



Montessori School of Central Vermont

Testimony of Kristen Martin to the House Education Committee,
February 18, 2020

Thank you for making time for us today; before I begin I was hoping to ask a question of the committee: what is the catalyst/motivation for the division of oversight? Where is this coming from and what is being gained by doing so?

Recommendations for proposed changes to Vermont's Universal PreK system:

- Maintain joint oversight between AOE and CDD/AHS
- Keep language regarding professional development requirements to include Montessori certified teachers
- Keep proposed language regarding uniformity in invoicing, attendance/record keeping, contracts, enrollment, etc.
- Enhance AOE monitoring system of Universal PreK programs

Rationale:

- Maintain joint oversight of Universal PreK programs shared between AOE and CDD/AHS

The current system by which AOE maintains oversight of academic standards and quality, while AHS maintains health and safety standards is the perfect checks and balance system.

The most recent licensing regulations went into effect only a few years ago, and had taken many years to revise. All Early Childhood Programs should maintain these standards, regardless of being public or private. There are some regulations which may require adaptation to public programs, however maintaining one set of health and safety regulations, that have already been outlined and determined by AHS, should stay in effect for all programs. AHS/CDD should continue to monitor the health and safety of all programs, while the AOE should continue to enhance their monitoring system for quality early childhood academic standards.

- Keep language regarding professional development requirements to include Montessori certified teachers

Tamara has done a wonderful job explaining why this language should stay, and is worth spending time developing. I, myself, went through the Portfolio Review process to licensure. I was able to receive my ECE endorsement because of how easily my Montessori training aligned with the framework for peer review. It is my understanding that this state is in dire need of high quality, EC educators and programs to serve young children. The recognition of Montessori trained teachers as quality EC educators would help to get the numbers going in the right direction and could, potentially, begin to help close the gap in quality programs offered to



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children. Recognizing Montessori trained teachers from the onset would also limit the amount of money and resources spent on going through the Peer Review process

- Keep proposed language regarding uniformity in invoicing, attendance/record keeping, contracts, enrollment, etc.

The Winooski Valley Superintendent's Association has done an amazing job of streamlining all of the processes by which private programs report and contract with Supervisory unions. One set of expectations regarding contracts, attendance reporting, invoicing, etc. has been done! This is not something the committee, or the AOE, or anyone!, should have to spend time doing. There is a framework in place that seems to work for twelve SU's in Central Vermont and many, many private programs. These expectations may vary by region, typically based on what SU's receive as legal council in terms of reporting, gathering and sharing information. The AOE developing and monitoring ALL of the relationships with public programs, and the CDD doing the same for private programs isn't going to solve the issue of varying expectations by region, assuming that legal council remains the same.

- Enhance AOE monitoring system of Universal PreK programs

The ONE area of the current law and rules that should take precedence is enhancing the current AOE monitoring system. Time and MONEY should be spent here to ENSURE that Vermont's children are receiving high quality early childhood education. At the moment the monitoring system consists of a Google form and operates on the honor system. Simply filling out a bubble agreeing that my program offers high quality education and submitting a form without someone walking through my program feels disconnected and disheartening. I recently reviewed testimony provided by Kate Rogers and am excited to learn that ACIS program continues to evolve and improve. I want the AOE to come into my program and see the wonderful work the teachers and children do each day; I welcome unscheduled visits and questions about the curriculum being offered and how the children are learning...when these visits don't occur it doesn't feel as though the agency is involved as they should be. Resources should be focused on ensuring that this system continues to monitor programs closely for quality and consistency.

In summary, I continue to be confused about the proposal of the division of oversight for Universal PreK. I have read a lot of the testimony provided over the past few years, as well as provided my own in regards to this issue. The general opinion is to keep the oversight shared, however the discussion continues to happen. The continued 'push' of an agenda that is not



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supported by the people who work in the field is, at best, disheartening and clearly politically driven; this kind of shift in oversight would only serve to divide the public and private programs.

If this decision is data driven, and outcomes provided prove that the children and families would benefit from this type of structure then I would be able to support the recommended language. I see these children every day; I speak with their families and I support the teachers who work with them. Conversations shouldn't be happening about how we are going to divide this work, rather how we need to COME TOGETHER in this work to provide the best start we can to Vermont's children.