



Unworthy Wages: State-Funded Preschool Teacher Salaries and Benefits

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The National Institute for Early Education Research

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For state-funded preschool programs the compensation of teachers is a [critical issue](#) for program quality and effectiveness. If preschool programs are to attract and [retain](#) teachers comparable to those in primary schools, preschool teachers must receive comparable pay and benefits. This brief assesses compensation parity between state-funded preschool lead teachers and public school K-12 teachers. As state-funded preschool programs typically use mixed public-private delivery systems we separately examine compensation for preschool teachers in the public schools and in other (nonpublic) organizations (including for-profits and non-profits some of which also offer Head Start). Data for this report are from the 2020-21 school year survey for the [State of Preschool Yearbook](#).

To assess compensation parity, we must first address differences in teacher qualifications between preschool and K-12 sectors. Not all state-funded preschool programs require lead teachers to have qualifications comparable to those of K-12 teachers, and requirements also vary by the type of setting in which the teacher works. Table 1 summarizes information on requirements to have a BA degree. Lead teachers in state-funded preschool programs often, but not always, have the same qualifications as public K-12 teachers. Preschool lead teachers working in public schools (Figure 1) typically must have a BA degree like their K-12 peers, with 80% of the programs requiring these teachers to have a 4-year-college degree. However, state-funded preschool teachers working in nonpublic organizations (Figure 2) are much less likely to be required to have a BA. Less than half of the state programs reporting this information replied that lead preschool teachers in nonpublic settings were required to have a BA degree.

An important difference among states regarding compensation parity is whether they have policies that require parity in starting salary and for the full salary schedule for preschool and K-12 teachers with the same qualifications. As can be seen in Table 2, just four states have policies that require this complete parity for all teachers in all their preschool programs. Some states with multiple programs have different policies across programs. The most common pattern is for pay parity to be required for lead preschool teachers within the public schools but not for those in nonpublic providers of state-funded preschool education.

With few states requiring pay parity and some not requiring the same qualifications, it is unsurprising that preschool teacher lead salaries tend to be low and pay gaps with K-12 tend to be high (Table 3). Only one state reported minimal pay gaps for all lead preschool teachers regardless of setting, while 9 reported less than a 10 percent difference for those in public schools. A 10 percent pay gap might be accounted for by higher pay for secondary school teachers and more years of experience for K-12 teachers. However, the average pay gap for lead preschool teachers compared to their state's K-12 teachers for the programs that could report this information is much higher: \$13,645 per year for those in the public schools (Figure 4) and \$26,218 for those in nonpublic school settings (Figure 5). In some states, lead preschool teachers are paid only about half as much as K-12 teachers. Such substantial disparities seriously impact preschool teachers and the children they serve.

Most state preschool programs are [not adequately funded](#) to support pay parity for lead teachers, sometimes even when there are policies for pay parity and when teacher qualifications requirements are equal to those in K-12. Differences in degree requirements partially explain the pay gap in some states, do not explain the pay gaps in other states. Even in states like Georgia and Michigan, where all lead preschool teachers must have a bachelor's degree and additional credentials, large salary gaps are still found.

K-12 teacher compensation includes important non-salary benefits—retirement, healthcare, and paid time off—that teachers in state preschool programs often do not equally receive (Table 4). As summarized in Figure 7, out of 60 programs, number providing benefit parity for preschool teachers in public schools was 26 (43%) for retirement, 27 (45%) for health insurance, and 33 (55%) for paid time off. Only one state reported providing all these benefits to state-funded preschool teachers outside the public schools.

[Expectations for state-funded preschool](#) teachers are quite high—to provide rich experiences that bring them happiness, instill a joy of learning, and support future school and life success. Should not they be able to expect in return pay and benefits comparable to that of their K-12 peers?

Table 1: Degree Requirements for Lead Teachers in State-Funded Preschool by Setting

State Programs	Bachelor's Degree Required		Same Requirement for Public School and Nonpublic
	Public School	Nonpublic	
Alabama	Yes	Yes	Yes
Alaska	Yes	Yes	Yes
Arizona	No	No	Yes
Arkansas	No	No	Yes
California CSPP	No	No	Yes
California TK	Yes	NA	No
Colorado	No	No	Yes
Connecticut CDCC	NA	No	No
Connecticut SR	No	No	Yes
Connecticut Smart Start	Yes	NA	No
Delaware	Yes	No	No
District of Columbia	Yes	No	No
Florida	No	No	Yes
Georgia	Yes	Yes	Yes
Hawaii EOEL	Yes	NA	No
Hawaii SPCSP	Yes	NA	No
Illinois	Yes	Yes	Yes
Iowa Shared Visions	Yes	No	No
Iowa SWVPP	Yes	Yes	Yes
Kansas	Yes	Yes	Yes
Kentucky	Yes	Yes	Yes
Louisiana 8(g)	Yes	NA	No
Louisiana LA 4	Yes	NA	No
Louisiana NSECD	NA	No	No
Maine	Yes	Yes	Yes
Maryland	Yes	Yes	Yes
Massachusetts New Program	NA	No	No
Massachusetts Chapter 70	Yes	NA	No
Michigan GSRP	Yes	Yes	Yes
Michigan DK	Yes	NA	No
Minnesota HdSt	Yes	No	No
Minnesota VPK/SRP	No	No	No*
Mississippi	Yes	Yes	Yes
Missouri PP	Yes	Yes	Yes
Missouri Pre-K FF	Yes	NA	No
Nebraska	Yes	Yes	Yes
Nevada	Yes	Yes	Yes
New Jersey Abbott	Yes	Yes	Yes
New Jersey ECPA	Yes	Yes	Yes
New Jersey ELLI	Yes	Yes	Yes
New Mexico	Yes	No	No

