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Oregon Preschool Programs Make Gains on Quality and Enrollment, Yet More Children Need Access

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 Oregon 34th in the nation for preschool enrollment for four-year-olds and 12th in the nation for 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:

- Oregon's state-funded preschool programs served 16% of 4-year-olds and 12% of 3-year-olds, for a total enrollment of 11,720 children, an increase of 1,711 from the prior year.
- State spending totaled \$189,067,971, up \$45,008,829 (31%), adjusted for inflation, since last year.
- State spending per child equaled \$16,132 in 2022- 2023, up \$1,739 from 2021-2022, adjusted for inflation.
- Oregon's two preschool programs met an average of 7.7 of 10 research-based quality standards benchmarks for minimum quality recommended by NIEER.

Oregon Pre-K and Oregon Preschool Promise began a new system for structured classroom observations and both programs now meet the continuous quality improvement system benchmark. The changes raised Oregon's count of quality benchmarks from an average of 6.9 to 7.7 out of 10 across the state's two preschool programs.

Oregon's new Department of Early Learning and Care (DELIC) officially launched July 1, 2023 to unify, strengthen and expand Oregon's early learning and care system for families and child care professionals. The agency brings together the Early Learning Division (ELD) and the Employment Related Day Care (ERDC) program to create one central agency for early care and education policy and program administration.

"Oregon has strong early learning programs, a new consolidated early learning department, and a comprehensive plan to support families from birth through Kindergarten," said **W. Steven Barnett Ph.D., NIEER's senior co-director**. "Oregon leaders have done the careful work of ensuring that the state's programs have the per-pupil funding and structured classroom observations needed to maximize student outcomes. Oregon can improve by continuing to expand access to preschool and supporting teachers in obtaining higher education and pay parity with K-12."

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 serve both three- and four-year-olds? Will states support a 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.