



To: House Education

From: Jay Nichols , Executive Director

Date: April 12 , 2023

Subject: H. 208: House Child Care Bill

Good morning, for the record, Jay Nichols Executive Director of the Vermont Principals' Association. My purpose today is to testify on H.208, my comments will be focused primarily on the issue of 4 year olds in public schools. In full disclosure, the VPA has a position on this issue that calls for all 4 year olds to have the option to be in public schools for full day, full week, full school year service.

We have heard from the very strong private early childhood education providers and lobby that they want to keep the same hybrid mixed delivery system that is in place currently. To be fair, there have been some positives with the hybrid system at least for some parents. And we are not calling for an end to what is done at the 0-3 year old level. In the current delivery model there are some issues with quality right now with two sets of rules, for example in public schools instruction is delivered by high quality licensed teachers. In private programs, the instruction is often not delivered by high quality licensed teachers and although a qualified licensed teacher does not have to deliver the instruction they do have to be on site. This is akin to Rep Brady teaching her class versus her leaving lesson plans for the substitute or a paraeducator who may or may not be qualified. Of course, all research clearly demonstrates the importance of having a licensed teacher working with students. Those private programs that actually have a licensed teacher who is actually providing the developmentally appropriate instructional experiences for students can be of very high quality.

What we do know is that we have many four year old students in Vermont right now that do not receive high quality programming from licensed teachers. We have places where there are

literally no private programs available. We also have other places that receive public money but don't actually provide instructional strategies from licensed teachers. We, in Vermont, could move all of our 4-year old students into public schools in the next few years and provide ALL 4 year olds with a high quality full day, full week, full year program that is optional for parents/students but schools would be required to provide. This is something that was started in Oklahoma in the late 1990's to great success, it is interesting that Oklahoma a state with a long history of underfunding education, has this available for all parents and students for free and we don't in VT a state that prides itself on equity.

We all agree that 10-hours dosage is not enough. Dosage matters, licensed teachers matter, at least for 4 year olds, babysitting doesn't deliver the quality we need and for many students that is essentially what they get. This is not a knock on any program, just representative of the fact that many students do not have any other options because of limited travel, affordability of the private care facility, hours of the public school option, parents work schedule etc. We can't fix every issue but we can dramatically improve access and dosage for the vast majority of 4-year old students. Doing this alone would be a boost to reading and math scores, students ability to regulate, allow for trained professionals to have quicker and more extended access to students with challenges, would improve all student outcomes including graduation rates, likelihood of going to college or pursuing some other certification or degree program beyond high school graduation. We've seen these results in other states and in other countries.

Additionally, many current school districts are already providing full day programming. However, they are facing a tax disincentive for doing that. Schools are not fully compensated for preK students for a full day even when they run a full day program. The potential result of that funding issue is that some of our poorest districts that are providing full day programming only get to count the students in terms of per pupil funding ADM as .43 students instead of 1.0 students. At the very least, the legislature this year should fully count ADM for preK-students the same as they do for K-5 students for school districts that are providing the full day full week, full year program. If you are committed to keeping the current system that definitely works well for some families as a subsidy from the Education Fund that is completely up to the committee but please at least fund the school districts that are taking it upon themselves to do the right thing for the four year olds in their towns that simply don't have other options.

A final concern of mine is that for many the purpose of the hybrid system and the whole 10-hour model is to use three and four year olds to prop up a private business model that isn't fiscally sustainable on its own. It seems like the legislature is going to spend hundreds of millions of dollars into that child care system - and I have no problem with that - it is a legitimate policy discussion and resources decision. However, you have thousands of 4 year olds in VT that are getting no or minimal services that could be addressed immediately.

There are many excuses as to why you should not put four year olds in school. I will address some of those here:

Schools will be too crowded: 120,000 kids in 1997, 80,000 kids now. We have room overall and we also have tuitioning options schools could use like they already do at many grade levels as this committee is well aware.

Buses: Will be too crowded, same answer as above; 4 year olds are too young to ride on the bus - we have a whole bunch of schools that already do that.

4 Year Olds model for three year olds: true. But 4 year olds on waiting lists or in places with no private programs and no full day public program can be left behind depending on the schedule of their parents and the ability to transport their children. Hard to be a model or see other student models if you can't get access to the program which happens for far too many kids right now. Public schools are no allowed to have waiting lists; we serve all kids.

When we pushed for Kindergarten in all public schools we heard a lot of the same arguments. The bottom line is if we want to improve our schools and student learning, now is the time to actually take bold action that will also help the state economically and be beneficial to thousands of students and many families that right now have poor or limited options at least for their four year old students. The amount of money being put into the private child care programs without all four year olds being fully the responsibility of the parent trying to figure out would be better spent by using those millions of dollars to A) support 0-3 and B) provide additional support to families for afterschool and summer programming for all students.

And one more time:

If you are not going to move in this direction at least provide full ADM funding for full day, full school year, full week programs that are already doing this - None of the arguments you have heard from the backers of the Status Quo has anything to do with providing our poorest school districts with appropriate ADM. Superintendents and Business Managers can speak to the impact this will have in a positive way on their systems.