



June 3, 2024

Senate Education Committee
New Jersey State House
P.O. Box 099
Trenton, NJ 08625-0099

Re: Senate Education Committee Hearing on Mixed Delivery Preschool in New Jersey

Dear Chair Gopal and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for your leadership in holding this important hearing on mixed delivery preschool in New Jersey. The Early Care and Education Consortium (ECEC) is a national non-profit alliance of licensed child care providers, state child care associations and education service providers. Collectively our members operate over 7,000 child care centers nationwide, serving nearly one million children. In New Jersey specifically, our members operate 355 centers, employ over 8,600 educators and staff, and have the capacity to serve over 53,800 children. Seven of our member companies participate in New Jersey's state preschool program, and many also participate in the preschool programs of other states.

Since 2018, Governor Murphy and the Legislature have increased preschool funding by over \$427 million and added more than 14,600 preschool seats in New Jersey school districts. Given this significant investment and its potential impact on preschool providers and families, it is important to consider *how* preschool services are delivered. We believe (and we understand that the Administration shares this view) that providing preschool through a mixed delivery model – one that leverages the expertise and infrastructure of *both* community-based providers *and* the public schools – is the best and most effective way to provide preschool services. Community-based providers can include, for example, centers and Head Start programs.

Including community-based providers in the state preschool program helps leverage existing infrastructure – physical infrastructure that is already purpose built for young children – and human infrastructure (educators that are trained to work with preschoolers). Including community-based providers also expands options for families and ensures that they can select a high-quality program that best meets their needs. It is noteworthy that community-based providers often provide programs that cover all working hours and operate during the summer, and they already have relationships with families as a result of serving younger children.

While New Jersey provides districts the option to contract with community-based providers to offer preschool, most districts are not required to do so. Further, it is noteworthy that failing to sufficiently invest in mixed delivery preschool can cause negative unintended consequences. For example, if state Pre-K is offered solely or mostly through public schools, and community-based providers lose four-year-olds to this program, they may struggle to keep classrooms open and serve remaining families in their care. We are currently seeing these effects in New Jersey. To make child care budgets work, tuition is needed from three-and four-year-old classrooms to help offset the cost of care for infants and toddlers. Care for younger children is more expensive to provide due to lower adult-child ratios, and it is often difficult for families to cover the full cost of this care. Ultimately, when providers lose four-year olds, they may also have to raise tuition on remaining families.

In recent months, New Jersey has made some progress toward advancing mixed delivery. As of 2023, districts' Preschool Expansion Aid (PEA) applications are assigned priority points if they include collaboration with



community-based providers. In addition, language was included in New Jersey's FY 24 budget that required districts to show (in their applications) due diligence that they had sought to establish partnerships with all licensed child care providers and Head Start programs in their community and neighboring communities that were willing and able to meet all preschool program requirements. Ultimately, 19 out of 39 district applications (almost half) included plans to partner with community-based providers.

While the aforementioned examples indicate progress, more mixed delivery partnerships could be developed. According to a 2024 report on mixed delivery by the New Jersey Department of Education, of 283 districts that are participating in the state's preschool program, 90 (or just under 32 percent) are partnering with community-based providers. In addition, entering into mixed delivery partnerships could be made more palatable for both community-based providers and school districts. Further, with 70 percent of New Jersey children under the age of six who have all available parents in the workforce,¹ it is clear that more full-day, full-year pre-K options are needed. Community-based providers can help to meet this need.

Thank you for your time and consideration, and please do not hesitate to contact me at ejacobsen@bhfs.com with any follow-up questions or recommendations.

Sincerely,

Elsa Jacobsen
Director of State Government Relations
Early Care and Education Consortium

ENCLOSURE: [Improving State Pre-K Investments: How Mixed Delivery Pre-K Programs Maximize Parent Choice and Effectively Serve Children and Families](#)

¹ Statistics on Children, Youth and Families in New Jersey (2022). Kids Count Data Center, Annie E. Casey Foundation and Advocates for Children of New Jersey.
https://datacenter.aecf.org/data/tables/5057-children-under-age-6-with-all-available-parents-in-the-labor-force?loc=32&loc_t=2#detailed/2/32/false/1095,2048,1729,37,871,870,573,869,36,868/any/11472,11473