



Association for Children
of New Jersey

PROVIDING THE TOOLS TOWARDS QUALITY: THE STATUS OF P-3 TEACHER PREPARATION PROGRAMS IN NEW JERSEY

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ACNJ POLICY BRIEF

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OVERVIEW

In the 2000 *Abbott v. Burke* decision, the New Jersey Supreme Court acknowledged the critical role that well-educated preschool teachers play in the lives of young children. The Court stated that because “teacher certification is unquestionably an important component of any preschool education program,” preschool teachers working in community-based programs in our poorest school districts that lacked “academic credentials would be given four years to obtain certification.” New teachers were required to be college graduates and obtain a Preschool -3rd grade (P-3) certification.¹

Implementing the Court’s mandate was no easy feat since at the time of the decision a P-3 certificate did not exist in New Jersey. The only certification option that prospective preschool teachers had was to attain a Nursery through Grade 8 (N-8) credential, thus allowing anyone having this certification to teach in classrooms ranging from preschool through middle school.²

Within months of the Court decision, the state’s four year institutions of higher education developed P-3 certifications so that Abbott preschool teachers could obtain specialized training in early childhood education and be able to meet the Court’s four year deadline of September 2004. Currently, 100% of Abbott preschool teachers have their degrees and appropriate endorsement.

Along with the P-3 certification, a Kindergarten-5th grade (K-5) certification was instituted in place of the N-8 certification. This compromise permits a certification overlap between kindergarten and 3rd grade.

Since the 2000 Abbott decision requiring preschool teachers to be certified, research has been conducted that has focused on both the capacity and the content of teacher preparation and professional development for these teachers in New Jersey.³ However, little remains known about the following issues that also are involved with the P-3 certification:

- Because the various P-3 programs were developed to meet the Abbott preschool mandate, it is uncertain as to whether their development focused primarily on preschool preparation or whether the programs gave equal

weight to prepare prospective teachers to effectively teach preschool through third grade.

- Whether the current P-3 coursework is addressing continuity between the grades, the developmental levels at each grade and the different teaching methods needed for the varied developmental stages.
- Whether P-3 certifications were developed in a way that ensured alignment with other education certifications, including the K-5 certification which overlaps with the P-3 certification.

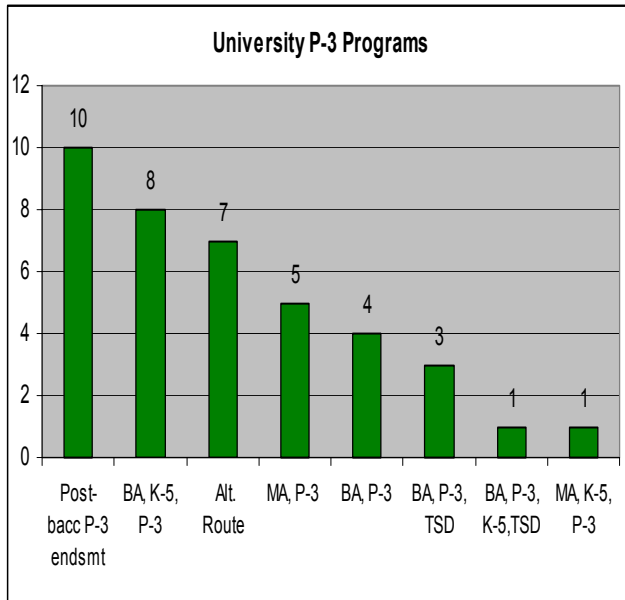
This policy brief attempts to assess whether P-3 teacher preparation programs are preparing prospective teachers to teach the continuum of grades within the P-3 system, review how new P-3 programs are aligned with other certification programs within universities, and examine how the overlap of the P-3 and K-5 certificates has impacted other university programs.

The findings reported in this policy brief were obtained through an interview protocol developed by the authors, in consultation with experts from the higher education community. Those New Jersey universities, a total of 13, that currently have some form of P-3 program(s) participated in the study. Staff familiar with the P-3 programs at each of these universities participated in a telephone interview either by one of the authors or by completing the protocol in writing and submitting their responses. Interviewing took place from the summer of 2006 through the spring of 2007.

