



April 18, 2024

**Contact:**

Ashley Davison, NIEER, [adaviosn@nieer.org](mailto:adaviosn@nieer.org), (848) 932-3142 (o), (609) 969-1587 (m)

Adam Muhlendorf, Longleaf Strategies, [adam@longleafstrategies.com](mailto:adam@longleafstrategies.com), (334) 625-0175 (o), (202) 641-6216 (m)

## Minnesota Seeks to Rise from Bottom Half of National Preschool Access Rankings

*National report says it's a "time to choose," as states have bounced back unevenly from the pandemic when it comes to preschool enrollment and quality*

**NEW BRUNSWICK, N.J.** - A new national report released today ranks Minnesota 37<sup>th</sup> in the nation for preschool enrollment for four-year-olds and 32<sup>nd</sup> for three-year-olds across two state-funded preschool programs: Minnesota Head Start and Minnesota Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK) & School Readiness Plus (SRP).

The National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) today released its annual *State of Preschool* report, which tracks preschool enrollment, funding, and quality across states. The 2023 State of Preschool Yearbook found that, in the 2022-2023 school year:

- Minnesota served 11% of four-year-olds and 1% of three-year-olds in state-funded preschool, for a total combined enrollment of 7,799 (a decrease of 245 from the prior year).
- State spending totaled \$52,523,670, down \$1,168,499 (2%), adjusted for inflation, since last year
- State spending per child equaled \$6,735 in 2022-2023, up \$60 from 2021-2022, adjusted for inflation
- Minnesota preschool met an average of 5.4 of 10 research-based quality standards benchmarks for minimum quality recommended by NIEER.

In 2023, Minnesota's state legislature made the current funding for 7,160 VPK & SRP seats permanent and committed to adding 5,200 additional seats by FY 2026. The legislature also increased state appropriations for Head Start and Early Head Start by \$10 million, for a total of \$35.1 million. This is in addition to other funding for 3- and 4-year-olds through the Early Learning Scholarship, School Readiness, and Early Childhood Family Education programs (totaling \$142 million).

"Our report on the 2022-2023 school year found that Minnesota leaders had work to do to improve preschool enrollment, funding, and quality. We applaud the additional funding for preschool in the coming years and urge state leaders to do more to expand preschool access for both three- and four-year-olds and raise quality standards," **said W. Steven Barnett, Ph.D., NIEER's senior co-director and founder.** "We encourage Minnesota to continue supporting Grow Your Own programs to help preschool teachers earn qualifications and to help address teacher shortages and ensure preschool teachers are qualified for the job."

Nationally, the report finds that this is a critical moment for preschool. The nation has emerged, albeit unevenly, from the COVID-19 Pandemic. States are poised to make new progress toward serving more three- and four-year-olds in high-quality, full-day preschool programs. How each state chooses to move forward – and whether the federal government helps – will determine how much real progress is made. Most states have not committed to serving all children, and even those states that have often fall short. Most states need to increase funding per child substantially to enable providers to meet minimal standards for a high-quality, effective program.

During the 2022-2023 school year, states enrolled over 1.63 million children in preschool, marking a 7% surge compared to the preceding year. Preschool enrollment reached 35% of 4-year-olds and 7% of 3-year-olds, with state expenditures reaching \$11.73 billion—an 11% increase from 2021-2022 when adjusted for inflation. Notably, state spending per child surpassed \$7,000 for the first time. However, despite this notable progress, most states still fell short of their pre-pandemic preschool enrollment. While several states made strides towards achieving universal preschool access, six states persisted in not allocating any funding for preschool programs.

"With the pandemic in the rear view, it is time for states to choose whether they are going to support high-quality preschool and how," **said Allison Friedman-Krauss, Ph.D., the report's lead author.** "Will states commit to serving all four-year-olds? Will states serve both three- and four-year-olds? Will states make the investments needed to ensure that programs are effective? Will states support an equitable mixed-delivery model for preschool incorporating both existing child care programs and public schools? Will states provide a full school-day option for all families who want it? How will states recruit, support, and retain preschool teachers? These decisions will impact millions of children for years to come."

###

*The 2023 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](http://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.*