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## Leaders In Massachusetts Should Choose Quality When Expanding 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 ranks Massachusetts 24<sup>th</sup> in the nation for preschool enrollment for 4-year-olds and 8<sup>th</sup> 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:

- Massachusetts' two state funded preschool programs enrolled 33,064 children, an increase of 4,509 from the prior year.
- The state served 28% of 4-year-olds and 16% of 3-year-olds in 2022-2023.
- State spending totaled \$64,121,030 up \$2,347,793 (4%), adjusted for inflation, since last year.
- State spending per child equaled \$1,939 in 2022-2023, down \$224 from 2021-2022, adjust for inflation.
- Massachusetts met an average of 6 of 10 research-based quality standards benchmarks for minimum quality recommended by NIEER.

"The research is clear when it comes to preschool. Programs must maintain a high level of quality to foster the teacher-child interactions that lead to long-term results," said **W. Steven Barnett, NIEER's senior co-director**. "Massachusetts has been a leader for K-12 education and can become a preschool leader too if the state follows through with its commitment to expanding preschool. The State must pay attention to quality, following the example of Boston. It is important that the state sets, funds, and supports strong, research-based quality standards for their preschool programs, especially when it comes to teacher qualifications and pay, adult-child ratios, and providing at least a full school day of instruction. The state must also provide a per-pupil funding amount that allows such standards to be put in place."

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 3- and 4-year-olds? Will states support an equitable mixed-delivery model for preschool incorporating both existing

child care programs and public schools? Will states make the investments needed to ensure that programs are effective? 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](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.*