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Maryland Leaders Have Choices to Make About How to Expand Preschool While Maintaining Quality Standards

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 Maryland 17th in the nation for preschool enrollment for 4-year-olds and 19th for 3-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:

- Maryland served 37% of 4-year-olds and 7% of 3-year-olds in state-funded preschool, for a total combined enrollment of 31,907 children (an increase of 2,589 from the prior year).
- State spending totaled \$224,382,022, down \$44,138 (less than 1%), adjusted for inflation, since last year.
- State spending per child equaled \$7,032 in 2022-2023, down \$623 from 2021-2022, adjusted for inflation.
- Maryland met 8 of 10 research-based quality standards benchmarks for minimum quality recommended by NIEER.

"Blueprint for Maryland's Future," landmark legislation passed in 2022, put in place increases in preschool funding over the next 10 years to support expansion in the state. As a result, along with multiple education reforms, the Maryland State Department of Education is charged with establishing and implementing high-quality pre-kindergarten programming by expanding voluntary pre-kindergarten in a mixed-delivery system for 3- and 4-year-olds from families earning incomes at or below 300% of the federal poverty level (FPL).

"The Blueprint for Maryland's Future promises to make Maryland a national leader in serving 3- and 4-year-olds in quality preschool," said **W. Steven Barnett Ph.D., NIEER's senior co-director**. "However, as with most bold pieces of legislation, implementation will be key. As state administrators expand Maryland preschool over the next decade, they can look to New Jersey as a model for helping teachers gain the level of education needed to ensure quality in the classroom and earn pay on par with K-12 educators. This can be done for preschool teachers in both public schools and in the broader private child care ecosystem, but it takes careful planning, support and resources."

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 3- and 4-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 3- and 4-year-olds? Will states make the investments needed to ensure that programs are effective? 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.

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.