

New Jersey Department of Education Division of Early Childhood Education

End-of-Year Report: 2006 - 2007

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 Expectations: Standards of Quality* and the *Core Curriculum Content Standards*. Division staff continue to 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 county superintendents to provide guidance and program oversight to three sets of school districts that receive state funding for preschool:

- 31 Abbott school districts
- 101 non-Abbott school districts that receive Early Childhood Program Aid (ECPA)
- 26 school districts that participate in the Early Launch to Learning Initiative (ELLI).

In April 2007, the Office of Early Childhood Education became the Division of Early Childhood Education, expanding its functions to include support for kindergarten through third grade. Dr. Jacqueline Jones was appointed assistant commissioner for the Division of Early Childhood Education, and Dr. Ellen Wolock became the director of the Office of Preschool Education within the division. No new kindergarten-through-grade-three staff have been hired to date. Within the division, the Office of Preschool Education (OPE) is responsible for oversight of the Abbott preschool program. Substantial support and professional development are also provided to the ECPA and ELLI school districts. The Division of Early Childhood Education's 2006-2007 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 of these three programs over the past year.

Abbott Preschool Programs

The Abbott preschool program continued to make significant strides in 2006-2007. Through intense professional development in a broad range of topics related to best practices and fiscal accountability in early childhood programs, there has been measurable progress throughout the Abbott school districts in the areas of program quality, measuring and assessing progress, and fiscal accountability and integrity.

Fiscal Accountability and Integrity

In the 2006-2007 school year, the approved projected budget for the Abbott preschool program totaled over \$489 million with an average per-pupil allocation of \$11,831 for students served in school district and private provider-operated programs. Staff from the Division of Early Childhood Education reviewed over 367 individual private provider budgets, including both expanded (fully state funded) and enhanced (state and federally funded) Head Start centers. In addition, division staff reviewed budgets for the 31 Abbott school district programs, 28 of which also oversee private provider programs.

The 2006-2007 budget year is the first for which all Enhanced Head Start agencies used newly organized budget forms designed specifically for Head Start agencies that receive both federal and state funds. The forms, developed with federal assistance from the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) and the New Jersey Department of Human Services (DHS), were piloted in 14 agencies during the 2005-2006 budget process. The new forms were designed to produce a more accurate reflection of how state funding supplements federal funding to enable Head Start agencies to incorporate Abbott standards into their existing programs.

Abbott Preschool fiscal specialists continued to play an important role in the fiscal accountability of the preschool program in the Abbott school districts. In 2006-2007, fiscal specialists from the Abbott school districts came together through a series of four workshops to discuss the challenges of their role in the Abbott program and to help the division determine useful professional development topics for fiscal specialists to take back to their private providers. Findings from limited reviews 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 fourth year, utilizing the Office of Fiscal Accountability and Compliance (OFAC), the division conducted limited review examinations and audits of preschool programs within private providers served in the Abbott school districts. Entrance and exit conferences with both school district and private provider representatives continue to serve as a valuable tool for both the reviewers and reviewees. Approximately 74 private providers in 23 school districts were selected for a review of their 2005-2006 Abbott preschool budgets.

Findings from this review indicate that each year more private providers are filling out their Quarterly Expenditure Reports with greater accuracy and completeness. In addition, the providers appear to have gained a better grasp of the standards required to follow Generally Accepted Accounting Principles (GAAP). Consequently, fiscal specialists have been able to adjust payments to private providers earlier in the year, thus reducing the amount of funding owed to school districts after the end of the school year.

