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Date: August 12, 2021
To: Senator Hardy and Representative Kornheiser
From: Miranda Gray, Interim Deputy Commissioner, Child Development Division
Kate Rogers, Early Education Programs' Manager, Agency of Education
Re: Task Force on the Implementation of the Pupil Weighting Factors

Brief Legislation Summary

[Act 166 of 2014](#). *Access to publicly funded Universal Prekindergarten Education*

Act 166, Vermont's Universal Prekindergarten Education law was enacted on May 10, 2014. School district implementation of the law required promulgation of administrative rules by the Vermont State Board of Education, and the timeline for adoption of the rules extended through September 2015. On November 25, 2014 AOE/AHS issued a joint agency memo allowing school districts to choose to implement Act 166 as of July 1, 2015 or to wait one (1) year with full implementation July 1, 2016. Just under a third of school districts moved forward with implementing Universal PreK in the 2015-16 school year. School systems that fully implemented Act 166 in 2015-16 were referred to as "early adopters."

Act 166 requires the establishment of a system by which the AOE and the AHS shall jointly administer, monitor and evaluate publicly funded PreK education programs to promote optimal outcomes for children and to collect data that will inform future decisions. The Agencies are required to report annually to the General Assembly in January. The agencies have established and implemented the state's Universal Prekindergarten Education (UPK) Accountability and Continuous Improvement Monitoring System (ACIS). UPK ACIS monitors over 400 prequalified public and private PreK programs to ensure compliance with Act 166 requirements. An overview presentation of the UPK ACIS monitoring system was shared with legislators in January 2019.

Act 166 Basics:

- Beginning in Fall 2016, all School Districts were mandated to *offer* publicly-funded PreK to resident families who voluntarily enroll their child in a prequalified public or private PreK program.
- All children who are three, four, or five years of age by the date established by the district of residence for kindergarten eligibility, and who are not yet enrolled in



kindergarten, have access to publicly funded PreK.

- Families receive a minimum of 10 hours per week for 35 weeks per year of education offered by their school district of residence.
- Publicly-funded PreK may be provided in prequalified public school-operated PreK classrooms or prequalified private childcare programs (registered or licensed family childcare homes and/or licensed center-based childcare programs).
- [Prekindergarten education is publicly funded](#) by resident school districts. The statewide 2021/2022 school year Prekindergarten Tuition Rate is \$3,536.00.
- The cost of prekindergarten is part of a school district's budget as approved by district voters.
 - a. If a parent chooses to enroll their prekindergarten child in the prequalified program operated by the school district where they live, the cost of the program is paid from the voter-approved district budget.
 - b. If a parent chooses to enroll their prekindergarten child in a prequalified public or private program other than a program operated by school district where they live, the law sets the [PreK Tuition Rate](#) that district will pay for the first 10 hours of prekindergarten education. This tuition is paid from the voter-approved district budget.

Criteria for Prequalified PreK Education Programs:

Act 166 (Universal PreK) legislation and SBE Rules series 2600 require that a public school or private PreK education program shall be considered prequalified if it meets all of the following criteria:

1. The public or private program receives and maintains at least one of the following quality program recognition standards:
 - a. National accreditation through the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC);
 - b. A minimum of four stars in [Vermont's Step Ahead Recognition System \(STARS\)](#) program, or three stars if the program has a plan approved by the AOE and AHS/CDD to achieve four or more stars within two years.
2. The public or private program must maintain good regulatory standing with [childcare licensing regulations](#) that is overseen by AHS/CDD;
3. The public or private program's curricula must be aligned with the [Vermont Early Learning Standards \(VELS\)](#);
4. PreK students must have access to qualified, AOE licensed educator who holds an active endorsement in either early childhood education or early childhood special education:
 - a. Prequalified public school-operated PreK programs must employ or contract with a licensed early childhood educator (ECE) or early childhood special educator (ECSE) per classroom to provide 10 hours of direct PreK instruction for 35 weeks of the academic school year.



- b. Prequalified private programs that are center-based must have at least one AOE licensed ECE or ECSE present and on site during the 10 hours per week across 35 weeks of the academic school year in which publicly funded PreK education is offered to families.
 - c. Prequalified private programs that are registered or licensed family childcare home providers must employ or contract with a licensed early childhood educator or early childhood special educator for at least three hours per week.
5. Child progress monitoring must be completed at least two times a year and reported to the AOE by July 31. The state approved child assessment measure is Teaching Strategies Gold (TSG).

