

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on the [PreKindergarten Education and Continuity of Learning guidance](#) issued on April 13, 2020 by the Vermont Agency of Education. I am the Universal PreK Coordinator for Addison Central SD, Addison Northwest SD, and Mount Abraham USD. We currently have PreK partnerships with 35 PreK programs serving about 350 children.

### **Continuity of Learning**

We have concerns about the AOE messaging about UPreK continuing learning plans needing to be supported by our district staff as opposed to the staff of the private programs those children attend. Our plan to support PreK programs and families is based on best practice as well as contractual obligations.

Private PreK programs are best placed to be able to offer families ongoing relationships with teachers, support children and monitor educational progress. Districts have no pre-existing relationships and any communications or activities that were delivered would be given to families by strangers as opposed to known and loved teachers. This is not best practice for children and runs counter to the AOE directive that we maintain relationships and connections for students.

Most of our private programs are already offering ongoing connections and learning activities to families and children. Under our contracts with them, they have full responsibility for the general education of PreK students, including connections with families, parent-teacher conferences, and child progress reports. They have continued with this responsibility just as we have continued paying them for this service. We will continue to offer programs supports and resources to meet the needs of their PreK children and families, including special education services delivered to eligible children.

Finally, our district staff do not have capacity to take on the added obligations of instruction for the children not in our school buildings and our staff contracts will not allow them to take on these added students. Approximately 80% of our area children are in private PreK programs, representing over 350 children in total. The limited PreK staffing of our districts would not allow us to form meaningful relationships or individualized instruction and assessment to those children in this time frame and they will be better served by the programs that already know them.

### **PreK Funding**

We have additional concerns regarding the final statement: *“These payments should continue under COL regardless if a private provider is providing PreK services or not, or if a child remains enrolled in the program.”*

PreK tuition payments are provided to PreK programs specifically for the purpose of providing tuition assistance for an individual child to attend the program and receive general education services. We are concerned that the funds will continue even if the child is not receiving any

PreK education. This is not allowed under our contracts, under the Education Fund that supports Act 166, or in best practice.

We understand that the AOE issued this guidance in an attempt to assist private programs that were coping with conflicting guidance related to the Act 166 payments and the Child Development Division's Child Care Stabilization program. The CDD Child Care Stabilization program is assisting programs to keep their regular staff fully paid by providing state funding to make up for lost child care tuition.

However, under the stabilization program, private programs are only eligible to claim the full 100% of tuition up to \$360/week if the child fully unenrolls as a result of family inability to pay. Some programs were caught in a financial trap where in order to make up the full amount of their weekly tuition, they were forced to unenroll children. Until the AOE issued guidance on this topic, it was unclear how this impacted PreK children. Now we have two sets of guidance for PreK programs who are unenrolling children and still a lack of clarity.

A possible solution would be to have all families unenrolled from the child care portion of their program but NOT the PreK 10 hours/week. Children would thus be able to receive PreK tuition and continuity of learning from their private provider for ten hours/week through the end of this school year. The CDD could promise programs that unenroll such children from additional child care hours 100% of what the parents would have paid for the additional hours and the child would be fully unenrolled from PreK and child care at the end of the school year.

Thank you for your time,  
Meg Baker  
Addison County Universal PreK Coordinator