

A Provider's Guide to Preschool Expansion in New Jersey 2023

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Overview

For more than 20 years, New Jersey's nationally recognized high-quality preschool program has served thousands of young children through a delivery system using public preschool, private providers, and Head Start classrooms. This mixed delivery model is one of the hallmarks of the former Abbott preschool program. With the supports and resources afforded by contracting with the school districts, the private providers and Head Start programs meet all the rigorous standards for quality. All preschool settings (school district, private providers, and Head Start) can be part of the school district's state-funded preschool program. School districts are required to ensure the quality of each site in the district's overall preschool program, whether district-operated, private provider-operated, or Head Start-operated.

What are the benefits?

- Access to funding to increase your program quality.
 - Districts are required to provide contracting programs with funding for teachers' salaries that are comparable to the district salary scale for teachers.
 - Districts provide funding for classroom and curricular materials and supplies.
 - Districts include all sites in an intentional system to continuously improve program quality.
- Opportunity for professional development for all staff.
 - Coaching (in program, curriculum, and social-emotional supports).
 - Curriculum and assessment training.
- Increased access to district services for children.
- The opportunity to offer high-quality preschool to eligible families at no cost.



Preschool Mixed Delivery System

- **The goal for preschool expansion is to provide access to all 3- and 4-year-olds within an eligible district--not just to fill the current classrooms available in school buildings.** Few districts have the classroom capacity to serve all 3- and 4-year-olds. Child care providers and districts can work together to attain the goal of providing preschool to their entire universe of 3- and 4-year-olds. In fact, many eligible children are already being served in child care programs. While school districts are encouraged to contract with child care providers, most are not required to do so and, if choosing to collaborate, may not choose to work with all providers that meet the standards. Providers can help school districts understand the role they can play in supporting future district expansion goals.
- **The "mixed delivery" model requires a collaboration between a school district and their local Head Start and/or child care providers, which is formalized in a contractual relationship.** Head Start and/or child care providers are required to meet the same high standards as school districts, including class size maximums, facilities requirements, staffing, and teaching credentials.

The contract between districts and collaborating providers also specifies how many children will be served, minimum days/hours of operation, when payments will be made, and expectations for things like insurance, accounting, and recordkeeping.

- **Regardless of location, the school district is responsible for program implementation and quality.** Oversight to ensure the implementation of a high-quality program rests with the school district. Funding to support that oversight is included as part of state aid that is paid to school districts at per-pupil rates that are determined annually and vary by county. Funding is designed to include district oversight costs, including things such as instructional coach salaries and professional development. The districts will reserve a portion of the per-pupil rates to pay for program oversight.
- **State funding flows through the school district.** Eligible school districts receive state funding and in turn, fund collaborating providers, typically for one or more full classrooms. Those dollars are to be used to meet the required program standards, which include providing teaching staff (including a teacher with a B.A. with Preschool-Grade 3 [P-3] certificate and an instructional assistant) with comparable salaries to their public school colleagues. This ensures a fair wage across the program and reduces teacher turnover in provider centers. State funding for children in Head Start-funded classrooms is approximately half of the amount provided to child care providers since Head Start agencies receive federal funding that contributes to the preschool program. For more information, see #1 in the *Frequently Asked Questions section below*.
- **Child care and Head Start teachers are typically not employees of the district.** Although teachers in collaborating programs must meet the same standards as school districts, they typically remain child care or Head Start employees. Site supervisors are responsible for day-to-day program administration and teacher supervision.
- **Districts can collaborate with child care and Head Start programs located in and out of their community.** Collaboration between school districts, Head Start, and child care providers is not exclusive to programs located in one town or city, but can include others located in neighboring towns, if all of the children served are age-eligible district resident

children. It is the district's responsibility to fund transportation costs, if applicable.

What can you do to be part of preschool expansion?

