

Trends in Pre-K Education Funding in 2017-18

Emily Parker, Tom Keily, Bruce Atchison and Jill Mullen

Early education represents a crucial time in developing a child's potential and building key academic, social, emotional and cognitive skills.¹ High-quality pre-K during these early years can set children up for future success and help shrink the achievement gap.²

An analysis of 2017-18 state appropriations for pre-K in all 50 states and the District of Columbia shows continuing support from both republican and democratic governors, legislators and state boards of education. In 2017-18, 28 states increased funding levels for pre-K programs; and overall, state funding for pre-K programs increased by \$256 million, or 3.42 percent, over the previous fiscal year. While states continue their investment in pre-K programs, the year-over-year increase from 2016-17 to 2017-18 is the smallest one-year increase since 2012, the year Education Commission of the States began producing this report.

Overall, state funding for pre-K programs increased by \$256 million, or 3.42 percent, over the previous fiscal year. This is the smallest one-year increase since 2012.

The most common way states fund pre-K is through legislative appropriation, which means pre-K programs are often subject to discretionary budget decisions and economic cycles.

In 2017-18, four states — **Idaho, New Hampshire, South Dakota** and **Wyoming** — did not provide state funding for pre-K programs.

Educational Impact of Quality Pre-K

Over the past several years, research developments have suggested that pre-K has a positive impact on students and society at large. In 2018, researchers from Georgetown University and the University of West Virginia found that benefits of high-quality pre-K can stretch beyond school entry, reaching into a child's middle school years.³ This research — which follows students from Tulsa, Okla., who entered the state's pre-K program in 2006 — shows that the short-term impact on math skills from pre-K extends into middle school. In addition, students in the pre-K program were more likely to enroll in honors courses, less likely to be held back and more likely to perform better on reading assessments.⁴

Societal Benefits and Return on Investment of Quality Pre-K

In addition to academic benefits, research shows health and societal impacts associated with pre-K. Nobel Laureate James Heckman followed two generations of families who engaged in high-quality programs for children up to age five from low-income households.⁵ Students in the study were more likely to graduate from high school, had higher IQs, experienced better overall health and were less likely to be incarcerated than their peers who did not experience high-quality early learning programs. As a result of these types of academic and social outcomes, society incurs fewer costs associated

with incarceration, special education and remedial education for these students later in life. While the benefits vary based on program type and population, researchers estimate that pre-K and comprehensive early learning programs targeting children from lower-income households have an annual social rate of return — a term defined in Heckman's research — between 7 and 10 percent.⁶

Importance of Quality Pre-K in the P-3 Continuum

Although states continue to increase funding for pre-K programs, experts argue that states should consider the gains made in pre-K as part of a quality P-3 continuum.⁷ By establishing a [high-quality K-3 environment](#), schools can create a seamless space to nurture the foundational development that takes place in high-quality pre-K programs. Offering [full-day kindergarten](#), [supporting children and parents through the transition from pre-K to kindergarten](#), and [principal leadership](#) are key components in a high-quality, P-3 environment.

Today, there are more than 400,000 licensed and regulated early childhood centers and pre-K programs in the United States.⁸ However, there is a lack of quality and consistency in cost and transportation. Forty-seven percent of kindergarten students from low-income households are likely to have attended a center-based program or preschool, compared with 66 percent of children from higher-income households.⁹ As states continue their investment in pre-K, they may consider

