THE STATE OF PRESCHOOL

2004 STATE PRESCHOOL YEARBOOK

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Executive Summary

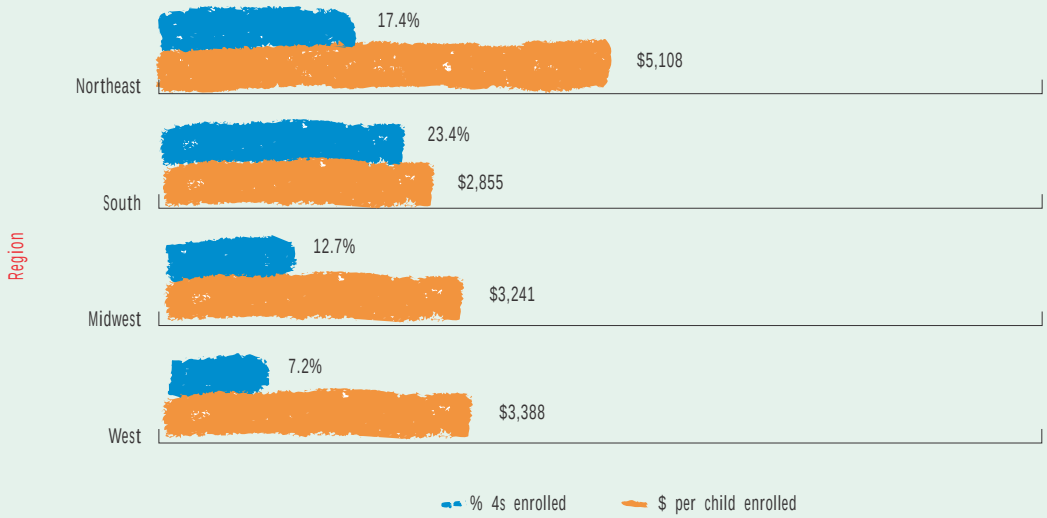
At a time when quality preschool education is widely recognized as an engine of success for our nation's children, the disparity in availability of that engine within and among the states is startling. A difference of a few miles can make the difference between being guaranteed access to high-quality preschool and having no access at all. And, where state-funded programs exist, preschool spending per child in one state can be nearly 10 times as high as in another. Across our nation, high-quality and readily available state-funded preschool programs are the exception rather than the rule. If quality prekindergarten education is "the little engine that could," that engine too often lacks fuel, suffers from substandard design, and, in many places, has no track on which to run.

In developing *The State of Preschool: 2004 State Preschool Yearbook*—our second annual report on state prekindergarten—NIEER found that the number of children attending state-funded preschool programs rose from 693,000 in school year 2001–2002 to 738,000 in 2002–2003. Although this finding is heartening, state-funded preschool programs only reached about 10 percent of the nation's 3- and 4-year-olds. Couple that with the fact that 10 states account for three-quarters of all the children served, and it becomes painfully obvious that some states are much worse than others when it comes to offering preschool education. The state preschool picture across the United States is one of haves and have-nots, with notable regional differences as shown in Figure 1 below. Access to a good education depends on where a child lives and the income of the family. Parents looking for a state where state-funded preschool is universally available will find only two states from which to choose.

Though total enrollment in state-funded programs rose, spending per preschool student fell as funding failed to keep pace with enrollment, particularly in states with budget shortfalls that opted to cut funding to preschool programs. The instability of funding is particularly disturbing—and unwise, given that few other state expenditures are so important to our children's future or return so much on the state's investment. There would be public outcry were such cuts levied on kindergarten or first grade. The education of younger children is no less deserving of protection from the vicissitudes of year-to-year swings in the economy.

Despite the instability of funding, some states did make gains. For example, New Jersey, North Carolina, and Louisiana increased funding substantially. In terms of access, Louisiana, Kansas, and North Carolina made noteworthy gains.

FIGURE 1: ACCESS FOR 4-YEAR-OLDS AND STATE SPENDING PER CHILD ENROLLED BY REGION



States With No Program

Alaska	New Hampshire
Florida	North Dakota
Idaho	Rhode Island
Indiana	South Dakota
Mississippi	Utah
Montana	Wyoming

Major findings from our study can be grouped into three main categories as follows:

Access

- In 2002–2003, 38 states funded one or more state prekindergarten initiatives, serving a total of nearly 740,000 children (about 45,000 more than the previous year). Access was uneven across states, with 10 states accounting for over three-quarters of enrollment.

- State prekindergarten initiatives served more than six times as many 4-year-olds as 3-year-olds in 2002–2003. Twenty states enrolled at least 10 percent of their 4-year-olds in state preschool programs, but only 3 states served at least 10 percent of their 3-year-olds.

- Georgia and Oklahoma continued to be the only states that made prekindergarten universally available to children. Across the United States, only one out of 10 children ages 3 and 4 were participating in state preschool programs, as most states targeted programs to serve economically or otherwise disadvantaged children.

- Twelve states (see box above) do not have a state-funded prekindergarten program.

Quality

- States need to initiate or improve policies that establish stronger quality standards. Only one state, Arkansas, met all 10 of NIEER's quality benchmarks, whereas 20 state initiatives met five or fewer benchmarks.

- State policies regarding quality standards were inconsistent. For example, one state may emphasize comprehensive services and another, teacher qualifications.

- Only 13 state prekindergarten initiatives required teachers to have both a bachelor's degree and specialized training in early childhood education. In addition, only 13 programs required teachers to be paid on a public school salary scale, even though adequate compensation is necessary for attracting and retaining the most qualified and effective teachers.

Resources

- State funding for prekindergarten initiatives totaled $2.54 billion in 2002–2003. Over three-fifths of this funding was from five states—California, Georgia, New Jersey, New York, and Texas. Inadequate funding severely limited access and quality in most states.

- State spending per child enrolled in state-funded preschool ranged from less than $1,000 in Maryland to more than $8,700 in New Jersey. State spending per child averaged about $3,500—less than half the total funding provided per child in federal Head Start or public K–12 education.

- Between 2001–2002 and 2002–2003, total state spending (adjusted for inflation) rose by $90 million, or 4 percent. However, state funding *per child* enrolled decreased by $90, and 21 states decreased total spending.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Vast disparities exist in quality, access, and resources across the states. Some states, such as Arkansas, Illinois, New Jersey, and Oklahoma, have moved far beyond others in at least one of these areas. In contrast, a "dirty dozen" states fail to provide any state program at all. Children in highly rural western states have particularly poor access to preschool education because of a lack of state support. The need for preschool education does not cease when family incomes exceed the income thresholds for targeted state (and federal) programs. Children in these families constitute a large underserved population and deserve access to high-quality preschool programs. There is good reason to believe that our nation would benefit from making such programs more widely available.

Because, after parents, the primary responsibility for education rests with the states, it is the states that should develop policies that seek to address this large need. The costs of these policies are modest relative to overall state budgets. If states were to increase access so that 80 percent of all 4-year-olds were served in state-funded programs (including preschool special education) or Head Start for at least a half day, the full cost would be an additional $15 billion. If states simply paid for the same share of preschool education that they do for K–12, the cost would be only $8.75 billion above current annual spending. This is just a bit more than one penny per dollar of current state spending.

The following policy recommendations are offered as a means of promoting equal access to high-quality education for the nation's 4-year-olds:

- All states should increase funding to improve access and quality. If states included prekindergarten in their public K–12 funding formulas, every state in the nation could provide a good education for 80 percent of its 4-year-olds with a national investment of less than $9 billion in state funds.

- States must improve their standards for prekindergarten education if programs are to produce the large gains in learning and development that the nation seeks. Teachers are required to have a BA and specialized training in preschool education in only 13 state preschool initiatives, whereas all public K–12 teachers must hold 4-year degrees and be state licensed or certified by the end of the 2005–2006 school year. States should apply high standards to all programs, so that no child can slip through the cracks.

- State-funded preschool has vast potential to contribute to economic growth and prosperity. States should make adequate funding for these programs a priority so that prekindergarten initiatives are less reliant on local support. When funding depends on local investment, services for the most disadvantaged children are often the most compromised.

- The federal government should increase support specifically for prekindergarten programs by offering to match state government spending that is accompanied by high standards. Such financial incentives could promote integration of various federal and state programs. Currently, federal programs that support the education of young children are inadequately funded to serve all targeted children.

- States need to create better data systems that provide the critical information policymakers need to make informed decisions about expanding and improving preschool. Most states cannot report unduplicated enrollment counts across early childhood education programs, nor can they track funding across multiple sources. Such shortcomings in information gathering do not exist for children in grades K–12. The federal government should support states in creating or improving data systems for prekindergarten programs.

- Effective change requires careful planning. Improvements in access and quality will most likely have their desired effects if sufficient time, funding, facilities, and personnel are provided to meet changing needs.

This report may be viewed in its entirety on the NIEER website at www.nieer.org.

TABLE 1: STATE RANKINGS AND QUALITY CHECKLIST SUMS

State	Access for 4-Year-Olds Rank	Access for 3-Year-Olds Rank	Resources Rank	Quality Standards Checklist Sum (Maximum of 10)
Alabama	35	none served	14	8
Alaska	no program	no program	no program	no program
Arizona	29	none served	28	4
Arkansas	26	12	21	10
California	21	13	17	4
Colorado	15	18	25	4
Connecticut	18	9	4	4
Delaware	22	none served	5	7
Florida	no program	no program	no program	no program
Georgia	2	none served	12	6
Hawaii	25	none served	15	5
Idaho	no program	no program	no program	no program
Illinois	10	5	23	9
Indiana	no program	no program	no program	no program
Iowa	30	20	22	5
Kansas	14	none served	34	4
Kentucky	7	3	27	7
Louisiana	12	none served	10	7.5
Maine	16	none served	32	3
Maryland	8	14	37	8
Massachusetts	17	2	9	6
Michigan	13	none served	19	5
Minnesota	36	19	2	8
Mississippi	no program	no program	no program	no program
Missouri	31	11	30	4
Montana	no program	no program	no program	no program
Nebraska	33	17	31	6
Nevada	38	24	13	4
New Hampshire	no program	no program	no program	no program
New Jersey	11	1	1	8.3
New Mexico	34	23	33	4
New York	5	25	16	5.6
North Carolina	28	none served	6	9
North Dakota	no program	no program	no program	no program
Ohio	20	7	8	6.5
Oklahoma	1	none served	29	8
Oregon	27	10	3	6
Pennsylvania	37	none served	not available	2
Rhode Island	no program	no program	no program	no program
South Carolina	4	15	35	8
South Dakota	no program	no program	no program	no program
Tennessee	32	21	7	8
Texas	3	8	26	3
Utah	no program	no program	no program	no program
Vermont	19	6	36	6
Virginia	24	none served	20	5
Washington	23	16	11	6
West Virginia	6	4	18	5
Wisconsin	9	22	24	3.3
Wyoming	no program	no program	no program	no program

TABLE 2: CHANGES IN ENROLLMENT AND FUNDING FOR STATE PRESCHOOL PROGRAMS FROM 2001–2002 TO 2002–2003

STATE	CHANGE IN ENROLLMENT FOR 4-YEAR-OLDS		CHANGE IN ENROLLMENT FOR 3-YEAR-OLDS		CHANGE IN TOTAL STATE SPENDING		CHANGE IN STATE SPENDING PER CHILD ENROLLED	
	number enrolled	percent of state population	number enrolled	percent of state population	inflation-adjusted dollars	percent	inflation-adjusted dollars	percent
Alabama	504	0.90%	0	none served	$1,724,030	60.3%	-$146	-3.9%
Alaska	0	no program	0	no program	$0	0.0%	$0	0.0%
Arizona	-185	-0.53%	0	none served	-$106,617	-1.1%	$80	3.4%
Arkansas	14	0.07%	-94	-0.24%	$2,632,689	39.8%	$908	43.4%
California	-1,476	0.17%	-272	0.01%	$2,484,514	1.0%	$142	4.5%
Colorado	139	-0.17%	176	0.22%	$3,503,160	12.6%	$99	3.6%
Connecticut	392	0.96%	25	0.06%	-$5,599,846	-13.6%	-$1,323	-19.1%
Delaware	0	0.53%	0	none served	$44,154	1.0%	$53	1.0%
Florida	0	no program	0	no program	$0	0.0%	$0	0.0%
Georgia	2,287	0.86%	0	none served	$8,009,640	3.3%	-$12	-0.3%
Hawaii	-315	-1.51%	0	none served	-$689,341	-17.5%	$325	10.3%
Idaho	0	no program	0	no program	$0	0.0%	$0	0.0%
Illinois	3,366	2.88%	-382	-0.08%	-$6,432,584	-3.8%	-$285	-8.9%
Indiana	0	no program	0	no program	$0	0.0%	$0	0.0%
Iowa	89	0.46%	-33	-0.03%	-$985,432	-12.5%	-$467	-13.8%
Kansas	3,203	8.86%	0	none served	$4,713,723	101.6%	-$359	-17.3%
Kentucky	858	3.83%	1,343	3.18%	-$826,040	-1.7%	-$377	-13.2%
Louisiana	5,449	9.07%	0	none served	$18,769,208	58.5%	-$346	-8.1%
Maine	0	1.14%	0	none served	$432,240	19.1%	$300	19.1%
Maryland	0	0.84%	0	0.02%	-$593,285	-3.0%	-$29	-3.0%
Massachusetts	-1,405	-1.08%	-1,405	-1.22%	-$26,169,120	-26.3%	-$871	-17.5%
Michigan	-765	0.11%	0	none served	-$2,463,380	-2.8%	$3	0.1%
Minnesota	74	0.19%	47	0.10%	-$1,320,950	-7.0%	-$544	-7.5%
Mississippi	0	no program	0	no program	$0	0.0%	$0	0.0%
Missouri	-512	-0.55%	-832	-1.10%	-$4,717,012	-30.5%	-$283	-11.4%
Montana	0	no program	0	no program	$0	0.0%	$0	0.0%
Nebraska	227	1.04%	217	0.94%	$759,960	56.7%	-$883	-31.6%
Nevada	171	0.47%	107	0.31%	$1,686,409	128.4%	$645	21.2%
New Hampshire	0	no program	0	no program	$0	0.0%	$0	0.0%
New Jersey	3,486	3.70%	3,526	3.33%	$109,695,251	40.3%	$1,320	17.8%
New Mexico	-842	-3.10%	-308	-1.21%	-$111,240	-6.9%	$959	119.1%
New York	7,723	5.19%	-4,405	-1.74%	-$15,633,880	-6.0%	-$386	-10.3%
North Carolina	5,031	4.46%	0	none served	$23,517,523	351.0%	-$584	-10.8%
North Dakota	0	no program	0	no program	$0	0.0%	$0	0.0%
Ohio	442	0.60%	-498	-0.27%	-$15,724,876	-12.9%	-$656	-12.7%
Oklahoma	2,181	3.79%	0	none served	$1,675,204	2.6%	-$135	-5.4%
Oregon	51	0.09%	251	0.55%	-$2,350,080	-8.3%	-$1,168	-15.2%
Pennsylvania	59	0.15%	0	none served	not available	not available	not available	not available
Rhode Island	0	no program	0	no program	$0	0.0%	$0	0.0%
South Carolina	674	2.90%	605	1.21%	-$1,786,020	-7.3%	-$216	-14.2%
South Dakota	0	no program	0	no program	$0	0.0%	$0	0.0%
Tennessee	642	0.89%	-42	-0.07%	-$462,000	-3.0%	-$1,162	-20.3%
Texas	15,491	3.79%	-6,079	-2.04%	-$2,560,688	-0.6%	-$207	-7.0%
Utah	0	no program	0	no program	$0	0.0%	$0	0.0%
Vermont	24	1.18%	87	1.72%	-$93,719	-6.6%	-$224	-15.8%
Virginia	8	-0.01%	0	none served	-$1,160,938	-6.0%	-$202	-6.1%
Washington	238	0.30%	69	0.09%	$881,975	3.4%	-$41	-1.0%
West Virginia	749	4.69%	125	0.79%	$3,031,424	13.4%	$20	0.6%
Wisconsin	3,326	5.65%	-18	-0.01%	-$1,037,690	-2.0%	-$745	-20.5%
Wyoming	0	no program	0	no program	$0	0.0%	$0	0.0%
50 States	**51,398**	**1.7%**	**-7,790**	**-0.2%**	**$92,736,368**	**3.8%**	**-$90**	**-2.5%**

The State of Preschool

The *2004 State Preschool Yearbook* is the second in this annual NIEER series evaluating state-funded preschool programs. It describes state-funded prekindergarten in the 2002–2003 school year. Last year's *State Preschool Yearbook* focused on programs for the 2001–2002 school year and established a baseline against which we may now measure progress. Tracking these trends is essential, since the role states play in preschool education will increasingly affect how successfully America's next generation will compete in the knowledge economy.[1]

As this year's report demonstrates, the states vary greatly in how they pick up where federal and private programs leave off. There is a wide gap between states like Oklahoma and Georgia, which make programs available for all 4-year-olds, and states like Indiana, South Dakota, and Utah, which provide no state programs.[2] In the middle are states like Colorado, Iowa, and Washington with programs developed for at-risk and economically disadvantaged populations.[3]

The *State Preschool Yearbooks* have been developed by NIEER to serve as a resource for everyone from policymakers to advocates to researchers. Because state and local governments bear great responsibility for education in the United States, evaluating the approaches taken by, and progress of, the states is essential. From the start, NIEER's *Yearbook* initiative has contributed to a robust dialogue about prekindergarten and the growing role of states in program development. We believe that this dialogue enables policymakers to make more informed decisions about state-funded preschool.

