

TESTIMONY PROVIDED TO: House Education Committee

FROM: Dr. Amy Fowler, Deputy Agency of Education

TOPIC: [Draft 6.1- S.257 4.5.2018](#) – Section 9;

Draft 8.1- Section 10, page 9-10

DATE: April 10, 2018

Overview

The current bill strips all language related to prekindergarten that had been jointly proposed by AHS and AOE that was debated and modified before being passed by the Senate. Replacing the AHS/AOE language is a request for the AOE to complete a study by December 1, 2018.

AOE Position

The AOE respectfully requests that the committee return to the language passed by the Senate and modify that as you see appropriate. We expect that you will find elements to change, but as we have previously shared with the House Education Committee, this language reflects specific changes that were requested by different stakeholders in the prekindergarten sphere. In determining what we would recommend to you, AOE and AHS were mindful to balance the “wins” and “losses” for participants to create a package that addresses the highest-level concerns for participants. Please know that each time a “win” is conferred for a particular segment, a “loss” is perceived by another segment.

In our joint work, [Recommended Reform of Act 166](#), we committed to the following based on our review of current Act 166 implementation and stakeholder input. These recommendations are unlikely to change between now and December 2018 and all have been addressed in the language submitted for the prekindergarten changes that were recommended to the legislature:

- 1) The State of Vermont should continue to sponsor a universal PreK voucher program that would allow families of children who are 3 or 4 years old and not in kindergarten to have 10 hours of PreK, for 35 weeks a year.
- 2) The State of Vermont should continue to sponsor a portable voucher that allows families to access those services in the location of their choosing.
- 3) The State of Vermont should continue to fund the PreK voucher program from the Education Fund.
- 4) The State of Vermont should discontinue joint administration (AOE and AHS) of the PreK voucher program and should instead have the AOE be the lead agency to make decisions and administer the program.
- 5) The State of Vermont should seek efficiency in the PreK voucher program through centralized accounting and contracting at the AOE for providers and school systems.

- 6) The State of Vermont should simplify the mechanisms for participation, regulation and monitoring to ensure that the least amount of dual regulation and duplicative efforts for all program types exists. Issues to address include:
 - a) Pursuing single regulation so that CDD would regulate private providers and AOE would regulate public providers.
 - b) Clarifying the value of the voucher for private and public providers (fiscal transparency).
 - c) Clarifying the quality criteria programs must meet to participate in the PreK voucher program.
- 7) The State of Vermont should provide time to prepare for implementation of these recommendations.
- 8) The State of Vermont should revisit the quality criteria for provider participation in the PreK voucher program.

The result of legislative inaction on the AHS/AOE submitted language essentially requires us to continue a system that has clear flaws for an even longer period of time. The Agency of Education could produce the report you request, just as we did this past year, but we suspect that whatever we would recommend would still result in legislation that has clear opposition from multiple stakeholders who have differing interests and the “wins” and “losses” would still remain.