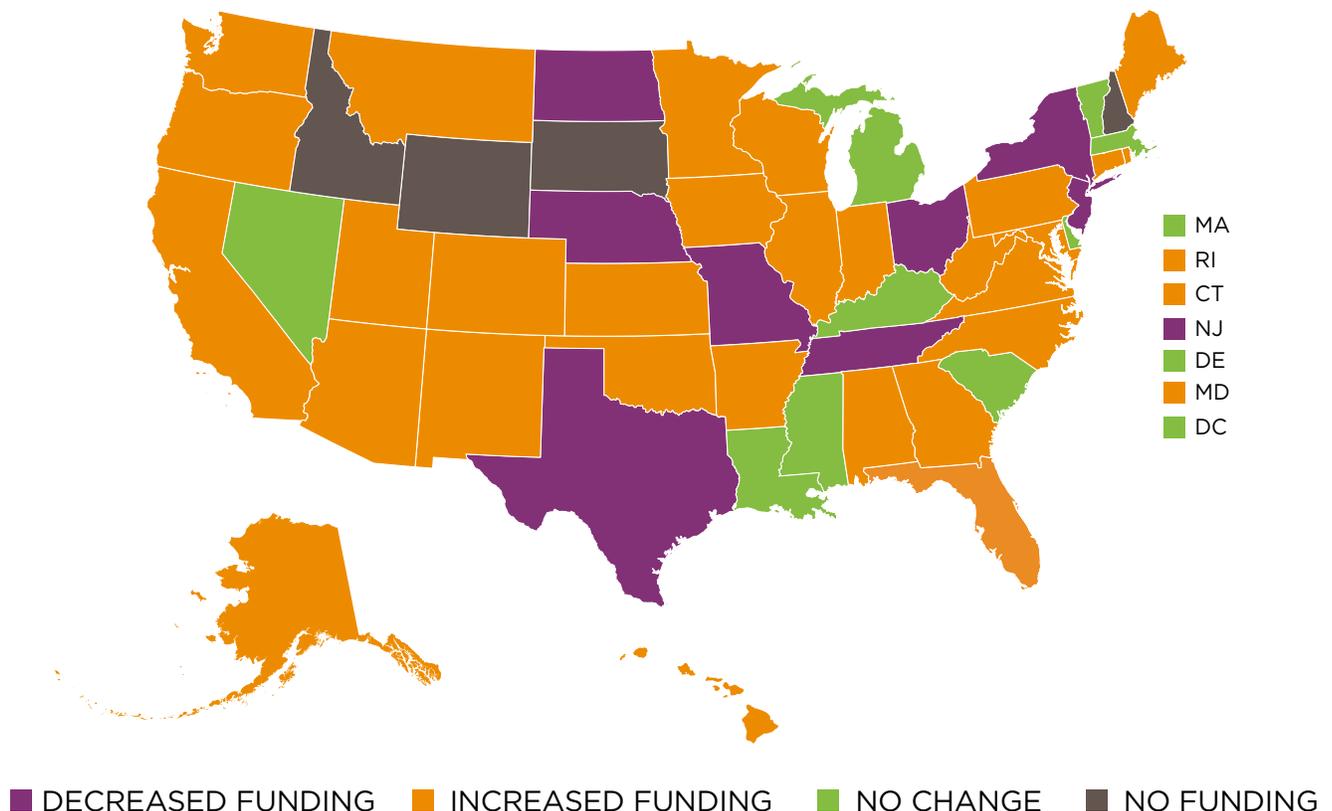
coupling the investment with high-quality K-3 programs.

How States Fund Pre-K

At least 10 states and the District of Columbia include pre-K programs in their state education funding formulas, which helps [to insulate those funds from budget cuts](#).¹⁰ Some states, such as **Hawaii** and **Wisconsin**, include their voluntary pre-K programs in their constitutions as a way

to ensure equity and access for 4-year-old students. In doing so, states maintain funding for pre-K over time, making it a state priority as opposed to something that is left to discretionary annual decisions. Other states, such as **Georgia**, **North Carolina** and **Virginia**, fund pre-K through lottery funds or tobacco settlement dollars. The most common way [states fund pre-K programs](#) is through a legislative appropriation.

Changes in Pre-K Funding From 2016-17 to 2017-18



State Examples

The data in this report include responses from surveys sent to state early education administrators, budget analysts or governors' staff in each state.



