

**Self-Assessment Validation System (SAVS) 2004-2005:
Preliminary Report on Statewide Progress in Abbott Preschool
Program Implementation**

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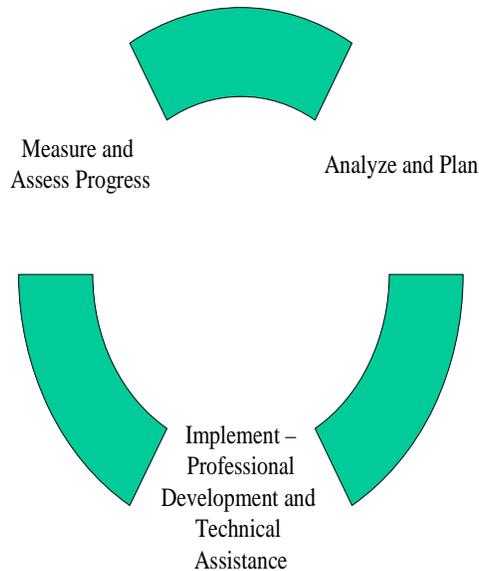
Introduction

Since the landmark New Jersey Supreme Court decision, *Abbott vs. Burke*, that established the Abbott Preschool Program in the 1999-2000 school year, three- and four-year old children in the highest poverty districts in the state receive a high-quality preschool education that prepares them to enter school with the knowledge and skills necessary to meet the *Preschool Teaching and Learning Expectations: Standards of Quality* and the kindergarten Core Curriculum Content Standards. Through a Department of Education (DOE) and Department of Human Services (DHS) partnership, Abbott preschool classrooms combine a DOE-funded six-hour, 180-day component with a DHS-funded wrap-around program that provides daily before- and after-care and summer programs. In total, the full-day, full-year program is available ten hours per day, 245 days a year.

Expansion of the program has occurred rapidly. During the 2004-05 school year, the 31 Abbott districts enrolled over 39,000 three- and four-year old children in preschool – compared to only 19,000 in the first school year of the program. The projected enrollment for the 2005-06 school year is over 43,000 children.

As more districts have shifted their emphasis from finding places for children to be served to offering high quality learning experiences, the Department of Education-Office of Early Childhood Education (OECE), recognized the need to establish a program evaluation component that would foster a continuous cycle of program improvement. In 2003-04, the department launched the Self-Assessment Validation System for Abbott Preschool Programs (SAVS), a multi-phase process of program improvement augmented by fiscal accountability. Districts can use the SAVS process to review their current program status and make improvements in accordance with newly revised implementation goals and objectives.

The SAVS is part of a continuous improvement cycle initiated by the OECE. This cycle begins with establishing standards for program excellence, the Abbott Preschool Program Implementation Guidelines, and for the classroom, the *Preschool Teaching and Learning Expectations: Standards of Quality*. Progress toward these standards is measured, the results are analyzed to develop improvement plans, and the plans are then implemented. Progress is measured again and the cycle depicted below is repeated.



The Continuous Improvement Cycle

Overview of the Self-Assessment Validation System (SAVS)

During the 2002-2003 school year, the OECE brought together stakeholders throughout New Jersey, chosen for their expertise in the field of early childhood education, to develop a program evaluation tool. Participants from the Department of Education, Department of Human Services, districts, childcare centers, and professional organizations contributed to the development of the SAVS. The SAVS is derived from the *NJ Abbott Program Implementation Guidelines*, as well as the *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).

During Phase I, district personnel, in collaboration with other relevant parties, such as the local Early Childhood Advisory Council, assess their early childhood program. These initial ratings inform revisions to the operational plan and budget requests submitted to the Department of Education. Since the SAVS is a program improvement tool, districts are encouraged to look critically and honestly at their programs. Phase I is a time for self-assessment and planning for improvement.

Phase II allows districts and their DOE liaisons to rescore the SAVS noting growth, areas still in need of development and collecting documentation to justify their scores. These results are then submitted to the department. A validation visit then occurs to verify the scores reported in the SAVS.