New York	Yes	Yes	Yes
North Carolina	Yes	Yes	Yes
North Dakota	Yes	Yes	Yes
Ohio	No	No	No*
Oklahoma	Yes	NA	No
Oregon Pre-K	No	No	Yes
Oregon Preschool Promise	No	No	Yes
Pennsylvania RTL	Yes	No	No
Pennsylvania HSSAP	No	No	No*
Pennsylvania K4 & SBPK	Yes	No	No
Pennsylvania PKC	Yes	Yes	Yes
Rhode Island	Yes	Yes	Yes
South Carolina	Yes	No	No
Tennessee	Yes	Yes	Yes
Texas	Yes	Yes	Yes
Utah	No	No	Yes
Vermont	Yes	No	No
Virginia	Yes	No	No
Washington ECEAP	No	No	Yes
Washington TK	Yes	NA	No
West Virginia	Yes	Yes	Yes
Wisconsin	Yes	Yes	Yes

NA = Not applicable.

No* = Requirements differ by setting though neither requires a BA.

Figure 1. Number of Programs that Require BA Degrees by Setting

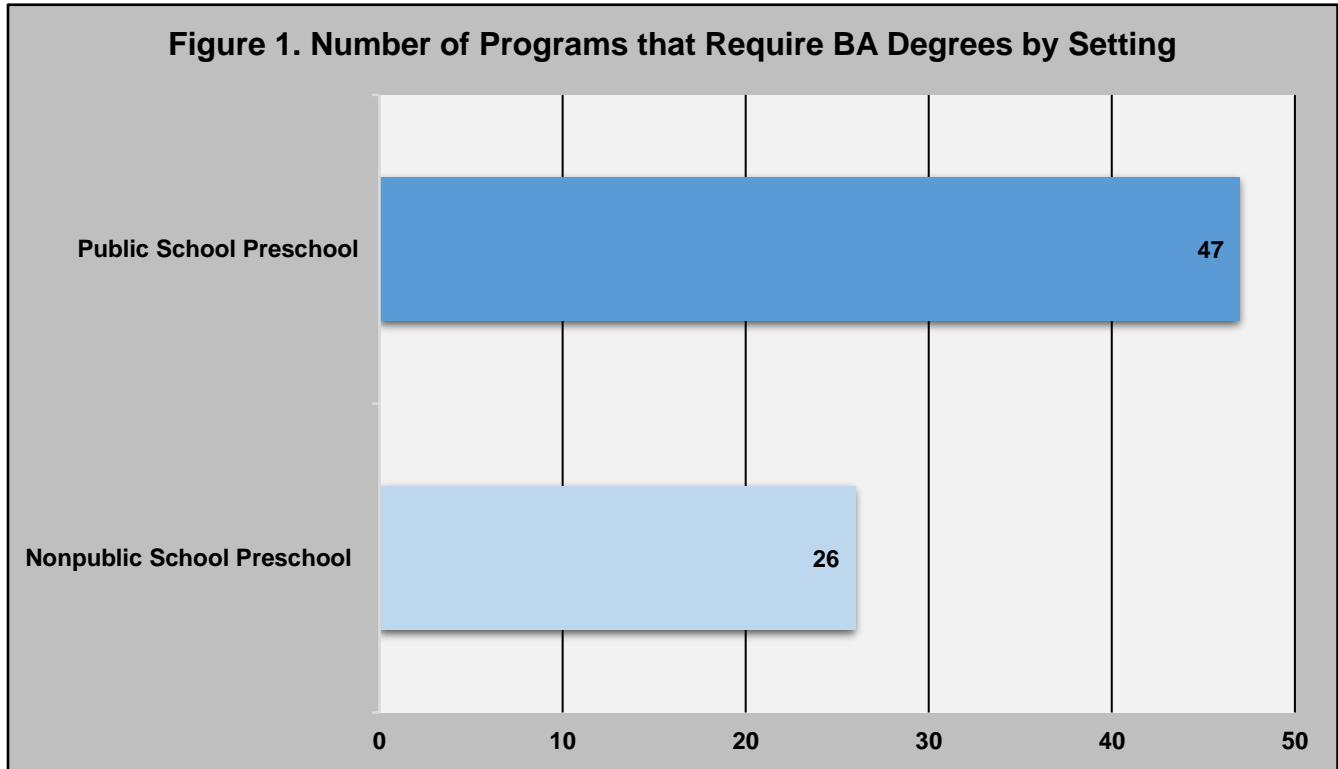


Figure 2. Are BA Degrees Required for Preschool Lead Teachers in Public Schools?

