

Assessing the Capacity of Child Care and Head Start Centers to Participate in New Jersey's Preschool Expansion Initiative: Phase 1

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Executive Summary

This report shares the results of a telephone survey of 407 directors of child care centers and Head Start programs in the districts that will be most affected by New Jersey's preschool expansion effort. The survey focused on: 1) the ages served in early care and education settings in these districts, 2) the general quality of these settings, particularly in terms of implementing licensing standards, curriculum, and learning expectations, and 3) the potential contributions and constraints to the preschool expansion initiative that these sites represent.

Our results suggest that the early care and education programs located in these districts have resources that could support the expansion of publicly funded preschool. These resources include:

- ▶ Experience serving preschoolers
- ▶ Directors' educational levels and administrative experience
- ▶ Experience meeting DHS licensing standards for group sizes and staff-child ratios
- ▶ Full-time, direct care staff
- ▶ Direct care staff who speak Spanish
- ▶ Ownership of facilities
- ▶ On-site internet access
- ▶ Head Start programs' experience implementing a research-based curriculum and familiarity with learning standards

At the same time, this study suggests there are areas that represent potential challenges, including the:

- ▶ Small size of most facilities
- ▶ Lack of experience in child care centers in implementing a research-based curriculum
- ▶ Lack of experience implementing learning standards
- ▶ Directors' uneven early childhood training

Of course, these potential resources and challenges are based on the directors' self-reports and the assumptions drawn from them. As a result, before making any decisions about centers' ability to support the expansion initiative, we advise using the data generated by the larger preschool expansion needs assessment being conducted by NIEER. This follow-up research involves a self-administered workforce survey; on-site visits to district, child care, and Head Start classrooms; and interviews of center directors and district supervisors and superintendents. These additional measures will shed light on such topics as classroom square footage, the presence of kitchens, storage space, and meeting rooms within individual buildings, as well as the credentials, experience, and linguistic capacity of teaching staff. We will also have more information about the general structural quality of these settings through an inventory of the materials and equipment presently available.

In sum, the capacity of child care centers and Head Start programs to help districts expand access to preschool appears to be mixed. This study suggests that they have the experience to successfully enroll 3- and 4-year olds, but their ability to effectively enhance preschoolers' early learning skills will probably require a variety of training and technical assistance efforts.

Assessing the Capacity of Child Care and Head Start to Participate in New Jersey's Preschool Expansion Initiative

New Jersey's School Funding Reform Act of 2008 requires a significant expansion of publicly funded preschool education. The purpose of this study was to assess the capacity of licensed child care and Head Start centers located in those school districts that will be most impacted by the preschool expansion initiative. Commissioned by the Division of Early Childhood Education of the New Jersey Department of Education (DOE), the New Jersey Association of Child Care Resource & Referral Agencies (NJACCRRRA), and the Schumann Fund for New Jersey, the questions guiding this study are:

- 1) What ages are served in early care and education settings in these districts?
- 2) What is the general quality of these settings in terms of staff-child ratios, group sizes, and director credentials, as well as experience with implementing curricula, learning expectations, and program standards?
- 3) What potential contributions and constraints to the preschool expansion initiative do these sites represent?

To answer these questions, NIEER conducted a telephone survey of directors of child care centers and Head Start programs in the districts that will be most affected by the expansion effort. This paper provides a brief background to the study and describes the results of the telephone survey. It also includes a description of our sample and data collection procedures.

Background to Study

New Jersey currently provides high quality, full-day preschool education to approximately 38,000 3- and 4-year olds living in its 31 "Abbott" school districts. A small number of additional districts offer part-day preschool through the Early Launch to Learning Initiative and non-Abbott Early Childhood Program Aid funds (Barnett, Hustedt, Friedman, Boyd, & Ainsworth, 2007). Despite the Abbott preschool program's demonstrated success in improving children's outcomes (Frede, Jung, Barnett, Lamy, & Figueras, 2007), access to full-day programs has been limited to families

living in the Abbott school districts. Beginning in September 2009, preschoolers living in the state's non-Abbott District Factor Group "A" and "B" districts, as well as "CD" districts with at least 40 percent free and reduced lunch rates, will also have access to a full-day early education program. Targeted preschool for at-risk 3- and 4-year-olds will be available in all additional districts (NJAC 6A:13A).

When fully implemented, enrollment in full-day preschool education is anticipated to approach 70,000 3- and 4-year olds (NJDOE, 2008). While the benefits of expanded access are clear, the capacity of individual districts to increase enrollment is less certain (Ackerman, Barnett, Hawkinson, Brown, & McGonigle, 2008). The majority of preschool programs currently offered in non-Abbott school districts are half-day efforts targeted towards 4-year olds alone (Barnett et al., 2007). Ramping up both hours and numbers of children served will require additional personnel, materials, and technical assistance. School districts located in densely-populated urban cities and towns and with older school buildings may find issues related to space particularly onerous (Ackerman et al., 2008).

One potential source of classrooms and teaching personnel are the child care centers and Head Start programs located within and nearby any school district (Ackerman et al., 2008). However, the regulations and standards for these programs are often far less stringent than those governing state-funded preschool education initiatives (Barnett et al., 2007). In addition, the small number of New Jersey child care studies that have been conducted (e.g., Brown & Traill, 2006; NJACCRRRA, 2001; Riesser & Freer, 2003) are limited in scope. As a result, little is known about the capacity of these stakeholders to successfully participate in the expansion effort.

This study was specifically designed to shed light on the capacity of the private providers and Head Start programs in a select group of cities and towns. In doing so, we hope to inform policymakers and stakeholders at the state and local level about the potential resources available to them, as well as the likely obstacles that will need to be addressed. To begin, we describe the study's participants.

