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Rhode Island Expands Preschool Access to One-Quarter of State's 4-Year-Olds

Rhode Island Continues to Meet Top Pre-K Quality Standards but far from High Enrollment Levels of Other States

NEW BRUNSWICK, N.J. - A new national [report](#) released today finds that Rhode Island ranked 26th in the nation in providing preschool to 4-year-olds, up from 29th last year. In 2024-2025, Rhode Island served 26% of 4-year-olds but did not serve any 3-year-olds. Rhode Island ranked 10th in spending per child, up from 11th last year.

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 4-year-olds but only 9% of 3-year-olds.

Additional Rhode Island findings for the 2024-2025 school year:

- Rhode Island preschool enrolled 2,864 children, an increase of 500 from the prior year.
- State spending totaled \$28,232,929, up \$5,385,882 (24%), adjusted for inflation, since last year.
- State spending per child equaled \$9,858 in 2024-2025, up \$193 from 2023-2024, adjusted for inflation.
- Rhode Island met 10 of 10 research-based quality standards benchmarks recommended by NIEER.

"Rhode Island should be applauded for its commitment to quality preschool," **said NIEER director Steve Barnett.** "State leaders would be wise to expand access to meet Governor McKee's goal of 5,000 children by 2027-2028."

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.

Only 5 additional states join Rhode Island in meeting all 10 of NIEER's research-based benchmarks for quality – Alabama, Georgia, Hawaii, Michigan, and Mississippi – in this year's report. Georgia made history this year by becoming the largest state-funded preschool program in the nation to reach all 10 quality benchmarks, and the first universally accessible program to do so. NIEER's benchmarks measure essential preschool quality indicators, including teacher qualifications, class sizes, early learning standards, and curriculum supports.

States 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 3 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.

RHODE ISLAND: 2025 NATIONAL RANKINGS

- Enrollment at age 4: 26th (26%)
- Enrollment at age 3: None Served
- State spending per child: 10th (\$9,858)
- All reported spending per child: 21st (\$9,933)
- Total benchmarks met: 10

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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.