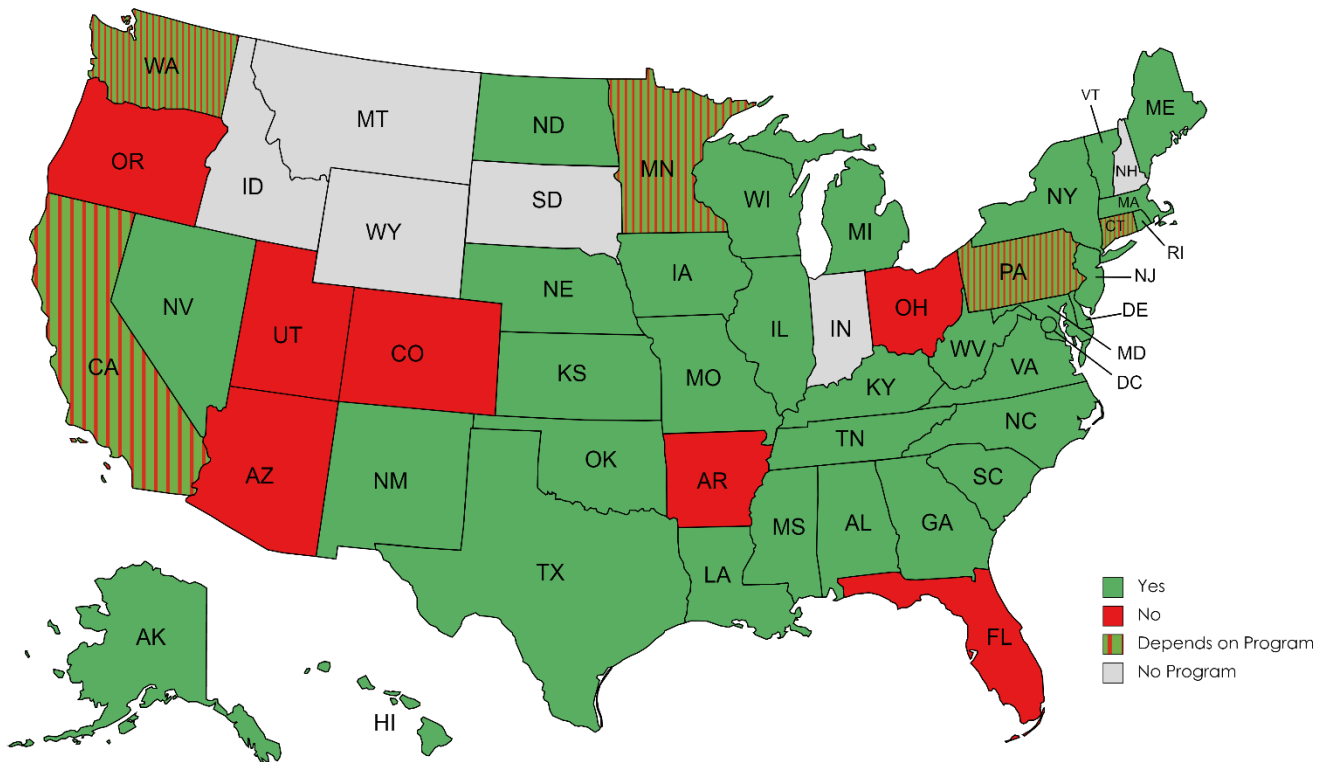


Figure 3. Are BA Degrees Required for Preschool Lead Teachers in Nonpublic Settings?