Methodology

Sample

This study used a sample of 407 directors of child care centers and Head Start programs located in 128 cities, all of whom were recruited through a three-step process. First, we used a New Jersey Department of Children & Families state-wide database of licensed settings to determine which child care and Head Start centers were located in the districts of interest and served children ages 5 and under. After grouping the 52 Head Start centers located in these districts according to their respective grantee agencies, we had a total potential sample of 462. This number included 444 child care centers, 11 Head Start programs with 45 centers, and 7 Head Start programs with single sites. Next, we sent a database of these 462 programs to NJACCRRRA, who then added the names of each site's respective director. Lastly, each director received a phone call from their local Child Care Resource and Referral Agency alerting them to the study, as well as a follow-up letter from NIEER describing the study's purpose and asking for their participation.

Fifty-three child care center directors and two Head Start program directors—each with three centers of interest—elected not to participate in the survey, giving us a final sample of 391 child care and 16 Head Start directors with 46 sites between them. This represents an 88 percent response rate. As can be seen in Table 1, the average total licensed capacity of the 53 non-participants is 59 children, versus 70 for the participants. Fifty-one percent of the centers with participating directors are licensed for children under the age of 2 ½ or over the age of 6. This is the case for 45 and 47 percent, respectively, of non-participating centers. In addition, based on the first two zip code digits, a greater percentage of non-participants than participants (56.6 vs. 48.3 percent) are located in northern New Jersey. However, in all of these cases, the difference in the number of percentage points is not greater than 8.3.

Data Collection

Data for this study were collected in February and March 2008 using a 6-minute structured telephone interview protocol. The protocol was designed specifically for this study by stakeholders from NIEER, the DOE, and

NJACCRRRA and contained a total of 24 questions. The majority of questions required directors to provide a “yes,” “no,” or “how many” answer. Three questions were open-ended.

Initial questions focused on the number of infant, toddler, and preschool classrooms in a center, as well as the number of children enrolled in each age group. Participants were then asked to report on the number of full-time direct care staff and how many of these individuals are fluent in Spanish. The open-ended questions explored the curricula used by preschool teachers and whether preschool learning expectations and program standards were based on any specific document or documents. Additional questions determined ownership of center buildings, if centers have internet access, and whether they offered transportation. The final set of questions asked directors to report on their experience and educational background.

After piloting the survey with former and current preschool teachers, the interviews were conducted by a professional data collection firm using a computer-aided telephone interview system. All participating directors were mailed a \$10 gift card to a national bookstore chain upon completion of the survey.

Data Analysis

For the child care sample, we calculated means and overall percentages for each question. We also performed cross tabulations between questions that focused on related topics. Because the Head Start sample included nine directors answering questions about more than one site, as well as seven directors with single sites, we used additional databases available for these programs and sites to approximate means for individual centers.

Table 1. Licensed Capacity of Child Care Sample and Non-Participants

	Child Care	
	Participants (n = 391)	Non-Participants (n = 53)
Licensed capacity (M)	69.6	58.9
Licensed for children < 2 1/2 (%)	51.2	45.3
Licensed for children > 6 (%)	51.2	47.2
Northern NJ (07XXX zip) (%)	48.3	56.6

Findings

As is the case with the current Abbott preschool program (Frede et al., 2007), it is anticipated that the majority of school districts in New Jersey will need to collaborate with private child care centers and Head Start programs to offer expanded access to preschool. However, while there is a database detailing all of the state's licensed programs and what ages centers are licensed to serve, very little is known about actual characteristics of individual centers. This includes whether preschoolers are currently enrolled (and if so, how many), the linguistic capacity of the full-time staff, and directors' credentials and experience.

Director Demographics

Should child care centers and Head Start programs participate in the expansion initiative, site directors will most likely assume new administrative duties. Staff will need to adjust to implementing a more intensive educational focus, as well. The survey asked directors whether they had attained a college degree, and if so, whether their highest degree is an Associate's (AA), Bachelor's (BA), Master's (MA), or Doctorate (Ph.D or Ed.D).

Just under 74 percent of child care directors report having a minimum of a BA (see Table 2). An additional 7.7 percent stated that they have attained an AA. Within this group, about half report that their 4-year degree major is related to early childhood. The remaining 18.4 percent of directors report that they do not have a college degree.

Among the Head Start sample, 69.6 percent of program directors have a Master's degree. The remainder have a 4-year degree. Forty-one percent of Head Start program directors indicate that their major is related to early childhood.

Compared to when the Abbott preschool initiative was first implemented, the percentage of child care and Head Start directors with a college degree related to early childhood education is higher. At that time, just 44 percent of directors had a college degree that focused on early childhood education. However, the percentage of "no degree" directors was just 17 percent, compared to 18.4 percent of our current sample (Barnett, Tarr, & Frede, 1999).

The survey also asked participants how many years they have been the director of their center/program. As also seen in Table 2, child care center directors have an average of 8.3 years of experience working in this capacity. Just over one-third have up to three years of experience. An additional 31.8 percent have between 4 and 9 years of director experience. The remaining third have worked as the director in their center for at least 10 years.

The 16 Head Start program directors have an average of 10.3 years of experience in their present job. Thirty-one percent have three years or less of experience. The same percentage of directors have been in this role for between four and nine years. The remaining directors have at least 10 years on the job. It should be noted that three of the participants in this last category have between 28 and 35 years of experience.

Table 2. Director Demographics

Characteristic	Child Care (N=391)		Head Start (N=16)	
	Percent	Years (M)	Percent	Years (M)
College Degree Status				
No degree	18.4		0	
AA	7.7		0	
BA	49.9		30.4	
MA	22.5		69.6	
Doctorate	1.5		0	
AA, BA, or MA related to early childhood (n = 319)	46.5		41.3	
Years of experience as director in current setting		8.3		10.3
0 – 3	35.5		31.1	
4 – 9	31.8		31.1	
10+	32.7		37.2	

Ages of Children Served

While centers may be licensed to serve children between the ages of 0 and 13, they may not necessarily enroll children that reflect all of those age points. One important aspect of the study was to determine which child care centers and Head Start programs serve infants and toddlers or preschoolers, or a combination of both. Participants were therefore asked to report on whether they enroll children in these age groups. They were also queried on how many children in either age group were currently enrolled, as well as the quantity of classrooms used for each cohort.

