# NEW JERSEY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

# PRESCHOOL PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION GUIDELINES

**2015**

**ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

These guidelines were originally developed in February 2003 in conjunction with stakeholders chosen for their diversity and expertise in the field of early childhood education and their commitment to the children of the state of New Jersey. Many thanks go to all those who participated, including other state agencies, advocacy groups, researchers and professional education organizations. Special thanks to all of the individuals who participated in the focus group sessions and responded by letter or e-mail to provide input for the original document.

Based on new research and best practice, significant revisions have been made by the Division of Early Childhood Education in the areas of supporting dual language learners, master teachers, family and community involvement, and fiscal oversight.

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# PRESCHOOL PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION GUIDELINES

## INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this document is to provide guidance to school districts, private providers and local Head Start agencies in the planning and implementation of high-quality preschool programs for three-and four-year old children. These guidelines are designed to meet the *New Jersey Preschool Teaching and Learning Standards.*

Each school district's preschool program should be driven by the research-based best practices offered in this document along with a systematic assessment of the needs of children in that district. With technical assistance from the Department of Education (DOE), school districts can provide high-quality preschool programs via a locally determined mix of in-district, private provider, and local Head Start agency classrooms.

Intensive, high-quality preschool programs can close much of the early achievement gap for lower income children. This substantially increases their school success and produces a host of life-long benefits, including increased school achievement and social and economic success as adults (Schweinhart, Barnes & Weikart, 1993; Ramey & Campbell, 1984; Reynolds, 2000). These goals can be reached through the creation and support of high-quality preschool programs. The preschool effort presents an extraordinary opportunity to meet the needs of New Jersey's most disadvantaged children.

State-funded preschool programs in school districts must include all of the major elements identified by the Department as essential for implementation of a high-quality preschool program and found in chapter 13A, Elements of High Quality Preschool Programs located in the New Jersey Administrative Code.

These elements are the essential ingredients of effective preschool education. High quality teachers and teacher assistants are imperative. Enrollment in general, should not exceed fifteen students in any preschool classroom. Classrooms must be sufficiently large (950 square feet per classroom for new construction and for newly contracted classrooms) and organized for developmentally appropriate preschool activities, which differ significantly from those of elementary school children. Health, nutrition and other services should be incorporated, and family involvement should be maximized.

The guidelines in this document offer a basic framework for individual school districts to use when implementing each component of the preschool program and when evaluating how well children and their communities are being served.

## PRESCHOOL PROGRAM COMPONENTS

### Administrative Oversight

Administrators play an integral role in shaping the quality of each preschool program component, from the oversight of teachers to recruitment and outreach efforts. Because administrative personnel perform such a critical role, this document sets forth guidelines to maximize the effectiveness of their skills, expertise, and time.

The superintendent and designated school district personnel have ultimate responsibility for the implementation of the preschool program. A director and/or supervisor of early childhood education should lead the implementation of the program. The director/supervisor should provide assistance to master teachers/coaches on professional development and best program practices, oversee the recruitment/outreach efforts and ensure the coordination and delivery of comprehensive services, including parent involvement. This administrator may conduct some of the formal evaluations of the classroom teachers in both school district-operated and private provider preschool classrooms. He or she must be well versed in strategies designed to help teachers and other professionals optimize children's learning and development. Regardless of the size of the preschool program in the district, the director/supervisor is responsible for the following:

- Developing and implementing the preschool budget, preschool program plan, annual updates, and professional development plans;
- Contributing to the development of long range facilities plans;
- Supervising registration, recruitment and outreach efforts;
- Overseeing contractual compliance with private provider and local Head Start agencies;
- Collaborating and communicating with the school district office of special services;
- Facilitating transition initiatives in collaboration with other preschool through third grade administrators;
- Meeting regularly with private providers, including local Head Start agencies, to foster collaboration and program implementation including, but not limited to, fiscal and curriculum information;
- Overseeing the implementation of the comprehensive preschool curriculum;
- Providing assistance to all staff responsible for the implementation of appropriate early childhood practices within the preschool program;
- Administering strategies designed to help teachers and other professionals optimize children's learning and development in all domains;
- Coordinating annual program evaluation;
- Hiring, supervising and ensuring evaluation of all in-district staff funded by the preschool programmatic budget; and
- Ensuring that each private provider and local Head Start agency implements a system for classroom teacher observations.

Early Childhood Supervisor

In school districts with greater than 750 enrolled preschool children at least one dedicated in-district early childhood supervisor is provided. In-district early childhood supervisors and administrators of in-district buildings with preschool children must hold the appropriate New Jersey Supervisor's Certificate or New Jersey Principal's Certificate, and have preschool education experience. Experience in preschool education may include: preschool teaching or supervision experience or experience as a director of a licensed private provider or Head Start agency. The supervisor and/or administrator must participate in annual training specific to preschool program planning and implementation and the school district's comprehensive preschool curriculum.

Principals/Vice Principals

In school districts with schools containing preschool or any combination of preschool, kindergarten and elementary classrooms, funding prorated by the proportion of preschool children is provided in the preschool programmatic budget for a principal and vice principal and one administrative support staff member, depending upon the number of teachers employed in each school building. The principal or vice principal in this situation should be involved in both the development of the preschool program plan, annual updates, professional development specific to early childhood education and the supervision of classroom staff.

Support Staff

Administrative support personnel such as secretaries and data clerks are essential to the daily operations of any program. Support staff responsibilities may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Enrollment and registration of preschool children;
- Data collection and entry;
- Clerical assistance to master teachers/coaches, supervisors, directors, and other personnel; and
- Provision of general program information to families.

**Recommended Model**:
These positions lead to effective supervision and support:

- For school districts with total preschool enrollments of fewer than 3,000 preschool children, one early childhood education supervisor should be available for every 750 students minus the number of students enrolled in district stand-alone early childhood education buildings;
- For school districts with at least 3,000 total preschool students, one district-wide administrator/supervisor should be a director or an administrator of the preschool program;
- For school districts with at least 4,000 total preschool students in all settings,

one of these administrators should be an assistant superintendent;

- One principal, one vice principal and one administrative support staff are provided for each stand-alone early childhood center or school serving 300 or more three-and four-year-olds.

**Master Teachers/Coaching**

Master teachers are funded in New Jersey's State Preschool Program to provide and maintain high levels of quality by helping and supporting preschool teachers. The maximum ratio to use when planning for master teachers in state fully funded preschool programs is one master teacher for every 20 preschool classrooms. Their primary role is to visit classrooms and coach teachers using reflective practice to improve instruction. Specific responsibilities include:

*Curriculum & Professional Development*

- Visit classrooms on a regular basis to coach and provide feedback to teachers to improve teaching practices through the reflective cycle
- Coach teachers on the use of Performance-Based Assessments (Teaching Strategies GOLD, CORE, Work Sampling, etc.), including supporting quality assessment, interpretation of data and use of assessment data in planning.
- Administer structured program evaluation instruments (in assigned classrooms) in the fall-winter to measure quality practices in preschool classrooms (e.g., ECERS-3, SELA, PCMI, High/Scope Preschool Program Quality Assessment, Creative Curriculum Fidelity Tool, etc.)
- Use performance-based assessment data and results of structured classroom observations to determine and support a high level of curriculum implementation Plan specific goals and training opportunities, including, but not limited to, modeling classroom practices and lessons, facilitating PLC meetings, and planning and implementing workshops, to improve weak areas identified from structured observation instruments (aggregated data), curriculum observation instruments, performance-based assessment results, district evaluation data, and other information
- Confer with early childhood supervisors to coordinate, articulate, and provide professional development for all early childhood staff
- Provide individualized follow-up support to the teacher's level of development and plan small group meetings/trainings for teachers with similar needs
- Reflect on own professional development needs, attend workshops, read research articles, consult with others, etc.

*Support*

- Confer regularly with the preschool intervention and referral team to discuss how to support teachers and parents with children who have challenging behaviors
- Confer regularly with the community parent involvement specialist to plan for smooth transitions for children entering preschool or going to kindergarten and assist in planning parent involvement activities (e.g., ensuring that the results of the performance-based assessment along with other information about the preschoolers are shared with kindergarten staff, planning parent workshops together, planning visits to kindergarten classrooms)

- Provide technical assistance to district and provider administrators to discuss curriculum goals, professional development, performance-based assessment, structured observation visits, etc.
- Master teachers with specific expertise (e.g., inclusion, bilingual education, mathematics, literacy) should provide consultation to other master teachers
- Perform additional duties as assigned that are directly related to early childhood classroom improvement

*Required Qualifications*

- A bachelor's degree and teacher certification;
- Three to five years experience teaching in preschool programs;
- Experience providing professional development to classroom teachers;
- Experience in implementing developmentally appropriate preschool curricula;
- Experience with performance-based preschool assessments; and
- Beginning September 1, 2007, newly appointed master teachers shall hold certification as follows:
  - ✓ Preschool through grade three standard instructional certificate; or
  - ✓ Standard elementary school instructional certificate and the equivalent of two academic years of full-time experience teaching three and four-year olds under the certificate in a position that would require the preschool through grade three endorsement; or
  - ✓ Standard New Jersey nursery school instructional certificate; or
  - ✓ Preschool through grade three endorsement in addition to other standard instructional certificate, except as indicated at N.J.A.C. 6A:9-11.2 and 11.7.

