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Mississippi Praised for Top-Tier Pre-K Quality in New National Report, Work Remains to Increase Access

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 Mississippi is one of only six states in the country to meet 10 of 10 research-based quality benchmarks for preschool quality. Mississippi improved its national ranking from 31st to 29th in preschool enrollment for four-year-olds. While Mississippi served 23% of its four-year-olds in state-funded pre-K in 2024-2025, neighboring Alabama served 40%, Arkansas served 33%, and Louisiana served 35%. Mississippi's pre-K program does not serve three-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.

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

- Mississippi's state-funded pre-K programs enrolled 8,076 children, an increase of 931 from the prior year.
- State spending totaled \$39,017,901, and an additional \$4,394 in federal recovery funds supported the program, up \$6,638,190 (20%), adjusted for inflation, since last year.
- State spending per child (including federal recovery funds) equaled \$4,832 in 2024-2025, up \$299 from 2023-2024 adjusted for inflation.
- Mississippi preschool met 10 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 director.** "Mississippi continues to expand access preschool while maintaining top quality standards. However, the majority of Mississippi's four-year-olds still do not have the opportunity to attend state-funded pre-K programs, and no three-year-olds are served."

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

MISSISSIPPI: 2025 NATIONAL RANKINGS

- Enrollment at age 4: 29th (23%)
- Enrollment at age 3: None Served
- State spending per child: 35th (\$4,832)
- All reported spending per child: 22nd (\$9,470)
- Average benchmarks met: 10

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.

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.