



# PRE-K OUR WAY

Prepared for school, ready for success.

**Ruth Piatt  
State Senate Testimony  
State Senate Education Committee  
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Thank you. As a first generation American, it is an honor and privilege to be here today. My name is Ruth Piatt from Vineland.

Dr. Barnett, Ms. Zalkind, Mr. Maher and Ms. Anderson-Towns have testified to the real and lasting effects preschool has on education and school achievement. I want to spend my time addressing access to affordable, high-quality preschool programs for all families in our state.

New Jersey's preschool program is unique because it is implemented as a mixed-delivery system throughout public school districts *and* effectively utilizes private and community preschools to best suit local needs. In fact, the law calls for just such a delivery system. A delivery system that utilizes existing facilities with experienced faculty to successfully fulfill community needs. This law had the foresight to see the value of private preschools partnering with the public educational community to become a part of a larger mission in reaching and teaching more preschool children, and in strengthening the local tax base that builds up the local economy and educates the local workforce.

I'm a private preschool owner with over 30 years of experience (small business) in Vineland, New Jersey, who works with New Jersey's public preschool program to bring high-quality care and instruction to more 3- and 4-year-olds. My school, Little Lamb Preschool-Keener Kids, Inc. has been partnering with the Vineland public schools for 16 years. We educate 90 students every day at our 6 classroom facility. Each classroom has a teacher with either a BA and/or a Master's Degree in Early Childhood Education.

Yes, I'm a private provider of a public program. My preschool is a local small business providing a service to my community. As such, I employ local residents, engage local businesses (i.e., janitor cleaning service, local landscaper, local vendor for our children's hot lunch program, buy from a local hardware store, use a local electrician and plumber for building needs...) to provide services to our school. Those businesses and I all pay taxes. The taxes we pay help our public schools, roads, local fire and police department. We are a revenue-producing entity within our city.

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While I manage my business as a business, I am fortunate to get up every day and know my business is providing high-quality preschool programs to Vineland's youngest citizens. When my students leave our center to begin their K-12 school careers, I know they are prepared for school and ready for success. There are many private, community based and public preschool providers in our state. Despite our diversity, we all have the same goal: to make sure all children have access to high-quality preschool. Vineland's mixed delivery system has a proven track record that private and public preschools can put their personal agendas aside to improve the culture of the community.

Many providers don't need to generate or seek new business. Many have families on waiting lists for services. Unfortunately, for many parents, preschool is unaffordable.

There are more children in need of high-quality preschool than there are preschools to serve them or programs that working families can afford. Many children come from families where parents work two or three jobs to make ends meet. Their parents may not have the time, resources or education to provide the early learning all children need.

Preschool programs like mine provide these families and their children with a free, six hour educational program that ensures that they will not be left behind.

But it is not just about access; it is about access to high-quality programs. Quality is the top concern for preschool providers who care about their children and families. Quality is why I chose to be a private provider of New Jersey's public preschool program. As a business owner, the value of this law matches good business practices: it develops a positive culture, has a strong vision and mission statement of meeting the needs of ALL children, has standards of excellence (degreed staff implementing best practices) and a discussion of ideas between the private and public educational sector, and has a high educational yield along with qualitative research to prove the value of the dollars invested. What is needed NOW is your leadership and influence!

States across the nation are building preschool programs, but few are as thorough and tested as ours.

It's simply the best in the country—and it gives a private provider, like me, confidence that I can deliver the greatest value to the children in my care and the parents who place their trust in me.

We don't lack the proven program. We lack courage.

Courage to embrace the fact that education starts long before kindergarten.

Courage to act upon the overwhelming research that shows how our preschool program leads to better education

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outcomes that strengthen our communities and our economy.

Courage to invest more money in our young children so all have the skills to compete and do well.

We in Vineland are so blessed to have been one of the 31 towns originally chosen to receive the state's public preschool program.

Fortunate children. Fortunate parents. Fortunate schools. Fortunate employees. Fortunate local businesses—and fortunate community.

But the opportunity of a life-changing education shouldn't depend on the luck of where one is born, or where one's parents can afford to live.

We can't afford to wait any longer to expand our preschool program to more 3- and 4-year-olds—to more communities that have been waiting for their chance to prepare their children for success in school and life.

I urge you to have the courage to fully implement the law that expands New Jersey's preschool program to additional communities.

We must finish what we started—making sure each child has the access to high-quality preschool.

Thank you.