Priority 1: Master teachers should dedicate the greatest amount of time to classroom visits engaging teachers in reflective practice. During these visits, master teachers should observe classroom practices and provide feedback directly to teaching staff, plan and model exemplary practices and meet with the program directors or principals. Recordkeeping, including use of the Reflective Cycle, should be maintained during these visits.

Priority 2: A substantial amount of time, but less than that devoted to classroom visits, will be dedicated to providing and planning for professional development experiences for classroom teachers. Professional development experiences should be aligned with the *New Jersey Preschool Teaching and Learning Standards*, the school district's DOE approved curriculum and the district's DOE approved professional development plan. Experiences should be differentiated to match varying levels of experience and expertise of the instructional staff. Professional development should be presented in a variety of participant settings, ranging from small groups to cohorts to entire staff.

*Accommodating English Language Learners and Children with IEPs*

Within the master teacher allocation, each district must maintain appropriately credentialed master teachers who can assist preschool teachers and other master teachers in working with specialized populations. Districts with a substantial proportion of English language learners (ELL) or children with individualized education plans (IEPs) served in general education classrooms are required to hire bilingual and inclusion specialists as master teachers. The specialists provide specialized professional development and consultation to other master teachers and in-district and private provider teachers.

- The master teacher with a specialization in bilingual education should possess bilingual or English as a second language certification and either possess or pursue early childhood certification.
- Master teachers with a specialization in inclusion should possess special education certification and either possess or pursue early childhood certification.

*The Role of the Specialized Master Teacher*

Master teachers with a specialization will conduct the same duties of all other master teachers and will have the added responsibility of providing professional development and support for other master teachers regarding inclusion or supporting ELL practices. A district may want to consider assigning each master teacher in their program a specialization (e.g. mathematics, literacy, ELL, inclusion, etc.)

*Professional Development for Master Teachers*

Master teachers also need professional development to support the goals of the early childhood program. Whenever possible, they should be trained by curriculum developers using training of Teacher Trainer models. This will help to ensure sustainable and high quality curriculum implementation. New master teachers must become Early Childhood Professional Development Fellows by completing all requirements of the *The Role of the Master Teacher* course offered by the Division of Early Childhood Education. Master Teachers should also attend annual Master Teacher meetings sponsored by the Division of Early Childhood. School Districts should support Master Teachers in receiving additional training related to their specialization and roles as instructional coaches.

*Recommended Model*

The recommended model to use when budgeting for master teachers is predicated on the understanding that novice teachers and teachers serving children with IEPs and English language learners need greater guidance. Self-contained preschool disabled classroom are not included in the classroom count for this purpose. General education classrooms including students with IEPs should be counted. At a minimum, one master teacher is provided for every 20 preschool classrooms. Each district, regardless of size, is provided at least one full-time master teacher.

## Instructional Staff

Appropriate qualifications of classrooms teachers are an essential component of a high quality preschool classroom. Teachers of preschool children must understand how young children learn and develop, as well as their role in facilitating the growth of each child in all domains, from early math and language arts literacy to social emotional development and science understanding. Preschool teachers must accommodate the individual growth of each child, while taking into account his or her unique circumstances. All preschool classrooms must be staffed with one appropriately certified teacher and one appropriately qualified teacher assistant.

*Certification Requirements for General Education Preschool Teachers*

Ultimately, all preschool classroom teachers must have a bachelor's degree and a preschool through grade three certificate or one of the following other equivalent certifications:

- A bachelor's degree and a certificate of eligibility or a certificate of eligibility with advanced standing for preschool through grade three certification;
- A standard New Jersey nursery school endorsement; or
- Any other equivalent certification, pursuant to N.J.A.C. 6A:9.

**Intervention and Support Services**

The goal of the preschool education program is to provide each child the opportunity to access a high quality preschool learning environment with the individualized supports needed for school success. Individualized supports to children are informed by the use of ongoing records, observations and performance based assessments that document children's behavior, progress, and functioning within the classroom. Observations and performance based assessments provide the necessary information to adapt activities and environments to meet the individual child's distinct learning or behavioral needs. High quality preschool programs also include classroom teachers who have established relationships with the child's family or caregivers, who are the child's "first teachers." Connections with families should occur from the first day of school or even before school starts, to share important information about the child or any concerns that may occur. Information from family and caregivers is vital to understanding an individual child's unique needs. When a child demonstrates learning or behavioral difficulties, the classroom teacher uses all the above resources and enlists other resources such as the master teachers, social workers and family workers. All play a critical role, in supporting teachers and communicating regularly with families.

<u>The Preschool Intervention and Referral Team</u>

In addition to the supports listed above, the Preschool Intervention and Referral Team (PIRT) is in place to assist preschool staff in addressing children's persistent challenging behaviors. Through the development and implementation of an intervention plan and positive behavior support plan (PBS), teachers are given strategies and interventions that address a variety of persistent challenging behaviors in young children (i.e. aggression and lack of socialization), behaviors that may otherwise prevent successful participation in general education classrooms.

- The primary role of the PIRT is to provide support and suggested interventions to teachers so that all children can succeed within the general education classroom.
- PIRT members should have knowledge and training in early childhood education, child development, the district chosen curriculum, and the four levels of the Pyramid Model and Positive Behavior Supports (Fox, Jack, & Broyles, 2005).
- The team may include any combination of the following: teachers, master teachers, behavior specialists, psychologists, learning disabilities teacher-consultants, school social workers, speech and language pathologists or other specialists. The PIRT is supervised by the school district preschool administrator.

*Positive Behavior Support Pyramid Model* (Fox et al., 2005)

Positive Behavior Supports Pyramid Model (PBS) offers a process that provides teachers and families with a way to understand and address a child's persistent challenging behavior. The strategies used to change behavior include teaching new skills, preventing the occurrence of challenging behavior, and supporting the child in achieving meaningful, long-term outcomes. PBS includes a written intervention plan for the teacher

to address problem behaviors that range from aggression, tantrums, and property destruction to social withdrawal.

*Preschool Intervention and Referral Team Responsibilities:*

Preschool Intervention and Referral Teams (PIRT) responsibilities include working with teachers, families and other preschool personnel on the implementation of the district chosen social emotional curriculum and the four levels of the Pyramid Model and Positive Behavior Supports (PBS) from the Center on the Social Emotional Foundations for Early Learning (CSEFEL) and the Technical Assistance Center for Social Emotional Interventions (TACSEI). CSEFEL and TACSEI resources can be obtained at: http://www.vanderbilt.edu/csefel/ and http://www.challengingbehavior.org/do/pyramid_model.htm.

PIRT dedicates the greatest amount of professional time working in classrooms, observing teachers and children, collecting documentation and data, modeling strategies, and providing feedback using CSEFEL, TACSEI and Positive Behavior Supports. PIRT meets outside of the classroom to write intervention and positive behavior support plans based on the data and information gathered during classroom observations and interviews with families, teachers and other relevant staff. PIRT uses a consultation model as outlined by CSEFEL, TACSEI and PBS and does not give therapeutic interventions directly to children.

In addition, PIRT provides substantial yearly professional development on the district's social and emotional curriculum, CSEFEL, TACSEI and the four levels of the pyramid model including PBS, the district's PIRT Protocol and the Request for Assistance (RFA). Professional development is ongoing and is routinely offered by PIRT to classroom teachers, paraprofessionals, special education support staff, administrative staff, and parents and families, in a variety of ways, differentiated to match varying levels of experience, expertise, and need. Professional development should include one-on-one consultations, technical assistance meetings, informal work groups, and structured small and large group presentations.

*Additional PIRT Responsibilities:*

- Coordinate the administration of a developmentally based screening such as the Early Screening Inventory-Revised (Meisels et al., 1997).
- Establish a PIRT assistance Protocol including a Request for Assistance (RFA) form.
- Once an RFA is received, establish and manage a case file for each child. Each case file contains a PIRT Intervention Plan which may include a Positive Behavior Support Plan (PBS) as needed. PBS plans are typically needed for only 1-4% of the classroom population: http://www.vanderbilt.edu/CSEFEL/).
- Conduct classroom visits to observe, coach, model strategies, make verbal and written recommendations, and provide feedback regarding the child's Intervention Plan or PBS plan.

- Modify and adapt the Intervention Plan or PBS plan as necessary throughout the year.
- Consult with necessary professionals and families as applicable (i.e. classroom teacher, master teacher, administrators, social workers, family workers).
- Evaluate the progress of the child and, if necessary, facilitate a written referral to the school district's Child Study Team as set forth in N.J.A.C. 6A:14.
- Facilitate transition of all PIRT case files when necessary to other programs (i.e. kindergarten, CST) per written district policy.

*Screening*

Preschool program regulations require the administration of a developmentally-based early childhood screening assessment, such as the Early Screening Inventory-Revised (Meisels et al., 1997), to each child upon entry into the preschool program. Information from the screening instrument should never be used to determine or deny placement. Rather, it should be used to determine if a child is within one of the three screening categories: 'refer', 're-screen', 'ok'. Parents must be notified before and after all screenings have taken place. Additional information regarding screening is located in the Curriculum and Assessment section of this document.

