

# THE STATE OF PRESCHOOL

2003 STATE PRESCHOOL YEARBOOK

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# Executive Summary

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*The State of Preschool: 2003 State Preschool Yearbook* demonstrates that state preschool programs are failing the nation's children. Few set high standards and fewer still provide adequate funding. Even the disadvantaged children targeted by most state preschool initiatives are not assured of access to high-quality programs. Most children and their families receive even less help. Children's learning and development suffers as a result. This must change. Several states are leading the way, but the rest must follow if all our children are to receive the early education they deserve.

In the 21st century no topic in education is more important than the education of our young children, which is far different today than it was just a few decades ago. Today most children attend a preschool program prior to kindergarten. Yet, they do so in a "system" that is highly uneven in access, educational quality, and the financial burdens imposed on families. State governments have begun to create programs to increase access, improve quality, and invest public resources in preschool education. As they do so, it is essential that the public be well informed so that government can be held accountable. This *State Preschool Yearbook* reports on the first of what will be annual check-ups on the programs funded by state governments to educate America's children at ages 3 and 4. The *Yearbook* clearly points out the state policies that impact the level of access children have to preschool, the quality of preschool programs offered, and the commitment of the state to resources for these programs.

## Access

- Forty states funded 45 state preschool programs in the 2001–2002 school year. The 38 states providing data enrolled approximately 700,000 children, almost all of whom were ages 3 and 4.
- The vast majority of children served by state prekindergarten programs were 4-year-olds, with 581,705, or 14.8 percent, of the nation's 4's enrolled. Only Massachusetts and New Jersey enrolled more than 10 percent of their 3-year-olds.
- Two states sought to provide universal access to preschool, Georgia and Oklahoma. They enrolled more than half of their 4-year-olds in state preschool programs. Seven other states enrolled more than 20 percent of their 4's, eight states enrolled 10–20 percent, and 20 states enrolled less than 10 percent. Insufficient information was available from three states to determine the percentage of 4-year-olds served.

## Quality

- All states needed to improve their quality standards. State quality standards varied widely. Most states did not meet a majority of our research-based benchmarks for minimum state standards.
- Although no state met all 10 benchmarks for state quality standards, three state programs met nine out of 10: Arkansas, Illinois and New Jersey's "Abbott District" program.
- Only 18 states required preschool teachers in all of the programs they funded to have the four-year college degree that every state requires of kindergarten teachers and that has been recommended by the National Research Council for every preschool education classroom.

## Resources

- Total state spending for state-funded prekindergarten exceeded \$2.4 billion in 2001–2002. Ten states accounted for 83 percent of all spending. Limited access resulted from limited funding.
- In most states, spending per child was far too low to assure quality. Only two states spent at least as much per child enrolled as Head Start. On average, federal Head Start programs received nearly \$3,500 more per child than states provided to their preschool programs.
- Low state funding suggests that many states implicitly relied on local schools, parents, and others to share the costs. This likely produces inequities in access to quality because the less a state spends the more quality depends on financial capacity of local schools and parents.
- Most states allowed their preschool programs to be operated under a variety of auspices including public schools, Head Start centers, and private child care centers. This permitted states to maximize their use of existing resources when expanding state programs.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

- Three state preschool programs stand out as exemplary in one or more ways that make them useful models for other states. Georgia and Oklahoma provide far more access than any other states, and Oklahoma requires that all its preschool teachers be certified. New Jersey's "Abbott District" preschool program sets the highest standards in the nation and is required to provide free preschool to all, beginning at age 3, in 30 of the state's largest and most disadvantaged school districts.
- Low state quality standards and funding levels in many states raise serious concerns about state commitment to providing a good education to our young children. Recognizing that many states currently do not have the resources to fully fund high-quality preschool, the federal government must make a major new commitment to investing in prekindergarten programs. This federal effort should be designed, not just to supplement, but to leverage new state funding.
- States need to improve their preschool data systems. It is impossible to obtain an unduplicated count of children served or to track the amount of public funds spent on each child across the various federal and state programs or to account for local efforts.

**This report may be viewed in its entirety on the NIEER website at [www.nieer.org](http://www.nieer.org). The information is also provided on the website in an interactive format for ease of use.**

# Introduction

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America has changed the way we educate young children. As recently as 1960 it was rare for children under 5 to be educated outside the home. Today, most children spend time in a preschool prior to kindergarten. In 2001, 52 percent of 3- and 4-year-olds were in a nursery school or kindergarten classroom, and the enrollment rate for 4-year-olds in 2001 had nearly matched the enrollment rate for 5-year-olds in 1970.<sup>1</sup> Many social, economic and demographic trends have contributed to this dramatic change, as has scientific progress demonstrating the importance of early learning for the development and future success of our children.<sup>2</sup>

The *State Preschool Yearbook* has been developed by NIEER to provide information on one important contributor to change in the education of young children—state-funded prekindergarten programs. This 2003 *Yearbook* is the first in an annual series reporting on programs funded by state governments to educate children at ages 3 and 4. Primary responsibility for education in the United States resides with state and local governments, and state prekindergarten programs will play an important role in the education of young children in the 21st century. We recognize that other types of programs serve young children under a variety of names and auspices, including the federal Head Start program and privately- and publicly-funded child care. This report seeks to improve the public's knowledge and understanding of state prekindergarten programs in that larger array of programs.

This first *State Preschool Yearbook* describes state-funded prekindergarten programs in the 2001–2002 school year and establishes a baseline against which to compare future progress. The *Yearbook* data were collected from an intensive survey of the states. Information is presented on three key characteristics of prekindergarten programs: access, quality standards, and resources.

- *Access:* Access remains far from universal across the country and varies both across and within states. The ability to attend preschool depends greatly on what parents can afford and where they live. We use enrollment of children at ages 3 and 4 to measure the extent to which states expand opportunities for preschool participation.
- *Quality Standards:* The quality of preschool education determines its educational value. Yet, many preschool programs in the United States are poor to mediocre. State standards are essential for ensuring that preschool programs provide quality education. The *Yearbook* compares state quality standards against a research-based checklist of benchmarks.
- *Resources:* Resources, as measured by state expenditures for preschool, indicate each state's commitment to expanding access and ensuring educational adequacy. State spending per child in the prekindergarten program is a key determinant of program quality and a measure of state support for *equal* access to a good preschool education.

This *Yearbook* is organized into three major sections. The first section provides background information on preschool education in the United States, a description of our data collection and analytical methods, a national summary of our findings, and national policy recommendations. The second section presents detailed reports identifying each state's policies with respect to preschool access, quality standards, and resources. In addition to basic program descriptions, these state pages describe unique features of state programs and recent changes that can be expected to alter the future *Yearbook* data on these programs. Finally, the last section contains the appendices, including tables that report all of the survey data obtained from every state, as well as Head Start and child care data.

### Overview of Preschool Education in the United States

In 1960, just 10 percent of the nation's 3- and 4-year-old children were enrolled in any type of classroom. The percentage of young children enrolled in preschool classrooms doubled by 1970 and doubled again prior to 1990. It continued to rise through the 1990s, peaking in 1997 at just over 50 percent, a level that remained steady through 2001.<sup>3</sup> As shown in Figure 1 (page 10), increased maternal employment is only one part of the explanation for increased enrollments. The upward trend was just as rapid for children of stay-at-home mothers as for children with mothers in the labor force, leading to the conclusion that increases in preschool enrollment were driven by a desire for a better early education. Increases in parental education and income together with decreasing numbers of children per family increased the inclination and ability of families to pay for education outside the home.

In the years since 1960, state-funded prekindergarten has emerged as one part of a complicated collection of education and child care arrangements adopted by families. In sharp contrast to elementary school and even kindergarten, preschool classrooms are primarily outside the public schools. Prekindergarten education takes place in private programs, Head Start, and the public schools. Young children also spend time in family home care—either in their own home or others'—with care provided by relatives, neighbors, or professional child care providers. Many young children spend time in more than one type of education or care arrangement, for example combining a part-day preschool program with family home child care. Parents remain the most important influences on young children, and preschool programs support rather than replace parents.



### **Private Preschool Programs**

In 1970, 70 percent of 3's and 4's attending preschool were enrolled in private programs. The provision of preschool education expanded in both private and public sectors in the following decades, with the public sector gaining only slightly on the private sector in terms of enrollment. In 1990, private programs still served 64 percent of the children attending preschool programs. However, during the 1990s, the private sector grew more slowly than the public sector. By 1995, only 52 percent of the children attending preschool were in private programs. Private programs maintained a very small edge in total preschool enrollment through 2001.<sup>4</sup> Private preschools are operated by for-profits, independent nonprofits, and programs sponsored by religious organizations. These operate under a wide variety of names including nursery school, preschool, day care, and child care, and most are part-day programs. Regulation is primarily by state child care agencies, but varies by state and within states by auspice. Some states exempt religious or private school programs from child care licensing standards. Like their regulation and funding, the educational quality of private programs is highly variable and tends to be lower on average than for public programs.<sup>5</sup>

About 20 percent of 3- and 4-year-olds are not enrolled in a preschool program, but do attend a family home day care or receive in-home child care by relatives and others.<sup>6</sup> Research has failed to find the kinds of educational benefits from these kinds of child care arrangements that have been found for preschool classes. This is an important source of concern because federal policy requires states to ensure that parents receiving child care subsidies can choose these types of care, and state-funded prekindergarten programs may permit services to be provided by family child care homes.

### **Head Start**

The federal Head Start program has provided many low-income families across the nation with free education for their young children since 1965. From 1975 to 1990 the program grew slowly. In 1975, Head Start enrolled 5 percent of the nation's 3- and 4-year-olds. By 1990 enrollment had risen to 7 percent. Head Start grew faster in the 1990s and in the year 2000 served 11 percent of all 3- and 4-year-olds. In 2001, Head Start reported funding over 900,000 children,<sup>7</sup> 712,216 at ages 3 and 4. Despite this growth, Head Start cannot reach all of the eligible children. Moreover, Head Start's program standards fall short of what is required to ensure that programs are highly effective. Head Start teacher qualifications and compensation are of particular concern. Only recently has Congress required that half of Head Start teachers have even a two-year college degree. And, Head Start teachers earn about half the average public school teacher's salary. Without fully-qualified teachers (BA degrees with a specialization in early childhood education) who are adequately paid, Head Start is unlikely to ever be highly effective.<sup>8</sup>

## State Prekindergarten Programs

For the most part, states came late to the preschool education revolution. When they did, most followed Head Start's lead and targeted children with the greatest needs. They did so with two types of programs, one providing preschool special education for children with disabilities and the other providing regular preschool education to children in low-income families or otherwise identified as being at high risk for school failure. This administrative structure parallels the structure already in place in K–12 education.

In the 1970s, states began to create entitlements to a free education for 3- to 5-year-old children with disabilities. Illinois, Michigan and Wisconsin were the first states to do so in 1973–1974.<sup>9</sup> Federal legislation in 1986 provided federal funds as incentives for all states to provide a free appropriate education to young children with disabilities by 1991–1992. The legislation was highly effective: the 24 states providing such services prior to the legislation were joined by 25 more in 1991–1992, and one remaining state mandated services in 1992–1993. Enrollment rose steadily over the years and by 2001 reached 353,238 in the 50 states (357,495 in states, US territories and military bases), or 4.6 percent of all 3- and 4-year-olds. Most were served in public schools, but some were served in Head Start and private programs.

States began to create programs for children in poverty or otherwise determined to be at high risk of poor academic progress in the mid-1960s, but the number of states and enrollments in their programs did not grow substantially until the mid-1980s. Rapid growth accelerated through the 1990s. Prior to 1980 only seven states funded preschool programs.<sup>10</sup> By 1991, this had climbed to 28 states with about 290,000 children being served. In 2001, 40 states funded preschool programs and served about 700,000 3- and 4-year-olds. In recent years, states also began to expand eligibility from an “at-risk” group to all children. Georgia created the first statewide universal Pre-K (UPK) program in 1995. Oklahoma, New York, and West Virginia followed, though New York has not fully funded its program and West Virginia will phase it in by 2012. In 2002, Florida voters approved a constitutional amendment that entitles all 4-year-olds to a free, high-quality prekindergarten education by 2005.

By the 2001–2002 program year, states were providing an array of state-funded prekindergarten programs to children. This *Yearbook* is brought to you in an effort to compare the similarities and dissimilarities, the strengths and weaknesses and the opportunities and challenges ahead for these programs.

1 Current Population Survey, October 2001, and U.S. Statistical Abstract 2000, Table No. 259.

2 Bowman, B., Donovan, M., & Burns, S. (Eds.) (2001). *Eager to Learn: Educating our preschoolers*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press. Shonkoff, J.P. & Phillips, D.A. (Eds.) (2000). *From neurons to neighborhoods: The science of early childhood development*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.

3 U.S. Statistical Abstract and Current Population Survey, October 2001. The CPS tracks “nursery school” enrollment. Comparison with data from the National Household Education Survey conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics for all center-based programs suggests that perhaps 10 percent of child care center enrollment is not reported as nursery school.

4 U.S. Statistical Abstract and Current Population Survey, October 2001. It seems likely that the CPS numbers may underestimate the percentage of children in private child care.

