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Making the Most of our Early Education Investments

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Highlighted text links to corresponding presentation slide.

Building excellence in the early years, providing opportunity and building a community. It's with great pride and enthusiasm that, on behalf of the Union City Board of Education, [I present to you our district's Abbott Preschool education program](#). The Union City School district focuses focus is on academic excellence and promoting a high-quality classroom environment for all children. One of its most compelling reasons for comprehensive school reform and improvements is its long, strong focus on the New Jersey preschool teaching and learning expectations, standards of quality, and New Jersey core curriculum content standards for grades K-12. Our early childhood program is a collaboration of thirty-six community providers in the Union City public schools that have improved the quality and consistency of early childhood education. The program promotes the philosophy and methodology of developmentally appropriate education.

The program is designed to foster the learning, literacy skills and experiences necessary to help young children succeed in school and life. Its goal is to have high quality classroom settings that are structured around the main components of high school educational approaches, an active learning environment that promotes active learning and language, and adult-child interactions.

For those who may not know about Union City, it is 1.4 square miles and we are right across the river. Although we are a tiny community, we have a large population with over 67,000 residents. According to the 1990 census, we are considered the most densely populated urban community in the United States. Union City ranks among the top 92 most economically depressed localities in the United States. The average family income is \$20,000. Union City is one of the thirty Abbott districts in New Jersey. We have nine elementary schools, one middle school and two high schools. According to the Application for School State Aid Report, our schools' population is 11, 679; 94% are Latino; 97% are minorities from Central and South America; 85% do not speak English at home; 40% of our enrolled students are in bilingual and ESL programs; 25% have been in the country less than three years; and 90% receive free or reduced lunch. More than 76% of our three-year olds are identified as bilingual students. However, by the time the children enter kindergarten, more than half have either tested advanced bilingual or they've tested out of the bilingual program.

As you can see here, these are the [elements of the Abbott Preschool Program](#).

Our goal is to provide and ensure quality education for all our children so that when they enter Kindergarten, they're ready to succeed. We provide opportunities for high-quality, pre-school programs and a seamless transition into elementary school.

As you can see, [the budget for 2005 and 2006](#) is over 16 million. We have a zero-based budget for every community provider, and believe it or not, it's a tremendous task to monitor their expenditures. Every month, we ask the community providers to forward an expenditure report on a monthly and quarterly basis. And unless they do their homework, they will not receive monthly payments.

Our teacher certification process has been a tremendous accomplishment for our district and for the state of New Jersey. Through a New Jersey scholarship, the group of teachers that were employed were able to go back to college and receive their PK-3 certificate for free. This alone is a tremendous accomplishment. I am proud to say that this year, we have met our mandate and all 117 teachers have received their PK-3 certificate. All of our community providers have an Abbott Preschool Program contract, which must be in compliance with all the Abbott Preschool components.

We have a comprehensive student family support program in which we provide health screening for all three and four-year olds in order to see if there are any issues that need to be addressed.

When we started in 1998, we served approximately 300 four-year olds in a half-day program. We are currently, and this was yesterday's total number, servicing 1,645 three and four-year olds, all in a space that totals 1.4 square miles.

Yes, New Jersey is making the nation's largest investment into provide a preschool and school education. However, we expect that this investment will pay both long-term and immediate benefits to the students, their families and the entire state.

This slide shows all the **Abbot Preschool Program components**. The program runs for 245 days It includes six hours of comprehensive educational programming with a certified teacher. The class size does not exceed 15 children. The teachers and the teacher's assistants are in the classrooms at all times. We have one full-time family worker for every 45 children and their families. We provide and ensure that we have a learning environment with quality programs in all our classrooms.

The centers must meet the Department of Human Services Family Division requirements. We have a curriculum that meets the state's pre-school teaching and learning expectations and is linked directly to New Jersey's core curriculum content standards. We have parent involvement opportunities to that meet the needs of families; we have monthly parent meetings and parent surveys so that we can see what issues or topics the parents would like to learn about.

Our recruitment and outreach programs have been tremendous in Union City. Believe it not, this year, our PK enrollment universal number reached 92% of our eligible preschool population. The beauty of this program is that it provides 10 hours of free programming for our children. For those of you sitting in the room with three and four-years old, imagine what you are paying for day care.

These are the documents that the Abbott Pre-School Program must follow. We have the function **documents of guidance**, which meet the components of the Abbott Preschool Program and the Abbott Implementation guidelines. The program also has a document which is called the Self Assessment Validation System, which is considered the best document the Department of Education has developed because it has sixteen areas in which every district must follow, document, and sincerely assess whether they have met -- fully or partially -- all the indicators.

For those of you who work in preschool, you know that assessment of three, four, and five-year olds is very difficult. The State Department has developed the Early Learning Assessment System., which is a system of observing what is ongoing. All teachers need to have portfolios for the children so that for the following year's, the teachers receive an actual document of how children have progressed the entire year.

The **long-term benefits of the Abbott Preschool Program** accrue to the community providers, children, parents, teachers, district, and of course, the development of excellence throughout the years.

These are the groups of individuals that have been affected for so many years. Union City had a group of community providers that were providing services to the children, but yet, there was no communication with our school district. Yes, they were providing education per se, but the quality was not there. Not until six years ago could we have forged this partnership with the community providers, directors, the State Department, and the Department of Human Services. Together, we have truly made an impact on our children. I am proud to share with you that **all of our teachers are certified and that we now have a total of 117 Abbott Preschool classrooms**. Thank you.