

# Raising Quality in New Jersey's Child Care System: A Front-Line View



By Cynthia Rice, Senior Policy Analyst

**T**he research is clear on how important it is for young children to spend their days in nurturing and stimulating environments. Such environments, at a time when children's brains are developing at a greater rate than at any other period of their lives, can provide them with the skills critical for school success.

In New Jersey, more than 400,000 children age 5 and under spend part of their week in some form of child care. Many of these children attend licensed child care centers, home-based child care that is registered with the state, Head Start or Early Head Start.

For many child care agencies, providing quality care at a cost that families can afford is challenging — and even harder for those serving children from low-income families. The components of quality, such as low child/staff ratios, qualified teachers, meaningful professional development, developmentally-appropriate supplies and equipment, adequate facilities and strong family partnerships, are very costly.

For those caring for children living in low-income families, the state reimbursement rate for child care subsidies has been stagnant for five years, making it even more difficult to provide the level of quality so critical for young minds.

New Jersey is at a crossroads. In December, the state was one of six to receive a \$44 million grant from the federal government's 2013 Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge fund to improve access to high-quality early learning and development programs.



Giving Every Child A Chance

Much of the federal dollars will be used to support the implementation of *Grow NJ Kids*, a system under development aimed at improving and rating the quality of child care in centers and homes across New Jersey. Implementation is beginning in 56 child care centers located in three counties and in Newark.

While the infusion of the federal dollars is welcome, strategically using those funds to maximize their impact is critical. To help inform this effort, Advocates for Children of New Jersey surveyed child care providers and held focus groups to determine the barriers to providing high-quality care and the resources providers need to create the best possible environments for young children.

This policy brief reflects the findings of those efforts, offering a front-line view of the challenges child care providers face, as well as recommendations to build relevant supports to improve the quality of care.

## Overall Quality

Survey respondents recognized critical aspects of quality, especially environments that are “warm and caring” and “healthy and safe.” Also listed among the most important components of quality were positive interactions both among children and staff and among children themselves.

Providers said these areas are key to children’s strong social and emotional development. In each of these categories, more than 70 percent of survey respondents said their programs are “extremely successful” in achieving these goals.

They indicated, however, that they are less successful in caring for special populations, such as young children with special needs and children whose first language is not English. Respondents said they suffered from a lack of bilingual staff to address the language issue.

These sentiments were reiterated in the focus groups, particularly in the area of children with special needs. Overwhelmingly, the participants said their staff lacked the skills to address the ever-increasing number and complexity of children with special needs.

One participant described the disconnect between programs offered by school districts to children classified as “preschool disabled” and the realities of working families. She said that often, when a child receiving early intervention turns 3, the school districts’ programs are typically only half-day — not a viable option for working parents.

## The Child Care Needs Survey and Focus Groups

Beginning in the fall 2013, all licensed child care agencies, registered family child care homes and Head Start agencies throughout the state were asked to complete an ACNJ survey to identify their needs in raising the quality of care they provide to New Jersey’s children.

The survey focused on three critical areas that support quality: professional development, parent engagement and facilities.

More than 400 child care workers and directors completed the survey, representing every region of the state, with more than three-quarters offering center-based care. Nearly all — 92 percent — care for children from birth through the preschool years. Of those, more than two-thirds cared for infants and toddlers exclusively.

Nearly 63 percent of respondents reported that they were not accredited by a national accreditation entity, such as the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) or the National Association for Family Child Care (NAFCC). The split was nearly 50/50 as to whether the respondents worked for a for-profit or non-profit agency.

In order to delve deeper into the survey results, ACNJ held three in-person focus groups in December 2013 and January 2014 — one in each of the three regions of the state. Also, in January, ACNJ held a “virtual” focus group to obtain additional information from individuals who could not attend the focus groups. In total, 50 people participated in these four events.

This report reflects the findings of the survey and focus groups.

Many parents are then forced to opt for full-day programs in child care centers, which are often ill-equipped to meet the child’s needs. As a result, the child does not receive the needed services through the district, and the center must address his or her issues, often at a cost to the other children. Quality — on all levels — is compromised.

During the focus groups, it was clear that the biggest barrier to quality is inadequate resources—and the problem is even more confounding for those who serve our poorest families. The participants provided many examples of the



creative and low-cost ways they try to meet the needs of their children and families, such as collaborating with and connecting families to community agencies. These attempts, however, often do not ensure that the overall needs of children and families are met, and as a result, quality is compromised.

