Washington Central Unified Union School District

WCUUSD exists to nurture and inspire in all students the passion, creativity and power to contribute to their local and global communities.

1130 Gallison Hill Road

Montpelier, VT 05602
Phone (802) 229-0553
Fax (802) 229-2761

Washington Central PreK Programming Configuration Overview

This document outlines the current configuration of PreK programming within the Washington Central Unified Union School District (WCUUSD). Its purpose is to inform the School Board and the public about the foundational structure, rationale, decision-making criteria, and related impacts, including financial, special education, Community Connections, staffing, and adherence to state regulations.

Program Foundations: Quality and Planning
Program planning begins each fall by analyzing current and projected student enrollment, birth records, and registration data gathered each spring. Staffing needs are budgeted based on these verified numbers, class size procedures, and state licensing requirements.

Quality Standards and Size
In PreK, the optimal class size is 10–12 students, up to 15 (20 is max allowed by the State based on space). A class size below 8 students does not allow the district to offer a high quality PreK program. Furthermore, state licensing regulations determine the maximum number of students in a classroom based on square footage, which may never exceed 20 students.

Act 166 and Program Development
Vermont's Universal Pre-Kindergarten law, Act 166, requires the district to provide universal access to at least 10 hours per week of publicly funded prekindergarten education for children aged 3–5. In June 2025, the district organized a PreK Task Force to establish a robust program that prioritizes quality, accessibility, and equity, while aligning with evidence-based practices. The Task Force also aimed to determine family and staff childcare needs and ensure sustainable program options.

Rationale for Current Recommendations

Washington Central's PreK programming is configured to maximize access, efficiently utilize community partnerships, ensure compliance with Act 166, and responsibly manage operational and financial resources. The district adheres to a mixed delivery system that includes WCUUSD-operated PreK classrooms and state-approved independent community providers.

PreK Task Force Recommendations and Outcomes
The PreK Task Force submitted a WCUUSD Universal Prekindergarten (UPK) Program Recommendations memorandum on October 14, 2025, recommending five district-based classrooms providing 25 hours of weekly instruction. This recommendation was deemed too costly to implement at this time. Consequently, the administration chose to focus on a slight increase in programming from 10 to 12.5 hours per week, acknowledging that further expansion is not feasible until more sustainable financing is available.

Enrollment for the 2026-2027 School Year (as of 4/7/26)

School	PK3	PK4	Pending	Act 166	K
Berlin	10	17	3	10	18
Calais	3	11	6	4	6
Worcester	1	1*	0	2	2
East Montpelier	5	6	7	8	18
Middlesex	8	6	3	5	11
Total	**27**	**41**	**19**	**29**	**55**

*Pending refers to registrations that have been started in our Infinite Campus Student Information System that have additional paperwork to submit to complete their registration.
*1 other.

Key Criteria Guiding Configuration Decisions
Decisions regarding the configuration are based on the following key criteria:

Criteria	Description
Classroom configuration	Single classroom for PK Single classroom Kindergarten

Enrollment Demand	Measured by the number of eligible children and projected growth in the district.
Quality & Compliance	Assurance that all participating programs meet all state quality and licensing standards.
Geographic Access	Ensuring equitable distribution of PreK slots across the district to minimize travel burden for families.
Financial Sustainability	Evaluating the cost-effectiveness of district-operated versus partner-based slots, and the viability of district programs.
Special Education Needs	Capacity to deliver required Individualized Education Program (IEP) services within all program settings.
Staffing	Ability to fully staff both PreK and Community Connections programs.

Financial Implications
Financing PreK programs is dependent on a combination of state funds, local funds, and tuition payments to community partners.

- **State Funding (Act 166):** The district receives $4,106 per student in state funding for the mandated 10 hours of universal PreK. Agreements with community partners involve a per-child payment based on this established state rate.
    - *Community Partners:* Montessori, Rainbow Gardens, St. Monica-St. Michael, Turtle Island, Orchard Valley Waldorf School, North Branch Nature Center, Montpelier Child House, Natures Ninos, Hunger Mountain, River Branch, Moretown, Brookside Primary.
- **Operational Costs:** District-operated classrooms incur direct costs for staffing, materials, and facility. The estimated staffing cost per program is available in this table.
- **Future Planning:** Any future expansion to increase PreK will require an updated financial impact study and additional funding from the State.

