

New Jersey Department of Education Office of Early Childhood Education

End of the Year Report: 2005 - 2006

The mission of the Office of Early Childhood Education (OECE) is to enhance the development and implementation of quality early childhood education programs in New Jersey by facilitating program improvement and fiscal integrity in district-sponsored preschool programs. The OECE pursues this goal throughout the state, preparing children 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. OECE staff work with the Office of Special Education, the Office of School Funding, the Office of Literacy, and with the offices of the regional assistant commissioners and county superintendents to provide guidance and program oversight to three sets of districts that receive state funding for preschool:

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

The primary responsibility of the OECE is to oversee the Abbott preschool program, however substantial support and professional development are also provided to the ECPA and ELLI districts. The OECE 2005-06 End of Year Report summarizes the initiatives that OECE adopted 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 great strides in 2005-06. Through intense professional development in diverse topics of early childhood best practices and fiscal accountability, measurable progress has been attained throughout the Abbott districts in the areas of program quality, measuring and assessing progress, and accountability and fiscal integrity.

Accountability and Fiscal Responsibility

In the 2005-06 school year, the approved projected budget for the Abbott preschool program reached nearly \$445 million with an average per pupil allocation of \$10,783 for students served in district and community provider operated programs. OECE staff reviewed over 450 individual private provider budgets, including both Expanded (fully State funded) and Enhanced (State and Federally funded) Head Start centers. In addition, OECE reviewed budgets for the 31 Abbott district programs, 28 of which also oversee private provider centers.

2005-06 marked the first budget year for which Enhanced Head Start agencies were given the option to use newly organized budget forms designed specifically for Head Start agencies that

receive both Federal and State funds. With assistance from The Federal Administration for Children and Families (ACF) and The New Jersey Department of Human Services (DHS), the new forms were devised to produce a more accurate reflection of how State funding supplements Federal funding to allow Head Start agencies to incorporate Abbott standards into their existing programs. Overall, 14 Head Start agencies chose to use the new budget forms right away, while the remaining seven opted to use the original forms for an additional year.

Abbott Preschool Fiscal Specialists play an important role in the fiscal accountability of the preschool programs in the Abbott districts. In 2005-06, fiscal specialists from the Abbott districts came together several times to discuss the challenges of their role in the Abbott program and to help the OECE determine useful professional development topics for fiscal specialists to take back to their 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 third year, via the Office of Compliance Investigation and the Office of Internal Audit for state operated districts, the OECE conducted limited review examinations and audits of private preschool providers in the Abbott districts. Several improvements were made to the overall examination process for the 2005-06 school year, including an entrance and exit conference with both district and provider representatives for each provider selected for review. Over eighty providers in 26 districts were selected for a review of their 2004-05 Abbott preschool budget.

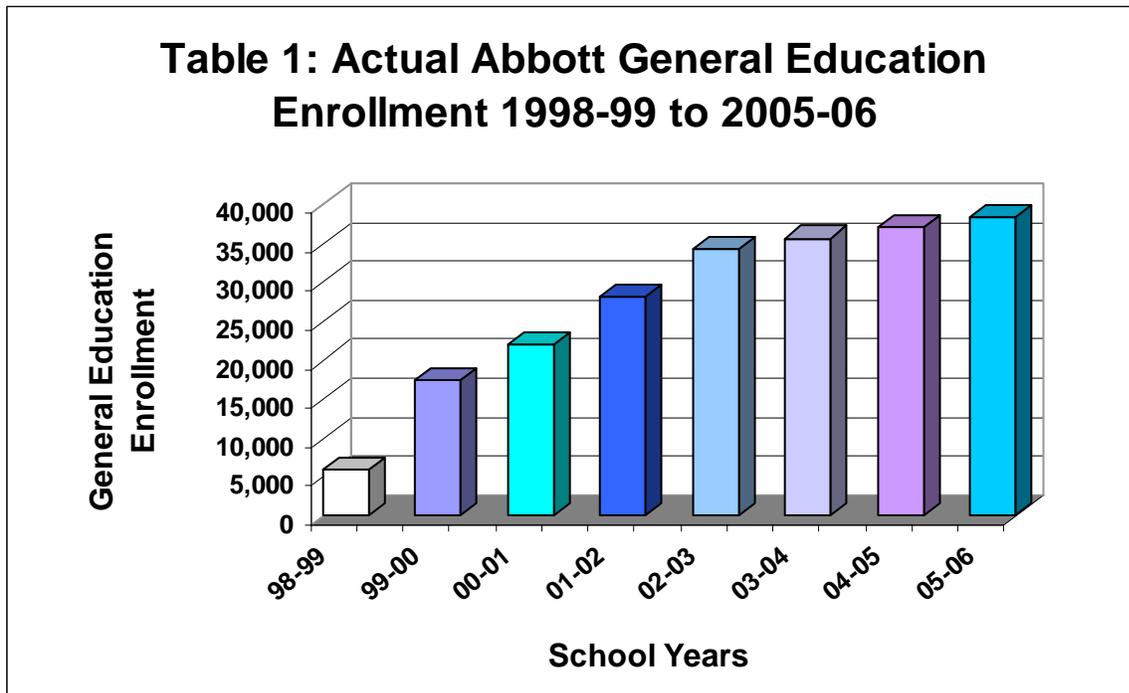
Preliminary findings from the limited reviews indicate that providers continue to have difficulty separating Abbott expenditures and keeping general records that follow Generally Accepted Accounting Principles (GAAP). In certain cases, districts are compelled to end contracts with providers whose violations are unacceptable. However, initial findings also show that an increasing number of providers are more accurately and completely filling out their Quarterly Expenditure Reports and are submitting them to their districts in a timely manner. As a result, fiscal specialists are able to adjust payments to providers throughout the year based on actual expenditures.