In the first year, the SAVS consisted of criteria in each of the following 16 program component areas, derived from the *Abbott Preschool Program Implementation Guidelines*: Mission/Philosophy, Administration, Recruitment and Outreach, Facilities, Community Collaboration, Head Start, Curriculum and Program, Supporting English Language Learners, Special Education, Staff Qualifications, Professional Development, Child Screening, Child Assessment, Health and Food Services, Parent Involvement and Program Evaluation.

For the second round of the SAVS, the OECE made several revisions to the protocol by adding two new program component areas – Transition, to emphasize the continuity between preschool and kindergarten programs; and Intervention and Support, which addresses district support teams serving preschoolers at risk for special education referrals. Program component areas were reorganized; Child Assessment and Child Screening were combined, Special Education was renamed to reflect a more appropriate inclusion focus and various indicators were strengthened throughout the SAVS to specify more stringent and measurable standards.

Another major change to the overall process was the selection of districts who receive a validation visit. In the first year, all districts received validation visits in the late spring. Beginning with the 2004-05 school year, only selected districts will receive validation visits each year and every district's scores will be validated at least once every three years. The validation visits last 1-3 days depending on the size of the district. This year, thirteen districts were selected for validation visits that occurred between May and July 2005. Although the Salem School District was one of the thirteen chosen, their results are not included in the data presented in this report. The remaining districts conducted the self-assessment and completed their scoring with their DOE district liaison as part of a district team that usually includes the early childhood supervisor/administrator and in some cases, master teachers and/or other appropriate district staff. Validation teams are composed of representatives from the OECE, Office of Special Education, and other DOE offices as deemed appropriate. The teams conduct interviews, review a wide range of documentation and check databases. At the conclusion of the visit, the results of the validation process are shared with the district. A SAVS analysis highlights criteria which meet or exceed expectations. Criteria rated "in progress" or "not met" are followed with recommendations from the DOE. These recommendations form the basis of each district's SAVS Improvement Plan.

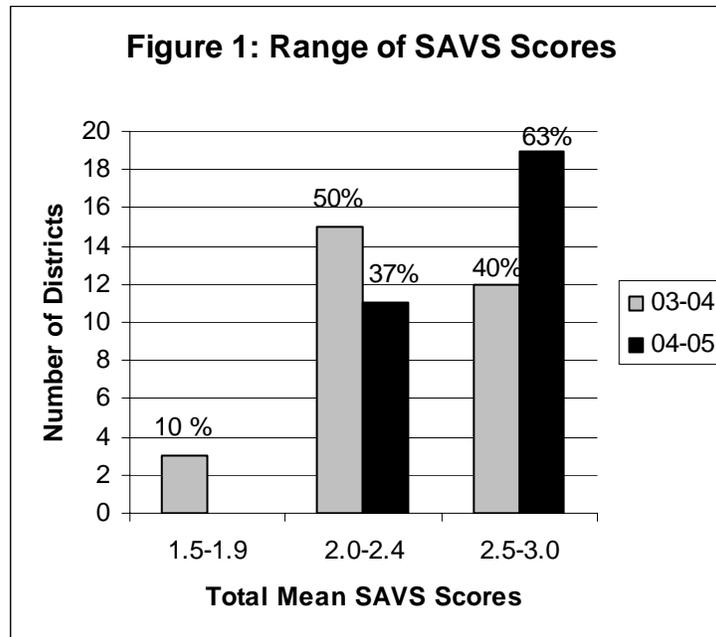
Results

Following each criterion are one or more indicators. These indicators are essential components to consider when rating a criterion. Scoring protocol was adapted The Accreditation Criteria & Procedures of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC, 1998). Criteria are rated as follows:

Not Yet – There was little evidence that this statement accurately described the program but plans may have been developed;

