

New Jersey Department of Education Division of Early Childhood Education

End-of-Year Report: 2007-2008

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)
- 28 school districts that participate in the Early Launch to Learning Initiative (ELLI).

The DECE continues expanding its functions to include support for kindergarten through third grade. Within the division, there are two offices: the Office of Preschool Education (OPE) and the Office of Kindergarten through Third Grade. The Office of Preschool Education's major responsibility is oversight of the Abbott preschool program. Substantial support and professional development are also provided to the ECPA and ELLI school districts. Currently, new kindergarten-through-grade-three staff have not been hired but staff have been reassigned to accomplish needed tasks. The Division of Early Childhood Education's 2007-2008 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 Program

The Abbott preschool program continued to make significant strides in 2007-2008. 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 the Abbott school districts in the areas of program quality and fiscal accountability and integrity.

Fiscal Accountability and Integrity

In the 2007-2008 school year, the approved projected budget for the Abbott preschool program totaled almost \$514 million with an average per-pupil allocation of \$12,297 for students served in school district and private provider-operated programs. Staff from the Division of Early Childhood Education reviewed almost 350 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, 27 of which also oversee private provider 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 2007-2008, fiscal specialists from the Abbott school districts came together through a series of 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 fifth year, the division worked with the Office of Fiscal Accountability and Compliance (OFAC) to conduct 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. Eighty-four private providers in twenty school districts were selected for a review of their 2006-2007 Abbott preschool budgets.

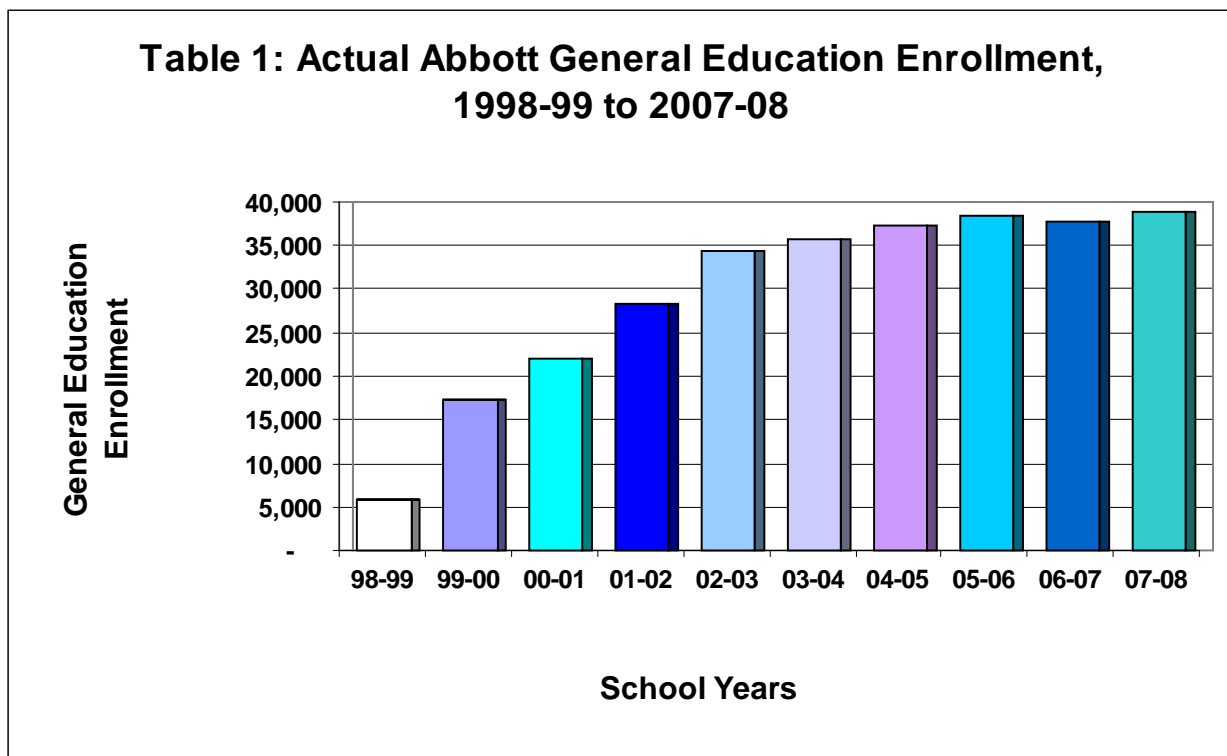
OFAC reports indicated that both contracted private providers and district-employed fiscal specialists are more able to accurately project and monitor expenditures. Findings showed that each year more private providers are filling out their Quarterly Expenditure Reports with greater accuracy and completeness. In addition, private providers demonstrate 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 addressed. In 2007-2008, OFAC reviewed all 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

The initial four years of Abbott preschool implementation were marked by rapid growth. The most recent five years saw steady overall growth of one percent per year, with 75.6% percent of the estimated universe of Abbott-eligible general education preschoolers served in 2007-2008. During the 2007-2008 school year, the ninth year of implementation, the 31 Abbott school districts served over 38,818 general education and about 1,900 special education three- and four-year-old children for a total of over 40,000 students. Forty-six percent of enrolled students were three-year olds and fifty-four percent, four-year olds.

