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Sponsored by:

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SYNOPSIS

Makes various changes to provision of preschool aid and facilities requirements; establishes Universal Preschool Implementation Steering Committee; requires full-day kindergarten in all school districts.

CURRENT VERSION OF TEXT

As reported by the Senate Budget and Appropriations Committee on June 26, 2025, with amendments.

AN ACT concerning early childhood education, amending various parts of the statutory law, and supplementing P.L.2007, c.260 ¹and chapters 26 and 44 of Title 18A of the New Jersey Statutes¹.

BE IT ENACTED by the Senate and General Assembly of the State of New Jersey:

1. (New section) Sections 1 and 2 ¹[,] ¹and ¹6 through ¹[12, and 15] ¹ of this act shall be known and may be cited as the "New Jersey Universal Preschool and Kindergarten Act."

2. (New section) The Legislature finds and declares that:

a. Research is clear that high-quality preschool can change the educational trajectories of young children, particularly economically disadvantaged children and multilingual learners. Improvements in literacy, numeracy, social-emotional and self-regulatory development, and lifetime earnings have been demonstrated among individuals who attend high-quality preschool compared to their peers.

b. New Jersey leads the nation in expanding access to high-quality preschool opportunities. The State has achieved a unique and world-class combination of significant financial investment and rigorous quality standards. New Jersey State-funded preschools are required to serve three- and four-year olds in full-day programs featuring small class sizes led by quality instructors with ample curriculum support, professional development, and accommodations for students with special needs. New Jersey's State spending on preschool is among the highest in the country, with clear, significant impacts on our public school system: tens of thousands of three- and four-year olds in hundreds of communities around the State attend transformative high-quality early education programs.

c. District-operated preschool programs, licensed childcare centers, and Head Start programs form an interrelated and interdependent early childhood ecosystem. Each component is made stronger by the other, and the system is greater and more impactful than the sum of its parts. No component can reach its full potential without the facilities, staff, resources, and expertise of the others. Together, the system represents a continuum of education and care services from birth through age five necessary not only for children to realize their full life potential, but for families to participate fully in economic and civic society. To lift up this system is a moral and economic imperative.

d. To build on the State's preschool expansion progress to date and to realize the full benefits of high-quality preschool, it is

fitting and proper for the State to enshrine certain policies and values in State law, including:

- (1) providing sustainable, annual financial support for expanding access to high-quality preschool;
- (2) codifying preschool education aid provisions previously implemented through language in various annual appropriations acts and harmonizing New Jersey law accordingly;
- (3) prioritizing expansion for economically disadvantaged families and communities;
- (4) requiring State-funded preschool programs to make every effort to partner with local ready, willing, and able licensed childcare providers and Head Start programs; and
- (5) conducting ongoing evaluations of the State's approach to early childhood and preschool education to ensure that policy continues to reflect stakeholder expertise and evolving research.

e. In addition to high-quality preschool education, full-day kindergarten is necessary not only to unlock a child's full learning potential, but to facilitate a smooth transition from high-quality preschool into elementary programs.

3. Section 3 of P.L.2007, c.62 (C.18A:7F-38) is amended to read as follows:

3. a. Notwithstanding the provisions of any other law to the contrary, a school district shall not adopt a budget pursuant to sections 5 and 6 of P.L.1996, c.138 (C.18A:7F-5 and 18A:7F-6) with an increase in its adjusted tax levy that exceeds, except as provided in subsection e. of section 4 of P.L.2007, c.62 (C.18A:7F-39), the tax levy growth limitation calculated as follows: the sum of the prebudget year adjusted tax levy and the adjustment for increases in enrollment multiplied by 2.0 percent, and adjustments for an increase in health care costs, increases in amounts for certain normal and accrued liability pension contributions set forth in sections 1 and 2 of P.L.2009, c.19 amending section 24 of P.L.1954, c.84 (C.43:15A-24) and section 15 of P.L.1944, c.255 (C.43:16A-15) for the year set forth in those sections, [and,] in the case of an SDA district as defined pursuant to section 3 of P.L.2000, c.72 (C.18A:7G-3), during the 2018-2019 through the 2024-2025 school years, increases to raise a general fund tax levy to an amount that does not exceed its local share , and, in the case of a school district first receiving preschool education aid in the 2025-2026, 2026-2027, or 2027-2028 school years and participating in the pilot program established by the commissioner pursuant to subsection h. of ¹section 12 of P.L.2007, c.260 (C.18A:7F-54), increases to raise a general fund tax levy for the local share of preschool education costs.

b. (1) The allowable adjustment for increases in enrollment authorized pursuant to subsection a. of this section shall equal the per pupil prebudget year adjusted tax levy multiplied by EP, where EP equals the sum of:

(a) 0.50 for each unit of weighted resident enrollment that constitutes an increase from the prebudget year over 1%, but not more than 2.5%;

(b) 0.75 for each unit of weighted resident enrollment that constitutes an increase from the prebudget year over 2.5%, but not more than 4%; and

(c) 1.00 for each unit of weighted resident enrollment that constitutes an increase from the prebudget year over 4%.

