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Reaching for Quality:

Lessons from New Jersey on Raising Preschool Teacher Qualifications While Maintaining Workforce Diversity

A BUILD BRIEF ON DIVERSITY AND EQUITY

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About this resource brief • • •

This brief is part of a series of resource briefs sponsored by the Build Initiative on equity and diversity in developing early learning systems. These briefs examine how responding to the diversity of young children and addressing issues of ethnicity, language, and culture need to be part of all aspects of early learning systems building. They draw on states’ experiences—particularly states that have taken a lead in tackling important early learning system building issues—and describe critical issues, opportunities, and lessons learned in developing an early learning system for America’s multi-ethnic population. This brief examines New Jersey’s pioneering experiences in building a high-quality preschool system in high poverty school districts under the State Supreme Court *Abbott* decision.

Introduction • • •

Teacher diversity and cultural competence are important characteristics of quality early care and education. In quality programs, teachers reflect and affirm children’s cultures and create learning environments that connect the home and school settings.

Children’s backgrounds and experiences must be understood and respected.¹ Teachers who are diverse—who reflect the ethnic, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds of the children and families they serve—have first-hand experience with the cultural subtleties of how children are raised and can communicate better with parents and support continuity between the home and early childhood settings.²

In addition, teacher-child relationships play a critical role in shaping pathways and impacting outcomes for young children. Young children notice differences in race, culture, ethnicity, and language and begin to place values on those characteristics based on the signals (intentional and unintentional) sent by the adults around them. Teachers who “look like” the children they serve and speak their

1 Bowman, B.T., Donovan, M.S., & Burns, M.S. (Eds.). (2000). *Eager to learn: Educating our preschoolers*. Washington DC: National Academy Press.

2 Matthews, H. (2008). *Charting progress for babies in child care: Support a diverse and culturally competent workforce*. Washington, DC: Center for Law and Social Policy.

language contribute to self-esteem and social-emotional development by reinforcing the value and importance of children’s cultural backgrounds. Young children learn about their own ethnic and cultural identity and how that ethnicity and culture is similar to and different from other cultures. In particular, young children who are not from the dominant culture learn ways to navigate between their own culture and the culture that is dominant.³

“...all children can benefit from exposure to different cultures and need to be in environments that promote appreciation for others...”

At the same time, all children can benefit from exposure to different cultures and need to be in environments that promote appreciation for others and address issues of bias when they occur, both in the classroom and in larger society.⁴ For example, well-meaning teachers sometimes expect children of diverse backgrounds to meet the same standards and use the same learning styles as the dominant culture. This perpetuates the myth that the values, mores, and learning styles of minority or diverse cultures are less important or less than ideal. A teacher’s ability to engage children of diverse backgrounds while encouraging their achievement and promoting self-esteem can have a major effect on children’s school readiness.⁵ For all of these reasons, diversity in the early care and education workforce is important for young children.

Teacher professional preparation also is an important part of quality early care and education.⁶ Research shows that better-educated and trained teachers generally are more knowledgeable about developmentally-appropriate teaching practices⁷ and yield greater developmental and learning benefits for children.⁸ For example, they tend to be more sensitive and responsive to young children, are less harsh and restrictive compared to teachers with less training,⁹ and provide rich language and cognitive experiences for children. As a result, children with better-educated teachers tend to have better cognitive, linguistic, and social-emotional outcomes.¹⁰

In response to this research, a number of states have raised the quality of their early care and education programs by raising teacher qualifications. For example, 27 states now require lead preschool teachers to have at least a bachelor’s degree, and 37 states require those teachers to have specialized early childhood training.¹¹ This specialized training is important because policies focused solely on four-year degrees may not be sufficient to improve classroom quality

3 Bruner, C., Wright, M.S., & Tirmizi, S.N. (2007). *Village building and school readiness: Closing opportunity gaps in a diverse society*. Des Moines, IA: State Early Childhood Policy Technical Assistance Network. Chang, H. (2006). *Getting ready for quality: The critical importance of developing and supporting a skilled, ethnically and linguistically diverse early childhood workforce*. California Tomorrow.

4 Build Equity and Diversity Working Group.

5 Green, M. (2006) *Social and emotional development in the zero-to-three child: A systems change approach*. In B. Bowman & E.K. Moore (Eds.). *School readiness and social-emotional development: Perspectives on cultural diversity* (pp. 89-98). Washington, DC: National Black Child Development Institute.

6 Barnett, W.S. (2003). Better teachers, better preschools: Student achievement linked to teacher qualifications. *Preschool Policy Matters (Issue 2)*. New Brunswick, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research.

7 McMullen, M. B., & Alat, K. (2002). Education matters in the nurturing of the beliefs of preschool caregivers and teachers. *Early Childhood Research and Practice*, 4(2). Retrieved from <http://ecrp.uiuc.edu/v4n2/index.html>.

8 Kontos, S., & Wilcox-Herzog, A. (1997). Influences on children’s competence in early childhood classrooms. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 12(3), 247-262. Whitebook, M., Howes, C. & Phillips, D. (1989). Who cares? Child care teachers and the quality of care in America. *Final report: National child care staffing study*. Oakland, CA: Child Care Employment Project.

9 Kagan, S. L., & Cohen, N. (1997). *Not by chance: Creating an early care and education system for America’s children*. The Quality 2000 Initiative. New Haven, CT: The Bush Center in Child Development and Social Policy.

10 Barnett (2003).

11 National Institute for Early Education Research (2008). *State preschool yearbook*. New Brunswick, NJ: Author.



or maximize children’s academic gains.¹² This is especially true because research shows many early childhood teacher education programs awarding bachelor’s degrees do not provide sufficient course content or nurture practice skills in supporting children of diverse backgrounds. As a result, teachers leaving those programs do not feel properly equipped to meet the needs of children from non-dominant cultures or of children living in poverty.¹³ The ability to establish relationships with young children from dominant and non-dominant cultures and to support their social-emotional development are valued competencies that provide a pathway to positive outcomes for young children.¹⁴ When considering quality in programs, it is important to consider these skills alongside degree status.