*Referral to the Child Study Team*

When initial screening indicates that a child should be referred, or a parent, teacher, or PIRT member has a concern about a child's development and suspects a potential disability, the following steps should be taken:

1. Submit a written request to the school district's child study team for evaluation for eligibility for special education and related services. The written request (referral) must be submitted to the appropriate school official. This may be the principal at the neighborhood school, the director of special education, or the child study team coordinator of the school district.
2. The parent, preschool teacher and the child study team (school psychologist, school social worker, learning disabilities teacher-consultant, and speech and language pathologist) meet within twenty days (excluding school holidays) to determine the need for evaluation.
3. After the completion of the evaluation and upon determination of eligibility, an Individualized Education Program (IEP) is developed for the child by an IEP team consisting of a parent, a child study member, a school district representative, the case manager, and the general education teacher. The team determines modifications, interventions, and supplementary aids and services necessary to support the child in the least restrictive environment.

*Services Provided in the Least Restrictive Environment*

As per N.J.A.C.6A: 14-4.2(a) Students with disabilities shall be educated in the least restrictive environment…

- To the maximum extent appropriate, a student with a disability is educated with children who are not disabled;
- Special classes, separate schooling or other removal of a student with a disability from the student's general education class occurs only when the nature or severity of the educational disability is such that education in the student's general education class with the use of appropriate supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily;
- A student with a disability is not removed from the age-appropriate general education classroom solely based on needed modifications to the general education curriculum;

In the event that there is disagreement, the school district has an obligation to inform parents of due process rights in referral. A parent and a preschool teacher or an administrator who is familiar with the school district's preschool programs must be present at all meetings when determining special education services and placement. Classroom teachers are involved in the planning process.

*Referrals from Early Intervention*

Throughout the year, referrals are made to the child study team from the Early Intervention (EI) system which serves children from birth to three years of age. Children exit the EI system at age three. If the child is determined to be eligible for special education and related services as a preschool child with a disability, an Individualized Education Program (IEP) is developed by the child's third birthday.

## Health and Nutrition

The goal of school health services is to strengthen and facilitate the educational process by improving and protecting the health status of children. According to the "School Health Services Guidelines" developed by the New Jersey Department of Education in 2001, the health and intellectual development of children are inextricably related. For instance, screening of students for current immunization helps to reduce absences due to illness. Screening for vision and hearing problems removes potential obstacles to learning. Health services staff provide physical and emotional support so that children can better cope with periodic illness and injury, which are commonly a part of growing up. Schools also provide daily support to students with chronic health needs.

### School Nurse

The school nurse is a health services specialist who assists students, families and staff in attaining and maintaining optimal health and health attitudes. School nurses strengthen and facilitate the educational process by improving and protecting the health status of children and staff.

Nurses who work with preschool children and their families provide the following services:

- Conduct health screenings (vision, hearing, dental, height, and weight screenings);
- Monitor and follow up on individual child health records;
- Document and communicate with staff and parents about allergies or other health issues;
- Assist in written policies related to health, safety and nutrition;
- Assist parents in locating appropriate medical and health resources, as needed;
- Assist in the development of written emergency procedures; and
- Provide health-related training to staff, parents and/or children.

**Recommended Model:**

- Nurses will be employed at a ratio of one for every 300 preschool students in fully funded state preschool programs and will provide services to all students, including those in private provider programs.

- Each school district will conduct health examinations to include, at a minimum, vision, hearing, dental, height and weight screenings of each eligible child upon entry into the school district.

- Parent education will include regular health and safety topics designed to meet the unique needs of families enrolled in the program.

## Food and Nutrition

Adequate nutrition is a critical component of the preschool program. Meals and snacks should be planned to meet a child's nutritional requirements as recommended by the Child Care Food Program of the United States Department of Agriculture.

Meals and snacks are essential for young children's optimal growth and development. Healthy foods help to ensure that children will be ready to fully participate learning opportunities. During meal and snack-times, preschool children learn to make nutritious choices, discover a wide variety of different foods, and develop healthy eating habits while engaging in language-rich interactions. Nutritious meals and snacks should be offered every two to three hours at appropriate times (not too early or too late) during the school day. Food should be offered to children who are hungry when arriving at school after a scheduled mealtime.

### *Meal Health and Safety*

Programs should be diligent in maintaining a healthy, safe environment for food preparation and eating areas. Staff and children's hand-washing requires consistent attention. Proper washing and sanitizing procedures should be followed for cleaning tables used for eating, food preparation surfaces, and food equipment before and after food use. The recommended procedure for cleaning eating surfaces involves washing tables with a soapy solution, then sanitizing with a bleach-water solution. Tables should be dried with disposable paper towels. Staff should always wash their hands after wiping tables and before serving food. Before meals, children should wash their hands with soap and water, dry their hands with a paper towel, and go directly to a table.

### *Family Preferences and Food Allergies*

Families' dietary restrictions due to religious beliefs, personal beliefs, cultural customs, and health issues should be respected. Information regarding food allergies should be documented in writing for each affected child and be readily available to all staff involved with children's meals and snacks. This includes kitchen personnel and substitute instructional staff.

### *Meal Time is Part of the Educational Day*

Meal and snack times offer excellent learning opportunities. They allow children to:

- Practice emerging independence by using child-sized containers and utensils, allowing preschoolers to set tables, pour beverages, serve themselves, and clear their places;
- Interact in a pleasant social atmosphere as they participate with peers and adults in decision-making, sharing, communicating with others, and practicing good manners during family-style mealtime settings;

- Learn healthy habits such as hand-washing;
- Practice counting, sorting, patterning and one-to-one correspondence; and
- Enhance language development by hearing and using new vocabulary, and by engaging in conversational turn taking.

*Family Style Meals*

These important language, math, and social skills can best occur in family-style meal settings in children's classrooms. School cafeterias often provide table and seating heights that are inappropriate for preschoolers. More importantly, opportunities for teachers to extend children's language and learning are decreased in large, noisy environments.

## Family and Community Involvement

All aspects of the child's life can be more meaningfully supported with systematic coordination between home and school. Many families encounter challenges that place children at risk. Basic issues involving clothing, shelter, and medical care add to family stress and interfere with a child's ability to learn. Program staff should support and partner with parents by making every attempt to understand their perspectives, enhance their understanding of child development, assist them in reaching their goals, and involve them in the preschool program. Programs must carefully balance understanding of obstacles that their families face with high expectations for the children's success.

*Defining Family Involvement*

Family makeup varies widely and can include parents, stepparents, grandparents, brothers, sisters and others living in the household. Families also come from a variety of cultural backgrounds, values, and traditions. Differences can be misinterpreted as indifference to children's education. There are a variety of ways to effectively engage family members in their child's preschool experience, from helping at the school, to taking an active role in educational decision-making processes. It is critical that schools develop policies that are sensitive to, and reflective of, the communities they serve.

*General Ways to Include Families* (Epstein, 2002)

- Communicating: Communication between home and school is regular and two-way;
- Parenting: Parenting skills are promoted and supported;
- Student Learning: Parents play an integral role in assisting student learning;
- Volunteering: Parents are welcome in the school, and their support and assistance are sought;
- School Decision-Making and Advocacy: Parents are involved in the decisions that affect children and families; and
- Collaborating with Community: Community resources are used to strengthen schools, families, and student learning.

*Specific Ways to Include Families*

The best way to accommodate the varying types and degrees of family participation is to offer a range of flexible ways to get involved. The following approaches easily adapt to each individual family's changing needs and circumstances:

- Include teachers, parents and other family members in the design of family services plans;
- Ask families to develop their own participation goals;
- Design a volunteer calendar and encourage parents to participate when possible;
- Communicate regularly. Focus on verbal communication when written language is an obstacle;

- Create a browsing and checkout library with books, videos, cassettes, brochures and magazines;
- Make it easy for parents to attend meetings and visit the school by offering transportation and child care;
- Hold meetings at different times of the day to accommodate working schedules;
- Send frequent communications to families about both individual children and classroom content. Provide information about key child developmental milestones and ways to nurture and support growth. Offer specific, individualized strategies that guide families in how to help at home;
- Act as a clearinghouse for external supports such as local businesses, health care agencies, and colleges to make services more accessible; and
- Solicit the help of interested family partners.

The following positions are provided to address family needs:

Community and Parent Involvement Specialist (CPIS)/Parent Liaison

The Community and Parent Involvement Specialist (CPIS) or Parent Liaison is a district position that oversees the district's family services. The CPIS is responsible for facilitating the community needs assessment, staffing the Early Childhood Education Advisory Council, organizing family involvement plans and activities, and coordinating work with other school district professionals and community agencies and providers.

Social Worker

The social worker is a district position in the role of collaborating with the classroom teachers, master teachers/coaches, CPIS and other school district professionals to support the Family Services Program. In conjunction with the CPIS, the social worker should reach out to families, determine individual needs, provide advocacy services and help obtain available community services. Responsibilities also include assisting parents in learning about child development, nutrition, providing a safe environment and how to support the curriculum chosen by the school district. The social worker should accomplish this by designing and providing family workshops based on identified needs and topics revealed on parent surveys.

Family Worker

Family workers are provider employees that have experience working with families, as well as knowledge of local community resources and social service agencies. Family workers work closely with the CPIS, in-district social workers, master teachers/coaches, teachers, private provider center directors, and other school district professionals, as needed, and assist in the recruitment and outreach process. The family worker has ongoing communication with families to ensure that their social and health services needs are being met. Family workers visit each family at least three times per school year.

