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**Contact:**

Allison Muhendorf, *Longleaf Strategies*, [allison@longleafstrategies.com](mailto:allison@longleafstrategies.com), (334) 450-1027 (m)

## Louisiana's Pre-K Progress Stalls, Access and Funding Lag Behind Other Southern States

*States looking to address the child care crisis are expanding access to free pre-K for three- and four-year-olds. However, researchers warn that access without quality isn't enough to improve student outcomes. Meanwhile, Georgia Pre-K sets a new example for the nation.*

**NEW BRUNSWICK, N.J.** A new national [report](#) released today finds that Louisiana improved slightly from 23<sup>rd</sup> to 22<sup>nd</sup> in the nation in preschool access for four-year-olds and remained 33<sup>rd</sup> in access for three-year-olds. In 2024-2025, Louisiana served 35% of its four-year-olds and 1% of three-year-olds in state-funded pre-K. Louisiana ranked 31<sup>st</sup> in the nation in preschool spending per child.

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 Louisiana, the report found that, in the 2024-2025 school year:

- During the 2023-2024 school year, Louisiana's three state-funded preschool programs enrolled 19,884 children, an increase of 369 from the prior year.
- State spending totaled \$91,116,479 and an additional \$19,907,428 in TANF funds supported preschool, down \$1,796,638 (2%), adjusted for inflation, since last year.
- State spending per child (including TANF) equaled \$5,584 in 2024-2025, down \$198 from 2023-2024, adjusted for inflation.
- Louisiana met an average of 8.8 of 10 research-based quality standards benchmarks.

"When states invest in quality preschool programs that can produce strong outcomes, they invest in a better future for children and taxpayers," said **W. Steven Barnett Ph.D., NIEER's senior director and founder**. "Louisiana ranks toward the bottom nationally in per-pupil funding for preschool and could look to neighbors Arkansas and Alabama for examples of more adequate funding. Leaders would be wise to invest in preschool quality improvement as well as expansion."

Nationally, state support for preschool education hit record highs in enrollment and funding in 2024-2025, but the pace of growth slowed compared to the previous year— and quality remains highly uneven from state to state.

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.

### LOUISIANA: 2025 NATIONAL RANKINGS

- Enrollment at age 4: 22<sup>nd</sup> (35%)
- Enrollment at age 3: 33<sup>rd</sup> (1%)
- State spending per child: 31<sup>st</sup> (\$5,584)
- All reported spending per child: 38<sup>th</sup> (\$5,584)
- Average benchmarks met: 8.8

“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.”

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.

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](http://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.*