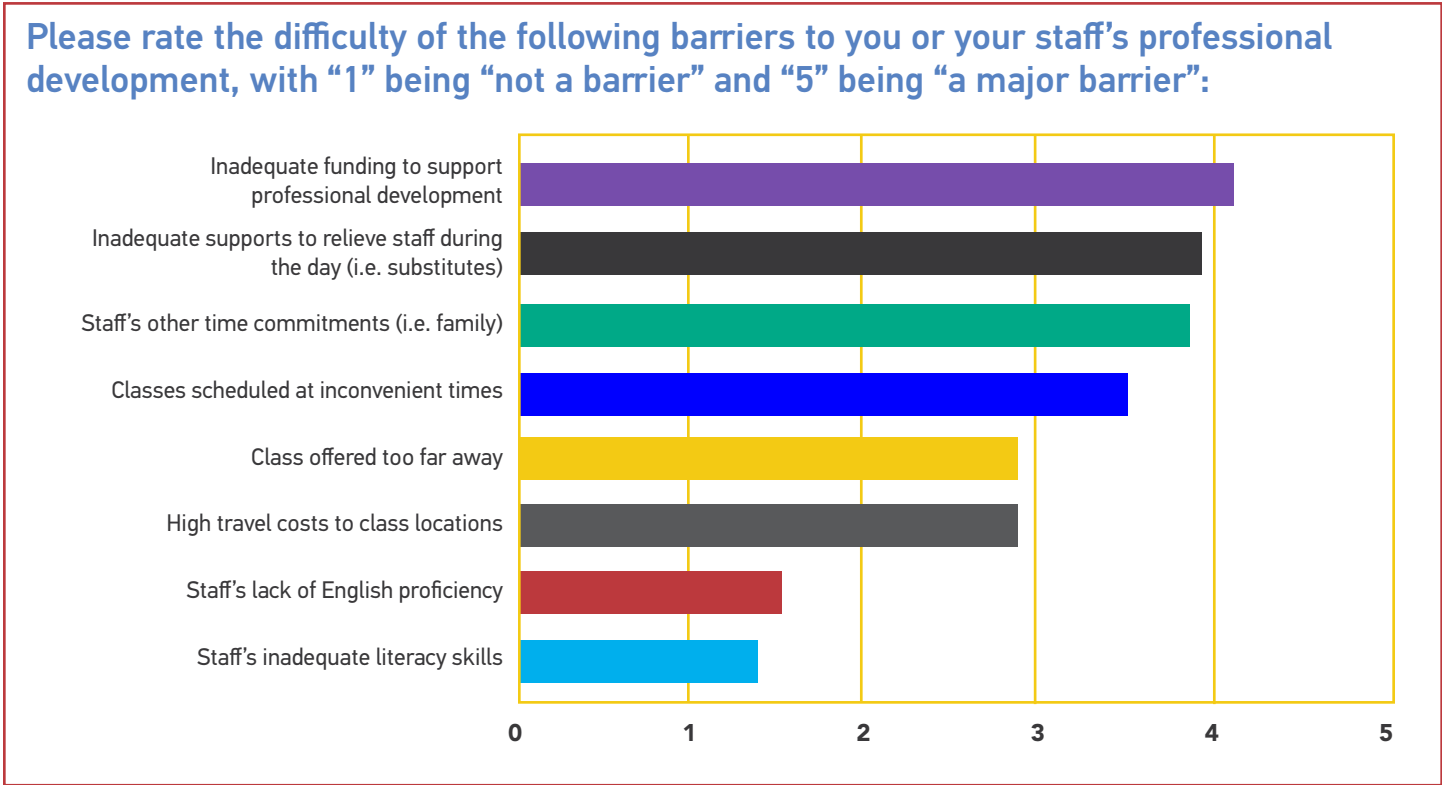
Many child care centers in low-income communities accept state-subsidy payments of \$34.75 per day for an infant and \$28.65 for a preschooler,<sup>1</sup> which barely covers the basics — staff, rent and utilities. According to the National Women’s Law Center, New Jersey’s reimbursement rates for center-based care is roughly 40 percent lower than the national standard, or about \$400 a month lower that standard.

Often, parents cannot afford to supplement the subsidy rate. When providers’ only support is through the subsidy system, quality improvements take a backseat. Even programs serving middle-income families struggle to provide quality care, while maintaining reasonable fees. Focus group participants from smaller centers that receive no subsidy are also struggling. “For-profit” center directors said that other than parent tuitions, they had few options for additional support to their budget, as they could not apply for other sources of funding, such as potential grant opportunities.

Running on a “shoestring” budget was the repeated theme at all of the focus groups, which affects every aspect of quality of care — from professional development, teacher retention, classroom materials, family engagement and adequate facilities.