Vermont Agency of Education's [Enrollment Dashboard](#)

PreK Enrollment

Table 1: Enrollment in Publicly Funded PreK 2014-15 (no Act 166), 2015-16 (Partial Implementation of Act 166), 2016-17 (Full Implementation of Act 166), 2017-18 (Full Implementation of Act 166), 2018-2019 (Full Implementation of Act 166), 2019-20 (COVID Impact), 2020-21 (COVID Impact), Change in Enrollment (2019-2021)

| School Year | Enrollment |
|---|------------|
| 2014-2015 (Prior to Act 166) | 6,281 |
| 2015-2016 (Partial Implementation of Act 166) | 7,326 |
| 2016-17 Full Implementation (Full Implementation of Act 166) | 8,950 |
| 2017-18 Full Implementation (Full Implementation of Act 166) | 8,815 |
| 2018-19 Full Implementation (Full Implementation of Act 166) | 8,962 |
| <i>Change in enrollment (2014-15 to 2018-2019)</i> | +2,681 |
| 2019-20 Full Implementation (COVID Impact--School Closure Spring 2019) | 8656 |
| 2020-21 Full Implementation (COVID Impact—Public and Private PreK programs offered PreK thru a variety of models including: in-person/remote/hybrid learning) | 6673 |
| <i>Change in enrollment (2019-2021)</i> | -2288 |



PreK Expenditures

PreK enrollments are based on the census data collected and reported by Supervisory Unions and Supervisory Districts. These data only reflect statewide school district of residence, not the location where PreK services are actually received by students.

Table 2: Statewide Expenditures for PreK from all State and Federal Funding Sources

| School Year | Total Expenditure | Enrollment | Per Student Cost |
|------------------------------------|--------------------|--------------|------------------|
| 2015-16 | \$54,629,330 | 7,326 | \$7,457 |
| 2016-17 | \$64,473,630 | 8,950 | \$7,204 |
| 2017-18 | \$65,289,078 | 8,815 | \$7,407 |
| 2018-19 | \$67,274,383 | 8,962 | \$7,507 |
| <i>Change (2015-16 to 2018-19)</i> | +12,645,053 | +1636 | +\$50 |

Data for the 2019/2020 school year is not yet available

PreK Student Weighting

PreK student's weight is less than one. It is statutorily set at 0.46 which means that a 10 hour per week PreK student who is full-time has an Average Daily Membership (ADM) count of 1.0. But for weighting purposes in the equalized pupil formula, that ADM is reduced to 0.46 (1.0 ADM x 0.46 = 0.46 weighted ADM).

An elementary student is considered the standard for weighting and has a weight of 1.0. Since a PreK student costs less than an elementary student, a PreK student's weight is less than one.



Prequalified Public and Private PreK Programs

Table 3: Prequalified Public and Private PreK Programs

| Number of Public PreK Programs | Number of Private PreK Programs | Number of Family Childcare PreK Programs | Number of Head Start PreK Programs | Total Number of Prequalified PreK Programs |
|--------------------------------|---------------------------------|--|------------------------------------|--|
| 155 | 191 | 35 | 22 | 403 |

403 = The total number prequalified Public and Private PreK Programs

24 = Number of PreK Programs that have closed or withdrawn their PreK status since October 2020

44 = Number of New PreK applications have been received/verified/approved between March 2020 and July 2021

[Mapping link for Vermont's Prequalified Private and Public PreK Programs](#)

Act 11 PreK Education Study

In October of 2018 the AOE and CDD contracted with Education Development Center, Inc. to conduct a study on PreK in Vermont as outlined in Act 11. In 2020, Vermont worked with the Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) Northeast & Islands to explore program characteristics, the differences between public and private programs, and how the programs availability, quality and family choice differ by local education agency population size and poverty level.

What is Working Well

- Over 90% of children were enrolled in a 4- or 5-STAR program (high quality)
- Children with IEP's (Individualized Education Plans) and/or who were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch enroll in high-quality and public school programs at higher rates.
- 74% of kindergartners in 2017/18 enrolled in publicly funded PreK.
- Children with IEP's were more likely to enroll in publicly funded PreK the year before kindergarten.



Areas to Strengthen

- Public PreK programs are perceived to have an easier time recruiting teachers because of the higher salaries, benefits and working conditions.
- Administrative burden to the programs is significant. A request was made for universal invoice forms and a way to track attendance and payment schedules.
- Transportation to programs is a barrier for families.
- Children with individualized education plans (IEP) have limited access to PreK programs if the parents/caregivers want to ensure their child has access to their IEP services (families often have to stay within their district to receive services which limits the family's choice).
- Children who identify as English learners tend to enroll less in publicly funded programs.
- PreK programs must comply with two sets of regulations (public school system and Child Care Licensing Regulations) which was reported in the REL study to be burdensome.

Resources

[Final UPK Study](#)

<https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/projects/project.asp?projectID=4654>

