



**Fiscal Year 2024 Report to the  
New Jersey State Legislature on  
Preschool Expansion and Mixed Delivery**

March 2024

## Introduction

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In response to the Legislature’s directive in the Fiscal Year 2024 Appropriations Act ([P.L. 2023, Chapter 74](#)), the New Jersey Department of Education (Department), in collaboration with the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER), undertook a landscape analysis of New Jersey’s preschool education system as a whole and where private preschool providers fit within that system. The Department analyzed current enrollments, facilities, and overall participation. Additionally, the Department and NIEER spoke with private providers, school districts, and other New Jersey early childhood community-based organizations to assess their experiences with the mixed delivery model. A summary of those conversations can be found in Appendix B.

The following overview report provides a brief history and rationale of mixed delivery models, the status and efficacy of the mixed delivery model of preschool and its role in New Jersey’s preschool expansion efforts (including district/provider participation, enrollment, and facilities data), and considerations for successful expansion of public preschool in New Jersey mixed delivery settings.

## History of Mixed Delivery

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Mixed delivery refers to serving preschoolers, children ages three and four, in classroom settings that meet all state regulations, and are operated by a combination of school districts and private providers (i.e., childcare centers and federally funded Head Start programs licensed by the New Jersey Department of Children and Families (NJDCF)). The mixed delivery model has its roots in the requirement in the New Jersey Supreme Court decisions of *Abbott v. Burke* (Abbott V, Abbott VI, Abbott VIII, Abbott XII) that New Jersey’s former Abbott districts, now referred to as “SDA districts,” collaborate with all willing and able private providers to implement a program meeting all preschool program standards. This collaboration requirement is further codified in [N.J.A.C. 6A:13A](#). Additionally, contracting private providers are required to meet the same regulatory standards as school districts (e.g., no more than 15 children in a classroom, implementing a state-approved developmentally appropriate curriculum, classrooms staffed with an appropriately certified preschool teacher). The mixed delivery model of preschool in New Jersey has been documented in a series of reports regarding the outcomes of children who attend the state preschool program (for more details, see the [Abbott Preschool Program Longitudinal Effects Study](#)). New Jersey’s Preschool Teaching and Learning Standards are also considered some of the most rigorous in the nation.<sup>1</sup>

The Department continues to support preschool implementation through the expectation of mixed-delivery relationships. As of 2023, applications for preschool expansion aid include priority points for applications that include collaboration with private providers. In addition, districts are now required to submit documentation of due diligence in partnering with local licensed providers as a component of the successful application. The Department also continues to support and convene interested parties via

<sup>1</sup> Minervino, J. (2014, September). [Lessons from Research and the Classroom – Implementing High quality Pre-k that Makes a Difference for Young Children](#). The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. [https://docs.gatesfoundation.org/documents/lessons%20from%20research%20and%20the%20classroom\\_september%202014.pdf](https://docs.gatesfoundation.org/documents/lessons%20from%20research%20and%20the%20classroom_september%202014.pdf); and Mead, S. (2014, January 21). [Can Bill de Blasio Really Deliver on his Promise of Universal Pre-k? He’ll need to look to New Jersey to do it](#). Slate Magazine. <https://slate.com/human-interest/2014/01/bill-de-blasios-push-for-universal-pre-k-the-model-exists-and-its-in-new-jersey.html>

information sessions, technical assistance training, webinars, and individual correspondence to continue to ensure that mixed delivery models are encouraged through preschool expansion. As an example, in September 2023 the Department invited 4,000 licensed child-care providers to participate in a webinar describing the state’s preschool program and the role of private providers in current preschool expansion efforts. The Department will continue to provide support in the implementation of high-quality preschool and the mixed delivery model.