Table 1 below illustrates the growth of the Abbott preschool program from 1998-1999 to 2007-2008.



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. Currently, 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.

As of April 2008, the Head Start State Collaboration Office relocated from the Department of Human Services to the Department of Education. This change has enabled the division to work

more closely with the State Collaboration Coordinator with the goal of providing high-quality preschool education to as many Head Start-eligible preschoolers as possible in the Abbott districts and beyond.

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

Six years ago, the division brought together a group of leading early childhood education faculty from New Jersey State colleges and universities to form the Early Learning Improvement Consortium (ELIC) to measure and assess progress. Annually, members of the ELIC conduct classroom observations on 12 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 identified by the evaluations. As a result, the division has increased training to improve teaching practices in mathematics and science. In the 2007-2008 school year, the ECERS-R average score was 5.20. 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				
SUBSCALE	2005	2006	2007	2008
space & furnishings	4.57	4.72	4.90	5.03
personal care	4.47	4.16	4.30	4.29
language	4.97	5.03	5.08	5.46
activities	4.12	4.34	4.62	4.85
interactions	5.98	5.93	6.16	6.44
program structure	4.91	5.02	5.41	5.41
parents & staff	5.17	5.19	5.38	5.59
ECERS Overall	4.77	4.81	5.03	5.20

Self Assessment Validation System (SAVS)

School year 2007-2008 marked the fourth 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 *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 2007-2008 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.

Classroom Quality

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.

Abbott district supervisors and master teachers 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, including High/Scope's Preschool Quality Enhancement Assessment© (PQEA) and

Creative Curriculum's Implementation Checklist© provide the depth of information needed to plan appropriately for professional development and technical assistance that will bring about the necessary improvements.

Child Progress

The Division continues to focus on school district's use of 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 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© and Creative Curriculum's Developmental Continuum©.

Longitudinal Study Outcomes

The impact of the Abbott Preschool Program was measured in 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 Abbott preschool program performed better on measures of language, literacy and math than children who did not attend the program.

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. Although the study indicates that children who did not attend preschool programs made gains in kindergarten, the gains were not as large. Kindergarten students who did not attend preschool 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 attended preschool for two years at both age 3 and 4 significantly out-perform those who attended 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.

Table 3. Longitudinal Study Receptive Vocabulary at Kindergarten Entry by Years of Attendance (N=1,038)

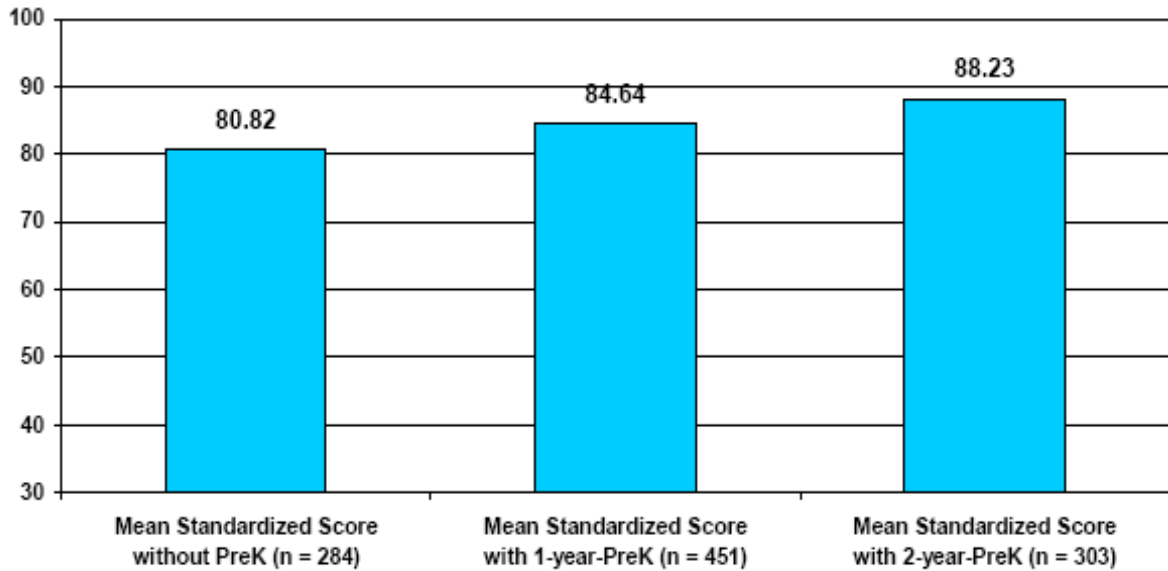


Table 4. Longitudinal Study Receptive Vocabulary at End of Kindergarten by Years of Attendance (N=974)