Early childhood educators (particularly child care workers and family child care providers and Head Start staff) generally reflect the diversity of the young child population they serve.

The table below shows national data on the composition of the child care and preschool and elementary school workforce compared to the young child population. Child care workers and young children across the nation have similar minority representation. Differences increase for preschool and kindergarten teachers, and increase further for elementary teachers.

| Early Childhood Workforce and Young Child Population: Select Characteristics | | |
|--|---------------------|----------|
| | White, Non-Hispanic | Minority |
| Young child population (0-4) | 54.9% | 45.1% |
| Child care workers | 59.9% | 40.1% |
| Preschool or kindergarten teachers | 75.0% | 25.0% |
| Elementary or middle school teachers | 81.1% | 18.9% |

Sources: Child data, American Community Survey data 200x. Workforce composition data, Bureau of Labor Statistics data, 2008. Workforce composition data is available only on a national level.

But many early childhood educators do not have higher professional credentials. The Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that 44 percent of the child care workforce has a high school diploma or less.¹⁵ At the same time, and particularly in poor, immigrant, and minority communities, these early childhood educators are a core part of the employment base for the community and represent the trusted social connections for families with young children. Therefore, activities that increase their

12 Washington, V. (2008). Role, relevance, reinvention: *Higher education in the field of early care and education*. Boston, MA: Wheelock College.

13 Ray, A., Bowman, B., & Brownell, J. O’N. (2006). Teacher-child relationships, social-emotional development, and school achievement. In B. Bowman & E. K. Moore (Eds.), *School readiness and social-emotional development: Perspectives on cultural diversity* (pp. 7-22). Washington, DC: National Black Child Development Institute.

14 Ray A., Bowman, B., & Brownell, J. O’N. (2006). *Ibid.*

15 Bureau of Labor Statistics (2009). *Career guide to industries, 2010-11 edition*. Retrieved from <http://www.bls.gov/oco/cg>.

professional preparation and their incomes can benefit both the young children they serve and the community as a whole.¹⁶ This applies to those who can secure teacher certificates; it also applies to those who can achieve other gains in their knowledge and development, even if that does not result in a specific degree.¹⁷

There are concerns, however, that increasing preschool teacher qualifications may negatively affect the diversity of the early care and education workforce. In other words, attempts to raise quality in one way (by raising teacher qualifications) may negatively impact quality in another (decreasing teacher diversity).

These goals do not have to be mutually exclusive. Raising quality by increasing teacher qualifications can lead to retention and even expansion of the diversity of the early childhood professional workforce.

This case study discusses New Jersey's experiences with teacher qualifications and diversity. New Jersey's experiences can inform other states as they work to build early learning systems that feature high-quality preschool programs.

¹⁶ Bruner, C. (2004). *Many happy returns: Three economic models that make the case for school readiness*. Des Moines, IA: State Early Childhood Policy Technical Assistance Network.

¹⁷ Mitchell, A.W. (2000). *An evaluation of the impact of the Mississippi Director's Child Care Credentialing Project*. Prepared for the Mississippi Forum on Children and Families.

New Jersey Case Study • • •

Over a decade ago (in 1998), the *Abbott v. Burke* Supreme Court case required New Jersey to provide high-quality preschool programs within New Jersey's 30 lowest-income school districts and also to set preschool teacher qualifications, giving teachers four years in which to achieve them. This case study begins with some background on the *Abbott* case and its rulings on preschool in New Jersey. It then goes on to discuss how the state responded to the Court's mandates and tried to support existing preschool teachers to meet those mandates. It ends with a discussion of how the preschool teacher workforce was affected, and lessons from New Jersey's experience for other states that want to increase preschool teacher qualifications without trading off the quality that comes from having a diverse workforce.

The case study is based on research that included semi-structured interviews with 20 key stakeholders involved directly in New Jersey's response to the *Abbott* mandate. Stakeholders included state agency representatives, advocates, college faculty, professional development providers, preschool providers, school districts, researchers, and policymakers (see the Acknowledgments for a list).

What is *Abbott* Preschool • • •

***Abbott v. Burke* is a long-running New Jersey Supreme Court case about the equitable funding and supplemental program needs of the state's 30 poorest school districts** (known as *Abbott* districts). This important case has focused on finding ways to eliminate learning disadvantages and close the achievement gap between students in the urban *Abbott* districts and their more affluent suburban peers.¹⁸

¹⁸ *Abbott v. Burke*, 153 N.J. 480, 710 A.2d 450 (1998). Ed. Law Rep. 258.



Over the last three decades, the *Abbott* case has resulted in numerous Court-mandated changes for low-income children in New Jersey. For example, the Court required that the state provide parity in education funding, and offer specific supplemental programs in the *Abbott* districts “over and above regular education” to assist disadvantaged students. These supplemental programs included whole school reform, supportive health and social services, full-day kindergarten, and preschool for three- and four-year-olds.

Abbott v. Burke mandated high-quality and comprehensive preschool. In 1998, during the case’s fifth time in front of the New Jersey Supreme Court (the case was known as *Abbott V*), the Court ruled that *all* three- and four-year-olds in *Abbott* districts have access to a *high-quality* and *comprehensive* preschool education. The goal was to enable children in low-income school districts to enter kindergarten ready to learn, with the same skills and abilities as children in the state’s wealthier districts. The Court based its judgment on scientific research that shows high-quality preschool can greatly increase the school readiness of low-income children, and has long-term benefits in academic achievement and later on in life.

In the case’s next iteration (*Abbott VI*), the Court went a step further and defined what it meant when it said “high-quality” programs. The Court’s definition focused on five areas—substantive standards, teacher qualifications, class size, facilities, and supplemental services for children. The State, with the Department of Education acting as lead agency, was charged with making the resources available to meet these standards.