## **Rationale for Mixed Delivery**

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Universal access to high-quality preschool requires the maintenance of a mixed delivery model, by which age-eligible children may be educated in a combination of classrooms, including private provider settings; specifically childcare centers and federally funded Head Start programs (hereinafter private providers). Mixed delivery systems maximize the capacity of existing private providers to meet the goal of universal access to high-quality preschool programming while remaining responsive to parental choice and continuity of services from birth to third grade. Research shows that kindergarten readiness, third-grade literacy, and college and career preparation are more attainable if all programs serving children under the age of five provide the critical components of effective care and education.<sup>2</sup>

## **District and Private Provider Participation**

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As of the 2023-2024 school year, a total of 572 districts and charter schools serve elementary school-age children. All school districts and charter schools can apply for preschool expansion funding if providing full-day kindergarten. Charter schools must also have the ability to serve preschool age students included in their approved charter if they pursue preschool funding.

Of those 572 eligible districts and charter schools, 283 currently participate in the state’s universal preschool program. They are:

- 31 former Abbott districts, now referred to as “SDA districts.” The former Abbott districts are school districts in New Jersey that are provided remedies pursuant to the New Jersey Supreme Court decision in *Abbott v. Burke*.
- 11 charter schools. A charter school is a public school that operates as its own local educational agency (LEA) under a charter granted by the Commissioner of Education.
- 241 regular operating districts or LEAs, which are not charter schools or SDA districts.

<sup>2</sup> Bartik, T. (2022, June 14). [The Long-Run Effects of High-Quality Pre-K: What Does the Research Show?](https://research.upjohn.org/testimonies/26/) [Conference presentation]. Presented to the Michigan State Board of Education. <https://research.upjohn.org/testimonies/26/>; and Minervino, J. (2014, September). [Lessons from Research and the Classroom – Implementing High quality Pre-k that Makes a Difference for Young Children](https://docs.gatesfoundation.org/documents/lessons%20from%20research%20and%20the%20classroom_september%202014.pdf). The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. [https://docs.gatesfoundation.org/documents/lessons%20from%20research%20and%20the%20classroom\\_september%202014.pdf](https://docs.gatesfoundation.org/documents/lessons%20from%20research%20and%20the%20classroom_september%202014.pdf).

Additionally, 12 districts are funded under former preschool funding mechanisms through either New Jersey's Early Childhood Program Aid (ECPA) or Early Launch to Learning Initiative (ELLI) to provide preschool for four-year-olds in half day programs.

According to NJDCF data from Spring 2023, there are approximately 2,978 licensed childcare centers in New Jersey licensed to serve children 2.5 to 5 years. Of those licensed providers, a total of 515 (416 childcare providers and 99 Head Start programs) are currently contracting with 90 school districts to provide state-funded preschool through a mixed delivery model.

## Funded Enrollment

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New Jersey is home to approximately 197,000 preschool-age children. The total projected state-funded preschool enrollment for the 2023-2024 school year was 83,620<sup>3</sup>, including:

- 71,277 general education preschool students, and
- 12,343 preschool students with disabilities.

Children served across mixed-delivery settings (actual 2023-24 general education enrollment) represents:

- 41,314 preschoolers in in-district and charter classrooms (58%),
- 5,378 preschoolers in Head Start classrooms (8%), and
- 23,587 preschoolers in childcare provider classrooms (34%).

## Facilities

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In 2023, the NIEER surveyed all New Jersey local education agencies regarding current and potential capacity to serve preschoolers. Based on survey responses, the Department analyzed data on existing classroom space in all licensed childcare providers throughout the State.

The analysis indicated that approximately 21,679 rooms are in licensed childcare providers settings. Of those:

- 2,328 rooms (10.7%) are at or above 950 square feet (meeting Department regulatory requirements for facility square foot).
- 5,027 rooms (23.2%) are between 700 and 949 square feet (eligible for a waiver from Department).
- 13,625 rooms (62.9%) are below 700 square feet. These rooms would only be viable as state preschool classrooms if sites were to combine smaller spaces into classrooms that are at least 950 square feet and include a bathroom.

<sup>3</sup> For an enrollment breakdown by legislative district, see Appendix A.

