

NEW JERSEY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

PRESCHOOL PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION GUIDELINES

August 2008
Abbreviated Version

November 14, 2008: *All* school districts should submit enrollment data.

November 14, 2008: School districts providing a *universal* preschool program should submit the five-year preschool program plan and budget planning worksheets.

December 15, 2008: School districts providing a *targeted* preschool program should submit the five-year preschool program plan and budget planning worksheets.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

These guidelines were originally developed in February 2003 in conjunction with stakeholders chosen for their diversity and expertise in the field of early childhood education and their commitment to the children of the state of New Jersey. Many thanks go to all those who participated, including other state agencies, advocacy groups, researchers and professional education organizations. Special thanks to all of the individuals who participated in the focus group sessions and responded by letter or e-mail to provide input for the original document.

Significant revisions have been made over the past five years based on new research and best practice to the original 2003 document by the Division of Early Childhood Education in the areas of supporting English language learners, master teachers and community and family involvement. Additionally, new sections provide guidance on contracting with private providers and local Head Start agencies, fiscal oversight, facilities and waivers.

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PRESCHOOL PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION GUIDELINES

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this document is to provide guidance to school districts, private providers and local Head Start agencies in the planning and implementation of high-quality preschool programs for three- and four-year old children. The five-year preschool program plan is based on these guidelines and designed to meet the *New Jersey Preschool Teaching and Learning Expectations: Standards of Quality (Expectations)*.

Each school district's preschool program plan should be driven by the research-based best practices offered in this document and a systematic assessment of the needs of children in that district. The plan should be updated annually for programmatic and budgetary approval. With the technical assistance from the Department of Education (DOE), school districts will provide high-quality preschool programs via a locally determined mix of in-district, private provider, and local Head Start agency classrooms.

GENERAL PROVISIONS

The New Jersey School funding Reform Act of 2008, P.L. 2007, c.260 mandates that all eligible *at-risk three- and four-year-old children be offered a high-quality preschool program beginning at age three (**at-risk children means, children who are eligible for preschool programs as defined by age- and income-eligibility pursuant to P.L. 2007, c.260 section 12(a)*). Intensive, high-quality preschool programs can close much of the early achievement gap for lower income children. This substantially increases their school success and produces a host of life-long benefits, including increased school achievement and social and economic success as adults (Schweinhart, Barnes & Weikart, 1993; Ramey & Campbell, 1984; Reynolds, 2000). These goals can be reached through the creation and support of high-quality preschool programs for all eligible children. The preschool effort presents an extraordinary opportunity to meet the needs of New Jersey's most disadvantaged children.

State-funded preschool programs in each school district must include all of the major elements identified by the Department as essential for implementation of a high-quality preschool program and found in chapter 13A, Elements of High Quality Preschool Programs located in the New Jersey Administrative Code.

These elements are the essential minimum ingredients of effective preschool education. High quality teachers and teacher assistants are imperative. Enrollment may not exceed fifteen students in any preschool classroom. Facilities must be sufficiently large (950 square feet per classroom for new construction and for newly contracted classrooms) and organized for developmentally appropriate preschool activities, which differ significantly from those of grade school children. Health, nutrition and other services should be incorporated, and family involvement should be maximized.

School districts have the primary responsibility for providing high-quality preschool education and related services. The guidelines in this document offer a basic framework for individual school districts to use when developing the five-year plan, making annual updates, implementing each component of the preschool program and evaluating how well children and their communities are being served.

ELIGIBILITY, ENROLLMENT AND THE UNIVERSE

Eligibility

Universal preschool programs: All age-eligible children who are residents of District Factor Group (DFG) A and B school districts and DFG CD school districts with a concentration of at-risk children equal to or greater than 40 percent are entitled to preschool services, regardless of family income level.

Targeted preschool programs: Age-eligible children in all other school districts are entitled to receive preschool services only if they meet the income requirements that define the designation of “at-risk.”

For preschool children in both types of programs, issues such as toilet training, immigration status, allergies and other individual circumstances cannot prevent a child from receiving services. In fact, the goal is to serve every eligible at-risk child.

The Department recognizes that the dynamic nature of communities may result in changes in recruitment strategies from one year to the next. Individual school districts are unique and, therefore, no one strategy will work for all school districts. Rather, each school district should carefully research and analyze the most effective recruitment and public information strategies for its community.

Enrollment

The goal is to enroll at least 90 percent of the universe of eligible three- and four-year-old children residing in each school district by the 2013-2014 school year. School districts are encouraged to offer a high quality preschool program within a mixed delivery system that includes in-district, private provider and local Head Start agencies.

The school district’s strategies for recruitment must be assigned to individuals who know the community (e.g. Community Parent Involvement Specialists). School districts should establish centralized year-round enrollment procedures and should set reasonable enrollment benchmarks to reach full enrollment by the 2013-2014 school year.

<p><i>All school districts should submit enrollment data to the Department of Education on November 14, 2008.</i></p>

Strategies for Enrollment

Every community has a broad spectrum of organizations, both religious and social, that can assist the school district in the recruitment process. Community groups that might be consulted include the following:

- Churches, synagogues, mosques and other religious organizations representing denominations of families in the school district;
- Social clubs, community groups and nationally recognized organizations (YMCA, Rotary, Lions, Kiwanis, Police Athletic Leagues, Hispanic and black coalitions, etc.);
- Local employers;
- Local, state or national agencies and/or charitable groups (e.g. Division of Youth and Family Services, Volunteers of America, Salvation Army);
- Professional and labor organizations; and
- Hospitals and pediatricians.

The following strategies will help ensure public awareness:

- Ask private providers and local Head Start Agencies to assist in recruitment efforts;
- Use multiple means of communication when establishing contact with the families;
- Place fliers and/or bulletins at stores, doctor's offices, laundromats, beauty salons, restaurants, etc. Information should be presented in the language(s) of the community in a clear, direct format;
- Provide information about the availability of child screenings, evaluations and special education services in recruitment materials;
- Use appropriate languages to advertise on cable television channels and/or local radio stations;
- Encourage local politicians to endorse the preschool program in newsletters, political mailings, campaign literature, etc.
- Send sound cars throughout school district neighborhoods, providing enrollment messages that advertise dates and times of registration;
- Hold recruitment fairs at local churches; and
- Provide information at community events, with knowledgeable people on-site who can answer questions.

Written Agreements between Districts

School districts may elect to deliver a high quality preschool program in collaboration with another school district. Districts choosing this option must establish a written agreement for these services to ensure that all of the elements of a high quality preschool program are in place. All written agreements must be submitted to the Department in the five-year preschool program plan. Written agreements must include at least the following information to be considered for approval:

- Amount of tuition due per child;

- Physical location of the preschool program;
- Number of children to be served;
- Specific curriculum and assessment system to be implemented;
- Staffing and professional development plan;
- Transportation and wraparound services information, if applicable; and
- Process for communicating information between districts and to families.

Tuition Setting

The amount of tuition that may be charged to a school district or parent/ guardian cannot exceed the per pupil amount received from the state.

Waiting Lists

School districts must attempt to make the most accurate and reasonable projections possible when projecting the enrollment of preschool children to be served in each school year. School districts should also remember that issues of capacity can be addressed through the mixed delivery system consisting of willing and able private providers and local Head Start Agency settings when making these decisions. However, even the most careful planning can lead to situations in which the number of children that wish to enroll exceeds the school district's total service capacity, and a waiting list may need to be developed. In the event that a school district exceeds its projected enrollment in a school year and is able to serve the wait-listed children, school districts should contact the Department of Education for guidance. Therefore, school districts will need to develop a policy to serve children who are placed on waiting lists.

Recommended Model for Serving the Universe of Preschool Children:

The goal is to serve 90% of all eligible preschool children in each school district.

Outreach

- The Community Parent Involvement Specialist, working with the Early Childhood Advisory Council and family workers from provider settings, should concentrate their efforts in the area of outreach. Districts should develop and follow an action plan to ultimately serve 90% of children in the district.

Enrollment

- Each school district should serve at least 20 percent of their universe in the 2009-2010 school year. Enrollment should be increased in each subsequent school year using approximate percentages provided below:
 - 35 percent of the universe in 2010-2011
 - 50 percent of the universe in 2011-2012
 - 65 percent of the universe in 2012-2013
 - 90 percent of the universe in 2013-2014

PRESCHOOL PROGRAM PLAN COMPONENTS

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December 15, 2008: School districts providing a *targeted* preschool program should submit the five-year preschool program plan and budget planning worksheets.

Administrative Oversight

Administrators play an integral role in shaping the quality of each preschool program component, from the oversight of teachers to recruitment and outreach efforts. Because administrative personnel perform such a critical role, this document sets forth guidelines to maximize the effectiveness of their skills, expertise and time. The primary administrative responsibilities in school districts are as follows:

- Development and implementation of the five-year preschool program plan and annual updates;
- Oversight of the budget, coordination of program services (e.g. bilingual, special education, social and health); and
- Supervision of administrative and program staff.

Ultimate responsibility for the implementation of the five-year preschool program plan and annual updates rests with the superintendent and designated school district personnel. A director and/or supervisor of early childhood education should lead the implementation of the preschool plan. The director/supervisor should provide assistance to master teachers on professional development and best program practices, oversee the recruitment/outreach efforts and ensure the coordination and delivery of comprehensive services, including parent involvement. This administrator may conduct some of the formal evaluations of the classroom teachers in both school district-operated and private provider preschool classrooms. He or she must be well versed in strategies designed to help teachers and other professionals optimize children's learning and development. Regardless of the size of the preschool program in the district, the director/supervisor is responsible for the following:

- Developing and implementing the preschool budget, five-year preschool program plan and annual updates and professional development plans;
- Contributing to the development of long range facilities plans;
- Supervising registration, recruitment and outreach efforts;
- Overseeing contractual compliance with private provider and local Head Start agencies;
- Collaborating and communicating with the school district office of special services;

- Facilitating transition initiatives in collaboration with other preschool through third grade administrators;
- Meeting regularly with private providers, including local Head Start agencies, to foster collaboration and program implementation including, but not limited to, fiscal and curriculum information;
- Overseeing the implementation of the comprehensive preschool curriculum;
- Providing assistance to all staff responsible for the implementation of appropriate early childhood practices within the preschool program;
- Administering strategies designed to help teachers and other professionals optimize children's learning and development in all domains;
- Coordinating annual program evaluation;
- Hiring, supervising and ensuring evaluation of all in-district staff funded by the preschool programmatic budget; and
- Ensuring that each private provider and local Head Start agency implements a system for classroom teacher observations.