FINDINGS

I. P-3 Programs in General

In the 2005-2006 academic year 13 of New Jersey public and private four-year institutions had one or more programs at the undergraduate or graduate level that prepared prospective teachers to teach children between the ages of three and eight years old. The number and types of programs offered at each institution varied significantly. There were three universities that offered only one P-3 program and there was one university that offered seven. The average number of programs offered at each university was slightly higher than 3.5.



II. The Types of P-3 Programs

New Jersey universities offer both undergraduate and graduate programs for prospective teachers interested in obtaining either a P-3 certificate or endorsement. The types of programs being offered varied from institution to institution. The following programs are currently being offered at universities throughout the state:

Undergraduate

1. Bachelor's Degree with P-3 only

A prospective teacher interested in a Bachelor's Degree with a P-3 certificate is required to complete general education requirements, an academic major, and a professional P-3 program that includes both coursework and field experience. The prospective teacher must achieve a cumulative GPA of at least 2.75/4.0 equals an A grade in a baccalaureate program.⁴ The New Jersey State Board of Education adopted a Praxis II test for Early Childhood Education in September 2007. Prior to the adoption, individuals who had obtained a P-3 certificate were not required to take a Praxis II test. Four out of the 13 universities, or 31%, currently offer a BA Degree with P-3 only.

2. Bachelor's Degree with Dual Certification in P-3 and K-5

A prospective teacher interested in a Bachelor's Degree with a dual certification in P-3 and K-5 is also required to complete general education requirements, an academic major, and follow the professional programs recommended for P-3 and K-5 teaching certifications including both coursework and field experience. For the K-5 certification, prospective teachers are required to take and pass the elementary Praxis II examination. This dual certification is offered in twice as many universities as the "stand-alone" P-3 certification, with eight out of 13 universities, or 62%, offering the program.

3. Bachelor's Degree with Dual Certification in P-3 and Special Education (TSD)

A prospective teacher who would like to obtain a Bachelor's Degree with a dual certification in P-3 and TSD is required to complete general education credits, an academic major and complete all education courses required for these two certifications. This dual certification has only existed since 2006. Within its first year of implementation, three of the 13 universities or 31% have already established the dual certification.

4. Bachelor's Degree with Certification in P-3/ K-5 and Special Education

This certification requires a prospective teacher to complete general education requirements, an academic major, and complete all education courses required for these certifications. Currently, two of the 13 universities or 15% offer this multiple certification.

5. Bachelor's Degree with a P-3 Minor

One university offers a program in which a prospective teacher is required to meet the criteria for a Bachelor's Degree in Elementary Education and can minor in pre-school through 3rd grade.

The undergraduate certification options indicate two trends. The findings demonstrate that universities are more inclined to offer a dual certification of either P-3/K-5 or P-3/TSD that prepares them for teaching more than P-3 general education.

Second, although the dual certification of P-3/TSD programs has only been in existence for one year at the time of the survey, these programs were offered in the same number of universities as the P-3 only programs, which were developed as an immediate response to the Court decision.

Graduate

1. Alternate Route P-3 Certification

The graduate alternate route program permits individuals with a Bachelor's degree to obtain certification while simultaneously teaching. A prospective teacher who holds a bachelor's degree from a regionally accredited college or university, has an academic major in liberal arts or science, has a baccalaureate grade point average of at least 2.75 when 4.0 equals an A grade⁵ and has verification of employment from a school district to be a P-3 teacher in that district, meets the criteria to participate in one of eight (62% of the total number of universities) alternate route programs throughout the state.

2. Post-Baccalaureate/Graduate with a P-3 Endorsement

The Post-Baccalaureate/Graduate with a P-3 Endorsement permits individuals with a Bachelor's degree to

obtain a P-3 endorsement without taking Master's degree courses. A prospective teacher who already holds a bachelor's degree from a regionally accredited college or university as well as a New Jersey Teaching Certification in another area can obtain a P-3 endorsement. Nine out of the 13 universities or 69% offer this option.

3. Master's Degree with P-3 Only

This graduate degree allows prospective teachers to obtain both a P-3 certification and a Master of Arts and Teaching. Five of the 13 universities (38%) offer this option.

