

RSU 5 Early Childhood Education Task Force - Meeting Minutes

Date: Wednesday, October 29, 2025

Time: 5:30 – 7:30 p.m.

Location: Morse Street School

In attendance: Matt Pillsbury, Holly Johnson, Malik Farlow, Stephanie Merrill, Katie Penge, Michelle Ritcheson, Heather Roy, Nikki McKeen, Sarah Grant, Rebekah Polster, Julie Nickerson, Elisha Morris, Helen Humphrey, Valarie Williams, Stephanie Worth, Jon Morris, Will Pidden, Erica Mazzeo, Tom Gray

Not in attendance: Kelly Wentworth

Guests: Ted Dalton

Meeting Goals

- Build a shared understanding of the state’s early childhood education mandate and our district’s responsibilities.
 - *FAPE responsibilities move to the District by July 2028 latest*
 - *Aim to present a menu of options vetted by this body by the January 14th meeting*
 - *‘A widely representative body from the communities offers the following recommendations’*
 - Take stock of current district and community resources.
 - *Current programming is robust*
 - Identify key areas of concern and opportunity.
 - Clarify next steps, including opportunities to join state cohorts for early implementation.
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Agenda

5:30 – 5:40 | Welcome and Introductions

- Superintendent’s opening remarks and purpose of the Task Force.
- Roundtable introductions (name, role, and connection to early childhood education).
- Overview of meeting norms and collaboration expectations;
 - **1. Stay Student-Centered**
Keep our focus on what will best serve children and families — especially our youngest learners — as we explore options for the district’s future responsibilities.
 - **2. Honor All Perspectives**
We come from different roles and experiences. Listen with curiosity and respect; seek to understand before seeking to be understood.
 - **3. Assume Positive Intent**
Everyone in the room is here because they care about children and want to do what’s right. Approach differences in opinion with generosity.

- **4. Speak from Experience, Listen for Understanding**
Use “I” statements to share your perspective. When others speak, listen to understand, not to reply.
- **5. Be Present and Engaged**
Limit side conversations, multitasking, and phone use. We have important work to do in a short time.
- **6. Keep It Constructive and Solution-Oriented**
Our charge is to identify possibilities and options — not to assign blame. Let’s focus on what we *can* do and what’s within our control.
- **7. Be Mindful of Time and Space**
Help ensure everyone’s voice is heard by being concise when speaking and inviting quieter voices in.
- **8. Transparency and Trust**
We will share information openly and ensure that processes are clear to all. What we learn together will be communicated accurately and respectfully.
- **9. One Conversation at a Time**
Respect the facilitator and each other by allowing one person to speak at a time.
- **10. End with Commitment to the Work**
Leave each meeting with a shared understanding of next steps and a spirit of collaboration as we move toward our common goal.

5:40 – 6:10 | Understanding the Mandate

- **Presentation:** State requirements for providing FAPE (Free Appropriate Public Education) for children ages 3–5 by July 1, 2028.
- Overview of **Cohort 3 and Cohort 4 options:**
 - *Current model robust and beyond the minimum requirements*
 - *Cohorts 1 and 2 ships have sailed*
 - Cohort 3: begins FY26 (FY27), districts assume responsibility for 4-year-olds.
 - *We would take on responsibility for every 4yo in our district whether they attend or not*
 - *There are additional funds available for early implementers - furnishings and staff (administrative staff)*
 - Cohort 4: begins FY27, districts assume responsibility for both 3- and 4-year-olds.
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 - Funding opportunities and considerations for each.
 - *K-12 The state reimburses through EPS*
 - *State funds 55% of education. RSU 5 receives less than 55% (low mid)*
 - *Multiplier example - Low SES is 150%*
 - *Law is that the State will reimburse the District at a rate of 100%*
 - *This means that start up costs such as Admin, Clerical, Staff*
- Brief Q&A.
 - *Is there a reason why the district didn't join Cohorts 1 or 2? Mixed impressions from early implementors, uncertainty about (trust) in State promises*
 - *Q: Is there a limit to how much we can request?*
 - *A: Funding is based on the child count (ID'd student)*
 - *Q: Is there any advantage with regard to funding in starting sooner?*

