

WHAT QUALIFIES AS A STATE PRESCHOOL PROGRAM?

NIEER's *State Preschool Yearbook* series focuses on state-funded preschool education initiatives meeting the following criteria:

- The initiative is funded, controlled, and directed by the state.
- The initiative serves children of preschool age, usually 3 and/or 4. Although initiatives in some states serve broader age ranges, programs that serve *only* infants and toddlers are excluded. The program must reach at least one percent of the 3- or 4-year-old population in the state to be included.
- Early childhood education is the primary focus of the initiative. This does not exclude programs that offer parent education but does exclude programs that mainly focus on parent education. Programs that focus on parent work status or programs where child eligibility is tied to work status are also excluded.
- 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* and *integrated* with the subsidy system for child care.
- The initiative is *not* primarily designed to serve children with disabilities, but services may be offered to 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, and if the state assumes some administrative responsibility for the program. State supplements to fund quality improvements, extended days, or other program enhancements or to fund expanded enrollment only minimally are not considered equivalent to a state preschool program.

While ideally this report would identify all preschool education funding streams at the federal, state, and local levels, there are a number of limitations on the data that make this extremely difficult to do. For example, preschool is only one of several types of education 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 therefore do not know the extent to which they are spent on preschool education. 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. 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-funded preschool education initiatives, it is nearly impossible to determine what proportion of the child care funds are spent this way.

AGE GROUPINGS USED IN THIS REPORT

Children considered to be 3 years old during the 2014-2015 school year are those who were eligible to enter kindergarten two years later, during the 2016-2017 school year. Children considered to be 4 years old during the 2014-2015 school year were eligible to enter kindergarten one year later, during the 2015-2016 school year. Children considered to be 5 years old during the 2014-2015 school year were already eligible for kindergarten at the beginning of the 2014-2015 school year.

Roadmap to the State Profile Pages

How to interpret data on the individual state profiles

For each state with a preschool education initiative, we include one page with a description of the state's program, followed by a page with data on the program's key features, focusing on access, quality, and resources.

The first page for each state begins with two sets of bar graphs. The first set shows percentages of the state's 3-year-olds and 4-year-olds enrolled in the state prekindergarten program. The second set shows the state's spending per child enrolled in the state pre-K initiative. Both sets of bar graphs depict changes in state preschool over time, from fiscal year 2002 (which corresponds to the 2001-2002 school year) through fiscal year 2015 (which corresponds to the 2014-2015 school year). Due to space constraints, not all years can be included. Instead, data is included for the years ending in 2002, 2004, 2006, 2008, 2010, 2012, 2014, and 2015. Most of the data used for comparison purposes come from NIEER's previous *Yearbooks*, although spending figures are adjusted for inflation and represent 2015 dollars. In addition, there are some exceptions in cases where states revised data or reported data differently. The percent of children enrolled is calculated using Census estimates of 3- and 4-year-old children in each state.

Following the bar graphs is a brief narrative providing information on the main features of the state's initiative(s). This includes details such as the initiative's history, the types of settings in which state-funded preschool can be offered, enrollment eligibility criteria, and evaluations (if conducted). In many cases, the narrative also describes unique or particularly interesting aspects of the state's initiatives that may not be highlighted elsewhere in the report, as well as relevant new developments in the 2014-2015 school year and expected changes for the 2015-2016 school year. New for the 2014-2015 Yearbook, information from the Dual Language Learner and Workforce supplemental surveys is also included. Some descriptive information in the narratives was originally based on information found in the reports *Seeds of Success* from the Children's Defense Fund and *Quality Counts 2002* from *Education Week*.

For the 42 states with preschool programs and the District of Columbia, the bottom of the first page of each state profile presents four numbers showing the state's ranking on the following measures:

- The percentage of the state's 4-year-old population enrolled in the state's preschool program (Access Rankings – 4-Year-Olds);
- The percentage of the state's 3-year-old population enrolled in the state's preschool program (Access Rankings – 3-Year-Olds);
- State expenditures per child enrolled in the program (Resources Rankings – State Spending);
- All reported expenditures per child enrolled in the program, including local and federal spending as well as state spending (Resources Rankings – All Reported Spending).

The All Reported Spending ranking provides a more complete picture of pre-K spending in states using local and federal funding sources than the State Spending ranking alone. Because states vary in their ability to report spending from these other sources, however, this ranking is imperfect and sometimes underestimates total spending.

New for the 2014-2015 Yearbook, the bottom of the first page of each state profile also presents two boxes indicating whether or not the state has policies in place to support:

- Dual Language Learners
- Workforce (Teachers)

Connecticut, Iowa, Kansas, Louisiana, Massachusetts, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Vermont, and Wisconsin each have more than one distinct preschool education initiative, therefore information is presented slightly differently for these states and is explained on their individual profiles.