Early Childhood Supervisor

In school districts with greater than 750 enrolled preschool children a dedicated in-district early childhood supervisor is provided. In-district early childhood supervisors and administrators of in-district buildings with preschool children must hold the appropriate New Jersey Supervisor's Certificate or New Jersey Principal's Certificate, and have preschool education experience. Experience in preschool education may include: preschool teaching or supervision experience or experience as a director of a licensed private provider or Head Start agency. The supervisor and/or administrator must participate in annual training specific to preschool program planning and implementation and the school district's comprehensive preschool curriculum.

Principals/Vice Principals

In school districts with schools containing preschool or any combination of preschool, kindergarten and elementary classrooms, funding prorated by the proportion of preschool children is provided in the preschool programmatic budget for a principal and vice principal and one administrative support staff member, depending upon the number of teachers employed in each school building. The principal or vice principal in this situation should be involved in both the development of the five-year preschool program plan, annual updates and the supervision of classroom staff.

Support Staff

Administrative support personnel such as secretaries and data clerks are essential to the daily operations of any program. Support staff responsibilities may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Enrollment and registration of preschool children;
- Data collection and entry;

- Clerical assistance to master teachers, supervisors, directors and other personnel; and
- Provision of general program information to families.

Recommended Model:

These positions lead to effective supervision and support:

- For school districts with total preschool enrollments of fewer than 3,000 preschool children, one early childhood education supervisor should be available for every 750 students minus the number of students enrolled in district stand-alone early childhood education buildings;
- For school districts with at least 3,000 total preschool students, one district-wide administrator/supervisor should be a director of the preschool program;
- For school districts with at least 4,000 total preschool students in all settings, one of these administrators should be an assistant superintendent;
- One principal, one vice principal and one administrative support staff are provided for each stand-alone early childhood center or school serving 300 or more three-and four-year-olds.

Master Teachers/Coaching

Master teachers play an essential role in implementing and maintaining high levels of program quality by supporting preschool classroom teachers. Their primary role is to assist in curriculum implementation by conducting classroom observations and coaching teachers using the principles of reflective practice to improve instruction.

Priority 1: Master teachers should dedicate the greatest amount of time to classroom visits using the reflective cycle model. During these visits, master teachers should observe classroom practices and provide feedback directly to teaching staff, plan and model exemplary practices and meet with the program directors or principals. Recordkeeping should be maintained during these visits.

Priority 2: A substantial amount of time, but less than that devoted to classroom visits, should be dedicated to providing and planning for professional development experiences for classroom teachers. Professional development should be aligned with the New Jersey Preschool Teaching and Learning Expectations: Standards of Quality, and the school district’s curriculum and professional development plan approved as part of the five-year preschool program plan. Experiences should be differentiated to match varying levels of experience and expertise of the instructional staff. Professional development should be presented in a variety of ways, ranging from informal work groups to more structured small and large group presentations.

Primary Master Teacher Responsibilities

Visiting classrooms on a regular basis to coach and provide feedback to teachers to improve teaching practices using the reflective cycle model,

- Planning specific goals and training opportunities to improve weak areas identified from curriculum developer reports and results of structured classroom observations (e.g. Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale – Revised, (Harms, Clifford, & Cryer, 2004), performance-based assessment results, program-wide evaluations, and other information sources,
- Administering structured program evaluation instruments (in assigned classrooms) to measure quality practices in preschool classrooms (e.g., ECERS-R, SELA, PCMI, High/Scope Preschool Program Quality Assessment, Creative Curriculum Implementation Checklist),
- Conferring with early childhood supervisors to plan for and provide professional development for all early childhood staff,
- Providing individualized follow-up support and facilitate small group meetings/trainings for teachers with similar needs,
- Supporting implementation of performance-based assessments to ensure reliable collection of child information through portfolio review meetings and professional development, and
- Training teachers on the administration of the Early Screening Inventory–Revised (ESI-R, (Meisels, Marsden, Wishke, & Henderson, 1997).

The Master Teacher’s Role in Collaboration

- Coordinating with the preschool intervention and referral team to request assistance for children with challenging behaviors,
- Conferring regularly with the preschool intervention and referral team to discuss how to support teachers and parents with children who have challenging behaviors,
- Conferring regularly with the community parent involvement specialist to plan for smooth transitions for children entering preschool or going to kindergarten, and assist in planning related parent involvement activities (e.g., ensuring that the results of the performance-based assessment are shared with kindergarten staff, planning parent workshops, planning kindergarten classroom visits), and
- Providing technical assistance to district and provider administrators to discuss curriculum goals, professional development, performance-based assessment implementation, and structured observation results.

Required Master Teacher Qualifications

- A bachelor’s degree and teacher certification;
- Three to five years experience teaching in preschool programs;
- Experience providing professional development to classroom teachers;
- Experience in implementing developmentally appropriate preschool curricula;

- Experience with performance-based preschool assessments; and

Master teachers appointed after September 1, 2007, shall hold at least one of the following certifications:

- Preschool through grade three standard instructional certificate;
- Standard elementary school instructional certificate and the equivalent of two academic years of full-time experience teaching three and four-year olds under the certificate in a position that would require the preschool through grade three endorsement;
- Standard New Jersey nursery school instructional certificate; or
- Preschool through grade three endorsement in addition to other standard instructional certificate, except as indicated at N.J.A.C. 6A:9-11.2 and 11.7.

Accommodating English Language Learners and Children with IEPs

Each district must select master teachers who can assist preschool teachers and other master teachers in working with specialized populations. Districts with a substantial proportion of English language learners (ELL) or children with individualized education plans (IEPs) served in general education classrooms are required to hire bilingual and inclusion specialists as master teachers. The specialists provide focused professional development and consultation to other master teachers and in-district and private provider classroom teachers.

Additional Qualifications Determined by the Population Served

- Master teachers with a specialization in bilingual education should possess bilingual or English as a second language certification and either possess or pursue early childhood certification.
- Master teachers with a specialization in inclusion should possess special education certification and either possess or pursue early childhood certification.

The Role of the Specialized Master Teacher

Master teachers with a specialization conduct the same duties of all other master teachers and have the added responsibility of providing professional development and support for other master teachers regarding inclusion or supporting ELL practices. Other specializations or content areas (e.g. mathematics, literacy, science, assessment) can be assigned to master teachers, depending on their backgrounds and qualifications.

Professional Development for Master Teachers

Master teachers need ongoing professional development to support the goals of the early childhood program. Whenever possible, they should be trained by curriculum developers using a Training-of-Teacher-Trainer model. This will help to ensure sustainable and high quality curriculum implementation. New master teachers should complete the “Preschool

Leadership Track: Role of the Master Teacher” course offered by the Division of Early Childhood Education.

Recommended Model:

The maximum ratio to use when planning for master teachers is one master teacher for every 20 preschool classrooms. The ratios provided below are designed to accommodate the needs of novice teachers and teachers serving English language learners and/or children with disabilities.

General education classrooms including students with IEPs are included when calculating the master teacher/classroom ratio. Self-contained preschool disabled classrooms are not included in the ratio.

School districts with English Language Learners (ELLs)

- May reduce their standard master teacher/classroom ratio from 20:1 to 15:1.
- Should have at least one master teacher that specializes in supporting the learning of English language learners.

Ratios for inclusion of children with disabilities in general education classrooms

- One inclusion master teacher is provided for every 10 regular education classrooms serving children with disabilities on a full-time basis.

Ratios adjusted for teacher qualifications

- One master teacher is provided for every 12 classrooms with uncertified teachers (non-BA and CE);
- One master teacher is provided for every 15 classrooms with certified teachers in their first year of teaching;
- One master teacher is provided for every 17 classrooms with certified teachers in their second and third years of teaching; and
- One master teacher is provided for every 20 classrooms for all other classrooms (the standard mandated by code)

Instructional Staff

The qualifications of classroom teachers are an essential component of a high quality preschool classroom. Teachers of preschool children must understand how young children learn and develop, as well as their role in facilitating the growth of each child in all domains, from early math and language arts literacy to social emotional development and science understanding. Preschool teachers must accommodate the individual growth of each child, while taking into account his or her unique circumstances. All preschool classrooms must be staffed with one appropriately certified teacher and one teacher assistant.

Certification Requirements for General Education Preschool Teachers

Ultimately, all preschool classroom teachers must have a bachelor's degree and a preschool through grade three certificate or one of the following other equivalent certification:

- A standard elementary school endorsement with the equivalent of two academic years of full-time experience teaching three and four-year olds under the certificate. The teaching experience must be in a position that would require the preschool through grade three endorsement, or
- A standard New Jersey nursery school endorsement.

Certification Requirements for Districts in the Initial Year of Implementation

Districts in the initial year of implementation of their preschool program can allow teachers time to acquire the appropriate certification.

Private provider and local Head Start agency teachers who are teaching in a general education preschool classroom during the initial year of the school district's implementation of preschool but do not have a bachelor's degree and/or appropriate certification, have until September 2012 to get their certification.

