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Promises of High-Quality Preschool for All 3- & 4-Year-Olds Can Make New Jersey a National Leader

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

NEW BRUNSWICK, NJ – New Jersey’s state-funded program preschool partially recovered last year from the negative impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, as did programs nationally. Longstanding problems across the country persisted as preschool access and funding remained 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](#)).

New Jersey stands out for high standards and strong funding, but much remains to be done to ensure all children can access the program. Key findings from the annual survey, which focused on the 2021-2022 school year, are summarized below for New Jersey:

- Enrollment in state-funded preschool was 53,293, an increase of 6,398;
- State spending for preschool programs was \$891,476,664, a decrease of \$55,369,735 (inflation adjusted);
- State spending per child enrolled in preschool was \$16,728;
- New Jersey met an average of 8 of 10 quality standards benchmarks;
- New Jersey’s Governor Murphy has committed to universal preschool for three-and four-year-olds.

NEW JERSEY: 2022 NATIONAL RANKINGS

- Enrollment at age 4: 23rd (29%)
- Enrollment at age 3: 4th (20%)
- State spending per child: 2nd (\$16,728)
- All-reported spending per child: 2nd (\$16,728)

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

Most state-funded preschool programs reported experiencing a shortage of qualified teachers during the 2021-2022 school year, including New Jersey, but few states reported providing incentives for teacher recruitment or 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.**

New Jersey is one of a handful of states with new initiatives for universal preschool.

“For the first time in decades, new state commitments to universal preschool give hope that the USA might take a giant step forward. New Jersey will become a national leader in providing high quality early learning opportunities to all children if it moves forward with Governor Murphy’s universal preschool initiative” **said W. Steven Barnett Ph.D., NIEER’s senior co-director.**

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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.