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Contact:

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

West Virginia Ranks 4th Nationally in Preschool Access for Four-Year-Olds

West Virginia could join Georgia in setting an example for the nation in both quality and access

NEW BRUNSWICK, N.J. A new national [report](#) released today finds that West Virginia once again ranks 4th in the nation in providing preschool to 4-year-olds, reaching 66%. The state enrolled just 7% of 3-year-olds, ranking 20th, down from 19th last year. West Virginia ranked 13th in spending per child, up from 16th 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 4-year-olds. Nationally, enrollment reached 37% of 4-year-olds but only 9% of 3-year-olds.

Additional West Virginia findings for the 2024-2025 school year:

- West Virginia preschool enrolled 13,674 children, a decrease of 190 from the prior year.
- State spending totaled \$120,466,591 (including TANF and federal Covid-19 relief funding), up \$8,862,817 (8%), adjusted for inflation, since last year.
- State spending per child equaled \$8,810 in 2024-2025, up \$760 from 2023-2024, adjusted for inflation.
- West Virginia met 9 of the 10 quality standards benchmarks recommended by NIEER.

"West Virginia continues to be a leader in preschool access and quality, though the state must work to maintain a high level of enrollment of 4-year-olds," **said NIEER director Steve Barnett**. "West Virginia could easily raise quality standards to meet all 10 benchmarks and should consider offering preschool to 3-year-olds. Two years of quality preschool can have larger, longer lasting benefits than one year."

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.

"West Virginia could join Georgia soon in being a national leader in both access and quality. To meet all 10 of NIEER's quality standards benchmarks, the state should provide coaching to all pre-K teachers," **said Allison Friedman-Krauss, the report's lead author**.

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

WEST VIRGINIA: 2025 NATIONAL RANKINGS

- Enrollment at age 4: 4th (66%)
- Enrollment at age 3: 20th (7%)
- State spending per child: 13th (\$8,810)
- All reported spending per child: 14th (\$11,918)
- Total benchmarks met: 9

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.

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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.