READY, SET, GO!

Assessing Capacity for Pre-K Expansion in New Jersey

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Executive Summary

Public demand and political will are pushing New Jersey closer to providing high-quality preschool for all families statewide. Governor Murphy campaigned on fully funding preschool expansion by 2020, and the Legislature supported expansion by allocating $25 million for Preschool Education Expansion Aid in 2017-2018, followed in 2018-19 by $75 million more for expansion and more than $30 million to support existing pre-k programs.

Ready, Set, Go assesses how prepared New Jersey's early childhood education system is and what policies and practices must change to ensure that districts are ready and capable of implementing a high quality pre-k program as the funding expands. Expanding high-quality public preschool beyond the current 35 mostly state Supreme Court-mandated high-poverty, school districts has been on the state's To Do List since 2008, when approval of the NJ School Funding Reform Act (SFRA) called for providing high-quality pre-k for all 3- and 4-year-old children in more than 100 school districts with a high proportion of low income families, along with targeted aid to fund preschool for children from low-income families in more affluent districts. However, the SFRA was never funded.

Today, state-funded pre-k programs enroll about 53,370 children—about 30% of 4-year-olds and 21% of 3-year-olds, according to *The State of Preschool 2017* report. But an additional 50,000 children are estimated to be eligible for state-funded pre-k under the SFRA. Of those 50,000 eligible children, approximately 8,000 are enrolled in state pre-k through either the Early Childhood Program Aid (ECPA) or Early Launch to Learning Initiative (ELLI). But most of those enrolled are not in pre-k classrooms meeting the high-quality standards research has shown narrows achievement gaps and reduces both grade retention and special education placements.

Understanding the readiness of New Jersey's early childhood system to serve eligible children will help prepare the early childhood community to make the best use of anticipated continued funding to benefit as many children and families as possible, as quickly as possible.

Our study included a sample of 30 of the approximately 100 school districts most likely to be eligible for universal pre-k with full funding of SFRA 2008, from all regions of the state and ranging from a pre-k universe of 1040 to just 26 children.

We conducted classroom quality observations, administered surveys and in-depth interviews with pre-k administrators and convened a workgroup of representatives from Early Childhood Education higher education faculty, along with policymakers and other stakeholders.

Findings

• Current private and public classroom capacity and quality are inadequate to serve all eligible children. Districts are serving less than half of eligible children and many have made no plans to expand facilities. Measures of classroom quality showed that all programs are below the threshold of good quality but there is wide variation based on funding levels, with lower funding resulting in lower quality

• Although the NJ School Funding Reform Act is more than 10 years old, only 41% of participating district leaders had heard of the SFRA—and even those who had heard of it had no understanding of how it would affect their districts

• Many of the centers/schools and classrooms do not meet state facilities regulations for preschool expansion--62% reported no space to expand in their current buildings from half-day to full-day programs

• Pre-k expansion could be facilitated by collaborations between districts and private pre-k providers, but few districts have contacted child care centers in their community and many do not know they exist. Districts with the greatest number of potential partners to choose from reported being "not interested" in collaboration

• More than 3,000 P-3 teachers will be needed within the next four years—but the current rate at which we are producing certified teachers cannot meet that need

• Need for bilingual teachers is particularly acute

• Principals overseeing pre-k programs are not required to have any experience in, or complete any coursework related to, early childhood development

• Barriers to developing a fully qualified workforce include lack of funding to attend college

Recommendations

Based on our research, we identified steps New Jersey policymakers and educators must take now to live up to the promise of providing high-quality preschool and to guarantee the best return on significant public investments. Our recommendations include:

• Focus initial preschool expansion planning on enhancing facilities and the workforce

• Return the Division of Early Childhood Education lead position in the Department of Education to Assistant Commissioner status to ensure a senior expert is engaged in major pre-k policy decisions

• Increase staffing of the Division of Early Childhood Education to provide needed support and oversight

• Establish a public-private revolving loan fund to provide needed pre-k classrooms and a scholarship program to enable existing teachers in child care and Head Start centers to obtain required certification and degrees

• Develop and require micro-credentials for school district leaders to ensure ECE expertise

• Counties and DECE should host county-level collaboration consortia to begin planning for pre-k expansion; these groups eventually could become county Early Childhood Advisory Councils

• Design and provide web-based technical assistance to help district staff plan for expansion and complete required applications

• Facilitate collaboration by introducing districts to pre-k providers, developing guidance around shared services for pre-k, and providing targeted technical assistance on implementing high-quality pre-k to large districts collaborating with private providers

• Maintain pay parity between private provider and district teachers and establish methods to more closely match benefit packages

• Create special mentoring for teachers with highly desirable qualifications to ensure they have support to stay in the job

Conclusion

Strong support from both Gov. Murphy and the Legislature is creating new early learning opportunities for New Jersey's children—along with a need for training, technical assistance, and collaboration among state policymakers, school districts and community providers.

The good intention of spending taxpayer dollars to directly benefit children has, unfortunately, led the state to cut back on state DOE staff needed to support expansion and maintain quality. Research shows preschool can help narrow achievement gaps, increase high school graduation, raise lifetime earnings and reduce health problems—but only if quality is high.

Helping state and district leaders maintain quality while enrolling more children will be the difference between an empty promise and a promise fulfilled.

Introduction

The NJ School Funding Reform Act (SFRA) of 2008, called for provision of high-quality preschool for all 3- and 4-year-old children in more than 100 school districts with a high proportion of low-income families and for targeted aid to fund preschool for children from low-income families in more affluent districts[i]. The SFRA was never funded. However, with the election of a new governor, scale up to full implementation has been promised for 2022. Governor Murphy campaigned on fully funding preschool expansion and the Legislature has already shown its support for expansion by making a modest down payment of $25 million (named Preschool Education Expansion Aid, PEEA) for the 2017-2018 school year and an additional $50 million for 2018-2019 (a total of $75 million for PEEA). In addition, the Legislature budgeted more than $30 million in additional Preschool Education Aid (PEA) in 2018-19 to support existing preschool programs (including maintenance of 2017-18 PEEA). The early childhood community welcomed the initial funding; however, it was difficult for both the NJ DOE and school districts to respond quickly to the funding opportunity and more than $5 million of available funding was not expended in FY 2018.

The *Ready, Set, Go* study was undertaken to assess how the preschool landscape had changed since the publication of the comprehensive Preschool Expansion Assessment Research Study (PEARS) in 2009. At present approximately 53,370 children are served in state-funded pre-K in NJ, but it is estimated that 50,000 children are eligible for pre-K under the SFRA. Of the estimated 50,000 children who are eligible for the expanded high quality public preschool, approximately 8,000 are already enrolled in Early Childhood Program Aid (ECPA) or Early Launch to Learning Initiative (ELLI) districts. However, only the approximately 3,727 children who are receiving preschool in classrooms that are funded by the federal Preschool Expansion Grant (PEG) or in the newly funded PEEA districts are afforded the full quality standards met in Abbott programs. Understanding the readiness of the current early childhood system to serve these eligible children will help prepare the early childhood community for the anticipated continued funding of preschool expansion in NJ.

Our study included a sample of 30 of the approximately 100 school districts most likely to be eligible for universal pre-K with full funding of SFRA 2008. The districts were in all regions of the state and ranged from the largest, which had a pre-K universe of 1040, to the smallest, which had a universe of just 26 students. Some were selected specifically because of their proximity to another eligible district so we could investigate willingness to collaborate. We also attempted to include private providers of preschool (child care and Head Start centers) located in these sample districts but were mostly unsuccessful in recruiting child care centers (See Table 3 for more information). We conducted classroom quality observations, administered a survey with the entire sample on the current provision of pre-K as well as the current or perceived potential for expansion and collaboration with other districts or private providers. In-depth interviews were also conducted with 20 district and center leaders to better understand nuances of the survey data.

Because the quality of instruction is the most important determinant of an effective education initiative, we were also interested in understanding more about the teacher preparation landscape. In addition to including questions in the interviews and surveys on the availability of qualified teachers, we also convened a workgroup of representatives from ECE higher education faculty in two-year and four-year colleges, relevant state agencies and other stakeholders. Issues and recommendations from that workgroup are included in this report.