ALABAMA

Alabama has continually increased the number of students served and the amount of state funds allocated to pre-K since 2005-06. The number of 4-year-olds served by the state's voluntary pre-K program rose from 750 in 2016 to 14,032 in 2017. The state's voluntary pre-K program served 24 percent of all 4-year-olds in 2017, and all 67 counties in the state offered it.¹¹

In 2017, Alabama was one of five states that met all of the National Institute for Early Education Research's 10 quality benchmarks.¹² The First Class Pre-K program includes several components that are indicative of quality pre-K, including early learning standards and structured professional development for teachers and assistants.

First Class Pre-K

\$77.5M in 2017-18

\$64.5M in 2016-17




MARYLAND

In addition to pre-K programs already operating in the state, during the 2017 legislative session, Maryland passed [H.B. 684/S.B. 1024](#) establishing a supplemental grant program to support full-day pre-K programs. The grant program — which began in 2018 and will continue through 2020 — intends to expand public pre-K for 4-year-olds from families with household incomes either at or below 200 percent of the federal poverty guidelines.¹³

Maryland Pre-K Program

\$117.7M in 2017-18

\$115.6M in 2016-17

Head Start

\$1.8M in 2017-18

and in 2016-17

State Pre-K Expansion

\$8M in 2017-18

\$4.3M in 2016-17

The program provides applicants, including school districts and qualified vendors, with \$7,344 per student for the creation of a new spot not previously funded through the pre-K expansion fund or \$3,672 per student for an improved slot, where the provider will improve the quality of an existing program.¹⁴ Grantees must use the improvement funds to extend the program from half day to full day, in addition to any of the following: limit the class size to 20 and decrease the child-staff ratio to 1 to 10, employ certified state teachers, and provide professional development for pre-K educators and comprehensive services for students.¹⁵

Preschool for All
\$91K in 2017-18

\$606K in 2016-17

State Full-Day Kindergarten Supplemental Grants

\$11M in 2017-18

\$0 in 2016-17



In 2017, Gov. Steve Bullock announced in his [State of the State](#) address his intention to create and fund a state pre-K grant program. Montana did not have existing state-funded pre-K, but that same year, Bullock worked with the legislature to create a pilot program for 4- and 5-year-olds. The two-year STARS Preschool Pilot included \$6 million in grants to expand quality early childhood education programs.¹⁶ The state received 47 applications and selected 17 grantees to participate. In 2018, the Montana [Department of Public Health and Human Services](#) reported children enrolled in the STARS program showed a 21 percent overall increase in school readiness. Since the program received more grant applicants than it had money to spend, the governor's office is seeking more funding during the upcoming legislative session.¹⁷

STARS
Preschool Pilot

\$3M in 2017-18

\$0 in 2016-17





As part of a statewide expansion plan to include more children in its Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program, Washington increased funding for pre-K by nearly 14 percent in 2017-18. ECEAP is a voluntary pre-K program serving 3- and 4-year-old children from low-income families or who are considered vulnerable because of developmental needs or environmental risk factors.¹⁸ The Washington Department of Early Learning set a goal to make the program available to all eligible children statewide by 2022-23.¹⁹ The state added 800 slots for children in 2017-18 and an additional 1,000 in 2018-19. The state's goal is to make 90 percent of the state's children — regardless of race or family income — kindergarten-ready by 2020.²⁰

Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program

\$110.3M in 2017-18

\$97M in 2016-17



Final Thoughts

Overall, state funding for pre-K increased by a higher percentage between the 2015-16 and 2016-17 fiscal years than between 2016-17 and 2017-18. Between 2015 and 2017, funding increased by \$480 million nationally, and between 2016 and 2018, funding increased by \$256 million. This was largely due to significant investments from several states in previous years, which were then held constant in 2017-18. Although many states have introduced supports to address the need for available and accessible high-quality early childhood programs, it remains a key issue for states as they prepare their respective budgets.

