

**Q & A For districts formerly known as Early Childhood Program Aid (ECPA) districts and Early Launch to Learning Initiative (ELLI) districts**

**Section I: Program Planning and Administration**

Administration

**Q:** *Should teachers in contracting provider or Head Start settings be paid the same as district teachers?*

**A:** The district board of education must ensure that compensation for certified teachers and teacher assistants in provider and Head Start settings is comparable to that of a teacher or teacher assistant employed by the district board of education based on equivalent certification and credentials.

**Q:** *When can we expect to receive notice of the preschool funding our district will receive for the upcoming school year?*

**A:** Your district can find its PEA amount on the State Aid Notice sent out annually within 72 hours of the Governor's Annual budget address.

**Q:** *What administrative code applies to former ECPA and/or ELLI districts?*

**A:** Portions of *N.J.A.C. 6A:13A*.

Recruitment and Outreach

**Q:** *How can schools address school absences more effectively?*

**A:** Districts should be proactive in educating families, staff and the community on the benefits of regularly attending school and the disadvantages associated with absenteeism. The Division of Early Childhood Education (DECE) recommends that all school districts have written policies that include steps in dealing with absences. A copy of the written policies should be included in the district handbook given to families and staff, and discussed with all school, home and community stakeholders.

**Q:** *Does the 180 day rule apply to preschool and kindergarten?*

**A:** Yes. Under *N.J.S.A.18A:7F-9*, schools must be in session for 180 days to receive state aid

Facilities

**Q:** *What are the maximum class sizes for former ECPA and ELLI settings?*

**A:** ECPA programs must maintain classroom enrollments of no more than 18 children with one certified teacher and one qualified assistant, *N.J.A.C. 6A:13A-3 [(b)](c)5-i*. ELLI programs' class size maximum is 20 students (but must leave room for inclusion and non-income-eligible students).

**Q:** *Can a preschool classroom be located on the third floor of a public school facility?*

**A:** No. Preschool classrooms can be no higher than the second floor of a school facility (N.J.A.C. 6A:26-6.4 (h)(2) and cannot be located in the basement.

**Q:** *What strategies can be used if preschool children do not have access to a developmentally appropriate playground at all locations?*

**A:** Children need to move around and control their bodies while in motion. Although not the ideal circumstance, if a developmentally appropriate playground is unavailable, teachers should implement gross motor activities safely in their classrooms. Role-playing, dramatic play, story retelling, rhyming, freeze dance in-between activities, transitions, counting and math are all excellent opportunities to incorporate gross motor activity e.g., jumping by tens and fives within the classroom.

**Q:** *Is partnering with another district allowable for former ECPA and ELLI districts?*

**A:** Yes, ECPA/ELLI districts may establish a send-receive relationship or written agreement for preschool.

## **Section II: Curriculum and Classroom Practices**

### Curriculum and Program

**Q:** *What are the state-recommended curricula?*

**A:** There are four researched-based curricula that the Department supports. They are Creative Curriculum, Curiosity Curriculum, High/Scope and Tools of the Mind.

**Q:** *What are some alternatives to specials?*

**A:** The use of specials offered to preschool children should be limited or avoided in order to prevent the interruption of Choice Time and to ensure that children are not required to sit still for inappropriate periods of time. The content of preschool specials is best delivered in the context of the children's classroom and curriculum. If specials teachers are to be used, they should be trained in the district's curriculum and function as a resource to enrich the teaching practices by coordinating content and activities with classroom teachers.

**Q:** *Is there Department guidance on supplies and materials?*

**A:** There are no specific guidelines for purchasing materials and supplies; however, there are lists of materials in the budget worksheet and kindergarten guidelines that are customarily purchased for high-quality classrooms.

**Q:** *What are acceptable alternatives to Preschool Intervention and referral Team (PIRT)?*

**A:** PIRT services may be fulfilled by contracting with a county or regional educational services commission for PIRT services or by providing training for the Intervention and Referral Services staff.

### Inclusion

**Q:** *Will special education students in the preschool program be funded through preschool funds in the future?*

**A:** No, Preschool Education Aid (PEA) is intended to fund only general education preschool students. Preschoolers with disabilities, regardless of whether they are served in self-contained or inclusive settings, are supported through the district's special education funding.

**Q:** *How do we report curriculum adaptation for our special education students?*

**A:** The preschool daily schedule should be reviewed when developing children's IEPs, and accommodations and modifications needed to support children's learning should be documented in IEPs and lesson plans.

**Q:** *How can we collaborate with special education staff?*

**A:** Opportunities for collaboration and consultation among teachers, therapists, and child study teams should be built into the school schedule. All staff should intensify efforts in implementing policies and procedures for ensuring that, to the maximum extent appropriate, preschool children with disabilities are served in general education classrooms.

