



NJDOE News

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DOE Releases [Early Childhood Report for Abbott Preschool Programs for 2002-03](#) *Report Shows Early Progress on Administration's Abbott Preschool Initiatives*

The Department of Education (DOE) today issued its first report on the classroom quality and language skills in the Abbott Preschool Program. The report, released in conjunction with the Early Learning Improvement Consortium, finds that the majority of kindergartners in Abbott districts are entering formal school with many of the early literacy skills necessary to be successful readers, among other things.

When the Administration came into office in January 2002, the state of the Abbott preschool programs was far from acceptable, with low enrollment leaving many young children without access, and inadequate funding that resulted in problems with program quality for the children who were receiving preschool education. DOE officials made it their top priority to address both issues concurrently.

The report issued today demonstrates that a mere year after taking office, the Administration already made great strides in expanding access to preschool and is making smaller but meaningful steps in improving the quality of Abbott preschool education.

"As found in its conclusion, this report indicates that we are making progress – progress in outreach and enrollment, progress in raising teacher's qualifications, progress in the quality of the classrooms and progress in children's abilities to succeed in school," said Commissioner of Education William L. Librera. "Overall, this report demonstrates that we are at a critical point in our reform of the Abbott early childhood system. Our success in expanding access has led to an influx of children and, therefore, teachers. Supporting this influx will require a continued uncompromising focus on improving quality in these preschool programs."

The report reflects the DOE's ongoing efforts to both increase the population of Abbott Preschool programs, as well as to increase the accountability of such programs in order to make sure that children are best served. Among the positives addressed in the report is that many programs continue to see growing success, despite increased enrollment.

"We have more hard work to do to fulfill the promise of Abbott preschool but the children are receiving nothing less than our most dedicated efforts," Commissioner Librera said.

The study also comes on the heels of a February report by the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER), which found that New Jersey ranked high in access to preschool programs for both three and four-year-olds – ninth and second, respectively. New Jersey was additionally one of only three states to reach the highest score for its quality standards in the Abbott District program, the NIEER report said.

"We continue to examine the state of our Abbott Preschool Programs, and more importantly, how to improve them," said Dr. Ellen Frede, head of Early Childhood Education a senior staff member of the Department of Education. "What we find, through these cross samples, is that on the whole, these programs are working, despite rapid expansion in many of them, but there is still a long way to go to achieve the type of success we want to see."

The report takes into account random samplings from different classes in the 30 Abbott Preschool Programs and is based on 2002-03 data. It finds that children are entering kindergarten with better language skills, but are still behind their more affluent peers.

"We at the Department of Education, with the fine work of Dr. Frede and Assistant Commissioner Gordon MacInnes in this case, continue to emphasize the importance of early childhood education — particularly, early childhood literacy," said Dr. Librera. "As Dr. Frede said, there is still much work to do, but the progress we continue to make in our Abbott districts is certainly encouraging."

In general, the report finds the following:

- Programs where teachers create a warm, nurturing environment and focus on solving social problem solving and other skills that lead to success in school; and
- Children's oral language skills at kindergarten entry have increased since the inception of the preschool program, but are still below the nation's average.

The primary purpose of the research conducted by the ELIC is to obtain information to improve policy and practice. In the fall of 2002, the ELIC administered tests of oral language development and early literacy skills to randomly selected kindergarten students in each district. This gives a general picture of children's "readiness" to succeed in school.

In the following winter and spring of 2003, faculty from the universities conducted structured classroom evaluations on 13 percent of the Abbott preschool classrooms to provide information on classroom practices likely to influence child learning. The findings comprise the report released today.

The DOE continues to emphasize improvement in the Abbott PreK programs. The report acknowledges the following programs as important in continuing such efforts:

- Guidelines for facilities construction were developed by a task force representing the Department of Education, the Department of Human Services (DHS), child-care providers, Head Start agencies and others. These guidelines have informed amendments to the NJ Administrative Code (N.J.A.C.) 6:19-3. Facilities that meet these guidelines are currently being constructed or designed in almost every district. These will provide the quality environments which result in higher scores on classroom assessments but, more importantly, better programs for children;
- The Preschool Teaching and Learning Expectations: Standards of Quality (DOE, 2004) were revised based on the latest research in best practices for developmentally appropriate education for three- and four-year-old children. The revised expectations consist of examples of high-quality teaching practices along with learner outcomes within each learning domain and offer significant assistance to the classroom teacher for planning instruction. The Expectations have received three favorable reviews from national organizations.
- Another project completed during the 2002-2003 school year to enhance the quality of Abbott preschool programs was the development of the Abbott Preschool Program Implementation Guidelines. The guidelines are recommendations based on the latest research and expert opinion and are designed to inform district's planning and implementation.
- In order to increase quality in the Abbott preschool classrooms, the Office of Early Childhood Education (OECE) offers a comprehensive, year-long training for master teachers who mentor and coach over 5,000 teachers and assistant teachers in the Abbott districts. The year-long course was designed to more clearly define the master teacher role and to ensure that master teachers have the skills they need to foster change and improve classroom quality.
- Typically, in the past, private child-care centers have suffered from a high rate of teacher turnover and a lack of well-trained teaching staff, thus limiting the ability to provide a high-quality program. In 2002-2003, in order to provide the high-quality programs that the court mandated, private provider teachers that received the proper training and held the appropriate certifications, received salaries comparable to in-district teacher salaries. Upgrading teacher salaries and qualifications will have the effect of stabilizing employment in the centers and creating a pool of well-trained and experienced teachers.
- High-quality educational programs undergo a continual cycle of gathering evidence about programs in order to make informed decisions toward improvement. The Self-Assessment Validation System (SAVS) is a system designed to guide the district through a systematic self-appraisal of its preschool program and to aid in program improvement. The SAVS is intended to highlight strengths of district programs and to alert districts to areas in need of improvement, which will inform program improvement.

As stated previously, the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) last month found that New Jersey ranked high in access to preschool programs for both three and four-year-olds – ninth and second, respectively. New Jersey was additionally one of only three states to reach the highest score for its quality standards in the Abbott District program.

That report, the [State of Preschool](#), is based on the 2001-02 school year and ranks New Jersey first on spending per child, second on percentage of 3-year-olds served and ninth on the percentage of 4-year-olds served. It is one of three states to have programs that meet nine of 10 benchmarks for adequate quality standards. No state program met all 10. For more information, please click here: <http://www.state.nj.us/njded/news/0219ps.htm>.

For more information, please contact the Department of Education Public Information Office at (609) 292-1126.