### Professional Development

When asked to identify the top three areas in professional development that would help raise the quality of care, the most frequent responses all included “financial assistance” to help staff achieve a higher level of education. An average of 50 percent of the respondents indicated that this support would help improve program quality. Similarly, the main barrier to providing staff with professional development was “inadequate funding.”



Nearly 68 percent of respondents said that staff “never” or “occasionally” paid for professional development. When comparing the cost of education with staff salaries, the participants stated that few of their employees could afford to return to school without assistance. Focus group participants agreed that a scholarship program was needed. New Jersey had instituted such a program when child care providers were required to return to school to continue teaching when the state began funding high-quality preschool in certain high-poverty districts. This program ended in 2007.

“When you are getting paid \$8.25 per hour, you can’t afford courses or a CDA (Child Development Associate),” one participant said. “You are stuck, even though you are great with kids.”

Options appear to be limited when providing meaningful staff professional development or technical assistance. Sixty-seven percent of survey respondents said trainings are always or frequently held “in-house,” limiting the richness of courses.

Focus group participants said this was primarily because of cost.

“Any professional development always falls on my shoulders and it would be good for my staff to hear from others,” one center director said.

The second most common source of training, identified by 54 percent of survey respondents, was the Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies, which operate in every county as a support to child care providers and a resource for parents.

Even these agencies now have fewer training options for child care providers. Recent budget cuts have abolished the county child care health consultant positions who had previously provided training on health-related issues. There are fewer opportunities for the resource and referral agencies to hire other outside professional trainers since their budgets limit how much they can pay their trainers and how many trainings they can provide. Participants stated that these two resources were invaluable as affordable sources of professional development. They said it was difficult to develop a “community of learners” when fewer affordable options were available.

Travel for coursework was also identified as an impediment. More than 77 percent of survey respondents said their staff would only travel a maximum of 20 miles for trainings. One focus group participant from an urban community stated that transportation to trainings is a big barrier for his staff. “Many don’t travel outside our city. Public transportation to trainings and safety while traveling are big issues,” he said.

Focus group participants also recognized the need for “a fresh set of eyes,” other than the director to gauge their overall classroom quality. A mentoring program that could help support classroom practices, as well as opportunities for staff to see best practices, first-hand, outside their building or home would be beneficial.

Moreover, there was consensus that it is important to ensure that teachers were putting what they learned in trainings to work in the classroom. Yet, directors found this a difficult task to juggle. Several stated that their lack of key support staff, such as a nurse responsible for ensuring children’s updated immunizations, family workers to help support teachers and families, administrative staff responsible for e-childcare implementation and adequate mental health supports, made it very difficult to consistently be the instructional leader of their classrooms. There just is not enough time, they said.



## Substitutes and Compensation for Professional Development

No one disagreed with the importance of professional development. As one director stated, “In order to nurture our own passion, we need the professional development.” The nuts and bolts, however, in nurturing that passion were often arduous. Two big barriers — substitutes and paying staff for professional development — plagued most directors.

When asked who their substitutes were, one southern New Jersey director stated, “You’re looking at them.” Many of the directors had come up with creative ways to find substitutes for when staff members were attending professional development or when a staff member was sick or took a personal day. These included working with



## Report Shows Child Care Quality Lacking

Many of New Jersey's youngest children are spending their most formative years in below-average child care, threatening their ability to arrive at kindergarten ready to learn, according to a recent report from the National Institute of Early Education Research at Rutgers University.

In fact, on a scale of 1 to 7, with "5" indicating good quality and "7" being excellent, the average score was 4.24 for 511 classrooms observed. These classrooms serve New Jersey's youngest children, from birth to age three, when the brain grows faster than during any other time in life. During this time, critical foundations are laid for later academic and life success.



The centers achieved the highest scores for "interactions," which included discipline, supervision and the interactions among staff and children, as well as the children's interactions with each other. This was the only area where centers received a "good" rating, according to the report, called *The State of Infant-Toddler Care and Education in New Jersey*.

The lowest score was for personal care routines at 3.48 — a troubling finding as this encompasses basic health and safety measures, such as children and staff washing their hands, meals and toileting. The activities score was second lowest at 3.56.

In addition, a second NIEER study that focused on four Essex County cities — East Orange, Newark, Orange and Irvington — found that care in private homes was even worse — scoring about 3 on our scale. This is considered low quality.

The study also found that funding source mattered. Early Head Start centers, which receive federal funding, scored highest in quality of care. Private centers that had not received state contracts or other direct public funding scored the lowest quality.

New Jersey is a national leader in providing high-quality preschool to students in 35 of our most impoverished school districts. The lessons learned from the development of these preschools should be applied to create high-quality child care for children across the state.