Teachers in this category must submit an initial application and annual updates to their school district signed by the teacher's college advisor verifying that the teacher is complying with the following requirements:

1. Is working toward completing the preschool through grade three certification by September 2012;
2. Is a student in good standing;
3. Has a minimum GPA of 2.75 when 4.0 equals an A; and
4. Has a detailed and feasible plan for attaining preschool through grade three certification within the timeframe described above.

The employing school district will:

1. Review each initial application and subsequent revisions for accuracy and completeness by the start of the school year;
2. Approve or deny each individual application; and
3. Ensure that only teachers who have completed the requirements listed above remain as a classroom teacher beyond the start of the 2012 school year.

Certification Requirements for Districts receiving Preschool Expansion Aid or Education Opportunity Aid in 2007-2008

Private provider preschool teachers and local Head Start agency teachers in this category must have already possess a bachelor's degree and, at a minimum, a certificate

of eligibility or certificate of eligibility with advanced standing for preschool through grade three or other equivalent preschool certification.

Local Head Start preschool teachers in this category and teaching in classrooms that are newly contracted during 2007-08 who do not have a bachelor's degree and, at a minimum, a certificate of eligibility or certificate of eligibility with advanced standing for preschool through grade three or other equivalent preschool certification should follow the information above for local Head Start agency preschool teachers in school districts not receiving preschool expansion aid or education opportunity aid in 2007-2008.

Certification Requirements for preschool classroom teachers in Self-Contained Classroom Settings

Teachers holding teacher of the blind or partially sighted, teacher of the deaf or hard of hearing and/or the teacher of handicapped endorsements issued prior to September 1, 2008 may teach students with disabilities in a self-contained classroom at the preschool level if they can demonstrate to the district content knowledge appropriate to the content and the content level to be taught.

Teachers holding preschool through grade three certification and subsequently receiving teacher of students with disabilities certification may teach students with disabilities in a self-contained classroom at the preschool level.

Intervention and Support Services

The New Jersey School Funding Reform Act provides an historic opportunity to alleviate the educational disadvantages related to poverty for all children, including children with challenges due to a physical, learning or behavioral disability. Through this mandate, there are far greater opportunities for children to be educated in an inclusive setting with their peers and to have access to all the resources necessary to address their individualized needs. The goal of the preschool education program is to provide each child the opportunity to access a high quality preschool learning environment with the individualized supports needed for school success.

When a child demonstrates learning or behavioral difficulties, it is the responsibility of the classroom teacher to observe and document the child's behavior and to be proactive in addressing any issues that may have a potentially negative impact on the child's preschool experience. The classroom teacher should attempt to adapt the activities and environment to meet the child's distinct learning or behavioral needs. The help of the child's parents must also be enlisted, as they are the primary source of information concerning the child. Another resource is the classroom master teacher who works with the classroom teacher to provide curriculum modifications to meet the child's needs. Social workers and family workers also play a critical role, as they communicate regularly with families and assist in getting the necessary support.

The Preschool Intervention and Referral Team

The Preschool Intervention and Referral Team (PIRT) is in place to help school district preschool staff modify children's challenging behaviors (i.e. physical, social, language) that block successful participation in a general preschool classroom through development and implementation of intervention plans. Intervention plans address a variety of behaviors (i.e. a child who hits, a child who doesn't have any friends, a child with separation anxiety, a child who stutters, a child who does not speak).

Each school district's per pupil amount includes funds for a four-member PIRT for every 750 preschool students. In school districts with fewer than 750 preschool children, one team is allocated for every 750 children in preschool through grade three. In this case, the school district's preschool budget funds the preschool proportion of the team.

- The primary role of the PIRT is to provide support and suggested interventions to teachers so that all children can succeed within the general education classroom.
- Collectively, PIRT members should have a strong background and knowledge in early childhood education, child development, the district chosen curriculum, and the four levels of the Positive Behavior Support pyramid model ((Fox, Jack, & Broyles, 2005)).
- The team may include any combination of the following: teachers, behavior specialists, psychologists, learning disabilities teacher-consultants, school social workers, speech and language pathologist or other specialists. The PIRT is supervised by the school district preschool administrator.

Positive Behavior Support Pyramid Model (Fox et al., 2005)

Positive Behavior Support pyramid model provides a process for understanding and resolving the problem behavior of children and offers an approach for developing an understanding of why the child engages in problem behavior and strategies for preventing the occurrence of problem behavior while teaching the child new skills. It includes a written plan for the teacher to address problem behaviors that range from aggression, tantrums, and property destruction to social withdrawal. PBS resources can be obtained at: <http://challengingbehavior.fmhi.usf.edu/>.

Preschool Intervention and Referral Team Responsibilities:

- Support classroom teachers in order to provide strategies for children who are exhibiting difficulty in the classroom as indicated through the screening process or through observation.
- Provide support including written strategies for classroom staff, modeling, professional development and consultation to classroom staff, parents, administrators and master teachers.

- Provide ongoing professional development based upon Positive Behavior Support pyramid model for district staff (i.e. administrators, teacher assistants, master teachers, teachers).
- Coordinate the Early Screening Inventory-Revised (ESI-R) screenings.
- Facilitate transition of all PIRT case files to other programs (i.e. kindergarten, CST).
- Establish a PIRT assistance protocol including a Request For Assistance (RFA) form.
- Once an RFA is received, establish and manage a case file for each child.
- Consult with necessary professionals as applicable (i.e. classroom teacher, master teacher, administrators, social workers, family workers, parents).
- Create and implement a PIRT intervention plan for which each child that an RFA is received.
- Conduct classroom visits, as necessary, to implement the PIRT intervention plan. These visits may include observations, providing feedback regarding the child or support plan, providing recommendations and modeling strategies.
- Modify and adapt the PIRT intervention plan as necessary throughout the year.
- Evaluate the progress of the student and, if necessary, facilitate a written referral to the school district's Child Study Team as set forth in N.J.A.C. 6A:14.

Screening

Preschool program regulations require the administration of a developmentally-based early childhood screening assessment, such as the Early Screening Inventory-Revised (Meisels et al., 1997), to each child upon entry into the preschool program. Information from the screening instrument should never be used to determine or deny placement. Rather, it should be used to determine if a child is within one of the three screening categories: 'refer', 're-screen', 'ok'. Parents must be notified before and after all screenings have taken place. Additional information regarding screening is located in the Curriculum and Assessment section of this document.

Referral to the Child Study Team

When initial screening indicates that a child should be referred, or a parent, teacher, or PIRT member has a concern about a child's development and suspects a potential disability, the following steps should be taken:

1. Submit a written request to the school district's child study team for a special education evaluation. The written request (referral) must be submitted to the appropriate school official. This may be the principal at the neighborhood school, the director of the preschool provider, the director of special education, or the child study team coordinator of the school district.
2. The parent, preschool teacher and the child study team (school psychologist, school social worker, learning disabilities teacher-consultant, speech and language pathologist) meet within twenty days (excluding school holidays) to determine the need for evaluation.
3. After the completion of the evaluation and a determination of eligibility, an Individualized Education Program (IEP) is developed for the child by an IEP team consisting of a parent, a child study member, a school district representative, the

case manager, and the general education teacher. The team determines modifications, interventions, and supplementary services necessary to support the child.

Services Provided in the Least Restrictive Environment

The preschool general education environment and routines should always be considered when determining the goals and areas needing to be addressed. To the maximum extent appropriate, preschool children eligible for special education will be enrolled in general education preschool programs with their non-disabled peers. In the event that there is disagreement, the school district has an obligation to inform parents of due process rights in referral.

A preschool teacher or an administrator who is familiar with the school district's preschool programs should be available at all meetings when determining special education services and placement. Classroom teachers should also be involved in the planning process.

Referrals from Early Intervention

Referrals throughout the year are made to the child study team from the Early Intervention (EI) system, which is responsible for children from birth to three years of age. Children exit the EI system at age three. If they are eligible to be classified as a preschool child with a disability, they are to begin preschool with an individualized education program (IEP).

Recommended Model:

Preschool Intervention and Referral Team (PIRT):

- A preschool intervention and referral team with expertise in early childhood education and development is available exclusively for approximately every 750 preschool children. In school districts with fewer than 750 preschool children, one team is allocated for every 750 children in preschool through grade three. In this case, the number of team members should be calculated based on the number of preschool children in the district (e.g. a district with 325 preschool children would hire a two-member team).

Inclusion Master Teacher:

- Inclusion master teachers should be employed at a ratio of one inclusion master teacher for every ten preschool classrooms serving children with special needs. These master teachers will hold a valid New Jersey instructional certificate as teacher of children with disabilities and have specialized knowledge of ways to naturally support the goals of the IEP in preschool classrooms.

Health and Nutrition

The goal of school health services is to strengthen and facilitate the educational process by improving and protecting the health status of children. According to the “School Health Services Guidelines” developed by the New Jersey Department of Education in 2001, the health and intellectual development of children are inextricably related. For instance, screening of students for current immunization helps to reduce absences due to illness. Screening for vision and hearing problems removes potential obstacles to learning. Health services staff provide physical and emotional support so that children can better cope with periodic illness and injury, which are commonly a part of growing up. Schools also provide daily support to students with chronic health needs.

School Nurse

The school nurse is a health services specialist who assists students, families and staff in attaining and maintaining optimal health and health attitudes. School nurses strengthen and facilitate the educational process by improving and protecting the health status of children and staff.

Nurses who work with preschool children and their families provide the following services:

- Conduct health screenings (vision, hearing, dental, height, and weight screenings)
- Monitor and follow up on individual child health records
- Document and communicate with staff and parents about allergies or other health issues
- Assist in written policies related to health, safety and nutrition
- Assist parents in locating appropriate medical and health resources, as needed
- Assist in the development of written emergency procedures
- Provide health-related training to staff and/or children

Food and Nutrition

Adequate nutrition is a critical component of the preschool program. Meals and snacks should be planned to meet a child’s nutritional requirements as recommended by the Child Care Food Program of the United States Department of Agriculture.