Of the 391 child care centers participating in the survey, 82.6 percent enroll infants and toddlers (N=323) and 97.2 percent (N=380) enroll 3- and 4-year olds. The 16 Head Start programs all enroll preschoolers. Just over half of the centers within these programs enroll children between the ages of 0 and 2.

Number of Classrooms per Age Group

The survey also asked how many classrooms within individual centers are currently used for either age group. As can be seen in Table 3, 1.9 percent (n=6) of centers enroll infants and toddlers but do not have a separate classroom for this age group. Under one percent (n=2) of

child care centers do not have at least one classroom just for preschoolers. These two centers are among the six centers that do not have a separate classroom for children between the ages of 0 and 2.

For the majority who do have distinct classrooms, the average quantity for either group is almost identical: 2.3 infant/toddler classrooms and 2.5 preschool classrooms. Similar percentages of centers have one, two, or three classrooms for either group.

Fifteen percent of child care centers serving infants and toddlers have four or more rooms for this age group and 11 percent of sites serving preschoolers have this many rooms for 3- and 4-year olds. Our child care sample contained centers that are most likely part of chains or corporations (e.g. Goddard, Kindercare, LaPetite Academy), but when compared to the rest of the sample, these centers are no more likely to have four or more classrooms in either age category.

All of the Head Start centers serving infants and toddlers have at least one classroom for this age group. Among our entire Head Start sample, just 26.1 percent have between one and three preschool classrooms. The majority of Head Start sites have four or more classrooms for 3- and 4-year olds.

Table 3. Number of Classrooms Set Aside for Infants/Toddlers and Preschoolers

	Child Care (Total N = 391)		Head Start (Total N = 46)	
	Infant/Toddler (n = 323)	Preschool (n=380)	Infant/Toddler (n = 24)	Preschool (n = 46)
Number of Classrooms (M)	2.3	2.5	1	4.9
Centers with... (%)				
0 rooms	1.9	.5	0	0
1 – 2 rooms	62.3	63.1	100.0	10.9
3 rooms	20.4	21.1	0	15.2
4+ rooms	15.4	11.3	0	73.9

As highlighted above, not all child care centers serve children between the ages of 0 and 5. Because there is a perception in the field that child care centers tend to favor the enrollment of preschoolers over infants and toddlers, we also examined whether centers that enroll children in both groups have similar numbers of classrooms. The average ratio of classrooms in these child care centers remained 1:1, with 2.3 classrooms for each age group. Because all Head Start centers serve preschoolers and our sample within this cohort is so small, we did not conduct this analysis for the Head Start data.

Enrollment

Directors were also asked to report how many infants/toddlers and preschoolers who are not yet in kindergarten were enrolled in their center. The total enrollment among all the

sites represented in this study is 7,006 children between 0 and 2 and 17,380 3- and 4-year olds. In child care centers, the mean number of infants/toddlers enrolled is 21.5, while the average number of preschoolers is 33.4 (see Table 4). The average enrollment in individual Head Start centers is 7.2 infants/toddlers and 62.1 preschool-aged children.

Total center enrollment appears to be similar to when the Abbott preschool initiative first began. In 1999 more than half of surveyed centers had a maximum capacity of fewer than 45 children (Barnett et al., 1999). In our present study, 53.4 percent of child care centers have a similar capacity based on their reported total enrollment of infants/toddlers and preschoolers.

Table 4. Number of Children Enrolled per Center

	Child Care (Total N = 391)		Head Start (Total N = 46)	
	Infant/Toddler (n = 323)	Preschool (n=380)	Infant/Toddler (n = 24)	Preschool (n = 46)
Number of Children (M)	21.5	33.4	7.2	62.1
Centers with (%)...				
1 – 10 children	32.8	11.4	75.0	26.1
11 – 20 children	29.7	28.9	25.0	
21 – 30 children	14.5	20.7		13.0
31 – 40 children	11.9	11.4		
41 – 50 children	4.4	9.8		
51+ children	6.7	17.8		60.9

We examined the percentage of centers enrolling progressively larger quantities of children in either age group. As seen in Table 4, 62 percent of child care centers serving infants and toddlers enroll between one and twenty children in this age group, while 61 percent serving 3- and 4-year olds enroll between one and thirty children in this category. Three-fourths of centers with Early Head Start programs enroll 10 or fewer infants and toddlers. Sixty-one percent of Head Start centers enroll more than 50 preschoolers.

Average Group Sizes

Research suggests that group size contributes to the quality of children’s experiences while enrolled in early care and education programs (Ruopp, 1979). New Jersey’s licensing standards limit classrooms with one primary caregiver and serving children up to 18 months old to a group size of four. Classes serving toddlers between the ages of 18 and 30 months are limited to group sizes of 12. The maximum group size for children between the ages of 2 ½ and 4 is 20 (NJ DHS, 2005). Abbott preschool education classrooms are limited to group sizes of 15 (NJAC 6A:13A).

The child care sample averages 21.5 infants and toddlers enrolled in 2.3 classrooms, and 33.4 preschoolers enrolled in 2.5 classrooms. When using these figures, the estimated mean group sizes are 9.4 and 13.4, respectively. When using the individual center group sizes to calculate an average, the mean group size for infant/toddler classrooms is nearly identical: 9.3. However, the average group size for preschool classrooms comes in higher at 14.5. These latter averages, as well as an examination of the range of group sizes in our sample, suggest that the majority of centers are in compliance with the state’s licensing regulations. As Table 5 shows, 86.5 percent of centers enrolling infants and toddlers have mean group sizes of 15 or less. A similar percentage (86.9%) of preschool classrooms have group sizes of 20 or fewer children. In 1999, the average class size was 16 (Barnett et al., 1999).

