Raising Preschool Teacher Qualifications

Julia Coffman and M. Elena Lopez

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Preschool teacher qualifications make a difference for children.

High quality early care and education supports children's school readiness and continues to affect their performance in school and beyond.

Teacher professional preparation is a crucial component of quality early care and education. Well-educated teachers with specialized training in early childhood education have the knowledge and skills to positively impact child outcomes.

Research shows that the most effective preschool teachers (including Head Start) have a four-year degree with specialized training in teaching young children.

New Jersey required four-year degrees and certification within four years.

New Jersey's recent experiences with upgrading preschool teacher qualifications suggest it is possible to do so on a short deadline if necessary policy and funding supports are available to help teachers succeed.

The New Jersey Supreme Court case Abbott v. Burke established high-quality preschool as necessary to ensure that children in the state's thirty poorest school districts enter school ready to learn. Teacher qualifications were one standard for preschool quality.

Teachers in Abbott districts (in district-run and community-based programs including Head Start) were required to obtain a bachelor's degree and early childhood certification. Already-hired teachers without these credentials had four years, or until September 2004, to obtain them. Many teachers had to return to school.

Essential funding supports helped teachers achieve the necessary qualifications and to recruit and retain qualified teachers. Critical dollars went for teacher scholarships for both tuition and non-tuition expenses related to returning to school, funds to increase the infrastructure of teacher preparation institutions, and compensation parity needed to recruit and retain teachers with higher credentials.

Key Success Factors in Raising Teacher Qualifications

- New Jersey's experience reveals that to successfully meet a mandate that preschool teachers have a bachelor's degree, that mandate must be supported with policies and sufficient funding for:
  - Realistic but Ambitious Timelines
  - Quality Teacher Education
  - Strengthened Teacher Education Infrastructure
  - Teacher Scholarships
  - Adequate Teacher Compensation and Parity

New Jersey preschool teachers are meeting the four-year mandate.

With a little more than a year to go in the four-year deadline, 80% of Abbott teachers in community-based programs have obtained their bachelor's degree, up from 35% in 1999-2000. More than half have obtained necessary certification.
Raising Preschool Teacher Qualifications

With a Case Study on How New Jersey’s Early Childhood Teachers are Getting Four-Year Degrees and Certification Under a Four-Year Deadline

Julia Coffman and M. Elena Lopez

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I. INTRODUCTION: The Importance of Teacher Qualifications

High quality early care and education supports children’s school readiness and continues to support their performance in school. Teacher professional preparation is a crucial component of high quality care. Well-educated teachers with specialized training in early childhood education possess the knowledge and skills to have a positive impact on child outcomes. Based on research linking teacher qualifications, program quality, and positive child outcomes, many research, professional and advocacy organizations and experts back raising the qualifications of teachers, with the minimum qualification for a preschool teacher being a four-year degree and specialized training in teaching young children.

A. Why are preschool teacher qualifications important?

Two decades of research confirms that teacher qualifications significantly affect the quality of care and education provided to young children, and that higher qualifications contribute to more positive short- and long-term child outcomes.

Better-educated teachers benefit children, parents, and society. Research supports policy efforts to raise the minimum qualifications for preschool teachers to a four-year degree. Teachers with at least a four-year college degree consistently provide the high quality teaching and learning experiences that are crucial for young children’s school success. Such teachers are more knowledgeable about developmentally appropriate teaching practices. They display

Research on Teacher Qualifications and Quality

The multi-state Cost, Quality, and Child Outcomes study concluded that teachers’ educational level differentiates poor, mediocre and high quality child care centers. High quality settings employ teachers with more years of formal education. Children in high-quality settings have better social and cognitive outcomes, and these outcomes continue through the early school years. A Florida study of 150 child care centers determined that classrooms with more educated and trained teachers scored better on quality indicators that examine child-teacher and children’s social interactions, children’s interactions with learning materials, and environmental features that support those interactions.

A North Carolina study of 180 child care centers concluded that teacher education and professional experience were related to overall program quality in child care centers. One third of centers served children with disabilities.

