



For Immediate Release:

April 22, 2026

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Georgia Becomes First Universal Pre-K State to Meet 10-of-10 Preschool Quality Benchmarks

NEW BRUNSWICK, N.J. Georgia's state-funded pre-K program for four-year-olds was recognized today as the largest state-funded preschool program in the nation to meet all 10 recommended quality benchmarks, and the first universal program to do so.

Georgia's recognition is the top finding in the [National Institute for Early Education Research's](#) new [2025 State of Preschool Yearbook](#). The yearbook provides an annual snapshot of state-funded preschool across the country. Currently, 44 states and DC fund preschool programs. Most state pre-K programs continue to primarily or only serve four-year-olds.

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 Pre-K Program. NIEER's benchmarks measure essential preschool quality indicators, including teacher qualifications, class sizes, early learning standards, and curriculum supports.

"Georgia is proud to be a leader in quality early childhood education as we work to ensure all Georgians have the opportunity to succeed, including our youngest learners," **said Georgia Governor Brian P. Kemp**. "Having strategically invested in our Pre-K classrooms, we are both meeting all 10 NIEER benchmarks of excellence and giving Georgia students a strong start on the path of lifelong learning."

In Georgia, the [report](#) found that, in the 2024-2025 school year:

- Georgia Pre-K enrolled 70,572 children, a slight decrease of 954 from the prior year as the state implemented small class sizes.
- State spending totaled \$538,431,295, up \$72,157,626 (15%), adjusted for inflation, since last year.
- State spending per child equaled \$7,630 in 2024-2025, up \$1,111 from 2023-2024, adjusted for inflation.
- Georgia met 10 of 10 quality standards benchmarks.

"Georgia proves that state-funded preschool with well-qualified teachers, pay parity with K-12, small classes, and strong continuous improvement systems can be scaled as a universal program," **said NIEER director Steve Barnett**. "With new initiatives to support quality, Georgia can expect increased enrollment, but leaders will need to work to actively promote increased enrollment and expand capacity where it is most needed."

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. Preschool enrollment increased by 44,000 children nationally, reaching almost 1.8 million, including 37% of U.S. four-year-olds and 9% of three-year-olds. California, Colorado, Michigan, Minnesota, and Missouri contributed the most to increased enrollment, adding more than 52,000 new seats.

States spent nearly \$14.4 billion on preschool in 2024-2025. 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.

"Not only does preschool access vary by which state a child happens to live in, but so does the quality of that preschool experience," **said Allison Friedman-Krauss, lead author of the report**. "Only high-quality early care and

education programs support children’s development enough to result in lasting academic and other gains that ultimately deliver savings for taxpayers. Georgia is a national leader in both quality and access.”

Additional information about the *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 2025 State of Preschool Yearbook was supported with funding from the Heising-Simons Foundation and the Gates Foundation.

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.