- 699 rooms (3.2%) are listed without square footage. Based on these estimates, 7,355 rooms could be available for preschool expansion in licensed childcare facilities.

To support the facilities needs of growing high-quality preschool programs, the FY2023 Appropriations Act included \$120 million in federal American Rescue Plan funding for preschool capital projects. To date, 23 school districts have been awarded nearly \$52 million to support 30 facilities expansion projects. Additionally, the New Jersey Economic Development Authority (NJEDA) is investing over \$110 million in hundreds of childcare centers that serve tens of thousands of children. To date, NJEDA has awarded \$30M to 152 licensed childcare centers for facilities improvement projects and additional award opportunities for registered family child care homes are forthcoming.

## **The Importance of Early Childhood Education and the Mixed Delivery Model**

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Due to recent preschool expansion efforts, seats are available for over 83,000 children in a high-quality, full-day public preschool program, free to participating families. School districts and private providers that have been participating in the program for many years agree that New Jersey's mixed delivery model has set the standard for what it takes to ensure high quality intervention in early childhood. Participating districts and providers have noted that the mixed delivery system is strongest when collaborating districts and private providers meet regularly, plan recruitment and outreach efforts simultaneously, and communicate with fidelity and transparency. The resulting programs meet the needs of parents and children while providing choice opportunities.

Beginning in 2005, a cohort of over 1,000 children was studied to determine the impact of participation in the state preschool program through grade 10.<sup>4</sup> Researchers found that children who attended the state preschool program had lasting effects on achievement in language arts and literacy, math, and science, and that those achievement effects were roughly twice for children who had two years of preschool versus just one. The study also found that preschool participation reduced grade retention by 15 percentage points and reduced the need for special education services by seven percentage points. It is important to note that this effective preschool program was provided across district, childcare, and Head Start classrooms. The benefits of the program were attributed to the time and adequacy of funding devoted to ensuring that all settings reached a level of quality that is beneficial for children.

Another success through expansion efforts was the availability of scholarship funding for teachers to work towards a degree and certification while continuing to teach in state preschool classrooms. This was particularly helpful in private provider locations, where many teachers were employed, but did not have the certification credentials to remain a state preschool teacher. Professional development for teacher assistants also created a strong and valuable presence in preschool classrooms.

<sup>4</sup> [Fact Sheet: The Abbott Preschool Program Longitudinal Effects Study \(APPLES\)](https://live-ru-nieer.pantheonsite.io/research-library/fact-sheet-abbott-preschool-program-longitudinal-effects-study-apples). National Institute for Early Education Research. (2013, December 1). <https://live-ru-nieer.pantheonsite.io/research-library/fact-sheet-abbott-preschool-program-longitudinal-effects-study-apples>

## **Mixed Delivery Conversations**

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The Department, in collaboration with NIEER, met with private providers, school districts, and other early childhood community-based organizations from across the state to gather information and capture the unique impact of preschool expansion and suggestions for addressing county specific challenges. Three categories emerged as common themes: classrooms/facilities, workforce, and mixed delivery, which were also discussed with a working group gathered specifically to inform the 2024 legislative report. A summary of the conversations is included in Appendix B.

## **Conclusion**

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The Department remains committed to providing universal access to high-quality preschool to all three- and four-year-olds. School districts alone do not have the capacity or facility space to meet this goal. Mixed delivery is an essential element of New Jersey's growing preschool system and must be a central tenet of universal access. The Department will continue to work with the education community to better align requirements, priorities, and availability of resources.