State profile pages are also given for the 8 states that did not fund preschool education initiatives in the 2014-2015 school year. For these states, the table of quality standards is omitted. These profiles do report enrollment data for special education and federally funded Head Start, however. In addition, data on per-child spending for K-12 education and federal Head Start are included. When applicable, state-funded Head Start spending and enrollment are also provided for no-program states. Profile pages are also included for 6 US territories (American Samoa, Guam, Northern Mariana Islands, Palau, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands). For the territories, a narrative is provided but none fund pre-K programs for which we could report on access, quality standards, and resources.



The following sections provide an overview of information contained in the data tables on the state profile pages and explain why these elements are important. Data in the tables are for the 2014-2015 school year except where noted.

ACCESS

The Access data table begins with the total state program enrollment, which is the number of children of all ages enrolled at a specific point in time. Following that is the percentage of school districts (or other local education authorities, such as counties or parishes) providing state-funded prekindergarten programs. This information shows the extent of the initiative's geographic coverage. Next, the table shows what, if any, income requirement is used in determining eligibility for the program.

Data on the hours of operation (hours per day and days per week) and operating schedule (academic or calendar year) are shown as additional measures of access because working parents may find it difficult to get their children to and from programs that operate only a few hours a day. The amount of time children participate in a preschool program also matters for other reasons, such as influencing the program's effects on children's development and learning.

The Access data table also shows enrollment of 3- and 4-year-old children in two federally funded programs besides the state prekindergarten initiative: preschool special education and Head Start. The Head Start enrollment total includes children in the American Indian/Alaskan Native and Migrant Seasonal programs. The final item in the table reports how many children ages 3 and 4 are participating in Head Start through state supplemental funds.

Two Access pie charts illustrate the percentages of the state's 3- and 4-year-olds enrolled in the state-funded preschool initiative(s), special education, and Head Start. The remaining children are categorized as enrolled in "Other/None." These children may be enrolled in another type of private or publicly funded program (e.g., state-subsidized child care) or may not be attending a center-based program at all. For the 2015 Yearbook, we calculated an unduplicated count for special education enrollment in order to more accurately represent the number of children served in the state. The special education percentage in the pie chart represents children who are in special education but not enrolled in Head Start or state preschool programs. For the first time in the 2015 report, we also calculated an unduplicated count for Head Start enrollment in order to avoid double counting Head Start children enrolled in state prekindergarten. For the states that were able to report this information, the Head Start percentage does not include children also enrolled in state prekindergarten.

QUALITY STANDARDS CHECKLIST

State policies in 10 critical areas related to quality are shown in the Quality Standards Checklist table. For each area, states receive a checkmark when their policy meets or exceeds the related benchmark standard. On the right side of the page, a box displays the total number of benchmarks met by the state.

The Quality Standards Checklist represents a set of minimum criteria, established by state policy, needed to ensure the effectiveness of preschool education programs, especially when serving children who are at risk for school failure. While the checklist is not intended to be an exhaustive inventory of all the features of a high-quality program, each of these research-based standards is essential. Meeting all 10 standards does not necessarily guarantee that a program is of high quality, but no state's prekindergarten policies should be considered satisfactory unless all 10 benchmarks are met. Although programs may routinely engage in practices meeting criteria for quality standards, credit is given only when the practices are explicitly required in state policy.

The limitations of the research are such that judgment inevitably plays a role in setting specific benchmarks based on evidence. Studies find that the potential benefits from strong preschool education programs are such that the monetary investment in pre-K is returned 7 to 17 times.¹ Therefore, we gave more weight to the risk of losing substantial benefits by setting benchmarks too low than to the risk of raising costs by setting benchmarks too high. Costs of many preschool programs are currently quite low; thus, benchmarks steer closer to the characteristics of programs demonstrated to produce reasonably large education benefits for children in randomized trials and the strongest quasi-experimental studies (e.g., HighScope Perry Preschool and Chicago Child-Parent Centers) and farther from the characteristics of programs found in rigorous studies to have weak effects.²

Of the 10 standards we use to gauge the quality of state-funded preschool programs, four involve teacher credentials and training. State preschool policies are evaluated based on whether programs require teachers to have at least a bachelor's degree;³ whether they require teachers to have specialization in preschool education;³ whether they require assistant teachers to have at least a Child Development Associate (CDA) or equivalent credential based on coursework;⁴ and whether they require teachers to have at least 15 hours of annual in-service training.⁵ Teacher qualifications receive this emphasis in our checklist because research shows this area to be crucial in determining program quality. Better education and training for teachers can improve the interaction between children and teachers, which in turn affects children's learning.