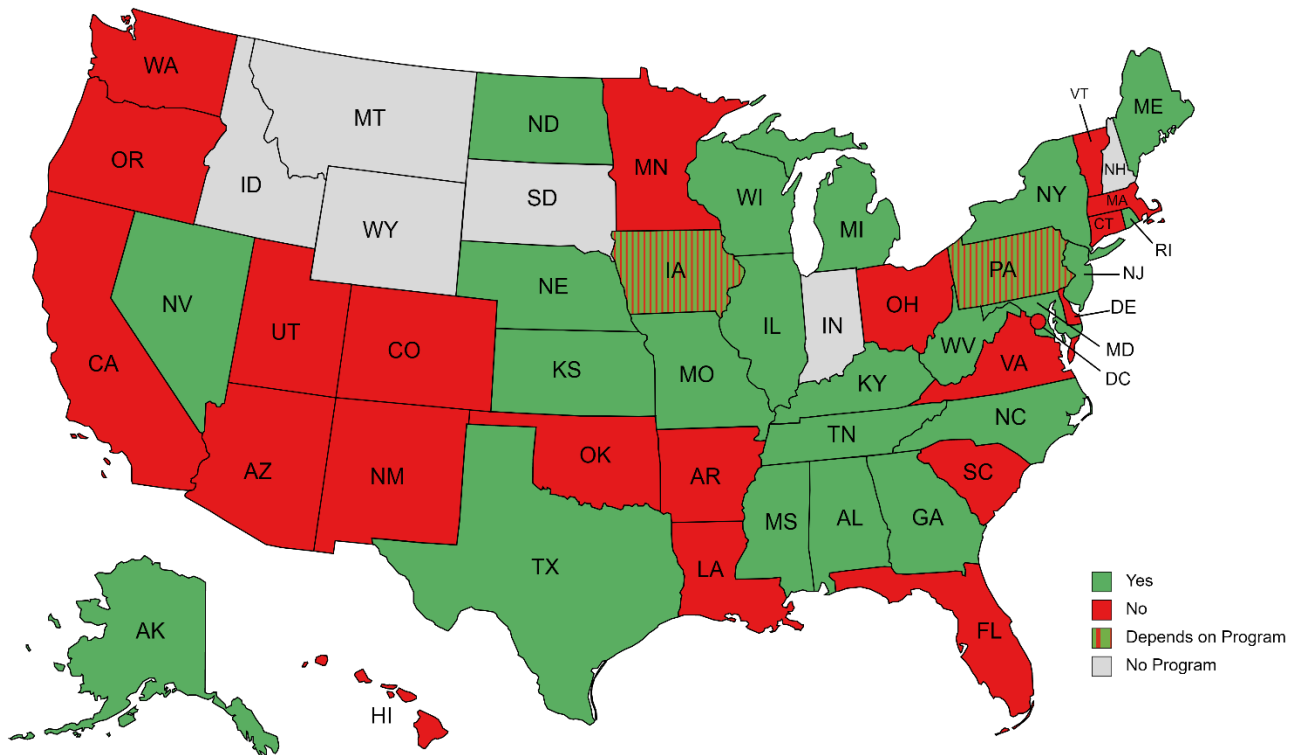


Table 2: Policies Regarding Lead Preschool Teacher Pay Parity by Setting and Program

State Programs	Starting Salary Equal to K-3		Salary Schedule Equal to K-3	
	Public School	Nonpublic	Public School	Nonpublic
Alabama	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Alaska	No	No	No	No
Arizona	No	No	No	No
Arkansas	Not Reported	Not Reported	No	No
California CSPP	No	No	No	No
California TK	Yes	NA	Yes	NA
Colorado	No	No	No	No
Connecticut CDCC	NA	No	NA	No
Connecticut SR	No	No	No	No
Connecticut Smart Start	Yes	NA	Yes	NA
Delaware	Yes	No	Yes	No
District of Columbia	Yes	No	Yes	No
Florida	No	No	No	No
Georgia	Yes	No	Yes	No
Hawaii EOEL	Yes	NA	Yes	NA
Hawaii SPCSP	Yes	NA	Yes	NA
Illinois	No	No	No	No
Iowa Shared Visions	Yes	No	Yes	No
Iowa SWVPP	Yes	No	Yes	No
Kansas	No	No	No	No
Kentucky	Yes	No	Yes	No
Louisiana 8(g)	No	NA	No	NA
Louisiana LA 4	No	NA	No	NA
Louisiana NSECD	NA	No	NA	No
Maine	Yes	No	Yes	No
Maryland	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Massachusetts New Program	NA	No	NA	No
Massachusetts Chapter 70	No	NA	No	NA
Michigan GSRP	No	No	No	No
Michigan DK	Yes	NA	Yes	NA
Minnesota HdSt	No	No	No	No
Minnesota VPK/SRP	Yes	Yes	No	No
Mississippi	Yes	No	Yes	No
Missouri PP	Yes	No	Yes	No
Missouri Pre-K FF	No	NA	No	NA
Nebraska	No	No	No	No
Nevada	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
New Jersey Abbott	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
New Jersey ECPA	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
New Jersey ELLI	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
New Mexico	Yes	No	Yes	No

New York	No	No	No	No
North Carolina	Yes	No	Yes	No
North Dakota	Yes	No	Yes	No
Ohio	No	No	No	No
Oklahoma	Yes	NA	Yes	NA
Oregon Pre-K	Yes	Yes	No	No
Oregon Preschool Promise	No	No	No	No
Pennsylvania RTL	No	No	No	No
Pennsylvania HSSAP	No	No	No	No
Pennsylvania K4 & SBPK	No	No	No	No
Pennsylvania PKC	No	No	No	No
Rhode Island	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
South Carolina	Yes	No	Yes	No
Tennessee	Yes	No	Yes	No
Texas	Yes	No	Yes	No
Utah	No	No	No	No
Vermont	Yes	No	Yes	No
Virginia	Yes	No	Yes	No
Washington ECEAP	No	No	No	No
Washington TK	Yes	NA	Yes	NA
West Virginia	Yes	No	Yes	No
Wisconsin	No	No	No	No

NA = Not Applicable.