Each of the following programs is offered at one university:

- 4. Master's Degree with Dual Certification for P-3/K-5**
- 5. Master's Degree with Dual Certification for P-3/TSD**
- 6. Master's Degree, TSD, K-5 and P-3 endorsement**

Findings indicate that the majority of graduate programs continue to be either the alternate route or post-baccalaureate/ P-3 endorsement, the two programs that were initially developed to address the Abbott mandate.

III. The Number of Prospective Preschool Teachers Attending New Jersey's Universities

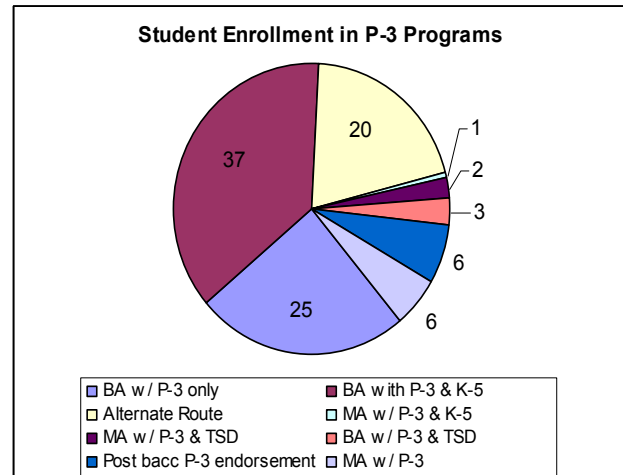
Survey findings indicated that in the 2005-2006 academic school year, over 2,500 prospective preschool teachers were attending P-3 programs at New Jersey's universities. Only a few universities indicated that this data was unavailable and several provided ranges of numbers. Of the students enrolled in university P-3 programs, 67% were enrolled in an undergraduate certification program, 19% were enrolled in a graduate alternate route program, and the remaining 14% were enrolled in another type of post-baccalaureate program. The breakdown is as follows:

<i>Undergraduate Programs</i>	<i>Numbers</i>
BA with P-3 only	596-606
BA with dual certification P-3/K-5	910-915
BA with dual certification P-3/TSD	71-81
BA with multi-certification P-3/K-5/TSD	119
BA with P-3 minor	5
TOTAL UNDERGRADUATE	1,701-1,726
<i>Graduate Programs</i>	<i>Numbers</i>
Post-baccalaureate P-3 endorsement	152
Graduate Alternate Route	484-494
MA with P-3 only	138
MA with dual certification P-3/K-5	15
MA with dual certification P-3/TSD	40-50
TOTAL GRADUATE	829-849

The data shows that nearly 2/3 (65%) of the undergraduates are in some form of a dual or multi-certification program.

However, in light of the fact that there are only four P-3 only programs, their enrollment numbers are significant. In the 2005-2006 school year, there were 606 prospective students in the four P-3 only programs compared with 915 in the eight dual certification P-3/K-5 programs.

The findings also indicate a significant student interest in those certifications that have a higher focus on special education. Although the TSD programs are new, in the 2005-2006 school year, 200 undergraduate students and 40-50 graduate students were combining early education training with special education. Still, when the undergraduate and graduate numbers are combined, less than 10% of the prospective early childhood teachers were receiving more comprehensive special education training through the dual TSD certification programs.



IV. Program Creation and Implementation

The initial focus of the universities in developing their P-3 programs was to meet the Court's mandate. Generally, the surveys indicated that there were four programs that were developed to respond to the Court's requirement. They were:

- BA with P-3 only;
- BA with dual certification P-3/K-5;
- Graduate Alternate Route; and
- Post-Baccalaureate/Graduate with P-3 endorsement.

These programs were either created and implemented at the same time or were developed soon after the Court decision and formally approved by the universities during the next school year.

After the initial response, new programs were developed to both meet the specific needs of prospective early childhood teachers and young children. For example,

MA with P-3 only programs doubled after 2005. Programs that addressed both early childhood and special education issues developed quickly once regulatory changes were made in 2006 permitting dual certification in P-3 and TSD.

The number and types of programs that have developed recently indicate some universities' attempt to provide the types of teaching skills necessary to meet the diverse needs of young children.

