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## States Continue to Outpace Virginia in Preschool Enrollment, State Spending Per Child

*States looking to address the child care crisis are expanding access to free pre-K for 3- and 4-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 Virginia ranks 31<sup>st</sup> in the nation in providing preschool to 4-year-olds and 26<sup>th</sup> for 3-year-olds. In 2024-2025, the Virginia Preschool Initiative (VPI) served 22% of 4-year-olds and 3% of 3-year-olds. The state's two other early childhood initiatives, the Early Childhood Foundation Mixed Delivery program and the Child Care Subsidy Program (CCSP), served an additional 7% of 4-year-olds and 8% of 3-year-olds. These two programs are not included in rankings due to a requirement for program eligibility that parents be working or in school. Virginia ranked 28<sup>th</sup> in 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 4-year-olds. Nationally, enrollment reached 37% of 4-year-olds but only 9% of 3-year-olds.

Additional Virginia findings for the 2024-2025 school year:

- VPI enrolled 24,425 children while the other two programs added 14,132 children.
- State spending on VPI totaled \$149,480,336 and an additional \$125,456,530 was spent on Mixed Delivery and CCSP.
- State spending per child for VPI equaled \$6,120 in 2024-2025.
- VPI met 5 of 10 quality standards benchmarks. Mixed Delivery met 4 and CCSP met 3.

"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**. "Virginia has focused on improving program quality but could work to enact higher quality standards across its early childhood system. Leaders would be wise to invest further in preschool quality improvement as well as expansion."

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.

Georgia's state-funded pre-K program for 4-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 5 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.

### VIRGINIA: 2025 NATIONAL RANKINGS

- Enrollment at age 4: 31st (22%)
- Enrollment at age 3: 26th (3%)
- State spending per child: 28th (\$6,120)
- All reported spending per child: 18th (\$10,656)
- Total benchmarks met by VPI: 5

“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 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](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.*