adults for 15 students is incredibly helpful in providing the needed support to 3 and 4 years. If we were to expand our classrooms to their full capacity, I would suggest an additional adult in each classroom. Our district would need to expand transportation to 4-year-olds for the school year and hire more drivers to possibly transport 3-year-olds who need ESCE services at the school. If we changed our model for providing service to 3-year-olds at their private programs, we may need to budget for an additional ECSE. We would also have to expand our after-school programming to include 4-year-olds meaning we could need to hire more after school staff.*

## **Adjacent State Considerations**

Some families living in Vermont border towns struggle to access Vermont's publicly-funded prekindergarten programs. The committee was asked to consider "whether there are areas of the State where prekindergarten education can be more effectively and conveniently furnished in an adjacent state due to geographic considerations."

For example, constituents in Essex County described their rural and predominantly low-income region as a "child care desert" where, according to BFIS data from June 2024, no prekindergarten programs exist to serve eligible children in the district. Instead, many families cross the border to New Hampshire to attend the nearest prekindergarten programs, as well as to access healthcare and K-12 schooling. As a result, these families pay full tuition for prekindergarten, or do not attend prekindergarten education at all. In addition, Vermont is limited in its ability to support the well-being of these children with data collection and connections to service providers of all types.

Constituents from Essex County [proposed a solution](#) to extend the prekindergarten benefit to the New Hampshire school districts where they already have tuition agreements and infrastructure to support adjacent state K-12 public education. Although this solution may present administrative and political challenges, there is precedent for Vermont providing adjacent state tuition. Additionally, due to the potentially small number of impacted families, a case-by-case solution may be sufficient and policy-level change unnecessary.

Some committee members questioned the need for and feasibility of supporting enrollment in prekindergarten in adjacent states. They wondered if there is a comparison of distance traveled out-of-state and the distance traveled by some families and children within rural districts that are geographically large. They also expressed concerns about lack of oversight for program quality in programs out of state and enthusiasm that implementation of all-day prekindergarten for all four-year-old children will ensure that there will be available programming throughout all school districts. Other committee members emphasized the need for flexibility, especially in areas where children attend K-12 out-of-state, to ensure that all Vermont children have access to prekindergarten education.

## **Allow school districts to choose to provide prekindergarten programs directly within schools, through direct contracting with private programs or other public schools, or through a combination of these options.**

The Law charges school districts to make decisions about where prekindergarten education is furnished – in schools or through contracts with center-based, home child care, or other public school programs.

Vermont’s current Universal Prekindergarten law 16 V.S.A. § 829.b.3 states that “If requested by the parent or guardian of a prekindergarten child, the school district of residence shall pay tuition to a prequalified program operated by a private provider or a public school in another district even if the district of residence operates a prekindergarten education program.” In this model, the family is responsible for finding and choosing prekindergarten education for their child and the school district must pay tuition to any prequalified prekindergarten program selected by the family if the child is not attending a program directly operated by their local school district.

The change proposed in Section 2 of Act 76 gives school districts the opportunity to choose how it would like to implement prekindergarten for its students; the district could choose to serve all children directly or it could serve some students directly and others via a contract. A significant difference is that school districts could choose which prequalified prekindergarten programs they would like to partner with. Based on analysis of prekindergarten data reviewed by the committee, during the 23/24 school year, some school districts pay tuition to as many as 48 UPK partner programs (though the average is closer to 15), and some partner programs work with as many as 26 school districts (average is closer to 4).

Committee members pointed out that this change could limit families’ access to prekindergarten, especially if the school district could not provide a prekindergarten space that included full-day, year-round care for families that need it. In addition, families that are already established at a quality prekindergarten partner program may find their district doesn’t partner with the program that works for their family.

Other committee members emphasized that this could also significantly streamline universal prekindergarten administration for some school districts by providing greater control over the partnership agreements they enter into. Some school districts may reduce the number of prekindergarten partnership agreements and build deeper relationships with fewer programs. However, the impact would vary by district since some districts would still need many partner programs to be able to ensure a prekindergarten spot for every eligible child.

## **Summary of Changes Proposed by Act 76**

The committee analyzed how four changes proposed by Act 76 would impact the current system.



1. Make prekindergarten programs available for the full-school-day and full-school-year for all four-year-old children.

Given national research demonstrating that children benefit from more hours or prekindergarten, the committee generally agreed with increasing the number of hours that prekindergarten education is offered to Vermont children. However, when defining the number of hours that constitute a full-school-day, alignment with Kindergarten regulations, including attendance and mandated hours, should be considered, to create a continuum of PreK-grade 2 regulations. Expanding prekindergarten hours also has significant implications for afterschool and summer programs, many of which are already at capacity, and would require significant changes to meet developmental and safety needs for three- and four-year-olds.

2. Transition three-year-olds to the child care and early education system.

Based on national research that children who attend two years of prekindergarten fare better in school than those who attend one, many committee members disagreed strongly with this proposed change. This concern was similarly reflected by constituents, who expressed concerns about the potential negative impacts that transitioning three-year-olds out of prekindergarten would have on children's access to prekindergarten and early childhood special education services; families' choices and access to continuity of care; and financial impacts on private programs and the mixed delivery system.

3. Require school districts to ensure four-year-olds whose families choose to access prekindergarten programs have access.

Constituents, particularly school leaders, expressed both interest in expanding prekindergarten to all four-year-olds, as well as deep concern about their capacity to implement this change during this period of turbulence in public education. Constituents and committee members cited capacity challenges with workforce, facilities and infrastructure, administrative requirements, and transition planning as obstacles to implementation. The Committee also considered families living in Vermont border towns who access prekindergarten in adjacent states due to a lack of Vermont-based prekindergarten programs that would have to be addressed.

4. Allow school districts to choose to provide prekindergarten programs directly within schools, through direct contracting with private programs or other public schools, or through a combination of these options.

This change would transfer the onus of finding and enrolling in publicly-funded prekindergarten programs from families to school districts. School districts would decide where prekindergarten education is furnished – in schools or through contracts with center-based, family child care, or other public school programs. This change could streamline administration for some school districts. It could also negatively impact families' choice and access to prekindergarten and limit private providers' control over participating in prekindergarten programming.

## Recommendations

The Committee was unable to vote on a full suite of recommendations but established the following four recommendations as critical next steps toward expanding access to prekindergarten education in Vermont.

→ ***Maintain the 10-hour/week (350 hours/year) prekindergarten benefit for three-year-olds and four-year-olds***

Fifteen out of eighteen (83%) committee members voted in favor of this recommendation. One member was absent from the vote and two members abstained. One of those who abstained explained that it was because he believed that prekindergarten education was an “entitlement” rather than a “benefit.”

→ ***Expand prekindergarten access, including hours and services, for four-year olds***

Fifteen out of eighteen (83%) committee members voted in favor of this recommendation. One member was absent. Two members abstained. One explained her abstention was due to the pressure of increased costs on school boards.

→ ***Commission an analysis of Vermont’s pupil weight for prekindergarten.***

Twelve out of eighteen (66%) committee members voted in favor of this recommendation. One voted against, two abstained, and three members were absent from the vote. Those who abstained noted that the recommendation does not include increasing ADM to 1.0 for those already providing full-day prekindergarten.

→ ***Review methodology for establishing prekindergarten payments to non-school-based programs and propose updates.***

Ten out of eighteen (56%) committee members voted in favor of this recommendation. Six voted against, one abstained, and one member was absent from the vote. Of the six who voted against this recommendation, most (5/6) voted in favor of a proposed amendment to the recommendation that included “focused on efficiency and effectiveness” at the end. Committee members who voted against the proposed amendment stated that they supported a focus on efficiency and effectiveness, but thought this amendment should apply to an analysis of all prekindergarten programs, not just non-school-based programs.

## Additional Considerations

In addition to the recommendations above, the Committee discussed considerations for improving and expanding Vermont’s prekindergarten education system. One key area of agreement is that significant work remains to create a realistic and responsive implementation plan. This might be carried out by a working group with capacity, ability, programmatic expertise, and policy experience to create an implementation plan, update statute, and draft legislative language. It was also discussed that a

prekindergarten expansion could only be successful if considered within broader conversations about public education, specifically as part of the work of the Commission on the Future of Public Education.

There is also a need to gather information that will be critical to making informed choices about implementing a prekindergarten expansion. This might include analyzing and modeling the costs to deliver prekindergarten education within the current system, as well as for the proposed expansion, and conducting additional research on demand and capacity. One consideration is that state agencies and school districts, as well as relevant state committees (i.e., Commission on the Future of Public Education, School Construction Aid Task Force, Building Bright Futures State Advisory Council) should collaborate to assess needs related to expanding prekindergarten and create implementation plans and timelines. There is shared understanding that efficiency and effectiveness are key criteria through which to examine the overall prekindergarten education delivery model and consider changes.

To move toward meeting national benchmarks for teacher preparation, the Committee discussed the importance of transition plans, resources, and timelines to support success. Other states have successfully increased the number of lead/classroom prekindergarten teachers with a bachelor's degree and ECE or ECSE endorsements, and Vermont has existing efforts to support pathways to teacher qualifications. The lessons and successes of these models should guide the planning and benchmarking as Vermont moves toward meeting the national benchmark for teacher preparation. Vermont is not far off from meeting the national benchmark for professional development and coaching and could make considerable progress by defining the coaching requirements and frequency across prekindergarten settings and by leveraging Vermont's existing coaching and mentoring models.

To improve data systems, the Committee discussed strengthening Vermont's capacity for ongoing assessment and evaluation to monitor the delivery and effectiveness of high-quality prekindergarten education and access to comprehensive services. This could include tasking the Agency of Education, Child Development Division, and Building Bright Futures to create and implement a new monitoring and accountability protocol with robust research and data collection, as well as an analysis process to monitor prekindergarten education in Vermont. Additionally, the field could benefit from agreement on a cycle of planning, observation, and feedback across agencies that ensures data on classroom quality is systematically collected and that local programs and the state both use information from the CQIS to help improve policy or practice.

To simplify and streamline system oversight, consideration should be given to strengthening state-level prekindergarten collaboration with cross-sector input to guide ongoing policy and implementation. The Committee also discussed the importance of reviewing statutes for mandatory offerings and the length-of-day to create alignment across prekindergarten and grades K, 1 and 2. Clarifying the role of prekindergarten

coordinators, and aligning systems related to educator qualifications, continuing education, and regulations across agencies, should also be considered.

To address the needs of border towns without access to prekindergarten programs in Vermont, the state should consider developing equivalent prequalification pathways for prekindergarten programs in adjacent-state-areas where there is already an interstate public education agreement in place, so that prekindergarten children could attend the same institution for prekindergarten as they will for kindergarten.

To address family challenges with accessing special education services for prekindergarten-aged students, considerations might include identifying school districts where families feel well-supported and building on these successes to support districts that are struggling. Another consideration might be to research opportunities for districts to share early childhood special education resources within small regions to ensure efficient and effective support for prekindergarten-aged children and reduce challenges with cross-district service provision.

## Model Contract

The Prekindergarten Education Implementation Committee was also charged with developing a model for a contract for school districts to use for contracting with private providers for prekindergarten education services. A subcommittee, including the committee co-chairs, members of the AOE early education and legal teams, and committee members Sandra Cameron and Rebecca Webb met to discuss this contract.

The subcommittee agreed that the goals of developing this model contract included reducing the administrative burden to both schools districts and private providers, as well as providing consistent guidance on the expectations, language and process across partnerships. Currently, the Agency of Education offers [Universal Prekindergarten Partnership Agreement Recommendations](#), which were developed in consultation with school district prekindergarten coordinators to offer guidance for districts.