The average Head Start infant/toddler group size is estimated to be 7.2. Preschool classrooms have an average enrollment of 12.7 3- and 4-year olds. Due to the nature of our Head Start sampling, we were unable to calculate the ranges of group sizes within individual centers for this cohort. We therefore also advise cautious reliance on these estimated groups sizes.

Table 5. Range of Group Sizes in Individual Child Care Centers

	Infant/Toddler (n=323) (%)	Preschool (n=380) (%)
< 5.0	29.0	8.8
5.5 – 10.0	38.1	27.7
10.5 – 15.0	19.4	29.9
15.5 – 20.0	9.3	20.5
20.5 – 25.0	1.6	8.0
25.5. – 30.0	.7	2.4
> 30.5	1.9	2.7

Table 6. Full-Time Staff-Child Ratios in Individual Child Care Centers

	Child Care (Total N = 391)	
	Infant/Toddler (n = 303) (%)	Preschool (n=367) (%)
< 1:2	20.8	3.3
> 1:2 – 1:4	40.6	14.7
> 1:4 – 1:6	28.4	22.3
> 1:6 – 1:8	6.2	25.1
> 1:8 – 1:10	1.7	17.2
> 1:10 – 1:12	0.6	4.0
> 1:12 – 1:14	0.4	2.8
> 1:14 – 1:16	0.6	2.2
> 1:16 – 1:18	0.4	1.0
> 1:18 – 1:20	0	1.4
> 1:20	0.3	6.0

Full-Time, Direct Care Staff

New Jersey's expanded preschool program will mirror the current Abbott initiative in that it will use a full-day, 5 days per week schedule (NJAC 6A:13A). Staff will therefore be needed that are willing to work on a full-time basis. The survey asked directors to report on how many direct care staff worked five days and at least 30 hours per week.

Centers employ on average 5.6 infant/toddler and 4.6 preschool full-time teachers and assistants. We estimate that Head Start programs have an average 2.4 full-time staff for children between the ages of 0 and 2 and 11.9 full-time staff in preschool classrooms. However, due to how we sampled the Head Start cohort, the totals for this group should be cautiously interpreted.

Average Staff-Child Ratios

Teacher-child ratios also contribute to the quality of early care and education programs (CQO Study Team, 1995; NICHD ECCRN, 2000; Phillipsen, Burchinal, Howes, & Cryer, 1997). In New Jersey, licensed child care centers must have a staff-child ratio of 1:4 or better in rooms serving children under the age of 18 months and 1:6 in toddler rooms (18–30 months old). Preschool classrooms serving

children between the ages of 31 and 48 months old are required to have a ratio of 1:10, and rooms serving 4-year olds must have a 1:12 ratio (DHS, 2005). The current Abbott preschool classrooms have ratios of 1:7.5 or better, with classrooms staffed with both a teacher and an assistant (NJAC 6A:13A).

The average full-time staff-child ratio in child care centers appears to fall within licensing regulations. Based on the enrollment figures detailed above, the mean staff-child ratio is 1:3.8 in infant/toddler rooms and 1:7.3 in preschool rooms. When calculated based on individual center ratios, the average staff-child ratio is slightly higher: 1:4.23 in classrooms serving children ages 0–2 and 1:8.7 in classrooms serving preschoolers.

As can be seen in Table 6, 61.4 percent of centers serving infants and toddlers have a full-time staff to child ratio of 1:4 or better. An additional 28.4 percent have ratios greater than 1:4, but up to 1:6. In centers serving 3- and 4-year olds, 82.6 percent have ratios of 1:10 or better. A small percentage of centers appear to have full-time staff-child ratios that are not in compliance. However, we emphasize that the survey did not inquire about part-time staff or whether the children enrolled were all participating in full-day programs. These ratios could also be the result of errors in self-reporting.

The Head Start full-time staff-child ratios are estimated to be slightly lower: 1:3 in infant/toddler classes and 1:5.2 in classes serving 3- and 4-year olds. Once again, due to the nature of how we sampled Head Start directors, we were unable to calculate the range of average staff-child ratios. These average ratios should be cautiously relied upon as well.

Spanish-fluent Full-time Staff

The percentage of English Language Learners in the districts that form the basis for this study ranges from 0 to 16.3 percent. The most common non-English home language in New Jersey is Spanish (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). Thus the survey also asked directors to report how many of their full-time direct care staff are fluent in Spanish.

When looking at individual child care centers, directors report an average of one full-time staff member working with either age group who is fluent in Spanish. Of the centers with full-time staff in infant/toddler classrooms, 44 percent report that none are fluent in Spanish. In centers with preschool classrooms, 53 percent of directors say they do not have any full-time staff members that can speak Spanish fluently. Just 12 to 17 percent of classrooms have three or more full-time staff serving either age cohort that are fluent in this language.

Our small Head Start sample with infant/toddler classrooms also reports an average of one full-time staff member fluent in Spanish. The average number of full-time preschool staff with this linguistic capacity is six. While this number is greater than the average for child care centers, it should be noted that Head Start centers generally have 2 ½ times as many full-time staff for this age group, as well as twice as many enrolled preschoolers and preschool classrooms.

Curriculum Used

The preschool education programs that become part of the expansion effort will need to follow many of the regulations in place for the current Abbott preschool program (NJAC 6A:13A). This includes implementing either the High/Scope (High/Scope Foundation, 2005), Curiosity Corner (Chambers, 2008), Creative (Dodge, Colker, & Heroman, 2002), Bank Street (Zimiles, 1993), or Tools of the Mind (Bodrova & Leong, 1996) curriculum. Programs will also be required to align their classroom practice with the New Jersey Preschool Teaching and Learning Expectations (NJ DOE, 2004). Their program standards, which include group size and teacher credentials, must conform to the Abbott Preschool Implementation Guidelines (NJAC 6A:13A).