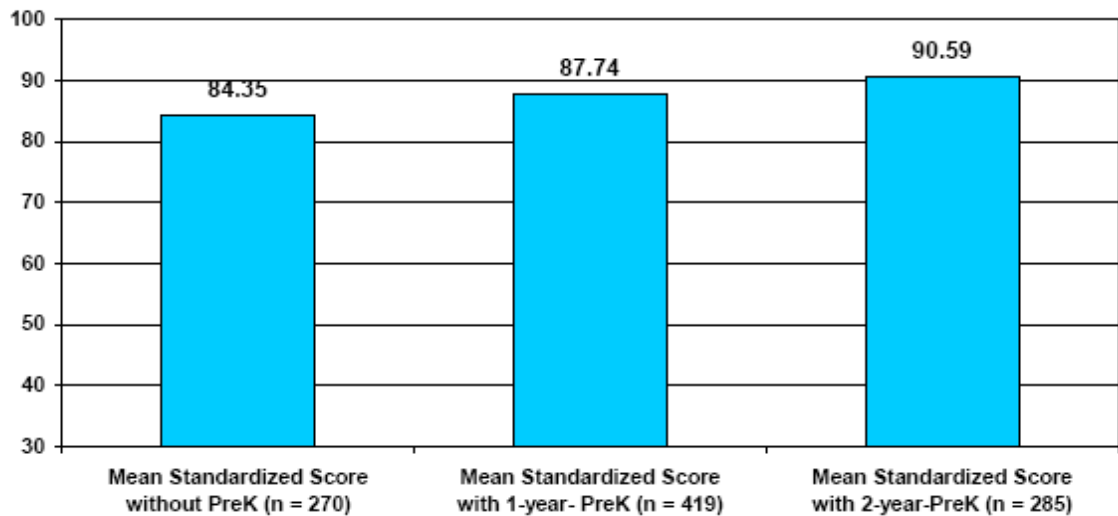
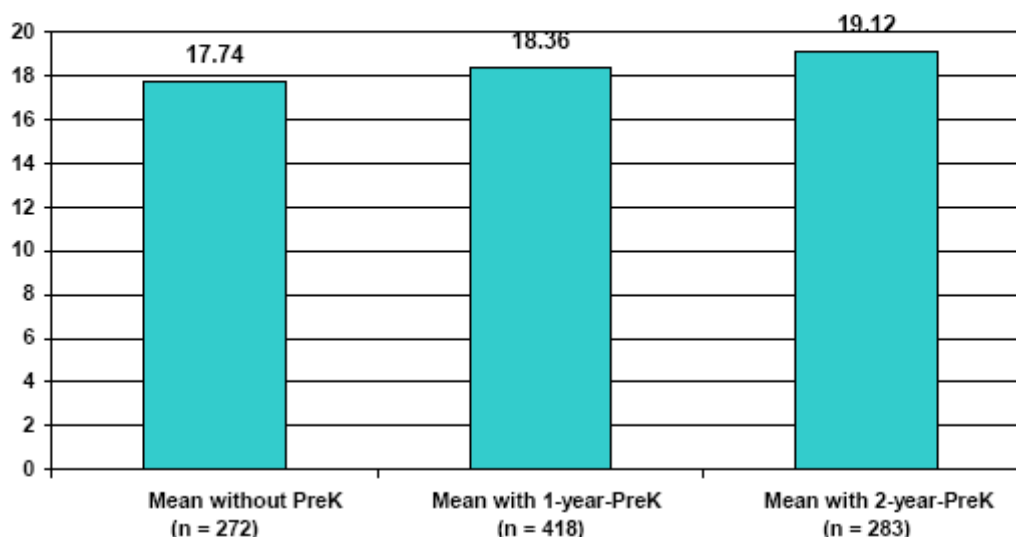


Table 5. Longitudinal Study Mathematic Scores at End of Kindergarten by Years of Attendance (N=973)



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 2007-2008 school year:

- Regular meetings for about 50 Abbott Early Childhood Supervisors that included training on numerous topics and technical assistance on program administration.
- An eight day training series on the Environmental Rating Scale – Revised (Harms, Clifford and Cryer) for approximately 200 master teachers.
- A webinar with developers of the five comprehensive preschool curricula recommended by the Division. Optimal environments and instruction in the general education classroom for preschool children with disabilities and preschoolers who are English language learners emerged as critical areas of focus.
- Training for more than 100 master teacher and supervisor on topics such as supporting English language learners and aggregating classroom observation data.
- A ten-month intensive seminar, entitled “The Preschool Leadership Track”, to demonstrate research-based best practices in preschool and tools and tips for successful leadership. Over 50 new master teachers and new administrators attended the seminar.
- A fourth annual conference which was attended by about 300 Abbott preschool directors and administrators and that included presentations related to the theme of the conference: Understanding What Matters: Advancing Leadership through Assessment.
- A three day regional training for 150 Preschool Intervention and Referral Teams (PIRT) that focused on roles and responsibilities of PIRT members within New Jersey Administrative Code and the New Jersey Preschool Program Implementation Guidelines.