The *Abbott* mandate includes some reference to diversity, but without much depth. It requires that children in *Abbott* preschools have a person in the classroom (not necessarily the teacher) who speaks the children’s language. It also recommends that resources in the community be utilized to support this requirement.

Abbott preschools included district-run programs, community-based child care, and Head Start. The Court’s ruling gave the 30 *Abbott* school districts primary responsibility and authority for preschool programs. Districts were not to

Components of *Abbott* Quality Preschool

Substantive Standards

Developmentally appropriate curriculum geared toward school readiness skill development.

Teacher Qualifications

A qualified and certified teacher and an assistant in every preschool classroom

Class Size

Maximum class size of fifteen students

Facilities

Adequate space, facilities, supplies

Supplemental Services

Transportation, dental, health, and other social services; services for children with disabilities and limited English proficiency





develop new preschool programs without acknowledging the programs that already existed in their communities. They were instructed to contract with state-licensed community-based child care centers where possible to speed up implementation and avoid duplication of services. Any community-based child care center that received an *Abbott* contract had to adhere to the same quality standards as district-run classrooms.

Districts also were to include Head Start in their efforts when possible. Like community-based centers, Head Start programs had to meet the same quality standards as other *Abbott* classrooms, with State funding to support those efforts.

Preschool teachers in *Abbott* districts had to get a bachelor's degree and early childhood certification within four years. The Supreme Court ruled that well-educated and certified teachers were a critical component of high-quality preschool. The Court asserted that without such teachers, the achievement gap between urban and suburban peers could not be closed sufficiently.

After the 1998 *Abbott* ruling, the State had to develop an appropriate definition of a “qualified and certified teacher” for the *Abbott* district preschools. The Department of Education later defined this as a bachelor's degree and early childhood certification. Teachers in *Abbott* programs who lacked the necessary academic credentials were required to make annual progress toward a bachelor's degree and to obtain that degree within *four* years. Previously, teachers did not need a college degree, and many teachers had a two-year associate's degree, a Child Development Associate (CDA) credential, or less.

“...teachers without bachelor's degrees had to return to school if they were to be eligible to serve as preschool teachers in *Abbott* preschools.”

These mandates created major questions about how the existing preschool workforce in New Jersey might be affected. While many teachers in community-based and Head Start programs had extensive experience working with young children, they had a mix of educational backgrounds, and 65% had less than a four-year degree. Consequently, teachers without bachelor's degrees had to return to school if they were to be eligible to serve as preschool teachers in *Abbott* preschools. This was not an issue for teachers in district-run preschools, however, as they already were required to have bachelor's degrees.

The *Abbott* mandates created numerous questions about *Abbott* teachers and what would happen to the early care and education workforce in general. The four-year timeframe was unprecedented in the country, and it was not clear if teachers would be able to complete the necessary degree and certification process on time. Complicating this was the fact that most New Jersey's colleges did



not have sufficient capacity to meet training demand increases. Few colleges had faculty trained in early childhood education, and, at the time, New Jersey had no early childhood certification.

It also was not clear how many teachers in community-based or Head Start settings would actually try to meet the qualifications. If they chose not to, they would be displaced or moved to assistant teacher positions where the qualifications were lower. This was a particular concern for long-standing teachers with many years of experience, but without the inclination or means to go back to school later in their careers.

Underlying all of this was the question of how the mandates would affect workforce diversity. The teachers affected by the mandates in community-based and Head Start settings were much more likely to be diverse than teachers in district-run classrooms.

How did New Jersey Respond to *Abbott* demands? ●●●

It was not enough for the State to set out the requirements for teachers in *Abbott* classrooms. A series of supports were required to help teachers in non-district settings meet the four-year deadline. Those supports included policies, funding, and information that aided teachers, programs, colleges and others in their attempts to meet the new education requirements.

It is important to note upfront that teacher diversity was not addressed directly in responses to the *Abbott* mandate. While the *Abbott* ruling's impact on workforce diversity was raised during some discussions about how to meet the new mandates, New Jersey did not put in place any supports for teachers that had the explicit goal of maintaining teacher diversity.

Rather, the emphasis was on creating supports that helped *existing teachers* in community-based settings meet the new requirements. Because existing teachers in those programs were considered to be diverse and fairly representative of their communities, a number of stakeholders felt that the supports that were put in place indirectly supported teacher diversity. So although diversity was not directly addressed, there was a clear concern for helping existing teachers keep their jobs.¹⁹

New Jersey offered multiple supports for existing teachers. The state responded to a series of challenges that threatened to keep existing teachers from continuing in *Abbott* programs after the four-year deadline. Challenges included the short timeline, the education system's capacity to meet training demands, helping teachers pay to go back to college, giving them the incentives to go back, helping teachers manage their challenging work and family responsibilities, and finally engaging critical stakeholders who were essential to success.

¹⁹ Early Care and Education Coalition (2003). *Position Statement*. Newark, NJ: Association for Children of New Jersey.



Challenge: The Four-Year Timeline

According to many who were very involved in the *Abbott* mandate's implementation, the short timeline and emergency-like state it created represented the most difficult challenge. Everything had to move quickly and all at once in order to meet the four-year deadline. While most felt that the mandate itself was a major step forward, the requirements at times seemed impossible to meet in a timely manner.

Eventually, the Court gave a two-year extension to teachers who could demonstrate progress.

As data presented later show, some teachers were able to meet the four-year deadline. Other teachers, however, found that timeframe too challenging. In 2004, as the four-year deadline was ending, the New Jersey Supreme Court granted a two-year extension for teachers trying to acquire their degrees and certifications. To qualify, teachers had to have 30 or fewer credits left to complete their degree, and they had to be making steady progress toward it. In addition, teachers had to remain in good academic standing and provide letters of support from both their employer and the school district that held their program's *Abbott* contract.



Challenge: Education and Training Capacity

At the time of the Court's initial ruling, only one New Jersey college offered an early childhood degree. In addition, the state had no early childhood credential.²⁰ Consequently a great deal of work had to occur quickly to make the education system ready to meet the needs of preschool teachers who wanted to return to school.

