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With Governor Whitmer's Pre-K for All Proposal, Michigan Poised to Become a National Leader in Preschool

National report says it's a "time to choose," as states have bounced back unevenly from the pandemic when it comes to preschool enrollment and quality

NEW BRUNSWICK, N.J. - A new national report released today finds Michigan is one of only five states in the country to meet 10 of 10 research-based quality standards benchmarks for pre-kindergarten programs. However, the report finds the state ranks 18th in the nation for preschool enrollment for four-year-olds and serves no three-year-olds.

The National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) today released its annual *State of Preschool* report, which tracks preschool enrollment, funding, and quality across states. The 2023 State of Preschool Yearbook found that, in the 2022-2023 school year:

- The Michigan Great Start School Readiness (GSRP) enrolled 38,140 children, an increase of 2,245 from the prior year, reaching 34% of 4-year-olds.
- State spending totaled \$369,120,000, with an additional \$83,000,000 in federal recovery funds to support the program, down \$4,696,417 (1%), adjusted for inflation, since last year.
- State spending per child (including federal recovery funds) equaled \$11,854 in 2022-2023, down \$872 from 2021-2022, adjusted for inflation.
- Michigan met 10 of 10 research-based quality standards benchmarks for minimum quality recommended by NIEER.

Earlier this year, Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer recommended a bold \$159 million proposal to help the state reach its goal of universal pre-k for all four-year-olds two years prior than her administration's original target date of 2027. The proposal is informed by *A Roadmap for Implementing PreK for All*, a set of recommendations released in January 2024 based on input from over 4,200 Michiganders, the latest research, and findings from other states and localities with robust pre-k systems. The recommendations focused on several key areas, including building the state's pre-K capacity, strengthening the workforce, supporting robust enrollment, and coordinating pre-k for all with other programs and initiatives within the state's birth to-five early learning and care system.

"Every kid deserves a strong start that helps them learn, grow, and thrive," said **Michigan Governor Whitmer**. "My Pre-K for All proposal will save families \$10,000 a year and ensure kids arrive at kindergarten better prepared to succeed. I'm proud Michigan is being recognized for our work to expand access to affordable pre-K and I hope our leadership inspires other states to join us and invest in a brighter future for all kids."

"We applaud Governor Whitmer for her bold plan to provide universal access to quality pre-K," said **W. Steven Barnett, Ph.D., NIEER's senior co-director and founder**. "We were glad to see New Jersey Preschool cited as a model in Michigan's Pre-K for All Roadmap. Like New Jersey, Michigan can provide universal preschool through a mixed delivery system that strengthens the overall early care and education infrastructure and recognizes that child care must be paid for the full cost of quality."

Nationally, the report finds that this is a critical moment for preschool. The nation has emerged, albeit unevenly, from the COVID-19 Pandemic. States are poised to make new progress toward serving more three- and four-year-olds in high-quality, full-day preschool programs. How each state chooses to move forward – and whether the federal government helps – will determine how much real progress is made. Most states have not committed to serving all children, and even those states that have often fall short. Most states need to increase funding per child substantially to enable providers to meet minimal standards for a high-quality, effective program.

During the 2022-2023 school year, states enrolled over 1.63 million children in preschool, marking a 7% surge compared to the preceding year. Preschool enrollment reached 35% of 4-year-olds and 7% of 3-year-olds, with state expenditures reaching \$11.73 billion—an 11% increase from 2021-2022 when adjusted for inflation. Notably, state spending per child surpassed \$7,000 for the first time. However, despite this notable progress, most states still fell short of their pre-pandemic preschool enrollment. While several states made strides towards achieving universal preschool access, six states persisted in not allocating any funding for preschool programs.

"With the pandemic in the rear view, it is time for states to choose whether they are going to support high-quality preschool and how," **said Allison Friedman-Krauss, Ph.D., the report's lead author.** "Will states commit to serving all four-year-olds? Will states serve both three- and four-year-olds? Will states make the investments needed to ensure that programs are effective? Will states support a mixed-delivery model for preschool incorporating both existing child care programs and public schools? How will states recruit, support, and retain preschool teachers? These decisions will impact millions of children for years to come."

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The 2023 State of Preschool Yearbook was supported with funding from the Heising-Simons Foundation and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. For more information and detailed state-by-state profiles on quality, access, and funding, please visit www.nieer.org.

The National Institute for Early Education Research at the Rutgers Graduate School of Education, New Brunswick, NJ, supports early childhood education policy and practice through independent, objective research and the translation of research to policy and practice.