The subcommittee discussed that the following areas should be addressed in a standardized statewide contract that considers the needs of all parties:

- Per Act 76, an antidiscrimination provision that requires compliance with the Vermont Public Accommodations Act, 9 V.S.A. chapter 139, and the Vermont Fair Employment Practices Act, 21 V.S.A. chapter 5, subchapter 6. The Agency of Education offered this provisional language which is used in the Approved Independent School application: *I assure that the program complies, to the fullest extent consistent with its constitutional and statutory rights, with the Vermont Public Accommodations Act (9 V.S.A. chapter 139) and the Vermont Fair Employment Practices Act (21 V.S.A. chapter 5, subchapter 6) in all aspects of the school's admissions and operations.*

- Per Act 76 Sec. 2a, requirements related to the provision of special education services. The above discussion of concerns related to special education for prekindergarten children should be considered.
- Clarity on indemnification and insurance provisions that reflects both legal needs and practical concerns of school districts and UPK partner programs. Discussion should include the safety elements included via child care licensing regulations. Discussion should address both general liability and sexual abuse and molestation coverage; a key reference is this June 2024 joint memo from CDD and AOE: [Memo: Insurance Provisions within Universal Prekindergarten Partnership Agreements, Agency of Education](#).
- Recourse when AOE and CDD do not respond to Administrative Complaints as outlined in 2600 Rules.
- Clarity regarding 5-year-olds who are age-eligible for kindergarten and compulsory attendance (which begins at age 6).
- Practices related to student registration (“enrollment”), attendance, and payments.

Creating a standardized contract also provides an opportunity to convene relevant stakeholders to discuss and clarify the following:

- ☒ How the standard contract can create efficiencies for the system and reduce administrative burden for both UPK partner providers and school districts – knowing that these can sometimes be in tension, particularly when there are many layers of local control.
- ☒ Standardizing a calendar that includes tuition dates and school cycles.
- ☒ Standardizing registration and attendance policies to reduce administrative burden for both private providers and school districts.
- ☒ Standardizing payment provisions while recognizing these may depend on the demographics of families within the district.
- ☒ Clarify systems of accountability for partner programs.
- ☒ Clarify compliance requirements and other responsibilities for districts.

For next steps, the subcommittee recommends that AOE and CDD convene stakeholders to discuss the topics above; the committee should include representatives from the Agencies, school district business offices, school district prekindergarten coordinators, and private prekindergarten partner programs.

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## Glossary

The following terms and acronyms are specific to Vermont and/or early childhood systems:

- ACIS - Accountability and Continuous Improvement System: The monitoring system established and implemented to ensure all prequalified public and private PreK education programs maintain compliance with Act 166.
- Act 166: Vermont's universal prekindergarten law passed in 2014.
- Act 76: A law passed in 2023 that relates to child care, early education, workers' compensation, and unemployment insurance.  
<https://legislature.vermont.gov/Documents/2024/Docs/ACTS/ACT076/ACT076%20As%20Enacted.pdf>
- ADM - Average Daily Membership: A funding formula used through the Vermont Department of Education to support the cost of educating children in the public school system. Early childhood programs may qualify to access this funding if they meet the requirements set forth by the DOE.  
<http://education.vermont.gov/data-and-reporting/school-reports/average-daily-membership>
- AHS - Agency of Human Services: The goal is to improve the conditions of well-being of Vermonters today and tomorrow and protect those who cannot protect themselves. AHS funds programs and provide services both directly through our departments and in cooperation with our community partners. Areas include criminal justice, health issues, children/families, juvenile justice, mental health, substance abuse and elderly/disabled. <http://humanservices.vermont.gov/>
- AOE - Agency of Education: <http://education.vermont.gov>
- BBF - Building Bright Futures: A public/private partnership to leverage private contributions to sustain a system of early childhood services to Vermont's children. <http://www.buildingbrightfutures.org>
- CCFAP - Child Care Financial Assistance Program: A program of Vermont's Department of Children and Families, also known as subsidy, that provides financial support to eligible families to help pay for child care.  
<https://dcf.vermont.gov/benefits/ccfap>
- CDA - Child Development Associate: Facilitated through the Council for Professional Recognition in Washington, DC, the CDA National Credentialing Program's purpose is to enhance the quality of child care by defining, evaluating and recognizing the competence of child care providers and home visiting. A provider becomes a CDA or earns their CDA credential. [www.cdacouncil.org](http://www.cdacouncil.org)
- CDD - Child Development Division, State of VT Child Development Division (within the Agency of Human Services' Department of Children and Families): The mission is to assure a statewide system that promotes and supports safe, accessible, quality child care for Vermont families. In addition to co-administering Universal Prekindergarten, services include child care subsidy, licensing and regulatory oversight for child care programs, professional

development systems and quality improvement incentives (such as bonuses for credentials and degrees, training dollars for community workshops and college courses, grants). <http://dcf.vermont.gov/cdd>

- Center-based child care/preschool program: Provides care for children in a dedicated space that is not located in a home. These programs are also regulated by the state and have two or more staff who have specific training or formal education in early childhood care and education. Licensed child care centers offer many different types of programs, and may focus on a particular age group, such as preschool.
- Child Care Licensing Regulations: The rules that govern regulated child care programs in the State of Vermont. <https://dcf.vermont.gov/cdd/laws-rules/licensing>
- Child Find: Counts the percentage of children evaluated within 60 days of parental consent for initial evaluation or state time frame.
- CLASS - Classroom Assessment Scoring System: An observational instrument developed at the Curry School Center for Advanced Study of Teaching and Learning to assess classroom quality in PK-12 classrooms. It describes multiple dimensions of teaching that are linked to student achievement and development and has been validated in over 2,000 classrooms. <http://teachstone.com/class/>
- Early MTSS: A tiered framework of evidence-based practices developed by two national, federally funded research and training centers, the Center on the Social and Emotional Foundation for Early Learning (CSEFEL) and The Center for Early Literacy Learning (CELL) along with recommendations of the US. Dept of Education and US. Department of Health and Human Services to address the identified need and prioritize support for young children's (birth through age 8) social/emotional and early literacy development.
- ESCE - Early Childhood Special Education: ECSE is administered through local school districts to ensure access and participation in early childhood programs for children aged three to six who are determined eligible for services.
- ECE - Early Childhood Education: Early Childhood Education is a term that refers to educational programs and strategies geared toward children from birth to the age of eight. This time period is widely considered the most vulnerable and crucial stage of a person's life. Early childhood education often focuses on guiding children to learn through play. The term commonly refers to preschool or infant/child care programs.
- Family child care home/preschool program: Registered Family Child Care Homes (Registered FCCHs): Also known as family providers or home-based providers, registered FCCHs provide early care and education programs in the early childhood educator's own home for children from more than two families. These home-based providers have gone through a licensing process with CDD to certify

that they meet specific regulations that promote children’s health, safety, and development in order to care for a small group of children. Registered FCCHs are the most common type of regulated, home-based child care in Vermont. Licensed Family Child Care Homes (Licensed FCCHs): As with registered FCCHs, licensed FCCHs offer a regulated home-based option for child care. The difference between registered FCCHs and licensed FCCHs is that licensed FCCHs typically care for more than six children with the support of an assistant. Like registered FCCHs, licensed FCCHs have received a license with CDD to certify that they meet specific regulations that promote children’s health, safety, and development. Since licensed FCCHs care for more children than registered FCCHs, they must meet additional regulations.

- Head Start: Federal program funded through Office of the Administration for Children and Families to support children's growth from birth to age 5 through high-quality services centered around early learning and development, health, and family well-being. Available at no cost to children ages birth to 5 in every state, many tribal nations, and several U.S. territories, including Puerto Rico.
- IDEA Part B - Individuals with Disabilities Education Act: Part B includes provisions related to formula grants that assist states in providing a free appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment for children with disabilities ages three through 21.
- IDEA Part C – Individuals with Disabilities Education Act: Early Intervention program for infants and toddlers provides a broad array of services to children with special needs, birth through three years of age, and their families.
- IEP - Individual Education Plan: is a legal document that outlines a child's special education services and is required for all public school students aged three through 21 who need special education.
- LEA - Local education Agency: A local entity involved in education including but not limited to school districts, county offices of education, direct-funded charter schools, and special education local plan area (SELPA).
- Mixed delivery system: An approach in which public preschool and child care are offered through a variety of settings, including local education agencies (LEAs) as well as non-LEA settings, such as Head Start agencies, community-based child care centers and family child care homes.
- NIEER - National Institute of Early Education Research: An organization that conducts academic research to inform policy supporting high-quality, early education for all young children. <https://nieer.org/>
- NAEYC - National Association for the Education of Young Children: AA professional membership organization that works to promote high-quality early learning for all young children, birth through age 8, by connecting early childhood practice, policy, and research. <https://www.naeyc.org/>

- PEIC - Prekindergarten Education Implementation Committee: Established under Act 76 “to assist the Agency of Education in improving and expanding accessible, affordable, and high-quality prekindergarten education for children on a full-day basis on or before July 1, 2026”.  
<https://legislature.vermont.gov/Documents/2024/Docs/ACTS/ACT076/ACT076%20As%20Enacted.pdf>
- QRIS - Quality Rating Improvement System: QRIS is a system of evaluating the quality of early care and school-age care and education programs. Vermont’s Quality Rating System is called STARS. <https://qrisguide.acf.hhs.gov>
- Ready for Kindergarten! Survey: R4K!S is a readiness assessment of children entering kindergarten about students’ knowledge and skills within the first six to ten weeks of school.
- Regulated Programs: Child care/prekindergarten programs that go through a licensing process with the Vermont Department for Children and Families Child Development Division requiring them to meet health and safety regulations and programming guidelines. The licensing process also requires the state to inspect programs to make sure they provide a safe and age-appropriate space and meet other regulations and guidelines for child care and early childhood education.
- SBE - State Board of Education: Pursuant to [Title 16 of the Vermont Statutes, Chapter 3](#), the State Board of Education is responsible for making regulations governing: attendance and records of attendance of all pupils, standards for student performance, adult basic education programs, approval of independent schools, disbursement of funds, and equal access for all Vermont students to a quality education. The governing regulations are outlined in the [State Board of Education Rules](#).
- SD - school district: An entity responsible for operating one or more public schools, or [paying tuition] for students in the district. School districts are governed by a publicly elected [school board]. Vermont has [several types of school districts], with some being a single town or city, and others encompassing multiple towns.
- STARS - STep Ahead Recognition System: STARS is Vermont’s quality recognition system for child care, preschool, and afterschool programs. Programs that participate in stars are stepping ahead — going above and beyond state regulations to provide professional services that meet the needs of children and families. <http://dcf.vermont.gov/childcare/parents/stars>
- SU - supervisory union: An entity that oversees and administers Vermont’s public schools, provide administrative and support services to their member school districts, set curriculum and manage special education. Often supervisory unions and school districts are one and the same. In these cases, the functions of the school district and supervisory union are performed by the Supervisory District.

- System for Program Access to Resources for Quality Supports (SPARQS): An initiative to support Vermont’s early childhood education and afterschool programs facilitated by the Vermont Association for the Education of Young Children (VTAEYC) in partnership with Vermont Afterschool provides consultation, coaching, mentoring, technical assistance, and program quality assessment.
- TSG - Teaching Strategies Gold: TSG is an assessment tool used in early education classrooms. <http://teachingstrategies.com>
- UPK - Universal Prekindergarten: A policy framework that ensures any family who wants to enroll their preschool-aged child in a publicly-funded, prekindergarten care and education program has the opportunity to make that choice. In Vermont, UPK is funded by school districts and voluntary for families. UPK programs must meet state criteria to participate and can be located in public schools, center-based settings or family child care homes.
- VELs - Vermont Early Learning Standards: The Vermont Early Learning Standards (VELs) help inform families about the development and capabilities of children from birth through grade 3 and guide educators in the development and selection of program-wide curriculum and educational strategies for children from birth through grade 3. These standards are central to the shared vision of what we want for young children in Vermont; and highlight the importance of high-quality early childhood experiences as the foundation for school success and lifelong learning. Plainly said, early experiences matter. Beginning in 2012, a cross-section of early childhood development and education stakeholders convened to begin the task of revising the VELs; originally published in 2003. <http://education.vermont.gov/student-support/early-education/vermont-early-learning-standards>
- VTNEA - Vermont-National Education Association: A union of Vermont teachers, administrators, and other educators associated with elementary and secondary schools and colleges and universities. <https://vtnea.org/about-vt-nea>

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## Appendix

### Appendix A: Online Survey Questions for Public Prekindergarten Teachers

The following survey questions were emailed to prekindergarten teachers through the VTNEA email list.