The National Survey of Adult Literacy reported that adults with an associate’s degree are twice as likely as those with bachelor’s degrees to have literacy skills below the “competent level.” Young children need well-educated teachers to develop strong vocabularies and reading skills.
characteristics conducive to young children’s development, including warmth, enthusiasm for learning activities, clear communications, and encouragement of sharing and cooperation among children.\textsuperscript{6}

Better-educated teachers are more skilled at helping children thrive. They are more sensitive and responsive to young children, and less harsh and restrictive compared to teachers with less training.\textsuperscript{7} They provide richer language and cognitive experiences for children. The overall result is better child cognitive, linguistic, emotional and social development.\textsuperscript{8}

Parents also benefit from better-educated teachers. The ability to work well with parents is integral to the repertoire of high-quality preschool teachers.\textsuperscript{9} Education with field-based courses in family relationships help teachers communicate with parents, engage them in their children’s learning, and link them to family support services.

Finally, society benefits when well-educated teachers work with young children. Young children develop social and emotional competence, and schools and communities avoid the high costs of remedial and special education services.\textsuperscript{10}

\textbf{B. Can policy influence higher teacher quality?}

Despite the research linking teacher education and child outcomes, a substantial number of preschool teachers lack the qualifications needed to provide high quality learning experiences for young children. Only one-half of teachers of three and four-year-old children have a four-year degree.\textsuperscript{11} By contrast, all public elementary school teachers must have a four-year college education. The most-educated preschool teachers work in the public schools, where 87 percent of teachers have at least a bachelor’s degree.\textsuperscript{12}

Policy support for strong teacher qualifications is inconsistent and highly variable. Of the 40 states that offer state-financed pre-K, just over half require teachers to have a bachelor’s degree in early childhood or another subject.\textsuperscript{13} Only 21 states require teachers in private early childhood programs to undergo any pre-service training.\textsuperscript{14}

\textbf{Existing early childhood teachers can meet four-year degree qualifications.} While many early childhood teachers lack the four-year degrees that are recommended, teachers can make progress toward higher educational levels within a reasonable timeframe.

Many early childhood teachers in Head Start and other programs have course credits and two-year associate’s degrees that can put them on a successful track toward a four-year degree. For example, in 1998 Congress mandated that 50 percent of Head Start teachers attain an associate’s degree or higher, with a specialization in early childhood education or a related field, by September 2003. Between 1997 and 2001, the proportion of teachers meeting this standard grew from 34 percent to 45 percent.\textsuperscript{15} The Head Start Bureau recently announced that the percentage of teachers meeting this standard in 2002 was 51 percent.\textsuperscript{16} This demonstrates that a growing percentage of Head Start teachers have already made significant headway toward earning their four-year degrees.
Higher teacher qualification mandates cannot go unfunded. While teachers can achieve higher education credentials, they cannot do so without supports and an educational system that helps them succeed. Students need access to quality early childhood teacher education programs with adequate faculty to meet demand. Teachers need scholarships and other forms of financial and academic supports that enable them to meet the financial challenges associated with returning to school. And early childhood programs need to offer compensation packages that both attract and retain teachers in early childhood programs once they have obtained higher education credentials.

II. NEW JERSEY CASE STUDY: Requiring Four-Year Degrees and Early Childhood Certification within a Four-Year Timeline

The state of New Jersey offers a good case study on how to raise early childhood teacher qualifications and what it takes to make that policy successful. Five years ago, acting under the long-running Abbott v. Burke court case, the New Jersey State Supreme Court ruled on the qualifications teachers of three- and four-year-olds in the state’s lowest-income school districts needed. As a result, the State required those teachers to have a bachelor’s degree plus early childhood certification within a four-year timeline, and put together a set of financial and other supports to back the new mandate.

A. Why did New Jersey raise preschool teacher qualifications?

Abbott v. Burke is a New Jersey Supreme Court case about the funding and supplemental program needs of the state’s thirty poorest school districts (known as Abbott districts). This important case, and the Court’s numerous rulings over the case’s twenty-two year history, has focused on finding viable solutions for eliminating learning disadvantages and closing the achievement gap between students in the urban Abbott districts and their more affluent suburban peers. 17

The Abbott case has resulted in significant benefits for low-income children in New Jersey. The Court’s rulings have