Guidelines have been established by the Department of Agriculture, Child and Adult Care Food Program (www.nal.usda.gov/childcare/cacfp) that allow both profit and non-profit private providers to apply for the Child Care Food Program. Alternatively, non-profit private providers may be eligible for the National School Breakfast and Lunch Programs. All contracting private providers and local Head Start agency programs must apply to participate in one of these programs.

Nutritious meals and snacks are essential for young children's optimal growth and development. Healthy foods help to ensure that children will be ready to fully participate learning opportunities. During meal and snack-times preschool children learn to make nutritious choices, discover a wide variety of different foods, and develop healthy eating habits, while engaging in language-rich interactions. Meals and snacks should be offered nutritious food every two to three hours at appropriate times (not too early or too late) during the school day. Food should be offered to children who are hungry when arriving at school after a scheduled mealtime.

Meal Health and Safety

Programs should be diligent in maintaining a healthy, safe environment for food preparation and eating areas. Staff and children's hand-washing requires consistent attention. Proper washing and sanitizing procedures should be followed for cleaning tables used for eating, food preparation surfaces and food equipment before and after food use. The recommended procedure for cleaning eating surfaces involves washing tables with a soapy solution, then sanitizing with a bleach-water solution. Tables should be dried with disposable paper towels. Staff should always wash their hands after wiping tables and before serving food. Before meals, children should wash their hands with soap and water, dry their hands with a paper towel and go directly to a table.

Family Preferences and Food Allergies

Families' dietary restrictions due to religious beliefs, personal beliefs, cultural customs and health issues should be respected. Information regarding food allergies should be documented in writing for each affected child and be readily available to all staff involved with children's meals and snacks. This includes kitchen personnel and substitute instructional staff.

Meal Time is Part of the Educational Day

Meal and snack times offer excellent learning opportunities. They allow children to:

- Practice emerging independence by using child-sized containers and utensils, allowing preschoolers to set tables, pour beverages, serve themselves and clear their places.
- Interact in a pleasant social atmosphere as they participate with peers and adults in decision-making, sharing, communicating with others and practicing good manners during family-style mealtime settings.
- Learn healthy habits such as hand-washing.
- Practice counting, sorting, patterning and one-to-one correspondence.
- Enhance language development by hearing and using new vocabulary and by engaging in conversational turn taking.

Family Style Meals

These important language, math and social skills can best occur in family-style meal settings in children's classrooms. School cafeterias often provide table and seating heights that are inappropriate for preschoolers. More importantly, opportunities for teachers to extend children's language and learning are decreased in large, noisy environments.

Recommended Model:

- Nurses will be employed at a ratio of one for every 300 preschool students and will provide services to all students, including those in private provider programs.
- Each school district will conduct health examinations to include, at a minimum, vision, hearing, dental, height and weight screenings of each eligible child upon entry into the school district.
- Parent education will include regular health and safety topics designed to meet the unique needs of families enrolled in the program.

Family and Community Involvement

All aspects of the child's life can be more meaningfully supported with systematic coordination between home and school. Many families encounter challenges that place children at risk. Basic issues involving clothing, shelter and medical care add to family stress and interfere with a child's ability to learn. Program staff should support and partner with parents by making every attempt to understand their perspectives, enhance their understanding of child development, assist them in reaching their goals and involve them in the preschool program. Programs must carefully balance understanding of obstacles that their families face with high expectations for the children's success.

Defining Family Involvement

Family makeup varies widely and can include parents, stepparents, grandparents, brothers, sisters and others living in the household. Families also come from a variety of cultural backgrounds, values and traditions. Differences can be misinterpreted as indifference to children's education. There are a variety of ways to effectively engage family members in their child's preschool experience, from helping at the school, to taking an active role in educational decision-making processes. It is critical that schools develop policies that are sensitive to, and reflective of, the communities they serve.

General Ways to Include Families (Epstein, 2002)

- **Communicating:** Communication between home and school is regular and two-way;

- Parenting: Parenting skills are promoted and supported;
- Student Learning: Parents play an integral role in assisting student learning;
- Volunteering: Parents are welcome in the school, and their support and assistance are sought;
- School Decision-Making and Advocacy: Parents are involved in the decisions that affect children and families; and
- Collaborating with Community: Community resources are used to strengthen schools, families and student learning.

Specific Ways to Include Families

The best way to accommodate the varying types and degrees of family participation is to offer a range of flexible ways to get involved. The following approaches easily adapt to each individual family's changing needs and circumstances:

- Include teachers, parents and other family members in the design of family services plans;
- Ask families to develop their own participation goals;
- Design a volunteer calendar and encourage parents to participate when possible;
- Communicate regularly. Focus on verbal communication when written language is an obstacle;
- Create a browsing and checkout library with books, videos, cassettes, brochures and magazines;
- Make it easy for parents to attend meetings and visit the school by offering transportation and child care;
- Hold meetings at different times of the day to accommodate working schedules;
- Send frequent communications to families about both individual children and classroom content. Provide information about key child developmental milestones and ways to nurture and support growth. Offer specific, individualized strategies that guide families in how to help at home;
- Act as a clearinghouse for external supports such as local businesses, health care agencies and colleges to make services more accessible; and
- Solicit the help of interested family partners.

The following positions are provided to address family needs:

Community and Parent Involvement Specialist (CPIS)

The Community and Parent Involvement Specialist (CPIS) is a district position that oversees the district's family services. The CPIS is responsible for facilitating the community needs assessment, staffing the Early Childhood Education Advisory Council, organizing family involvement plans and activities, and coordinating work with other school district professionals and community agencies and providers.

CPIS Qualifications

The Community and Parent Involvement Specialist should have a minimum of three (3) years experience coordinating and delivering social services to children and families. The ideal candidate would hold a Master's degree in social work, or related field such as sociology, psychology or education. However, a strong candidate with a Bachelor's degree in one of the identified areas listed above could also serve in this position.

Social Worker (MSW)

The social worker is a district position in the role of collaborating with the classroom teachers, master teachers, CPIS and other school district professionals to support the Family Services Program. In conjunction with the CPIS, the social worker should reach out to families, determine individual needs, provide advocacy services and help obtain available community services. Responsibilities also include assisting parents in learning about child development, nutrition, providing a safe environment and how to support the curriculum chosen by the school district. The social worker should accomplish this by designing and providing family workshops based on identified needs and topics revealed on parent surveys.

Family Worker

Family workers are provider employees that have experience working with families, as well as knowledge of local community resources and social service agencies. Family workers work closely with the CPIS, in-district social workers, master teachers, teachers, private provider center directors and other school district professionals, as needed, and assist in the recruitment and outreach process. The family worker has ongoing communication with families to ensure that their social and health services needs are being met. Family workers visit each family at least three times per school year.

Recommended Model:

This staffing model supports and extends the services provided by classroom teachers by helping to maintain communication with families and connecting families with community resources and services.

- One family worker should serve every 45 children and their families in private provider settings;
- A social worker (MSW) should serve the school district-operated classrooms at a ratio of one for every 250-300 children; and
- One community and parent involvement specialist or person designated to serve in this role should fulfill this function in the school district.

Local Community Collaboration

Everyone benefits when families, schools, and community (e.g., local businesses, community colleges, and health agencies) are invested in the school district's implementation of the preschool program. Schools enjoy the informed support of families and community members, and families experience many opportunities to contribute to their children's education.

To ensure effective collaboration:

- Each school district will form an Early Childhood Advisory Council to review preschool program implementation and support transition as children move from preschool through grade three. The Community Parent Involvement Specialist or person serving in this role employed within the school district staffs the council; and
- The Early Childhood Advisory Council will provide an opportunity for local stakeholders invested in the education and welfare of preschool-age children to review progress towards full implementation of high-quality programs.

Recommended Model:

The following practices will help identify and provide services that match the needs of the children and families.

- A Community and Parent Involvement Specialist (CPIS) should be employed by each school district. In smaller school districts this position may be combined with another position. The CPIS will coordinate the advisory council, evaluate the needs of families, organize and coordinate systematic parent involvement plans and activities, and coordinate work with social service personnel and other agencies.

The Advisory Council might include, but not be limited to, representatives of the following groups:

- Child care providers, pediatric medical providers, Head Start agencies, child and family advocates, municipal government, health professionals/agencies, social service providers, higher education, philanthropic community, mental health agencies, school district central office, teacher’s union, business community, parents, kindergarten through grade three teacher(s), bilingual education specialists, supervisors and administrative organizations, early intervention/special education groups, community groups such as: NAACP, Urban League, churches, YMCA/YWCA and The New Jersey Association for the Education of Young Children (NJAEYC).

Suggested Responsibilities of the Council

- Participate in the community assessment of specific community needs and resources, including facilities, as they pertain to the implementation of high-quality preschool services;
- Review preschool program implementation and support transition as children move from preschool through grade three.

Structure and Operations:

To implement local collaboration as defined here, the council should do the following:

- Meet at least quarterly;
- Elect its own leadership and adopt its own bylaws; and
- Be led by elected co-chairs, consisting of one district representative and one community representative.

Collaboration with Head Start Programs Serving Eligible Children

Head Start is the nation's oldest federally-funded early care and education program. Its mission is to promote school readiness by enhancing the social and cognitive development of young children by providing educational, health, nutritional, social and other services to low income children and families.

Governed by the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) within the US Department of Health and Human Services, the program provides grants to local public and private non-profit and for-profit agencies to provide comprehensive early care and education services to economically disadvantaged children and families, with a special focus on helping preschoolers develop the early reading and math skills they need to be successful in school (<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ohs/about/index.html#mission>).

Head Start programs serving eligible children in each community should be included in all preschool efforts. As contracted preschool service providers, Head Start programs will work systematically toward achieving the standards of high-quality preschool programs.

Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)

The overall goal of providing high quality preschool to low income children +will be best met through a collaborative effort between school districts and local Head Start agencies. To accomplish effective collaboration, ACF requires that Head Start grantees and the local districts enter into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU).

Curriculum and Assessment

Curriculum

Curriculum, broadly speaking, is “what schools teach.” This includes all that is planned for children in the classroom, such as learning centers, morning circle or a teacher-initiated small-group activity. Curriculum also includes the unplanned experiences a child has while building a bridge with paper towel tubes, string and popsicle sticks, waiting for the bus, at the snack table or when frustration leads to a temper tantrum. Curriculum is the entire range of experiences that children have at school. Content objectives and learning outcomes, knowledge of child development and careful observation of the needs and interests of individual children guide a curriculum. The National Association for the Education of Young Children calls this “developmentally appropriate practice” (Neuman, Copple, & Bredekamp, 2000). Developmentally appropriate practice follows the interactive or constructivist approach.

The *Preschool Teaching and Learning Expectations*, which are the state standards for preschool, delineate effective teaching practices that are linked to developmentally appropriate learning outcomes. This is the framework for planning and adopting curricula for preschool classrooms. It is not meant to replace preplanned curricula, but instead to be a guide for making important curricular decisions. There is no one “best” curriculum for

all programs. There are many excellent models that meet the guidelines for developmentally appropriate practice and the *Expectations*. The five curriculum models below each meet the following criteria for effective curricula:

- Aligned with the *Expectations linked to New Jersey's Core Curriculum Content Standards*;
- Provide methods for inclusion of students with disabilities;
- Have clear, research-based content and teaching strategies;
- Include significant content taught with focus and integration;
- Focus on maximizing child initiation and engagement;
- Are developmentally appropriate; and
- Show evidence of benefits.

The school district's curriculum choice will be approved as part of the five-year preschool program plan and annual updates. The program and curriculum should include, at a minimum: systematic support for language acquisition for all children; a clearly described systematic and intensive approach for all aspects of development and learning; and implementation of a comprehensive, performance-based assessment system aligned with the preschool curriculum. The five curricula are:

Bank Street Developmental Interaction Approach

Bank Street's Developmental Interaction Approach is based on the theories of Jean Piaget, Erik Erikson, John Dewey and Lucy Sprague Mitchell, among others. The Developmental Interaction Approach stresses that the optimal educational process maximizes children's direct and rich interactions with a wide variety of materials, ideas and people in their environment. The approach aims for actively involving children in acquiring competence. Choice, active investigation, independent pursuit and learning through discovery are dominant components of the learning climate. The curriculum is flexible within a planned framework encompassing developmentally appropriate knowledge and skills. Teachers seize every opportunity to promote cognitive development by creating a climate that encourages questioning, exploration and children's growing understanding of patterns, rhythms and relationships in the ideas and environment around them (Nager & Shapiro, 2000).

The Creative Curriculum®

The Creative Curriculum® for Preschool is a comprehensive, scientifically-based curriculum, linked to an assessment system that addresses teachers' need to know what to teach and why, and how children learn best. It specifies the literacy, math, science, social studies, arts and technology content to be taught, based on published standards. It relates directly to the subject area curricula used in elementary schools, so children's learning in preschool forms the basis of all of the learning that will follow. Its distinguishing features are a framework for decision making and a focus on interest areas. *The Creative Curriculum® for Preschool* is inclusive of all children—those developing typically, children with disabilities and English language learners (Dodge, 2002).

Curiosity Corner®

Curiosity Corner was developed as a comprehensive school reform program by the Success for All Foundation in response to the *Abbott* decision. The program was piloted in the winter of 1999 and then implemented and evaluated in 1999-2000 and 2000-2001. The curriculum provides a developmental approach emphasizing language and literacy as well as physical, emotional and interpersonal development, math, science, social studies, music, movement and art. The literacy-focused, problem solving program provides teachers and children with structured thematic units that include concrete, interactive experiences with detailed instructions and materials. Effective instruction is built around the concept of cooperative learning within a carefully designed and supportive structure. Extensive training and support for teachers is integral to ongoing curriculum implementation (SFA, 2005).

High/Scope Preschool Curriculum

The High/Scope Curriculum, utilized in thousands of programs worldwide, is based on the work of constructivists: Jean Piaget, High/Scope's founder David Weikart and others. The basic premise of the High/Scope Curriculum is that children learn best by doing. "Control" is shared between adults and children so that children's creativity and exploration of individual interests are encouraged. The teacher's role is that of a facilitator who observes and interacts with children and, with the High/Scope Content (Key Experiences), provides high-quality experiences and interactions that keep children engaged and learning. The High/Scope Key Experiences align with *New Jersey's* education standards for young children (Weikart, 1970).

Tools of the Mind Project

The Tools of the Mind project, which started in 1992, is the result of collaborative work between Russian and American educational researchers based on the theories of Lev Vygotsky. Utilizing the Vygotskian approach, a series of strategies was created to support meta-cognitive and meta-linguistic skills as well as other skills essential to literacy development. Play is the central teaching tool, within a scaffolded learning environment that focuses on giving children the tools they need that will lead to the development of higher mental functions (Bodrova & Leong, 2007). Techniques include teacher's facilitation of children's construction of individual play plans and asking children to describe multiple, imaginative uses for open-ended objects such as blocks. Central to the approach is the use of scaffolded writing to help children recognize words as units, work with the sounds that make up words and use letters to represent those sounds. The program emphasizes that young children must build strong speaking and social skills and be able to exercise emotional and behavioral control (self-regulation) before they can learn to read.

Assessment

Assessment of is the ongoing process of documenting evidence of early learning in order to make informed instructional decisions. This evidence may include anecdotal records of

children's conversations and behaviors in individual, small- and large-group situations, samples of artwork and drawings, and photographs, recordings or other records of children engaged in activities and play. Judgments about children's learning should be directly linked to a set of clearly defined learning goals (*The Expectations*).

The Major Purpose of Assessment in Preschool Education

In their report to the national goals panel (Shepard, Kagan, & Wurtz, 1998) argued that, "An appropriate assessment system may include different assessments for different categories of purpose, such as:

- ◇ Assessment to support learning,
- ◇ Assessments for identification of special needs,
- ◇ Assessments for program evaluation and monitoring trends, and
- ◇ Assessments for high-stakes accountability." (p.7)

The primary purpose of the assessment of young children is to support learning and help educators determine appropriate classroom activities for individuals and groups of children.

The assessment of young children's learning should do the following:

- Build on multiple forms of evidence of the child's learning;
- Take place over a period of time;
- Reflect sensitivity to each child's special needs, home language, learning style and developmental stage.

The information from the assessment process should do the following:

- Connect to developmentally appropriate learning goals;
- Add to an understanding of the child's growth and development;
- Provide information that can be applied directly to instructional planning; and
- Be communicated with the child's family and special education personnel when appropriate.

Curriculum-based Assessment

Curriculum-based assessment is intended to support learning. Gullo (Gullo, 2005) describes curriculum-based assessment as, "a wide-ranging approach to assessment that directly links the assessment process to the curriculum content and instructional strategies used within the classroom (p.160). Therefore, districts are encouraged to use the assessment instrument that is tied to the comprehensive preschool curriculum approved in the 5-year plan, such as High/Scope's Child Observation Record and the Creative Curriculum's Developmental Curriculum.

The Parents

Parents should be partners in the accurate and sensitive assessment of young children. The following practices help encourage parental involvement in child assessments:

- Accentuate the positive when discussing children;
- Talk about child observations informally, during everyday conversations with parents;
- Explain assessment approaches at a parent meeting or workshop. Be clear about the differences between standardized tests and curriculum-based assessments;
- Write about assessment in a newsletter or a special letter home;
- Invite parents to be partners in the assessment progress. Give them the opportunity to collect and discuss samples of their child's drawings or notes on the child's language and conversation to school. ; and
- Support comments with documentation showing what the child has accomplished over time.

The Children

Everyone has a view of a child's abilities, preferences, and behaviors, including the child. To effectively involve the children in their own assessment do the following:

- Observe and document things the children say and do. Often random statements such as, "I was this big on my last birthday, now I'm THIS big," are evidence that children are capable of assessing what they can do and how they are changing.
- Ask children about themselves. Children will tell you what they do and do not like to do. Some children may be pleased by a conference-like situation in which they have the adult's undivided attention, while others may respond to more informal discussions.
- Ask children to assess their work. Ask children to help decide which work should be included in their portfolio. Respect their choices and responses about their work.
- Let children take pictures of their most prized work from time to time. They can make a bulletin board display of their specially chosen picture portfolio.

Achievement Tests

When assessing young children's progress, individual- and group-administered norm referenced tests of achievement are usually inappropriate tools to inform instructional planning. Such measures may be appropriate to administer to a sample of children for large scale program-wide evaluation.

Developmental Screening Measures

Developmental screening is a brief assessment procedure designed to identify children who might be at risk for a possible learning problem or delay. Screening tools quickly

sample children's skills across areas of language, reasoning, gross motor, fine motor and social development. Screening is only the first step in the assessment process. It does not provide enough information to identify and assist children needing special education services.

The following protocol is recommended when using a screening device:

- Screen upon entry to the program within the first month of school by the child's teacher.
- Screen to determine if further evaluation is necessary; never use as a sole means for identifying children needing special services or for providing intervention.
- Do not use screening as a pretest/posttest assessment. The screening process is not designed to show growth over time.
- For children who fall into the "re-screen" category, screen within the time frame recommended by the screening instrument (usually within six weeks).
- For children, who fall into the "refer" category, or fall below the predetermined cutoff, after parental consent, refer to the child study team (via written referral) for further, more in-depth evaluation.
- Advise parents as to the purpose and results of the screening and notify them both before and after the screening takes place.

