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Alabama Recognized for Pre-K Quality for 20th Consecutive Year

Maintaining the nation's longest-running record of meeting all 10 NIEER quality benchmarks

NEW BRUNSWICK, N.J. A new national [report](#) released today highlights Alabama as one of only six states in the country to meet 10 of 10 research-based quality benchmarks for preschool programs—an achievement that underscores the state's commitment to effective early childhood education.

Alabama served 40% of four-year-olds in state-funded pre-K during the 2024-2025 school year and continues to expand access to high-quality early learning statewide. The state ranked 18th nationally in preschool access for four-year-olds..

The [National Institute for Early Education Research's 2025 State of Preschool Yearbook](#) presents a critical snapshot of preschool education in America. 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 9% of three-year-olds.

Additional Alabama findings for the 2024-2025 school year:

- Alabama preschool enrolled 24,238 children, a slight decrease of 402 from the prior year.
- State spending totaled \$185,448,382, up \$528,976 (0.3%), adjusted for inflation, since last year.
- State spending per child equaled \$7,651 in 2024-2025, up \$146 from 2023-2024, adjusted for inflation.
- Alabama met 10 of 10 quality standards benchmarks.

"Alabama Pre-K hits a milestone this year by meeting 10 of 10 of NIEER's research-based quality standards for 20 consecutive years, the longest running state to do so," **said NIEER director Steve Barnett**. "However, the majority of Alabama's four-year-olds still do not have the opportunity to attend Alabama's First Class Pre-K program. When states invest in quality preschool programs that can produce strong outcomes, they invest in a better future for children and taxpayers."

Nationally, state support for preschool education hit record highs in enrollment and funding in 2024-2025. The pace of growth slowed, however, compared to the prior year, and many states continue to lag behind pre-pandemic enrollment levels.

Only five additional states join Alabama in meeting all 10 of NIEER's research-based benchmarks for quality — Georgia, Hawaii, Michigan, Mississippi, and Rhode Island—in this year's report. Of these states, only Georgia serves more than half of its four-year-olds. NIEER's benchmarks measure essential preschool quality indicators, including teacher qualifications, class sizes, early learning standards, and curriculum supports.

States spent nearly \$14.4 billion on preschool in 2024-2025. Twenty-eight states increased their investments in preschool from the prior year, for a total increase of \$434

ALABAMA: 2025 NATIONAL RANKINGS

- Enrollment at age 4: 18th (40%)
- Enrollment at age 3: None Served
- State spending per child: 18th (\$7,651)
- All reported spending per child: 17th (\$10,741)
- Total benchmarks met: 10

million, or 3%, adjusted for inflation. Including federal and local dollars, total spending was almost \$17.7 billion. Three states each spent more than \$1 billion last year: California (\$4.1 billion), New Jersey (\$1.2 billion), and New York (\$1 billion). Together, these three states account for 45% of all state preschool spending. Texas adds almost another \$1 billion.

Additional information about the *2025 State of Preschool Yearbook*, including individual state profiles and maps, graphs, and state rankings, can be found at www.nieer.org.

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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.