



Thursday, January 19, 2017

To: House Education Committee
From: Janet McLaughlin, Executive Director, Vermont Birth to Five

Testimony on Vermont's Universal Pre-K System

Thank you very much for inviting me to speak with you today about Vermont's universal pre-K system. My name is Janet McLaughlin, and I am the Executive Director of Vermont Birth to Five, often referred to as V B 5. Through close collaboration with state agencies and community organizations, VB5 directly engages child care providers in projects designed to improve program quality, and our organization also encompasses the Vermont Community Preschool Collaborative, also referred to as V C P C, which is focused on supporting and sustaining quality preschool and pre-K programming in the state, including supporting the implementation of publicly-funded pre-K in Vermont.

This important issue to me, not only from a professional perspective, but also as the parent of a two-year-old and four-year-old who are in a community-based children's center. Last year, my son did not benefit from universal pre-K because our school district do not participate in early implementation. This year, no spots were available in a public-school-based program, but he was able to participate in a prequalified pre-K program through a community-based program in a child care center. Even with 10 hours of pre-K covered through Act 166, our family is still paying over \$25,000 this year for the early care and learning of our two kids. Even with two working professional parents, this is a huge cost for us, and it would be an even larger financial burden without universal, publicly-funded pre-K.

I am also the Board Treasurer for Pine Forest Children's Center so I can see how Act 166 funds impact our center's budget and enrollment. The pre-K funding available through Act 166 has made a difference in Pine Forest's ability to serve more low-income kids. In the last two months, we have added 3 kids who really need Pre-K to be ready for school to our pre-K classroom because of Act 166. These are families who wouldn't be able to invest in part-time pre-K for their kids without these funds. Many of these families are eligible to receive tuition assistance through the state's Child Care Financial Assistance Program for hours outside of those covered by Act 166 funding to allow children to receive part-time or full-time early care and learning programming, but Act 166 served as the impetus for these families to enroll their children in a pre-K program.

From my professional perspective, the data from early implementation highlights the positive benefits of our commitment to our young children at the statewide level. Initial data from the early implementation of Act 166 indicates that there was strong participation in publicly-funded pre-K during the 2015–2016 school year, with approximately 7,300 age-eligible children enrolled in publicly-funded pre-K programs.ⁱ While there have been some concerns regarding the equity of early implementation, the initial data from VCPC partnerships indicates that low-income children are benefiting from the opportunity to access high-quality programming at no cost to their family. As we move farther into the first full academic year of implementation, we look forward to reviewing how the initial data evolves to better understand challenges and successes across the state.

As an organization that is focused on quality development in Vermont's early care and learning system, we have noticed additional benefits to Vermont's entire early care and learning system. In our state's mixed-delivery model – a model that utilizes public school-based pre-K programs and community-based pre-K programs in regulated home or center-based early care and learning programs - community-based pre-K providers play an important role in offering equitable, publicly-funded pre-K

programming. Through Act 166, these providers' programs are strengthened and sustained, allowing them expand facilities and/or increase enrollment, and stabilizing Vermont's broader early care and learning system. Pre-K funding also supports community-based providers in investing in the quality of their programs. In order to be eligible to be prequalified to participate in the state's publicly-funded pre-K program, regulated early care and learning providers must have a quality designation of 4 or 5 stars, or 3 stars with a plan to get to 4 stars, in the state's quality recognition and improvement system, known as STARS. These quality designations are the highest recognition levels available, and linking participation in publicly-funded pre-K to having a high level quality supports programs in developing quality across their programs.

Vermont can also learn from the experiences of other states and communities that have implemented universal, publicly-funded pre-K programs. According to national research, in 2005, of the 38 states that operated some form of publicly-funded pre-K, 29 did so through mixed-delivery systems, also referred to as diverse delivery systems.^{ii, iii}

- In 10 of the 29 states that utilized mixed-delivery system, more than half of children enrolled in publicly-funded pre-K programs attended pre-K in community-based settings.^{iv}

More recent studies have shown that the majority of states and municipalities that operate publicly-funded pre-K systems continue to use a mixed-delivery system.^{v, vi} These include:

- New York City, where approximately 60% of publicly-funded pre-K slots were located in community-based programs at the start of the 2016–2017 school year;^{vii}
- West Virginia, where 74% of publicly-funded pre-k classrooms were in community-based settings in the 2013–2014 school year;^{viii} and
- New Jersey, where 56% of children who attended publicly-funded pre-K in 2013 did so in a community-based setting.^{ix}

In addition to the lessons that can be learned from individual state, the federal government is also aligning resources to support the best-practice approach of delivering pre-K through mixed-delivery systems. In 2015, preschool development and expansion grants moved under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). As part of this move, additional criteria were added to the grant, based on input from the early care and learning community, including requiring applicants for preschool development and expansion grants to utilize a mixed-delivery system for their pre-K programs to qualify for funding. This move has been echoed by major national and international funders focused on early care and learning initiatives. In 2014, a project of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation released a paper on the elements of high-quality pre-K based on four "exemplary" programs. Of the four, three were mixed-delivery systems (NJ, NC and MD).^x The Pew Charitable Trusts' Pew Center on the States has also published a series of reports on work being done to develop voluntary, publicly-funded pre-K programs at the state level, and much of its work focused on what it called mixed-delivery systems methods, which they refer to as collaborative delivery methods.^{xi}

From Vermont Birth to Five's perspective, Vermont's universal, publicly-funded pre-K system is positively supporting the growth and development of our state's youngest children.

Thank you very much for your time and consideration.

ⁱ <http://buildingbrightfutures.org/initiatives/how-are-vermonts-young-children/>

ⁱⁱ <http://nieer.org/sites/nieer/files/2005yearbook.pdf>

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://www.centerforpubliceducation.org/Main-Menu/Pre-kindergarten/Pre-Kindergarten/Pre-kindergarten-What-the-research-shows.html>

^{iv} <http://www.centerforpubliceducation.org/Main-Menu/Pre-kindergarten/Pre-Kindergarten/Pre-kindergarten-What-the-research-shows.html>

^v <http://nieer.org/publications/annual-state-pre-k-reports-state-preschool-yearbooks>

^{vi} http://media.hoover.org/sites/default/files/documents/Chester_E_Finn_Jr_Reroute_the_Preschool_Juggernaut_78.pdf

^{vii} http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2015/09/30/nyc-pushes-to-meet-promise-of-universal.html?_ga=1.53359983.633297987.1476977753

^{viii} <http://static.k12.wv.us/oel/docs/WV-PreK-Overview-2013-14.pdf>

^{ix} <http://commonwealthmagazine.org/education/004-new-jersey-prek-holds-lessons-for-mass/>

^x https://docs.gatesfoundation.org/documents/lessons%20from%20research%20and%20the%20Classroom_September%202014.pdf

^{xi} <https://www.nmeffoundation.org/getmedia/c9544bc4-2128-4ec5-8446-d7858f12868b/BeyondtheSchoolYard>