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ACT 11 PREKINDERGARTEN STUDY – FINAL REPORT

Presentation to the Vermont House
Committees on Education and Human
Services

January 2020
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Agenda

- 1 Study background
- 2 Overview of study
- 3 Key findings
- 4 Undesirable outcomes & possible solutions

Study background

- Act 166, passed in 2014, was fully implemented beginning 2016/17
 - 76% of 4 year olds
 - 62% of 3 year olds
- Act 11, section E.500.7 – how to more effectively and efficiently provide state-funded, universal PreK
- Study timeline:
October 2018 > Interim Report March 2019 > Final Report July 2019

Key areas of interest for Act 11 PreK study

- ⊕ How well is the funding model working?
- ⊕ How are families making choices about PreK?
- ⊕ Does the system provide equitable access?
- ⊕ Does the current system create undesired outcomes?
- ⊕ How can oversight be simplified?

Overview of study

A mix of qualitative and quantitative methods were used

- **Qualitative**
 - 13 semi-structured interviews with state-level stakeholders (legislators, AOE, AHS, BBF, UVM, VSBA, and VSA)
 - 28 semi-structured interviews with representatives from randomly-selected PreK programs
 - Systematic literature review
- **Quantitative**
 - Survey of families with children attending 28 randomly-selected programs
 - Secondary analysis of PreK and K data from the 2017/18 school year (descriptives, logistic regression, hierarchical linear modeling)

Sample – family surveys

Table 2. Percent of survey respondents with children enrolled in each program type.

Program Characteristic	Percent of Survey Respondents
Setting	
Public	51%
Private	49%
Head Start	27%
Family child care home	4%
STARS Rating	
3 stars	4%
4 stars	42%
5 stars	54%

$N = 107$

Sample – family survey

Table 4. Demographics of Parent Survey Respondents.

Parent Characteristics	%	Parent Characteristics	%
Income		Employment	
\$0-45,000	31	At least one parent employed/seeking work	96
\$45,000-90,000	35	Full-time caregiver in household	22
\$90,000+	34	No full-time caregiver in household	78
Highest Parental Education		Race/ethnicity	
Graduate or professional degree	32	White, Non-Hispanic	97
Bachelor's degree	27	White, Hispanic	2
Associate degree	5	More than one race, Non-Hispanic	1
Some college credit but no degree	13	Languages Spoken in the Home	
High school diploma or GED	18	English	100
Some high school but no diploma	4	Spanish	2
Marital Status		Other	2
Married or partnered	74		
Single	17		
Separated, divorced or widowed	9		

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Sample – analysis of 2017/18 data

Table 3. Statistical analysis sample, 2017/18.

Child Characteristics	N	%
Age as of 9/1/2017:		
2 years	38	0.6
3 years	3,027	44.7
4 years	3,602	53.2
5+ years	108	1.5
Gender		
Boys	3,610	53.3
Girls	3,165	46.7
Race/ethnicity		
White	6,123	90.4
Non-white	652	9.6
Eligibility for free or reduced-price lunch		
Not eligible for free or reduced-price lunch	4,644	68.5
Eligible for free or reduced-price lunch	2,131	31.5
IEP status		
No individualized education program	5,812	85.8
Individualized education program	963	14.2

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KEY FINDINGS

Mixed Delivery System

Public and private programs are generally working together effectively, but variations exist

- Joint professional development
- Sharing student data
- Coordinating resources for students with special needs
- Same Page Initiative
- Unqualified partnership agreements
- Targeted student supports
- Regional coordinators

Public PreK programs have a marked advantage in hiring AOE ECE/ECSE licensed PreK teachers

Part of the problem is that while we're expecting teachers to be licensed, the pay scale is not commensurate with those expectations like it is in the public schools.

~ Private PreK Interviewee

Children enrolled in a mix of program types, supporting the mixed-delivery system of publicly-funded PreK in Vermont

Figure 7. Percent of children enrolled in PreK programs, by program type, STARS quality rating and location for 2017/18.



Figure 7 note. N = 6,775. Private programs included private child care centers and family child care homes.

KEY FINDINGS

Funding and contracting

The current system of local contracting has increased administrative demands for PreK programs and their staff

But there's no universal invoice that's used.... The other thing with invoicing is that [the public schools] are all on different time schedules. So, some of them will do four times a year. Some of them do three times a year.... [I]f it was more universal, I think it would be easier for everybody to understand, and it wouldn't be a different method for a different school district like it is with me...