Methodology

The following questions were used to focus our data collection. In order to answer these questions, information was collected on the school district, school/center and classroom level. In addition, a group of experts was convened to discuss issues related to higher education and workforce readiness.

- How many 3- and 4-year-old children can be offered a high-quality preschool education in existing public schools, private child care centers and Head Start programs within the identified districts?
- What plans do school districts have for preschool expansion?
- What are the credentials of the current child care, Head Start and public school preschool teaching workforce in these settings?
- Are there enough candidates with a preschool–3rd grade certification to fill the anticipated need for preschool teachers?
- What, if any, early childhood education experience do administrators and center directors have?
- What are common issues that need to be addressed to improve the quality of current pre-K classrooms?
- What opinions do school district, Head Start, and child care directors hold regarding mixed delivery system and what plans do they have for overcoming perceived barriers to collaboration?

The methods of data collection used in the study included:
- Classroom observations to assess the quality of current pre-K programs across settings
- Interviews with program leaders to provide deeper context to classroom data and investigate leadership opinions about and plans for expansion
- Surveys to gauge the physical capacity of programs as well as other readiness indicators for expansion across auspice
- The higher education workgroup generated issues and solutions related to workforce readiness

Sample Selection and Recruitment

To estimate the capacity of districts to serve the projected population of incoming preschoolers, we selected the sample from among the "universal" districts that were most likely to be eligible to receive the next round of state funding. All of the so-called "universal" districts under the SFRA of 2008, already provide preschool to at least some 4-year-olds under the long-standing Early Childhood Program Aid (ECPA) funding but at lower quality standards than the state-funded Abbott program. ECPA districts include those also receiving Preschool Expansion Grant (PEG) and Preschool Education Expansion Aid (PEEA) funds. These funds enable districts to serve at least some children at the higher Abbott program standards. ECPA funding is exclusive to districts with between 20% and 40% of their student population eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, meaning their family's income is at or below 180% of the federal poverty rate. From this list of "universal" districts we included 10 of the largest school districts and 20 small school districts. Large school districts were defined as having a preschool universe of greater than 350 students and small school districts were defined as having a universe of less than 225 students. A special effort was made to recruit small districts that were contiguous to one another. We focused on these two distinct types of districts for the following reasons:

- The large districts serve the most children as a group (with the largest 15 having almost 40% of the total population in the 100 universal districts). We projected that they would be more likely to have viable partners for collaboration and might need more assistance in developing a qualified workforce and identifying facilities. Thus, extrapolating from the 10 sample large districts should provide good

estimates of the needs for a large portion of the population.

- Small districts are important to the sample because the state has limited experience supporting expansion in small districts and small districts will have few, if any, options for partnering with private providers. In addition, the rigorous supports required in the preschool program standards will be difficult for small districts to meet without exploring collaboration with nearby districts and/or Head Start. Because of the projected importance of collaboration, there was a special focus on recruiting districts into the sample that were contiguous to one another.

We selected districts that provided diversity not only in region and size, but also variation in auspice (i.e. Head Start centers, child care centers involved in Grow NJ Kids which is a state initiative to provide supports and recognition for quality, sites which have obtained national accreditation, and other centers), experience with mixed delivery, and receipt of PEG/PEEA funds.

District Selection

To determine the sample of 30 districts, we sorted districts by funding source, size and location, and noted other characteristics (e.g. presence of Grow NJ Kids accredited and Head Start centers) relevant to mixed delivery systems. For the purposes of this report, counties and the school districts located within them were divided into three geographic regions: North, Central, and South. The North region contains Bergen, Essex, Hudson, Morris, Passaic, Sussex, Union, and Warren Counties. The Central Region includes Burlington, Hunterdon, Mercer, Middlesex, Monmouth, Ocean, and Somerset counties. The South region consists of Atlantic, Camden, Cape May, Cumberland, Gloucester, and Salem counties. Table 1 shows how the sample was distributed across the state.

Table 1: District Participation by Geographic Region & Size

	North		Central		South	
	Large	Small	Large	Small	Large	Small
N and Size	5	0	2	7	3	13

For the large district subsample, we approached the 15 largest districts via email and phone call and 10 agreed to participate. For the small contiguous district pairs, we mapped the districts with an estimated preschool population of less than 225 children and began recruiting those districts that both served the targeted number of children and were located contiguous to another universal district. Once one district agreed to participate, efforts were intensified to recruit the neighboring district through personalized calls and by asking for assistance from the first district in a pair in recruiting the second. All participants were offered incentives in the form of a $50 gift card. Once any district agreed to participate they were asked to submit a letter of support for the study and complete a form that listed all of their district pre-K classrooms (including any contracted child care of Head Start classrooms). Our final sample consisted of 30 districts across 14 counties: Atlantic, Bergen, Burlington, Camden, Cape May, Cumberland, Gloucester, Hudson, Monmouth, Middlesex, Ocean, Salem, Somerset, and Union.

Of those districts:

- 10 were large districts (universe of >350 with a mean of 669)

- 20 were small districts (universe of <225 with a mean of 96)
    - (10) of the small districts were contiguous pairs
    - (3) districts formed a trio that was clustered in close proximity
    - (7) individual districts were spread throughout the state

Table 2: District Participation by Funding Type

	ECPA/ELLI ONLY	PEEA	PEG *
N of Districts	18	9	4

Child Care Center Selection

As soon as a school district had been recruited into the study the research team obtained the contact information for nearby child care centers from the list of licensed child care facilities published by the NJ Division of Human Services. For consistency, we attempted to recruit only child care centers that were located in the same town or township as the school district. Attempts were made to contact all licensed child care centers that met the geographic criteria via telephone and by email if there was a published address. Once contact was made, researchers requested to speak with the center director to explain the study and invite them to participate. All participants were offered a $50 gift card as an incentive to participate. The researchers provided follow-up information regarding the study in writing to all centers we were able to make contact with. We were supported in recruitment by the New Jersey Association for the Education of Young Children (NJAEYC).

Of the 30 school districts, 11 did not have a licensed child care center in their town. In the remaining 19 school districts, there were 83 licensed child care centers. Researchers attempted to contact and recruit all 83 centers into the study sample. A log was kept noting the date and mode (phone call, email) of the recruitment attempt as well as any responses received during the recruitment process. Each center received a minimum of three phone calls during the recruitment process, with some centers receiving far more. Our recruitment efforts were hampered by the fact that many centers either did not have an answering machine, or the person answering was not able to take a message for the director. When messages were taken by centers, calls were rarely returned. Researchers had the most success in recruitment when they continued calling until a director or owner was able to be reached. Table 3 summarizes the recruitment results.

Head Start Selection

Nine different Head Start agencies covered the catchment area for the 30 school districts in the sample. If there was a Head Start center in one of the districts in the sample, we wanted to observe those classrooms; and if there was no physical center, we were still interested in gathering information on the attitudes and readiness of the Head Start leaders to collaborate with the districts. Of the nine Head Start agencies, six responded and were included in the study at some level.

Nine individual centers containing 21 classrooms were located near districts in the sample. We were able to observe a sample of their classrooms as part of the study. It should be noted that additional centers did eventually respond after repeated contacts and were able to take the survey, but the condensed timeline of the study made adding classroom observations impossible. As with the districts, once any child care center or Head Start agency agreed to participate, they were asked to submit a letter of support for the study and complete a form that listed all of their pre-k classrooms operating within the geographic boundaries of the school district in the sample.

Table 3: Child Care Center Recruitment and Sample

In 19 districts, there were 83 child care centers. In 11 districts, there were no child care centers.

Yes	Soft "no"	Hard "no"	Unreachable
N=15 /18%*	N=25 /30%	N=21/25%	N=22/27%
Agreed and signed consent	Asked for more information or said they would *"think about it"* but never consented.	Center Director declined.	Did not return messages.

11 agreed to classroom observations, four agreed to only the survey or interview

Representativeness of the Sample

The sample of 30 districts is fairly representative of the total population of ECPA districts and thus we contend the results can be confidently generalized. The sample does not, however, represent those districts that will likely be eligible for pre-K expansion due to the income levels of their population but are not currently included in the ECPA category. Their readiness and attitudes toward expansion are likely different from our sample and the ECPA districts because they do not have experience providing state-funded pre-K. While regionally representative, our sample was slightly more likely to have received PEG and PEEA funding (40% sample vs 35% in the full set of ECPA districts). The full sample reported for the classroom quality data represents 65% of the ECPA districts and the findings are robust for generalization.

