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Maine Increases Pre-K Funding, Per Pupil Expenditures

Maine continues its work to expand access to pre-K, as federal funding uncertainty looms

NEW BRUNSWICK, N.J. - A new national [report](#) released today finds that in 2023-2024, Maine served 47% of its four-year-olds in state-funded pre-K. Through 2023-24, Maine did not serve any three-year-olds in state-funded preschool, but that has changed this school year, as the responsibility for preschool for 3-5-year-olds with identified special needs has begun to shift to school administrative units. Maine also made increases in state spending per child.

The [National Institute for Early Education Research's 2024 State of Preschool Yearbook](#) presents a critical snapshot of preschool education in America. The 2023-2024 school year set national records for state-funded preschool enrollment and spending. While the increases in funding and enrollment are skewed by a small number of states making progress, quality of preschool programming remains highly uneven from state to state.

In Maine the report found that, in the 2023-2024 school year:

- Maine preschool enrolled 6,361 children, an increase of 124 from the prior year.
- State spending totaled \$34,079,285, with an additional \$6,234,595 in federal recovery funds to support the program, up \$8,456,798 (27%), adjusted for inflation, since last year.
- State spending per child (including federal recovery funds) equaled \$6,338 in 2023-2024, up \$1,230 from 2022-2023, adjusted for inflation.
- Maine met 9 of 10 quality standards benchmarks recommended by NIEER.

Currently, 44 states and DC fund preschool programs. Most state pre-K programs continue to serve only four-year-olds; few state pre-K programs serve three-year-olds. Nationally, enrollment reached 37% of four-year-olds but only 8% of three-year-olds.

"When states put money into quality preschool programs, they are investing in children's futures and can expect to see strong returns on their investments," said **W. Steven Barnett Ph.D., NIEER's senior director and founder**. "Despite the state's goal of universal pre-K, Maine's progress is slower than other states in the Northeast, like New York and Vermont, that serve a majority of their four-year-olds in state-funded pre-K.

States spent more than \$13.6 billion on preschool in 2023-2024, including \$257 million in federal COVID-19 relief dollars. This represents an increase of nearly \$2 billion (17%) over the previous year. However, just four states—California, New Jersey, New York, and Texas—accounted for half (51%) of total national preschool spending.

Preschool investments increased in all but five states with existing programs. Six states—California, Colorado, Maryland, New Jersey, New Mexico, and Texas—each boosted preschool spending by more than \$100 million.

Enrollment grew to 1,751,109 children nationwide, an increase of more than 111,000 from the previous year. Ten states saw enrollment growth exceeding 20%: Alaska, Colorado, Delaware, Hawaii, Mississippi, Missouri, Nevada, New Mexico, North Dakota, and Ohio. California and Colorado alone added more than 30,000 children each, together accounting for over 60% of the national enrollment increase.

Alabama, Hawaii, Michigan, Mississippi, and Rhode Island remain the only states nationwide to meet all 10 of NIEER's recommended benchmarks for preschool quality. NIEER's benchmarks measure essential preschool quality indicators, including teacher qualifications, class sizes, early learning standards, and program assessments.

A key question across the country is how proposed cuts to the U.S. Department of Education, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, and other federal agencies will affect Head Start and other programs for children. If Head Start funding for children in low-income families is eliminated, access to public preschool will decline in several states by more than 10 percentage points, and in some, by 20 percentage points.

"Nearly 2,000 three- and four-year-olds in Maine could lose access to Head Start if federal funding for the program is eliminated," **said Allison Friedman-Krauss, Ph.D., lead author of the report.** "Increased uncertainty about federal funding underscores the urgency for states to prioritize and expand early childhood investments."

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The 2024 State of Preschool Yearbook was supported with funding from the Heising-Simons Foundation and the 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.