Department Faculty Involved in Developing Programs

Overall, the majority of programs were created by the faculty from the education departments which included both elementary and early childhood education only. A few programs did engage colleagues from other departments, including faculty from family studies, psychology and special education. Additionally, one university included early childhood professionals from the New Jersey Department of Education and practitioners from the community in the creation of their alternate route program.

VI. The Process Chair

Not surprisingly, the chairs of the committees developing both undergraduate and graduate programs all consisted of individuals from the universities' education departments. Of the 11 responses, four were chaired by the chairs of the education departments, one was chaired by the Associate Dean of Students of the Division of Teacher Education, five were chaired by Education Department faculty and one was chaired by a facilitator, which the survey indicated helped with time and focus.

VII. The Decision-Making Process

Survey responses indicated that decisions on program development were largely made through both informal and formal processes. Although the responses varied significantly, program design was largely accomplished through an informal process of collaboration between faculty. Several institutions stated they developed their P-3 programs by using existing elementary models and integrating P-3 within those models. This approach differentiated between the two models by stating that the K-5 model was more discrete with subjects taught separately, while the P-3 subjects were more integrated.

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Another university attempted to minimize university bureaucracy by using the names and course numbers of early childhood courses that were discontinued years ago and aligned them with coursework that reflected the P-3 mandate.

Several responses indicated that their programs were developed by using outside documents, including New Jersey's standards, position statements of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), specialized pedagogy matrices, the Boyer Topics and professional experiences. One

institution included practitioners from the field to assist with program development.

The review of the developed programs was mainly completed through more formal channels including a curriculum and review process and the college/university review.

VIII. Issues in Program Design

Several of the responses indicated problems in their programs' development. The following is a list of the major barriers identified from the surveys:

- **A lack of consensus between participants.** There were disagreements between faculty of different departments as to the type of early childhood programs that should be developed and implemented. Because of differing opinions, final versions of the P-3 programs were a compromise, with the focus of the programs being to prepare prospective teachers to teach preschool, not the P-3 continuum. Also, it was identified that the process took a long time to complete because of the group's lack of consensus.
- **University bureaucracy.** The college approval process became a barrier because the individuals responsible for approving new programs had experience in disciplines outside early childhood. Surveys indicated program implementation was also affected because of the elementary faculty's lack of knowledge in early childhood.
- **The credit overlap between P-3 and K-5.** Since these two certificates overlap, there were disagreements in how many credits should be taken in both early childhood and elementary education. The surveys indicated that these disagreements were based on both differences in philosophy and protection of individual turfs.
- **Too much to teach, too few credits.** Currently, New Jersey's licensing and standards regulations do not permit a prospective teacher to take more than 30 semester credit hours of instruction that are devoted to professional preparation.⁶ This makes it difficult to cover all of the material in 30 credits that would ensure that prospective preschool teachers have the requisite skills to address daily classroom issues within the P-3 continuum. Incorporating special education and multicultural topics into P-3 coursework and preparing students to teach in at-risk school environments were identified as being particularly difficult.

One comment stated that the programs developed later on and not as a response to the Court mandate, were

more thoughtfully developed since time was not an issue. These programs were developed by using other types of information, including student evaluations and conversations with district early childhood supervisors.

IX. Continuity of Content Area and Program Structure Across Certification Programs

All of the program responses indicated that steps were taken to ensure that there was continuity of content area and program structure between the various certification programs. The responses, however, varied as to the specific steps the individual universities took to ensure this continuity. A few of the responses were very broad and included holding meetings, reviewing syllabi or jointly selecting text books. Approximately 1/3 of the responses (four universities) indicated that their P-3 programs were modeled after their K-5 programs, in such areas as content, course coverage and time in the field.

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Other responses that ensured such continuity included:

- Review of scope and sequence to ensure that necessary topics were included and developed in a logical progression;
- Admission process, general education and GPA requirements were the same;
- Course outlines for student teaching were the same;
- Program and learning outcomes were aligned; and
- State and national accreditations were all linked.

The majority of responses, approximately 62%, indicated that they did not encounter any alignment problems between early childhood and their other programs. Only three responses (23%) indicated some difficulty with alignment. One university that experienced difficulty indicated that their elementary faculty appeared to have issues integrating early childhood into the curriculum. The remaining 2 responses (15%) did not answer the question.

X. Program Effectiveness

For the most part, respondents were satisfied with the programs they developed.