Table 3: Lead Teacher Salaries and Pay Parity Gaps in State-Funded Preschool by Program

State Programs	2020-2021 Preschool Teacher Mean Annual Salary		Preschool Nonpublic-Public School Salary Gap	K-3 Public School Teacher <u>Average Salary</u>	State Preschool - K-3 Salary Gap	
	Public School	Nonpublic			Public School	Nonpublic
Alabama	\$49,866	\$42,734	-\$7,131	\$56,495	-\$6,629	-\$13,761
Arkansas	\$42,915	\$27,900	-\$15,015	\$54,006	-\$11,091	-\$26,106
Connecticut CDCC	NA	\$38,495		\$79,742	NA	-\$41,247
Connecticut Smart Start	\$60,779	NA		\$79,742	-\$18,963	NA
Connecticut SR	\$60,543	\$41,024	-\$19,519	\$79,742	-\$19,199	-\$38,718
Georgia	\$38,821	\$38,821	\$0	\$63,521	-\$24,700	-\$24,700
Hawaii EOEL	\$65,293	NA		\$73,548	-\$8,255	NA
Hawaii SPCSP	\$50,300	NA		\$73,548	-\$23,248	NA
Illinois	\$58,487	\$45,933	-\$12,554	\$69,300	-\$10,813	-\$23,367
Iowa Shared Visions	\$52,201	\$34,417	-\$17,784	\$61,770	-\$9,569	-\$27,353
Iowa SWVPP	\$54,075	\$49,223	-\$4,852	\$61,770	-\$7,695	-\$12,547
Kentucky	\$54,548	Not reported		\$57,283	-\$2,735	
Louisiana LA 4	\$41,217	NA		\$57,100	-\$15,883	NA
Louisiana NSECD	NA	\$31,640		\$57,100	NA	-\$25,460
Maine	\$44,576	Not reported		\$59,126	-\$14,550	
Maryland	\$47,962	Not reported		\$78,875	-\$30,913	
Massachusetts UPK	NA	\$33,000		\$86,315	NA	-\$53,315
Michigan GSRP	\$43,505	\$33,051	-\$10,454	\$64,267	-\$20,762	-\$31,216
Minnesota HdSt	\$42,544	\$38,379	-\$4,165	\$74,266	-\$31,722	-\$35,887
Mississippi	\$45,528	\$28,198	-\$17,330	\$49,773	-\$4,245	-\$21,575
Nebraska	\$52,005	\$52,005	\$0	\$56,549	-\$4,544	-\$4,544
Nevada	\$50,295	\$33,000	-\$17,295	\$67,065	-\$16,770	-\$34,065
New Mexico	\$51,013	Not reported		\$57,275	-\$6,262	
North Carolina	\$42,000	\$34,727	-\$7,273	\$54,392	-\$12,392	-\$19,665
Oklahoma	\$53,451	NA		\$56,629	-\$3,178	NA
Oregon Pre-K	\$71,726	\$41,995	-\$29,731	\$70,727	\$999	-\$28,732
Oregon Preschool Promise	56,658	40,893	-\$15,765	\$70,727	-\$14,069	-\$29,834
Rhode Island	\$87,000	\$62,000	-\$25,000	\$81,871	In\$5,129	-\$19,871
South Carolina	\$51,780	Not reported		\$57,719	-\$5,939	
Tennessee	\$54,000	\$54,000	\$0	\$55,372	-\$1,372	-\$1,372
Texas	\$56,274	Not reported		\$61,881	-\$5,607	
Utah	\$29,000	\$25,000	-\$4,000	\$61,358	-\$32,358	-\$36,358
Vermont	\$56,585	Not reported		\$64,454	-\$7,869	
Washington ECEAP	\$44,118	\$35,508	-\$8,610	\$83,449	-\$39,331	-\$47,941
West Virginia	\$47,013	Not reported		\$52,137	-\$5,124	

