



## **PRE-K OUR WAY**

Prepared for school, ready for success.

**Lynda Anderson-Towns  
State Senate Testimony  
State Senate Education Committee  
September 21, 2015**

Thank you, it is an honor to be with you today.

My name is Lynda Anderson-Towns. I'm the former -- just recently retired -- Principal and Superintendent of Woodbine Elementary School in Cape May County, New Jersey. I served 9 years at Woodbine, and devoted my entire career of 34 years to education in Morris County at Dover High School and also to Cape May County at Middle Township High School, to Lower Township at the Maude Abrams Elementary School and then to the Woodbine School District at Woodbine Elementary School.

I'd like to give you a first-hand account of what New Jersey's high-quality preschool program does for children, our local schools and our communities—especially those that struggle to make sure each child and family has the opportunity to achieve the American dream.

Today, Woodbine Elementary School is the pride of our community. It wasn't always that way.

Our school has a diverse population with many children from hard-working families. While their parents may not have as much as others, they have just as much desire to see their children do well in school and succeed in life.

Preschool is expensive in New Jersey. Many families, particularly in communities like Woodbine, struggle to pay for it and many can't afford the quality programs children need to be successful when they get to school.

In the past, many of our children arrived at school with a significant disadvantage because their parents couldn't afford high-quality preschool that prepared them for kindergarten and beyond. Woodbine Elementary School struggled too because too many of our children arrived at school with knowledge and developmental gaps that were hard to close no matter how hard educators, students and their parents tried.

Kindergarten needs to be a springboard, not an effort to teach children how to swim.

As an educator I can tell you that quality preschool is essential for building the early cognitive and character skills that enable effective, life-long learning. On the first day of school every kindergarten teacher can tell you which child

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went to preschool. They come in eager to learn from their teachers and their peers. They're attentive. They contribute. They're ready to build literacy and numeracy skills.

Fortunately, New Jersey has one of the best public preschool models in the nation and our school was lucky to get it.

We adapted the state preschool program to serve the needs of our local children and families, while maintaining the high standards this program requires. And that proved to be the turning point for us.

Today, the Woodbine school district educates over 90% of the community's preschool-aged students in programs that share the same building as its K-8 classes.

Educators – and parents – see the progression of learning, and the shared socialization and growth in each child from pre-k to kindergarten and beyond.

The introduction of a high-quality pre-k program has shown real improvement throughout each child's school life, and fundamentally changed Woodbine's school performance.

Woodbine's educators continue to see that children enter kindergarten with dramatic increases in language proficiency, writing skills, number recognition and awareness.

In fact, the number of students reading at third grade level has doubled since the preschool was implemented in 2008.

This strong start provided by high-quality preschool persists through the elementary school grades and helps improve the quality of instruction in Woodbine's schools.

Teachers move students forward instead of taking a great deal of time to get them up to speed.

Woodbine also has time to identify students with special needs and give them the attention they need to be successful—without holding other students back.

This success benefits the child, his or her classmates, and all of their futures.

It also gives parents confidence that public schools remain the best choice for their children—something that builds great value in and for the community. In fact, many Woodbine families who previously homeschooled their children

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as well as parents who sent their children to private schools have now returned for pre-k and kindergarten – and elementary school.

Today, many families recognize that our pre-k program is one of the best in Cape May County.

They move into our district and become a part of the Woodbine community because we provide a great start at the very beginning.

We're closing achievement gaps by investing early and working to prevent them with quality preschool.

I consider our school and community to be lucky to have been able to implement New Jersey's high-quality preschool program. But it saddens me to think that the future of too many children in too many communities depends on luck.

You can view our Woodbine story as a short video at [www.prekourway.org/videos](http://www.prekourway.org/videos). Our success story does not need to be limited to our community. With your leadership, we can replicate our story in other communities across this state.

What we need is the funding to make sure that each child, no matter where they live, receives quality preschool that prepares him or her for school and success in life.

I urge you to expand New Jersey's preschool program to more three- and four-year-olds. We know it works and it's time to put it to work for more children in New Jersey.

Thank you.