(2) A school district may request approval from the commissioner to calculate EP equal to 1.00 for any increase in weighted resident enrollment if it can demonstrate that the calculation pursuant to paragraph (1) of this subsection would result in an average class size that exceeds 10% above the facilities efficiency standards established pursuant to P.L.2000, c.72 (C.18A:7G-1 et al.).

c. (Deleted by amendment, P.L.2010, c.44)

d. (1) The allowable adjustment for increases in health care costs authorized pursuant to subsection a. of this section shall equal that portion of the actual increase in total health care costs for the budget year, less any withdrawals from the current expense emergency reserve account for increases in total health care costs, that exceeds 2.0 percent of the total health care costs in the prebudget year, but that is not in excess of the product of the total health care costs in the prebudget year multiplied by the average percentage increase of the State Health Benefits Program, P.L.1961, c.49 (C.52:14-17.25 et seq.), as annually determined by the Division of Pensions and Benefits in the Department of the Treasury.

(2) The allowable adjustment for increases in the amount of normal and accrued liability pension contributions authorized pursuant to subsection a. of this section shall equal that portion of the actual increase in total normal and accrued liability pension contributions for the budget year that exceeds 2.0 percent of the total normal and accrued liability pension contributions in the prebudget year.

(3) In the case of an SDA district, as defined pursuant to section 3 of P.L.2000, c.72 (C.18A:7G-3), in which the prebudget year adjusted tax levy is less than the school district's prebudget year local share as calculated pursuant to section 10 of P.L.2007, c.260 (C.18A:7F-52), the allowable adjustment for increases to raise a tax levy that does not exceed the school district's local share shall equal the difference between the prebudget year adjusted tax levy and the prebudget year local share.

(4) In the case of a school district first receiving preschool education aid in the 2025-2026, 2026-2027, or 2027-2028 school years and participating in the pilot program established by the commissioner pursuant to subsection h. of ¹section¹ 12 of P.L.2007, c.260 (C.18A:7F-54), the allowable adjustment for increases to raise a general fund tax levy for the local share of preschool education costs shall be equal to the actual increase required to provide preschool education under the pilot program less State aid provided pursuant to subsection h. of ¹section¹ 12 of P.L.2007, c.260 (C.18A:7F-54).

A school district first receiving preschool education aid in the 2025-2026 school year and participating in the pilot program established by the commissioner pursuant to subsection h. of ¹section¹ 12 of P.L.2007, c.260 (C.18A:7F-54) may, prior to the delivery of tax bills pursuant to R.S.54:4-64, recertify to the county board of taxation the sum to be raised in the district during the ensuing school year if the change in the amount to be raised is equal to the district's local share of preschool education costs for that school year.

e. (Deleted by amendment, P.L.2010, c.44)

f. The adjusted tax levy shall be increased or decreased accordingly whenever the responsibility and associated cost of a school district activity is transferred to another school district or governmental entity.

(cf: P.L.2018, c.67, s.6)

4. Section 3 of P.L.2007, c.260 (C.18A:7F-45) is amended to read as follows:

3. As used in [this act] P.L.2007, c.260 (C.18A:7F-43 et al.) and P.L.1996, c.138 (C.18A:7F-1 et al.), unless the context clearly requires a different meaning:

"At-risk pupils" means those resident pupils from households with a household income at or below the most recent federal poverty guidelines available on October 15 of the prebudget year multiplied by 1.85;

"Base per pupil amount" means the cost per elementary pupil of delivering the core curriculum content standards and extracurricular and cocurricular activities necessary for a thorough and efficient education;

"Bilingual education pupil" means a resident pupil enrolled in a program of bilingual education or in an English as a second language program approved by the State Board of Education;

"Budgeted local share" means the district's local tax levy contained in the budget certified for taxation purposes;

"Capital outlay" means capital outlay as defined in GAAP;

"Combination pupil" means a resident pupil who is both an at-risk pupil and a bilingual education pupil;

"Commissioner" means the Commissioner of Education;

"Concentration of at-risk pupils" shall be based on prebudget year pupil data and means, for a school district or a county vocational school district, the number of at-risk pupils among those counted in resident enrollment, divided by resident enrollment;

"County special services school district" means any entity established pursuant to article 8 of chapter 46 of Title 18A of the New Jersey Statutes;

"County vocational school district" means any entity established pursuant to article 3 of chapter 54 of Title 18A of the New Jersey Statutes;

