

Date: May 8, 2014

Recommended Position on:

[H.270](#) – An Act Relating to Providing Access to Publicly Funded Prekindergarten Education:

☐ Support ☐ Oppose ☐ Remain Neutral ☒ Support

Analysis of Bill

1. Summary of bill and issue it addresses. *Describe what the bill is intended to accomplish and why.*

This bill proposes to provide access to at least ten hours per week of high-quality, publicly funded prekindergarten education for 35 weeks annually to any “prekindergarten children” (defined as 3- to 4-year-olds) a parent or guardian wishes to enroll in an available, prequalified program. Prequalified prekindergarten programs include programs operated by public schools, private early education and care programs, and Head Start.

2. Is there a need for this bill? *Please explain why or why not.*

Some school districts currently do not offer a pre-K education program. This bill ensures parents in all districts have access to quality pre-K education. In addition, private early education and care providers will have the guarantee that if they meet the quality standards, they will receive a specific tuition amount for pre-K, rather than needing to negotiate with each school district with which they partner. Families also will have more say in the options they want for their children.

3. What are likely to be the fiscal and programmatic implications of this bill for this Department?

Monitoring of qualified private providers and public school operated programs will require time and staff through AOE and AHS (DCF). That monitoring will have a cost, although the development and initial implementation of a pre-K monitoring system is covered by Vermont’s Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge grant. Other implementation costs include: staff time to establish statewide tuition rates, analyze child progress reports, provide technical assistance, and collaborate across agencies and designated partners (e.g., Building Bright Futures). Additionally, AOE would need to have staff and data to determine if school districts could establish or expand school-operated pre-K programs.

The Agency will need to re-purpose resources to meet the monitoring and reporting requirements of this bill. If additional data and reporting requirements relating to pre-k are assigned to the Agency in the future, it will further strain our resources and we may not be capable of meeting those new requirements.

4. What might be the fiscal and programmatic implications of this bill for other departments in state government, and what is likely to be their perspective on it?

This will fiscally impact AHS (DCF) due to monitoring and other requirements (refer to above), although they are supportive.

Multiple (27) supervisory unions and districts currently use a portion of their Title I dollars to fund prekindergarten education. They will no longer be able to spend those federal funds on the initial 10 hours of pre-k offered because it would be considered supplanting with federal funds. They could, however, repurpose those Title funds to supplement and grow their existing programs.

5. What might be the fiscal and programmatic implications of this bill for others, and what is likely to be their perspective on it? (for example, public, municipalities, organizations, business, regulated entities, etc.)

The overall cost to the Education Fund will increase, putting pressure on the base homestead education tax rate; we expect an increase consistent with the JFO note. School budgets, even for districts currently offering pre-K, would increase since districts would be required to include anticipated costs for tuition payments for all resident three-five year olds, as well as costs for its school-operated program (if one exists), administration, quality improvements, transition planning, etc.

H.270 will impact how special education services may or may not be provided to children with disabilities whose parents choose to place their child in a pre-K program outside of the district's jurisdiction. School districts are not obligated to provide a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) to students outside their jurisdiction if they are able to offer appropriate educational services 'in house'. Once pre-k regions are established as required in this bill, this concern would be mitigated (see Section 3B). Also, clear guidance will need to be established and published immediately by the Agency and Department for districts.

6. Other Stakeholders: School districts, families

6.1 Who else is likely to support the proposal and why?

Parents and guardians of pre-K children since the bill will allow their children access to pre-K in some districts currently not offering pre-K programs, or offering pre-K only to four-year-olds, or with limited capacity. Additionally, there is potential for portability since families could access out-of-district pre-K programs unless the geographic area is limited by the "Pre-K Region".

6.2 Who else is likely to oppose the proposal and why?

Certain taxpayers when they see increased school budgets and groups who do not want to see new costs to the Education Fund and their property taxes.

7. Rationale for recommendation: *Justify recommendation stated above.*

There is evidence that quality pre-K programs have benefits to children as they enter school; although the quality standards represented in the current bill should be increased. Vermont prides itself on equitable opportunities for all. Currently, children's opportunity for pre-K and the type of options afforded them is dependent on which district they reside in.

- 8. Specific modifications that would be needed to recommend support of this bill:** *Not meant to rewrite bill, but rather, an opportunity to identify simple modifications that would change recommended position.*

None. AOE recommends support of this bill.