Currently, the program standards for child care centers are dictated by New Jersey's licensing regulations (NJ DHS, 2005). As is the case in other states (Morgan, 2003), these regulations do not require child care centers to use a specific curriculum or consider learning expectations when planning their daily activities. Head Start programs are required to choose a curriculum that will support preschoolers' literacy and language skills, as well as overall cognitive development. They must also follow the program standards found in the Head Start Act (P.L. 110-134). However, these standards are not always aligned with those in the Abbott preschool program, as well.

To shed further light on the capacity of child care centers and Head Start programs, the survey asked directors three questions focusing on these standards-related topics. The first focused on whether the preschool teachers in their center use a particular curriculum, and if so, which one. Directors were not prompted with any titles, but were requested to name whichever curricula they might use.

Table 7. Curriculum Used by Preschool Teachers

	Child Care (n=364) (%)	Head Start (n=16) (%)
No curriculum used	23.6	
Teacher- or center-designed	29.7	
Abbott-aligned	17.3	100.00
Other	26.6	
Don't know name	2.7	

As shown in Table 7, 23.6 percent of child care center directors report that their preschool teachers do not use a curriculum. An additional 30 percent report that a teacher- or center-designed approach is used. Just 17.3 percent report using one of the five Abbott preschool curricula. Within this specific category, the most commonly used is *Creative Curriculum* (Dodge, Colker, Heroman, 2002).

Almost 27 percent of directors report that their preschool teachers use a curriculum that we coded as "other." The most frequently mentioned curricula implemented in this category are *A Beka* (Horton & Horton, 2008), a Christian-based curriculum, and *High Reach* (High Reach Learning, n.d.). Finally, less than 3 percent of directors indicate that their preschool staff use a curriculum, but they do not know its name.

As can also be seen in Table 7, all 16 Head Start directors in our study report that their preschool teachers use an Abbott-aligned curriculum. Of these, 67 percent report using *Creative Curriculum* (Dodge, Colker, Heroman, 2002) and the remainder report using *High/Scope* (Weikart, n.d.).

We also examined whether a director's college degree is correlated with the curriculum used

when coded as displayed in Table 7. Sixty-three percent of directors serving preschoolers report that their highest degree is a BA. Of all the responses indicating that no curriculum was used, the curriculum is teacher- or center-designed, is an Abbott-aligned curriculum, or is one that we coded as "other," between 62 and 65 percent are from directors with a BA. In sum, having a BA does not make a director any more or less likely to provide a response that falls into any of these curriculum categories.

We also examined whether having a major related to early childhood predicted a director's response to this same curriculum question. Fifty-eight percent of directors serving preschoolers and with a college degree indicate that their major was related to early childhood. Once again, there appears to be no relationship between this major and curriculum choice as we coded the responses. Sixty percent of all directors saying that no curriculum is used in their preschool classrooms also majored in an early childhood-focused program. An equal percentage of the "teacher- or center-designed" and "other curriculum" responses are from directors with this major. Fifty-five percent of the early childhood majors state their preschool teachers used an Abbott-aligned curriculum.

Table 8. Source for Preschool Learning Expectations

Source of Expectations	Child Care Centers (n = 378) (%)	Head Start (n=16) (%)
No specific source	21.2	
Curriculum used	19.3	25.0
Teacher's discretion	17.2	
Preschool Teaching & Learning Expectations	9.3	12.5
NAEYC/Developmentally appropriate practice (DAP)	8.5	
District's kindergarten or readiness expectations	8.2	
Teacher's discretion + Preschool Teaching & Learning Expectations	4.8	
Teacher's discretion + curriculum	1.9	12.5
Head Start standards		12.5
Head Start standards + Preschool Teaching & Learning Expectations		12.5
Head Start standards + Preschool Teaching & Learning Expectations + teacher's discretion		6.3
Head Start standards + curriculum		6.3
Other	7.2	12.5
Don't know source	2.4	0

Learning Expectations

The second standards-related question asked directors whether expectations for what preschoolers should learn while participating in their program were based on any specific document or documents. Once again, directors were not prompted to respond to any titles and were instead asked to name whichever document they might use. It should be noted that anecdotal information from our telephone surveyors, as well as the surveys that the first author listened to on the first day of data collection, indicated that the phrase “learning expectations” was an unfamiliar phrase, and thus also a source of confusion for some participants. It is therefore likely that these same directors may not have fully understood what this phrase meant.

Similar to the response for the preschool curriculum question, 21.2 percent of child care directors say their expectations are not based on anything specific (see Table 8). Of the remaining directors, 19.3 percent say their learning expectations are aligned with the

curriculum used. An additional 17.2 percent say any expectations are left up to individual teachers’ discretion. Eight and a half percent of directors cite NAEYC or developmentally appropriate practice. Another 9.3 percent report that their preschool learning expectations are based on the Department of Education’s Preschool Teaching and Learning Expectations. Eight percent say they use their district’s kindergarten or readiness expectations.

All 16 Head Start directors cite at least one document that forms the basis for their preschool learning expectations. Four of the directors (25 percent) indicate that the curriculum alone guided their learning expectations. Despite the fact that Head Start programs are required to adhere to the Child Outcomes Framework (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Administration for Children & Families, 2000), Head Start standards, either alone or in combination with New Jersey’s Preschool Teaching & Learning Expectations or the curriculum, are cited by just six directors (37.5 percent).

Program Standards

To gauge the understanding directors currently have of their preschool program standards, the final open-ended question asked whether their standards on items such as group size and teacher credentials were based on any specific document or documents. As was the case with “learning expectations,” anecdotal information from our telephone surveyors, as well as the surveys that the first author listened to on the first day of data collection, indicated that the term “program standards” was both an unfamiliar phrase and a source of confusion for some participants. It is therefore likely that some directors may not have fully understood what this phrase meant, as well.