The *Yearbook* data were collected from an intensive survey of the states. Information is presented regarding three key characteristics of prekindergarten programs: access, quality standards, and resources.

- *Access:* Access remains far from universal across the country. It varies not only between states, but also within them. The ability to attend preschool depends greatly on family income and where families live. We use enrollment of children at the ages of 3 and 4 to measure the extent to which states offer 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 or mediocre. High 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 a prekindergarten program is a key determinant of program quality and a measure of state support for access to a good preschool education.

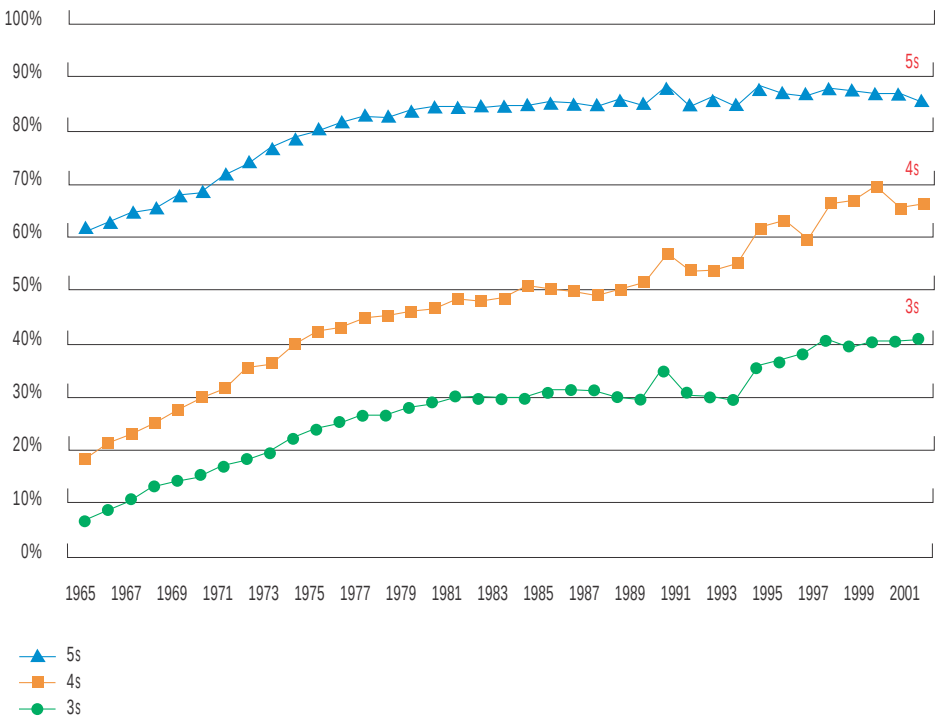
This *Yearbook* is organized into three major sections. The first section provides background information on preschool education in the United States, a description of our data collection and analytical methods, a national summary of our findings, and national policy recommendations. The second section 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 profiles describe unique features of a state's program and recent changes that can be expected to alter the future *Yearbook* statistics on a program. Unlike last year's *Yearbook*, the states without state-funded programs also have their own profile pages. The last section contains the appendices, including tables that report the complete survey data obtained from every state, as well as Head Start and child care data.

PRESCHOOL IN THE UNITED STATES: AN OVERVIEW

Preschool participation in the United States has with rare exception moved steadily upward throughout the last four decades, as shown in Figure 2. In 1965, about 5 percent of 3-year-olds and 17 percent of 4-year-olds attended some form of preschool. By 2002, about 40 percent of 3-year-olds and 66 percent of 4-year-olds attended preschool.[4] Much of the growth in preschool education has occurred beyond the purview of state-provided public education. In sharp contrast to elementary school and even kindergarten, early childhood education remains primarily outside the public schools. Prekindergarten education takes place in private programs, federal Head Start, and public schools.

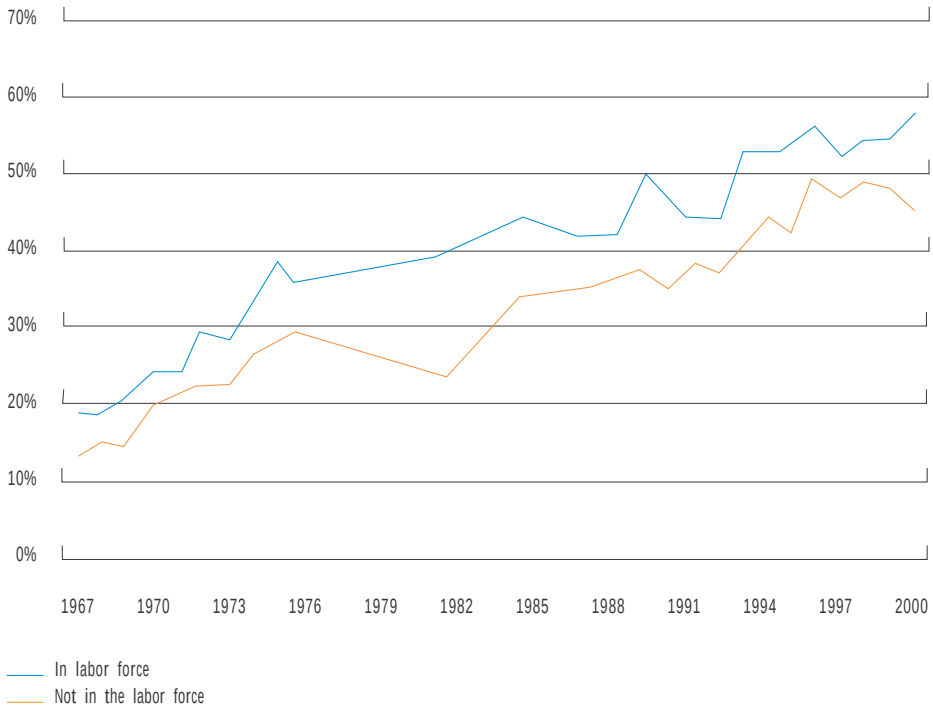
While availability has grown, access to affordable, high-quality preschool education is highly unequal across the country. Despite the best efforts of an array of federal and state programs targeting the disadvantaged, less than half of children in poverty attend preschool at ages 3 and 4.[5] Prekindergarten is also less available to a potentially larger group of families whose incomes hover just above the eligibility requirements for targeted programs but who cannot afford private preschool. These families with modest incomes find it difficult to afford a good private preschool, and many of their children miss out on this opportunity.[6]

FIGURE 2: KINDERGARTEN AND PRESCHOOL PARTICIPATION BY AGE 1965–2001



Source: October Current Population Survey (C.P.S.) 1965–2002.
Note: Some children enter Kindergarten at age 6 and are not included here.

FIGURE 3: PRESCHOOL PARTICIPATION BY MATERNAL EMPLOYMENT 1967–2001

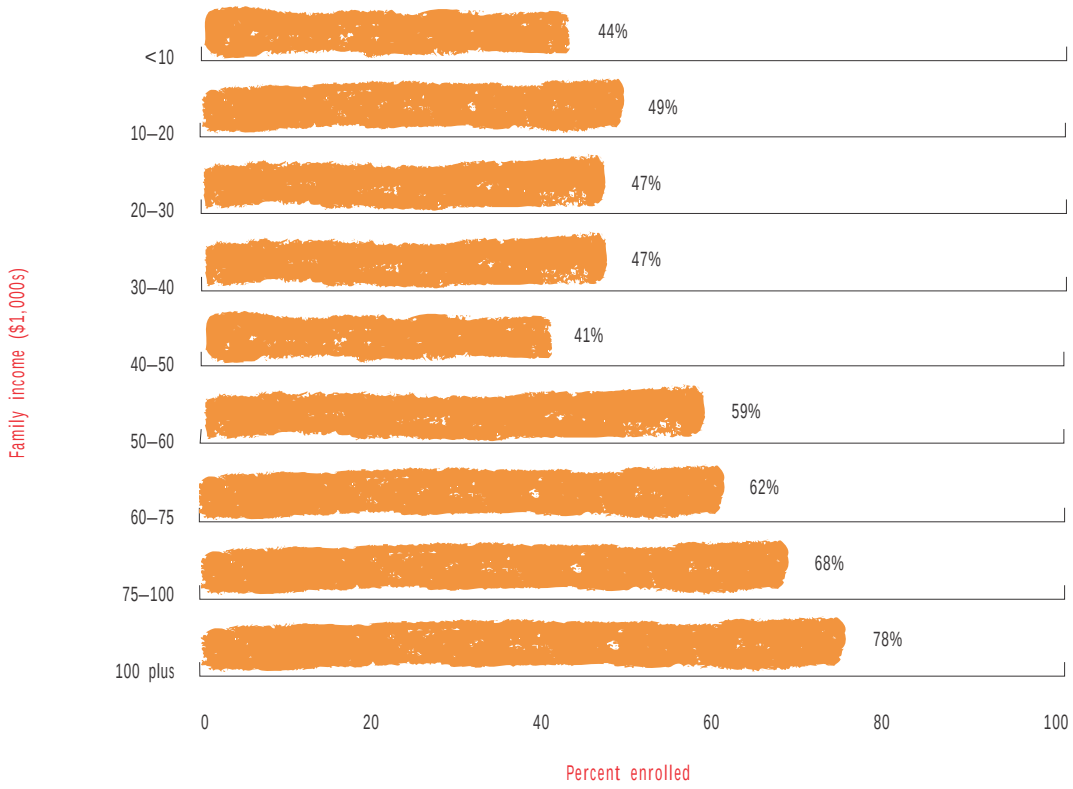


Source: Current Population Survey (C.P.S.) 1967–2002
Data for the following years have been interpolated: 1977–1981, 1983, 1984 and 1986.

What Drives Preschool Participation

Contrary to the oft-held view that working mothers—and a concomitant need for child care—drive the demand for preschool, research demonstrates that the prevailing motivator for increased preschool attendance is parents' desire to better educate their children.[7] As shown in Figure 3, the rate of participation in preschool by children of mothers not in the labor force, while somewhat lower than the rate for children of employed mothers, has grown at virtually the same rate since the late 1960s. Although, child care demand plays some role in increased preschool participation, it appears to be of decidedly secondary importance.

FIGURE 4: PRESCHOOL PARTICIPATION BY FAMILY INCOME 2001



Despite a variety of government programs, family income remains a prime determinant of preschool participation. Because of state prekindergarten and Head Start, rates of preschool participation vary relatively little over the bottom end of the income scale, as shown in Figure 4.[8] However, there is a significant dip at the $40,000 to $50,000 income level. Preschool education opportunities appear to be least available to children in families with moderate incomes. Participation rises with income thereafter, but most Americans have less access to preschool than the wealthiest.

Mothers' education is also highly predictive of preschool participation. Among 4-year-olds whose mothers have a 4-year college degree, 76 percent attend preschool. Sixty-five percent of 4-year-olds whose mothers graduated from high school attend preschool and 49 percent of those whose mothers dropped out of high school attend preschool. Thus, despite the public programs we have today, the less education a child's parents have (and thus the more the child might gain from preschool attendance), the less likely it is that a child will attend prekindergarten.

Private Preschool Programs

Preschool education has expanded in both the private and public sectors, although at different rates. In 1990, private programs served 64 percent of the children attending preschool programs. During the 1990s, public programs grew more rapidly and by 1995 only 52 percent of the children attending preschool were in private programs. Private programs maintained a small edge in total preschool enrollment thereafter.[9] Private preschool programs are operated by for-profit organizations, independent nonprofit organizations, or religious organizations. They 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.[10]

Head Start

Since the program was launched in 1965, federal Head Start has provided many low-income families with free education for their young children and comprehensive services. 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. During the 2003 fiscal year, Head Start reported funding more than 900,000 children, nearly 800,000 of whom were ages 3 and 4.[11] Despite this growth, Head Start does not reach all of the eligible preschoolers. Furthermore, 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 2-year college degree. Head Start teachers still earn about half the average public school teacher's salary. Without fully qualified teachers (those with BA degrees and specialization in early childhood education) who are adequately paid, Head Start will not be nearly as effective as it could be.[12]

State Prekindergarten Programs

With notable exceptions, the states have been slow to recognize the revolution in preschool education and to address a new reality with policies that provide equal access to effective programs. Most states with preschool programs followed the federal government's lead and targeted children with the greatest needs. Typically, states support two types of preschool programs—one providing preschool special education for children with disabilities and the other providing preschool education to children in low-income families or children otherwise identified as being at high risk for school failure. States began to create entitlements to a free education for 3- to 5-year-old children with disabilities in the 1970s. Illinois, Michigan and Wisconsin were the first states to do so in 1973–1974.[13] Federal legislation passed 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 law was highly effective: the 24 states already providing such services were joined by 25 more in 1991–1992, and the one remaining state mandated services in 1992–1993. Enrollment rose steadily over the years and by 2002 reached 382,290 in the 50 states (387,293 in states, U.S. territories and military bases), or 5 percent of all 3- and 4-year-olds. Most were served in public schools, but some were served in Head Start or private programs.

Movement Toward Preschool for All

Growth accelerated in preschool programs for at-risk children through the 1990s. Following a logical progression, some states began to expand eligibility from at-risk groups to all children. Georgia created the first statewide universal prekindergarten (UPK) program in 1995. Oklahoma, New York, and West Virginia followed suit, though New York has not fully funded its program and West Virginia plans for a phase-in by 2012. In 2002, Florida voters approved a constitutional amendment entitling all 4-year-olds to a free, high-quality prekindergarten education by 2005. That date looms large in the wake of Florida's failed attempt at universal prekindergarten legislation in the first half of 2004. Also active is Massachusetts, which made its first move toward universal preschool in 2004 by passing legislation to create the Office of Early Education and Care charged with developing a state-funded preschool program for all children.

During the 2002–2003 program year, as during the 2001–2002 program year, states were using a wide variety of models to provide prekindergarten services to 3- and 4-year-olds. This *Yearbook* compares the different models in use, highlights the strengths and weaknesses of those models, and identifies the opportunities and challenges that lie ahead for state prekindergarten initiatives.

Prekindergarten Data Systems

The data in this report do not provide the complete picture of all publicly funded early childhood programs. Although detailed data about state prekindergarten, Head Start, and preschool special education programs are included, there are many additional types of resources that states use in support of early childhood education. The *Yearbook* provides limited details about these other resources because most states do not have adequate data systems to track this information.

Louisiana is an example of a state that gathers more complete data about a range of programs serving 4-year-olds, by local parish and statewide. The state also compares the number of children served by state, federal, and local programs to the estimated number of at-risk children.

Despite this promising effort, most other states lack data systems that allow children and funds to be tracked across programs.

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

2 Barnett, W.S., Robin, K., Hustedt, J., & Schulman, K. (2003). *The state of preschool: 2003 state preschool yearbook*. New Brunswick, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research, Rutgers University.

3 Barnett et al. (2003).

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HIGH-QUALITY PRESCHOOL PROGRAMS: WHAT'S IN IT FOR THE STATES?

In a world shaped by global competition, preschool programs play an increasingly vital role in the education of our children—and, ultimately, the competitiveness of our states and nation. More parents and policymakers recognize the potential for educating children during the period of rapid growth and development that occurs before age 5. It is then that children can improve the foundational capabilities in ways that can dramatically change their lives for the better.

Numerous studies demonstrate that high-quality preschool programs produce large gains in school readiness for economically disadvantaged children. That translates to improved achievement and behavior in school. Long-term follow-up studies show that children from disadvantaged families who attend high-quality preschool programs acquire more education, earn more money, and become more responsible citizens than children from similar families who do not attend high-quality preschool.[1]

A growing body of evidence shows that preschool education has similar benefits for children who are not poor, though those benefits may not be as pronounced.[2] Not to be underestimated are societal gains that go beyond those realized by children in their individual lives. Such gains accrue to society in the form of a better-educated, more productive workforce, enhancing the ability of states and communities to sustain economic growth and compete with the world's best. Other benefits include stronger families and communities.