**Recommended Model**:
This staffing model supports and extends the services provided by classroom teachers by helping to maintain communication with families and connecting families with community resources and services.

- One family worker should serve every 45 children and their families in private provider settings;
- A social worker should serve the school district-operated classrooms at a ratio of one for every 250 children; and
- One community and parent involvement specialist or person designated to serve in this role should fulfill this function in the school district.

Local Community Collaboration

Everyone benefits when families, schools, and community (e.g., local businesses, community colleges, and health agencies) are invested in the school district's implementation of the preschool program. Schools enjoy the informed support of families and community members, and families experience many opportunities to contribute to their children's education.

To ensure effective collaboration:

- Each school district will form an Early Childhood Advisory Council to review preschool program implementation and support transition as children move from preschool through grade three. The Community Parent Involvement Specialist or person serving in this role employed within the school district staffs the council; and
- The Early Childhood Advisory Council will provide an opportunity for local stakeholders invested in the education and welfare of preschool-age children to review progress towards full implementation of high-quality programs.

**Recommended Model**:
The following practices will help identify and provide services that match the needs of the children and families.

- One community and parent involvement specialist or person designated to serve in this role should fulfill this function in the school district. In smaller school districts, this position may be combined with another position. The CPIS will coordinate the advisory council, evaluate the needs of families, organize and coordinate systematic parent involvement plans and activities, and coordinate work with social service personnel and other agencies.

The Advisory Council might include, but not be limited to, representatives of the following groups:

- Child care providers, pediatric medical providers, Head Start agencies, child and family advocates, municipal government, health professionals/agencies, social service providers, higher education, philanthropic community, mental health agencies, school district central office, teacher's union, business community, parents, kindergarten through grade three teacher(s), bilingual education specialists, supervisors and administrative organizations, early intervention/special education groups, community groups such as: NAACP, Urban League, churches, YMCA/YWCA, and The New Jersey Association for the Education of Young Children (NJAEYC).

**Suggested Responsibilities of the Council**

- Participate in the community assessment of specific community needs and resources, including facilities, as they pertain to the implementation of high-quality preschool services;
- Review preschool program implementation and support transition from preschool through grade three.

**Structure and Operations**:
To implement local collaboration as defined here, the council should do the following:

- Meet at least quarterly;
- Elect its own leadership and adopt its own bylaws; and
- Be led by elected co-chairs, consisting of one district representative and one community representative; and
- Concentrate on preschool as well as the preschool through third grade continuum.

Collaboration with Head Start Programs Serving Eligible Children

Head Start is the nation's oldest federally-funded early care and education program. Its mission is to promote school readiness by enhancing the social and cognitive development of young children by providing educational, health, nutritional, social and other services to low income children and families.

Governed by the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) within the US Department of Health and Human Services, the program provides grants to local public and private non-profit and for-profit agencies to provide comprehensive early care and education services to economically disadvantaged children and families, with a special focus on helping preschoolers develop the early reading and math skills they need to be successful in school (http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ohs/about/index.html#mission).

Head Start programs serving eligible children in each community should be included in all preschool efforts. As contracted preschool service providers, Head Start programs will work systematically toward achieving the standards of high-quality preschool programs.

*Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)*

The overall goal of providing high quality preschool to low income children will be best met through a collaborative effort between school districts and local Head Start agencies. To accomplish effective collaboration, ACF requires that Head Start grantees and the local districts enter into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU).

## Curriculum and Assessment

Curriculum

Curriculum, broadly speaking, is "what schools teach." This includes all that is planned for children in the classroom, such as learning centers, morning circle or a teacher-initiated small-group activity. Curriculum also includes the unplanned experiences a child has while building a bridge with paper towel tubes, string and popsicle sticks, waiting for the bus, at the snack table or when frustration leads to a temper tantrum. Curriculum is the entire range of experiences that children have at school. Content objectives and learning outcomes, knowledge of child development and careful observation of the needs and interests of individual children guide a curriculum. The National Association for the Education of Young Children calls this "developmentally appropriate practice" (Neuman, Copple, & Bredekamp, 2000). Developmentally appropriate practice follows the interactive or constructivist approach.

The *Preschool Teaching and Learning Standards* delineate effective teaching practices linked to developmentally appropriate learning outcomes. This is the framework for planning and adopting curricula for preschool classrooms. It is not meant to replace planned curricula, but instead to be a guide for making important curricular decisions. There is no one "best" curriculum for all programs. There are many excellent models that meet the guidelines for developmentally appropriate practice and the *Standards*. The four curriculum models below each meet the following criteria for effective curricula:

- Aligned with the *Standards;*
- Provide methods for inclusion of students with disabilities;
- Have clear, research-based content and teaching strategies;
- Include significant content taught with focus and integration;
- Focus on maximizing child initiation and engagement;
- Are developmentally appropriate; and
- Show evidence of benefits.

The four curricula are:

*The Creative Curriculum®*

The Creative Curriculum® for Preschool is a comprehensive, scientifically-based curriculum, linked to an assessment system that addresses teachers' need to know what to teach and why, and how children learn best. It specifies the literacy, math, science, social studies, arts, and technology content to be taught, based on published standards. It relates directly to the subject area curricula used in elementary schools, so children's learning in preschool forms the basis of all of the learning that will follow. Its distinguishing features are a framework for decision making and a focus on interest areas. The Creative Curriculum® for Preschool is inclusive of all children—those developing typically, children with disabilities, and English language learners (Dodge, 2002).

*Curiosity Corner®*

Curiosity Corner was developed as a comprehensive school reform program by the Success for All Foundation in response to the *Abbott* decision. The program was piloted in the winter of 1999 and then implemented and evaluated in 1999-2000 and 2000-2001. The curriculum provides a developmental approach emphasizing language and literacy as well as physical, emotional and interpersonal development, math, science, social studies, music, movement and art. The literacy-focused, problem solving program provides teachers and children with structured thematic units that include concrete, interactive experiences with detailed instructions and materials. Effective instruction is built around the concept of cooperative learning within a carefully designed and supportive structure. Extensive training and support for teachers is integral to ongoing curriculum implementation (SFA, 2005).

*High/Scope Preschool Curriculum*

The High/Scope Curriculum, utilized in thousands of programs worldwide, is based on the work of constructivists: Jean Piaget, High/Scope's founder David Weikart and others. The basic premise of the High/Scope Curriculum is that children learn best by doing. "Control" is shared between adults and children so that children's creativity and exploration of individual interests are encouraged. The teacher's role is that of a facilitator who observes and interacts with children and, with the High/Scope Content (Key Experiences), provides high-quality experiences and interactions that keep children engaged and learning. The High/Scope Key Experiences align with *New Jersey*'s *Standards* for young children (Weikart, 1970).

*Tools of the Mind*

Tools of the Mind, which started in 1992, is the result of collaborative work between Russian and American educational researchers based on the theories of Lev Vygotsky. Utilizing the Vygotskian approach, a series of strategies were created to support meta-cognitive and meta-linguistic skills as well as other skills essential to literacy development. Play is the central teaching tool, within a scaffolded learning environment that focuses on giving children the tools they need that will lead to the development of higher mental functions (Bodrova & Leong, 2007). Techniques include teacher's facilitation of children's construction of individual play plans and asking children to describe multiple, imaginative uses for open-ended objects such as blocks. Central to the approach is the use of scaffolded writing to help children recognize words as units, work with the sounds that make up words, and use letters to represent those sounds. The program emphasizes that young children must build strong speaking and social skills and be able to exercise emotional and behavioral control (self-regulation) before they can learn to read.

## Assessment

*Assessment* is the ongoing process of documenting evidence of early learning in order to make informed instructional decisions. This evidence may include anecdotal records of children's conversations and behaviors in individual, small- and large-group situations, samples of artwork and drawings, and photographs, recordings or other records of children engaged in activities and play. Discussions and decisions about children's learning should be directly linked to a set of clearly defined learning goals (*Standards*).

### *The Major Purpose of Assessment in Preschool Education*

In a report to the national goals panel, Shepard, Kagan, and Wurtz (1998) argued that, "An appropriate assessment system may include different assessments for different categories of purpose, such as:

- Assessment to support learning;
- Assessments for identification of special needs;
- Assessments for program evaluation and monitoring trends; and
- Assessments for high-stakes accountability" (p.7).

The primary purpose of the assessment of young children is to support learning and help educators determine appropriate classroom activities for individuals and groups of children.

The assessment of young children's learning should do the following:

- Build on multiple forms of evidence of the child's learning;
- Take place over a period of time;
- Reflect sensitivity to each child's special needs, home language, learning style, and developmental stage.

The information from the assessment process should do the following:

- Connect to developmentally appropriate learning goals;
- Add to an understanding of the child's growth and development;
- Provide information that can be applied directly to instructional planning; and
- Be communicated with the child's family and special education personnel when appropriate.

### *Curriculum-based Assessment*

Curriculum-based assessment or otherwise known as performance-based assessment is intended to support learning. Gullo (2005) describes curriculum-based assessment as, "a wide-ranging approach to assessment that directly links the assessment process to the curriculum content and instructional strategies used within the classroom" (p.160). Therefore, districts are encouraged to use the assessment instrument that is tied to the comprehensive preschool curriculum such as High/Scope's Child Observation Record and the Creative Curriculum's Developmental Curriculum.

