



For Immediate Release:

April 29, 2025

Contact:

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

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

West Virginia Seen as National Leader in Pre-K for 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 West Virginia ranks 4th in the nation in providing preschool to four-year-olds. The state ranks 19th in serving three-year-olds, up one spot from the prior year. In 2023-2024, West Virginia served 67% of its four-year-olds in state-funded pre-k and 7% of three-year-olds. The state is also a leader in pre-K quality, meeting 9 of the 10 research-based quality benchmarks proven to support students.

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 and 8% of three-year-olds.

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

- West Virginia preschool enrolled 13,864 children, an increase of 133 from the prior year.
- State spending totaled \$104,609,046 and an additional \$4,464,621 in TANF funds and \$497,104 in federal recovery funds supported the program, up \$13,205,354 (14%), adjusted for inflation, since last year.
- State spending per child (including TANF and federal recovery funds) equaled \$7,903 in 2023-2024, up \$885 from 2022-2023, adjusted for inflation.
- West Virginia met 9 of 10 research-based quality standards benchmarks recommended by NIEER.

"West Virginia is a national leader in supporting four-year-olds with quality pre-K," said **W. Steven Barnett Ph.D., NIEER's senior director and founder**. "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. We would now like to see West Virginia expand preschool access to more three-year-olds. The evidence is clear that two years of preschool have a greater impact than one. West Virginia must also be careful to adequately fund preschool."

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. Ominously, several states that have been leaders in universal preschool continued a long-term decline in enrollment, including Florida, Georgia, Oklahoma, and Wisconsin.

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 6,500 three- and four-year-olds in West Virginia 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. As West Virginia's collaborative model relies heavily on Head Start partnerships, federal cuts could hit the state's pre-k program could be hard."

NIEER's Yearbook includes a special pullout section highlighting Alabama, Michigan, New Mexico, and Oklahoma as strong examples that states can replicate— despite having taken different paths to success.

###

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.