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Partnering for Preschool

A Study of Center Directors
in New Jersey's Mixed-Delivery
Abbott Program



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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Study Rationale

In the first decade of the twenty-first century, the United States is undergoing a dramatic shift in how it defines the school years. Preschool, rather than kindergarten, is increasingly the target for school entry, and efforts are underway across the country and the political spectrum to establish or expand publicly funded preschool for four-year-old children, and, in some cases, three-year-olds as well (Kirp, 2007). These programs are seen as one of several strategies for addressing achievement gaps between children of different economic, cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Roughly three-quarters of the states supported a preschool program with public dollars in the 2005-06 academic year, serving nearly one million four-year-olds and more than 100,000 three-year-olds. Over \$3 billion in state funds were spent on this effort (Barnett, Hustedt, Hawkinson & Robin, 2006). And as the 2008 presidential election approaches, many candidates are unveiling plans for expanding early care and education services.

But although most states are now engaged in providing public preschool services, it would be mistaken to assume that they are approaching the creation or expansion of such services in the same way. State-supported, publicly funded preschool programs vary along several dimensions:

- whom they serve: all children in the state, or target groups;
- who delivers the service: school districts, private child care centers, or a combination;
- the length of day and school year: year-round, or during the academic year only; and for two-and-a-half, three, or six hours per day.

According to the National Institute for Early Education Research (Barnett et al., 2006), states also vary considerably with regard to preschool quality standards, as well as the preparation, qualifications and compensation of teachers. NIEER has specified ten benchmarks for state standards, corresponding roughly to the program features that have been shown to produce the best learning outcomes for children (Phillips, Gormley,

& Lowenstein, 2007; Reynolds, 2000; Reynolds et al., 2007; Takamishi & Bogard, 2007). NIEER's latest survey indicates that although many states are improving, only two states met all ten benchmarks in 2005-06, six states met nine, and ten states met less than half.

The New Jersey Abbott Preschool Program stands out as a model worthy of study for several reasons. The program has met nine out of ten of the NIEER quality benchmarks (see Table 1), and the recent Abbott Preschool Program Longitudinal Effects Study (APPLES) found ongoing improvements in classroom quality, as well as comparable quality between private and school district classrooms (Frede, Jung, Barnett, Lamy, & Figueras, 2007). The study also found that children showed gains through kindergarten in language, literacy, and math, regardless of the type of Abbott preschool setting they had attended, and that those who had attended for two years, at ages three and four, showed the greatest gains. Already in its ninth year of implementation, with much of the "start-up noise" that accompanies new initiatives having settled down, New Jersey's preschool effort can now be considered a mature, established program. Most importantly, as one of many remedies mandated by the New Jersey Supreme Court in order to address educational inequities in the state, the program was ambitious in its design and committed funds to support a high-quality service from its inception.

In a series of New Jersey Supreme Court decisions known as *Abbott v. Burke*, the 28 (now 31) urban school districts serving the state's poorest students were ordered to create systems of high-quality preschool for all three- and four-year-old children, beginning in the 1999-2000 school year. High-quality programs were defined as having a class size of no more than 15 students, with one certified teacher and one assistant teacher per classroom. In addition, the *Abbott VI* decision in 2000 ordered that each program use a developmentally appropriate curriculum linked to the state's core curriculum content standards, and provide adequate facilities, special education, bilingual education, transportation, and health services.

To enact these requirements, the developers of the Abbott Preschool Program—a group including policy makers, academic experts, practitioners and advocates—tackled three key issues that others across the country have grappled with as they design, expand or revamp such programs.

Table 1. New Jersey’s Rating on NIEER Quality Standards Checklist

State PreK Policy	NIEER Benchmark	New Jersey Requirements	Does New Jersey requirement reach benchmark?
Early learning standards	Comprehensive	Comprehensive	Yes
Teacher degree	BA	BA	Yes
Teacher specialized training	Specialized in pre-K	Certification in Pre-K-3	Yes
Assistant Teacher degree	CDA or equivalent	High school diploma	No
Teacher in-service	At least 15 hours per year	100 clock hours per 5 years	Yes
Maximum class size	20 or lower	15	Yes
Staff-child ratio	1:10 or better	2:15	Yes
Required screening, referral, support services	Vision, hearing, and at least 1 support service	Vision, hearing, health and development and support services	Yes
Meals	At least 1/day	Breakfast, lunch and snack	Yes
Required monitoring	Site visits	Site visits and other monitoring	Yes

Source: Barnett, W.S., Hustedt, J.T., Hawkinson, L.E., & Robin, K.B. (2006). *The State of Preschool 2006*. New Brunswick, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research.

First, they were committed to establishing a preschool program that not only operated within school districts at school sites, but also built upon existing early care and education services in the community. Thus, the Abbott Program can provide lessons for those who are interested in developing a mixed delivery system, in which publicly funded preschool is offered in private child care centers as well as in public schools.

Second, they recognized that many of the families in the 31 school districts targeted for the Abbott Program would need a full-day, full-year service to meet their child care needs. Accordingly, the program developed a system of “wrap-around” services to extend its six-hour day and ten-month year to a 10-hour day and full year.

Lastly, they sought to establish a system that placed preschool teachers on an equal footing with their K-12 colleagues with respect to compensation and qualifications. To ensure quality and consistency across centers, the court’s *Abbott VI* ruling mandated that all teach-

ers in Abbott preschools—unless they already held the Nursery or Kindergarten through Grade 8 certificate, and had two years of experience working with preschool aged children—obtain at least a bachelor’s degree and a Preschool-Grade 3 (P-3) certification by September 2004. The program designers therefore recognized the need to provide resources that would enable institutions of higher education to expand and revamp their programs, and they provided financial assistance and other supports to help current and prospective teachers meet these new professional development goals by the target date. In 2002, in *Abbott v. Burke VII*, the court further ruled that once teachers in the Abbott Program had completed their degree and certification, their salaries were to be raised to parity with K-12 teachers.

The Abbott Preschool Program now serves approximately 40,000 children, the majority of them in classrooms located in private child care centers. According to the APPLES evaluation (Frede et al., 2007), 56 percent of children are served in private centers, 37 per-

cent in school district classrooms, and seven percent in Head Start centers.

The purpose of this New Jersey Abbott Preschool Director Study has been to elicit the perspectives of child care and Head Start center directors, who (together with school district administrators) have borne the front-line responsibility for the day-to-day implementation of this ambitious educational reform. The study has compiled firsthand accounts from directors about their experiences in becoming Abbott contracting sites and operating Abbott classrooms, and their thoughts about how the program might be improved, specifically looking at features related to administration, governance, staffing, and wrap-around services.

While most directors made suggestions for improving the Abbott Preschool Program, their assessments of the program were overwhelmingly positive, citing increased quality in their centers and impressive gains in the learning and school readiness of the children they served. They noted increased skill and stability among teaching staff, largely due to the program's mandates for higher levels of training, education, and compensation. Finally, most directors praised the quality of the support services they had received from their public school district.

Between February and May, 2007, we conducted in-depth interviews with 98 directors of private child care and Head Start centers and organizations operating Abbott classrooms. These centers were located throughout the state in 16 of the 31 Abbott districts, and included single-site and multiple-site centers, multiservice organizations administering one or more centers, and Head Start grantees. Our exploration of the Abbott Preschool Program is intended to inform those who are currently working to improve it, as well as those who are designing publicly funded preschool programs in other states and communities.

The New Jersey Early Childhood Context

As the New Jersey Supreme Court noted in 2000, when plaintiffs returned to argue that little progress had been made since the 1998 decisions, "The task was, and is, enormous. In effect, a major transformation in the educational system serving the state's poor, urban districts has been authorized by the legislature." Despite the enormity of the task, the 2000 decision reaffirmed the requirements of *Abbott V*, and, along with a

new governor and new leadership at the Department of Education, it set in motion a number of reforms in the state government offices administering early childhood services, as well as in school districts and in the higher education system.

As a means of transitioning policy into practice, school districts were encouraged to collaborate with existing Head Start and private child care centers. Twenty-four districts chose this option. Given that child care, Head Start, and public schools had been administered and funded by distinct government agencies, an attempt was made to consolidate primary responsibility for state-funded preschool education into one agency. The Department of Human Services maintained its responsibility as the lead agency for child care, including Head Start and wrap-around care for all Abbott centers. It took responsibility for administering various training supports for teachers and family workers. These included a scholarship program overseen through a contract with the Professional Development Center for Early Care and Education, now known as Professional Impact New Jersey. In addition, the Department of Human Services funded the training and technical support for family workers, newly created positions to help families in Abbott districts access and participate in preschool programs.

The Department of Education, through its Office of Early Childhood Education, took the main leadership role for implementing high-quality preschool programs. The Assistant to the Commissioner for Early Childhood Education and her team also brought key stakeholders together to develop and institute a number of policies leading to improving and sustaining classroom quality. The first of these was the development of a distinct set of early learning expectations for preschool children. New Jersey had developed Core Content Standards for pre-K through age 12, but these were very general, and did not attend to the particularities of very young children. In 2000, the Department published *Early Childhood Program Expectations: Standards of Quality*, later revised and renamed as *Preschool Teaching and Learning Expectations: Standards of Quality* (New Jersey Department Of Education, 2000, 2004b). These standards cover eight domains of learning: social and emotional development, creative arts, world languages, math, science, language arts/literacy, social studies, and health, safety and physical education.

The second of these policies was the development of the Abbott Preschool Program Implementation Guidelines (New Jersey Department of Education, 2003), to guide school district administrators through the decision-making and budgetary considerations that lead to high-quality preschool practices. Identifying and elaborating on the research base for best practices, these guidelines cover six key educational components—curriculum and program, instructional supports, professional development, supporting English language learners, inclusion intervention and support, and continuity and transition—as well as family involvement; children’s health, safety and nutrition; and evaluation tools to monitor the progress of program improvement efforts.

Third, an assessment and evaluation system was developed in order to track the impacts of the Abbott Preschool Program and to improve it. This system included a database of children and staff in the program, so that it was possible to estimate how many teachers were able to meet the September 2004 mandate of completing a bachelor’s degree and P-3 certification. In addition, the Early Learning Improvement Consortium, a group of higher education researchers, was created and charged with tracking children’s development and program quality indicators over the course of implementation. This consortium has collected data on children’s learning by using a battery of tests to assess language and cognitive development. Evaluation has also included the use of the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS-R) (Harms, Clifford, & Cryer, 2005), the Supports for Early Literacy Assessment (SELA) (Smith, Davidson, & Weisenfeld, 2001), and the Preschool Classroom Mathematics Inventory (PCMI) (Frede, Weber, Hornbeck, Stevenson-Boyd, & Colon, 2005), measuring overall classroom quality and teachers’ use of literacy and math practices.

Finally, to help Abbott preschool teachers use assessment to improve classroom practice, the state developed, and trained teachers in the use of, the Early Literacy Assessment System, or ELAS (New Jersey Department of Education, 2004a). This portfolio assessment system is based on the preschool learning expectations for language arts and literacy, and guides teachers to collect samples of children’s literacy and language development at different points in the year. To ensure the successful implementation of these policies, members of the early childhood team in the State Office of Early Childhood Education were assigned as

direct liaisons to specific school districts.

At the local level, the 31 public school district administrations were funded to develop early childhood administrative and technical assistance teams. These teams include a person designated as the district’s Early Childhood Supervisor, overseeing all early childhood programs. This person’s task includes developing the district’s program improvement plan and accompanying budget, as well as overseeing professional development experiences for the district’s preschool teachers. Each district also has a group of master teachers who report to the Early Childhood Supervisor, and provide technical assistance to teachers to implement curriculum and improve their teaching. In order to address special education and bilingual services as needed, each district has specially funded preschool special services and language education teams. If a district is contracting with Head Start and private child care centers to provide Abbott preschool services, then there is also at least one family worker, depending on the number of children being served, in one of the contracting child care centers.

Prior to the New Jersey Supreme Court’s 2000 decision in *Abbott VI* to raise preschool teacher qualifications to a bachelor’s degree and P-3 certification, teachers in the state’s private preschool centers and Head Start programs were required only to hold a group teacher license. Since New Jersey had not had a specialized early childhood teaching certificate, most of its institutions of higher education now created specialized P-3 certification programs, to meet criteria informed by the guidelines for early childhood teacher certification programs produced by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (Hyson, 2003).

These P-3 certification programs encompass both alternate route and traditional approaches to teacher preparation, and range from initial licensure at the BA level, to post-baccalaureate, master’s level, and endorsement programs. Under this system, teachers can access a program relevant to their level of qualifications no matter where they are in their professional development. A state-funded scholarship program was expanded to help child care teachers, many of whom are nontraditional students, to undertake studies toward a BA and P-3 certification. Teachers could receive financial assistance of up to \$5,000 per year for tuition costs related to attaining a BA, or MA and teacher certification, and were also eligible to receive \$50 per course for other

expenses such as books and photocopying.

The *Abbott v. Burke* decisions created a new system of publicly funded early childhood education. There is now an administrative structure in place specifically focused on improving the quality of preschool education at the local and state levels, and the state has a system of early childhood preparation and professional development that has contributed to developing a new population of certified preschool teachers paid comparably to elementary and secondary teachers.

Chapter 2

STUDY DESIGN

The universe for the New Jersey Abbott Preschool Director Study included 405 of the 440 private child care and Head Start centers, administered by a total of 270 agencies, in 16 of the 31 Abbott school districts. In most cases, these 16 districts enrolled the largest percentage of children in private Abbott preschool programs. (See Appendix for a detailed description of the study universe.) These 405 centers included single-site centers; multiple-site centers run by larger child care or multi-service agencies, and Head Start centers. Some centers, in addition to their Abbott classrooms, operated early childhood services for infants and toddlers, three- and four-year olds who were not eligible for the Abbott Program, and/or school-age children, while others operated Abbott classrooms exclusively.

The 270 eligible respondents for the study were either directors of single-site centers or the persons responsible for overseeing multiple-site agencies, usually executive directors.¹ We selected the survey sample to include respondents from across the state and from a wide variety of school districts and organizational structures. This allowed us to compare responses among similar groups of organizations and across these groups. It is important to note that we did not draw a random sample; thus, our findings are not representative of all Abbott Preschool Program directors.

Telephone interviews, averaging 30 minutes, were completed with 98 directors between February 20 and May 4, 2007. The survey questionnaire included both closed-ended and open-ended questions. The questions in the survey addressed:

- General program information
- Director demographics
- Rationale for becoming an Abbott site
- Impact of new educational requirements on staffing during the first year of implementing Abbott
- Most positive contributions of the Abbott Program
- Directors' assessment of teachers' preparation and experience
- Directors' assessment of Abbott and non-Abbott teachers
- Directors' relationship with the school district
- Directors' professional preparation and profes-

sional characteristics

- Challenges of Abbott, recommendations to improve it, and recommendations for new directors.

Data analyses were completed in four phases: 1) inductively coding all the open-ended questions; 2) data entry of both open- and closed-ended questions into SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences 14.0), and running frequencies to determine trends in the data for both kinds of questions; 3) sorting the data for open-ended questions according to assigned codes; and 4) performing inferential statistical tests (e.g., chi-square, t-test, ANOVA) on the data generated from the closed-ended questions. All significant results are reported, including group differences at a *p* value of .05 or better.

The Appendix includes a detailed description of the survey methodology, data analyses, and survey completion and response rates.

Directors in the Sample

Eighty-nine percent of interviews were conducted with directors or executive directors of organizations. The remaining interviews were conducted with individuals serving in another administrative capacity for their centers, such as directors of education, directors of academic affairs, or program supervisors. We asked respondents to provide us with demographic information, including gender, age, ethnic background, and languages spoken (Table 2). We also asked directors about their educational background and professional experience, discussed in Chapter 5.

The mean age of directors in our sample was 50.4 years. Although the current sample of directors is not representative of all directors in New Jersey preschool centers, comparisons with adult women in New Jersey point to the aging population of center directors. One-third of adult women in New Jersey are under age 40,² compared with 13 percent of directors we interviewed. Eighty-seven percent of directors we interviewed were female.

We asked directors to describe their racial or ethnic group. Slightly more than one-half of directors we interviewed identified themselves as Black or African

¹ For the sake of simplicity, we refer to all respondents throughout this study as "directors."

² U.S. Census Bureau (2006).

American; less than one-quarter were White, non-Hispanic; 11 percent were Latino or Hispanic; and 11 percent identified themselves as being of another ethnicity, including Asian American, or of more than one ethnic group.

Table 2. Demographics of Directors in the Sample (N=98)

Mean age	50.4 (SD=9.63)
Female	87%
Male	13%
Ethnicity	
African American	55.1%
White, non-Hispanic	22.4%
Latino/Hispanic	11.2%
Other	11.2%
Languages spoken fluently	
English	100%
Spanish	18%

We also asked directors what language or languages they spoke fluently. All directors reported speaking English fluently, and 18 percent reported speaking Spanish fluently. Fewer than five percent reported speaking a language other than English or Spanish fluently. The Education Law Center (2007) reports that 13.4 percent of K-12 children in Abbott school districts are classified as English language learners. The percentage of English Language Learners in the 16 school districts in our sample ranged from one percent in East Orange to 31 percent in Union City.

Centers in the Sample

The 98 organizations in our sample had been in operation for an average of 22.6 years. More than one-third had been in operation for 10 years or less, and approximately one-quarter had been in operation for 33 years or more. Organizations also varied as to how long they had been Abbott Preschool sites. About one-quarter of the organizations in our sample had been Abbott sites for five years or less, and the remaining three-quarters had been Abbott sites for six or more years.

The organizations in our sample included 287 center sites with a total of 1,131 classrooms, including 768 Abbott classrooms (Table 3). These organizations employed 1,196 teachers and 1,483 assistant teachers, with 747 teachers and 823 assistant teachers working in Abbott classrooms (Table 4). Teachers were defined as those who had the lead responsibility for a group of children or a classroom. Assistant teachers were defined as individuals who worked under the supervision of a teacher, and who did not independently supervise a classroom or group of children.

Table 3. Sites and Classroom in Sample (N=98)

	All Organizations
Number of organizations	98
Number of sites	287
Number of classrooms	1,131
Number of Abbott classrooms	768

Table 4. Teaching Staff (Abbott and non-Abbott) in the Sample (N=98)

	All Organizations
Number of teachers	1,196
Number of Abbott teachers	747
Number of assistant teachers	1,483
Number of Abbott assistant teachers	823

Chapter 3

STUDY FINDINGS: BECOMING AN ABBOTT PRESCHOOL SITE

Rationale for Initial Participation in the Program

We were interested in learning directors' initial rationales for participating in the Abbott Program. Of the 98 directors we interviewed, 60 percent were employed as directors at their centers when the decision was made to implement the program. We asked, "If you played a role in the decision to implement Abbott in your center(s), what was your rationale?"