Class size and staff-child ratios are also emphasized in the Quality Standards Checklist, with the expectation that states will limit class sizes to 20 children at the most⁶ and have no more than 10 children per staff member.⁷ With smaller classes and fewer children per teacher, children have greater opportunities for interaction with adults and can receive more individualized attention, resulting in a higher quality program.

¹ Reynolds, A., Temple, J., Robertson, D., & Mann, E. (2002). Age 21 cost-benefit analysis of the Title I Chicago Child-Parent Centers. *Education Evaluation and Policy Analysis, 24*, 267-303. Belfield, C., Nores, M., Barnett, S., & Schweinhart, L. (2006). The High/Scope Perry Preschool Program: Cost-benefit analysis using data from the age-40 follow-up. *Journal of Human Resources, 41*(1), 162-190.

² Temple, J., & Reynolds, A. (2007). Benefits and costs of investments in preschool education: Evidence from the Child-Parent Centers and related programs. *Economics of Education Review, 26*, 126-144. Barnett, W.S., & Belfield, C. (2006). Early childhood and social mobility. *Future of Children, 16*(2), 73-98.

³ 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, B.T., Donovan, M.S., & Burns, M.S. (Eds.). (2001). *Eager to learn: Educating our preschoolers*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press. 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. Whitebook, M., Howes, C., & Phillips, D. (1989). *Who cares? Child care teachers and the quality of care in America* (Final report on the National Child Care Staffing Study). Oakland, CA: Child Care Employee Project.

⁴ Preschool classrooms typically are taught by a team 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, Donovan, & Burns (2001). Burchinal, Cryer, Clifford, & Howes (2002). Barnett (2003). Whitebook, Howes, & Phillips (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.

⁵ Good teachers are actively engaged in their continuing professional development. Bowman, Donovan, & Burns (2001). Frede, E.C. (1998). Preschool program quality in programs for children in poverty. In W.S. Barnett & S.S. Boocock (Eds.). (1998). *Early care and education for children in poverty: Promises, programs, and long-term results* (pp. 77-98). Albany, NY: SUNY Press. Whitebook, Howes, & Phillips (1989) found that teachers receiving more than 15 hours of training were more appropriate, positive, and engaged with children in their teaching practices.

⁶ The importance of class size has been demonstrated for both preschool and kindergarten. A class size of 20 children 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.). (1998). *Early care and education for children in poverty: Promises, programs, and long-term results* (pp. 11-44). Albany, NY: SUNY Press. Bowman, Donovan, & Burns (2001). Finn, J.D. (2002). Class-size reduction in grades K-3. In A. Molnar (Ed.). (2002). *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 (2005). *NAEYC early childhood program standards and accreditation criteria*. Washington, DC: Author.

⁷ A large body of literature establishes linkages between staff-child ratio, program quality, and child outcomes. A ratio of 1:10 allows more children per teacher than in programs that have demonstrated large gains in disadvantaged children and is the lowest (fewest number of children per teacher) generally accepted by professional opinion. Barnett (1998). Bowman, Donovan, & Burns (2001). Frede (1998). NICHD Early Child Care Research Network (1999). National Association for the Education of Young Children (2005).

Early learning standards are also critical to quality, as they offer programs guidance and ensure that they cover the full range of areas essential to children’s learning and development.⁸ States should have comprehensive early learning standards covering all areas identified as fundamental by the National Education Goals Panel⁹—children’s physical well-being and motor development, social/emotional development, approaches toward learning, language development, and cognition and general knowledge. These standards should be specifically tailored to the learning of preschool-age children so that it is appropriate for their level of development.

The Quality Standards Checklist also addresses the comprehensive services that preschool education programs should be expected to offer. Programs should provide at least one meal;¹⁰ vision, hearing, and health screenings and referrals;¹¹ and other support services, such as parent education, parent conferences and/or home visits, or referrals for such services.¹² These items are included because children’s overall well-being and success in school involves not only their cognitive development but also their physical and social/emotional health.

It is important to note that the Quality Standards Checklist focuses on state preschool policy requirements rather than actual practice. A state with good policies may have some programs that fail to comply with these policies; conversely, a state with weak policies may have many programs that exceed state minimum standards. While evaluating implementation of standards is outside the scope of this report, the checklist does include an indicator of whether states are taking steps to monitor programs’ implementation of the quality standards. Policies requiring strong state quality standards are essential, but it is also necessary to have a means of ascertaining that individual pre-K programs meet those standards.¹³ Therefore, programs should require at a minimum that all sites are visited for program quality at least once every five years to enforce standards and to ensure high-quality education in state-funded preschool programs.