Vermont-NEA is one of 18 members of the Legislatively created PreK Education Implementation Committee. The Committee is charged with making recommendations to the Legislature about how to support PreK education in Vermont with a specific focus on how best to support and expand the education of 3, 4, and 5-year-olds in our publicly-funded PreK programs. This includes both PreK programs run by public schools and private programs, as well as increasing the hours of publicly-funded PreK and the specific options for increasing the number and placement of 4-year-olds. We are asking Vermont-NEA members who work in PreK classrooms to share some thoughts with the "Systems Level Working Group" of the PreK Education Implementation Committee. Other stakeholder groups are being asked these same questions. These answers will help inform the work of this sub-committee and the full committee as they work on recommendations to the legislature next January. Thanks for being willing to take a few minutes to share your thoughts. Your comments will be kept confidential.

#### 1. Value Needs

- What should we think about in order to evolve into a PreK-4 system?
- What will this mean for families?
- What might change and what might stay the same?

#### 2. Practical Needs

- What will this look like practically?
- What info, resources and support will we need?
- What tools already exist?

#### 3. Legal Needs

- What legal implications must be considered?

#### 4. System Oversight

- What might a system change mean for families?
- How might they experience



- What might change and what will stay the same?
5. Transitioning 3-year-olds
    - What should we consider as we think about transitioning 3-year-olds out of the 10-hour PreK benefit?
    - What will this mean for educators? What changes will be necessary?
    - What will stay the same? What impacts can you imagine?
  6. Any other thoughts you would like to share about the future of public PreK in Vermont and what you need to continue to support your students?

## Appendix B: Group Interview Protocol

The following interview protocol was used to facilitate conversations with private PreK Teachers, UPK coordinators, Leaders from AOE, CDD, AHS and Gov. Office and Head Start Constituents.

Needs	Questions
Questions related to <b>Value Needs</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>What should we think about in order to evolve into a PreK-4 system?</i></li> <li>• <i>What will this mean for us?</i></li> <li>• <i>What might change and what might stay the same?</i></li> <li>• <i>What should we think about as we plan for this moving forward?</i></li> <li>• <i>[What will be important for families to know and understand?]</i></li> </ul>
Questions related to <b>Practical Needs</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>What will this look like practically?</i></li> <li>• <i>What support, information and resources will we need?</i></li> <li>• <i>What tools already exist?</i></li> <li>• <i>[How will this impact family experience day-to-day?]</i></li> </ul>
Questions related to <b>Legal Needs</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>What legal implications must be considered?</i></li> </ul>
Questions related to <b>System Oversight</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>What should we consider as we think about system oversight?</i></li> <li>• <i>What will this mean for us?</i></li> <li>• <i>What might change and what might stay the same?</i></li> <li>• <i>[How might families experience this?]</i></li> </ul>
Questions related to <b>Transitioning 3-year-olds</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>What should we consider as we think about transitioning 3-year-olds out of the 10-hour PreK benefit?</i></li> <li>• <i>What will this mean for us?</i></li> <li>• <i>What might change and what might stay the same? What will stay the same?</i></li> <li>• <i>What impacts can we imagine?</i></li> <li>• <i>[How might families experience this?]</i></li> </ul>

## Appendix C: Online Survey Questions for Principals

The following survey questions were emailed to principals through the Vermont Principals Association email list.

1. What considerations should we think about in order to evolve into a PreK-4 system? Please check all that apply.
  - Implementing developmentally appropriate practices aligned with children's needs
  - Ensuring program quality standards and certified educators
  - Addressing the financial implications and funding plans
  - Supporting social and emotional and academic readiness for kindergarten
  - Aligning with special education requirements and least restrictive environments
  - Other...
2. What support, information and resources will you need to have 4-year-olds full time in your school? Check all that apply.
  - Curriculum materials and lesson plans
  - Training for teachers on early childhood education
  - Classroom space and facilities suitable for young children
  - Support staff (e.g. aides, counselors)
  - Parent engagement strategies and resources
  - Funding and budget considerations
  - Health and safety guidelines specific to young children
  - Access to community resources and partnerships
  - Streamlined agency oversight to reduce administrative burden and general confusion
  - Other...
3. What is already in place for you to move forward?
4. What support would you need for system oversight?
  - Data management and analysis tools
  - Regular performance metrics and evaluation processes
  - Training on compliance and regulatory requirements
  - Budget management and financial oversight
  - Communication systems for stakeholder engagement

- Professional development for leadership and management skills
- Risk management and mitigation strategies
- Technology infrastructure for monitoring and reporting
- Other...

5. What would your plan for three-year-olds be?

- Keep 3-year-olds in district programming regardless of loss of state funding
- Transition 3-year-olds to the child care system
- Offer a hybrid model with both district and child care options
- Implement a gradual transition plan from child care to district programming
- Offer part-time district programs for 3-year-olds
- Develop partnerships with high-quality child care providers
- Create a separate early learning center for 3-year-olds within the district
- Unsure at this time, need for information to decide
- Other...

6. Anything else you would like to share about the implementation of Act 76?

## Appendix D: Online Survey Questions for Superintendents

The following survey questions were emailed from the Agency of Education to all Vermont superintendents.

### Introduction

The purpose of this survey is to provide the Prekindergarten Education Implementation Committee (PreK Committee) with information about the needs and readiness of school districts to expand prekindergarten education as outlined in Vermont [Act 76](#) of 2023.

Act 76 proposes modifying Vermont's current prekindergarten program to extend prekindergarten access to all four-year-old children on a full-day basis, providing schools with full ADM for enrolled students. The eligible population would be limited to only four-year-olds and five-year-olds not enrolled in Kindergarten, meaning that three-year-olds no longer have access to the 10 hours of publicly-funded prekindergarten education and be transitioned to early care and education. School districts and supervisory unions would be responsible for ensuring that all eligible children have access to full-school-day prekindergarten. Public schools could provide prekindergarten programs directly within schools, through direct contracting

with private programs or other public schools, or through a combination of these options.

All Vermont superintendents have been asked to complete this survey by October 4, 2024. Your feedback will help the PreK Committee to understand how each district currently provides prekindergarten education under Act 166 and how the changes proposed by Act 76 will affect districts. The findings will be used to understand Vermont's readiness and needs to implement Act 76 and will be summarized in the PreK Committee's report to the Legislature, which will be submitted by December 1, 2024.

Thank you for taking the time to complete the questions below. If you have questions about this survey or Act 76 generally, please contact

### General Information

- School District Name:
- Contact Person Name and Title:

### Current Prekindergarten System

- Through which of the following ways does your district provide families with access to prekindergarten? Select all that apply:
  - Prekindergarten classrooms(s) in district schools
  - Contracts with private prekindergarten providers
  - Contracts with other districts/SUs for their district program
  - Other (please explain)

The remainder of the questions in this section are focused on prekindergarten classroom(s) operated by your district through the end of the 2023-2024 school year. Please **ONLY** include data from 2023-2024 and do not provide any information about prekindergarten services for the 2024-2025 school year.

- How many children were enrolled in your district's Act 166 prekindergarten program as of the end of the **2023-2024** school year?
  - Number of 3-year-olds enrolled in a Pre-K classroom operated by this district:
  - Number of 4-year-olds enrolled in a Pre-K classroom operated by this district:
  - Number of 5-year-olds enrolled in a Pre-K classroom operated by this district:
- Please use the grid below to indicate how many of the Pre-K classrooms operated by your district operate on a full-day, partial-day, or minimum-day basis

as of the end of the **2023-2024** school year. A full-day class offers Pre-K programming equal to the full school day for this district's elementary school. This must equal at least 30 hours per week. A partial-day class offers Pre-K for at least 11 hours a week, but not for the full-school-day. A minimum-schedule class offers no more than 10 hours of Pre-K programming per week.

- Complete the following table based on your answers in question 2.3. The information should reflect **2023-2024** school year enrollment data. The enrollment capacity numbers should be across all programs in your SU, not per classroom. Partial and minimum schedules should include all sessions.
- Do you maintain a waitlist for the prekindergarten class(es) operated by this district?
  - Yes
  - No
- How many children, as of the end of the **2023-2024** school year, were on the waitlist to enroll in prekindergarten class(es) operated by this district?
  - Number of 3-year-olds:
  - Number of 4-year-olds:
  - Number of 5-year-olds:
- What are the primary obstacles your district faces to admitting children from these waitlists? Check all that apply:
  - Limited physical space
  - Lack of qualified educators
  - Insufficient funding
  - Transportation challenges
  - Other (please explain)
- Based on enrollment data as of the end of the **2023-2024** school year, how many children enrolled in a prekindergarten classroom operated by this school district qualified for ECSE services?
- Of the children who attended a prekindergarten class operated by your district who qualified for ECSE services, what is the primary location for services provided to these students?
- As of the end of the **2023-2024** school year, did you provide transportation for children enrolled in your district's prekindergarten programs?
  - Yes
  - No

- Does your district operate afterschool programming?
  - Yes
  - No
- Please describe the barrier(s) to operating afterschool programming:
- As of the end of the **2023-2024** school year, were your afterschool programs licensed to allow prekindergarten-aged students to attend?
  - Yes
  - No
- As of the end of the **2023-2024** school year, how many prekindergarten students who attend a prekindergarten class operated by your district were enrolled in afterschool programs?
  - Yes
  - No
- Does your district offer licensed before-school or half-day child care programs for prekindergarten-aged students to attend?
  - Yes
  - No
- As of the end of the **2023-2024** school year, how many prekindergarten students who attend a prekindergarten class operated by your district were enrolled in before school or half-day child care programs?

### Proposed Legislative Changes to PreK

Vermont Act 76 of 2023 proposes to modify Vermont’s current prekindergarten program in the following ways:

1. Make prekindergarten programs available for the full-school-day and full-school-year for all four-year-old children (and five-year-olds not enrolled in kindergarten);
  2. Transition three-year-olds from the current ten-hour prekindergarten benefit to the child care and early education system;
  3. Require school districts to ensure four-year-olds whose families choose to access prekindergarten programs have access; and
  4. Allow school districts to choose to provide prekindergarten programs directly within schools, through direct contracting with private programs or other public schools, or through a combination of these options.
- If the proposed change to prekindergarten were to go into effect for the **2025-2026** school year, would your district need to modify how prekindergarten is



provided to eligible students in your service area based on your response in Section 1? We understand that this is speculation and your school is not being committed in any way to this course of action. This information is being used for feasibility analysis only.

- Yes, our district would need to modify how we provide prekindergarten services to eligible children in our service area (ie: even with three-year-olds under child care vs. UPK, we will need to make changes).
- No, our district would not need to modify how we provide prekindergarten services to eligible children in our service area (ie: we would repurpose other spaces to adapt to full day PreK for four-year-olds).
- What additional resources would your district need to address the proposed changes to prekindergarten in time for the 2025-2026 school year?
  - Additional classrooms or facilities
  - More qualified prekindergarten teachers
  - Pupil weight adjustment to at least 1.0 FTE Increased funding
  - Support for transportation service
  - Curriculum development and materials
  - Training and professional development for staff
  - Administrative support for program management
  - Contract with new or additional private prequalified prekindergarten programs
  - None
  - Other (please explain)
- Are there specific infrastructure improvements your district would require to expand prekindergarten capacity?
  - Yes
  - No
  - Not Sure
- Please describe the specific infrastructure improvements your district would require to expand prekindergarten capacity.
- What kind of professional development or training would be most beneficial for your prekindergarten educators to expand prekindergarten capacity?
- The obligation of school districts and supervisory unions under IDEA to provide special education services for all three-year-olds would not change under this proposal. Given that three-year-olds would no longer be counted in the district's

ADM for UPK, do you anticipate that your school would need to modify how it provides ECSE services to three-year-olds in your service area, as described in Section 1 of this survey?