### Transition

**Q:** *What guidelines are there for initiating a Transition to K plan?*

**A:** The NJDOE is still working on the transition plan for PK to K, but the P-3 Transition Plan (Appendix 5 in the Kindergarten Guidelines) and the narrative on p. 42 provide guidance.

## **Section III: Professional Development**

### Professional Development

**Q:** *How do districts design their professional development plan?*

**A:** The components of the school district's annual professional development plan should be specific to preschool and should be part of a systematic, multi-step, multi-year process for implementing high-quality preschool programming.

**Q:** *How do districts use structured observation instruments for professional development planning?*

**A:** In addition to using structured observation instruments for individual classroom teacher support, the district should also analyze the results of the observations to determine the staff development needs of the district. Differentiated professional development should be part of this plan.

**Q:** *We are in the midst of preparing a professional development survey to go out to all staff. What do you envision the PD survey looking like?*

**A:** Asking teachers about their perceived professional development needs makes sense for two main reasons. First, while professional development should be driven by classroom/child assessment data, such data are not the only sources of information. For instance, the data tool does nothing to get at family practices, which are an essential component to a good early childhood program. At its best, the data tool could help to drive a piece of the professional

development picture. Second, it's important for teachers to ask themselves what they need help with and for the district to compare the perceived need to what the data tells you. For example, does the data say that the district needs work in literacy, while none of the teachers mention literacy as an area of improvement? The absence of information would itself be the pertinent information.

### Staff Qualifications

**Q:** *What are the staffing requirements for an ECPA and/or ELLI classroom?*

**A:** One (1) certified teacher and one (1) qualified teacher assistant per class is the requirement.

**Q:** *What diversity training is available for early childhood teachers?*

**A:** The NJDOE provides professional development supports and training to the maximum extent possible to address the needs of preschool, assist with translation, support cultural diversity and provide understanding regarding school and/or community functions and programs. Please check the Department's PD calendar of events at <http://www.state.nj.us/education/ece/calendar/pdcalendar.pdf> for scheduled trainings. Districts should also consider implementing their own district-wide training.

### **Section IV: Program and Child Evaluation**

**Q:** *Is an Early Childhood Advisory Council (ECAC) required and what would a suggested membership roster look like?*

**A:** A preschool through grade three early childhood advisory council (ECAC) is recommended to review preschool program implementation and to support transition as children move from preschool to grade three, *N.J.A.C.6A:13A-4.6(c)*. The membership of the council must consist of stakeholders in the community, as well as parents, contracting private providers and the local Head Start agency, if applicable, with new representation added as needed, *N.J.A.C.6A:13A-4.6(c)1*.

**Q:** *What classroom structured observation tool is recommended for our preschool program?*

**A:** The Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale-Revised (ECERS-R) is a nationally recognized measure of preschool classroom quality and the instrument the NJDOE recommends to use to collect baseline data in the initial stages of classroom improvement and as a comparative index across programs over time. For new classrooms and classrooms scoring under a 5.0, the ECERS-R should be used on an annual basis to facilitate the quality improvement process.

### **Section V: Community Collaboration**

**Q:** *What should be included in a parent handbook?*

**A:** Families should receive a procedure and policy family handbook at the start of the program year that includes written communication about school policies, schedules and procedures, information about the child and the program and all essential information related to the child and the family presented in the home language, as necessary.

## Head Start

**Q:** *How should a district go about contracting with Head Start to ensure that all Head Start-eligible children residing in the district are served?*

**A:** The district and Head Start should develop a memorandum of understanding (MOU) which is required by the Office of Head Start. The intent of this requirement in the reauthorization is to maximize public resources provided to support young children and families, and to improve the availability and quality of services. The MOU should include the following, but not be limited to:

- Educational activities, curricular objectives, school readiness goals, student outcomes and instruction;
- Selection priorities for eligible children to be served by program;
- Staff training, including opportunities for joint staff training on topics such as academic content standards, instructional methods, curricula, and social and emotional development;
- Communications and parent outreach for smooth transitions to kindergarten;
- Program technical assistance;
- Enrollment procedures;
- 10% disability requirement;
- Provision and use of facilities, transportation and other program elements; and
- Other elements mutually agreed to by the parties.

## **Section VI: Support Services**

### Health, Safety and Food Services

**Q:** *Are there alternatives to chlorine bleach for table disinfecting?*

**A:** A product that is not chlorine bleach can be used in child care settings IF:

- It is registered with the EPA;
- It is also described as a disinfectant; and
- It is used according to the manufacturer's instructions.