

ASSEMBLY APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE

STATEMENT TO

[First Reprint]

ASSEMBLY, No. 5717

with committee amendments

STATE OF NEW JERSEY

DATED: JUNE 19, 2025

The Assembly Appropriations Committee reports favorably and with committee amendments Assembly Bill No. 5717 (1R).

As amended, this bill is to be known as the “New Jersey Universal Preschool and Kindergarten Act.”

The amended bill modifies various statutes governing early childhood education in an effort to codify and expand on requirements that the Department of Education has previously established for providing State-funded preschool to build and sustain universal access to high-quality programs.

Preschool Expansion Grants

The amended bill requires the Department of Education (DOE) to provide annual preschool expansion grants, defined as grants expanding free access to high-quality preschool for resident three- and four-year children in districts that do not, at the time of application for a grant, provide State-funded, high-quality, free preschool programs. Pursuant to the amended bill, the department’s preschool expansion grant program is to include certain requirements.

Preschool Education Aid

The amended bill also revises requirements for preschool education aid. The revisions include an update to the formula for determining each district’s allocation of preschool education aid to eliminate the use of District Factor Groups and specify the use of projected FTE enrollment for the upcoming year. The amended bill also requires districts that receive preschool education aid to meet certain criteria concerning partnerships with licensed child care providers and Head Start programs, program planning, and self-assessment.

Preschool Cost-Sharing Pilot Program

The amended bill establishes a three-year pilot program for a methodology of sharing preschool education costs between the State and participating school districts. A participating district is any district receiving preschool education aid for the first time in the 2025-2026, 2026-2027, or 2027-2028 school years. Under the pilot program, preschool education aid for participating school districts is to be calculated by multiplying the district's district aid percentage by the amount calculated under the preschool education aid formula applicable to districts that received preschool education aid in the 2024-2025 school year. District aid percentage for this purpose is to equal to the greater of the district aid percentage as defined pursuant to the State school construction law or 40 percent.

Universal Preschool Implementation Steering Committee

The amended bill establishes in the Department of Education a Universal Preschool Implementation Steering Committee composed of representatives of various State agencies and the New Jersey Legislature.

Other Early Childhood Education Provisions

The amended bill also:

- requires the DOE, the Department of Children and Families, and the Department of Human Services to maintain and annually update certain information regarding preschool and child care providers on their respective Internet websites;
- requires the DOE, the Department of Children and Families, and the Department of Human Services, in consultation with stakeholders, to annually submit a report to the Legislature on the status of preschool education in the State and the efficacy of the mixed delivery method of preschool education;
- requires numerous State agencies to publish guidance on a variety of topics related to expanding access to high-quality preschool education in areas of greatest need; and
- removes preschool students from the population used to determine approved area for unhoused students for school facilities projects.

Finally, the bill requires each elementary-serving school district in the State to establish a full-day kindergarten program no later than the beginning of the 2029-2030 school year. Attendance at the kindergarten program shall be free. School districts not providing full-day kindergarten by the effective date of the amended bill may satisfy this requirement by entering into a sending-receiving relationship with an adjacent school district.

COMMITTEE AMENDMENTS:

The committee amended the bill to:

- permit a school district applying for a preschool expansion grant to justify its decision not to use a mixed delivery model of preschool education by including evidence that extenuating circumstances in the school district's community limit accessibility to, or feasibility of partnership with, licensed childcare centers and Head Start programs; and
- make a technical correction to a citation in the bill.

FISCAL IMPACT:

Fiscal information for this bill is currently unavailable.