- Yes, our school would need to modify how we provide ECSE services to three-year-olds in our service area.
- No, our school would not need to modify how we provide ECSE services to three-year-olds in our service area.
- Please provide more information on how your school might modify ECSE service provision for three-year-olds. An example of a modification could be offering a three-year-old classroom that is inclusive of both children with and without disabilities, offering a three-year-old playgroup setting, contracting with additional ECSE service providers to provide community-based services, hiring additional teachers, etc.
- What, if any, changes to your transportation model for Prekindergarten students would be needed if you moved to serving all four-year-olds (and no three-year-olds) per Act 76?

### Anticipating Future Needs

- Looking ahead to enrollment years 2025-2029, do you anticipate that your community census for incoming 4-year-olds will:
  - Increase significantly
  - Increase slightly
  - Stay the same
  - Decrease slightly
  - Decrease significantly
  - Not sure
- What proactive measures is your district considering to respond to this change?
- Are there any challenges you foresee for your district as prekindergarten education evolves?
- What support from the state would help you address these challenges: [Check all that apply]
  - Financial grants or additional funding
  - Full pupil weight of at least 1.0 FTE
  - Guidance on best practices for program expansion
  - Assistance with recruitment and retention of staff

- Access to state-approved curricula and materials
- Regular communication and updates on compliance requirements
- Other (please explain):

### **Additional Feedback**

- Please share any additional comments or suggestions about your district's current and/or future ability to offer prekindergarten programming.

## **Appendix E: Online Survey Questions for School Board Members**

The following survey questions were emailed to school board members through the Vermont School Board Association email list.

1. What considerations should we think about in order to evolve into a PreK-4 - grade 12 system? Please check all that apply.
  - Implementing developmentally appropriate practices aligned with children's needs
  - Ensuring program quality standards and certified educators
  - Addressing the financial implications and funding plans
  - Supporting social and emotional and academic readiness for kindergarten
  - Aligning with special education requirements and least restrictive environments
  - The provision of PreK-4 within a larger system of PreK-4 - grade 12 system?
  - Educational equity
  - Other...
2. What support, information and resources will you need to have 4-year-olds full time in your school? Check all that apply.
  - Curriculum materials and lesson plans
  - Training for teachers on early childhood education
  - Classroom space and facilities suitable for young children
  - Support staff (e.g. aides, counselors)
  - Parent engagement strategies and resources
  - Funding and budget considerations
  - Health and safety guidelines specific to young children

- Access to community resources and partnerships
  - Streamlined agency oversight to reduce administrative burden and general confusion
  - Educational leadership from an administrator who has experience as a school administrator
  - Not much, we are already providing all-day PreK / We are already planning to do this
  - Other...
3. What is already in place for your SU/SD to move forward?
4. What benefits would you anticipate as a result of this change?
- More focused learning opportunities, curriculum, and instruction for PreK-4
  - More opportunities for cross-grade professional development (PreK-4 and Kindergarten)
  - More alignment of scheduling and utilization of resources (i.e.: transportation)
  - More focus on smooth transitions from PreK-4 to Kindergarten
  - Increased educational equity: each child has access to a highly qualified teacher and has equitable access to programming and additional supports
  - Other....
5. What support would you need for system oversight?
- Data management and analysis tools
  - Regular performance metrics and evaluation processes
  - Training on compliance and regulatory requirements
  - Budget management and financial oversight
  - Communication systems for stakeholder engagement
  - Professional development for leadership and management skills
  - Risk management and mitigation strategies
  - Technology infrastructure for monitoring and reporting
  - Nothing more / not much more than we have now
  - Other...
6. To the best of your knowledge, how would your SU/SD adjust to three-year-olds being under child care v. universal prekindergarten vouchers?

- Provide PreK education for 3-year-olds in district regardless of loss of state funding
- Comply with IDEA child find and Special Ed requirements for 3-year-olds by offering programming outside of the classroom (i.e. playgroups, small group services, etc.)
- Offer part-time district programs for 3-year-olds
- Utilize partnerships with high-quality child care providers to ensure a connection to families and smooth transitions to PreK-4
- Create a separate early learning center for 3-year olds within the district
- Unsure at this time, this work must be considered within the full context of the Future of Public Education in Vermont
- Unsure at this time, need for information to decide
- Other...

7. Anything else you would like to share about the implementation of Act 76?

## **Appendix F: Themes from Superintendent, Principal, and School Board Member Surveys**

### **Themes from Superintendents**

The survey results indicated that superintendents and other school personnel have significant concerns about the resources it would take to implement full school-day, full school-year PreK for 4-year-olds. In addition to obvious cost considerations like the need for additional classroom space, hiring teachers, and meeting new professional development needs, survey respondents also identified less obvious costs like retrofitting spaces to be developmentally appropriate, needing to address deferred building maintenance, transportation costs and considerations unique to young children, and the need for technology updates. Lastly, survey respondents shared concerns about the impact on 3-year-olds if they were to be removed from PreK, the financial impact on the mixed-delivery model, additional complexities delivering special education services to 3 and 4-year-olds, the need to simplify early education regulations, and the fact that the proposed changes come at a politically sensitive time with little appetite for additional education spending.

### **Overall Numbers**

- 42 SDs responded
- 37 SDs (88%) responded that they would have to modify how PreK is provided
- 29 SDs (69%) responded they would require infrastructure changes/resources

- 29 SDs (69%) responded that they would need to modify special education services for 3's

## Results Of Thematic Analysis

- **Significant investment in facilities or physical infrastructure would be required**
  - Creation of, or adaptation to, developmentally appropriate physical space for 3 and 4-year-olds (including bathrooms, sinks, playgrounds, roofing/plumbing, running water, heating/cooling, furniture, and materials, etc.)
    - Retrofit existing classrooms
    - Deferred maintenance
    - Additional Classrooms
    - Playground space
    - Equipment, furniture, supplies, organization and storage materials
    - Safety, health, compliance infrastructure and space
    - Food service infrastructure expansion
    - ADA compliance
- **Current workforce crisis across all sectors will impact our capacity**
  - Significant workforce capacity needed across all roles
    - Leadership/Directors
    - Qualified ECEs with licenses
    - ECSE and support staff (Paras, speech, OT, PT, etc.)
    - Afterschool providers
    - UPK Coordinators/point person within SDs/Regions
    - Administrative staff and support positions
    - Bus drivers
    - Custodial and food service staff
  - Considerations for workforce and staffing configurations if transitioning the model re: ratios, settings, licensing, etc.
- **Need to review, adapt, and/or develop the PreK program model within the necessary mixed-delivery model (including child care, head start, and afterschool and out-of-school-time care)**



- Reviewing, adapt, and align programmatic offerings, schedules (part time, full-day, school-day, afterschool and out-of-school-time care)
- Review and develop transition plans from current models (or no offering) to new model allowing for appropriate transition time
- Review, develop, and EXPAND offerings and slots in childcare, Head Start and Early Head Start, and afterschool and out-of-school-time care settings that align with new preK program offerings based on ages of children and ratios
- Consider the impact of age on ratios, developmentally appropriate spaces and education, as well as the federal requirements under IDEA for children with disabilities and special health care needs
- Review existing model of mixed delivery preK for 3 and 4-year-olds to determine successes and best practices that can be replicated and scaled vs. overhauling
- Review programming and alignment/collaboration between preK and Head Start programs
- **Importance of maintaining 3-year-old benefit and mixed delivery model**
  - Concerns about removing 3-year-olds
    - Limiting families options to meet their child’s needs related to early learning opportunities and special education
    - Many families do not have a demonstrated need for care to qualify for CCFAP and may no longer have access to care or preK in a 4s only model of preK
  - Importance of maintaining mixed delivery to foster a strong early childhood education system that prioritizes family needs, two years of preK, and meets the needs of the rural nature of Vermont
    - Strong reliance on private/community-based partners for preK
    - Concerns about a complete shift in programming for child care, preK, and afterschool and out-of-school-time care
  - How to increase opportunities for 3-year-olds
  - Concerns about removing 3s: impact on staffing and attendance in public schools, impact on private programs re: business model and ratios
- **Transportation Considerations**
  - Expand existing transportation and schedules or develop new transportation options for young children

- Adapt physical space and schedules for developmentally appropriate drop-off or transportation
- New travel models would need to be developed to support drop-off and pick-up across public schools and private/community programs and entities
- workforce/staffing issues
- Existing transportation challenges/stress on the system
- Not currently set up to transport 4-year-olds and would need new procedures for 3s
- Supervision and safety during transport
- Collaboration and public/private partnerships
- Huge financial cost for districts
- Several district have transpiration for prek already
- Training/PD and CQI
- **Need to consider significantly expanding early care, extended care, afterschool and out-of-school-time care**
  - Need for extended care earlier and later in the day requiring partnership with private/community programs
  - Lack of after school care and state funding for afterschool programming
  - Not currently meeting after school needs, vision would significantly increase the need for afterschool and out-of-school time care
  - Lack of transportation to and from afterschool
  - Lack of staffing capacity, multiple background checks, workforce crisis
  - Limited physical space/infrastructure
- **Need to simplify agency oversight**
  - Single agency oversight
  - Simplify licensing regulations for preK in public schools
  - Dual agency oversight as a significant challenge and expending time and resources to staff and administrators in public schools
  - Importance of strengthening partnerships: Collaborate with community-based childcare providers to co-locate pre-K classrooms. Coordinate with Head Start or other pre-K programs to share resources and facilities. Engage parents and local stakeholders to generate support for pre-K expansion.

- Clear communication
- Alignment between licensing and regulations across agencies
- **Funding Considerations**
  - Pupil weight adjustment of at least 1.0 FTE/Increased funding
  - Concerns about school budgets and broader economic concerns
  - Significant time and financial resources required (at odds with Governor’s request for school districts to significantly cut budgets)
  - Significant concerns about financial viability of the service delivery model
  - Financial resources will be required for:
    - Staff time to review, plan, coordinate, build strategic/transition plans, implement, and support continuous quality improvement/monitoring within and across PreK programs, child care, head start and early head start, and afterschool and out-of-school-time care, as well as the Agency of Education, the Child Development Division, and Building Bright Futures
    - Facilities/Physical Infrastructure, materials, oversight, contracting, etc.
    - Increase in workforce/staffing infrastructure needed, alongside the time needed to recruit, train, and support building a high quality workforce across all sectors identified
    - Transportation: busses, bus drivers, coordination time, pickup and drop-off zoning
    - Technology upgrades: connectivity/internet, materials and equipment, and monitoring systems
  - An analysis of financial resources required to meet these needs and transitions will be necessary
- **Special Education Considerations**
  - **Impact on vulnerable children:** Concerns about impact on most vulnerable families: children with disabilities, special health care needs, english language learners, historically marginalized, etc.
  - **Service delivery restructure:** The need to restructure the entire service delivery model for preK and special education moving toward itinerant, community-based service provision
  - **Workforce:** Concerns about workforce/staffing given the high rates of mental health, behavioral challenges, disabilities, and special health care needs of the existing children (challenges hiring and finding early

childhood special education staff and support staff alongside additional professional development needs)

- **Reduction in hours and services:** 3-year-olds would have less time in an early childhood education setting, negatively impacting socialization and family wellness; The ability for ECSE staff to provide services would decrease due to increased travel and administrative time required
  - **Facilities/infrastructure:** May require additional classrooms and slots to ensure meeting federal regulations around Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)
  - **Inclusive Individualized Instruction:** Develop inclusive, sensory-rich classrooms with increased individualized instruction and specialized therapies
  - **Playgroups:** Considerations/exploration of playgroups model
  - **Transition planning:** Implement robust transition planning for 3-year-olds as they move from early intervention services to the public school system, including classroom visits, family meetings, and coordinated service plans.
  - **Transportation:** New travel models would need to be developed to support drop-off and pick-up across public schools and private/community programs and entities
  - **Financial impact/cost:** Significant time and financial resources required (at odds with Governor’s request for school districts to significantly cut budgets); Significant concerns about financial viability of the service delivery model
- **Many opportunities to improve professional development** (Table on pg. 10 for question 21)

**Question By Question Responses and Themes**

**Question 1: Through which of the following ways does your district provide families with access to prekindergarten? Select all that apply**

How District Provides PreK	Response Count
PreK Classrooms in District Schools	39
Contracts with Private PreK Providers	36
Contracts with Other Districts/SUs	21