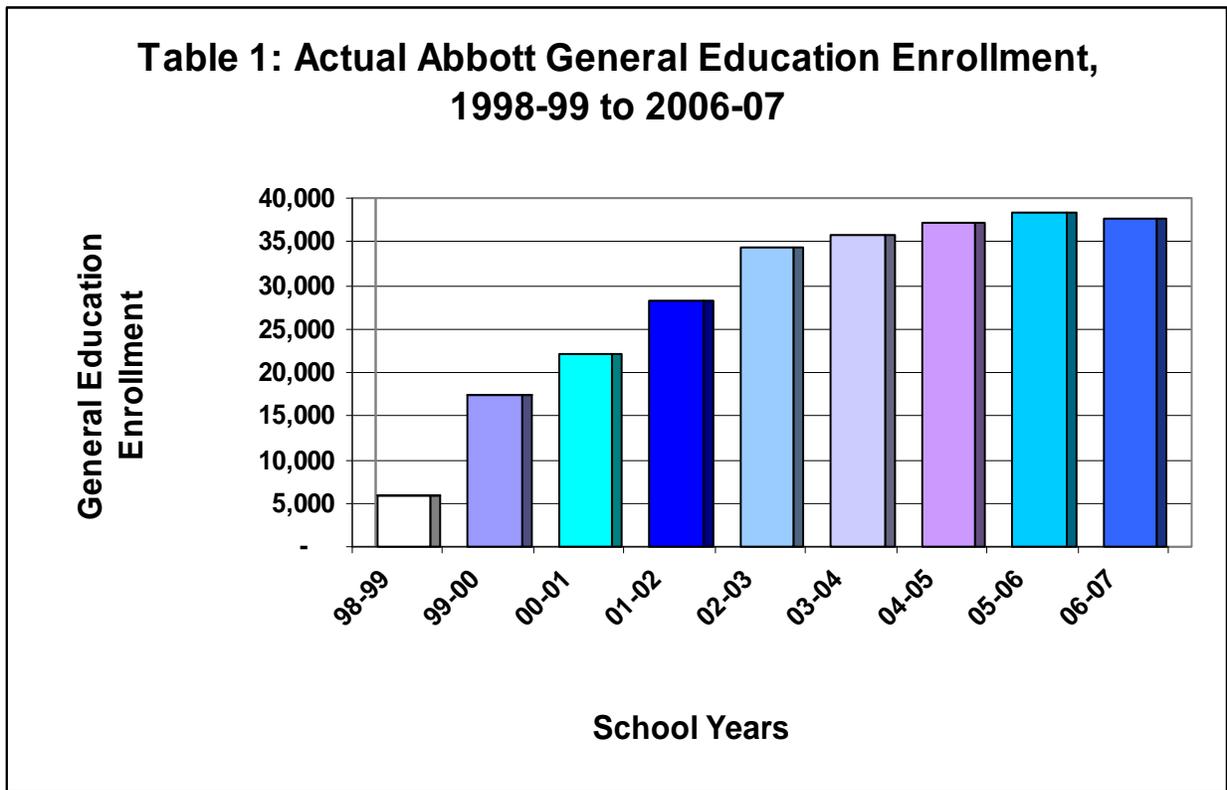
In 2006-2007, OFAC took on the responsibility of reviewing corrective action plans submitted by private providers and school districts in response to their individual limited review

examinations. School district administrators work closely with their private providers to address findings from the reviews, specifying the timeline by which all concerns will be addressed. OFAC then reviewed corrective action plans for appropriateness and completeness, working with school districts and private providers to remediate any deficiencies. The corrective action plans serve as a valuable tool to monitor the progress of private providers in need of stronger fiscal controls.

Capacity Building

During the 2006–2007 school year, the eighth year of Abbott preschool implementation, the 31 Abbott school districts served over 37,600 general education and about 2,100 special education three- and four-year-old children for a total of almost 40,000 students. Approximately 72 percent of the estimated universe of Abbott-eligible general education preschoolers was served in 2006-2007.

Table 1 below illustrates the growth of the Abbott preschool program from 1998-1999 to 2006-2007.



