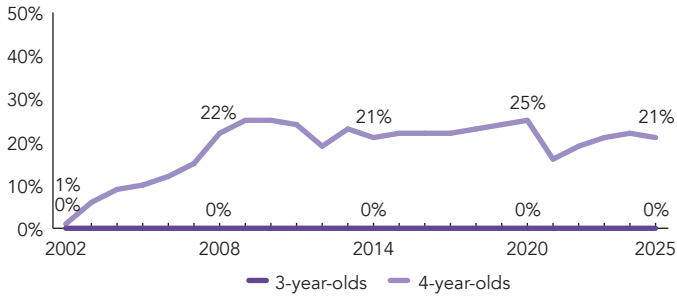
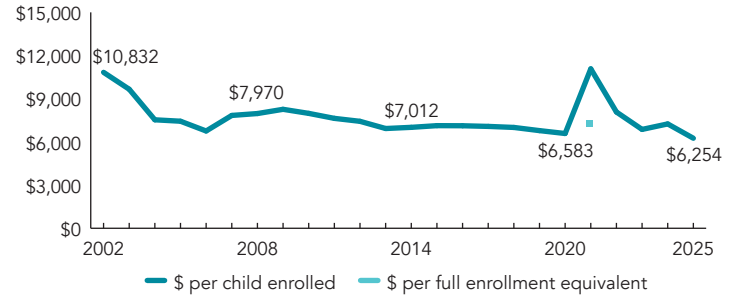


# North Carolina

PERCENT OF STATE POPULATION ENROLLED



STATE SPENDING PER CHILD ENROLLED (2025 DOLLARS)



## OVERVIEW

During the 2024-2025 school year, North Carolina preschool enrolled 26,707 children, a decrease of 597 from the prior year. State spending totaled \$98,840,868 and \$68,186,143 in TANF funds also supported the program, down \$30,896,434 (16%), adjusted for inflation, since last year. State spending per child (including TANF funds) equaled \$6,254 in 2024-2025, down \$995 from 2023-2024, adjusted for inflation. North Carolina met 9 of 10 quality standards benchmarks.

## WHAT'S NEW

In September 2024, North Carolina was one of 10 states, and D.C. awarded a 3-year federal renewal Preschool Development Grant B-5 (PDG B-5) totaling \$9,000,000 annually. PDG B-5 builds on past successes to enhance the state's early care and learning network through strengthening ECE programs in its mixed delivery system, supporting the ECE workforce, increasing family involvement in ECE programs, improving ECE program quality, expanding access to early childhood services, and creating seamless learning experiences from birth to kindergarten.

## BACKGROUND

North Carolina has provided state-funded pre-kindergarten education since 2001, originally via the More at Four Pre-Kindergarten Program. In 2011-2012, the program was renamed the North Carolina Pre-Kindergarten (NC Pre-K) Program, and administrative control moved from the Department of Public Instruction to the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS). NC Pre-K enrolls at-risk 4-year-olds from low-income families who have not participated in other early childhood programs. NC Pre-K programs are required to operate 6.5 hours per day for 36 weeks each year and serve as many eligible children as funding levels permit. Eligibility requires children to be in a household with income at or below 75% SMI, but up to 20% of children may be in a household with a higher income if they have another designated risk factor such as a developmental delay or identified disability, a chronic health condition, or limited English proficiency.

Funding for NC Pre-K includes state general appropriations and North Carolina Education Lottery receipts, federal funds, and a local contribution, with the majority of funding from the state. NC Pre-K classrooms operate statewide in settings such as privately licensed Head Start programs, childcare centers, and public schools. All programs, whether in public or private settings, must earn high quality ratings under the state child-care licensing system to participate in NC Pre-K and the state's subsidy system. NC Pre-K sets a maximum class size of 20 four-year-olds and requires a staff-child ratio of 1:10. Lead teachers must have a bachelor's degree and hold or be working towards a birth-through-kindergarten license. Classroom staff are required to use approved curricula and formative assessments aligned with the state's early learning standards. Staff conduct ongoing formative assessments to gather information about each child's growth and skill development, as well as to inform instruction.

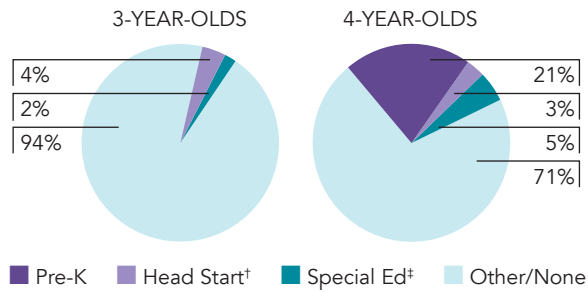
ACCESS RANKINGS		RESOURCE RANKINGS		TOTAL BENCHMARKS MET
4-YEAR-OLDS	3-YEAR-OLDS	STATE SPENDING	ALL REPORTED SPENDING	
32	None Served	27	26	9*

# NORTH CAROLINA PRE-KINDERGARTEN PROGRAM

## ACCESS

Total state pre-K enrollment .....	26,707
School districts that offer state program .....	100% (counties)
Income requirement .....	75% SMI
Minimum hours of operation .....	6.5 hours/day; 5 days/week
Operating schedule .....	School or academic year
Special education enrollment, ages 3 and 4 .....	12,141
Federally funded Head Start enrollment, ages 3 and 4 .....	12,742
State-funded Head Start enrollment, ages 3 and 4 .....	0

## PERCENT OF POPULATION ENROLLED IN PUBLIC ECE



† Estimates children in Head Start not also enrolled in state pre-K.  
‡ Estimates children in special education not also enrolled in state pre-K or Head Start.

## QUALITY STANDARDS CHECKLIST

POLICY	NC PRE-K REQUIREMENT	BENCHMARK	REQUIREMENT MEETS BENCHMARK?
Early learning & development standards	Comprehensive, aligned, supported, culturally sensitive	Comprehensive, aligned, supported, culturally sensitive	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Curriculum supports	Approval process & supports	Approval process & supports	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Teacher degree	BA	BA	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> *
Teacher specialized training	ECE, CD	Specializing in pre-K	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Assistant teacher degree	CDA or AA in ECE or CD	CDA or equivalent	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Staff professional development	5-20 hours/year; PD plans; Coaching	For teachers & assistants: At least 15 hours/year; individual PD plans; Coaching	<input type="checkbox"/>
Maximum class size	20 (4-year-olds)	20 or lower	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Staff-child ratio	1:10 (4-year-olds)	1:10 or better	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Screening & referral	Vision, hearing, health & more	Vision, hearing & health screenings; & referral	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Continuous quality improvement system	Structured classroom observations; Data used for program improvement	Structured classroom observations; data used for program improvement	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

For more information about the benchmarks, see the Executive Summary and Roadmap to State Profile Pages.

\* Indicates that while policy meets the benchmark, it is not being implemented fully.

9\*

## RESOURCES

Total state pre-K spending .....	\$167,027,011
Local match required? .....	Yes
State Head Start spending .....	\$0
State spending per child enrolled .....	\$6,254
All reported spending per child enrolled* .....	\$8,722

\* Pre-K programs may receive additional funds from federal or local sources that are not included in this figure.

† Head Start per-child spending includes funding only for 3- and 4-year-olds.

‡ K-12 expenditures include capital spending as well as current operating expenditures.

## SPENDING PER CHILD ENROLLED

