

New Jersey Department of Education Division of Early Childhood Education

End-of-Year Report: 2008-2009

Introduction

The mission of the Division of Early Childhood Education (DECE) is to enhance the social, emotional, physical, and academic development of New Jersey's children, preschool through third grade, by providing leadership, resources and professional development that support high-quality early childhood programs in a comprehensive and collaborative system. The DECE pursues this goal throughout the state, preparing children to succeed in school by acquiring the knowledge and skills necessary to meet the *Preschool Teaching and Learning Standards* and the *Core Curriculum Content Standards*. Division staff members work with the Office of Special Education Services, the Office of School Funding, the Office of Early Literacy, the Office of Bilingual Education and the Executive county superintendents to provide guidance and program oversight to school districts receiving state funding to implement preschool programs. The districts are categorized as follows:

- 35 school districts that receive funding under the School Funding Reform Act of 2008 (SFRA) (including the 31 school districts formerly known as Abbott)
- 96 non-Abbott school districts that receive aid formerly known as Early Childhood Program Aid (ECPA)
- 24 school districts that participate in the former Early Launch to Learning Initiative (ELLI). Nine of these districts are also included among the 96 former ECPA districts.

The DECE continues to expand its responsibility to include program support for kindergarten through third grade. Within the division, there are two offices: the Office of Preschool Education and the Office of Kindergarten through Third Grade. The Office of Preschool Education's major responsibility is oversight of state funded preschool programs, including the former Abbott, ECPA and ELLI school districts. To date, staff has not been hired for the Kindergarten-through-Third Grade Office; however, existing staff have been assigned to accomplish preliminary tasks.

The Division of Early Childhood Education's 2008-2009 End-of-Year Report summarizes the initiatives that the division established to meet the overall goals of the New Jersey Department of Education and highlights the achievements over the past year.

Preschool and the School Funding Reform Act (SFRA)

New Jersey's school funding formula, the SFRA, mandates that all eligible at-risk three- and four-year-old children be offered a high-quality preschool program beginning at age three. In

this context, “at-risk” refers to children who are eligible for preschool programs as defined by age and income-eligibility pursuant to P.L. 2007, c.260 section 12(a)).

Fiscal Accountability and Integrity

The 2008-2009 budget year marked significant changes to the way in which the DECE handled budget submissions for the 31 former Abbott districts, due in part to the passage of the SFRA, and the establishment of Preschool Education Aid (PEA). For the first time, districts and private preschool providers were given the option of accepting a cost-of-living budget increase (2.89 percent) in order to gain more flexibility in their line-item budgeting. Overall, 74.2 percent of districts (23) and 86.5 percent of providers (289) accepted a “presumptive” budget amount. The remaining 25.8 percent of districts (8) and 13.5 percent of providers (45) submitted line-item budgets requesting aid in excess of a 2.89 percent increase. These district and provider budgets were given a more intensive review by DECE staff.

In the 2008-2009 school year, the approved projected budget for general education students in the former Abbott preschool program totaled almost \$532 million, with an average per-pupil amount of \$12,531 for students served in school district and private provider-operated programs. Division staff reviewed budgets and supporting tables for the 31 former Abbott school district programs, as well as budgets for over 330 private provider sites, including both expanded (fully state funded) and enhanced (state and federally funded) Head Start centers.

Preschool fiscal specialists in the former Abbott districts continued to play an important role in the fiscal accountability of the preschool program. In 2008-2009, fiscal specialists participated in a series of workshops to discuss the challenges of their role in the state funded preschool program and to help the division determine useful professional development topics for fiscal specialists to take back to their private providers. Fiscal guidance, contracts, quarterly reviews of provider budgets, and limited review examinations were some of the topics covered in the workshop series. Findings from limited review examinations of individual preschool programs helped to guide discussion of the areas in which private providers need the most assistance from their fiscal specialists.