Referral for an Evaluation

When a potential disability is suspected, or if a child's screening results require it, a written referral to the school district's child study team starts the process of determining whether a child may be eligible for special education. The parent, preschool teacher, PIRT and the child study team meet to determine the need for evaluation and discuss the assessments to be completed. After completion of the evaluation and a determination of eligibility, an Individualized Education Program (IEP) is developed. In addition to special education personnel, the IEP team always includes the parent and the preschool teacher. The team determines what types of support are necessary, such as modifications to the classroom or special education services. To the maximum extent appropriate, preschoolers with disabilities should receive their preschool education with their peers.

Professional Development

Each school district will submit an annual district-wide preschool professional development plan as part of the five-year preschool program plan and annual updates. This plan should be designed to achieve the *Expectations*. The professional development plan must be directly related to the school district's long-term vision outlined in the five-year preschool program plan and annual updates. It should include provisions for systematic ongoing training and be based on research on adult learning and children's development, as well as on a formal needs assessment. In addition to in-service workshops, various professional development techniques may be incorporated, such as mentoring, peer coaching, modeling, self-assessment, observation and feedback, and

team development. The plan should also include steps to evaluate the effectiveness of each professional development strategy.

Professional Development to Improve Classroom Quality

Using systematic classroom observation data to plan professional development for preschool teachers and assistant teachers is necessary for improving quality. School districts should use a structured observation instrument or set of instruments approved by the Department as part of the five-year preschool program plan to measure quality practices in preschool classrooms. Through examination of individual classroom data and aggregate school district data, finely tuned professional development can be planned. Teachers and school districts then set goals for themselves and provide training opportunities to improve in the weaker areas.

District Wide Professional Development

Too often, school district staff members are not knowledgeable about “best practices” or curricula for preschool and may have inappropriate expectations for this age group. Therefore, district-wide professional development should be available that includes the benefits of preschool education and the elements of effective preschool tailored to the different audiences. For example, administrators need information, including, but not limited to, criteria for evaluating preschool teachers, preschool language and literacy, (including the needs of English language learners), knowledge of the curriculum components and appropriate adult-child interaction strategies, particularly classroom management and facilitation of children’s language and reasoning skills. Child study teams, social workers and their administrators need information on preschool education for young children. Additional support staff including lunch assistants, custodians and bus drivers should receive information about interacting with young children.

Professional development should address the needs of administrators, master teachers, private provider and Head Start directors, and preschool teachers in district operated classrooms, private provider and local Head Start agency classrooms. It should address other educational staff, including all preschool intervention and referral team members, teachers of children in self-contained settings, child study team members, speech and language therapists, social workers, learning consultants, occupational therapists, behavioral specialists and nurses. It should also support teacher assistants, family workers, parent liaisons and any other support staff. An approach which supports learners’ construction of new ideas or concepts based upon their current knowledge should be used in developing the plan.

Professional development shall be planned and implemented as a comprehensive, multiyear strategy for improvement. It must adhere to the *Expectations* and focus on implementation of the school district’s comprehensive preschool curriculum. Each activity in the professional development plan must represent an integral component of the comprehensive plan as opposed to staff attendance at workshops or seminars addressing

an array of discrete topics. Professional development for teachers should always include in-class follow-up of the content of the training.

Teacher Professional Development

The New Jersey Department of Education requires teachers to pursue 100 hours of professional development over a five-year period. These professional development hours are to focus on training in implementation of the Core Curriculum Content Standards and related topics. With the publication of the revised *Expectations*, a base has been formed for the appropriate preparation of preschool teachers. Since so many new teachers are entering the field, and many more teachers are joining the ranks of early childhood teaching from other grades and disciplines, it is essential that all teachers working with young children are grounded in the knowledge base of preschool education. This knowledge base includes the following aspects of developmentally appropriate practice:

- Knowledge of child development, including research on the relationship between early experiences and brain development;
- Design of the learning environment;
- Preschool curriculum and assessment;
- Classroom management techniques;
- Emergent literacy;
- Enhancing problem-solving, skill development and integrated content knowledge in math, social studies, science, the arts and other domains of learning;
- Promoting social competence and healthy emotional development;
- Performance based assessment;
- Cultural competence;
- Inclusion practices;
- Methods for enhancing language development in the home language, as well as English;
- Technology in the preschool classroom; and
- Family and community involvement.

These training topics should be required for all teachers and delivered in a systematic, on-going basis. All training should include relevant theory and current research and their applications to classroom practice.

Based on the school district's Professional Development Plan, approved as part of the five-year preschool program plan, teaching staff should attend a variety of workshops each year. Integrated with the comprehensive preschool curriculum, these workshops should be both formal and informal, offered by master teachers and followed by in-class support. This professional development should be tailored to meet the needs observed and identified in classroom evaluations. Preschool teachers should attend building- or district-wide training, if appropriate, but not at the expense of training designed specifically for the preschool program.

Peer Tutoring

The value of teachers learning and working together is well recognized. Opportunities should be provided for preschool teachers to observe each other and to collaborate on curriculum development and meeting student needs. Master teachers should be responsible for helping teachers to build collaboration opportunities into the school schedule. Each school district should develop a plan to allow interactions between teachers to become more regular than incidental.

Conferences

Participation in large conferences, while worthwhile, does not substitute for ongoing, professional development. Local, state or regional conferences tend to offer few opportunities for active participation and hands-on experiences. In addition, there is no current method to evaluate how conference attendance meets professional development goals.

Supporting English Language Learners

When children enter preschool, they are still just beginning to learn all about language. Strategies used to foster language development have critical implications for lifelong literacy and school success. Preschool teachers are faced with additional challenges when children come to their classes from different home language backgrounds. In order to make each child feel welcome and accepted, and to provide the best possible foundation for their development of language and literacy, special attention must be paid to the unique needs of English language learners. Early childhood education guidance, based on research and expert opinion ((Tabors, 2008); (NAEYC, 1995)(Snow, 1998); (Genishi, 2002), emphasizes developmentally appropriate practice that is specific to three- and four-year-olds. The following concepts and practices are important to helping preschool English language learners benefit fully from their preschool education.

Support for Home Language is Essential

Support for continued development of the home language is critical in the preschool years as it impacts the child's basic language foundation as well as content learning. Research that examines ways to optimize the language development of young English language learners shows that educational programs should focus on first language development as well as English language acquisition. In fact, the support of the development of the home language has been shown to facilitate effective transfer of learning to English (August & Shanahan, 2006); (Snow, 1998). This support is also important because the children's first language is intricately tied to their concept of self, family, and home (Wong Fillmore, 1991).

Support Should be Built into Classroom Activities and Curriculum

Classroom support for children's language occurs best in the context of natural interactions and environments. Pull-out and push-in strategies are not appropriate for young children learning language. As bilingual children are exposed to English in their natural day-to-day interactions, they may begin to learn enough of the new language to appear competent in social situations. It is important for preschool teachers to continue to support the development of depth, richness and complexity in the home language during this transitional period as the early, superficial use of English is often not sufficient to support later literacy skills (NAEYC, 1995)(Neuman et al., 2000).

Bilingualism Should be a Goal for all Children

In today's world, being bilingual is an asset. Many school districts report that they enroll preschool children who are from language backgrounds other than English. Statewide estimates show that Spanish is the language spoken by up to ¾ of English language learners. There are 153 other languages spoken by students in New Jersey, including preschoolers.

Preschool Teachers Need Guidance

All children are entitled to a high quality preschool experience, whether they speak the majority language or are the only speaker of a language in his or her class. Preschool teachers need guidance on how to use resources appropriately to meet the needs of all children. An increasing number of school districts employ teachers and assistants who are bilingual. This is an important step, but is not sufficient on its own.

Qualified Staff are Essential

Every attempt should be made to employ both a teacher and teacher assistant who speak the language of the children enrolled in their classrooms. There should be at least one adult in the classroom who speaks the primary language of the children. Bilingual staff must be encouraged to use the children's home languages to fill the children's environment with rich vocabulary, open-ended questions, detailed conversations, and positive interactions. Care must be taken to ensure that all of the language input available to preschool children in any language is correct and developmentally appropriate in order to provide good language models for the children.

Non-bilingual teachers and teacher assistants should develop some basic communication skills in the predominant languages of the children in the classroom. This basic language must include both necessary survival needs as well as vocabulary that will welcome children and make them feel more comfortable in the classroom.

School districts should hire master teachers with bilingual expertise or certification, and utilize the increased master teacher/classroom ratio of one master teacher for every fifteen classrooms for school districts that serve large concentrations of English language

learners. Bilingual specialist master teachers must also have a strong background in early childhood education and developmentally appropriate practice.

Professional development should focus on:

- The development of both first and second languages
- The importance of facilitating home language development
- The importance of using open-ended questions, rich vocabulary and conversation in the children's home language. (It is inappropriate for bilingual staff to use their non-English language mainly for purposes of behavior management.)
- Appropriate strategies for supporting home language and English development in bilingual preschool children
- Areas identified by the Support for English Language Learners Classroom Assessment (SELLCA, (NIEER, 2005) or similar classroom assessment
- The acquisition of pre-reading and early reading skills, including phonological awareness and alphabet knowledge in the context of different languages

Knowledge of Child's Language

The home language survey should be used to help teachers know how to best support the child. The IPT and other English proficiency tests should be used only at the end of preschool when determining optimal kindergarten placements. Any child who speaks a language other than English at home is considered an English language learner, in need of home language supports, even if he or she understands and speaks some English. The home language survey should be followed up by individual conversation or interview with the parents to develop a better understanding of the child's home language environment and to help parents understand the school district's language goals for their child.

English language learners should not be isolated from each other. Children should be placed in classrooms where the most appropriate physical and human resources are available. Children can benefit from the opportunity to interact with their same-language peers and further develop their home language skills. All children can also benefit from interactions with different language peers.