Additionally, given the limited success of our recruitment efforts for child care and Head Start center site leaders, our data on classroom quality for these providers is not likely to be representative of the full population. Those agreeing to participate are clearly different from those that refused or could not be reached, and these differences could likely be related to classroom quality and readiness for expansion. We are more confident of the survey and interview data for the Head Start agencies as this was more complete.

Procedures and Instrumentation

Methods of data collection included on-line surveys to district and center leaders, interviews with a sample of leaders and classroom quality observations. Interviews and surveys for school districts, child care centers and Head Start agencies used the same protocols but with slightly different questions specific to each setting.

Surveys

The district, child care or Head Start administrator designated as the person responsible for the pre-K program on the letter of support received a survey related to space, staffing, collaboration around mixed delivery and plans for expansion. Prior to receiving surveys, all participants received an email alerting them that it would be coming and reminding them about the $50 incentive for completing it. Surveys were sent electronically to all participants. Reminder emails and phone calls were made every 3 days in an attempt to get as many surveys completed as possible. Paper surveys were mailed to participants with self addressed stamped envelopes if requested.

Out of the 30 school districts, one district did not respond to the survey. We were able to gather

information about the number of students currently being served from their letter of support but do not have information on the remaining survey items for this district.

All 15 child care centers that participated in the study completed surveys. In an attempt to gather more information from child care centers, surveys were sent to all centers who had not already opted out of the study (these were centers from the "soft 'no'" or "unreachable" categories in Table 3) for which an email address was available[1]. This effort yielded an additional 4 participants, bringing the child care survey number to a total of 19.

Nine Head Start centers completed surveys. These represented all the Head Start centers from the six participating agencies located in school districts that were part of the sample.

Table 4: Number of surveys completed by auspice[2]

	District	Child Care	Head Start
# of surveys	30*	19	9

Interviews

To gather more in-depth information than is possible in a survey, a sample of 23 participants were selected to take part in semi-structured interviews. Each interview took place either in person or via telephone and lasted approximately 60 minutes. Two groups of districts with unique characteristics were interviewed in a focus group format. Interview participants were selected based on characteristics likely to be relevant to expansion, such as funding source, size and location, whether they were Grow NJ Kids accredited, or had experience with mixed delivery.

Table 5: Number of interviews completed by auspice

	District	Child Care	Head Start
# of interview participants by auspice	11	6	6

Classroom Observations

The Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale—Third Edition (ECERS-3) was used in classrooms across all settings. The ECERS-3 is an observation and rating instrument for preschool classrooms serving children aged three to five. The total ECERS-3 score represents an average of the scores on the 35 items organized into six domains. A rating scale between 1 and 7 is used, where a rating of 1 indicates inadequate quality, a rating of 3 indicates minimal quality, a rating of 5 indicates good quality, and a rating of 7 indicates excellent quality[ii]. The most updated notes for clarification[iii] were utilized when scoring all classrooms in this sample. A general description of each of the 35 items on the ECERS-3 is provided in Appendix B.

Classrooms were observed between March and May of 2018. Prior to collecting data in the sample classrooms, all data collectors were trained to 85% or higher reliability on the instrument. To ensure all

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[1] Email addresses were obtained from the website of the child care center or DHS licensing reports
[2] Not all participants answered all questions in the survey which led to different N's for responses on some individual questions.

observers were reliable with the most current ECERS-3 protocols, the NIEER staff responsible for training the data collectors on the ECERS-3 underwent reliability training to reach anchor status with the Environment Rating Scale Institute (ERSI) in February of 2018.

In addition to the 140 classrooms recruited specifically for the *Ready, Set, Go* study, NIEER was able to include an additional 144 classroom observations in relevant districts from another study. This additional classroom data also came from universal districts located throughout New Jersey. Classroom observation protocols and the instrumentation were consistent across both studies. Combining these datasets doubled the sample size and allowed us to include classrooms from an additional three counties. An independent t-test was run to determine if the two groups were significantly different from each other. We found no significant differences between the two samples and combined them to strengthen the generalizability of the findings.

The availability of funding can directly impact classroom quality. To account for this, funding source was coded at the classroom level. Coding at the classroom level was necessary as not every classroom in a district receiving either PEEA or PEG funds is the recipient of those funds. "Fully funded" denotes a classroom that received PEG or PEEA funding (placing them close to Abbott level funding) and operated at the required standards of that funding (e.g. length of day, class size) at the time of the observation. "Base funded" denotes classrooms that currently receive only state PEA funding.

Classrooms also were coded by auspice as follows:

- District – classroom is administered by the school district and located in a district building
- Child care contracted – classroom is located in a child care center that contracts to provide pre-K with a district
- Head Start contracted – classroom is located in a Head Start center that contracts to provide pre-K with a district
- Child care not contracted – classroom is located in a child care center that is not working with a school district
- Head Start not contracted – classroom is located in a Head Start center that is not working with a school district

Because too few non-contracted child care and Head Start centers consented to participate in the study there were not enough observations conducted in those settings to provide a representative sample. Therefore, scores for non-contracted sites are not included in this report. It should be noted, however, that scores of non-contracted sites who allowed us to conduct observations followed the same pattern of classroom quality scores in child care and Head Start classrooms observed in 2000 before Abbott was fully funded and implemented. We are fairly confident that classroom quality has not changed substantially in the past 20 years where funding has not increased.

Knowledge and Planning Related to the SFRA of 2008

Despite the fact the SFRA was passed in 2008, pre-K district leaders' knowledge and understanding of the law and its implications is mixed. Presented with a question that first summarized the SFRA of 2008 and then asked to report on how familiar they are with it, district responses broke down as follows:

- 14% never heard of SFRA
- 41% heard of it but don't know how it would impact their district
- 38% understand the potential for preschool expansion under SFRA
- 7% understand the SFRA and are actively planning for expansion

While none of the districts in our sample were currently serving their entire universe of eligible children, 11 of the 29 districts (38%) responded that they were not planning for expansion at this time. Of those districts thinking about expansion, planning activities included:

- 10 (35%) had discussed expansion with their Early Childhood Advisory Council
- Four (14%) had conducted a facilities plan
- Three (10%) were in talks with local child care or Head Start
  Please note, percentages will not total 100% as districts could choose more than one answer or choose "other" and type a response.

Responses from two districts that chose to answer the question above in their own words seemed to confirm the lack of urgency around serving the entire universe of children. One district wrote that they "*already expanded under PEEA*" (in SY 16-17) and the other wrote that they expanded last year under PEEA (through contracting and mixed delivery) but did not intend to continue that relationship in the future.

Data gathered through interviews with districts fell along the same lines as the survey information but provided more context. When asked directly about their expansion plans, many district leaders spoke only of 4-year-olds unless asked specifically about serving 3-year-olds. Some expressed the belief that since their district was "*out of space*" there was nothing they could do at this time to serve more children. There was also a reluctance to put time or resources into planning a pre-K program when funding streams were not guaranteed, with one district stating, "*But really, I've been more waiting to see if Preschool Expansion money becomes available again, because I think that really—to invest the kind of time and everything into the program, I really don't want to do anything until we have a full-day program.*"

Likely because we were interacting directly with Head Start leadership (executive director or vice president for education level professionals), there was greater awareness and understanding of pre-K expansion. All six of the agency heads interviewed indicated they understood the SFRA and were actively planning ways to partner with school districts should funding become available. In addition, all agencies reported they had conducted a facilities review of their sites and were aware of challenges (even if they currently lacked the funding to remediate any deficiencies) related to meeting program quality requirements (e.g. room size or bathrooms). Finally, all the heads of the agencies had either reached out to districts, or were planning to, as soon as it became clear who might be eligible for the next round of pre-K expansion funding. During interviews Head Start respondents tended to possess more knowledge about how mixed delivery systems work than either district or child care leaders and spoke in a balanced way about what they viewed as the "pros and cons" of collaboration. It should be noted that our sample consisted only of six of the nine agencies that served children in the study catchment area. We were unsuccessful in getting three agency heads to participate. It is unclear whether they are engaged in the same level of planning as their peers who were responsive to our inquiries.