"CPI" means the increase, expressed as a decimal, in the average annualized consumer price index for the New York City and Philadelphia areas in the fiscal year preceding the prebudget year relative to the previous fiscal year as reported by the United States Department of Labor;

"Debt service" means payments of principal and interest upon school bonds and other obligations issued to finance the purchase or construction of school facilities, additions to school facilities, or the reconstruction, remodeling, alteration, modernization, renovation or repair of school facilities, including furnishings, equipment, architect fees, and the costs of issuance of such obligations and shall include payments of principal and interest upon bonds heretofore issued to fund or refund such obligations, and upon municipal bonds and other obligations which the commissioner approves as having been issued for such purposes;

"District income" means the aggregate income of the residents of the taxing district or taxing districts, based upon data provided by the Division of Taxation in the New Jersey Department of the Treasury and contained on the New Jersey State Income Tax forms for the calendar year ending two years prior to the prebudget year. The commissioner may supplement data contained on the State Income Tax forms with data available from other State or federal agencies in order to better correlate the data to that collected on the federal census. With respect to regional districts and their constituent districts, however, the district income as described above shall be allocated among the regional and constituent districts in proportion to the number of pupils resident in each of them;

"Equalized valuation" means the equalized valuation of the taxing district or taxing districts, as certified by the Director of the Division of Taxation on October 1, or subsequently revised by the tax court by January 15, of the prebudget year. With respect to regional districts and their constituent districts, however, the

equalized valuations as described above shall be allocated among the regional and constituent districts in proportion to the number of pupils resident in each of them. In the event that the equalized table certified by the director shall be revised by the tax court after January 15 of the prebudget year, the revised valuations shall be used in the recomputation of aid for an individual school district filing an appeal, but shall have no effect upon the calculation of the property value rate, Statewide average equalized school tax rate, or Statewide equalized total tax rate;

"Full-day preschool" means a preschool day consisting of a minimum six-hour comprehensive educational program in accordance with the district's kindergarten through grade 12 school calendar;

"GAAP" means the generally accepted accounting principles established by the Governmental Accounting Standards Board as prescribed by the State board pursuant to N.J.S.18A:4-14;

"General special education services pupil" means a pupil receiving specific services pursuant to chapter 46 of Title 18A of the New Jersey Statutes;

"Geographic cost adjustment" means an adjustment that reflects county differences in the cost of providing educational services that are outside the control of the district;

"Household income" means income as defined in 7 CFR ss.245.2 and 245.6 or any subsequent superseding federal law or regulation;

"Net budget" means the sum of the district's general fund tax levy, State aid received pursuant to the provisions of this act other than preschool education aid, miscellaneous revenue estimated pursuant to GAAP, and designated general fund balance;

["Prebudget year" means the school fiscal year preceding the year in which the school budget is implemented;]

"Nonpreschool ECPA" means the amount of early childhood program aid, excluding prior year carry-forward amounts, included in a district's 2007-2008 school year budget certified for taxes that was allocated to grades K through 3;

"Prebudget year" means the school fiscal year preceding the year in which the school budget is implemented;

"Preschool expansion grant" means any grant funded by a portion of preschool education aid allocated by the Commissioner of Education or any other State funds appropriated for the purpose of expanding free access to high-quality preschool for resident three- and four-year old children in districts that do not, at the time of application for a grant, provide State-funded, high-quality, free preschool programs;

"Report" means the Educational Adequacy Report issued by the commissioner pursuant to section 4 of this act;

"Resident enrollment" means the number of pupils other than preschool pupils, post-graduate pupils, and post-secondary vocational pupils who, on the last school day prior to October 16 of the current school year, are residents of the district and are enrolled in: (1) the public schools of the district, excluding evening schools, (2) another school district, other than a county vocational school district in the same county on a full-time basis, or a State college demonstration school or private school to which the district of residence pays tuition, or (3) a State facility in which they are placed by the district; or are residents of the district and are: (1) receiving home instruction, or (2) in a shared-time vocational program and are regularly attending a school in the district and a county vocational school district. In addition, resident enrollment shall include the number of pupils who, on the last school day prior to October 16 of the prebudget year, are residents of the district and in a State facility in which they were placed by the State. Pupils in a shared-time vocational program shall be counted on an equated full-time basis in accordance with procedures to be established by the commissioner. Resident enrollment shall include regardless of nonresidence, the enrolled children of teaching staff members of the school district or county vocational school district who are permitted, by contract or local district policy, to enroll their children in the educational program of the school district or county vocational school district without payment of tuition. Disabled children between three and five years of age and receiving programs and services pursuant to N.J.S.18A:46-6 shall be included in the resident enrollment of the district;

"School district" means any local or regional school district established pursuant to chapter 8 or chapter 13 of Title 18A of the New Jersey Statutes;