## Appendix A: Project Preschool Enrollment by Legislative Districts

Legislative District	Town/School District	In District	Child Care Providers	Head Start Providers	Charter School	Total
1	Bridgeton	360	270	75	0	705
1	Cape May	36	0	0	0	36
1	Commercial Twp	80	0	0	0	80
1	Dennis	98	0	0	0	98
1	Downe	39	0	0	0	39
1	Estell Manor	24	0	0	0	24
1	Fairfield (Cumberland)	85	0	0	0	85
1	Lower	252	0	0	0	252
1	Maurice River	58	0	0	0	58
1	Middle	155	0	0	0	155
1	Millville	570	45	0	0	615
1	North Wildwood	30	0	0	0	30
1	Ocean City	60	0	0	0	60
1	Upper	33	0	0	0	33
1	Vineland	345	813	70	45	1273
1	West Cape May	12	0	0	0	12
1	Weymouth	26	0	0	0	26
1	Wildwood Crest	35	0	0	0	35
1	Woodbine	50	0	0	0	50
2	Absecon	172	0	0	0	172
2	Atlantic City	505	0	75	0	580
2	Brigantine	66	0	0	0	66
2	Egg Harbor Twp	366	75	41	0	482
2	Galloway	115	75	15	0	205
2	Hamilton (Atlantic)	255	0	45	0	300
2	Linwood	23	30	0	0	53
2	Northfield	22	114	0	0	136
2	Pleasantville	240	180	30	0	450
2	Somers Point	97	0	0	0	97
2	Ventnor	85	0	0	0	85
3	Alloway	42	0	0	0	42
3	Penns Grove/Carneys Point	125	0	45	0	170
3	Clayton	140	0	0	0	140

Legislative District	Town/School District	In District	Child Care Providers	Head Start Providers	Charter School	Total
3	Deerfield	58	0	0	0	58
3	Elk	80	0	0	0	80
3	Elsinboro	14	0	0	0	14
3	Glassboro	108	0	15	0	123
3	Greenwich (Cumberland)	14	0	0	0	14
3	Hopewell (Cumberland)	73	0	0	0	73
3	Logan	130	0	10	0	140
3	Lower Alloways Creek	42	0	0	0	42
3	Mannington	27	0	0	0	27
3	Mantua	130	0	0	0	130
3	National Park	54	0	0	0	54
3	Oldsman	12	0	0	0	12
3	Paulsboro	80	0	0	0	80
3	Pennsville	148	0	0	0	148
3	Quinton	43	0	0	0	43
3	Salem	161	0	0	0	161
3	South Harrison	56	0	0	0	56
3	Stow Creek	14	0	0	0	14
3	Upper Deerfield	165	0	0	0	165
3	Upper Pittsgrove	55	0	0	0	55
3	West Deptford	154	0	0	0	154
3	Westville	54	0	0	0	54
3	Woodstown-Pilesgrove	114	0	0	0	114
4	Buena	122	0	0	0	122
4	Chesilhurst	2	0	0	0	2
4	Gloucester Township	325	0	0	0	325
4	Monroe (Gloucester)	126	30	0	0	156
4	Washington (Gloucester)	183	26	27	0	236
4	Waterford	175	0	0	0	175
4	Winslow	175	0	0	0	175
5	Audubon	48	0	0	0	48
5	Bellmawr	135	0	0	0	135
5	Camden	900	745	520	60	2225
5	Collingswood	205	0	30	0	235
5	Deptford	260	0	15	0	275



Legislative District	Town/School District	In District	Child Care Providers	Head Start Providers	Charter School	Total
5	Gloucester City	274	0	0	0	274
5	Mount Ephraim	49	0	0	0	49
5	Runnemede	85	30	0	0	115
5	Woodbury	146	0	0	0	146
5	Woodlynne	214	0	0	0	214
6	Audubon Park	See Audubon-District 5	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
6	Berlin Township	39	0	15	0	54
6	Cherry Hill	99	90	60	0	249
6	Clementon	75	0	15	0	90
6	Gibbsboro	24	24	0	0	48
6	Lawnside	28	15	0	0	43
6	Lindenwold	125	0	55	0	180
6	Magnolia	24	0	0	0	24
6	Maple Shade	175	0	0	0	175
6	Oaklyn	56	0	0	0	56
6	Pine Hill	62	0	26	0	88
6	Voorhees	50	255	0	0	305
7	Beverly	56	0	0	0	56
7	Burlington	180	0	0	0	180
7	Burlington Township	150	45	0	0	195
7	Cinnaminson	20	0	0	0	20
7	Edgewater Park	40	0	30	0	70
7	Florence	20	22	0	0	42
7	Mount Laurel	90	145	0	0	235
7	Palmyra	101	0	0	0	101
7	Willingboro	347	0	0	0	347
8	Eastampton	54	0	0	0	54
8	Egg Harbor City	75	0	0	0	75
8	Folsom	15	0	0	0	15
8	Hainesport	40	0	0	0	40
8	Hammonton	118	0	0	0	118
8	Lumberton	112	0	42	0	154
8	Medford	78	60	0	0	138

