

**State Board of Education
February 21, 2006
Item F**

- **Team:** Lifelong Learning and State Board Early Education Ad Hoc Committee
- **Topic:** Shall the State Board of Education vote to adopt some version of this discussion paper as its position regarding Early Childhood Education?
- **Alignment with Goals:** Goal IA1 – Gain an understanding of the issues associated with early education in order to develop a position on a coordinated state system of early education. (This is also a State Board focus strategy.)
- **Background Information:** After reviewing the contents of proposed legislation on early education and previously developed draft early education rules, the State Board, at its December 21st meeting, decided to create an ad hoc committee to draft a position statement on early education for the full Board to consider for the purpose of providing input to the Legislature. The committee met several times and at the January 17th Board meeting recommended that the position statement include the following elements:
 - Participation in early education should continue to be voluntary.
 - Before a school district begins offering publicly funded early education, the district should be required to conduct a community needs assessment that involves qualified private providers and parents. The results of the assessment shall demonstrate a need, be incorporated into planning efforts, and be committed to writing.
 - Subject to space availability, parents residing in school districts that offer publicly funded early childhood education programs should be allowed to select their publicly funded, qualified early education provider regardless of geographic location within Vermont. The Department of Education shall develop a model contract which may be used by school districts to develop their contracts with private providers. Districts of residence would continue to include early education students in their ADM counts and would be required to pay the private or public (if other than the home district) provider as specified in the contract.
 - School districts should not be required to fund or arrange for transportation for early education students.
 - All publicly funded early education programs should be required to comply with the following standards and procedures:

Educator Licensing Standards

At least one of the educators teaching a group of children in a qualified early childhood education program shall maintain a valid Vermont educator license with an endorsement in either early childhood education or early childhood special education. In accordance with AHS rules governing the licensing of early childhood programs, a “group” of children three years old to kindergarten age shall not exceed 20.

Each newly established early childhood education program will be allowed to have three years to come into compliance with the above educator licensing standards pursuant to a plan approved by the Commissioner and Secretary. Subsequent to any such three-year transition period, the Vermont Standards Board for Professional Educators or its designee may grant emergency and provisional licenses to teachers in early childhood education programs upon request of a superintendent of schools. The superintendent, upon request from a director of an early childhood education program or provider with whom a school district has established a contract for early education services, may request and emergency or provision license for a teacher. Directors of private early education programs who hold a Vermont school administrator's license may also apply for a provisional or emergency license for a teacher.

Program Quality Standards

Each qualified early childhood education program shall:

- (a) Operate in accordance with the AHS rules governing the licensing of early childhood programs, and be in good regulatory standing,
- (b) Offer a developmentally appropriate early childhood education program of no fewer than six hours per week, and no fewer than 35 weeks per year,
- (c) Align the educational program curricula with *Vermont's Framework of Standards and Learning Opportunities* and the *Vermont Early Learning Standards*,
- (d) Assign no more than 20 children to any pre-kindergarten group,
- (e) Meet the educator licensing standards described in the above section, and
- (f) Have met one of the following conditions:
 - (1) National accreditation,
 - (2) Approval by the Commissioner and Secretary of a plan for achieving national accreditation within three years,
 - (3) Achievement of the requisite scores jointly agreed upon by the Commissioner and Secretary on the Step Ahead Recognition System (STARS) or other program quality recognition standards recognized by the Commissioner and Secretary, or
 - (4) Approval of a plan for achieving the program recognition standards set forth in section (f)(3) in a time period to be specified by the Commissioner and Secretary.

Qualification Procedures; Appeals

- (a) School districts shall obtain designation as a qualified early childhood education program by submitting to the Commissioner and Secretary an application on a form jointly developed by the Commissioner and Secretary. Private early childhood

education providers may also apply for designation as a qualified program via the same process. The application shall contain information necessary for the Commissioner and Secretary to determine whether the program meets the educator licensing, program quality, and planning process standards set forth in these rules. The Commissioner and Secretary, within 30 days of receipt of an application, shall respond to the school district in writing that: (1) the application is granted and the program is qualified to report its pre-kindergarten students for ADM purposes; (2) the program is not qualified, enumerating the reasons therefor, and consequently may not count such students for ADM purposes; or (3) the program may be qualified as soon as it meets certain specifications outlined in the response.

