

The state of preschool 2021 ^[1]

State preschool yearbook

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Excerpted from executive summary

The pandemic has highlighted and intensified longstanding problems in early childhood education (ECE). The pandemic wiped out a decade of progress increasing enrollment in state-funded preschool programs. Large enrollment losses also afflicted preschool special education and Head Start (down by one-third). Yet, even after the nation recovers from the pandemic, most children will lack access to publicly-funded preschool programs, and access to adequately funded programs that meet basic quality standards will remain even less common. Without major changes in public policies, there is no prospect for access to high-quality preschool to meaningfully improve in most of the nation any time soon.

The 2021 State of Preschool report covers the 2020-2021 school year, the first school year to be fully impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Nationwide enrollment in state-funded pre-K declined by more than a quarter-million children from the prior year. All but six states with state-funded preschool programs experienced enrollment declines (See Figure 1), and in some states, enrollment decreased by more than five percentage points. Not surprisingly, state spending on pre-K also fell, but not as much as enrollment because some states protected total funding despite pandemic-induced enrollment declines. However, many states used federal COVID-19 relief funding to offset decreases in state funding, and in some cases, even used these federal funds to increase spending compared to the prior year (See Figure 2). Nevertheless, state funding declined nationwide with reductions in 26 states — some massive. Were it not for the use of federal COVID-19 relief funds and the willingness of some states to sustain preschool spending despite the enrollment declines, the pandemic's impact on funding would have been much worse.

Region: United States ^[5]

Tags: enrollment ^[6]

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