Strategies for Children, between 12 and 14 percent of third graders what's known in education circles as the achievement gap.

The extra little ones didn't trouble her as much as the prospect of combining some classes and breaking others up in an effort to keep high. In practice, there was a lot of juggling: On any given day, teachers earned $10 an hour on average and staff turnover was

\[
\text{teacher ratio in full-day preschool classrooms from exceeding 10 to}
\]

so much so that gaps in language wealthier counterparts, so much so that gaps in language

low-income black and Hispanic students relative to their white or

so much so that gaps in language

The short-term results of these interventions were mixed. Some of

that the earliest years are a period of intense and rapid neural

trying to stimulate a
to Kelly's room. Massachusetts state law prohibits the child-to-

incapable of theorizing or abstraction.

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...those who couldn't always hold it open themselves.

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Preschoolers at Egenolf Early Childhood Center in Elizabeth, N.J., part of the state’s Abbott program for overtaxed teachers. Mary Alice McCarthy, director of the Center on improve students’ educational outcomes compared with those who declared that all preschool teachers would be required to obtain an... Last year, for instance, the District of Columbia school district took Springfield Arbors preschool would change owners this January, the playground’s edge. “Yes,” she said. “That’s a squirrel.” The boy big, round eyes. He pointed at the animal, silently but with gusto. One late afternoon, Kelly prided herself on setting those worries aside when she was at... big, round eyes. He pointed at the animal, silently but with gusto. One late afternoon, Kelly prided herself on setting those worries aside when she was at... big, round eyes. He pointed at the animal, silently but with gusto. One late afternoon, Kelly prided herself on setting those worries aside when she was at... big, round eyes. He pointed at the animal, silently but with gusto. One late afternoon, Kelly prided herself on setting those worries aside when she was at... big, round eyes. He pointed at the animal, silently but with gusto. One late afternoon, Kelly prided herself on setting those worries aside when she was at... big, round eyes. He pointed at the animal, silently but with gusto. One late afternoon, Kelly prided herself on setting those worries aside when she was at... big, round eyes. He pointed at the animal, silently but with gusto. One late afternoon, Kelly prided herself on setting those worries aside when she was at... big, round eyes. He pointed at the animal, silently but with gusto. One late afternoon, Kelly prided herself on setting those worries aside when she was at... big, round eyes. He pointed at the animal, silently but with gusto. One late afternoon, Kelly prided herself on setting those worries aside when she was at... big, round eyes. He pointed at the animal, silently but with gusto. One late afternoon, Kelly prided herself on setting those worries aside when she was at... big, round eyes. He pointed at the animal, silently but with gusto. One late afternoon, Kelly prided herself on setting those worries aside when she was at...
Amy O’Leary, a former preschool teacher and current campaign director for Strategies for Children, agrees: “The existing preschool work force is much more diverse than the elementary work force, and we want to preserve that,” she says. “If you hire only those teachers who have the means to do it on their own, you displace the existing ones, who often come from the communities they teach in and have their own specialized knowledge of what it is to live in neighborhoods like Six Corners.”

A Philadelphia-area community college, a union and a number of local preschools joined forces to make the first attempts at training preschool teachers in this way. The program pairs apprentice teachers with mentors as they progress through a structured curriculum while working in the classroom full time. They get four wage increases over a two-year period, so that by the time they complete the program, which grants them both an associate degree and a journeyman card, they are already earning $2 to $3 more an hour. “That’s a life-changing increase,” McCarthy says.

It’s also classroom-changing. The program is still in its infancy, but I spoke with apprentices, teachers and center directors who say that improvements in classroom dynamics and staff turnover, not to mention actual teaching, are already apparent. “I feel like I’ve learned more about how their little brains work, and also about the best ways to reach them,” says Briana Gonsiewski, an apprentice at Spin preschool in Philadelphia, who taught for 10 years before joining the program in 2017. “Before, I did not see playing on the ground as something structural. Now I get how they are really learning all the time, and I can start to see how to tap into that.”

It will take a few years more to say how the apprentice program stacks up against programs like Abbott, or even like Springfield Arbors, and if the teacher training affects student outcomes in any measurable way. And then individual communities will have to decide if the gains are worth the price.

“We have to come to terms with the fact that this is going to cost a lot more money,” O’Leary says. “And to accept that, I think we still have to shed a lot of prejudices about working mothers and the working poor, and what it means to help them.” In the meantime, with limited funds, policymakers and educators are caught between competing imperatives: Use the money they have to expand access so that as many students as possible receive some form of early education, or use it to improve quality in specific places like Six Corners, where both the need and potential payoff are greatest.

Investing in teacher education, as Abbott or the apprenticeship programs do, means choosing the latter, and that’s a tough sell to taxpayers who need child care themselves. “Politicians are understandably reluctant to tell parents who need to work and who are on the waiting list for subsidies, ‘Well, we’re not going to expand access this year, because we are putting that money into quality,’” Barnett says. “It’s true that the lowest-income areas stand to benefit the most from good preschools, but it’s not just the very poor that are struggling. The story of inequality is increasingly that the very rich are leaving everyone else behind.”

For now, Kelly and hers were making do. Her son was accepted at a private preschool that would cost $20,000. Her daughter was accepted at a public preschool, but the family couldn’t afford the $750 a month. “If we had started with the money we had put in the tank, or you’d end up stranded.”

Kelly learned this the hard way one evening. After a day filled with staff shortages and screaming children, she was heading through Six Corners toward home when the car sputtered to a stop. Both snow and darkness were falling fast, but there was a gas station six of the 10 colleges he applied to. He had qualified for some scholarship money, which would help bring his tuition down, but Kelly was scrambling to come up with the rest. She had found a second job working nights and weekends at Kohl’s, and was cutting corners where she could. One such economy was her car: a 2001 Buick Park Avenue, bought from a friend for $700. The engine was solid, but the gas meter was busted, so that you had to pay very close attention to the amount of driving you did relative to the amount of money you had put in the tank, or you’d end up stranded.

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