

PRE-SCHOOL ENROLLMENT



THE OPPORTUNITY PICTURE

According to the 2014 Opportunity Index, 18 states and the District of Columbia experienced an increase in the number of 3- and 4-year olds in pre-kindergarten while 29 states experienced a decrease and three states saw no change.

Studies consistently show that high-quality early childhood education reaps tremendous benefits. One study of four-year-olds in Tulsa who attended Oklahoma's Universal Pre-Kindergarten Program¹ found that they started kindergarten seven months ahead of other children in literacy skills and four months ahead in math skills.² Likewise, children who participated in New Mexico's pre-k initiative showed substantial gains in literacy and math.³

These benefits extend well beyond kindergarten. Children who receive high-quality early childhood education are less likely to repeat a grade, to require special education, to drop out of school or to commit a crime.⁴ Early childhood education enjoys bipartisan support. Both Democratic and Republican voters support the expansion of high-quality early childhood programs, according to a recent survey by the First Five Years Fund.⁵ The compelling evidence has led both Democratic and Republican leaders to agree that investing in high-quality preschool will enable students to get family-sustaining jobs, and become contributing members of society.⁶

Yet the Great Recession exacted a heavy toll on the expansion of pre-kindergarten programs. Just 28 percent of 4- and 3-year-olds have been enrolled in state-financed preschool since 2011. While the percent served has remained steady over the past three years, 9,160 fewer children were served in 2013 than in the previous year.⁷ The National Institute for Early Education Research says this drop "raises serious concerns" about the quality and access of pre-kindergarten programs for most American children. Nationwide, funding increased by \$30.6 million in 2013, but that was not enough to make up for \$500 million in cuts made in 2011-2012.

1 William T. Gormley, Jr., Center for Research on Children in the U.S., Georgetown University, The Effects of Oklahoma's Universal Pre-Kindergarten Program on School Readiness (June 18, 2007), available at <http://nieer.org/resources/research/OklahomaReadiness.pdf>.

2 Id. at 11.

3 Jason T. Hustedt, Ph.D, et al, Impacts of New Mexico PreK on Children's School Readiness at Kindergarten Entry: Results from the Second Year of a Growing Initiative, The National Institute for Early Education Research, Rutgers University (June 2008), available at <http://nieer.org/resources/research/NewMexicoRDD0608.pdf>.

4 William Carpluk, PEW Center on the States, Investments in Pennsylvania's Early Childhood Programs Pay off Now and Later (Jennifer v. Doctors eds., Mar. 2011), available at http://www.readynation.org/uploads/20110303_PAbriefFinal.pdf.

5 See, e.g., http://www.ffyf.org/sites/default/files/Poll_Fact_Sheet.pdf

6 Jacqueline Baker, Opportunity Nation, Index Indicator Blog Series: Preschool Sets Kids on the Path to Future Success (Aug. 14, 2013), available at <http://www.opportunitynation.org/blog/entry/index-indicator-blog-series-preschool-sets-kids-on-the-path-to-future-succe>.

7 See, e.g., <http://nieer.org/research/state-preschool-2013>

INDICATOR QUICK FACTS

INDEX DIMENSION

- Education

MEASURE

- The percentage of children ages 3-4 enrolled in public, private nursery school, preschool, or kindergarten

SOURCE

- U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey

OPPORTUNITY INDEX DATA

- The District of Columbia has the highest rates of preschool enrollment in the nation at **75.9%** due to their universal preschool initiative. D.C. was also "most improved" since 2013 on this indicator.
- **64%** of states saw a decrease or no increase in preschool enrollment, likely due to funding cuts to early childhood education programs.
- Perquimans County, North Carolina, reports **100%** preschool enrollment, the only county in the nation to do so.

47.6%



The national percentage of percentage of children ages 3-4 enrolled in public, private nursery school, preschool, or kindergarten