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Delaware preschool still far from “universal”

States looking to address the child care crisis are expanding access to free pre-K for three- and four-year-olds. Meanwhile, Georgia Pre-K sets a new example for the nation.

NEW BRUNSWICK, N.J. A new national [report](#) released today finds that Delaware maintained its national ranking of 42nd in preschool access for four-year-olds and improved slightly from 25th to 24th in the nation for preschool access for three-year-olds. In 2024-2025, Delaware served just 9% of its four-year-olds and 4% of three-year-olds in state-funded pre-K.

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.

In Delaware the report found that in the 2024-2025 school year:

- Delaware preschool enrolled 1,418 children, an increase of 180 from the prior year.
- State spending totaled \$17,090,424, up \$2,269,696 (15%), adjusted for inflation, since last year.
- State spending per child averaged \$12,052 in 2024-2025, up \$81 from 2023-2024, adjusted for inflation.
- Delaware met 9 of 10 quality standards benchmarks recommended by NIEER.

“When states invest in quality preschool programs that can produce strong outcomes, they invest in a better future for children and taxpayers,” **said NIEER director Steve Barnett.** “Delaware should be applauded for its pre-K program meeting 9 of 10 recommended quality standards, but only a small fraction of the state’s three- and four-year-olds have access. Delaware’s Governor and Secretary of Education are supporting state-funded preschool by deeming it as the model and foundation for building a comprehensive, universal preschool program for all children and families.”

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.

Georgia’s state-funded pre-K program for four-year-olds made history this year. It became the largest state-funded preschool program in the nation to meet all 10 quality benchmarks recommended by NIEER, and the first universal program to do so. Only five additional states meet all 10 of NIEER’s research-based benchmarks for quality – Alabama, Hawaii, Michigan, Mississippi, and Rhode Island—in this year’s report. None of those programs have the reach of Georgia’s Pre-K Program. 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 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.

DELAWARE: 2025 NATIONAL RANKINGS

- Enrollment at age 4: 42nd (9%)
- Enrollment at age 3: 24th (4%)
- State spending per child: 8th (\$12,052)
- All reported spending per child: 11th (\$12,052)
- Total benchmarks met: 9

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.