### This includes:

- Raising quality standards,
- Improving teacher preparation,
- Providing adequate funding,
- Putting in place a continuous improvement system that would include coaching.

With the help of a federal grant, New Jersey is embarking on an effort to improve child care quality. Called Grow NJ Kids, this initiative is just getting underway in a handful of counties. The findings of this research should be used to inform that effort.

community colleges to bring students in as substitutes and using former teachers who had retired. The reality, however, was that there was never enough.

“The public schools get them first,” one director stated, explaining that substitute pay is higher in school districts.

No substitute “pool” exists on the district or county level. This lack of substitutes compromises quality, they said. First, they personally spend a great deal of time filling in for teachers or aides, taking them away from other key responsibilities, including oversight and mentoring. Second, children are frequently “shuffled” around in order to comply with state ratios. Administrators agreed that this had a significant impact on children, but particularly “the little ones who need their primary caretaker.”

The cost of fingerprinting substitutes also weighed heavily on the administrators. While they understood the importance of it, it was an additional expense on their limited budgets.

Directors also struggle to provide some level of compensation for staff attending a workshop or returning to school. As one director explained, “My staff members are hourly workers. I feel I need to pay them something since they are taking a class for their jobs.” Many indicated that they could not provide this luxury.

## Higher Education Issues in Preparing Teachers for Young Children

While they recognized the importance of a better educated workforce, overwhelmingly, focus groups participants said that new teachers with bachelor’s degrees lacked both the academic and practical skills to work with very young children.

Even for those teachers holding a Preschool to 3<sup>rd</sup> grade (P-3) certificate, the administrators said that the institutions of higher education had not adequately prepared them to provide infants, toddlers and preschoolers with developmentally-appropriate learning environments, as well as to meet the needs of diverse populations. They believed that the focus of the certificate was on the early elementary years, rather than evenly spread between all ages within the early learning years.

“The way our colleges are teaching students has to be different, because they are missing the boat,” one director stated.

## The Disconnect Between an Educated Staff and a Stable Workforce:

### The Compensation Issue

Having a better educated workforce comes at a price, particularly when providing children with caretaker continuity — a critical component to quality early learning environments. One central New Jersey administrator stated, “While we promote staff to go back to school, we know that we will lose them with the more education they have, because we just can’t pay them.” Another stated that she was only able to retain staff with 4-year degrees when they were not their families’ “bread winners.”

It is easy to understand why teachers who attain a degree look for a higher paying position. One southern New Jersey teacher described how she took out a \$30,000 loan to earn a BA. Upon completion, she received a raise of \$2 per hour. She stayed in the position because of her director’s support to complete her degree, but it has been a personal struggle.

Administrators are hesitant to even hire teachers with BA degrees. They know that because of the low salary, the position is one of “transition” for them. One administrator from northern New Jersey described the huge challenge in retaining teachers with higher levels of education.

“I hired a teacher with a BA in September,” she explained. “She assured me that she would stay for the year. She gave her notice in mid-December. The children were just getting to know her. Because I don’t want them to have to get used to another new face, I am going to teach the class. I can’t do this to these children. They need continuity.”

Separate from the education link, overwhelmingly, administrators indicated that they wished they could “invest in their staffs” and provide them with a living wage.

“We have excellent teachers, but there’s never an upgrade in their salaries. They may love their jobs, but they still have to live and what they’re doing is worthy of an increase in salary,” said one director from southern New Jersey.

### Family Engagement

There is no question that children, families and our communities benefit when parents are involved in their children’s early learning—both in the classroom and at home. In providing for the “whole” child, the early learning community sees its role as both engaging families in supporting their young children’s learning and enriching families by assisting them with needed support services. These two undertakings, however, are not always easy to accomplish. As a result, program quality can be affected.

Focus group participants discussed their struggles in engaging parents. Recognizing the importance of learning at school and at home, the administrators acknowledged that parents struggle to juggle work and home responsibilities. The providers' limited resources also present a barrier to family engagement. While technology – e-mail, texting and the Internet — has made daily contact easier, meaningful engagement often requires face-to-face contact.

Administrators expressed frustration that, while they believed their work was providing children with the foundation for school success, they felt parents viewed them as “babysitters.” This is why it is so important to educate parents about early learning, including curricula, early literacy and math, so they can support learning at home, they said. However, child care providers struggle to get parents to attend their programs both during the day and in the evenings.

In many cases, parents often drop-off and pick-up their child — time when staff could interact with parents and better connect home and school life. Directors said, however, that they cannot afford to keep their full team in place until the end of the day, and so that natural connection between teacher and parent often fails to take place.

Family child care providers have even greater difficulty engaging parents. As the care takes place in homes, opportunities to bring parents together were described as challenging.