Capacity challenges

Head Start

The full inclusion of all Abbott-eligible children served in Head Start programs remains a major objective of the Department of Education. About 3,500 Abbott Head Start children are served in Head Start programs using a combination of state and federal funding that meet both federal Head Start and state Abbott standards. However, the division estimates that a significant number of Abbott-eligible children are currently served in Head Start programs that do not meet Abbott standards. The division will continue to work closely with the Head Start State Collaboration Office to provide a high-quality preschool education program to as many Head Start agencies as possible in the Abbott preschool system.

Program Quality - the Continuous Improvement Cycle

High-quality education depends on a continuous improvement cycle. This cycle consists of gathering and analyzing evidence about program progress, making plans for improvement, and implementing those plans. The process then begins again with another assessment of each program component. The division uses this continuous improvement cycle at the state level by measuring overall growth toward achieving full enrollment in high quality programs that will allow children in Abbott school districts to enter kindergarten with the skills necessary to succeed in school and in life. At the school district level, the division assists school districts with self-assessment, measuring progress, analyzing and planning, professional development, and technical assistance.

Measuring and Assessing Progress, Analyzing and Planning

Five years ago, the division brought together a group of the state's leading early childhood education faculty to form the Early Learning Improvement Consortium (ELIC) to measure and assess progress. The members of the ELIC conduct classroom observations on 11 percent of the 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 and have shown that throughout the eight 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. As a result, the division continues to provide training to improve teaching practices in mathematics and science. In the 2006-2007 school year, the ECERS-R average score was 5.03. Classrooms scoring 5.0 or above are considered by the instruments' authors to offer high quality preschool experiences (see A Snapshot of Growth in Quality below).



A snapshot of growth in quality

<u>ECERS-R subscale</u>	<u>2000</u>	<u>2007</u>
Space and Furnishings	3.73	4.90
Personal Care	3.98	4.30
Language & Reasoning	3.74	5.08
Activities	3.18	4.62
Interactions	4.47	6.16
Program Structure	3.86	5.41
Parents and Staff	4.59	5.38
Overall ECERS-R score	3.86	5.03

Self Assessment Validation System (SAVS)

School years 2006-2007 marked the third year the Abbott 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 *NJ Abbott Preschool Program Implementation Guidelines* and *Guidelines for Appropriate Curriculum Content and Assessment in Programs Serving Children Ages 3 through 8* (National Association for the Education of Young Children and the National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education). School districts use the findings from the SAVS to develop improvement goals which are included in their “Two-Year Instructional Priorities Report”.

Classroom Quality

Abbott supervisors and master teachers conduct regular observations of all preschool classrooms with an emphasis on improving the implementation of the school district’s curriculum. Curriculum implementation tools and structured observation instruments provide the depth of information needed to plan appropriately for professional development and technical assistance that will bring about the necessary improvements.

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.

Child Progress

Teachers use on-going formative child assessment to inform instruction in their classrooms. During the 2006-2007 school year, school districts began to transition from collecting data for the language arts literacy domain using the Early Learning Assessment System to collecting data for all domains using curriculum-based performance assessments. Teachers then use this information to adapt and individualize interactions for specific children and to adjust activities on a class-wide basis.

The impact of the Abbott Preschool Program was also measured through a longitudinal study conducted by the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER). A cohort of Abbott preschoolers was followed through kindergarten in (2005-2006) and first grade (2006-2007). The kindergarten data show that children who attended the program performed better on measures of language, literacy and math than children who did not attend the program.

Study Outcomes (Kindergarten Year)

The results in the NIEER study show that substantial gains in learning and development occurred in language, literacy, and mathematics. The longitudinal study finds that these gains are largely sustained through the kindergarten year. Even children who did not attend preschool made some gains in the kindergarten year. For example, they gained nearly .25 of standard deviation and closed 18 percent of the achievement gap between their scores and the national average in vocabulary-our broadest measure.

