

Survey of publicly funded Pre-K programs in NH serving developmentally typical children.

Survey conducted in late 2018 by LWV Kearsarge/Sunapee Education Committee

Report: Jane vanB, 1/6/2019

Background: In the fall of 2017 a subset of the education committee decided to investigate the status of public Pre-K education on the national and NH state level. We gathered documentation on the status of Pre-K across the US and research about the efficacy of public Pre-K, which is available on the LWVNH.org website's Education Study page. We visited a public Pre-K in Vermont. In May of 2018 we held a conference on public Pre-K with an impressive group of speakers including the head of the Vermont Pre-K program, an academic researcher from UNH, and several members of non-profits who are engaged in early childhood advocacy. After the conference the state LWVNH membership and board voted to formally include public Pre-K as a part of the education study.

Summary: All schools are required to provide Pre-K programming for children with special needs. These are federally mandated and at least in part federally funded, through the NH Dept. of Education. But what about Pre-K for children who are developmentally within normal ranges, with no identified special needs? In some districts, a defined percentage of typically developing children are served in the same classes, but parents must pay for this and it is limited to lottery or other criteria.

This survey sought out those school districts in NH that offer **publicly funded pre-K programs for three- and/or four-year-old children who have not been identified as having special needs.** Although there are many limits to this study, we were able to document that a large number of school districts in NH are beginning to experiment with some version of a publicly funded pre-K program for all of the three and/or four-year-old children in their district. These programs are voluntary. Several districts noted that they were able to gain public support for a new program by carefully laying the groundwork in their communities before asking for public funds.

Only two programs we know of are offering a true universal pre-K program; that is, five days per week, full school day for all three- and four-year-old children in a district, without charge. Two others are offering this for four-year-olds only. The rest of the districts are offering some combination of half day and/or less than five days per week for three- or four-year-olds or both.

Partial day or partial week programs are not helpful for most working parents. An interesting model is offered by the Cornish Elementary School. The morning session is funded by the district, but families may pay tuition to receive day care in the afternoon. Thus all day programming is achieved for those whose parents need it.

Method: In the fall of 2018 League member Dorene Lengyel with the assistance of Cindy Jones surveyed every school district in NH that the NH Dept of Education identifies as having some sort of Pre-K program. There are 167 districts in NH and 114 towns that offer pre-K. Most of these are special education pre-K that may include some developmentally typical children who pay tuition to attend. However, there are 29 towns that have some form of publicly funded Pre-K. All towns that have any Pre-K program were called but some did not return our calls after repeated attempts. One huge gap is

Manchester, which we know has public Pre-K for children with special needs, but we were unable to verify whether any other children are able to attend without cost.

The committee developed a questionnaire that requested the following information: contact person; location of Pre-K; financing; number of classrooms, ages of children served; days per week; hours per day; class size; number of years program has existed; number and qualifications of teachers; transportation; curriculum; mix of special education/typical children; and special services provided.

It was often difficult to get access to the person responsible for the program even when multiple messages were left. Sometimes it was the school secretary who provided the information. Therefore, these results provide an incomplete picture of the current status of public Pre-K in NH. Unless noted, all teachers are trained early childhood educators, but the definition of this training was not specifically asked. Many teachers also have special education training. Staffing patterns are variable with one or more teachers and para professionals "as needed." All programs are play-based unless otherwise noted. All programs are financed by the town or city, unless otherwise noted. Students with special education needs and "typically developing" children are mixed in these classes. Each entry details the number of years the program has existed.

Definitions:

- Universal: Pre-K provided for all three and four-year-old children in a district without cost.
- Five day: Monday-Friday
- < Five day: 2-4 days per week
- Full time: full day aligning with elementary school hours
- Half time: Morning or afternoon sessions

Findings:

1. Universal three and four-year-olds, five day/full time Pre-K.

- a. Josiah Bartlett Elementary School. District 35/SAU 9 Conway. This is the first year for the five day/full time program for all three and four-year-olds in the school district. The district spent five years preparing the town and the proposal passed with 74% approval. There are 31 children currently in the program.
- b. Bethlehem Elementary School. District 53/SAU 35 Bethlehem. Three years. Eighteen three and four-year-olds in two classes may attend full day or half-time up to five days per week.

2. Universal four-year-olds only, five day/full time Pre-K.

- a. Jaffrey Grade School. District 274/SAU 47 Jaffrey-Ringe Coop. This is a pilot program for 18 children. The curriculum combines play-based and academics. The district spent 1 ½ years making presentations and studying benefits and received 100% support from parents, staff and school board.

- b. John D. Perkins Academy. District 341 Marlow/SAU 29 Keene. Two years. This is a full day, five day a week program for PreK and Kindergarten students.

3. Universal four-year-olds only, five day/half time Pre-K.

- a. Cornish Elementary School. District 115/SAU 100 Cornish. Five years. The program currently serves eight four-year-olds. The half-time morning program is financed by the school district; parents can pay tuition for day care in the afternoon.
- b. Charlestown Primary School. District 174/SAU 60 Fall Mountain Regional. Nine years. There are morning and afternoon sessions five days per week.
- c. Unity Elementary School. District 539/SAU 6 Claremont. This small program is four years old and combines four four-year-olds and nine kindergarten students in one class half-time for five days per week.
- d. Walpole Primary School. District 174/SAU 60 Fall Mountain Regional. Three years. There are morning and afternoon sessions five days per week.