Directors identified several reasons for becoming involved in the program. All but three who had been employed since the inception of Abbott answered this question, and nearly one-half cited the opportunity to increase children's access to preschool services. A similar proportion cited the opportunity to improve the training and compensation of their staff. About one-third spoke of improving the overall quality of their centers, and about one-quarter discussed how Abbott helped them to fulfill their organizational mission to provide educational and social services to their community. Some directors also identified the monetary benefits linked to Abbott as their initial rationale for participation.

Serving Children and the Community

Because the Abbott Program is free to families, directors understood from the start that participating would allow them, as one said, "to open their doors to all children." For some, becoming an Abbott site meant that they could reach children in their communities who were not currently enrolled in any center-based program. One director explained that Abbott gave her "the ability to provide the stimuli for the children in our urban area, to flourish and begin their academic career on the proper path." She underscored that with Abbott, she could expose children to things that more affluent preschoolers had; some, for example, "had never experienced crayons and drawing implements before."

Other directors thought that participating in the Abbott Preschool Program would enable them to continue to serve children whose families were not consistently

able to cover the cost of care, a particularly common issue for parents who were seasonal workers or who had lost their jobs. One director explained, "Very often, a parent will pull their child out of school because they have gotten laid off from their job. We didn't want them to have the educational break, leaving for a month just because their parents couldn't afford it."

Directors also saw Abbott as a vehicle for improving services to children with special needs; included in these directors' definition of "giving the children of the community a good start" was the ability to identify developmental problems.

Many of the centers operating in Abbott districts were established for the purpose of meeting the needs of low-income, mostly minority families. For those centers, Abbott was the next chapter in their history of accessing public funds on behalf of families and children in their communities.

The rationale was that we've always, as a community center, participated in any child care program, such as Social Service Block Grants, Work First, and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families. So we've always provided preschool to the children living in our town and surrounding communities, no matter what the funding source or subsidy. When this came into place, it was just a natural transition to provide child care to the children of our area, despite the different funding mechanism.

In addition, many directors identified themselves as early childhood professionals and saw Abbott as a "major happening in the field," an exciting development that they wanted to be a part of, one which included laying the groundwork for early childhood services to be linked to the public education system. As one director explained,

We were now connected, considered part of the school district. Prior to that, centers were operating on their own independently, but now we were considered a valuable part of the educational community.

Building Blocks of Quality

Given the low salaries that are endemic to the early childhood field, center directors continually wrestle with how to recruit and retain well-prepared teaching staff. Abbott raised the bar on professional quali-

fications for teachers, provided resources to help them pursue their education, and guaranteed a substantial increase in compensation for those who met the new requirements. For many directors, Abbott offered a solution to a problem that has plagued the field for decades, and for some, this was the primary motivator for participating in the program.

The reason we were hoping to get into the Abbott Program was because [Abbott teachers] get offered comparable salaries to our bachelor degree, P-3-certified teachers. That allowed my staff to make additional money.

By upgrading staff preparation and stabilizing their teaching staff through higher salaries and better benefits, directors saw Abbott as a way to improve the quality of their centers, something that is challenging to accomplish when facing high turnover and insufficiently trained personnel.

Our major reason was that we saw it as a way to increase the quality of care; it gave us the ability to hire quality staff, to pay people what they're worth. Before Abbott, we were paying our group teachers in the preschool program \$23,000 to \$24,000 a year. They've more than doubled that. We've got really high-quality people. It's completely changed the classrooms around.

While competent staff are essential, several other features must also be in place for centers to enhance or maintain quality, including a high ratio of adults to children, manageable class sizes, appropriate learning materials, and safe and inviting facilities. Those who developed the Abbott Program viewed quality as involving multiple ingredients, as did many directors who welcomed this combination of standards and resources, seeing the new program, as one director said, as “a chance to improve.”

We believed all along that we were offering quality services, whether they were Abbott or non-Abbott. But we always thought we could do better. It came with money for more supplies, computers, and teachers having the opportunity to go back to school.

I thought that the combination of Head Start and the early childhood program offered by the school district would provide even more benefits to the children being served in the Abbott district. All certified teachers,

additional funding for things like supplies and trips, [were] really an enhancement of the Head Start services.

Some directors saw Abbott as an opportunity to transform their centers, while others saw it as an opportunity to enhance what they were already doing and to serve as a model for better practices for their non-Abbott classrooms. One director of a site with Abbott and non-Abbott classrooms saw it as “an opportunity to gain some knowledge and upgrade our centers,” adding, “I have tried to use what’s going on in the Abbott centers as a model for the other classrooms.”

Abbott brought with it a dependable and more generous source of funding than had ever been available. For many directors, Abbott made good business sense, while at the same time being consistent with their program mission.

From a business perspective, the most important reason for embarking on this was that it was a steady contract, the dollars were there, they were going to help us build the personnel because they were requiring certain specs for the teachers and the TA's, and the classrooms had to have certain materials. There were a lot of pluses that came with taking on an Abbott contract. And then, once you get into it, you realize that it's not just a benefit from a business perspective, but from a human perspective as well, for the children and their families.

Economic Well-Being and Survival

For some, becoming an Abbott site was motivated primarily by economics. As one director said, “We couldn’t compete with free.” To a number of directors, becoming an Abbott site seemed an offer they couldn’t refuse, the only way they thought they could remain in business.

One reason was economic survival, because previously we served three- and four-year-old children in our state-funded program. And when you are offering free care, people are going to gravitate toward the free care, so part of it was in defense of our organization.

We really did not have a choice, because if we had not chosen to go with Abbott, we would not have been able to function with the limited funding we receive from another source.

Impact of New Educational Requirements on Staffing

The 2000 *Abbott VI* ruling mandated that all teachers in Abbott preschools—unless they already held the Nursery or Kindergarten through Grade 8 certificate, and had two years of experience working with preschool aged children—obtain a minimum of a bachelor’s degree, with Preschool-to-Grade 3 (P-3) certification, by September 2004. Since there had not been an early childhood teaching certificate in the state, most of New Jersey’s institutions of higher education created new specialized P-3 certification programs, using both an alternate route and traditional approaches to teacher preparation. Further, since school districts were required to collaborate with Head Start and private child care centers already offering preschool in their communities, and many of these teachers had to obtain a P-3 credential, a state-funded scholarship program was initiated to pay for teachers’ tuition as they upgraded their qualifications. Thus, a system of preparation was set in place to make it possible for preschool teachers—typically in their late 30s, with limited qualifications (Ryan & Ackerman, 2005)—to access education while also working full-time (Lobman, Ryan & Mc Laughlin, 2005).

Directors who had been in their centers at the time recalled several major impacts to their centers because of this mandate, including teachers returning to school while working full-time, and a range of changes in center staffing to meet the court requirements.

Returning to School

Directors across all center types reported that many of their staff took the opportunity offered by the state and returned to school to improve their qualifications. Many directors viewed the requirements and the incentives being provided as positive opportunities for their staff. One director observed:

Our teachers got on board and took advantage of the full state scholarship of \$5,000 a year. They had to maintain a certain grade level, but it was an opportunity for many of our existing staff to get an education and continue their degrees, which they wouldn’t have been able to do otherwise.

The four-year time frame also meant that the transition to these new requirements was “not that much of

a hardship,” as one director said, for staff and centers. Another director described this transition for the staff and center as a logical progression:

We started with two classrooms. The two teachers that I hired had their CDA credential, as opposed to the teacher certification. Because it was the grace period, and they were providing the opportunity for them to go back and get their degrees, it did not affect us immediately. Basically, they enrolled in school and began to pursue the degree.

Other directors viewed the grace period as a motivator for staff; one director recalled that it “impacted them in a very positive way, because it pushed them to start going and take more than one course at a time.”

In some centers, the instructional staff returning to school included assistant teachers enrolled in programs leading to a CDA or an associate degree. Only a few directors spoke about this issue, but in doing so, they highlighted how the court requirements impacted all staffing in their centers. As one director said, “Among the good things that happened, I had three other people get CDAs who are on staff now, who are non-Abbott.”

Changes in Staffing

Making sure that staff went back to school to be in compliance with the mandate was one challenge, but for some centers, there were also teachers who did not go back to school, or who could not meet the new standards for some reason. As a consequence, centers went through a number of staffing changes.

We looked at it as a positive thing, because the State of New Jersey did offer them some sweetheart deals: go back to school and we’ll pay for it. So there were some who said, “Sign me up. Where do I go?” And there was a group that said, “You know this isn’t going to last. I’m not going to do that. I am who I am, and I don’t need that degree.” I had to release them.

Teachers had a choice whether or not to pursue further qualifications, and this choice had an impact on center staffing. Centers composed solely of Abbott classrooms had to replace teachers who did not have the qualifications to meet the mandate, or reassign them as assistant teachers. For directors operating centers with a mix of classrooms, it was possible to meet the

mandate and retain experienced teachers either by moving them to non-Abbott classrooms or by “downgrading” lead teachers to assistant teachers in Abbott classrooms. In agencies that operated multiple sites, directors could also move staff to other centers in order to retain their expertise while still being in compliance with the mandate.

The directors we interviewed provided anecdotal evidence about trying several different ways of shifting staff within or across their centers. They also commented on the staff changes that arose because of turnover and the need to hire new teachers.

Movement of Staff to Other Positions

About one-third of the directors we interviewed reported that the court mandate meant that some staff had to be moved around so that the center or organization’s Abbott classrooms met the law. For some, the only option, as one director put it, was to “demote all of those people who did not meet the requirements.” Directors tended to consider such demotions a matter of teachers’ own choice; one director said, for example, “We had to downgrade the ones who opted not to, and replace them with people who were qualified.” Several directors reported that teachers chose to stay as assistant teachers in Abbott classrooms “even though it was a reduced rate,” because assistant teachers were eligible for the better salaries offered under Abbott regulations, comparable to paraprofessional salaries in school districts. Directors operating centers with a mix of Abbott and non-Abbott classrooms even described some creative ways to shift staff around, so that teachers did not lose the authority associated with being lead teachers. One director recalled:

They took over positions as group teachers for our preschoolers who were ineligible for Abbott by way of not living in the city, or [because of the] age requirement. They became group teachers of the infant and toddler population. We had some we put in the loop in order to get their P-3, to first get their degrees. We lost no one. And some of them are still in that loop. It was an impossible task for many, to try to finish in that time frame and raise a family and work. And they don’t mind the competition that the Abbott teachers were brought in, or that we had to do some recruitment, because they still have positions of power. But they stayed with the agency and still were able to reap a lot of the benefits—the education piece being paid for.

While many directors tried to alleviate the differences between Abbott and non-Abbott teachers, one director working in a multiple-site organization with Abbott and non-Abbott classrooms considered the rearrangements of teaching staff within centers unfair: “You had a lot of teacher assistants who had their associate degree and were better teachers. But because they didn’t have their bachelor’s degree, they were pretty much shuffled to the rear, and to me, that was unfair.”

Hiring of New Teachers

Even if directors could rearrange some of their teaching staff, the new requirement of one qualified teacher for every 15 children in every Abbott classroom meant that some directors had to hire new teachers. About one-quarter of the directors we interviewed, who had been at their centers when the mandate was implemented, reported having done so. Obviously, centers that began as Abbott centers hired an entirely new teaching staff. For others, the new teacher-child ratios resulted in the need for new teachers, due to the need to open more classrooms. Still others reported expanding their centers to meet the demand for slots, and, as a consequence, having to recruit new teachers.

Turnover

About one-quarter of directors reported that their centers experienced staff turnover as a result of increased expectations for teachers. Sometimes, it was difficult to see teachers leave, even though directors could see the benefit of hiring more qualified staff:

When we switched to Abbott, a lot of my teachers were older and they did not want to go to school and meet the requirements of the Abbott Program, so they left. I was able to get certified teachers with the P-3 by the time they left, but I lost some good teachers because they didn’t want to start school all over again at their age. They had the experience, but just didn’t have the patience.

It was not until the Abbott VII ruling in 2002 that Abbott preschool teachers were paid equally, no matter where they worked. Not surprisingly perhaps, directors also reported experiencing turnover because of the disparity in wages between qualified teachers working in the public schools and those working in child care. One director reported, “I used to have a lot of turnover with teachers because they were highly qualified and

would leave for more money. They would go to the Board of Ed. Now I don't have that, because they make the same with me that they would with the Board of Ed." Another director agreed:

The first year was rough. The teachers would stay a little while and [then] go away to the school district where they could make more money. But subsequently, when there was parity of pay between the school district and those of us who are private providers, we have people who work for us now.

An additional issue was that most teachers who had to upgrade their qualifications were nontraditional students. Alternate route programs were designed to enable teachers to work full-time and obtain a credential, but traditional teacher preparation programs were not always as responsive. One director argued that university requirements led to the loss of staff:

Both of my two teachers at that time were almost finished with their CDA. And unfortunately for us, they had to leave to go full time because they had to do their student teaching. And they basically figured that it was going to take them longer to get their degree only one course at a time, so they basically opted to go full time into school. We had to hire different staff.

Several directors also reported that the various staffing changes in response to the new requirements altered the makeup of their staff teams, including ethnic composition. One director commented, "My staff became more White and less African American, but at the same time, we became more bilingual." Another director reported a positive impact on the diversity of her staff: "As we saw the need for additional staff, we hired them, and we were able to get a better diversity of teachers. We actually have a couple of Arab American teachers, and that is part of our population. That has been a real plus for us."

Assistance in the Transition to New Staffing Requirements

Directors reported on several kinds of assistance they received or sought out to help them with meeting the new teacher requirements. First, they used a variety of networks and resources to make adjustments to their staffing. Second, most of the directors we interviewed reported receiving some kind of assistance from the school district.

Actions Taken by Directors

Directors reported taking one of two actions to ensure they were in compliance with the mandate for a qualified teacher in every Abbott classroom. First, they sought to support their teachers and assistant teachers in accessing the appropriate training. For some, this involved being more flexible in terms of staff work hours—for example, letting them leave early to attend classes. One director explained, "I pretty much did everything they possibly could ask me to do. If they needed time off, I gave them time off. If they needed to finish their classes in the center during their break time, I gave it to them." The director of a center located on a community college campus spoke of helping her teachers navigate the P-3 system: "We worked with the college, the enrollment program here, and the university. They came in and advised staff on courses that they could take, and how they could assist them in taking those."

Second, directors were proactive in the recruitment and hiring of suitably qualified staff for their centers. Some worked independently and followed typical hiring procedures by "putting ads in the paper and over the internet." Others reported drawing on their formal and informal networks to gather information about staffing requirements and to connect them with potential teachers. One director noted that she and other local directors shared résumés. Another described a number of networks she engaged with:

I talked to directors who had been in the business for a number of years before Abbott started, talked to folks within the public schools, went to their personnel office and looked at their applicants to find personnel. Networking, word of mouth, basically was how we went about filling those staffing positions.

Other directors reported taking no action, because their centers were not adversely affected by the new staffing requirements. One director said, "The agency is very stable. And you now have the opportunity to bring in people at the same pay scale as the public school system. We have not had problems finding anyone at any time." Another director commented that since most of her staff went to school at night, no issues arose in the day-to-day operation of her center. For others, no action was required because the necessary services were in place, including scholarships to go back to school, appropriate programs at local universities, and school

district staff who helped with hiring. One director told us, "They provided everything," and elaborated as follows:

A lot of courses became available through different agencies like the Urban League, and there was a lot of stuff going around informing us of all these resources, to [help] our aides to go out and get their CDAs. There was a lot out there for them. And even as far as paying for it, they had grants.

Assistance Offered by School Districts

The requirement for a certified teacher with a BA in every Abbott preschool classroom was not clarified by the New Jersey Supreme Court until 2000, even though private providers and public school districts had begun to work together to provide preschool education for eligible three- and four-year-olds the year before. Since the primary administrative responsibility for the educational needs of preschool children was given to school districts, we wanted to learn about the kinds of assistance that districts provided to directors with the transition to the new staffing regulations. Of the 55 directors who had been in their positions when the new staffing regulations were enacted, most reported receiving school district assistance with training. About one-third said the local school district had helped them with recruitment and hiring of suitably qualified teachers. About one-third, however, reported that they did not receive any assistance.

The most common form of assistance from school districts was some form of training—typically, monthly meetings where directors could learn about the various state regulations and requirements. As one noted, "In the beginning, there were a lot of meetings, because it was new. They had to keep us abreast of everything that we needed to implement."

Other directors spoke of school districts as a resource for information about the new expectations for preschool teacher education. One said, "We received a grant for the teachers to go back to school, and all the information they needed to enroll. Whatever questions that [teachers] had, [district staff] were always open to them." Another cited the school district as a source of information about "colleges and where [teachers] can go."

Some directors talked about efforts made by specific districts to individualize the training and support of-

ferred to child care staff. One director reported, for example, that the district provided substitute teachers when teachers had to attend classes.

Almost one-third of directors who were at their current centers at the time of the 2000 Supreme Court mandate said that their local districts had helped them find qualified preschool teachers through recruitment fairs, teacher listings, and the like. One director described having access to teachers through a district-organized hiring fair. Several directors said their districts had made lists of qualified teacher candidates available to them. As one said, "They would send us résumés about people who were looking for positions and who were qualified." Another noted, "They were by all means opening up their doors to us to look at any résumés that they had." Yet another noted the initiatives provided through the State Department of Education:

The Department of Ed set up some group opportunities for centers to meet with candidates and identify people who might be able to work for you. They set up an on-line system which allows staff who are credentialed or in the process of being credentialed to put their names out, and then allows you to access that information so you can contact them.

Other directors were not so positive in describing the support from school districts related to the new staffing requirements. One director argued that the district could have done more to help with the transition: "They require you to have all the paperwork in place. If you don't, they'll tell you that this person doesn't qualify. But as far as them saying, 'Here's a list of teachers, go and get them'? No." Many of the Head Start directors we interviewed reported that they had received "nothing" from their respective school districts. One stated that "Head Start had to heavily support their requirements," implying that there was little benefit for her center. Several of the Head Start directors described the relationship with the school district as a competition for teachers in the beginning. One summed up the support from the school district as more oversight than useful help: "They really didn't give a whole lot of assistance, in terms of making a transition. But what they do provide is a lot of monitoring."

On the other hand, several directors who mentioned receiving little or no assistance from the school district found this understandable, because, as one said, "Everybody was learning." One director said that while

the district hadn't provided much help, "They were more than understanding of the burden the state had put upon us." Another director noted:

I'm not going to say they weren't supportive. But you've got to figure that what I was going through on a small scale, they were going through on a major scale. And [when] you have edicts hurtling down, things don't go up, they come down. So we were all essentially in the same boat.