- *A: Yes in terms of capturing staffing from the shallow pool, set up admin services*
- *Comment: There are unknown numbers not identified in the community*
- *Comment (Tom): Process Responsibility: Child Find > FAPE*
- *Comment (Tom): Parents of children who choose to keep children with IEP at home will need push out support in the community.*
- *We could retrofit our facilities to provide for 3 and 4 year olds. Or, we can work with community-based providers to supply or “mix model delivery” the services.*
- *Q: Do we know the diagnosis type with our roster?*
- *A: Yes*
- *Comment (Will): Early ID and Early Service improves outcomes for kids and (Stephanie) increases possibility for exit to general education (Julie) seeing patterns of being ID'd early and dismissed sooner (Kate) child find is daunting, but exciting*
- *Regular Education Setting (Tom): LRE Making sure that students with special education services have access to Least Restrictive programming (Heather) recommends sending providers in to observe kids (especially 3yo) in providers and homes*

6:10 – 6:40 | Taking Stock of What We Have

- **Group discussion: Inventory of current resources and strengths in the district and community.**
- ***In a lottery situation, ID'd kids get priority on slots***
 - *PES*
 - *1PK Classroom (.5 Program) - 1X AM? (8)*
 - *DCS*
 - *2PK Classrooms - 1 X AM (14) & PM (9) - 1 X AM only*
 - *MSS*
 - *2PK Classrooms - 2 AM, 2 PM (55)*

Request

(Matt) for briefing book - space - numbers - facilities

(Rebekah) similar districts and learning that can be shared back

- **Pre-K programs (half-day, staffing, facilities).**
 - *No 3yo PK*
 - *4yo PK in all three towns PES, DCS, MSS*
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 - *Special Educator, Speech, OT - Do screenings, make referrals, meet with CDS and then CDS writes IEPs, RSU 5 provides services. There are cases where services cannot be provided in the district and Special Purpose Programming is needed.*
 - *(Kate) 4yo birthdate is a hard start date, similar to 5yo. 3yo is a rolling admission*
 - *(Julie) Lots of time spent with families helping them understand the process and the language of programming.*
 - *(Kate & Tom) Important to note that the administrative logistics and child find are all the responsibility of CDS*

- *Comment (Will) Kids who just show up without having already been ID'd the team is able to wrap around the services.*
 - *(Ted) The beauty of our situation is that we do have a staff team in place w/4yo*
 - *(Elisha) in upper grades we don't have the flexibility with how our staff are used*
 - *(Tom) IEP services are ID'd disability, We have regular education intervention services by way of MTSS/RTI*
 - *(Stephanie) Speech currently provided by us, yes? (Kate) yes*
 - Community child care and early learning providers.
 - *Little Friends*
 - *First Step*
 - *United Way*
 - *Laugh and Learn - has full and half day program*
 - *YMCA Freeport*
 - *Relationships are strong*
 - *(Heather) parents don't want to pay for a full day spot so half day is a hard fit*
 - *(Will) there are tangible differences in readiness indicators for children accessing PK.*
 - *(Heather) full day is an equitability issue.*
 - Partnerships and service delivery models.
- Recorder captures shared assets and gaps on a visual chart or whiteboard.

6:40 – 7:10 | Identifying Primary Areas of Concern

- Small group discussion (mixed stakeholder tables):
 - What are your biggest questions or concerns about meeting this new responsibility?
 - What opportunities do you see to build on existing strengths?
- Large group debrief: share out themes.
- Begin to identify areas for deeper exploration in future meetings.

7:10 – 7:25 | Looking Ahead: Framing the Work of the Task Force

- Overview of the four-meeting timeline and expected outcomes:
 - Meeting 1 – Understanding the landscape
 - **Meeting 2 – Exploring models and scenarios - November 12th PES**
 - *ata briefing (see above)*
 - *Share exemplary models*

- Meeting 3 – Evaluating feasibility and costs
- Meeting 4 – Developing the menu of options for the Board
- Confirm next meeting date and pre-reading materials.

7:25 – 7:30 | Closing Reflections

- Quick round: one takeaway or hope for the work ahead.
- Thank you and adjourn.