- (b) A school district or a community provider may appeal a determination of the Commissioner and Secretary by filing within 30 days of the date of the determination a request for a hearing with a hearing officer jointly appointed by the Commissioner and Secretary. Hearings shall be conducted in accordance with Rule 1230 et seq.

- **Funding Considerations**

There is one additional element of this recommendation for which the committee was not in agreement and deferred to a discussion to the full State Board of Education on February 21st. The issue concerns whether all children will be counted for public funding purposes or whether public funding should be limited to at-risk students, which, for the purpose of discussion, shall mean students who meet specified criteria (e.g., income, disability, language skills, home environment).

Option A:

- After extensive review of the available research, the committee determined that the benefits versus the cost of extending publicly funded pre-K programs to non-at-risk students could not be justified. Therefore, the committee recommends the following:

School districts should only be allowed to count for ADM purposes early education students (3- and 4- year-olds) who are “at risk.” For this discussion, at-risk students are defined as those who have developmental delays, are English language learners or whose families’ household income are less than 185 percent of the federal poverty level. Any students currently receiving publicly-funded pre-K services will continue to receive those services until they are eligible for kindergarten.

Option B (Proposed by Tom James as an alternative for consideration by the full Board):

- The State Board recommends that the Legislature take no further action during this session to specifically limit or further codify which pre-kindergarten students are to be counted in a school district’s average daily membership. Furthermore, the State Board will not modify its rules related to pre-kindergarten students. It will instead direct the commissioner to contract for research to address the following three questions:

- Do students who do not fit the at-risk description benefit academically and socially from participation in early childhood education programs?
- Do students who fit the at-risk description benefit more from inclusionary (including student who are at risk and others who are not) early childhood education programs than they do from programs where the predominant number of students fit the at-risk definition?
- Are there long term benefits to students who received early childhood education services programs?

This recommendation is based on the following points:

1. Only a handful of states have universal programs that can be described as universal. Georgia and Oklahoma offer programs for 4-year-olds. West Virginia will fully implement universal pre-K over the next several years. Florida has passed legislation for 4-year-olds and is facing implementation challenges. The District of Columbia also has established universal pre-K recently.
 2. Sufficient research findings are not available to support that heterogeneous class make-up is beneficial to the students.
 3. At-risk-only programs are dominant in the nation, even though a preponderance of anecdotal information is available to support “universal” programs.
- **Purpose of Discussion:** For the State Board to discuss the proposed recommendations with the intent of listening to input prior to taking action.
 - **Staff Available:** Richard Cate; Jim Squires; Manuela Fonseca

Definitions for Early Childhood Education

Accreditation - Program recognition by an independent organization that a program has met a prescribed set of quality standards. Several national organizations offer accreditation (e.g., National Association for the Education of Young Children, National Association of Family Child Care) as well as Vermont's fledgling Step Ahead Recognition System (STARS) which, while operational, is still under development.

Average Daily Membership (ADM) - Census of school district students in preschool – grade 12 conducted annually during the first 40 days of school. ADM is used to determine an equalized pupil count for the purpose of establishing a town's homestead tax rate. Preschool children have counted for .46 FTE based upon 10 hours per week of school attendance.

At-Risk - Term used to describe children whose developmental status or environmental conditions pose a significant concern that would interfere with school success. This includes children with conditions such as: developmental delays, limited English language skills, economically disadvantaged, have suffered from or are at risk of abuse or neglect, exposure to violence or substance abuse, foster children lacking a stable home environment, and homelessness. It also includes children whose parents may be teen parents, have dropped out of school, or are incarcerated.

Child Development Associate (CDA) - A nationally recognized certificate program for those possessing a high school degree and currently supervised in an early childhood program. It consists of 120 clock hours of class time and successful review of portfolio (equivalent of almost 3 college classes) which are often accepted when transferring to an associate's degree (A.A.) program.

Community Needs Assessment - A comprehensive review of community resources and needs conducted collaboratively among all interested stakeholders. It should involve and/or incorporate information obtained from the regional Early Childhood Council (i.e., Building Bright Futures Regional Affiliate Council).