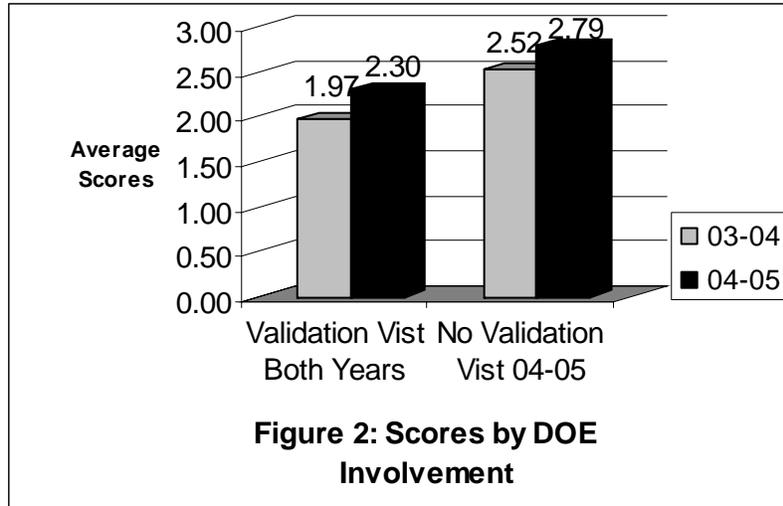
In Progress – There was some evidence that this statement accurately described the program. Plans have been developed and initiated but full realization is not yet accomplished.

Fully Met – There was a great deal of evidence that this statement accurately describes the program. For a criterion to rate a fully met, all indicators related to the criterion must be present (It is also possible for all indicators to be present without rating the criterion fully met).

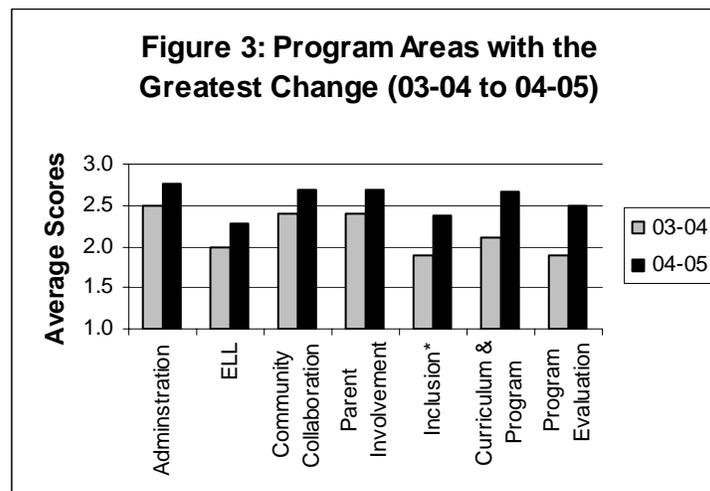


Overall, the statewide mean score on the SAVS increased to 2.6 compared to 2.3 in 2003-04. Nineteen districts scored over 2.5. No districts scored less than 2.0 this year as compared to last year when three districts scored below 2.0. The SAVS scores in Figure 1 do not reflect any results from the Salem School District since they were not under Abbott in 2003-04 and no comparison is possible.