*The Parents*

Parents should be partners in the accurate and sensitive assessment of young children. The following practices help encourage parental involvement in child assessments:

- Accentuate the positive when discussing children;
- Talk about child observations informally, during everyday conversations with parents;
- Explain assessment approaches at a parent meeting or workshop. Be clear about the differences between standardized tests and curriculum-based assessments;
- Write about assessment in a newsletter or a special letter home;
- Invite parents to be partners in the assessment progress. Give them the opportunity to collect and discuss samples of their child's drawings or notes on the child's language and conversation; and
- Support comments with documentation showing what the child has accomplished over time.

*The Children*

Everyone has a view of a child's abilities, preferences, and behaviors, including the child. Do the following to effectively involve the children in their own assessment:

- Observe and document things the children say and do. Often random statements such as, "I was this big on my last birthday, now I'm THIS big," are evidence that children are capable of assessing what they can do and how they are changing;
- Ask children about themselves. Children will tell you what they do and do not like to do. Some children may be pleased by a conference-like situation in which they have the adult's undivided attention, while others may respond to more informal discussions;
- Ask children to assess their work. Ask children to help decide which work should be included in their portfolio. Respect their choices and responses about their work; and
- Let children take pictures of their most prized work from time to time. They can make a bulletin board display of their specially chosen picture portfolio.

*Achievement Tests*

When assessing young children's progress, individual- and group-administered norm referenced tests of achievement are usually inappropriate tools to inform instructional planning. Such measures may be appropriate to administer to a sample of children for large scale program-wide evaluation.

*Developmental Screening Measures*

Developmental screening is a brief assessment procedure designed to identify children who might be at risk for a possible learning problem or delay. Screening tools quickly

sample children's skills across areas of language, reasoning, gross motor, fine motor, and social development. Screening is only the first step in the assessment process. It does not provide enough information to identify and assist children needing special education services.

The following protocol is recommended when using a screening device:

- Screen upon entry to the program within the first month of school by the child's teacher.
- Screen to determine if further evaluation is necessary; never use as a sole means for identifying children needing special services or for providing intervention.
- Do not use screening as a pretest/posttest assessment. The screening process is not designed to show growth over time.
- For children who fall into the "re-screen" category, screen within the time frame recommended by the screening instrument (usually within six weeks).
- For children, who fall into the "refer" category, or fall below the predetermined cutoff, after parental consent, refer to the child study team (via written referral) for further, more in-depth evaluation.
- Advise parents as to the purpose and results of the screening and notify them both before and after the screening takes place.

*Referral for an Evaluation*

When a potential disability is suspected, or if a child's screening results require it, a written referral to the school district's child study team starts the process of determining whether a child may be eligible for special education. The parent, preschool teacher, PIRT and the child study team meet to determine the need for evaluation and discuss the assessments to be completed. After completion of the evaluation and a determination of eligibility, an Individualized Education Program (IEP) is developed. In addition to special education personnel, the IEP team always includes the parent and the preschool teacher. The team determines what types of support are necessary, such as modifications to the classroom or special education services. To the maximum extent appropriate, preschoolers with disabilities should receive their preschool education with their peers.

## Professional Development

Each school district will submit an annual district-wide preschool professional development plan. This plan should be designed to achieve the *Standards*. The professional development plan must be directly related to the school district's long-term vision for their preschool through third grade program. It should include provisions for systematic ongoing training and be based on research on adult learning and children's development, as well as on a formal needs assessment. In addition to in-service workshops, various professional development techniques may be incorporated, such as mentoring, peer coaching, modeling, self-assessment, observation and feedback, and team development. The plan should also include steps to evaluate the effectiveness of each professional development strategy.

*Professional Development to Improve Classroom Quality*

Using systematic classroom observation data to plan professional development for preschool teachers and assistant teachers is necessary for improving quality. School districts should use a structured observation instrument or set of instruments approved by the Department to measure quality practices in preschool classrooms. Through examination of individual classroom data and aggregate school district data, finely tuned professional development can be planned. Teachers and school districts then set goals for themselves and provide training opportunities to improve in the weaker areas.

*Guidance on the Use of Structured Classroom Observation Instruments*

Structured classroom observation instruments provide a lens for the examination of the many components of classroom quality from the nature of teacher-child interactions to the availability of materials and activities that support early learning and development. Using a set of criteria and a rubric for scoring, structured observation instruments allow teachers and administrators to evaluate a range of classroom features. These observations inform individual and program-wide professional development and serve as a means of tracking program quality from year to year

<u>The Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale-Third Edition (ECERS-3)</u>
The ECERS-3 is a nationally recognized measure of preschool classroom quality. This instrument can be used to collect data for classroom or program improvement and as a comparative index across programs and over time.

<u>The Teaching Pyramid Observation Tool (TPOT)</u>
The TPOT is an observation instrument that measures the implementation of the Pyramid Model of practices that support children's social and emotional competence and prevent challenging behaviors. This tool should be used primarily for coaching classroom staff as well as aggregating data to determine professional development or program improvement plans.

<u>Curriculum-based Instruments</u>

*High/Scope's* PQA, *The Creative Curriculum's* Fidelity Tool, *Tools of the Mind's* Preschool Teacher Self-Reflection and *Curiosity Corner's* Implementation Checklist and Curiosity Implementation Self Assessment Guide are examples of curriculum-specific assessments that have a key role in maintaining curriculum fidelity.

Targeted Classroom Observation Instruments

If classrooms across the district have an average score of 5.0 or above on the ECERS-3 and achieve a high level of curriculum implementation using the measures associated with the program's curriculum, the district may want to instead consider more targeted instruments such as the Supports for Early Literacy Assessment, the Preschool Classroom Mathematics Inventory, or the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS), depending on need.

Reliability and Calibration

Reliability is the degree to which an assessment tool produces intended results. It is the process that will help the observer use the measure in a manner consistent with the way in which it is intended to be used. Most structured classroom observation instruments come with a recommended system of reliability to help observers use them in an accurate and consistent manner. If the instrument does not come with materials to guide the reliability process, the developer should be contacted.

Regardless of the instrument(s) administered, a system of calibration must be in place. Calibration is the degree to which multiple observers within the program observe and interpret a tool in the same way; specifically its "consistency" across staff members. It is important that master teachers and administrators use classroom observation instruments with consistency, so that they can appropriately inform program improvement.

For coaching purposes, it is generally not required that an observer be trained to reliability on the chosen instrument. However, to ensure that staff are interpreting each item correctly, they should be trained in the scoring rubric and practice what they have learned with a "reliable" observer to make sure that they are interpreting each item correctly. When using an observation tool for high-stakes decisions, such as continuance of provider contracts, the observations must be completed by reliable observers as outlined below.

Choosing a classroom observation instrument

Districts should be wary of using more than one formal observation instrument at a time, as the process can be time consuming. They should understand the purpose of each instrument and how the results will be interpreted and used. Thorough knowledge of these tools can inform supervisors' and master teachers' classrooms visit on a regular basis throughout the year.

- ✓ For new classrooms, classrooms with significant changes (such as a change in staff) and classrooms scoring under a 5.0, the ECERS-3 should be used on an annual basis to facilitate the quality improvement process.
- ✓ The TPOT should be administered by PIRT Specialists on an annual basis. It is recommended that, whenever possible, the TPOT is administered by the PIRT

Specialist as the Master Teacher administers the ECERS-3 or other chosen observation instrument to provide coherent, consistent coaching to classroom staff.

- ✓ For classrooms that score consistently over a 5.0 for at least 2 consecutive years on the ECERS-3, curriculum-based classroom assessments should be used instead (e.g. PQA, Fidelity Tool, etc.) on an annual basis to ensure high quality implementation of the program's curriculum. ECERS-3 should be administered in these classrooms every two to three years to insure that quality is maintained.
- ✓ For classrooms that score consistently over a 5.0 on the ECERS-3, also consider using more focused instruments depending on need such as the Support for Early Literacy Assessment, Preschool Classroom Mathematics Inventory or Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS).

<u>Using a structured observation instrument for coaching</u>

The purpose of administering these instruments is to present individual teachers with a template for effective practice.

- ✓ Structured observations should be used as formative evaluation tools for professional development purposes.
- ✓ Master teachers or PIRT Specialists should ask teachers to use the instrument for self-evaluation with time for discussion prior to administration of the instrument.
- ✓ Master Teachers and PIRT Specialists should visit each assigned classroom early in the school-year.
- ✓ The results of the classroom observations serve as the basis for the coaching model known as the reflective cycle, which involves a discussion between the master teacher and each classroom teacher shortly following the observation.
- ✓ The Master Teacher/PIRT Specialist and classroom teacher determine areas of improvement and use relevant sections from the classroom observation instrument for follow up.

Results from the use of these structured observation instruments **should not** be used for teacher evaluation or personnel decisions; appropriate teacher evaluation tools should be used for those purposes.