Limited Review Examinations and Audits

For the sixth year, the division worked with the Office of Fiscal Accountability and Compliance (OFAC) to conduct limited review examinations and audits of preschool programs operated by private providers contracting with former Abbott school districts. OFAC reviewed the 2007-2008 fiscal records of 64 randomly selected private providers in 20 school districts. Three additional providers were reviewed as a result of being referred by their contracting school district due to concerns about the providers’ fiscal operations. In addition to these 67 limited reviews, OFAC’s Internal Audit group performed full audits of 14 private providers in the two state-operated districts.

The OFAC reports on 2007-2008 budgets indicated that both contracted private providers and district-employed fiscal specialists continue to more accurately project and monitor expenditures. Findings confirmed that more private providers are filling out their quarterly expenditure reports

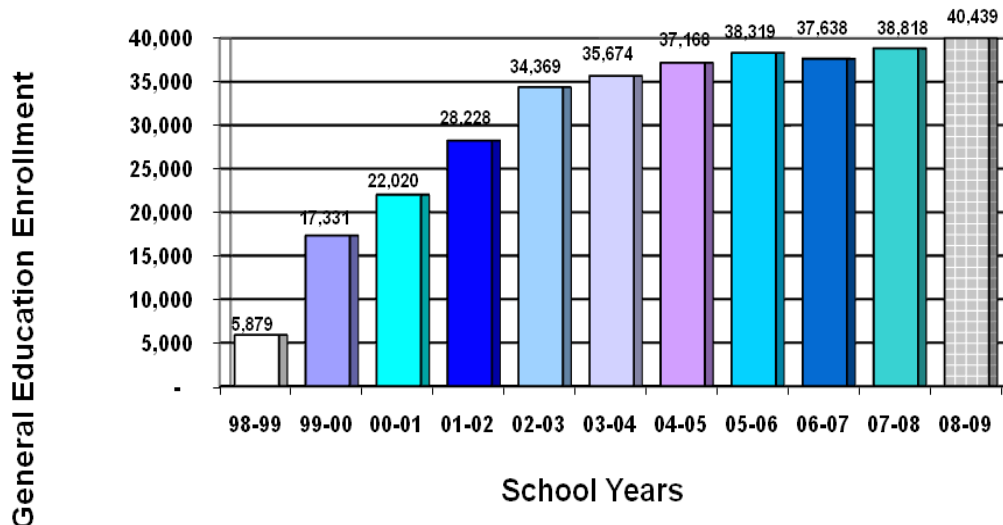
with greater accuracy and completeness. In addition, private providers demonstrated a better grasp of the standards required to follow Generally Accepted Accounting Principles (GAAP).

School district administrators work closely with their private providers to address findings from each individual OFAC review, providing documentation to support any issues that have already been addressed and specifying the timeline by which any outstanding issues will be rectified. For the second year, OFAC reviewed all corrective action plans for appropriateness and completeness, working with school districts and private providers to remediate any deficiencies. These corrective action plans serve as a valuable tool to monitor the progress of private providers in need of stronger fiscal controls.

Capacity Building in the Former Abbott Preschool Programs

The first four years of implementation for the Abbott preschool program were marked by rapid growth. The most recent six years saw steady overall growth, with 78.0 percent of the estimated universe of Abbott-eligible general education preschoolers served in 2008-2009. During the 2008-2009 school year, the tenth year of implementation, the 31 former Abbott school districts served 40,439 general education preschoolers and approximately 1,900 special education three- and four-year-old children for a total of over 42,300 preschool student. Just over 46 percent of enrolled students were three-year olds and slightly less than 54 percent were four-year olds. Below, Table 1 below illustrates the growth of the Abbott preschool program from 1998-1999 to 2008-2009.

Table 1: Abbott General Education Preschool Enrollment 1998-99 to 2008-09



Capacity Challenges – Head Start

Many New Jersey Head Start programs serve children who are eligible for both Head Start and the state’s preschool program using a combination of state and federal funding. These programs

are required to meet both state and federal guidelines. While many Head Start agencies participate in the state preschool program, there remain children who receive only Head Start services, but who are also eligible for the state preschool program. The full inclusion of all Head Start children into the state preschool program remains a major objective of the Department of Education. The barrier for full inclusion of these eligible children is in part due to the lack of adequate space. Head Start programs often struggle to find adequate space in areas where space is costly and scarce.