The educational problems addressed by high-quality preschool programs are experienced by many children who are not economically disadvantaged. In Maryland, for example, only 52 percent of all children entering kindergarten in 2002 were deemed "fully ready."[3] In 2003, 37 percent of our nation's fourth graders scored below "basic" on the reading portion of the National Assessment of Educational Progress. The problems of grade repetition and high school dropout are remarkably high even in middle-income families. The expansion of prekindergarten to serve children who are less disadvantaged may still produce savings at the state level, as costs associated with additional educational services are reduced.

As the case for state investment in quality prekindergarten programs grows more compelling, the fact remains that few programs exist of the quality necessary to bring about the potential benefits. Public financial support has been limited. Budget constraints led some states to decrease their financial commitments to quality prekindergarten between 2001–2002 and 2002–2003. This comes at a time when parents feel squeezed by the high costs of quality programs.

"We can, and should, be creating a preschool system that would be good enough for everyone. Public preschools should be built the same way we constructed our highway system: the same road available to all Americans, rich and poor."

John Merrow, editorial in *USA Today*

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. Most existing public programs are targeted in an attempt to reach the most disadvantaged children. While those programs have shown positive results among populations served, there is an even larger population of under-served children from families who are either missed by targeted programs or whose family income is just above eligibility requirements. Neither targeted programs nor most public school systems serve this segment of the population when it comes to preschool education.[4]

Parents must deal with the reality that high-quality preschool education is expensive. Americans pay a higher percentage of costs for preschool programs than for higher education.[5] In fact, parents in the United States bear more of the cost in comparison to their counterparts in other developed countries.[6]

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 of respondents 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 high standards for learning and teacher qualifications.

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 have found that preschool programs for disadvantaged children 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. Researchers at the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis urge states to invest in early education programs as an economic development strategy based on the exceptionally high payoff. In this economic research, the Federal Reserve researchers 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.

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METHODOLOGY

The data in this report were collected primarily through surveys of state prekindergarten administrators and focus on the 2002–2003 program year. During the spring of 2004, surveys were sent to administrators of the state-funded preschool initiatives covered in NIEER's previous *State Preschool Yearbook*. We also checked with other sources to determine whether any new initiatives had been started since the 2001–2002 program year or whether we had omitted any initiatives in that report. All initiatives included in the current report meet the criteria outlined in the survey, which define state prekindergarten initiatives as initiatives that are funded and directed by the state to support group learning experiences for preschool-age children, usually ages 3 and 4. For more information about these criteria, please see "What Qualifies As A State Preschool Program" on page 23.

This report covers most of the same initiatives as last year, with a few exceptions. Three initiatives in Louisiana (LA4, Starting Points, and the Nonpublic Schools Early Childhood Development Program) that were covered with only brief descriptions last year are given full data pages for 2002–2003. Minnesota's School Readiness Program, which was included last year, is not included this year. After a closer look at that program, we determined it did not meet our definition of a state prekindergarten initiative because it supported a range of services rather than primarily prekindergarten classes and because the state did not collect sufficient data to determine how much funding was used for prekindergarten classes.

Our survey included yes/no questions, questions that asked state administrators to select which of several choices best described their program, and open-ended questions. Where data were already available from the previous *State Preschool Yearbook* or from other sources, we filled in the responses for the states and simply asked them to verify that the information remained valid during the 2002–2003 program year.

The survey included questions on the topics of access, eligibility requirements, access for children with special needs, program standards, personnel, resources, monitoring and evaluation, state-level scholarships for teachers, state-level staffing, and important changes to the program since the previous survey. Most of the questions addressed the same issues as last year's survey. However, the wording of many questions—such as those on eligibility criteria, operating schedules, and comprehensive services—was revised to make them clearer and gather more precise data. Several new questions were added as well, requesting information on the use of other funding sources to serve children in the state-financed prekindergarten program, wrap-around care, monitoring and evaluation, and recent changes. Due to alterations in the survey, the data gathered this year are not completely comparable to data in last year's report, although largely similar information was collected in both years.

After completed surveys were returned, we followed up with state administrators to clarify any questions about their responses. Later, we contacted them again to provide an opportunity to verify the data we had gathered. At that time, we asked them to review tables containing all of the data for their program, as well as a written description of their program. We also requested data on funding and enrollment for 2003–2004 if available. Administrators' survey responses, including answers for items not covered in the state profiles, are shown in Appendix A.

Although most of the data in this report were collected through the survey, there are a few exceptions. For the data on curriculum standards, we referred to a 2003 analysis conducted for NIEER by Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL). McREL reviewed state documents to assess prekindergarten standards in each state. The analysis examined only standards focused on prekindergarten. If state prekindergarten standards were incorporated into a broader age range (such as prekindergarten through third grade), such standards were considered to be too general to guide instruction and were therefore excluded from the McREL analysis.

The Head Start Bureau in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services was the source of data on federal Head Start spending and enrollment for 2002–2003 as well as enrollment data used to calculate spending per 3- and 4-year-old in states that fund Head Start programs profiled in this report. Additional Head Start data are provided in Appendix B.

The U.S. Office of Special Education Programs was the source of data on special education enrollment in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Preschool Grants program (IDEA Section 619 of Part B) in 2002–2003. These data are presented in Appendix C.

Photo: RC Peters

Total federal, state, and local expenditures on K–12 education in 2002–2003 were calculated by NIEER based on data from the National Education Association's "Rankings and Estimates: Rankings of the States 2003 and Estimates of School Statistics 2004." Total K–12 spending for each state includes current operating expenditures as well as annual capital outlays and interest on school debt. This provides a more complete picture of the full cost of K–12 than including only current operating expenditures, which underestimate the full cost. Our estimate of K–12 expenditures is also more comparable to total prekindergarten spending per child because this funding generally must cover all costs, including facilities. Total spending per child in K–12 was calculated for each state by dividing expenditures by fall 2002 enrollment. We estimated the breakdown of total spending by source, using percentages of revenue receipts from federal, state and local sources in each state.

Populations of 3- and 4-year-olds in each state were obtained from the Census Bureau's Population Estimates Data Sets. Estimates of populations at each single year of age as of July 2002 were used to calculate the percentages of 3- and 4-year-olds enrolled in state preschool, federal Head Start, and special education. The Census Bureau data were also used to calculate spending per 3- and 4-year-old in each state. These figures were calculated using enrollment data broken down by age. When a state did not report separate enrollment numbers for 3-year-olds and 4-year-olds, the age breakdown was estimated using the proportion of children at each age in states that served both 3- and 4-year-olds and did provide data by age. For estimating separate funding amounts for 3-year-olds and for 4-year-olds, it was assumed that spending was proportional to enrollment—so that, for example, if 50 percent of children enrolled were age 3, 50 percent of spending was assumed to be directed to children age 3.

States are given rankings in three areas: the percentage of 4-year-olds enrolled in state prekindergarten initiatives (Access Ranking—4s), the percentage of 3-year-olds enrolled (Access Ranking—3s), and state spending per child enrolled (Resources Ranking). The measures of access for 3- and 4-year-olds were calculated, as described above, using state data on enrollment in the prekindergarten initiatives and Census population data. The measure of resources was calculated by dividing state prekindergarten funding (including TANF funding directed toward the state preschool initiative) by enrollment. All states that provided data are ranked, starting with "1" for the state with the greatest percentage of its children enrolled in the state prekindergarten program or the most spent per participant. States that did not serve children at age 3 receive notations of "none served" on the ranking of access for 3-year-olds. The 12 states that do not fund a preschool initiative are omitted from all rankings, and instead receive notations of "no program" on their state profile pages. Finally, Pennsylvania is omitted from the ranking on spending per child, as the state was unable to provide a funding amount specific to prekindergarten.

District of Columbia

This report also includes data on the District of Columbia's prekindergarten initiative. In a number of ways, the District of Columbia's prekindergarten efforts are more comparable to those of other cities—many of which also have their own extensive prekindergarten programs that are locally initiated, funded, and controlled—than to prekindergarten efforts in the 50 states. Although other local prekindergarten programs are not addressed in this report, the District's program is covered, since the District has a unique status as a city without a state. Yet the District's program is not ranked with the states on access or resources, and the program is only covered in the profile pages; no data for the program are included in Appendix A.

WHAT QUALIFIES AS A STATE PRESCHOOL PROGRAM?

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

- The initiative is funded, controlled, and directed by the state.
- The initiative serves children of prekindergarten age, usually 3 and/or 4. Although initiatives in some states serve broader age ranges, programs that serve infants and toddlers only (such as Early Head Start) are excluded.
- Early childhood education is the primary focus of the initiative. This does not exclude programs that offer parent education, but does exclude programs in which the main focus is parent education.
- The initiative offers a group learning experience to children at least two days per week.
- State-funded preschool education initiatives must be distinct from the state's system for subsidized child care. However, preschool initiatives may be coordinated with the subsidy system for child care.
- The initiative is not primarily designed to serve children with disabilities.
- State supplements to the federal Head Start program are considered to constitute *de facto* state preschool programs if they substantially expand the number of children served. State supplements to fund quality improvements, extended days, or other program enhancements and that expand enrollment minimally are not considered equivalent to a state preschool program.

While ideally this report would identify all prekindergarten funding streams at the state, local, and federal levels, there are a number of limitations on the data that make this extremely difficult to do. For example, prekindergarten is only one of several types of educational programs toward which local districts can target their Title I funds. Many states do not track how Title I funds are used at the local level and the extent to which they are spent on prekindergarten. Another challenge involves tracking total state spending for child care, using a variety of available sources, such as CCDF dollars, TANF funds, and any state funding above and beyond the required matches for federal funds. Also, although some of these child care funds may be used for high-quality, educational, center-based programs for 3- and 4-year-olds that closely resemble programs supported by state prekindergarten initiatives, it is nearly impossible to determine what proportion of the funds are spent this way.

Age Groupings Used in this Report

Children considered to be *3 years old* during the 2002–2003 school year are those who were eligible to enter kindergarten two years later, during the 2004–2005 school year. Children considered to be *4 years old* during the 2002–2003 school year were eligible to enter kindergarten one year later, during the 2003–2004 school year. Children considered to be *5 years old* during the 2002–2003 school year were already eligible for kindergarten at the beginning of the 2002–2003 program year.

State-Funded Prekindergarten: 2002-2003 Findings

Viewing the access, quality standards and resources findings of this *Yearbook* from a national perspective provides an overall summary of the status of state prekindergarten initiatives during the 2002–2003 program year. At the same time, it paints a picture of vastly different programs across the states, with varying levels of access, quality and funding provided for the nation's children.

Access to state prekindergarten was measured by the percentages of 3- and 4-year-olds enrolled in state programs. The total number of 3- and 4-year-old children served by 44 state prekindergarten programs in 2002–2003 rose to 711,000, up from the 667,000 children served in the previous year. Like the previous year, the children served were predominately 4-year-olds, with 616,618 or 16.1 percent of the nation's 4s enrolled (Figure 5). There was tremendous variation in the enrollment figures of the individual states. Again in 2002–2003, two states, Georgia and Oklahoma, enrolled more than half their 4-year-olds (Figure 9, p. 29). In 2002–2003, 10 additional states enrolled more than 20 percent of their 4s, eight states enrolled 10–20 percent; and 18 states enrolled less than 10 percent. Twelve states funded no state prekindergarten program at all. Although most state prekindergarten programs primarily serve 4-year-olds, some states are moving toward providing prekindergarten for 3-year-olds as well. In 2002–2003, Massachusetts, New Jersey and Kentucky enrolled more than 10 percent of their 3s.

Louisiana experienced the largest increase in the percentage of 4-year-olds enrolled, with an additional 9 percent of its 4-year-olds enrolled in state preschool. Texas, New Jersey, Louisiana and North Carolina all increased enrollment by more than 5,000 children compared to the previous year. The number of children served by the prekindergarten programs in both Kansas and North Carolina more than doubled. However, large decreases in access occurred in some states. For example, enrollment declined by more than 10 percent in both Massachusetts and Missouri, resulting in a combined 3,500 fewer children served in those states.

FIGURE 5: STATE PRE-K, HEAD START, AND SPECIAL EDUCATION ENROLLMENT AS A PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL U.S. POPULATION

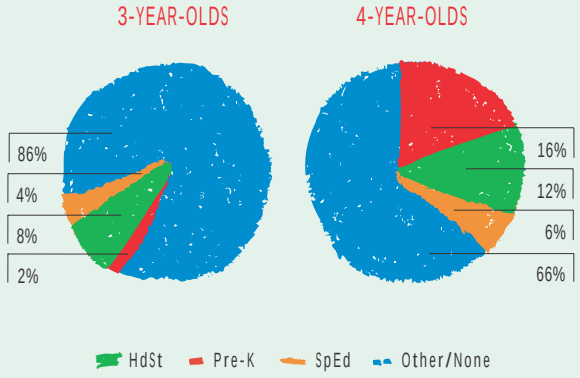
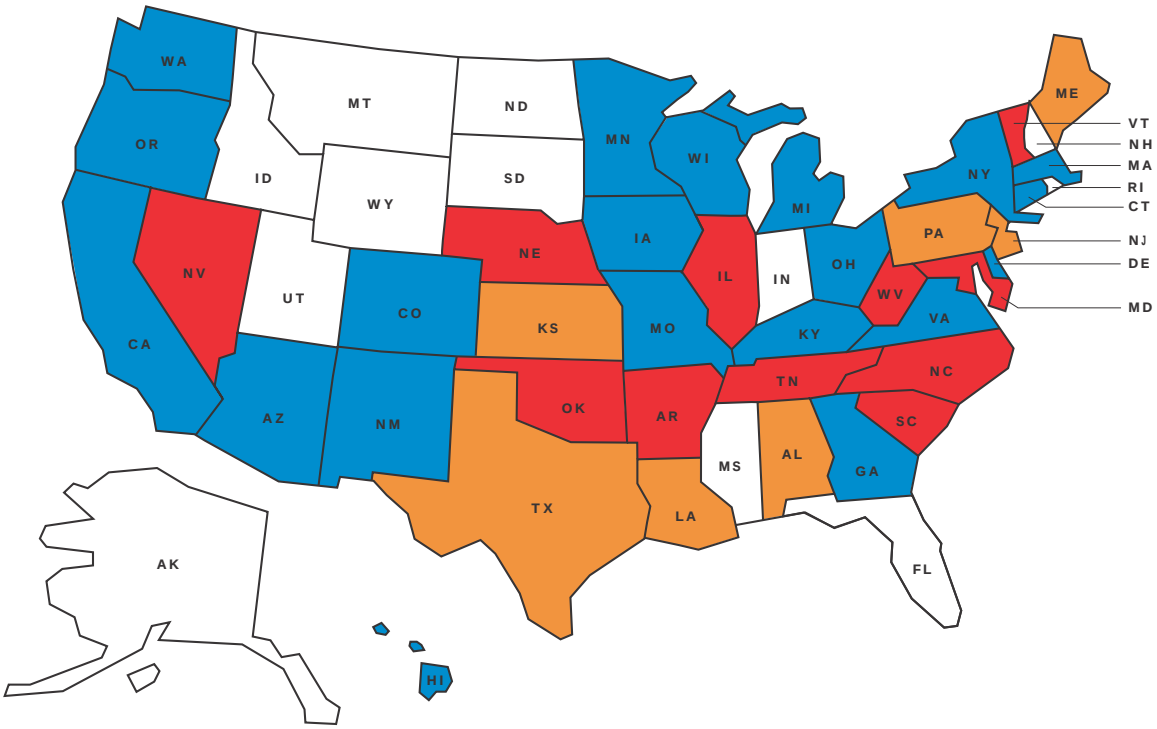


FIGURE 6: TEACHER TRAINING REQUIREMENTS*



* In states with multiple prekindergarten initiatives, the lowest permissable training requirement is shown.

The quality of state preschool programs depends on the standards required by each state. In this report, 10 benchmarks—based on scientific evidence—are compared to quality standards set by policy in each state. Table 4 on page 44 lists the benchmarks for quality met by each state. Only Arkansas met all 10 benchmarks. Three state programs met 9 out of 10 benchmarks: Illinois, New Jersey's Abbott program, and North Carolina. Twelve out of 44 programs met less than half of the benchmarks. Many states fell short on teacher qualifications (Figure 6). For example, only 23 of the 44 programs required their preschool teachers to have 4-year college degrees, just as they do for kindergarten teachers. Furthermore, only 13 programs required a teacher with a bachelor's degree and specialized training in early childhood education. The total number of state programs that meet each benchmark, as charted in Figure 7 (p. 27), demonstrates that most states lack adequate quality standards for their children.

States spent $2.54 billion in 2002–2003, slightly more than the $2.37 billion spent in the prior year. Again, dramatic variations can be seen in resources made available by states—with five states accounting for more than 60 percent of total state spending. State spending per child was calculated by dividing total state spending by the number of children enrolled in the state preschool initiative. When state spending per child is taken into account (Table 5, p. 51), it is clear that the levels of resources made available by most states are not sufficient to provide a high-quality program. Nationally speaking, the amount spent per child enrolled in state-funded preschool averaged $3,451—well short of the national average of $9,173 spent per child for K–12 education (Figure 8). Out of 38 states, only one spent at least as much per child as the federal Head Start program. Sometimes the funding stream for state-supported preschools is supplemented by local funding. However, if preschool programs were funded in the same way that states fund K–12 education, local funding would reliably supplement state funding for preschool. The hodgepodge of funding mechanisms currently in use causes doubts about states' support for quality programs and equitable access to the high-quality programs that do exist.

