




MEMORANDUM

TO: House Education Committee

FROM: Jeff Fannon, Vermont-NEA Executive Director 

DATE: February 27, 2018

RE: Pre-K Education Bill – Draft 18-0839

Thank you for inviting me to testify about the Pre-K Education bill, draft 18-0839. As a general matter, Vermont-NEA supports pre-k education and the expansion of it in the public school setting. Research shows that educating kids at an earlier age pays dividends down the road, and Vermont's encouragement of and decision to spend state resources on high quality early education will ensure Vermont's students arrive to school prepared to learn. Indeed, the emphasis has to be about high quality education not merely childcare.

I do have some comments about the draft bill. As a threshold matter, the bill does not eliminate the public dollar voucher system and that system benefits, unfairly, the well-off. The bill, however, is a step in the right direction inasmuch as it proposes to eliminate the need for public school operated pre-k programs to meet both AOE and AHS standards whereas private providers only have to meet AHS standards. This dual regulation system is unnecessary and the draft bill would correct that inequality.

Another inequality that the draft bill does not correct is found on page 5, 16 VSA § 829(c)(1)(B)&(2)(A). The draft bill would only require private providers to have a licensed teacher "present at the site during the hours that are publicly funded" whereas the public school pre-k provider must have a teacher "provide direct instruction during the hours that are publicly funded." The purpose of high quality pre-k is to have licensed teachers provide the instruction not just be in the vicinity, and whether the child knows it or not, there is real benefit to a teacher providing pre-k education and not just sending in a surrogate. Indeed, that point was made repeatedly in the DMG special education report that gave rise to this committee's special education bill. I recommend the draft bill be amended to require of private pre-k providers the same licensed teacher mandate as is required of the public pre-k providers.

On page 11 at 16 VSA § 829(e)(1), we recommend the following adjustment to the requirement that the Secretary promulgate pre-k rules:

- (1) To require that the Secretary provide opportunities for effective parental participation in the prekindergarten education program, in a manner that does not disrupt the educational program.

Without the additional qualifying language a misguided parent could use the statutory language to impose his or her will on a program without limitation. While certainly unlikely and rare, it has happened and cementing in statute parental participation should have some qualifying language.

Again, in subsection (4)(A) of the same rule-making section but on page 12, inserting the word “only” after the word “inaction” so ensure some limitation in the “administrative process” allowing for a parent to “challenge” a provider’s action or inaction.

Further but in subsection (7) of the same rule-making section but on page 13, the word “private” should be added to ensure that public and private providers “safety and quality requirements” are reported by the Secretary.

In all, the draft bill is a high quality effort to establish equity and fairness to the children enrolled in publicly funded pre-k programs.