Since the Head Start State Collaboration office relocated from the Department of Human Services to the Department of Education, the number of Head Start children in State Preschool programs has increased. This change has enabled the DECE to work more closely with the State Collaboration Director to meet the goal of providing both Head Start services and the state's high-quality preschool program to as many eligible preschoolers as possible.

Preschool Program Quality - The Continuous Improvement Cycle

High-quality education depends on a continuous improvement cycle. This cycle consists of gathering and analyzing data on classroom quality, developing plans for improvement and implementing those plans. The process continues with an assessment of each program component. The division continuously uses this cycle to measure the overall growth of the state preschool program in the former Abbott school districts. The division provides districts with technical assistance in the areas of self-assessment, program implementation, planning, improvement, data analysis and professional development.

Measuring and Assessing Progress, Analyzing and Planning

Six years ago, the division formed the Early Learning Improvement Consortium (ELIC). The purpose of the ELIC is to measure and assess program quality. The ELIC is comprised of leading early childhood education faculty from New Jersey State colleges and universities. Members of the ELIC conduct classroom observations on 12 percent of the former Abbott preschool classrooms each year to measure progress in improving program quality by administering the Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale-Revised (ECERS-R), the Supports for Early Literacy Assessment (SELA), and the Preschool Classroom Mathematics Inventory (PCMI). Findings are reported yearly. Reports have shown that throughout the ten years of the Abbott preschool program, overall quality has increased. The division uses the results gathered by the ELIC to plan future professional development activities that address areas of need identified by the evaluations. As a result, the division has increased training to improve teaching practices in mathematics and science. In the 2008-2009 school year, the average ECERS-R score was 5.23. Classrooms scoring 5.0 or above are considered by the instruments' authors to offer high-quality preschool experiences (see ECERS-R Subscale Scores below) that are associated with positive learning gains for children.

Table 2: ECERS-R Subscale Scores

ECERS-R Subscale Scores	Mean 2008-2009 (range)
<p><i>Space and Furnishings</i> This subscale addresses the areas of indoor and outdoor space, room arrangement, organization, display, furnishings and equipment.</p>	5.03 (3.13-7.00)
<p><i>Personal Care Routines</i> This subscale addresses practices around daily routines like greeting and departure, meals, naptime, and toileting as well as health and safety practices.</p>	4.34 (1.00-7.00)
<p><i>Language-Reasoning</i> This area addresses the classroom's formal and informal communication, language and reasoning opportunities.</p>	5.56 (1.75-7.00)
<p><i>Activities</i> This subscale looks at the learning opportunities in each of the areas of the classroom including fine motor, art, music/movement, blocks, sand/water, dramatic play, nature/science, math/number, use of video/computer, and diversity.</p>	4.86 (2.50-7.00)
<p><i>Interactions</i> This area addresses supervision of children, discipline, staff-child interactions, and interactions among children.</p>	6.33 (1.80-7.00)
<p><i>Program Structure</i> This area addresses classroom operations and schedule, including groupings, transitions and flexibility.</p>	5.45 (1.67-7.00)
<p><i>Parents and Staff</i> This area addresses the program's supports for both parents and staff, including opportunities to evaluate, communicate child-related information, family involvement and professional development opportunities.</p>	5.77 (2.67-7.00)
<p>Total Overall Average Score</p>	5.23 (3.34-6.71)

District supervisors and master teachers in former Abbott districts conduct regular observations of all preschool classrooms with an emphasis on improving implementation of the school district's curriculum. Structured observation instruments linked to the school district's comprehensive preschool curriculum include High/Scope's Preschool Quality Assessment® (PQA) and Creative Curriculum's Implementation Checklist®. The instruments provide a depth of information needed to appropriately plan professional development and program improvements.

