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With Dedicated Funding Sources in Place, New Mexico is Poised to Climb National Preschool 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, quality

NEW BRUNSWICK, N.J. - A new national report released today ranks New Mexico 13th in the nation for preschool enrollment for four-year-olds and 13th for three-year-olds in 2022-2023 — rankings that will improve in 2023-2024 as New Mexico rolls out a historic pre-k expansion using $100 million from its Land Grant Permanent Fund.

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:

- New Mexico PreK enrolled 5% more children from the prior year for a total combined enrollment of 13,227, serving 45% of four-year-olds and 11% of three-year-olds in state-funded preschool.
- State spending totaled $105,924,736, down $4,974,315 (4%), adjusted for inflation since last year.
- New Mexico ranked 14th in the nation for spending per child, which equaled $8,008 in 2022-2023 (including TANF), down $816 from 2021-2022, adjusted for inflation.
- New Mexico met 9 of 10 research-based quality standards benchmarks recommended by NIEER.

During the 2023 state legislative session, nearly $100 million from the state's Land Grant Permanent Fund was appropriated to New Mexico's new Early Childhood Education and Care Department (ECECD) to award a total of 279 PreK grants to 84 school district programs and 195 community-based programs, family child care providers, Head Start programs, Tribal governments (funding 554 Tribal PreK slots, both new and blended slots to support increased instructional hours). The funding will also be used to significantly expand instructional hours and increase pay for preschool teachers. In addition, funding was increased for transportation costs and research-based curricula.

"We have made universal access to high-quality PreK for three-, four-, and five-year olds one of our top priorities. We are making historic investments to expand PreK across our state so that every family has access to a high-quality early education program that meets their child's needs," **said New Mexico Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham**. "With the strong investments we are making in building a world-class prenatal to age five system, this generation of New Mexicans will enter school prepared and ready to thrive."

"In New Mexico, grassroots advocates, voters, the Legislature, and the Governor aligned in recent years to create dedicated, permanent funding streams to support early childhood education," **said W. Steven Barnett, Ph.D., NIEER's senior co-director and founder.** "While several states are committed to providing universal preschool, New Mexico has done the hard work of putting the funding mechanisms in place to make preschool expansion a reality. Next steps for New Mexico include improving qualifications and pay for the entire early care and education system, including New Mexico PreK teachers who work outside public schools. With the Governor's commitment to free college and the state's 18 early childhood teacher preparation programs, New Mexico's requirement that all New Mexico PreK teachers obtain a bachelor's degrees is within reach, which would raise New Mexico to a 10 out of 10 on our recommended quality benchmarks."

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 fallen short. Most states need to increase funding per child substantially to adjust for inflation and 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 make the investments needed to ensure that programs are effective? Will states commit to enrolling 3-year-olds as well as 4-year-olds? 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."

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