Abbott v. Burke Timeline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>Abbott I – Suit filed against the State of NJ on behalf of urban students in low-income school districts for equal educational opportunity and adequate programming.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>Abbott II – Education found unconstitutional in the state’s poorest districts. Parity required in educational spending and special programs in those districts. NJ legislature passed the Quality Education Act of 1990 (in response).</td>
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<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>NJ legislature passed Comprehensive Educational Improvement and Financing Act (CEIFA), directing statewide standards-based reform.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>Abbott IV – CEIFA found unconstitutional in Abbott districts because failed to provide sufficient funds. Funding party ordered, and hearings on necessary supplemental programs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>Abbott V – Entitlements ordered for disadvantaged children - whole school reform, full-day kindergarten, high-quality preschool for all 3- and 4-year-olds, and facilities program.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>Abbott VII – Implementation revisited tight timelines set for preschool plan submission, assessment, and approval.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>Abbott VIII – Issues clarified around enrollment, educational standards and facilities, and redirected state implementation.</td>
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mandated unprecedented changes in the form of parity in education funding, and required specific supplemental programs in the Abbott districts “over and above regular education” to assist disadvantaged students. These supplemental programs include whole school reform, supportive health and social services, full-day kindergarten, and preschool for three- and four-year-olds.

Abbott v. Burke mandated high-quality and comprehensive preschool. In 1998, under Abbott V, the Court ruled that all three- and four-year-olds in Abbott districts have access to a high-quality and comprehensive preschool education. The goal was to enable children in low-income school districts to enter kindergarten ready to learn, with the same skills and abilities as children in the state’s wealthier districts. The Court based its judgment on a careful consideration of scientific research that shows high-quality preschool can greatly increase the school readiness of low-income children, and has long-term benefits in academic achievement and later adult life.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Components of Abbott Quality Preschool</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Substantive Standards</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Developmentally appropriate curriculum geared toward school readiness skill development.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Teacher Qualifications</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>A qualified and certified teacher and an assistant in every preschool classroom</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Class Size</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Maximum class size of fifteen students</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Facilities</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Adequate space, facilities, supplies</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Supplemental Services</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation, dental, health, and other social services; services for children with disabilities and limited English proficiency</td>
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The Court, in Abbott VI, went a step beyond establishing a mandate for preschool in Abbott districts; it defined the standards for high quality programs. The Court’s definition of high quality preschool focused on five areas – substantive standards, teacher qualifications, class size, facilities, and supplemental services for children. The State, with the Department of Education acting as lead agency, was charged with making available the resources to meet quality preschool standards.

Teacher qualifications were one component of high-quality preschool. The Court asserted that without such teachers, the achievement gap between urban and suburban peers could not sufficiently be closed.

Abbott preschools include district-run programs, community-based child care, and Head Start. The Court’s ruling charged the thirty Abbott school districts with primary responsibility and authority for preschool programs. Districts were to contract with state-licensed community-based child care centers where possible to accelerate implementation and avoid duplication of services. Community-based child care centers were to be held to the same quality standards as district-run classrooms in terms of substantive standards, teacher qualifications, class size, facilities, and supplemental services.

Districts were also to include Head Start in their efforts when possible. Head Start programs were required to work systematically to achieve the same quality standards as other Abbott classrooms, with funding from the State to support those efforts.
B. What does New Jersey require of Abbott preschool teachers?

After the 1998 Abbott ruling, the State had to develop an appropriate definition of a "qualified and certified teacher" for the Abbott district preschools. In 2000 the Department of Education issued the formal definitions that are currently in effect.

Abbott preschool teachers need a bachelor’s degree. Teachers in community-based Abbott programs hired before September 2000, and who lacked the necessary academic credentials, were required to make annual progress toward a bachelor’s degree and to obtain that degree within four years, by September 2004. Effective September 2001, new hires in all Abbott programs were required to have a bachelor’s degree.

This qualification was not an issue for district-run preschool teachers because they already had bachelor’s degrees. It was, however, an issue for teachers in community-based programs that contracted with the school districts (including Head Start programs). Those programs had lower minimum education requirements prior to the State’s mandate. Therefore, while many child care and Head Start teachers had extensive experience working with young children, they had a mix of educational backgrounds, and 65% had less than a four-year degree.

Abbott teachers need Preschool to Grade Three (P-3) certification. Existing teachers in community-based Abbott programs were required to obtain P-3 certification by September 2004. Effective September 2001, new teachers in all Abbott programs were required to have P-3 certification.

The P-3 certification ensures that above and beyond a four-year degree, teachers have the early care and education theory and supervised practical training that will make them effective teachers. Two categories of teachers were exempted from the P-3 certification requirement: teachers who already held the previously existing New Jersey Teacher of Nursery School Certificate (N-K), and teachers holding the standard Elementary School Teacher certificate (N-8) with two years documented experience working in an early childhood setting.

The certification requirement presented a significant challenge in that New Jersey did not offer early childhood certification when the Court made its ruling. After the mandate was issued, New Jersey colleges and universities quickly had to develop the certificate and associated curriculum (P-3 pedagogy), and identify the different "routes" that teachers could take to earn it.