Universities had to be creative to work within the confines of the cap and still meet student needs.

While there appeared to be overall satisfaction, three of 11 respondents stated that they experienced challenges with students who were not able to meet school standards. Such challenges included issues around literacy skills and English language

learners. One of the three responses stated that many of their alternate route candidates were inadequately prepared for the rigors of graduate school and needed extra courses to attain the necessary skills.

Another response again identified the 30 credit cap as a problem, particularly in light of the identified literacy issues. Universities had to be creative to work within the confines of the cap and still meet student needs.

ASSESSING WHETHER P-3 TEACHER PREPARATION PROGRAMS ARE PREPARING PROSPECTIVE TEACHERS FOR EACH GRADE LEVEL IN THE P-3 SYSTEM

Because the P-3 certificate was initially developed immediately after the Supreme Court’s preschool mandate, the survey attempted to elicit information on how the programs were training prospective teachers beyond their preschool training.

I. The Initial Focus of the P-3 Programs

Eight of 10 responses indicated that the initial focus of their P-3 programs was to meet the Court’s preschool mandate. Of these, all universities with alternate route and endorsement programs stated that this was the initial focus of their program. Responses from other university P-3 programs varied, indicating a focus both on meeting the mandate as well as creating programs to prepare students to teach within the continuum.

II. Course Make-Up for Preschool and Primary Education

The majority of the survey responses indicated that their programs offered specific courses for both preschool and primary education. Of 12 responses, 8 or 67% said that their coursework tended to separate P-3 and K-5. Those institutions that had P-3 only programs integrated both preschool and K-3 issues in all of their courses. This integration also helped with addressing the 30 credit cap issue. One survey answered that their courses needed to be integrated to ensure that students were prepared by encompassing all levels (grade and development) in all courses.

III. The P-3 Field Experience (Traditional Route)

Each traditional route P-3 program required a student teaching experience with at least one of the student placements in an early childhood setting. In their research, Lobman et al. found that a third of P-3 programs required students to participate in student teaching experiences in two settings.⁷

This report sought to further examine the types and lengths of field experience placements including whether students are required to spend time in both preschool and primary classes in obtaining their P-3 certifi-

cation. There were tremendous differences in responses regarding the types of field placements experienced by prospective P-3 teachers at New Jersey's universities, ranging from three field experiences plus student teaching to field work imbedded in every educational course.

Of the 13 responses obtained, 11 or 85% stated that their students' field experiences included placements in both preschool and the primary grades. Eight of the surveys or 62% stated that the lengths of their field experiences varied, with only 2 stating that their placements were the same length.

However, these experiences also varied significantly. While several of the program responses appeared to evenly distribute their students' field placements between preschool, kindergarten and the primary grades, other responses indicated that placements were not as even-handed. For example, one survey response stated that field experiences were based on student interests and the three required placements could be in preschool, kindergarten or primary or other "various combinations." Thus, at this university, it is possible that a prospective P-3 teacher could be placed in two preschool and one kindergarten field placements and never experience a primary classroom.

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Further, in 2 programs, prospective P-3 teachers were not required to spend as much time in preschool classrooms as in primary and elementary classrooms. In one dual certification program, students had a field experience each year, growing with intensity in both time and involvement. These placements included exposure to both preschool and elementary, however the field experiences in students' junior and senior year focused on K-3 placements. This respondent stated that the faculty encouraged students to focus their field placements on the elementary grades because of a larger job pool. Students completing a dual certification at this university in P-3/K-5 could have minimal experience in a preschool classroom.

Individual responses provided additional information regarding field experiences:

- **Resources:** One response indicated that resources for field placements were a problem. The university didn't have the funding to split student teaching between preschool and primary.
- **The Availability of Quality Preschools:** One response indicated that they had avoided using preschool for student teaching because of the variability of teacher preparedness and the lack of certified teachers in their vicinity made such placements unsuitable. (This institution was not

located near any Abbott districts)

- **Urban v. Suburban:** Two universities required field placements in both urban and suburban settings.

IV. Recent Program Changes

The survey asked whether the universities' P-3 programs had recently been changed because of the required program submission to the state in 2005. Since many of the programs were developed under a short timeframe, this question attempted to elicit whether with time and reflection, the faculty had concluded that program changes and/or modifications were necessary. 38% of the responses indicated that their programs had been changed and 62% said that there had been no changes.

