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## Other States Across the Northeast Outpace Massachusetts in Preschool Enrollment, Spending

*Federal funding uncertainty puts pressure on states to close preschool gaps*

**NEW BRUNSWICK, N.J.** - A new national [report](#) released today finds that Massachusetts fell from 24<sup>th</sup> to 25<sup>th</sup> in preschool access for four-year-olds and from 8<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> in preschool access for three-year-olds. In 2023-2024, Massachusetts served 30% of its four-year-olds and 17% of three-year-olds in state-funded pre-K. Massachusetts also ranked almost last in per-pupil state preschool spending, which prevents programs from meeting recommended quality standards.

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. However, the increases in funding and enrollment are skewed by a small number of states making progress— and quality remains highly uneven from state to state.

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

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

- Massachusetts' two state-funded preschool programs enrolled 35,154 children in 2023-2024, an increase of 2,090 children from the prior year.
- State spending totaled \$100,292,048, up \$17,227,034 (21%), adjusted for inflation, since last year.
- State spending per child equaled \$2,853 in 2023-2024, up \$341 from 2022-2023, adjusted for inflation. Massachusetts met an average of 6 of 10 quality standards benchmarks.

In 2023-2024, the Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care (EEC) received additional funding from the state to add more grantees to the Commonwealth Preschool Partnerships Initiative (CPPI) funding to further expand access for 3- and 4-year-olds in 12 communities.

At the start of the current 2024-2025 school year, for which NIEER does not yet have final data, the Healey-Driscoll Administration announced grants for 30 school districts to partner with local community-based preschool programs to expand pre-k as part of Governor Healey's "Gateway to Pre-K" program.

"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 recent progress, Massachusetts continues to lag behind other states in the Northeast, like New York, and Vermont, that serve a majority of their four-year-olds in state-funded pre-K and provide more adequate levels of per-pupil funding. Vermont's universal preschool program served an impressive 76 percent of the state's four-year-olds and nearly 60 percent of three-year-olds in 2023-2024, and lawmakers in Connecticut and Rhode Island are currently considering universal pre-K legislation. Will Massachusetts lawmakers follow suit?"

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 the Trump Administration's 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 8,000 three- and four-year-olds in Massachusetts 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](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.*