



## **NJDOE News**

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For Release: January 19, 2001**

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### **Abbott Preschool Enrollments Rise**

New statistics show there was steady growth in the number of children enrolled in free Abbott preschool programs during the second year of Governor Christie Whitman's early childhood education initiative for disadvantaged families.

"From the very beginning, our goal has been to give at-risk children a jump-start on their education so when they enter school they are ready and eager to learn," said Governor Whitman. "Never before has an initiative of this magnitude been attempted. I am glad to see the program is growing. We will continue to inform families in Abbott communities about the availability of this program and the advantages it offers their children."

"In just two years, nearly three-quarters of the children eligible for enrollment in Abbott preschool classes are benefiting from this program," said Commissioner of Education David C. Hespe. "The participation rate is impressive given the fact preschool is not mandatory and many parents, particularly those of three-year-olds, prefer to keep their children home at such a young age. Still, we are constantly working to make families aware of this unique educational opportunity and how it can better prepare their children for academic success in the early grades."

The official count taken in October 2000 for the purpose of determining state school aid payments showed 22,020 three- and four-year-olds were enrolled in preschool programs in the 30 Abbott districts. That represents a 4,825 jump over the previous year's October count. Districts as part of the ASSA (Application for State School Aid) process must compile and submit their enrollment figures by October 15.

However, a follow-up count made by the Department of Education's Division of Early Childhood Education in December 2000 found that enrollments had risen by 806 in just two months time, to 22,826. This represents a 5,631 increase over the October 1999 ASSA tally.

New Jersey's groundbreaking early childhood education program for children in the Abbott districts offers parents the opportunity to enroll their children in free full- or half-day preschool classes, where they receive a high quality, developmentally appropriate educational experience linked to the state's core curriculum content standards. "No government-supported preschool initiative in the nation is as far reaching or holds a greater promise for the future of at-risk children," said Hespe.

This year, half the Abbott districts are offering full-day, full-year programs to all or some of their preschool children. "By next September, we envision that every Abbott preschool will be full-day, full-year," Hespe said. "We anticipate that enrollments will continue to grow as we move to full-day, full-year programs."

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