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## California Accounted for 71% of All States' Preschool Funding Increases in 2022-2023

*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 ranks California 16<sup>th</sup> in the nation for preschool enrollment for four-year-olds and 15<sup>th</sup> for three-year-olds across both the California State Preschool Program (CSPP) and Transitional Kindergarten (TK).

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:

- California served 38% of the state's four-year-olds and 9% of three-year-olds in state-funded preschool, for a total combined enrollment of 209,081 (an increase of 27,467 from the prior year).
- State spending totaled \$2,989,941,651 and an additional \$210,393,445 in federal COVID-19 relief funds supported the program, up \$830,595,002 (35%), adjusted for inflation, since last year.
- State spending per child (including COVID-19 relief dollars) averaged \$15,305 in 2022-2023, up \$2,258 from 2021-2022, adjusted for inflation.
- California's TK met 3 of 10 research-based quality standards benchmarks for minimum quality recommended by NIEER and CSPP met 6 of 10.

California made a big leap forward this year towards the state's ambitious goal of achieving universal preschool for 4-year-olds by 2025-2026. **The state increased preschool funding by nearly \$1 billion and this increase accounted for 71% of the entire national increase in preschool spending.** This additional funding increased access in both CSPP and TK.

"California remains fully committed to the expansion of Universal Transitional Kindergarten to give all families access to a free, high-quality preschool option," **said Patricia Lozano, executive director of Early Learning advocacy organization Early Edge California.** "We're excited by the opportunity to give more 4-year-olds access to this program in the coming year and to work with partners across the state to ensure that teachers, parents, and children are supported through the process."

"Universal preschool is a huge undertaking in the nation's most populous state, and California's efforts and commitment are fundamentally changing education in the Golden State," **said W. Steven Barnett, Ph.D., NIEER's senior co-director and founder.** "To fulfill the promise of a better education for all children, California must ensure funding remains adequate to provide high-quality preschool, pay teachers well, ensure small class sizes, and full-day programs as programs are expanded to serve families."

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. 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 make critical choices when it comes to quality preschool," **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 commit to serving three-year-olds as well as four-year-olds? Will states provide a full school-day option for all families who want it? Will states support an equitable 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](http://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.*