5 Barnett, W.S., Tarr, J., Lamy, C., & Frede, E. (2001). *Fragile lives, shattered dreams: A report on implementation of preschool education in New Jersey's Abbott districts*. New Brunswick, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research, Rutgers University. Cost, Quality and Outcomes Study Team. (1995). *Cost, quality, and outcomes in child care centers: Public Report*. Denver: University of Colorado at Denver, Economics Department. Zill, N., Resnick, G., Kim, K., Hubbell McKey, R., Clark, C., Pai-Samant, S., Connell, D., Vaden-Kiernan, M., O'Brien, R., D'Elia, M. (2001). *Head Start FACES: Longitudinal Findings on Program Performance, Third Progress Report*. Washington, DC: Research, Demonstration and Evaluation Branch & Head Start Bureau, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

6 National Center for Educational Statistics (2001). *National Household Education Survey*. Washington, DC: National Center for Educational Statistics.

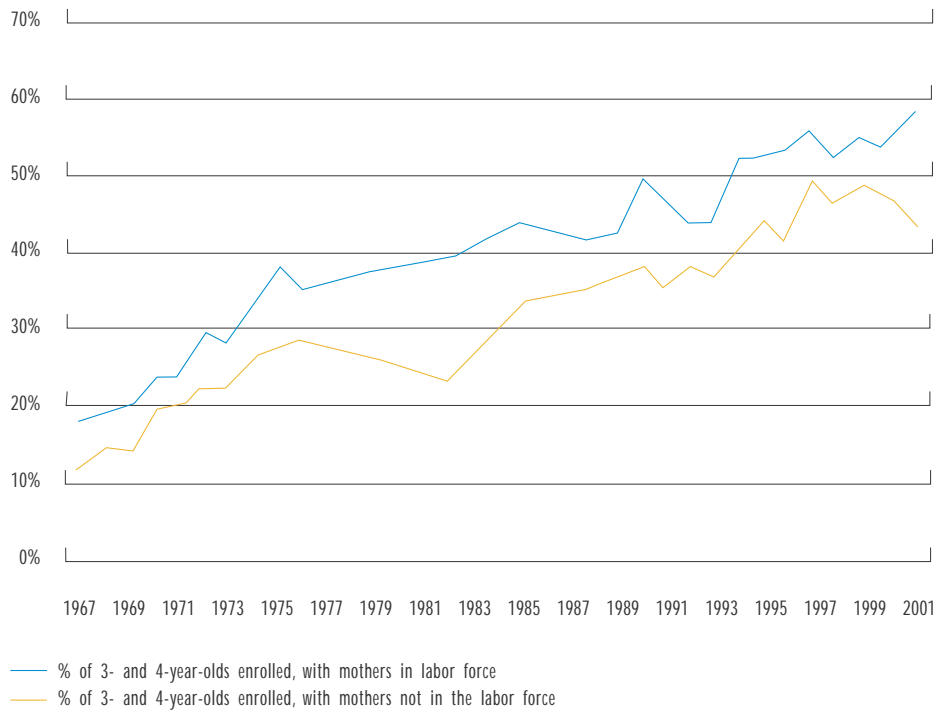
7 Head Start Bureau (2003) *Head Start Statistical Fact Sheets 2000–2003*. <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/hsb/research/factsheets.htm>

8 Barnett, W.S. (2003). Better teachers, better preschools: Student achievement linked to teacher qualifications. *Preschool Policy Matters*, 2. New Brunswick, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research. National Institute for Early Education Research (2003). Investing in Head Start teachers. *Preschool Policy Matters*, 4. New Brunswick, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research.

9 Trohanis, P. (2002). Progress in providing services to young children with special needs and their families. *NECTAC Notes*, 12, 1–18. Chapel Hill, NC: National Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center.

10 Mitchell, A.W. (2001). *Education for all children: The role of states and the federal government in promoting prekindergarten and kindergarten*. FCD Working Paper. NY: Foundation for Child Development. Schulman, K., Blank, H., & Ewen, D. (1999). *Seeds of success: State prekindergarten initiatives 1998–99*. Washington, DC: Children's Defense Fund.

**FIGURE 1: ANNUAL SCHOOL ENROLLMENT BY MATERNAL EMPLOYMENT STATUS**



Data for the following years have been interpolated: 1977–1981, 1983, 1984 and 1986.

This graph shows that school enrollment for young children is not due to labor force participation alone. In fact, the overall pattern of participation is quite linear, regardless of labor-force status. If the three-decade upward trend in school enrollment were to continue, we might very well realize nearly universal preschool enrollment over the next few decades. Hence, it is important for the nation to ensure our young children receive high-quality care.





## WHAT QUALIFIES AS A STATE PRESCHOOL PROGRAM?

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Our report focuses on state-funded preschool initiatives as defined by the following criteria:

- The initiative is state-funded.
- The focus of the initiative is on the child. This does not exclude programs that have a parent education component, but does exclude programs whose major component is parent education.
- The initiative serves children of prekindergarten age, usually 3 and/or 4. Some initiatives may serve broader age ranges, but programs that serve only infants and toddlers are excluded.
- Funds for the initiative support a group learning experience for children two or more days per week.
- The initiative is distinct from the state's child care subsidy system, although the prekindergarten initiative may be closely coordinated with the subsidy program.
- The initiative is not primarily designed to serve children with disabilities.
- State supplements to the federal Head Start program were considered to constitute de facto state preschool programs if they substantially expanded the number of children served. State supplements to fund quality improvements, extended days, or other program enhancements and that expanded enrollment minimally were not considered equivalent to a state preschool program.

## WHY SHOULD STATES SUPPORT HIGH-QUALITY PRESCHOOL PROGRAMS?

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Children who attend high-quality preschool programs gain experiences that can dramatically change their lives for the better. The first five years of life are a unique period of growth and development in which children acquire the foundational capabilities that prepare them for later success in school and life generally. Many studies find that high-quality preschool programs produce large gains in school readiness for economically disadvantaged children. These gains translate into improved achievement and behavior in school. Later, follow-up research with the children at older ages finds that the former disadvantaged preschoolers earn more money, experience more stable home lives and become more responsible citizens than they would otherwise.<sup>1</sup> There is growing evidence that preschool has similar, though most likely smaller, benefits for children who are not poor.<sup>2</sup> The significant gains enjoyed beyond the children themselves include benefits for their families and communities—indeed, the nation as a whole.

Yet, few programs exist of the quality necessary to bring about the benefits promised by research. Public financial support is limited, and parents face high costs for quality programs. The public programs that do exist are primarily targeted to reach the most disadvantaged children, and even many of these children remain unserved. Parents in the United States bear twice as much of the cost of early care and education as their counterparts in other developed countries.<sup>3</sup> The costs of a high-quality program can surpass the costs of education at a public university. Two-earner families may be caught in a bind because of the long hours of child care they must pay for, while single-earner families can find it difficult to afford even a good part-day program. Too many children in the United States lack access to any preschool program at all and too many others do not have access to a high-quality educational program.

A national poll of 3,230 voters conducted for NIEER in 2001 revealed strong public sentiment for increased state responsibility for high-quality preschool programs. Nearly 90 percent supported the view that states should provide funding for preschool programs so all parents could afford to enroll their children in high-quality programs. In addition, 85 percent agreed that states should ensure the quality of preschool programs by setting standards for learning and teacher qualifications.

**“It is irrefutable that some children are better prepared for school than others. No one would expect a youngster to play Chopin’s “Etudes” without first taking piano lessons. Those with more enriching experiences, who have a sense of order and sequence and understand the routines that often are crucial to learning, enjoy an advantage.”**

**Gene I. Maeroff, *Universal Pre-Kindergarten: State of Play***

### Long-Term Educational/Societal Benefits

Numerous studies show that high-quality preschool programs increase test scores and decrease grade repetition and special education placements for economically disadvantaged children. This includes research conducted at the Chicago Child Parent Centers in Illinois; High/Scope Educational Research Foundation in Ypsilanti, Michigan; and the Abecedarian Preschool Project in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. Results of these long-term follow-up studies included higher high school graduation rates, increased college attendance, decreased crime and delinquency, and improved employment and earnings. Even though most research has focused on the education gains achieved by children in lower-income families, there is also evidence of gains in school readiness and achievement for the rest of the population from high-quality preschool programs.

### Investing in Pre-K: An Economic Development Strategy

States searching for economic development strategies should first look to high-quality preschool, which can provide higher educational returns to the students, greater financial returns to our communities and families, and a more productive workforce to help shoulder future financial responsibilities. Cost-benefit analyses and other rigorous research demonstrate that preschool programs can be sound public investments with real, inflation-adjusted public returns as high as 12 percent, and combined public and private returns of 16 percent. The Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis urges states to invest in early education programs as an economic development strategy based on the exceptionally high payoff. In its economic research, the Federal Reserve Bank found that early childhood investments make more sense than spending on venture capital funds, subsidizing new industries such as biotechnology, building new stadiums or providing tax incentives for businesses.

- 1 Barnett, W. S. (1998). Long-term effects on cognitive development and school success. In W. S. Barnett & S. S. Boocock (Eds.), *Early care and education for children in poverty: Promises, programs, and long-term results* (pp. 11–44). Albany, NY: SUNY Press. Bowman, B. T., Donovan, M. S., & Burns, M.S. (Eds.). (2001). *Eager to learn: Educating our preschoolers*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.
- 2 Innes, F., Denton, K., & West, J. (2001, April). *Child care factors and kindergarten outcomes: Findings from a national study of children*. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Society for Research in Child Development, Minneapolis, MN. Peisner-Feinberg, E., Burchinal, M.R., Clifford, R.M., Culkin, M.L., Howes, C., Kagan, S.L., Yazejian, N., Byler, P., Rustici, J., & Zelazo, J. (1999). *The Children of the Cost, Quality, and Outcomes Study Go to School*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Frank Porter Graham Child Development Center. Sammons, P., Sylva, K., Melhuish, E., Siraj-Blatchford, I., Taggart, B., & Elliot, K. (2002). *Measuring the impact of preschool on children's cognitive progress over the pre-school period*. (Technical paper 8a). London: Institute of Education, University of London. Sammons, P., Sylva, K., Melhuish, E., Siraj-Blatchford, I., Taggart, B., & Elliot, K. (2003). *Measuring the impact of preschool on children's social/behavioral development over the pre-school period*. (Technical report 8b). London: Institute of Education, University of London.
- 3 Kagan, S., & Neuman, M. (2003). Integrating early care and education. *Educational Leadership*, 60 (7), 58–63.

# Methodology

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Data included in the state profiles were primarily collected from state prekindergarten administrators in 2003. After using various published studies to identify state prekindergarten initiatives, we sent surveys to the state-level administrators of these initiatives. Administrators were first asked to confirm that their program fit our definition of a state prekindergarten initiative and to inform us about any other initiatives in their states that met the definition. We defined *state prekindergarten initiatives* as state-funded programs that support a group learning experience for prekindergarten-age children, usually 3- and/or 4-year-olds. See “What Qualifies as a State Preschool Program” (page 11) for more details about the definition.

The NIEER survey requested program information for the 2001–2002 school year. It primarily consisted of questions that asked administrators to select an answer from a few specific choices, or that asked administrators to provide a short response. The survey was divided into sections on access, eligibility requirements, equity of access, program standards, personnel and resources.

Once administrators returned their completed surveys to us, we contacted them with follow-up questions about any information requiring clarification. Each administrator was given the opportunity to verify the summary of their program included in the state profiles as well as the data included in Appendix A and used as the basis for the state profiles. When contacted to verify the information, administrators were asked to provide updated information about funding and enrollment for 2002–2003. The administrators’ answers to each survey question, including several for which data were not presented in the state profiles, are provided in Appendix A.

A few items reported in the state profiles are derived from other sources. Data on curriculum standards were obtained from a survey and analysis conducted by Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL) for NIEER in 2003. McREL surveyed states to identify their prekindergarten standards and then reviewed documents outlining those standards as of 2003 for each state. Only standards specific to prekindergarten were included in the analysis and not, for instance, standards for a broad grade range such as prekindergarten through fourth grade, which were viewed as too general to provide effective guidance.

Data on federal Head Start enrollment for 2001–2002 were provided by the Head Start Bureau in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Spending and enrollment data used to calculate federal Head Start spending per child for each state were also provided by the Head Start Bureau. Appendix B provides additional Head Start data. Data on special education enrollment in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Preschool Grants program (IDEA Section 619 of Part B) were obtained from the U.S. Office of Special Education Programs,<sup>1</sup> and are reported in Appendix C.

Total federal, state, and local expenditures on K–12 were calculated by NIEER using data from the National Education Association (NEA). Federal, state, and local spending as percentages of total spending were provided in the NEA’s May 2003 report, “Rankings and Estimates: Rankings of the States 2002 and Estimates of School Statistics 2003.” These data are consistent with, but more up-to-date than federal government statistics on K–12 expenditures.

Total expenditures include capital outlays and interest on debt as well as current operating expenditures. Although current operating expenditures are more commonly reported as an indicator of the cost of K–12 education, they underestimate the full cost of K–12 education. Thus, we calculated total expenditure per K–12 pupil for each state by adding an estimate of annual capital outlays and interest on debt to current expenditures. This added amount was calculated based on the national average percentage of K–12 expenditures accounted for by capital outlays and interest on debt. In some cases, preschool programs may have other sources of state funding for facilities, but in many states (particularly for private programs and Head Start) per child funding from states must cover all costs.

The percentages of children served in state preschool programs, federal Head Start, and special education are provided separately for 3- and 4-year-olds for every state. However, not every state reported enrollment separately by age. When this was the case, we estimated age breakdowns based on the average proportion of enrollees at each age in states that serve 3-year-olds and report enrollment by age. Total population numbers were obtained from the Census 2000 for total state population at each age.

