



For Immediate Release:

April 29, 2025

Contact:

Ashley Davison, NIEER, adaviosn@nieer.org, (848) 932-3142 (o), (609) 969-1587 (m)

Allison Muhlenhof, Longleaf Strategies, allison@longleafstrategies.com, (334) 450-1027 (m)

Vermont is #2 in the Nation in Providing Pre-K Access for Three- and Four-Year-Olds

Meanwhile, federal funding uncertainty puts pressure on states to prioritize preschool

NEW BRUNSWICK, N.J. - A new national [report](#) released today finds that Vermont rose from 6th to 2nd in the nation for preschool access for four-year-olds and maintained its position as 2nd in the nation in serving three-year-olds. In 2023-2024, Vermont served 76% of its four-year-olds and 58% of its three-year-olds in state-funded pre-K. The state trailed only the District of Columbia, which served an astonishing 95% of four-year-olds and 82% of three-year-olds in universal pre-K in 2023-2024.

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

- Vermont preschool enrolled 8,321 children, a decrease of 13 from the prior year.
- State spending totaled \$71,825,895, up \$3,464,516 (5%), adjusted for inflation, since last year.
- State spending per child equaled \$8,632 in 2023-2024, up \$429 from 2022-2023, adjusted for inflation.
- Vermont met 7 of 10 research-based quality standards benchmarks recommended by NIEER.

"Vermont is one of only a handful of states nationally committed to universal preschool and is the only state close to achieving it for both 3- and 4-year-olds," said **W. Steven Barnett, Ph.D., NIEER's senior director and founder**. "Like other states, Vermont must continue to improve quality by providing additional resources to help more preschool teachers obtain the qualifications and compensation needed to deliver the highest-quality instruction – and student outcomes."

A benchmark of quality that Vermont's Universal Prekindergarten education program falls short on is not having an Agency of Education licensed Early Childhood Educator delivering direct instruction in private prekindergarten prequalified programs. In response to Act 35/Act 166 no expulsions under the age of 8, Vermont's Preschool Development Grant award was used to expand Early Multi-Tiered System of Supports in public and private prekindergarten education programs providing universal, targeted, and individualized preventative exclusionary discipline practices in order to create equitable and inclusive high-quality learning environments.

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 600 three- and four-year-olds in Vermont 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 early childhood investments."

###

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.