"State facility" means a State developmental center, a State Division of Youth and Family Services' residential center, a State residential mental health center, a Department of Children and Families Regional Day School, a State training school/secure care facility, a State juvenile community program, a juvenile detention center or a boot camp under the supervisory authority of the Youth Justice Commission pursuant to P.L.1995, c.284 (C.52:17B-169 et seq.), or an institution operated by or under contract with the Department of Corrections, Children and Families or Human Services, or the Youth Justice Commission;

"Statewide equalized school tax rate" means the amount calculated by dividing the general fund tax levy for all school districts, which excludes county vocational school districts and county special services school districts as defined pursuant to this section, in the State for the prebudget year by the equalized valuations certified in the year prior to the prebudget year of all

taxing districts in the State except taxing districts for which there are not school tax levies;

"Tax levy growth limitation" means the permitted annual increase in the adjusted tax levy for a school district as calculated pursuant to sections 3 and 4 of P.L.2007, c.62 (C.18A:7F-38 and 18A:7F-39).

(cf: P.L.2025, c.35, s.37)

5. Section 12 of P.L.2007, c.260 (C.18A:7F-54) is amended to read as follows:

12. a. [District factor group A and B school districts, and district factor group CD school districts with a concentration of at-risk pupils equal to or greater than 40%, shall provide free access to full-day preschool for all three- and four-year old pupils. All other school districts shall provide free access to full-day preschool for at-risk pupils. Preschool education aid shall reflect the cost of the pupil's placement in either a district program, a licensed child care provider program, or a Head Start Program.] (Deleted by amendment, P.L. __, c. __). (pending before the Legislature as this bill)

(1) [Preschool] In the case of a school district that received preschool education aid in the 2024-2025 school year, preschool education aid shall be calculated [for district factor group A and B school districts, and for district factor group CD school districts with a concentration of at-risk pupils equal to or greater than 40%,] as follows:

$$\text{Aid} = (\text{IDE} \times \text{IDA}) + (\text{PRE} \times \text{PRA}) + (\text{HSE} \times \text{HSA})$$

where

IDE is the [number] projected FTE enrollment for the upcoming school year of district pupils, other than preschool disabled pupils, in an in-district preschool program;

IDA is the per pupil aid amount for an in-district preschool program;

PRE is the [number] projected FTE enrollment for the upcoming school year of district pupils, other than preschool disabled pupils, in a preschool program operated by a licensed child care provider;

PRA is the per pupil aid amount for a preschool program operated by a licensed child care provider;

HSE is the [number] projected FTE enrollment for the upcoming school year of district pupils, other than preschool disabled pupils, in a Head Start Program; and

HSA is the per pupil aid amount for a Head Start Program.

[A CD school district with a concentration of at-risk pupils equal to or greater than 40% shall be eligible to receive preschool education aid pursuant to the provisions of this paragraph for a minimum of three school years from the time of initial

determination of eligibility even if the district's concentration of at-risk pupils falls below a 40% concentration of at-risk pupils. In the event that the district falls below a 40% concentration of at-risk pupils for two consecutive school years, in the third school year the district shall receive preschool education aid for each at-risk pupil and for any four-year old pupil for whom the district received preschool education aid in the prior school year, and that pupil shall receive free preschool education.】

(2) 【Preschool education aid shall be calculated for all other districts as follows:

$$\text{Aid} = (\text{ARID} \times \text{IDA}) + (\text{ARP} \times \text{PRA}) + (\text{ARHS} \times \text{HSA})$$

where

ARID is the number of at-risk district pupils, other than preschool disabled pupils, in an in-district preschool program;

IDA is the per pupil aid amount for an in-district preschool program;

ARP is the number of at-risk district pupils, other than preschool disabled pupils, in a preschool program operated by a licensed child care provider;

PRA is the per pupil aid amount for a preschool program operated by a licensed child care provider;

ARHS is the number of at-risk district pupils, other than preschool disabled pupils, in a Head Start Program; and

HSA is the per pupil aid amount for a Head Start Program.】
(Deleted by amendment, P.L. ____, c. ____). (pending before the Legislature as this bill)

b. 【In accordance with regulations adopted by the commissioner, all districts shall submit a five-year plan that provides for the full implementation of full-day preschool for all eligible three- and four-year olds by the 2013-2014 school year. For the purposes of this section, "full implementation" means serving 90% of eligible pupils in accordance with the preschool quality standards adopted by the commissioner or such greater percentage as determined by the commissioner. A school district shall annually update the five-year plan based on actual implementation experience and shall revise its pupil projections in accordance with that experience.】 (Deleted by amendment, P.L. ____, c. ____). (pending before the Legislature as this bill)

c. (1) 【In the case of a school district that did not receive any form of preschool aid in the 2007-2008 school year, the 2008-2009 school year shall be a preschool planning year. Beginning in the 2009-2010 school year, the school district shall receive preschool education aid calculated in accordance with the provisions of subsection a. of this section based upon projected preschool enrollment.