State prekindergarten spending per 3- and 4-year-old living in the state was calculated from spending data provided by the states and population data from the 2000 Census. If a state program served both 3- and 4-year-olds, then total state spending was divided between age groups according to the proportion of the enrolled population at each age. For example, if 30 percent of children served in a program were 3 years old, then we considered 30 percent of total state spending to be directed toward services for 3-year-olds. We then divided the appropriate estimate of state spending by the total state population at the corresponding age.

States are ranked separately on three measures: percentage of 4-year-olds enrolled in state-funded preschool programs, percentage of 3-year-olds enrolled in state-funded preschool programs, and state spending per child enrolled in state-funded preschool programs. The first two rankings were obtained using enrollment figures provided by the states and Census 2000 data, while the third represents total state spending divided by enrollment, using data reported by the states. All states that provided data receive a rank, beginning at “1” for the state with the highest percentage of children served or the highest per child spending figure. Florida, Minnesota, and Rhode Island did not provide the information necessary to be ranked, and are listed in the rankings tables as “NA” (not available). In addition, the spending-per-child rank for Pennsylvania is presented as “NA” because the state did not report total funding for 2001–2002. The 10 states that do not fund a preschool initiative receive rankings of “50.”

### **District of Columbia**

Data for the District of Columbia are presented following the state pages. As the District of Columbia is the only city that is not part of a state, it has unique implications for a report on state programs. Many city school districts in the United States fund prekindergarten. In fact, population density is a strong predictor of preschool program enrollment. However, children enrolled in local school district prekindergarten programs that are not state-funded are not included in this report. Nor are city school district funds that support children in state prekindergarten programs included in the funding totals. Given the District's unique status, we report its information but do not include the District in multi-state comparisons because it is not a state; for policy purposes, it would be more appropriately compared to other major urban school districts.

<sup>1</sup> Data are available on the Internet at [www.ideadata.org](http://www.ideadata.org).

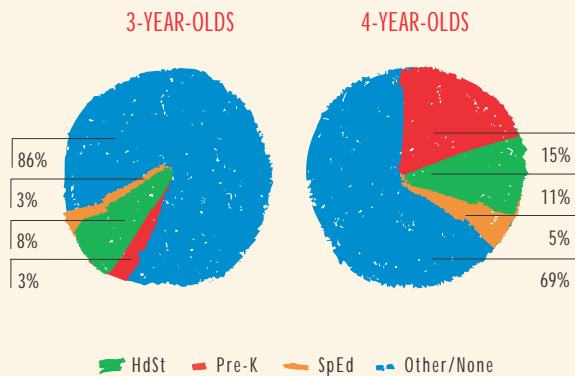
# State-Funded Prekindergarten: 2001-2002 National Overview

This section of the *Yearbook* provides a detailed summary of findings on access, quality standards, and resources, with each section discussed separately in the following pages.

In summary, state-funded prekindergarten programs in 38 states served approximately 700,000 children, almost all at ages 3 and 4 in 2001–2002. The vast majority of children served by state prekindergarten programs were 4-year-olds, with 581,705, or 14.8 percent, of the nation’s 4’s enrolled (Figure 2). Behind the overall national numbers is a tremendous diversity in enrollment as shown in Table 1 (page 27). Two states, Georgia and Oklahoma, enrolled more than half of their 4-year-olds (Figure 6, page 23). Seven more states enrolled more than 20 percent of their 4’s. Six states enrolled 10-20 percent of their 4’s. Another 22 states enrolled less than 10 percent. In three states enrollment could not be precisely determined, but it is unlikely to exceed 10 percent. Ten states funded no prekindergarten program at all. In most states, prekindergarten is primarily a program for 4-year-olds. Only Massachusetts and New Jersey enrolled more than 10 percent of their 3-year-olds.

States set out their expectations for preschool quality in program standards. This *Yearbook* compares each state’s quality standards against benchmarks derived from research in 10 areas. Table 2 (page 35) shows how state programs (5 states have multiple programs) fare on each benchmark and the total number of benchmarks met. No state achieved a perfect 10. Three state programs met nine out of 10 benchmarks: Arkansas, Illinois and New Jersey’s “Abbott District” program. Of the 43 programs for which sufficient data were available to check their standards, 19 met less than half of the benchmarks. For example, as Figure 3 (page 18) shows, only 21 of 43 programs required preschool teachers to have the four-year college degree that every state requires of kindergarten teachers. Figure 4 (page 19) charts the number of state programs meeting each benchmark. Clearly many states have far to go in setting adequate standards for the quality of their preschool programs and every state could make improvements.

**FIGURE 2: STATE PRE-K AND HEAD START ENROLLMENT AS PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL US POPULATION**

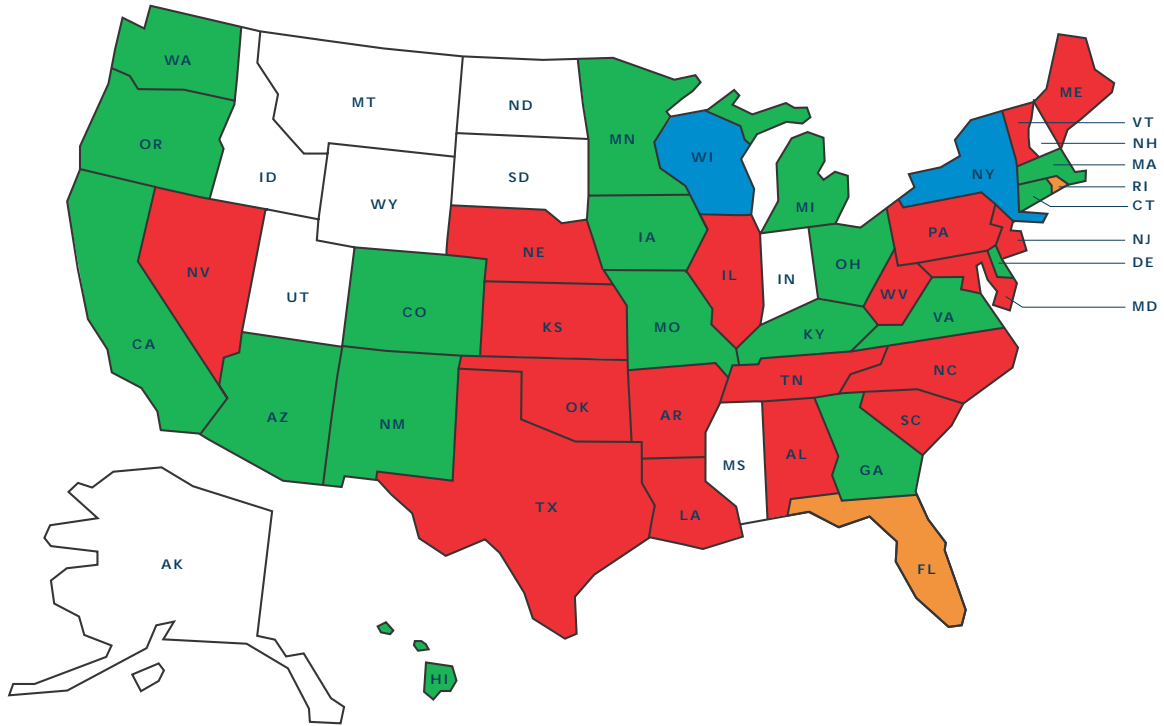




Total state spending for state-funded prekindergarten exceeded \$2.4 billion in the 2001–2002 school year. Ten states accounted for 83 percent of state spending. Total spending is determined by the number of children enrolled and the amount spent per child. State spending per child served is reported in Table 3 (page 41). In most states, state spending per child appears to be too low to support a high-quality preschool program. Figure 5 (page 19) shows the national average spent per child on state-funded preschool to be \$3,455 compared to the national average of \$8,733 spent per child for K–12 education. Only two states spent at least as much per child as federal Head Start. State funding may or may not be supplemented by local education funding and other sources. Some states explicitly or implicitly finance their preschool programs in the same way that they fund K–12 education so that state funding for preschool covers only part of the cost, and local public school (or other) funds make up the difference. This pattern of state funding raises questions about support for quality and equitable access to quality programs based on local school and parental ability to pay.

A broader, more in-depth discussion follows of each of the three aspects of the *Yearbook*—access, quality standards, and resources.

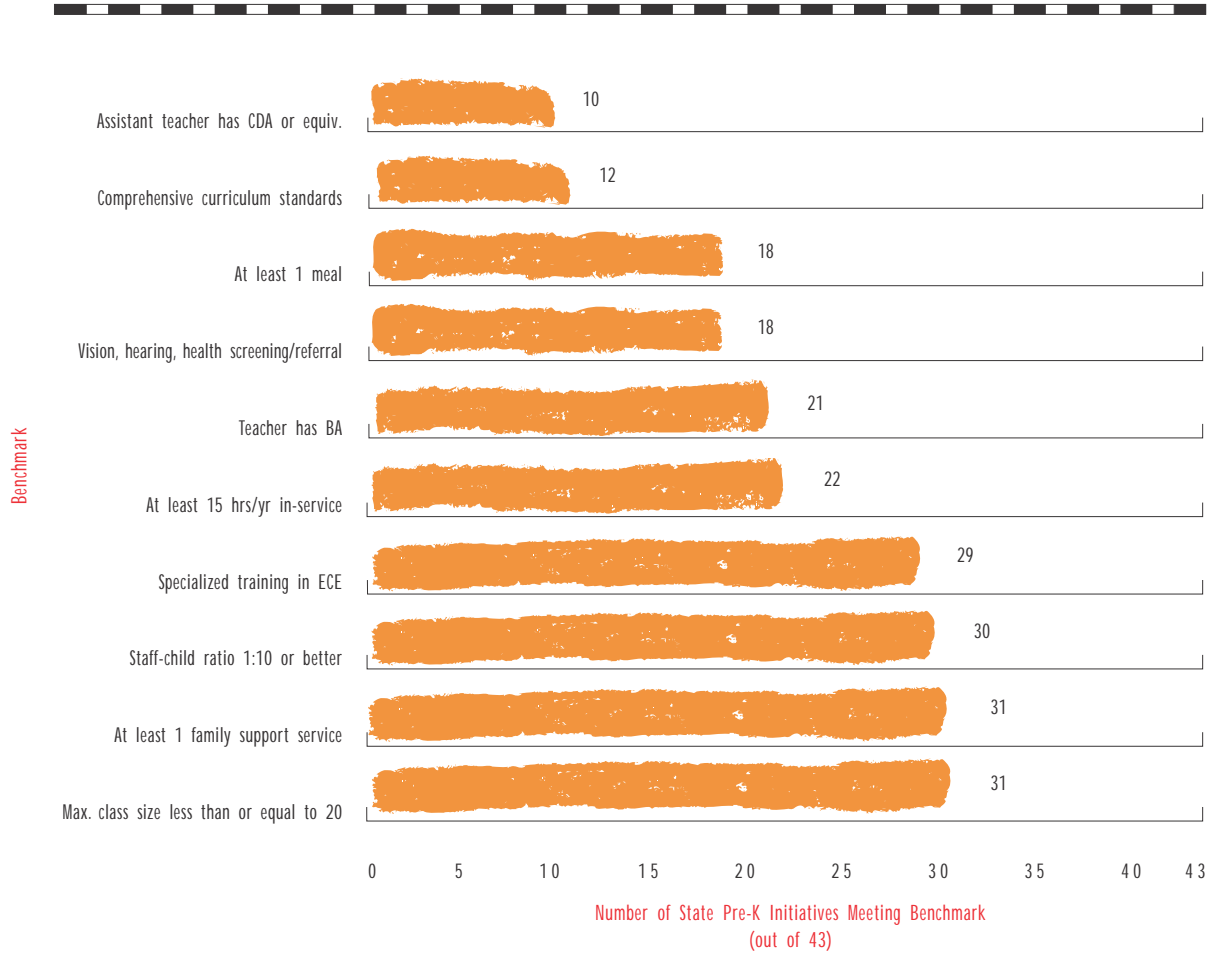
**FIGURE 3: DO PROGRAMS REQUIRE TEACHERS TO HAVE A BA?**



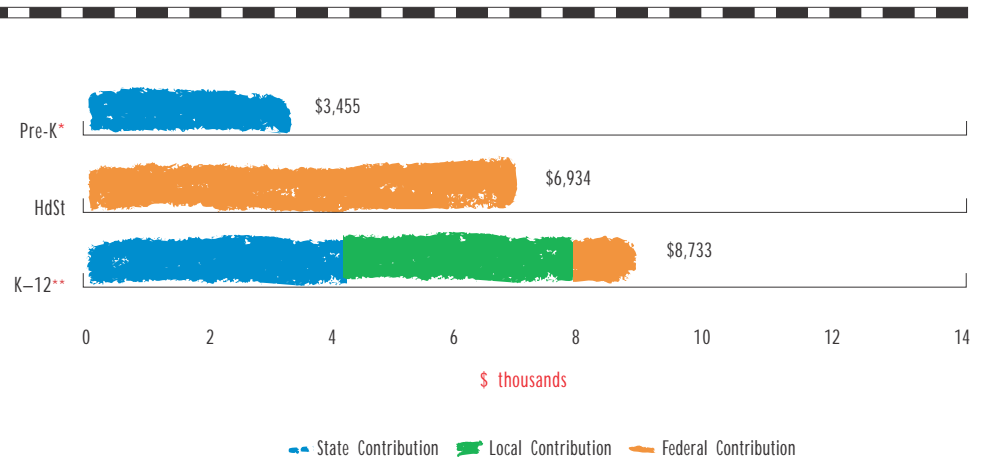
■ YES ■ NO ■ 1 program requires BA, 1 program does not require BA ■ Data Not Available □ No program



**FIGURE 4: NUMBER OF STATE PRE-K INITIATIVES MEETING BENCHMARKS**



**FIGURE 5: NATIONAL SPENDING PER CHILD ENROLLED**



\* Pre-K programs may receive additional funds from federal or local sources that are not included in this figure.  
 \*\* K-12 expenditures include capital spending as well as current operating expenditures.