However, the children who attended Abbott preschool also continued to close the achievement gap and those who attended for two years had closed over half the gap with the national average vocabulary score by the end of kindergarten. Further, children that attend preschool for two years at both age 3 and 4 significantly out-perform those who attend for only one year at 4 years of age or do not attend at all.

Similarly, in mathematics, children who had one and two years of Abbott preschool education maintained nearly all of their initial advantage through to the end of kindergarten.

Figure 15. Longitudinal Study Receptive Vocabulary at Kindergarten Entry by Years of Attendance (N=1,038)

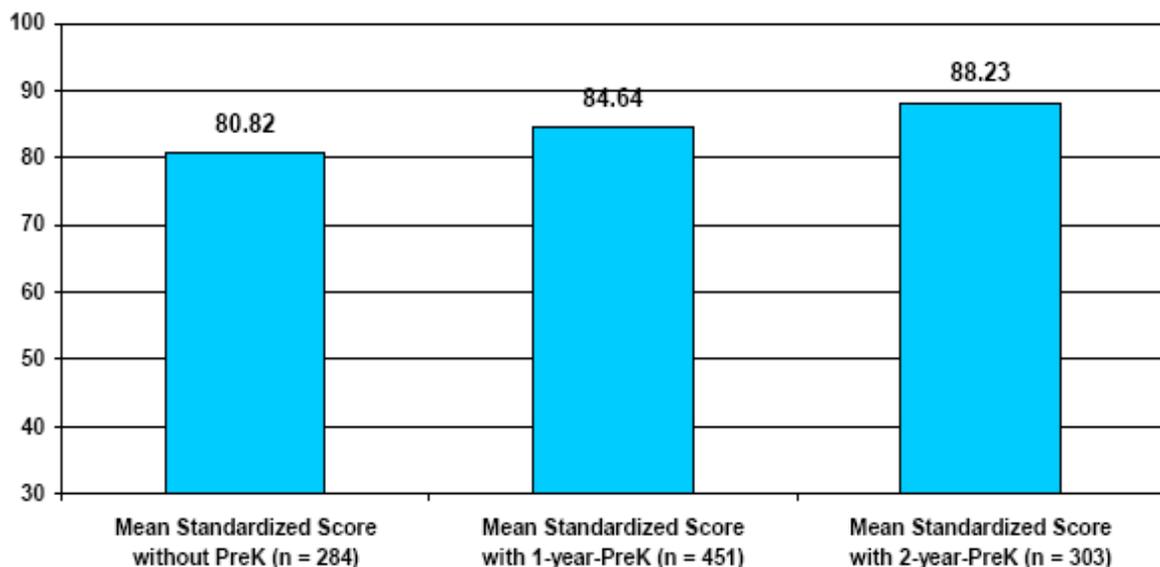


Figure 16. Longitudinal Sample Receptive Vocabulary at the End of Kindergarten by Years of Attendance (N=974)

