



Universal PreK Programs in the United States and Worldwide

United States

In the United States, seven states and Washington, DC offer universal PreKindergarten programs for 4-year-olds. In addition, a number of cities, including New York City, Boston, San Antonio and Chicago, offer or are in the process of implementing universal PreK.

For the purposes of this analysis, state programs were considered to be universal if they met the following criteria:

- 95% or greater of school jurisdictions offer the program.
- Program has no income or other eligibility requirements.

FLORIDA ¹					
% Enrolled ²	\$ per child ³	NIEER Rating	Setting	Funding	Structure
75%	\$2,225	4/10	Mixed Delivery	Annual allocation by Legislature	300 hours (summer) 540 hours (school year)

- Children attending Florida Voluntary PreK (VPK) were less likely to be retained in kindergarten.
- Florida's VPK program has not demonstrated sustained benefit to children. Researchers hypothesize this may be due to Florida's very low investment and regulatory requirements for VPK. ([Source](#))

GEORGIA					
% Enrolled	\$ per child	NIEER Rating	Setting	Funding	Structure
60%	\$4,907	8/10	Mixed delivery	Revenues from Georgia State Lottery ⁴	6.5 hours per day; 5 days per week

- Children exhibited significant growth during their PreK year across all domains of learning, including language and literacy skills, math skills, general knowledge, and behavioral skills. ([Source](#))
- Children in Georgia's pre-K program show significant increases in math scores as late as eighth grade among children eligible for free or reduced-price lunch ([Source](#)).

¹ All data derived from the [NIEER 2019 State of Preschool Report](#) unless otherwise noted.

² Percent of four-year-olds enrolled in state preschool program.

³ Annual per-child spending, adjusted for cost of living.

⁴ Georgia's program, which is often described as "universal," has capacity limitations based on funding raised by the Georgia State Lottery.

IOWA					
% Enrolled	\$ per child	NIEER Rating	Setting	Funding	Structure
66%	\$3,758	8/10	Public school with option to collaborate with private programs	School funding formula	Minimum 10 hours per week

- Studies show increased proficiencies in beginning reading skills among all children who attend Iowa's Statewide Voluntary PreK program. ([Source](#))

OKLAHOMA					
% Enrolled	\$ per child	NIEER Rating	Setting	Funding	Structure
76%	\$4,791	9/10	Public school with option to collaborate with private programs	School funding formula	Full school day; academic year

- Middle school students who participated in Oklahoma's Universal PreK have higher math test scores, are more likely to enroll in honors courses, and are noticeably less likely to have been retained in grade. ([Source](#))
- An evaluation of the program statewide showed a significant positive outcome on receptive vocabulary at school entry and, in adulthood, a reduction in crime. ([Source](#))
- A follow-up study on the preschool program in Tulsa showed reduced grade retention and higher enrollment in honors courses. ([Source](#))

VERMONT					
% Enrolled	\$ per child	NIEER Rating	Setting	Funding	Structure
78%	\$6,641	7/10	Public school with option to collaborate with private programs	Mix of federal, state and local funds	Minimum 10 hours per week; 35 weeks per year

- Kindergarten readiness scores do not vary between those who attended state-funded PreK and those who did not, but those who did not attend may have attended other childcare or PreKindergarten programs of comparable or higher quality. Limited hours also mean the most vulnerable students may be the least likely to attend. ([Source](#))

WASHINGTON, DC					
% Enrolled	\$ per child	NIEER Rating	Setting	Funding	Structure
87%	\$15,970	4/10	Mixed Delivery	School funding formula augmented with federal funds	6.5 hours per day; 5 days per week; 180 days per year

- In the years since Washington, D.C. began offering two years of Universal PreK, the city's maternal labor force participation rate has increased by about 12 percentage points, with 10 percentage points attributable to preschool expansion. ([Source](#))
- 86 percent of PreK students were ready for kindergarten on the cognition skills measured by the city's early childhood assessment. ([Source](#))

WEST VIRGINIA					
% Enrolled	\$ per child	NIEER Rating	Setting	Funding	Structure
59%	\$8,409	9/10	Public school, requires 50% of programs to partner with private or Head Start programs	School funding formula augmented with federal funds	Minimum 25 hours per week; 4 days per week

- Children in West Virginia's PreK program showed gains in vocabulary that were 30 percent higher than the gains of children without the program. This translates into an additional three months of progress in vocabulary growth due to the PreK program starting at age 4.
- PreK increased children's gains in math skills by 80 percent compared to children's growth without the program.
- Children in West Virginia gained from attending the PreK program regardless of ethnic background or economic circumstances. ([Source](#))

WISCONSIN					
% Enrolled	\$ per child	NIEER Rating	Setting	Funding	Structure
72%	\$3,682	3/10	Public school, with option to contract with private program or Head Start	School funding formula	437 hours/year. (Most programs part day, 4-5 days a week. Some full day 2-3 days a week)

- Wisconsin students enrolled in the Wisconsin 4K program showed growth on all ten academic skills assessments between the pretest and the post-test administrations.
- 4K students improved on all nine dimensions in language and literacy. ([Source](#))

Worldwide

Great Britain

- Children who are age 4 on Sept. 1 can attend government-funded primary schools and 5-year-olds are mandated to attend primary school from their fifth birthday.
- All children over 3 years old with working parents are eligible for 30 hours of free child care and education in either a public or private childcare center or by a certified home-based care provider.
- Those with non-working parents and the 40 percent of 2-year-olds from the lowest income families are eligible for 15 hours a week of funded care. ([Source](#))

Quebec, Canada

- Families pay for universal childcare on a sliding scale, with the wealthiest families paying a maximum of \$17 per day at public *centres de la petite enfance (CPE)* (young child centers).
- Space at CPEs is limited, so families can also use private childcare centers, where the government reimburses 75% of tuition.
- 80% of Quebecois mothers participate in the workforce, compared to the US average of 65% ([Source](#)).

Hong Kong

- All children ages 3 to 6 are offered free child care or kindergarten. The system is entirely private, though heavily regulated and subsidized by the government.
- Low-income families receive proportionally more assistance than higher income families.
- Many parents supplement the free care provided with paid care to cover all of their working hours ([Source](#)).

France

- France's school system formally begins with preschool at age 3. These programs must meet national standards and are sufficiently subsidized by the government to enable children from middle class families to attend at little or no cost ([Source](#)).

Australia

- PreKindergarten is universally available to 4-year-olds for 15 hours per week. States run independent early childhood systems, but all are subject to standards laid out in the National Quality Framework, which was established in 2009.
- Most families with younger children receive subsidies for their child care needs that cover 50 to 90 percent of the total cost of care. Lower income families receive larger subsidies ([Source](#)).

Other Countries with Universal Support for PreK ([Source](#))

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| ● The Netherlands | ● Taiwan | ● Denmark |
| ● South Korea | ● Finland | ● New Zealand |
| ● Switzerland | ● Belgium | ● Norway |
| ● Japan | ● Germany | ● Czech Republic |
| ● Singapore | ● Austria | |