Despite these mixed perceptions on the assistance provided by school districts to centers, the majority of directors reported that all of their current Abbott teachers met the new requirements. Those who said that some teachers were still in school were referring to those with a BA who were still working toward the P-3 certificate via the alternate route. That is, all of these child care centers had a qualified teaching staff. The court mandate and the system of incentives to encourage child care teachers to return to school also seem to have contributed to a professional track for child care staff; several directors noted that many of their staff members were continuing to improve their qualifications. One director explained:

One of our teachers started with us, and in fact worked to get her AA, then her BA. Now she is working on her master's. Then we had two teachers that started out as assistants, and now they are P-3 certified and took that big jump in salary. So, to me, it's been a good opportunity for teachers.

Chapter 4

STUDY FINDINGS: BEING AN ABBOTT PRESCHOOL SITE

Perceived Benefits of the Abbott Preschool Program

At the time of our interviews with directors, their centers had been operating Abbott classrooms for at least two years, and, on average, for about six-and-a-half years. We asked, “Thinking about your experiences as a director (or executive director), what have been the three most positive contributions of the Abbott Preschool Program to your center(s)?” All 98 directors answered this question, and in discussing the program’s benefits, they reiterated many of the themes that had motivated their initial participation. Notwithstanding the challenges that they identified (discussed in Chapter 6), all directors cited positive contributions of the Abbott Program to their centers.

As most had hoped, Abbott enabled many children in need to have access to more and better services, and the program provided the necessary infrastructure for centers to upgrade their services. More than one-half of the directors we interviewed noted an increase in staff skills and stability, supported by higher salaries and better educational opportunities. Nearly one-half mentioned the Abbott Program’s consistent and substantial funding, enabling them to stabilize their services and enhance their learning environments. Approximately one-third said that Abbott had helped them provide more extensive and better-quality services for children and families. A similar proportion of directors cited the benefit of being able to help children who were otherwise at risk of entering kindergarten substantially behind their peers. Some directors, often to their surprise, reported developing productive partnerships with their school districts as a benefit of the Abbott Preschool Program.

Supporting Quality Centers

The recent APPLES study (Frede et al., 2007) indicated that privately-operated centers taking part in the Abbott Preschool Program have consistently shown quality improvement, providing classroom experiences that are now on par with school district sites, and far exceeding the average quality of non-Abbott, center-based care. Directors identified three interwoven fea-

tures of the Abbott Preschool Program that had enabled them to improve their centers: support for staff, stable and sufficient funding for center materials and operations, and resources to offer comprehensive services to children and families.

Supporting Staff Through Education, Professional Development and Better Compensation

Limited resources for staff can fuel many problems, such as high turnover, the difficulty of recruiting adequately prepared staff, and burnout, all of which work against efforts to maintain or improve center quality. For decades, many have been calling for improved salaries, incentives and educational supports for early childhood staff, but few solutions have been available. Directors widely reported that the Abbott Program’s investment in education and salaries for teaching staff had indeed addressed many entrenched problems. In some cases, being able to pay better salaries meant that directors could recruit more qualified staff. In others, Abbott provided the opportunity and resources for staff to return to school, hone their skills, and expand their knowledge. In both situations, staff stability improved. In Head Start centers, many of which already employed substantial numbers of teachers with college degrees, directors tended to view the salary improvement dollars as the primary benefit of participating in Abbott. Two interviewees—the director of a multiservice organization with Abbott and non-Abbott classrooms, and a Head Start center director—described the experience as follows:

The salaries. From the time when I started in early childhood, it’s a great difference. We don’t have to be in competition with the schools, because our teachers are making the same salaries. They want to be in early childhood education, and because they can make a living wage in it, they’re here. They’re doing what they really want to do.

My staff make comparable salaries, and so I’m not having a constant revolving door, which was the situation [before]. Right now, my teachers are making 61 percent more than they were making before Abbott. So that’s certainly an encouragement. And they’re on the same salary guide that the district teachers are on. So, therefore, there’s no need for them to leave.

The designers of the Abbott Program recognized the need to help child care center staff pursue further edu-

cation by providing financial aid and other support. Unlike some previous Head Start mandates for further staff education that had carried no funding, the teacher certification requirements of the Abbott Preschool Program did not impose a financial burden on child care centers. According to one Head Start director, “It allowed us to upgrade our teaching staff and not have to worry about where we were going to get the money to do that.”

Directors noted that the benefits of greater professional development and educational opportunities accrued to all of their staff, not just the Abbott teachers but also the directors themselves and the non-Abbott teaching staff:

It has had a ripple effect, that everybody now sees, ‘Gee, I can do this too.’ And the support systems that came with it: New Jersey Professional Development, Kean University, established an office in this city, because we had a great need. They literally were able to come to our centers individually, providing scholarships for the teachers in the Abbott Program. It was so far reaching that they realized that you should build the whole [center], and so the scholarships are available even for those who are in the Abbott classrooms as teacher assistants.

Directors also spoke of the beneficial effects for their centers of the ongoing professional development requirements for Abbott staff. Many said that Abbott had been the catalyst for creating a richer adult learning environment, one in which directors appreciated “watching the teachers grow as well.” One director noted that teachers’ classroom management skills had improved, lessening the need to call in outside consultants to help them work effectively with challenging children.

I’m impressed with the overall progression of learning that takes place with the teachers; they require the teachers to learn a lot of information, but it really helps in understanding the developmental process that children go through.

Supporting Centers through Sufficient and Stable Funding

Abbott funding provided substantial allotments for classroom materials and equipment upgrades. Many directors identified these new materials as a major benefit of participating in the program, enabling them to equip their classrooms with previously unaffordable

items. One director noted, “We have the financial support to have the materials and supplies to do quality work.” Another said, “The classrooms are expected to be outfitted to the degree that would meet or exceed anybody’s expectation for a preschool classroom.”

Number one is the type of equipment, classroom supplies, and curriculum materials, which have been a hundred-percent funded by the school district. It keeps our supplies current and developmentally appropriate. Our environments are safe. They also require that each classroom be 950 square feet. We’ve gone through the ECERS evaluation, the Early Child Environment Rating Scale, which has really raised quality in the environment as well as the overall program. So there has been a strong focus on environment, number one.

In addition, many directors felt it was easier to operate their centers because of the stable nature of Abbott funding, whereby, as one put it, “you weren’t worried if you were covering your costs.”

Before, we were always sort of under the gun. Not that we did not have a contract; every year we did. But we had to ask people to resign every year and then hire them again on July 1 when we got the new contract.

Many directors identified additional benefits associated with the structure of the program, including the length of the program day, free service, and the like, while others appreciated the higher standards demanded by Abbott.

Supporting Comprehensive Services

As the Abbott effort has matured, it has placed greater emphasis on comprehensive family support services as an important component of the preschool program for children. Many directors mentioned family workers and health professionals as essential to how they define center quality, and welcomed the opportunity that Abbott provided to offer such services on their premises.

The family worker position gives the parents an outlet and resources for basic needs that they may have regarding housing, employment, and other social services—a link between home and school.

We have family workers, and our teachers really involve the family. And we see a lot of families who were

just staying home. These are parents that are now going out and getting jobs, and getting a place for their child to be that is safe and where they're learning.

For many directors of independent or freestanding early childhood centers, the array of services mandated and provided by Abbott marked a significant expansion of what they were able to offer families. But even directors of organizations that had a relatively long tradition of providing comprehensive services noted that Abbott funds had enabled them to expand such offerings:

Even though we always had an extensive social service component, the family worker component added another dimension. The [family workers] are able to make home visits, which our social service intake had not really had the time or the opportunity to do.

Directors also mentioned access to medical personnel and other district support staff as a clear benefit of the Abbott Program. As one director explained, "We [now] have a social worker, a nurse, a teaching liaison, and a learning liaison. As a small center, we [had not been] able to hire [such] specific positions." Another said:

We have a wonderful nurse from the Board of Education that makes sure that our children's records and screening are up to par, and gives services to parents who may not feel very comfortable going to a doctor. But hearing, after the nurse screens them, that their vision isn't correct, or they have an ear infection, [or] they need to go to a dentist, empowers these parents to take the necessary steps for their children.

Help and Opportunity for Children and Families

Directors also described witnessing, in their own centers, the ability of a high-quality preschool program to transform children's lives. They spoke of "the good beginning" that Abbott had brought families who could not have afforded such an opportunity otherwise, and expressed the view that these experiences were creating a "more level playing field" for poor children, many of whom had been in custodial care and were now in structured learning environments for the first time.

It's wonderful to be able to take children who otherwise wouldn't be able to afford preschool, and give them a positive first experience with school, and see them re-

ally be ready to go on and succeed once they get into elementary school.

The most exciting and positive thing is that children who are from lesser economics are able to get the same type of start [as] a child whose parents live in a suburban area or whose economics are much greater. Our children leave [the program] reading, understanding a lot of things that they may not have understood [otherwise] until they were almost ten years old.

I think it enhances children's joy of learning, [and] their social confidence and stamina are so much stronger when they go to elementary school, [so that] they get a lot more out of it. And it really prepares parents to be participants in their child's education. What we hope to do is to encourage parents to make that a lifestyle throughout the child's educational life—to be involved, to ask the right questions, and to feel comfortable with it, because that's a crucial part of their child's learning.

Many directors mentioned the particular benefits of Abbott for children with special developmental needs. For children with physical, learning or behavioral challenges, directors noted that Abbott had provided the resources and structure not only for early identification, but also for early intervention that can help children become more successful in school.

Once upon a time, we really didn't know who to contact when we had children who had, or may have had, a learning disability. But now because of the Abbott Program, that particular aspect is handled so well in our district—we have a liaison from the Board [of Education], along with a master teacher, and they come based on a referral. We interact with my team, with the parents, and we create a meeting ground to see how we can collaborate together to help the child. I don't feel like I'm just out there by myself, knowing that there's a problem but not having a place to refer parents, especially when they are unable to pay.

Abbott districts are also home to many children who speak a language other than English. Abbott directors expressed satisfaction that children were leaving their centers for kindergarten with the English skills they needed, as well as continuing to flourish in their home languages. Several mentioned how quickly children pick up a second language; as one said, "They come in September, and by January they're speaking English,"

while another added that children in her center “are learning how to communicate in both languages and just shining.”

Technical Assistance Provided by School Districts

Local school districts serve as administrators of the Abbott Preschool Program, negotiating and monitoring contracts with participating centers and agencies. In addition, the Abbott Program mandates a variety of services that school districts must provide to preschool sites.

Chapter 3 discussed directors’ assessment of school district support on staffing issues during the startup phase of the Abbott Preschool Program. Here, we report how directors described and assessed the ongoing support they had received from their districts, and their recommendations for improving it. Chapter 6 will examine how directors viewed their funding and governance relationships with school districts.

Types of School District Support Utilized

Directors were asked, “In the last 12 months, what assistance and support have you received from the school district, if any?” Almost all interviewees had accessed some form of school district support. As one director stated, “They have provided a lot for us. We have a master teacher that’s always here to provide the support for the teaching staff and for myself as well, and we also have access to all of the community specialists within the district: school nurses, social workers, special education teachers, and speech therapists.”

Another director commented on the continual flow of district personnel to his classrooms: “Somebody is always coming in from the district, whether it’s a social worker, the curriculum resource teacher, the nurse, or someone checking the attendance.” An executive director described the collaboration: “We have what we call ‘focus walk groups’ with the director, her assistants, the psychologist, my educational coordinator, the master teacher; we visit the classrooms to make sure that everything that’s supposed to be happening in that classroom is.” Another director reported, “If I have a problem, I can call one of the supervisors, and if the teachers have anything that comes up, they can call their master teacher.”

The extent to which mentor or master teachers were

available to centers varied by district, and, to some extent, by center size. In some instances, their presence was intermittent; in others, directors described the mentor teacher as an integral part of the center:

We have a master teacher who is a general troubleshooter. She’ll come in and tell us about the new assessment program, make sure we understand it, make sure we are going to do well with it. We just recently brought her in to go over some small group lesson plans, which were a stumbling block for a few teachers. She is pretty much there as we need her, or as she sees a need.

Three-quarters of interviewed directors mentioned relying on their districts for technical assistance and training related to center operations and administration, much of this support focused on fiscal issues and new or changing regulations. One director described the monthly directors’ meetings held by all Abbott districts across the state:

These meetings keep me current. They do technical support. They’re very informative. When we have to do budget development, if there are any changes, the meetings will cover that. They also provide curriculum meetings for the directors throughout the year. And they also help to keep me informed as to any changes coming about. So I find that connection is very important.

Another director said that the directors’ meetings addressed issues as they arose, and provided an opportunity for breaking down isolation among directors, particularly as they attempted to implement new directives from the district: “Whatever new issues or policies we need to discuss, we do, and then we make plans to implement them and work together.”

One-quarter of the directors we interviewed reported accessing district support for training related to curriculum, and referrals for helping children with special needs. One declared:

When we went over to Creative Curriculum, the district didn’t just throw it at us. They’re not leaving the directors in the dark; they’re making us part of the learning experience, giving us a well-rounded view of what the teacher does.

Another director explained how her district had helped with child assessment: “We identify those kids we’re worried about. We then point these professionals in

their direction, and when they go to the public school next year, they already have something lined up for them for support." Another said:

There is a natural working relationship with the district in terms of making sure that the services for children with disabilities or other types of special needs can be provided at our program. Without the Abbott relationship, it's much more of a struggle to get the district to work with us in terms of providing services.

Some directors mentioned relying on the assistance of a specific person in their district office to help with problems with parents, personnel, or finances in a direct and timely manner. As one director explained, "If I have any questions, I always get a response. Whether calling on the telephone, or sending in the email, or just going over to the building, I do get any questions or concerns that I have answered." Another commented that her district had been "very helpful when we've requested assistance. If they haven't been able to provide us with someone directly, they've been helpful in directing us where to get the help." Yet another mentioned how a district supervisor had "really stepped in for me," when a parent became irate in response to a request that she bring her children to school more regularly and on time.

Directors' Assessment of School District Services

We also asked directors, "Was the assistance from the school district helpful?" Ninety-one of the 98 directors we interviewed replied to this question, and about three-quarters of these directors were pleased with the support, using such descriptions as "very productive" and "extremely helpful." Some were quite effusive; one exclaimed, "I love my district, I love the people in my district." Some directors qualified their assessment of district support, identifying some aspects that were helpful and mentioning others that were not working as well as they would like. Well under one-quarter of the directors we interviewed reported that the support they received did not adequately meet their needs. Both of these latter groups mentioned the lack of district personnel with sufficient expertise in early childhood as a source of dissatisfaction.

If I had new teachers walking in the door, then I think the mentor teachers would be great, because they're there all the time. But sometimes the mentor teacher comes in and just takes notes. It isn't that she comes in

to advise our teachers, but she is taking pointers from them.

This year, the resource teacher has been very helpful in terms of working with the teachers in their individual classrooms to improve their teaching methods; she has a lot of experience in early childhood. It's been extremely helpful to the preschool, but I think that depends on the person herself. We had one last year [whom] the teachers weren't as enthusiastic about, because they said that she didn't really have much content or knowledge.

Suggestions from Directors for Improving School District Support

Finally, we asked directors whether they had any recommendations for improving the assistance or support they receive from their school district. Nearly one-half of the directors we interviewed had no recommendations. About one-quarter recommended including assistant teachers, family workers and directors themselves in professional development opportunities, such as making scholarships available for directors to pursue advanced education. Some directors suggested the expansion and more timely delivery of existing services.

Extension of Professional Development Opportunities to Assistant Teachers, Family Workers and Directors

Some directors recommended more intentional and frequent inclusion of assistant teachers and family workers in professional development opportunities offered by the districts. As one said, "I know the teachers are required to share information with their assistants, but I think helping the assistants like they're important, and including them in the training, would help with their morale as well."

Directors also recommended that more scholarship opportunities and training be available to family workers. One director noted:

They're going to set up college-credit classes for family workers, which I think is wonderful, and it would be great if we could tap into that scholarship funding that the teachers have, for family workers, too. It helps me, because when I have a trained family worker, I don't need to focus all my time in that area. I can trust that they're doing their job appropriately.

More than three-quarters of the directors we interviewed were satisfied with the level and types of support they received from the school districts; some recommended that certain aspects of this support be expanded or enhanced. Since this study is not an examination of how different Abbott districts structure their programs, however, the recommendations that follow do not apply to all districts.

Some directors expressed a desire for their districts to expand a particular support service. Several directors recommended “more support from the nurses” as something that would be helpful to their centers:

They have one nurse for God knows how many children. But the kids in the inner city, a lot of them have asthma, a lot of them have other health problems. Having a nurse there, we are able to handle [such] situations. We need more, because we can't give kids medication.

One director expressed a frequent need for support from a speech therapist, to assist with children who are difficult to understand. Several recommended more frequent visits from master or mentor teachers. One director felt that more frequent visits by the district teacher would improve teacher performance: “If the teachers know that the lead teacher is coming every week, they pay more attention to things they have to do.”

Some directors were concerned about more timely assessment services for children with behavior problems, and suggested that districts support more rapid interventions. One director criticized her district’s policy of a recommended waiting period, until a child was settled in to the program, before providing expert assessments. “You need help right away, because those two months that that child is adjusting to your school disrupt everything you’re trying to do.”

Concerns about timeliness extended to other issues as well. One director expressed concern that management assistance around rules and regulations was provided to directors too late, and proposed that with more timely assistance, “We can solve issues before they become compliance problems.”

Current Staffing Issues

Impact of Different Routes of Teacher Certification

There are two pathways to teacher certification in New Jersey. The first of these is the “traditional” route of preparation, resulting in a bachelor’s or master’s degree and certification. Most of the state’s BA-level programs involve 30 credits in both an academic major and educational methodology courses, as well as approximately 60 credits of general education. The 30 credit hours are meant to include study of behavioral/social sciences, the teaching of literacy and numeracy, children with special needs, and linguistic diversity, and to be aligned with the state’s Professional Standards for Teachers (N.J.A.C. 6A:9-10.2). In the traditional route, students are not employed as teachers while enrolled in a four- or five-year teacher certification program, and they participate in observational field experiences and semester-long supervised student teaching internships. Most students in traditional programs attend at least part of their preparation full-time.