<u>Using the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale-Third Edition for accountability in preschool provider settings</u>

According to NJAC 6A:10A-2.3(j)3(i.), "The district board of education in consultation with the Early Childhood Advisory Council (ECAC) and with approval from the Department shall establish a minimum acceptable score for all preschool classrooms in operation in the district". If any classroom falls below the minimum acceptable score, an improvement plan needs to be established. The minimum acceptable score should be close to the average for the district; not too high or too low. The steps to using the ECERS-3 for accountability purposes are described below.

- ✓ The master teacher conducts an ECERS-3 in a classroom as part of her/his individualized professional development responsibilities (as indicated above).
- ✓ After extensive assistance, if follow-up observations reveal serious concerns, these are discussed with the supervisor, principal or child care center director and teacher to establish goals and a timeframe for making the required changes.

- ✓ If improvements are not evident at the end of the timeframe, then "a reliable independent observer approved by the NJ Department of Education – Division of Early Childhood Education evaluates the classroom or program". *Observations by master teachers may not be used to determine whether to contract with a classroom or provider.*
- ✓ If it is verified that the classroom/program quality is below the minimum acceptable score in the contract, steps are taken by the district to remove the teacher from the classroom or terminate the Abbott Preschool Contract between the preschool provider and the district.

Using structured observation instruments for professional development planning
In addition to using structured observation instruments for individual classroom teacher support, the district should also analyze the results of the observations to determine the staff development needs of the district. Differentiated professional development should be part of this plan.

Using structured observation instruments for program improvement
Programs should aggregate data from Structured Observation Instruments to help inform program planning and improvement. Data should be aggregated at the item and domain/subscale levels as well as aggregating overall scores. Further, data should be disaggregated based on setting or other relevant characteristics, which will help inform targeted planning and program improvement efforts.

*District Wide Professional Development*

Too often, school district staff members are not knowledgeable about "best practices" or curricula for preschool and may have inappropriate expectations for this age group. Therefore, district-wide professional development should be available that includes the benefits of preschool education and the elements of effective preschool tailored to the different audiences. For example, administrators need information, including, but not limited to, criteria for evaluating preschool teachers, preschool language and literacy, (including the needs of dual language learners), knowledge of the curriculum components and appropriate adult-child interaction strategies, particularly classroom management and facilitation of children's language and reasoning skills. Child study teams, social workers and their administrators need information on preschool education for young children. Additional support staff including lunch assistants, custodians and bus drivers should receive information about interacting with young children.

Professional development should address the needs of administrators, master teachers, private provider and Head Start directors, and preschool teachers in district operated classrooms, private provider and local Head Start agency classrooms. It should address the needs of other educational staff, including all teacher assistants, intervention and referral team members, teachers of children in self-contained settings, child study team members, speech and language therapists, social workers, learning consultants, occupational therapists, behavioral specialists, and nurses. It should also support family workers, parent liaisons and any other support staff. An approach which supports

learners' construction of new ideas or concepts based upon their current knowledge should be used in developing the professional development plan.

Professional development shall be planned and implemented as a comprehensive, multiyear strategy for improvement. It must adhere to the *Standards* and focus on implementation of the school district's comprehensive preschool curriculum. Each activity in the professional development plan must represent an integral component of the comprehensive plan as opposed to staff attendance at workshops or seminars addressing an array of discrete topics. Professional development for teachers should always include in-class follow-up of the content of the training.

*Teacher Professional Development*

The New Jersey Department of Education requires teachers to pursue 100 hours of professional development over a five-year period. These professional development hours are to focus on training in the implementation of the Core Curriculum Content Standards and related topics. With the publication of the revised *Standards*, a base has been formed for the appropriate preparation of preschool teachers. Since so many new teachers are entering the field, and many more teachers are joining the ranks of early childhood teaching from other grades and disciplines, it is essential that all teachers working with young children are grounded in the knowledge base of preschool education. This knowledge base includes the following aspects of developmentally appropriate practice:

- Knowledge of child development, including research on the relationship between early experiences and brain development;
- Design of the learning environment;
- Preschool curriculum and assessment;
- Classroom management techniques;
- Emergent literacy;
- Enhancing problem-solving, skill development and integrated content knowledge in math, social studies, science, the arts and other domains of learning;
- Promoting social competence and healthy emotional development;
- Performance based assessment;
- Cultural competence;
- Inclusion practices;
- Methods for enhancing language development in the home language, as well as English;
- Technology in the preschool classroom; and
- Family and community involvement.

These training topics should be required for all teachers and delivered in a systematic, on-going basis. All training should include relevant theory and current research and their applications to classroom practice.

Based on the school district's professional development plan, teaching staff should attend a variety of workshops each year. Integrated with the comprehensive preschool

curriculum, these workshops should be both formal and informal, offered by master teachers and followed by in-class support. This professional development should be tailored to meet the needs observed and identified in classroom evaluations. Preschool teachers should attend building- or district-wide training, if appropriate, but not at the expense of training designed specifically for the preschool program.

*Peer Tutoring*

The value of teachers learning and working together is well recognized. Opportunities should be provided for preschool teachers to observe each other and to collaborate on curriculum development and meeting student needs. Master teachers/coaches should be responsible for helping teachers to build collaboration opportunities into the school schedule. Each school district should develop a plan to allow interactions between teachers to become more regular than incidental.

*Conferences*

Participation in large conferences does not substitute for ongoing, professional development. Local, state or regional conferences tend to offer few opportunities for active participation and hands-on experiences. In addition, there is no current method to evaluate how conference attendance meets professional development goals.

## Supporting Dual Language Learners

When young children enter preschool, they are still learning all about language. The strategies and approaches that are used to foster language development have critical implications for lifelong literacy, academic achievement and school success. Language-rich classrooms that immerse children in oral language experiences and developmentally appropriate practices provide the optimal environment for fostering language development (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009).

Many young children entering preschool classrooms come from homes in which English is not the first language. These children, referred to as English language learners (Ell), will be acquiring English as a second language. The linguistic and social needs of English language learners present challenges to monolingual teachers. Special consideration must be given to English language learners to help them feel welcomed, valued and accepted; and to provide the ideal foundation for their language and literacy development. Research in early childhood education and second language development emphasizes developmentally appropriate practices that are specific to three and four year olds, and addresses the unique needs of second language learners (August, Carlo, Dressler, Snow, 2005).

## Bilingualism and biculturalism

In the 21st century bilingualism should be a goal for all students. Schools must create learning environments that are culturally and linguistically relevant and that build upon the culture, language, strengths and practices of all the children and families that they serve. There are considerable benefits of knowing a second language, including: improved student academic performance, enhanced problem solving skills, increased cognitive tasks (Morton & Harper, 2007), better career opportunities, increased global marketability and biculturalism.

Research in cognitive neuroscience indicates that bilingualism has a positive effect on social emotional development, also referred to as executive function, which is directly related to children's academic success (Yoshida, 2008). Additionally, knowledge of two languages deepens children's understanding of important mathematical concepts (Yoshida, 2008). Knowledge learned through one language paves the way for knowledge acquisition in the second language (Lugo-Neris, Jackson & Goldstein, 2010). Therefore, students who learn content in one language can be expected to demonstrate content knowledge in the second language once they acquire the language skills to express that knowledge. The long-term cognitive advantages of bilingualism will not accrue until students have sufficiently developed both languages (Genesee, Lindholm-Leary, Saunders & Christian 2005).

## English language learners in the United States

The United States is becoming increasingly diverse culturally, ethnically and linguistically. In 2006, approximately 20% of children age 5-17 spoke a language other

than English at home (Estrada, Gomez, Ruiz-Escalante, 2009).The projections are that by 2030, 1 in 4 students will be English language learners. Currently, 80% of English language learners in the United States are Spanish speakers. The Latino population represents the fastest growing student group in our nation's public schools (Advocates for Children of New Jersey, 2012). The demographic changes in our society necessitate that public schools become more adept in creating effective research-based programs and utilizing developmentally appropriate practices to successfully meet the needs of young dual language learners (Garcia, Jensen & Scribner, 2009). English language learners are often at risk for academic failure. The future productivity of the workforce in the United States is dependent on the commitment to and success of our early childhood education programs, especially for second language learners.

**English language learners in New Jersey**

The linguistic diversity in New Jersey mirrors the nation. In 2010, 34% of the children in New Jersey lived in a family in which at least one family member was born in a foreign country and 66% of these children spoke a language other than English at home (Advocates for Children of New Jersey, 2012). In 2008-09, there were 187 language represented in NJ public schools. New Jersey ranks 7$^{th}$ in the percentage of English language learners in K-12 public schools. Spanish is the most common second language spoken**.**

**Support for the home language**

Most English language learners in the United States are enrolled in mainstream classes with general education teachers who lack the appropriate knowledge and strategies to teach linguistically diverse students (Estrada, Gomez, Ruiz-Escalante, 2009). Preschool classrooms should be child-centered, and teachers must incorporate practices and perspectives that celebrate the linguistic and cultural diversity of all the children to foster the positive socio-emotional development of young children (Hwa-Froelich & Vigil, 2004). It is critical that teachers provide support for children's home language in the preschool years because it impacts the child's basic language foundation and their ability to understand and grasp content knowledge.

Classroom support for children's language occurs best in the context of natural interactions and environments. Preschool English language learners should be provided with daily activities and experiences that promote oral language development and phonemic awareness in both their home language (to the maximum extent possible) and English. This can occur through daily music and movement activities, including songs, chants, finger plays and rhyming activities.

