



Early Care Issues

Providing Preschool Using a Mixed-Delivery System

ISSUE: As New Jersey moves forward with plans to expand preschool throughout the state, it is essential that such services be delivered utilizing a mixed-delivery system that includes schools, licensed community-based child care centers, and Head Start programs in order to provide choice for parents, to improve quality and to promote diversity in early care and education.

RECOMMENDATION: Child Care Aware of New Jersey (CCANJ) supports the expansion of preschool using a mixed delivery system that includes community-based licensed child care centers. Community-based child care centers can play an important role in providing state preschool programs for a number of reasons:

1. Community-based programs have years of experience in providing preschool in their respective communities.
2. Community-based child care centers can effectively address the needs of working parents who may need full-day, full-year services for their children. Providing preschool in community-based centers can be more convenient for parents, who do not have to figure out how to bring their children from one location to another during the work day, as well as less disruptive for children, who do not have to be moved from one location to another each day and during the summer. If a parent also has an infant or toddler, community-based centers may also provide care in the same facility.
3. Utilizing space in existing community-based child care centers can facilitate the rapid expansion of classrooms and will also reduce tax-payer investment by eliminating the need to expend funds for renovation or the construction of new classrooms.
4. Community-based child care center participation in state-funded preschool can enhance and improve the overall quality of a center by injecting new and needed resources into the program, and by requiring that the center meet state preschool standards that are more rigorous than state child care licensing requirements in areas such as teacher credentials, adult-child ratios, and group size. Our experience with Abbott has demonstrated that when the community-based centers are funded at a level comparative to their local Abbott districts, they have been able to hire and maintain certified teachers and provide an early childhood education opportunity for children assessed at the same level or higher than programs offered in-district.

5. Community-based child care center participation in state-funded preschool can have spillover beneficial effects on quality that extend beyond the particular children and hours funded by the preschool initiative to reach the entire center, including classrooms serving infants and toddlers.
6. Successful involvement of child care centers in preschool initiatives aligns preschool programs within a birth-through-third-grade continuum of services and creates sustainable programs by coordinating existing early learning funds. It also promotes collaboration among schools, child care providers, other early care and education programs and parents, enabling them all to take advantage of the expertise each partner brings and to make effective use of early childhood resources. Such collaboration can lead to joint efforts not only on preschool but also on the full array of supports and services that children and their families need.

For a mixed delivery system to be successful, CCANJ recommends:

- Funding that is sufficient to cover a child care center's full range of expenses for a high-quality program and that is stable and predictable;
- A funding distribution system that ensures that child care centers and other providers outside the schools can fairly compete to offer preschool programs.
- Opportunities to combine state preschool funding, child care assistance funding, and parent fees in ways that enable child care centers to offer full-day (8 - 10 hour), high-quality programs on a year-round basis.
- Supports and incentives to help child care center teachers obtain the training and education needed to meet pre-kindergarten credential requirements.
- Funding for salaries and benefits comparable to those offered by the public schools.
- Close coordination between school districts and child care centers and collaboration with other early childhood providers.
- Flexibility in curriculum and assessment requirements and opportunities for child care centers and other pre-kindergarten providers to provide feedback to ensure curriculum and assessment options that are appropriate for young children and responsive to the needs of children from diverse backgrounds.

For more information please visit www.ccanj.org.