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CONTACT: nieer@berlinrosen.com
adavison@nieer.org

New York’s “Universal” Preschool Program Serves Just Half of 4-Year-Olds—Will Albany Provide the Needed Funding for Expansion and Quality

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

NEW BRUNSWICK, NJ – New York still has far to go to meet its goal of providing every child with the opportunity for high quality preschool education. In New York and nationally, state-funded preschool partially recovered last year from the negative impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, longstanding problems in early education across the country 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](#)). New York ranks in the top 10 states for enrollment, but fell far behind in providing the funding needed for quality and setting high standards.

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

- Enrollment in state-funded preschool was 151,988, an increase of 36,391;
- State spending for preschool programs was \$883,787,441, including \$45,005,443 in federal pandemic relief funding, an increase of \$990,703 (inflation adjusted);
- State spending per child enrolled in preschool was \$5,815;
- New York met 7 of 10 quality standards benchmarks;
- New York has committed to universal preschool for 4-year-olds but thus far had only reached half of 4-year-olds;
- New York did not provide incentives for preschool teacher retention or recruitment.

NEW YORK: 2022 NATIONAL RANKINGS

- Enrollment at age 4: 9th (52%)
- Enrollment at age 3: 7th (16%)
- State spending per child: 23rd (\$5,815)
- All-reported spending per child: 32nd (\$5,815)

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.

“New York leaders, with federal support, should fully commit to reaching universal access for 4-year-olds and continue progress in enrolling 3-year-olds. At the same time the state must raise quality standards ensure all children have the educational opportunities they deserve,” **said Allison Friedman-Krauss, Ph.D., the report’s lead author.**

A handful of states newly considering universal preschool 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 universal preschool give hope that the USA might take a giant step forward. But this will be true only if these states, as well states like New York that promised preschool for all long ago, make good on their promised investments in preschool for all,” **said W. Steven Barnett Ph.D., NIEER’s senior co-director.** “Albany should make good on the decades old promise of universal preschool by increasing funding to support quality while expanding enrollment. New York’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.