How District Provides PreK	Response Count
Act 166 Partner Sites	1

**Question 2: What are your district’s primary obstacles to admitting children from these waitlists? Check all that apply (n=32)**

Waitlist Obstacles	Response Count
Limited Physical Space	20
Lack of qualified educators	13
Insufficient funding	10
Transportation challenges	11
No afterschool care	4
Not enough adults to support students with challenging behaviors	1
Because we are full	1
CDD ratios/number of classrooms	1
Insufficient number of students on waitlist to create a new classroom	1
None/NA	6

**Question 12: Please describe the barrier(s) to operating afterschool programming (n = 14)**

Emergent Themes	Description or Quote
Lack of funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lack of state funding for afterschool programming, budget constraints</li> </ul>
Transportation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lack of transportation between programs, especially ½ day programs, lack of bus drivers/workforce</li> </ul>

Emergent Themes	Description or Quote
Workforce/staffing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lack of staffing capacity, multiple background checks, workforce crisis</li> </ul>
Physical space/infrastructure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Limited existing physical space</li> </ul>
Administrative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Administrative oversight (joint oversight), logistics and coordination, multiple background checks and licensing regulations</li> </ul>

**Question 17: If the proposed change to prekindergarten were to go into effect for the 2025-2026 school year, would your district need to modify how prekindergarten is provided to eligible students in your service area based on your response in Section 1? (n = 42)**

Would you need to modify how PreK is provided?	Response Count
Yes	37
No	5

**Question 18: What additional resources would your district need to address the proposed changes to prekindergarten in time for the 2025-2026 school year? Please select all that apply. (n = 37)**

Additional Resources Needed	Response Count
Pupil weight adjustment of at least 1.0 FTE/Increased funding	34
More qualified prekindergarten teachers	33
Additional classrooms or facilities	31
Support for transportation service	31
Administrative support for program management	22

Additional Resources Needed	Response Count
Training and professional development for staff	18
Curriculum development materials	17
Contract with new or additional private pre qualified prekindergarten programs	17
Other	6

**Question 19: Are there specific infrastructure improvements your district would require to expand prekindergarten capacity? (n = 42)**

Infrastructure Improvements Needed?	Response Count
Yes	29
No	7
Not Sure	6

**Question 20: Please describe the specific infrastructure improvements your district would require to expand prekindergarten capacity. (n=34)**

#### Facilities/Physical Infrastructure

- Creation of, or adaptation to, developmentally appropriate physical space for 3 and 4-year-olds (including bathrooms, sinks, playgrounds, roofing/plumbing, running water, heating/cooling, furniture, and materials, etc.)
  - Retrofit existing classrooms
  - Deferred maintenance
  - Additional Classrooms
  - Playground space
  - Equipment, furniture, supplies, organization and storage materials
  - Safety, health, compliance infrastructure and space
  - ADA compliance
- **Deferred Maintenance:** “The current is already beyond the life expectancy and has significant infrastructure needs - roofing, plumbing... Additionally, we would need double the classrooms.”



- **Classroom Spaces:** Identify and renovate existing spaces within school buildings that could be converted into dedicated prekindergarten classrooms. This may involve repurposing underutilized rooms, expanding current early childhood wings, or constructing new additions.
- **Restroom Facilities:** Ensure that each prekindergarten classroom has direct access to appropriately sized and equipped restroom facilities, including child-height sinks, toilets, and diaper changing stations.
- **Outdoor Play Areas:** Expand or enhance outdoor play spaces that are specifically designed for young learners, with age-appropriate equipment, soft safety surfacing, and ample space for gross motor activities.
- **Storage and Organization:** Provide ample storage solutions within prekindergarten classrooms, such as cubbies, shelves, and cabinets, to accommodate the unique needs and materials required for early childhood education.
- **Technology Infrastructure:** Possible upgrade the technology infrastructure to support the integration of educational technology, including reliable high-speed internet, interactive whiteboards, tablets, and other digital resources.
- **Furniture and Equipment:** Furnish prekindergarten classrooms with appropriately scaled furniture, such as small tables, chairs, and activity centers, as well as specialized equipment like rest mats, manipulatives, and learning materials.
- **Dedicated Entrances:** Establish separate, secure entrances for prekindergarten students and their families to facilitate drop-off and pick-up procedures, as well as to maintain a distinct early childhood environment.
- **Nursing/Health Suites:** Ensure the availability of dedicated nursing or health suites within the prekindergarten wing to provide a space for routine health screenings, medication administration, and addressing student health needs, such as diapering.
- **Acoustics and Lighting:** Design the prekindergarten spaces with optimal acoustics and lighting in mind, considering factors such as sound absorption, natural light, and glare reduction to create a conducive learning environment.
- **Compliance and Safety:** Ensure that all prekindergarten facilities and infrastructure comply with relevant building codes, safety regulations, and accessibility standards for early childhood education settings.
- **Accessibility Features:** To meet ADA requirements and support all students, including those with mobility challenges or disabilities, we would need infrastructure modifications to improve accessibility—ramps, wide doorways, and adaptive furniture are examples.
- **HVAC and Air Quality:** Ensuring that ventilation and air filtration systems are modernized to provide clean, healthy air is especially important in early childhood settings, where students are more vulnerable to respiratory issues. We would need improvements in heating, cooling, and overall air quality to meet current health standards.

## Workforce/staffing

- Significant workforce capacity needed
  - Leadership/Directors
  - Qualified ECEs with licenses
  - ECSE and support staff (Paras, speech, OT, PT, etc.)
  - Afterschool providers
  - UPK Coordinators/point person within SDs/Regions
  - Administrative staff and support positions
  - Bus drivers
- Considerations for workforce and staffing configurations if transitioning the model re: ratios, settings, licensing, etc.

*“Our program currently runs Monday through Thursday. Expanding PreK capacity would mean we would need additional funding to pay teaching assistants for 5 days a week as well as more teaching assistants. . . . Our district would need to expand transportation to 4 year olds for the school year and hire more drivers to possibly transport 3 year olds who need ESCE services at the school. If we changed our model for providing service to 3 year olds at their private programs, we may need to budget for an additional ECSE. We would also have to expand our after school programming to include 4 year olds meaning we would need to hire more after school staff.”*

## **Review, Adapt, and/or Develop the PreK Program Model Within the Mixed Delivery Model (including childcare, head start, and afterschool and out-of-school-time care)**

- Reviewing, adapt, and align programmatic offerings, schedules (part time, full-day, school-day, afterschool and out-of-school-time care)
- Review and develop transition plans from current models (or no offering) to new model allowing for appropriate transition time
- Review, develop, and EXPAND offerings and slots in childcare, Head Start and Early Head Start, and afterschool and out-of-school-time care settings that align with new preK program offerings based on ages of children and ratios
- Consider the impact of age on ratios, developmentally appropriate spaces and education, as well as the federal requirements under IDEA for children with disabilities and special health care needs

*“I don't believe our current private providers would have the space without unenrolling 3 year olds. Our school could hold space but it would have to be retrofitted to meet preK standards, we would have to develop a program from the ground up and staff it.”*

*“Our community does not have enough "slots" to meet the needs of all 4yo, and our district does not have a UPK program. If the shift is for school districts to assume responsibility of providing preK programs for all 4-year-olds comparable to our 5-year-*

*olds, [our SD] would need to build a preK program to accommodate approximately 140 children. That would be about 10 classrooms, 10 teachers, 3 special educators, and at least 10 paraeducators. Our current structure does not have building or classroom space to accommodate. Adding a building also means additional administrative support. The structure of program oversight (i.e., Child Care Regulations, Agency of Education) will dictate staffing decisions and ultimately drive our infrastructure work.”*

## **Transportation**

- Expand existing transportation and schedules or develop new transportation options for young children
- Adapt physical space and schedules for developmentally appropriate drop-off or transportation

*“Parking and Drop-Off Zones: Expanding prekindergarten would increase the need for safe, efficient parking and drop-off/pick-up zones. Improving traffic flow and safety features around schools would be essential to manage increased enrollment.”*

*“We do not transport prekindergarten students so we would need assistance with transportation as well.”*

*“Our district would need to expand transportation to 4 year olds for the school year and hire more drivers to possibly transport 3 year olds who need ESCE services at the school.”*

## **Technology upgrades**

- Increased need for reliable high-speed internet, interactive whiteboards, tablets, and other developmentally appropriate tech tools
- Monitoring systems

*“Technology Integration: We would require improvements in technology infrastructure, such as updated wiring for internet connectivity and the installation of interactive technology tools that support early learning, both for instruction and for communicating with parents.”*

## **Funding/Cost**

- Financial resources will be required for:
  - Staff time to review, plan, coordinate, build strategic/transition plans, implement, and support continuous quality improvement/monitoring within and across PreK programs, child care, head start and early head start, and afterschool and out-of-school-time care, as well as the Agency of Education, the Child Development Division, and Building Bright Futures
  - Facilities/Physical Infrastructure, materials, oversight, contracting, etc.
  - Increase in workforce/staffing infrastructure needed, alongside the time needed to recruit, train, and support building a high quality workforce across all sectors identified

- Transportation: busses, bus drivers, coordination time, pickup and drop-off zoning
- Technology upgrades: connectivity/internet, materials and equipment, and monitoring systems

An analysis of financial resources required to meet these needs and transitions will be necessary

**Question 21: What kind of professional development or training would be most beneficial for your prekindergarten educators to expand prekindergarten capacity? (n = 38)**

Emergent Themes	Description or Quote
Developmentally appropriate practices and socio-emotional learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Understanding child development, creating engaging learning environments, and implementing teaching strategies tailored to the needs of young learners</li> <li>● Training on best practices for early childhood education that emphasizes play-based learning, social-emotional development, and individualized instruction. This ensures educators understand how to tailor their approaches to meet the diverse needs of young learners.</li> </ul>
Trauma-informed/responsive practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Conduct training on trauma-informed and/or responsive approaches to supporting the social-emotional and behavioral needs of young children who have experienced adversity or trauma</li> </ul>
Support in meeting licensing requirements/regulations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Learning and balancing the CDD licensing regulations with public school regulations</li> </ul>
Supporting students requiring special education or who are English Language Learners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Provide training on differentiating instruction and implementing interventions to meet the unique needs of each prekindergarten student, including those with special needs or English language learners.</li> </ul>
Support in meeting the mental health needs of students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS)</li> <li>● Early Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (Early MTSS)</li> </ul>

Emergent Themes	Description or Quote
Early literacy and numeracy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Training on implementing engaging and developmentally appropriate early literacy and numeracy activities. This will equip educators with tools to foster foundational skills critical for later academic success.</li> </ul>
Culturally responsive teaching	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Workshops focusing on cultural competency and inclusive teaching strategies to help educators engage with and support families from various cultural backgrounds, fostering a welcoming environment for all students.</li> </ul>
PreK curriculum, classroom management, curriculum development, and required models training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Offer workshops on designing and implementing high-quality, standards-aligned curriculum for prekindergarten classrooms. This could include training on integrating play-based learning, incorporating STEM concepts, and fostering social-emotional development.</li> <li>● Conduct professional development on effective classroom management techniques for prekindergarten settings. This may include strategies for creating routines, promoting positive behavior, and supporting students with diverse intense behavior; and health needs.</li> <li>● VELS and emergent curriculum</li> <li>● Universal design</li> </ul>
Family engagement/partnership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Train educators on building strong partnerships with families, including strategies for effective communication, involving parents in the learning process, and supporting family-school connections.</li> </ul>

Emergent Themes	Description or Quote
Monitoring, assessments and technology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Offer workshops on utilizing observational assessment tools to monitor student progress and inform instructional decision-making in prekindergarten classrooms</li> <li>● Offer professional development on integrating technology-based tools and resources to enhance learning and engagement in prekindergarten settings.</li> <li>● TSGOLD, Ready for K, etc.</li> <li>● AAC assessment and usage</li> </ul>
Collaboration and Teamwork	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Professional development on collaborative teaching models, including co-teaching strategies with special education staff or support personnel. This training will emphasize the importance of teamwork in providing comprehensive support to all students</li> </ul>

