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Abbott Preschools See Advances in Quality and Learning

» [A Rising Tide: Classroom Quality and Language Skills in the Abbott Preschool Program](#)

New Jersey's Abbott preschool program has made significant strides in terms of the number of children served, the quality of the programs offered and the literacy and language skills demonstrated by the children in kindergarten, according to a report released today by the New Jersey Department of Education (DOE).

Testifying at a meeting of the Legislature's Joint Committee on the Public Schools, Assistant to the Commissioner for Early Childhood Education Dr. Ellen Frede noted that as New Jersey begins the sixth year of state-funded preschool in the 30 Abbott districts, "it is very clear that the tide of excellence is rising and bringing with it the vessels of preschool program quality and child learning."

The hearing was held at the newly-opened Ignacio Cruz Early Childhood Learning Center in Perth Amboy, a \$15 million facility built by the New Jersey Schools Construction Corporation.

"Previous research has shown that children who attend quality preschool programs have better social skills, better communications skills, better literacy skills and better problem-solving skills. They've experienced the thrill that comes with understanding and achieving, and they are ready to move to the next level," Dr. Frede said.

"This year, we've established budgets that will provide preschool for more than 80% of three- and four-year olds in the Abbott districts," she said. "The classrooms they will attend are more effective vehicles for teaching and learning, and as a result, the children will enter kindergarten better prepared to succeed in school and in life."

The state provides the Abbott preschool services - mandated by a 1998 New Jersey Supreme Court decision - through a combination of school district-run programs and programs operated by approximately 450 private preschool providers.

More than 43,000 of the 54,000 three- and four-year olds who live in Abbott districts will be in preschool during the 2004-2005 school year. This is an increase of approximately 5,000 children over 2003-2004 and more than double the 19,000 children enrolled in the program during 1999-2000.

A 2003-2004 study of the early literacy abilities of Abbott district kindergarteners by the Early Learning Improvement Consortium (ELIC) - a partnership between DOE, other education professionals and academic experts at several state colleges and universities - showed marked improvement:

Forty-seven percent of the children scored in the "Very Strong" category, as opposed to 42 percent in 2002-2003. In the 1999-2000 school year, the average kindergarten student's language skills test score was 84.5; in 2003-2004, it was 89.6.

The study also found better practices and improvements in the majority of the Abbott preschool classrooms.

"Gains have been particularly strong in the practices most likely to impact a child's readiness to start school, including 'language and reasoning,' 'teacher-child interactions' and 'program structure,'" Dr. Frede said. "Fifty-five percent of the classrooms scored 'Above Adequate' in teaching practices proven to enhance literacy development."

Dr. Frede said DOE is very proud of the results of the research. "Although there is still room to improve, we are well on the way to meeting the mandate the court established when it publicly recognized the dramatic impact that quality preschool would have on the lives of our children and the future of our state," she said.