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## Mississippi Doubles Preschool Enrollment and Spending with Plans for Further Expansion

*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 Mississippi is one of only five states in the country to meet 10 of 10 research-based quality standards benchmarks for pre-kindergarten programs. However, the report finds the state ranks 35th in the nation for preschool enrollment for four-year-olds and serves no 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:

- Mississippi enrolled 5,329 4-year-olds (15%), an increase of 2,522 from the prior year.
- State spending totaled \$16,000,000 and an additional \$1,485,429 in federal COVID-19 relief funding supported the program, up \$8,064,628 (86%), adjusted for inflation, since last year.
- State spending per child equaled \$3,281 in 2022-2023, down \$75 from 2021-2022, adjusted for inflation.
- Mississippi met 10 of 10 research-based quality standards benchmarks for minimum quality recommended by NIEER.

Mississippi leaders showed their commitment to expanding preschool access in 2022-2023 by more than doubling both the number of seats and funding. The state continued that expansion in 2023-2024 by adding over 3,000 additional preschool seats and committing funding to plan for expansion. The state also began a new State invested Pre-K (SIP) program in August 2023, which is not yet covered by this report, with capacity to reach another approximately 3,800 children.

"The fact that Mississippi is one of only five states to meet 10 of 10 benchmarks really highlights just how much momentum our state has in the classroom," said **Mississippi Governor Tate Reeves**. "We've already doubled the number of seats and funding toward preschool access, and we'll continue doing whatever it takes to support Mississippi's parents, teachers, and students. This is another big win for education in our state."

"Mississippi is headed in the right direction and should be praised for its planful preschool expansion, which we hope will continue," said **W. Steven Barnett, Ph.D., NIEER's senior co-director and founder**. "The state serves as an example of a preschool program that started small with high quality standards in place and has expanded while maintaining those standards. Mississippi leaders should commit to paying all teachers an adequate salary as they continue to grow the state's preschool program."

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 commit to serving all four-year-olds? Will states serve both three- and four-year-olds? 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](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.*