The biggest increases in expenditures were in New Jersey, North Carolina and Louisiana. New Jersey increased spending by more than $100 million between 2001–2002 and 2002–2003, accounting for the majority of the nominal dollar difference in national spending on preschool. The biggest declines in total state funding were in Massachusetts, New York and Ohio, each of which reduced spending for state preschool by more than $15 million during 2002–2003, compared to adjusted spending for 2001–2002.

The access, quality standards and resources sections that follow discuss these issues in much greater detail.

Photo: RC Peters

FIGURE 7: NUMBER OF STATE PRE-K INITIATIVES MEETING BENCHMARKS

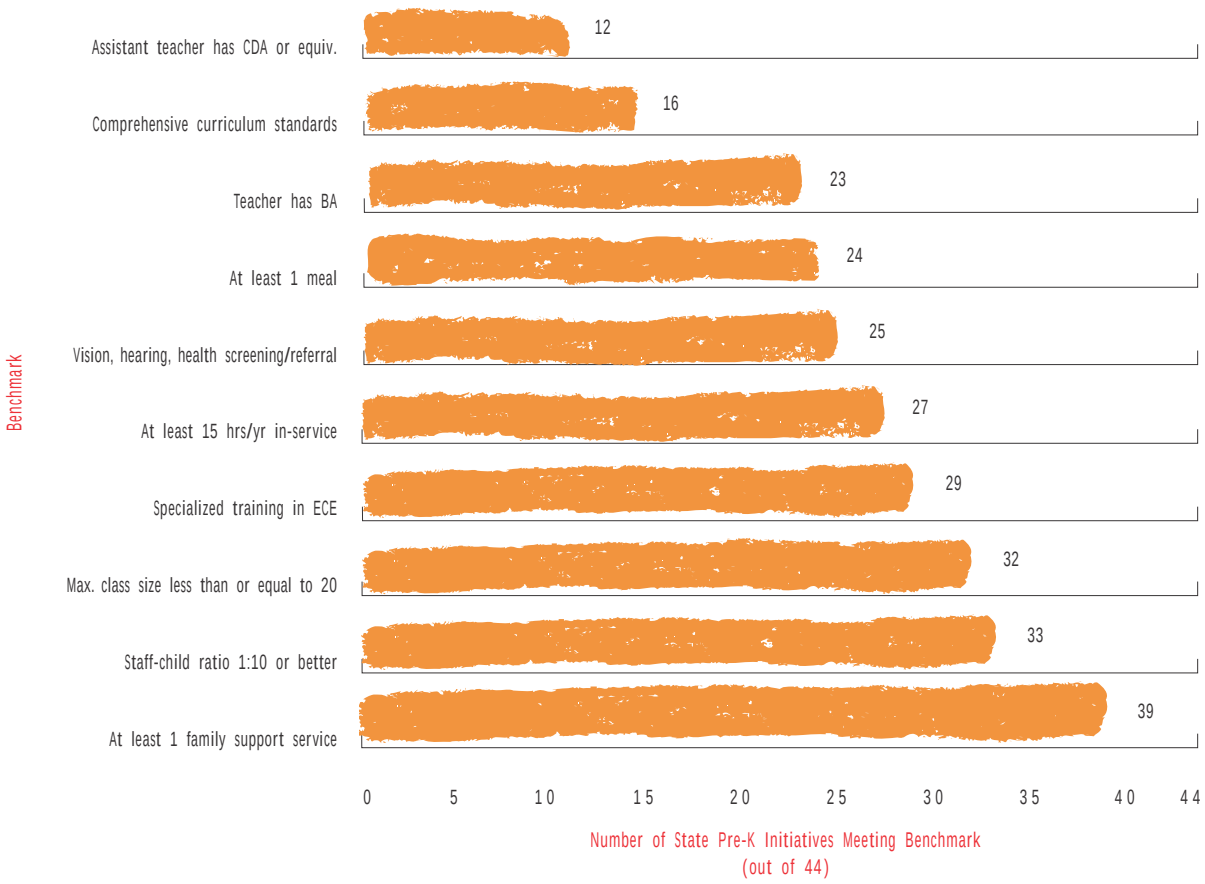
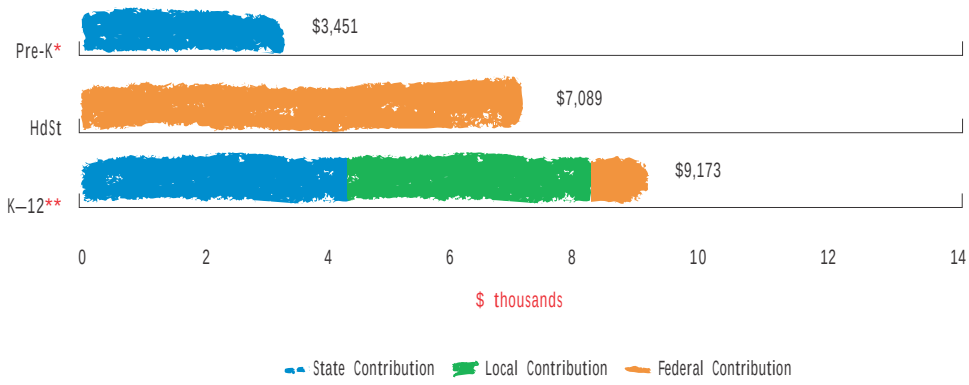


FIGURE 8: NATIONAL SPENDING PER CHILD ENROLLED



* 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.

ACCESS

Approximately 740,000 children were enrolled in state prekindergarten initiatives in 2002–2003. The number of children served ranged widely, with Delaware, Hawaii, Nevada, and New Mexico each serving fewer than 1,000 children, while Texas served more than 150,000 children. Ten states accounted for more than three-quarters of the children participating in state prekindergarten programs, and even these states served only a fraction of their preschool-age populations. Overall, state prekindergarten initiatives reached about 10 percent of the nation's population of 3- and 4-year-olds. Most of those participants were 4 years old, representing 16 percent of 4-year-olds in the United States. A mere 2 percent of 3-year-olds were served in state prekindergarten initiatives.

Eligibility Criteria

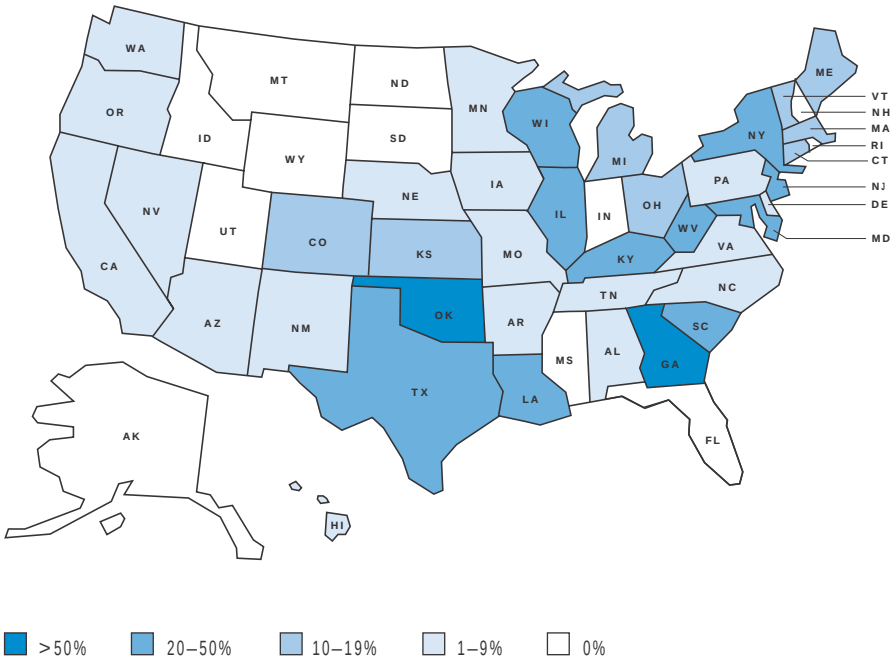
Most states targeted their programs to low-income children and children with other background factors that place them at risk for starting school behind their peers. However, there were nine states that did not set eligibility criteria for at least one of their state prekindergarten initiatives. Having no eligibility criteria does not mean all children are actually able to participate—Georgia and Oklahoma are the only two states that made prekindergarten universally available to 4-year-olds. In the other states, access was still limited by the availability of state funds to support prekindergarten and districts' willingness to offer it. Some states, such as Nevada, New York (for its Universal Prekindergarten Program), and West Virginia, which technically allowed all children to be eligible, in fact often gave priority to low-income and at-risk children—although New York and West Virginia plan to make prekindergarten universally available eventually.

Whereas many states used family income as one of the factors (or the only factor) in determining eligibility, they did not all use the same income cutoff. Commonly used income eligibility criteria were the cutoff for free lunch (130 percent of the federal poverty level), which was used in three states (Iowa, Kansas, and Kentucky), or the cutoff for reduced-price lunch (185 percent of poverty), which was used by 11 state initiatives. Eleven other state initiatives used alternative income criteria, with the cutoff set at levels ranging from 100 percent of poverty for the Head Start models in Delaware, Minnesota, Oregon, and Wisconsin, to 125 percent of state median income in Massachusetts. Both of New Jersey's state prekindergarten initiatives used free or reduced-price lunch eligibility to determine which districts qualified for programs, although all children in qualifying districts were allowed to participate.

Most of the states that set income eligibility criteria required only a certain proportion of participating children to meet these criteria or allowed at least some children to qualify based on other factors. For example, only half of the children enrolled in Vermont's prekindergarten initiative were required to meet the income eligibility criteria; the remainder qualified for the program based on other risk factors such as exposure to violence or substance abuse, low parental education levels, limited English proficiency, or developmental delay.

The eight remaining state initiatives did not set income eligibility criteria and instead took into account a range of risk factors. In several of these states, the risk factors used and the relative weight given to these factors were determined at the local level. Factors frequently taken into account included disability or developmental delay, limited English proficiency, low parental education levels, low birth weight, and experience of abuse or neglect. Some states, such as Louisiana (for its 8(g) program) and Illinois, used developmental screenings to determine whether children had risk factors that qualified them to participate.

FIGURE 9: PERCENT OF 4-YEAR-OLDS SERVED IN STATE PRE-K



Age Requirements

Although all state prekindergarten initiatives served 4-year-olds, in 2002–2003 there were 27 programs that offered services to children in other age groups as well. Twenty-two of these initiatives served only children at ages 3 and 4. Five additional states served even younger children. Arkansas, Minnesota, Nevada, and New Mexico served children from birth to age 5, while Nebraska served children from 6 weeks of age.

Some states that allowed 3-year-olds to participate limited their access. For example, Hawaii and Kentucky served 3-year-olds only if they had special needs, and West Virginia had plans to adopt a similar approach as of July 2004. Colorado required 4-year-olds to have only one risk factor to qualify for the program, but 3-year-olds were required to have three risk factors to participate. Washington allowed 3-year-olds to enroll only after all 4-year-olds whose families wanted them to participate had been served. Arizona allowed children younger than 4 to be served, but in practice generally served only 4-year-olds in its state program.

Among the 20 state initiatives that served children younger than 4 years old and reported enrollment data by age for 2002–2003, 3-year-olds accounted for 40 percent or more of total enrollment for only three state initiatives—programs in Massachusetts and Vermont, as well as New Jersey's Abbott program. In most states reporting data, 3-year-olds made up less than one-third of the enrollment. Seventeen state initiatives restricted access exclusively to 4-year-olds.

EVALUATING PRESCHOOL POLICY: WHY TARGETING INEVITABLY FALLS SHORT

For four decades, publicly funded preschool initiatives have primarily operated on the targeted program model. This is not without reason, as the premise of targeting is a worthy one. In concept, it focuses limited resources to deliver preschool programs only to children most in need—whether they are disadvantaged by economics, disability, or other circumstances.

At both state and federal levels, policymakers have been attracted to targeted programs because they "look good on paper" since the total commitment of public funds is less than if such programs were provided for all children. Conventional wisdom has held that targeting is more likely to gain political support than preschool programs for all.

However, this policy model has met with mixed success when put into practice. After decades of operation, many targeted programs have not been able to identify and serve the majority of children who qualify for them. So mobile are today's families, both geographically and economically, that targeting a high percentage of those who qualify has proven to be an almost insurmountable task.

A prime example is the federal Head Start program. Forty years after its inception—and 10 years after Congress authorized full funding—there are not enough slots to serve all eligible children. Enrollment remains at less than 60 percent of the number of preschool-age children in poverty. The actual number of children in poverty served by Head Start at any given time may in fact drop below 50 percent. This is because families with children move in and out of poverty and not all Head Start children (particularly those with disabilities) must come from low-income families. Such realities on the ground sorely test the operating model of targeted preschool programs.

The model used by child care programs to determine eligibility also poses problems. When this type of model is used, shifting family circumstances including mothers' employment status confound the process of determining eligibility. Changes in mothers' employment status may lead children to cycle in and out of programs, though their need for a good education does not change.

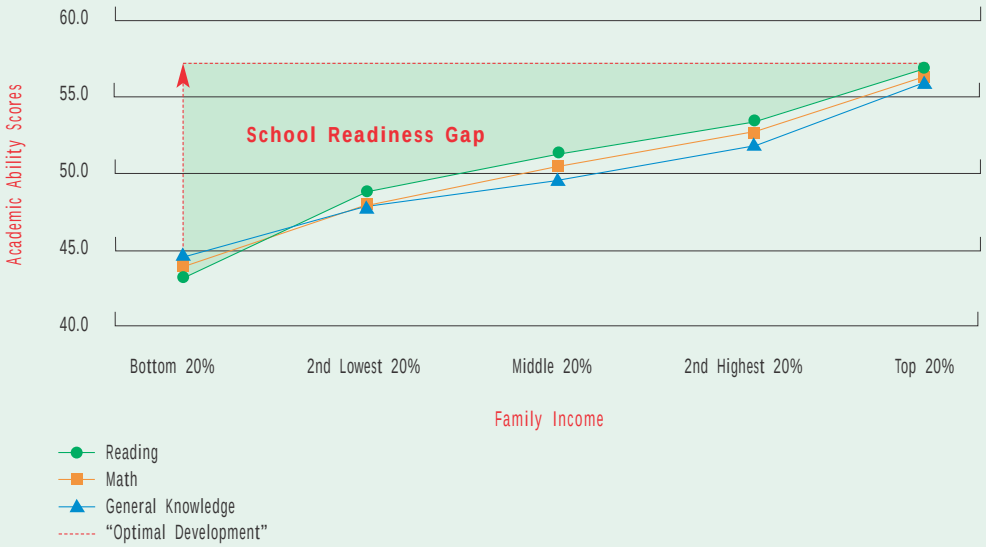
There is also mounting evidence of unmet demand for (and unequal access to) quality preschool among families whose incomes are somewhat above the qualification levels for targeted programs. Recent evidence suggests this group may represent a larger population of children than those who qualify for targeted programs.[1] Children from these families often lack access to the patchwork of programs that represents preschool in America. On one hand, they do not qualify for targeted programs; on the other, their parents cannot afford to pay for high-quality preschool programs even if they exist in their neighborhoods.

Recent research demonstrates that the need for quality preschool programs does not dramatically diminish once families exceed the income eligibility requirements for targeted programs. Rather, the school readiness gap (see figure 10) is surprisingly persistent and drops only gradually for all children except those with family incomes in the top 20 percent of all Americans.[2]

This inefficiency in providing access to quality early education—and the growing awareness among business and policy leaders of preschool's importance to future productivity—has spurred a reexamination of targeting. Of course, "one size fits all" will never be good prekindergarten policy; some children require broader and more intensive services than others. Still, more states should follow the lead of Oklahoma and Georgia to expand access for all children and at the same time ensure that children with the greatest needs are included in prekindergarten and receive the services necessary to fully support their learning and development.

1 Barnett, W.S., & Yarosz, D.J. (2004) Who goes to preschool and why does it matter? *Preschool Policy Matters, 8.* New Brunswick, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research, Rutgers University.
2 Barnett, W.S., Brown, K., & Shore, R. (2004) The universal vs. targeted debate: Should the United States have preschool for all? *Preschool Policy Matters, 6.* New Brunswick, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research, Rutgers University.

FIGURE 10: ACADEMIC ABILITIES OF ENTERING KINDERGARTENERS BY FAMILY INCOME



Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Kindergarten Class of 1998–99, Fall 1998.