Among the child care sample, this question had a higher percentage of affirmative answers as compared to the questions on curriculum and learning expectations. Just under 14 percent of

child care directors indicate their program standards are not based on a specific source (see Table 9). Forty-eight percent of the directors report their program standards are based on New Jersey’s licensing regulations alone. Five percent cite licensing standards in combination with the Abbott Preschool Implementation Guidelines, NAEYC standards, or the curriculum used. A small percentage of directors indicate that their program standards are solely based on the Abbott Preschool Implementation Guidelines.

All 16 Head Start directors could name a source for their program standards. More than 61 percent of their responses refer to New Jersey’s licensing regulations. Given that Head Start programs are required to adhere to Program Performance Standards (45CFR1304.21, 2000), perhaps not surprisingly these answers are often combined with a reference to the Head Start standards.

Table 9. Source of Preschool Program Standards

Source of Program Standards	Child Care Centers (n = 378) (%)	Head Start (n=16) (%)
No specific source	13.8	
Do not have any program standards	.5	
Don’t know	4.5	
NJ licensing regulations	48.4	18.8
NJ licensing regulations + Head Start standards		12.5
NJ licensing regulations + Abbott Preschool Implementation Guidelines	.8	
NJ licensing regulations + Head Start standards + Abbott Preschool Implementation Guidelines		12.5
NJ licensing regulations + NAEYC or curriculum	3.2	12.5
NJ licensing regulations + NAEYC + Abbott Preschool Implementation Guidelines		6.3
NAEYC	7.7	
Teacher’s discretion	5.0	
Teacher’s discretion + NJ licensing regulations, Abbott Preschool Implementation Guidelines, OR curriculum	1.0	
Curriculum used	2.9	6.3
Abbott Preschool Implementation Guidelines	7.4	12.5
Abbott Preschool Implementation Guidelines + NAEYC	.8	6.3
Head Start standards		12.5
Other	4.0	

Center Characteristics

One last purpose of the survey was to look beyond enrollment figures, practices, or director demographics and ask some questions about centers themselves. These questions included how long centers have been a part of their community and whether their space was owned or rented. We were also interested to know if they have internet access and whether transportation is offered to enrolled children.

Years of operation and space ownership: While child care directors have worked in this capacity at their respective centers for an average of 8.3 years, their centers have been in operation for an average of 16.9 years, or twice as long. As can be seen in Table 10, the percentage of centers that have been in operation for up to 5 years is not that different from the percentage that have been operating for 21 years and more (25.1 percent and 29.7 percent, respectively).

Among our small Head Start sample, the average number of years their program or center has been in operation is 38. Half of the programs report that they have been in business for 21 years or more.

Ownership of center buildings: Half of all child care directors report that their centers own their space (see Table 11). Among Head Start directors, 62.5 percent report that their space is owned, while 12.5 percent say they have a mix of both owned and rented space.

Internet access: Seventy two percent of child care respondents indicate that they have Internet access at their center. When compared with the number of years a center has been in operation, we found that new centers tended to have greater online access. More specifically, 79.3 percent of those in operation for fewer than 25 years have Internet access. Despite the longevity of half of the Head Start centers, 87.5 percent of this cohort has Internet access.

Transportation: Perhaps the largest difference between child care centers and Head Start settings is their offering of transportation to enrolled children. Just 14.6 percent of child care centers offer this service. The 57 child care centers that report this programmatic element did not tend to be larger in terms of preschool enrollment. Conversely, 62.5 percent of Head Start programs offer transportation to their enrollees.

Table 10. Years of Operation

Item	Child Care Centers (n = 391) (%)	Head Start Programs (n = 16) (%)
Years center has been in operation:		
0 – 5	25.1	6.2
6 – 10	19.9	6.2
11 – 15	13.6	6.2
16 – 20	11.7	18.8
21+	29.7	49.8
Don't know or refused	.8	12.4

Table 11. Space Ownership, Internet Access, and Transportation Offered

Item	Child Care Centers (n = 391) (%)	Head Start Programs (n = 16) (%)
Space is owned	49.9	62.5
Mix of both owned and rented space		12.5
Space is rented	50.1	25.0
Have internet access	71.6	87.5
Offer transportation to enrolled children	14.6	62.5

Potential Resources and Probable Constraints

The purpose of this study was to assess the capacity of licensed child care and Head Start centers located in those school districts that will be most affected by New Jersey's preschool expansion initiative. We were specifically interested in the ages served in early care and education settings in these districts, the general quality of these settings, and the potential contributions these sites could offer to the preschool expansion initiative. Of additional interest are the potential constraints, as well as the areas to be further explored through the follow-up phases of the larger needs assessment study.

Potential Resources for Supporting the Preschool Expansion Initiative

As highlighted above, the child care centers and Head Start programs that formed the basis of this study have been a part of their communities for an average of 16.9 and 38 years, respectively. Of the 391 child care centers participating in the survey, 97 percent enroll 3- and 4-year olds, as do all of the Head Start programs. Together these sites have an enrollment of 17,380 preschoolers. In addition to their longevity and experience with preschool-aged children, these sites have key strengths that potentially could help districts expand access to preschool education.

Total number of classrooms: The districts that will be most impacted by New Jersey's preschool initiative contain child care centers and Head Start sites with more than 1100 3- and 4-year old classrooms. In addition, 83 percent of child care centers and half of all Head Start sites serve infants and toddlers, with 7,000 children between the ages of 0 and 2 enrolled in 767 classrooms. While we do not advocate the discontinuation of infant/toddler early care and education as a means for serving more preschoolers, the fact remains that these classrooms have the potential to support expansion efforts in individual districts.

Ownership of buildings: Half of all child care and 62.5 percent of Head Start centers own their own space. While renting space does not preclude centers from remaining at their current address for the foreseeable future and/or renovating their facilities, the number

of sites that do own their buildings also represents a potential resource for individual districts.