Legislative District	Town/School District	In District	Child Care Providers	Head Start Providers	Charter School	Total
8	Pemberton Borough	See Pemberton Township	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
8	Pemberton Township	499	0	0	0	499
8	Tabernacle	36	0	0	0	36
8	Washington (Burlington)	9	0	0	0	9
8	Westampton	24	15	0	0	39
9	Barneget	297	0	0	0	297
9	Berkeley	338	0	0	0	338
9	Eagleswood	24	0	0	0	24
9	Lacey	233	0	0	0	233
9	Lakehurst	86	0	0	0	86
9	Little Egg Harbor	305	0	0	0	305
9	Manchester	225	0	0	0	225
9	Ocean Gate	28	0	0	0	28
9	Ocean Township (Ocean)	112	0	0	0	112
9	Stafford	241	90	0	0	331
9	Tuckerton	54	0	0	0	54
10	Brick	408	0	0	0	408
10	Island Heights	14	0	0	0	14
10	Seaside Heights	25	15	0	0	40
11	Asbury Park	210	105	0	0	315
11	Bradley Beach	26	0	0	0	26
11	Eatontown	105	60	0	0	165
11	Freehold Borough	60	0	30	0	90
11	Long Branch	600	0	0	0	600
11	Neptune	29	0	15	0	44
11	Neptune Township	380	0	0	0	380
11	Ocean Township (Monmouth)	33	15	0	0	48
11	Red Bank	141	59	0	15	215
12	Jackson	448	0	0	0	448
12	Matawan- Aberdeen	335	45	0	0	380
12	North Hanover	264	0	0	0	264
12	Plumsted	82	0	0	0	82

Legislative District	Town/School District	In District	Child Care Providers	Head Start Providers	Charter School	Total
13	Abderdeen	See Matawan-Aberdeen District 12	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
13	Atlantic Highlands	22	0	0	0	22
13	Highlands	27	0	0	0	27
13	Keansburg	240	0	0	0	240
13	Keyport	89	0	0	0	89
13	Oceanport	35	15	0	0	50
13	Union Beach	105	0	0	0	105
13	West Long Branch	18	10	0	0	28
14	Jamesburg	106	0	0	0	106
14	Robbinsville	179	0	0	0	179
15	Delaware Township	23	0	0	0	23
15	East Amwell	35	0	0	0	35
15	Frenchtown	12	15	0	0	27
15	Kingwood	24	0	0	0	24
15	Lawrence (Mercer)	71	0	0	0	71
15	Trenton	0	1835	190	0	2025
16	Clinton Township	65	0	0	0	65
16	Highbridge	58	0	0	0	58
16	Princeton	40	105	0	0	145
16	Raritan (Hunterdon)	64	10	12	0	86
16	Readington	35	60	0	0	95
16	South Brunswick	140	110	0	0	250
17	Franklin (Somerset)	368	182	30	0	580
17	New Brunswick	357	895	0	0	1252
17	North Brunswick	252	105	60	0	417
17	Piscataway	524	0	0	0	524
18	Highland Park	54	0	0	0	54
18	South Plainfield	130	0	0	0	130
18	South River	150	0	30	0	180
19	Carteret	200	0	0	0	200
19	Perth Amboy	945	225	105	0	1275
19	Sayreville	440	165	45	0	650
19	South Amboy	40	15	30	0	85