Corrective action plans continue to play a vital role in the limited review examination process. District administrators work closely with their providers to address findings from the reviews, specifying the timeline by which all concerns will be addressed. The corrective action plans serve as a tool for the DOE and the districts to monitor the progress of providers in need of stronger fiscal controls.

Capacity Building

During the 2005–06 school year, the seventh year of Abbott Preschool implementation, the 31 Abbott districts served over 38,680 general education and 1,880 special education three- and four-year-old children in Abbott preschool programs, for a total of over 40,500. Approximately 74 percent of the estimated eligible universe of Abbott general education preschoolers were served in 2005-06, for an increase of 2.5 percent over the 2004-05 school year. The table below

illustrates the collective efforts of the Abbott districts to increase capacity and enrollment since the inception of the program.



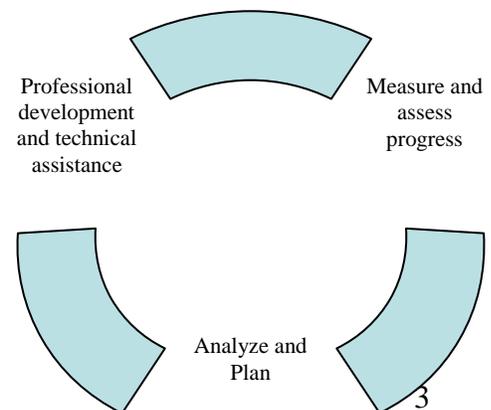
Capacity challenges

Head Start

In order to provide all Abbott families with access to high-quality preschool services, the full inclusion of all Abbott-eligible children served in Head Start programs remains a major objective of the DOE. Over 3,100 Abbott Head Start children are currently served meeting both federal Head Start and state Abbott standards and using a combination of state and federal funding. However, OECE estimates that a significant number of Abbott-eligible children are currently served in Head Start programs that do not meet Abbott standards. In an effort to increase Head Start participation in the Abbott preschool program, OECE continues to work with the federal Administration for Children and Families (ACF) to facilitate and increase local collaboration. The DOE is also working closely with the Department of Human Services (DHS) and the regional ACF office to develop a Letter of Agreement among the state and federal partners as well as a model Letter of Agreement for districts and Head Start agencies to augment local collaboration.

Program Quality - the Continuous Improvement Cycle

High-quality education depends on a continuous improvement cycle. This cycle consists of gathering evidence about program progress, analyzing this evidence and making plans for improvement, and implementing those



plans. The process then begins again with another assessment of progress. The OECE uses this continuous improvement cycle at the state level by measuring overall progress toward achieving full enrollment in high quality programs that will allow children in Abbott districts to enter kindergarten with the skills necessary to succeed in school and in life. At the district level, the OECE assists districts with self-assessment, measuring progress, analyzing and planning, professional development, and technical assistance.

Measuring and Assessing Progress, Analyzing and Planning

Four years ago, the OECE brought together a group of the state's top early childhood education faculty to form the Early Learning Improvement Consortium (ELIC), to measure and assess progress. In this multi-year initiative, participating New Jersey institutions of higher education assist the OECE and the Abbott districts in identifying the particularized needs of preschool children and programs. The ELIC is responsible for collecting and reporting on data concerning children and classrooms. Each fall, assessments of kindergartners' skills are conducted to measure progress toward preparing children to succeed in school. In addition, members of the ELIC conduct classroom observations on 11 percent of the Abbott preschool classrooms 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 seven years of the Abbott Preschool program, overall quality has increased, and children's scores upon entering kindergarten show significant and meaningful gains. The OECE uses results gathered by the ELIC to plan future professional development activities addressing areas of need. As a result, the OECE continues to provide training to improve teaching practices in mathematics and science.

Self Assessment Validation System (SAVS)

2005-06 marked the third year the Abbott districts participated in the Self Assessment Validation System (SAVS). This annual process assists districts in implementing a continuous improvement cycle. The SAVS is designed to guide the 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). Districts utilize findings from the SAVS process to develop improvement goals which are included in their Two-Year Instructional Priorities Report.

Classroom Quality

As part of the Continuous Improvement Cycle, Abbott supervisors and master teachers conduct regular observations of all preschool classrooms with emphasis on striving to improve the implementation of the 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 program improvement.

Districts use the results of the SAVS, classroom observations, curriculum reports, and other data to develop detailed professional development plans which are submitted to the OECE.