In the 2009-2010 school year the school district may also receive start-up funds in accordance with regulations adopted by

the commissioner.] (~~Deleted by amendment, P.L. _____, c. _____.~~
(~~pending before the Legislature as this bill~~).

(2) In the case of a school district that received Early Launch to Learning Initiative aid in the 2007-2008 school year, [for the 2008-2009 school year the district shall receive preschool education aid in an amount equal to the district's allocation of Early Launch to Learning Initiative aid in the 2007-2008 school year. Beginning in the 2009-2010 school year,] the school district shall receive preschool education aid calculated in accordance with the provisions of paragraph (1) of subsection a. of this section [based upon projected preschool enrollment.

In the 2009-2010 school year the school district may also receive start-up funds in accordance with regulations adopted by the commissioner] pending a determination by the commissioner that the district is prepared to meet all program requirements for high-quality preschool pursuant to regulations adopted by the commissioner.

(3) In the case of a school district that received early childhood program aid in the 2007-2008 school year but did not receive preschool expansion aid or education opportunity aid in that year, [for the 2008-2009 school year the district shall receive preschool education aid equal to the greater of the district's 2007-2008 amount of early childhood program aid for preschool or the district's 2007-2008 per pupil allocation of early childhood program aid as included in the district's original 2007-2008 budget certified for taxes, inflated by the CPI, and multiplied by the district's projected preschool enrollment; except that if the district is able to demonstrate in the five-year plan submitted to the commissioner that it has the capacity to offer a full-day three- or four-year-old program, or a full-day three- and four-year-old program, in the 2008-2009 school year, the commissioner may approve the funding of the full-day program calculated in accordance with the provisions of subsection a. of this section based upon projected preschool enrollment. The district shall be informed of the commissioner's determination upon approval of the five-year plan. Beginning in the 2009-2010 school year,] the school district shall receive preschool education aid calculated in accordance with the provisions of paragraph (1) of subsection a. of this section [based upon projected preschool enrollment.

In the 2009-2010 school year the school district may also receive start-up funds in accordance with regulations adopted by the commissioner] pending a determination by the commissioner that the district is prepared to meet all program requirements for high-quality preschool pursuant to regulations adopted by the commissioner.

(4) [In the case of a school district that received preschool expansion aid or education opportunity aid in the 2007-2008

school year, for the 2008-2009 school year the district shall receive preschool education aid in an amount equal to the preschool budget approved by the commissioner for the 2008-2009 school year. Preschool education aid for the 2008-2009 school year shall be adjusted following receipt of the Application for State School Aid in October 2008. Beginning in the 2009-2010 school year, the school district shall receive preschool education aid calculated in accordance with the provisions of subsection a. of this section based upon projected preschool enrollment; except that for any school year the district shall not receive preschool aid in an amount less than either the total amount of preschool aid the district received in the 2008-2009 school year after the State aid adjustment or the district's 2008-2009 school year preschool per pupil aid amount multiplied by the projected number of preschool pupils after the State aid adjustment, whichever is greater.

In the 2009-2010 school year the school district may also receive start-up funds in accordance with regulations adopted by the commissioner.] (~~Deleted by amendment, P.L. _____, c. _____~~). (pending before the Legislature as this bill).

d. For the 2008-2009 school year, the preschool per pupil aid amounts shall be \$11,506 for pupils enrolled in an in-district program, \$12,934 for pupils enrolled in a licensed child care provider program, and \$7,146 for pupils enrolled in a Head Start Program. The preschool per pupil aid amounts shall be adjusted by the CPI in the 2009-2010 and 2010-2011 school years as required pursuant to subsection b. of section 4 of this act. For subsequent school years, the preschool per pupil aid amounts shall be established in the Educational Adequacy Report, with the amounts adjusted by the CPI for each of the two school years following the first school year to which the report is applicable.

e. A district shall appropriate preschool education aid in a special revenue fund for expenditure. In the event that any preschool education aid is not expended during the budget year, the aid may be carried forward in accordance with regulations adopted by the commissioner.

f. In the event that a district has fully implemented a full-day preschool program for three- and four-year old pupils [in accordance with its five-year plan] and meets the preschool quality standards or has provided preschool education to the number of eligible students to be served during a school year in accordance with [that plan and its annual updates and] the preschool quality standards, the district may appropriate preschool education aid [to support kindergarten through grade 12 or to provide preschool education for three- and four-year old pupils for whom the district is not required to provide preschool education upon the approval of the commissioner. The district

shall request approval in its annual plan update and any approval granted by the commissioner shall be made during the annual school budget process] for additional purposes that may be designated by the commissioner, which purposes shall include, but not be limited to, providing summer programming for preschool students, professional development for preschool staff, preschool facilities improvements, and transportation services for preschool pupils.

