

# Top Five Facts About Preschool

- 1. Growth in state-funded preschool had slowed, even before the COVID-19 pandemic.**
  - In 2019-2020, states added only 12,000 preschool seats and the number of 4-year-olds in state-funded preschool declined for only the second time since 2002.
  - Real funding increased by just 3% in 2019-2020.
- 2. The pandemic imposed huge setbacks on pre-K, reversing recent progress.**
  - Preliminary estimates indicate that pre-K enrollment and spending fell in 2020-2021. Surveys find that many parents chose not to enroll children in pre-K due to pandemic-related fears of attending in person and the difficulties of remote pre-K.
  - If preschool funding is based on 2020-2021 enrollment, many states will face serious funding shortfalls when enrollment rebounds post-pandemic.
- 3. Progress has been uneven among the states. Some have moved forward; others stagnated or even declined in access, standards, and funding. This increased inequality in children's access to high-quality preschool across the states.**
  - Six states have no state-funded pre-K program while others like Alabama have made great strides going from serving 1% of 4-year-olds in 2001-2002 to 34% in 2019-2020 while meeting all 10 of NIEER's quality standards benchmarks.
  - New Jersey and Oregon expanded access to preschool in 2020-2021 despite the difficulties of the COVID-19 pandemic while others pulled back.
- 4. Most states spend too little per child to support high-quality, full-day pre-K; few reach all their children or even all those in low-income families.**
  - Only five states (D.C., NJ, NC, OK, WV) spend enough to pay for high-quality full-day pre-K. Nationally, \$12 billion is needed to improve the quality of existing preschool and Head Start seats.
  - \$30 billion is needed to expand access to all low-income 3- and 4-year-olds. Another \$32 billion would be required to serve all 3- and 4-year-olds.
- 5. Now is the time for a renewed commitment to high-quality pre-K for all beginning with those in the lowest income families.** In the short-run, states should invest federal rescue and recovery funds in pre-K to support a return to safe, highly effective programs. In the longer-run, a new federal initiative should fund a share of the costs and integrate federally supported programs into a single system of high-quality pre-K education.