Internet availability: Given the amount of information that can be effectively transmitted or obtained via the internet, it is also encouraging to know that a majority of directors in both cohorts report access to this resource. We admittedly did not ask about the internet proficiency of directors or their teaching staff. However, they appear to have the capacity to receive and submit documents electronically.

Full-time teaching staff: Our study found that centers employ on average 5.6 infant/toddler and 4.6 preschool teachers and assistants who work five days a week and for a minimum of 30 hours. We also estimated that Head Start programs have an average of 2.4 staff for children between the ages of 0 and 2 and 11.9 staff in preschool classrooms working a similar schedule. If centers and Head Start programs elect to participate in the expansion initiative, they already have staff who work a full-time schedule.

Staff Fluent in Spanish: Child care centers have an average of one full-time teacher or assistant who is fluent in Spanish. Head Start centers have an average of six preschool teachers and assistants with this capacity. The linguistic ability of these individuals represents a potential resource in districts with preschoolers whose home language is Spanish.

Head Start teachers' experience implementing a curriculum: All of the Head Start directors report that their preschool teachers use a curriculum that is aligned with the state's publicly funded preschool education programs. While we did not examine the quality of implementation, there appears to be a specific cohort of preschool teachers that could successfully participate in more rigorous curriculum professional development. Their familiarity with one of the preschool program-aligned curricula would seem to facilitate becoming trained in an additional curriculum, as well.

Head Start familiarity with learning expectations: All 16 Head Start directors cite at least one document that formed the basis for their preschool learning expectations. Four of the directors (25 percent) indicate that the curriculum alone guides their learning

expectations. Six directors (37.5 percent) cite Head Start standards, either alone or in combination with New Jersey's Preschool Teaching & Learning Expectations or the curriculum. These findings suggest that Head Start preschool teachers will have less of a learning curve in aligning their practice with the expectations.

Directors' administrative experience and degree status: The child care center directors in our study have an average of 8.3 years of experience working in this capacity. The 16 Head Start program directors have an average of 10.3 years of experience. About one-third of directors in both cohorts have three years or less of experience in their present job. In addition, about three-fourths of child care directors report that they have a four-year degree.

While the survey did not ask any of the participants to detail their administrative training or capacity, these results suggest that the majority of directors are not new to the field, and thus have the potential to successfully transition their centers into becoming part of the expansion initiative. Their "college status"—with 74 percent reporting a minimum of a BA—also suggests that they would be able to successfully undertake any administrative-focused coursework required for directors of participating centers.

Experience meeting program standards: The majority of directors appear to successfully meet New Jersey's program standards for group sizes and teacher-child ratios. In addition, half of the directors cited the state's licensing regulations as the source of their program standards. These findings suggest that there is a sizable cadre of child care directors who understand the importance of meeting program standards and could potentially do so again if participating in the expansion.

Probable Constraints to Partnering with Districts to Expand Preschool

Even though these sites represent a potential resource in terms of their space, personnel, and experience, there are four key areas that could constrain efforts to successfully participate in the expansion.

Size of facilities: The first probable constraint is the size of most child care centers. While the

centers participating in this study have a total of 942 preschool classrooms, more than 60 percent of individual centers have only one or two classrooms. The limited number of classrooms in these centers may mean their facilities are small. As a result, they may not have kitchens, adequate storage, and/or appropriate meeting space. However, as is detailed below, we will be able to verify if this is the case through on-site visits to centers as part of the larger needs assessment study.

Lack of experience implementing a curriculum: The second constraint to expansion is child care teachers' lack of experience in using a research-based curriculum that can support children's learning and development across all domains. More than one in five directors report that their preschool teachers do not use a curriculum at all. An additional 30 percent report that a teacher- or center-designed approach is used. Twenty-seven percent report use of a curriculum we coded as "other." Many of the "curricula" in this last category are actually themed arts-and-crafts-type kits.

Lack of experience implementing learning standards: On a related note, the study's findings suggest a third constraint in child care centers' lack of experience in using standards to guide their expectations for what children should learn. On the one hand, 9.3 percent report that their preschool learning expectations are based on the Department of Education's Preschool Teaching and Learning Expectations. An additional 19.3 percent say their learning expectations are aligned with the curriculum used. However, 21.2 percent stated that their expectations are not based on any specific document and 17.2 percent say any expectations are left up to individual teachers' discretion.

Directors' uneven early childhood training: The final potential constraint is the mixed level of early childhood expertise possessed by directors. While the majority have attained an AA or higher, just 46.5 percent of the child care cohort, and 41.3 percent of the Head Start group report, that their degree major was related to early childhood. Given the support staff present within Head Start programs, this issue may be a moot point for successful participation in the preschool expansion initiative. Child care teachers will have access to itinerant master teachers, but their directors' uneven formal training in early childhood could be problematic.

Summary of Resources and Constraints

The child care centers and Head Start programs located in the districts that will be most impacted by New Jersey's preschool expansion plans appear to represent a potential resource. In addition to being fixtures in their respective communities, they have experience serving preschoolers. Most directors are not new to the job and have attained a college degree. Centers already have some full-time staff members who would appear to be able to transition into a 40-hour work week. Programs appear to successfully meet licensing standards for group size and teacher-child ratios. In addition, many centers own their buildings.

At the same time, many child care centers do not currently implement one of the state-approved curricular choices or utilize standards when determining what children should learn. In addition, directors in both child care centers and Head Start program do not all possess a formal background in early childhood. The low average number of classrooms may also signal that child care centers will not have sufficient space to support a kitchen or meeting rooms.

Of course, all of these potential resources and constraints are based on the directors' self-reports and the assumptions drawn from them. As a result, before making any decisions about centers' capacity to support the expansion initiative, additional data is needed.

