

Universal Prekindergarten

Vermont Agency of Education

March 19, 2026

Agenda

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- Current State
- Education Transformation Policy Development Objectives
- Feedback on Proposed Bill
- Recommended Next Steps

Vision

CRADLE TO CAREER

Building a Strong Foundation: Cradle to Career

- Universal PreK is a critical entry point into Vermont's education system
- Supports early learning, family stability, and long-term student success
- A core component of broader **education transformation efforts**

Current State

STRONG FOUNDATION, COMPLEX SYSTEM

Service Delivery

- Vermont provides **publicly funded PreK through a mixed-delivery system**
 - Includes **public schools + private/community providers**
- Serves **3-, 4-, and 5-year-olds not yet in kindergarten**
- Minimum: **10 hours/week, 35 weeks/year**
- High participation:
 - ~71% of 3-year-olds
 - ~64% of 4-year-olds (top nationally)

System Design

- Jointly administered by AOE and CDD
- AOE and CDD are actively working to streamline compliance and strengthen shared oversight
- Funded by resident school districts
- Children enrolled in public school or approved community-based prekindergarten program are included in school district's ADM
- School district responsible for paying community-based providers
 - Tuition rate for community providers differ from average budget for public prek

Improvement Areas

Vermont outperforms the country in prekindergarten access and aligns with vast majority of NIEER standards. However, the complexity of governance and funding are areas of improvement.

- Fragmented governance across systems
- Limited hours for many families
- Funding not fully aligned to broader system
- Variation in access and delivery by geography

Policy Development

PRE-K IN CONTEXT OF EDUCATION TRANSFORMATION

Governor Scott's Policy Objective

- A Seamless PreK–12 System (Cradle to Career)
- PreK is not separate — it is the first stage of the education system
- Aligned with K–12 expectations, supports, and outcomes
- Focus on:
 - Early literacy and numeracy foundations
 - Inclusive environments for all learners
 - Smooth transitions into kindergarten and beyond
- Create a coherent, aligned system where every child enters school ready to succeed—and stays on track

Education Transformation

- Governor Scott's Education Transformation Proposal: Emphasized expanding access to pre-kindergarten through the proposed evidence-based foundation formula and achieving scale and quality support through larger districts
- H.454 as introduced in the House: Specified new weights for prekindergarten and associated modeling included prekindergarten at the adjusted weight within the proposed funding for the overall system
- H.454 as passed by the House: Shifted the funding formula from an evidence-based model to a cost-factor analysis model and included a study for prekindergarten
- Act 73 as signed into law: Requires a study to finalize the foundation formula and includes intent language for the establishment of a prekindergarten weight.

Act 73 and Pre-K

- **Section 1(b)(2)(vi):** Intent to, in the 2026 session, “*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.*”
- **Section 45a:** JFO study (due December 1, 2026) to recommend updates to the foundation formula, including “*weights determined to be empirically necessary for an adequate and equitable education.*”

Policy Development Priorities

- **PreK–12 Alignment:** Integrate PreK into a cradle-to-career system
- **Governor + Prekindergarten Education Implementation Committee Alignment:** Expand access for 4-year-olds (more hours/services); Maintain access for 3-year-olds
- **Funding Integration:** Incorporate PreK into the **overall education transformation (governance + funding)**
- **Operate at Scale:** Design for statewide implementation; Ensure consistency across districts and providers
- **Oversight Responsibilities:** Clarify roles across AOE, CDD, districts, and providers
- **Consistent Funding:** Predictable, equitable, and sustainable funding model

Feedback on 26-0802

Feedback

- The Administration **does not recommend moving forward with the proposed bill as written**
 - The bill is **disconnected from broader education transformation work**, particularly:
 - Governance redesign
 - Funding reform
- **Act 73 lays out a process for updating the foundation formula to reflect statewide priorities, including creating a dedicated weight for PreK**
 - Foundation formula study provides an opportunity to answer the same core questions this bill seeks to address in alignment with broader education transformation work
 - Does the committee recommend additional inputs or objectives be considered in the study?
- **Key Principle:** Policy changes to PreK must be **fully aligned with the larger transformation effort** to ensure coherence and sustainability

Recommended Next Steps

UPK Systems Alignment, funded by PDGB-5 2026

CDD, AOE, and BBF are in the process of selecting consultants to lead UPK Systems Alignment Framework engagement between April and December 2026. (Grant received December 2025, ends December 2026) The core goals are to:

1. Improve access by ensuring UPK policies and supports work consistently for families in every region and across program types.
2. Clarify and align UPK governance and expectations across agencies and settings so public schools, community-based programs, family child care, and Head Start partners operate within a coherent statewide framework.
3. Reduce administrative burden and duplication by identifying and addressing unnecessary differences in oversight, monitoring, and reporting.
4. Create the foundation for shared UPK data governance and integration so Vermont can track participation, quality, and outcomes across the mixed-delivery system using consistent definitions and low-burden processes.

Additional Considerations in UPK design

- Interaction with Head Start program and funding model, ~\$28M of federal funding for highest need children
- Early Childhood Special Education is legally mandated through LEA starting at 3rd birthday
- Impacts on early childhood education ecosystem, especially infant-toddler care
- Funding across settings
- Availability of afterschool or summer care for PreK children

Questions?