The “traditional route” was created for individuals without a bachelor’s degree. It requires the individual to complete a state-approved early childhood education teacher preparation program at a regionally accredited college or university with the P-3 pedagogy built in (5 courses)

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<tr>
<th>Abbott Preschool Teacher Requirements</th>
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<tr>
<td>(implemented in 2000)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bachelor’s Degree</td>
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<tr>
<td>P-3 Certificate</td>
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<tr>
<td>Deadlines</td>
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<tr>
<td>For new hires:</td>
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<tr>
<td>by September 2001</td>
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<tr>
<td>For existing teachers:</td>
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<tr>
<td>by September 2004 (4 years)</td>
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Exemptions:
- Licensed elementary teachers w/ 2 years experience
- Teachers w/ nursery school certificates

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threshold (2.75 on a 4.0 scale)\textsuperscript{19}, and passing a state test, become eligible for a Certificate of Eligibility With Advanced Standing (CEAS). The CEAS allows teachers to look for work in preschool programs. Once an offer for employment is obtained, individuals can apply for a provisional P-3 certificate and enter the State’s provisional teacher program, which requires mentorship in the preschool setting. The provisional teacher program offers thirty weeks of full-time, on-the-job support, with supervision and evaluations (three) provided by school-based professionals. After that year, and upon recommendation from the mentor and positive evaluations from a certified school administrator, the teacher receives P-3 certification.

The “alternate route” was developed for existing teachers in Abbott community-based programs who already had a four-year degree in a liberal arts or science major, but lacked training in the P-3 curriculum. Teachers with that degree who meet the specified GPA requirement and pass a state test, are issued a Certificate of Eligibility (CE). They can then take classes in the P-3 pedagogy and enter the provisional teacher program. Under the alternate route, the program provides 34 weeks of support, supervision, and evaluation. First year novice teachers receive 20 intensive consecutive days of mentoring before taking full responsibility for the class. Upon completion and positive recommendations and evaluations, P-3 certification is obtained.\textsuperscript{20}

Existing teachers had four years to meet the new qualifications. The Court noted that reasonable, but limited, timeframes for achieving teacher qualifications would be necessary to meet the goal of providing qualified teachers as soon as possible. On the one hand, teachers in community-run preschools needed enough time to obtain their educational degrees without losing their jobs or creating a substantial shortage of qualified teachers. On the other, the timeframe had to be short enough to eliminate as quickly as possible any disparities between district-run and community-based programs (creating a two-tiered system). In addition it was important that more generations of children in the Abbott districts would not lose the opportunity that high quality preschool promised.
C. What did it take to support the new mandate?

It was not enough for the State to set out the requirements for teachers in *Abbott* classrooms. A series of supports were required to help teachers in community-based programs contracting with *Abbott* districts successfully meet the four-year deadline. Those supports required a commitment from the State to support teachers (with policies, information, and funding) in their education efforts, cooperation from colleges and universities to quickly meet the demand the new mandate created, a willingness from teachers to return to school, and the assistance of *Abbott* community-run preschools to accommodate teachers in their education efforts.

The table below outlines the core needs faced by the state’s colleges and universities training *Abbott* teachers and the teachers themselves who had to go back to school. Needs are presented alongside solutions developed to try to meet those needs. These solutions were essential to meeting the new teacher qualification mandates.

<table>
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<th>New Jersey Needs and Solutions to Meet Teacher Qualification Requirements</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Core Need</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Early childhood certification</td>
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<tr>
<td>Training system capacity and infrastructure</td>
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<tr>
<td>Seamless system of transfer</td>
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<tr>
<td>Outreach, support, and academic counseling services</td>
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<tr>
<td>Financial support for college</td>
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<tr>
<td>Supports to meet demands of work, family, and school</td>
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<td>Comparable compensation</td>
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**The P-3 certificate was created.** At the time of the Court’s 1998 ruling, only one New Jersey college offered an early childhood degree. In fact, in 1988, and in large part because the public schools did not offer preschool at that time, the State Board of Education eliminated the state’s existing nursery school certificate. Without the early childhood credential, colleges were not motivated to offer early childhood courses.

