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Michigan's Preschool Enrollment Expands, Will New Promises Bring High-Quality Pre-K for All?

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 Michigan, as it did nationally. Yet, longstanding problems persisted across the country as 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](#)). Governor Whitmer has proposed expanding Michigan's high quality Great Start Readiness Program (GRSP) to all children to address these problems and state legislative leaders have expressed support for expanding GRSP, as well.

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

- Enrollment in state-funded preschool was 35,895, an increase of 9,120;
- State spending for preschool programs was \$428,120,000, including \$121,000,000 in federal pandemic relief funding, an increase of \$78,584,627 (inflation adjusted);
- State spending per child enrolled in preschool was \$11,927;
- Michigan met 10 of 10 quality standards benchmarks;

MICHIGAN: 2022 NATIONAL RANKINGS

- Enrollment at age 4: 19th (31%)
- Enrollment at age 3: None served
- State spending per child: 6th (\$11,927)
- All-reported spending per child: 6th (\$11,927)

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. Nationally, spending per child enrolled in preschool was \$6,571. 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, including Michigan, but few states reported providing incentives for teacher recruitment or retention. Waivers to teacher education requirements were more prevalent than in previous years, raising concerns about preschool quality.

“Nationally, 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.** “If Michigan can fulfill its promise of pre-K for all 4-year-olds while maintaining high standards for quality and improving teacher pay, all children in the state will have access to the educational opportunities they deserve.”

“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 Michigan, 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 encourage leaders in Michigan to move forward boldly to offer every child a Great Start. The state is already a leader for investing in quality. Michigan can transform its future and offer a model for the nation by making preschool investments in every child that will pay dividends today and far into the future.”

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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.

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.