- **Assess the status of districts.** Find out if nearby school districts currently receive funds to operate state preschool programs or are eligible to apply for preschool funding. For a current list of state-funded districts, see the link in *Resources below*.
- **Measure your classrooms.** All preschool classrooms, regardless of where they are located, are required to be a minimum of 950 square feet, consisting of 750 square feet of usable instructional space, 150 square feet of storage and equipment or furnishings that are either built in or not easily moveable, and 50 square feet of bathroom space. Providers are required to meet this more stringent square footage requirement, which differs from the square footage required by the Department of Children and Families, Office of Licensing. Note that, once funding has been awarded, districts and providers can seek waivers through the NJ Department of Education (NJDOE) for classrooms that provide a minimum of 700 square feet of instructional space. For full requirements, refer to the [*NJ Administrative Code 6A:13A, Elements of High-Quality Preschool*](#).
- **Become familiar with state preschool program requirements.** In addition to the classroom space requirements as noted above, other primary program requirements include:
 - Full school day and school year programs, matching the school district's operating hours and number of school calendar days, with a minimum of six hours/180 days per year.
 - Maximum of 15 children per class.
 - A P-3-certified teacher and instructional assistant in each contracted classroom.
 - To utilize the same approved curriculum and child assessment as contracting school districts. For a full list of all program requirements, refer to the [*NJ Administrative Code 6A:13A, Elements of High-Quality Preschool*](#).
- **Prepare to discuss how you can help the school district meet its goals of serving all children.**

This includes such things as a willingness to serve eligible children, having available classroom space,

having or being willing to hire a P-3 certified teacher, using an NJDOE-approved curriculum, participating in [Grow NJ Kids](#) (New Jersey’s Quality Rating and Improvement System), etc.

Outreach to districts: If districts are already funded to expand, let them know you’re interested in participating to help them move towards ensuring program access for all 3- and 4-year-olds in the community. If they are eligible and have not yet applied, encourage them to do so and offer your help.

- **Who do you formally contact?**
 - Send a letter or call to schedule a meeting with the superintendent. For districts that are already funded, you can also contact the early childhood supervisor.
 - Show that you’ve done your homework, that you understand and can meet the program requirements, and that you are ready to partner.
 - Attend a school board meeting. During the public session of the meeting, discuss the importance of bringing high-quality preschool to your community and offer to collaborate with the district. Point out how many of the district’s future kindergarteners you are already serving in your program.
 - Be persistent! It may take more than one letter or one call to cultivate a relationship. If one approach doesn’t work, try another.
- **Who can you informally contact?**
 - Consider who you know and reach out to school board members, teachers, parents, etc.
- **Offer to be on your district’s Early Childhood Advisory Council (ECAC).**

Frequently Asked Questions

1. How do school districts calculate per-pupil amounts to distribute to contracted child care and Head Start programs?

For each county in the state, the NJDOE calculates three distinct per-child rates that differ based on where children are served (district, Head Start, or child care settings). Each of the three rates includes funding for “district-wide costs” (coaches, nurses, early childhood supervisors, professional development, etc.) that benefit every classroom, regardless of setting. The NJDOE intends for the

district to use a share of each of the applicable per-child rates to support those district-wide costs. Before going into discussions, both the school district and collaborating providers should determine anticipated expenses for operating the program. The district should also estimate district-wide costs. The provider should estimate costs for salaries, overhead (rent, utilities), classroom supplies and materials, etc. Once those costs are estimated, the district and provider should meet to agree upon an appropriate total budget and per-pupil rate based on the provider’s unique needs. The provider budget workbook and instructions can help guide calculations ahead of signing contracts. See the link to materials in *Resources*.

2. Do classrooms that are brand new in Head Start and child care centers have to be empty classrooms?

No. Existing classrooms serving district children in Head Start and/or child care provider settings can be part of the state preschool program if they adhere to NJDOE’s program requirements (class size of 15, meeting minimum square footage requirements, serving children who are residents of the district and meet age cut-off requirements, P-3 certified teacher, etc.).

3. What does comparable compensation mean for salaries?

In-district teachers should be compensated with salaries and benefits that are the same as other teachers in the school district with comparable education, credentials, and years of experience. Teachers in provider settings should receive salaries on par with district teachers who have comparable education, credentials, and years of experience. Providers are not currently required to offer benefits comparable to the district.