After the *Abbott* ruling, the New Jersey Commission on Higher Education brought together colleges and universities to develop the P-3 certificate. This included identifying appropriate pedagogy, courses, and credits. The timeframe was short; colleges had less than six months to put new programs in place. Initially, six colleges responded to the challenge. Now eleven New Jersey colleges offer the P-3 certificate.21
Colleges built capacity and infrastructure with necessary financial support. Because many of the state’s colleges and universities did not offer early care and education courses, there was an overall shortage of faculty qualified to instruct in the P-3 pedagogy. Many early childhood faculty had either left the state for other positions, left the field altogether, or retired.

Despite this faculty shortage, many colleges built new early childhood programs focused on the P-3 certification. The State, through the Commission on Higher Education, and private foundations offered grants to support colleges in their efforts to increase capacity to support teacher preparation, which included the hiring of new faculty. Grants have been used in creative ways overall, including the building of an urban teaching academy at one university that supports transfer students for P-3 certification, provides enhanced academic support for P-3 certification students, and collaborates with urban teachers on curriculum, teaching, and mentoring.

Two- and four-year colleges created a more seamless system of transfer. Another challenge came from the lack of articulation agreements between two- and four-year colleges. Many community colleges offered terminal degrees (AAS) instead of a transferable degree (AA), and teachers with the terminal AAS degree lacked coursework that could easily transfer to a four-year institution. Eventually after negotiation, two- and four-year colleges in some New Jersey regions worked out articulation agreements for transferring course credits. And the public and privately funded New Jersey Professional Development Center for Early Care and Education provided leadership and coordinated collaboration in the development of articulation policies and agreements.

Building an effective statewide system of transfer remains, however, a challenge. Efforts are being made to improve communication between colleges and non-traditional students, and to create a more uniform system of transfer across the state’s colleges.

Colleges offered outreach, special support, and academic counseling services. Many of the Abbott teachers returning to college faced significant challenges in adapting their lives to the demands of college. Others faced literacy and English-language challenges. Still others had been out of the academic environment for a substantial period of time and lacked basic study and time management skills. As a result, colleges created positions for academic advisors that could work closely with students on helping them succeed in the classroom.

Colleges also sought creative outreach solutions for students trying to earn P-3 certification. Special funding provided for on-site advisement in Abbott preschools. On-site courses were offered. For students without easy access to one of the colleges offering the P-3 pedagogy, some colleges began offering courses through more geographically convenient two-year colleges, at night and on the weekends, online, or using distance learning mechanisms. Dual registrations were offered in community colleges and receiving four-year institutions. Other colleges catered materials and courses to students with limited English proficiency.

A number of New Jersey community colleges with Abbott districts in their counties also stepped up to the effort to prepare community-based Abbott teachers to meet the new certification requirements. Representatives did outreach in communities to help teachers without degrees get started in transferable community college programs, and made special efforts to provide flexible scheduling and support services.
Teachers received State-funded scholarships to attend school. The lack of funding to return to college was a major barrier for many Abbott teachers. The State responded with a scholarship program. Using child care dollars from the state’s Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) funds, the Department of Human Services provided scholarship funding for teachers employed in community-based Abbott programs. Scholarships paid for tuition and fees related to obtaining an early childhood education associate’s or bachelor’s degree and the P-3 certificate, including stipends to assist with books and other non-tuition expenses.

Policies and supports helped teachers manage work, school, and family. Many teachers who went back to school were parents who faced the additional challenge of working full time and attending school. While initially under the Court’s ruling, Abbott districts were required to provide only half-day preschool and that gave teachers some flexibility to attend school, by the 2001-2002 school year they were required to implement full-day, full-year programs.

Preschool programs had to handle the problem of being able to provide quality programs under limited budgets while allowing teachers release time to attend school. State funds for a substitute teacher pool helped programs offer teachers time outside of the classroom, although finding enough teachers to fill the pool was challenging.

Teachers received parity in compensation. One of the biggest concerns in New Jersey was that even if teachers could meet the mandate in time, many would probably leave the Abbott community-based classrooms upon doing so because there was a lack of salary parity between teachers in district- and community-run Abbott classrooms.

Teachers working in district-run classrooms were paid substantially higher salaries than teachers in community-based programs, contributing to the notion of a two-tiered system. In large part this was because teachers in district-run classrooms had higher credentials than many in community-based settings. Once New Jersey made qualifications for all Abbott preschool teachers equivalent, compensation had to be equalized in order to reduce the risk that once preschool teachers attained their bachelor degrees they would leave the community-based early childhood setting for jobs in school districts or for other jobs with better compensation packages.