## DIFFERENCE FOR ONE CHILD: GEORGIA'S PRE-K PROGRAM

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When 4-year-old Anthony arrived for his first prekindergarten class in Savannah, Georgia, he found it hard to get along with other children, he had a short attention span and couldn't identify any letters of the alphabet. Nor was he able to identify basic shapes or colors.

"At that point, if Anthony didn't like what another child was doing, he would have hauled off and popped him," says Roberta Youngblood, Anthony's teacher. "He'd never been to nursery school, and neither of his parents had spent much time reading to him. He hadn't learned how to follow directions or take turns yet—skills that could make or break his school career when he got to kindergarten. His home life was unstructured, with mom working and overwhelmed herself. His father had only recently moved back home, so Anthony was in the midst of many adjustments."

It was a situation familiar to Youngblood, as a veteran teacher in Georgia's public preschool program. "I'd say at least half the children come in as Anthony did, needing a lot of help to get ready for kindergarten. I knew that what Anthony needed most was a structured environment, with a constant set of expectations, to learn the social and academic skills to get along in a classroom."

Youngblood also knew that Anthony would reap special rewards from an enriched environment, both at school and at home, one that exposed him to a broader vocabulary, one that would help him categorize and organize his world. "You can't take basic knowledge of the world for granted with every child. I have some who arrive here like Anthony, without knowing what a fireplug is, or a helicopter," says Youngblood. "I'll point up at a helicopter and ask what it is, and they just don't know. Nor do they know who community workers are—like the police or doctors or fire fighters. They just lack a working knowledge of their world."

That's where the program makes such a big difference. Youngblood works on letter, shape and color recognition, gradually helping the children garner pre-reading and pre-math skills, using local walks to the park, games and special projects as opportunities for teaching. "We'll use the 'bear, bear' game to teach the children about colors and numbers, so it's fun. They get to count and sort and make associations. We also use a lot of language as we go, to broaden their vocabulary."

A simple walk to the park, for example, offers the chance to introduce new words, connected to hands-on experiences, that lead to more developed thinking as children get older. "They come to me with a basic working vocabulary, but they don't have the descriptive language to make more precise observations or make subtler distinctions," says Youngblood. "They may know the basic words like 'pretty' or 'hard' or 'soft,' for example, but not 'squishy' or 'fuzzy' or 'smooth.' We might start using words like 'spidery' when we describe some of the petals on a flower. They are not only adding words, but beginning to make associations and group things, a critical part of cognitive growth."

In Anthony's case, Youngblood also worked with his parents, teaching them how to work with Anthony at home, playing word games, reading and taking on some projects that helped extend Anthony's attention span, build his sense of success and accomplishment and engage him in learning. "In our program we really try to get parents involved, and then you see the kids just zoom. You also see the parents blossom, as they learn how to teach their children new skills."

So it was that Anthony began to settle down at school, follow directions, and as importantly, learn how to get along with his peers. "The emphasis on language in our program gave him a new way to communicate with his peers. Rather than hauling off and hitting them, he could put his feelings and needs into words. That makes a huge difference."

Indeed, the new power of self-control gave Anthony the ability to focus. "You could just see it. It was like a relief for him. Without the shoving and hitting, he could pay attention to what was going on, and gradually, step by step, as he experienced success, he could focus better and better."

Day by day, he grew more involved in the lessons and with the other children, learning as he went. "He began to identify letters, learned to count and to know his colors. With each gain, he practiced more and then added new skills."

By year's end, Anthony could identify all his colors, knew the entire alphabet in upper case, some lower-case letters, and could count and categorize with great ease. "He was just a different child than the one who came to me at the beginning of the year. I remember, at the end of last year, we were sitting in a circle and I was reading. A child next to Anthony started to talk and interrupt the story, and Anthony put his fingers to his lips and pointed at the book, to let the other child know to pay attention."

Even better, Youngblood says, is Anthony's joy in his own success. "He laughs as he tells me the right answer. He's proud of what he's learned. He chimes right in, tells me the answer to a question and then just laughs with joy at his accomplishment. That's the kind of attitude that is going to help him succeed in school."

...by Betty Holcomb

## ACCESS

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Children who attend high-quality prekindergarten programs are better prepared for school, academically, socially and emotionally. Over the past few decades, more states have begun funding prekindergarten programs and these state prekindergarten programs have served an increasing number of children. However, many children continue to lack access to prekindergarten. Children may not be able to participate because they do not meet the eligibility criteria or the state does not fund a program in their district. Nearly 700,000 children were participating in state prekindergarten programs in 2001–2002. Enrollment in each of the states varied widely—from just 432 children in Nevada to more than 147,000 children in Texas. This variation was not simply a factor of the size of the state—for example, West Virginia has a population of 3- and 4-year-olds similar to Nebraska, but its prekindergarten program served 14 times as many children.

### Preschool for All Versus Limited Access

A few states have established or are taking steps toward establishing universal prekindergarten. Georgia currently provides funding and sets eligibility criteria to make prekindergarten available to all 4-year-olds whose families want them to participate. Under Oklahoma's prekindergarten program, all 4-year-olds are eligible to participate and the state reimburses districts for each child enrolled in prekindergarten, in those districts that offer prekindergarten classes.

New York established a “Universal Prekindergarten” program several years ago that was expected to begin with a limited number of children and expand to be available to all children within five years. However, the program has not received funding increases as originally scheduled and it generally remains available only to children in low-income families and children who have other risk factors.

A few other states have long-term plans for moving toward universal prekindergarten. West Virginia passed legislation to make prekindergarten available to all 4-year-olds by 2012, and Florida is required by a 2002 constitutional amendment to make prekindergarten universally available for 4-year-olds by 2005. These plans are still in the very early stages of implementation.

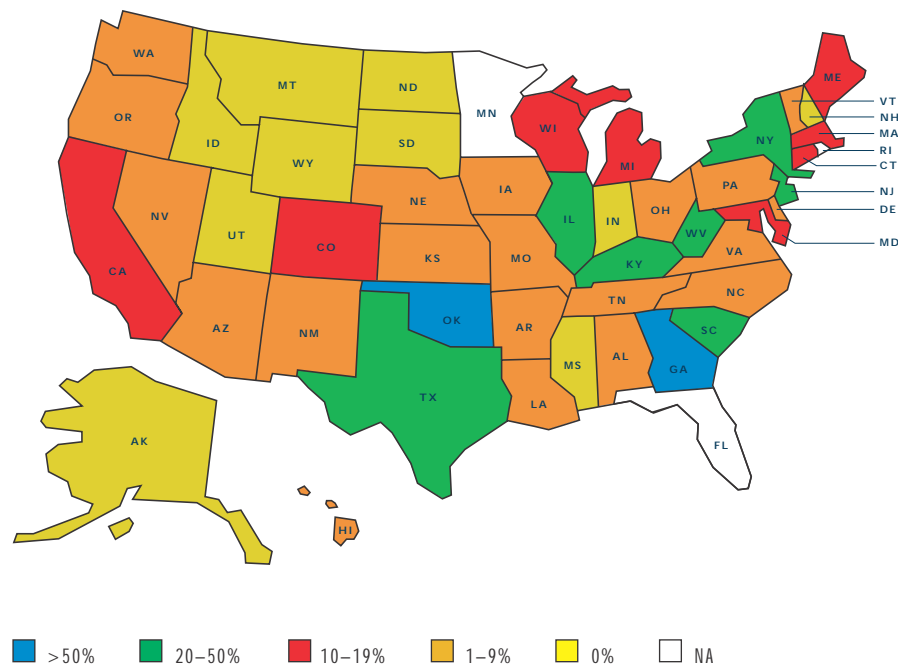
### Eligibility Criteria

Most states do not offer access to all preschool-age children, choosing to target their prekindergarten programs at children in low-income families or those who have other factors that place them at greatest risk of educational difficulties and school failure. These risk factors may include having a disability, being a child of teen parents, or having limited English proficiency. Some states employ screening tests to identify children whose early development and learning suggest they will have school readiness problems. In targeting their programs toward children considered at-risk, states may take one of a variety of approaches—a state may:

- set a specific income cutoff that applies to all children;
- allow children to qualify if they meet specified income criteria *or* have some other identified risk; or
- leave it up to individual districts or programs to decide which children to prioritize.

Slightly less than half of the states' prekindergarten initiatives set income criteria that at least a certain portion of enrolled children must meet to qualify for participation. States use a wide range of income cutoffs to define who qualifies as “low-income.” Cutoffs as of 2001–2002 were as low as the federal poverty level (\$15,020 for a family of three in 2002) for the state-funded Head Start models in Delaware, Minnesota, Ohio, Oregon, and Wisconsin, and as high as 125 percent of state median income in Massachusetts (\$75,270 for a family of three in 2002).<sup>1</sup>

**FIGURE 6: PERCENT OF 4-YEAR-OLDS SERVED IN STATE PRE-K**



About one-quarter of state initiatives use the eligibility criteria for the free lunch program (an income under 130 percent of poverty, or \$19,526 for a family of three in 2002), or the reduced-price lunch program (an income under 185 percent of poverty, or \$27,787 for a family of three in 2002) in determining who qualifies or receives priority for prekindergarten. This may be used either as the sole criterion or in combination with other criteria. While data are not available for all states, the information that has been collected indicates that children eligible for free or reduced-price lunch comprise a large proportion of the prekindergarten enrollment for most states, even those that do not explicitly use this in their eligibility criteria for prekindergarten.

A few states, including Illinois, Nevada, New Mexico, and Virginia, do not specify particular eligibility criteria, but instead let local communities or individual programs decide what factors to consider in determining eligibility or priority for prekindergarten. These states expect that local communities will be better able to identify which needs are greatest in their communities and which children could most benefit from early education experiences.

Some state prekindergarten programs target disadvantaged populations not through their eligibility criteria for individual children but rather through the criteria used to select entire communities to receive prekindergarten funding. For example, New Jersey's prekindergarten program is mandated for all children in low-income districts referred to as "Abbott Districts" (named after a court case on education finance equity). Missouri gives priority for grants to programs serving large numbers of low-income children and children with special needs.

### **Age Requirements**

Over half of the state prekindergarten initiatives allow both 3- and 4-year-olds to participate. However, in many of these states, actual enrollment primarily consists of 4-year-olds, with openings for 3-year-olds being more limited. For example, Texas requires 4-year-olds who meet other eligibility criteria to have access to prekindergarten, if there are enough eligible children in a district for a class, but serving 3-year-olds is optional for districts. Kentucky only serves 3-year-olds if they have a disability.

Sixteen state prekindergarten initiatives—those in Alabama, Arizona,<sup>2</sup> Delaware, Georgia, Kansas, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Michigan, New York (Universal Prekindergarten),<sup>3</sup> North Carolina, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Virginia, and Wisconsin (Four-Year-Old Kindergarten)<sup>4</sup>—serve only 4-year-olds.

On the other hand, a few states—including Arkansas, Nebraska, Nevada, and New Mexico—serve a broader age range, enrolling not only preschoolers, but infants and toddlers as well. In these states, state funds might be used not only for a typical prekindergarten classroom model but also for other models, such as home-visiting and family support, designed for younger children.

### **Availability of Prekindergarten Across Communities**

States differ widely in the proportion of their communities covered by the prekindergarten programs. In some states, a child would have access to a state-funded prekindergarten program no matter where he or she lived, while in other states a child would have to be very lucky to happen to have a program available nearby. A number of states, including Georgia, Hawaii, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Minnesota, and South Carolina, have prekindergarten programs in all, or virtually all, of their districts. In contrast, only 2 percent of Nebraska's districts and 6 percent of Pennsylvania's have prekindergarten. About half of states for which data are available fund prekindergarten in less than 50 percent of their districts.

### **Parent Fees**

The majority of states do not charge for participation in their prekindergarten programs. The states that do charge fees often charge only for particular groups, such as those with higher incomes, or in specific circumstances, such as if a family is working full time and needs extended hours of programming. Iowa and Kentucky allow localities to charge fees to participating families who do not meet the income eligibility criteria (which in both states is the same as the eligibility limit for free lunch, or 130 percent of the federal poverty level). Other states, such as Connecticut, Hawaii, Massachusetts, Minnesota (for its School Readiness Program), Missouri, Nebraska, and Ohio (for its Public School Preschool Program), also charge parent fees, using a sliding payment scale. In Virginia, districts may choose whether to apply a sliding fee scale.



### Operating Schedule

More than one-quarter of the state prekindergarten initiatives operate on a half-day basis, with classes often lasting only about two or three hours. Less than one-quarter operate for a full school day—about six hours. For the remaining state prekindergarten initiatives, operating schedules are determined at the local level. This local flexibility in setting operating hours produces different patterns in each state. For example, most programs in Missouri choose to operate for a full school day while the majority of programs in Kentucky operate for a half day.

