



Thursday, January 19, 2017

To: House Education Committee

From: Mary Lynn Riggs, Consultant, Vermont Community Preschool Collaborative

### **Testimony on Pre-K under Act 166**

Thank you very much for inviting me to speak with you today about Vermont's universal pre-K system. My name is Mary Lynn Riggs and I am a consultant for the Vermont Community Preschool Collaborative, a project of Vermont Birth to Five. My experience with early childhood and education has taken me on a journey from teaching, to serving as Principal of Swanton Elementary School, Orchard School in South Burlington, and St. Albans City School. I also had the pleasure of serving as the Director of Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment for the Franklin West Supervisory Union, and, along the way, I also obtained my Doctorate in Educational Leadership and Policy from UVM. In my current work with VCPC, I am able to lend my public education system experience to build and strengthen school-community partnerships to support young children and families under Act 166.

Currently, VCPC provides technical assistance and grant funding to 12 publicly-funded pre-K school-community partnerships in 10 counties throughout the state. As part of our work supporting programs, VCPC collects regular information from programs on a wide range of topics. Earlier this week, programs submitted mid-year reports for the 2016-2017 academic year, and the responses from partner programs highlight some of the key successes related to the equitable access of Vermont's mixed-delivery pre-K system during the first full year of implementation.

One of the key questions we asked programs on the mid-year evaluation was the percent of children enrolled in their program who are also income eligible to receive free or reduced lunch or child care tuition assistance through the state's child care financial assistance program, as the income caps for the two programs offer a good proxy for estimating the number of lower-income children participating in Act 166-funded pre-K programs.

A few of the highlights from the reports include the following:

- **Orwell School District Partnership**
  - Approximately 42% of children enrolled in Act 166-funded programs in the partnership area are income eligible for Vermont's Child Care Financial Assistance Program or are income eligible for free or reduced lunch programs.
- **The Southwest Vermont Supervisory Union Early Education Program Partnership**
  - Approximately 79% of children enrolled in Act 166-funded programs in the partnership area are income eligible for Vermont's Child Care Financial Assistance Program or are income eligible for free or reduced lunch programs.
- **St. Johnsbury Partnership**
  - Approximately 74% of children enrolled in the partnership's new Act 166-funded programs in the partnership area for 2016-2017 are income eligible for Vermont's Child Care Financial Assistance Program or are income eligible for free or reduced lunch programs.
  - Approximately 58% of children enrolled in all of the partnership's Act 166-funded programs in the partnership area for 2016-2017 are income eligible for Vermont's Child Care Financial Assistance Program or are income eligible for free or reduced lunch programs.

- **Rutland Central School Partnership**

- The Rutland Central School Partnership was able to report out income eligibility by school-based programs and community-based programs:
  - For school-based Act 166-funded classrooms in the partnership area, approximately 60% of children are income eligible for Vermont's Child Care Financial Assistance Program or are income eligible for free or reduced lunch programs.
  - For community-based programs, approximately 85% of children enrolled in Act 166-funded programs are income eligible for Vermont's Child Care Financial Assistance Program or are income eligible for free or reduced lunch programs.
- Rutland's experience demonstrates how Vermont's mixed-delivery system is an equitable and effective system to best serve children and families who most need these programs.

Another success of Act 166 is how the mixed-delivery system allows for the elevation of quality across school-community partnerships. In our mid-year evaluation, the Orange East SU Partnership reported that Act-166 has strengthened community resources in one of the area's lowest-income communities. In this area, there is no school-based program, so Act 166's mixed-delivery system, has allowed the area's prequalified pre-K provider to expand its program, enabling 21 children from the local community to attend publicly-funded pre-K.

While these results are based on the first half of the 2016-2017 school year, we are seeing the positive benefits of Vermont's mixed-delivery pre-K system, and how it is effectively addressing the needs of young children and families from all income levels across the state.

Thank you very much for your time and consideration of this important issue.