In an attempt to meet parents “where they are,” administrators said they do whatever they can to get parents to attend planned functions. The majority — 63 percent — said the top strategy for engaging parents was providing families with incentives, such as babysitting, meals and giveaways.

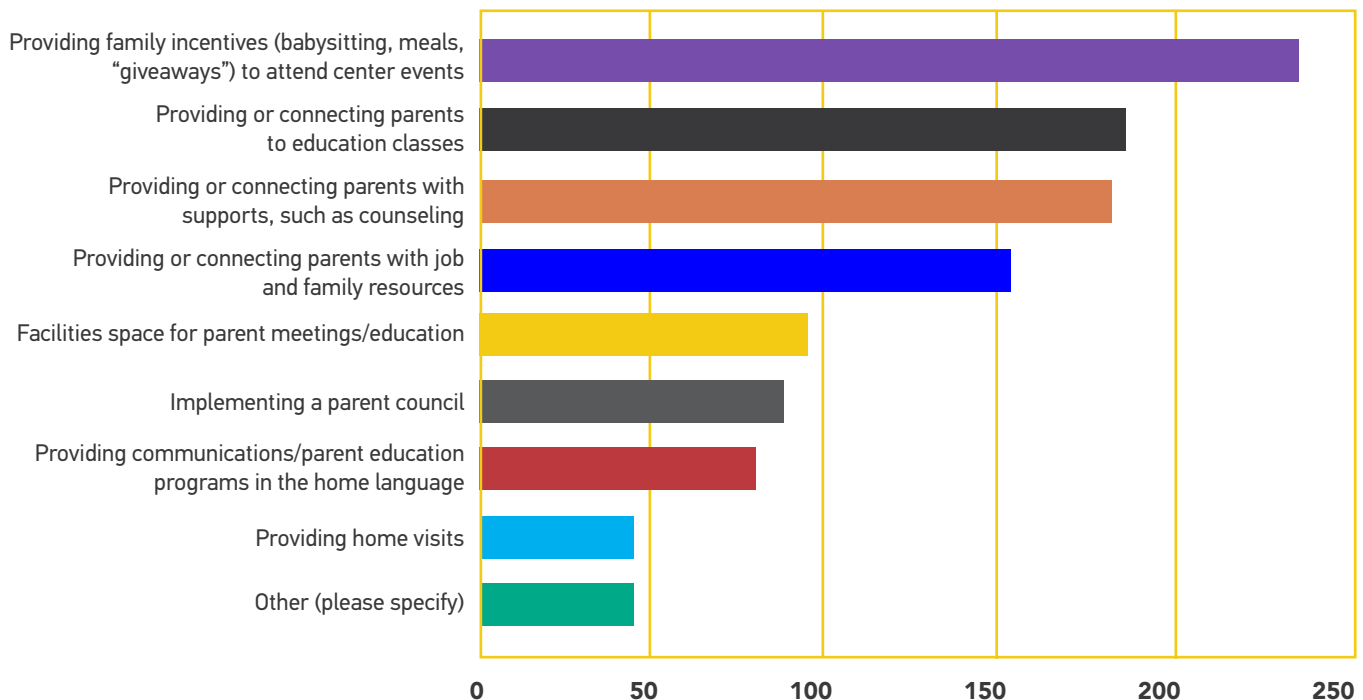
The focus group participants echoed this finding. Still, even with such incentives, transportation — physically getting parents to the event — can be a major obstacle — one most programs cannot afford to address. As one center director stated, “A parent may pay to get a child to school, but won’t be able to pay for them to attend an activity.”

### Parent Enrichment

Focus group participants candidly discussed the significant and complex issues facing their families.

“We have really good parents, but life is really beating them up,” one South Jersey director said.

### If financial support was provided, identify the top three areas in parent engagement, that you believe are needed to help raise the quality of your program:



Both the survey responses and the focus group comments indicated that they need help supporting families to address their needs. This includes connecting parents to education classes, counseling and job and family resources. The consensus was overwhelming that they did not have adequate staff to effectively address these pressing issues.

For example, a few administrators discussed the need for parenting courses. Teen mothers bring their children to their programs and they may not have a strong parent role model or the necessary supports so critical to good parenting. Meeting those needs can be daunting.

“We are doing a poor job in helping teen mothers,” one central New Jersey director said. “All we do is take good care of their babies. They need much more than what we can give them.”

Several directors working in low-income communities felt that having family workers on-staff, similar to New Jersey’s state-funded preschools, would be extremely beneficial. These family workers help connect parents with needed services and address other issues that may be affecting their child and ability to parent effectively.

“Teachers do a great job, but this would add a lot,” one director said.