Legislative District	Town/School District	In District	Child Care Providers	Head Start Providers	Charter School	Total
20	Elizabeth	2450	540	185	0	3175
20	Roselle	84	0	45	0	129
21	Dunellen	30	0	0	0	30
21	Springfield	87	0	0	0	87
22	Linden	345	0	75	0	420
22	North Plainfield	40	152	0	0	192
22	Plainfield	0	1385	180	0	1565
22	Rahway	213	167	0	0	380
22	Roselle Park	97	45	0	0	142
22	Winfield	22	0	0	0	22
23	Belvidere	40	0	0	0	40
23	Bloomsbury	13	39	13	0	65
23	Bound Brook	105	0	0	0	105
23	Franklin (Warren)	24	0	0	0	24
23	Hampton (Hunterdon)	25	0	0	0	25
23	Holland	36	0	0	0	36
23	Manville	60	143	15	0	218
23	Milford	11	0	0	0	11
23	Oxford	41	0	0	0	41
23	Phillipsburg	230	30	45	0	305
23	Pohatcong	24	0	0	0	24
23	Somerville	74	0	0	0	74
23	Union (Hunterdon)	52	0	0	0	52
23	Washington Borough (Warren)	82	0	0	0	82
23	Washington Township (Warren)	16	0	0	0	16
24	Andover Borough	40	0	0	0	40
24	Andover Township	See Andover Borough	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
24	Franklin (Sussex)	72	0	0	0	72
24	Fredon	25	0	0	0	25
24	Hamburg	50	0	0	0	50
24	Hardyston	45	0	0	0	45
24	Hopatcong	20	105	15	0	140
24	Independence (Great Meadows)	32	0	0	0	32
24	Lafayette	26	0	0	0	26

Legislative District	Town/School District	In District	Child Care Providers	Head Start Providers	Charter School	Total
24	Liberty (Great Meadows)	See Independence	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
24	Montague	56	0	0	0	56
24	Netcong	24	0	0	0	24
24	Ogdensburg	52	0	0	0	52
24	Sparta	74	0	0	0	74
24	Stanhope	10	0	0	0	10
24	Stillwater	52	0	0	0	52
24	Sussex	60	72	12	0	144
24	Wantage	See Sussex	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
25	Boonton	120	0	0	0	120
25	Dover	60	221	65	0	346
25	Jefferson	185	0	0	0	185
25	Mine Hill	23	30	0	0	53
25	Morris	70	467	56	0	593
25	Wharton	0	57	13	0	70
26	Bloomingtondale	116	0	0	0	116
27	Clifton	191	331	205	0	727
27	Montclair	48	72	24	0	144
27	West Orange	67	180	65	0	312
28	Hillside	205	30	0	0	235
28	Irvington	675	450	105	3	1233
28	Maplewood	See South Orange	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
28	Newark	2077	3254	1085	227	6643
28	South Orange	77	240	0	0	317
29	East Newark	0	39	0	0	39
29	Harrison (Hudson)	24	280	0	0	304
29	Newark	See District 28	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
30	Belmar	44	0	0	0	44
30	Farmingdale	22	0	0	0	22
30	Howell	321	0	0	0	321
30	Lake Como	9	0	0	0	9
30	Lakewood	252	15	0	0	267
31	Bayonne	520	312	72	0	904