g. A school district shall maintain the preschool quality standards as adopted by the commissioner as a condition of receipt of preschool education aid.

h. In the case of a school district that first receives preschool education aid in the 2025-2026, 2026-2027, or 2027-2028 school years, the aid shall be provided, within the limit of available appropriations, pursuant to a three-year pilot program established by the commissioner that includes a cost sharing methodology between the State and the school district such that the amount of preschool education aid allocated to the district shall be calculated by multiplying the district aid percentage by the amount calculated pursuant to the formula in paragraph (1) of subsection a. of this section, where the district aid percentage shall be equal to the greater of the district aid percentage as defined pursuant to section 3 of P.L.2000, c.72 (C.18A:7G-3) or 40 percent of eligible costs.

i. A school district receiving preschool education aid shall obtain approval by the Commissioner of Education, in a manner prescribed by the commissioner, prior to implementing any significant redistribution, as defined by the commissioner, of State-funded preschool seats among district-operated programs, licensed child care providers, and Head Start programs.

(cf: P.L.2007, c.260, s.12)

6. (New section) a. The Department of Education shall, within the limit of funds appropriated, annually provide at least one opportunity to award preschool expansion grants in accordance with the provisions of P.L. , c. (C.) (pending before the Legislature as this bill). A school district shall be eligible to apply for and receive a preschool expansion grant if the district provides full-day kindergarten at the time of application and meets any other criteria the Commissioner of Education deems appropriate. An eligible school district shall submit an application to the commissioner, in a manner and form determined by the commissioner, which application shall include, but not be limited to, the following:

(1) a general overview of the district's proposed preschool program operational plan;

(2) enrollment projections for preschool students, other than preschool students with disabilities, for the next five years;

(3) a description of the district's proposed preschool curriculum;

(4) a description of intended strategies to ensure the inclusion of preschool children with disabilities in general education settings to the maximum extent possible;

(5) a description of intended strategies to annually identify and recruit families of at-risk pupils and other hard-to-reach populations, and subsequently ensure these children receive priority placement in the preschool program;

(6) a demonstration of due diligence to partner with all ready, willing, and able licensed child care providers and Head Start programs in the district's immediate and neighboring communities ¹, which shall be made in a manner determined by the commissioner and shall include, but not be limited to, documenting all efforts the applicant made to engage with all licensed child care providers and Head Start programs in the applicant's immediate and neighboring communities¹;

(7) an analysis of community need and the potential impact of a mixed delivery model of preschool education in a format determined by the commissioner or, if the applicant does not propose a mixed delivery model, justification for the decision not to do so, which justification shall include evidence that the district has adequate facility and staffing resources to implement high-quality preschool education without a mixed delivery model ¹or that extenuating circumstances in the eligible school district's community limit accessibility to, or feasibility of partnership with, licensed childcare centers and Head Start programs¹; and

(8) a description of the strategies the district has in place for serving eligible preschool students, with a five-year plan to serve 90 percent of the district's universe of three- and four-year olds.

b. In determining preschool expansion grant amounts and recipients, the commissioner shall give preference to districts in accordance with the concentration of at-risk pupils, as defined in section 3 of P.L.2007, c.260 (C.18A:7F-45). Preference given pursuant to this subsection shall ensure that, all other application criteria being equal, applicants with higher concentrations of at-risk students receive funding priority. The commissioner may prioritize applicants representing a consortium of school districts agreeing to make a high-quality preschool program available in all member districts.

c. The Department of Education, the Department of Children and Families, and the Department of Human Services shall maintain on the departments' Internet websites a page that includes:

(1) a list of all districts ¹[receiving preschool expansion grants] offering State-funded preschool¹ for the school year;

(2) a list of all districts eligible to apply for preschool expansion grants for the school year;

(3) a list of all licensed child care providers and Head Start programs in each district's community, as well as in neighboring communities; and

(4) the contact information for all district-operated preschool programs, licensed child care providers, and Head Start programs.

d. The Department of Education, the Department of Children and Families, and the Department of Human Services shall annually update the information required pursuant to subsection c. of this section no later than July 14 of each year. ¹The Department of Education, the Department of Children and Families, and the Department of Human Services shall update the information required pursuant to subsection c. of this section in a timely manner after any preschool expansion grants are awarded.¹

7. (New section) a. A school district that receives preschool education aid pursuant to section 12 of P.L.2007, c.260 (C.18A:7F-54) shall:

(1) demonstrate due diligence to partner with all ready, willing, and able licensed child care providers and Head Start programs in the immediate and neighboring communities; and

(2) submit to the Department of Education an annual program plan detailing the status of the district's preschool program implementation. The plan shall include information specified by the commissioner, including but not limited to:

(a) the district's comprehensive curriculum;

(b) protocol for how students' families can access community services, including services offered by licensed child care providers and Head Start programs;

(c) a description of how the district conducts outreach to families to determine individual family needs, advocate on their behalf, and obtain appropriate community services; and

(d) a description of how the district identifies and recruits families of at-risk pupils and other hard-to-reach populations, and subsequently ensures these children receive priority placement in the preschool program.

b. A school district that receives preschool education aid pursuant to section 12 of P.L.2007, c.260 (C.18A:7F-54) shall participate in a system of self-assessment for continuous quality improvement approved by the Department of Education to inform the school district of the status of its preschool program implementation. The system shall identify program areas in need of improvement based on a self-assessment, and shall include a

validation visit by a State team at least once every three years. The department may, based on the results of a district's self-assessment and the validation visit, require the district to complete an improvement plan. The improvement plan shall include a detailed explanation and timeline of the steps the district will take to improve areas identified for improvement.

8. (New section) The Department of Education, the Department of Children and Families, and the Department of Human Services shall, in consultation with school districts, licensed child care providers, Head Start program providers, and other stakeholders identified by the Commissioner of Education, submit a report to the Legislature pursuant to section 2 of P.L.1991, c.164 (C.52:14-19.1) no later than March 1 next following the date of enactment of P.L.

, c. (C.) (pending before the Legislature as this bill) ¹and each March 1 annually thereafter¹ on the status of preschool education in the State and the efficacy of the mixed delivery method of preschool education. The Department of Education may utilize up to \$250,000 of any appropriation for preschool education aid to contract temporary staff to assist with the preparation of the report issued pursuant to this section.

9. (New section) a. There is established in the Department of Education a Universal Preschool Implementation Steering Committee. The members of the committee shall be as follows:

- (1) the Commissioner of Education, or a designee;
- (2) the Commissioner of Children and Families, or a designee;
- (3) the Commissioner of Human Services, or a designee;
- (4) the Commissioner of Labor and Workforce Development, or a designee;
- (5) the Commissioner of Health, or a designee;
- (6) the Chief Executive Officer of the New Jersey Economic Development Authority, or a designee;
- (7) one member appointed by the President of the Senate, who shall be an employee of the Legislature; and
- (8) one member appointed by the Speaker of the General Assembly, who shall be an employee of the Legislature.

b. The duties of the committee shall be as follows:

(1) recommending to the Governor and Legislature a funding methodology for preschool costs to be implemented for all school districts beginning in the 2028-2029 school year, which may include proposing a Preschool Adequacy Budget and preschool education aid formula modeled after the calculation of equalization aid pursuant to section 11 of P.L.2007, c.260 (C.18A:7F-53);

(2) evaluating the pilot program established pursuant to subsection h. of section 12 of P.L.2007, c.260 (C.18A:7F-54) for

school districts that first receive preschool education aid in the 2025-2026, 2026-2027, and 2027-2028 school years;

(3) proposing methods to incentivize school districts to pursue mixed delivery partnerships with licensed child care providers and Head Start programs;

(4) proposing optional methods for school districts to establish centralized enrollment systems that prioritize family choice first in determining a preschool student's placement setting;

(5) analyzing whether providing an adjustment to school districts' tax levy growth limitation related to preschool costs is necessary or beneficial to the State's preschool expansion efforts; and

(6) recommending any appropriate means by which the State can seek to strengthen and expand the preschool workforce.

c. The steering committee ¹[may] shall¹ convene one or more local subcommittees to solicit input from local practitioners to facilitate completion of the requirements set forth in subsection b. of this section.

d. The steering committee shall organize within 90 days of the effective date of P.L. , c. (C.) (pending before the Legislature as this bill).

10. (New section) The Department of Education, in consultation with the Department of Children and Families, shall develop and periodically update a Mixed Delivery Model Preschool Handbook to compile all State requirements and associated guidance documents, organized by topic, deemed relevant by the Commissioner of Education. The topics addressed in the handbook shall include, but not be limited to:

- a. funding and staffing requirements;
- b. school district and licensed child care provider program administration;
- c. eligibility, recruitment, and enrollment;
- d. family engagement;
- e. curriculum;
- f. child assessments;
- g. classroom assessments and program evaluation;
- h. optional strategies for school districts to establish centralized enrollment systems that prioritize family choice first in determining a preschool student's placement setting; and
- i. strategies for supporting contracted licensed child care providers in maintaining access to infant and toddler care.

11. (New section) In order to strengthen and expand the preschool workforce, the Secretary of Higher Education shall develop guidance encouraging two- and four-year public

institutions of higher education to enter into joint dual degree admission agreements that require all credits earned toward Early Childhood Associate of Arts or Associate of Science degrees to be fully transferable and applicable to course requirements for educator preparation programs at four-year institutions of higher education.

