

## IMPLEMENTING 15 ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS FOR HIGH-QUALITY PRE-K: New Jersey

The state of New Jersey funds three preschool programs. The largest and most intensive of the preschool programs, formerly known as the Abbott Preschool Program (Abbott), served 45,355 children in 35 of the state’s poorest school districts during the 2016-2017 school year. Abbott was created to comply with the New Jersey Supreme Court’s decisions in the landmark Abbott v. Burke school funding case. The Early Childhood Program Aid (ECPA) and the Early Launch to Learning Initiative (ELLI) are programs that typically offer part-day programs in districts serving predominantly low-income families but are part of the Abbott funding.

### Essential Elements

Fifteen Essential Elements clustered in three categories—Enabling Environment, Support for Educators and Young Learners, and High-Quality Instruction—have been identified among exemplary pre-K programs (Minervino, 2014). Note that practice in the field may vary so as to be either better or worse than might be expected based on specific policy or guidance. Consistency or quality of practice across large-scale programs is more difficult to assess than policy.

#### Abbott Preschool Program (Abbott)

Enabling Environment		Rigorous, Articulated Early Learning Policies								Strong Program Practices				
Political Will	Strong Leaders	BA + comp	Class size	Two Adults	Hours/ Dosage	EL Standards	Effective Curriculum	Special Ed	DLL support	HQ Teaching	PD	Child Assessments	Data Driven	Integrated System
●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	○	●	●	●	○

#### Non-Abbott Early Childhood Program Aid (ECPA)

Enabling Environment		Rigorous, Articulated Early Learning Policies								Strong Program Practices				
Political Will	Strong Leaders	BA + comp	Class size	Two Adults	Hours/ Dosage	EL Standards	Effective Curriculum	Special Ed	DLL support	HQ Teaching	PD	Child Assessments	Data Driven	Integrated System
●	●	○	●	●	–	●	○	○	●	○	●	●	○	○

Key: ● Fully Met    ○ Partially Met    – Not Met    ND Not determined

Early Launch to Learning Initiative (ELLI)

Enabling Environment		Rigorous, Articulated Early Learning Policies								Strong Program Practices				
Political Will	Strong Leaders	BA + comp	Class size	Two Adults	Hours/ Dosage	EL Standards	Effective Curriculum	Special Ed	DLL support	HQ Teaching	PD	Child Assessments	Data Driven	Integrated System
●	●	●	●	●	—	●	○	○	●	ND	●	●	○	○

Key: ● Fully Met ○ Partially Met – Not Met ND Not determined

**Political will.** Even though New Jersey is ranked second nationally for state pre-K spending, progress in the expansion of expenditures and enrollment stalled beginning with the recession, and in 2014-2015, inflation-adjusted spending decreased by \$19.2 million, or 3.1 percent. In 2016-2017, state funding for all three programs combined decreased another \$8.7 million. Current dollar funding for the ELLI program has been unchanged since the 2008-2009 school year, resulting in a substantial decline after inflation is taken into account. In 2017-2018 ECPA and ELLI districts were offered the opportunity to apply for additional money, referred to as Preschool Education Expansion Aid (PEEA). The grant awarded 26 districts additional money.

Newly elected Gov. Phil Murphy (D) is seen as a potential advocate for preschool. His first budget proposal had an \$83 million increase in state preschool spending; \$38 million to continue the expansion funded in the 2017-2018 budget and provide cost of living increases for the Abbott, ECPA and ELLI districts, and an additional \$50 million to expand preschool to 3- and 4-year-old children in more low-income communities. This is expected to be a first step in a four-year phase-in to fully fund preschool expansion per the 2008 school funding formula that requires high-quality preschool programs for all at-risk preschoolers. There is broad bipartisan support in the legislature for expansion to universal access to high-quality pre-k.

When comparing enrollment in 2016-2017 to the previous school year; Abbott increased enrollment by 1758 children (4%); ECPA’s enrollment decreased by 1280 children (15%); and ELLI’s increased by 122 children (19%).

Pre-K Our Way, a nonprofit organization, advocates for the expansion of high-quality preschool in New Jersey. The leadership of this group includes former New Jersey governors and business leaders. It has partnered with both local and national foundations. The Advocates for Children of New Jersey has also been active in advocating for preschool quality and expansion, often partnering with the Education Law Center which was instrumental in bringing the Abbott v Burke case to the NJ Supreme Court.