Appendix A: Total State Pre-K Funding

STATE	2016-17 Funding	2017-18 Funding	Change (\$)	Change (%)
Alabama	\$64,462,050	\$77,462,050	\$13,000,000	20.17%
Alaska	\$8,852,991	\$10,052,991	\$1,200,000	13.55%
Arizona	\$41,413,543	\$43,275,752	\$1,862,209	4.50%
Arkansas	\$105,000,000	\$114,000,000	\$9,000,000	8.57%
California	\$1,124,343,000	\$1,290,378,000	\$166,035,000	14.77%
Colorado	\$65,175,123	\$66,376,156	\$1,201,033	1.84%
Connecticut	\$111,472,539	\$127,038,975	\$15,566,436	13.96%
Delaware	\$6,149,300	\$6,149,300	\$0	0.00%
District of Columbia ¹	\$222,257,368	\$222,257,368	\$0	0.00%
Florida	\$395,180,396	\$396,812,611	\$1,632,215	0.41%
Georgia	\$357,846,380	\$364,854,613	\$7,008,233	1.96%
Hawaii	\$2,764,000	\$2,937,836	\$173,836	6.29%
Idaho	0	0	\$0	
Illinois	\$393,738,100	\$443,738,100	\$50,000,000	12.70%
Indiana	\$12,000,000	\$22,000,000	\$10,000,000	83.33%
Iowa	\$83,999,988	\$84,678,676	\$678,688	0.81%
Kansas	\$33,357,779	\$34,473,257	\$1,115,478	3.34%
Kentucky	\$90,113,200	\$90,113,200	\$0	0.00%
Louisiana ²	\$93,839,097	\$93,839,097	\$0	0.00%
Maine	\$22,088,742	\$22,355,948	\$267,206	1.21%
Maryland	\$122,340,213	\$138,459,379	\$16,119,166	13.18%
Massachusetts ³	\$26,728,875	\$26,728,875	\$0	0.00%
Michigan	\$243,600,000	\$243,600,000	\$0	0.00%
Minnesota	\$118,667,000	\$128,042,000	\$9,375,000	7.90%
Mississippi	\$4,000,000	\$4,000,000	\$0	0.00%
Missouri ⁴	\$17,194,141	\$15,194,141	(\$2,000,000)	-11.63%
Montana	\$0	\$3,000,000	\$3,000,000	n/a
Nebraska	\$24,880,200	\$24,493,620	(\$386,580)	-1.55%
Nevada	\$3,338,875	\$3,338,875	\$0	0.00%
New Hampshire ⁵	0	0	0	
New Jersey	\$655,517,000	\$653,596,871	(\$1,920,129)	-0.29%
New Mexico	\$51,900,000	\$52,300,000	\$400,000	0.77%

STATE	2016-17 Funding	2017-18 Funding	Change (\$)	Change (%)
New York	\$808,881,178	\$796,699,144	(\$12,182,034)	-1.51%
North Carolina	\$145,503,300	\$159,013,927	\$13,510,627	9.29%
North Dakota	\$1,500,000	\$750,000	(\$750,000)	-50.00%
Ohio	\$75,268,341	\$73,116,789	(\$2,151,552)	-2.86%
Oklahoma	\$141,394,474	\$144,470,607	\$3,076,133	2.18%
Oregon	\$72,646,487	\$74,400,000	\$1,753,513	2.41%
Pennsylvania	\$196,462,000	\$226,462,000	\$30,000,000	15.27%
Rhode Island	\$5,960,000	\$7,430,000	\$1,470,000	24.66%
South Carolina	\$62,937,948	\$62,937,948	\$0	0.00%
South Dakota	0	0	0	
Tennessee	\$86,617,200	\$86,522,900	(\$94,300)	-0.11%
Texas	\$909,200,000	\$799,450,000	(\$109,750,000)	-12.07%
Utah	\$9,263,900	\$10,763,900	\$1,500,000	16.19%
Vermont ⁶	\$20,700,000	\$20,700,000	\$0	0.00%
Virginia	\$68,869,827	\$69,100,000	\$230,173	0.33%
Washington	\$96,971,321	\$110,310,000	\$13,338,679	13.76%
West Virginia	\$93,440,418	\$94,533,303	\$1,092,885	1.17%
Wisconsin	\$197,095,400	\$209,134,400	\$12,039,000	6.11%
Wyoming	0	0	0	
NATIONAL TOTAL	\$7,494,931,694	\$7,751,342,609	\$256,410,915	3.42%

¹ The pre-K allocation amount for the District of Columbia for 2017-18 was not available at the time of publication. The authors assume flat funding from the 2016-17 fiscal year to the 2017-18 fiscal year.