Additional Data to be Collected through the Preschool Expansion Needs Assessment

In addition to the telephone survey that formed the basis of this report, NIEER has been engaged in additional research to assess the capacity of child care centers and Head Start programs to successfully support the expansion of publicly funded preschool in the state. This research involves a self-administered workforce survey; on-site visits to district, child care, and Head Start classrooms; and interviews of center directors and district supervisors and superintendents.

While the focus of this larger research agenda is much broader than the directors' telephone

survey, these additional studies will also shed light on some of the potential resources and constraints highlighted in this report. These include the square footage of individual classrooms, the presence of kitchens, storage space, and meeting rooms within individual buildings, and the credentials, experience, and linguistic capacity of teaching staff. We will also have more information about the general structural quality of these settings through inventorying the materials and equipment presently available.

Conclusion

This study relied on the self-report of 407 directors to examine three key issues related to expanding publicly funded preschool in New Jersey: 1) the ages served in child care centers and Head Start programs; 2) the general quality of these sites as measured by class size, teacher-child ratios, director credentials, and experience implementing curricula, learning expectations, and program standards; and 3) the potential contributions and constraints that these sites represent.

As detailed above, all of the Head Start programs and most of the child care centers that participated in this study serve preschoolers. A majority of child care facilities serve toddlers, as well, as do about half of the Head Start sites. The general quality of these sites is mixed. On the one hand, almost all of the centers appear to meet the licensing standards for class size and teacher-child ratios. A high percentage of directors have attained a minimum of a bachelor's degree, as well. Yet, far fewer directors indicate that their preschool teachers implement the type of curriculum that can support children's learning across all domains, or use specific learning expectations to guide their classroom practice.

As a result — and perhaps as expected — the capacity of child care centers and Head Start programs to help districts expand access to preschool is mixed. This study suggests that they have the experience to successfully enroll 3- and 4-year olds, but their ability to successfully support preschoolers' early learning and cognitive development will probably require a variety of training and technical assistance efforts.

APPENDIX

Districts from Which Sample is Drawn

DISTRICT CODE	DISTRICT
10	ABSECON
70	ALPHA
100	OCEAN
110	ATLANTIC CITY
185	BARNEGAT
220	BAYONNE
250	BELLEVILLE
260	BELLMAWR
270	BELMAR
330	BERLIN
1780	GLOUCESTER/BLACKWOOD
490	BOUND BROOK
570	BRIGANTINE
590	BUENA VISTA
600	BURLINGTON
710	CAPE MAY
750	CARTERET
860	CLAYTON
880	CLEMENTON
890	CLIFFSIDE PARK
900	CLIFTON
1020	DEERFIELD
1110	DOVER
1170	EAST BRUNSWICK
1200	EAST NEWARK
1230	EAST RUTHERFORD
1280	EDGEWATER PARK
1300	EGG HARBOR CITY
1310	EGG HARBOR TWP
1340	ELMER
1345	ELMWOOD PARK
1370	ENGLEWOOD

1470	FAIRVIEW
1570	FRANKLIN BORO
1590	FRANKLIN PARK
1610	FRANKLIN TWP/ FRANKLINVILLE/ SOMERSET
1640	FREEHOLD
1690	GALLOWAY
1730	GLASSBORO
1850	GUTTENBERG
1860	HACKENSACK
1920	HALEDON
1950	HAMILTON
7500	HAMILTON
1960	HAMMONTON
1970	HAMPTON BORO
2160	HIGHLANDS BORO
2180	HILLSIDE
2370	JAMESBURG
2410	KEARNY
2430	KEYPORT
2520	LAKESWOOD
2380	LANDING/LAKE HOPATCONG/JEFFERSON TWP
1940	LAURELDALE/HAMILTON TWP/MAYS LANDING
2560	LAWNSIDE
2580	LAWRENCE
2660	LINDEN
2670	LINDENWOLD
2690	LITTLE EGG HARBOR
2710	LITTLE FERRY
2740	LODI
2940	MANCHESTER
2990	MANTUA
3000	MANVILLE
3010	MAPLE SHADE
3110	MERCHANTVILLE
3140	MIDDLESEX

3160	MIDDLETOWN
3290	MONROE TWP
3430	MOUNT HOLLY
3440	MOUNT LAUREL
3490	NATIONAL PARK
3590	NEWTON
3610	NORTH BERGEN
3620	NORTH BRUNSWICK
3670	NORTH PLAINFIELD
3720	NORTHFIELD
3750	NUTLEY
3810	OAKHURST/OCEAN TWP
3770	OAKLYN
3780	OCEAN CITY
3780	OCEAN VIEW/OCEAN CITY
3910	PALISADES PARK
4070	PENNS GROVE
4060	PENNSAUKEN
4075	PENNSVILLE
4100	PHILLIPSBURG
4150	PITTSBGROVE
4270	PROSPECT PARK
4290	RAHWAY
4805	RARITAN/SOMERSET
4360	RED BANK
4400	RINGWOOD
4540	ROSELLE
4590	RUNNEMEDE
4700	SEA ISLE CITY

4710	SEASIDE HEIGHTS
4720	SEASIDE PARK
700	SICKLERVILLE
4790	SOMERDALE
4800	SOMERS POINT
4820	SOMERVILLE
4830	SOUTH AMBOY
4920	SOUTH RIVER
4960	SPARTA
5190	TOMS RIVER
5200	TOTOWA
5210	TRENTON/ HAMILTON
5220	TUCKERTON
5290	UNION
5230	UNION BEACH
5350	VENTNOR CITY
5390	VINELAND
5430	WALLINGTON
1620	WASHINGTON/FRANKLIN
5580	WEEHAWKEN
5720	WESTAMPTON
5740	WESTVILLE
5770	WHARTON
5790	WILDWOOD
5800	WILDWOOD CREST
5805	WILLINGBORO
5820	WINSLOW TOWNSHIP
5840	WOODBINE
5860	WOODBURY

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