¹[12. (New section) The Department of Children and Families, in consultation with the Department of Human Services and Department of Education, shall develop guidance for licensed child care providers to establish graduated salary scales for private teachers working toward preschool certification. The guidance shall encourage the development of salary scales that provide salary increases for increased academic preparation, including the completion of a Child Development Associate credential, the attainment of credits toward degree completion, the award of a bachelor's degree in early childhood education, and the receipt of an early childhood teacher certification.]¹

¹[13.] 12.¹ N.J.S.18A:44-2 is amended to read as follows:

18A:44-2. a. The board of education of [any] a district [may] serving elementary grades shall establish a kindergarten school or kindergarten department, which in order to receive State aid shall be a one-year program in advance of or in preparation for entrance to first grade, in any school under its control, and [may admit to such kindergarten school or department any child over the age of four and under the age of five and] shall admit to [such] the kindergarten school or department any child over the age of five and under the age of six years as of October 1 of that school year who is a resident of the district , but a board of education may, in its discretion, admit any student who turns five after this date if they meet entrance requirements as may be established by the rules and regulations of the board through a board approved policy.

b. A kindergarten school or kindergarten department established by a board of education shall provide a full-day kindergarten program no later than the beginning of the 2029-2030 school year; provided, however, that a district not providing a full-day kindergarten program prior to the effective date of P.L. __, c. __ (pending before the Legislature as this bill) may satisfy the requirements of this subsection by entering a sending-receiving relationship with a kindergarten school or kindergarten department established by the board of education of an adjacent school district. The tuition of students attending a kindergarten school or kindergarten department in another district in accordance with a sending-receive agreement shall be determined

in accordance with N.J.S.18A:38-19. Attendance at a kindergarten school or kindergarten department shall be free in accordance with the requirements of N.J.S.18A:38-1.
(cf: P.L.1996, c.138, s.72)

¹[14.] 13.¹ Section 8 of P.L.2000, c.72 (C.18A:7G-8) is amended to read as follows:

8. a. The number of unhoused students shall be calculated as the number of FTE students who are projected to be enrolled in [preschool for children with disabilities, preschool,] kindergarten, grades 1 through 12, and special education services pupil educational programs provided in a district within five years, which are in excess of the functional capacity of the district's current school facilities or the functional capacity of the school facilities which will be available within five years other than the school facilities for which the preliminary eligible costs are determined, based upon the district's long-range facilities plan. The determination of unhoused capacity shall separately consider projected enrollments and functional capacities at the [early childhood and] elementary ([preschool] kindergarten through grade 5), middle (grades 6 through 8), and high school (grades 9 through 12) levels. For the purpose of calculating the district's unhoused students, special education services students shall be considered part of the grade level to which the students' chronological age corresponds. In the event that the commissioner approves a school facilities project which involves the construction of a new school facility to replace an existing school facility, which shall accommodate both the unhoused students and the students in the existing school facility, the calculation of the number of unhoused students shall include the number of students currently attending the existing facility which is to be replaced.

b. Approved area for unhoused students (AU) shall be determined according to the following formula:

$$AU = [(UEC \times SEC) +] (UE \times SE) + (UM \times SM) + (UH \times SH)$$

where

[UEC,] UE, UM, UH are the numbers of unhoused students in the [early childhood,] elementary, middle, and high school enrollment categories, respectively; and

[SEC,] SE, SM, SH are the area allowances per FTE student in [preschool and] kindergarten [, grades 1] through grade 5, grades 6 through 8, and grades 9 through 12, respectively. Area allowances shall be determined based on the grade level of a student regardless of the grade configurations used in the school buildings of the district.

The minimum area allowance per FTE student shall be as follows:

ft.	
[Preschool] <u>Kindergarten</u> through grade 5	125 sq.
Grades 6 through 8	134
sq. ft.	
Grades 9 through 12	151
sq. ft.	

The commissioner, in consultation with the State Treasurer and the Commissioner of Community Affairs, shall adopt regulations that establish a process for the consideration of special circumstances, in addition to those provided in section 5 of P.L.2010, c.72 (C.18A:7G-5), in which the area allowances per FTE student established pursuant to this subsection may be adjusted. Any decision made by the commissioner pursuant to those regulations shall be made in consultation with the State Treasurer and the Commissioner of Community Affairs.
(cf: P.L.2017, c.131, s.18)

¹[15.] 14.¹ (New section) The Commissioner of Education shall adopt, pursuant to the "Administrative Procedure Act," P.L.1968, c.410 (C.52:14B-1 et seq.), rules and regulations necessary to effectuate the provisions of this act.

¹[16] 15.¹ This act shall take effect immediately ¹.¹