While the majority of state prekindergarten initiatives have most or all of their programs operating five days a week, several states have most or all of their programs operating four or fewer days a week (Colorado, Michigan, Minnesota’s School Readiness Program, Nevada, Ohio’s Public School Preschool Program, Oregon, and Washington).<sup>5</sup> In addition, only a few states have programs operating on a year-round basis. Hawaii’s prekindergarten programs are open 12 months a year, as are the majority of programs in Connecticut, Massachusetts, and New Mexico. All children participating in New Jersey’s “Abbott District” preschool program are eligible for free summer and wrap-around services. Other states that enable at least some children to attend full-year programs include Nebraska, Nevada, Oregon, and Vermont.

When schedules are less than full-day, year round, many working families may not find it feasible to participate in a prekindergarten program even though they are eligible. There are ways for states to address this issue. States may try to coordinate their prekindergarten programs with child care assistance programs that help cover the cost of additional hours of care for parents who work full-time. States may also offer prekindergarten in child care centers so that children can remain at the same setting for the extended hours and their families do not have to worry about transportation between different programs.

## Program Settings

Most states allow the prekindergarten programs they fund to be operated in a variety of settings, including public schools, Head Start centers, and private child care centers. This approach enables states to take advantage of existing preschool resources including experienced staff, buildings, playgrounds and other resources. It also permits them to piggy-back on funding from other government programs including Head Start and child care.

For about one-quarter of the state prekindergarten initiatives, 50 percent or more of participating children attend prekindergarten programs in settings outside of the public schools. For example, in Connecticut, 14 percent of children are in schools, 26 percent are in Head Start centers, 14 percent are in for-profit centers, and 47 percent are in nonprofit centers.

For about one-third of the state initiatives, at least some children attend prekindergarten classes in settings other than public schools, but the majority of children still go to prekindergarten in public school settings. Several additional states (including Minnesota, New Mexico, North Carolina, and Virginia) allow state-funded prekindergarten programs in community-based settings outside the public schools, but did not provide data about the percentage of prekindergarten children in each type of setting. For about one-third of state prekindergarten initiatives, it was reported that programs are only located in public schools.

- <sup>1</sup> While Massachusetts allows families with incomes up to 125 percent of state median income to be served, families with incomes above 100 percent of state median income can only be served after all families with incomes below 100 percent of state median income have been served.
- <sup>2</sup> Arizona does not explicitly limit its program to 4-year-olds, and the state's only age requirement is that children must not yet be eligible for kindergarten. However, attendance is generally limited to one year and almost all children enrolled in the program are 4 years old.
- <sup>3</sup> New York's Experimental Prekindergarten program is open to 3- and 4-year-olds.
- <sup>4</sup> Wisconsin's State-Funded Head Start Model is open to 3- and 4-year-olds.
- <sup>5</sup> Many states allow local programs to determine their own operating schedules and were not able to provide information about whether programs typically choose to operate five days a week.





**TABLE 1: STATE RANKINGS BY PRE-K ACCESS FOR 4-YEAR-OLDS**

Access for 4-Year-Olds Rank	State	Percent Enrolled in State Prekindergarten (2001-2002)			Percent Enrolled in State Prekindergarten, Head Start, or IDEA Preschool Grants Programs (2001-2002)		
		4-year-olds	3-year-olds	Total (3's and 4's)	4-year-olds	3-year-olds	Total (3's and 4's)
1	Oklahoma	55.6%	0.0%	27.8%	75.6%	14.5%	45.0%
2	Georgia	53.4%	0.0%	26.9%	67.6%	11.9%	39.9%
3	Texas	39.2%	6.1%	22.8%	53.2%	16.6%	35.0%
4	South Carolina	29.4%	0.7%	15.2%	46.1%	14.9%	30.7%
5	New York	24.6%	2.3%	13.7%	44.6%	15.9%	30.5%
6	West Virginia	24.2%	8.7%	16.6%	51.3%	26.9%	39.3%
7	Kentucky	23.9%	7.3%	15.7%	53.6%	25.5%	39.7%
8	Illinois	22.0%	7.6%	14.9%	37.3%	19.1%	28.3%
9	New Jersey	20.4%	11.2%	15.9%	30.9%	20.2%	25.6%
10	Michigan	19.1%	0.0%	9.7%	36.4%	13.9%	25.3%
11	Wisconsin	19.1%	0.9%	10.1%	35.2%	14.1%	24.8%
12	Maryland	15.1%	0.0%	7.6%	27.6%	8.8%	18.3%
13	California	14.2%	5.1%	9.7%	13.8%	29.2%	21.6%
14	Colorado	14.0%	1.2%	7.6%	28.4%	10.3%	19.4%
15	Massachusetts	11.6%	11.8%	11.7%	25.3%	21.9%	23.6%
16	Maine	9.7%	0.0%	4.9%	35.4%	17.3%	26.5%
17	Connecticut	9.5%	3.3%	6.4%	22.9%	13.6%	18.3%
18	Vermont	8.6%	5.3%	7.0%	22.5%	18.3%	20.4%
19	Ohio	8.3%	5.9%	7.1%	24.8%	18.7%	21.8%
20	Delaware	8.0%	0.0%	4.1%	22.8%	12.8%	17.9%
21	Hawaii	7.7%	0.0%	3.9%	20.8%	10.1%	15.6%
22	Washington	6.6%	1.7%	4.2%	19.3%	8.7%	14.1%
23	Virginia	6.3%	0.0%	3.2%	19.8%	8.1%	14.0%
24	Arkansas	6.1%	2.6%	4.3%	34.2%	20.0%	27.1%
25	Kansas	5.8%	0.0%	3.0%	22.8%	13.3%	18.1%
26	Oregon	5.7%	2.5%	4.1%	23.5%	12.7%	18.1%
27	New Mexico	5.6%	2.0%	3.8%	28.3%	14.8%	21.6%
28	Arizona	5.6%	0.0%	2.8%	21.3%	8.3%	14.8%
29	Louisiana	5.3%	0.0%	2.7%	27.1%	16.0%	21.6%
30	Missouri	4.9%	3.5%	4.2%	22.0%	16.4%	19.2%
31	Iowa	4.1%	1.4%	2.7%	19.0%	10.8%	14.9%
32	Tennessee	2.3%	1.1%	1.7%	20.2%	11.0%	15.7%
33	Pennsylvania	1.7%	0.0%	0.9%	17.0%	10.6%	13.9%
34	Nebraska	1.5%	0.5%	1.0%	17.8%	11.4%	14.6%
35	Alabama	1.3%	0.0%	0.6%	22.4%	11.5%	17.0%
36	North Carolina	1.2%	0.0%	0.6%	17.5%	9.3%	13.4%
37	Nevada	1.1%	0.4%	0.7%	11.5%	5.5%	8.5%
NA	Florida	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
NA	Minnesota	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
NA	Rhode Island	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
50	Alaska	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	14.9%	11.3%	13.2%
50	Idaho	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	19.0%	7.6%	13.3%
50	Indiana	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	14.3%	9.3%	11.8%
50	Mississippi	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	42.3%	28.0%	35.3%
50	Montana	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	19.7%	12.0%	15.9%
50	New Hampshire	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	10.4%	7.0%	8.7%
50	North Dakota	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	19.7%	12.5%	16.2%
50	South Dakota	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	19.6%	14.1%	16.8%
50	Utah	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	14.9%	6.6%	10.7%
50	Wyoming	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	28.3%	16.5%	22.4%
<b>50 State Population<sup>1</sup></b>		<b>14.8%</b>	<b>3.0%</b>	<b>9.0%</b>	<b>31.2%</b>	<b>14.0%</b>	<b>22.7%</b>

NA=Not available (State did not provide data or had initiative that was not comparable to those in other states.)

<sup>1</sup> For these calculations, Florida, Minnesota and Rhode Island were not considered to have any state Pre-K enrollment.

For details about how these figures were calculated, see the Methodology section and Roadmap to State Profile pages.

## POWER OF UNIVERSAL PRE-K: OKLAHOMA

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At Sunlight Preschool in Norman County, Oklahoma, the value of universal prekindergarten is easy to see, from the moment one sets foot in a classroom. Here, everything in the classroom, from the diversity of the children's backgrounds, to the diversity of materials and learning experiences, is consciously constructed to broaden every child's horizons.

"We know that each child brings different strengths, styles and experiences into the mix, and that sparks cognitive growth. The diversity in experience and knowledge among the children naturally creates a larger scaffolding for learning, expanding a child's base of knowledge and problem-solving skills," says Steffani Allen, director of early childhood education for Norman, a suburb of Oklahoma City. "That's why so many of us believed so strongly in the concept of universal preschool, instead of just targeting kids based on need. We recognized that if you put peers together in a classroom—all at-risk or all wealthy, all black or all white—you would automatically limit their experience and their learning. We wanted children to develop the broadest possible scaffolding for learning in the critical early years."

That goal was particularly important to Allen, who had worked as a reading recovery specialist for years, trying to help children in the older grades catch up. "When you really work with children who never had the exposure to preschool, you really appreciate the difference it can make. Children were coming to me without basic literacy and language, and it was so hard to try to catch them up later. They just didn't have the basic foundation skills they needed, so everything was a struggle," Allen says. "I moved to early education to help see to it that all children started kindergarten with basic foundation skills, the ones they learn through exposure and experience before they even get to kindergarten."

So it is in Oklahoma that the children of the wealthy arrive right alongside those from low-income and even transient families—with each child teaching the rest new lessons, offering new perspectives and experiences. After all, underachievement is not just a problem of the poor. "It's so wonderful to see how the idea of universal preschool works, in the classroom, among individual children," says Allen. "Those individual talents and experiences enrich the whole class, as they share with each other."

A shy child from a privileged family, for example, might learn a lot about how to communicate with adults from a less-privileged, but very outgoing child who's lived in a highly transient environment and had to learn to speak up for what she needs. "I have seen this happen. It's wonderful to watch. That child who's had to deal with lots of change may have developed very sophisticated social skills, the ability to be very charming and articulate in communicating with adults, because it's a matter of survival, part of their changing daily life, if they are going to get their needs met," says Allen.

When that child is in a classroom with the shy child, instant learning takes place, benefiting both children. “Once these children buddy up, the outgoing child becomes a role model for the shy one. The shy one might even say, ‘How did you do that?’ or ‘I like the way you did that!’ or you will just see the shy child start to try out some of those strategies, walking up to me or another teacher and using language to get what she needs. She may have a lot more possessions, but until she met this peer, she’s been at a loss about how to get what she wants from adults she doesn’t know well,” says Allen.

And, Allen adds, the model of a peer is far more powerful than any words or lessons she might impart. “That modeling by the transient child is really a lesson in problem-solving, a demonstration of how to use language in social interactions to get needs met, negotiate and get along,” says Allen. “We do structure those lessons into the classroom as much as we can, using language constantly—but there’s nothing like a peer, a buddy, to learn from. A child then sees exactly how to do it, what works and what doesn’t, from someone on his own level. That makes a huge difference.”

The transient child, for his part, learns about entirely new aspects of life from his more-privileged classmates. “The child who never had a pet will learn a lot about animals and how to care for them from the children who have a more stable home life and a lot of experience with pets,” Allen says. “That adds to the classroom lessons and again, broadens a child’s basic scaffolding for learning, by broadening his experiences. For example, if we have a lizard in the classroom, any child might learn a lot about lizards—that they shed their skin, what they eat and so on. But once he has a friend with a lizard or any other pet, he’ll start looking at animals differently. He’ll understand more about what it means to be attached to an animal, take care of it and meet its needs, even about veterinarians, where to buy pet food, that sort of thing—all sorts of life lessons that will enlarge his sense of the world and how to operate in the world.”

That kind of give-and-take among the children is one of the primary reasons why Oklahoma decided to take a universal approach to prekindergarten rather than create a targeted program, only for children at risk. “We know, from all the research, that children are developing a scaffolding for later learning in these early years. Their brains are taking in experience and knowledge, and they are literally laying the groundwork for learning as they get older,” says Allen. “And we know that children are constantly sharing perspectives and experiences, which contributes to their school readiness and overall chances for success. If we group them homogeneously, then their learning is going to be more limited—because the experiences coming into the classroom are going to be more limited. And, although children from higher income families may have more access to preschool programs than poor children, the quality of most of the programs they attend is usually not high. That’s what we wanted to avoid by taking the universal approach.”

...by Betty Holcomb

## QUALITY STANDARDS

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Research finds that children have greater success in kindergarten if they have already participated in high-quality preschool education programs. The quality of preschool programs depends to a great degree upon the requirements for teaching staff and the way in which programs are structured. For example, high levels of teacher education and low staff-child ratios are associated with more positive outcomes for preschoolers. Although standards for quality sometimes are set at the local level, states typically specify the minimum requirements. These minimum requirements sometimes vary with program settings. In particular, many states have higher standards for programs in public schools than those in private settings.

Our survey of the states requested information about requirements regarding the following program characteristics:

- degree requirements for teachers, assistant teachers, principals, and center/site directors;
- training in early childhood education;
- teacher licensing;
- in-service professional development;
- class size;
- staff-child ratios;
- meals provided;
- screening and referral services;
- parent involvement and support services for families;
- transition to kindergarten activities;
- standards for English Language Learners.

We also collected data about the extent to which programs served children with individualized educational plans (IEPs) and whether programs received higher levels of funding when meeting state standards. Finally, we incorporated information from a separate study on the status of preschool curriculum standards.