Survey and interview respondents from the child care centers fell into two distinct groups. Half of the child care center directors either had not heard about expansion or did not know how it might impact them. Half of the child care directors understood or were actively planning for how expansion could impact their centers. Planning included:

- Talking with the district
- Getting information from Pre-K Our Way and other sources to try to advocate for their centers
- Communicating with other center directors to learn about mixed delivery systems

All child care directors, regardless of their level of understanding of SFRA, were open to working with school districts, as indicated by the survey responses below:

- Somewhat interested in collaboration (26%)
- Very interested in collaboration (48%)
- Already working with a school district and plan to continue (26%)

Although they tended to have less knowledge about mixed delivery systems than the Head Start participants, on the whole center directors appeared to be very eager to work with school districts. As one center director reported, *"I'm not fearful of working with the district because I actually would welcome it... the district that backs you up, that helps you. You have a child study team at hand if you need it. It's all positive."*

It is important to note that our sample of child care directors is likely not typical as they either had the professional capacity (e.g. someone to answer phones and receive and reply to messages) or organizational structures (e.g. working email address) that allowed them to be reached. "Sample Selection and Recruitment" section of this report provides further detail regarding centers that are included in this study.

What is the Physical Capacity in Existing Public Schools, Child Care Centers and Head Start Programs?

The 30 districts in the sample provide a lens into the capacity of the "universal" districts to serve all eligible children. The current projected universe by district of pre-K children reported by the NJ DOE was used for this report. Districts reported that they were currently serving 3,794 children in 215 classrooms. It is important to note that many of these classrooms are currently half-day settings so the number of children who could be served at *full quality standards is smaller* than the overall number currently enrolled in pre-K.

Table 6: Population of eligible pre-K students compared to the number districts are serving

Universe of 3- & 4-year-old students in the 30 districts	N that districts are current serving	N of children left unserved by districts
8,624	3794 / 44%	**4,830 /56%**

When asked what additional space districts currently had in their buildings that could be used to serve more pre-K children, the majority (62%) reported they had no space to expand in their current buildings. Ten districts (34%) reported having a few classroom spaces (1-3) that could be used. Only one district reported that they had enough space (14 classrooms) to convert all their current half-day programs to full day. However, even with finding 14 additional spaces in which to expand its program, this district still lacked the physical capacity to serve their 3-year-old population.

Table 7: Space districts identified for pre-K expansion

N of classrooms districts identified in existing buildings	N of classrooms districts identified that could be rented or purchased	Additional children that could be served
35 classrooms	27 classrooms	**62 classrooms/ 930 additional students** (an additional 11% of the universe)

When the total number of potential expansion classrooms is multiplied by 15 students a class, the result indicates districts in the study could potentially serve 930 additional students. However, this may overestimate the number of additional students who could be served since many current classrooms may be providing half-day classes.

In interviews, two supervisors who had previously reported having "no space" stated they had subsequently conducted a facilities review with other district administrators which identified additional space available for pre-K classes. One of these districts is the outlier above that identified 14 classrooms. These cases underscore the importance of engaging leadership from across the entire district (principals, superintendents) in the facilities planning process.

In addition to the classrooms already serving pre-K children, 28 child care or Head Start centers in the same geographic area as our district sample reported having the following space available for potential pre-K classes.

Table 8: Space Identified by Child Care and Head Start for Expansion

N of spaces that could be converted into classrooms in existing buildings	N of classrooms identified that could be rented or purchased	Additional Children that could be served
23 classrooms	20 classrooms	**43 classrooms / 645 additional students*** (an additional 7% of the universe)

The child care and Head Start individuals surveyed represent a fairly established group of centers. Half of the centers owned their buildings. They had been operating for as little as one year, to as long as 44 years, with a mean of 12 years and a mode of 4 years. More than three quarters of the centers reported that 50% or more of the students they serve lived in the school district where the center is located. However, these responses only represent those who participated in our survey; therefore it may be an underestimation of actual capacity. In addition, because observations were not conducted in all the available classrooms we do not know the quality of the spaces identified as available by the centers.

Many of the centers/schools and classrooms included do not currently meet the state's facilities regulations for preschool expansion. This will be a greater issue for contracted sites than in-district sites. Child care and Head Start frequently reported the challenge of bringing classrooms up to current guideline standards (i.e. square footage or bathrooms in classrooms) without financial support. Sometimes the changes needed to meet code are small (taking down a non-load-bearing wall to increase class size) but without the guarantee of a contract with a district, directors report an understandable reluctance to go into debt making renovations.

Opinions and Perceived Barriers to a Mixed Delivery System

With so many unserved children and willing Head Start and Child Care partners, what are the barriers to serving more children under a mixed delivery system? One hurdle is that collaboration is not the cultural norm in many school districts. Table 9 reveals that self-reported rates of collaboration were quite low when districts, child care and Head Start centers were asked a variety of questions about how they collaborate with one another.

Table 9: Collaboration Activities Across Auspice

District N=29	Child Care N=18	Head Start N=9
(13%) currently contract with *either* Head Start or child care center(s)	(17%) contract with a district	(33%) contract with a district
(55%) report communicating with child care or Head Start	(78%) report communicating with their local school district	(100%) report communicating with their local school district
(42%) report receiving referrals for special education	(39%) refer children to district child study team	(67%)refer children to the district child study team
(7%) provide special education services in child care or Head Start centers	N/A	N/A

Only about one third of districts reported any type of collaboration with another school district. Of the districts that did collaborate with another district, most typical activities involved sharing contracted personnel or engaging in joint professional development opportunities for teaching staff.

Openness toward partnering with either child care or Head Start appears quite balanced at first glance, with the majority of districts expressing that they are "*somewhat interested*" (Table 10). The interest of individual districts in partnering with child care or Head Start becomes more complex when we consider the viability of mixed delivery systems varies by location. In the 30 districts in the sample, 11 had no licensed child care centers in their towns. In the 19 districts where child care centers were available, the number of centers available to partner varies, as can be seen in Table 11.

Table 10: District Report of Their Interest in Mixed Delivery

	Interest in Child Care	Interest in Head Start *
There are no centers in my area	7%	10%
Not interested	21%	24%
Somewhat interested	48%	48%
Very interested	17%	7%
Already contract and *plan to continue*[3]	7%	10%

*Due to rounding, totals may not equal 100%

Table 11: Number of Child Care Centers Per District

	No child care centers	< 2 child care centers	Between 3-6 centers	> 7 child care centers
# of Districts	11	11	5	3

This study did not find a clear link between the number of providers in an area and an openness to collaboration on the part of the district. **In fact, in this sample, the group of districts reporting being "not interested" included those with the greatest number of providers available;** while other districts

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[3] Not all districts who reported contracting in SY 16-17 in Table 10 reported a willingness to do so in Table 11

reporting being "very interested" were in regions with few centers. This points to a need for a targeted approach when working with the leadership of those large districts to ensure they understand the benefits of a mixed delivery system in ensuring all of their students are provided the opportunity to experience a quality pre-K program.

Current Classroom Quality

In Figure 1 below, we present ECERS-3 results comparing "base-funded" and "fully funded" classrooms by scoring ranges. According to the ECERS-3 developers, a rating of 1 indicates inadequate quality, a 3 indicates minimal quality, a 5 indicates good quality, and a 7 indicates excellent quality[iv]. On average, base-funded classrooms scored a full point lower than fully funded classrooms (3.40 versus 4.48). In addition, four base-funded classrooms scored in the "1" range (indicating that programs were completely inadequate to meet the educational and personal care needs of children), while only five scored in the good quality range; and none were excellent quality. While there is still more work to do with the fully funded classrooms to ensure uniform high quality, the distribution of scores was quite different. No fully funded classrooms scored in the inadequate range and almost one third were in the good to excellent range.