- Four PIRT and Head Start work group meetings to design collaboration training plans for 2008-2009.
- 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 on the new State immunization requirements for school entry along with the amended regulations
- Training workshops for 31 Community Parent Involvement Specialists from Abbott school districts to share goals and fine-tune job functions.
- One day training for approximately 60 master teachers on interpersonal communication and the role in child development.
- Training sessions throughout the year for master teachers and literacy coaches at the kindergarten level on using performance-based assessment reliably to inform instruction.
- A partnership with Liberty Science Center to provide two workshops: “Documenting Early Science Learning” and “Building Foundations in Early Science Learning: From the Ground Up” which attracted hundreds of participants from across the state. Also, the Division is supporting a partnership between the Liberty Science Center, Hoboken School District, and Tools of the Mind curriculum developer seeking a grant from the National Science Foundation.

Early Childhood Program Aid

In 1996, the NJ Legislature established funding for 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 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 to four-year-old children. In 2007-2008, almost 13,100 general education kindergarten students and approximately 7,500 general education preschool students were served by non-Abbott ECPA school districts. The cost of the preschool component was approximately \$37,500,000. Of the 7,500 preschool children served, almost 31 percent were served in full-day programs.

The division’s staff assists county education specialists in reviewing ECPA operational plans, and respond 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 2007-2008, 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. 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 fourth successful year. Twenty-eight 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; supports for English language learners; 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 and preschool expansion meetings.

In its fourth year, ELLI made high-quality preschool available to nearly 1,500 children in 28 school districts. In all, 660 low-income children participated in these programs at a total cost of \$2,684,550. A memorandum of understanding between the Division and William Paterson University resulted in the delivery of individualized professional development to each ELLI school district as well as regional workshops to groups of ELLIs to support quality preschool program implementation.

Preschool Quality Enhancement Awards (PQEA)

The Office of Preschool Education provided additional funding under the one-year Preschool Quality Enhancement Award grant program (NGO#08-PS09-J04) to 14 grant recipients. The additional funds from the New Jersey Department of Education will be used to enhance the recipients existing program components or implement new allowable program components as identified in the Notice of Grant Opportunity (NGO) #08-PS09-J04 and to support its existing preschool program through January 31, 2009. Program development specialists from the Division were assigned to each of the grant recipients to provide technical assistance. Grant recipients utilized funds for projects and programs spanning purchases of materials, supplies, classroom furnishings and equipment, playground installation and equipment, staff curriculum training, college coursework leading to teacher certification, teacher assistant training leading to the (non-degree) Child Development Associate credential.

Preschool Expansion Initiative

The Governor and the legislature made a huge commitment to the expansion of preschool with the passage of the School Funding Reform Act of 2008 which calls for a 6-year roll-out of high quality preschool for all at risk three- and four-year-old children statewide. The 2008-2009 school year is designed to be a planning period with the initial roll out of the program to begin in

2009-2010. When fully implemented over a six 6 years period, 30,000 more children will be served, bringing preschool enrollment to 70,000 children.

The School Funding Reform Act of 2008 allows Early Childhood Program Aid (ECPA) districts that are ready to expand in 2008-2009 to apply to the Commissioner to expand their program. Fairfield Township, Little Egg Harbor Township, Pemberton Boro, Red Bank Boro and Woodbine Boro were approved and will implement expansion plans during the 2008-2009 school year at a total cost of \$3,619,920 in addition to each district's ECPA and/or ELLI funding amounts.

The State of New Jersey Department of Education – Division of Early Childhood Education entered into an agreement with Rutgers University to conduct a preschool needs assessment survey. This survey is the first in a series of initiatives designed to assess the capacity of preschool programs in school districts throughout New Jersey that are not currently fully funded by the state. The results of the survey will be used to inform the NJDOE about the needs of preschools, preschool children and their families in preparation for the state's preschool expansion effort.

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 Division is looking ahead to the following goals for 2008-2009:

- Improve teacher-child interactions.
- Improve math and science teaching practices.
- 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, leadership conference and a best practices pamphlet.
- Professional development provided regionally for New Jersey Preschool Expansion (SFRA of 2008).