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Mississippi Preschool Enrollment Expands as State will Double Preschool Funding and Enrollment

Nationally Uneven Access & Quality Span Two Decades, but New Voluntary Preschool for All Efforts Offer Hope

NEW BRUNSWICK, NJ – In Mississippi and nationally, state-funded preschool partially recovered last year from the negative impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. The state will triple preschool funding and slots by 2023-2024. Nationally, longstanding problems in early education persisted 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](#)).

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

- Enrollment in state-funded preschool was 2,807, an increase of 80;
- State spending for preschool programs was \$8,829,003, including \$829,003 in federal pandemic relief funding, an increase of \$466,820 (inflation adjusted);
- State spending per child enrolled in preschool was \$3,145;
- Mississippi met 10 of 10 quality standards benchmarks;
- Mississippi has not committed to voluntary preschool for all four-year-olds;
- Mississippi did not provide incentives for preschool teacher retention or recruitment.

MISSISSIPPI: 2022 NATIONAL RANKINGS

- Enrollment at age 4: 37th (8%)
- Enrollment at age 3: None served
- State spending per child: 41st (\$3,145)
- All-reported spending per child: 23rd (\$7,958)

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, from the high of 1.66 million in 2019-2020 to 1.53 million in 2021-2022.

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. 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, 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.

“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.**

“Mississippi leaders should continue to move forward to address this ongoing lack of access and increase teacher pay to ensure that all children have access to the educational opportunities they deserve.”

A handful of states considering voluntary preschool for all 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 voluntary preschool for all give hope that the USA might take a giant step forward. If these states 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 praise the work being done in Mississippi to expand preschool access and increase funding, including substantial funding to plan preschool expansion and new efforts for preschool programs in school settings. The state should continue investing in preschool and commit to access for all children while maintaining high standards for quality. Mississippi’s young children deserve it.”

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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.