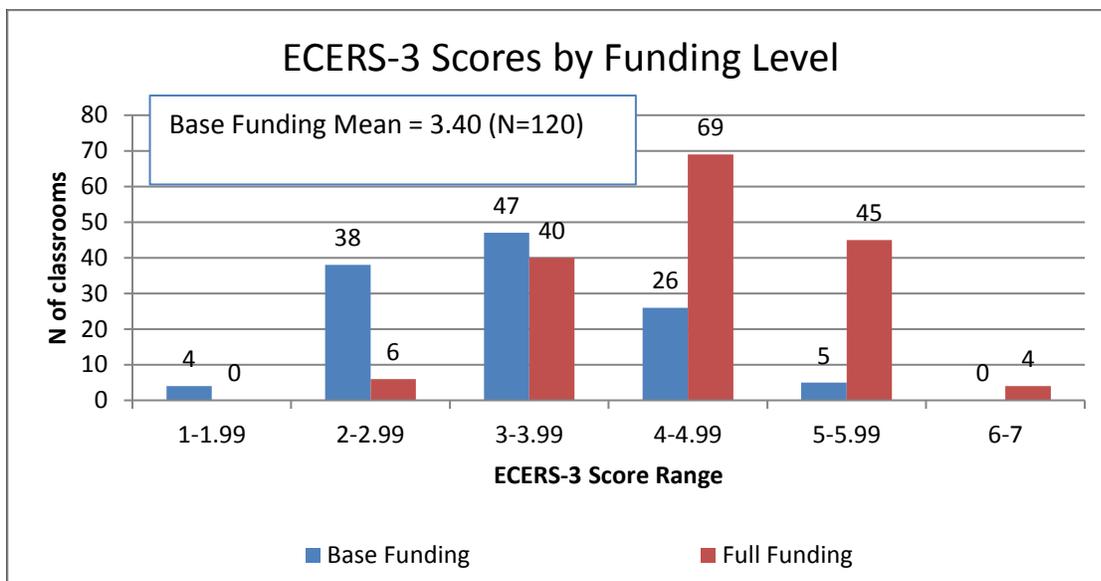**Figure 1:**

ECERS-3 Scores by Funding Level

Table 12 provides average scores for subscales comparing base-funded classrooms to fully funded ones. Subscales cluster items measure practices in different domains and thus give information about areas where programs should concentrate their improvement efforts. (Individual item results are provided in Appendix A.) Funding clearly impacted quality in each of the domains captured in the subscale scores. The pattern of higher and lower scores is similar across the two funding levels with both types of classrooms performing relatively better on Language and Literacy and Interaction. These are arguably two subscales most related to child progress. On the other hand, both types of classrooms score less well on the Learning Activities subscale which is also more associated with child learning. Health and safety practices in the Personal Care Routines subscale are also in need of attention.

Table 12: Subscale Scores by Funding Level

ECERS-3 Subscale	Base Funded Mean (range) N=120	Fully Funded Mean (range) N=164
Space and Furnishings This subscale addresses the areas of indoor and outdoor space, room arrangement, organization, display, furnishings and equipment.	3.23 (1.57-5.86)	4.15 (2.14-6.57)
Personal Care Routines This subscale addresses practices around daily routines such as meals and toileting as well as health and safety practices.	2.80 (1.00-6.00)	3.51 (1.00-7.00)
Language and Literacy This area addresses the classroom's formal and informal communication, language and vocabulary expansion opportunities, and use of books and attention to print.	4.07 (1.80-6.60)	5.01 (2.00-6.80)
Learning Activities This subscale looks at the learning opportunities in each of the areas of the classroom including fine motor, art, music/movement, blocks, sand/water, dramatic play, nature/science, math/number materials and activities, use of technology, and diversity.	2.71 (1.27-6.00)	4.23 (1.50-6.18)
Interaction This area addresses supervision of children, discipline, staff-child interactions, individualized teaching and learning, and interactions among children.	4.39 (1.00-7.00)	5.33 (2.00-7.00)
Program Structure This area addresses classroom operations and schedule, including groupings, transitions and flexibility.	4.28 (1.00-7.00)	5.26 (2.33-7.00)
Overall Average Score	**3.40 (1.59-5.82)**	**4.48 (2.41-6.39)**

There are several mechanisms by which funding is likely impacting program quality. The first, and most obvious, is that an increased level of program funding enables schools to provide children with a higher quality program in concrete ways. When funds are specifically made available for items such as classroom furniture, materials and supplies, programs tend to purchase these items, and in doing so, raise their ECERS-3 scores on particular items captured in the *Space and Furnishings* subscale that measures the amount, condition and appropriateness of furniture (i.e. child sized tables and chairs, cubbies for personal belongings).

Both the *Personal Care Routines* and *Learning Activities* subscales were observed to fall just below the "minimal" range for quality in base-funded classrooms. Items within the *Personal Care Routines* subscale measure practices such as hand washing (i.e. ensuring washing is done completely and correctly when needed) as well as diapering and bathroom procedures. Along with personal care practices, another reason the scores on this subscale were so low related to the meals and snacks offered to children. It was observed that in most classrooms, the quality of food served was insufficient, as defined by the USDA Meal Guidelines.[v] For example, not all children were offered the required meal components during the

three-hour observation, or the food offered was of insufficient quality (e.g. too much sugar). Funding would impact these scores directly.

Funding for space and teacher salaries also impacts the length of time a program can operate. A full day of instruction offers more opportunity to plan a program that meets the time requirements needed to raise the score on many items throughout the ECERS-3 and this in turn raises program quality. In the "Learning Activities" subscale many of the individual items measure whether materials and activities that promote learning are accessible for at least one hour a day. While fully funded programs must operate a six-hour school day many of the "base funded" pre-K programs in the state still operate on a half-day schedule (providing children with a two-and-a-half- or three-hour program). These shortened days naturally make it more challenging to provide children with extended periods of time for play and learning. For example, items which measure children's ability to access space and equipment for gross motor play were among the lowest scoring items. Given the importance of vigorous exercise to children's physical health and academic achievement, providing time in the day for this is essential to overall wellbeing.[vi]

Some subscales are more easily explained by differences in funding than others. All state-funded pre-K classrooms, regardless of funding level or auspice, require a P-3 certified teacher which makes it puzzling that scores differ on the *Interaction* subscale measuring supervision of children, discipline, staff-child interactions, individualized teacher and learning, and interactions among the children. We would expect certified teachers to score equally well in this subscale given that time and materials are not measured in these items. Although it is beyond the scope of this study to determine the exact causes of these differences, it is reasonable to presume that some of the other structural supports fully funded classrooms receive may explain at least part of the difference. For example, teachers in fully funded classrooms receive in-classroom coaching by master teachers and related technical assistance. They also operate at a lower teacher-to-student ratio than base-funded classrooms. Research is clear that class size, particularly with young children, impacts the quality of the program.[vii]

Current Capacity of the Early Childhood Workforce

District

During the initial Abbott preschool expansion, the state faced a scarcity of teachers qualified to teach pre-K. Based on the lessons learned from that period, it is critical to understand current capacity to meet demand for P-3 certified teachers given the expectation that SFRA will be fully funded. Answering this question requires understanding the adequacy of the current system in producing certified teachers as well as examining the current early childhood workforce in private provider classrooms.

Approximately 50,000 preschool children are estimated to be eligible and not yet in pre-K which translates into well over 3,000 P-3 teachers needed within the next four years. The current rate at which we are producing certified teachers can not meet that need. It should also be noted that for the past three years the number of P-3 certificates issued has been decreasing. Additionally, there seem to be regions of the state where shortages are more likely as expansion continues. The information gained directly from districts child care and Head Start leaders, as well as by reviewing teacher certification and employment data from the state of NJ, paint a picture of a system which has been able to absorb the slow rate at which pre-K has expanded in the last decade. Plans must be made however for the eventual number of students that will need to be served once SFRA is fully funded

The majority of districts (73%) report having no pre-K teacher turnover in the past year. When districts do hire a new teacher the search typically lasts less than three months. As can be seen in Table 13, Head Start

and child care centers report rates similar to districts, albeit with slightly more turnover and a longer time frame to find qualified candidates (particularly true for Head Start candidates).