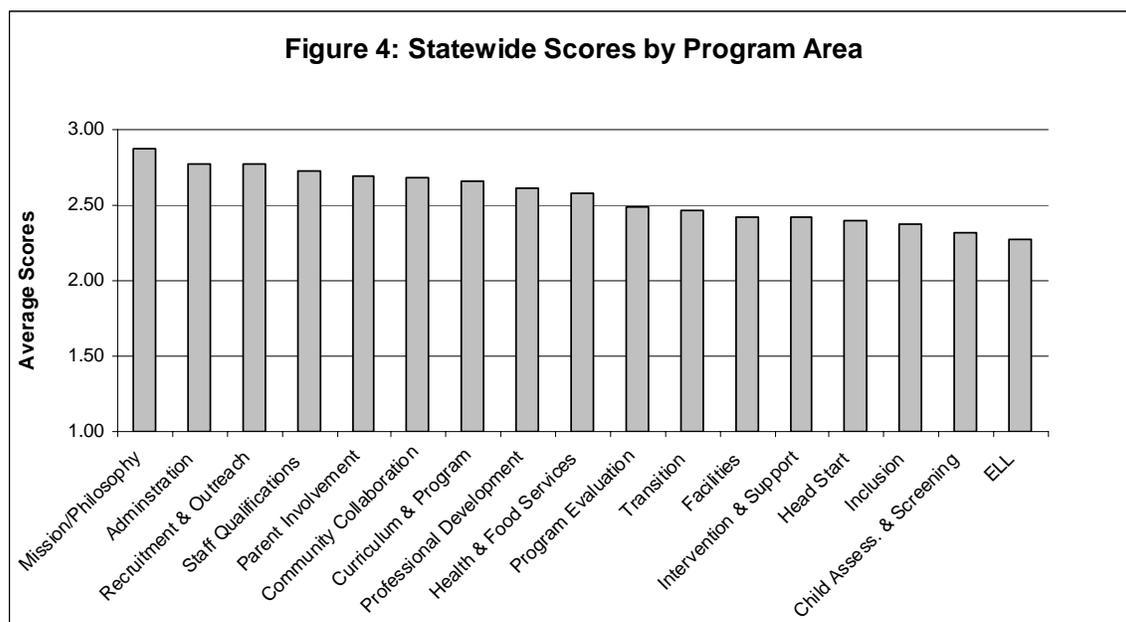
Part of this year's data analysis was to compare district SAVS scores by whether or not a validation visit was conducted. This was done to determine the fidelity of the self-assessment process and if districts are more or less likely to rate themselves critically depending on a validation visit by a team of state representatives. Figure 2 shows that all districts increased over their average scores from last year. Districts who received a validation visit in both years increased 16.8% from the 2003-04 score and districts without a validation visit this year increased 10.7% from the previous score. These are promising results given the more stringent criteria, improved documentation from districts and increased experience with the SAVS instrument by all raters, district and DOE alike.



Using the continuous improvement cycle, districts are making important gains in several major program components previously identified as needing improvement. Figure 3 illustrates those program areas where the greatest change occurred: Administration, English Language Learners, Community Collaboration, Parent Involvement, Inclusion, Curriculum and Program, and Program Evaluation. These areas of improvement are reflective of a range of best practices in early childhood programs such as but not limited to: increased training opportunities for principals; the use of classroom observations to assess supports for ELL students; well-functioning Early Childhood Advisory Councils; ongoing community collaboration; regular meetings with community providers; multiple opportunities for parent involvement; meetings between early childhood and special education staff; adoption of comprehensive, research-based curricula; and using the SAVS findings to inform revisions to each district’s 2004-05 operational plan. For a more detailed breakdown statewide on each criterion and component area, see Table 1.



The Abbott Preschool Program is still evolving; some program areas will improve as additional program supports and initiatives become fully realized over the next school year. For example, Child Assessment and Screening may improve as all districts begin to fully implement the Early Learning Assessment System (ELAS) in 2005-06. Fully staffed teams of preschool intervention and referral specialists were not in place during the 2004-05 school year as districts struggled to hire professionals with the appropriate credentials. Although the statewide score for ELL increased slightly over last year, systematic supports for all ELL children continue to be inconsistent across districts. Lastly, efforts toward including more children with IEPs into general education classrooms remains a challenge despite an increased statewide focus to do so. Figure 4 represents a comparison of all program areas from 2003-04 to 2004-05.



Some caution must be used in drawing conclusions from these results. This data was collected as part of a program improvement process and the procedures may not reach the level of rigor necessary for high stakes decisions. For example, although all team members were trained in the system, and every effort was made to establish consistency across teams, scoring protocol may have drifted as teams worked. The relevance of the scores, especially the total score, to child outcome is not established. Items represent good program practice but not all would have direct effects on children. The total score is a simple average of all criteria with no special weight given to more essential criteria. Thus, one district may score higher than another but not be implementing program practices that are as beneficial to children as the other district is.

Next Steps

As more districts show marked improvements in meeting the standards of high quality preschool programs, revisions will be made to strengthen individual indicators for the

2005-06 SAVS process. Likewise, the scoring protocol will be changed to the following five-point rating scale for more discrete measurement of the criteria:

Not Yet- There is no evidence that this statement accurately described the program but plans may have been developed;

Partially Met-There is some evidence that this statement accurately describes the program but plans may have been developed

In Progress - There is evidence that this statement describes activities initiated or planned in this program. Plans have been developed and initiated but full realization is not yet accomplished.