An early childhood certificate (P-3) was created.

The Court mandated a four-year degree *plus* early childhood certification. Early childhood certification was included to ensure that above and beyond a degree, teachers would have the early care and education theory and supervised practical training needed to be effective teachers. As New Jersey did not offer an early childhood certificate, colleges and universities quickly had to develop the certificate and associated curriculum.

After the *Abbott* ruling, the New Jersey Commission on Higher Education brought together colleges and universities to develop the P-3 certificate collaboratively. This included identifying appropriate pedagogy, courses, and credits. The timeframe was short; colleges had less than six months to put new programs in place. Initially, six colleges responded to the challenge. Remarkably, by 2003 eleven New Jersey colleges offered the P-3 certificate.²¹

Alternate routes to certification streamlined the process for teachers with different starting points.

It was not enough to create the certificate; "routes" to earning it also had to be defined.

The "traditional route" was created for individuals starting without a bachelor's degree. It worked

²⁰ In 1988, and in large part because the public schools did not offer preschool at that time, the State Board of Education eliminated the state's existing nursery school certificate. Without the early childhood credential, colleges were not motivated to offer early childhood courses. Trenton State College/College of New Jersey has, however, maintained its early childhood program for over 150 years.

²¹ Bloomfield College, Caldwell College, College of Saint Elizabeth, Kean University, Monmouth University, Montclair State University, New Jersey City University, Rowan University, Seton Hall University, The College of New Jersey, William Paterson University.

like most teacher education programs, requiring individuals to complete a teacher preparation program at a regionally-accredited institution with the P-3 pedagogy built in (4 or 5 courses), and to complete field-based clinical and practical experiences. After that, individuals entered the provisional teacher program, which provided about 9 months of full-time, on-the-job support, supervision, and evaluation. Upon its successful completion, teachers received P-3 certification.

The “alternate route” was developed for existing teachers who already had a four-year degree in a liberal arts or science major, but lacked training in the P-3 curriculum. Those teachers entered the provisional teacher program while taking classes in the P-3 pedagogy.

Higher education institutions received state and foundation grants to support their training

development. Because many of the state’s colleges and universities did not offer early care and education courses, there was an overall shortage of faculty qualified to instruct in the P-3 pedagogy. Many early childhood faculty had left the state for other positions, left the field altogether, or retired.

Despite this shortage, many colleges built new early childhood programs focused on the P-3 certification. New Jersey’s Commission on Higher Education and private foundations offered grants to support colleges in their capacity-building efforts, which included hiring new faculty. Some grants were used in creative ways. For example one university built an urban teaching academy that supported transfer students for P-3 certification, provided enhanced academic support for P-3 certification students, and collaborated with urban teachers on curriculum, teaching, and mentoring.

Articulation agreements (voluntary at first, mandated much later) smoothed credit transfer from two- to four-year institutions.

As is still the case today, numerous early care and education teachers approached their training and work experience in reverse order. They entered the field as child care workers or associates, often without any college experience or even a high school diploma. As they gained experience, through their own motivation and when provided with incentives and supports, some went back to school to obtain or improve their professional qualifications. When they returned to school, many early childhood students started their training at community colleges or through other professional development programs (e.g., the Child Development Associate).²² As so many preschool teachers started their training at community colleges and then transferred to four-year institutions, it was important to make that transition as seamless as possible so students could achieve higher qualifications without unnecessary delay or expense.



22 The Child Development Associate is a national credential for caregivers in center- or family-based child care, or home visitation programs. It includes 120 hours of class time, observation, a written test, and the development of a resource file.

While most two and four year institutions had some existing form of articulation agreements, this usually did not include professional or “technical” programs or courses. This meant that many teachers lacked coursework that easily could transfer to a four-year institution. As a result, they did not get credit for some of their previous coursework, which lengthened the amount of time they needed to get their degree.

Based largely on evidence gathered about the articulation challenges *Abbott* teachers experienced, in 2008 legislation passed that guaranteed easier credit transfer not only for early care and education professionals, but for all community college students in New Jersey. Although there are still issues with regard to standards and the accreditation requirements of the four- and five-year institutions, eventually after negotiation, two- and four-year colleges in some New Jersey regions worked out articulation agreements for transferring course credits. The 2008 legislation created a much more seamless system of credit transfer between two- and four-year colleges.

Challenge: College Affordability

The lack of funding to return to college also was a major barrier for many *Abbott* teachers. Without financial support, most teachers would have found college unaffordable.

Scholarships of \$5,000 a year for community-based teachers were essential. Using child care dollars from the state’s Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) funds, New Jersey provided scholarship funding for teachers employed in community-based *Abbott* programs. Scholarships paid for tuition and fees related to obtaining an early childhood education associate’s or bachelor’s degree and the P-3 certificate, including stipends to assist with books and other non-tuition expenses.

Scholarships did not pay for all coursework, however. Because the level of academic attainment for many teachers in community-based settings was generally low, colleges and universities had to develop college preparatory, or what they referred to as “remedial,” courses to ready teachers to enter college. These courses were not always covered by scholarship funds.

Challenge: Recruitment and Retention

One of New Jersey’s biggest concerns with the mandate for community-based *Abbott* teachers to obtain a four-year degree was that once they completed their degree, they would leave the *Abbott* community-based classrooms for better paying jobs with better benefits in school districts. Indeed, district-run programs paid substantially more as they had historically required higher teacher credentials than their community-based counterparts.



At first, qualified teachers in community-based settings received a “signing bonus” of \$3,500-\$6,000 and a laptop for becoming an Abbott teacher.

When the Abbott program began, not enough teachers were willing to work in preschool settings. To help recruit and retain teachers, the Governor started a program that offered salary incentives of \$3,500-\$6,000 and a laptop for anyone with a bachelor’s degree who could qualify for an



alternate route to P-3 certification and was willing to work in an Abbott community-based preschool. Unfortunately, this incentive was insufficient for community-based programs to retain their teachers.