Table 13: Teacher Turnover by Auspice

Question	District	Child Care	Head Start
Teacher turnover in past 12 months?	73% lost none 27% lost 1	63% lost none 21% lost 1 11% lost 2 5% lost 4	67% lost none 22% lost 1 11% lost 3
Length of time to find a qualified (properly certified) candidate?	25% – < 1 month 71% – 1-2 months 4% – 2-3 months	19% – < 1 month 56% – 1-2 months 25% – 2-3 months	50% – 1-2 months 37.5% – 2-3 months 12.5% – > 3 months

In interviews, all supervisors reported they receive enough applicants to fill positions. Many answered they receive upwards of 30 per posting. This response is mirrored by the data provided in the NJ Department of Education Preparation Provider Reports which show that 30-40% of all novice teachers (not just those with P-3 certificates) are not employed in a public school district 1 year later. The information included in these reports draws on data submitted to the NJ DOE through several sources including: The Teacher Certification Information System (TCIS), New Jersey's student- and staff-level Standards Measurement and Resource for Teaching data system (NJSMART) and the Office of the Secretary of Higher Education's Student Unit Record system (NJSURE).[viii]

Supervisors do not consider a candidate "qualified" simply because they hold a P-3 certificate. When surveyed about the availability of "*qualified candidates"* the majority responded, "*there may be some, but it will take significant effort to locate and recruit them.*" The desired qualifications supervisors most often reported in interviews were ability to speak Spanish, hold a dual certification in ESL, be dual-certified in special education, and experience working in preschool or urban settings. The need for bilingual teachers is particularly acute in communities that have seen a rapid rise in their Spanish-speaking population not matched by bilingual teachers applying for positions.

 "*The applicant pool is so small. And our pre-K is largely Spanish speaking. And we only have one pre-K teacher out of the seven that is a Spanish speaker….*" (Building Principal)

As can be seen in Table 14, over the past three years, the state has issued more than 3,000 P-3 teaching certificates, which would seem to be an adequate number for expansion. The picture on teacher availability, however, is complicated. P-3 licensed teachers are also able to teach in K-3 classrooms. The Higher Education workgroup reported that many P-3 candidates are only taking that certificate because they can't pass the more rigorous assessments required for the K-6 certificate. In addition, it was discovered that P-3 certified teachers who are employed at district-contracted private providers are not consistently reported to the DOE as employed by the contracting district. Estimates of the availability of P-3 certified teachers may not be as large as the official employment numbers suggest. Another troubling trend is that the number of teachers obtaining either the certificate of eligibility (CE) or certificate of eligibility with advanced standing (CEAS) has decreased substantially over the past three years, with only half as many CEs and a decrease of 25% of CEAS issued in 2016-17, compared to 2014-15.

Table 14: Certificate issued: Preschool CE and CEAS

	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	Total
CE	482	302	242	1026
CEAS	844	767	653	2264
Total Issued	1326	1069	895	3290

Child Care

Higher Education workgroup participants agreed the pool of educators working in child care and Head Start settings should be seen as a resource. These educators, who are already working in local communities, can help fill needed teaching positions. However, they may need supports to obtain their P-3 credentials.

According to state code, all teachers who work in publicly funded pre-K, regardless of auspice, must have their P-3 certificate. In NJ, 89% of Head Start teachers have a BA. Many current Head Start teachers who have a BA degree, but not an ECE certification, will need financial assistance to complete the two-year alternate route program. Less is known about the credentials of child care teachers. Our survey data allowed us to estimate that 35% of child care teachers held a BA and of those teachers with a BA, 50% have a teaching credential. Thus, about 18% have a teaching credential. Our data are unclear regarding specific certification. These estimates show a lower proportion of child care teachers with a BA than was found in 2009 in the PEARS report. That study took place during the Great Recession and more college graduates were without employment at the time. The majority of current child care teachers will need support completing a four-year degree. Because the private provider workforce is already experienced working with young children, is typically more diverse, and has traditionally had a larger percentage of teachers who speak Spanish, it is important to ensure that these valuable human resources are a retained.

The Leadership Workforce

In order to create and support high-quality pre-K programs, administrators need to possess knowledge regarding early childhood development and practices. Currently there is no requirement in licensure for principals to complete any coursework related to early childhood development. Similarly, directors of child care centers currently are not required to hold a degree in early childhood education despite the fact they oversee centers that primarily serve children under the age of five. District administrators, child care center directors and Head Start site supervisors differ in their levels of early childhood experience with 22% of district leaders reporting having no college coursework in ECE, 46% reporting some coursework and 32% reporting substantial coursework. Half reported attending "some" (defined as "a few workshops") while the other 50% reported attending a "substantial" (defined as lasting "at least a week" or "meets over the course of a semester") number of professional development experiences.

As shown in Table 15, child care center directors and Head Start site supervisors are more likely to have degrees in early childhood education, with 78% of child care directors and 83% of Head Start site supervisors reporting that either their bachelors' or masters' degree was in early childhood education. A small number of building leads do not have a four-year college degree. In our sample, 6% of child care leads did not have a BA and reported their highest degree was a high school diploma. In Head Start, 11% of site supervisors reported that their highest level of education was an AA degree.

Table 15: Private Provider Leadership Credentials

Question	Child care	Head Start
Highest degree	6% High School 44% BA 50% MA	11% AA 56% BA 33% MA
Degree in ECE	78% Yes 22% No	83% Yes 17% No
Years in position	Mean 13 years Range 2-40 years	Mean 7.75 years Range 1-14 years

Recommendations of the ECE Higher Education Stakeholders

A group of faculty and others were convened to identify barriers in the current system to developing a fully qualified workforce and to focus on preparation and retention of teachers and leaders in ECE. In this report, we highlight the most relevant recommended solutions from the group to overcome these barriers.[ix]

Teacher Preparation and Retention

- The major barrier to teacher preparation identified by the workgroup is lack of funding to attend college. They were especially concerned that teachers in private provider classrooms who are experienced preschool teachers, and as a group are more diverse than the K-12 teaching pool, will be lost to the system if supports are not provided to help them complete college and/or become certified.

- The workgroup unanimously recommended the state fund teacher tuition through scholarship with a provision that the teacher work for at least four years in preschool classroom in a high-needs region where there are fewer teachers. Additionally, the scholarships should include all licensing tests and fees. Stringent expectations for eligibility were also recommended such as maintaining a high GPA and making steady progress each year. Candidates should also already be teaching in a child care or Head Start center.

- Drawing from the Abbott Preschool program expansion, the workgroup recommended that support such as reimbursement for hiring substitutes be built in such that teachers can take classes during the day when necessary. Institutes of Higher Education(IHE) could be required to adjust schedules and locations of courses as a condition of receiving and administering scholarship funds. Rigorous online coursework should also be pursued such as Early EdU.

- Both the Higher Education workgroup and the data from districts and Head Start interviews highlighted difficulty in recruiting and retaining P-3 certified teachers holding additional qualifications deemed important to the quality of pre-K programming (i.e. bilingual, experience working with children with special needs). Regions of the state with fewer teacher preparation providers experience this scarcity more acutely than others. The workgroup identified several barriers and solutions to this issue.

- Private provider centers and all providers in specific regions have more difficulty keeping qualified candidates. The workgroup recommended maintaining pay parity between private provider and district teachers and establishing methods to more closely match benefit packages such as a statewide health benefits pool. Leadership and expertise from other state agencies such as Labor and Pensions would be helpful.

- They also suggested creating special mentoring for teachers with highly desirable qualifications to ensure they have supports needed to stay in the job.

Developing and Maintaining Expert Leaders

In addition to the anticipated need for certified pre-K teachers, there is also a need for qualified leaders to run new or expanded pre-K programs. These include early childhood supervisors, principals, master teachers, center directors, and others.

The workgroup confirmed the results of our survey that principals (and some supervisors) do not have strong specialized knowledge of early childhood education. They recommended requiring in the principal certification that candidates complete at least one early childhood education course or spend a specified portion of the 300 hours of internship in an early childhood setting with a highly qualified ECE leader. They also recommended convening a meeting between building leaders, ECE faculty and deans in IHEs to discuss how incorporating a focus on P-12 in their coursework and providing stipends to help them develop such coursework. This could be augmented or replaced by a "micro-credential" in Early Learning Leadership which NJPSA is considering developing.

The workgroup was concerned that private provider building leaders are not required to have early childhood education experience and may lack other skills vital to collaborating with districts such as fiscal management. They suggested creating a leadership credential for working in ECE that all leaders, regardless of auspice, should acquire.