Teachers and assistants should be informed of the languages of all students to be enrolled in their class and learn several key words and phrases in each child's home language to help the child and family feel welcome.

Interactions and Activities Designed to Enhance Early Language and Literacy

Though every aspect of the child is considered in decisions about daily activities, the teacher should modify his/her teaching style by always keeping language in the forefront. Language and literacy skills must be taught and facilitated within the context of the comprehensive preschool curriculum. 'Emergent themes', 'studies' or 'projects' provide support for English language learners' expanding skills.

Teachers must immerse children in meaningful language experiences. Effective strategies include:

- Use on-the-spot labeling strategies with familiar, culturally sensitive themes and materials.
- Avoid teaching words without meaningful contexts.
- Sing songs and read books in both languages (though not at the same time), use props when reading stories and playing with the children.
- Bilingual staff uses their language to engage in individual conversations with children to enhance early literacy and oral language skills along with content knowledge.
- Create a setting with numerous opportunities for informal English and home language exposure and practice. For example, songs and rhymes that repeat and teach sentence patterns and phonological awareness are part of the daily routine.
- Provide opportunities for children to create and share their own pictures, books and stories. These child-generated texts make literacy a more meaningful activity and reflect the child's individual culture and experience.
- Plan consistent daily activities are enriched with pictures, hand signals, body language, simple words to facilitate understanding. A relaxed, natural implementation of paired bilingual teaching supports the language skills of all children in the classroom. In this model, different parts of the schedule are devoted either to English or to the other main languages.
- Facilitate social interaction between English-speaking children and English language learners, encouraging them to speak each other's languages, giving them motivation to experiment with their growing language skills and providing translation, when appropriate.
- Use an approach that is always non-punitive and is designed to build confidence. Rather than having children repeat the "correct" way to say something, teachers gently rephrase or model, when appropriate. All language is learned best through meaningful conversation and communication. Teachers encourage, rather than discourage, children's use of their home languages.

Classroom Environment

The setting has numerous pretend-play materials like puppets, dolls, animals and telephones that encourage language and conversation. Authentic literacy materials from each child's culture best serve this purpose, including menus, magazines, empty food containers and toy packages.

Child-made stories, fiction, poetry and nonfiction books, as well as other print, audio and visual materials, are available in all languages of the students. There must be a strong mix of literacy materials that use predictable patterns and simple vocabulary along with high quality children's literature and materials that foster higher level thinking.

Functional print in the classrooms, such as birthday charts, materials and areas, is labeled with pictures and words in English and in the children's home languages, providing regular, informal exposure.

District Support for Teachers

The school district should develop clear roles for the bilingual specialist master teachers. They perform the normal duties of a master teacher while also providing support, training and resources to the other master teachers who, in turn, bring this support to all preschool teachers in the district.

The school district should be involved in networking with other school districts to share strategies, solutions, training and resources. The school district should also facilitate local networking with other agencies, businesses and organizations that can help teachers provide more comprehensive supports for the English language learners in their classrooms.

The school district should maintain a library of resources, activities, and materials that teachers can borrow for their classes depending on the languages that appear each year. The school district must ensure that students receive a high quality preschool experience that includes plenty of early literacy exposure in their home language. This requires the acquisition of a good variety of books and classroom materials in different languages as appropriate. These can be purchased, borrowed or handmade. The SELLCA or similar classroom assessment is used to determine what supports and materials are needed in each classroom and to target professional development for the teaching staff accordingly.

The school district must look closely at how English language learners are addressed in the Transition section of its five-year preschool program plan and annual updates. Specific strategies need to be in place to support children from different home languages and varying language abilities as they enter the preschool program and as they move on to later grades. Strong collaboration between the preschool staff and the kindergarten – third grade staff must be stated in order to establish a smooth transition from the types of bilingual supports offered in preschool to the school district's educational strategies for bilingual children in kindergarten through third grade.

Use of Community Resources

- Libraries, social service agencies, cultural organizations, local businesses and travel agents are all examples of community members that can provide assistance, materials, and information on many languages and cultures to enrich the classroom.
- Neighboring school districts that serve similar language groups should work together to share resources, translated materials and support.
- Caution should be exercised in accessing translations from websites or uncertified translators. Incorrect or inappropriate translations can often do

- The children's parents are a key community resource available to the classroom. Parents are eager to share their home culture and share information, food, as well as other items from their home country and culture.

Support for Families

- The parents' primary language is used to communicate during parent-teacher meetings and in other communications with children's families. Bilingual staff provides assistance with written, phone, and face-to-face interactions.
- Workshops and other supports are provided to emphasize the importance of parents reading and talking to their preschool child in their home language every day. Parents must be helped to understand that supporting the home language is the way to help the child succeed in school and make the transition to English.
- Parents should be invited to bring home language experiences to the classroom by reading, singing songs, demonstrating crafts, foods or games, or sharing pictures from a trip to their home country.

Highlighted Strategies to Support English Language Learners

- Know and use the home language of each and every child.
- Understand and respect each child's culture.
- Support the child's development of his or her home language while scaffolding the development of English language skills.
- Fill the environment with rich, varied literacy supports in home languages and English.
- Use local, state and national resources, especially families, to bring breadth and depth to the supports provided for English language learners.
- Keep in mind that being bilingual is an asset for success in school and beyond.

Transition

The literature on early childhood practices provides a strong rationale for creating continuity in transitions during this period. Achievements made during preschool, especially cognitive gains, sometimes fade as children move through subsequent grades (Shore, 1998). Changes in program components such as parent involvement, classroom organization, curriculum and teaching style may explain the differences in growth (O'Brien, 1991). Similarly, children have been found to have difficulty adjusting to classrooms where the rules, routines and underlying philosophy differ from their previous experience (Shore, 1998).

Transitions to Preschool

For many children and their families, their first major transition occurs when they enter preschool. Preparing families for the transition process helps orient families to the program, anticipate services based on each child's need and provide valuable insight to each child and family. Family participation also helps reduce some of the stress that may be associated with transition.

The level and type of participation prior to enrollment will vary across families, based on each family's interests, resources and general ability to be involved. Offering a range of flexible ways to learn about the program will help ensure that most families are ready for the program. The following activities will foster smooth transitions:

- Offer parent meetings focused on child and family expectations and services in the preschool setting. Topics can include parent role, curriculum and family services;
- Send out invitations to visit the preschool;
- Have an open house for families;
- Hold a child orientation at the preschool prior to attending; and
- Set up home visits for teachers to meet the families.

To facilitate a smooth transition for toddlers who attend child care or for children with disabilities already in early intervention programs, preschool teachers should meet, consult and plan with the child's teachers and therapists, when appropriate, from their previous placement. If possible, they should observe the child in the setting.

Continuity and Transitions within Settings

One way to facilitate continuity and minimize transition is by implementing multi-age practices. The term "multi-age" refers to the grouping of children so that the age span of the class is greater than one year. This technique uses both teaching practices and the makeup of the classroom to maximize the benefits of interaction and cooperation among children of various ages. In mixed- or multi-age classes, teachers encourage children with different experiences and stages of development to interact with each other throughout the day, naturally facilitating emerging skills (Katz, 1998). Another way to minimize effects of transitions is to loop, or keep the same group of children and adults together for more than one year.

Optimal Mixed-Age Groupings

Ideally, school districts will create multi-age settings for three- and four-year-old children. Children of both ages will stay with the same adults in the same room for a two-year period, creating a "family" type learning environment that includes the children, teachers and parents.

Cross-age learning allows for social interaction, modeling, mentoring and leadership among children. A child may accomplish something earlier with support from a more advanced peer while the older child experiences feelings of confidence and compassion (Vygotsky, 1962; (Vygotsky, 1978) (Slavin, 1987). A multi-age setting allows teachers to foster an emotionally secure environment for children to grow, learn, take risks and experience success. While children are developing social skills, learning responsibility and engaging in more complex play, teachers are generally more child-centered, as they must adeptly accommodate individual strengths, interests and needs. The two-year time period helps ensure that teachers, parents and children know each other well and develop a working partnership.

Same-age Groupings

If a school district is unable to provide multi-age classes, looping can be used on its own, allowing same-age children (all threes or all fours) to remain with the same adults for two or more years. If the children must move from one room to another from year one to year two, the teachers and children travel together.

For private providers, looping up through second or third grade is usually not practical. Therefore, looping with the same adults in the same classroom environment should continue to the highest available “grade level” in the partnering agency.

Transitions to Kindergarten

It is also important to smooth out the transition from preschool to the next setting. This will help prepare children for the new situation and increase the involvement of parents and families in the process (Bohan-Baker & Little, 2002). General transition activities are as follows:

- Invite families to visit children’s future kindergarten;
- Distribute home-learning activities, including summer book lists and other literacy activities for the summer months prior to kindergarten entry;
- Partner with the local parent-teacher association to inform parents about how they can be involved in their child’s kindergarten setting and connect new families with families currently enrolled in the school;
- Disseminate information to parents on the transition to kindergarten, including kindergarten registration guidelines, kindergarten options in the community, information on specific schools once placements have been made, and health and nutrition information to ensure that children enter school healthy;
- Offer early registration for kindergarten so that families have time to prepare children for their new setting and specific teachers can contact their prospective students well before the first day of school;
- Arrange field trips to participating elementary schools and kindergarten classrooms to increase children's familiarity with the new environment;
- Invite future teachers to visit children and give parent presentations;

- Ask current preschool teachers to visit the participating classrooms. These visits can promote the sharing of curriculum information, early childhood strategies, philosophies and special needs of specific children;
- Offer meetings focusing on child and family expectations in the next setting to better prepare children and their families for the opportunities and challenges they will encounter. Parenting and curriculum, the school district's structure, family services and advocacy and other topics can be covered; and
- Hold workshops that combine both preschool and elementary school teachers to discuss and coordinate curriculum and teaching practices to ensure continuity from one setting to the next.

