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Oregon is a National Leader in State Preschool Investments

Federal funding uncertainty puts pressure on states to close pre-K gaps

NEW BRUNSWICK, N.J. - A new national [report](#) released today finds that Oregon ranks 2nd in state preschool spending per child but still ranks 34th in preschool access for four-year-olds. The state's ranking for three-year-olds dropped from 12th to 14th from 2022-2023 to 2023-2024. In 2023-2024, Oregon served 17% of its four-year-olds and 12% of its three-year-olds across two state-funded pre-k programs, well below leaders that have continued to move toward universal access.

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

- Oregon preschool enrolled 12,597 children, an increase of 877 from the prior year.
- State spending totaled \$234,774,788, up \$46,644,445 (25%), adjusted for inflation, since last year.
- State spending per child ranked 2nd in the nation, \$18,637, up \$2,585 from 2022-2023, adjusted for inflation.
- Oregon met an average of 7.6 of 10 quality standards benchmarks recommended by NIEER across its two state-funded preschool programs.

"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**. "Oregon leaders should be applauded for increasing state spending per child to help its preschool programs meet quality standards. While Oregon did add some additional children to its state preschool programs in 2023-2024, several other states including California, Colorado, and New Mexico saw much more dramatic increases in enrollment."

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.

"More than 4,000 three- and four-year-olds in Oregon could lose access to Head Start if federal funding for the program is eliminated. Cuts to Head Start could also jeopardize preschool in Oregon as more than half of state preschool slots are through the state's supplement to Head Start," **said Allison Friedman-Krauss, Ph.D., lead author of the report.** "Increased uncertainty about federal funding underscores the urgency for Oregon leaders 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.