Essential Support Programs
The configuration is designed to seamlessly integrate support services required for families and students with special needs.

Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE/EEE)
ECSE refers to the provision of special education and related services for children ages 3–5. Students requiring ECSE are given clear priority in the tiered enrollment system. WCUUSD special education staff (e.g., Speech-Language Pathologists, Occupational

Therapists) provide required services in both district-operated classrooms and partner sites. Child Find activities and initial evaluations are coordinated by the WCUUSD Special Education team. The current system promotes inclusion by providing opportunities for children with and without disabilities to learn together.

Impact on Service Efficiency: The current configuration is designed to ensure seamless integration of special education and related services. Having 3 sites allows our services to be more efficient, where more sites would mean less access for students and less efficient use of staff.

Community Connections (CC) Programming
CC is a WCUUSD program that offers subsidized child care on either end of the part-day PreK programs so that families can access full-day programming if necessary. CC also provides before and afterschool care in some locations as well as programming during school breaks.

- **Current CC Services:**
    - Before school care is available at Berlin, Calais, East Montpelier, and Rumney.
    - Extended Day programming for students attending PreK is available at Berlin, Calais, and East Montpelier.
    - After school care is offered at Berlin, Rumney and East Montpelier.

Staffing
Staffing decisions are made to comply with state requirements and reflect the needs of district-operated classrooms and partner sites. The Early Childhood Director coordinates programming for CC, registration, and partner program payments. All staff are required to meet the state's qualifications for early childhood education professionals.

Role	Responsibility
PreK Teachers	Direct instruction, assessment, and family communication.
Paraeducators	Classroom support, individual student assistance.
CC (site coordinator, staffing)	Program oversight, quality assurance.
Special Education Staff	IEP services, evaluations, and consultation.

Implications of a combined EMES/Calais PreK

Moving the PreK program currently operating at Calais back to Rumney and having EMES serve as the PreK site for Calais and East Montpelier with morning and afternoon programs would allow for a more efficient and sustainable service.

The current school year has two full day PreK sites, one at Berlin and one at East Montpelier, and a half day PreK at Calais. The Calais teacher and ESP were previously at Rumney, however, there was not a sufficient number of students to keep the PreK program at Rumney this school year. There are enough PreK students next year in Middlesex and Worcester to bring that half-day program back to Rumney.

The district staffing allows a dedicated full-time PreK teacher to manage both a morning and afternoon program efficiently at EMES and Berlin. Students at EMES will have access to a full-time nurse, and to art, Music, Library and PE programming. Splitting the program between Calais and EMES would necessitate securing hard-to-find part-time staff. Furthermore, it prevents the efficient sharing of critical Community Connections (CC) staff who provide before, after, and lunch coverage. Since CC is fundamental to providing working families with access to full-day programming, splitting the schedule undermines our ability to staff and sustain this vital service.

Moreover, increasing the number of district-run PreK sites directly conflicts with the operational goal of maximizing efficiency for Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) services. The current three-site configuration ensures WCUUSD special education staff (e.g., Speech-Language Pathologists, Occupational Therapists) can efficiently deliver required services. Expanding to more sites means less efficient use of staff time (due to increased travel) and ultimately could result in reduced access to services for students with IEPs.

State Regulatory Compliance

Washington Central's PreK configuration meets the state's Universal Prekindergarten Education Act requirements.

- **Required Hours and Quality:** All programs offer the mandated 10 hours per week of universal PreK education and are subject to the state's quality rating system and licensing requirements. PreK classrooms are inspected and licensed annually by the state to ensure compliance.
- **Teacher Licensing:** Teachers must hold a valid Vermont educator license with a specific endorsement in Early Childhood Education or Early Childhood Special Education.
- **Support Personnel:** Support staff are regulated by the Child Development Division (CDD).

    - *Preschool Teaching Assistant:* Must be at least 18 years old with a high school diploma/GED and complete a 30-hour course in child development or a 3-credit college course in the field within one year of hire.
    - *Preschool Teaching Associate:* Requires a higher level of preparation, such as an associate degree in early childhood development or a related field (human development, elementary education).
- **Assessment:** Teaching Strategies GOLD, the State approved PreK assessment, is required for all UPK programs twice per year. The cost for 2025-2026 is $15.55 per student.