New Jersey has also had “alternate route certification” since 1985, and a specialized P-3 alternate route program since 2001. According to the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) website, an alternate route program is designed for those who have not completed a formal teacher preparation program at a college or university, and who have a minimum of a bachelor’s degree. Completing the alternate route requires first applying for a certificate of eligibility from NJDOE, and finding employment in a preschool site. The preschool center then has the responsibility to provide 20 days of intensive mentoring for the first four weeks of employment, and to supervise and evaluate these teaching staff. While employed, preschool teachers in centers must attend 200 hours of for-credit coursework in P-3 pedagogy (13-17 credits) in a state-approved alternate route program. They also receive an additional 30 weeks of mentoring in addition to the mentoring received when they first enter the classroom (Lobman, Ryan, McLaughlin, & Ackerman, 2004). The alternate route, therefore, is a more flexible option, and is usually the route chosen by individuals who have a bachelor’s degree of some kind and are seeking certification while working full-time.

We were interested in knowing whether directors observed any differences in teachers certified via these different pathways. The directors with whom we

spoke were almost evenly split on this issue. For some, there was no difference in teacher expertise related to route of preparation. As one director commented, "Everybody is really on the same page." In contrast, those directors who were critical of the alternate route P-3 certification argued that the required 15 credits of P-3 courses didn't equip teachers, as one said, "with what you need to be a great teacher." One director called the alternate route program "a little scaled down," and felt that those members of her staff were not as knowledgeable about developmentally appropriate practice:

It's meeting the needs, but not to the extent it would have been if it was early childhood from freshman year. There is certainly room to improve in the areas of what is developmentally appropriate.

Another director concurred that her alternate route teachers were "talking to or planning for children on a higher level...[like] they are talking to third graders." For one director, the alternate route teachers' lack of preparedness meant that she needed to provide oversight. As she observed, "Their intentions are excellent, and their ideas are wonderful. I just think they need a little more guidance." Another director called alternate route teachers "pretty much new teachers, so they don't have experience in classroom management and parental involvement."

A handful of directors noted that having teachers prepared by the alternate route could be beneficial. One director said, "They're a lot easier to mold because they don't really come with a lot, so they are kind of willing to step out of the box."

In many ways, these directors were not simply talking about the distinction between alternate and traditional pathways to certification, but differences between new teachers and those with more experience.

Impact of Varying Teacher Experience

The influx of new teachers to the field created by the court mandate had varied impacts on centers. Some directors reported finding little difference between new hires and their more experienced staff. Others said that they found differences between teachers with more and less experience, or with different kinds of teaching experience. Many directors noticed that their newer teachers were less competent in managing the classroom and in implementing developmentally appropriate

practices. As one director stated, "They've got the book knowledge, but when you actually get into a classroom with three-year-olds, that's tough." Another director described experienced teachers as "more knowledgeable in regards to their lesson plans, classroom management, and classroom setup. If you don't have the experience, you really don't know what's expected."

Other directors noted that staff members who were experienced in child care had a level of mastery that could not be matched by an educational qualification. One director reported that teachers who had worked in the center a long time "knew the families and the kids, and they're much more familiar with the population. When you bring in an Abbott teacher, just because someone's certified, [it] doesn't necessarily mean they're able to work with the kids, the families, and be sensitive."

A handful of directors did not view a lack of experience as a deficiency, but rather as an opportunity. As one director put it, "The flip side is that with newer teachers, sometimes you have newer ideas and new excitement. [They] breathe in some freshness to the program as well." Another director argued: "The longer they are [here], the better they are, but then the longer they are [here], the more settled they get, and sometimes it's good to renew."

Additional Skills Needed by Abbott Teachers

Given that some directors spoke about observing differences in their teachers due to limited experience or the type of preparation they had received, we were interested in learning whether they perceived that their "qualified teachers" needed any further training.

Some directors reported that their teachers did not require any additional knowledge and skills to perform effectively, because of the quantity and quality of professional development being offered to their staff. One director observed, "The Board of Education is supplying them with workshops and continuing educational courses. Basically, everything is taken care of." Directors in every kind of service and center offering Abbott programs talked about the range of professional development opportunities being offered to their teachers.

Even with this ongoing professional development, however, other directors felt that their teaching staff required more preparation, particularly in the areas of

child development and early education content, and working with children of particular populations.

Child Development and Early Education Content

Although studies have found that preschool teachers receive child development coursework more than any other subject area in their certification process (Lobman, Ryan, & Mc Laughlin, 2005; Maxwell, Lim, & Early, 2006), directors argued that, despite having a degree, their teachers still did not necessarily understand young children. One director said that her teachers “need an understanding of the stages.” Another director elaborated on this issue:

The problem comes in when you see a teacher coming in with high heels to teach three-year-olds. Where are your jeans and your sneakers to get down on the floor and the sand table and the water table? That’s basically one of the biggest things that they should teach them, that this is not the same as teaching an eighth grader or seventh grader.

Yet another director commented:

One of my concerns is that the teachers come in without a real knowledge of child care. It’s not just about the instructional component; it’s the whole child whose needs have to be met socially, as well as intellectually and health-wise.

In addition to a general knowledge of young children and how they develop, directors also identified curriculum knowledge as an area where teachers could improve their expertise. To ensure that high-quality programs were enacted in Abbott classrooms, the State Department of Education created expectations for children’s learning, and directed districts to choose from a list of recommended research-proven curriculum models. Several directors commented that their teachers needed to know more about these specific models. As one told us, “Out of the three Abbott centers that I have, one curriculum is High/Scope, two are Curiosity Corner. And when a teacher comes out of school, unless they have some knowledge of these different curricula, they have to start from day one.”

Other directors believed that staff needed to upgrade their curriculum training in specific subject areas. One director noted a need for more preparation in art, music, reading, and “the tone of voice that you use.” Two

directors identified science as an area of need. Another argued that Abbott teachers needed both curriculum model and subject matter knowledge: “They would benefit from some continuing education units in the curriculum, or in the reading, math, and science things that we do.”

Understanding Diversity

Roughly one-half of the directors we interviewed reported that their teaching staff required additional skills and knowledge, as one said, “when it comes to the cultures and different children from different areas.” One director noted that teachers needed help in responding effectively to challenging behaviors related to the particular life circumstances of some children in the Abbott districts:

In the district we work in, we have a population of children that have behavior problems from [families’] substance abuse, and they have different issues going on. It’s hard when you have a classroom of 15 children, and you have two or three children that exhibit some type of behavior problem. Some [of the difficulty] is because of the environment that they live in, and some is substance abuse. And the teachers really have a hard time controlling the classroom and dealing with these children.

For a number of directors, the range of special needs presented by children meant that their staff needed ongoing training. One director said, “Having additional training can be helpful, because I think each year [we] deal with different children with different issues, with special needs that we may not have had the prior year.” While Head Start programs have always included children with special needs, one Head Start director concurred that children in the Abbott districts brought a “host of problems,” and that teachers “need to be better prepared to deal with the emotional problems that children go through.” Several directors also noted the increasing trend toward inclusion, the increasing numbers of children with identified disabilities attending preschool, and therefore the need for ongoing special education training. As one director said:

More and more we’re seeing children with special needs, with center integration problems, or ADHD, or even autism. They’re being integrated into a regular classroom. So I would like to see more teachers getting training with children with special needs, which was

not necessarily part of the teacher certification Pre-school through Third Grade, at the time that most of my teachers took it.

The Abbott districts serve a large proportion of the state's immigrant and minority student populations whose first language is other than English. Directors reported that their teaching staff needed to improve their knowledge and skills in the areas of bilingualism and English language learning. Some directors talked about language training to help their teachers communicate with particular groups of children. One director said, for example, that such training "would help for bilingual children, because we get a lot of Creole-speaking children, [and] a few Latinos, but it's very hard to communicate." Similarly, another director said, "We have a big demographic shift happening here in our area. Spanish seems to be the typical second language learner tongue, but now we're seeing a lot of French Creole and other languages [such as] Chinese, where we do not really have the people to deal with that." Alternatively, another director suggested that teachers needed to know about language development and culturally responsive practices. From her perspective, teachers needed "more [training] on cultural [issues], the importance of keeping the home language, the importance of providing cultural materials."

As many directors noted, working with children from diverse circumstances also necessitates working with diverse families. Several directors stressed the importance of their center's linkages to the community, in the belief that that they were first and foremost a community center. Directors from a range of centers spoke of the importance of being able to work with families in urban settings, and noted that P-3 certification programs had not necessarily prepared their teachers for this aspect of the job:

It's not just the child; you have to deal with the parents, too. And a lot of times, the parents aren't as educated as you'd like them to be, and they just can't comprehend what you're trying to tell them. Or they just don't want to cooperate. So it's a dual learning curve for somebody that's always dealt with suburban children.

Another director observed:

Probably what teachers need the most is relational skills, because they can relate well with the children, but sometimes they can't relate as well to parents.

Directors' Actions to Help Teachers Improve Their Expertise

We asked directors to identify any actions they had taken to improve the skills and expertise of their teaching staff. For most directors, the best way to support their teachers in improving their expertise was to offer a combination of on-site and off-site training. As one director observed, "We provide in-service, we send them to conferences, we have a huge amount of resources—articles, books. I and my two other head teachers provide a lot of support. We go into the classroom. We model."

Most directors encouraged their staff to attend off-site trainings by keeping them abreast of workshops and conferences being offered. One director said that he expected teachers to participate in workshops outside the agency: "It's something they have to do if they want to continue to work here." For most directors, off-site training was a combination of workshops offered by the school district, and trainings offered by organizations such as resource and referral agencies. One director explained, "We're in collaboration with a local Head Start program, and they have opportunities for professional development above and beyond what the Board [of Education] is offering." Similarly, a director working in a multiservice organization described a partnership between her agency and the local university campus.

While every respondent was positive about encouraging staff to access ongoing training outside the workplace, budgeting for professional development appeared to differ across center types. The director of a single center with Abbott and non-Abbott classrooms noted that she paid for professional development "out of private funding," while a director in a multiservice organization said that her agency promoted weekend rather than weekday training opportunities in order to lessen costs. Alternatively, several directors working for larger organizations reported that they were able to provide tuition reimbursement for their teachers. A Head Start director said, "We have money set aside in the budget to help teachers acquire their two-year degrees, then their four-year degrees."

Many directors also brought training to their teachers on-site, and thus were often able to individualize training to the staff's particular needs. One director said, "Typically, we sit down and try to understand

what some of the problems are, and then go out and get resources.” Directors spoke of institutionalizing on-site training by setting aside several in-service days per year for professional development, as well as more regularly through staff meetings. Directors described staff meeting trainings as ranging from workshops by outside speakers to meetings that one director likened to a “learning community,” where staff could “discuss ECERS-R findings or lesson plans.” Some directors mentioned the outside speakers, consultants, and resources they could access as part of their relationship with the local school district, in order to help their staff deal with particular issues. These included master teachers, social workers, special education resource teachers, and family workers.

In addition to these formal offerings, directors mentioned acting as mentors to teachers. One director described her approach as “going around to the classrooms and helping out from time to time, modeling things that need to be done or just giving advice as needed.” Another described the collaborative nature of her mentoring: “As a team, we talk about lesson plans and different things we’re doing in the classroom. If there’s a concern that someone has with a student, we can brainstorm and come up with different strategies.” Several directors mentioned having various resources available for teachers to use, such as articles, videos and books on child development and other early childhood topics.

Teacher Turnover

Since the Abbott centers have been in operation for some time, and the early implementation issues described by directors have largely been resolved, we were interested in knowing whether centers were still experiencing teacher turnover. Half of the directors with whom we spoke reported having at least one teacher leave in the past 12 months. Personal reasons such as moving or pregnancy were the most common factor. Another group of directors reported having to let staff go who were unable, as one director said, to “handle the class and do the job effectively.”

A recent evaluation of the Abbott centers reported less than 23-percent turnover in Abbott classrooms (Frede et al., 2007). Nine percent of these teachers ended up moving to another Abbott classroom, and for some, this was a public school classroom. Not surprisingly, some directors with whom we spoke reported losing

staff to public school districts because of the better benefits offered there. The director of a center that had lost several teachers said, “They were all happy working with us, but they all went because of the pension issue.” Similarly, another director reported, “All of my teachers go [to the school] district because we don’t offer the same package; we can’t. We do offer a 401k, but we don’t offer pension and vision and all those other perks.”

Since Abbott teachers are employed on a 10-month contract, many directors said that there was little impact on their centers when teachers left. As one director said, “It was at the end of the school term, [and] the new teachers came in September, so it did not disrupt the children at all.” Others were less positive, arguing that turnover had a major impact. As one director explained, “What that teacher brings to that classroom is like software for the computer, so it’s a rebuild, and it takes time.”

Supporting Relationships between Abbott and non-Abbott Teachers

The education of preschool children has typically been the province of multiple agencies, including Head Start, child care, public schools, and specialized programs for children with disabilities. With the implementation of the Abbott Program, there has been an effort to bring these various providers of preschool services together to create a coordinated system of early care and education. While such systems make sense, there are also challenges in building partnerships between programs that have traditionally been distinct in their funding sources and regulations.

We therefore were interested in talking with directors of sites with a mix of Abbott and non-Abbott classrooms about how they negotiated differences in expectations for Abbott and non-Abbott staff in terms of wages, working conditions, and qualifications. In particular, we asked about relationships between Abbott and non-Abbott staff in these sites, and what directors and school districts had done to encourage positive relationships.

Most of the 70 directors we interviewed who were running a center or organization with a mix of classrooms characterized the relationships among teaching staff as positive. Directors spoke of staff sharing ideas, and felt that having a mix of classrooms acted as a motivator

for non-Abbott staff. One director said, “Both sets [of teachers] respect one another. The non-Abbott teachers know that the Abbott teachers make more than them, but I say to them, ‘If this is something you want to have, then enroll in school.’”

But some directors also acknowledged that tension between staff had arisen because of the disparity in salary and, as one director put it, the “emphasis on Abbott as opposed to non-Abbott.” Some directors asserted that different regulations and funding for the Abbott Program led non-Abbott staff to feel “inferior, or like an after-thought.” In the words of one director, “They have voiced at different times that everything is about Abbott—even when we should be closed or not.” Several directors were critical of the disparities in salaries and working conditions. A Head Start director described the relationship between Abbott and non-Abbott staff as “divisive,” because the Head Start teachers felt that “they are providing the same service, if not a better service, to children and families, and they work the same amount of hours, and then they’re not compensated for it.” Another director attributed the “cool” relationship between Abbott and non-Abbott staff to cultural differences. As she said, “You’re dealing with two different cultures. You’re dealing with two educational levels. In the beginning, [with] the non-Abbott teachers, I think their pride was hurt. It was like, ‘Why are these people coming in? We have been doing this job very well for years.’”

Actions Taken by Directors

Some directors managed to avoid tensions by placing non-Abbott and Abbott teachers in different sites or on different floors. But many directors reported dealing with the issue more directly, by deliberately implementing strategies to bring staff together. Overall, they seemed to favor two main strategies: creating parity between programs, and/or bringing staff together socially.

One way to address disparities between Abbott and non-Abbott staff is to make some aspects of the workplace more equal. Many directors with whom we spoke reported attempting to create this kind of equity by ensuring that all staff used the same curriculum, attended staff meetings and trainings together, and had access to similar materials. As one Head Start director said, “We include the Abbott and Head Start teachers in all of our activities, whether it’s training or things that say to our teachers, ‘We appreciate you.’” Another Head Start director said that shared meetings were

a way to communicate to all teachers that they were working under the same expectations.

Directors also described trying to create, as one of them called it, a “culture that encourages collaboration.” One director explained that she had “changed the curriculum so it’s more seamless, and changed the schedules for the non-Abbott classrooms, so that the teachers didn’t feel that they were being shortchanged.” Another director reported using the High/Scope curriculum for the two-and-a-half-year-olds, as well as the preschoolers, “to bridge the gap.” Yet another described how she and her board had raised funds to provide more supplies to the non-Abbott classrooms.

A small number of directors spoke of finding ways to begin raising salaries and benefits for non-Abbott staff. One Head Start director reported that at her center, Abbott and non-Abbott teachers were members of the same union. The director of a multiple-site organization reported paying 100 percent of benefits, equally for every staff member. A director in a multiservice organization described how she had grappled with this issue:

We had to raise the salaries in the non-Abbott classrooms, and then had to shorten their workday. They worked year-round, and the Abbott teachers didn’t want to, and so in the summer I had to get a whole new staff. It’s not equal, but it’s more than they were making before. And also, they don’t have [college] degrees.

Directors also spoke about organizing social events such as picnics, holiday potlucks, and monthly social events to bring their staff in differing programs together. One director described creating an employee-of-the-month program for all staff: “The teachers get an opportunity to vote anonymously. They have our criteria, and the person who is selected has to fit those criteria. They get a \$50 gift certificate, or can choose things from one of the catalogs for their classroom.” Some directors also reported reaching out to various staff, in order to “get their input on how we can make things better,” as one director put it.

Actions Taken by School Districts

Since school districts have the responsibility of administering the Abbott Program, they technically do not assist in any way with the relations between staff in differing programs within centers. We were interested

in knowing, however, whether directors in mixed-classroom sites had received any assistance from their local districts.

A small group of directors reported that school district staff were flexible wherever possible, so that non-Abbott teachers were included in Abbott staff activities, such as training events. These ranged from periodic professional development workshops to an annual preschool conference held by one district. A handful of directors also reported that their local district was quite liberal in how master teachers and special services teams used their time. As one director told us, "The master teachers, in theory, are only here to help Abbott teachers, but they help non-Abbott teachers as well." A director from a different district concurred: "Whether it's the master teachers that are responsible for the centers, or the nurses, or the social workers, it has amazed me how they will include these other teachers and teacher assistants in things that they're doing." One director reported, however, that the help received from district support personnel depended on who was visiting: "One group will come in and say, 'Sure, the other teacher can sit in on our meeting,' and then another one will say, 'Absolutely not.'"

Not surprisingly, most of the directors we interviewed reported that school districts provided little or no assistance to non-Abbott teachers. For many directors, this lack of assistance was to be expected and was of little consequence, since the non-Abbott classrooms were a different program, and therefore, as one said, the "internal responsibility" of site directors. One director argued that the district was "run off its feet" just trying to support the Abbott Program: "I don't think they have the staff or the time to do it," she said. "It's not an issue of not wanting to, but the fact is that they are very, very busy." Yet although many directors we interviewed seemed to understand why the districts focused only on Abbott-funded staff in their centers, many also said that they would like the districts to show respect for the non-Abbott teachers and to include them in school district opportunities. As one director asserted, "There should be a more comprehensive approach to early childhood learning, as opposed to Abbott versus non-Abbott."

Other directors had a more explicit wish list for additional assistance from their school district. Several noted wanting local district training and in-service days to be opened up to Abbott and non-Abbott teaching staff alike. Others addressed the parity of benefits is-

sue; as one director suggested, "Maybe they could take the insurance under their umbrella, and offer it to everyone."