Moreover, the mental health needs of children and families, particularly those in low-income communities, far surpass staffs’ existing expertise. Directors overwhelmingly agreed that professionals who could address these complex issues were desperately needed for the children, their families and staff to better support families.

## Successfully Meeting Families Where They Are

**E**ven on “shoe string” budgets, focus group participants provided innovative and cost-effective examples of how they try to engage and enrich their families.

Collaborations with community resources led the way in providing innovative programs and supports to families. Connecting families with English-language, computer or GED classes, mental health services and public libraries were all part and parcel of the work of these child care providers.

One center received a grant for a “Family Academy” that provides their families with a variety of supports to help them be stronger advocates for their children. Several providers said that when new businesses opened in their area, such as a pediatricians’ office, they would request that they present to their families on a relevant issue — for free.

One central New Jersey director said he and his staff often play the role of family “advocate.” Many of their families are very poor and do not speak English. As a



result, the staff tries to help with such problems as landlord/tenant issues, or working with the gas and electric company to maintain a family’s services when they are unable to make payment.

Another center with 86 percent of its families being Spanish speaking, invested in a “Rosetta Stone” program for the parents. This central New Jersey director stated that using the language-learning software has been “well-sought out,” as there is a waiting list to use it. Not only does this help parents learn the language, it means they may be better able to read to their children in English.

Recognizing that all adults need time with other adults, one center instituted “Date Night.” For \$5 per hour, parents can leave their children at the center on designated Saturday nights with child care staff. It is also used as an incentive to bring parents into the classroom. Parents can get a free Date Night pass if they work in the center’s library. This has proven to be a win/win for parents and centers.



## Facilities

New or renovated outdoor play space topped the list of facilities' needs, cited by 55 percent of survey respondents. The focus group participants echoed this concern, citing an inability to pay for costly upgrades, especially those that support curriculum areas, such as science.

"We need to allow children to be able to imagine new things. So many spend time in front of the television, and they need to experience science and discovery outside," said one southern New Jersey director.

Indoor space was also identified as an issue that affects quality, said both survey respondents and focus group participants. Adequate play and learning space, a meeting place for families and a meeting room for staff planning and preparation were all identified as being important steps towards quality, but for the most part, were out of reach.

Basic facilities issues were also discussed, such as heating equipment. One southern New Jersey director described how children were frequently moved to other classrooms because the heater did not function well in all of the classes.

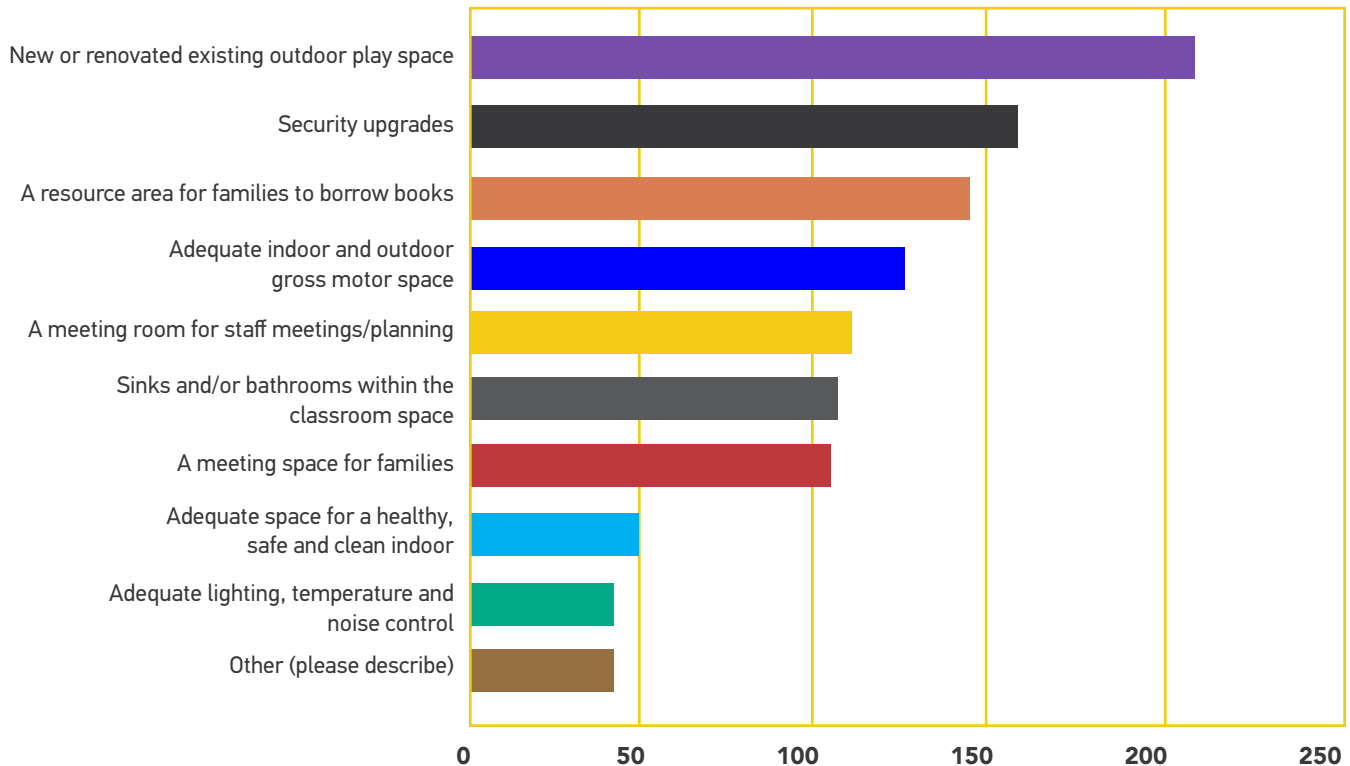
He could not buy a new heater, as he relied heavily on the state's low reimbursement rate, which did not provide adequate funding to purchase such an expensive item.