² The pre-K allocation amount for Louisiana was not available at the time of publication. The authors assume flat funding from the 2016-17 fiscal year to the 2017-18 fiscal year.

³ The pre-K allocation amount for Massachusetts was not available at the time of publication. The authors assume flat funding from the 2016-17 fiscal year to the 2017-18 fiscal year.

⁴ Missouri includes a pre-K funding allocation for low-income students in its school funding formula. However, disaggregated data is not available.

⁵ The pre-K allocation amount for New Hampshire was not available at the time of publication. Based on 2016-17 data, the authors assume that New Hampshire did not have a program in 2017-18.

⁶ The pre-K allocation amount for Vermont was not available at the time of publication. The authors assume flat funding from the 2016-17 fiscal year to the 2017-18 fiscal year.

Appendix B: State Pre-K Funding by Program

STATE	PROGRAM	2016-17 Funding	2017-18 Funding	Change (\$)	Change (%)
Alabama	First Class Pre-K	\$64,462,050	\$77,462,050	\$13,000,000	20.17%
Alaska	Alaska Pre-K Program	\$2,000,000	\$3,200,000	\$1,200,000	60.00%
	Head Start	\$6,852,991	\$6,852,991	\$0	0.00%
Arizona	Quality First Scholarships	\$41,413,543	\$43,275,752	\$1,862,209	4.50%
Arkansas	Arkansas Better Chance	\$105,000,000	\$114,000,000	\$9,000,000	8.57%
California	Part-Day California State Preschool Program	\$719,180,000	\$822,460,000		14.36%
	Additional Funding for Full-Day California State Preschool Program	\$355,163,000	\$417,918,000	\$62,755,000	17.67%
	Preschool Quality Rating and Improvement Systems Grant	\$50,000,000	\$50,000,000	\$0	0.00%
Colorado	Colorado Preschool Program	\$65,175,123	\$66,376,156	\$1,201,033	1.84%
Connecticut	Priority School Readiness	\$82,792,842	\$80,903,866	(\$1,888,976)	-2.28%
	Competitive School Readiness	\$10,241,933	\$9,860,593	(\$381,340)	-3.72%
	Child Day Care (State-Funded Preschool Only)	\$10,421,880	\$27,901,627	\$17,479,747	167.72%
	Head Start	\$5,571,838	\$5,048,843	(\$522,995)	-9.39%
	Smart Start	\$2,444,046	\$3,324,046	\$880,000	36.01%
Delaware	Early Childhood Assistance Program	\$6,149,300	\$6,149,300	\$0	0.00%
District of Columbia ¹	Pre-K	\$222,257,368	\$222,257,368	\$0	0.00%
Florida	Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK)	\$395,180,396	\$396,812,611	\$1,632,215	0.41%
Georgia	Georgia Pre-K Program	\$357,846,380	\$364,854,613	\$7,008,233	1.96%
Hawaii	Executive Office of Early Learning Prekindergarten Program	\$2,764,000	\$2,937,836	\$173,836	6.29%
Idaho	NO PROGRAM				
Illinois	Early Childhood Block Grants	\$393,738,100	\$443,738,100	\$50,000,000	12.70%
Indiana	On My Way Pre-K	\$10,000,000	\$22,000,000	\$10,000,000	100.00%
	Early Education Matching Grants	\$2,000,000	<i>Combined with On My Way Pre-K funds</i>		n/a
Iowa	Statewide Voluntary Preschool for 4-Year-Olds	\$76,300,000	\$78,150,966	\$1,850,966	2.43%
	Shared Vision At-Risk Preschool Program	\$7,699,988	\$6,527,710	(\$1,172,278)	-15.22%

