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Contact:

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

Maine Shows Improvement in National Preschool Rankings through Continued Expansion of Public Pre-K

In the 2024-2025 school year, Maine pre-K met nine of 10 research-based quality standards benchmarks recommended by NIEER.

NEW BRUNSWICK, N.J. A new national [report](#) released today finds that in the 2024-2025 school year, Maine served 47% of its four-year-olds and 1% of its three-year-olds in state-funded pre-K. Maine ranks 13th in the nation for access to public pre-K for four-year-olds, up from 14th place last year. Additionally, three-year-olds with identified special needs were newly eligible for public pre-K in the 2024-2025 school year, as Maine began shifting responsibility for early childhood special education for 3- and 4-year-olds to its school administrative units, a process set to occur over the next several years.

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 Washington, D.C. 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 Maine the report found that, in the 2024-2025 school year:

- Maine preschool enrolled 6,445 children, an increase of 84 from the prior year.
- State spending totaled \$39,812,310 with an additional \$1,199,903 in federal recovery funds to support the program, down \$49,661 (0.1%), adjusted for inflation, since last year.
- State spending per child (including federal recovery funds) equaled \$6,363 in 2024-2025, down \$92 from 2023-2024, adjusted for inflation.
- Maine preschool met 9 of 10 research-based 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 W. Steven Barnett Ph.D., NIEER's senior director and founder.** "Maine is a leader in pre-K. With modest funding increases, Maine could reach a majority of the state's children with a program meeting all 10 of our benchmarks for quality standards. Additional funding to increase the number of hours children receive each week would also be beneficial."

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.

"Maine is well on its way to joining the list of states meeting all 10 benchmarks, needing only to add additional professional development supports and coaching for teachers," **said Allison Friedman-Krauss, lead author of the report.**

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.

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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.