Contract - A formal, written agreement stipulating the conditions and expectations two or more parties enter into in exchange for goods or services. In the case of publicly-funded preschool partnerships, school districts will have contracts with any interested, qualified provider. The contract specifies the amount of funding and other benefits (e.g., professional development) the school district will provide in exchange for early education services and related reporting requirements.

Developmental Delay - An observable or measureable delay of six or more months in any area of development (e.g., communication, socio-emotional, cognitive).

Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) - An effective set of research-based educational practices and strategies geared to meet the developmental needs of individual children within broader age-appropriate expectations, thereby enabling each child to meet challenging and achievable goals.

Early Childhood Council (ECC) - A representative body of early education providers from various programs (e.g., schools, child care, Head Start, Parent Child Centers), parents, health and social service providers, community members, and others interested in the well-being of young children and families, and the coordination of services to best address family interests and desires. Each Vermont county has an ECC.

Early Childhood Education - An intentional program designed to foster children's development and learning in several domains (physical, social-emotional, cognitive, communication), thereby

enabling them to make a successful transition to, and succeed in, school. ECE incorporates curriculum, assessment and instruction. Early Childhood Education has often been viewed as addressing children from birth – eight years (due to developmental skill levels); however, it can be grouped into three distinct groups of infant/ toddler (0-2 years), preschool (3 – 5 years), and primary (kindergarten – grade two).

Family, Infant and Toddler Program - A program jointly administered by the Vt. Dept. of Education and the AHS Dept. for Children and Families; it provides services to children birth up to age 3 years who possess significant medical conditions and/or developmental delays and to their families. Often referred to as “special education for babies and toddlers,” this is also known as Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act.

Geographic Flexibility - A provision requiring school districts to fund a child’s attendance at a qualified preschool program regardless of its location or the child’s town of residence.

Head Start - A targeted, federally funded preschool program for three- and four-year old children living at or below federal poverty guidelines. Head Start may be center-based, home-based, or a combination. Increasingly, Head Start co-locates services in public schools and child care centers. Early Head Start is for poor children under 3 years of age and their families. Early Head Start provides services through a home visiting model.

Licensing Standards - Program standards required to operate licensed centers and registered family child care homes. The Child Development Division of the Dept. for Children and Families at AHS has the authority to license and monitor programs.

Preschool Child - Any child from the age of three years to kindergarten entry date as established by the school district.

Publicly Funded Preschool - Voluntary early childhood education services offered to three- and four-year old children who meet specified criteria and use, wholly or in part, funds from the Vermont Education Fund. Publicly funded preschool may be school-based (operated in and by the public school), school-linked (contracted program operated by qualified non-school providers), or a combination of the two.

Step Ahead Recognition System (STARS) - Quality rating system established for Vermont early childhood and school-age programs operated through the Child Development Division of the AHS Dept. for Children and Families. Programs voluntarily participate to receive one through five star recognition (five stars is highest); there are financial incentives for attaining different levels of STARS. In addition, some programs are required to participate in order to receive AHS funding..

Educator Licensure - A license awarded by the Vermont Standards Board for Professional Educators and through the Department of Education that allows individuals to perform specified services. An early childhood educator (ECE) license is needed for those who teach preschool age children. To obtain an ECE license, the candidate must have completed an approved teacher preparation program or completed an alternative route to licensure (e.g., Peer Review).

Targeted Programs - Early childhood programs limiting participation and/or funding support to children meeting specified criteria (e.g., poverty, disability, English Language Learner). Participation is voluntary.

Universal Access - Early childhood education programs providing voluntary access to all children regardless of income, disability, or other criteria.

**What Would Be the Consequences of Limiting Public Education Funding to Only At-Risk Preschoolers?
Results of a Survey Conducted 1/25/06-1/30/06**