In its 2002 Abbott VIII ruling, the Supreme Court addressed the topic of salary parity between district-run and community-run Abbott preschool programs. The Court noted that ensuring qualified and certified teachers are available for all Abbott programs is an essential component of adequate state funding. Districts were required to address salary parity between district-run and community-based programs, and if community providers, including Head Start, demonstrated an inability to retain qualified staff due to salary parity problems, the Department of Education had to consider additional funding for teacher salaries.

While the State addressed some parity issues with salary adjustments to teachers at the end of the school year, more efforts are being waged to eliminate the two-tiered system, especially in the area of teacher benefits. While teacher salaries must be equal, benefits must be at a comparable cost. Because school districts can "buy" better benefits than community providers, teachers are still finding public schools a more attractive option.
D. Is New Jersey meeting its Abbott teacher qualifications mandate?

Abbott preschool teachers in community-based programs still have over one year to meet the bachelor’s degree requirement and obtain P-3 certification. Data collected by the State Department of Education reveal that after almost three years, and in large part due to the supports discussed above, notable progress has been made.

A high percentage of Abbott preschool teachers now have a bachelor’s degree. When the mandate began, only 35% of preschool teachers in community-based Abbott programs had their bachelor’s degree. A clear majority of teachers had to return to school.

According to the NJ Department of Education, 80% of Abbott preschool teachers in community-based programs now have a bachelor’s degree or higher, more than twice the percentage only three years ago. Of the small percentage of teachers who do not yet have their four-year degree (20%), but still have more than a year to obtain it, most have at least a two-year associate’s degree.

No official data exist on what has happened to all of the teachers who were working in Abbott preschools when the mandate began in 2000. The 80% figure represents the percentage of Abbott teachers that currently have their four-year degree. They are not necessarily the same individuals that were teaching when the mandate began.

Clearly, some Abbott teachers returned to school and earned their degree. Others chose not to return, left their positions as lead teachers in Abbott programs, and moved onto other non-Abbott early childhood settings, or took positions as classroom aides. Only a very small percentage of teachers currently in the Abbott classrooms without their bachelor’s degree have chosen not to work toward that goal. With the supports discussed above, most teachers with the desire to get their degree have been able to achieve that goal already or will by September 2004. Advocacy efforts are underway to extend the deadline for those who are making satisfactory progress, but may not meet the four-year deadline.

P-3 certification results are promising. Data collected in January 2003 by the Department of Education suggest that of those with at least a bachelor’s degree and not exempted from the P-3 certification, more than 35 percent have obtained the certification, and more than 55 percent have obtained a Certificate of Eligibility or Certificate of Eligibility with Advanced Standing on their way to earning certification.
E. Has New Jersey seen any unexpected effects?

The preliminary results on teacher qualification requirements in New Jersey’s Abbott districts are promising. They also warrant a discussion of unexpected effects as a result of the new mandate. Those involved in fulfilling the mandate – the State, colleges and universities, preschool programs, and the teachers or students themselves – acknowledge that this is a work in progress and much more needs to be done to improve the system in order to prepare future quality teachers both in and outside the Abbott districts.

Student demand is not waning. Initially colleges and universities that developed P-3 certification programs were concerned that student demand for these programs would decrease or plateau after an initial sharp increase. They feared the consequences of being able to sustain capacity under those circumstances. To date, demand for the P-3 certification has not dropped off, and colleges are working hard to attract new teachers.

Students see benefits of better educational preparation. In general, college administrators and faculty report that students who return to school find value in it. While there is some natural resistance to new ideas and techniques, particularly for teachers with many years of experience, overall there has not been a negative backlash among teachers who return to college.

The value of better educational preparation becomes most salient, of course, when it results in a substantial difference in compensation. For some teachers salaries have doubled, making a substantial impact on their own lives as well as the lives of their families.

Some teachers opted out. While many students have found value in returning to school, others chose not pursue further education. No official statistics were collected, but anecdotal data reveal that some sites experienced substantial turnover as a result of the new mandate. This resulted in an initial shortage of qualified teachers to fill those positions. The State attempted to counter that trend with outreach and incentives for teachers to take positions in the Abbott districts. For example, the Department of Education sponsored an initiative that offered cash incentives and laptop computers to attract Abbott teachers.