The division continues to focus on school districts use of observation instruments/performance based assessments that give teachers an understanding of individual student's growth and development in all domains of learning and serve as a springboard for purposeful planning of classroom activities. School districts are encouraged to use the performance based assessment

instrument that is tied to the comprehensive preschool curriculum approved in their five-year plan. Appropriate instruments include High/Scope's Child Observation Record® (COR) and Creative Curriculum's Developmental Continuum®.

Self Assessment Validation System (SAVS)

In school year 2008-2009, 35 school districts participated in the Self-Assessment Validation System (SAVS). This annual process assists school districts in implementing the continuous improvement cycle. The SAVS is designed to guide the school district through a systematic self-appraisal of its preschool program. The SAVS criteria are derived from the *New Jersey Preschool Program Implementation Guidelines* and the National Association for the Education of Young Children's (NAEYC) position statement on *Early Childhood Curriculum, Assessment and Program Evaluation* (NAEYC 2004). School districts use the findings from the SAVS to develop improvement goals which are included in their five-year program plans.

Areas identified for district improvement in the 2008-2009 SAVS included providing greater supports for preschool English language learners, increasing the inclusion of preschool children with disabilities in general education classrooms, maximizing the efforts of preschool intervention and referral teams, and fully implementing plans for children's seamless transition through grade levels. School districts use the results of the SAVS, classroom observations, curriculum reports, and other data to develop detailed professional development plans which are also submitted to the division for approval. Division liaisons work with the school districts to implement these plans.

Division Professional Development and Other Technical Assistance

During 2008-2009, the division conducted regional technical assistance meetings to provide districts with research based information and strategies on how to improve their early childhood plans, as well as program implementation. In addition, district principals, supervisors, master teachers, nurses, preschool intervention team members and social workers participated in professional development trainings to discuss leadership, program policies, and strategies on meeting the needs of staff, preschool children and their families.

The 35 school districts continued to make significant strides in 2008-2009. Through intense professional development in a broad range of topics related to best practices and fiscal accountability in early childhood programs, there continues to be measurable progress throughout these districts in the areas of program quality and fiscal accountability and integrity.

The division's data is used to design effective technical assistance for individual school districts and to determine appropriate topics for professional development statewide. The following are examples of professional development activities from the 2008-2009 school year:

- Regular meetings for about 50 Abbott Early Childhood Supervisors that included training on numerous topics and technical assistance on program administration.
- Articulation meetings with county education specialists and county business administrators on preschool expansion.
- Meetings with various child care organizations throughout the state to discuss preschool expansion.

- Regional meetings for over 600 district administrators regarding preschool expansion.
- Three-day curriculum showcase for representatives from universal and targeted school districts to introduce the High/Scope, Curiosity Corner, Tools of the Mind, and Creative Curriculum models to school districts looking to adopt a research-based program.
- Preschool Intervention and Referral Team (PIRT) training for over 150 PIRT members on district protocol and positive behavior supports system.
- An intensive seminar, entitled “The Role of the Master Teacher” for 50 new master teachers and Head Start education specialists/coaches.
- A four-day regional series, entitled “The Preschool Leadership Track”, to demonstrate research-based best practices in preschool and tools and tips for successful leadership.
- Training workshops for 31 Community Parent Involvement Specialists from Abbott school districts to share goals and focus on how to engage families.
- A kindergarten conference which was attended by about 300 administrators from across the state.
- Regional training sessions on inclusion and special education regulations for Head Start and Early Head Start directors, disability service staff, district special education supervisors, and early childhood supervisors.
- Training for more than 100 bilingual directors and coaches on supporting English language learners.
- Special professional development meetings for 70 preschool nurses on the new State immunization requirements for school entry, along with the amended regulations.
- Training session for approximately 500 veteran master teachers.