~Private PreK Interviewee

Interviewees expressed mixed opinions about the possibility of moving to state-level contracting

In terms of if the funding went statewide, I think our partners would suffer because when there's a problem, they wouldn't have a direct line to fix it... We also give them preventative technical support and make sure that we're double checking their work. We use that as our lens to make sure that our children who have attendance issues starting in PreK go through the... process and get support, so we would kind of lose that lens. So I think it would be, as much as it's a lot of work, it benefits the children and the partners to have the local billing.

~ Public PreK Interviewee

KEY FINDINGS

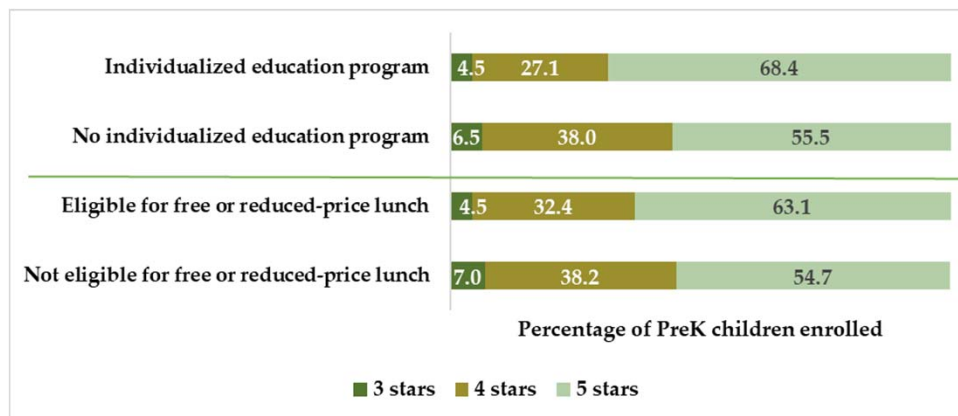
Equity

Limited transportation resources and registration requirements are possible barriers to PreK access

- Working parents can't transport children from program to program
- Low-income families may have unreliable access to transportation
- Regulations of bus companies, age restrictions
- Complex registration process requiring substantial documentation
- Online registration and limited Internet availability

High-needs children have access to high-quality PreK through the current system of publicly-funded PreK in Vermont

Figure 10. Percentage of PreK children enrolled in 3-, 4- and 5-star PreK programs, by individualized education program status and free or reduced-price lunch eligibility, 2017/18.



However, interviewees shared concerns about equitable access to universal PreK for students with special needs

We had children from different districts who were utilizing our Act 166 program but they couldn't get the services that they needed unless the parent could transport them because they were out of district.... In that case, I don't see it as universal, you know?

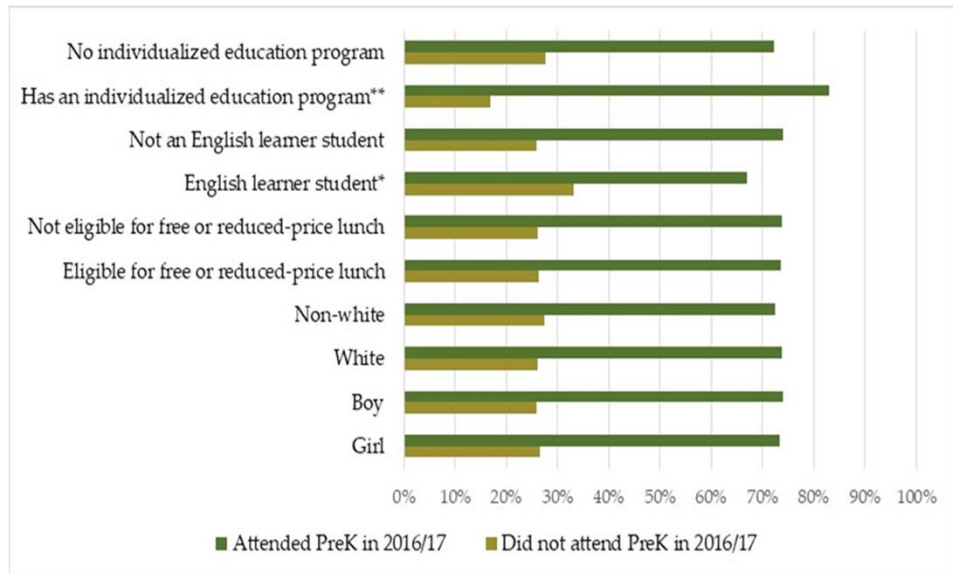
~ Private PreK Interviewee

My program's children have access to, for example, an early childhood special educator, and they have access to speech and language pathologists and all of that. The private programs don't have those abilities.