Conclusions: What we know about the capacities of current preschool providers

Many of our conclusions confirmed what was already suspected about the ECE landscape, and thus allow us to move forward having established that our assumptions are correct or that earlier findings from the PEARS report have not changed substantially. However, we also discovered some new findings of interest.

Program quality

• Money matters: fully funded sites (i.e. those receiving the PEG or PEEA funding to meet all pre-K standards) outperformed base-funded sites (i.e. those receiving funding that is inadequate to meet full quality standards) on classroom quality measures. Fully funded classrooms had quality ratings of 4.48 on a 7-point scale which is considered almost "good," compared to the

base-funded classroom average of 3.40 considered just over minimal quality. See Tables 13 & 14 for details.

• But money alone isn't enough: In 1999-2000, initial classroom quality for the Abbott Preschool districts was comparable to the current classroom quality in base-funded ECPA & ELLI districts. The multi-faceted and intensive TA the state started providing in in 2003 led to systematic implementation of program supports which in turn resulted in high-quality classroom practices. This same type of cascading support has been available to PEG-funded classrooms resulting in classroom quality which substantially exceeds the base-funded classrooms.

Facilities capacity

• Current classroom capacity and quality are inadequate to serve all eligible children. Districts are serving less than half of eligible children; and when asked to project what space they might be able to provide for additional classrooms (either in current buildings or by renting or purchasing space), district leaders identified only enough space to serve an additional 11% of eligible children. See Tables 6, 7, & 8 for details.

Workforce qualifications and preparation

Approximately 50,000 preschool children are estimated to be eligible but not yet in pre-K, which translates into needing more than 3,000 P-3 teachers within the next four years. The current rate at which we are producing certified teachers can not meet that need.

• For the past three years, the number of P-3 certificates issued has been decreasing. Additionally, there seem to be regions of the state where teacher shortages are more likely as expansion continues.

• The qualifications of the current district workforce are mixed. All teachers are appropriately certified with specialization in early childhood education but the administrators, who are expected to be instructional leaders, have mixed expertise in early childhood education. Over 20% of district pre-K leaders report having completed no coursework in early childhood education, while just under 50% report completing one or two courses.

Awareness of and planning for expansion

"Readiness" is an issue for both child care centers and districts -- but for slightly different reasons. Child care centers already are serving pre-K children and are interested in working with districts; but administrators are unclear about how to gain the attention of the districts. In the absence of a contract with a district, they also lack funds necessary to bring classrooms up to current guidelines. Readiness issues for districts include lack of knowledge of pre-K guidelines and expectations for their districts, leading to lack of planning for the eventual reality of having to serve all eligible children.

• SFRA of 2008 is not well understood by either districts or child care providers. Half of both district administrators and child care providers surveyed reported they either had never heard of SFRA or didn't know how it would impact them.

• Conversely, Head Start agencies all report understanding SFRA and are actively engaged in planning for expansion by conducting facilities review, planning to acquire additional space and examining their teacher workforce qualifications.

• Few districts report planning for expansion, with only 10% reporting conducting a facilities plan or reaching out to Head Start or child care centers to explore the possibility of collaboration. This is especially true when it comes to planning to serve 3-year-olds.

• Some districts are waiting for funding to become available before investing resources in planning to expand; and some are leery of investing in a program that does not have guaranteed future funding.

Collaboration between districts and with private providers

There are a number of compelling reasons why pre-K expansion needs to be based on collaborations. The NJ DOE collaborates with other state agencies to develop a seamless system of supports for families of young children. To scale up quickly and take advantage of all resources in and around the community, collaboration between districts and with private pre-K providers will enhance the ECE system and aide in quick scale-up.

• Roughly a quarter of districts are currently unwilling to collaborate with child care or Head Start; others (48%) are somewhat willing to entertain the idea, and a small number (7% child care/10% Head Start) already contract or are definitely willing to continue to do so. However, they are less reluctant to consider shared services and other collaborations with neighboring districts. Currently 35% of the districts collaborate in small ways, such as partnering to offer professional development opportunities for staff or sharing contracted staff such as master teachers.

• We discovered that even small collaborations among districts can lead to large results. In one focus group interview with districts contiguous to each other, the possibility for various shared services generated many ideas. Additionally, during the 2016-2017 PEEA expansion, a group of districts was brought together by a county business administrator to explore the idea of applying for PEEA funding. With support, the group grew to include a supervisor of a nearby Abbott district. The end result was all the districts received PEEA funding, pooled money to hire one Master Teacher across the districts and are still meeting to support one another around issues related to further expansion, budgeting, and shared professional development.

• Districts generally do not understand how Head Start works (e.g. funding, catchment areas). Conversely, the Head Start agency leaders have a federal mandate to establish relationships with

districts and understand how contracting works from their experience working with PEG and Abbott districts. They are almost uniformly willing to partner and this is not just limited to contracting for classrooms but includes providing expertise such as coaching and inclusion support to teachers, overseeing recruitment and enrollment, assisting in developing long-term plans with facilities assessments, contributing to PEEA grant applications, and conducting screenings and other required ancillary services. Head Start agencies are hampered in their attempts to assist and partner because it is often not clear which districts will apply for funding, making it difficult for them to focus their planning efforts.

• Few districts have had preliminary conversations with child care centers in their towns, and many do not know they exist. In addition, the southern part of the state, along the coast and other rural areas are child care "deserts" with few or even no licensed centers—and those centers that do exist often are quite small.   In contrast, many large districts include Head Start agencies and multiple child care centers ready to collaborate; yet many of those districts remain reluctant to contract for pre-K services despite lacking the the physical capacity to serve their population of preschool children.

• Our study was impeded by the fact many of child care centers were impossible to engage. Our multiple attempts to contact them were unsuccessful: they either did not have email or did not respond to email, did not answer the phone, did not call back after numerous messages were left, and did not reply to regular mail. This is an important finding because a school district official attempting to reach a nearby center will likely not make numerous attempts. Additionally, it reveals that, likely due to limited resources, some centers do not currently follow accepted business practices.

• Similarly, some center directors and Head Start leaders we interviewed reported that they attempted to reach districts but found them non-responsive to email or phone messages.

Recommendations for increasing readiness to expand

NIEER convened a group of stakeholders including representatives from state agencies, districts, child care centers, Head Start agencies, higher education, advocates and funders to review the findings. We augmented existing recommendations taken from the Preschool Expansion in NJ: A Roadmap for Implementation (Frede, 2018) with those derived from our conclusions. The following set of recommendations would increase the ECE community's readiness for expansion.

Program Quality and Capacity

Initially, in the first few years of expansion, the focus should be on facilities planning and workforce development including adequate programmatic support to district and private provider leaders as well as the teachers and assistant teachers.

- To ensure the increased money for preschool expansion leads to improved classroom quality and ultimately results in benefits for children, the Division of Early Childhood Education lead position should be returned to Assistant Commissioner status to ensure a senior expert in early childhood education at the DOE is directly engaged in major policy decisions.

- Additionally, Division staffing should be increased at least until pre-K expansion is fully implemented. To facilitate this, many of ECE experts could be on loan from state IHEs and school districts for the initial scale-up and implementation. Graduate student internships could also be funded to assist.

- The state should authorize new funding for facilities projects in expansion districts where capacity is low and/or facilities do not meet standards. The DECE should provide guidance on reviewing and planning for facilities and require that districts conduct thorough facilities reviews within district buildings and within the community.

- The state should create and contribute to a public-private partnership with community development financial institutions and philanthropic donors to establish a revolving loan fund for providing buildings for Head Start and child care centers in districts where there is an established need for more classrooms. The state should consider privileging centers that are enrolled in GrowNJKids and have a high tier rating.

- Many current Head Start teachers who have a BA degree, but who do not have certification, will need financial assistance to complete the two-year alternate route program. The majority of current child care teachers will need support completing a four-year degree. A scholarship program for teachers in contracting private provider classrooms should be funded and administered directly to colleges and universities in proportion to the eligible preschool population near the IHE. Additionally, the state should institute a salary structure for teachers working toward their degrees that would provide regular salary increases as they meet milestones toward completion.