Legislative District	Town/School District	In District	Child Care Providers	Head Start Providers	Charter School	Total
31	Jersey City	2525	1738	360	90	4713
31	Kearny	305	12	13	0	330
32	Hoboken	0	887	60	0	947
32	Jersey City	See District 31	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
33	Secaucus	52	39	13	0	104
33	Union City	374	1410	60	0	1844
33	West New York	374	525	44	0	943
34	Belleville	419	105	15	0	539
34	East Orange	653	465	180	10	1308
34	Nutley	78	41	0	0	119
34	Orange	281	280	203	0	764
35	Garfield	534	0	0	0	534
35	Haledon	55	0	0	0	55
35	Paterson	649	2168	280	90	3187
35	Prospect Park	60	30	0	0	90
36	Carlstadt	13	15	0	0	28
36	Fairview	90	0	0	0	90
36	North Arlington	60	30	0	0	90
36	Passaic	1247	255	180	0	1682
37	Bogota	36	93	0	0	129
37	Englewood	149	75	0	0	224
37	Hackensack	144	105	0	0	249
37	Palisades Park	105	0	0	0	105
37	Ridgefield Park	11	57	0	0	68
37	Teaneck	221	89	0	0	310
38	Bergenfield	59	0	26	0	85
38	Little Ferry	36	49	0	0	85
38	Moonachie	42	0	0	0	42
40	Woodland Park	214	0	0	0	214

## Appendix B: Summary of Stakeholder Conversations

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Below is a summary of conversations that the Department, in collaboration with NIEER, had with private providers, school districts, and other early childhood community-based organizations. This summary reflects a compilation of independent stakeholder comments, which are not necessarily endorsed by the Murphy Administration.

### Classrooms and Facilities

- Providers shared that classrooms do not meet Department facility standards and that, although the opportunity for a waiver of state standards is helpful, many provider classrooms are too small to qualify for a waiver. There is tension between the goal of serving more children and the availability of classrooms that meet state standards.
- Also noted was that funding available through the New Jersey Child Care Facilities Improvement Program grants, offered by the New Jersey Economic Development Authority, are not substantive enough to address the physical limitations of facilities.
- Providers expressed concern regarding the short and long-term impact of preschool expansion on business viability, which impacts families with children of all ages. Childcare is a business that heavily depends on the enrollment of three- and four-year-old children to offset the higher cost of serving infants and toddlers. Providers are concerned that age-eligible children will move to public schools, making certain business models no longer viable. Providers also identified concerns that participating in state preschool will only be temporary until or when additional in-district facility space may become available.
- For classrooms in the former Abbott districts, there was a concern about the future of classrooms that have historically been excused from meeting square footage requirements, and how the state might judge any new spaces that are acquired in these districts.

### *Classroom and Facilities Considerations*

- Additional guidance from the state could allow districts and providers to secure vacant buildings, lease new spaces, and complete necessary renovations. The state could also provide guidance on how school districts and providers might work together to identify and secure new spaces.
- Extended annual contracts which include clear rules on school facilities development, may help in the maintenance of a viable childcare community and would provide assurance to providers seeking to make necessary capital improvements to meet state preschool facilities standards. Multiple-year contracts could also allow providers to keep unspent funding from one year to the next, to use funding towards facility improvements.
- Especially for less densely populated areas, districts and providers suggested that being able to serve children from multiple districts in one classroom would be helpful and the details of how this would work could be handled through a modified contract.

- Districts and providers requested more onsite visits from Department liaisons with the goal of helping districts and private providers understand the state’s facilities standards for preschool. Constituents suggested that at least one liaison could be housed and deployed from each of the Department’s County offices of education to ensure statewide coverage.
- Additional research is necessary to understand the relationship of square footage to high quality preschool.

## **Workforce**

- Staff turnover in private provider locations is exacerbated by “poaching” of teachers from providers to districts where benefit packages, including quality health insurance and the state pension, may be perceived as more attractive. (See the mixed delivery section below for how state per child rates impact this issue further.)
- Providers noted that teaching staff are typically non-traditional students who may face additional challenges in enrolling and completing degree requirements. Specifically noted was college credits from various institutions that would benefit from specific support enrollment to graduation to certification. Other certification seekers may struggle with standardized assessments, benefiting from alternate methods of assessment.
- Student teaching requirements can be a barrier for lead teachers in private provider locations when they are required to leave their own classroom.
- Districts and providers also identified difficulty in finding short- and long-term substitutes with the preschool through third grade (P–3) certification credential.
- Private providers noted that mentoring can be an obstacle if district supervisors are not willing to mentor teachers in provider locations, making it take much longer for teachers to progress through the certification process.

