So I'm Collaborating With a School District to Provide Preschool...Why Aren't My Troubles Over?

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Some quick facts about NJ Preschoolers...*

For the 2025-2026 school year:

- **NJ was home to about 197,000 preschool-age children;**
- **79,763 general education preschoolers, participated in the program, approximately 40% were served;**
- **The funded seats were divided with:**
- **-48,267 in district/charter classrooms (61%)**
- **-5,662 in Head Start classrooms (7%)**
- **-25,834 in child care provider classrooms (32%)**

***Fiscal Year 2026 Report to the NJ State Legislature on Preschool Expansion and Mixed Delivery, March 2026.** Fiscal Year 2026 Report on Preschool Expansion and Mixed Delivery

Some quick facts about districts…*

As of the 2025-2026 school year:

- **Any school district and charter school that offers full-day kindergarten is eligible for preschool expansion funding;**
- **Of the 567 eligible school districts/charter school, 294 (52%) currently participate in state funded preschool including:**
  - ***31 SDA Districts (former Abbotts)***
  - ***11 Charter schools***
  - ***252 Regularly operating school districts***

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Some quick facts about providers...*

- **DCF Data as of December 1, 2025**
- **There are 3,298 NJ licensed child care centers serving 2.5-6 year olds;**
- **In FY 2026, 560 (17%) providers (470 child care and 90 Head Start) were contracting with 131 school districts;**
- **Of the 294 school districts participating, approximately 45% are implementing the program through the mixed delivery model.**
- ***Fiscal Year 2026 Report to the NJ State Legislature on Preschool Expansion and Mixed Delivery, March 2026.** Fiscal Year 2026 Report on Preschool Expansion and Mixed Delivery

So What Does this Data Tell Us?

It tells us….

- That with only 40 percent of New Jersey's preschoolers being served in state-funded preschool classrooms, there is still a lot of expansion that needs to take place;
- That the majority of school districts are keeping the children in-house;
- That the majority of child care providers and Head Start programs are not involved in collaborating to implement the mixed delivery model;
- BUT….
- State-funded preschool under the New Jersey Universal Preschool and Kindergarten Act must be implemented by the 2029–2030 school year.

The “Rose, Bud, Thorn” of Preschool

- **Volunteers please:**
  - ***Your names***
  - ***The school districts in which you are collaborating***
  - ***The “rose” in collaborating***
  - ***The “thorn” in collaborating***

The “Roses” and “Thorns” of Collaboration

- The “Roses:”
- Increased funding
- Better educated staff
- Increased PD opportunities
- Increased preschool access
- Parent affordability

- The “Thorns:”
- Disparities in funding structures
- Un (under) funded costs
- Shortage of qualified teachers
- Partnership issues
- Difficulty to compete with districts for staff
- Enrollment issues
- Impact on infant/toddler programs
- Facilities
- Overall accountability

Who (or What) Makes these Decisions that Impact My Program?

- It depends…
  - State
  - District
- *This is why a multi-tiered advocacy strategy*
  - *is key!*

Advocacy at the State Level



Advocacy at the Local Level



The “MUSTS” of Basic Advocacy

- Understand the issues and know the policy/decisionmakers
- Find and work with your allies in working towards change
- Numbers matter
- Know that you are the expert–Have confidence in yourself
- There will never be enough time–so don’t put your advocacy on the back burner
- Relationships are everything

Steps for Advocating at the State Level

- Regularly meet with/talk to fellow providers in your community
- Recommend that they become NJAEYC members and subscribe to ACNJ
- Regularly provide information to your state partners (NJAEYC, ACNJ)
- When asked to be available to meet with policy makers, do everything you can to be available
- Don’t be afraid to testify before a State Committee or write a few letters
- Know your legislators and work towards developing a relationship with their staff

Steps for Advocating at the Local Level

- Regularly meet with/talk to fellow providers in your community
- Be a member of your district's Early Childhood Learning Council
- Talk to the district team about scheduling regular (monthly) "conversations" with you and a group of your fellow providers. Develop both issues and potential solutions
- Meet with the superintendent
- Go and speak at School Board meetings
- Educate your parents about the program and its issues

AND REMEMBER...

Your advocacy

ALWAYS, ALWAYS

must focus on the

children



Thank you!

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