**Compelling vision and strong leadership.** All three of New Jersey’s preschool education programs operate under the auspices of the state DOE, Division of Early Childhood Education and Family Engagement (DECEFE) which has 16 senior professional staff. The Department of Children and Families oversees licensing of private preschool providers. DHS, Division of Family Development oversees the before- and after-school portion of the preschool program for eligible children. Coordination occurs with the Head Start State Collaboration Office, which is housed in DOE. The Departments of Education,

Children and Families, and Human Services meet regularly to work together on state and federally funded initiatives and they work with others in the state through the New Jersey Council for Young Children.

In New Jersey, each school district's superintendent, along with any required and/or designated school district personnel, is assigned the ultimate responsibility for implementation of the state-funded preschool program in his or her district. School districts with greater than 750 enrolled preschool children must have at least one dedicated in-district early childhood supervisor who has an appropriate New Jersey Supervisor's Certificate or New Jersey Principal's Certificate, as well preschool education experience.

**Education and compensation.** Lead teachers in all three programs are required to have a BA and early childhood credential. Salary parity with K-3 teachers varies by program.

**Abbott:** In both public schools and nonpublic school settings teachers have salary parity with K-3 teachers.

**ECPA:** In ONLY public school settings are teachers required to have salary parity with K-3 teachers. To date, fewer than 5% of ECPA districts have children in nonpublic settings.

**ELLI:** In both public schools and nonpublic school settings teachers are required to have salary parity with K-3 teachers, however none of the ELLI districts now serve children in nonpublic settings.

**Adult-child ratio and two adults in the classroom.**

**Abbott:** The maximum class size is 15 for both 3- and 4-year-olds with a staff to child ratio of 2:15.

**ECPA:** The maximum class size is 18 for both 3- and 4-year-olds with a staff to child ratio of 1:9.

**ELLI:** The maximum class size is 20 for 4-year-olds with a staff to child ratio of 1:10. ELLI funding does not support 3-year-olds, though many districts enroll 3-year-olds in ELLI classrooms with special education, tuition or district general funding.

**Learning time.**

**Abbott:** All Abbott programs must operate for at least six hours. Some programs offer extended-day programs with an additional four hours of wraparound care for income-eligible children, but the number of students is unknown. The wraparound program is funded through the Department of Human Services (DHS). Some districts have also used surplus or Title 1 funds to provide summer programs.

**ECPA:** Districts may operate either a part- (2.5 hours per day) or school-day (six hours per day) program. DHS funding may be used to extend beyond a full-day for income-eligible children, but the number of students is unknown.

**ELLI:** Some programs are part-day, some programs are school-day, and some programs offer a combination of both. Some programs participate in DHS wraparound programs for before- and after-care, but the number of students is unknown.

**Age-appropriate learning standards.** All three programs use the New Jersey Preschool Teaching and Learning Standards which were revised in 2014. They are comprehensive and aligned with K-3 standards. The state provides professional development for the use of the standards. Additional policies that support the use of the standards vary by program.

**Abbott:** State policy requires specific child assessment(s) that are aligned with the standards.

**ECPA:** Child assessments are required to be aligned with the standards, but programs can choose the assessment. Technical assistance is provided through both trainings offered to early childhood supervisors and the DECEFE review of districts' annual preschool program plans. Additional resources are also provided to programs to implement the standards.

**ELLI:** Child assessments are required to be aligned with the standards, but programs can choose the assessment. Technical assistance is provided through both trainings offered to early childhood supervisors and the DECEFE review of districts' annual preschool program plans. Additional resources are also provided to programs to implement the standards.

**System that ensures effective curriculum.** All three programs have similar state supports for curriculum decision-making and implementation including having guidance on selecting evidence-based curriculum models, DECEFE training, access to support materials, additional funding for curriculum implementation or training, and technical assistance on implementation. Programs and sites must use one of the curricula which are aligned with the ELDS and on the approved list: Creative Curriculum; Curiosity Corner; HighScope; or Tools of the Mind.

Only Abbott requires there to be a system to ensure that curricula are being implemented with fidelity.

**Support for students with special needs.** Children who receive special education services may attend state preschool classrooms, but are not counted in state preschool enrollment. Funding and enrollment for special needs preschoolers are counted separately. State policies related to providing supports for preschool children who have special needs vary by program.

**Abbott:** Inclusion specialists are available to support preschool teachers and/or children. Preschool intervention and referral teams (PIRT) use a consultation model to help maximize the teacher's ability to support all students who exhibit challenging behaviors, learning difficulties or other social difficulties and to decrease the number of referrals to special education.

