



TO: House Education Committee

FROM: Sue Ceglowski, Vermont School Boards Association
Chelsea Myers, Vermont Superintendents Association
Jay Nichols, Vermont Principals Association
Jeff Fannon, Vermont-NEA

RE: DR 26-0802 Draft 7.3 - Publicly Funded Prekindergarten Education

DATE: April 1, 2026

On behalf of the Vermont School Boards Association (VSBA), the Vermont Principals' Association (VPA), the Vermont Superintendents Association (VSA) and the Vermont-NEA, thank you for the opportunity to testify on draft bill 26-0802, an act related to the provision of publicly funded prekindergarten education. Our understanding is that the Committee is working on this legislation with the expectation that it may be considered for inclusion in broader legislation responding to the implementation requirements of Act 73 of 2025.

The scope and pace of education-related policy before the General Assembly is significant. While some committees are focused on cost containment, other proposals under consideration would increase costs without clear understanding of their impact on quality and opportunity. Our associations are currently tracking nearly two dozen bills, several of which, if implemented, will increase education spending.

Last year, Act 73 was passed as a sweeping education transformation initiative. However, there remains considerable uncertainty about its implementation and the broader reorganization of public education. The Universal Prekindergarten (UPK) system is complex and operates within a much larger public education framework. We hope to support the Committee's understanding of these complexities within the specific context of this bill.

Our Associations believe that high-quality PreK education is one of the most important levers to improve quality and equity in our education system.

Today, we ask you to consider three guiding questions:

- Does this improve quality across the whole system?

- Does this make the system more or less equitable?
- Does this add costs and/or uncertainty to the costs of providing PreK?

In addition to these questions, we ask you to consider how this language fits within the broader context of Act 73, which references prekindergarten in multiple places.

Relevant language includes:

“(vi) establish an appropriate weight for prekindergarten students, as well as enact changes to the publicly funded prekindergarten program that ensure costs are borne by the appropriate funding source depending on the age of the student and the prekindergarten education provider”

“(B) addressing inefficiencies of education delivery through programmatic updates to prekindergarten, career and technical education, and special education;”

“(b) On or before December 15, 2025, the Joint Fiscal Office shall submit a report to the House Committee on Ways and Means, the Senate Committee on Finance, and the House and Senate Committees on Education on the current funding systems for prekindergarten education, the Child Care Financial Assistance Program, or any other early care and learning systems. The report shall review financial incentives in these existing early care and learning systems. As part of the report, the Joint Fiscal Office shall provide considerations for changing the funding streams associated with these early care and learning systems to align with the education transformation initiatives envisioned in this act.”

The Joint Fiscal Office delivered on this requirement through [its presentation](#), and Ways and Means subsequently translated this work into legislative language.

We would also like to note that we are generally supportive of the Joint Fiscal Office report that recommends bifurcated and streamlined funding for both public and private providers. It also appropriately weights public PreK in the foundation formula, where districts would receive the full weighted Education Opportunity Payment for PreK students. This would be a solid foundation from which to hold discussions about PreK funding.

Now, we offer section-by-section comments:

Sec. 1.

There appears to be broad agreement that all students deserve access to high-quality prekindergarten education and that this work should align with the broader goals of Act 73.

However, we do not believe the draft legislative language as currently written achieves these aims.

Sec. 2.

“(2)(A) A private provider shall employ or contract for the services of at least one teacher who is licensed and endorsed in early childhood education or in early childhood special education under chapter 51 of this title, including through the issuance of provisional and emergency licenses.”

Ensuring highly qualified and licensed teachers in all prekindergarten settings has long been a goal of our associations. However, we have concerns about the parallel process currently under consideration in S.206, which would create an Office of Professional Regulation certification pathway that differs from the Agency of Education process. If passed, this will result in two credentials with different requirements being labeled the same, which will create confusion.

Our Associations are not supportive of the added language reinforcing an existing practice that places superintendents in the position of overseeing provisionally licensed teachers in private settings where they have no operational oversight. This creates a challenging situation for school leaders and raises concerns about accountability. We believe the system should move toward clearer lines of responsibility and oversight.

Sec. 4.

“(3) A school district shall be responsible for ensuring resident prekindergarten children have access to publicly funded prekindergarten education pursuant to this section, either by operating a prekindergarten program within the district or assisting a family to identify a prequalified private provider located within the district or in another school district or a prequalified public provider located in another school district, with capacity to enroll new prekindergarten children. School districts are encouraged to maintain a position or collaborate with other school districts to maintain a shared position that serves as a prekindergarten education coordinator...to develop a regional plan to further expand capacity, including through the issuance of provisional and emergency licenses issued by the Standards Board for Professional Educators pursuant to chapter 51 of this title. If necessary, a school district shall begin or expand a program to meet that demand.”

This language continues a pattern of assigning additional responsibilities to local education agencies without corresponding funding or authority. At a time when school districts are being asked to manage costs carefully, this provision would require districts to ensure expansion of PreK programs without additional fiscal support.

This approach will increase costs for local school districts, including staffing and coordination responsibilities. It also does not address current funding structures that discourage expansion of public PreK programs. Superintendents will speak further to this issue in their testimony.

The removal of geographic limitations in this section would also move the system toward an even more expansive voucher model. At the same time, local education agencies would continue to hold responsibility for services for students with IEPs, English learners, and students experiencing homelessness. This would occur across a much broader and more complex network of providers, increasing logistical and oversight challenges while maintaining district liability. Again, these additional costs are unfunded under the current draft bill.

Sec. 6.

This section proposes another study, despite the December 2025 study already required and completed by the Joint Fiscal Office under Act 73. We encourage the Committee to consider the legislative language that emerged from that report. Given that this analysis has already been completed, it is unclear what additional value a new study would provide at this time. The primary objective of this work was to prepare for the foundation formula by establishing a weight for PreK. This draft language does not fulfill this objective.

In summary, we respectfully ask the Committee to consider whether the language before you aligns with the intent outlined in Section 1. While the intent is commendable, the current proposal does not appear to strengthen the overall PreK–12 delivery system. It will create challenges for public systems by increasing responsibilities and liabilities without corresponding funding or authority for oversight at a time when you are asking for reductions in spending. We are willing and ready to work with you in regards to the charge of Act 73 – creating a more efficient, equitable, and high-quality model for PreK.

We respectfully urge the House to reconsider this approach and to give careful consideration to the language that emerged from the Joint Fiscal Office report originally commissioned under Act 73, which would establish a more appropriate weight and funding mechanism for PreK.