STATE	PROGRAM	2016-17 Funding	2017-18 Funding	Change (\$)	Change (%)
Kansas	State Pre-K Program (4-year-olds at-risk)	\$13,451,184	\$14,549,792	\$1,098,608	8.17%
	Kansas Preschool Program	\$4,132,317	\$4,132,317	\$0	0.00%
	Early Childhood Block Grants	\$15,774,278	\$15,791,148	\$16,870	0.11%
Kentucky	Kentucky Preschool Program	\$90,113,200	\$90,113,200	\$0	0.00%
Louisiana ²	LA 4	\$75,514,057	\$75,514,057	\$0	0.00%
	Nonpublic School Early Childhood Development Program	\$7,181,440	\$7,181,440	\$0	0.00%
	Student Enhancement Block Grant (8g)	\$11,143,600	\$11,143,600	\$0	0.00%
Maine	Public School Program	\$19,001,011	\$19,316,515	\$315,504	1.66%
	Head Start	\$3,087,731	\$3,039,433	(\$48,298)	-1.56%
Maryland	Maryland Pre-Kindergarten Program	\$115,634,333	\$117,650,297	\$2,015,964	1.74%
	Head Start	\$1,800,000	\$1,800,000	\$0	0.00%
	State Pre-K Expansion	\$4,300,000	\$7,972,000	\$3,672,000	85.40%
	Preschool for All	\$605,880	\$90,979	(\$514,901)	-84.98%
	State Full-day Kindergarten Supplemental Grants	\$0	\$10,946,103	\$10,946,103	n/a
Massachusetts ³	Universal Pre-Kindergarten Program	\$7,400,000	\$7,400,000	\$0	0.00%
	Head Start Supplemental	\$9,100,000	\$9,100,000	\$0	0.00%
	Early Childhood Mental Health Program	\$1,250,000	\$1,250,000	\$0	0.00%
	Inclusive Preschool Learning Environments (IPLE) Grant	\$8,978,875	\$8,978,875	\$0	0.00%
Michigan	Great Start Readiness Program	\$243,600,000	\$243,600,000	\$0	0.00%
	School Readiness Program	\$33,683,000	\$33,683,000	\$0	0.00%
Minnesota	Head Start Supplemental	\$25,100,000	\$25,100,000	\$0	0.00%
	Early Learning Scholarships	\$59,884,000	\$69,259,000	\$9,375,000	15.66%
Mississippi	Early Learning Collaborative	\$4,000,000	\$4,000,000	\$0	0.00%
Missouri ⁴	Missouri Preschool Project	\$13,694,141	\$11,694,141		-14.60%
	Child Development Missouri Early Head Start	\$3,500,000	\$3,500,000	\$0	0.00%
Montana	STARS Preschool Pilot	\$0	\$3,000,000	\$3,000,000	n/a
Nebraska	School Funding Formula	\$20,607,732	\$21,014,623	\$406,891	1.97%
	Early Childhood Education Grant Program	\$4,272,468	\$3,478,997	(\$793,471)	-18.57%
Nevada	Early Childhood Education	\$3,338,875	\$3,338,875	\$0	0.00%
New Hampshire ⁵	NO PROGRAM				
New Jersey	Preschool Education Aid	\$655,517,000	\$653,596,871	(\$1,920,129)	-0.29%
New Mexico	Pre-K Program	\$51,900,000	\$52,300,000	\$400,000	0.77%