Program	Brief Description	% currently attending who would not be eligible	Effect on program enrollment, composition of the groups, & parents' ability/interest to pay tuition	How nature of the program would be affected
Interviews with Private Community Providers				
Burlington Children's Space <i>Interviewed: Cynthia Greene, Director</i>	Private non-profit child care program licensed for 60 children, including infants and toddlers. Member of the Chittenden county community-school partnership. The Board of Directors is committed to serving a diverse population of families and has a sliding fee scale to make the program affordable for all. Fees only cover a third of the program's \$600K budget; child care subsidies, grants, fund raising, and state education funds make up the rest.	55% - 60% would no longer be eligible	The sliding fee scale makes the center affordable for middle class parents. Without the state education funding, the sliding fee scale couldn't be maintained and the result would be two separate groups: the at-risk and the wealthy since the middle class wouldn't be able to afford the \$160/week fee. If more at-risk children were included, then wealthier families wouldn't stay.	The families at the center would become less diverse, especially in terms of socioeconomic groups; it would effectively shut out the middle class families. The center is already struggling to keep its sliding fee scale. The Board would be forced to consider some drastic changes such as changing its mission to becoming either a therapeutic child care program or closing its doors.
Happy Days Preschool, Arlington <i>Interviewed: Carol Barbieri, Director</i>	Private non-profit child care program licensed for 75 children from the ages of 6 weeks to 12 years. Happy Days has been in operation for 22 years. It is a partner with Arlington SD, Head Start, and the Bennington-Rutland SU. Parents are charged fees on a sliding fee scale. The center has an EEI grant that enables at-risk children to attend. Some of the children attend as part of their IEP and receive services in this inclusive setting. These children's tuition is paid through the school-community collaborative.	45% would no longer be eligible	There is a potential loss of 10 – 13 children if the school districts currently contracting with Happy Days are "adversely impacted by the more targeted approach" and have less funding. There could be a higher percentage of at-risk children in the group which could affect the curriculum. It is hard to predict whether parents could afford to keep their children enrolled. Of the 52 preschoolers currently receiving services, only 20 (38%) pay full tuition for the additional child care services; this indicates that "most of the children affected by the targeted approach would be unable to cover the tuition."	"Our current financial situation remains adequate though precarious. As with many centers, we operate on a shoestring. Our operation could be forced to make significant changes and, in a worst case scenario, would cause more children to lose child care and early education."
Robin's Nest, Burlington <i>Interviewed: Luann Beninati, Director</i>	Private non-profit child care program licensed for 40 children, including infants and toddlers. The center uses a sliding fee scale to make the program affordable for a cross-section of families. It is a member of the Chittenden county community-school partnership.	65% would no longer be eligible	It's anticipated that the enrollment numbers would stay the same, although the number of middle income families would decrease. Because of state education funding, the center has been able to lower parent fees. A decrease in state funding would require the center to raise fees and make the center too expensive for the families just above 185%. The center would probably not increase the percentage of at-risk children because of the additional needs at-risk children bring.	The program and the staff would be affected. Fees would need to be increased. The salary adjustment bonuses the center has been able to give out since partnering with the Chittenden schools would need to be discontinued. The bonuses have enabled the center to keep licensed, highly trained teachers; so losing the bonuses might mean losing staff. Since having more at-risk children and fewer qualified teachers is not good, the center would probably opt to become smaller.

