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May 18, 2023

CONTACT: [nieer@berlinrosen.com](mailto:nieer@berlinrosen.com)  
[adavison@nieer.org](mailto:adavison@nieer.org)

## Colorado Preschool Expands as State Implements Universal Preschool

*Nationally Uneven Access & Quality Span Two Decades, but New Universal Preschool Efforts Offer Hope*

**NEW BRUNSWICK, NJ** – State-funded preschool partially recovered last year from the negative impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic in Colorado and nationally. Across the nation, longstanding problems in early education across the country persisted. Preschool access remained below pre-pandemic levels, funding was inadequate, and quality standards failed to improve, according to the [2022 State of Preschool Yearbook](#), released today by Rutgers University’s National Institute for Early Education Research ([NIEER](#)).

Key findings from the annual survey, which focused on the 2021-2022 school year, are summarized below for Colorado:

- Enrollment in state-funded preschool was 20,467, an increase of 2,279;
- State spending for preschool programs was \$69,412,304, an increase of \$8,164,817 (inflation adjusted);
- State spending per child enrolled in preschool was \$3,391;
- Colorado met 4 of 10 quality standards benchmarks;
- Colorado has committed to and is working on universal preschool for four-year-olds;
- Colorado provided incentives for preschool teacher retention and recruitment.

### COLORADO: 2022 NATIONAL RANKINGS

- Enrollment at age 4: 26th (23%)
- Enrollment at age 3: 15th (8%)
- State spending per child: 40th (\$3,391)
- All-reported spending per child: 31st (\$6,240)

The new [report](#) found substantial year-over-year progress in enrollment nationally with a 13% increase of children in state-funded preschool in 2021-2022 with 180,668 more preschoolers enrolled than in the prior school year, and growth in nearly every state. Despite this, most children still lack access to high-quality, publicly-funded early childhood education, and preschool enrollment is down by 8% compared to pre-pandemic levels.

States spent an estimated \$9.9 billion on preschool, including more than \$393 million in COVID-19 relief, an inflation adjusted increase of only \$71 million (0.7%) from the prior year. Adjusting for inflation, spending per child has not changed in 20 years and remains too low to support high-quality full-day preschool.

Most state-funded preschool programs reported experiencing a shortage of qualified teachers during the 2021-2022 school year. Colorado was one of just a few states to report providing incentives for teacher recruitment and retention.

“Progress in expanding access to high-quality state-funded preschool over the last two decades has been slow and uneven, despite proven benefits to children, families and our nation’s

economy as a whole,” **said Allison Friedman-Krauss, Ph.D., the report’s lead author.**

“Colorado is addressing these problems by launching its new universal preschool commitment. In rolling this out, the state must focus on improving quality and teacher pay to ensure that all children have access to the educational opportunities they deserve.”

A handful of states, including Colorado, newly supporting universal preschool offers a bright spot and an opportunity to expand access for nearly half of preschoolers across the country.

“For the first time in decades, new state commitments to universal preschool give hope that the USA might take a giant step forward. If these states, including Colorado, make good on their newly promised investments in preschool for all they will advance early education opportunities dramatically,” **said W. Steven Barnett Ph.D., NIEER’s senior co-director.** “We applaud Colorado’s push to expand preschool access and increase funding. Colorado can serve as a model for other states if it raises standards and ensures preschool quality while expanding to serve all children.”

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*The 2022 State of Preschool Yearbook was supported with funding from the Heising-Simons Foundation and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. For more information and detailed state-by-state profiles on quality, access, and funding, please visit [www.nieer.org](http://www.nieer.org).*

*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.*