

## **EDUCATION**

### **COMMISSIONER OF EDUCATION**

#### **Elements of High Quality Preschool Programs**

##### **Readoption: N.J.A.C. 6A:13A**

Proposed: November 7, 2016, at 48 N.J.R. 2193(a).

Adopted: March 20, 2017, by Kimberley Harrington, Acting Commissioner, Department of Education

Filed: March 20, 2017, as R.2017 d.068, **without change**.

Authority: P.L. 2007, c. 260.

Effective Date: March 20, 2017.

Expiration Date: March 20, 2024.

#### **Summary of Public Comments and Agency Responses:**

The following is a summary of the comments received from Michael A. Vrancik, Director of Government Relations, New Jersey School Boards Association and the Department's responses.

1. COMMENT: The commenter expressed support for a coordinated system of early childhood (birth through age eight) programs that provide a continuum of developmental experiences that enable children to grow and learn to their potential and that are inclusive of all children of all abilities. The commenter further stated the development of a comprehensive system of early childhood programs and services is a wise investment of public and private funds and should include the development of State, county, and local

structures through which all education, health, and social welfare agencies work together to provide appropriate programs for young children and their parents.

The commenter further stated an early childhood education unit should exist within the Department of Education (Department), with sufficient staffing to provide district boards of education with on-going technical assistance, staff training, research information, and successful program models and to coordinate early childhood efforts with the Department of Human Services. The commenter also stated the Department should provide district boards of education with technical assistance to enable school districts to expand and improve their early childhood programs. The commenter further supported a State-level advisory committee to advise on early childhood policies, programs, and legislation.

RESPONSE: The State continues to grow and promote its cross-agency, multi-level system of early childhood education and services (birth to third grade) designed to provide young children and their families with the supports and educational opportunities needed to ensure each child at an early age develops a solid foundation for life-long learning and growth. Assisted by the Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge grant awarded to New Jersey (<http://www.state.nj.us/education/ece/rttt/>), State, county, and local agencies work together to provide children with appropriate educational, nutritional, medical, and intervention services.

A recent reorganization of the Department's Division of Early Childhood Education advanced this effort to support early learnings by focusing the division's work on the needs of children from birth to grade three. The division also works closely with New Jersey Council for Young Children, which is an advisory group that provides

recommendations to the Inter-Departmental Planning Group (administrators from the Departments of Health, Human Services, Children and Families, and Education), which reports to the multi-agency Early Learning Commission (the Commissioners of the four agencies), to enhance the coordination and quality of early childhood systems from pregnancy through age eight.

2. COMMENT: Regarding N.J.A.C. 6A:13A-4.5, the commenter stated programs that provide medical and nutritional services for mothers and infants in at-risk populations can result in healthier children and avert later educational problems.

RESPONSE: The Department recognizes the importance of proper nutrition and medical care in a child's development. In connection with the Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge grant, at-risk children and families are able to connect to medical and nutritional services via central intake hubs ([http://www.nj.gov/dcf/families/early/visitation/Central%20Intake%20Sites%20-%20DOH\\_DCF.pdf](http://www.nj.gov/dcf/families/early/visitation/Central%20Intake%20Sites%20-%20DOH_DCF.pdf)). Central intake hubs direct children and families to the appropriate service provider (for example, medical home, social services, and child care).

3. COMMENT: Regarding N.J.A.C. 6A:13A-4.6, Family and community involvement, the commenter stated public schools can play an important role in the development of a comprehensive system of early childhood development and education through partnerships with other agencies and organizations that offer family focused programs and services for young children and their families. The commenter also stated school leaders should actively participate as members of community coordination bodies and

State, county, and regional panels convened to plan and provide support for services to children and families.

RESPONSE: The Department agrees that school districts can play an important role in the coordinated system of early childhood education. The Department's work takes place in conjunction with other State agencies and is carried out at the State, county, and local levels. School districts play a vital role in the coordination and provision of services at the local level.

The Department also partners with the Department of Children and Families to provide families with access to family and child-centered programs and services via the County Councils for Young Children (<http://www.state.nj.us/education/ece/njcyc/county/>), which also stem from the Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge grant.

4. COMMENT: Regarding N.J.A.C. 6A:13A-4.7, District board of education fiscal accountability and integrity of preschool programs, the commenter stated Federal and State funding should be available to support child development programs for parents of children in the first three years of life; address the need for more trained early childhood professionals in early childhood education; and provide services for at-risk children under the age of three and their families.

RESPONSE: The State's Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge has enabled New Jersey to initiate or expand upon many of the same initiatives suggested by the commenter, including training for early childhood professionals via the Statewide Training Academy, which is designed to equip child care professionals with the tools

they need to provide high-quality programs. The Department also continues to work closely with the Department of Health to ensure children and families are supported through early intervention services (birth through age three children exhibiting developmental delays) and their transition to school district-provided services (age three and beyond).

5. COMMENT: The commenter expressed support for the encouragement of the development of age-appropriate preschool programs for three- and four-year-olds that include full-day care for children of working parents. The commenter also stated preschool programs should provide an environment that allows for the inclusion of students with physical and mental disabilities in the general education environment and that is racially and culturally diverse, with efforts to hire staff who reflect the ethnic and cultural heritage of students being served.

The commenter further stated preschool programs can be improved through collaborative efforts of public schools and community-based programs, including joint staff training opportunities and program articulation. The commenter also said school districts should be encouraged to work with community groups, institutions of higher education, and the corporate sector to develop partnerships targeted to the delivery of quality preschool programs.

RESPONSE: The high-quality preschool programs governed by N.J.A.C. 6A:13A provide age-appropriate instruction in a mixed delivery system (in-district programs, private providers, and Head Start programs) that follow the same programmatic and staffing requirements.

6. COMMENT: The commenter stated preschool education should not be mandated by the State unless State funds are provided to meet the need for necessary additional facilities and staff.

RESPONSE: N.J.A.C. 6A:13A applies only to preschool programs that receive funds from the State.

### **Federal Standards Statement**

With the exception of one rule, there are no Federal standards or requirements that have an impact on the readopted rules. Schools and/or school districts receiving Title 1 funds must follow the applicable rules established through the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015, for paraprofessionals. N.J.A.C. 6A:13A-4.3(f) meets but does not exceed the Federal mandate.

**Full text** of the readopted rules can be found in the New Jersey Administrative Code at N.J.A.C. 6A:13A.