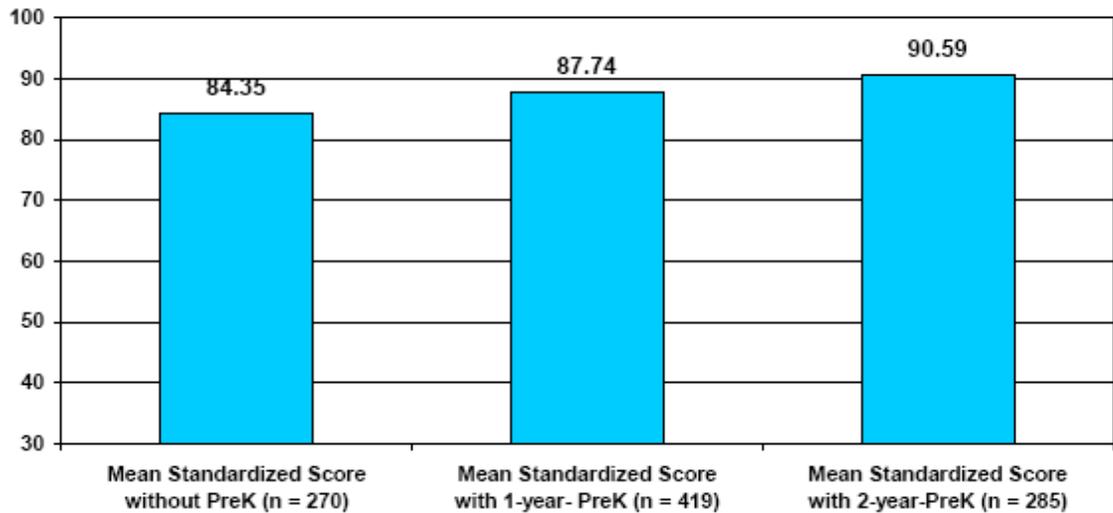
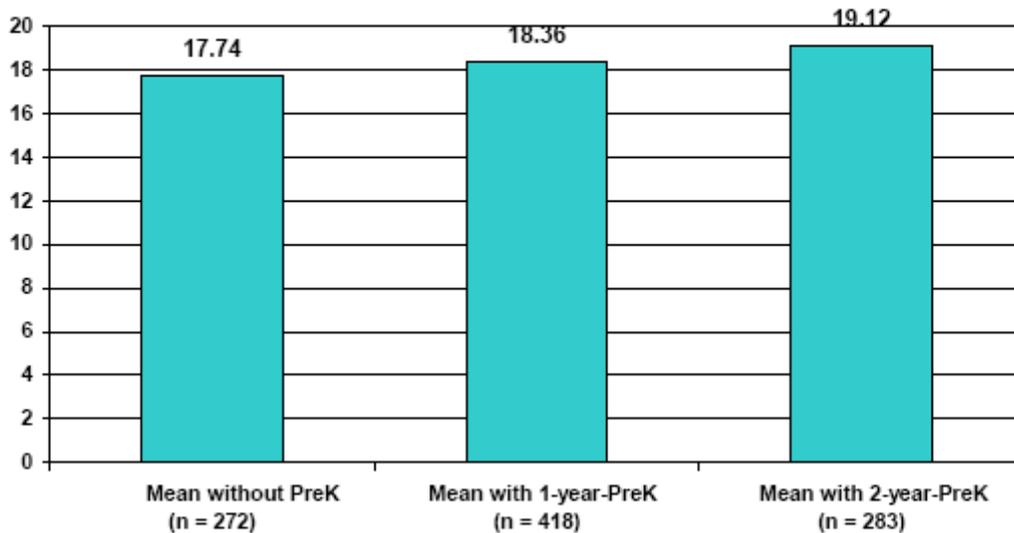


Figure 18. Longitudinal Study Mathematics Scores at the End of Kindergarten Years of Attendance (N=973)



Examples of Professional Development and Other Technical Assistance

The division uses results of all of the data collection efforts 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 2006-2007 school year:

- Regular meetings for about 50 Abbott Early Childhood Supervisors that included workshop components on numerous topics, as well as general technical assistance on program administration.
- Master teacher and supervisor training on topics such as supporting English language learners, aggregating classroom observation data. More than 100 master teachers and supervisors attended these trainings.
- Curriculum-specific meetings that brought together school districts using the same curriculum to clarify professional development needs, share implementation strategies, and develop effective professional development plans. Over 200 master teachers and supervisors participated in these meetings.
- A ten-month intensive seminar, entitled “The Preschool Leadership Track”, to demonstrate research-based best practices in preschool, as well as tools and tips in successful leadership for 50 new master teachers and new administrators.
- Veteran master teacher training addressed the reflective cycle, interpersonal communication, and understanding the role of scaffolding in child development for approximately 200 master teachers.
- A third annual conference for about 300 Abbott preschool directors and administrators, with presentations geared toward the theme of **Climbing the Ladder of Quality: Next Steps for Early Childhood Education Leaders**
- A meeting entitled “Hand-in-Hand: Building Better Systems for Inclusion” brought together nearly 100 Abbott preschool supervisors and directors of special education.
- The annual curriculum showcase for 50 representatives from ELLI and ECPA 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.
- Special professional development meetings for 70 preschool nurses and for 31 Community Parent Involvement Specialists from Abbott school districts to share goals and fine-tune job functions.
- School district technology coordinators attended a new presentation on using developmentally appropriate technology in the preschool classroom.
- A summer session on developmentally appropriate practices for principals and other administrators responsible for preschool classrooms.
- Training sessions throughout the year for master teachers and literacy coaches at the kindergarten level on using performance-based assessment reliably to inform instruction.