Providing preschool English language learners with experiences that focus on oral language development in their native language helps to develop a strong foundation as they transfer learning in English (August, Calderon & Carlo, 2002); and research has shown that early literacy skills transfer from one language to another (August, Carlo, Dressler & Snow, 2005). These foundational skills are the precursors for reading and

mathematics. Additionally, the child's first language is intricately tied to their concept of self, family and home; and when young children lose their first language they experience a separation from the cultural and social nuances of their families and communities (Fillmore, 2000).

**Dual language Programs**

At the Department of Education, we strongly support dual language programs, in which students are engaged in "academic" work in both English and another language as an effective way to meet the needs of English language learners and close the achievement gap (Lindholm-Leary, 2001). Dual language programs integrate English language learners and English speaking students and provide instruction in English and the native language of the English language learners. They are an effective way to provide second language instruction through an immersion approach for both bilingual and monolingual English speaking students. Dual language programs provide content area instruction in both languages for a significant portion of the instructional time, in classroom settings that promote language and social equality with the goal of full bilingual proficiency for both native and non-native speakers of English.

This model provides a win-win approach that is beneficial for all students. In this model, the goal is fluency in English and Spanish (or another language) for both monolingual English speaking students and for English language learners. Transitional bilingual programs are subtractive programs in which the student's first language is replaced with a new one and the first language is underdeveloped or lost (Fillmore, 2000). Dual language programs are additive bilingual programs, in which students learn a second language in addition to their first or native language. Dual language programs develop bilingual, biliterate and bicognitive skills in English and a second language which helps all participating students to maintain academic achievement at or above grade level after several years of dual language instruction. This programmatic structure also promotes cross-cultural understanding and appreciation.

**Screening and Placement**

The home language survey should be included at the time of registration for families whose first language is other than English. Any child who speaks a language other than English at home is considered an English language learner, in need of home language supports, even if he or she understands and speaks some English. The home language survey should be completed by the primary caregiver (with translators available, if and when needed). It is designed to help school administrators and teachers know how to best support the child and families. Additionally, as specified in Bilingual Code, "*The district board of education shall also use age-appropriate methodologies to identify limited English proficient preschool students in order to determine their individual language development needs*."

The home language survey should be followed up with an individual conversation between the teacher and the primary caregivers to develop a better understanding of the

child's home language environment; and to help families understand the school district's linguistic, social-emotional and academic goals for the families. The home language survey and information gleaned from family conversations should also be used by preschool teachers to inform instruction that addresses the linguistic needs of each child. It is critical that teachers provide explicit vocabulary instruction to help English language learners learn English vocabulary and to also build comprehensible input. Preschool teachers should develop vocabulary and language goals and embed them in developmentally appropriate ways to ensure that English language learners are being taught appropriate vocabulary within the context of each lesson, activity or hands-on experience.

The IPT and other English proficiency tests should only be administered at the end of preschool or for kindergarten entrance when determining optimal kindergarten placements. Any child who speaks a language other than English at home is considered an English language learner, in need of linguistic supports, even if the child understands and speaks some English. Preschool English language learners should be placed in inclusive classrooms, with teachers that are cognizant of their social-emotional, physical, linguistic and academic needs. They should also have ongoing exposure to, and interactions with peers that speak their home language as and with speakers of English, because all children benefit from interactions with multiple language peers. Ideally, teachers and paraprofessionals should be informed of the languages of all students in the class, and should be provided with ongoing support via professional development, coaching and resources to best meet the needs of their linguistically diverse students.

**Staff Qualifications**

It is important that teachers of English language learners acquire strong knowledge about the varied aspects of language in teaching. Teachers need to recognize the cultural aspect of language; and have a clear understanding of, and respect for the varied linguistic patterns of diverse children and families (Adger, Snow & Christian, 2003). This is essential to help children from various cultural and linguistic backgrounds make a smooth transition from home to school. Teachers of English language learners also need to understand dialectical usages of language and typical errors made by young children learning a new language, so that they can provide targeted support, via age-appropriate strategies to make language comprehensible.

Teachers should understand the stages of language development, so that they can carefully and purposefully choose materials and activities that promote language development, and provide scaffolded support as needed (Adger, Snow & Christian, 2003). It is also important that teachers realize that all assessments are actually language assessments and are not necessarily representative of what young children, particularly English language learners know and can do. Therefore, it is essential that multiple factors are considered when assessing all children, especially young second language learners.

Every attempt should be made to employ both a teachers and teacher assistant who speak both English and the second language of the bilingual children enrolled in their

classrooms. There should be at least one adult in the classroom who speaks the primary language of the English language learners. In classes where there are significant numbers of second language learners, one adult should speak the home language of the majority of English language learners.

Bilingual staff must be encouraged to use the children's home languages to provide a classroom environment with rich and explicit vocabulary instruction embedded in the context of developmentally appropriate activities to build comprehensible input, and promote expressive language (Lugo-Neris, Jackson & Goldstein, 2010). Teachers should also provide hands-on, small group literacy instruction focused on comprehension; and emergent literacy experiences in the home language, as well as rich exposure to both languages (Coppola, 2005), including the use of props, pictures and realia – (*objects from real life used in classroom instruction*). Schools must ensure that all staff members serve as good language models for all children by using standard and age-appropriate language. Non-bilingual teachers and teacher assistants should develop some basic communication skills in the home languages of the children in their classrooms. This should include both survival language and vocabulary and phrases that make the children feel welcomed and comfortable in the classroom.

School districts should hire master teachers with bilingual expertise and/or bilingual certification and a strong background in early childhood education and developmentally appropriate practices. The bilingual master teacher is a resource for classroom teachers and should provide training in strategies and techniques to support first and second language development. The bilingual master teacher should assist the classroom teacher with bilingual labels for the classroom environment in the most common home language (s) of the children. Additionally, the bilingual master teacher should prepare a list of survival words and phrases, and general conversational phrases in the home languages of the children (along with the transliteration) for non-bilingual staff. Districts should adhere to the suggested master teacher/classroom ratio of one master teacher for every fifteen classrooms for school districts with large numbers of English language learners.

**Professional Development**

Professional development should be ongoing, developmentally appropriate and designed to provide classroom teachers and teacher assistants with knowledge of the stages of language development. It should incorporate engaging, child-centered strategies and techniques that support both first and second language development. Professional development should instill the importance of supporting the home language, and incorporate ways parents can support their children's literacy development. The professional development should include a focus on the acquisition of early literacy skills, including oral language development, phonological awareness and alphabetic principle in the context of different languages. The professional development should also assist teachers with instructional approaches that provide explicit vocabulary instruction, facilitate rich conversations, and utilize varying questioning techniques based on the children's level of English proficiency.

## Transition

The literature on early childhood practices provides a strong rationale for creating continuity in transitions during this period. Achievements made during preschool, especially cognitive gains, sometimes fade as children move through subsequent grades (Shore, 1998). Changes in program components such as parent involvement, classroom organization, curriculum and teaching style may explain the differences in growth (O'Brien, 1991). Similarly, children have been found to have difficulty adjusting to classrooms where the rules, routines and underlying philosophy differ from their previous experience (Shore, 1998).

### Transitions to Preschool

For many children and their families, their first major transition occurs when they enter preschool. Preparing families for the transition process helps orient families to the program, anticipate services based on each child's need, and provide valuable insight to each child and family. Family participation also helps reduce some of the stress that may be associated with transition.

The level and type of participation prior to enrollment will vary across families, based on each family's interests, resources and general ability to be involved. Offering a range of flexible ways to learn about the program will help ensure that most families are ready for the program. The following activities will foster smooth transitions:

- Offer parent meetings focused on child and family expectations and services in the preschool setting. Topics can include parent role, curriculum, and family services;
- Send out invitations to visit the preschool;
- Have an open house for families;
- Hold a child orientation at the preschool prior to attending; and
- Set up home visits for teachers to meet the families.

To facilitate a smooth transition for toddlers who attend child care or for children with disabilities already in early intervention programs, preschool teachers should meet, consult and plan with the child's teachers and therapists, when appropriate, from their previous placement. If possible, they should observe the child in the setting.

### Continuity and Transitions within Settings

One way to facilitate continuity and minimize transition is by implementing multi-age practices. The term "multi-age" refers to the grouping of children so that the age span of the class is greater than one year. This technique uses both teaching practices and the makeup of the classroom to maximize the benefits of interaction and cooperation among children of various ages. In mixed- or multi-age classes, teachers encourage children with different experiences and stages of development to interact with each other throughout the day, naturally facilitating emerging skills (Katz, 1998). Another way to minimize

effects of transitions is to loop, or keep the same group of children and adults together for more than one year.

*Optimal Mixed-Age Groupings*

Ideally, school districts will create multi-age settings for three- and four-year-old children. Children of both ages will stay with the same adults in the same room for a two-year period, creating a "family" type learning environment that includes the children, teachers and parents.

Cross-age learning allows for social interaction, modeling, mentoring and leadership among children. A child may accomplish something earlier with support from a more advanced peer while the older child experiences feelings of confidence and compassion (Vygotsky, 1962; Vygotsky, 1978; Slavin, 1987). A multi-age setting allows teachers to foster an emotionally secure environment for children to grow, learn, take risks and experience success. While children are developing social skills, learning responsibility and engaging in more complex play, teachers are generally more child-centered, as they must adeptly accommodate individual strengths, interests and needs. The two-year time period helps ensure that teachers, parents and children know each other well and develop a working partnership.