**Question 22: The obligation of school districts and supervisory unions under IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) to provide special education services for all three-year-olds would not change under this proposal. Given that three-year-olds would no (n = 42)**

Would you need to modify special ed services for 3's?	Response Count
Yes	29
No	13

**Question 23: Please provide more information on how your school might modify ECSE service provision for three-year-olds. An example of a modification could be offering a three-year-old classroom that is inclusive of both children with and without disabilities, off (n = 37)**

Emergent Themes	Description or Quote
<p>Restructure entire service delivery model for preK and special education moving toward itinerant, community-based service provision</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Special education services would have to happen outside of preK classrooms which is not in alignment with federal IDEA law of students being educated alongside typically developing peers in the least restrictive environment (LRE)</li> <li>● Services/providers traveling to meet children in community-based and private settings</li> <li>● Requires additional travel time and less service provision to children</li> <li>● Additional contracts with community-based service providers</li> <li>● Considerations for already high (and increasing) caseloads across all early childhood settings</li> <li>● Considerations for flexible service delivery models</li> </ul> <p><i>“In addition to inclusive three-year-old classroom, playgroup settings, and community-based services, and collaboration with local agencies, we anticipate additional needs for professional development of new and existing staff, and flexible service delivery models due to possible increased enrollment. We anticipate the need for two additional classrooms that would need to be constructed, furnished and staffed.”</i></p>



Emergent Themes	Description or Quote
Workforce/staffing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Hire additional staff to meet child, family, and community needs               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Recruitment, retention (challenges finding/hiring new ECSE and support staff)</li> <li>○ ECSE and support staff (Paras, speech, OT, PT, etc.)</li> </ul> </li> <li>● Increased staff travel</li> <li>● Increased professional development needs (training, coaching, etc.)</li> </ul>
Reduction in hours and services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● 3-year-olds would have less time in an early childhood education setting, negatively impacting socialization and family wellness</li> <li>● The ability for ECSE staff to provide services would decrease due to increased travel and administrative time required</li> </ul> <p><i>“Unless we were able to add additional classrooms and staff, then we would have to provide itinerant services. This would require additional staff. Given the amount of need, we would not be able to provide as many hours of services as we do now.”</i></p>
Facilities/Infrastructure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Would require additional classrooms and slots to ensure meeting federal regulations around Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)</li> </ul> <p><i>“We currently have classrooms that integrate 3 and 4 year olds in our PreK on site classrooms (1/2 day). We have limited classroom slots, but we offer those to 3 and 4 year olds where it has been decided they need to be on site for FAPE. We do not have capacity to provide additional classrooms and if we had only 4 year olds, we would not have balanced classrooms if we also had only 3 year olds with disabilities.”</i></p>

Emergent Themes	Description or Quote
Develop inclusive, sensory-rich classrooms with increased individualized instruction and specialized therapies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Consider placing 3-year-old students with special needs in inclusive prekindergarten classrooms alongside their typically developing peers. This provides opportunities for socialization, peer modeling, and access to the general education curriculum.</li> <li>● Design the 3-year-old special education classroom environments with sensory integration in mind, incorporating calming colors, flexible seating options, and manipulatives that engage the senses.</li> <li>● Ensure 3-year-old students with special needs receive more frequent and intensive one-on-one or small group instruction to address their specific learning, developmental, and therapeutic needs.</li> <li>● Integrate speech-language, occupational, and physical therapy services directly into the 3-year-old's daily classroom routines and activities, rather than pulling them out for separate sessions.</li> <li>● Utilize specialized, developmentally appropriate curriculum designed for 3-year-old students with special needs, focusing on foundational skills in areas such as communication, social-emotional development, and adaptive behavior.</li> </ul>
Playgroups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Considerations/exploration of playgroups model</li> </ul>
Transition Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Implement robust transition planning for 3-year-olds as they move from early intervention services to the public school system, including classroom visits, family meetings, and coordinated service plans.</li> </ul>
Transportation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● New travel models would need to be developed to support drop-off and pick-up across public schools and private/community programs and entities</li> </ul>

Emergent Themes	Description or Quote
Financial Impact/Cost	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Significant time and financial resources required (at odds with Governor’s request for school districts to significantly cut budgets)</li> <li>• Significant concerns about financial viability of the service delivery model</li> </ul> <p><i>"I think if this legislation goes through, we will be doing a great disservice to the 3-year-olds we know need services, while possibly holding spots for 4-year-olds who may never attend. With the amount of money it would cost to provide a special 3-year-old classroom or playgroup or add ECSE service providers or hire more teachers, it would be more cost effective to keep things status quo."</i></p>
General feedback	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Specific modifications would depend on the individual needs of the 3-year-old students, the resources available within the school district, and the overall early childhood special education service delivery model.</li> </ul> <p><i>"Our district would need time and significant financial resources and support for those funds from the Governor's office directly in order to provide services for three year olds in our school buildings. [Our SD] DOES NOT have classroom capacity for this. We would require the time and funds for facilities expansion in order to make this happen. We also do not have the staffing. For our current and very small preschool program we frequently have to close due to staff absences and no qualified substitutes.</i></p> <p><i>We would modify our programs by adding a 3 year old playgroup that would be supported by SLPs and Special Educators. If resources were added to our school budget from the state, we would add classrooms and staffing in order to have a 3 year old classroom as a half day program. We would want to have an entire separate teaching team that would be dedicated to developing and delivering a program for 3 year olds and to also transition those students from early intervention.</i></p> <p><i>Would require additional staff to provide community based services (outreach services) and we are unclear how to do that given that the Governor has asked school districts across the state to cut their budgets significantly."</i></p>

**Question 24: What, if any, changes to your transportation model for prekindergarten students would be needed if you moved to serving all four-year-olds (and no three-year-olds) per Act 76?**

Emergent Themes	Description or Quote
Workforce/staffing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Would require additional bus drivers and traveling support staff/aids</li> </ul>
Existing transportation challenges/stress on system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Currently struggling to provide transportation for the district K-12 due to staffing shortages, lack of staff riding the bus/supervision, challenges contracting, etc.</li> <li>• Lacking current capacity, adding 4-year-olds isn't possible</li> </ul>
Not currently set up to transport 4-year-olds and would need new procedures for 3s as well	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Need expanded bus routes</li> <li>• Would need to consider transporting 3-year-olds accessing special ed services</li> <li>• Expanding bus services at multiple times throughout the day (morning, mid-day, afternoon)</li> </ul>
Supervision and safety during transport	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Concerns about additional staff necessary during bus rides and at drop-off to ensure safety</li> <li>• Need for additional safety restraints/refitting of current bus safety restraints (5-point-harnesses)</li> <li>• Modification of vehicles to be accessible for young children with disabilities</li> </ul>
Collaboration and Public/Private partnership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Significant collaboration and partnership between CDD, AOE, school districts/LEAs, community-based programs, bus companies around planning, transition, regulations, and implementation</li> </ul>

Emergent Themes	Description or Quote
Finances/Cost	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Huge financial barrier for the districts</li> </ul> <p><i>We currently offer transport 25-30 children annually at a cost of \$210,000. If we expanded public PreK we would need to consider dramatically expanding that transportation contract to provide developmentally appropriate transportation to a group of children that could be 6 times as large.</i></p>
No change necessary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Several districts already provide transportation for preK students and have systems in place</li> </ul>
Training/Professional Development and CQI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Professional development and training for bus drives and bus aids/support staff</li> <li>• Monitoring transportation effectiveness and engage in CQI</li> </ul>

Emergent Themes	Description or Quote
Overall Concerns	<p><i>“The answer here depends on what you require for transportation. Be aware that [our SD] does not have enough buses to transport the current number of students that we have as a district. We are currently struggling to provide transportation for our district. We contract with [bus company] for bussing and we are still short a minimum of two bus drivers. This has been a significant challenge to generalized transportation over the past three school years. Also, note that we DO NOT have an adult riding on all of our buses. That is not something that we guarantee. The staffing shortage plays a role in this and we are still understaffed as a district. If you require transportation for these students as described, and if you require that each bus has a supervisor for the preschoolers ages 3 or 4, you are setting districts up for failure and to be out of compliance with potential regulations due to the staffing shortages. Transportation for many districts, even in Chittenden County remains a significant challenge. I caution you to be careful on what you regulate as it might be something that schools are not able to provide.”</i></p> <p><i>“Transporting preschoolers requires increased supervision compared to older students. We would have concerns around who is supervising preschoolers while riding the bus. Bus drivers are not able to provide supervision for preschoolers as they are driving. It would be impossible for us to guarantee that we would have a bus monitor on each of our buses for preschoolers. Clearly there would be a need for car seats, and currently our current buses do not have seat belts. This again would be an added expense for the district. Our final concern is around preschoolers and supervision as they wait for the bus, and the supervision of students when they are dropped off. We would not want to just drop a preschooler off, we would want an adult there to receive the child. This is currently a challenge for kinder families, causing buses to be late or return to school as the adult was not at the home to receive the student.”</i></p>

**Question 25: What, if any, other changes would your district consider in order to expand prekindergarten capacity per Act 76? (n = 32)**

Emergent Themes	Description or Quote
ADM and Funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Concerns about school budget</li> <li>● Increasing preK ADM</li> <li>● Opportunities to write grants to support preK:</li> <li>● Economic concerns</li> <li>● Apply for state, federal, or private grants to fund pre-K expansion.</li> <li>● Reallocate existing school budget funds to prioritize pre-K program growth.</li> <li>● Explore partnerships with local early childhood organizations to share costs.</li> </ul>
Maintaining/increasing opportunities for 3-year-olds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● How to increase opportunities for 3-year-olds</li> <li>● Concerns about removing 3s: impact on staffing and attendance in public schools, impact on private programs re: business model and ratios</li> <li>● Maintaining mixed delivery</li> </ul>
Facilities/Infrastructure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Food service infrastructure expansion</li> <li>● Playgrounds</li> <li>● Deferred maintenance</li> <li>● Developmentally appropriate facilities</li> </ul>
Workforce/Staffing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Concerns over staffing shortages</li> <li>● Additional certification/licensure</li> <li>● Additional food and custodial staff</li> </ul>
Early and Afterschool Care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Need for extended care earlier and later in the day requiring partnership with private/community programs</li> </ul>



Emergent Themes	Description or Quote
<p>Joint Agency Oversight and Collaboration across public, private, and community-based programs</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Dual agency oversight as a significant challenge and expending time and resources to staff and administrators in public schools</li> <li>● Importance of strengthening partnerships: Collaborate with community-based childcare providers to co-locate pre-K classrooms. Coordinate with Head Start or other pre-K programs to share resources and facilities. Engage parents and local stakeholders to generate support for pre-K expansion.</li> <li>● Clear communication</li> <li>● Alignment between licensing and regulations across agencies</li> </ul> <p><i>If this act passes, we would have to consider our collaboration with Head Start. Since we have different rules (Head Start could keep 3's, but not in our case because of the collaboration; they work fewer days, they have different requirements), we don't know what that would look like for sure. I am very concerned that the passing of this law could fracture this collaboration that we have worked so hard to maintain for the last 20 years and that works to serve children and families.</i></p>
<p>Transportation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Age-appropriate transportation</li> </ul>
<p>Varied options for families</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Understanding and prioritizing family choice</li> </ul> <p><i>“Our families have been making choices around where their children receive PreK learning opportunities based upon the locations and times available. Many of our families would not be able to access school based full day programs due to still having a need for extended care on either end of the school day. Our schools do not have the staffing nor the space to provide licensed extended care. This would create a need for modifications to buildings and increased hiring of staff. We struggle to find the proper staff that is needed for our programs currently. Families need to have varied options that will provide for the youngest members of our communities.”</i></p>

**Question 26: Please share any additional comments or suggestions about your district’s current and/or future ability to offer prekindergarten programming. (n = 30)**