4. Universal four year-olds only, less than five day/half time Pre-K.

- a. Stewartstown Community School. District 501/SAU 7 Colebrook. Two years. Small program (three students) three hours; three days per week; Ppay based.
- b. Stratford Public School, North Stratford. District 509/SAU 58 Northumberland. Three years. This is a half-time program three days per week. The curriculum is described as being based on the common core standards.
- c. Pittsburgh Elementary School. District 437/SAU 7 Colebrook. This is a combined Pre-K and kindergarten classroom and the Pre-K students attend half-time for three days per week.

5. Universal three and four-year olds, five day/half time Pre-K.

- a. Landaff Blue School. District 291/SAU 35 Landaff. Five years. Ten three- and four-year-olds attend up to five days per week for a half day.
- b. Marlborough Elementary School. District 339/SAU 29 Keene. Two years. This program is financed by grants and taxpayers. This class of nine three- and four-year olds meets five days per week half time.
- c. Inter-Lakes Elementary School, Meredith. District 269/SAU 2 Inter-Lakes Coop. 30 years. Three and four-year olds attend morning sessions five days per week. Four and five-year-olds (not kindergarten) attend afternoon sessions.
- d. Moultonborough Central School. District 369/SAU 45 Moultonborough. All three and four-year-olds (30 students) are included. Four-year-olds attend five days a week and three-year-olds attend three days per week.
- e. Piermont Village School. District 435/SAU 23 Haverhill. Nine three- and four-year-olds attend five days per week half time.

- f. Winchester School. District 573/SAU 94 Winchester. Nine four-year-olds attend afternoon sessions five days per week. Five three-year-olds attend morning sessions four days per week.
- g. Elm Street School. District 285 Laconia/SAU 30 Laconia. Four-year-olds attend either morning or afternoon 5 days per week. The ratio is 75% typical children and 25% children with special needs.

6. Universal three and four-year olds: less than five day/half time Pre-K.

- a. Milan Village School. District 355/SAU 20 Gorham. 10 years. It is financed by REAP funds and a grant from the Neil & Louise Tillotson Foundation. Eleven three-year-olds attend two times a week and nine four-year-olds attend three times a week for a half day.
- b. Claremont Pre-School Center. District 101/SAU 6. 10 years. Three-year-olds attend morning classes two days per week and four-year-olds attend afternoon classes four days per week. There are 12 students in each class. One head teacher and 2 para professionals in each class. There are three classes of 12 four-year-olds and three classes of 12 three-year-olds. Public transportation is provided. They use the Creative Curriculum and follow the NH Early Learning Standards.
- c. Woodsville Elementary School. District 238/SAU 23 Haverhill Coop. 22 years. One classroom serves 22 children; three-year-olds come two days per week morning and afternoon and four-year-olds come three days per week morning and afternoon. The program uses the Creative Curriculum.
- d. Allstead Primary School. District 174/SAU 60 Fall Mountain Regional. 8 years for four-year-olds, and a pilot program this year for three-year-olds. Four-year-olds attend half-time five days per week and three-year-olds attend three days half-time. The Creative Curriculum is used but academics are mixed in.
- e. Belmont Elementary School. District 486/SAU 80 Shaker Regional. Three-year-olds attend two days per week and four-year-olds attend three days per week half-time.
- f. Alton Central Elementary School. District 15/SAU 72 Alton. Three years. There are two classrooms of mixed three- and four-year-olds who attend half days four days per week.
- g. Hillsboro-Dearing Elementary School, Hillsboro. District 251/SAU 34 Hillsboro-Dearing Coop. 10 years. There is one classroom and children attend half-time two or three days per week.
- h. Whitefield Elementary School. District 568/SAU 36 White Mountain Regional. Five years. Two classrooms serve three- and four-year-olds together for morning and afternoon sessions. Public transportation is provided.
- i. Union Sanborn School, Northfield. District 582/SAU 59 Winnisquam Regional. Three classrooms serve ten children in each class. Three-year-olds attend in the morning and four-year-olds in the afternoon.
- j. Lancaster Elementary School, Lancaster. District 568/SAU 36 White Mountain Regional. Four years. Three- and four-year-olds are mixed four days per week and attend morning or afternoon sessions.

- k. Seabrook Elementary School. District 485/SAU 21 Seabrook. Five years. Two classes of 8-10 mixed three- and four-year-olds attend morning or afternoon sessions. Days per week unknown.
- l. Woodland Heights Elementary School. District 285 Laconia/SAU 30 Laconia. Three-year-olds attend in the morning two days a week. Four-year-olds attend four days per week in the afternoon. Seventy-five percent of the children have special needs and 25% are typically developing children.
- m. Pleasant Street School. District 285 Laconia/SAU 30 Laconia. Four-year-olds attend in the morning. The ratio is 75% typical children and 25% children with special needs.