From these responses, it seems that any assistance from school districts to date in encouraging positive relationships between Abbott and non-Abbott staff has been at the discretion of individual district staff, and those working in private centers within those districts. While some directors were inclined toward working more closely with districts, some were comfortable, as one put it, with districts "not dealing with non-Abbott." As one director observed, "The responsibility falls pretty much on me."

Chapter 5

STUDY FINDINGS: PROFESSIONAL PREPARATION OF ABBOTT PRESCHOOL DIRECTORS

Directors play a major role in building and sustaining high-quality early childhood centers. Higher-quality centers have been found to employ directors with longer tenure at their site, more years of formal early childhood training, and more prior experience in child care programs (Helburn, 1995). Researchers have also identified the important contribution that directors make to staff retention (Whitebook & Sakai, 2004).

Although the New Jersey Supreme Court required all teachers in Abbott-funded classrooms to have a bachelor's degree and P-3 certification, it did not mandate similar educational requirements for directors. Instead, directors were required to attend the Directors' Academy, consisting of 45 hours of training in child care center administration, management and leadership. To better understand directors' backgrounds, we asked them to discuss their educational attainment and professional experience, and to assess their professional skills and characteristics.

Educational Attainment and Professional Preparation of Directors in the Sample

College and University Degrees

As displayed in Table 5, more than three-quarters of the directors we interviewed reported completing a bachelor's or higher degree, with almost one-half having completed a bachelor's degree, and slightly fewer holding a master's or higher degree.

Table 5. Educational Attainment of Directors in the Sample (N=98)

	Percentage of Directors
Some college/Associate degree	13.3
Bachelor's degree	46.9
Master's degree or higher	39.8

We also asked directors with a bachelor's or higher

degree whether their degree was specifically in early childhood education, education, business administration, accounting, education administration, or another area. As shown in Table 6, almost one-half of directors had earned their bachelor's or higher degree in a field other than early childhood or business; these included human development, psychology, and science. About one-quarter of directors had earned their bachelor's or higher degree in early childhood education, while a smaller number had earned a degree in education, or in business administration, accounting, or educational administration.

Table 6. Type of Degree Earned by Directors in the Sample with a Bachelor's or Higher Degree (N=98)

	Percentage of Directors
Early childhood education	28.3
Education	14.1
Business	17.6
Other	40.0

Directors with a degree in early childhood education or education were asked whether they had also completed 15 credit hours or more in business administration, accounting, or education administration. Well over one-half reported having done so. Directors with degrees in business administration, accounting, or education administration were asked whether they had also completed 15 credit hours or more in early childhood education. About three-quarters reported having done so.

Further, we asked those with some college or an associate degree whether they had completed 15 credit hours in early childhood education, education, business administration, accounting, or education administration, and nearly all such directors had done so.

Teacher Certification

We asked directors with a bachelor's or higher degree whether they held a teacher certification, and if so, what type. Slightly more than one-half of these directors were certified. The most commonly reported certification was P-3; a smaller number had a K-8, N-8, or other type of certification.

Professional Background

Child Care or Elementary School Teaching Experience

To better understand directors' professional background, we asked whether they had ever worked as elementary school teachers in a public or private school, or as child care teachers in any setting, prior to their current job (Table 7). Nearly one-half had worked as child care center teachers only, a small number had worked as elementary school teachers only, and some had held both positions. Directors who had worked as child care teachers had an average tenure of 5.7 years in such work. About one-third of directors had no prior experience as an elementary or child care center teacher.

Table 7. Teaching Experience of Directors in the Sample (N=95)

	Percentage of Directors
No experience	36.8
Experience as elementary school teacher only	4.2
Experience as child care teacher only	46.3
Experience as both elementary and child care teacher	12.6

Experience as a Child Care Center Director

We then asked directors how long they had directed their current site or organization, and whether they had worked as child care center directors in any setting prior to their current employment. More than one-half of the directors we interviewed had been employed for more than five years at their centers (Table 8). More

Table 8. Tenure at Current Job of Directors in the Sample (N=97)

	Percentage of Directors
Employed less than 6 years	43.3
Employed 6 to 10 years	26.8
Employed more than 10 years	29.9

than one-third of interviewed directors reported that they had not had any experience as directors prior to their current position.

Directors' Assessment of the Directors' Academy

Directors' Academy courses were offered throughout the state, and were delivered by a variety of organizations, including child care resource and referral agencies, two-year colleges, and other professional development organizations. Each of these designed its own curriculum and delivery mechanism. The Academy is funded by the New Jersey Department of Human Services and is implemented by Professional Impact New Jersey, formerly known as the New Jersey Professional Development Center for Early Care and Education.

Directors received full scholarships to attend the Directors' Academy. Executive directors of multiple-site organizations were not mandated to attend the Academy and were ineligible for scholarships. Three-quarters of directors in the sample who were required to attend the Directors' Academy reported having done so. About one-half of the executive directors of multiple-site organizations that we interviewed reported having participated voluntarily.

Strengths of the Directors' Academy

We asked directors who had attended the Academy, "What were the strengths of the Directors' Academy in terms of helping you in your job as an Abbott Preschool Program director?" Nearly all of these directors had found it to be helpful, and even those who had not found it personally helpful recognized its value to directors with less education or experience.

Subject Matter

Most directors who had participated in the Academy cited the subject matter as a strength. Many cited content related to the overall administration and management of their preschool site; the "nuts and bolts of the business," as one director described it. As another director said, this included "all the areas that a director should be knowledgeable and comfortable about in terms of management, finances, relationships, and networks."

Directors also cited the importance of receiving information specific to the rules and regulations of the Ab-

bott Program. As one director responded, “With the DHS and the Abbott contracts, there are special guidelines for each contract. The Directors’ Academy prepared me for that.”

Some directors, despite substantial experience and being well educated and well versed in the subject matter, found the Directors’ Academy valuable because it helped them stay up-to-date:

If you’ve been in child care for a long time, a lot of it you knew; it was just refreshing, bringing you up-to-date on some of the things that you know about, keeping you abreast of everything that was coming down the pike.

Directors also mentioned appreciating the content provided through the Academy related to facilities, nonprofit legal issues, human resources, curriculum, working with children and families, and working with school districts.

Design

About one-third of directors mentioned the design of the Academy as a strength. Some talked about the opportunity to network with and learn from other Abbott directors, emphasizing the “camaraderie of having other directors there and the interaction between the different directors and centers.” Other directors highlighted the expertise of the presenters.

Even the few directors who did not find the Academy very helpful personally, still recognized that it was important for others who were new to the field:

Because I took it late in life, it wasn’t [very helpful]. I had been a director so long that it was like a refresher course where you say, okay, yes, I’ve been doing that. But for new directors who have not had a lot of experience, I think it’s excellent.

Recommendations for Improving the Directors’ Academy

We then asked directors who had attended the Academy for their recommendations to improve it. More than one-third of these directors responded that they did not have any specific recommendations; in almost all these cases, they were very satisfied with their experience. Some made recommendations related to

the subject matter of the Academy, and others recommended a different design.

Subject Matter

Some recommendations regarding the Academy’s subject matter focused on more rigorous instruction, specifically related to Abbott rules and regulations, and program expectations:

I think there needs to be more emphasis on state requirements and mandates. I think it needs to be more rigorous. They talked about employee handbooks and job descriptions [in a] very general [way]. This is nice information to have, but they want these preschools to run in a specific way, and they didn’t give the specific information to have that result.

Some directors talked about the importance of aligning the subject matter with the experience and educational level of the audience. As one director said, “You need to evaluate who you’re speaking to, your audience.” Another said:

There should be a basic Directors’ Academy for those that don’t have a degree or don’t have training in child development. And there should be a second Directors’ Academy, maybe a Directors’ Academy Two, where directors who already have formal education can really go in and learn more about developing curriculum. So, step it up quite a bit.

Other directors recommended more advanced courses for all directors. As one director commented, “Let’s go up to a graduate level and have someone who knows what’s going on far better than I.” Directors also recommended continuing refresher courses. As one director put it, “I think it needs to be ongoing, monitored, maybe every two to three years, to keep people current.”

Other recommendations for improving the content of the Academy included a greater focus on finances and working with staff, particularly for new directors; an additional focus on day-to-day center operations; grief counseling; and fundraising.

Design

Extending the duration of the Directors’ Academy was the most frequent recommendation for improving its

design. As one director said, “It needs to be longer, because it was too much information to process in a short period of time.”

Other recommendations for improving the design and format included linking the Academy to credit-bearing institutions; a mentoring component for directors without child development training; and using more convenient locations so that participants did not have to travel long distances. One director proposed opening up the Academy to all child care center directors, Abbott and non-Abbott, saying, “There should be more Directors’ Academies in all communities, and they should be free for everybody. Non-Abbott, Abbott, everybody should take it.”

Other Recommendations

When directors were asked to recommend improvements to the Abbott Program, about one-quarter recommended that more education and scholarships be made available to them. One director said, “There’s really no training available for the directors; it’s more along the lines of just meetings.” A number of directors proposed that they receive support to pursue formal education. One director was interested in returning to school, but needed financial support to do so: “They provide funding up to \$5,000 a year for the teachers and the assistant teachers to go back to school. They should do the same thing for the directors who want to continue their education.” Others concurred, perceiving a lack of equity between directors and teaching staff in the current arrangement. As one director noted:

I think they should create a scholarship for directors to go back to school. We have a lot on our shoulders. I’m attending a master’s degree program at College of St. Elizabeth, and I’m paying out of my pocket. I have two teachers that make more money than I do. And I have a lot of responsibility.

Directors’ Assessment of Their Strengths

We asked interviewees, “What do you think are your strengths as a director?” Almost all directors responded to this question, and many mentioned more than one strength. Many directors cited their professional expertise, while others focused more on their personal characteristics or dispositions.

Professional Expertise

Many directors identified their strengths in relation to professional expertise. Nearly one-half talked about skills related to developing and maintaining positive relationships with staff; these included the ability to set clear expectations, to support and motivate staff to work effectively and continue their education, to relate to staff on a personal and professional level, to manage staff conflicts, and to communicate effectively. As one director put it:

To support the staff; my office is always available to them. To create a team atmosphere and a family atmosphere where everyone is comfortable coming to work everyday. Making sure that the teachers believe in themselves and believe in what they are doing. I always want to give my teachers the chance and the opportunity to make their own choices and to learn from those choices, and learn from mistakes made by me or by them, and just grow from it.

Some directors discussed how positive staff relationships were based on their own background in early childhood education—“the fact that I can talk to my teachers and tell them, ‘I’ve been there, done that, because I was a teacher myself,’” as one director said.

More than one-third of directors identified their administrative skills—the ability to manage and run their centers effectively—as a strength. One director stated, “I think that because I’ve had a background as an educator and formal administrator, that is really a strength.” Directors also highlighted specific administrative and management skills such as setting up policies and procedures; human resource management; the ability to manage change; developing and implementing projects; and compliance with contractual requirements and expectations.

Some directors mentioned fiscal skills such as accounting, fiscal management, or budgeting, but only one in ten directors mentioned their knowledge and experience related to early childhood education or teaching practices, as strengths.

Personal Characteristics

Slightly more than one-half of directors mentioned various personal characteristics as strengths. Many of these directors talked about attitudes, specifically a

commitment to the children they serve. As one director said, “I maintain a focus on the children and I fight for what these kids need.” Others referred to personal characteristics that helped them with their jobs, such as being able to “juggle a variety of skills;” being “compassionate, reliable, easy to talk to, a great listener, hard working, a team player;” being a “visionary and great leader;” being able to “deal with everybody;” and being “structured and organized.”

About one-quarter of directors discussed their positive relationships with the community and families they served. One director talked about being “very well known in this community. We have no problem enrolling, and we get almost all our enrollees through referrals.” Another spoke of her ability “to go out there in the community and rally, rally, rally people in the area, to support and fund us for things that we need, above and beyond the budget that’s supplied.”

Directors also talked about identifying with the families they served; one director cited her “strong desire to work with low-income families, because I’m from a low-income family.” This was echoed by another director, who spoke of her “awareness and empathy for parents and their needs gained from my life experiences as a working mother who has gone through many changes with her children.”

Directors’ Assessment of Their Needs for Improvement

We also asked directors to talk about the areas of their job in which they felt the least confident, and followed up with a question about what additional knowledge or skills would be helpful to them. Almost all of the directors we interviewed responded to these questions.

Most of these directors identified at least one area in which they were not confident, and nearly all identified additional knowledge or skills that would be helpful to them. Many directors cited areas related to program administration and management, or areas related to early childhood education. A smaller percentage of directors talked about working with families, computers and technology, or facilities.

Program Administration and Management

Almost one-third of directors talked about a lack of confidence in the fiscal arena, including budgeting, ac-

counting, and fundraising. Many responded that they relied on other staff who had greater expertise and interest in this area. As one director put it, “I’m still learning the financial aspect of it. We have someone who handles this, but when he starts talking to me, I just say okay, so I really need to learn more in that area.”

When asked about the additional knowledge or skills that would be helpful to them in their jobs, about one-third of directors responded that they would like to improve their fiscal skills, including working with electronic spreadsheets; being more knowledgeable about funding sources and grant writing; understanding accounting principles; creating budgets; and developing budget strategies to maximize financial resources.

A small number of directors mentioned human resources—including hiring, disciplining, firing, evaluating, and supervising staff—as an area in which they felt unconfident, or would like more knowledge and skills. Several cited either their overall role as a manager, or their specific management skills, as an area in which they felt unconfident, with some mentioning this as an area in which they would like more knowledge or skills.

Knowledge of Early Childhood Education

Some of the directors we interviewed mentioned feeling unconfident in areas related to early childhood education. This included lack of knowledge of child development theory, the curriculum, and working with children with special needs. Directors also talked about their lack of hands-on teaching experience:

Probably my [least confident area] is the teaching skills, because I never taught. I really rely on my teachers, and they appreciate that, because I give them free rein to do what they need to do. I think they appreciate that I rely on them for their educational background.

Other directors talked about not being able to spend enough time with the children and teachers in the classrooms because of their administrative responsibilities:

Sometimes, I feel that I don’t get enough time to go into the classes, because we have so much paperwork. I try to visit as much as I can, even if I do little walk-arounds and go and sit in. So, I think that’s an area where I’m not as confident, because I don’t get enough time in there.

Although only a small percentage of the directors we interviewed mentioned early childhood education as an area in which they felt unconfident, nearly one-third cited this as an area in which they would like more knowledge or skills. Directors specifically mentioned learning more about children with special needs, the curriculum, current research on brain development, and child development. Some emphasized the importance of having as much knowledge as their teachers in this area:

I think [we need] ongoing training for directors from the district in regards to what they want to see in the classroom, because curricula and approaches to learning are constantly changing. Even though I have a background in teaching, what was five years ago isn't what it is now. Our teachers are being trained in new developments made to the curriculum, and it would be nice for us to be trained before that, so we can ensure that it is being implemented in our classrooms.

Other Areas

A small percentage of directors mentioned other areas in which they felt unconfident or wanted more knowledge or skills. These included working with families; managing facilities; using computers and technology; and keeping up-to-date on issues related to their work.

Preferred Means of Training and Education

One-quarter of directors recommended that more education and scholarships be made available to them. We asked directors, "In what ways do you prefer to attain knowledge or skills?" Many directors had more than one response. As shown in Table 9, almost three-quarters of the directors who responded to this question preferred workshops, trainings or seminars, about one-quarter were interested in one-on-one training, and a small number cited credit-bearing formal education, online training, or other methods.

Table 9. Directors' Preferred Methods of Training and Education (N=83)

	Percentage of Directors
Workshops, trainings, seminars	74.7
One-on-one training	25.3
Formal credit-bearing education	15.7
Online training	14.5
Other types of training	12.0

Chapter 6

MOVING FORWARD

Challenges that Directors Face in Operating Abbott Classrooms, and Recommendations for Addressing Them

We asked directors to identify the three greatest challenges they faced in participating in the Abbott Preschool Program. While they recognized the many benefits of the Abbott Program, directors also spoke freely about various difficulties. All identified at least one general challenge that was a result of taking part in this program.

Many directors recognized that these challenges were in part the by-product of the program's ambitious scope. It has not only sought to expand the educational system by serving all three- and four-year olds in the Abbott districts, but has done so through a collaboration between local school districts and privately-operated child care centers, Head Start centers, and social service agencies—an array of institutions with histories, operating procedures, and organizational cultures quite different from one another.

We also solicited directors' opinions about how to address the challenges they described. Whenever they mentioned specific challenges, we asked, "What would be helpful to you to meet those challenges?" We also asked, "If you were able to recommend three changes to improve the Abbott Preschool Program to those in charge, what would they be?" All but one director provided at least one recommendation.

Without question, the greatest challenge for directors concerned administrative issues. While they expressed strong appreciation for the benefits of reliable Abbott funding, nearly three-quarters of directors expressed frustration related to budgeting, paperwork, and program regulations. Most directors mentioned administrative concerns, whether they were single- or multiple-site child care agencies, Head Start centers, or centers administered by a multiservice organization.

Almost one-half of directors spoke about challenges related to governance; these concerns were most often expressed by Head Start and multiservice organization directors, having to do with conflicting expecta-

tions and regulations between the Abbott Preschool Program and their other funding sources or organizational demands. For more than one-quarter of interviewed directors, governance-related issues included a perceived lack of respect from and/or collaboration with their school district.

Some directors mentioned issues related to wrap-around care. Some mentioned challenges related to working with families. Challenges related to staffing, school district support services, and directors' educational preparation were discussed in Chapters 4 and 5, and will not be repeated here.

Administrative Challenges

As a court-ordered remedy for educational inequity in New Jersey, the Abbott Preschool Program was developed with very specific standards for program elements such as staffing, group size, teacher/child ratios, and goals for children. Funding levels and program criteria, set by the New Jersey Department of Education and implemented through the school districts, carried with them various rules and procedures that centers were required to follow as a condition of participation. For some privately operated centers, the administrative expectations that accompanied the Abbott contract were far more prescriptive than any they had previously encountered. Head Start and multiservice organization centers were experienced with such administrative requirements, but found it challenging to integrate Abbott expectations and rules with those already in place in their organizations and required by other funding sources. The Abbott Preschool Program also carried high standards for accountability, which later intensified in light of the reported misuse of funds by several sites.

The administrative challenges cited by directors centered on three main issues: budgeting (specifically, line-item budgeting, and certain budget allowances), reporting requirements, and regulatory changes.