Early Childhood Program Aid

In 1996, the NJ Legislature established funding for Early Childhood Program Aid (ECPA). School districts in which the overall concentration of low-income students is between 20 and 40 percent of the population are eligible to receive Early Childhood Program Aid. In addition to the 31 Abbott school districts, 101 non-Abbott school districts qualify for ECPA funding. The intent of ECPA funding is to help school districts operate a full-day kindergarten program and offer at least a half-day preschool program for four-year-old children. In 2006-2007, almost 13,100 general education kindergarten students and 7,336 general education preschool children were served by non-Abbott ECPA school districts. Of the 7,336 preschool children served, over 26 percent were served in full-day programs.

The division's staff assists county education specialists in reviewing ECPA operational plans, and responds to school district requests for technical assistance on early childhood programs and policies. ECPA school districts are expected to provide high-quality programs that are developmentally appropriate and consistent with the *Preschool Teaching and Learning Expectations: Standards of Quality*, use community resources and plan parent involvement and professional development activities.

During 2006-2007, the division further increased professional development opportunities for the non-Abbott ECPA school districts. ECPA school districts were invited to the Curriculum Showcase hosted by the division. Three regional technical assistance meetings were conducted by the division to provide information to ECPA school districts about improving their early childhood plan, as well as their program implementation.

Early Launch to Learning Initiative

The Early Launch to Learning Initiative (ELLI) completed its third successful year. Twenty-four school districts continued with the project and two new school districts were approved for funding. The Division of Early Childhood Education supported the ELLI school districts with professional development and networking opportunities designed to enhance the quality of program implementation. Regular meetings offered supervisors information on a variety of topics including funding requirements; classroom quality; curriculum-specific program implementation; grant-writing opportunities; and classroom observation and supervision methods. Additional quality enhancement support was provided through the ELLI-ECERS Professional Development project, whereby school districts received training and materials to introduce the Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale-R (ECERS-R) to their staff. In addition, ECERS-R consultants visited each school district to provide on-site observation and feedback. Representatives from the ELLI school districts were also invited to a number of OPE professional development events, including the bilingual master teacher meetings, curriculum-specific workgroups, and the developmentally appropriate technology presentation.

In its third year, ELLI made high-quality preschool available to nearly 1,500 children in 26 school districts. In all, 525 low-income children participated in these programs at a total cost of \$2, 220,000.

Next Year ...

The Continuous Improvement Cycle guides much of the work of the Division of Early Childhood Education. Based on results of the SAVS, ELIC research and DOE data, the Office of Preschool Education is looking ahead to the following goals for 2007-2008:

- Improve teacher-child interactions.
- Expand and fine-tuning early childhood assessment practices.
- Expand the reach of preschool, including the expansion of Head Start participation.
- Increase inclusion of children with disabilities and improve inclusion practices.

- Improve the use of the Preschool Intervention and Referral teams in Abbott school districts.
- Improve transition from Preschool to Kindergarten.
- Plan for the readoption of the *Preschool Teaching and Learning Expectations: Standards of Quality*.
- Plan for Kindergarten, including regulations, guidelines and a best practices pamphlet.