**ECPA:** School districts must ensure coordination between preschool and all other relevant school district programs, i.e. special education. Specific plans for inclusion are required in the annual planning process.

**ELLI:** School districts must ensure coordination between preschool and all other relevant school district programs, i.e. special education. Specific plans for inclusion are required in the annual planning process. ELLI was originally designed as an inclusion program with the requirement that children with disabilities be included in every classroom.

**Support for dual (English) language learners (DLL).** All three New Jersey preschool programs have policies that support DLLs. This includes having an approved written plan for supporting DLLs; monitoring of the quality of the bilingual instruction; screening children in their home languages; and policies that support families. In addition, districts with large percentages of DLL children are required to have bilingual specialist master teachers available to provide support to teachers and other master teachers on the education of DLLs.

Only Abbott was able to report the number of DLLs (19,956; 44% of the total enrollment) enrolled in 2016-2017 and the percentage of teachers who were fluent in a language other than English (23% lead teachers; 38% assistants).

**High quality teaching.**

**Abbott:** In 2000, the average ECERS-R score was 3.9 and by 2008 it had risen to 5.2. Other assessments used to measure the quality of practice specific to literacy and mathematics revealed a similar pattern of a low starting point and considerable progress. The state contracts for annual ECERS observations in a representative number of classrooms across the state. The statewide average has been regularly above 5. The state switched to the ECERS-3 in 2015- 2016 and 2016-2017. The average score dropped well below 5 in those two years.

**ECPA:** In 2017-2018, ECERS-3 observations were conducted in a representative sample of ECPA district classrooms that had not received additional funds from the federal Preschool Expansion Grant. The average score in those classrooms was 4.4.

**ELLI:** CLASS or ECERS scores were not available for review.

**Professional development.** All three preschool programs require 100 clock hours/five years whether teachers are located in a public or nonpublic school setting. In addition, all lead and assistant teachers in the Abbott program receive coaching at least twice a month with a maximum of twenty teachers assigned to each coach.

**Child Assessments.** State policy all three state-funded preschool programs to assess children's learning and development multiple times during the preschool year. Programs may select from Teaching Strategies GOLD, Work Sampling System, Early Learning Scale (ELS), or HighScope COR. Child assessment data are used to guide teacher training, adjust curriculum, track child and program level outcomes over time, and to provide a measure of kindergarten readiness. The state supports the use of the assessments through targeted technical assistance and professional development opportunities, including coaching for early childhood supervisors and master teachers.

**Data-driven decision-making.** Data collected during monitoring of all three programs is used by both the state and at the local level to create program improvement plans and to provide program staff with technical assistance. The state uses this information to make changes to state policy; to make funding decisions; and identify programs for corrective actions. At the local level, data are used to adjust curriculum. Other data-driven decision-making varies by program.

**Abbott:** The Self Assessment and Validation System (SAVS) is administered locally and submitted to the state. Annually a subset of district assessments is directly validated by the state. The

results of the SAVS are used as the basis for program planning and incorporated into each district's Preschool Program Plan.

Structured observations of classroom quality using the ECERS also occur annually in all classrooms. Observations are done both locally and by an independent third-party. State policy also requires that programs receive on-going feedback based on data collected from structured observations of classroom quality.

Only Abbott has had an external, independent evaluation (most recent one was in 2016) as well as publicly available classroom assessments.

**ECPA and ELLI:** Each program submits an annual plan based on a self-assessment. Participation in a state quality rating system is encouraged but not required. Only PDG-funded classrooms have structured observations of classroom quality using the ECERS conducted annually. The state receives the results of these observations.

New Jersey's State Longitudinal Data System (called NJ SMART) was created in 2012, through a grant from the USDOE, and includes all public school children, preschool through grade 12. Through various other grants, NJDOE is working with partner state agencies to build upon the state's current data system and make it a more comprehensive statewide system that tracks student information from pre-K through entry into higher education and the workforce. A parallel effort (NJ EASEL) is also underway to integrate early care and education data from various other state agencies with NJ SMART data to better understand child outcomes. This effort is funded by NJ's federal RTT-ELC grant.

**Integrated System.** All three preschool programs in New Jersey operate within NJ DOE under the auspices of the DECEFE. DECEFE is responsible for the development, implementation, and alignment of program components with a focus on standards, curricula, and assessment. All three preschool programs use the same set of program and child standards and have the same curricula and child assessment choices. DECEFE has programmatic responsibility for preschool through 3rd grade programs.