Serving Children with Special Needs

Most states served children with special needs in state prekindergarten classrooms through a combination of state prekindergarten funding along with other local, state, and/or federal sources such as IDEA funding. However, several states—Arizona, Colorado, Connecticut, Georgia, Iowa, Kansas, Nebraska, New Jersey (for its Abbott program), Oregon, Pennsylvania, and Virginia—reported that children with special needs may be served in state prekindergarten classrooms but only using funding other than state prekindergarten dollars.

Many states were not able to provide data on the percentage of children enrolled in state prekindergarten initiatives who had Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) for meeting their special needs. Of the 26 state initiatives for which there were data, the percentage of children with IEPs ranged from 3 percent in California and South Carolina to 63 percent in Kentucky. The median for the states reporting data was 10 percent.

Enrollment Supported with Other Sources

Many of the children enrolled in state prekindergarten programs were partially supported with other funding sources, such as federal IDEA, Head Start, or TANF funds, or local sources. For example, Iowa reported that of the 2,355 children served, 286 were supported with local sources and 379 with IDEA funding.

Most states reported using some other funding sources to help support services for participating children, but they were often unable to provide complete, specific data on the number of children benefiting from each of these sources. A few states also indicated that some children beyond those counted in the state prekindergarten enrollment totals were being served in the same classrooms as state prekindergarten children, but using other sources of funding. Once again, these states were generally not able to provide specific data on the number of children served or amount of funding from these other sources.

Availability of Programs Across Communities

Children's ability to participate in prekindergarten depends on availability of programs in their communities. Only three states required prekindergarten to be offered in all of their school districts (Kentucky, Maryland, and South Carolina). Another four states offered prekindergarten in all of their counties, and five states offered prekindergarten in at least 90 percent of their towns, counties, or school districts.

In contrast, 14 states had state prekindergarten programs available in fewer than half of their districts or communities. Nebraska's prekindergarten program was offered in just 5 percent of school districts and Pennsylvania's program was available in only 6 percent of districts.

A few states, including Connecticut, New Jersey, and Texas, did not require prekindergarten to be offered in all districts, but did require it in certain districts. For example, schools in Texas were required to offer prekindergarten if there were at least 15 eligible 4-year-olds (children who qualified for free or reduced-price lunch, were unable to speak and understand English, or were homeless) in the district.

Parent Fees

Most state prekindergarten initiatives served children free of charge to families. However, nine state initiatives had (or allowed districts the option of having) sliding fee scales, which charge parents fees based on income. Connecticut charged fees to all families, but most other states charged fees only to certain families or under certain circumstances. For example, Hawaii and Ohio charged fees only to families whose incomes were above 100 percent of the federal poverty level, and Iowa, Kentucky, and Louisiana's LA4 program collected fees only from families who did not meet income eligibility criteria.

Hours of Operation

State prekindergarten programs most commonly operated on a half-day basis, 5 days per week during the school year. However, a number of state initiatives operated on a different schedule, offering longer hours or fewer days per week. In addition, many states coordinated with other programs and resources to provide full-day, full-year services to meet the needs of families with working parents.

Only 10 state initiatives operated on a full school-day schedule or for longer hours. Twelve state initiatives operated on a part-day schedule, and Delaware's programs operated between 4 and 6 hours per day. In Connecticut, at least 60 percent of slots in each community were required to be full-day slots. For the remaining 20 state initiatives, daily operating hours were locally determined. However, many of these state initiatives required programs to operate for a minimum number of hours per day or per week—usually about 2.5 or 3.5 hours per day—and one state initiative required a minimum number of hours of operation per year.

Several states that offered both full-day and half-day options varied the amount of funding provided to programs based on hours of operation. For example, Connecticut paid $7,000 per child for full-day programs and $4,500 per child for half-day programs. New York's Experimental Prekindergarten Program provided 45 percent more for full-day classes than for half-day classes. In Oklahoma, full-day programs received nearly twice as much funding per child as half-day programs.

More than half (23) of the state initiatives operated 5 days per week. Colorado and Michigan's programs operated fewer than 5 days per week. The rest of the state initiatives (19) had locally determined weekly schedules. However, some of these initiatives required programs to operate for at least 4 days per week.

Most states' prekindergarten programs operated for the academic year. While a number of states allowed the specific schedule to be determined locally, programs in these states still typically operated for the academic year. A few states had a significant number of programs operating on a full-year schedule. These include Hawaii, Connecticut (which required at least 60 percent of slots to be full-year), Massachusetts (where about 60 percent of programs operated for the calendar year), New Mexico, and Vermont (where prekindergarten programs offered in child care centers generally operated year-round).

While state prekindergarten initiatives were typically funded to operate on a part-day, part-year schedule, in 34 state initiatives children were able to receive wrap-around services. These wrap-around services were usually provided in coordination with other resources and programs, and were not funded by the state prekindergarten initiative itself. The most commonly cited sources of funding for wrap-around care were federal Child Care and Development Funds and tuition charged to parents. Most states were not able to provide data on how many of the children enrolled in their prekindergarten programs were receiving wrap-around services. Among those states that did provide data, the percentage of enrolled children in wrap-around care ranged from 5 percent in California and Maryland to an estimated 90 percent in Hawaii.

Program Settings

Although the large majority of children enrolled in state prekindergarten programs are served in public school settings, many children are also being served in other locations, such as child care centers and Head Start programs. Each type of setting has certain advantages. For example, public schools can allow programs to take advantage of existing resources, such as experienced staff, buildings, and playgrounds. Child care centers may be better able to provide full-day services for children with working parents. Head Start programs can offer prekindergarten programs access to their comprehensive services and other resources. As shown in Figure 11, of the states that were able to report data, 71 percent of children were served in public schools, 18 percent in private child care centers, 7 percent in Head Start programs, less than 1 percent in faith-based programs, less than 1 percent in family child care, and 3 percent in other settings.

Out of the 39 state initiatives for which data were reported, 25 served half or more of their children in public school settings. These state initiatives include 11 in which all, or virtually all, children were served in public school settings.

Still, in some state prekindergarten initiatives, a large percentage of children were served in private child care settings. More than 40 percent of children participating in initiatives in Connecticut, Georgia, Massachusetts, New Jersey (for its Abbott program), and North Carolina were served in private child care.

FIGURE 11: PERCENTAGE OF STATE PRESCHOOL ENROLLEES BY TYPE OF PROGRAM SETTING

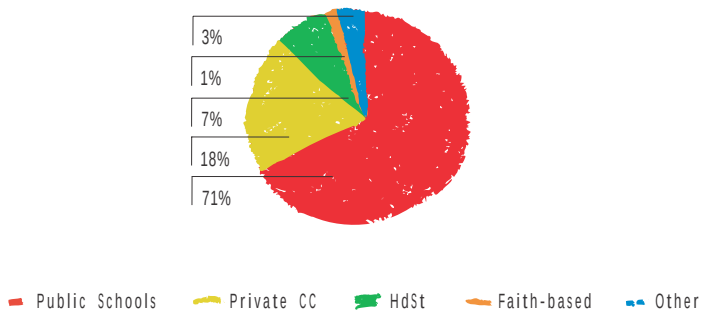


Photo: RC Peters

Some states served many of their children in Head Start programs. In addition to the state Head Start models in Delaware, Ohio, Oregon, and Wisconsin, 11 state initiatives each had 10 percent or more of enrolled children receiving state prekindergarten services in Head Start settings.

Only four states reported using family child care to deliver state prekindergarten services. Even in states that did, only a small percentage of children were served in this type of setting—7 percent in Massachusetts, and 2 percent or less for New York's Universal Prekindergarten Program, Ohio's Head Start program, and Washington's Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program.

Most states were not able to provide data on the proportion of children enrolled in faith-based settings. Among those that did provide data, only Louisiana's Nonpublic Schools Early Childhood Development Program, which had nearly all children enrolled in such settings, had a large proportion of children served in this type of program. Connecticut had 14 percent of its children in faith-based settings, and the other six states reporting data for this category had 5 percent or less of their children in faith-based programs.

Twelve state initiatives had a home-based option during the 2002–2003 program year. The number of children enrolled in this type of component ranged from 20 children in Washington to 4,719 in Arkansas.

Changes in Access from 2001–2002 to 2002–2003

The number of children enrolled in state prekindergarten programs grew from approximately 693,000 in 2001–2002 to more than 738,000 in 2002–2003, an increase of 45,000 children, or 6.5 percent. Twenty-six states showed increases in enrollment. In about half of these states, the increase was less than 10 percent, but several states reported increases of 50 percent or more. However, enrollment decreased in nine states. Although many of these states saw only a small drop in the number of children served, decreases in other states were relatively large. For example, New Mexico's enrollment dropped more than 50 percent, from 2,000 to 850, and Massachusetts reduced its enrollment by 10 percent, or more than 2,000 children. Enrollment in three states was unchanged (Delaware, Maine, and Maryland).

Despite the overall growth in enrollment, the number of 3-year-olds participating in state prekindergarten programs actually declined. Although the proportion of 4-year-olds in the U.S. enrolled in state prekindergarten programs increased from 14.4 percent in 2001–2002 to 16.1 percent in 2002–2003, the proportion of 3-year-olds dropped slightly from 2.7 percent to 2.5 percent. Many of the programs that expanded most rapidly served only 4-year-olds, and some of the programs that served both 3-year-olds and 4-year-olds placed more emphasis on serving 4-year-olds. For example, the number of 4-year-olds in Texas' prekindergarten program increased by more than 15,000, but the number of 3-year-olds decreased by 6,000. New York's EPK program served 3,400 more 4-year-olds but 4,400 fewer 3-year-olds. Arkansas, Iowa, and Tennessee also each had small decreases in the number of 3-year-olds served whereas enrollment of 4-year-olds in their programs rose.

Due to some differences in the way information was collected in 2001–2002 and 2002–2003, data related to other aspects of access to prekindergarten are not completely comparable between the two time periods. However, based on the information available, there do not appear to have been major shifts in state policies and practices for prekindergarten access. States maintained generally the same approaches on issues such as which districts or communities offered prekindergarten, eligibility criteria, operating schedules, use of sliding fee scales, and settings in which programs operate.

Although state policies and practices involving access to prekindergarten have been largely stable, a few states have begun to make changes in certain areas. For example, Maryland revised its eligibility criteria so that, as of 2003–2004, local districts are required to provide prekindergarten to all 4-year-olds who qualify for free or reduced-price lunch or who are homeless. In North Carolina, individual programs currently determine eligibility criteria, but by 2004–2005, at least 80 percent of participants must be from families at or below 75 percent of state median income.

A few states have started to implement changes to other aspects of their programs. For instance, Illinois, Maryland, West Virginia, and Wisconsin have indicated that they plan to start making greater use of settings outside the public schools in providing prekindergarten.

TABLE 3: STATE RANKINGS BY PRE-K ACCESS FOR 4-YEAR-OLDS

Access for 4-Year-Olds Rank	State	Percent Enrolled in State Prekindergarten (2002–2003)			Percent Enrolled in State Prekindergarten, Head Start, or IDEA Preschool Grants Programs (2002–2003)		
		4-year-olds	3-year-olds	Total (3s and 4s)	4-year-olds	3-year-olds	Total (3s and 4s)
1	**Oklahoma**	**59.4%**	0.0%	29.7%	82.4%	16.4%	49.5%
2	**Georgia**	**54.3%**	0.0%	27.0%	68.1%	11.6%	39.7%
3	**Texas**	**43.0%**	4.1%	23.5%	57.6%	14.7%	36.1%
4	**South Carolina**	**32.3%**	1.9%	17.1%	51.1%	16.4%	33.7%
5	**New York**	**29.7%**	0.6%	15.2%	56.2%	14.1%	35.2%
6	**West Virginia**	**28.9%**	9.5%	19.2%	57.9%	27.4%	42.7%
7	**Kentucky**	**27.7%**	10.5%	19.1%	60.8%	29.5%	45.1%
8	**Maryland**	**26.3%**	2.0%	14.2%	39.9%	11.5%	25.7%
9	**Wisconsin**	**24.8%**	1.0%	12.9%	43.0%	14.8%	28.9%
10	**Illinois**	**24.4%**	8.0%	16.2%	41.5%	19.9%	30.7%
11	**New Jersey**	**24.1%**	14.6%	19.4%	35.4%	23.2%	29.3%
12	**Louisiana**	**20.9%**	0.0%	10.5%	43.2%	17.1%	30.1%
13	**Michigan**	**19.2%**	0.0%	9.7%	39.2%	13.6%	26.5%
14	**Kansas**	**14.7%**	0.0%	7.3%	32.6%	13.1%	22.8%
15	**Colorado**	**13.8%**	1.5%	7.6%	28.7%	10.3%	19.4%
16	**Maine**	**10.8%**	0.0%	5.5%	39.4%	17.6%	28.6%
17	**Massachusetts**	**10.5%**	10.6%	10.5%	25.5%	20.9%	23.2%
18	**Connecticut**	**10.4%**	3.4%	6.9%	24.2%	12.7%	18.5%
19	**Vermont**	**9.8%**	7.0%	8.4%	26.6%	19.9%	23.3%
20	**Ohio**	**9.5%**	6.2%	7.9%	26.6%	19.1%	22.8%
21	**California**	**8.7%**	2.2%	5.5%	25.0%	11.2%	18.2%
22	**Delaware**	**8.5%**	0.0%	4.2%	24.6%	10.1%	17.3%
23	**Washington**	**6.9%**	1.8%	4.4%	21.8%	10.0%	15.9%
24	**Virginia**	**6.3%**	0.0%	3.1%	20.1%	8.0%	14.0%
25	**Hawaii**	**6.2%**	0.0%	3.1%	21.1%	10.8%	15.9%
26	**Arkansas**	**6.1%**	2.4%	4.3%	35.3%	19.9%	27.7%
27	**Oregon**	**5.8%**	3.0%	4.4%	22.7%	13.4%	18.1%
28	**North Carolina**	**5.6%**	0.0%	2.8%	21.9%	8.9%	15.3%
29	**Arizona**	**5.1%**	0.0%	2.5%	23.7%	9.9%	16.8%
30	**Iowa**	**4.5%**	1.3%	2.9%	20.5%	12.1%	16.3%
31	**Missouri**	**4.3%**	2.4%	3.4%	22.2%	16.1%	19.2%
32	**Tennessee**	**3.2%**	1.1%	2.1%	22.0%	10.1%	16.0%
33	**Nebraska**	**2.5%**	1.5%	2.0%	20.2%	14.2%	17.2%
34	**New Mexico**	**2.5%**	0.8%	1.6%	28.3%	14.3%	21.2%
35	**Alabama**	**2.2%**	0.0%	1.1%	23.8%	11.9%	17.9%
36	**Minnesota**	**2.1%**	1.3%	1.7%	18.0%	12.1%	15.1%
37	**Pennsylvania**	**1.8%**	0.0%	0.9%	18.9%	11.7%	15.3%
38	**Nevada**	**1.5%**	0.7%	1.1%	11.1%	6.3%	8.7%
No Program	**Alaska**	**0.0%**	0.0%	0.0%	22.3%	16.9%	19.6%
No Program	**Florida**	**0.0%**	0.0%	0.0%	16.2%	9.3%	12.8%
No Program	**Idaho**	**0.0%**	0.0%	0.0%	19.4%	8.1%	13.7%
No Program	**Indiana**	**0.0%**	0.0%	0.0%	15.3%	9.6%	12.5%
No Program	**Mississippi**	**0.0%**	0.0%	0.0%	43.2%	28.7%	35.9%
No Program	**Montana**	**0.0%**	0.0%	0.0%	27.1%	17.0%	22.1%
No Program	**New Hampshire**	**0.0%**	0.0%	0.0%	10.9%	7.7%	9.3%
No Program	**North Dakota**	**0.0%**	0.0%	0.0%	31.0%	17.8%	24.5%
No Program	**Rhode Island**	**0.0%**	0.0%	0.0%	23.3%	11.6%	17.5%
No Program	**South Dakota**	**0.0%**	0.0%	0.0%	26.9%	19.9%	23.3%
No Program	**Utah**	**0.0%**	0.0%	0.0%	14.9%	7.2%	11.0%
No Program	**Wyoming**	**0.0%**	0.0%	0.0%	30.5%	19.8%	25.1%
	50 State Population	**16.1%**	**2.5%**	**9.3%**	**34.0%**	**13.8%**	**23.9%**

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

QUALITY STANDARDS

Research shows that children who have previously attended high-quality preschool education programs are more successful in kindergarten. Quality in a prekindergarten program depends on several factors including curriculum standards, personnel requirements, program structure, and the availability of family support services. For example, high levels of teacher education are associated with more positive outcomes for preschool students. Quality standards for state-funded preschool initiatives are typically specified in state-level policies that identify the minimum requirements. Findings from our survey show that policies relating to quality standards vary considerably from state to state—and sometimes within a state, in states with multiple prekindergarten initiatives.