Facilities

The physical environment of a preschool classroom has an impact on both the behavior and learning of the children and adults working in that space. Adequate physical space affects children's levels of involvement and the types of interactions with their teachers and peers. Classroom facilities for preschool children must be designed specifically to meet the needs of three- and four-year-old children.

Classroom Requirements

All contracted private provider and Head Start agency preschool classrooms must have a minimum of 950 square feet per classroom consisting of 750 square feet of usable space, 150 square feet of storage and equipment or furnishings that are either built in or not easily movable and 50 square feet of toilet room. Preschool classrooms must not be higher than the second floor of a school facility.

Each preschool classroom must have:

- An attached toilet room designed to accommodate the needs of physically handicapped students with features designed for the independent use of preschool children;
- A resilient floor covering, and soft furnishings and carpets for floor use;
- Access to a sink with a flood rim height no greater than 26 inches from the floor that is separate from a toilet room;
- A water cooler or fountain; and
- Windows that open to provide ventilation.

Outdoor Requirements

Preschool children must have access to a developmentally appropriate playground for at least 45 minutes daily. Outdoor gross motor space should have a variety of surfaces such as sand, woodchips, grass, and black top. Gross motor equipment, both stationary and portable, should be available. Outdoor areas should also have some protection from the elements, such as shade trees.

Classroom Environment

An optimal classroom environment allows children to have independent access to materials and activities. The classroom environment should have at least seven learning centers that encourage children's experiences with blocks, books, dramatic play, creative arts, writing, manipulatives, math, science, sand, water, and computers. Space should accommodate both active and quiet activities. Soft furnishings and spaces for privacy should be available for children who need a quiet place to rest.

Building Supervision

When preschool classrooms are housed in a school building owned by the school district, New Jersey Administrative Code 6A:32-4.1 (f) requires each school district to assign a full time non-teaching principal to be responsible for the administration and supervision of the school. If a principal is not assigned to the school, the district board of education, upon the advice of the chief school administrator, should submit a plan to ensure adequate supervision. This plan for building supervision should be included in the school district's five-year preschool program plan.

Program Evaluation

Each school district providing preschool programs must be committed to providing high-quality programs for young children and their families. To create and maintain quality, each school district preschool program participates in the Department's *Self Assessment and Validation System* (SAVS). The self assessment and validation process examines the total program, from the quality and nature of teacher-child interactions to the developmental appropriateness of the activities, health and safety of the setting, teacher-child ratios, staff qualifications, physical environment, administration and ability to accommodate the needs of the community. The focus is on how well the components of the program work together to support each child's learning and development. Each school district's self-assessment should be conducted yearly. Parent surveys, teacher surveys, administrator evaluations and results of structured classroom observations should be used to determine how well the program is working.

The Self Assessment and Validation System (SAVS) components include:

Community Collaboration

- An Early Childhood Advisory Council is in place and participates in program planning, community needs assessment and the self-assessment;
- The Early Childhood Advisory Council includes appropriate community representatives and meets at least quarterly;
- Regular meetings are scheduled with private providers, including Head Start; and

- The needs and goals of the community, as determined by a community needs assessment, are met.

Recruitment and Outreach

- The school district actively recruits eligible children throughout the year using multiple strategies; and
- The school district is meeting recruitment goals.

Facilities

- Amendments to the long-range facilities plan are formulated with careful consideration given to assessment of the universe, demographic trends, housing patterns, community needs and the adequacy of current facilities based on ECERS-R results and other evaluations.

Administration

- Administrators overseeing the preschool program and educational leaders have the proper qualifications and training specific to early childhood education;
- Principals have experience in early childhood education and proper qualifications; and
- The fiscal specialist has a working knowledge of the preschool program, familiarity with professional accounting standards and performs duties relevant to the fiscal accountability of community providers including ensuring submission of effective and efficient private provider budgets, analyzing private provider quarterly reports to ensure that expenditures conform to approved budgets, developing corrective action plans as necessary, providing training and assistance to providers and maintaining teacher certification information.

Staff Qualifications

- All teachers have or are working toward appropriate credentials and certification;
- In-district and private provider teachers and assistants receive ongoing evaluations and reviews;
- All assistant teachers have a high school diploma or equivalent and meet DCF licensing requirements, where applicable;
- All existing and new directors of private providers complete the DCF required Director's Academy; and
- Master teachers meet recommended qualifications.

Curriculum and Program

- Curriculum guidelines, as described in the *Expectations*, are met;
- Teachers demonstrate knowledge of how children learn and develop;
- Teacher expectations vary appropriately for children of differing ages and abilities. Individual differences are respected;
- All aspects of the child are supported including language development, cognitive development, social and emotional development and physical development;
- Children work and play individually or in small groups, minimizing whole-group activities with a balance between child-initiated and teacher-initiated activities; and
- The results of classroom observations indicate a high level of quality and curriculum implementation.

Child Assessment and Screening

- The assessment system is used appropriately and regularly to support each child's unique learning and developmental growth; and
- Screening devices are carefully selected and used appropriately.

Professional Development

- Professional development is based on the school district's approved preschool plan and is grounded in the knowledge base for preschool education articulated by the school district's chosen curriculum.
- Training topics cover all aspects of the child's development, as well as the specific needs of the program;
- Appropriate training is implemented for instructional, non-instructional and administrative staff;
- Appropriate assistance and training is provided to teachers of English language learners, as well as to teachers working with children with special needs; and
- Systematic classroom evaluation is used to determine professional development topics.

Supporting English Language Learners

- Teachers use strategies to support English language learners;
- The focus is on helping children achieve English competency and maintain their first languages; and
- The curriculum provides numerous language enrichment opportunities.

Intervention and Support

- A preschool intervention and referral team is fully staffed; and

- The intervention and support from the team meets the needs of the early childhood staff.

Inclusion

- Administrative supports are in place that facilitate inclusion;
- Children with special needs are served in least restrictive environments with IEP goals addressed in the context of the curriculum and daily activities;
- Children with special needs are served in general education classrooms to the maximum extent possible;
- The proportion of children with and without special needs reflects that of the general population;
- The IEP team includes the teacher, parent, child study team member and special education personnel; and
- Push in and pull out services are not used or are used on a limited basis.

Transition

- Families, teachers and children are prepared for transitions from preschool to kindergarten and kindergarten through grade three; and
- Transition activities are planned for children entering the preschool program from early intervention and other settings.

Health, Safety and Food Services

- The program is designed to help children reach and maintain the *Expectations* for health, safety and physical education;
- Nurses are available at a ratio of one for every 300 preschool students and will provide services to all students including those in private provider and Head Start programs;
- All children receive health screening upon entry into the school district;
- Parent education includes regular health and safety topics designed to meet the unique needs of families enrolled in the program;
- Meal and snack requirements established by US Department of Agriculture are in place; and
- Family style meals are served in children's classrooms.

Parent Involvement

- Parents are welcome in the school and their support and assistance are sought;
- There are multiple opportunities for parents to be involved with school;
- Parents are partners in the decisions that affect children and families;
- Community resources are used to strengthen schools, families and student learning;
- Communication between home and school is regular and two-way;

- Parenting skills are promoted and supported;
- Parents play an integral role in assisting student learning;
- Barriers to family involvement such as transportation and language are reduced; and
- Family workers, social workers and community parent involvement specialists work together to assist parents in obtaining services within the school district and the community.

Contracts

Within the mixed delivery system, school districts may contract with private providers and/or local Head Start agencies that are willing and able to provide high-quality preschool programs as required by P.L. 2006, c.260 and described in chapter 13A, of the Administrative Code. The Department of Education provides a State-approved contract template for school districts to use when contracting for preschool program services.

Fiscal Oversight

Districts are responsible for ensuring that preschool funds are spent according to *N.J.A.C. 6A:13A*, and that the fiscal practices of private providers are sound. In school districts that contract with more than eight private providers including the local Head Start agency, a fiscal specialist may be necessary. The role of the fiscal specialist is to:

- Provide financial management assistance to private providers and local Head Start agencies in the development and monitoring of their program budgets;
- Monitor compliance with the preschool program contract;
- Track and report teacher certification information;
- Review and expedite adjustments to quarterly expenditure reports in accordance with the approved child care center provider budgets; and
- Work with those private providers needing assistance including the development of corrective action plans in response to findings from an audit and/or limited review examination.

To be effective, the fiscal specialist shall have auditing, budgeting and accounting experience. This staff member will be directly responsible to the early childhood supervisor or director of early childhood programs. The fiscal specialist should also work with the business administrator's office.

Recommended Model:

- One fiscal specialist for each school district contracting with a minimum of eight private provider agencies.

Monitoring Private Provider and Head Start Fiscal Practices

The district board of education must provide financial management assistance to monitor the expenditures of each contracted private provider and local Head Start agency. Private providers and Head Start agencies should work with the school district to complete the “One-Year Private Provider Budget Planning Workbook” prior to the start of the fiscal year. The Budget Planning Workbook delineates all allowable expenditure categories and serves as the basis for the private provider’s quarterly reports.

Quarterly Reports

All private providers must submit to the district board of education a quarterly report of actual, approvable, reasonable and customary expenditures with supporting documentation and receipts. School districts must recoup any unexpended or misspent funds based on the quarterly expenditure reports, enrollment records and monthly payments made by the school district. The quarterly report must include expenditures for allowable budget lines for the school year including all salaries, benefits, payroll taxes, substitute stipends, classroom materials and supplies, start-up classroom materials/supplies and technology, if applicable, field trips and transportation, space costs, food costs, and all allowable administrative and indirect costs itemized in the Budget Planning Workbook. Quarterly reports must be signed and certified by an officer of the corporation.

Corrective Action Plans

The district board of education must collaborate with private providers and/or local Head Start agencies in the development of corrective action plans in response to any findings from audits and/or limited review examinations.

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