Emergent Themes	Description or Quote
<p>Maintaining 3-year-old benefit and mixed delivery model</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Concerns about removing 3-year-olds               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Limiting families options to meet their child’s needs related to early learning opportunities and special education</li> <li>○ Many families do not have a demonstrated need for care to qualify for CCFAP and may no longer have access to care or preK in a 4s only model of preK</li> </ul> </li> <li>● Importance of maintaining mixed delivery to foster a strong early childhood education system that prioritizes family needs, two years of preK, and meets the needs of the rural nature of Vermont               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Strong reliance on private/community-based partners for preK</li> <li>○ Concerns about a complete shift in programming for child care, preK, and afterschool and out-of-school-time care</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p>Vulnerable children and families</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Concerns about impact on most vulnerable families: children with disabilities, special health care needs, english language learners, historically marginalized, etc.</li> </ul>
<p>Funding</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Additional funding and resources required across all domains to expand and adapt preK</li> <li>● Increasing ADM for preK is critical</li> <li>● Concerns about private PreK competing for public preK funding</li> </ul>

Emergent Themes	Description or Quote
Review current service delivery models to strengthen current system with or without expansion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Review existing model of mixed delivery preK for 3 and 4-year-olds to determine successes and best practices that can be replicated and scaled vs. overhauling</li> <li>● Review programming and alignment/collaboration between preK and Head Start programs</li> </ul>
Transportation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Concerns about transportation</li> </ul>
Schedules/Slots (Capacity)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Concerns about definition of full-day, full school year and definition not meeting needs of families</li> </ul>
Critical Transitions (prek to K, early intervention to special education, etc.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Some programs have strong transitions built into their current mixed delivery systems that can serve as a model based on prioritization and planned transitions for children with SHCN on IEPs</li> </ul>
Administrative Considerations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Difficult budget climate for schools</li> <li>● Significant time would be needed for any transitions</li> <li>● Coordination/collaboration and strategic planning critical to transitions that are mindful of the intersections and impacts within and across child care, preK, and afterschool</li> <li>● Clear communication from the state and legislature</li> </ul>
Simplify Agency Oversight	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Single agency oversight</li> <li>● Simplify licensing regulations for preK in public schools</li> <li>● Clarity in regulations and compliance</li> </ul>

Emergent Themes	Description or Quote
Process critiques	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Concerns and frustration with the PEIC survey re: timing and limiting the opportunity for data analysis</li> </ul>

**Alternative (Minority) Perspective**

*“Our public schools have the capacity and expertise to provide full-day programs for all four-year-olds, offering a high-quality early education that sets the foundation for future academic success. Given the current financial picture, we must prioritize our resources effectively.*

*Investing in our public prekindergarten programs is crucial for our community's future. To achieve this, we need strong support from the state in recruiting and retaining top-notch early education staff. This investment in human capital is essential to maintain the high standards of education our children deserve.*

*It's important to recognize that public school systems are held to rigorous standards and accountability measures. Diverting funds to private Pre-K systems through vouchers, which may not adhere to the same strict standards, could potentially compromise the quality of early education our children receive.*

*Instead, provide full Average Daily Membership (ADM) funding for our prekindergarten students and channel our efforts into strengthening our public education system. This strategy ensures that every dollar spent goes directly towards improving the quality of early education in our community.*

*By concentrating our resources on public prekindergarten programs, we can create a more robust, early education system that gives all our four-year-olds the best possible start in their educational journey. This approach not only maximizes the impact of our educational resources but also ensures more equitable access to high-quality early education for all families in our community.*

*Let the Agency of Human Services focus on birth through three; and the Agency of Education focus on age 4-high school completion. It is time we decouple the dual requirement system we have created in Vermont.”*

**Themes from Principals**

**Overall Numbers**

- 74 total respondents
  - 62 Principals
  - 13 School Board members

- 53/47 responded that they have existing prek programs when asked “What is already in place for you to move forward?”

## Results Of Thematic Analysis

- **3-year-olds**

- Respondents did not have clarity about what they would do with 3-year olds.
- The top response to “what is your plan for 3-year-olds?” was “unsure at this time, need more info to decide” (35/74 responses). No other choice was selected by more than 13 recipients.
- Only 5/74 principals and school board members selected “transition 3yos to the child care system” when asked “what is your plan for 3-year-olds?”.
- Concern re: 3-year-olds was noted in 8/50 responses to the option, open question, “anything else you would like to share about the implementation of ACT 76??”

- **Capacity challenges**

- Only 8 responses specifically called out physical space/facilities when asked “what is already in place for you to move forward?”

- **Simplify agency oversight**

- “Streamlined agency oversight to reduce administrative burden and general confusion” was the 2nd choice (51/74 responses) among principals and school board members asked “what considerations should we think about in order to evolve into a prek4 system?”
- Also came up in the “other” category of multiple choice questions 5
- “Training on compliance and regulatory requirements” was the top choice among principals (38/62 responses) when asked “What support would you need for system oversight?”

- **Funding**

Funding was top concern for many survey respondents

- “Addressing the financial implications and funding plans” (66/74 responses) was the top choice among principals and school board members asked “what considerations should we think about in order to evolve into a prek4 system?”
- “Funding and budget considerations” the top choice (63/74 responses) among principals and school board members asked “what support, information and resources will you need to have 4-year-olds full time in your school?”

- “Budget management and financial oversight” was the 2nd choice answer among principals (32/62 responses) when asked “What support would you need for system oversight?”
- Most frequent response to come up among the 50 principals and school board members who responded to the optional, open question, “anything else you would like to share about the implementation of ACT 76??”

### Question By Question Responses And Themes

**Question 1: What considerations should we think about in order to evolve into a PreK-4 System? Please check all that apply. (n=74 Principals and School Board)**

Multiple Choice Answer	Response Count
Addressing the financial implications and funding plans	66
Ensuring program quality standards and qualified educators	57
Implementing developmentally appropriate practices aligned with children's needs	51
Supporting social and emotional and academic readiness for kindergarten	50
Aligning with special education requirements and least restrictive environments	47
Other (streamline regulations, impact on private/existing programs)	15

**Question 2: What support, information and resources will you need to have 4-year-olds full time in your school? Please check all that apply. (n=74 Principals and School Board)**

Multiple Choice Answer	Response Count
Funding and budget considerations	63
Streamlined agency oversight to reduce administrative burden and general confusion	51
Support staff (e.g. aides, counselors)	51
Classroom space and facilities suitable for young children	45
Health and safety guidelines specific to young children	24
Training for teachers on ECE	23
Parent engagement strategies and resources	23
Access to community resources and partnerships	21
Curriculum materials and lesson plans	19
We already have 4 year olds in the building	9
Other	6



**Question 3: What is already in place for you to move forward? (n=74 Principals and School Board)**

Emergent Theme	Response Count	Description or Quote
Existing Prek Program	53	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Full time prek program in district (15)</li> <li>• Part time prek program in district (12)</li> <li>• Prek program in district, time unspecified (26)</li> </ul>
Classroom/Space	8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>We already have PreK classrooms at each building with the capacity of taking on our 4 year olds.</i></li> </ul>
Staff/teachers	7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Excellent teaching staff and developmentally appropriate practices in well functioning programs for children</i></li> </ul>
Nothing	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Nothing currently! All would need to be expanded upon.</i></li> </ul>
Unknown	5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Unknown at this time.</i></li> </ul>

**Question 4: What support would you need for system oversight? (N=62 Principals)**

Multiple Choice Answer	Response Count
Training on compliance and regulatory requirements	38
Budget management and financial oversight	32
Professional development for leadership and management skills	25
Regular performance metrics and evaluation processes	24
Communication systems for stakeholder engagement	21

Multiple Choice Answer	Response Count
Risk management and mitigation strategies	18
Data management and analysis tools	17
Technology infrastructure for monitoring and reporting	9

**Question 5: What would your plan for 3-year-olds be? (n=74 Principals and School Board)**

Multiple Choice Answer	Response Count
Unsure at this time, need more information to decide	35
Offer part-time district programs for 3yos	13
Offer a hybrid model with both district and child care options	11
Keep 3yos in district programming regardless of loss of state funding	10
Develop partnerships with high-quality child care providers	10
Provide district-supported programs within existing child care centers	6
Transition 3yos to the child care system	5
Implement a gradual transition plan from child care to district programming	4
Create a separate early learning center for 3yos within the district	2
Other (depending on funding and supports)	6

**Question 6: Anything else you would like to share about the implementation of ACT 76? (n=50)**

Emergent Theme	Response Count	Quote
Funding challenges	16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>This change to the publicly funded pre-K model will have a positive impact on the well-being of Vermont's children. With that said, in a time when schools are facing staffing, facilities and budget challenges, this change will have many unintended consequences that will impact the efficacy and financial stability of public education in our state.</i></li> <li>● <i>My only concern is the expectation placed upon current schools and districts. We would need the funding and time to prepare for this without compromising the experiences of current students and staff (loss of \$\$\$)</i></li> <li>● <i>With the governor's recent letter regarding the state education funding outlook for next year, it is hard to foresee how we would make a significant change to PreK at this time, without significant negative impacts on the younger students and their families in our community. If we are to absorb them, too, that would most likely require doubling the number of PreK classrooms in our school, at a time when I expect we will be asked to cut teaching positions across the board.</i></li> <li>● <i>Without looking at overall funding of education in VT, just adding full day for 4 year olds is going to stress an already stressed system. That is what I worry about most</i></li> <li>● <i>The continuation of funding early childhood from the same pot as the K12 system is highly problematic as we are already struggling to maintain costs and present a passable budget to our voters. Continuing to create required additional actions/education without addressing our funding structure is dangerous and irresponsible.</i></li> </ul>

Emergent Theme	Response Count	Quote
Staff capacity challenges	13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Consideration of available trained faculty and staff, especially in rural communities, needs to be a priority before mandates should be put in place.</i></li> <li>• <i>It is increasingly difficult to find quality, licensed Early Educators in our area. The last time we hired a PreK teacher we had just one applicant. If we have to provide classroom space for all of our district 4 year olds then we will need to hire at least 2 more licensed early educators and at least 2 more classroom paras.</i></li> </ul>
Timeline/readiness challenges	10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Is this really the right time to add an additional burden on struggling school districts?</i></li> <li>• <i>This change to the publicly funded pre-K model will have a positive impact on the well-being of Vermont's children. With that said, in a time when schools are facing staffing, facilities and budget challenges, this change will have many unintended consequences that will impact the efficacy and financial stability of public education in our state.</i></li> <li>• <i>It would require many hours of thoughtful planning to make this work for our district.</i></li> </ul>
Streamline regulations and oversight	10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Please advocate for streamlining Pre-K requirements for Pre-K in public school.</i></li> <li>• <i>The regulations of a child care facility inside a public elementary school is a huge burden to the operation of the school for a majority of the student population served in a PK-6 setting.</i></li> </ul>

Emergent Theme	Response Count	Quote
Space/facilities challenges	9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Larger school districts do not have the space or budget to add 7-8 additional classrooms with staffing in order to implement Act 76. I wonder how the state will be able to support this legislation financially.</i></li> <li>• <i>I think that this would be difficult to accomplish in smaller communities where infrastructure can and will be a problem. Where will the classrooms be and how will buildings change to accommodate these new rooms?</i></li> </ul>
Supportive of change	8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>This change to the publicly funded pre-K model will have a positive impact on the well-being of Vermont's children.</i></li> <li>• <i>I am very optimistic about the pathway that Act 76 will create for a more equitable student and family educational experience and the short and long term benefits it would have.</i></li> </ul>
Concern re: 3YOs	8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Please don't forget about programming for three year olds. Can't ACT 76 include ten hours a week for 3 year olds that could continue to receive funding?</i></li> <li>• <i>I am incredibly disappointed that opportunities are going to be taken away from 3 year old children. Our data supports great success from students receiving 2 years of high quality PreK education. Particularly our children with disabilities benefit from 2 years in a consistent classroom setting. Removing 3 year olds from the conversation continues to cause me concern and I fear that it will result in reduced outcomes for children.</i></li> </ul>

## Appendix G: Constituent Feedback and Data collected by Building Bright Futures

Building Bright Futures submitted the following data, constituent feedback, and legislative testimony/memos summarizing the current status of UPK in Vermont, and questions and concerns of community members to the Committee:

- [Vermont Universal Prekindergarten Education \(UPK\) Data, Publications, Reports, and Resources](#), Updated November 2024: Compilation of most recent data, stakeholder feedback, publications (State and national), and partner testimony on UPK in Vermont.
- [S.56 Stakeholder Feedback](#): This document captured invested party feedback on the policies and priorities originally proposed in S.56. Much of the feedback was related to UPK and a mixed delivery model and was presented in the House Committee on Human Services, the Senate Committee on Health and Welfare, the Senate Committee on Education, and the House Committee on Education.
- [Data Needed to Inform Decision-making](#): This document outlined the questions/data that would be important to have to inform decision-making on the future of UPK, originally presented to the Senate Committee on Education.
- [BBF's Universal Prekindergarten \(UPK\) Webinar on results from Statewide Data Collection on Successes and Challenges in UPK](#) and [Testimony on the findings of Building Bright Futures' information gathering effort on Universal Prekindergarten \(UPK\)](#): 13 in-person focus groups were held statewide including 199 participants from 26 unique sectors and an electronic feedback form captured data from over 169 participants from over 26 sectors. The purpose of this information gathering effort was to utilize BBF's statewide and regional networks to ask those directly impacted by Act 166 to identify perceptions of success, where and why it's been successful and to share best practices, also outline persistent barriers to successful UPK administration and implementation.
- [Memo submitted to the Senate Committee on Education](#): This memo provided an overview of what information and data should be reviewed and discussed in order to improve UPK.
- [Memo submitted to the Senate Committee on Health and Welfare](#): This memo provided concrete guidance on the importance of compiling critical data and determining the cost of expanding/adapting UPK before convening a study committee and called attention to the lack of unified vision for UPK policy and the time frame associated with convening a study committee.
- [Memo submitted to the House Committee on Education](#): This memo included considerations for data-driven decision-making in UPK, preliminary themes resulting from stakeholder feedback on S.56/H.208 captured from February 2023, and outlining existing data, publications, reports and resources on UPK.
- [The Vermont Early Childhood Strategic Plan Committee's Early Learning and Development's February 2023 Meeting on Pre-K](#). In February, the Early Learning and Development Committee Meeting held a discussion with Prekindergarten coordinators and partners about potential impacts of the bill (S. 56/H. 208) during their February meeting.

- [Vermont Early Care and Education Financing Study \(RAND Report\)](#): This report, required by Act 45 of 2021, includes financial estimates on the cost of restructuring the state’s Child Care Financial Assistance Program and funding options to support an increased state investment in early childhood education.
- [The Vermont Child Care and Early Childhood Education Systems Analysis Final Report](#): This report, required by Act 45 of 2021, includes a set of recommendations for how the state might improve its early childhood governance, with specific steps state policymakers should consider taking.

## Appendix H: Vermont’s Prekindergarten Data Gaps and Efforts

The BBF Early Childhood Data and Evaluation Strategic Plan Committee has begun to document a [Data Development Agenda for UPK](#) that includes the following:

- Identification of existing cross-sector data by topic and priority
- Limitations, gaps, and challenges
- Data needed to inform decision-making
- Questions and considerations
- Identification of lead data entity or data steward

In addition, BBF developed the [Data Needed to Inform Decision-Making in UPK](#) document to more concisely articulate key data required to understand the current system to inform the future of UPK in Vermont.

The work of the PEIC, in close partnership with CDD, AOE, and Building Bright Futures, has made progress in filling some of these data gaps over the course of its tenure as reflected by the surveying and data analysis efforts. The following data efforts have been prioritized and will result in strong, systematic data collection and publications over the coming years:

- **Prioritization of UPK data analysis and dissemination:** The Agency of Education and the Child Development Division are working to compile and analyze existing UPK data (report forthcoming) and will partner on dissemination with Vermont’s Early Childhood Data and Policy Center at Building Bright Futures through the data portal, the State of Vermont’s Children annual report, and data briefs.
- **Documentation of a Prekindergarten Program Quality Matrix:** outlining current national benchmarks and best practices for high-quality prekindergarten education and documents if and how these benchmarks are met across settings in Vermont’s regulated programs.
- **Surveys of Superintendents, Principals, and School Board Members** (themes from the surveys can be seen in Appendix G)



- [Early Childhood Grand Rounds](#) (June 2024) - The State of Preschool: Situating Vermont within the National Context
  - [Recording](#)
  - [Summary](#)
  - [Panelist Bios](#)
- Strategic planning and PreK monitoring and data integration efforts: The following initiatives are now underway to support Vermont’s ability to have a clearer picture of PreK alongside early childhood service provision and outcomes for children and families:
  - **Preschool Development Grant (PDG) Activity 5.1** - Continuous Quality Improvement and Monitoring in Universal Prekindergarten Education (Key partners: AOE, CDD) - Aligning communication between agencies, developing notification tools, implementing welcome visits, strengthening tracking systems through ACIS.
  - **Preschool Development Grant (PDG) Activity 5.3** - Early Childhood Data Monitoring and Integration (Key Partners: BBF, CDD, AOE, DMH, VDH, ORE) - Interagency collaboration led by BBF to (1) collect, analyze, share, and use data, using a continuous quality improvement lens to monitor data practices, (2) utilize the Data and Evaluation Committee meetings and other convenings to develop, commit to, and implement a vision for data integration supported by data governance and based on existing gaps and opportunities; (3) Develop strategies to link data across sectors and data collection repositories; and (4) Make data meaningful and publicly available.
  - **The Hunt Institute’s Early Childhood Leadership Summit Vermont Team Goals (Key Partners: BBF, CDD, AOE, House Representatives):** Prioritizing the development and implementation of a new, collaborative monitoring and accountability protocol for UPK that is based on the data development agenda, existing data, lessons learned from the past 10 years of CQI, and national best practice.
  - **The cost-of-care analysis commissioned by CDD** to create a new way to establish and update prekindergarten payments made to non-school-based prekindergarten programs for the 25/26 school year and beyond.

## Appendix I: Prekindergarten Education Implementation Committee Process and Discussion Survey Results

**Erica McLaughlin (Vote Yes)** The committee's performance fell short of fulfilling the charge outlined in Act 76. The diverse composition of the committee, while intended to bring multiple perspectives, ultimately hindered progress. An inordinate amount of time was consumed by level-setting discussions and debates over the interpretation of the committee's charge, rather than focusing on its core purpose of developing a comprehensive implementation plan for expanding prekindergarten education.

The committee structure, which relied heavily on small group work, severely limited opportunities for full group discussions and consensus-building. This approach fragmented the process and prevented the development of a cohesive set of recommendations that could have reflected the full range of perspectives represented. More structured full-group discussions and dedicated time for collective decision-making were sorely needed to synthesize the diverse viewpoints and expertise present on the committee.

The committee's failure to vote on a comprehensive suite of recommendations, managing to reach majority agreement on only four foundational points, underscores its struggle to synthesize discussions into actionable proposals aligned with Act 76's mandate. This mandate called for "improving and expanding accessible, affordable, and high-quality prekindergarten education for all four-year-old children on a full-day basis on or before July 1, 2026".

While the committee's work provided valuable insights and considerations, it failed to deliver the comprehensive implementation plan requested by Act 76. The inability to overcome internal divisions and focus on the core mission represents a missed opportunity to shape the future of prekindergarten education in Vermont. The committee's process and outcomes highlight the need for a more focused approach in future efforts to address this critical issue in early childhood education.

**Janet McLaughlin (Vote Yes)** As Co-Chair, I'm grateful for the time, focus, and expertise brought by each Committee member. I look forward to continuing the work along with Secretary Saunders to ensure that all Vermont children benefit from a strong prekindergarten education.

**Jeff O'Hara (Vote Yes)**

**Jeffrey Francis (Vote Yes)** As a member of the Commission representing the Vermont Superintendents Association, I support the statements provided by Erica McLaughlin for the Vermont Principals' Association and Sandra Cameron for the Vermont School Boards Association.

**Korinne Harvey (Vote Yes)** While I'm happy to see this important work move forward, and truly believe it will benefit Vermont families and the future of our children (and their futures!), I do continue to be concerned that something has missed the mark. Basically,

have we put the horse before the cart? Not only has this left special education for 3s in limbo in many ways, but when there is no statewide day Kindergarten, I don't see how the possibility of 4s getting full-day education only to then get part-time schooling at 5 is not a bigger concern than should have also been addressed first. I thank the legislature and this committee for their time and energy, and I am grateful to see early education getting the attention it deserves! Good luck to all moving forward!

**Mary Lundeen (Vote Yes)** There was not ample time for the committee, as a larger group, to fully discuss and vote on the recommendations made by the smaller subcommittees. It will be important for any future committee work to provide the time necessary for these important conversations.

**Morgan Crossman (Vote Yes)**

**Nicole Miller (Vote Yes)**

**Rebecca Webb (Vote Yes)**

**Renee Kelly (Vote Yes)**

**Sandra Cameron (Vote Yes)** The VSBA has been a fully engaged partner in the work of the PreK Implementation Committee over the past 16 months, despite ongoing significant concerns about the lack of full transparency due to most meetings being conducted in small groups and due to feedback, even voting, being conducted by electronic survey. We have been concerned about the lack of opportunity for full-committee dialogue and deliberation throughout this process and also concerned that individual responses could be taken out of context without committee discussion. We have requested changes to address these concerns and did not see those requests come to fruition. We requested a meeting of the full PEIC to vote on the entire final draft of the report and instead received an electronic form. Further, we have expressed concern about the use of alternative methods of voting/approval being in compliance with Vermont's Open Meeting Law which is designed to promote transparency, accountability and better decision-making in government.

The PreK implementation committee's charge as outlined in Act 76 was to bring together a large and diverse group of people to come to consensus around recommendations on the implementation of full-time PreK for four-year-olds. The committee charge was to focus on "how," not on "whether" implementation should be done. Legislative committees had collected testimony on this issue prior to the enactment of Act 76, yet the committee's work was often diverted from the legislative charge to various other issues within the early childhood arena. The committee fell short of fulfilling this charge, despite multiple efforts to redirect the work to the legislative charge. The process was hindered by both the lengthy advocacy for the child care financial assistance via the Education Fund and by facilitation of a group process that was largely done virtually in fragmented small groups. This prohibited the full implementation committee from focusing on its core purpose of developing a comprehensive implementation plan for expanding prekindergarten education. Lastly,

committee members had varying degrees of understanding of the PreK-grade 12 public education system and the effect of any change on the overall delivery. The committee focused more on the effects of any changes to the child care system than the effects of any changes to the comprehensive public education system, where the funding and accountability of the Universal Prekindergarten tuition voucher program sits. This resulted in very little discussion about necessary changes that reflect the current context of public education in Vermont, despite the Governor's persistent communication and calls for decreased spending by school districts. In fact, the majority of the committee, including the two co-chairs who are part of the administration, voted against language that would have promoted effective and efficient models of delivery for prekindergarten.

In the end, the committee failed to develop actionable recommendations aligned with its charge in Act 76, which called for "improving and expanding accessible, affordable, and high-quality prekindergarten education for all four-year-old children on a full-day basis on or before July 1, 2026". We are disappointed in the missed opportunity to provide meaningful and actionable recommendations to the General Assembly regarding prekindergarten education and hope that the Commission on the Future of Public Education in Vermont will take this up as part of their comprehensive work on behalf of students grades PreK-12.

**Sharron Harrington (Vote Yes)**

**Sheila Quenneville (Vote Yes)**

**Sherry Carlson (Vote Yes)**

**Theresa Pollner (Abstain)** Due to timeline constraints, I didn't have sufficient time to read through the final draft of the report so I had to abstain.

**Zoie Saunders (Vote Yes)** I want to extend my appreciation to the committee members for their dedication to ensuring access to high-quality prekindergarten programs for our youngest Vermont learners. I also appreciate Deputy Commissioner McLaughlin's leadership as a co-chair on the committee and look forward to our ongoing collaboration to support prekindergarten students. As the General Assembly considers prekindergarten policies, there is an opportunity to situate these efforts within the context of broader discussions about system-wide enhancements that support the quality, equity, and sustainability of Vermont's education system from cradle to career.