Later, the Court ordered salary parity for teachers in district and community-based settings (but not for benefits and pensions). Once New Jersey made qualifications for all Abbott preschool teachers equivalent, compensation had to be equalized in order to retain in community-based settings.

In its 2002 *Abbott VIII* ruling, the Supreme Court addressed the topic of salary parity. The Court noted that ensuring qualified and certified teachers are available for all Abbott programs is an essential component of adequate state funding. Districts were required to address salary parity between district-run and community-based programs, and if community providers, including Head Start, demonstrated an inability to retain qualified staff due to salary parity problems, the Department of Education had to consider additional funding for teacher salaries.

While the State addressed some parity issues with salary adjustments to teachers at the end of the school year, complete parity still does not exist, especially in the area of teacher benefits. Salary parity did not affect other teacher benefits such as health insurance and pensions, and most teachers in community-based programs did not receive these benefits. While teacher salaries had to be *equal*, benefits had to be at a *comparable cost*. Because school districts could “buy” better benefits than community providers, public schools still remained a more attractive option for many teachers.

From the perspective of teachers in community-based programs who were able to obtain degrees and preschool teacher status under Abbott, their own income gains were significant to their families and their communities. The challenge was for those who were not able to obtain degrees and preschool teacher status.

“From the perspective of teachers in community-based programs who were able to obtain degrees and preschool teacher status under Abbott, their own income gains were significant to their families and their communities.”

Challenge: Managing School and Work

Many teachers who went back to school were parents who faced the additional challenge of working full time and attending school. To really appreciate their circumstances, it is important to focus on how early care and education programs work. They demand long hours to meet the needs of working families. Like other urban areas, New Jersey's community-based programs start early in the morning and usually end after 6:00 in the evening. *Abbott* preschool teachers were expected to take courses for their bachelor's degree when they could find time, which usually meant after the work day ended.

While initially under the Court's ruling, *Abbott* districts were required to provide only half-day preschool and that gave teachers some flexibility to attend school, by the 2001-2002 school year they were required to implement full-day, full-year programs in order to meet the needs of working parents.

Campus advisors and counselors supported individual teachers. Many of the *Abbott* teachers returning to college faced significant challenges in adapting their lives to the demands of college. Others faced literacy and English-language challenges. Still others had been out of the academic environment for a substantial period of time and lacked basic study and time management skills. As a result, some colleges created positions for academic advisors that could work closely with students on helping them succeed in the classroom.

Colleges also sought creative outreach solutions for students trying to earn P-3 certification. Special funding provided for on-site advisement in *Abbott* preschools. On-site courses were offered. For students without easy access to one of the colleges offering the P-3 pedagogy, some colleges began offering courses through more geographically convenient two-year colleges, at night and on the weekends, online, or using distance learning mechanisms. Dual registrations were offered



in community colleges and receiving four-year institutions. Other colleges catered materials and courses to students with limited English proficiency.

A number of New Jersey community colleges with *Abbott* districts in their counties also stepped up to the effort to prepare community-based *Abbott* teachers to meet the new certification requirements. Representatives did outreach in communities to help teachers without degrees get started in transferable community college programs, and made special efforts to provide flexible scheduling and support services.

Substitutes helped support centers while teachers went to school. Preschool programs had to handle the challenge of providing quality programs under limited budgets while allowing teachers release time to attend school. Classrooms in district-run programs could draw on the district's substitute pool when teachers needed to be out of the classroom, but community-based centers did not have this resource. State funds for a substitute teacher pool helped, but finding enough teachers to fill the pool was challenging.

“A number of New Jersey community colleges with *Abbott* districts in their counties also stepped up to the effort to prepare community-based *Abbott* teachers to meet the new certification requirements.”

Challenge: Getting all vested parties to play a productive role.

Successfully meeting the mandated changes in teacher qualifications required the participation and cooperation of many parties who play a role in New Jersey's teacher education process and early childhood system. Many stakeholders participated in this process.

With strong encouragement from the Governor, state agencies worked together to meet the mandate. At *Abbott's* onset, policy representatives from the Governor's Office worked with relevant state departments to promote collaborative planning and implementation. Several broad-based planning committees and commissions were created that incorporated both the public and private sectors. Many in New Jersey credit Governor Whitman's interpretation and enforcement of the *Abbott* ruling as a key factor in bringing groups together and catalyzing statewide collaboration

Higher education institutions came together to agree on curriculum and certification. Indeed, the requirement that all *Abbott* preschool teachers acquire a bachelor's degree and P-3 certification within a fixed timeline was a challenge to higher education, particularly because of the extremely rapid increase in capacity needed to respond to the needs of nontraditional students population. Their cooperation in developing the P-3 certification, building programs to accept new students, and creating alternative routes to certification were all critical factors for success.

A statewide professional development center for early care and education (now called Professional Impact NJ) provided important technical assistance and guidance to teachers seeking the bachelor's degree and P-3 certification. The center, funded by the NJ Department of Human Services and located at a state university (Kean University), provided key functions to support *Abbott* implementation. For example, the center established and maintained a statewide database to track teacher courses and credits on a voluntary basis. The center also managed the *Abbott* scholarships that were so vital to the successful staffing of *Abbott* preschools. Additionally, the center was involved in furthering articulation agreements between two- and four-year colleges; helping create a system for a credit-bearing Child Development Associate certificate; and creating the Directors Academy, a comprehensive course for early childhood center directors.

Directors worked hard to support their teachers in meeting the mandate.

Directors of *Abbott* preschools played a strong role in helping their teachers meet the mandate. It was often the directors who had to mentor staff on how to interact with the various state departments involved, especially when those departments had conflicting policies on *Abbott* requirements. Directors had to find ways to support their teachers in meeting the *Abbott* requirements while their teachers worked full time and took care of their families. Some directors also supported teachers by providing them with computers and by making the time and space available for teachers to study.