Quality Standards Checklist

We used a 10-item Quality Standards Checklist to compare standards of quality across different state prekindergarten initiatives. Previous research has shown that the components of this checklist contribute to the quality of prekindergarten programs, and research findings were used in developing benchmarks for each item. The benchmarks do not represent high standards of excellence or an exhaustive list of quality elements. Rather, they indicate important minimum standards for educationally effective programs, particularly those serving disadvantaged children.

State prekindergarten programs received a summary score indicating the number of items for which state policies met or exceeded the relevant benchmarks. Possible quality summary scores range from a minimum of zero to a maximum of 10. This scoring system is simply a count of quality components—it does not imply that each item is of equal value or is interchangeable. We strongly recommend that state policies be evaluated based on standards for each component of the checklist rather than solely on the basis of summary scores. Our Quality Standards Checklist is composed of the following benchmarks:

- *Curriculum standards*—the state must have comprehensive curriculum standards that are specific to prekindergarten and cover the domains of language/literacy, mathematics, science, social/emotional skills, cognitive development, health and physical development, and social studies.[1]
- *Teacher degree requirement*—lead teachers in both public and private settings must be required to hold at least a BA.[2]
- *Teacher specialized training requirement*—preservice requirements for lead teachers should include specialized training in prekindergarten. Such training might involve licensure/endorsement in the prekindergarten area or a degree or credential in early childhood, such as a CDA. Kindergarten endorsements and elementary teaching certificates did not qualify as specialized training in a pre-school area.[2]
- *Assistant teacher degree requirement*—assistant teachers are required to hold at least a CDA or equivalent training, in both public and private settings.[3]
- *Teacher in-service requirement*—teachers must be required to attend an average of at least 15 clock hours of professional development per year. In-service training received in fulfillment of state recertification requirements was counted toward a program's teacher in-service requirement.[4]

- *Maximum class size*—class sizes must be limited to no more than 20 children, for both 3- and 4-year-olds.[5]
- *Staff–child ratio*—at least one staff member must be present per 10 children in a classroom, for both 3- and 4-year-olds.[6]
- *Screening/referral requirements*—programs are required to provide both screening and referral services covering at least vision, hearing, and health.[7]
- *Required support services*—programs must offer (either directly or through active referral) at least one type of additional support service for families of participants or the participants themselves. Types of services may include parent conferences or home visits, parenting support or training, referral to social services, and information relating to nutrition.[8]
- *Meal requirements*—all participants must be offered at least one meal per day, including any meals offered due to requirements not specifically set by the preschool program. Snacks were not counted as meals.[9]

This year's Quality Standards Checklist is adapted from the checklist used in NIEER's *2003 State Preschool Yearbook* and is largely unchanged in its emphasis. The item labeled "Required Support Services" replaces the item labeled "Family Support Service Requirements" in the 2003 *Yearbook*, reflecting a broader emphasis on the types of support services offered to participants and their families.[10]

Details about how programs fared on each of the component benchmarks are discussed below and reported in Table 4 (p. 44) for each of the 44 state-funded initiatives. State-financed prekindergarten initiatives varied considerably in meeting the benchmarks and received a wide range of scores on the Quality Standards Checklist. Summary scores were as high as 10 in Arkansas, and as low as 2 in Pennsylvania.

Curriculum Standards

States identify and prioritize specific content areas for educational programs through the adoption of curriculum standards. Since curriculum standards are set at the state level, all prekindergarten programs funded by any given state must follow a common set of curriculum standards. This is true even in states that fund more than one preschool initiative. Curriculum standards were found to be comprehensive in 12 of the 38 states that funded prekindergarten initiatives.

Photo: RC Peters

Personnel Requirements

Educational requirements for prekindergarten teachers are important indicators of a state's commitment to supporting quality early education services. Research shows that teachers and staff members with higher levels of education provide higher quality learning environments in their preschool classrooms. However, personnel requirements vary considerably from state to state, and many state policies do not meet the minimum benchmarks.

In 23 of the 44 state-financed preschool initiatives profiled in this report, all lead teachers were required to hold a bachelor's degree. In eight more state preschool initiatives—those in Iowa, Massachusetts, Michigan, Missouri, Oregon, Virginia, and Washington, as well as New York's Universal Prekindergarten program—lead teachers were required to hold a bachelor's degree only when teaching in public school settings. Each of these additional programs had a two-tier system in which teacher degree requirements were more stringent for teachers in public school settings than they were for teachers in nonpublic settings.

Overall, more than two-thirds of the state preschool initiatives required teachers working in public school settings to have at least a BA. New York's initiatives had the most stringent requirements for prekindergarten teachers in public schools. Teachers trained after 1978 were required to have master's degrees. New Mexico was the only state that did not require a degree or credential of preschool teachers in public schools—all other states required at least an associate's degree, a CDA, or equivalent training.

Bachelor's degrees were required of teachers in fewer than half of the state initiatives allowing children to be served in prekindergarten programs operating in private school settings. Among the 21 state initiatives not requiring a BA, only three required an AA for all teachers in nonpublic settings. The CDA (or equivalent training) was the most common requirement among programs not requiring a BA. In five state initiatives, there was no specific degree or credential requirement that applied to all teachers in nonpublic settings, although four of these programs either set requirements for teachers in certain types of nonpublic settings (e.g., Head Start) or required teachers to complete a minimal amount of coursework.

In 29 of the 44 state-financed preschool initiatives, teachers were required to receive specialized training in prekindergarten. Requirements for specialized training were closely tied to teacher degree requirements. In programs that required teachers to hold a bachelor's degree, specialized training typically took the form of licensure, certification, or an endorsement in early childhood or a closely related area. In programs that did not require a BA, specialized training usually involved earning a CDA.

Degree requirements for assistant teachers were minimal, and were less stringent than those for lead teachers in all states except New Mexico. New Mexico did not set a minimum educational requirement for lead or assistant teachers. Only 12 of the 44 state prekindergarten initiatives required assistant teachers to have at least a CDA or equivalent training. In some states, the educational requirements for assistant teachers differed in public and private settings. Although requirements in public schools were generally more rigorous, the differences in requirements were relatively minor. For example, assistant teachers in Missouri's state prekindergarten initiative were required to have a high school diploma plus vocational certification in early childhood education when working in public schools, but were required to have only a high school diploma when working in nonpublic settings. Vermont set the most rigorous educational requirements in public schools, as assistant teachers in such settings were required to have a BA. Across the states, the most common educational requirement for assistant teachers was a high school diploma or its equivalent. In eight state prekindergarten initiatives there were no minimum educational requirements that applied to assistant teachers in all program settings, and in three additional programs the requirements were determined locally in at least some circumstances. Pennsylvania's program did not require assistant teachers to be present in the classroom.

Although requirements for teacher in-service training varied considerably from one state prekindergarten initiative to the next, 27 of the 44 initiatives required teachers to participate in an average of at least 15 hours of in-service training per year. In some cases, the reported in-service requirements were determined by state regulations for recertification. Alabama set the highest annual in-service requirement—40 clock hours per year. Six state initiatives had no annual requirement for teacher in-service training.

Class Size and Staff–Child Ratio

Small class sizes are associated with more effective programs. The benchmark of capping class sizes at no more than 20 students was met by 32 of 44 state preschool initiatives. When programs served both 3- and 4-year-olds, they typically followed the same requirements for maximum class sizes for children in both age groups. Of the programs that did not, most followed Head Start's requirements for a maximum class size of 17 for 3-year-olds and a maximum class size of 20 for 4-year-olds. Regardless, when maximum class sizes differed by the age of child, requirements always specified a smaller group size for 3-year-olds than for 4-year-olds.

The state preschool programs that required the smallest group size were Colorado's program and New Jersey's Abbott program. Each of these initiatives required that group sizes be no larger than 15 children for both 3- and 4-year-olds. In nine state prekindergarten programs, there was no statewide requirement regarding maximum class size, in which cases requirements may be determined at the local level. However, some of these state initiatives offered specific guidance—for example, encouraging programs to follow recommendations of the National Association for the Education of Young Children.

Low staff–child ratios are also associated with effective early childhood education programs. Staff–child ratio requirements were closely related to the class size requirements followed by state prekindergarten initiatives. Three-quarters (33 of 44) of the state preschool initiatives had requirements in place that set a 1:10 staff–child ratio or better. When programs served both 3- and 4-year-olds, they typically followed the same staff–child ratio requirements for children in both age groups. However, when this was not the case, requirements always specified a lower staff–child ratio for 3-year-olds than for 4-year-olds.

The lowest overall staff–child ratio requirement was the 2:15 requirement set by New Jersey's Abbott program. In a few states, even lower ratios were required for classes with larger group sizes. For example, New York's Universal Prekindergarten and Experimental Prekindergarten programs required staff–child ratios of either 1:9 or 3:20. In seven of the initiatives covered by this report, there was no minimum state requirement for staff–child ratios (in which cases requirements may be determined at the local level). With one exception, the initiatives without state-specified staff–child ratio requirements also did not set maximum requirements for class size.

Comprehensive Services

The remaining components of our Quality Standards Checklist focused on the types of comprehensive services provided by state preschool initiatives. The additional support services offered to preschoolers and their families can help promote learning and child development. As with state policies regarding curriculum standards, personnel requirements, and program structure, there was a good deal of variability in the types of comprehensive services offered across different state programs.

Twenty-five of the 44 state preschool initiatives required programs to provide all enrolled children with both screening and referral services covering vision, hearing, and general physical health. A number of initiatives went beyond this benchmark by offering additional types of services, including dental and developmental screening and referral. Among the state preschool programs not meeting our benchmark of screening and referral for vision, hearing, and health, six offered at least one type of screening and referral service. Five more programs allowed screening and referral services to be determined at the local level, and the remaining eight did not mandate screening and referral services for vision, hearing, or health.

Support services for families were offered through 39 of the 44 state prekindergarten programs. The only state programs that did not require at least one type of support service were those in Arizona, Maine, Missouri, Pennsylvania, and West Virginia. The majority of state policies mandate multiple types of family support services. Some of the most frequently required support services were parent involvement activities, parenting support or training, parent conferences/home visits, referral to social services, health services for children, and transition to kindergarten activities.

Finally, in 24 of the 44 state preschool initiatives, all children were offered at least one meal per day. While not requiring meals for all participants, an additional 13 programs offered meals under certain circumstances, particularly when children attended programs that offered longer class days or were operating during mealtimes. In the remaining state preschool programs, there were no meal requirements or only snacks were offered.

Photo: RC Peters

Quality Standards Overview and Changes from 2001–2002 to 2002–2003

Overall, program standards for quality varied widely from initiative to initiative. Of 44 state-financed prekindergarten initiatives across the U.S., the Arkansas Better Chance program was the only initiative to meet all 10 of our benchmarks for quality. Initiatives in Illinois and North Carolina, as well as the New Jersey Abbott program, met 9 of 10 benchmarks. Pennsylvania's program received the lowest quality score, meeting only 2 of the 10 benchmarks. Taking all state-funded prekindergarten initiatives into account, the median Quality Standards Checklist summary score was 6 of 10, indicating that there is marked room for improvement in quality standards of many state prekindergarten programs.

In terms of individual elements of the Quality Standards Checklist, the benchmark for required family support services was met by the most (39 of 44) state preschool initiatives, while the benchmark for assistant teacher degree requirements was met by the fewest (12 of 44). Only 12 states—representing 16 prekindergarten initiatives—had promulgated comprehensive preschool curriculum standards. Each of the other benchmarks was met by between one-half and three-quarters of the state preschool initiatives.

It is important to note that the Quality Standards Checklist is a measure of state *policy*, and does not necessarily represent actual practices in prekindergarten programs. In some cases, program quality may widely exceed the standards set at the state level, and in other cases many providers may fail to comply with state requirements. Nevertheless, our data on state policies clearly indicate a need for improvement. Such policies are the means by which states establish acceptable levels of quality to which every child served is entitled. Inadequate standards mean that fewer children will receive an effective preschool education.

When comparing the policies of state prekindergarten initiatives that were followed in 2001–2002 with those followed in 2002–2003, it is apparent that policies change very slowly. State preschool standards are essentially unchanged from the previous year, despite the inadequacies of most of them. Only one state initiative specifically reported a policy change for the 2002–2003 program year that resulted in its meeting an additional benchmark on the Quality Standards Checklist. A number of other states received higher scores on the Quality Standards Checklist in 2002–2003, and two states received lower scores, due to improvements in NIEER's survey questions or the information provided by states. The single policy change reported in response to NIEER's survey was made by Louisiana's 8(g) Student Enhancement Block Grant Program, which changed its staff–child ratio requirement from 1:15 to 1:10.

1 Current practice too frequently underestimates children's capabilities to learn during 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). 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. 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, Rutgers University. 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. Research focusing specifically on the qualifications of assistant teachers is rare, but the available evidence points to a relationship between assistant teacher qualifications and teaching quality. 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 are beginning 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: Bush Center in Child Development and Social Policy, Yale University.

4 Good teachers are actively engaged in their continuing professional development. Bowman et al. (2001). Frede (1998). Whitebook et al. (1989) found that teachers receiving more than 15 hours of training were more appropriate, positive, and engaged with children in their teaching practices.

5 The importance of class size has been demonstrated for both preschool and kindergarten. A class size of 20 is larger than the class size shown in many programs 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: Author.

6 A large literature establishes linkages between staff–child ratio, 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 provides the first opportunity to detect vision, hearing, and health problems that may impair a child's learning and development. This opportunity 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 brain development 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.

10 In the 2003 *Yearbook*, state preschool initiatives were considered to offer family support services if they required parent conferences or provided any support services to enrolled families. In the current report, our definition of support services was slightly broadened. Programs received credit for requiring additional support services if they offered any of the following: parent conferences, home visits, education services or job training for parents, parenting support or training, parent involvement activities, health services for parents or children, information about nutrition, referral to social services, transportation, transition to kindergarten activities, other specified support services, or if additional services were required by the state but specified only at the local level.

TABLE 4: 2002–2003 STATE PRE-K QUALITY STANDARDS

State	Comprehensive curriculum standards	Teacher has BA	Specialized training in Pre-K	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 scr./ref.	At least 1 support service	At least 1 meal	**Quality Standards Checklist Sum 2002–2003**
Alabama		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	**8**
Arizona	✓		✓			✓	✓				**4**
Arkansas	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	**10**
California			✓		✓		✓		✓		**4**
Colorado			✓			✓	✓		✓		**4**
Connecticut			✓			✓	✓		✓		**4**
Delaware			✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	**7**
Georgia			✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	**6**
Hawaii	✓		✓	✓					✓	✓	**5**
Illinois	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		**9**
Iowa						✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	**5**
Kansas		✓		✓				✓	✓		**4**
Kentucky			✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	**7**
Louisiana (8g)	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	**7**
Louisiana (LA4/SP)	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	**8**
Louisiana (NSECD)	✓	✓				✓	✓		✓	✓	**6**
Maine		✓		✓	✓						**3**
Maryland	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		**8**
Massachusetts	✓				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		**6**
Michigan			✓	✓		✓	✓		✓		**5**
Minnesota	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	**8**
Missouri			✓		✓	✓	✓				**4**
Nebraska		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓		**6**
Nevada		✓	✓		✓				✓		**4**
New Jersey (Abbott)	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	**9**
New Jersey (ECPA)	✓	✓			✓			✓	✓		**5**
New Mexico					✓			✓	✓	✓	**4**
New York (EPK)	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	**8**
New York (UPK)	✓				✓	✓	✓		✓		**5**
North Carolina		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	**9**
Ohio (HdSt)			✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	**7**
Ohio (Public School)			✓		✓			✓	✓	✓	**5**
Oklahoma	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	**8**
Oregon			✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	**6**
Pennsylvania		✓			✓						**2**
South Carolina		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	**8**
Tennessee		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	**8**
Texas	✓	✓							✓		**3**
Vermont		✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓		**6**
Virginia						✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	**5**
Washington			✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	**6**
West Virginia		✓	✓		✓	✓		✓			**5**
Wisconsin (4K)		✓			✓				✓		**3**
Wisconsin (HdSt)			✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	**6**
Totals	**16**	**23**	**29**	**12**	**27**	**32**	**33**	**25**	**39**	**24**	

Note: Alaska, Florida, Idaho, Indiana, Mississippi, Montana, New Hampshire, North Dakota, Rhode Island, South Dakota, Utah, and Wyoming are not included in this table because they do not fund state prekindergarten initiatives.
For more details about quality standards and benchmarks, see Roadmap to State Profile Pages.

RESOURCES

The preschool programs shown by research to produce large gains in learning and development that the nation seeks, particularly for its most disadvantaged students, were well funded. To be equally effective, state-funded preschool programs must have sufficient funding to: hire and retain good teachers and assistant teachers, keep class size reasonable, provide strong educational leadership and supervision, and put the other elements of a quality education in place. Obviously, money alone does not guarantee educational excellence, but without enough money educational excellence is not possible on a large scale. The amount of funding is a key indicator of state commitment to high-quality preschool education for 3- and 4-year-olds.