Overall, we find that quality standards varied tremendously from state to state. Unlike Head Start, a federal program that sets consistent standards for classrooms across the U.S., state-financed preschool programs differed widely in terms of personnel requirements, maximum allowable class size, the services provided to children and families, and program standards. The findings from our survey highlight the variability across state-funded prekindergarten initiatives during the 2001–2002 program year.

### Quality Standards Checklist

To better summarize quality standards across different state prekindergarten initiatives, we designed a 10-item Quality Standards Checklist. The items included in this checklist have been found by research to contribute to the quality of prekindergarten programs. Benchmarks were developed for each item, and for each prekindergarten program we determined whether or not state policy met the relevant benchmark. These benchmarks do not represent a high standard of excellence, but are viewed as important minimums for an educationally effective preschool program, particularly programs that serve educationally disadvantaged children. (This checklist should not be interpreted as implying that these are the only aspects of a program that are important for quality.) Each prekindergarten initiative received a summary score based on the total number of benchmarks that were met, ranging from a minimum of zero to a maximum of 10. **This scoring system is merely a count of the items and is not meant to imply that all of the items are of equal value or interchangeable.** For example, providing a meal does not offset the effects of failing to require that teachers have a college degree and vice versa. Thus, state policies should be evaluated and compared based on their standards for each of the 10 items and not simply based on the number of items for which they meet benchmarks. The following items and associated benchmarks were used in the Quality Standards Checklist:

- *Curriculum standards*—the state must have comprehensive curriculum standards that are exclusive to prekindergarten and cover the domains of language/literacy, mathematics, science, social/emotional skills, cognitive development, health and physical development, and social studies.<sup>1</sup>
- *Teacher degree requirement*—lead teachers are required to hold at least a BA in both public and private program settings.<sup>2</sup>
- *Teacher specialized training requirement*—pre-service requirements for lead teachers must include specialized training in early childhood. Such training might involve licensure/endorsement in the prekindergarten area or a degree or credential in early childhood, such as a CDA. Elementary teaching certificates and kindergarten endorsements were not considered to qualify as specialized training in early childhood.<sup>2</sup>
- *Assistant teacher degree requirement*—assistant teachers are required to hold at least a CDA or equivalent (24 credits in early childhood), in both public and private settings.<sup>3</sup>
- *Teacher in-service requirement*—teachers must be required to receive an average of at least 15 clock hours of professional development annually.<sup>4</sup>
- *Maximum class size*—class sizes must be limited to no more than 20 children, for both 3- and 4-year-olds.<sup>5</sup>
- *Staff-child ratio*—classrooms are required to have at least one staff member present per 10 children attending, for both 3- and 4-year-olds.<sup>6</sup>
- *Screening/referral requirements*—programs are required to provide both screening and referral services that cover at least vision, hearing and health.<sup>7</sup>
- *Family support services*—programs must offer at least one type of support service for families of participants. Services may include parent conferences or adult education, referral to social services for families, or information relating to nutrition.<sup>8</sup>
- *Meal requirements*—programs are required to provide participants with at least one meal daily. Snacks were not counted as meals.<sup>9</sup>

State-financed prekindergarten initiatives varied greatly with respect to the number of items on the Quality Standards Checklist for which they met benchmarks. Summary scores were as high as 9 in Arkansas, Illinois, and the New Jersey “Abbott District” program, and as low as 2 in Kansas, New Mexico and Texas. The summary scores for each of the 43 state-funded initiatives and the District of Columbia’s initiative are shown in Table 2 (page 35). State standards relative to each individual benchmark are discussed below. Serious concerns are raised by the failure of most state programs to meet the benchmarks for comprehensive curriculum standards and teacher qualifications.

## Curriculum Standards

The decision to adopt comprehensive curriculum standards provides evidence that a state has identified and prioritized specific content areas to be covered by preschool education programs. Curriculum standards are specified at the statewide level. As a result, the states with multiple prekindergarten initiatives employ a single set of curriculum standards across all state-financed programs. Comprehensive curriculum standards were in place in 10 of the 38 states profiled in our report.

## Personnel Requirements

Personnel requirements can be used as an index of a state's commitment to providing quality preschool. More educated teachers and staff are more likely to provide a high-quality learning environment for their students. Our study findings suggest that children who live in different states receive preschool educations that dramatically vary in quality.

Teachers were required to hold a bachelor's degree in 21 of the 43 state-financed prekindergarten initiatives covered by our report. Minimum teacher degree requirements generally depended upon a program's setting. When state prekindergarten programs operated in public schools, teachers were usually required to have at least a bachelor's degree. New York's public preschool programs had the most stringent educational requirements, as teachers trained after 1978 were required to have master's degrees. States not requiring a BA in public school settings mandated that teachers have an AA, a CDA, or equivalent training—except New Mexico, which did not have any minimum degree requirement for prekindergarten teachers in public schools.

Prekindergarten teachers in only about one-third of the programs that operated in private settings were required to have a BA. Most commonly, teachers in private settings were required to have a CDA, although some states required an AA and others required specific training that was less than a CDA. In five state-funded initiatives, there were no minimum degree requirements for prekindergarten teachers in private schools.

Teachers in 29 of the 43 state-financed prekindergarten initiatives were required to have specialized training in early childhood. In state-funded programs that required teachers to have a BA, this training often took the form of earning a certificate, license, or endorsement in early childhood or a closely related area. In programs that did not implement a BA requirement for teachers, this specialized training generally involved the attainment of a CDA.

Minimum requirements for assistant teachers were always less stringent than those for lead teachers (except in New Mexico, which had no educational requirements for lead or assistant preschool teachers). Only 10 states required all assistant teachers to earn a CDA or receive an equivalent level of training. Educational requirements for assistant teachers tended to be fairly uniform across public and private settings. In all cases in which they differed, the requirements were less stringent in private settings. The most common educational requirement for assistant teachers was a high school diploma or GED (occasionally with some minimal additional training), although a wide range of requirements was used across different states. Vermont had the most stringent requirements for assistant teachers in public schools, as assistant teachers in public settings were required to have a BA. In 11 other state-financed programs there were no specified educational requirements for at least some assistant teachers. Massachusetts allowed 16-year-olds to serve as assistant teachers in nonpublic settings when under constant supervision.

Specific requirements for annual in-service training varied across the states. Overall, slightly more than half of the state initiatives mandated that teachers receive an average of at least 15 clock hours per year. (In some cases, statewide in-service requirements for recertification are reported, when programs were subject to these requirements but did not set specific requirements of their own.) In-service requirements were as high as 40 clock hours per year in Alabama, although eight states had no in-service requirements.



### Program Structure and Service Standards

Responses to our survey show great variability in state policies relating to program structure and services, providing further evidence that children in different states may receive vastly different types of state-financed prekindergarten services.

Lower class sizes are generally associated with more effective early education programs. In general, state-financed prekindergarten programs placed a priority on limiting classrooms to 20 or fewer students: this benchmark was met by 31 of the 43 state-financed initiatives covered in our report. Among programs that served both 3- and 4-year-olds, the requirements for class size generally did not differ by the age of the child. However, when requirements differed, maximum class sizes were always smaller for 3-year-olds than for 4-year-olds. Maximum class sizes were as low as 15 children in Colorado and the New Jersey “Abbott District” programs. In several initiatives there was no required limit on the maximum number of children in a classroom, although many of these initiatives offered specific recommendations, such as the recommendation that programs follow guidelines of the National Association for the Education of Young Children.

As with class sizes, lower staff-child ratios are associated with higher levels of quality. Staff-child ratios of 1:10 or better were mandated in 30 of the state preschool initiatives. In most programs that served both 3- and 4-year-olds, ratio requirements did not differ by the age of child. In states where the requirements differed, without exception, they specified lower staff-child ratios for 3-year-olds. Staff-child ratios were as low as 3:20 for children in New York State’s Universal Prekindergarten and Experimental Prekindergarten programs, and 2:15 for children attending the New Jersey “Abbott District” program. Six state-financed programs specified no maximum staff-child ratio. In the Wisconsin Four-Year-Old Kindergarten program staff-child ratios were determined at the local level.



Services such as health screenings and referrals, family support services, and meals also contribute to a program's effectiveness in promoting child development and learning. Eighteen of the state-financed initiatives mandated screening and referral for vision, hearing, and health. Twenty additional initiatives mandated at least one type of screening or referral, or allowed programs to determine screening and referral requirements at the local level. Five state initiatives had no specific requirements for screening and referral services.

Support services were offered to families of enrollees in 31 of the state preschool initiatives. Many states offered more than one service. Family support services were generally targeted toward parents—including parent conferences, parenting education, adult education, and job training services. However, occasionally support services focused more directly on enrolled children—such as services that help children make the transition into preschool.

Finally, 18 of the state-financed prekindergarten initiatives offered at least one meal per day. Of the initiatives that did require meals, some specified which meals should be provided, while in other initiatives the meals to be offered were determined by local factors such as the provider's hours of operation.

### Quality Standards Overview

Although each individual benchmark in our Quality Standards Checklist was met by at least 10 state-financed preschool initiatives, none of the initiatives met *all* of the benchmarks. Even among the three initiatives meeting the most benchmarks—Arkansas, Illinois, and the New Jersey “Abbott District” program—there was variability in which benchmarks were met. Overall, quality standards in state preschool programs varied dramatically from state to state. The data strongly illustrate that children in the U.S. are not guaranteed a high-quality preschool education. Even though actual quality may exceed state standards on average, when quality standards are lacking, some children (particularly the most disadvantaged) are likely to receive very poor quality programs.

- 1 Too often current practice underestimates children's capabilities to learn in the preschool years. Clear and appropriate expectations for learning and development across all domains are essential to an educationally effective preschool program. Bowman, B. T., Donovan, M. S., & Burns, M.S. (Eds.). (2001). *Eager to learn: Educating our preschoolers*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press. Frede, E. C. (1998). Preschool program quality in programs for children in poverty. In W. S. Barnett & S. S. Boocock (Eds.), *Early care and education for children in poverty: Promises, programs, and long-term results* (pp. 77–98). Albany, NY: SUNY Press. Kendall, J. S. (2003). Setting standards in early childhood education. *Educational Leadership*, 60(7), 64–68.
- 2 Based on a review of the evidence, a committee of the National Research Council recommended that preschool teachers have a BA with specialization in early childhood education (Bowman et al., 2001). Barnett, W. S. (2003). Better teachers, better preschools: Student achievement linked to teacher qualifications. *Preschool Policy Matters*, 2. New Brunswick, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research. Burchinal, M. R., Cryer, D., Clifford, R. M., & Howes, C. (2002). Caregiver training and classroom quality in child care centers. *Applied Developmental Science*, 6, 2–11. Whitebook, M., Howes, C., & Phillips, D. (1989). *Who cares? Child care teachers and the quality of care in America*. (Final report of the National Child Care Staffing Study). Oakland, CA: Child Care Employee Project.
- 3 Preschool classrooms typically are taught by teams of a teacher and an assistant. While research specifically on the qualifications of assistants is rare, the available evidence points to a relationship between assistant qualifications and teaching quality and there is much evidence on the educational importance of the qualifications of teaching staff generally. Bowman et al. (2001). Burchinal et al. (2002). Barnett (2003). Whitebook et al. (1989). The CDA has been recommended to prepare assistant teachers who may be viewed as starting on a career path to become teachers rather than permanent assistants. Kagan, S. L., & Cohen, N. E. (1997). *Not by chance: Creating an early care and education system for America's children*. Abridged report. New Haven, CT: Yale University, Bush Center in Child Development and Social Policy.
- 4 Good teachers are actively engaged in their continuing development. Bowman et al. (2001). Frede (1998). Whitebook et al. (1989) found that teachers with more than 15 hours were more appropriate, positive, and engaged with children in their teaching practices.
- 5 The importance of class size has been demonstrated for preschool and kindergarten. A class size of 20 is larger than that which research has shown to produce large gains for disadvantaged children. Barnett, W. S. (1998). Long-term effects on cognitive development and school success. In W. S. Barnett & S. S. Boocock (Eds.), *Early care and education for children in poverty: Promises, programs, and long-term results* (pp. 11–44). Albany, NY: SUNY Press. Bowman et al. (2001). Finn, J. D. (2002). Class-size reduction in grades K–3. In A. Molnar (Ed.), *School reform proposals: The research evidence* (pp. 27–48). Greenwich, CT: Information Age Publishing. Frede (1998). NICHD Early Child Care Research Network. (1999). Child outcomes when child care center classes meet recommended standards for quality. *American Journal of Public Health*, 89, 1072–1077. National Association for the Education of Young Children. (1998). *Accreditation criteria and procedures of the National Association for the Education of Young Children*. Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children.
- 6 A large literature establishes the links between ratio and program quality and child outcomes. A ratio of 1:10 is larger than in programs that have demonstrated large gains for disadvantaged children and is the largest generally accepted by professional opinion. Barnett (1998). Bowman et al. (2001). Frede (1998). NICHD Early Child Care Research Network (1999). National Association for the Education of Young Children (1998).
- 7 For some children, preschool may be the first opportunity to detect vision, hearing, and health problems that may impair a child's learning and development. This is an opportunity that should not be missed. Meisels, S. J., & Atkins-Burnett, S. (2000). The elements of early childhood assessment. In J. P. Shonkoff & S. J. Meisels (Eds.), *Handbook of early childhood intervention* (pp. 231–257). New York: Cambridge University Press.
- 8 Families are the primary source of support for child development and the most effective programs have partnered with parents. Bowman et al. (2001). Frede (1998).
- 9 Good nutrition is essential for healthy development of the brain and for children's learning. Shonkoff, J. P., & Phillips, D. A. (Eds.). (2000). *From neurons to neighborhoods: The science of early childhood development*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.