Figure 4. Lead Teacher Salary and Gap with K-12 by Program and Setting

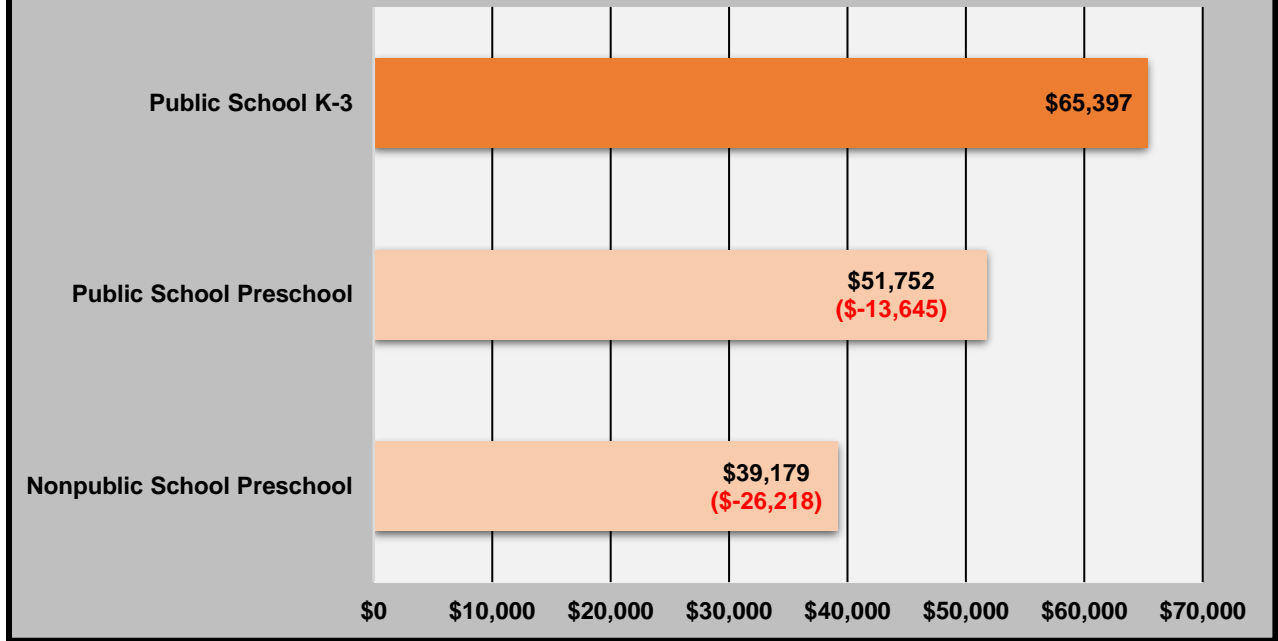