### *Workforce Considerations*

- Teachers in private provider locations could benefit from scholarships to obtain the degree and certification necessary to continue as state preschool teachers without incurring a level of debt that is incongruent with their level of compensation. Assistance could include support for childcare while candidates are in classes and studying.
- New Jersey Child Care Resource and Referral agencies (CCR&Rs) have begun to develop “shared service” alliances across the state. Amongst other things, alliance goals include the development of substitute teacher pools and access to benefits, making them more affordable for childcare staff.
- Tailoring alternate route teacher certification pathways for specific circumstances could encourage individuals who want to transition from alternate professions.



- Consideration for student teaching requirements for private provider teachers completed through work in one's own classroom.
- To help prospective teachers access necessary coursework, institutions of higher education could be brought together to discuss keeping early childhood education programs open and creating pathways for offering college level classes at community-based sites.
- A stronger marketing campaign to recruit new teachers and build on career and technical education (CTE) and other "Grow Your Own" models may increase interest in the field.

## Mixed Delivery

- Providers discussed funding-related challenges in meeting state preschool standards, noting specifically salary parity, some teachers in private provider locations are receiving less than peers in public school locations. Pay parity exacerbates issues of teachers being "poached" by districts and forces private providers to hire teachers with potentially less experience and lower salary requirements.
- Salary disparities between district and provider teachers are also exacerbated when districts salary scales are unsettled because teachers in private provider locations do not receive retroactive pay increases. Further, providers may not consistently provide additional compensation when teachers are asked to work beyond the traditional school day, again increasing the compensation disparity with public school teachers.
- Providers expressed concern that private childcare providers are only approached for partnership when public schools do not have the space for preschool expansion.
- Providers expressed frustration in trying to connect with districts about partnering to serve children.
- Providers and districts acknowledged a lack of understanding about how mixed delivery partnerships work and requested detailed guidance from the Department on the state's expectations when children are served in private providers in terms of how children are registered/assigned to locations and what that means in terms of transportation requirements.
- To help navigate the mixed delivery relationship, technical assistance should be provided through trainings and additional guidance from the state, and as well as through connections to other districts and providers with successful collaborations to serve as mentors. State guidance could outline what successful collaborations look like, including the need for regular meetings and transparency between districts and contracting providers.
- Another solution would be to conduct a local landscape analysis to identify viable partnerships prior to the determination of preschool expansion classrooms. Such analysis would protect the unique and essential role that childcare centers play in the community, not only in providing preschool but also in supporting the needs of working families.

- In certain counties, providers noted long distances between district and provider buildings that make collaboration challenging. Solutions would need to be vetted further.
- Childcare providers expressed that the requirement to participate in the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) creates additional expenses and administrative burden and may disincentivize participation.

#### *Mixed Delivery Considerations*

- Publication of a consistently updated, county-wide list of districts and private providers who are willing to collaborate for ease of reference.
- As noted above, technical assistance should be provided through mentors and additional guidance from the state, and/or connections with other districts and providers with successful collaborations.
- Guidance should be provided to define what is expected in terms of curriculum implementation, and instructional coaching, especially for cases where children from multiple school districts are served together. Additionally, training for center directors should include support on preschool budgeting and reporting processes.
- Multi-year contracts, as mentioned in the facilities section above, may help providers to plan for subsequent years and provide more job security for teaching staff.
- Private providers sometimes struggle to meet Department program standards when they conflict with NJDCF licensing standards. For example, when teachers meet with coaches during the day, classrooms may be out of compliance with NJDCF staffing ratios. Alignment between the Department's and NJDCF's standards and/or guidance would help to mitigate these issues.