**TABLE 2: STATE PRE-K QUALITY STANDARDS**

State	Comprehensive curriculum standards	Teacher has BA	Specialized training in ECE	Assistant teacher has CDA or equiv.	At least 15 hrs/yr in-service	Maximum class size ≤ 20	Staff-child ratio 1:10 or better	Vision, hearing, health screening/referral	At least 1 family support service	At least 1 meal	Quality Standards Checklist Sum
Arkansas	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	9
Illinois	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		9
New Jersey (Abbott)	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	9
Oklahoma	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	8
Tennessee		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	8
Alabama		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	7
Delaware			✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	7
Georgia			✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	7
Kentucky			✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	7
Minnesota (HdSt)	✓		✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	7
New York (EPK)		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	7
North Carolina		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	7
South Carolina		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		7
Maryland	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓				6
Minnesota (MSRP)	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓		✓		6
Ohio (HdSt)			✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	6
Oregon			✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	6
Washington			✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	6
Wisconsin (HdSt)			✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	6
Michigan			✓	✓		✓	✓		✓		5
New Jersey (ECPA)	✓	✓			✓			✓	✓		5
Vermont		✓	✓			✓	✓		✓		5
Virginia						✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	5
West Virginia		✓	✓		✓	✓		✓			5
Arizona	✓		✓			✓	✓				4
Colorado			✓			✓	✓		✓		4
Connecticut			✓			✓	✓		✓		4
Louisiana	✓	✓				✓			✓		4
Massachusetts	✓					✓	✓		✓		4
Nebraska		✓	✓			✓			✓		4
Nevada		✓	✓		✓				✓		4
New York (UPK)					✓	✓	✓		✓		4
California			✓				✓		✓		3
Hawaii			✓	✓						✓	3
Iowa						✓	✓		✓		3
Maine		✓		✓	✓						3
Missouri			✓			✓	✓				3
Ohio (Public School)					✓				✓	✓	3
Pennsylvania		✓			✓			✓			3
Wisconsin (4K)		✓			✓				✓		3
Kansas		✓		✓							2
New Mexico					✓			✓			2
Texas	✓	✓									2
<b>Totals</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>18</b>	
District of Columbia		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓		6

Note: Florida and Rhode Island are not included above because they do not have initiatives that are comparable to those covered in this table. Alaska, Idaho, Indiana, Mississippi, Montana, New Hampshire, North Dakota, South Dakota, Utah, and Wyoming are not included because they do not have state prekindergarten initiatives.

For more details about quality standards and benchmarks, see the Roadmap to State Profile pages.

## QUALITY MAKES A DIFFERENCE: **NEW JERSEY**

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There's a pervasive sense of joy at the Vailsburg prekindergarten program in Newark, a sense that both the faculty and the 4-year-olds are not only learning, but also genuinely and generously engaged with each other, as they tumble along through the day. Transitions between activities, from the playground to circle time, flow easily due to the consistent natural order of the day. With the simple teacher guidance, "Let's all walk as quietly as a mouse," the children are able to gather themselves from the full force of a game of tag, line up with relative calmness, walk a block to the classroom, wash hands, sit in a circle and then focus on a game of "Uno" without a sharp word or constant directions from the teachers.

And it is only the third week of the year.

"I do see how the training makes a difference with my teachers," says Dale Goodwin, director of the program and a veteran of nearly three decades in early education. "It looks easy, but it's not, of course. It is drawn from understanding how children develop, and then learning to respond to their behavior in a positive way. That kind of response from the adults in their lives helps build the children's confidence and create an environment where real learning takes place. That's where it all starts, with the teachers' knowledge and a positive attitude."

The teachers in Goodwin's program, like those in others across New Jersey, are in the process of meeting broad new state requirements for teacher training. Under a new state mandate, preschool programs in the state's poorest districts must be of high quality which means providing a good curriculum, small classes, screening and referral programs, meals and family support services. But most would agree that the most important requirement is that every Pre-K teacher must have not only a bachelor's degree, but also certification in early childhood development by fall 2004.

To make sure it happens, the state is underwriting college costs for many teachers, through a system of grants and loan forgiveness agreements. That has meant that a few of the teachers on Goodwin's staff have had to return to school, but she believes this has only enhanced the program—and prospects for the teachers themselves.

"It's a plus for the program and for the teachers," she says. "They will take this training wherever they go, and the credentials will allow them to earn a living wage—something that was hard to do in this field in the past." And that, she adds, should help keep teachers on the job, build continuity for the children, and stabilize the prekindergarten program as it expands across the state. "The move to make the field more professional is very positive for everyone, especially the children," Goodwin says. "With that background in early childhood, there is a big difference in the way the teachers communicate with the children and the activities they choose. They know what's age-appropriate. They know how long children can pay attention. They know how to respond to a child who is acting out and keep things positive. It makes a difference all around."

So it is with "small group" time, as the teachers gather groups of seven or eight children on the rug to play number games. Today the children have chosen "Uno," which helps develop math skills, number recognition and social skills like turn-taking and planning ahead. As one child counts out the cards for her classmates the teacher quickly reviews the rules of the game.

As soon as they begin playing the game it is clear that although the teacher is playing alongside the children she is also planfully weaving skills and concepts into the activity. She reinforces the names of the numerals as the children place the cards, "I see Laila put down a seven, if your turn is coming up you should be thinking about whether you have a seven," and encourages children in their attempts to get along with each other by saying things like, "Gregory, I appreciate the way you reminded Kayla that it was her turn."

As simple as the 20-minute activity might appear to the casual observer, Goodwin and her staff know it takes years of training and hours of planning each week to create the activities that spur school readiness skills, from number recognition to taking turns. "I have always emphasized the importance of training and preparation among my staff, because I know what a difference it makes," says Goodwin. "But the great thing today is that the State of New Jersey has put that on the agenda, and is not only requiring teacher training – but starting to compensate the teachers and reward them as they get additional training."

Starting this year, teachers in her program will earn as much as public school teachers, up to \$40,000 in annual salary with experience. "Up until now, head teachers were making \$25,000 a year, barely enough to live on in New Jersey. I know that when I started out, I had to live with my parents. The fact that teachers couldn't earn enough to support themselves played out in many programs, causing high rates of staff turnover. You can see that things are stabilizing around Newark, as the state raises standards and pays teachers better," she says.

That stability translates into a sense of community and support at Vailsburg, with teachers returning year after year, enhancing the classrooms, learning new techniques and building relationships with the children and families they serve. A resource center full of special notebooks with model lesson plans, articles on the latest findings in child development research and general information on children's emotional and mental health sits at the core of the program, an easy place for teachers to drop by and spend some time on break, over lunch or at day's end, if they need some new ideas.

In addition, the halls and walls throughout the center sport inspirational sayings for teachers and families alike, reminding everyone of the power of respect and high expectations. "There's no substitute for a good relationship in this work," says Goodwin. "Everything flows from that. Once the teachers know how to respond and build a child's trust and confidence, then learning takes place. And the background in early childhood helps them frame a positive response, from the tone they use to the words they choose."

So it is as two children spill off the playground and run into each other on the way to circle time. There are tears, but within moments, teacher Tanya and her assistant have delivered hugs, reassuring words that acknowledge the brief hurt, but turn the exchange into something positive. "Oh, I know that must have hurt, but you two have such fun together. How about a hug? How about you two hold hands on the way to 'Uno?' I know you are both winners at that game!"

Smiles ensue, and the two join their classmates, hand-in-hand, to play "Uno." And learn their numbers, how to take turns and count, along the way.

...by Betty Holcomb

## RESOURCES

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The quantity of resources that a state devotes to preschool education impacts both the number of children that can be served and the quality of service that they receive. By devoting more resources, states may improve access to preschool either by providing additional slots or extending hours of program operation, and may enhance quality by allowing programs to offer comprehensive services or pay salaries of highly qualified teachers. Resources may be used with varying levels of efficiency, but as a general rule, the largest and highest quality programs tend to be the best funded. Though overall spending on state preschool has increased in recent years, funding for these programs remains low relative to K–12 and Head Start spending. Substantial additional funding will be required to significantly increase access and quality.

In this report, we examine resources as a reflection of state commitment to high-quality preschool. For each program, we asked states to report total state funding and also to indicate funds received from federal sources such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) or the Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF). We also collected information regarding local match requirements. Data were obtained at the state level in three other areas: information about scholarships awarded to preschool teachers, policies regarding teacher certification in early childhood education, and number of full-time staff employed to administer preschool or early childhood special education.

### State Spending

Total state spending figures presented on the state profile pages do not include all money received from federal or local sources, and are not estimates of full program cost. The state figures include some flow-through money from federal sources when such funds were reported as part of state spending, and were used to serve children enrolled in a program that also received state money. States are ranked according to state spending per child enrolled, calculated by dividing the total program funding figure by total enrollment. As an indication of per capita spending on preschool education, we report state spending per 3-year-old, and state spending per 4-year-old, derived by dividing a portion of funding (based on the age-breakdown of enrollees) by total state population at each age.

States contributed a total of about \$2,435,000,000 to preschool programs during 2001–2002. Individual state spending varied considerably, from \$650,000 in Maine to over \$300,000,000 in California, New Jersey, and Texas, with an average of just over \$65,000,000 for 37 states that reported funding. While the largest state contributions tended to come from the most populous states, funding figures did not depend entirely upon the size of the 3- and 4-year-old populations. For example, South Carolina put more money into preschool than eight states with larger populations of 3- and 4-year-olds. As shown in Table 3 (page 41), spending per child enrolled in state preschool programs ranged from \$451 in Maine to \$10,088 in New Jersey, with a mean of about \$3,450 per child. The majority of states that funded programs provided between \$2,000 and \$4,000 per child, but six states spent over \$5,000, three of which offer state Head Start model programs (Delaware, Ohio and Oregon). New Jersey enrolls far more children in state preschool compared to the five other states that spend more than \$5,000 per child.



By examining spending per capita, we are able to compare funding across states with vastly different populations. These figures are also presented in Table 3. Most states either do not fund, or contribute only minimally to preschool for 3-year-olds. Of the 24 states that did provide funds to serve this age group, 11 contributed at least \$100 for each 3-year-old residing in the state. New Jersey spent about \$65 million more than any other state on preschool for 3-year-olds, representing more than double a per capita investment. States provided considerably greater funds to support preschool services for 4-year-olds, with 30 states spending at least \$100 for each resident of this age. Five states—Georgia, New Jersey, Oklahoma, New York, and Texas—spent over \$850 per 4-year-old in the state. In general, states with larger populations tended to spend more per capita on 4-year-olds than those with smaller numbers of children.

Finally, we compared state spending on preschool to funding for public K–12 education and federal Head Start funding, and found that preschool programs tended to receive considerably less money than either of these other types of programs. State funding per child for K–12 exceeded spending on preschool in all but six states. When total funding (including federal and local contributions) for K–12 was considered, preschool programs received less in all states. Spending per child in federal Head Start programs was greater than spending for preschool in 34 of 36 states for which these data were available. New Jersey and Oregon were the exceptions, but on average, federal Head Start programs received nearly \$3,500 more per child than states spent on their preschool programs.

#### **Funds from Federal or Local Sources**

Over one-third of state-funded preschool programs also received money from federal sources during 2001–2002. Federal money was used to supplement state spending in both large and small programs, and use of these funds did not seem to be related to the magnitude of the state financial commitment.

The requirement of a local match to augment state funding was relatively rare. These matches were usually expressed as a percentage of total funding, and did not always need to be provided in cash. Some states allowed districts or localities to offer matches in-kind, meaning that services such as transportation, provision of meals, or maintenance of building facilities would be paid for at the local level. Only seven of the 43 state preschool programs required a local match. In cases where this match was expressed as a percent of overall funding, the requirement ranged from 11 percent in New York to 50 percent in Alabama and Nebraska. In Wisconsin, the preschool program was run as part of the public school system, thus the local share of school revenue applied to preschool as well as K–12. The size of the local match required in Virginia depended on a composite index of local ability to pay. Though most states did not report a required local match, it is likely that funding from local sources is significant in many states. Data on funding that is provided at local discretion (which might include federal Title I funds as well as local funds) is not routinely collected by states or the federal government and is not included in this report, even though such funding may be substantial.

### Other Types of State Support for Preschool

States may demonstrate a commitment to resources that promote high-quality preschool by facilitating the professional development of early childhood teachers. As a measure of such commitment, we report whether a state awarded scholarships to preschool teachers, and, if so, how many were awarded. We also discuss state policy regarding teacher certification in early childhood education. We considered a certificate to be in early childhood only if it included a grade-level or age below kindergarten. For example, the lower boundary of the developmental range covered by an early childhood certificate may be specified as preschool, nursery, birth, or any age below 5. States that award early childhood certificates do not always require them for preschool teachers, but the certificate is a policy-level recognition of a unique body of knowledge and skills that represents early childhood expertise.

Ten states awarded scholarships to preschool teachers in 2001–2002. Most respondents from these states were not able to specify the number of scholarships awarded. Of the three who could, Kentucky granted the greatest number, with 78.

Only four states, Alabama, Arizona, Hawaii and Michigan, did not award early childhood education (ECE) certifications during 2001–2002, although Michigan did offer an early childhood endorsement. Alabama granted a certificate that covered kindergarten through grade 6, but this range did not meet NIEER's criterion of early childhood specificity. About half of the remaining 34 states provided data for the total number of ECE certifications awarded, ranging from 36 in Delaware to 8,521 in Georgia. Three other states, California, Louisiana and Missouri, awarded more than 1,000 certifications.