Child Progress

In addition to using child assessment on a random sample of children to evaluate progress in the Abbott program statewide, teachers use on-going child assessment as part of the Continuous Improvement Cycle in their classrooms. To capture information about children's language and literacy development and to assist teachers in using valid classroom assessment to improve teaching, the OECE, with the help of the ELIC, created a language arts literacy performance-based assessment. The Early Learning Assessment System (ELAS) is based on the *Preschool Teaching and Learning Expectations: Standards of Quality* and assists preschool and kindergarten teachers to assess children's emerging literacy skills. Teachers then use this information to adapt and individualize interactions for specific children and to adjust activities on a class wide basis.

Examples of Professional Development and Other Technical Assistance

The OECE uses results of all of the data collection efforts to design effective technical assistance for individual districts and to determine appropriate topics for professional development statewide. The following are examples of professional development activities from the 2005-06 school year:

- Regular meetings for about 50 Abbott Early Childhood Supervisors that included workshop components on specific topics as well as general technical assistance on program administration.
- Master teacher and supervisor training on topics such as supporting English language learners, positive behavior supports, and using structured observation tools for continuous improvement. 38 master teachers and supervisors attended these trainings.
- Curriculum-specific meetings that brought together 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 in math and science for approximately 200 master teachers.
- A second annual conference for about 300 preschool directors and administrators, with presentations geared toward the theme of "Paving the Way to Excellence".
- Community-Parent Involvement Specialists (CPIS) trainings on topics that included promoting literacy and mathematics in the home, transition activities to kindergarten, and collaborating with family workers and social workers district-wide. A CPIS (or representative) from each of the 31 Abbott districts attended these trainings.
- Preschool Intervention Referral Team (PIRT) training on the Positive Behavioral Support (PBS) system by Lise Fox, University of South Florida for 60 PIRT team members.
- The annual curriculum showcase for 50 representatives from ELLI and ECPA districts to introduce the High/Scope, Curiosity Corner, Tools of the Mind, and Creative Curriculum models to districts looking to adopt a research-based program.

- An initial meeting for 70 preschool nurses on their role within the Abbott preschool program.

Early Childhood Program Aid

In 1996, the NJ Legislature established funding for Early Childhood Program Aid (ECPA) district. 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 districts, 101 non-Abbott school districts qualify for ECPA funding. The intent of ECPA funding is to help districts operate a full-day kindergarten program and offer at least a half-day preschool program for four-year-old children. In 2005-06, over 13,100 general education kindergarteners and 7,270 general education preschool children were served by non-Abbott ECPA districts. Of the 7,270 preschool children served, over 25 percent were served in full-day programs.

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

During 2005-06, the OECE further increased professional development opportunities for the non-Abbott ECPA districts. For the second year, ECPA districts that currently use one of OECE's recommended curricula, participated in the curriculum-specific planning and training meetings mentioned above. In addition, ECPA administrators attended training sessions on "What is Quality Preschool" and "Making Inclusion Work in Your District" and participated in the "Paving the Way to Excellence" conference for preschool directors and administrators. In 2006-07, OECE plans to continue to increase opportunities for ECPA districts to participate in professional development meetings and to assist ECPA districts as they strive to increase capacity and quality in their Early Childhood programs.

Early Launch to Learning Initiative

The Early Launch to Learning Initiative (ELLI) completed its second successful year. Twenty-four districts continued with the project and four new districts were approved for funding. The Office of Early Childhood Education assisted the ELLI districts with professional development and networking opportunities to support enhanced quality of program implementation. Bimonthly meetings presented supervisors with a breadth of information. Topics included technical assistance for funding requirements, best practices for inclusion and integrated therapies, curriculum-specific program implementation, exploring additional funding and grant writing options, and classroom observation and supervision methods. Additional quality enhancement support was provided via the ELLI ECERS Professional Development project, whereby districts received training and materials to introduce the Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale (ECERS) to their staff, and consultants visited each district to

provide on-site observation and feedback. Representatives from the ELLI districts were also invited to a number of OECE professional development events, including the bilingual master teacher meetings, curriculum-specific workgroups, the New Leaders in Early Childhood Education series, Early Learning Assessment System training, and the “Paving the Way to Excellence” conference for preschool directors and administrators.

In its second year, ELLI made high quality preschool available to nearly 1,500 children in 28 districts. In all, 535 low-income children participated in these programs for a total cost of \$2,187,000.

Next Year ...

The Continuous Improvement Cycle guides all of the work of the Office of Early Childhood Education. Based on results of the SAVS, ELIC research, and DOE data, the OECE is looking ahead to the following goals for 2006-07:

- Improving curriculum implementation
- Enhancing services for special populations
- Increasing the focus on math and science learning
- Building early childhood expertise among site-level administrators
- Introducing the Center Level Assessment System for providers to use for self-assessment
- Developing a self-assessment system for ECPA and ELLI districts
- Continuing improvement of the budget planning and monitoring process
- Increasing collaboration with both new and existing Head Start agencies operating in Abbott districts.