



Increasing Access to High-Quality Early Education for Three and Four Year Olds

Providing access to high-quality early education for our three and four year-olds is a sound investment. By creating and implementing effective early childhood policies and programs, we can ensure that children have a solid foundation for a productive future.

Science tells us that early childhood is a time when the brain undergoes enormous growth. Pathways are established that allow learning throughout life. When children have enriching experiences and relationships, they get off to a good start, with the ability to think, learn and develop successfully.

Act 62 offers communities an opportunity to provide high-quality early education to 3- and 4-year olds and to build the cost of doing so into local school budgets. However, there is a cap on the number of children who can participate. **The Kids Are Priority One Coalition and Pre-k VT recommend that the legislature lift the cap to allow school districts to offer pre-k for all children who choose to participate as an effective educational strategy.**

REASONS TO LIFT THE ENROLLMENT CAP

- **Studies show that high-quality early education helps set a strong foundation for future growth and learning.** When children are ready to learn in kindergarten, it saves the school real dollars. The Burlington School District did an informal study comparing children who started kindergarten with and without pre-k. Especially for low-income children, those who had pre-k did noticeably better. This finding is consistent with national randomized studies.
- **Local school districts are in the best position to decide whether or not to offer pre-school to their children.** Lifting the cap restriction increases the choices the school districts have. Schools are under a lot of pressure to hold down spending. Allowing them to decide how much pre-school to offer expands their choices of how to provide what is best for their children. It allows them to take advantage of the benefits and cost savings associated with high-quality education, as more children enter kindergarten with the social and cognitive skills needed for success.
- **The cap restriction is very complicated to calculate, cumbersome to administer and causes a lot of confusion.** School districts struggle with understanding the rules governing the caps. The calculation means that one year a school may fall under a cap and the next it may not. This makes it difficult to plan, and such uncertainty can disrupt children's and families' lives. The cost of implementing the pre-k enrollment cap includes administrative costs such as taking out newspaper ads and paying for

extra hours. All in all, it would be much simpler to let the districts decide how to offer pre-k.

THE PACE OF CHANGE

An increased investment in early education will happen gradually, whether we lift the cap or not.

- School districts are not required to provide pre-school services. The Minimum Loss provision, the new two-vote requirement, and Challenges for Change have put new financial pressures on schools— even since the January 2010 Vermont Department of Education report on pre-k—thus making School Boards more cautious about adding early education expenses to their budgets.
- There are not enough community-based early childhood programs that meet the quality standards required by Act 62 to permit a significant increase in participation of all eligible children, and it takes several years for a school to get an on-site pre-k program up and running.

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