Program	Brief Description	% currently attending who would not be eligible	Effect on program enrollment, composition of the groups, & parents' ability/interest to pay tuition	How nature of the program would be affected
Interviews with Private Community Providers (cont'd)				
<p>Vermont Achievement Center (VAC) - Sherburne site</p> <p><i>Interviewed: Sarah Bolster, Director</i></p>	<p>VAC is a large private non-profit child care program located in Rutland. It is licensed for 189 children from the ages of 6 weeks to 12 years. About 18 months ago, VAC met with representatives from the Sherburne Elementary School, parents, and members of a part-time cooperative nursery school to discuss the need for a full-day, full week child care program. Since there are few child care providers in the area, together the group agreed to establish a collaboration whereby VAC would administer, staff, and deliver an early childhood program for 3-5 year olds onsite at the Sherburne school. "It's a true collaboration." The program began enrolling children a year ago. Although children from Sherburne are given priority to attend the program, it is open to families from Killington, Pittsford, and Plymouth who need early education and child care.</p>	<p>33% would no longer be eligible</p>	<p>If only children who are at-risk could be counted, 5 of the current group of 15 would not be able to attend the program at all since they can't afford the tuition. That would leave 3 at-risk and 7 fee-paying children. "With these lower projected enrollment numbers, it might be financially unfeasible to sustain the program. Most likely VAC would be unable to continue the partnership and would need to consider closing the classroom" at the Sherburne Elementary School.</p>	<p>"The program would no longer be an inclusive environment for young children, a huge disappointment." With only 10 children, VAC would need to cut staff to only 1 teacher; this would change the nature of the program. "We currently offer a full-day option for children which might not be feasible to continue offering with lower enrollment numbers."</p>
Interviews with Public School Personnel				
<p>Franklin Country Early Childhood Programs</p> <p><i>Interviewed: Michelle Spence, Coordinator, Early Childhood Programs</i></p>	<p>Three supervisory unions in Franklin County have formed a partnership that collaborates with several private non-profit and for-profit centers, home-based child care programs, and Head Start in order to offer families universal access to quality early education programs.</p>	<p>31% would no longer be eligible</p>	<p>If eligibility is limited to only at-risk children, these programs will again be known as only for children with problems. This stigma would result in a decline in at-risk and EEE enrollment. The greatest impact would be on lower middle income families who wouldn't qualify but who can't afford to pay tuition fees for their children's program.</p> <p>"Without universal access we were "finding" an average of 55 students per year who needed services. This year we "found" 135 at-risk children-an increase of 67.5% over the years we did not have (universal access)." In addition, some private providers would be adversely impacted. "One program indicated they are struggling to keep doors open as is (with ADM support). Another site that has been in business for 11 years felt confident they would remain open with parents who have higher incomes but would still have to raise rates."</p>	<p>"We have gone from having a waiting list for at-risk kids to not waiting list at all (through) many partnerships with Head start, and center- and family-based childcare providers. This has allowed us to provide parents with a variety of choices that were not available to them before."</p>

Program	Brief Description	% currently attending who would not be eligible	Effect on program enrollment, composition of the groups, & parents' ability/interest to pay tuition	How nature of the program would be affected
Interviews with Public School Personnel (cont'd)				
<p>Ludlow Preschool Program</p> <p><i>Interviewed: Joan Frangiose, Special Education Coordinator</i></p>	<p>This school-based preschool with optional full day child care is a new program; it opened its doors this past September. The program resulted from a community-wide discussion of families' needs. The discussion included private providers in the town of Ludlow. It was reported that the program collaborates with other private preschools.</p>	<p>55% would not be eligible</p>	<p>If eligibility was limited to at-risk children, it is assumed that the number of children enrolled in the program would drop. This would become a more segregated program of high-risk children although it is difficult to gauge the exact proportions. "Poverty levels for families shift mid-year and not on a regular timeline for determining eligibility, so it's hard to plan as to who it will affect, how and when." Most parents in this community are middle income and might be squeezed out. The program might not be able to continue operating with reduced numbers because of the cost of providing the program. Parents have chosen to send children to this program over others due to quality and convenience, but it might become too expensive for some families.</p>	<p>"We try so hard to promote an inclusive program which reflects the community. The benefits of peer models will likely be lost for all. Middle income families would be squeezed; they are the ones least likely to afford it. In addition many at risk students would not be identified if initially excluded."</p>
<p>Orange East SU (Bradford, Newbury, Corinth, Topsham, Thetford)</p> <p><i>Interviewed: Kathy Blanchard, Early Education Coordinator</i></p>	<p>Orange East has five partner programs, 2 are school-based and 3 are community-based. The SU sends its licensed early childhood special educators to its partner programs 10 hours per week to co-teach with the program's teacher. This model has been working successfully for the past five years. The community-school partnerships are supported with EEE funds, EEI funds, Title I, and state education funds.</p> <p>It was noted that in these communities child care, preschool and other programs are full.</p>	<p>In 3 towns/programs, 0% of the children would not be eligible since only children who are at-risk are counted. In 2 of the towns/programs, about 25 children would be affected since these programs are trying to implement universal access.</p>	<p>Since 3 of the programs are only counting children who meet the at-risk criteria used in EEE, Title I, or EEI, there would be no effect on these programs. However, there would be an effect on the other 2 programs since there is a percentage of families who are just above 185% poverty and who would find paying the full cost of the program prohibitive.</p>	<p>There would be little change in 3 of the partner programs, but it especially would impact the Topsham/Corinth program since that program is working towards universal access. It would mean curtailing those plans.</p> <p>"There's a hope that counting all children and offering universal access would help us identify more children needing early education services."</p>
<p>Rutland Northeast SU (Chittenden, Pittsford, Leicester, Brandon, Sudbury, Whiting)</p> <p><i>Interviewed: Joanne Pye</i></p>	<p>This district has offered what amounts to universal access to early education for about 17 years through the use of EEI, EEE, Title 1, and state education dollars. The programs are part-time and located in the supervisory union's towns.</p>	<p>about 50% would not be eligible</p>	<p>It is anticipated that there would be a reduction of lower-middle and middle income children without disabilities in all of the programs, despite the fact that there are no other qualified private preschool programs in 3 of the 6 communities. "The classes would consist primarily of a segregated population of at-risk and special needs children. We'd be going backwards." Approximately half of those no longer identified as eligible would be able to pay meaning that one-quarter of the total enrollment would probably lose access to a program.</p>	<p>The nature of the program would be "hugely affected. The loss of reciprocal benefits by having a balance of typically developing and at-risk children would cause the curriculum to be changed."</p>