The issue identified as second most important in the survey, which also elicited the most discussion in all three focus groups, was security. More than 42 percent of survey respondents said security upgrades were key to raising the quality of their care. This is understandable, as child care centers and parents continue to grapple with how best to protect their students and staff in the wake of the Sandy Hook tragedy.

It was clear, however, from all three conversations, that state guidance has been limited. As a result, the security of these environments varied significantly from program to program. As the cost of security upgrades falls entirely on the centers, programs with less funding have limited security options.

Although centers are required through licensing to develop a lockdown plan, participants worried that staff lack the ability to implement the plan in the event of an emergency. With limited state guidance and no new money, children were being placed at risk, they said.

### If financial support was provided, identify the top three areas in facilities that you believe are needed to help raise the quality of your program:



Several center directors said that they had worked with their local police force, which provided suggestions on how to keep children safe from outside threats. Most agreed, that this was helpful, but not enough. Additional guidance from the state was needed.

### Other Issues

During the focus groups, other concerns affecting quality were discussed, but did not fall into the categories of professional development, parent engagement and enrichment and facilities. Their significance, however, warrants mentioning.

### Exposing Children to New Ideas and Materials

“Environment is everything,” said one South Jersey director. In a world where children are constantly stimulated by technology, providing them with varied experiences, such as field trips, strengthen program quality.

Providing these experiences, however, is often difficult to do because of limited funds. Even additional classroom materials would help raise quality. Focus group participants said this would allow teachers to rotate these important classroom items to keep children interested and engaged.

### Links Between Child Care and the Schools

Participants in all three focus groups voiced their concerns about the “complete disconnect” between child care/preschool and the public schools. One administrator from the northern group said that she was concerned the schools did not realize child care and preschool programs were “setting children up for the future.”

As a result, little interaction occurred among providers and the schools. They felt this hindered children’s educational progress. Collaboration, one central New Jersey director said, both to address issues affecting children and to leverage resources, would be beneficial for everyone.

### A Lack of Consistency in State Guidance

Participants in the northern New Jersey focus group had experienced inconsistencies in both licensing regulations and in workshops provided by the New Jersey Department of Children and Families. One center director described how her program was cited because it had not properly anchored a slide located outside. The director was told that she could simply bring the slide inside and it would not need anchoring.

Another director described how she had sent two of her staff to a workshop on “Understanding Licensing.” Two weeks later, she sent two more staff members to the same

workshop. When comparing what they learned, the staff members had been told different things and they weren’t sure what was correct.

## Recommendations: Where do we go from here?

Both the survey results and the focus group conversations provide a clear view from those who care each day for New Jersey’s youngest children on what is needed to improve quality in every child care setting. The following recommendations provide a pathway for quality improvement.

- 1. The state subsidy rate must be increased.** No significant quality improvement can occur without a subsidy rate increase. All aspects of quality are affected — retaining teachers, adequate equipment, meaningful professional development and effective family engagement. For those centers in low-income communities that only accept subsidies, an increase would make a tremendous difference in better meeting the needs of children and families, while providing parents with more options when choosing care for their children.
- 2. The higher education community should review and modify their classroom content and practices to ensure that early childhood education students acquire the skills needed to be effective instructional leaders for all children between birth and 8.** College coursework should evenly address the developing needs of all children within the early learning continuum so that new teachers can enter their classrooms prepared to teach all young children.
- 3. Scholarships for early learning teachers should be reinstated.** As the salaries of thousands of child care workers in our state are so low, it is out of reach for them to pay tuition for college or relevant coursework. From 2000-2007, New Jersey was a national model for providing funding to preschool teachers in the state’s most impoverished communities, so that they could return to college and obtain a BA and an early childhood certificate.