Substantially Met - There is a great deal of evidence that this statement accurately describes the program. For a criterion to rate a “substantially met,” all indicators related to the criterion must be present (It also is possible for all indicators to be present without rating the criterion substantially met.)

Exemplary Progress-The evidence exceeded all indicators and expectations.

It is important to note that many of the important accomplishments that have occurred in each individual district can not be captured when district data is aggregated statewide. Based on this second round of the SAVS process, the OECE will use these results and other data to plan professional development and make other revisions to our work both statewide and at the district level. Some examples of this are as follows:

- Continued professional development with districts organized by curriculum targeting areas of need including inclusion of children with special needs, addressing challenging behaviors, supporting ELL, transition, etc;
- Ongoing technical assistance with the ELAS rollout facilitated by the OECE and the Early Learning Improvement Consortium (ELIC);
- Professional development for Community/Parent Involvement Specialists (CPIS) and district social workers to improve coordination of services for families;
- Collaboration with DHS to better define the role of the family worker in the Abbott Preschool Program;
- Developing training modules for fiscal specialists to use with community providers;

The OECE’s process of setting standards for program practice, measuring attainment of the standards and then using the results for program improvement is one of the critical factors in the progress we have made. We anticipate that districts will continue to advance toward successful implementation of high quality in the Abbott Preschool Program.

**Table 1: Statewide Means on Program Areas and Criteria
2004-2005 SAVS**

Program Components	MEAN	MEAN
MISSION AND PHILOSOPHY COMPONENT SCORE	2.87	
<u>M & P 1</u> : The preschool program has an effective mission statement reflective of sound preschool pedagogy and is responsive to the specific characteristics of the community.		2.9
ADMINISTRATION COMPONENT SCORE	2.77	
<u>ADM 1</u> : Administrators overseeing the preschool program and educational leaders have the proper qualifications and training specific to early childhood education.		2.7
<u>ADM 2</u> : Principals should have experience in early childhood education and proper qualifications.		2.6
<u>ADM 3</u> : The fiscal specialist has a working knowledge of the preschool program.		2.8
<u>ADM 4</u> : The fiscal specialist has a working familiarity with professional accounting standards and the proper training and skills to perform rigorous analyses of preschool provider budgets and required financial statements.		2.8
<u>ADM 5</u> : The fiscal specialist regularly collects and analyzes budgets and financial report from private providers to ensure that their expenditures conform to approved budgets; fiscal practices conform to district contractual terms; and general fiscal integrity is maintained.		2.7
<u>ADM 6</u> : The fiscal specialist or other designee reports certification information.		2.9
RECRUITMENT/OUTREACH COMPONENT SCORE	2.77	
<u>R / O 1</u> : Multiple recruitment strategies are being used.		2.8
<u>R / O 2</u> : Accurate enrollment data is collected, maintained, and updated as needed.		2.7
FACILITIES COMPONENT SCORE	2.42	
<u>FAC 1</u> : An amended long-range facility plan (LRFP) that is based on an assessment of the universe, demographic trends, housing patterns and community needs has been submitted by the district.		2.2
<u>FAC 2</u> : ECERS-R results and other facilities evaluations are used to assess the adequacy of school facilities and as a basis for improvements.		2.6