RESOURCES

The table in the Resources section provides the following information: total state spending for the state prekindergarten initiative; whether a local match, monetary or in-kind, is required; amount of state Head Start spending (if applicable); state spending per child enrolled in the program; and all reported (local, state, and federal) spending per child enrolled in the program. These measures show various views of the resources dedicated to pre-K, which allows for a more complete picture of a state’s commitment to preschool education. For example, a state’s total spending may appear low, but may prove to be high relative to the number of children enrolled. On the other hand, a state with a high total funding level may have a low per-pupil spending level if it enrolls a large number of children. In some states, local communities contribute substantial additional funds to state preschool education by using local funding sources or by leveraging federal funding sources. In such cases, the figure that includes all reported spending is the best gauge of the level of available resources, to the extent that information about local and locally allocated federal spending is available.

The bar chart in the Resources section compares per-child spending in state-funded programs to federal Head Start and K-12 per-child spending. Head Start per-child spending for the 2014-2015 year includes funding only for 3- and 4-year-olds served. Past years’ figures have unintentionally included funds for Early Head Start, which made per-child amounts seem artificially higher. Different colors indicate the different funding sources (local, state, and federal). Separate colors are used to indicate any TANF funds that a state directs toward its preschool initiative. While TANF funds are federal dollars, it is the state’s decision to devote these funds to preschool education, as opposed to other purposes. Data on the amounts of local and federal preschool funds are included in the bar chart when available.

⁸ 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, Donovan, & Burns (2001). Frede (1998). Kendall, J.S. (2003). Setting standards in early childhood education. *Educational Leadership*, 60(7), 64-68.

⁹ National Education Goals Panel (1991). *The Goal 1 Technical Planning Subgroup report on school readiness*. Washington, DC: Author.

¹⁰ Good nutrition contributes to healthy brain development and 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.

¹¹ 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.). (2000). *Handbook of early childhood intervention* (pp. 231-257). New York: Cambridge University Press.

¹² Families are the primary source of support for child development, and the most effective programs have partnered with parents. Bowman, Donovan, & Burns (2001). Frede (1998).

¹³ Monitoring of program quality and external accountability for pre-K are essential components of program standards. Bowman, Donovan, & Burns (2001).

Guide to State Profiles

ACCESS

Total state program enrollment.....	Number of all-age children in state pre-K program
School districts that offer state program	Percentage of school districts in state where program is offered
Income requirement	Maximum family income for participants
Hours of operation	Hours per day and days per week program operates ¹⁴
Operating schedule	Annual schedule of operation (academic year or calendar year)
Special education enrollment.....	Number of 3- and 4-year-olds served by the Preschool Grants Program of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act
Federally funded Head Start enrollment	Number of slots for 3- and 4-year-olds in Head Start funded with federal money
State-funded Head Start enrollment	Number of slots for 3- and 4-year-olds in Head Start funded with state money

QUALITY STANDARDS CHECKLIST

POLICY

STATE PRE-K REQUIREMENT

Early learning standards.....	National Education Goals Panel content areas covered by state learning standards for preschool-age children must be comprehensive
Teacher degree	Lead teacher must have a BA, at minimum
Teacher specialized training	Lead teacher must have specialized training in a pre-K area
Assistant teacher degree	Assistant teacher must have a CDA or equivalent, at minimum
Teacher in-service	Teacher must receive at least 15 hours/year of in-service professional development and training
Maximum class size	Maximum number of children per classroom must be 20 or fewer
3-year-olds	
4-year-olds	
Staff-child ratio	Lowest acceptable ratio of staff to children in classroom (e.g., maximum number of students per teacher) must be 1:10 or better
3-year-olds	
4-year-olds	
Screening/referral and support services	Screenings and referrals for vision, hearing, and health must be required; at least one additional support service must be provided to families
Meals	At least one meal must be required daily
Monitoring.....	Site visits must be used to demonstrate ongoing adherence to state program standards

RESOURCES

Total state pre-K spending	Total state funds spent on state pre-K program
Local match required?.....	Whether state requires local providers to match state monetary contributions to program
State Head Start spending (when applicable)	Total state funds spent to supplement Head Start program
State spending per child enrolled.....	Amount of state funds spent per child participating in pre-K program
All reported spending per child enrolled	Amount of all reported funds (local, state, and federal) spent per child participating in pre-K program

¹⁴ In an effort to ensure data is comparable from state to state, NIEER now provides guidelines for characterizing length of program day. "Part day" is defined as fewer than 4 hours per day; "school day" is at least 4 hours but fewer than eight hours per day; and "extended day" is eight or more hours per day.