Program	Brief Description	% currently attending who would not be eligible	Effect on program enrollment, composition of the groups, & parents' ability/interest to pay tuition	How nature of the program would be affected
Interviews with Public School Personnel (cont'd)				
<p>Southwest SU (Bennington, North Bennington, Pownal, Shaftsbury, Woodford)</p> <p><i>Interviewed: Karen Burnell,</i></p>	<p>The SWSU's early childhood programs serve about 100 preschoolers. Of these, 71 are in center-based programs located in the community or in schools. It is this population of 71 children that socioeconomic data were readily available for.</p>	<p>28% or 20 of the 71 children in center programs would not be eligible.</p>	<p>The programs would lose the children who are typically developing and serve as role models. If these children couldn't be counted, then the school board would need to charge these families' fees. The fees would need to be high because the program offers wrap around services (including transportation), licensed teachers, and experienced paraprofessionals. Many parents couldn't afford the fees, so the programs would become much less integrated. Some years ago, SWSU charged parents of non at-risk children \$100/month tuition and found that many parents couldn't pay that amount.</p>	<p>Fearful that the inclusionary piece of the programs would be impacted. Parents slightly above 185% poverty would have to make some difficult choices, and would probably need to discontinue sending their children. It appears that the needs children have keep going up, but the resources to serve those needs don't.</p> <p>The district would need to either reduce services to these children or go back to the taxpayers for additional funds.</p>
<p>St. Johnsbury SD</p> <p><i>Interviewed: Julie Sturm, EEE Coordinator</i></p>	<p>This program is a school-based program that serves 85 three- and four-year olds. The program has been in existence for eight years. It serves the district's EEE children in an inclusive setting.</p> <p>It should be noted that there is a lack of quality early childhood programs in the area. All of the private programs (e.g., Good Shepard, Montessori) are full, as is the local Head Start center.</p>	<p>About 33% would not be eligible</p>	<p>Despite the community's support for early education, it is doubtful that children not being counted could be included unless parents were assessed tuition. Middle class parents would find it difficult to afford the program. The result would be less diverse classes with a higher concentration of children with special needs. Although some of the children are in child care, the quality of the child care is varied.</p>	<p>The program would be less integrated than it is now. The greatest impact would be on the children who are not eligible and have no other place to go, and on the eligible children whose parents wouldn't want to send them to a program for "at-risk" children. The program as it is now enables staff to do play-based screening and identify children with mild disabilities who can benefit from early intervention provided in the program.</p>

EARLY EDUCATION IN VERMONT PUBLIC SCHOOLS SURVEY RESULTS

Background

To gain a better understanding of school involvement in preschool education, members of the Vermont Legislature requested specific information on the status of public early education within the state and the utilization of public school funds that support these efforts. A brief survey of school districts was conducted by the Vermont Department of Education between November and December to obtain data specific to the request. For purposes of the survey, publicly funded preschool was defined as those early education services for three- and four-year-olds that are funded wholly or in part with General State Support/Average Daily Membership (ADM) monies. Programs whose services were funded wholly by Essential Early Education (EEE), Early Education Initiative (EEI), Title I funds or Even Start grants were excluded from this study. The survey did not request data on student achievement due to a lack of uniform assessment measures for children in this age group.