Advocacy groups monitored implementation to determine whether adjustments were needed. *Abbott* created interest in advocacy at many levels. A statewide coalition of early childhood stakeholders, called the Early Care and Education Coalition, organized shortly after the initial *Abbott* ruling. This group, as well as many other advocates, played pivotal roles in the planning and monitoring of *Abbott*. The county-based child care resource and referral agencies also played significant advocacy roles in preparing for *Abbott* implementation. Some of these agencies made the initial contact with local school districts, encouraging them to contract with the community-based child care centers to provide *Abbott* preschool given the lack of capacity in school districts. In many instances, these agencies served on school district advisory boards and acted as informal liaisons between the school districts and the child care centers.

Position papers, forums, and policy briefs also had an influence on the implementation process. For example, national groups such as the National Black Child Development Institute and National Council of La Raza monitored and advocated on the mandate's implementation. They were concerned that the push for increased professional qualifications (bachelor's degree) might decrease and displace experienced teachers of color who lacked the degree and who would find it very difficult to acquire within the mandated timeframe. These groups advocated along with members of the New Jersey early care and education community for a fair and equitable implementation of the mandate.

Philanthropy got involved. Several foundations saw the *Abbott* mandate as an opportunity to improve early childhood outcomes and to achieve their own goals of improving the quality of early childhood education in New Jersey. Regional funders such as the Schumann Fund for New Jersey, The Fund for New Jersey, Prudential Foundation, and the William Penn Foundation took the lead on making sure that the promise of *Abbott* could be achieved. This group then engaged other foundations to support successful implementation.

Foundation support went to, for example, needs assessments in school districts, advocacy efforts, and early childhood quality improvement programs. It also supported professional development, including colleges' efforts to promote access for existing teachers, and innovative initiatives to support teachers' professional needs. For example, one foundation provided grant funding to a state college that served primarily nontraditional students for a special project to provide technical assistance and mentoring to *Abbott* teachers, aspiring teachers, and directors. Foundations also actively participated in commissions and coalitions focused on *Abbott* implementation and convened special forums.



What Happened to Teachers in *Abbott* Districts? • • •

Because data collection was limited, very little is known for sure about teachers before and after the *Abbott* mandate. Although it is important to know who benefited from the supports and resources described above and the *Abbott* mandate's impact on the early care and education workforce,²³ unfortunately comparison data on preschool teachers before and after the *Abbott* mandate are not available. As a result, it is not possible to tell with any precision who those teachers were, if and how long teachers stayed in *Abbott* programs, or what skills they possessed and gained.

This absence of intentional data collection is a significant void. While some things can be discerned from direct observation and experience, and some data were collected after the *Abbott* deadline, a whole body of comparable pre and post evidence is missing.

| Abbott Teachers With a BA in 2006 | | | |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 2006 | TOTAL (including Head Start) | District-Run (37% of all programs) | Private (56% of all programs) |
| At least a BA | 97.1% | 100% | 98.2% |

It is clear that by 2006—at the end of the Court's two-year extension—almost all teachers in the *Abbott* districts (97%) had their bachelor's degree.²⁴ Even in 2003 with a year to go in the original four-year mandate, the New Jersey Department of Education estimated that 80% of teachers in community-based settings had their bachelor's degree.²⁵

However, it is not known how many qualified *Abbott* teachers were new hires versus previous teachers in those classrooms. While many of the teachers in the *Abbott* community-based programs lived in the urban areas where the centers were located, a number of more traditional college students from suburban areas in New Jersey took advantage of the *Abbott* scholarship program and other supports. Some of these students successfully completed the traditional route to a bachelor's degree and P-3 certification and were newly hired to work in *Abbott* classrooms.

Prior to the *Abbott* mandate, a large number of teachers in community-based programs came from the neighborhoods where they worked and reflected the cultures and ethnicities of the people who lived there. This knowledge is based on the experiences of individuals at the New Jersey Department of Human Services' Division of Family Development who had contracts with and made site visits to many community-based child care centers that later became *Abbott* preschool programs. This diversity comes from the fact that the community programs in *Abbott* districts were market-driven and employed teachers whose income and education levels were not very different from the families who lived in the community. This means that a large number of the teachers before

23 National Black Child Development Institute (Ed.) L.M. Beaulieu, (2004), *Universal prekindergarten in New Jersey: Teacher preparation and professional development in New Jersey's Abbott districts*. Washington, DC: Author.

24 Frede, E., Jung, K., Barnett, W. S., Lamy, C., & Figueras, A. (2007). *The Abbott preschool program longitudinal effects study (APPLES)*. New Brunswick, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research.

25 Coffman, J. & Lopez, E. (2003). *Raising preschool teacher qualifications*. Washington, DC: Trust for Early Education.



the *Abbott mandate* were low-income, African American, and Latino women, and had limited educational backgrounds.

Data comparing teacher ethnicity in 2003 and 2006 suggest that some shifts occurred. Although data on teacher ethnicity prior to the *Abbott* mandate are not available, data do exist for teachers in 2003, one year before the Court-mandated four-year timeline ended in 2004. Data also exist for 2006, after the Court's two-year extension beyond 2004

was up. Unfortunately, these data do not capture teacher shifts that might have occurred in *Abbott* classrooms during the three years that came right after the mandate, but they are the best baseline data available.

These data show that the percentage of White teachers compared to non-White teachers stayed about the same from 2003 to 2006. Among non-White teachers, the percentage of African-American teachers decreased by nine percent, while the percentage of Hispanic teachers increased by five percent.²⁶

When 2003 to 2006 changes are examined by the type of *Abbott* classroom, it is clear that community-based and Head Start programs experienced decreases in non-White teachers. The percentage of African-American and Hispanic teachers decreased in community-based and Head Start classrooms (from 58% to 51% in community-based classrooms, and from 72% to 63% in Head Start classrooms). Adding support to this finding is research that showed about a quarter of center directors interviewed in 2007 said they experienced turnover as a result of *Abbott*, and that turnover for some meant a decrease in diversity.²⁷

Stakeholder interviews combined with existing research suggest that several factors likely contributed to this shift. First, even with the two-year extension, some teachers were unable to complete their degrees and gain certification within the timeline. In addition, some teachers in community-based or Head Start programs who already were or became certified left their positions for jobs in school districts that offered both salary parity and additional benefits. Other lead teachers were moved to non-*Abbott* classrooms or were made assistant teachers in *Abbott* classrooms.²⁸ Again, the lack of data do not offer a clear indication of how many teachers left for each of these reasons, but it is clear that some African American and Hispanic teachers in *Abbott* classrooms were no longer in lead teacher roles and some may have been displaced from their roles in child care altogether.

