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Montana Falls Further Behind in Providing Access to Preschool Education

NEW BRUNSWICK, NJ – Montana is one of just six states that does not fund a preschool program. As other states move ahead, Montana falls further behind in support for learning and development prior to kindergarten. Today, more states than ever before are moving forward to offer every child a free public education beginning at ages 3 or 4.

Nationally, state-funded preschool partially recovered last year from the negative impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic though longstanding problems remained for access, funding, and quality standards according to the [2022 State of Preschool Yearbook](#), released today by Rutgers University's National Institute for Early Education Research ([NIEER](#)).

According to **Allison Friedman-Krauss, Ph.D., the report's lead author**, "Montana leaders should join others across the country to expand access to the quality early educational opportunities that every child deserves."

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

- Enrollment in state-funded preschool partially rebounded from the COVID-19 pandemic but remained lower than pre-pandemic levels;
- State spending per child enrolled in preschool is the same as 20 years ago (inflation adjusted);
- Seven states are newly working towards universal preschool.

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. Thirty-two percent of 4-year-olds and 6% of 3-year-olds were enrolled in state-funded preschool. Adding in Head Start and Early Childhood Special Education, public preschool enrollment was 41% at age 4 and 17% at age 3. 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.

"New state commitments to universal preschool give hope that the USA might take a giant step forward this year," said **W. Steven Barnett Ph.D., NIEER's senior co-director**. "Montana should join other states that have chosen to become early education leaders from Maine to Iowa and Hawaii by funding quality preschool education. Montana's young children deserve no less than others."

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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.