For those P-3 programs that had made modifications, the changes included:

- Adding new classes addressing areas including inclusion, English Language Learners and portfolio and professional assessment;
- Adding whole new programs; and
- Establishing rubrics for coursework.

For those programs that had not changed, 56% indicated that they plan to review their current program in the following areas:

- Updating and refining of programs;
- Revising assessments; and
- Institutionalizing a new P-3 program.

The changes point to programs that are evolving by ensuring that prospective preschool teachers have the necessary skills to address issues that will confront them upon entering their classrooms.

EXAMINING HOW THE OVERLAP OF THE P-3 AND K-5 CERTIFICATES HAS IMPACTED OTHER UNIVERSITY PROGRAMS

New Jersey's current Professional Licensure and Standards regulations state that an elementary school teacher certificate is valid in grades kindergarten through five and a Preschool through Grade three certificate is valid in preschool through grade three.⁸ The regulations for these two certificates permit overlap for kindergarten and first through third grade.

I. The Overlapping Issue

The survey attempted to elicit from the responders the benefits and impediments of such an overlap in certification. While the survey questions attempted to elicit overlap information, survey responses actually outlined issues stemming from their P-3 and K-5 programs. Their responses, however, provided substantive information on the status of these programs.

Four responses or 31% indicated that there was no benefit to the overlap. Three of these four responses were from institutions offering non-dual programs.

31% of the responses indicated that there was no benefit to the certificate overlap.

A. Overall Responses from P-3 Stand-Alone Programs

One of the four responses provided positive comments regarding the P-3 stand-alone programs which included:

- More overall diversity in their students including color and age;
- More students transferring from community colleges; and
- Better articulation between the universities and the community colleges.

Four responses identified the impediments of the overlap. Three of the 4 responses were from universities having P-3 only programs. Their comments articulated their opinions and experiences:

- Two of the 4 responses stated that the certifications should have been P-3 and 4-8. This would have recognized and established early childhood education as a particular period of time. One of these responses indicated that it was an “incredibly stupid move;”
- Two of the 4 responses also stated that the decision to choose between P-3 and K-5 is very difficult for students. Most will choose K-5 because they are told that it is the better choice;
- Institutions that have dual certifications do not often offer the same or same type of coursework as those with P-3 only programs in preparing students to teach early childhood education;
- Field experiences are harder on teachers who are already in the classroom because of the number of placements students need to take;
- Many principals continue to lack information about the P-3 certification; and
- The dual certification helped students become a “Jack of all-Trades and the master of none,” because they would not be obtaining a comprehensive education in early childhood.

B. Overall Responses from Dual Certification Programs

Nine or 69% of the 13 responses articulated the benefits for a prospective teacher to obtain dual certification of P-3 and K-5. Some of the positive responses included:

- There is value in exposing students to a spectrum of grade levels. Learning is on a continuum and the dual certification allows for more effective teaching;

- Graduates of dual certification programs are better able to adapt programs to individual student needs;
- The broader spectrum makes students more marketable in the public schools. Administrators see the P-3 stand-alone programs as too limiting;
- The dual certification provides more flexibility for teachers, supervisors and administrators; and
- School administrators who hire graduates with dual certifications will obtain a better understanding of early childhood and primary issues.

100% of respondents who stated that there were benefits in the overlap, outlined benefits stemming from their programs rather than from the overlap of certifications.

The following are quotes regarding impediments from the other universities that do not have a P-3 stand alone program included:

- “The dual programs were developed without a thoughtful and deliberate action plan;”
- “The dual programs do not recognize early childhood as an established learning period of time for young children;”
- “Fitting all that needs to be covered under the 30 credit cap continues to be a problem;”
- “The P-3 certificate is generally not taken seriously;”
- “There is a great deal of pressure to prepare teachers to teach 2nd and 3rd grade. While students may be interested in preschool, they are really concerned with the other levels;”
- “Providing adequate field experience is difficult in both the amount of experiences and the types;”
- “Even though grades K-3 are a part of “early childhood,” because the state does not have a clear definition of it, these grades are not seen as part of the definition;”
- “K” should not be in K-5. It appears that programs are doing an abysmal job in preparing students for kindergarten;”
- “There remains continued confusion about developmentally appropriate practices in early childhood;” and
- “Things are taught differently in P-3 and K-5.”