Budgeting

Directors widely acknowledged the adequacy of Abbott per-child spending, particularly as it related to staffing costs, including compensation, as well as learning materials and equipment. Nevertheless, many directors mentioned struggling to meet certain program operation costs. Although a number of directors

expressed concern that Abbott resources overall were getting tighter, they were often less concerned about inadequate funds than about not having decision-making power over how to spend the funds available to them—for example, being unable to move unspent dollars from one line item to another, or to define line items more broadly. As discussed earlier, many directors felt they possessed insufficient business skills. In response to directors and other advocates, the Department of Education and the school districts have been working to make the budgeting process more user-friendly, yet many directors continued to consider it a difficult aspect of their jobs. Some felt that the budgeting process itself sometimes locked them into untenable positions:

We find that sometimes when you put a budget together, you come up with ballpark figures, and then when time moves on, you find out that you really need more in a different line item. Theoretically, that can be done, but in practice it is very, very difficult.

Directors expressed concern about the definitions of budget categories:

They're not letting us put the money where we really need it, and then they disapprove all the requests for budget modifications. It's a nice thing that they put computers in every class, but it costs me more money that they don't give me for repairs and upkeep. They give me a budget for equipment, but I can't use it for upkeep. So that's one of the issues we're fighting about now.

In this instance, the Department of Education does in fact allow a certain amount per classroom to purchase, upgrade, and repair computers, printers, software, and other educational technology in the classroom. But this director's comment suggests that directors may not always be fully informed of the rules, or that some districts may interpret them differently.

Some directors also felt that certain allowable expenses, such as food-related costs and utilities, should be increased. Others mentioned insufficient resources for facility-related needs, such as repairs and upkeep:

There's no provision for capital improvements or repairs, so if you want to do a new playground, for example, you have to put in a special request, and then it'll be denied. We had a fence that was falling down in

the preschool and we wanted to fix it, but there wasn't enough in the normal maintenance budget to cover that. They denied our special request, and said, "That's a capital improvement, and we don't cover that." But nobody does.

Sometimes you need to have the driveway or the parking lot repaved, or you need to have a new roof, or it has to be painted, or we have broken faucets, or this, that or the other, and the money is not always there.

Finally, some Head Start directors mentioned inadequate funding for certain staff positions, such as Education Coordinators, that provided services to Abbott classrooms but were not reimbursed, since school districts viewed the services provided by the mentor teachers as performing the same function. Some directors were troubled that the school district failed to recognize the increased workload that Head Start personnel were experiencing because of Abbott, and that no additional funds had been allocated to cover a portion of those salaries.

Instead of [school districts] giving us resource teachers to come in and monitor—and half of those folks are not really early childhood people, and aren't doing what I think they need to do—we should be able to have head teachers in our centers that can go and provide the day-to-day educational supervision that's needed in the classroom. It will strengthen the program.

Across types of centers, directors recommended eliminating the line item budget. One director echoed the sentiments of many when she said, "If they would just give us a cost per child, and let us use our own budget, that would be the number one." Another suggested that flexibility did not have to conflict with accountability:

The budget process has come a long way, but I think we need a little bit more autonomy with our individual budgets. I don't say that we should not have accountability; we certainly need it. People go crazy spending money when they see large sums of money, and they have to know what to do with it.

Several directors recommended greater flexibility in the minimum Abbott class size. The program requires a minimum and maximum of 15 children for each classroom, with one teacher and one assistant teacher. While directors planned for that class size, unexpected

circumstances, such as a child leaving mid-year and no children on a waiting list, left some centers operating at a deficit. One director explained the implications of the 15-child minimum for his center:

We had 13 children last year. They took \$85,000 from our budget, but I won't turn around to say, "Teachers, instead of paying you \$60,000 a year, we'll pay you \$45,000 or \$50,000, because you didn't teach 15 children." So, at the end of the year, it's really difficult to pay the teachers.

Directors recommended specific changes in how budgeted expenditures related to facilities. One recommended, "The funding needs to be looked at, because I don't think they pay enough for space." Another recommended that districts be better informed about facilities issues and the constraints that centers face: "They would love for me to have a big building. But the problem is that we have five-year leases required; what would I do? I would have to pay those leases out in order to move into a larger building."

Reporting Requirements

Across all levels of education, ongoing concerns about whether public dollars are being well spent have given rise to strict accountability standards related to funding and program outcomes. To demonstrate that they are meeting expectations, directors and teachers must complete a variety of reports for the Abbott Preschool Program. For centers that rely on additional funding sources, Abbott expectations constitute only a portion of the reporting demands they face. Even the director of a single-site center with all Abbott classrooms found these demands challenging: "Everybody has their own rules, the Food Program, the state for wrap-around, and Abbott. You have to keep in line with everyone, and it's a lot of paperwork." Another said, "Financial reporting, HR reporting, it's just voluminous. When we submit an expenditure report, it's a carton of documents."

While most directors expressed frustration about the amount and the sometimes duplicative nature of the reporting requirements, others recognized their importance, particularly in light of the misuse of Abbott funds by several centers, widely reported in the media:

We spend a lot of money on administration so that we can prove that we're spending money in the correct

way. I have to hire a CPA to dot all my I's and cross all my T's, but that money probably could be spent better in the program. But I don't know that that's even possible, because of the level of integrity of some people who will not spend the money correctly.

Others were less patient with the reporting requirements, which they felt kept them from other important aspects of their jobs, particularly their contact with the children and staff:

I'm the type of director who works ten hours a day. If I'm spending five hours doing paperwork, then I'm missing spending time in the classroom. I want the kids to know who I am. I don't want them to see this person every once in awhile, and I want my staff to see me all the time.

Directors also expressed concerns about the reporting demands on teachers, who are expected to provide detailed information about children's developmental progress. Some questioned whether the multiple observations of children were leading to their intended effect. One said, "The people who are dictating these policies are really not getting the full picture of what is going on in these classes." Although she conceded that the assessments "do help the teachers to see things," she also wondered, "At the end of the year, when they have all these stacks and stacks of paperwork, where is it going?" Another director, while understanding the need for reporting in order to "oversee the teachers and assure quality," expressed the opinion that they "kind of homogenize any personal expertise that a teacher might be able to bring to a classroom. So, I think it's handicapped the program to a degree." Another director suggested that the requirements undermined quality and contributed to turnover:

Oh, the paperwork—I feel really bad for my teachers. They just don't have the time to do it. Our teachers are already involved with a lot of paperwork all day. And every year they bring on something new. Or they're sitting around doing tons of observations, and it's taking them off of what they really need to do in the classroom. And they're overwhelmed. I think that's another reason why we lose some of them.

But while about three out of five directors we interviewed identified paperwork as a challenge, and wanted something to be done to lessen their teachers' and their own burdens, few had specific suggestions about

how to accomplish such a reduction. It was difficult to discern whether they were resigned to the reporting demands in this era of accountability, or were unsure about what was possible. To reduce having to provide the same information more than once, one Head Start director urged the establishment of a “universal” format for similar information requested by various governing and funding bodies.

Regulatory Changes

Directors recognized that changing policies and regulations went hand in hand with operating a publicly funded center, and, overall, they expressed a willingness to comply with the rules of the Abbott Preschool Program. But some directors felt that, as rules and regulations evolved over the course of the program, they had been expected to change without sufficient notice or training, or too soon on the heels of other changes.

Although many of the complaints were related to budget changes, other program policies had also changed, and directors felt that they had had insufficient time or knowledge to carry them out properly. A number of directors complained about insufficient notice for meetings, some of which required travel, leading to serious disruption of plans. Some complaints were directed toward school districts, while others concerned the Department of Human Services, in relation to the wrap-around program, as discussed later in this chapter.

Directors’ recommendations in this area focused on process, suggesting that governing agencies consider the timing of changes, and provide more training to help directors accommodate to new rules and practices. One director reflected, “Maybe if we’d been given a little bit more training and direction upfront on how to submit things, there would be fewer problems.” Another recommended more notice and more thoughtful scheduling for changes to the curriculum:

If I knew before that they were going to change the curriculum, the teachers and myself could have gotten ready earlier, not making changes at the last minute. They shouldn’t have the workshop for teachers in August, but have it before school ends, so they have an idea of what’s ahead.

Governance

Juggling the conflicting demands of multiple funding

streams and program regulations, directors experience first hand the consequences of an early care and education system that has been built piece by piece. The Abbott Preschool Program was predicated on the melding of different pieces of this delivery system, and directors were at the heart of making these less-than-perfectly-fitted parts come together. Prior to Abbott, many school districts had had no contact with local child care centers, and varying degrees of experience contracting with another agency to provide educational services. For many centers, contracting with the district was their first experience with an external funding agency, and the first time that they had submitted to an external governing authority. Other centers, especially Head Start centers and those administered by multi-service organizations, were seasoned in dealing with government programs and/or more complex governing relationships, but now faced the challenge of balancing these with the demands of the Abbott Program as operated by their school district. Thus, the Abbott Preschool Program challenged all players, in somewhat different ways, to develop relationships with unfamiliar partners with new lines of authority.

Directors identified two major areas of difficulty related to governance. The first had to do with conflicting expectations among agencies with governing authority over their centers—often leading to inefficiency and duplication of efforts. The other area was a perceived lack of respect for, or acknowledgement of, directors’ expertise.

Conflicting Expectations from Authorities

Directors in the Abbott Preschool Program are at the meeting ground of several publicly funded programs serving the same population of children: the Abbott Program itself, the state-funded wrap-around program (administered by the Department of Human Services) for services in the hours before and after preschool, the Child and Adult Care Food Program, and, for some, the federal Head Start program. Many directors felt that the school districts, the Department of Human Services, and other agencies functioned with little awareness of the conflicting demands that the Abbott centers faced. As the director of a center working in a multiple-site organization asserted, “They fail to realize that we’re bigger than just Abbott.” Others made the following comments:

I don't think anyone really took into consideration that we have a license with the state for our other funding, and that we have been doing it for years. You would think they would have asked the state, "What do you require for that population and their age range?"

The state has rules and regulations that have to be followed, and sometimes it's hard to mesh them with the Head Start Performance Standards. Regardless of what we get from the district, the bulk of our money comes from the federal government. You have to comply with the federal government's standards; they supersede the state's and everybody else's.

The area of difficulty most often cited by directors was conflicting expectations around staff benefits. School districts allocated a higher dollar amount for staff benefits than most centers spent on other non-Abbott staff, and did not necessarily understand that giving one group of employees a more generous, comprehensive benefits package would raise equity issues in the workplace that the directors had to handle. As one director said:

We've been trying to make the case that we cannot provide Head Start teachers with one type of benefit, and then give a better package to the Abbott teachers, because it wouldn't be equitable. They want us to do it that way, and we have balked.

Beyond balancing the conflicting demands of various governing authorities, some Head Start directors also cited duplication of services and confusing lines of authority:

Every year we must get an audit for the school district. I have another audit from the Department of Human Services, because I get their money for an extended-day program. Then I have another audit from the USDA Food Program. So I'm ending up with three or four audits, because the state is not accepting what the federal government has in place. And it's not cost-effective to keep going over the same duties and responsibilities. The second part about it is the duplication of services, and the paperwork. [For] the teachers, we have to maintain certain documents for Head Start, and certain documents for Abbott. I feel for the teachers, that they are trying to straddle both regulations.

We have our own nurse, family advocates, and social service people; they have a nurse, family advocates, and

social service people, too. When everything is going through two people, it's a waste of funding, if you ask me. If you have duplicate people doing the same job, it makes no sense.

The resolution of the governing issues would require, in the opinion of several directors, nothing short of an overhaul of the state's early childhood infrastructure—perhaps a more centralized system under the aegis of one statewide agency, as suggested by one director:

I think that the whole publicly funded child care system—infant, toddler, preschool—needs to be under one department. You've got split departments who, while they say they get along, really don't talk to each other at all. And when they're creating policy, they don't ever look at how what they are doing impacts on what you're doing for the other portion of the day.

In addition to a streamlined early childhood system, directors also made suggestions that addressed specific areas of duplication. Several directors called for a single audit that would be accepted by the various governing agencies. In a similar vein, some were frustrated by repeated requests from various agencies for the same information in slightly different formats, and called for a centralized database for staff credentials and other documentation. Directors also recommended that governing agencies work more closely with one another to resolve the unintended consequences of some of their policies.

In Head Start, we're only funded for 80 percent of the needed funds. We make up the difference in non-federal funds. But the school district, by ordering the supplies, eliminated us getting any of the non-federal funds this year from the vendors. So that really hurts my program.

Several Head Start directors recommended eliminating the school district as the intermediary between their centers and the State Department of Education:

It would be direct funding to Head Start, so you don't have that dual supervision. All supervision would be routed through the Head Start supervisor, who of course would have the same qualifications, and who does have the same qualifications as master teachers, so that you wouldn't have the teacher not knowing who to take direction from.

Head Start centers were not alone in calling for direct funding to the centers, although the reason varied somewhat among other types of private centers. Some felt that they were at an unfair advantage, competing with the school districts for families while also depending upon them for funding:

I don't think it should go through the school districts. Our district also has early childhood classrooms in some of their schools, so it hurts the community providers. There's not really the sense that the district wants to have the community providers, anyway. In fact, as they construct new schools, they're finding ways to put the community providers out of business.

Other directors suggested restructuring options that stopped short of direct funding:

We don't like that they're going to start doing centralized registration. We want to register our own kids, to ensure that siblings are being able to attend our programs.

Several directors suggested that a more individualized approach to policy, taking into account the unique situations of centers, would alleviate much of the present difficulty:

If they looked at each center individually, as opposed to just grouping us all in one bundle and see how our funds are spent, it would be better. You could, because we're audited. I do a self-imposed audit every year. We do that just to make sure that we're on track with what we're doing, and take a look at where the funds are being spent. You can see the money's going into those classrooms and for the children. It's not being misappropriated. We should be allowed a little bit more flexibility in our budget.

Other directors urged more flexibility at the state level, encouraging districts to request budget modifications that would allow them more leeway in structuring the program for their particular communities:

Each district and each provider has to be able to look at their service area and look at what the needs are and how they can provide them—not just say, okay, one contract fits all, because it doesn't. The districts need to be able to contract with their providers according to the needs of that district. Doesn't that make sense?

Respect and Collaboration

As described in the previous chapter, one-quarter of interviewed directors were very pleased with their relationship with their school districts, considering it one of the benefits of participation in the Abbott Preschool Program. But a similar proportion of directors identified a lack of respect from and/or collaboration with their district as a significant challenge they faced in participating in the program.

Many of these directors felt that district personnel allowed for only minimal input into decisions that directly affected their centers. In describing the attitude of some school district personnel, one director stated, “The rules of engagement change on their end at will, and we’re just expected to comply.”

While recognizing that school districts and centers came to these relationships with different degrees of power, some directors expressed the belief that a more collaborative relationship was possible. One suggested that district personnel “sit down and hear us out about what is happening, rather than dictating: allowing some input, particularly when everyone’s been trying to abide by all of the Abbott criteria all along.”

Others were less optimistic about better communication with district personnel:

It's not really a give and take in terms of dealing with the community providers, acknowledging that there's any knowledge or resource there. It's always [as if] the district knows everything, and the providers know nothing, but because the district has the money, providers don't want to complain or say anything.

Some directors worried about the implications of questioning their district’s policies; one recommended a venue that was confidential and supportive, “a place to vent without fear that it will go back to the school district or Abbott.”

Many directors commented on district personnel’s failure to acknowledge their experience and expertise, finding it both disrespectful and a lost opportunity. Such directors felt that their years of experience in operating preschool centers could serve as models for districts that had limited experience with pre-kindergarten children:

They should see us as the experts that we are in what we do. There should be more recognition of the credentials of the directors, and an effort to make us a part of what needs to happen. They have to do the monitoring, but we should become more of a team. If we all worked together, we could do more.

We work with the families. We have mental health consultants helping with spousal abuse, alcohol and drug abuse. We have an ESL class for parents, and a fatherhood initiative where our teachers are training fathers on child development. We even have a family soccer team. The schools could learn from that—from all the supports we have in place. You cannot educate a child without assisting their family and welcoming them into the program. You have to have something meaningful for parents to do. They're not just to sit in the corner and tie shoes. They're not, as we said in the 60s, "teacher maids."

For some Head Start directors, another signal of disrespect was a lack of recognition by district personnel of the differences in mission and staff qualifications between Head Start and child care centers:

It has been a long battle to get districts to understand that Head Start is not child care. I have all the respect in the world for child care. [But] somewhere along the line, Head Start directors got into college, and programs began to hire quality Head Start directors at the top who were degreed. This didn't happen in child care. But the district lumps us all into one boat. We have a Head Start director who has a PhD. They made this woman sit through a paraprofessional training for months, or threaten not to refund her.

Other directors echoed this last concern, that districts' training opportunities were sometimes established with little regard for the level of competence of those attending. One said, "You get a little frustrated when you know you're doing that, and you have to sit through that discussion." A Head Start director advocated more tailored, rather than one-size-fits-all, training for family workers:

They require that we attend those sessions. I wish that they would look at our needs assessment first, see what kind of training we really need, and then work with us to get that training. The sessions are elementary, because the money that they give you is not sufficient for the social workers. So, therefore, we put more of our money in to hire more qualified social workers, but the training

they give is for those high school social workers.

Most directors offered a simple solution to being better respected and having their expertise acknowledged. They urged the school districts and other governing agencies to approach the relationships with contracting centers more collaboratively, encouraging them to listen and discuss, rather than issue directives. As one director said, "If you can have input, then of course the relationship is better." Acknowledging that her relationship with the district had improved—now referring to it as "great"—another director emphasized the importance of "being able to talk with one another, to really listen and be open-minded. Lots of times what we had before was, the state said this, the state said that, and whether it fit or not, you had to do it." Another director concurred: "Listen to your directors. Hear what's going on."

Directors also underscored the importance of solid early childhood expertise among those in district leadership positions, as reflected in the following comments:

If I could have what I want, it would be that the [local] Department of Education didn't have so many PhDs and politicians, and had people with a lot more hands-on teaching and school administrative experience at my level.

One of the things that have been very helpful to us is that the people we're working with now have a better understanding of early childhood curriculum. They are willing to sit down and look at what the performance standards are saying, and we can come to a better understanding of what we need to do here.

Another recommended that district personnel more actively seek out advice from center directors:

In working with these families, English is their second language; we offer the parents ESL classes. They feel secure, and their attendance is excellent. They start here, and then they go the district and leave, and the district doesn't understand what's happening. It's a matter of where you feel welcome. They should ask us, "How do you maintain your attendance?"

