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MEMORANDUM

TO: All Head Start Providers, Superintendents, and Principals
FROM: Hal Cohen, Secretary of the Agency of Human Services
Dr. Rebecca Holcombe, Secretary of Education
COPY: Dr. Ben Allen, Director, Vermont Head Start State Collaboration Office BA
SUBJECT: Public School and Head Start and Act 166: Statement of Preferred Practice
DATE: August 2016

Act 166 of 2014 entitles all Vermont three, four, and five year olds (not enrolled in kindergarten) to tuition vouchers for 10 hours per week for 35 weeks annually of high-quality prekindergarten education. Parents enroll their children in the preapproved prekindergarten program of their choice and which will accept them. The school district in which the child is resident pays the tuition to the provider where the child is enrolled. Preapproved prekindergarten providers include private day care centers, family day cares, public prekindergarten programs and Head Start prekindergarten programs. Some school districts offer prekindergarten education in a school-based setting and partner with Head Start to offer expanded programming for eligible students in the same location.

When parents choose to send their children to prekindergarten education programs provided in tandem with Head Start in school-based settings, the public schools and Head Start leverage and optimize federal, state and local resources to assure equity, access and benefits for young, vulnerable children from low-income families. Leveraging and optimizing funding streams enables programs to expand services to unserved children, provide prekindergarten education in a socioeconomically diverse setting, add additional hours of service, enhance systems and services consistent with federal Head Start quality standards, and/or provide wrap-around, comprehensive child and family development services.

Of the options affiliated with Head Start, our preferred practice is that public prequalified prekindergarten programs partner with Head Start to provide prekindergarten education in heterogeneous public school/school-based settings with expanded services for Head Start eligible children. We prefer this practice because empirical research has demonstrated young children learn much from their peers when they learn in a socioeconomically heterogeneous context. We value the role Head Start grantees can play in supporting children who live in poverty by adding comprehensive Head Start services to prekindergarten education so that children eligible for Head Start receive critical support and opportunities-- including family supports-- that they need to thrive and learn alongside their more affluent peers in an integrated context, as well as family supports that are critical to early school success.