A relevant question is what happened to the teachers who opted out and left their positions in Abbott programs. Again based on anecdotal data, a number of scenarios played out. In some cases teachers were switched into different classrooms, so that teachers without the degree taught younger children or children in non-Abbott classrooms. Thus while quality increased in Abbott classrooms, it may have decreased in the classrooms of younger children or children in non-Abbott settings. Another scenario saw some assistant teachers interested in getting the degree switched into the lead teacher role, while the lead teacher not interested in going back to school switched into the assistant role. This role reversal caused some relational problems in classrooms.

Non-Abbott programs have seen some fallout. While the issue of compensation parity is being addressed within Abbott districts, this has had effects for early childhood programs outside of those districts, and within centers providing both Abbott and non-
Abbott classrooms. It has created a two-tiered system for Abbott and non-Abbott programs. For example, Head Start teachers earn $38,000 for a full year. Abbott teachers with the same qualifications in public schools earn $40,000 for ten months. As a result, Head Start has had to offer health and pension benefits in order to be competitive. For these same reasons, some programs in non-Abbott districts have had problems hiring teachers with higher credentials because teachers want to be employed by Abbott districts where compensation packages are better.

The final results are still out. Finally, the September 2004 deadline has not yet arrived, and therefore the final results are not in. While early results are promising, results on P-3 certifications have yet to play out completely. Teachers are in various stages of obtaining their certifications, but as of January 2003, a little under half of all teachers had not yet achieved necessary certification, and almost 15 percent of those teachers had not yet received their bachelor’s degree.

Results also are not yet known on whether the increases in Abbott teacher credentials have shown the expected positive differences in classroom quality, and as a result, positive changes in child outcomes.

II. SUMMARY: Success Factors for Meeting Higher Preschool Teacher Qualifications

As the New Jersey experience demonstrates, preparing competent and qualified early childhood teachers requires multiple strategies implemented by numerous partners. Both research and the New Jersey experience suggest at least five key “success factors” for the successful implementation of policies that raise teacher qualifications.

Realistic but Ambitious Timelines
Early childhood teachers come to the field with varying educational levels. In raising the standard of teacher qualifications, realistic, but ambitious, timeframes should be set in ways that balance the needs of children as well as those of existing teachers and new entrants to the field.

► New Jersey was ambitious in its four-year timeline for Abbott teachers to earn their degree and certification, but results so far show that many teachers are well on their way to meeting it.

Quality Teacher Education
Early childhood teacher preparation programs need to be based on sound instructional practices and a quality curriculum. A major shortcoming of teacher preparation programs lies in their overemphasis on child development and learning that is separate from gaining the skills to plan curriculum, particularly when colleges employ primarily part-time faculty without time to provide needed mentoring. Thus, in addition to

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<td>New Jersey’s experience reveals that to successfully meet a mandate that preschool teachers have a bachelor’s degree, that mandate needs to be supported with policies and sufficient funding for:</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Realistic but Ambitious Timelines</td>
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<td>- Quality Teacher Education</td>
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<td>- Strengthened Teacher Education Infrastructure</td>
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<td>- Teacher Scholarships</td>
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<td>- Adequate Teacher Compensation and Parity</td>
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coursework, teachers should have field-based experiences with competent and well-qualified mentors who can model best practices and provide supervision.

▷ New Jersey made sure Abbott teachers had supervised field-based experiences through teacher preparation programs at state colleges and universities, and the provisional teacher program required for P-3 certification.

Early childhood teachers need to be prepared to teach children with diverse cognitive, linguistic and cultural backgrounds. A large majority of teachers perceive that they are not well prepared to teach diverse types of children. The quality of educational experiences needs to be raised to improving the course content, pedagogy, and field-based experiences in these areas among existing and new teacher cohorts.

▷ New Jersey’s Department of Education specified areas of study required for the P-3 certificate. The P-3 specialized pedagogy includes study in child development and learning; understanding the family and community; and curriculum and assessment.

Strengthened Teacher Education Infrastructure
There are an estimated 1200 early childhood teacher preparation programs in the United States. Most offer an associate’s degree or less, and less than half offer a bachelor’s degree. Furthermore, these programs tend to have a small number of faculty (many part-time) serving large numbers of students, with little capability for providing students with out-of-classroom mentoring and career guidance.

Policies that support the recommended four-year level for quality early childhood teachers require associated funding to address much needed increases in the infrastructure of teacher preparation programs. This includes addressing faculty shortages in the short-term, and developing recruitment systems that enable early childhood educators to obtain advanced degrees and become faculty members. In particular, attention must be paid to recruiting ethnically and culturally diverse faculty to reflect the changing demographics of children in this country. Faculty also need ongoing professional development, especially in the areas of diversity, inclusive approaches, and accommodating individualized learners.