Other Division Initiatives

Early Childhood Program Aid (ECPA)

In 1996, the New Jersey Legislature established Early Childhood Program Aid (ECPA). In addition to the 31 Abbott school districts, 101 non-Abbott school districts with an overall concentration of low-income students between 20 and 40 percent qualified for ECPA funding. Districts receiving ECPA funding are expected to operate a full-day kindergarten program and offer at least a half-day preschool program to four-year-old children. Due to the passage of the SFRA, ECPA funding was changed to PEA starting in the 2008-2009 school year. Along with this change, five former ECPA districts were approved to begin to expand their existing preschool programs to enroll more students and to meet the more rigorous standards of the Abbott preschool program. Almost 13,250 general education kindergarten students and almost 8,100 general education preschool students were served by the 101 non-Abbott ECPA school districts. Of the almost 8,100 preschool children served, over 32 percent were served in full-day programs. The cost of the preschool component was approximately \$41 million.

The 101 former ECPA school districts are expected to provide high-quality programs that are developmentally appropriate and consistent with the *Preschool Teaching and Learning Standards*, use community resources, and plan parent involvement and professional development activities.

Early Launch to Learning Initiative (ELLI)

The Early Launch to Learning Initiative (ELLI) completed its fifth successful year as 23 school districts continued with the project. The division supported the ELLI school districts with professional development and networking opportunities designed to enhance the quality of program implementation. Representatives from the ELLI school districts were invited to all of the professional development activities offered to the former Abbott and ECPA districts. The ELLI program provided high-quality preschool programs for an additional 543 low-income children at a total estimated cost of \$2.3 million.

Kindergarten Through Third Grade

In 2008-2009, the division conducted a review of New Jersey's Preschool Teaching and Learning Standards in order to align the document with the New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards (NJ CCCS). During the review, revision and alignment process, we discovered that more work needs to be done to make the K-3 standards more developmentally appropriate.

Preschool Quality Enhancement Awards (PQEA)

The Preschool Quality Enhancement Award (PQEA) was established by Governor Corzine in 2007, and included \$8.5 million in the state budget to foster high-quality early childhood education in qualifying private provider programs. This one-time \$8.5 million grant was designed to provide funding (outside of the former Abbott districts) to programs providing preschool services to children at or below the federal poverty level. Eligible programs received funds for activities that fostered high-quality early childhood education and supported developmentally appropriate practices within their existing preschool programs. All agencies that applied for the award had to have an existing preschool program with at least 75 percent of families at or below poverty level. The funding could not be used to start new programs.

PQEA recipients had to use the funds to support one or all of the following program components: teacher and teacher assistant certification, adopting and implementing a research-based comprehensive curriculum and assessment model, professional development, supports for English Language Learners and children with special needs, classroom materials and supplies, playground installation or other programmatic strategies that make up a high-quality preschool education.

The Division of Early Childhood Education assumed programmatic oversight, while the Office of Grants Management maintained management of the application process. A total of 18 applications were received by the department. Fourteen applications were approved, all but one from Head Start agencies. The 14 approved agencies served a total of 2,656 preschool children.

Preschool Expansion Initiative

The Governor and the legislature made a huge commitment to the expansion of preschool with the passage of the SFRA which calls for a six-year roll-out of high-quality preschool for all at-

risk three- and four-year-old children statewide. The 2008-2009 school year was designated to be a planning year with the initial implementation of the program to begin in 2009-2010. When fully implemented in six years, an estimated 30,000 additional general education preschoolers will be served, bringing state-funded preschool enrollment to approximately 70,000 children.

Next Year ...

The continuous improvement cycle guides much of the work of the DECE. Based on results of the SAVS, ELIC research and DOE data, the DECE is looking ahead to the following goals for 2009-2010:

- Improving teacher-child interactions
- Improving math and science teaching practices
- Expanding and fine-tuning early childhood assessment practices
- Expanding the reach of preschool, including the expansion of Head Start participation
- Increasing inclusion of children with disabilities and improving inclusion practices
- Improving the use of the Preschool Intervention and Referral Teams (PIRT)
- Improving transition from preschool to kindergarten
- Planning for the readoption of the *Preschool Teaching and Learning Standards*
- Planning for kindergarten, including regulations, guidelines, a leadership conference and a best practices pamphlet
- Professional development provided regionally for districts expected to expand their preschool programs