- Expansion will compound the need to provide specialized professional development to school district leadership including ECE supervisors, building principals, master teachers and other classroom support personnel. Center directors and Head Start site supervisors will also need specialized support and professional development. Micro-credentials recognized in the Preschool Program Guidelines should be developed andcoursework to complete the micro-credentials should be offered on a sliding fee scale based on position and need. Additionally, leaders across position and auspice should be brought together in

regional PLCs to support and learn from each other. Including experienced leaders from the former Abbott districts and contracted centers could augment the learning in these groups.

- The expert voices of ECE faculty need to be represented in teacher preparation policy decisions. The New Jersey Association for Early Childhood Teacher Education should be strengthened so members are knowledgeable about current policy decisions and active in informing the state about their impact.

Awareness of and planning for expansion

Develop methods to ensure that eligible districts are beginning the planning process now and not waiting for the next budget. These should include the following:

• County superintendents (or their designee) and a DECE specialist should co-host county-level collaborative consortia. All "eligible" and current PEEA districts should be invited. The TA could be tiered such that PEG and current PEEA districts are working on their five-year plan to serve their entire universe and improve the quality of their instruction while remaining base-funded districts also receive assistance on responding to the anticipated NFO. There is another group of districts that will be eligible for universal funding once revisions of the SFRA designations are implemented. Most of these districts as well as most of the districts that will receive "targeted" funding for children who are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch do not currently provide general education preschool. They may need more basic TA around implementing the guidelines.

These consortia meetings could mirror the successful collaboration in Monmouth County for the first PEEA grant and draw from our experience conducting focus groups with clustered districts. TA could be enhanced (e.g. Abbott ECE supervisors, ACNJ, NIEER, contracting center directors) or coordinated (e.g. ACNJ, NIEER) by knowledgeable others. Ultimately, these could become county Early Childhood Advisory Councils.

• Design web-based TA on planning for expansion and completing the application; focus on the budget pages and the process for contracting but include criteria for selecting curriculum and the rationale behind the standards in the preschool guidance.

Collaboration between districts and with private providers

In addition to the county-level ECE consortia which should foster some collaboration,

• Introduce Head Start grantee and child care center directors to districts via email and invite them to part of the county meeting.

• Develop guidance around shared services for pre-K across districts including curriculum PD, sharing ECE supervisor, master teacher or other specialized ECE staff positions.

• Provide targeted, personalized TA on facilities planning as well as all aspects of implementing high quality pre-K to large districts including assistance in developing their plans if they agree to include private providers in the planning.

Appendix A: Item Scores by Funding Level

ECERS-3 Item	Mean for Base Funded N=120	Mean for Fully Funded N=164
1. Indoor space	4.33	4.12
2. Furniture for care, play, and learning	3.77	3.99
3. Room arrangement for play and learning	3.13	4.12
4. Space for privacy	3.78	5.88
5. Child-related display	3.62	4.87
6. Space for gross motor play	2.23	3.21
7. Gross motor equipment	1.79	3.35
8. Meals/snacks	1.11	2.33
9. Toileting/diapering	3.01	3.63
10. Health practices	2.85	3.84
11. Safety practices	4.25	4.31
12. Helping children expand vocabulary	4.54	5.38
13. Encouraging children to use language	4.83	5.68
14. Staff use of books with children	3.87	4.58
15. Encouraging children's use of books	3.23	5.23
16. Becoming familiar with print	3.78	4.89
17. Fine motor	3.09	5.18
18. Art	2.92	4.74
19. Music and movement	2.88	4.02
20. Blocks	2.13	4.12
21. Dramatic play	2.80	4.72
22. Nature/science	2.08	3.51
23. Math materials and activities	2.35	3.94
24. Math in daily events	3.49	4.68
25. Understanding written numbers	2.19	3.97
26. Promoting acceptance of diversity	3.17	5.06
27. Appropriate use of technology	2.64	3.46
28. Supervision of gross motor	3.22	4.46
29. Individualized teaching and learning	4.39	6.04
30. Staff-child interaction	5.43	5.79
31. Peer interaction	4.37	5.45
32. Discipline	4.53	5.22
33. Transitions and waiting times	4.79	5.55
34. Free play	3.45	5.38
35. Whole group activities for play and learning	4.58	5.01

Appendix B. ECERS-3 Subscale and Item Descriptions

Subscale	Items	Description
Space for Furnishings	1. Indoor Space	Considers enough indoor space for children, staff, and basic furnishings for routines, play, and learning.
	2. Furnishings for care, play, and learning	Focuses on ample furniture for routine care, play, and learning, including convenient cubbies for individual use.
	3. Room arrangement for play and learning	Space is arranged so that classroom pathways generally do not interrupt play and supervision.
	4. Space for privacy	Considers an indoor space for privacy available and set up physically in the classroom to discourage interruptions.
	5. Child-related display	Focuses on appropriate materials displayed for children throughout the classroom, including simple pictures, posters, and artwork.
	6. Space for gross motor play	Gross motor area is spacious, generally safe, and easily accessible to children.
	7. Gross motor equipment	Equipment is age appropriate, accessible, and ample enough to interest every child.
Personal Care Routines	Meals/Snacks	Schedule and sanitary procedures are appropriate during meal times. Staff sit with children to encourage learning.
	Toileting/diapering	Proper sanitary procedures usually followed with pleasant supervision.
	Health practices	Proper sanitary procedures used consistently as needed, with a few lapses.
	Safety practices	Considers no more than 2 major safety hazards present indoors or outdoors.
Language and Literacy	Helping children expand vocabulary	Measures how frequent staff uses specific words for objects and actions and descriptive words as children experience routines and play.
	Encouraging children to use language	Assesses how frequent staff asks questions that children are interested in answering and that require longer answers. Includes many conversations during gross motor free play and routines.
	Staff use of books with children	Staff read appropriate books to children that relate to current classroom activities or themes, showing interest and enjoyment while doing so.
	Encouraging children's use of books	Many books are accessible and organized in a defined interest center.
	Becoming familiar with print	Focuses on how most visible print is combined with pictures, relates to current classroom topics, and shows a variety of words.
Learning Activities	Fine motor	Focuses on the accessibility for children of fine motor materials, including interlocking building materials, manipulatives, puzzles, and art materials.
	Art	Art materials, including drawing materials, paints, 3D objects, collage materials, and tools, must be accessible for children.

	Music and movement	Measures how many music materials and activities are accessible for children during free play.
	Blocks	Enough space, unit blocks and accessories from 3 different categories for 2-3 children to build at once.
	Dramatic play	Many and varied dramatic play materials, including dolls, furniture, play food and dress-up clothes must be accessible for children during free play.
	Nature/science	At least 15 nature/science materials, including living things, natural objects, factual books, tools, or sand/water must be accessible for children.
	Math materials and activities	At least 10 different appropriate math materials accessible, including materials to count/compare quantities, measure/compare sizes, and familiarize children with shapes.
	Math in daily events	Assess how staff encourages math learning as part of daily routines.
	Understanding written numbers	At least 3-5 different materials should be present in the classroom that shows children the meaning of print numbers.
	Promoting acceptance of diversity	At least 10 examples of diversity accessible, including books, displayed pictures and materials.
	Appropriate use of technology	All observed materials used are appropriate and limited to 10-15 minutes per child during the observation.
Interaction	Supervision of gross motor	Focuses on careful supervision in order to ensure children's safety.
	Individualized teaching and learning	Many activities observed are open- ended and most allow children to be successful.
	Staff-child interaction	Evaluates frequent positive staff- child interactions, with no long periods of no interaction.
	Peer interaction	Captures positive peer interactions during at least half of the observation.
	Discipline	Children appear to be aware of classroom rules, and generally follow them with reasonable amount of teacher control.
Program Structure	Transitions and waiting times	Classroom transitions are usually smooth and productively engaging.
	Free play	Free play takes place for 1 hour during observation, including some time indoors and some time outdoors (weather permitting).
	Whole - group activities for play and learning	Staff are responsive and flexible in ways that maximize child engagement during whole group activities.

Endnotes

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[v] New Jersey Department of Education (2017). *Education Preparation Provider Report.* Retrieved from URL: https://www.state.nj.us/education/educators/rpr/preparation/providers/

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