The District of Columbia's Public School Prekindergarten program is open to all 4-year-old children in the city. The prekindergarten programs are only operated by public schools, and programs are available in all elementary schools across the city. Prekindergarten funding is provided through the school funding formula with funds allocated on a per pupil basis.

In addition to operating a prekindergarten program open to all children, the District of Columbia Public School System (DCPS) operates federally-funded Head Start programs. DCPS-operated Head Start programs serve children who meet the federal eligibility criteria (an income under 100 percent of poverty). The Head Start programs are available in communities where there are large populations of low-income families who can benefit from the comprehensive family and child support services that Head Start offers. The DCPS-operated Head Start programs are required to follow all federal Head Start Performance Standards. However, the District treats these programs as an integral part of its overall prekindergarten initiative.

Funding and enrollment for DCPS-operated prekindergarten programs in 2002–2003 was similar to funding and enrollment in 2001–2002. Approximately 4,281 children were served with an estimated $37,000,000.

This profile, like the preceding state profiles, provides detailed information about access to prekindergarten in the District, program quality standards, and resources. However, the District is not ranked among states on enrollment or resources, given the difficulty of comparing a city to a state. The comparison is particularly complicated given that the DCPS functions as both a state education agency and a local education agency.