

Evolving Universal Pre-Kindergarten: Head Start Considerations

**Perspectives from the Vermont Head Start Association and the
Office of Head Start Regional I Office**

What is Head Start & Early Head Start?

Comprehensive Child Development Programming

- Early Learning and Development
- Health
- Family Well-Being

Gives children from **at-risk backgrounds** the skills they need to be successful in school and life.

Promotes **school readiness**.

Different program types reflect needs of communities:

- Center-based
- Home-based
- Family child care
- Locally designed options

Who does Head Start & Early Head Start serve?

Head Start primarily serves 3- and 4-year-old children

Early Head Start serves infants, toddlers, and pregnant women

Income Eligibility:

- At or below 100% of FPL
- Below 130% FPL if space available (not more than 35% enrollment)

Categorical Eligibility:

- Families receiving public assistance (TANF/Reach-Up; SSI; SNAP)
- Children in foster care (Kinship Care is prioritized)
- Children/families experiencing homelessness

Vermont Head Start & Early Head Start

- 7 Head Start recipients
- 6 Early Head Start recipients
- 5 Community Action Agencies, 1 Mental Health Agency, 1 School District
- 1,273 children and their families
 - 732 Head Start
 - 541 Early Head Start
- 72 locations across the state
 - Includes partnerships with schools, private child care centers and family child care homes
 - Home-based services provided by 4 recipients
- 671 staff employed
- \$26,890,187 in FY24 federal funding

Gathering Information for the PEIC

Areas of Focus:

- Value Needs
- Practical Needs
- Legal Needs
- System Oversight
- Family Needs

Engaging Stakeholders:

- VHSA provided input via survey administered by the VHSCO
- VHSCO aggregated themes and shared summary with VHSA for review
- Office of Head Start Region I Office staff provided input via structured conversation on Zoom.
- PEIC Systems-Level Considerations Workgroup incorporated feedback.

Value Needs: Key Considerations

Family Choice & Mixed Delivery System

- Importance of allowing families to choose educational settings that align with family preferences

Collaboration Over Competition

- Concerns about competition for funding and workforce

Access

- Addressing needs for vulnerable populations and rural communities

Innovation

- Exploring new approaches to remain responsive to community needs

Practical Needs:

Anticipated Changes

Impact on Enrollment & Funding

- Possible decrease in Head Start enrollment and federal funds coming into the state

Access to Comprehensive Services

- Concerns about loss of health, wellness, and family support services.

Workforce Challenges

- Recruitment, retention, and pay parity issues.

Operational Adjustments

- Aligning UPK and Head Start Program Performance Standards, improving communication, and minimizing administrative burden

Legal Needs:

Compliance & Implications

Special Education Services

- Ensuring compliance with IDEA regulations

Service Delivery Concerns

- Reductions in special education support within Head Start settings.

Continuity of Care for Children with Disabilities

- Need for strong partnerships between LEAs and Head Start.

System Oversight:

Considerations & Recommendations

Inconsistencies in UPK Delivery

- Risk of inequitable access if LEAs act independently

Increased Oversight Requirements

- Need for additional training, evaluation, and administrative alignment.

Recommendations

- Support multi-disciplinary, cross-sector teams, standardize reporting, joint training, and family engagement standards.

Family Needs:

Ensuring Support & Access

Community Partnerships

- Strengthening collaborations with healthcare and social services

Family-Responsive Programming

- Addressing family needs and priorities.

Family Engagement & Communication

- Transparency in policy changes and decision-making involvement.