Wrap-Around Services

From its inception, the Abbott Preschool Program was designed to provide full-day, year-round services. Al-

though the preschool portion of the day would cover only six hours during the academic year (September to June), the districts were required to develop wrap-around plans that allowed for a ten-hour day and a full-year schedule, using federal child care funds for those time periods. Many of the administration and governance issues that directors raised about working with school districts were identified in relation to the wrap-around program as well.

The wrap-around program had been revamped in the year prior to our interviews, and directors were attempting to adapt to the new reimbursement structure. Previously, centers had contracted with the state to provide services for all children enrolled in the Abbott Preschool Program, with reimbursement based on that number of students. The new approach was a voucher system in which reimbursement was based on student attendance and parental income. (Since our interviews, the policy has been changed back to presumptive eligibility.) One director said:

Right now, our biggest challenge is that the State of New Jersey has gone to a voucher program for the wrap-around services. Whereas before we would get one large quarterly check from the Department of Human Services, now we are being paid on a per-student basis as we submit vouchers. So, it's really wildly increased our paperwork. And this is the first year it's been implemented, so there are bugs and glitches.

Directors expressed particular concern about the financial implications of the new reimbursement policy:

The children have to be here x number of days in order for us to get full funding for that child, but there are no consequences for the family if attendance is bad. My expenses don't change based on whether they send me a full check or not.

Enrollment has to be such that the children are actually participating in wrap-around. So if the children aren't participating in wrap-around, do I now send that salaried person home, and not pay them that portion of their salary that's inclusive?

The summertime posed a particular challenge, because summer attendance was often sporadic:

If I'm contracted for 60 kids, I get full payment if they all come in 80 percent of the time. But during the sum-

mer, everyone takes vacation. So what is that going to do? We have fixed costs. Our rent doesn't go to some kind of lower summer premium. And what do I [say] to the two people in the classroom? "You have no jobs"?

Some found the year-round schedule of the wrap-around program difficult, particularly if the rest of their program had periodic down time between sessions, such as the school year and summer:

We get paid for our wrap-around program, non-stop around the year. You don't have an opportunity to close and provide your trainings, have your teachers' meetings, a general staff meeting like we used to do, or close the center, just to clean the facilities.

Directors also mentioned difficulties related to changing policies toward parent payments. Specifically, they had just recently assured parents that wrap-around care was free, and they were now required to collect payments as well as detailed information about parents' finances:

They promised one thing, and mid-year we let our parents know they had free child care 11 hours a day. We did all the paperwork. Now we got a fax that said we had to tell parents that as of July 1, they had to pay for their four hours of wrap-around. We had to do that after they had signed, saying that they're going to be here for free.

By design, directors are expected to run one program, blending expectations from at least two different authorities. While this was challenging in and of itself, directors also cited a lack of communication among the governing and funding agencies, leading to numerous obstacles around staffing and wrap-around care:

I guess the biggest challenge is that sometimes the two different departments that we work with, the DHS and the DOE, don't speak the same language. Many times the criteria are different. The expectations are different. And that's confusing. It's very hard to keep the same quality in the pre-hours and the after-hours, because we don't have the same kind of level of people in terms of credentials. The money's different. We are lucky our teachers agreed to work seven hours, because most teachers only want to work six hours like they do in the public schools. So you have to compete with the public schools. It's very difficult.

The disharmony between the Department of Human Services and the Department of Education, our two funding sources, is our biggest problem. There are some conflicts in how things are handled, and no one seems to want to take ownership. So we're the agencies that have to finagle their two sets of criteria, which really don't fit child care. We're the ones who know child care, and to provide caretakers or instructional people for those non-Abbott hours is crazy without using the same staff. Who are you going to get to work for an hour in the morning and then two-and-a-half or three, not even three-and-a-half hours in the afternoon? With our contract with DOE, all of our employees have to be salaried. You can't change them from salaried to hourly during the wrap-around time; that goes against the Department of Labor.

First and foremost, to address the challenges associated with the wrap-around program, directors recommended returning to a contract system. As one director stated, "I would drop the voucher system and go back to the way it was previously. I don't think the voucher system is saving them any money, because it's taking up more in paperwork than it would in any funds they are able to conserve through not paying us for children who aren't using the service."

Directors called specifically for a change that would address the problems around attendance, particularly in the summer, when centers' reimbursement fell short of their expenses if children were on vacation or absent for other reasons. As one director urged:

We have to have a system somehow that if the child doesn't come to school, they lose the opportunity to be in school for the summertime, so that we can replace them with another child who will attend. But it's not like we can expel anybody. It's very difficult. But again, if the child is a month out and comes back, I have to take the child back.

Working with Families

About one in five of the directors we interviewed mentioned working with parents as a challenging aspect of participating in the Abbott Preschool Program. Some of these directors spoke of the difficulty of helping parents understand that the program carried an expectation for prompt and consistent attendance—asking parents to view the center less as a drop-in service and more as an educational facility. This was particularly a

problem for directors in centers that had provided child care to families prior to opening Abbott classrooms. Whereas, previously, parents could drop children off at the center as needed, children in Abbott classrooms were expected to attend regularly and to arrive on time in the morning, in order to experience the full complement of program offerings during the day.

One director described the challenge in getting parents to "buy into the fact that it's not just a drop-off place. This is an educational facility. Yes, it's free, but there are expectations on your part." Another said, "Sometimes it takes a while for parents to understand that it's serious, that they need to have their children on time every day. They can't just take days off randomly when they feel like it."

When discussing how to address these challenges, some directors suggested that the school district take a more active role in orienting parents to these expectations, and establishing the consequences for not meeting them. One director said, "There should be more accountability from the parents. If the parents are going to be allowed in this program for free, then I think that there has to be something that's asked of them." Another wanted to see an attendance and lateness policy established:

The Abbott Program is almost like a drop-in program. There are no teeth in it regarding attendance and tardiness. If we're spending this kind of money, and caring this much, then I think there ought to be responsibilities for parents that they must meet.

On the other hand, some directors made suggestions about policies or support services that would help them respond to the particular needs of the families in their communities. One director requested more "education on, or help in, assisting centers with bilingual parents." Another thought the district should develop more flexible attendance policies for children in immigrant families:

Maybe 80 percent of my families are Hispanic, and they have got family and connections back in their country. When they leave for an emergency or vacation, or whatever, they are gone for two to three to four weeks at a time, and they take the children. If I say to a family, "If you go for that long, I don't know if I can hold your child's slot, because I have to have a child in that seat to be funded," I have had parents say to me, "Can

I pay you what you would be losing from the state to hold my child's slot?" And the state says, "No. It can't be done." A parent is willing to pay the 40 or 50 dollars a week, whatever it is, to hold their child's slot so that I won't be hurt on the financial end, and they won't be hurt in terms of their child coming back. Maybe they have to go home because there is a death in the family. Now you put this extra burden on them.

Advice to Other Directors

We asked directors, "What advice would you give to a director of a child care center in another community who is just starting up an Abbott program?" Almost all of the directors we interviewed responded to this question. Most of their suggestions related to becoming well informed in advance. Many also offered advice about the personal dispositions required for being successful at such an ambitious undertaking. A small number offered suggestions related to relationships with school districts, staffing, professional development, or working with parents.

Becoming Well Informed About the Abbott Preschool Program

About two-thirds of the directors we interviewed counseled those who were thinking of implementing an Abbott program—or, presumably, a similar program in another state—to consider the decision carefully in advance. As one director said, "You should have a clear sense of what it costs to operate a quality program before getting involved with Abbott, so that you're in a better position to evaluate the options as they're presented. A lot of small preschools really don't have the financial acumen to do it."

A number of directors suggested thorough investigation before deciding to participate in Abbott. One recommended, "Really determine how beneficial becoming an Abbott program is to you, to your agency. And really insist on some kind of partnership agreement that both parties adhere to." Many directors urged those considering becoming a part of the Abbott Program to "talk to other directors who are in the program, and find out how things work." One director counseled, "Analyze the effects both fiscally and operationally before you jump in, so that you know what you are getting into," adding:

If you feel that it is necessary for you to be a part of

Abbott, because you feel that you have to offer better services or more quality programs, then get into it. But if you feel that you are already offering that, and that your experience and your relationship with the community are great already, [then] that should be a second thought, and not the first one.

One director warned of the changes in power and control that accompanied participating in Abbott, and urged directors to consider such implications:

Be sure that you know that this is what you want to do, because in a lot of areas, it does tie your hands. Much of the decision-making is not yours any more. For example, if there's a child with a problem like biting, you can't put them out of your program. So you do give up some of your autonomy to work with the Board of Education.

Dispositions, Attitudes, and Professional Preparation

More than one-third of interviewees offered advice about the personal dispositions and professional preparation that are necessary for succeeding as an Abbott director. One director said, "You have to be very visionary." Another warned, "Be willing to sacrifice a lot, and make sure you're really dedicated to this." Another urged calm and patience: "I would say to her, 'Don't get excited. Don't fall off the chair when you see the budget. Give yourself a year, and it will all come into play.'" Yet another counseled, "Never settle with what you are told. It changes day to day in terms of mandates and requirements. That advice was given to me, and it made life so much easier."

One director urged new directors to "fight for everything that you need up front when you put your budget together, and hold your line on it, so to speak." Another counseled, "Don't be afraid to ask questions as you go along, and read all the contracts carefully, so that you are sure of what's being expected of you." Directors repeatedly urged their newer peers to "learn the rules carefully and follow them" to avoid problems down the line.

Directors also urged newer peers to continue their education. Regarding those without a strong early childhood background, one director said, "Anything the director could do to understand quality, rather than just licensing requirements, would be helpful."

Another cautioned, “Make sure that you have a good solid foundation in early childhood and business, because this is a business. My budget is a little over \$2 million—not a lot of money, but it’s enough to get in trouble with.”

Establishing Relationships with School Districts

Nearly one-quarter of the directors we interviewed specifically recommended that when starting out, directors put considerable energy into building a good working relationship with the school district. As one director commented, “If you have a good relationship, then I think you can work through anything.” Another added:

Hang on; it’s a challenge, but fun. Get a warm relationship started with the school district, or whoever is the level above the program, and keep it going. Direction should be from the center to the district; it’s got to come from us to that department, because there are a lot of people out there who are political. So I mean, you have to just make good relationships and keep good relationships. And don’t point the finger of blame.

Staffing

Directors also offered specific advice around staffing issues, with nearly twenty percent speaking both about the positions needed and about the characteristics of the staff. One director cautioned, “Hire a CPA. I’m serious. You just need somebody that knows business. And hire teachers that have experience and a heart for kids. The other stuff will take care of itself.” Another director said, “A lot of small preschools really don’t have the financial acumen, so make sure you have somebody that has a strong fiscal background in audits and that kind of thing, because it’s a lot more arduous on that level.”

Working with Families

About one in ten directors urged new directors to work proactively on their relationships with parents of children in the Abbott classrooms. One director counseled, “Get the parents involved. See what the parents are expecting of you. Understand their expectations.” Another reflected upon the changing expectations for children and families that the Abbott Program had brought, and their implications for the director’s role:

Make sure you have as much communication as you can with your families up front, to explain to them the program, the funding sources, why you have certain requirements, that you are not just hounding them like a truant officer. Let them know this is not day care, to really make them understand that this is the beginning of your child’s educational journey, for the next 18 to 20 years, and you must take this step of it seriously. Then I try to educate them on becoming advocates for their children, that what you do at this level, you are going to have to do for the next 12 years also, in terms of getting in there, and knowing what your child is supposed to get from his education, and making sure he gets it.

Chapter 7

LESSONS LEARNED

In less than a decade, New Jersey has established a high-quality system of publicly funded preschool for all three- and four-year old children residing in school districts with the highest concentration of poverty. The Abbott Preschool Program's success has been established with respect to improved classroom quality, positive child outcomes, and increased teacher preparation and salaries (Frede et al., 2007). Private child care centers participating in the program are now rated comparable in quality to school-based classrooms. For those seeking to create a high-quality, publicly-funded preschool systems with similar features—mixed delivery, full-day and full-year services, and increased formal education, certification and compensation for teachers—the Abbott Program demonstrates that major transformation can occur on several fronts, raising the bar on the quality of services for children and families and the preparation and skill of practitioners.

This study focused on how directors of privately operated centers viewed their experience of participating in the Abbott Preschool Program. Our report provides a perspective on implementing publicly funded preschool from key players “on the ground” who, along with school district leaders, turned policy into practice.

A study of this nature does have its limitations. Although we spoke to a robust sample of directors of private centers participating in the Abbott Preschool Program, the sample was not randomly selected and cannot be considered a representative sample of all such centers. Still, the 98 directors we interviewed, from across the state and from many different types of centers, provide a valuable perspective that can inform efforts in New Jersey and elsewhere to revamp or build publicly funded preschool systems.

The directors in our sample spoke freely in describing the benefits for their centers of participating in the Abbott Program. They were also unabashed in describing the organizational challenges they faced in integrating their private centers with school district systems and services, blending the Abbott preschool portion of their operation with publicly funded wrap-around services, and, in some instances, creating a cohesive staff

composed of both Abbott and non-Abbott teaching staff. As the Abbott Preschool Program approaches the end of its first decade, it is clear that significant work remains in making the program as user-friendly and seamless as possible.

The following “lessons learned,” based on these director interviews, are related to implementing a publicly funded preschool system that utilizes private child care centers and that seeks to raise the bar on the education and professional development of the workforce. These are meant to be applicable not only to New Jersey, but also to other states implementing or revamping preschool systems. We also recognize that there is considerable variation among New Jersey's school districts; as a result, several of these suggestions will apply to some communities more than others.

Operating a Mixed Delivery System

Even when the goal is to build something new and different, implementing change in early care and education typically requires interfacing with the pre-existing system. Such has been the case with the Abbott Preschool Program, and so it is in most states. School districts generally do not have the space, capacity, expertise, or desire to offer preschool services for all eligible children, and therefore must rely on the participation of private child care centers. Since preschool funding is rarely sufficient for the full-time services that many families need, programs also rely on existing public child care dollars to offer “wrap-around” services, and these generally come with far fewer resources for quality.

But bridging funding streams, organizations, and regulatory systems is administratively complex. It requires understanding, determination and commitment among all players, and a period of strain and adjustment is probably unavoidable. The following are several recommendations for creating a multifaceted and user-friendly mixed delivery system.

Goal 1: Enhanced collaboration among state agencies

The lead agencies responsible for preschool and child care work to create a mixed delivery system that functions seamlessly for local school districts and centers by:

- Setting a tone of collaboration and striving to avoid conflicting expectations or duplication of effort. This might be accomplished by creating

one early childhood department at the state level, or by establishing a single point of communication and information for districts and centers that interface with more than one governing and/or funding agency.

- Establishing an “operations work group” composed of representatives of all participants in the publicly funded preschool and wrap-around child care program. Typically, this would include the State Department of Education and/or Department of Human Services, as well as representatives from the federal agency administering Head Start, local school districts, and various types of private centers operating preschool classrooms. The group would be established during planning, and reconvened periodically as needed to anticipate and monitor issues related to operating a publicly funded preschool program in a mixed delivery system. The group would also address how implementation issues vary for different types of centers.
- Developing and implementing uniform, cross-system tools for auditing and reporting, modeled along the lines of the universal college application form now used by most institutions of higher education in the U.S., to avoid duplication in data collection and reporting.
- Establishing a database that tracks the retention, educational advancement, and ongoing professional development of all personnel participating in the publicly funded preschool and wrap-around program, to simplify reporting burdens and to inform professional development planning.

Goal 2: Enhanced collaboration between state agencies and school districts

The lead agency or agencies work closely with school districts that contract with private child care and Head Start organizations, creating open channels of communication and assessing and strengthening all players’ knowledge and skills related to operating a publicly funded system, by:

- Establishing an advisory committee composed of a representative sample of districts and state leaders, which meets regularly to vet compliance and governance issues. This committee would review content and scheduling of changes in policy, and identify appropriate technical assistance for districts as well as strategies for communicating

changes to private centers.

- Developing a “readiness inventory” to identify gaps in expertise, and needs for training and technical assistance, among district and state-level leaders in areas related to early childhood education and administration. The inventory findings could inform how professional development opportunities are designed, and could guide institutions of higher education and other professional development agencies about content and programming options.

Goal 3: Enhanced collaboration between school districts and private centers

Working relationships are more likely to succeed when they maximize the key contributions of all players in a given system, their differences in authority notwithstanding. According to the directors interviewed for this study, some school districts have done an exemplary job—at times, after early missteps—in building a culture of collaboration between districts and private centers. Further research could identify best practices for districts to employ in working with such centers. In the interim, based on our interpretation of directors’ comments, the following suggestions can serve as ground rules for districts and center directors in establishing a partnership.

School districts establish a collaborative communication structure with center directors by:

- Meeting regularly with directors, and building agendas that reflect the concerns of both district and center participants.
- Differentiating among centers with respect to their organizational structures, and acknowledging that policies may need to be adapted to varying situations.
- Recognizing that for many centers, particularly Head Start agencies and larger social service organizations, preschool funding is only one source of revenue, and may not be the major one.
- Respecting the expertise of directors and teachers, and soliciting their advice on a range of issues related to classrooms, working with families, and center operations.
- Engaging other district personnel, including early elementary teachers, in learning about private centers that deliver preschool services.

Center directors strive to create a positive working relationship with school districts by:

- Being well informed about district policies and expectations, and asking for clarification about district policy as needed.
- Investing time in educating district personnel about the particular needs and issues facing their centers, and informing the district about their areas of expertise.
- Investing in their own professional development, to ensure that they are experts in both early childhood education and program management.

Goal 4: Policies to minimize the difficulties in blending preschool and wrap-around services

The blending of preschool and wrap-around child care services can carry its own set of challenges. With the introduction of a part-day, publicly funded preschool program, as distinct from “wrap-around” services for the remainder of the day, center directors generally must resolve discrepancies in purpose and funding between two major authorities and funding sources, even if they have not previously considered one part of the day “educational” and the other part “custodial. To the extent that the state agencies responsible for these systems strive toward greater parity and coordination between preschool and wrap-around services, there is significant potential to reduce tensions within programs and increase program quality.

State-level lead agencies, in collaboration with other stakeholders, seek to minimize disparities among early care and education services by:

- Generating strategies for developing a more unified early care and education system, with fewer discrepancies in quality standards and resources between preschool and wrap-around services, and allowing for coordinated budgeting and implementation.

Staff Parity and Equity

Similarly qualified people working in a given industry will typically gravitate to the best-paying jobs for which they meet the requirements. The introduction of the Abbott Preschool Program into New Jersey’s early care and education system provided a strong incentive for qualified child care teachers to seek Ab-

bott classroom jobs. Likewise, since Abbott jobs were also available in school districts, which initially paid higher salaries, qualified teachers often left privately operated Abbott centers in favor of school district positions. Since the Department of Education now mandates salary parity at the district level for all Abbott teachers, the flow of teachers from private centers to districts has decreased, but it has not entirely stopped, largely due to the better benefits still offered by school districts and the higher status associated with working at schools.