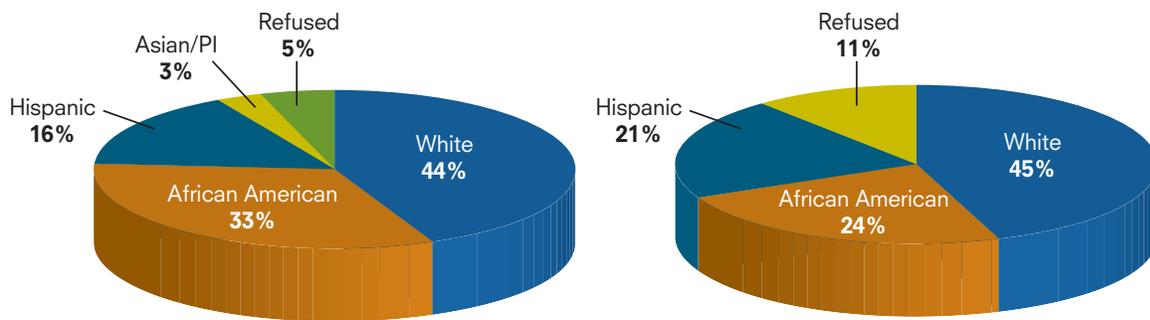
26 Ryan, S., & Ackerman, D. (2004). Getting qualified: A report on the efforts of preschool teachers in New Jersey's *Abbott* districts to improve their qualifications. New Brunswick, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research. Ackerman, D. (2008). *Recruiting and retaining a qualified workforce*. Unpublished manuscript.

27 Whitebook, M., Ryan, S., Kipnis, F., & Sakai, L. (2008). *Partnering for preschool: A study of center directors in New Jersey's mixed delivery Abbott program*. Berkeley, CA: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment.

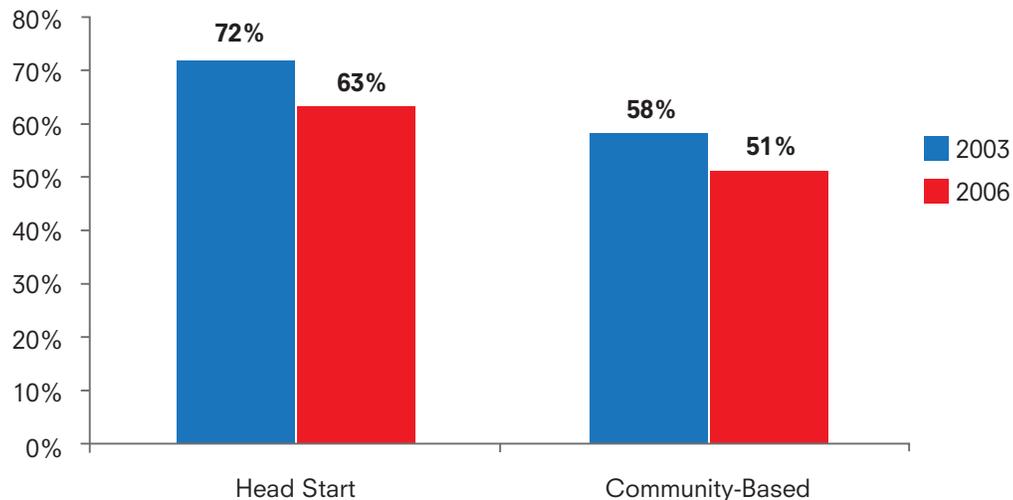
28 Whitebook, Ryan, Kipnis, & Sakai (2008); National Black Child Development Institute (2004).



Abbott Teacher Ethnicity Overall: 2003 and 2006



Percent of African-American and Hispanic Teachers in Abbott Classrooms



Sources: Ryan, S., & Ackerman, D. (2004). *Getting qualified: A report on the efforts of preschool teachers in New Jersey's Abbott districts to improve their qualifications*. New Brunswick, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research. Ackerman, D. (2008). *Recruiting and retaining a qualified workforce*. Unpublished manuscript.

New Jersey gave substantial attention to building a credentialed workforce and offering opportunities to existing non-credentialed staff to gain credentials. Unfortunately, the absence of data on the experiences of non-credentialed teachers and child care workers in seeking to obtain professional development and credentials and the degree of their success in doing so means that a number of important questions about building a diverse and credentialed workforce cannot be fully answered.

“New Jersey gave substantial attention to building a credentialed workforce and offering opportunities to existing non-credentialed staff to gain credentials.”

Lessons for Other States • • •

New Jersey's experience offers lessons for other states working to maintain or increase workforce diversity as they increase teacher qualifications for early care and education.

Recognize that quality is a systems issue.

New Jersey is in the process of developing a comprehensive early care and education system that will support quality and meet the varied needs of its stakeholders. Many aspects of this system support quality through the preschool workforce, including, for example, a statewide professional development center, a scholarship fund that provides essential supports to teachers, and, more recently, an articulation law that benefits New Jersey teachers by allowing students to more seamlessly transfer core component courses into the third (junior) year of college and receive credit toward the bachelor's degree. Other aspects of this comprehensive system include standards and regulations, financing strategies, family support, public engagement, public and private partnerships, quality improvement, and other enhanced programs and service.