STATE	PROGRAM	2016-17 Funding	2017-18 Funding	Change (\$)	Change (%)
New York	Universal Pre-Kindergarten	\$385,034,734	\$410,034,734	\$25,000,000	6.49%
	Targeted Pre-K	\$1,320,300	\$1,303,000	(\$17,300)	-1.31%
	Priority Pre-Kindergarten (rolled into universal)	\$30,526,144	\$0		-100.00%
	Statewide Universal Full-Day Pre-Kindergarten Program	\$340,000,000	\$340,000,000	\$0	0.00%
	Expanded Pre-K for 3- and 4-Year-Olds	\$30,000,000	\$30,000,000	\$0	0.00%
	Prekindergarten for 3-Year-Olds	\$22,000,000	\$10,361,410	(\$11,638,590)	-52.90%
	Additional Expanded Pre-K for 3- and 4-Year-Olds	\$0	\$5,000,000	\$5,000,000	n/a
North Carolina	NC Pre-K Program	\$145,503,300	\$159,013,927	\$13,510,627	9.29%
North Dakota	Early Childhood Education Grant Program	\$1,500,000	\$750,000	(\$750,000)	-50.00%
Ohio	Early Childhood Education	\$75,268,341	\$73,116,789	(\$2,151,552)	-2.86%
Oklahoma	Early Childhood 4-year-olds program	\$141,394,474	\$144,470,607	\$3,076,133	2.18%
Oregon	Head Start	\$72,646,487	\$74,400,000	\$1,753,513	2.41%
Pennsylvania	Pre-K Counts	\$147,284,000	\$172,284,000	\$25,000,000	16.97%
	Head Start Supplemental Assistance	\$49,178,000	\$54,178,000	\$5,000,000	10.17%
Rhode Island	Pre-K	\$5,160,000	\$6,240,000	\$1,080,000	20.93%
	Head Start	\$800,000	\$1,190,000	\$390,000	48.75%
South Carolina	Child Development	\$47,424,102	\$47,424,102	\$0	0.00%
	EIA Half Day Child Development	\$15,513,846	\$15,513,846	\$0	0.00%
South Dakota	NO PROGRAM				
Tennessee	Voluntary Pre-K Program	\$86,617,200	\$86,522,900	(\$94,300)	-0.11%
Texas	FSP Pre-Kindergarten Program	\$761,000,000	\$786,000,000	\$25,000,000	3.29%
	Supplemental Funding for Pre-K	\$15,000,000	\$0		-100.00%
	Texas School Ready!	\$15,200,000	\$13,450,000	(\$1,750,000)	-11.51%
	High Quality Prekindergarten Grant	\$118,000,000	\$0		-100.00%
Utah	Utah School Readiness	\$3,000,000	\$3,000,000	\$0	0.00%
	UPSTART	\$6,263,900	\$7,763,900	\$1,500,000	23.95%
Vermont ⁶	ACT 62/ACT 166	\$20,500,000	\$20,500,000	\$0	0.00%
	Voluntary Pre-K Program	\$200,000	\$200,000	\$0	0.00%
Virginia	Preschool Initiative	\$68,869,827	\$69,100,000	\$230,173	0.33%
Washington	Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program	\$96,971,321	\$110,310,000	\$13,338,679	13.76%
West Virginia	Early Childhood Education Program	\$93,440,418	\$94,533,303	\$1,092,885	1.17%

STATE	PROGRAM	2016-17 Funding	2017-18 Funding	Change (\$)	Change (%)
	4-Year-Old Kindergarten	\$189,481,300	\$201,520,300	\$12,039,000	6.35%
Wisconsin	4-Year-Old Kindergarten - Start Up Grants	\$1,350,000	\$1,350,000	\$0	0.00%
	Head Start Supplement	\$6,264,100	\$6,264,100	\$0	0.00%
Wyoming	NO PROGRAM				
NATIONAL TOTAL		\$7,494,931,694	\$7,751,342,609	\$256,410,915	3.42%

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Jill Mullen



Jill Mullen is a former policy researcher at Education Commission of the States. Prior, she worked as a policy staffer at the Colorado General Assembly. In her free time, Jill enjoys paddleboarding, tacos and audiobooks.

ENDNOTES

1. Bruce Atchison and Louisa Diffey, *Initiatives From Preschool to Third Grade* (Denver: Education Commission of the States, 2018), <https://www.ecs.org/initiatives-from-preschool-to-third-grade-a-policy-makers-guide/>.
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3. William T. Gromley, Deborah Phillips and Sara Anderson, “The Effects of Tulsa’s Pre-K Program on Middle School Student Performance.” *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* 37, no. 1 (Winter 2018): 63-87.
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