II. Student Choice for One or the Other Stand-Alone Certificate

When respondents having both P-3 and K-5 stand alone programs were asked, what had been their experience with students in determining which certification they

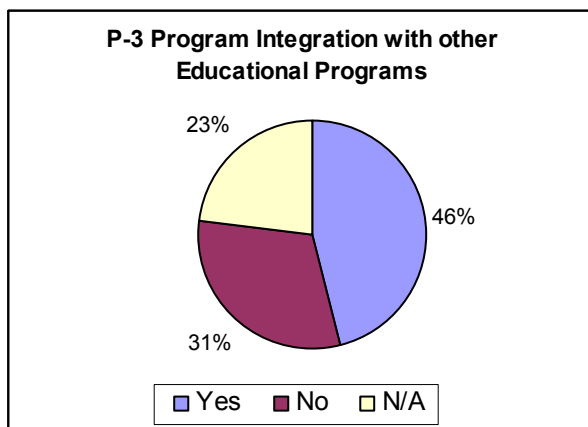
chose to attain, the responses varied. The responses from the 4 programs that have a P-3 stand alone program provided insight on why these programs have had difficulty obtaining legitimacy. The following university responses capture the problems faced by their students:

- Students are told that districts will not hire prospective teachers with just a P-3 certificate;
- Some students state that their parents have put pressure on them to choose the K-5 certificate;
- Students are told that they will be more “marketable” if they possess a K-5 or a dual certification;
- Three of the 4 survey responses stated that some students may choose the P-3 certificate because they fear taking a Praxis II exam (response was made prior to the State Board of Education’s adoption of a Praxis II examination for Early Childhood Education); and
- Other than students who plan to work in Abbott districts, students are not choosing to pay tuition for a P-3 certificate.

Additionally, one program that has both a dual P-3/K-5 program and a K-5 program stated that unless well counseled, most students tend to choose the K-5 certification “since it is the ‘default’ or more regular major.” When the faculty point out the advantages of the P-3 particularly when combined with the K-5, many will switch to the dual certification, but others will not.

III. The Full Integration of the P-3 Certificate

When asked whether their P-3 program was fully integrated (has become part of the university’s educational infrastructure) into other educational programs, slightly less than half (46%) stated that it was. Four responses (31%) stated that it was not fully integrated and three responses (23%) said that this was not applicable to their institution.



Those responses that indicated that the P-3 program was not fully integrated continued to outline the struggle for P-3 credibility. In the responses below it was clear that one significant barrier was their faculty colleagues:

- There is a perception that preschool teachers are babysitters;
- Many educators continue to believe that anyone can teach courses in early childhood education; and
- Other faculty/departments within the universities remain skeptical of the student quality for early childhood education.

IV. The Acceptance of the P-3 Certificate

Similarly, when asked whether the P-3 certificate was accepted as a legitimate program, 5 of the 8 respondents who were able to answer this question, 63%, indicated in the affirmative. One response indicated that they did not know, and 1 stated that the question was not applicable to their university. However, 2 of the 8 (25%) of the responses specifically talked about school principals and their not wanting to hire P-3 certified candidates because there was no Praxis II exam for P-3. (Responses were prior to the adoption of the Praxis II test for Early Childhood Education). At the time of the survey, several of the universities stated that they required their P-3 students to take the Elementary Praxis exam.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Eliminate the overlap between the P-3 and K-5 Certifications: While interview respondents did recognize benefits for students enrolled in dual certification programs, their responses indicated a benefit of students being well-versed in both early childhood and elementary education. Further, they recognized impediments which result from the lack of understanding of the P-3 certification within school districts.

With less than half of the respondents believing that the P-3 certification has been fully integrated and only 39% who believed it was accepted as a legitimate program, changes are necessary to support the legitimacy of the P-3 certification. A P-3 certification that does not overlap will demonstrate state support for the idea that early childhood is an established learning period of time for young children. The existing overlap dilutes that notion. If teaching certifications are distinct in what they cover, each certification may hold equal value in the eyes of students, as well as district practitioners and leaders.