Frame teacher diversity as critical to quality. In quality early childhood programs, teachers reflect and understand the ethnic, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds of the populations they serve. In today's diverse society, the open expression of diverse cultural perspectives enriches individual contribution and can lead to maximum effectiveness. Children and families see that their early childhood programs are connected to their home, personal interests, and other aspects of their lives, which then helps them maximize the benefits of their experiences. The integration of culturally-diverse viewpoints and developmentally-appropriate learning experiences can strengthen early childhood programs by increasing the potential for rich curricula that are relevant to children's lives.

The bachelor's degree is one important indicator of quality, but there are others. It is important to make

certain that the teacher preparation programs in the colleges and universities that grant bachelor's degrees in early childhood include essential coursework and supervised teaching experiences. Programs must also include core content on multicultural curricula, bilingual education, and child development from multiple perspectives. This will prepare teachers to contribute to quality early care and education for all children in today's culturally- and linguistically-diverse communities.²⁹

Make sustaining diversity an explicit goal with explicit strategies. The benefits of developing strategies to create and maintain workforce diversity in early care and education programs cannot be overstated. Recruiting and educating teachers and other staff of diverse backgrounds and providing specialized training in early childhood development increases the likelihood of providing high-quality culturally- and linguistically-competent care in early childhood programs.³⁰ While sustaining diversity was not an explicit goal in New Jersey, there was concern for maintaining the jobs of existing teachers and there were efforts to provide extended timelines to assist these teachers. Advocacy efforts were instrumental in creating the educational pathways for existing workers and extending the deadlines. Although there were recruitment efforts that focused on recruiting diverse teachers, there is little evidence that New Jersey policymakers focused explicitly on teacher diversity as a critical component of a quality program. Making that goal explicit is critical because an overarching goal in the education of preschool children is school readiness for all children and successful outcomes in later years.

Establish pathways for improving the skills and compensation of the early childhood workforce as a whole. The existing child care workforce is characterized by low wages and workers who often start with limited educational backgrounds. Actions

29 Chang, H. (2006) *Getting ready for quality: The critical importance of developing and supporting a skilled, ethnically and linguistically diverse early childhood workforce*. Oakland, CA. California Tomorrow.

30 Chang, H. (2006). *Ibid.*



that can improve both these workers' knowledge levels about child development and compensation levels contribute to improved child development and family self-sufficiency. For many child care workers, formal education is not the first step to improving their knowledge and skills. Multiple pathways are necessary. Over time, however, child care workers who successfully build their skills may be increasingly ready to re-enter the formal educational system, even if they have not previously been successful in formal education. The stronger the overall system is to support early childhood workers in building their skills, the larger and more diverse the pool will be of individuals to secure credentials and teacher status.

Provide supports that make it possible for teachers to succeed. Agreement existed among those interviewed that without the *Abbott* scholarship fund, sufficient staff would not have been available to provide the program as mandated. The scholarship program made it possible for many to attend college and to acquire certification.

While the scholarship was considered generous by many (including a \$50 book stipend each semester), it was not enough for those teachers who received wages at the poverty level. The true cost of a bachelor's degree mounted with the additional fees, books, and transportation costs and created barriers to successful completion. Despite the availability of some funds to support substitutes, the release time that was specified by the *Abbott* ruling so that teachers could attend some courses during the work hours did not occur in most cases for teachers in community-based programs.

Other supports that made a difference to *Abbott* teachers included mentoring and assistance in understanding and navigating the higher education system. In New Jersey, community college faculty and staff played a major role by providing guidance and advisement to non-traditional students. These efforts were supported by grants to colleges from state government and private foundations and were considered valuable investments. The *Abbott* ruling that required there be parity in compensation among *Abbott* preschool teachers in school districts and community programs was a milestone for the field of early care and education in New Jersey; but it is still necessary to ensure that these supports and incentives continue.

Collect and monitor data on child care worker and teacher ethnicity, linguistic background, and teacher needs.

It is clear from New Jersey's experience that it would have been helpful to have data on *Abbott* preschool teachers and on the child care worker community in the *Abbott* districts. Privacy issues were raised as one reason this information was not collected, but this issue certainly can be addressed. There is an understandable sensitivity to data collection in areas related to race, ethnicity, age, and linguistic background. Personal data of this nature must be managed in a secure and responsible manner (such information is collected about Head Start programs). Still, it is important to collect and monitor data on ethnicity, linguistic and educational backgrounds, and years in the field. The collection of this data could prove very beneficial to teachers by providing information on who is in the workforce, who is underrepresented, and who needs support.³¹



31 Bruner, C., Ray, A., Stover Wright, M., Copeman, A. (2009). Quality rating and improvement systems for a multi-ethnic society. Build Initiative.

In addition, some tracking and surveying or interviewing of workers who both did and did not seek teaching degrees can provide information on the strengths of different approaches, barriers that need to be addressed, and additional actions that may need to be taken with specific populations. In addition to establishing an overall data system that collects information on ethnicity, linguistic background, and teacher needs, there are specific questions that can best be answered by focused research and evaluation designs.

Finally, allow sufficient time for teachers to acquire necessary qualifications, especially English Language Learners (ELL) students and others with literacy issues. A state Supreme Court mandate does not allow for much negotiation, but the time constraints in New Jersey created challenges at every level for all concerned. ELL students in particular had to contend with language and literacy issues. But other disadvantaged groups also needed advisement and guidance in navigating the unfamiliar higher education system that offered few supports. An amazing number of teachers “got through” the alternative route, despite articulation problems between two- and four-year colleges. Students often ended up repeating the same course when transferring to another college because of a lack of transferring credits. This was a major barrier until it became clear to legislators that the state was frequently paying for the exact same course twice at which point it enacted an articulation law in 2008.

“It is important to be open to many learning styles..”

Diversity also exists in learning styles. It is important to be open to many learning styles, not just the traditional college classroom pathway to the bachelor’s degree. Diverse students can benefit from varied approaches, including online possibilities. Allow time to find ways to be more inclusive and discover unknown competencies and areas of relatedness within that diversity.

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