Programs Components	MEAN	MEAN
CURRICULUM/PROGRAM COMPONENT SCORE	2.66	
<u>C/P 1</u> : The preschool curriculum is effective in helping children learn and develop.		2.8
<u>C/P 2</u> : The curriculum is being implemented as intended.		2.4
<u>C/P 3</u> : Curriculum efficacy is fostered by meeting basic court mandates.		2.8
SUPPORTING ELL COMPONENT SCORE	2.27	
<u>ELL 1</u> : All English language learners receive systematic support for language acquisition in their natural preschool environment.		2.3
<u>ELL 2</u> : Children are encouraged to maintain their primary language both in school and at home.		2.2
<u>ELL 3</u> : The bilingual specialist master teacher fulfills the roles and responsibilities outlined in the <i>Abbott Preschool Implementation Guidelines</i> .		2.4
INTERVENTION AND SUPPORT COMPONENT SCORE	2.42	
<u>I/S 1</u> : A preschool intervention and referral team is fully staffed.		2.4
<u>I/S 2</u> : The intervention and support from the team meets the needs of the early childhood staff.		2.5
INCLUSION COMPONENT SCORE	2.38	
<u>INCLUSION 1</u> : Children with disabilities are included in general education classrooms to the maximum extent possible.		2.3
<u>INCLUSION 2</u> : Integrated therapies are offered within the general education classes.		2.3
<u>INCLUSION 3</u> : Administrative supports are in place that facilitates inclusion.		2.5
TRANSITION COMPONENT SCORE	2.47	
<u>TRANSITION 1</u> : A plan has been developed for transition of children from the preschool program into kindergarten.		2.5
<u>TRANSITION 2</u> : Transition activities are planned for children entering the preschool program from early intervention and other settings.		2.5
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT COMPONENT SCORE	2.62	
<u>P D 1</u> : Professional development is based on the approved plan submitted as part of the operational plan and is grounded in the		2.6

knowledge base for preschool education articulated by the district's chosen curriculum.		
<u>P D 2</u> : A cohesive professional development plan that includes the benefits of preschool education and the elements of an effective preschool is implemented for instructional, non-instructional, and administrative staff.		2.5
<u>P D 3</u> : Master Teachers fulfill the roles and responsibilities outlined in the <i>Abbott Program Implementation Guidelines</i> (NJ Department of Education, 2003).		2.8

STAFF QUALIFICATIONS COMPONENT SCORE	2.73	
S Q 1: All teachers must have appropriate credentials and appropriate certifications (Certificate of Eligibility with Advanced Standing or Certificate of Eligibility).		2.9
S Q 2: In-district and community provider teachers and assistants receive ongoing evaluations and reviews.		2.7
S Q 3: All assistant teachers have a high school diploma or equivalent and meet DHS licensing requirements, where applicable.		2.8
S Q 4: All existing and new directors of private providers have completed the DHS-required Directors Academy.		2.6
S Q 5: Master teachers meet recommended qualifications.		2.7

CHILD ASSESSMENT & SCREENING COMPONENT SCORE	2.32	
<u>ASSESS 1</u> : The Early Learning Assessment System is used appropriately and regularly to support each child's unique learning and developmental growth.		2.3
<u>ASSESS 2</u> : A system of screening is in place. Screening instruments are carefully selected and used appropriately.		2.4

PROGRAM EVALUATION COMPONENT SCORE	2.48	
<u>P E 1</u> : A self-study is completed with guidance provided by the Department of Education.		2.7
<u>P E 2</u> : The preschool program is evaluated annually.		2.2

COMMUNITY COLLABORATION COMPONENT SCORE	2.68	
<u>CC 1</u> : The Early Childhood Advisory Council includes appropriate and diverse community representatives, meets regularly, and is integrally involved in advising on the preschool program.		2.9
<u>CC 2</u> : There are regularly scheduled meetings with providers, including Head Start.		2.6
<u>CC 3</u> : The needs and goals of the community are being met.		2.5

PARENT INVOLVEMENT COMPONENT SCORE	2.69	
PARENT 1: There are multiple opportunities for parents to be involved.		2.8
PARENT 2: Direct two-way communication with parents takes place regularly.		2.5
PARENT 3: Family workers and/or social workers are active participants in the preschool program.		2.7

HEAD START COMPONENT SCORE	2.40	
HEAD ST 1: All Abbott-eligible children served by Head Start are included in the district.		2.4

HEALTH AND FOOD SERVICES COMPONENT SCORE	2.58	
HEALTH 1: The educational process is strengthened and facilitated by improving and protecting the health status of children.		2.6
HEALTH 2: Children receive adequate nutrition.		2.6