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As New York State Continues to March Toward Universal Pre-K, Leaders Have Choices To Make

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 that New York ranks 8th in the nation for preschool enrollment for four-year-olds and 9th for 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:

- New York preschool served 56% of 4-year-olds and 15% of 3-year-olds in state-funded preschool, for a total enrollment of 155,512 children, an increase of 3,524 from the prior year.
- State spending totaled \$884,375,996, with an additional \$64,396,595 in federal recovery funds to support the program, up \$5,745,842 (1%), adjusted for inflation, since last year.
- State spending per child (including federal recovery funds) equaled \$6,101 in 2022-2023, down \$104 from 2021-2022, adjusted for inflation.
- New York met 7 of 10 research-based quality standards benchmarks for minimum quality recommended by NIEER.

In 2022-2023, \$25 million in competitive Statewide Universal Full-Day Prekindergarten Program (SUFDPK) grants were awarded to 57 school districts for preschool expansion. Additionally, the state budget enacted in 2023 for Fiscal Year 2024 included an additional \$100 million for the Universal Prekindergarten Program (UPK) and \$50 for a new competitive SUFDPK grant, actions that should improve New York's standing in next year's *State of Preschool* report. New York's Office of Early Learning also increased capacity to add more site visits and professional learning opportunities and updated preschool regulations to better support the needs of emergent multilingual learners.

"New York leaders should be applauded for making progress toward universal access to preschool for three- and four-year-olds across the state," said **W. Steven Barnett, Ph.D., NIEER's senior co-director and founder**. "However, New York must continue this unfinished work; in the past progress has stalled after advances. Research consistently shows that investments in quality preschool reap long-term outcomes for students and the economy. As New York leaders continue to expand preschool, they should ensure that per pupil funding is adequate to cover the minimum quality standards that have been shown to maximize outcomes. New York's neighbor, New Jersey, spends more than twice per child on preschool, and pays a higher allocation to private child care providers in the program since they lack the economy of scale of public schools. New Jersey is also a leader in supporting preschool educators across settings in obtaining higher education and paying them on par with teachers in K-12."

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 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? Will states provide a full school-day option for all families who want it? 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.