Total state spending is an important determinant of both access and quality, and states may make tradeoffs between the two. Total state spending on preschool has increased considerably over the past decade. This has enabled states to greatly increase the number of children served in preschool programs. Funding per child enrolled is the critical indicator for quality. Despite overall increases in state spending, the amount spent per child has stayed low relative to per-child spending for the model programs they seek to emulate, such as the federal Head Start program and public K–12 education.

One of the limitations of the existing data on preschool funding is the lack of information about federal and local funds going into state-funded preschool programs. This year's survey added questions in an effort to identify spending amounts from specific federal, state, and local funding streams. We found that, although federal and local funds are widely used to support preschool in most states that fund programs, the amount of money received from these sources is generally not tracked. As a result, most states cannot provide reliable estimates of total funding. We also added questions this year about mechanisms used by states to distribute funds to eligible agencies. As in our previous *Yearbook*, we collected data on local match requirements.

State preschool programs require resources beyond those that go directly into classrooms and local agencies. Standards must be developed and set at the state level. Data systems must be developed and operated for educational and financial accountability. And, when building programs, it is vital to provide adequate resources for the development of a high-quality teacher force, as many preschool teachers have far less education than is typical in K–12 education. Thus, one additional funding category for which we collected information is scholarships for preschool educators.

Photo: RC Peters

State Spending

For this year's report, total state spending figures include all funds reported from state sources as well as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) funds directed to preschool at states' discretion. Data on state preschool spending do not include money received from federal sources such as the Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), or local sources such as district funds and parent fees. Preschool spending figures presented on the state profile pages are not estimates of total spending, but reflect each state's level of financial commitment to preschool. The resources ranking is based on state spending per child enrolled, calculated by dividing total state funding by total enrollment. Spending per child in states with multiple programs was calculated by dividing the sum of state spending by the sum of enrollment across all programs profiled. 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 multiplying state funding by the percent of enrollees in each age category, then dividing that product by total state population at the corresponding single year of age.

States contributed a total of about $2.54 billion to their preschool programs during 2002–2003, exclusive of preschool special education funding. Individual state spending varied considerably, from about $1.5 million in New Mexico and Vermont to more than $400 million in Texas. Among the 37 states that reported funding for preschool, average total state spending was just under $70 million. More than 60 percent of national spending on preschool came from five states: New Jersey, Texas, Georgia, California, and New York. Spending in Texas and New Jersey was more than 50 percent greater than that of any other state. Although the most populous states generally provided the largest state contributions to preschool, there were some exceptions. For example, Oklahoma ranked tenth in total state spending although 26 states have larger populations of 3- and 4-year-olds.

As shown in Table 5 (p. 51), state spending per child enrolled in preschool ranged from less than $1,000 in Maryland to more than $8,700 in New Jersey. Average state spending per child across the 37 states for which data were available was $3,451. Twelve of the 13 states not included in this calculation do not fund preschool. Data were unavailable for Pennsylvania. Only nine states provided more than $4,000 per child. Four of these offer state Head Start programs (Delaware, Minnesota, Ohio, and Oregon), which provide comprehensive and family support services that raise the cost of supporting each child enrolled. Whereas New Jersey served more than 20 percent of its 4-year-olds, each of the five other leading states in this category served less than 10 percent of its population.

During 2002–2003, funding per child for both public K–12 education and federal Head Start far exceeded state spending on preschool in most states. The average state share to support a child in K–12 was $3,935, and total K–12 spending, which includes federal and local money as well as capital spending, was $9,173. Only Connecticut, Nevada, New Jersey, Ohio, Oregon, and Tennessee funded each child in state preschool at a level that matched or surpassed the state share for a child in K–12, and total funding per child in K–12 exceeded state preschool spending in every state. Per child spending on preschool was at least $3,500 less than total K–12 spending in all but 5 states.

Federal Head Start also received considerably more money per child than state preschool programs. State funding for a child in preschool was lower than federal funding for Head Start in 36 of 37 states for which these data were available. Nationally, federal Head Start programs received more than double the support per child in comparison to state preschool programs. Although Head Start served fewer 3- and 4-year-olds than state preschool during 2002–2003, federal Head Start grantees received more than $6 billion to provide services to participants, 87 percent of whom were 3 or 4 years old.

The size of the 3- and 4-year-old population differs dramatically by state. Thus, we compared funding across states by calculating per-capita spending for each year of age separately. Although no state currently funds preschool programs for all 3- and 4-year-olds, this method of calculation provides a useful indicator of state financial commitment relative to the entire preschool population. Per-capita spending figures are presented in Table 5. Twenty-five states offered some preschool services for 3-year-olds, but only six provided more than $200 of support per 3-year-old in the state. New Jersey made more than three times the per capita investment of any other state for 3-year-olds. The majority of state funds for preschool were directed to services for 4-year-olds, and all states with a program served children in this age group. Spending per 4-year-old was greater than $500 in 12 states, and exceeded $1,000 in four—Georgia, New Jersey, Oklahoma, and Texas. Georgia and New Jersey spent considerably more than other states, supporting preschool with an average of more than $2,000 for each 4-year-old resident.

Funds from Federal or Local Sources

Most states reported that some federal or local funds had been used to supplement state support for preschool during 2002–2003. Generally, states were not able to specify how much money was spent on preschool from these sources, and, therefore, they could not accurately report total spending on state Pre–K from all sources. In some cases, state administrators did not know whether specific federal or local sources were being used to support preschool. At least seven states directed TANF funds to preschool, supporting nine different preschool initiatives. Of all federal and local sources, states were most often able to specify funding amounts for TANF. Three programs, two in Louisiana and one in Ohio, were entirely or almost entirely supported with TANF dollars. Additionally, more than half of state preschool funds in Tennessee came from TANF, and these funds constituted about 30 percent of total preschool spending in Massachusetts.

The federal funding stream most frequently used to support state preschool was IDEA. Out of 44 programs profiled in this report, 24 used IDEA money to fund services for some participants. IDEA funds were generally used to supplement or replace state funds for children who required special services. Many programs (18) also were reported to use Title I funds. Unfortunately, state preschool administrators were rarely able to estimate how much funding was received from either Title I or IDEA. West Virginia used more than $8 million from Title I to fund preschool, which was one-third as large a contribution as state funding. Finally, child care (CCDF) funds supported preschool in at least seven states, with a specific amount reported for three of those states. Washington directed more than $5 million in CCDF money to support its state preschool initiative, representing an almost 20 percent increase over state funds alone.

At least 80 percent of programs used local money to help pay for preschool. As was the case with federal funds, few states were able to quantify support received from local sources. More than two-thirds of programs received in-kind contributions from localities, which may include services such as transportation, provision of meals, or maintenance of facilities. About one-third of programs were partially supported by parent fees, usually collected on a sliding scale based on family income. Connecticut and Massachusetts each reported using more than $10 million in parent fees to help fund their programs.

Although 35 programs were reported to receive some support from local funds, only eight required a local match. Percentages of funding required from local sources ranged from 11 percent for New York's EPK program to 40 percent of total funding in Arkansas. Alabama required that localities match half of the amount granted by the state. Some states allowed local matches to be either in cash or in-kind. In Wisconsin's 4K program, the local share of general school revenue was reported as a local match for preschool. Local funds are likely to be required in any state that funds a preschool initiative through the regular public school funding formula. The local match requirement in Virginia depended on a composite index of local ability to pay, so that wealthier localities generally have to pay for a higher percentage of overall program cost. In Kentucky, nearly $20 million in local funds were used to fund preschool, though no match was required.

Types of Agencies Eligible to Receive Funding

The manner in which states distribute resources to preschool programs may affect both the accessibility and quality of services. In most cases, the state distributes funds directly to operating agencies, which may or may not be allowed to subcontract with other providers. During 2002–2003, preschool initiatives in Kansas, Louisiana 8(g), Maine, New York (EPK), and Pennsylvania were operated exclusively through public schools. In these programs, only public schools were eligible to receive state funds and no subcontracting was permitted. In 36 of the 44 state initiatives, services were offered through a combination of public and private providers. Private agencies received funds directly from the state in 20 programs. Head Start, private or family child care, and faith-based centers were each eligible to receive funds directly in more than one-third of state programs. In 16 other initiatives, the state gave funds only to public schools, but schools subcontracted with private providers. Public schools were not involved with the provision of services in Hawaii's Preschool Open Doors Project, which distributes subsidies directly to parents, or in Louisiana's Nonpublic Schools Early Childhood Development Program, which operates out of nonpublic facilities.

Subcontracting with multiple types of agencies was allowed in about three-quarters of the programs profiled. Head Start centers and private child care were the providers most frequently used for subcontracting. More than half of all programs permitted subcontracting with faith-based centers, although some states did not allow services offered by these providers to include religious content. Programs that allow subcontracting in policy may in practice distribute different proportions of funds to eligible agencies. For example, more than half of all funds for New York's UPK program were distributed to subcontractors, whereas in South Carolina and Illinois a very small percentage of funds was directed to outside providers.

Other Types of Support for Preschool

No commitment a state can make to early childhood education is more important than recruiting and retaining highly qualified preschool teachers. To demonstrate such commitment, resources must be allocated to provide competitive salary and benefit packages for preschool teachers. Thirteen programs required all teachers to be paid on the public school district salary scale, including eight of the 12 programs that met at least eight benchmarks on NIEER's Quality Checklist. Approximately one-third of state prekindergarten initiatives applied the public salary scale only to preschool teachers employed by a public school system or those who taught in a public school. Teachers employed by agencies such as Head Start or other private agencies were generally not required to be paid public school teacher salaries. In 14 programs, the public school salary scale did not apply to preschool teachers regardless of program setting, and Pennsylvania allowed districts to decide this issue locally.

Scholarship or loan forgiveness programs were available to some preschool teachers in 23 states. These programs encourage professional development and reflect a financial commitment to promote high-quality preschool. Of 11 states that were able to provide specific data, only Arkansas, Colorado, and Massachusetts awarded more than 200 scholarships. In some states, such as Iowa and West Virginia, scholarships were only available to teachers in nonpublic settings who had not yet attained a BA. Assistant teachers in Nebraska and Wisconsin's 4K program were eligible for T.E.A.C.H. scholarships, but lead teachers in these two programs could not receive such support.

States were asked to report the number of full-time professional staff members employed at the state level who administered early childhood education programs. Resources devoted to administrative staff can contribute to program quality by funding teacher support and supervision as well as program monitoring and evaluation efforts. Of the 34 states for which data were available, 18 employed fewer than five full-time staff members to administer early childhood programs. In most states, administrative staff worked within a single agency or entity, such as the Department of Education, even when overseeing multiple programs. Approximately 300 administrators were employed nationally, each responsible on average for 2,500 preschoolers. In Texas, a single individual administered a program that served nearly 150,000 children. Such initiatives clearly depend on local public school administration to support the preschool program.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Preschool programs can be held accountable for compliance with quality standards through systems of monitoring and evaluation. During 2002–2003, states monitored their programs using a variety of approaches, including site visits, financial audits, and desktop reviews of other program records. About one-third of the state initiatives required site visits by state monitors at least once per year, including eight state initiatives that required two or three site visits per year. New Jersey's Abbott program, which required the most frequent site visits (one per week), uses "mentor" teachers who act as coaches for less experienced staff. Thirteen states did not require any site visits.

The vast majority of states reviewed financial or other program records (or both) at least once per year, including some states that reviewed records quarterly or monthly. Several states, including Arizona, Hawaii, Maine, Missouri, Texas, and West Virginia, did not require record reviews.

For most state initiatives, the monitoring requirements were the same regardless of the type of program providing services. However, there were some exceptions. For example, programs in nonpublic school settings in Illinois received additional visits from state monitors. For New York's UPK program, the state monitored programs provided by school districts directly, but districts were responsible for monitoring any agencies with which they subcontracted to provide services.

Along with monitoring, states also ensure accountability for their preschool programs through evaluations. Of 28 state initiatives that had completed evaluations, most assessed both child progress and program quality. The majority of state preschool evaluations that were completed by 2002–2003 were required and funded by the state, but most were conducted by an independent organization such as a university or private research firm. Other initiatives were evaluated either by the state or jointly by the state and an independent organization.

Summary

During 2002–2003, state preschool programs continued to experience inadequate funding, especially when compared to other types of educational initiatives for children, such as federal Head Start or public K–12 schools. Lack of resources affects programs directly by limiting access and quality. Staffing and budget constraints at the administrative level restrict monitoring and evaluation efforts and severely limit available data on state preschool programs. State preschool initiatives are part of broader systems of early education that usually involve several programs and funding streams, and multiple levels of government. Few states have data systems that provide unduplicated enrollment counts across programs or specific funding information across sources. Given these challenges, it is difficult to estimate the total amount of resources directed to each program, or to evaluate the efficiency with which these resources are being used.

Changes from 2001–2002

Differences in state funding for preschool from fiscal year 2002 to fiscal year 2003 can be examined in terms of nominal (unadjusted) dollars, or with spending figures for 2002 adjusted for inflation. In unadjusted figures, states spent about $165 million more on preschool during fiscal year 2003, and spending per child rose by about $15. However, when 2002 dollars are adjusted, the increase in total spending is reduced to approximately $90 million or 4 percent, and funding per child *decreases* by $90 for 2003. A similar pattern of change occurred for federal Head Start, although both total funding and spending per child decreased slightly in 2003 when comparing adjusted dollars. Of course, changes in funding are related to enrollment, and federal Head Start saw a small drop in funded enrollment during 2003, whereas participation in state preschool programs increased by about 7 percent.

Using 2002 adjusted figures, North Carolina, Nevada, and Kansas more than doubled total spending on preschool for 2003. In North Carolina, funding for the *More at Four* program increased by 350 percent, but state support for the Smart Start initiative has been significantly reduced. The largest spending increase occurred in New Jersey, where funding for preschool was nearly $110 million greater during 2003. The second largest increase was $24 million in North Carolina. Nationally, 16 states increased preschool spending for 2003 while funding decreased in 21 states. In six states—Missouri, Massachusetts, Hawaii, Connecticut, Ohio, and Iowa—spending on preschool dropped more than 10 percent between 2002 and 2003. In unadjusted dollars, 14 states decreased funding for preschool. Pennsylvania was not able to provide data for these analyses.

Only 12 states showed increases in spending per child enrolled in state preschool initiatives during the 2002–2003 program year. Spending increased by more than 10 percent in six states, including New Jersey—despite its having led the nation in spending per child during 2002. Among states that spent more per child during 2003, the percentage of change was greatest in New Mexico and Arkansas. Fifteen states lowered spending per child by at least 10 percent for the 2003 fiscal year. In Nebraska, Wisconsin, and Tennessee, the decline in state spending per child exceeded 20 percent.

The proportion of preschool funds directed to services for 4-year-olds as compared to 3-year-olds was relatively constant from 2002 to 2003. The vast majority of resources was spent in service of 4-year-olds, as would be expected given that nearly seven 4-year-olds were served in state preschool initiatives for every one 3-year-old enrolled. Spending per capita for 4-year-olds increased by more than 50 percent in North Carolina, Kansas, Nevada, and Louisiana, while the largest decreases were seen in Massachusetts and Missouri. The few states that contributed significantly to preschool for 3-year-olds during 2002, such as New Jersey, Massachusetts, and West Virginia, continued to do so during 2003.

TABLE 5: RANKINGS OF STATE PRE-K RESOURCES PER CHILD ENROLLED

Resources Rank	State	$ per child enrolled in state Pre-K	$ per 3-year-old in the state	$ per 4-year-old in the state
1	New Jersey	$8,739	$1,373	$2,009
	FEDERAL HEAD START	$7,089	*FEDERAL HEAD START*	
2	Minnesota	$6,672	$96	$149
3	Oregon	$6,525	$197	$379
4	Connecticut	$5,601	$191	$584
5	Delaware	$5,287	$0	$449
6	North Carolina	$4,819	$0	$271
7	Tennessee	$4,573	$49	$147
8	Ohio	$4,514	$292	$416
9	Massachusetts	$4,104	$436	$430
10	Louisiana	$3,922	$0	$820
11	Washington	$3,897	$69	$270
12	Georgia	$3,824	$0	$2,075
13	Nevada	$3,686	$25	$57
14	Alabama	$3,638	$0	$79
15	Hawaii	$3,478	$0	$215
16	New York	$3,347	$20	$996
17	California	$3,317	$72	$288
18	West Virginia	$3,309	$313	$957
19	Michigan	$3,306	$0	$636
20	Virginia	$3,090	$0	$195
21	Arkansas	$2,998	$70	$184
22	Iowa	$2,925	$39	$133
23	Illinois	$2,905	$231	$708
24	Wisconsin	$2,881	$44	$700
25	Colorado	$2,864	$42	$395
26	Texas	$2,746	$112	$1,192
27	Kentucky	$2,484	$261	$688
28	Arizona	$2,432	$0	$123
29	Oklahoma	$2,368	$0	$1,406
30	Missouri	$2,198	$52	$95
31	Nebraska	$1,909	$28	$49
32	Maine	$1,875	$0	$203
33	New Mexico	$1,765	$14	$44
34	Kansas	$1,721	$0	$253
35	South Carolina	$1,303	$25	$421
36	Vermont	$1,197	$84	$117
37	Maryland	$936	$19	$246
NA	Pennsylvania	NA	NA	NA
No program	Alaska	$0	$0	$0
No program	Florida	$0	$0	$0
No program	Idaho	$0	$0	$0
No program	Indiana	$0	$0	$0
No program	Mississippi	$0	$0	$0
No program	Montana	$0	$0	$0
No program	New Hampshire	$0	$0	$0
No program	North Dakota	$0	$0	$0
No program	Rhode Island	$0	$0	$0
No program	South Dakota	$0	$0	$0
No program	Utah	$0	$0	$0
No program	Wyoming	$0	$0	$0

NA=Not available (State did not provide data.)