Method

DOE staff prepared a brief survey for distribution. Surveys were sent to each superintendent explaining the research effort. In turn, superintendents had the option of completing the surveys for each school district within their office or enlisting the support of their respective school districts.

Non-respondents were contacted the week following the deadline to increase the response rate. This effort yielded improved results; however, a small percentage of surveys from school districts were not received in time to prepare this report.

Results

Of the 238 school districts which were sent surveys, 219 were returned for a 92 percent return rate. Responses to the questions were reported as follows:

1. Does your town provide publicly funded preschool?
Yes 131 (60%)
No 88 (40%)

For the 131 towns reporting that they provide publicly funded preschool:

2. Publicly-funded preschool services are offered to:
All resident children 41 (30%)
Selected children 90 (70%)
3. How many hours of publicly funded preschool services are offered per week to:
Three-year-olds 97 programs averaged 9.8 hours/week (range 2 - 34 hours)
Less than 10 hours 39 programs (40%)
Ten hours 41 programs (42%)
More than 10 hours 17 programs (18%)
Four-year-olds 131 programs averaged 11.2 hours/wk (range 2 - 34 hours)
Less than 10 hours 31 programs (24%)
Ten hours 63 programs (48%)
More than 10 hours 37 programs (28%)

4. Where are the publicly funded preschool services provided? (check all that apply)

In a public school	97
Off-site in a building operated by the school	24
Off-site in partnership with an existing early childhood program	43

5. Are publicly funded preschool services offered in partnership with: (check all that apply)

70 programs (53%) operate in partnership

Licensed child care center(s) 44

Head Start 43

Parent Child Center 20

Other * 32

*(registered family child care providers, licensed preschools, adult education programs, Success by Six, Even Start Family Literacy Programs)

6. If the town's publicly funded preschool is operated in partnership with a contracted community provider, approximately what percentage of the preschool education funds is retained by the school district?

Range: 5 – 100%

5% 3

15% 4

20% 4

25% 1

30% 6

100% 26*

No response 24

* Programs indicate partnerships with adult education programs, child care centers where school districts cover staff costs, school-based programs incorporating Head Start or child care, and migrant education services. Typically, programs reporting that 100 percent of ADM funds were retained were existing school-based programs that broadened services to collaborate with other community-based providers.

7. If the town's publicly funded preschool is operated in partnership with a contracted community provider, what services, in addition to administrative support, does the school district offer the community provider? (check all that apply)

Space/ facility 25 (19%)

Equipment and/or materials 39 (30%)

Transportation 13 (10%)

Access to school health services/information 23 (17%)

Professional development for early childhood staff 40 (31%)

Access to school's guidance/counseling services 18 (14%)

Other* 24 (18%)

* Technical assistance, paid paraeducators, itinerant early educators

8. Was the town's decision to provide publicly funded preschool the result of communitywide discussions?

Yes	76 (58%)
No	24 (18%)
Not sure	27 (21%)
No response	4 (3%)

If yes, were community providers from child care, Head Start, or Parent Child Centers involved in program planning and design?

Yes	58 (76%)
No	8 (11%)
Not sure	6 (8%)
No response	4 (5%)

9. Are parents assessed any fees for publicly funded programs operating 10 hours per week or less?

Yes	10 (8%)
No	101 (78%)
Not sure	4 (3%)
No response	14 (11%)

For the 88 towns reporting that they do not provide publicly funded preschool:

10. If your town does not offer publicly funded preschool services at this time, is your town exploring plans to do so in the future?

Yes	34 (39%)
No	43 (49%)
Not sure	11 (12%)

If yes, are you considering developing contracts with existing community providers?

Yes	25 (74%)
No	0
Not sure	9 (26%)

Limitations of the Survey

The data gathered from these surveys are informative but they do not tell the whole story. It would be necessary to obtain more detailed qualitative data in order to gain a full understanding of how early childhood education programs are being operated in Vermont. DOE staff has not had an opportunity to follow up with respondents to verify or clarify questions about responses.

**Early Education Cost Estimate
(Submitted to Senate Education Committee – 02/06/06)**

School districts receive funding for the total amount of their adopted budgets regardless of the per pupil cost. Because of this, individual districts may have very different per pupil expenditure rates for their early education programs. This makes it very difficult to accurately project the cost of increased enrollment to the Education Fund.