▷ New Jersey State funds and state-based foundations supported colleges and universities with funding to build new early childhood teacher preparation programs and strengthen others.

Articulation issues must be addressed comprehensively so that students can earn and transfer credits from two-year colleges to four-year colleges. This involves appropriate resources (e.g., information, technical assistance) that facilitate institutional agreements. Two-year colleges need to clearly inform students about the difference between an associate’s degree and a terminal certificate, the differences in course requirements for the two, and which classes may be transferred with full or partial credit to nearby four-year institutions.

▷ In New Jersey, individual two- and four-year colleges negotiated articulation agreements and policies on credits transfer. Outreach materials and counseling were offered through multiple channels to inform students about transfer options.
Teacher Scholarships
To build a well-qualified teacher workforce, grant, loan and loan-forgiveness programs must be expanded. At the same time, new financial aid programs for early childhood teachers are necessary for those who have dedicated their lives to the care of young children but do not have high levels of formal education. The early childhood education workforce consists of many low-income individuals who are unlikely to have earned a bachelor’s degree or borrow large sums of money to pay for college. Federal research shows that low-income students are less likely to drop out of college if they receive grant aid rather than loans. Whether teachers receive financial aid through loans or grants or through Head Start or the Higher Education Act, service requirements can be attached to aid to ensure that such individuals continue to teach in those programs (with appropriate compensation for higher credentials earned).

- New Jersey’s Department of Human Services provided scholarships for teachers in community-based programs who needed to return to school. These scholarships were essential; without them most would not have been able to afford additional education opportunities.

Academic and nonacademic support services add value to a scholarship program. The average age of teachers of 3-and 4-year old children is 39 years. Being out of an academic setting for a long period of time requires adjustments to the demands of coursework. Teachers can be motivated to pursue and complete their degrees when adequate advising and remedial help are available.

- New Jersey colleges and universities offering the P-3 certificate provided special supports and counseling services to help students deal with issues of literacy, English proficiency, and study and time management skills.

Adequate Teacher Compensation and Parity
It is not enough to raise the standards of teacher qualifications to assure high quality care for America’s young children. Preschool teachers are poorly paid. The median salary in 2002 was $21,332, less than what a janitor or cook typically earns. By comparison, the median kindergarten teacher’s salary was $43,152, double the median preschool teacher’s salary.

Preschool teacher compensation is associated with program quality. Poor pay and poor benefits make for high teacher turnover that, in turn, weakens the social and emotional relationships between children and teachers. Learning is a social activity and does not occur divorced of its context. Less than optimal results can be expected when social relationships lack the trust and nurturance that stability brings.

Compensation issues must be addressed in order to recruit and retain good teachers in early education programs. Poor working conditions and wages are one of the key challenges in attracting and retaining students to in the early childhood profession. Without parity in compensation for early childhood teachers who earn four-year degrees, teachers will seek higher paying jobs in kindergarten or elementary classrooms.

- New Jersey provided State funding to address compensation parity between teachers in public schools and community-based programs.
ENDNOTES

1 Authors are consultants to the Harvard Family Research Project. Correspondence may be directed to Julia Coffman at Julia_Coffman@msn.com and M. Elena Lopez at elena_lopez@post.harvard.edu.

2 This brief is based on research conducted in June 2003. Two methods were used to gather data for the brief: 1) literature and document review, and 2) key informant interviews with individuals representing the perspectives of researchers, New Jersey colleges and universities, New Jersey's Department of Education, early childhood teachers, and funders.


References for textbook:


12 Saluja, et al. (2002). Ibid.


14 Ackerman (2003). Ibid.


18 P-3 pedagogy includes study in three areas: child development and learning, understanding family and community, curriculum/assessment.
Responding to concerns about the impact of this GPA threshold on hiring otherwise qualified staff, the State Board of Education issued a two-year moratorium on the 2.75 requirement, and lowered the GPA level to 2.50 until September 2004.

Note that some colleges also offer a master's program leading to P-3 certification.

Bloomfield College, Caldwell College, College of Saint Elizabeth, Kean University, Monmouth University, Montclair State University, New Jersey City University, Rowan University, Seton Hall University, The College of New Jersey, William Paterson University.


Isenberg (2002). Ibid.

Personal communication with Trust for Early Education, June 23, 2003.


Personal communication with Trust for Early Education, June 23, 2003.

Saluja, Early, & Clifford (2002). Ibid.


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