

New Jersey Pre-K¹

Background

New Jersey funds three targeted pre-K programs with different eligibility and operating schedules.² All three programs are overseen by the Division of Early Childhood Education in the state Department of Education. The largest program, formerly known as the Abbott Preschool Program, served about 19 percent of the state's three-year-olds and 21 percent of the state's four-year-olds during the 2015-16 school year, compared with about 1 percent of three-year-olds and 8 percent of four-year-olds served in the other two programs combined.³ In 2015-16, across all pre-K programs, 57 percent of children were served within the district and 43 percent in private or Head Start centers.⁴

The former Abbott Preschool Program was created in 1998, following a New Jersey Supreme Court ruling in the *Abbott v. Burke* school funding case, which required the state to fund high-quality pre-K open to all three- and four-year-olds in certain high-poverty districts.

How is the pre-K program financed?

Resources are transferred from the state to local school districts, using a formula based on enrollment. Due to the New Jersey Supreme Court decision, the funds for pre-K are protected, but there is no guarantee of increases over time.

School districts have the option of providing pre-K services directly or contracting with private providers. More than half of children are served in Head Start or community child care settings rather than classrooms in schools.

What is the current status of state efforts toward compensation improvement for pre-K teachers?

Two out of the three New Jersey pre-K programs, including the former Abbott Preschool Program, require compensation parity with K-3 teachers for all pre-K teachers, whether in private contracted programs or public schools.⁵ For exact language governing this requirement, see the sidebar [New Jersey State Regulations Governing Compensation Parity](#) in the full report, *Strategies in Pursuit of Pre-K Teacher Compensation Parity: Lessons From Seven States and Cities*.⁶ The following discussion refers to the former Abbott Preschool Program specifically.

Salary: Parity in both starting salary and ongoing salaries is required for teachers with equivalent certification, credentials, and working hours. While the state regulations use the term “comparable,” this standard is enforced by looking at the district salary scale.

1 All information in this profile comes from interview data, unless otherwise specified. Personal communication with Vincent Costanza and Ellen Wolock, New Jersey Department of Education, April 2017 (Follow-up: August 2017).

2 For further information on each of the three programs, see the New Jersey profile in Barnett, W.S., Friedman-Krauss, A.H., Weisenfeld, G.G., Horowitz, M., Kasmin, R., & Squires, J.H. (2017). *The State of Preschool 2016: State Preschool Yearbook*. New Brunswick, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research.

3 See the New Jersey profile in Barnett et al. (2017).

4 Education Law Center. (2017). *NJ's State Funded Preschool Program*. Retrieved from <http://www.edlawcenter.org/research/preschool-data.html>.

5 Barnett, W.S., Weisenfeld, G.G., Brown, K., Squires, J., & Horowitz, M. (2016). *Implementing 15 Essential Elements for High Quality: A State and Local Policy Scan*. New Brunswick, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research.

6 Also available from N.J.A.C. 6A:13A, *Elements of High-Quality Preschool Programs*. Retrieved from <http://www.state.nj.us/education/code/current/title6a/chap13a.pdf>.

Benefits: Benefits are included within the requirements for comparable compensation, but while salary comparability is enforced by looking at the district salary scale, benefits may not necessarily be provided as an equivalent package or at equivalent value for community-based pre-K teachers because, in practice, it is easier to buy better benefits at lower cost in larger school districts than in smaller private settings.⁷

Payment for Professional Responsibilities: Paid time for planning and professional development is also included in the requirements for equivalent time to K-3 teachers. The problem of low wages for early educators has been stalled for decades, but pre-K appears to be an area gaining momentum on how to address this pervasive issue. States and cities across the nation are increasingly pursuing compensation parity between teachers in state-funded pre-kindergarten programs and K-3 teachers.

What was the rationale for taking forward the issue of pay parity?

The New Jersey Supreme Court case ruling made the provision of high-quality pre-K a matter of educational equity, with the goal of narrowing children's educational achievement gaps. Included in the elements of high quality were teachers with education and compensation equivalent to other district teachers.

What was the approach/strategy for moving toward parity?

Compensation parity, along with parity in educational qualifications, was required by the New Jersey Supreme Court, but implementation of these requirements called for the creation of a pipeline of appropriately credentialed teachers, particularly in the community-based settings. As a result, there was a concerted effort to establish clear guidelines for when teachers must achieve their bachelor's degrees and state certification in order to remain employed as pre-K teachers, to fund supports such as scholarships, and to build higher education programs with appropriate coursework to meet those needs.⁸

What has been helpful in moving these efforts along?

A binding legal ruling was clearly the main impetus for moving toward compensation parity requirements in New Jersey, but this achievement would not have been possible without an understanding that high-quality pre-K must include teachers who are as well qualified and well compensated as teachers of older children.

What positive outcomes have been seen as a result of the push toward parity?

The emphasis on high-quality pre-K services, including professional workplace supports for teachers, in the former Abbott Preschool Program has demonstrated positive educational outcomes for children. The Abbott Preschool Program Longitudinal Effects Study (APPLES) estimated the effects of preschool education programs on academic skills in language arts and literacy, mathematics, and science based on standardized tests given to all New Jersey children in 4th and 5th grade.⁹ The study found persistent gains in all tested subjects on the state assessments, with greater test-score gains for children who participated in two years rather than one year of preschool.

7 Coffman, J., Green, M., Bruner, C., & Daniel, Y. (2010). *Reaching for Quality: Lessons from New Jersey on Raising Preschool Teacher Qualification While Maintaining Workforce Diversity*. Boston, MA: BUILD Initiative. Retrieved from <http://www.buildinitiative.org/WhatsNew/ViewArticle/tabid/96/ArticleId/261/Reaching-for-Quality-Lessons-from-New-Jersey-on-Raising-Preschool-Teacher-Qualifications-While-Maint.aspx>.

8 Coffman et al. (2010).

9 Barnett, W.S., Jung, K., Youn, M., & Frede, E. (2013). *Abbott Preschool Program Longitudinal Effects Study: Fifth Grade Follow-Up*. New Brunswick, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research. Retrieved from <http://nieer.org/research-report/201311apples205th20grade-pdf>.

Abbott Preschool Program participation was also linked to lower grade retention and special education placement rates. An explicit link between the quality of the Abbott program and the high compensation levels of pre-K teachers has not been documented. However, a 2008 study of center directors participating in the New Jersey Abbott pre-K program found that center directors attributed the higher salaries to reduced teacher turnover at their sites.¹⁰

What has been challenging about these efforts?

The pre-K administrators interviewed did not specifically mention challenges related to achieving compensation parity in the former Abbott Preschool Program. However, a broader challenge for the New Jersey approach has been securing sufficient funding for substantial expansion of the program to serve three- and four-year-olds outside the former Abbott districts and ensuring that compensation parity requirements apply across all three pre-K programs. Some progress has been made recently with regard to funding — the 2017-18 state budget included an additional \$25 million to expand preschool to further school districts.¹¹

10 Whitebook, M., Ryan, S., Kipnis, F., & Sakai, L. (2008) *Partnering for Preschool: A Study of Center Directors in New Jersey's Mixed-Delivery Abbott Program*. Berkeley, CA: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley. Retrieved from http://cscce.berkeley.edu/files/2008/partnering_preschool_report08.pdf.

11 InsiderNJ. (2017, June 26). Senate budget committee approves budget plan. *Insider NJ*. Retrieved from <https://www.insidernj.com/press-release/senate-budget-committee-approves-budget-plan/>.