During that time, the state paid \$21.7 million in scholarship money to approximately 6,600 teachers,<sup>2</sup> resulting in a better educated, professional workforce. As a state investment, this was money well spent. But this support was only available to teachers in about 30 of New Jersey’s poorest communities. Reinstating and expanding the scholarship program would help both young children and their teachers. When the teachers are better educated, the children will reap the benefits of that education.

4. **Provide teachers returning to school with needed supports.** The scholarship program was successful because the state met the teachers “where they were.” Such supports included additional dollars for transportation and books. Several universities were innovative and provided college classes in the communities so that teachers would not have to address transportation issues. Many of the issues are the same with this cadre of teachers. Providing such supports will maximize the number of teachers who successfully complete their education goal.
5. **Provide mentors to classroom teachers.** While returning to school is important, it is even more important that what teachers learn is actually being implemented in their classrooms. Directors were clear that they often did not have the time to support teachers in this way. Providing this support—similar to what exists in New Jersey’s state-supported preschool—would be key to raising their quality.
6. **Provide additional staffing supports.** For child care, “shoe-string” budgets mean “shoe-string” staffs. Additional staff member, such as nurses, curriculum supervisors and family workers, are all important to enhance child care quality.
7. **Develop a statewide or county database of qualified substitutes.** Directors suggested that such a database or “hotline” be administered by the county resource and referral agencies or Professional Impact New Jersey, which administers another child care-related database.
8. **Improve state guidance and supports regarding security issues.** Providers do not feel that they are adequately prepared or funded to meet the growing needs of security and emergency management. Strengthening state regulations, providing additional technical assistance and funding is clearly needed.
9. **Address continuity issues between child care and the early elementary years.** While New Jersey has been a leader in developing an aligned and coordinated system of early learning between preschool and 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, more work is needed. A review of regulations

from the Departments of Human Services, Children and Families and Education — the departments responsible for children between 0-8 — is needed to ensure that the regulations both complement and support each other.

10. **Provide opportunities for technical assistance in fundraising.** Providers were amenable to exploring additional sources of revenue, but they described barriers. For-profit centers expressed their frustration in frequently being barred from taking advantage of grant opportunities. Others were not sure how to begin looking for new dollars. Technical assistance in this area, either on the county or state level, would provide child care administrators with skills necessary for exploring potential funding options.

## Conclusion

During two of the focus groups, participants called for a formal campaign to educate the public on what high-quality early education is and why it is so important to the long-term success of young children, both in school and in life. One Central Jersey director stated that without raising the awareness of high-quality early childhood education, “what will be the fallout for our society?”

There is no doubt that such a campaign is needed. But we can’t stop there. Providing every child with a quality early childhood experience requires a change in how our state currently does business. The findings of this report clearly show that more funding is needed to drive quality.

But that, too, is not enough. It will also take changes in the systems that support quality, including higher education, professional development and meaningful family engagement and enrichment. Lastly, it will take public will and a sustained commitment to making these needed changes.

When describing how difficult it was to provide quality, one director from the southern focus group said, “Can’t we brainstorm to find the answers?” Trying to find solutions to the quality dilemma seems to be the least we can do for New Jersey’s young children.

### End Notes:

<sup>1</sup> The High Price of Child Care 2013. A Study of the Cost of Child Care in New Jersey. (2013) Trenton, NJ: The New Jersey Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies.

<sup>2</sup> Fasbach Donovan, Laura. (2009) An Added Bonus: The Educational Success Story of New Jersey’s Preschool Teachers. Newark, NJ: Association for Children of New Jersey.

## Right from the Start

This report is part of Advocates for Children of New Jersey's ongoing Right from the Start Campaign, aimed at improving the safety, health and well-being of New Jersey's youngest children. This initiative examines issues and advances change to give children the strongest possible start.

A coordinated early care and education system, starting at birth and continuing into a child's early elementary years, is the foundation to ensure that children are reading on target by 3rd grade. This early literacy is key to long-term school success.

Child care is a critical piece of an effective early learning system, as is high-quality preschool and early intervention programs.

While New Jersey has some aspects of a strong early care and education system in place — quality preschools for some children and growing use of home visitation services — there is still much more to do before we can say that all children are getting off to the right start.

To learn more, visit [www.acnj.org](http://www.acnj.org).

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