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New Mexico Poised to Become a National Leader in Preschool Education with Universal Access, Work Remains to Raise Teacher Qualifications and Pay *Nationally Uneven Access & Quality Span Two Decades, but New Universal Preschool Efforts Offer Hope*

NEW BRUNSWICK, NJ – New Mexico is on its way to becoming a leader in providing free high quality early education. Historic increases in state funding and future spending from the state’s permanent fund authorized by voters in last year’s constitutional amendment can propel New Mexico to the top for access, funding, and quality. Elsewhere, longstanding problems in early education across the country have 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 New Mexico:

- Enrollment in state-funded preschool was 12,567, an increase of 2,179;
- State spending for preschool programs was \$103,932,565, an increase of \$3,550,991 (inflation adjusted);
- State spending per child enrolled in preschool was \$8,270;
- New Mexico met 9 of 10 quality standards benchmarks;
- New Mexico has committed to universal preschool for four-year-olds;
- New Mexico provided incentives for preschool teacher retention and recruitment.

NEW MEXICO: 2022 NATIONAL RANKINGS

- Enrollment at age 4: 13th (42%)
- Enrollment at age 3: 10th (11%)
- State spending per child: 10th (\$8,270)
- All-reported spending per child: 21st (\$8,270)

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. New Mexico was one of just a few states to report providing

incentives for teacher recruitment and retention. Waivers to teacher education requirements were more prevalent than in previous years, raising concerns about preschool quality.

“New Mexico has made substantial progress expanding access to high-quality state-funded preschool,” **said Allison Friedman-Krauss, Ph.D., the report’s lead author.** “New Mexico leaders have stepped up and committed to universal preschool. The state must also raise preschool teacher qualifications and pay to ensure that all children 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 New Mexico and other 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 applaud New Mexico for expanding enrollment and investing in quality. New Mexico can serve as a model for others.”

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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.