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

Policy Recommendations

Throughout America, children share a common need for a good early childhood education, and their families face common challenges in obtaining this education for them. Education for 4-year-olds can no longer be thought of as a luxury in any state, nor should it be viewed as a service that can only benefit poor children. Using a variety of models, a number of states have made progress on key aspects of state prekindergarten programs. However, much remains to be done. We offer specific recommendations for state and federal government policy to promote the effective education of young children.

1. States should increase funding for prekindergarten programs to improve access to a quality education. The 12 states without prekindergarten programs should each start one, and states that already have programs should increase their efforts. Oklahoma (which ranks 42nd in per-capita income) has demonstrated that even states with modest resources can make a good education available to all 4-year-olds. The Oklahoma prekindergarten program, together with Head Start and preschool special education, serves 82 percent of the state's 4-year-olds. All of the children enrolled in Oklahoma's state program are provided with fully qualified early childhood teachers. Georgia is not far behind in providing access. If every state followed Oklahoma by including prekindergarten in its state K–12 funding formula, 80 percent of all 4-year-olds in the United States could be served with an increase of only $9 billion in state funds.

2. High standards are necessary for educational excellence. States must improve their standards for prekindergarten education. Again, some states have demonstrated that this is possible. For example, Arkansas met all 10 of our benchmarks for state policy regarding quality. As the most important benchmarks relate to teacher quality, it is noteworthy that only 13 programs require all teachers to have a BA and specialized training in preschool education. All states should adopt this standard. Many states require this standard for some programs or have a high percentage of fully qualified teachers. Unfortunately, when this is not required, the most disadvantaged children are most likely to end up with poorly qualified teachers. Other elements of quality are also important and are detailed in our description of the Quality Standards Checklist.

3. Funding for state prekindergarten programs is too often a low priority. No other state-funded programs have greater potential to contribute to economic growth and prosperity. Yet, states spend more than $1 trillion each year on other priorities. States could adequately fund prekindergarten programs for all 4-year-olds by reallocating only about one percent of their total spending. Without sufficient resources, programs are forced to limit the number of children they serve and to skimp on quality. Inadequate state funding can also lead to heavy reliance on local funding to finance programs. Given the vast differences in local financial capacity, this has the potential to produce serious gaps and inequities in access to effective preschool education.

4. The federal government's role in prekindergarten education must continue to evolve and improve. Important federal supports for the education of young children include Head Start, child care funding through several programs, preschool special education funds, and Title I. However, despite the proliferation of overlapping federal programs, they do not provide enough funding to adequately serve all targeted children. As with most state prekindergarten programs, Head Start standards for teachers fall short, and programs struggle to pay salaries sufficient to attract and keep highly qualified teachers. Child care programs barely address the issues of educational quality at all. Although it is important to plan for the integration of education and child care, this poses difficulties. A large portion of child care funds are used to serve older children or children whose parents work outside normal school hours. Therefore, most child care funds are not available to fund preschool education. The federal government could increase support specifically for prekindergarten programs by offering to match state government spending that is accompanied by high standards. Rather than seeking to force integration of various federal and state programs, the federal government could experiment with financial incentives for program integration.

5. States need better data on prekindergarten enrollment. Most states cannot accurately identify how many 3- and 4-year-olds receive how much education and from which programs. Although it is highly desirable that the existing programs be braided together to give young children good education and care, the result is that an unduplicated count of the number of children served is not available in many states. Financial information is no easier to come by. For children in grades K–12, it is possible to identify the state, local, and federal share of expenditures for a year of education. Most states cannot provide this information for their state prekindergarten initiatives. More detailed data are critical for policymakers to make fully informed decisions about how to expand and improve prekindergarten and how to coordinate resources so that they are used in the most efficient way possible. As many of the difficulties arise from lack of coordination among multiple federal programs, the federal government should support states in creating better data systems.

6. Advance planning is essential to effecting change in prekindergarten programs. States should look ahead to determine what improvements are needed and how to implement changes so that they bring about the desired effects. For example, if a state expands funding to serve more children, planning is essential to ensure that local districts and communities are able to inform families and enroll children, and to ensure that new teachers and facilities are available. If teacher qualification standards are raised, states may need to provide financial support, time, and training to enable teachers to meet the new regulations, as well as increased compensation to attract and retain teachers with higher credentials.

Photo: RC Peters

Leading States for Prekindergarten

Several states stand out as leaders in providing prekindergarten. Each of these states is noteworthy for making prekindergarten widely accessible, setting high quality standards, providing the resources to implement high standards, or investing substantial new funding in its initiatives in recent years. These states' prekindergarten initiatives have some shortcomings, and there is room for improvement as they work toward opening up high-quality prekindergarten programs to more children. Still, the states are taking some promising steps forward and offer models for others to follow.

Arkansas

In 2002–2003, the Arkansas Better Chance (ABC) program was the only initiative that met all 10 of NIEER's quality benchmarks. Although enrollment decreased slightly between 2001–2002 and 2002–2003, total spending rose by 40 percent and spending per child enrolled rose by 43 percent. Total funding dropped by a small amount in 2003–2004, but the state will greatly expand its prekindergarten investment in 2004–2005 as part of a broader education reform measure. State spending will increase from about $9 million in 2003–2004 to about $50 million in 2004–2005. Funds will be targeted to schools where students are not performing well on statewide exams.

Arkansas helps ensure high-quality prekindergarten not only by setting strong standards but through other steps as well. The state annually monitors and evaluates all center-based programs using the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS), and programs must score an overall average of 5.5 out of 7. The state also requires preschool teachers to be paid on the public school salary scale and provides scholarships to nearly 600 prekindergarten teachers, about one-quarter of whom are ABC staff working toward their CDA credentials.

Illinois

Although funding for the state's Prekindergarten Program for At-Risk Children decreased between 2001–2002 and 2002–2003, Illinois appropriated about $27.5 million in additional funding for the initiative for 2003–2004. With this new money, the state was able to enroll about 8,000 more children in the prekindergarten program. Illinois' program is also notable for its commitment to quality, meeting 9 of NIEER's 10 quality benchmarks. In the one area it falls short—meal requirements—programs are required to provide snacks and, while it is not mandated, most full-day programs also provide lunch.

In addition, the state is now encouraging agencies outside the public schools to provide prekindergarten by allowing them to compete directly for funding, rather than permitting them to receive funding only through subcontracts with the schools. These agencies will still have to comply with all the same quality standards that apply to public schools, including having teachers certified in early childhood education who are paid according to the public school salary scale.

New Jersey

As a result of a court ruling in a school finance equity case, New Jersey is making high-quality prekindergarten available to all 3- and 4-year-olds in the 30 lowest-income districts in the state (referred to as the Abbott districts, and expanded to include one additional district in 2004). The Abbott prekindergarten program's quality standards, which must follow standards laid out by the state Supreme Court, meet all but one of NIEER's quality benchmarks. Abbott programs employ certified teachers who are paid salaries equivalent to other public school teachers. Enrolled children receive comprehensive services and attend 6 hours per day, with wrap-around services available using funds from the Department of Human Services. State spending per pupil is more than $8,700, which is higher than the amount provided by any other state initiative.

Although the state has been successful in addressing prekindergarten needs in its lowest-income areas, it is still lagging behind in covering other districts. The state has a secondary prekindergarten program for 102 districts other than the Abbott districts, but this program enrolls only about one-fifth as many children as the Abbott prekindergarten program. In addition, the quality standards do not match up with those for the Abbott districts, although the state is working to align the two sets of standards.

New Jersey is seeking to expand prekindergarten to additional non-Abbott districts through its new Early Launch to Learning Initiative (ELLI). The state has set aside $15 million that could be used to serve 4,000 low-income preschoolers throughout the state in fiscal year 2005. The long-term goal is to make prekindergarten available to all 4-year-olds in New Jersey by 2010.

Oklahoma

In Oklahoma, all 4-year-olds are eligible to participate in prekindergarten if their district offers it. Districts that choose to provide prekindergarten receive funding from the state for each 4-year-old served, just as they would for any K–12 student. The state prekindergarten initiative has expanded rapidly since 1998 when it was opened up to all 4-year-olds. In 2002–2003, the program was available in more than 90 percent of school districts. These districts served 28,000 children, or 59 percent of all 4-year-olds in the state—a higher percentage served than by any other state. Oklahoma's program has continued to expand, enrolling more than 30,000 children in 2003–2004. The initiative is limited to 4-year-olds and does not serve 3-year-olds.

The state has taken some important steps to ensure the quality of its programs, including requiring all teachers to have bachelor's degrees with certification in early childhood education and paying them salaries equivalent to those of other public school teachers. However, the program lacks statewide requirements for health screenings and referrals. The state continues to work on strengthening other aspects of this initiative, for example by increasing collaboration with Head Start and child care programs to offer services.

States to Watch

A number of states are worth watching to see if they follow through with current plans for strengthening and expanding prekindergarten. Although there are initial signs of progress in these states, there is also reason for caution. In some cases, these states have yet to commit resources to increasing access to prekindergarten or to lay out specific plans to achieve their goals.

Developments in ***Florida*** deserve particular attention. In 2002, voters approved a ballot measure requiring prekindergarten to be made universally available for all 4-year-olds by 2005. Although this was a landmark measure, the state has yet to adopt an implementation plan or identify a funding source even as the deadline fast approaches. A proposal passed by the Legislature in the 2004 session failed to set adequate quality standards and was ultimately vetoed. Fulfilling the voter mandate will require the state to serve an estimated 90,000 additional 4-year-olds not served by other publicly funded programs. Florida lacks a state prekindergarten initiative to build upon because it eliminated its separate prekindergarten initiative and the associated quality standards in 2001.

Several other states have taken promising steps forward, although these are often only first steps:

Maryland plans to increase access to prekindergarten over the next several years, with the goal of making it available to all eligible 4-year-olds by 2007–2008. The state emphasizes coordination of its various prekindergarten funding streams.

Policy changes are planned for ***New York's*** Universal Prekindergarten program (UPK) that would raise standards to fulfill at least two of NIEER's quality benchmarks that the program did not meet in the year covered by this report. Legislation drafted in 1997 required all UPK teachers to be certified in early childhood education by 2002. The state has made progress toward achieving this goal, with an estimated 80 percent of UPK teachers certified during 2002–2003, but implementation of the requirement has been postponed until September 2005. In addition, assistant teachers in UPK programs located in public schools will be required to complete 18 credit hours toward an AA or BA within 4 years of their hiring date. The change in assistant teacher requirements went into effect in February 2004. Other states, such as Kentucky and West Virginia, plan to make policy changes in the next few years that would improve their prekindergarten quality standards. In some cases, the vast majority of providers already meet the higher standards, so the new requirements may not be particularly expensive or problematic to fulfill.

In ***North Carolina***, funding and enrollment for the *More at Four* program—which meets 9 out of 10 quality benchmarks on NIEER's checklist—have grown steadily. The program, which served 1,240 children in 2001–2002, is expected to serve 12,000 children in 2004–2005. Meanwhile, funding has increased from $6.5 million for 2001–2002 to approximately $50 million for 2004–2005. Yet, some of this expansion of *More at Four* has come at the expense of the state's comprehensive early childhood program, Smart Start, which has experienced a decrease in funding from $231 million in 2000–2001 to $191 million in 2003–2004.

Photo: RC Peters

Pennsylvania established a new Education Accountability Block Grant in 2004 that school districts can use to support prekindergarten. The block grant provides a total of $200 million, two-thirds of which will be targeted toward early childhood, with individual school districts determining exactly how their funds will be spent. More than $9 million of the block grant funds will be used to provide prekindergarten to about 3,400 children in 40 school districts.

In 2004, ***Virginia*** significantly increased the amount of funding available to districts for prekindergarten. The goal is to make prekindergarten available to more at-risk 4-year-olds through either Head Start or the state program. While the state previously provided funds to serve 60 percent of at-risk 4-year-olds not enrolled in federal programs such as Head Start or Title I, state funding will now allow districts to serve 90 percent of at-risk 4-year-olds not served by Head Start. However, it is up to districts whether they access the funds and offer prekindergarten programs.

West Virginia intends to make prekindergarten universally available for all 4-year-olds by 2012–2013. Enrollment in the state's prekindergarten program has already increased somewhat over the past few years, from 6,853 children in 2001–2002 to 7,924 children in 2003–2004. The program currently serves only about one-third of the state's 4-year-olds.

Wisconsin has been promoting its Four-Year-Old Kindergarten (4K) program, which is open to all 4-year-olds if schools choose to offer it. The number of children enrolled in 4K has grown from about 12,700 children in 2001–2002 to more than 16,000 in 2002–2003 to nearly 17,000 children in 2003–2004. However, the increase in enrollment has not been accompanied by a similar increase in funding. State funds for 4K remained relatively flat from 2001–2002 to 2002–2003, leading to a 20 percent decline in spending per child. Although most children are served within the public schools, the state is working to encourage collaboration with community-based settings such as child care and Head Start centers to meet the increased demand.

Enrollment in each of several additional states, including ***Alabama***, ***Kansas***, ***Louisiana***, ***Nebraska***, and ***Nevada***, grew by more than 50 percent between 2001–2002 and 2002–2003. However, there is still much more room for further expansion of these state prekindergarten initiatives. Louisiana's four prekindergarten initiatives reached more than 20 percent of the state's 4-year-olds in 2002–2003, and Kansas' initiative served 15 percent of its 4-year-olds, but neither of these states' programs serves 3-year-olds. Alabama, Nebraska, and Nevada each served 2.5 percent or less of their 4-year-olds in 2002–2003.

Roadmap to State Profile Pages

Policies in place—How to interpret the data on individual state pages:

For each state that has a prekindergarten initiative, we present one page with a description of the state's program followed by a page with data on the program's key features.

On the top of the first page for each state are five bar graphs:

- The first bar shows the percentage of the state's 4-year-olds enrolled in the state program in 2002–2003.
- The second bar shows the percentage of the state's 4-year-olds enrolled in 2003–2004, when data were available.
- The third bar shows how many of the 10 benchmarks in the Quality Standards Checklist were met by the state's prekindergarten policies as of 2002–2003.
- The fourth bar shows the state's spending per child enrolled in the state prekindergarten initiative in 2002–2003.
- Finally, the fifth bar shows the state's spending per child enrolled in 2003–2004, if data were available.

Next to the bar graphs representing the 2002–2003 enrollment and spending data are arrows pointing up or down or an equal sign. These symbols indicate whether there has been an increase, decrease, or no change in the percentage of 4-year-olds enrolled in the state's prekindergarten program or in state spending per participant compared to 2001–2002. Most of the 2001–2002 data used for comparison purposes come from NIEER's *2003 State Preschool Yearbook*; however, spending figures from our earlier report were adjusted for inflation. There are also some exceptions in cases where states revised data or reported data differently. In such cases we adjusted the data to ensure comparability across program years.

The bar graphs are followed by a narrative describing the main features of the state's initiative, including its origins, the types of settings in which prekindergarten can be offered, and the eligibility criteria for children. The narrative also notes unique or particularly interesting aspects of the state initiative that may not be highlighted elsewhere in the report. Where information is available, new developments in funding and enrollment are also discussed, including specific data for 2003–2004. Some of the descriptive information in the paragraphs was originally included in *Seeds of Success* from the Children's Defense Fund and the *Quality Counts 2002* issue of *Education Week*.

At the bottom of the first page of each state profile are three numbers showing how the state ranks against other states on the following measures:

- The percentage of the state's 4-year-old population enrolled in the state's prekindergarten program (Access Ranking—4s)
- The percentage of the state's 3-year-old population enrolled in the state's prekindergarten program (Access Ranking—3s)
- State expenditures per child enrolled in the program (Resources Ranking)