The ECE certificate covered age levels beginning at birth in 15 states. Most often, these certifications extended up to grade 3 or age 8, though some only applied through kindergarten. In 13 other states, the youngest grade level covered by ECE certification was Pre-K. In these cases, the upper range for the certificate usually was either grade 3 or grade 6. Louisiana, Maryland and Pennsylvania used nursery as the earliest grade boundary for their ECE certificates, while Arkansas and Ohio began their range of coverage at age 3. The oldest children covered by an ECE certificate were eighth graders in Georgia.

Another significant measure of resources is the number of full-time employees at the state level who administer preschool education. In reporting this figure, we are typically referring to personnel at the State Department of Education or other equivalent administering agency who oversee the implementation and delivery of the preschool program. In addition, we specify the number of full-time staff who administer preschool special education programs only.

A majority of states employed five or fewer full-time employees at the state level to administer preschool education. Responses ranged from zero in Pennsylvania to 68 in California, with a mean of about 8, though only nine states employed a staff larger than 10. Texas, which has the highest reported enrollment, employed two full-time staff to administer its state preschool program. The number of full-time staff devoted to the administration of early childhood special education was reported to be one or less by 21 of the 32 states from which data were available. Considering that Louisiana, Missouri, New York and Virginia did not provide data pertaining to administrative staff, there were likely about 300 full-time employees who administered programs that served some 700,000 young children. On average, each administrator was responsible for approximately 2,300 students.

One of consequences of the small staff and other commitments to state infrastructure for preschool is that the collection and reporting of data on preschool is highly limited in many states. Generally, states do not have unduplicated counts of the number of children served across state prekindergarten, preschool special education, state subsidized child care, and Head Start programs. Nor are data available on how many children participate in multiple programs. Data typically are not available on children served by local education agencies at their discretion. Equally distressing is the lack of comprehensive information on funding from local, state, and federal sources comparable to that available for K–12 education so that total public spending on preschool cannot be accurately determined. The diversity of auspices under which preschool is provided makes this a more complex task, but few resources are allocated to accomplish it.

**TABLE 3: RANKINGS OF STATE PRE-K RESOURCES PER CHILD ENROLLED**

Resources Rank	State	\$ per child	\$ per 3-year-old	\$ per 4-year-old
		enrolled in state pre-k	in the state	in the state
1	New Jersey	\$10,088	\$1,277	\$1,922
2	Oregon	\$7,463	\$184	\$427
	FEDERAL HEAD START	\$6,934	FEDERAL HEAD START	
3	Connecticut	\$6,727	\$225	\$637
4	North Carolina	\$5,242	\$0	\$61
5	Delaware	\$5,078	\$0	\$404
6	Ohio	\$5,015	\$302	\$407
7	Washington	\$4,908	\$82	\$325
8	Massachusetts	\$4,826	\$571	\$558
9	Arizona	\$4,559	\$0	\$255
10	Georgia	\$3,721	\$0	\$1,987
11	New York	\$3,622	\$78	\$896
12	Wisconsin	\$3,518	\$46	\$654
13	Iowa	\$3,291	\$45	\$134
14	Michigan	\$3,205	\$0	\$613
15	Virginia	\$3,194	\$0	\$201
16	Alabama	\$3,175	\$0	\$40
17	Illinois	\$3,094	\$250	\$665
18	California	\$3,080	\$158	\$437
19	Hawaii	\$3,059	\$0	\$235
20	Nevada	\$2,950	\$21	\$73
21	Kentucky	\$2,776	\$204	\$662
22	Nebraska	\$2,708	\$14	\$41
23	Colorado	\$2,682	\$33	\$375
24	West Virginia	\$2,486	\$240	\$672
25	Oklahoma	\$2,428	\$0	\$1,350
26	Missouri	\$2,407	\$84	\$118
27	Louisiana	\$2,389	\$0	\$128
28	Tennessee	\$2,226	\$25	\$51
29	Texas	\$2,186	\$134	\$857
30	Arkansas	\$2,028	\$52	\$123
31	Kansas	\$2,018	\$0	\$118
32	Maryland	\$1,751	\$0	\$264
33	South Carolina	\$1,473	\$10	\$433
34	Vermont	\$1,379	\$73	\$119
35	New Mexico	\$782	\$16	\$44
36	Maine	\$451	\$0	\$44
NA	Florida	NA	NA	NA
NA	Minnesota	NA	\$143	\$255
NA	Pennsylvania	NA	NA	NA
NA	Rhode Island	NA	NA	NA
50	Alaska	\$0	\$0	\$0
50	Idaho	\$0	\$0	\$0
50	Indiana	\$0	\$0	\$0
50	Mississippi	\$0	\$0	\$0
50	Montana	\$0	\$0	\$0
50	New Hampshire	\$0	\$0	\$0
50	North Dakota	\$0	\$0	\$0
50	South Dakota	\$0	\$0	\$0
50	Utah	\$0	\$0	\$0
50	Wyoming	\$0	\$0	\$0

NA=Not available (State did not provide data or had an early childhood initiative that was not comparable to those in other states.)  
For details about how these figures were calculated, see the Methodology section and Roadmap to State Prolife Pages.

## STATES WITH EXEMPLARY POLICIES

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Three state preschool programs stand out as exemplary in one or more ways that provide interesting models for other states. These states illustrate that it is feasible for even states of modest means to offer preschool programs to all children and that high-quality preschool programs can be delivered to all children on a large scale. None of these states provides a perfect program, but each is far above average in its commitment to assuring that children receive a good early education.

**Georgia** was the first state to offer preschool to all 4-year-old children. The program is supported by lottery funds, and over half of the state's 4-year-olds enrolled in 2001–02. Georgia does not require that teachers have a college degree or early childhood certification. However, the state has a tiered reimbursement system that pays more per child to programs whose teachers have higher qualifications. As a result, 80 percent of its preschool teachers are certified. Georgia could upgrade its qualifications requirements at relatively little cost so as to ensure that every child has a qualified teacher.

**Oklahoma** was the second state to open its preschool program to all 4-year-olds. As the program is offered to all districts, but districts are not required to participate, the program is not yet available everywhere in the state. Nevertheless, Oklahoma enrolls a higher percentage of its 4-year-olds than any other state: 56 percent in 2001–2002 and 60 percent in 2002–2003. Including Head Start and preschool special education, combined enrollment may have exceeded 75 percent in 2001–2002. In addition, all preschool teachers are certified and receive the same salaries and benefits as other public school teachers, even when they teach outside the public schools. State funding is provided through the regular education funding formula, which lends financial stability to the program. Districts can partner to provide services through Head Start and private programs in Oklahoma without lowering standards.

**New Jersey's** "Abbott District" preschool program sets the highest standards in the nation and provides preschool free to all beginning at age 3 in 30 of the state's largest and most disadvantaged school districts. The program is the combined result of a court order, legislation, and the policy decisions of both Republican and Democratic governors. The "Abbott District" preschool program provides a certified teacher (paid a public school salary) and an assistant to each class of 15 children. Department of Education funds pay for a 6-hour day during the school year. Human Services funds pay for extended hours and additional days up to 245 per year. New Jersey also provides funds for half-day preschool (and full-day kindergarten) to 102 more school districts. Even though quality standards are lower in these districts than in the "Abbott District" program, state spending per child enrolled remains in the top 10. In funding these programs, New Jersey commits more money per child enrolled and more money per 3-year-old statewide than any other state and ranks second in the nation for spending per 4-year-old.



### States to Watch

Ten additional states have pursued policies that show promise or peril for preschool education, but the results will depend on future policy decisions. These states are poised to make important gains. However, policy developments in these states should be closely watched to ensure that they lead to improvements in access, quality and the resources required to implement educationally effective programs.

**Alabama:** In 2000, the state began a pilot Pre-K initiative for 4-year-olds. While still small, this program is growing and may be able to serve a larger proportion of the population, since only the funding level (rather than eligibility restrictions) prevents more children from enrolling.

**Arkansas:** The state has set higher quality standards than the vast majority of states and taken the unique approach of supporting its high-quality preschool program with an excise tax on beer, passed in 2001.

**California:** In addition to funding the State Preschool Program, since 1998 California has been devoting additional resources to preschool through the California Children and Families Act, which is funded by a dedicated tobacco tax. It will be important to ensure that adequate quality standards are set when Los Angeles and other counties implement preschool programs with this new funding.

**Florida:** In November 2002, Florida voters passed a ballot initiative specifying that all 4-year-olds in the state should have access to free “high-quality” preschool programs by 2005. The state is now developing plans for this initiative including setting quality standards and funding levels. It is essential that both quality standards and funding be adequate to create a program that truly is high-quality for every child.

**Illinois:** Illinois is another state with relatively high quality standards. For fiscal year 2003–2004 Illinois committed an additional \$29.4 million to the block grant that funds its state-financed prekindergarten program. This increased funding should allow the program to provide access to more of Illinois’ children. As the state budget picture improves, increased commitment to access and quality could make Illinois a true leader in early education.

**Maryland:** By the 2007–2008 school year, all local school systems in Maryland will be required to provide preschool to 4-year-olds from disadvantaged families or who are homeless, following provisions of the Bridge to Excellence in Public Schools Act passed in 2002. It will be important to monitor annual progress toward this goal in terms of access, quality standards and resources.

**New York:** The state established a prekindergarten program in 1997 with the intention of making it universally available to all 4-year-olds after five years. The program has received insufficient funding and continues to be limited, for the most part, to children from low-income families. The state postponed implementing a provision that would have required all classrooms to have a certified teacher by 2002. A renewed commitment by New York to its preschool promises could transform the state into a model for others.

**Ohio:** Until recently, Ohio invested a significant amount of state funds to supplement federal Head Start funding. State-funded Head Start followed the comprehensive Head Start model in addressing children's full range of developmental needs, from health care to nutrition to social services to parent involvement. However, Ohio has now replaced its own state funds with federal TANF funds. This is a potentially unstable funding source. Ohio's support for this program in the future may be judged in part by its continued commitment of state as well as federal funds to maintain and expand the program.

**Pennsylvania:** Even though a major initiative was proposed this year in Pennsylvania to jump-start a state preschool program, a much more limited and smaller initiative was passed. The proposal just passed will make \$175 million in block grants available in 2004–2005 for schools to use for any of a variety of purposes that could include prekindergarten and full-day kindergarten. Individual school districts will determine how to spend the new funds. State support for preschool barely exists currently, with only 2 percent of the state's children served in 4-year-old kindergarten, fewer than enroll in preschool special education. If Pennsylvania provided funding specifically for a preschool program, it could change from a laggard to a leader with respect to both access and quality standards.

**West Virginia:** State legislation passed in 2002 provides for 4-year-olds in West Virginia to have universal access to prekindergarten by 2012. It is important that the state make steady annual progress toward that goal while improving its quality standards.

More information about each of the state-financed preschool initiatives mentioned in this section can be found in the "State Profiles" section later in this report.



## POLICY CONCLUSIONS

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Given the great variation in state-funded prekindergarten programs, policy makers and concerned citizens within each state should reach their own conclusions about what should be done to improve their state's programs. We hope that this *Yearbook* will encourage public debate about state preschool programs. The states have much to learn from each other and we expect that state policy debates will benefit from comparisons across the states that this *Yearbook* facilitates. Nevertheless, we offer five general policy conclusions:

1. All states should provide adequate access to state-funded preschool programs. Twenty states serve fewer than 10 percent of their 4-year-olds. Ten states serve none. The three states that have committed to universal access do not in fact reach all 4-year-olds, and New York is far from its goal. European nations that offer universal preschool programs routinely enroll nearly 100 percent of the children, and many school districts in the United States that offer universal access to preschool have enrollment nearing 100 percent. A well-designed universal preschool program should have an enrollment rate at least as high as public kindergarten.

2. All states need to improve their quality standards. While standards do not ensure quality, inadequate standards permit substantial variation in quality at best and overall low quality at worst. Without quality, children will not receive the educational benefits that states seek to provide, and some children may even be harmed. Our checklist provides an evidence-based starting point for states to assess their quality standards. Some states only need to make a few, relatively inexpensive changes to their standards. Others will require more extensive improvements. However, the costs of these improvements can be more modest than they appear at first. For example, Georgia does not require preschool teachers to have a BA degree, but as 80 percent of its preschool teachers already have a BA, the number of teachers who would need to upgrade their credentials to meet this standard is modest.

3. Ten states spend nothing at all on preschool and state spending is embarrassingly low in many or even most other states. The case for increased preschool funding is obvious. No other public expenditure can reasonably claim to produce higher economic returns. Yet, limited state funding severely reduces the number of children that can be served and the quality of programs. In addition, many states explicitly or implicitly rely on local government and other funding (including parent fees) to cover a significant percentage of costs. This approach seems likely to recreate in preschool programs the inequities that have plagued the public school system more generally for decades.

4. In view of the problems with state quality standards and funding, one remedy could be for the federal government to offer financial incentives to states for investing in quality preschool programs. Such a policy might be implemented by offering to match state funds invested in preschool programs with high standards.

5. At least partly as a result of federal Head Start, special education, and child care policies, there is a lack of coordination in state data-gathering. In most states it is impossible to obtain an unduplicated count of children served or to track the total amount of public funds spent on each child across all levels of government. The federal government should take steps to remedy this problem by providing states with incentives to collect and report accurate data.