Transitions to Kindergarten

It is also important to smooth out the transition from preschool to the next setting. This will help prepare children for the new situation and increase the involvement of parents and families in the process (Bohan-Baker & Little, 2002). General transition activities are as follows:

- Invite families to visit children's future kindergarten;
- Distribute home-learning activities, including summer book lists and other literacy activities for the summer months prior to kindergarten entry;
- Partner with the local parent-teacher association to inform parents about how they can be involved in their child's kindergarten setting and connect new families with families currently enrolled in the school;
- Disseminate information to parents on the transition to kindergarten, including kindergarten registration guidelines, kindergarten options in the community, information on specific schools once placements have been made, and health and nutrition information to ensure that children enter school healthy;
- Offer early registration for kindergarten so that families have time to prepare children for their new setting and specific teachers can contact their prospective students well before the first day of school;
- Arrange field trips to participating elementary schools and kindergarten classrooms to increase children's familiarity with the new environment;
- Invite future teachers to visit children and give parent presentations;

- Ask current preschool teachers to visit the participating classrooms. These visits can promote the sharing of curriculum information, early childhood strategies, philosophies, and special needs of specific children;
- Offer meetings focusing on child and family expectations in the next setting to better prepare children and their families for the opportunities and challenges they will encounter. Parenting and curriculum, the school district's structure, family services and advocacy and other topics can be covered; and
- Hold workshops that combine both preschool and elementary school teachers to discuss and coordinate curriculum and teaching practices to ensure continuity from one setting to the next.

## Physical Environment

The physical environment of a preschool classroom has an impact on both the behavior and learning of the children and adults working in that space. Adequate physical space affects children's levels of involvement and the types of interactions with their teachers and peers. Classrooms for preschool children must be designed specifically to meet the needs of three- and four-year-old children.

### Classroom Environment

An optimal classroom environment allows children to have independent access to materials and activities. The classroom environment should have at least seven learning centers that encourage children's experiences with blocks, books, dramatic play, creative arts, writing, manipulatives, math, science, sand, water, and computers. Space should accommodate both active and quiet activities. Soft furnishings and spaces for privacy should be available for children who need a quiet place to rest.

### Outdoor Requirements

Preschool children must have access to a developmentally appropriate playground for at least 45 minutes daily. Outdoor gross motor space should have a variety of surfaces such as sand, woodchips, grass, and black top. Gross motor equipment, both stationary and portable, should be available. Outdoor areas should also have some protection from the sun, such as trees for shade.

**Program Evaluation**

Each school district providing preschool programs must be committed to providing high-quality programs for young children and their families. To create and maintain quality, each school district's fully funded state preschool program participates in the Department's *Self Assessment and Validation System* (SAVS). The self assessment and validation process examines the total program, from the quality and nature of teacher-child interactions to the developmental appropriateness of the activities, health and safety of the setting, teacher-child ratios, staff qualifications, physical environment, administration, and ability to accommodate the needs of the community. The focus is on how well the components of the program work together to support each child's learning and development. Each school district's self-assessment should be conducted yearly. Parent surveys, teacher surveys, administrator evaluations and results of structured classroom observations should be used to determine how well the program is working.

The Self Assessment and Validation System (SAVS) components include:

*Community Collaboration*

- An Early Childhood Advisory Council is in place and participates in program planning, community needs assessment, and the self-assessment;
- The Early Childhood Advisory Council includes appropriate community representatives and meets at least quarterly;
- Regular meetings are scheduled with private providers, including Head Start; and
- The needs and goals of the community, as determined by a community needs assessment, are met.

*Recruitment and Outreach*

- The school district actively recruits eligible children throughout the year using multiple strategies; and
- The school district is meeting recruitment goals.

*Facilities*

- Amendments to the long-range facilities plan are formulated with careful consideration given to assessment of the universe, demographic trends, housing patterns, community needs, and the adequacy of current facilities based on ECERS-3 results and other evaluations.

*Administration*

- Administrators overseeing the preschool program and educational leaders have the proper qualifications and training specific to early childhood education;
- Principals have experience in early childhood education and proper qualifications; and

- The fiscal specialist has a working knowledge of the preschool program, familiarity with professional accounting standards and performs duties relevant to the fiscal accountability of community providers including ensuring submission of effective and efficient private provider budgets, analyzing private provider quarterly reports to ensure that expenditures conform to approved budgets, developing corrective action plans as necessary, providing training and assistance to providers, and maintaining teacher certification information.

*Staff Qualifications*

- All teachers have or are working toward appropriate credentials and certification;
- In-district and private provider teachers and assistants receive ongoing evaluations and reviews;
- All assistant teachers have a high school diploma or equivalent and meet DCF licensing requirements, where applicable;
- All existing and new directors of private providers complete the DCF required Director's Academy; and
- Master teachers meet recommended qualifications.

*Curriculum and Program*

- Curriculum guidelines, as described in the *Standards*, are met;
- Teachers demonstrate knowledge of how children learn and develop;
- Teacher expectations vary appropriately for children of differing ages and abilities. Individual differences are respected;
- All aspects of the child are supported including language development, cognitive development, social and emotional development, and physical development;
- Children work and play individually or in small groups, minimizing whole-group activities with a balance between child-initiated and teacher-initiated activities; and
- The results of classroom observations indicate a high level of quality and curriculum implementation.

*Child Assessment and Screening*

- The assessment system is used appropriately and regularly to support each child's unique learning and developmental growth; and
- Screening devices are carefully selected and used appropriately.

*Professional Development*

- Professional development is grounded in the knowledge base for preschool education articulated by the school district's chosen curriculum.
- Training topics cover all aspects of the child's development, as well as the specific needs of the program;

- Appropriate training is implemented for instructional, non-instructional, and administrative staff;
- Appropriate assistance and training is provided to teachers of dual language learners, as well as to teachers working with children with special needs; and
- Systematic classroom evaluation is used to determine professional development topics.

*Supporting Dual Language Learners*

- Teachers use strategies to support dual language learners;
- The focus is on helping children achieve English competency and maintain their first languages; and
- The curriculum provides numerous language enrichment opportunities.

*Intervention and Support*

- A preschool intervention and referral team is fully staffed; and
- The intervention and support from the team meets the needs of the early childhood staff.

*Inclusion*

- Administrative supports are in place that facilitate inclusion;
- Children with special needs are served in least restrictive environments with IEP goals addressed in the context of the curriculum and daily activities;
- Children with special needs are served in general education classrooms to the maximum extent possible;
- The proportion of children with and without special needs reflects that of the general population;
- The IEP team includes the teacher, parent, child study team member, and special education personnel; and
- Push in and pull out services are not used or are used on a limited basis.

*Transition*

- Families, teachers and children are prepared for transitions from preschool to kindergarten and kindergarten through grade three; and
- Transition activities are planned for children entering the preschool program from early intervention and other settings.

*Health, Safety and Food Services*

- The program is designed to help children reach and maintain the *Standards* for health, safety, and physical education;

- Nurses are available at a ratio of one for every 300 preschool students and will provide services to all students including those in private provider and Head Start programs;
- All children receive health screening upon entry into the school district;
- Parent education includes regular health and safety topics designed to meet the unique needs of families enrolled in the program;
- Meal and snack requirements established by US Department of Agriculture are in place; and
- Family style meals are served in children's classrooms.

*Parent Involvement*

- Parents are welcome in the school and their support and assistance are sought;
- There are multiple opportunities for parents to be involved with school;
- Parents are partners in the decisions that affect children and families;
- Community resources are used to strengthen schools, families, and student learning;
- Communication between home and school is regular and two-way;
- Parenting skills are promoted and supported;
- Parents play an integral role in assisting student learning;
- Barriers to family involvement such as transportation and language are reduced; and
- Family workers, social workers and community parent involvement specialists work together to assist parents in obtaining services within the school district and the community.

**Contracts and Fiscal Oversight**

Within the mixed delivery system, school districts may contract with private providers and/or local Head Start agencies that are willing and able to provide high-quality preschool programs as required by P.L. 2006, c.260 and described in chapter 13A, of the Administrative Code. The Department of Education provides a State-approved contract template for school districts to use when contracting for preschool program services.

Districts are responsible for ensuring that preschool funds are spent according to *N.J.A.C. 6A:13A*, and that the fiscal practices of private providers are sound. In school districts that contract with more than eight private providers including the local Head Start agency, a fiscal specialist may be necessary. The role of the fiscal specialist is to:

- Provide financial management assistance to private providers and local Head Start agencies in the development and monitoring of their program budgets;
- Monitor compliance with the preschool program contract;
- Track and report teacher certification information;
- Review and expedite adjustments to quarterly expenditure reports in accordance with the approved child care center provider budgets; and
- Work with those private providers needing assistance including the development of corrective action plans in response to findings from an audit and/or limited review examination.

To be effective, the fiscal specialist shall have auditing, budgeting and accounting experience. This staff member will be directly responsible to the early childhood supervisor or director of early childhood programs. The fiscal specialist should also work with the business administrator's office.

**Recommended Model**:

- One fiscal specialist for each school district contracting with a minimum of eight private provider agencies.

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