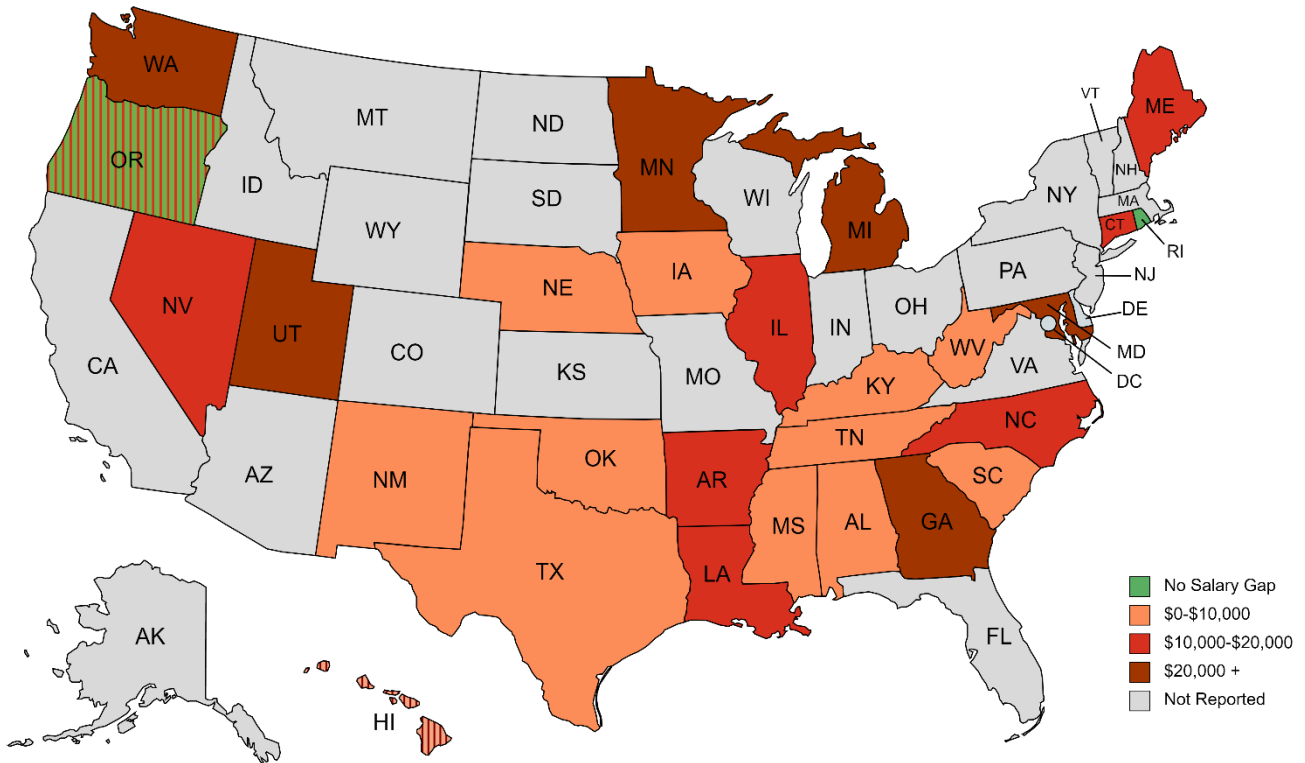
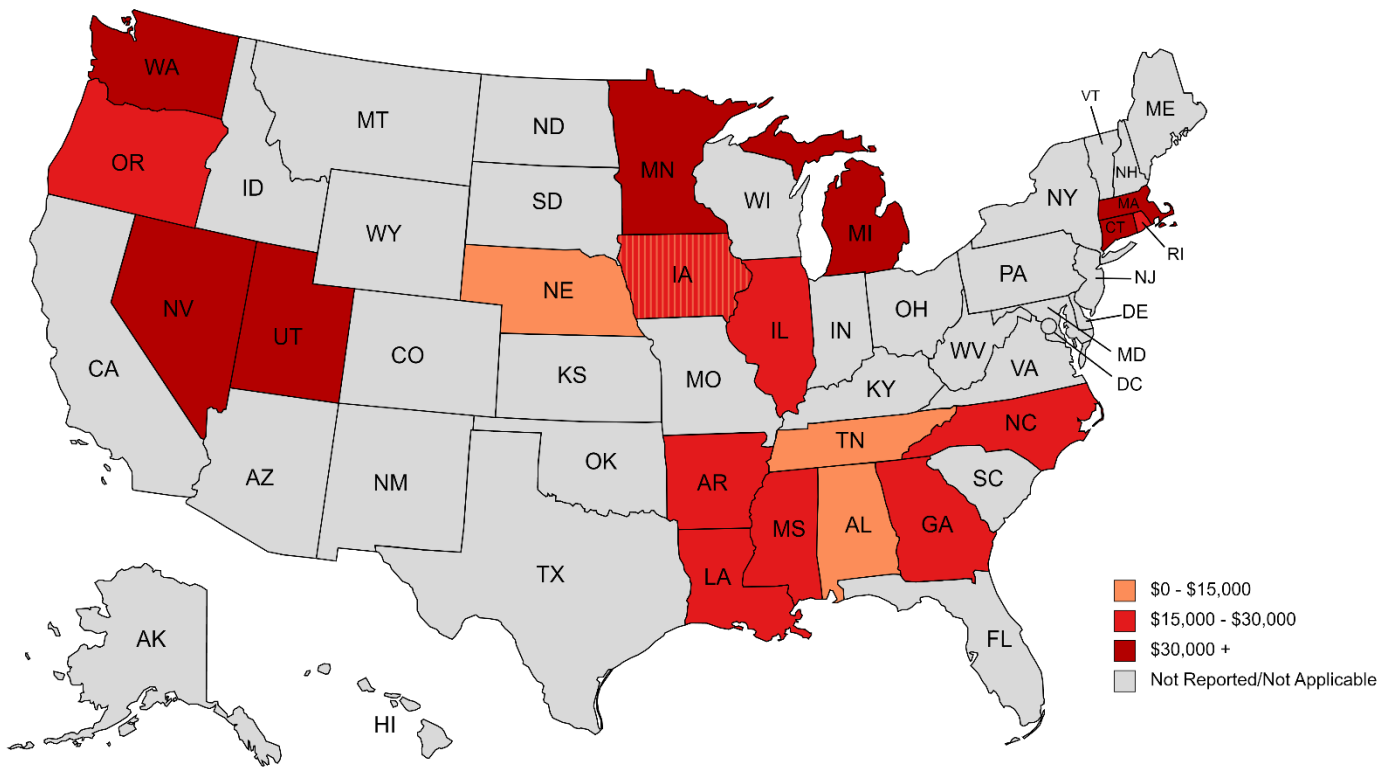