The Ad Hoc Committee was clearly concerned about the cost of universal access. The Committee, DOE staff and I spent the majority of time allotted to the two most recent committee meetings reviewing current data and the formula, and discussing how increased enrollments might affect the overall tax rates in school districts and ultimately increase the burden on the Education Fund. Although we did not create specific spreadsheets, the State Board Ad Hoc Committee and DOE staff did work through some projections, which are described below, using the 2003-04 school year enrollment data.

As you can see from the statewide enrollment spreadsheets that we sent you, there were 2494 pre-K (not including EEE) students enrolled in 2003-04. Using the following year's kindergarten enrollment data, discounting the effects of transfers in and out of the State, it appears that approximately 1523 (61%) of pre-K students were four-year-olds and the remainder (971) were three years old. Therefore, if the system moved to serving only at-risk students, approximately 900 to 1000 students would need to be held harmless during the transition year and be able to be served. Using the 1523 students that moved from pre-K to kindergarten as a sample group and then subtracting the ELL, special education and free and reduced lunch students, 1008 (66%) of the students would not have met the at-risk definition being considered by the Committee. Applying this percentage to the entire group of 2494 students would yield an estimated 1600 +/- students that would not have been eligible for services if the at-risk definition was applied. Although, as noted above, block grants are not part of the formula, we used the base foundation amount (\$6800) as the basis for our estimates.

Using above assumptions

Current cost: (2494 students) x (.46 FTE) x (.87 formula discount factor) x (\$6800) = \$6.78 M

Reduction in cost if converted to "at-risk": (1600 students) x (.46) x (.87) x (\$6800) = (\$4.35 M)

Projecting forward, if participation increased to 60% of the total population, the savings would be calculated as follows: 7800 students (60% of 13,000) minus 3714 students (those currently served in pre-K and EEE) = 4086 additional students (if universal access were continued). If the at-risk definition were applied, an estimated 66% (2696) of these students would not be eligible.

Additional Future projected savings: (2696 students) x (.46) x (.87) x (\$6800) = (\$7.34 M)

(We did not apply any inflation adjustments.)

**National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER)
Frequently Asked Questions Excerpt**

What states offer preschool to all children?

Georgia was the first state to offer preschool to all 4-year-old children, opening its program for unrestricted enrollment in 1995. The initiative is supported by lottery funds, and 54 percent of the state's 4-year-olds enrolled during 2002-2003.

In 1998, Oklahoma became the second state to open its preschool program to all 4-year-olds, but districts are not required to participate, so the program is not yet available everywhere in the state. Funding flows through the public schools, which receive a per child allotment based on the K-12 funding formula. During 2002-2003, Oklahoma maintained relatively high-quality standards, while serving nearly 60 percent of its 4-year-olds in the state Pre-K program.

New York established a pre-kindergarten program in 1997 with the intention of achieving universal availability after five years, but the program has not been adequately funded to do so, and access remains limited primarily to children from low-income families.

New Jersey and Kentucky target free preschool education to some children, such as those in poverty. New Jersey law mandates free, high-quality preschool for 3- and 4-year-olds living in the state's highest-poverty districts, while Kentucky provides free preschool to 4-year-olds from the state's lowest-income families, and to 3- and 4-year-olds with disabilities.

Florida voters amended the state constitution through a ballot initiative to require that all 4-year-olds be provided with a high-quality preschool education beginning in 2005. The state is now working to develop policies to implement this new initiative.

West Virginia passed legislation to make pre-kindergarten available to all 4-year-olds by 2012. Teachers in this program must attain state certification in early childhood within five years of employment.

Universal preschool is available on a first-come, first-served basis to 4-year-olds in Washington D.C. Los Angeles County is using tobacco taxes to develop a program for the city's 3- and 4-year-olds.

Increasingly, states have recognized the importance of quality early childhood education and invested in some form of preschool. Currently, 38 states have state-funded pre-kindergarten. The growth in the pre-kindergarten movement is directly attributed to the recognition that supporting young children and their families meet their essential needs yields children starting school ready to learn.

For additional information, see the [NIEER 2004 State of Preschool Yearbook report](#).