4. Does a district have flexibility with start times? Do private provider school hours have to be the same as the school district? Can they just be the same number of hours?

Yes, there is flexibility with start and end times, but the program must be offered for the same length of day as provided by the district.

5. How are program oversight and support services provided to Head Start and/or child care centers (coach, nurse, therapies, etc.)?

School districts are required to provide on-site support services for all program components, including teacher coaching (Preschool Instructional Coach and Preschool Intervention and Referral Specialist), health and safety (nurse), therapies for children with special needs (speech, physical, occupational therapists), and program oversight (early childhood supervisor, fiscal specialist). In some cases, Head Start or child care providers may already have some of those services in place (e.g., coaching) and provision of those services can be done by the provider rather than the district. Services should be coordinated between the school district and provider with an understanding that all services are necessary to ensure a high-quality preschool program. Together, they can determine how often services will be provided based on the number of classrooms and the needs of individual children and staff. See the NJDOE's [Preschool Program Implementation Guidelines](#).

6. Are Head Start and child care providers required to use the same curriculum and performance-based assessment as the school district?

If a provider is planning to contract with a school district and has yet to select a curriculum, it is preferable that they choose the same curriculum in order to maximize the supports that the school district can provide. Supports include access to curricular materials, professional development, and coaching on curricular components. If the provider has already been implementing a different NJDOE-approved curriculum and staff have been trained in curricular components, the district may decide to approve their use of that curriculum, assuming the alternative curriculum supports continuity from preschool to grade three. The school district should be aware, however, that this does create some challenges in coaching and supervising classrooms using more than one curriculum. The benefits and drawbacks of implementing more than one curriculum should be discussed and both parties should agree on the best way to proceed. Only curriculums deemed aligned and approved by the NJDOE's Division of Early Childhood Services (DECS) is allowable in state-funded classrooms.

The list currently includes four options: Creative Curriculum, High Scope Preschool Curriculum, Tools of the Mind, and Connect4Learning.

7. If a provider teacher is hired with a Certificate of Eligibility (CE) or Certificate of Eligibility with Advanced Standing (CEAS) for Preschool to Grade 3, who is responsible for mentoring and evaluating the teacher to complete certification requirements?

It is the district's responsibility for mentoring and evaluation. Refer to the [NJDOE's Office of Certification and Induction](#) for more answers to questions about teacher certification requirements.

8. How are health screenings and nursing services provided to children in provider settings?

The school district is required to provide nursing services in provider settings unless the child care or Head Start provider has a nurse available to provide those services. This includes basic child health services, including health screening, record maintenance, and parent education. There is some flexibility in how these services can be provided. For further details, refer to the guidance documents in *Resources below*.

9. Which party (district or provider) is responsible for the recruitment and enrollment of preschool children into the program?

Per the preschool contract, the provider and district are jointly responsible for the recruitment and enrollment of children into the program. There is some flexibility in how this can be managed so it should be discussed, and a joint plan developed before recruitment and enrollment begin. Recruitment and enrollment can be centralized at the district or conducted at each individual site with state preschool classrooms. Head Start, through federal requirements, has specific recruitment/enrollment/registration requirements. If the district is contracting with Head Start, the enrollment plan for these providers must comply with federal requirements.

Resources:

- NJ Department of Education, Division of Early Childhood Services: <https://www.nj.gov/education/earlychildhood/preschool/> (For access to preschool guidance and forms, including provider contracts and budget workbooks, list of approved curriculums, etc.)
- NJ Administrative Code 6A:13A, Elements of High-Quality Preschool: <https://www.nj.gov/education/code/current/title6a/chap13a.pdf>
- NJ Preschool Program Implementation Guidelines: <https://www.nj.gov/education/earlychildhood/preschool/docs/PSImplementationGuidelines.pdf>
- List of school districts currently funded to operate the state preschool program: <https://www.nj.gov/education/earlychildhood/preschool/programs.shtml>
- Advocates for Children of New Jersey's list of districts that have been eligible to apply in previous years:
 - NJ Teacher Certification: <https://www.nj.gov/education/license/provprogram.htm>
 - Grow NJ Kids: <https://www.grownjkids.gov/>