Figure 5. Preschool Teachers in Public Schools: K-3 Salary Gap by State¹



¹ This map reports data from the State of Preschool Yearbook Survey that not all states could provide (listed as “not reported”). States with two colors indicate multiple programs with different salary gaps.

Figure 6. Preschool Teachers in Nonpublic Settings: K-3 Salary Gap by State²

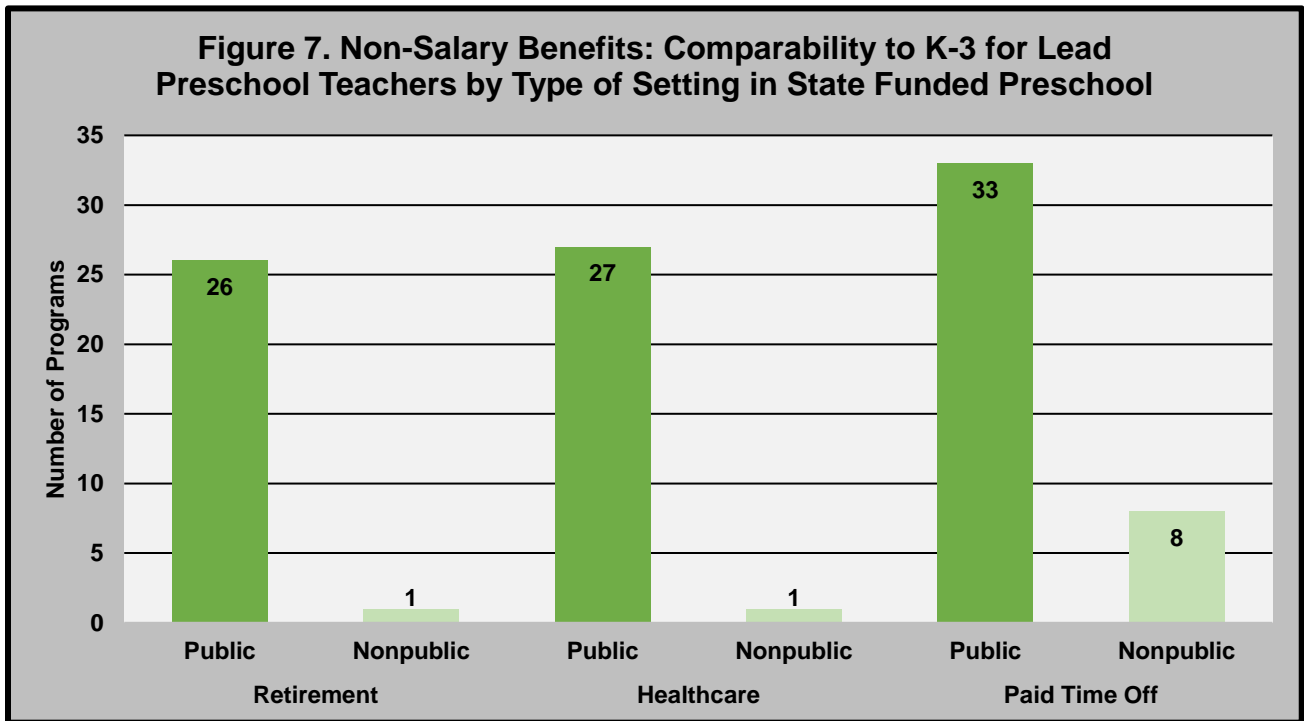


² This map reports data from the State of Preschool Yearbook Survey that not all states could provide (listed as “not reported”).

Table 4: State-Funded Preschool Provision of Benefit Parity To Lead Teachers (Yes, No)

State Programs	Retirement		Healthcare		Paid Time Off	
	Public School	Nonpublic	Public School	Nonpublic	Public School	Nonpublic
Alabama	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Alaska	No	No	No	No	No	No
Arizona	No	No	No	No	No	No
Arkansas	No	No	No	No	No	No
California CSPP	No	No	No	No	No	No
California TK	Yes	NA	Yes	NA	Yes	NA
Colorado	No	No	No	No	No	No
Connecticut CDCC	NA	No	NA	No	NA	No
Connecticut SR	No	No	No	No	No	No
Connecticut Smart Start	Yes	NA	Yes	NA	Yes	No
Delaware	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
District of Columbia	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Florida	No	No	No	No	No	No
Georgia	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Hawaii EOEL	Yes	NA	Yes	NA	Yes	NA
Hawaii SPCSP	Yes	NA	Yes	NA	Yes	NA
Illinois	No	No	No	No	No	No
Iowa Shared Visions	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Iowa SWVPP	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Kansas	No	No	No	No	No	No
Kentucky	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Louisiana 8(g)	No	NA	No	NA	No	NA
Louisiana LA 4	No	NA	No	NA	No	NA
Louisiana NSECD	NA	No	NA	No	NA	No
Maine	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Maryland	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Massachusetts New Program	NA	No	NA	No	NA	No
Massachusetts Chapter 70	No	NA	No	NA	No	NA
Michigan GSRP	No	No	No	No	No	No
Michigan DK	Yes	NA	Yes	NA	Yes	NA
Minnesota HdSt	No	No	No	No	No	No
Minnesota VPK/SRP	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
Mississippi	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Missouri PP	No	No	No	No	Yes	No
Missouri Pre-K FF	No	NA	No	NA	No	NA
Nebraska	No	No	No	No	No	No
Nevada	Yes	No	Yes	NA	Yes	No
New Jersey Abbott	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
New Jersey ECPA	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
New Jersey ELLI	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
New Mexico	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No

New York	No	No	No	No	No	No
North Carolina	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
North Dakota	No	No	No	No	No	No
Ohio	No	No	No	No	No	No
Oklahoma	Yes	NA	Yes	NA	Yes	NA
Oregon Pre-K	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
Oregon Preschool Promise	No	No	No	No	No	No
Pennsylvania RTL	No	No	No	No	No	No
Pennsylvania HSSAP	No	No	No	No	No	No
Pennsylvania K4 & SBPK	No	No	No	No	No	No
Pennsylvania PKC	No	No	No	No	No	No
Rhode Island	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
South Carolina	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Tennessee	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Texas	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Utah	No	No	No	No	No	No
Vermont	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Virginia	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Washington ECEAP	No	No	No	No	No	No
Washington TK	Yes	NA	Yes	NA	Yes	NA
West Virginia	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Wisconsin	No	No	No	No	No	No



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