
TESTIMONY

Testimony To: House Committee on Education
Respectfully Submitted by: Daniel M. French, Ed.D., Secretary of Education
Subject: PreK 101
Date: February 1, 2023

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on the topic of Prekindergarten Education. The purpose of this testimony is to provide a general overview of Vermont's prekindergarten (PreK) policy landscape, or "PreK 101".

Policy Background

Vermont's PreK policy is described in [Act 166 of 2014](#).

PreK is an educational activity. PreK is not childcare, although many private childcare providers participate in Vermont's PreK system.

Our PreK system is implemented through a public-private partnership between public school districts and private providers to ensure broad access to these services. This commitment to broad access often leads us to describe our system as Universal PreK, or UPK, but the terms PreK and UPK have the same meaning for the purposes of this discussion.

As a result of this public-private partnership, PreK is administered by two state agencies: the Agency of Education (AOE – for public PreK) and the Agency of Human Services (AHS – for private providers of PreK).

Participation in PreK is optional for both districts and parents. Districts are not required to operate PreK programs and parents are not required to send their students to these programs. School districts may operate PreK programs and/or contract with private providers to deliver these services.

Districts receive a prorated pupil count (0.4 of an equalized pupil) for each resident student who attends an approved PreK program. This additional taxing capacity is provided to districts to support the costs of these services. District costs are usually attributed to the costs of operating their own programs, tuition costs to private providers, or a combination of both.

The tuition rate paid to qualified private providers (10 hours a week for 35 weeks annually) is determined at the state level. The statewide school year PreK tuition rate for the 2022-2023 school year is \$3,764.00. The tuition rate is adjusted on an annual basis for inflation.



Research and Rationale

The investment in PreK is one of the most prudent and important investments in the education process. Large longitudinal studies such as the [Chicago Child Parent Center Study](#) and studies related to the [Carolina Abecedarian Project](#) have shown the value of PreK participation.

PreK is also considered one of the most important interventions relative to addressing patterns of inequity in our education system. Ensuring all students get off to a good start in critical areas such as literacy is an important goal of our education system.

PreK Implementation in Vermont

The implementation of PreK has been analyzed extensively in Vermont. The National Institute for Early Education Research reviews how PreK is implemented in each state. Vermont's most recent NIEER review can be found [here](#). Vermont is considered a national leader in both PreK quality and access.

The General Assembly commissioned a [study of PreK implementation](#) in Act 11 of 2018. Some of the key findings of that study include the following.

Mixed delivery

- Public and private programs are generally working together effectively to share information and resources to support PreK education.
- Public PreK programs have a marked advantage in hiring AOE licensed PreK teachers.
- The majority of children enrolled in publicly-funded PreK are enrolled in the highest-quality programs, as rated by Vermont's quality rating system.

Equity

- Programs identified limited transportation resources and registration requirements as possible barriers to PreK access.
- Concerns were identified about equitable access to PreK for students with special needs.
- Children eligible for free or reduced-price lunch had on average, fewer prequalified PreK programs within the geographic boundaries of their supervisory union.

Regulatory Oversight and Administration

- The vast majority of public-school programs have found it redundant and inefficient to ensure that their PreK programs comply with two sets of

regulations—those required by the public school system and by the state’s childcare regulations.

- Some public PreK providers expressed a need for more robust monitoring and accountability systems.
- In general, suggestions regarding joint vs. single agency administration were mixed, although several public programs favored single agency administration through AOE.

Parent Feedback and Choice

- No parents indicated that their child’s placement at their current PreK program was a barrier to receiving special education services; furthermore, children eligible for special education services (that is, those with individualized education programs) did not travel significantly farther to their PreK program compared to ineligible children.
- Overall, parents reported that they had very positive feelings about Vermont’s publicly funded universal PreK system and that they were very satisfied with the quality of education that their children were receiving through their PreK program.

To better understand the regional trends of PreK implementation across the state, the AOE worked with the Region 1 Comprehensive Center to map out key data relative to PreK implementation and delivery. [This map](#) provides a useful and interactive way to understand patterns of PreK programming on a regional basis.