~ Public PreK Interviewee

The majority of children access PreK the year prior to kindergarten, though disparities exist

Figure 6. Percentage of 2017/18 kindergartners who attended publicly-funded prekindergarten in 2016/17.



Children eligible for free/reduced lunch and those attending 3-star programs have, on average, fewer programs within their SU

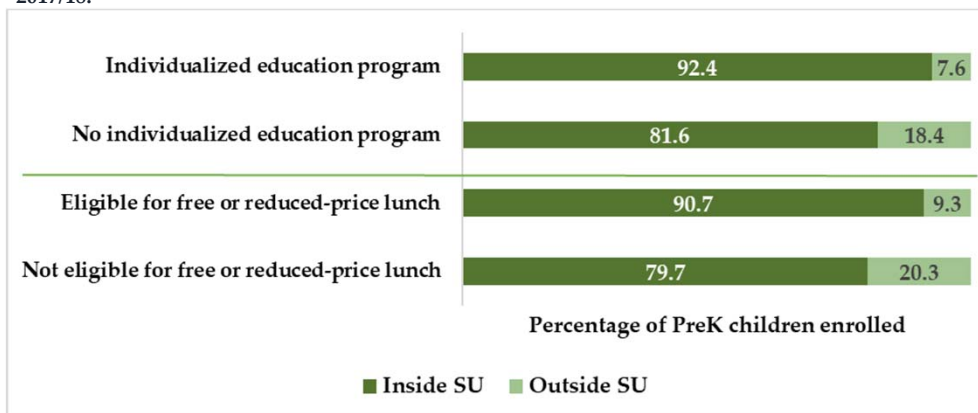
Table 7. Average number of PreK programs in a child's supervisory union of residence by characteristics of their PreK program of enrollment, 2017/18.

Program of Enrollment	Mean	Standard Deviation	N
Inside residence SU	9.9	6.2	5,635
Outside residence SU	9.1	6.1	1,140
Public program	7.8	5.4	3,060
Private program	11.4	6.3	3,715
STARS Rating			
3 stars	8.4	4.9	421
4 stars	9.8	5.7	2,467
5 stars	9.8	6.6	3,887
Overall	9.7	6.2	6,775

8.8 vs. 10.2
 programs within boundaries of SU for free/reduced lunch eligible vs. not eligible

Children with special needs and those eligible for free/reduced lunch are more likely to enroll in PreK within their SU boundaries

Figure 12. Percentage of PreK children enrolled inside and outside the geographic boundaries of their SU, by individualized education program status and free or reduced-price lunch eligibility, 2017/18.



KEY FINDINGS

Regulatory oversight and administration

Many interviewees suggested it is redundant and inefficient to ensure that PreK programs comply with two sets of regulations

- More challenges for public than private
- Repetition of tasks (e.g., providing proof of fire drills)
- Contradictory regulations
- Duplication of background checks, issues with public PreK substitutes
- Public administrators' knowledge of CDD regulations
- Lack of control over facilities and procedures in public settings

There is a need for more robust monitoring and accountability systems

The tricky piece is when we have this partnership agreement and it says, for example, you need to do such and such and such...No one is really going in and telling them, doing anything when they don't do it. As someone who is not really a supervisor of [the partner programs], it's hard for me to do that, even though we have this contract.... I think there needs to be a monitoring system where if they don't do it, that's coming from someone other than me as the person that does the partnership agreement.

~ Public PreK Interviewee

In general, programs' suggestions regarding joint vs. single agency administration were mixed

- Half of interviewed private programs knew about joint administration
 - Most who didn't know, assumed AOE was sole administrator
- Among state-level interviewees, many, but not all, supported the idea of administering Act 166 through a single agency
- Private PreK programs, no consensus regarding whether it would be preferable to continue with joint administration or shift to single agency administration
- Public PreK programs were not unanimous in their recommendations, however, many suggested that AOE should be the agency to oversee administration

KEY FINDINGS

Parent feedback and choice

Parents consider many factors when choosing a PreK program for their child

- Figure 1, pg. 25
- Rated from “not at all important” to “extremely important”
- Parents consider many factors
- Highest rated:
 - Program safety
 - Warm and nurturing environment
 - Teacher education or qualifications
 - Curriculum
 - Program philosophy
 - Cost

The majority of parents reported that their child was currently attending the program that was their top choice