A P-3 certification that does not overlap will demonstrate state support for the idea that early childhood is an established learning period of time for young children. The existing overlap dilutes that notion.

2. Promote a better understanding of the P-3 certificate both inside and outside the universities: Responses indicate that there is a lack of understanding of

early childhood by elementary faculty within the universities as well as by district leaders. An understanding of early childhood by all faculty is crucial to shape credentialing programs at universities and ensure proper and well-balanced advisement by the faculty to prospective early childhood teachers.

The same type of understanding is just as important at the district level. Findings of a recent ACNJ report indicated that school administrators often do not have backgrounds in early childhood education which affects what they perceive should be taking place in P-3 classrooms.⁹ A better understanding of this specific learning period of time in young children in both higher education faculty and school administrators, will help support the legitimacy of the P-3 certificate.

3. Students should be required to spend equal amounts of field placement time and intensity in both preschool and elementary classes: A student completing a P-3 certification will be licensed to teach at every level within the continuum. Their training should reflect adequate classroom experiences at each level.

4. Conduct research regarding the different teaching styles in the different certification programs: By implementing the P-3 certification, the State has taken positive steps in its commitment to effectively train prospective teachers in early childhood education. Should the certifications remain as they are however, and the overlap continues to exist, universities should examine the way classes are taught in the P-3 and K-5 programs. The brief's findings indicated that at some universities the teaching approaches to P-3 and K-5 were different. While classes for the P-3 certificate focused on coursework integration, K-5 classes focused on content area. This study does not address the effectiveness of either approach, but rather highlights that students who will be certified to teach the same grade levels (K-3) may have obtained very different skills in their teacher preparation coursework.

5. When programs are being reviewed and modified, special education faculty/departments should play a collaborative role in ensuring programs incorporate important special education pedagogy into the program: While some survey responses stated that special education faculty played a role in the development of some of the programs, that role was limited. This lack of participation is problematic at both the undergraduate and graduate level. In the two programs that educate the majority of prospective teachers, the BA with P-3 only and the BA with dual certification P3/K5 programs, the surveys indicated minimal participation from the special education department. Similarly, the surveys from the two most popular graduate programs, the Graduate Alternate Route and the Post-Baccalaureate/Graduate with P-3 endorsement, indicated no collaboration with special education colleagues. Only one survey from an MA with P-3 only program indicated faculty collaboration with the special education department. Input from special education faculty can only make programs stronger, and ultimately make stronger teachers.

CONCLUSION

The development of P-3 certification programs at New Jersey's universities in a short period of time demonstrates the State's commitment to providing its young students with highly qualified teachers. Further, it highlights the expertise of the universities in training early childhood educators.

However, even with this remarkable achievement, it appears that the P-3 certificate suffers from an "identity crisis" that plagues its legitimacy. It is crucial that this certificate be independently recognized as a valuable asset for successfully training teachers to provide a rich, meaningful and developmentally appropriate education for our young children between the ages of 3 and 8 years old. By implementing the report's recommendations, the state and educational stakeholders will move closer in providing this certificate with the legitimacy it deserves.

FOOTNOTES

¹ Abbott v. Burke, 163 N.J. 95 (2000) Abbott VI.

² Ryan, S., & Ackerman, D. (2003) *Creating a Qualified Early Childhood Workforce: Part 1. Getting Certified. A Report on the Efforts of Preschool Teachers in New Jersey's Abbott Districts to Improve their Qualifications*. New Brunswick, NJ: NIEER.

³ Lobman, C., Ryan, S., McLaughlin, J., & Ackerman, D. J. (2004). *Educating preschool teachers: Mapping the teacher preparation and professional development system in New Jersey*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Graduate School of Education.

⁴ N.J.A.C. 6A:9-11.

⁵ N.J.A.C. 6A:9-11(a)2.

⁶ N.J.A.C. 6A:9-10.2(a)4

⁷ Lobman.

⁸ N.J.A.C. 6A:9-9.1(a)1.

⁹ Rice, C. (2007) *Building Strong Rungs to Build Sturdy Ladders: The Status of Preschool – 3rd Grade Systems in New Jersey*. Newark, Association for Children of New Jersey, New York, NY: Foundation for Child Development.

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