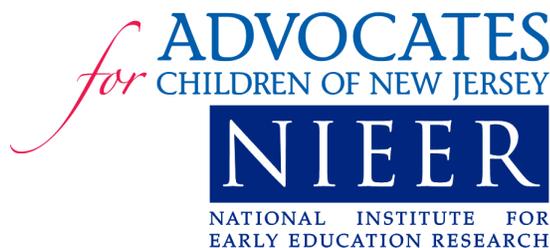


NJ Preschool Expansion: A Parent's Roadmap

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A strong early care and education system that includes high-quality preschool provides young children with the educational foundation they need to be successful in kindergarten and beyond. For more than 20 years, New Jersey's nationally recognized preschool program has served thousands of young children throughout the state.

Since 2017, the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) has made significant investments in expanding preschool to additional districts. State-funded preschool is offered in some school districts— but not all. However, that number has been growing.

What about your district?

Parents can play an important role in bringing preschool to their communities—and it is important to know the facts. This roadmap tells you what you need to know about preschool expansion and how you can advocate to bring it to your community.

What parents should know about preschool expansion:

- **Not every district is eligible.** The NJDOE releases a list of eligible school districts annually. Eligibility to apply is based on the percentage of students eligible for free and reduced lunch.
- **Eligible districts must apply for the funding.** [The School Funding Reform Act of 2008](#) mandates preschool expansion, but the state cannot require all eligible districts to provide the program until it is fully funded. Each year, the Governor needs to allocate funds for preschool expansion in his next State budget, then the budget would need to be passed by the state's legislature, and finally signed into law. In past years, the application process began once the funding in the state budget was finalized, usually in early July.
- **Not every eligible district has applied for funding.** Although all children can benefit from our state's high-quality preschool, not every eligible school



district has applied for the funding, leaving children in those communities without access to our state-funded program.

- **Most eligible districts that have been awarded funding have yet to offer the program for all their 3- and 4-year-olds.** Facilities play an important role in district expansion planning. Frequently, districts do not have enough room in their own buildings to house the “universe” of 3- and 4-year olds in their community.* Although some districts receive state funds to provide preschool, some are still not serving all the children who could benefit from this high-quality program. The good news is that school districts can collaborate with local child care providers and Head Start to implement the same standard of quality preschool in their classrooms in order to maximize the number of children who can benefit.

**Calculating a district's preschool universe is determined by multiplying by “2” the number of students in the district's first grade.*

Giving Every Child A Chance

What can parents do to advocate for preschool expansion?

- **Find out whether your district is eligible.** Go to www.acnj.org to find out the preschool status of your district.

If the district is eligible for preschool expansion, but has never applied, parents can be the voice for preschoolers! School districts that have yet to apply, need to hear that there is a need and a demand for preschool expansion.

If parents find out that their district is eligible but hasn't applied, the following are a few advocacy steps that they can take:



Talk to your friends and other parents in the community. Find out whether or not your friends and other parents are interested in advocating for preschool expansion. Be creative in reaching out, including posting on social media and urging interested parties to reach out.



Have local child care and Head Start providers at the table from the beginning. These community programs can maximize the number of preschoolers who can participate in the program. Making sure that they are part of the conversation early on will provide districts with much-needed information regarding available community space as they plan their program.



Write a letter. Send the district superintendent and the school board president a letter stating that the district is eligible for preschool expansion funds. Urge district officials to apply for funding when additional funds become available. Ask them why the district has yet to apply for the funding.



Meet with the district superintendent. Voice your support for preschool expansion with a face-to-face meeting. The district leader often has the most influence as to whether or not a district applies for funding.



Speak at a school board meeting. Bringing the issue to the attention of the members of the school board and the public-at-large is an important way to engage others.



Engage other community leaders. Let your mayor, town council and state legislators know that there is support for preschool expansion in communities they represent.



Bring along friends. Volume matters and when broad support is shown, it makes a difference!

If the district has already applied, but not all preschoolers are being served:

Districts are urged to develop programs that provide a classroom for every 3- and 4- year old in the community. If there are preschoolers that are not in the program because of space, urge the district to think “outside of the box” when it comes to implementing the program.

Hearing “we have no classroom space” does not mean that a district can't bring state-funded preschool to their community!

Urge them—using the advocacy steps above—to engage local child care providers and Head Start to become part of the program, so that there is enough room for all.

If your district is not eligible for preschool expansion state funding:

- **Talk to the district superintendent and school board members** and urge them to help preschoolers attain that educational foundation critical for academic success by providing quality preschool through federal (Title I) or local funds. **Talk to your state legislators** to explain that you want preschool expansion to come to your community!

Questions? Contact Cynthia Rice at crice@acnj.org.