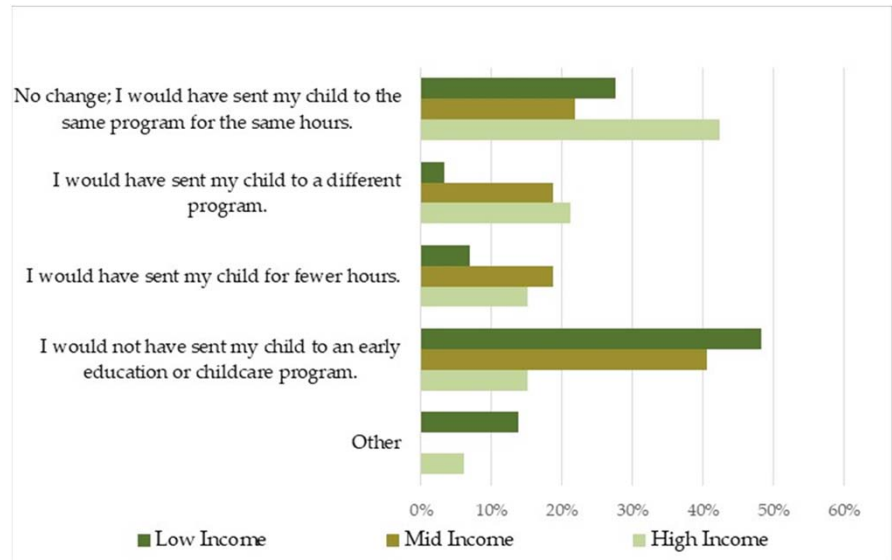
- 97% attending program of choice
- 61% considered only their child's current program or one other program
- 34% considered 2 to 3 other programs
- 5% considered 4 or more other programs
- For those not in first choice, preferred option had:
 - Better teacher qualifications
 - Curriculum
 - Program quality

No parents indicated that their child's placement at their current PreK program was a barrier to receiving special education services

- 29% of parents reported their children were eligible for special education
- Among these:
 - 62% were receiving special education services
 - 39% were not
- Parents indicated that those not receiving special education services were not in need of those services at the time of the survey

For some children, access to publicly-funded PreK is the only exposure they have to high-quality early learning environments

Figure 5. Parent responses to “What would you have done without publicly-funded PreK?” by household income.



Overall, parents are satisfied with the universal PreK system and quality of PreK education

- 81% reported “very positive” feelings about universal PreK
- 11% “somewhat positive”
- Only 2% “somewhat negative” or “very negative”
- 91% reported “very satisfied” with the quality of education
- 7% “somewhat satisfied”
- Only 2% “somewhat dissatisfied” or “very dissatisfied”

UNDESIRABLE OUTCOMES AND POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

Mixed delivery system

- **Challenge:** Inequitable levels of compensation for PreK teachers may be attracting the highest quality teachers to public school settings, hindering private programs from hiring teachers of equally high quality.
- **Challenge:** Opportunities for private programs to collaborate, receive cross-sector support, or participate in joint professional development vary by region.
 - **Possible solution:** Provide state-level professional development on priority topics.

Funding and contracting

- **Challenge:** The current system of local contracting has increased administrative demands for PreK programs and their staff.
 - **Possible solution:** Develop, and require (or incentivize) public districts to use universal systems and forms for PreK contracting.
 - **Possible solution:** Transfer responsibility for PreK invoicing to the state level.

Equity

- **Challenge:** Transporting children to and from PreK may be a barrier to participation for some parents, especially in a 10-hour-per-week program.
 - **Possible solution:** Require/incentivize/encourage programs to consolidate their PreK hours into a smaller number of days.
 - **Possible solution:** Bus transportation.
- **Challenge:** Parents with children of special needs may be limited in their ability to choose from any prequalified program in the state without risking their ability to receive special education services.

Regulatory oversight and administration (1)

- **Challenge:** Public school programs find it burdensome and inefficient to comply with two sets of health and safety standards—both child care licensing regulations and existing public school standards.
 - **Possible solution:** Develop a separate set of health and safety regulations that would apply only to public PreK programs.
 - **Possible solution:** Streamline reporting and documentation requirements for public schools.

Regulatory oversight and administration (2)

- **Challenge:** Current monitoring systems may not be sufficiently robust to ensure accountability and provide programs with timely feedback and guidance.
 - **Possible solution:** Increase the frequency of site visit observations and opportunities for programs to receive feedback about their programs.
 - **Possible solution:** Clarify expectations for the role, if any, of public programs in monitoring partner programs.

Parent feedback

- Surveyed parent *suggestions*:
 - 86% think funding for universal PreK should be increased
 - Full school day or for after-school hours for working parents
 - Challenge to drop off and pick up for a 2-hour day
 - Increased funding could support transportation
 - Increased pay and benefits for teachers
 - More access for low-income and rural families
 - Center-based programs should not be allowed to increase prices for PreK students
 - Better communication from school districts



THANK YOU

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