At the same time, private centers that operate both Abbott and non-Abbott classrooms have faced internal issues related to teacher qualifications and pay. Questions of inequity have surfaced, since assistant teachers in Abbott classrooms often earn more than non-Abbott head teachers, and even if non-Abbott teachers meet the higher Abbott qualifications, private centers seldom have sufficient funds to pay them at the higher rate.

Goal 5: Minimize inequities among teaching staff within and across preschool centers

Policy makers can help to minimize internal and external teaching staff inequities within a mixed-delivery system by:

- Creating a “quality set-aside” in the preschool system to allow for improved professional development opportunities and compensation for staff who work in other center classrooms and work with preschoolers during the wrap-around portion of the day.
- Establishing a mechanism to create parity in benefits as well as in salaries, education and certification between staff in private and school district centers. Strategies for improving health and retirement benefits in privately operated programs might include creating better purchasing pools for self-insurance, creating associations among private centers, or establishing partnerships that allow teachers in private centers receiving public preschool funds to access school district benefits.
- Supporting participation in professional development activities and services for all center staff, not just those teaching in the preschool program.

Goal 6: Provide ongoing mentoring and support for center directors about staff development and equity issues within centers

The lead agency or agencies and the school districts can support directors who are creating public preschool classrooms in their centers by:

- Establishing a director mentoring program that provides one-to-one support from experienced directors, helping new directors navigate the staffing challenges associated with opening public preschool classrooms.
- Providing training for directors that enables them to guide their staff effectively toward appropriate educational opportunities.
- Providing training for directors focused on managing dynamics among staff with similar jobs but dissimilar qualifications and compensation.
- Providing training for directors on strategies for equalizing teacher pay and professional development opportunities within centers.

Professional Preparation and Development of Teaching Staff

Developers of the Abbott Preschool Program recognized that raising educational standards for preschool teachers would require a significant investment in the state's professional development infrastructure. The program's comprehensive workforce development initiative has included increased higher education funding, tuition supports, salary improvements, and ongoing mentoring and other types of training. The result has been a preschool teacher workforce that holds college degrees and certification, and earns professional salaries.

Directors provided anecdotal information, however, about teachers who had left their centers, been demoted to the assistant teacher level, or moved to non-Abbott classrooms because they were unable to meet the Abbott qualifications. Yet existing data do not provide an accurate count of such staff, fully explain why they did not pursue further education, or measure any resulting loss or gain in the diversity of the teaching workforce. Given the overall demand for well-qualified early care and education staff, and the goal of a culturally and linguistically diverse workforce, better tracking systems and more focused research on helping the existing workforce access and succeed in higher education

programs (Dukakis & Bellm, 2006) could increase the percentage of child care teachers who are able to transition successfully to preschool jobs.

In New Jersey, based on directors' reports, there also appears to be a need for some fine tuning of the P-3 certification process, with a greater focus on classroom management skills, working with children from diverse backgrounds, and working with children with special needs. At present, some Abbott preschool directors perceive a gap between better-educated teachers who lack classroom experience, and more experienced teachers who have completed less education.

Goal 7: Develop a training and professional development system that is accessible to working adults and leads to a skilled and diverse early childhood teacher workforce

The lead agency or agencies will work with policy makers to create a viable system of early childhood educator preparation and development by:

- Setting a reasonable timeline to phase in new qualifications for early childhood educators.
- Providing resources to institutions of higher education to develop a variety of options for early childhood-related courses that lead to degrees and certification, and that are accessible to working adults as well as more "traditional" full-time students.
- Creating a system of professional development, including mentors as well as ongoing coursework and training, that helps beginning teachers continue to grow and develop.
- Working with institutions of higher education to build their capacity to enhance the preparation of teachers in specific areas such as classroom management, and working with linguistically and culturally diverse children.
- Conducting periodic assessments of teachers and directors to identify ongoing professional development needs, particularly around issues related to classroom management, English language learners, and children with special needs.

Recruitment and Preparation of Directors and Other Leaders

By necessity, much of the discussion about professional development focuses on teaching staff. But school

district staff and center directors also have significant professional development needs in developing and operating a publicly funded, mixed-delivery preschool system.

As the Abbott Program has matured, it has devoted more attention to director preparation and training. Directors noted that their jobs demanded expertise in both child development and business, and that they often deferred to teachers' greater classroom knowledge and experience. Additionally, much of the director workforce is approaching retirement age, and without a leadership "pipeline," it will be difficult to recruit and prepare the next generation of preschool leaders. Some directors also bemoaned a lack of expertise in early childhood education among school district personnel.

These findings suggest that leadership preparation should be strongly on the agenda from the beginning in developing a publicly funded preschool system.

Goal 8: Promote ongoing leadership development for publicly funded, mixed-delivery preschool services

Policy makers and lead institutions will work with other key stakeholders, including the appropriate institutions of higher education, to develop and recruit diverse preschool leaders by:

- Setting standards for school district leadership positions and center directors, requiring districts over a period of time to employ and/or contract with personnel in positions of authority who have appropriate early childhood education and business expertise.
- Assessing current gaps in professional development opportunities for building the skills and competencies required for leadership positions.
- Supporting more advanced educational opportunities, providing resources for institutions of higher education to expand their graduate offerings.
- Providing scholarships and other supports to assist early- and mid-career directors seeking to advance their skills, with particular attention to building a linguistically and culturally diverse leadership.

Further Research

While this study has served to clarify a number of the successes and challenges associated with creating a mixed-delivery, public-private preschool system, additional research on several related topics would be very helpful to the early care and education field. We recommend a research program, in New Jersey and other states, to investigate the following areas of interest:

- Best practices in promoting positive relationships between school districts and community-based child care centers in mixed-delivery preschool systems;
- What other states have done to ease administrative burdens on community-based child care centers in mixed-delivery preschool systems;
- Administrative and teaching staff diversity in mixed-delivery preschool systems. In order to measure the maintenance, decrease or increase of such diversity as community-based child care staff transition to meeting higher educational standards as preschool staff, we recommend that states begin by collecting baseline workforce demographic data.

Next Steps for New Jersey

Having crossed the major hurdles of becoming established, the Abbott Preschool Program moves into its second decade well positioned to grapple with the various challenges discussed by the directors whom we interviewed. In addition to the previous recommendations, intended for both New Jersey and other states, we highlight three priority areas for the New Jersey Department of Education in the coming years. Progress in these areas can enhance the Abbott Preschool Program, and further secure New Jersey's leadership in building high-quality preschool services that deliver on their promise of improving the lives of young children, families, and communities.

Streamlined and coordinated reporting systems. We recommend that the Department of Education convene a work group to explore creating universal reporting forms for preschool centers that will satisfy the needs of state agencies, school districts, and federal partners involved in the Abbott Program. The initial phase would include background research on what other states have accomplished (whether in early care or education or other service areas), and other relevant processes such

as the universal college application form. Directors from various center types should be represented in the work group, to ensure that any proposed format meets the needs of all the organizational structures that provide preschool education.

Best practices for collaboration between school districts and private child care centers. We recommend that, through a series of focus groups with school district personnel and preschool directors, the Department of Education tap the expertise of those who have created the most successful partnerships, identifying key practices or elements such as communication and approaches to governance. The information gleaned can also be used to inform professional development training for school district personnel and preschool directors.

Leadership training and recruitment. We recommend that the Department of Education, building upon its groundbreaking efforts in raising teacher qualifications and creating the Director's Academy, now create a more extensive training and recruitment initiative to address the demand for early childhood leaders, in such positions as center directors, college instructors, mentor teachers, district supervisors, and school principals. This effort could begin by defining competencies required to perform these roles effectively, and a method (such as a degree or certification) to establish that they have been met; assessing the capacity of existing institutions of higher education and training agencies to provide relevant education and training; providing resources for the development of appropriate academic and professional opportunities; and creating incentives and support to attract and retain a linguistically and culturally diverse new generation of early care and education leaders.

Conclusion

The New Jersey Abbott Preschool Program represents a public policy achievement that is worthy of emulation by other states and communities. Rather than merely enlarging the state's existing early care and education system, the program's designers succeeded in addressing several entrenched issues of access and quality. By offering a free service, and by building upon the state's private child care system, the Abbott Program has allowed many children of low-income families to attend a high-quality preschool and to receive a comprehensive array of health and social services. By raising the bar on teacher qualifications, investing in the state's

higher education system, providing tuition assistance, and funding salary increases to create parity with K-12 teachers, Abbott is helping a new generation of early childhood educators build lasting careers with young children, and assuring centers a more skilled and stable workforce. In addition, private centers have received an investment in materials and support that have shown that quality improvement can be realized.

The center directors who shared their perspectives for this study have been an indispensable part of these impressive achievements of the Abbott Preschool Program. Their reflections on successes and challenges provide a roadmap to policy makers, practitioners and other stakeholders throughout the U.S. who are committed to meeting the needs of young children and their families, while offering long-overdue professional and economic support to the teaching staff and directors upon whom high-quality early care and education programs depend.

METHODOLOGY

Survey Universe and Survey Sample

The New Jersey Department of Education provided the research team with contact information and basic program data for the 630 Abbott Preschool Program sites. Four hundred and forty of these sites, serving 63 percent of the children participating in the Abbott Program, were private child care or Head Start centers. The remaining 190 sites, serving 37 percent of the children in the Abbott Program, were school district-run centers (Frede et al., 2007).

The universe for the New Jersey Abbott Preschool Director Study included 405 of the 440 private child care and Head Start centers, administered by a total of 270 agencies, in 16 of the 31 Abbott school districts. (See Table A-1.) These centers included single-site centers; multiple-site centers run by larger child care or multi-service agencies, and Head Start centers. Some centers also operated early childhood services for infants and toddlers, three- and four-year olds ineligible for the Abbott Preschool Program, and/or school-age children, while others operated Abbott classrooms exclusively.

We selected our universe from the 14 Abbott districts where at least 50 percent of the Abbott children were enrolled in private child care or Head Start organiza-

Table A-1. Twenty-one Sampling Groups: Seven Organizational Types and Three Regions of the State

Seven Organizational Types

1.	Single-site child care centers	All Abbott classrooms
2.	Single-site child care centers	Mixed Abbott and non-Abbott classrooms
3.	Multiple-site child care agencies	All Abbott classrooms
4.	Multiple-site child care agencies	Mixed Abbott and non-Abbott classrooms
5.	Child care centers that were part of larger multiservice organizations: (could be multiple- or single-site)	All Abbott classrooms
6.	Child care centers that were part of larger multiservice organizations: (could be multiple- or single-site)	Mixed Abbott and non-Abbott classrooms
7.	Head Start centers: All mixed Abbott and non-Abbott classrooms (could be multiple- or single-site)	All mixed Abbott and non-Abbott classrooms

Three Regions of the State

1.	Southern and Central New Jersey	2.	Northern New Jersey- (1)	3.	Northern New Jersey- (2)
	School districts: ▶ Asbury Park ▶ Camden ▶ Pemberton ▶ Pleasantville ▶ Trenton ▶ Vineland		School districts: ▶ East Orange ▶ Irvington ▶ New Brunswick ▶ Newark ▶ Orange ▶ Plainfield		School districts: ▶ Jersey City ▶ Paterson ▶ Union City ▶ West New York

tions, and where there were more than five private child care or Head Start organizations in the district. We included two additional school districts to ensure that our universe of organizations included districts from throughout the state.

The 270 eligible respondents were either directors of single-site centers or were persons responsible for overseeing multiple-site centers, usually executive directors. We targeted interviews with 125 of the 270 directors and executive directors. Our intent was to interview directors or executive directors from sites across the state and from a wide variety of school districts and organizational structures, allowing us to compare responses among similar groups and across groups. To accomplish this, we created 21 sampling groups by categorizing the universe of sites into seven organizational structures in three regions of the state, with multiple school districts within each region. We targeted up to seven completed interviews in each sampling group. (See Table A-1.)

It is important to note that we did not draw a random sample; thus, our findings cannot be interpreted as representative of the views of all Abbott Preschool Program directors.

If there were seven or fewer respondents within a sampling group, we attempted interviews with all respondents. In the larger sampling groups, we sampled respondents in a school district proportionally to the school district's occurrence in the universe.

Survey Questionnaire

The New Jersey Abbott Preschool Director Study questionnaire included both closed-ended and open-ended questions. Prior to data collection, the survey instrument and data collection procedures were approved by the Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects at the University of California at Berkeley, and were then pre-tested with five directors.

The questions in the survey addressed:

- *General program information:* Length of time the center had been in operation; length of time that the Abbott Program had been operating at the center; number of sites; number of Abbott and non-Abbott classrooms; number of Abbott and non-Abbott teachers and assistant teachers.

- *Director demographics:* Age; racial/ethnic group; gender; languages spoken fluently.
- *Rationale for becoming an Abbott site.*
- *Impact of new educational requirements on staffing during the first year of implementing Abbott, and assistance offered by the school district.*
- *Most positive contributions of the Abbott Program.*
- *Directors' assessment of teacher preparation and experience:* differences among Abbott teachers with different certification and levels of experience; additional skills and knowledge needed by Abbott teachers; actions by the director and/or organization to improve teacher skills; teacher turnover.
- *Directors' assessment of Abbott and non-Abbott teachers:* Relationships between the two groups of teachers; assistance from the school district to support positive relationships; the role of the director or executive director in supporting positive relationships.
- *Directors' relationship with the school district:* Assistance received from the school district; recommendations to improve such assistance.
- *Directors' professional preparation:* Educational attainment; tenure at current position; professional experience; attendance at Director's Academy.
- *Directors' professional characteristics:* Strengths as a director; areas in which least confident; additional knowledge and/or skills that would be helpful; preferred mode of attaining additional knowledge and skills; current salary.
- *Challenges of Abbott, recommendations to improve it, and recommendations for new directors.*

Data Collection

Our first step was to make telephone contact with the director or executive director to explain the purpose of the study and to encourage participation. We offered to schedule the interview at the respondent's convenience, including before, during, or after the work day, as well as during the weekend. We made up to eight attempts to schedule an interview with each director or executive director.

When a respondent agreed to participate, we scheduled a 30-minute telephone interview. We then sent the respondent a letter describing the study in more detail, along with a reminder form highlighting the date and time of the scheduled interview. We also placed a reminder call the day before the scheduled interview. If the respondent was not available to complete the in-

interview at the scheduled time, we made an additional seven attempts to reschedule the interview.

The research team conducted 98 telephone interviews between February 20 and May 4, 2007. These were conducted in English, and were professionally recorded and transcribed, with the permission of the respondent. The interviews took an average of 30 minutes to complete.

Survey Completion and Response Rate

Overall, we targeted 125 interviews and completed 98. As displayed in Table A-2, we completed 29 interviews with directors of single-site centers; 20 interviews with executive directors of multiple-site agencies; 37 interviews with directors or executive directors of centers that were part of larger multiservice organizations; and 12 interviews with executive directors of Head Start centers. Table A-2 also indicates the number of

centers with Abbott-only or mixed Abbott and non-Abbott classrooms. Table A-3 displays the geographical distribution of these interviews, with 30 interviews conducted in the southern and central regions of the state, and 68 interviews conducted in the two northern regions of the state.

Table A-3. Completed Interviews by Region of the State

Region	Completed Interviews
South and Central	30
North 1	44
North 2	24
Total	98

Table A-2. Completed Interviews by Organizational Type

Organizational Type	Completed Interviews	Abbott Classrooms	Non-Abbott Classrooms
Single sites: Abbott only	8		
Single sites: Mixed Abbott and non-Abbott	21		
TOTAL	29	107	50
Multiple sites: Abbott only	7		
Multiple sites: Mixed Abbott and non-Abbott	13		
TOTAL	20	163	65
Part of multiservice organization: Abbott only	14		
Part of multiservice organization: Mixed Abbott and non-Abbott	23		
TOTAL	37	296	51
Head Start centers	12	202	197
TOTAL	98	768	363

As displayed in Table A-4, we dialed 172 centers to complete the 98 interviews, for an overall completion rate of 57 percent. However, 38 of these centers were contacted at least once but never interviewed, because the target number of interviews had already been reached in their individual sampling group before their interview could be scheduled. Excluding these 38 centers, we completed interviews with 73 percent of the live sample.

Only two percent of the centers were ineligible to participate, either because the center was out of business or because it was no longer serving an Abbott preschool site. The most common reason for non-response was “respondent not available.” Generally, in these cases, we talked with a secretary or receptionist but were unable to make contact with the respondent, or the respondent repeatedly asked the interviewer to call back to schedule an interview at a later date.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was completed in four phases. The first phase involved inductively coding all the open-ended

questions to establish recurring categories that captured the meanings expressed by participants. Team members individually read and coded 15 percent of the interviews. The team then met and compared codes assigned for each interview question. Where there were points of disagreement, the team selected the code that reflected their joint consensus. The team then read additional transcripts. Once these categories became saturated (Straus & Corbin, 1998), we finalized the coding scheme for each question, which was then used to analyze all remaining transcripts. To ensure the validity of the coding scheme and its application, 10 percent of all interviews were double coded.

The second phase involved data entry of both open- and closed-ended questions into SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences 14.0). Frequencies were then conducted to determine trends in the data for both kinds of questions.

In the third phase, the data for open-ended questions were sorted according to their assigned codes. Using the process of categorical aggregation outlined by Stake (1995), the chunked excerpts of text related to

Table A-4. Survey Completion and Response Rates

	Number	Percentage
<i>Universe</i>	270	
Sample released	172	100
Completed interviews; percentage of released sample	98	57
Target reached (<i>Center was contacted but an interview was not scheduled because the target had already been reached in the sampling group</i>)	38	22
Non-response (<i>See categories below</i>)	36	21
Live sample (<i>Does not include target reached</i>)	134	100
Completed interviews (<i>Percentage of live sample</i>)	98	73
Respondent not available	22	16
Refused	10	8
Answering machine	1	1
Ineligible: no longer an Abbott site, or organization out of business	3	2

each code within a question were then read carefully—first, to generate a sense of the meanings given to the code across all participants, and second, to ascertain whether there were any differences among particular kinds of sites. Team members then generated a summary narrative of the data pertaining to each question, paying attention to the frequency of codes as well as what was said by participants in differing sites.

The fourth and final phase involved performing inferential statistical tests (e.g., chi-square, t-test, ANOVA) on the data generated from the closed interview questions. All significant results are reported including group differences at a p value of .05 or better.

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