

July 1, 2019

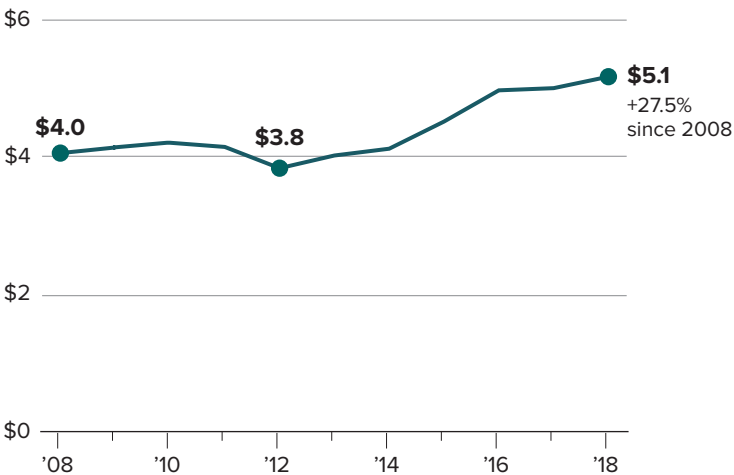
State pre-K funding continues to rise, but access varies

State spending on prekindergarten programs has steadily increased over the past decade, reaching \$8.1 billion in 2018, a 76 percent increase since 2008. On average, states that fund pre-K programs spent more than \$5,000 per student in 2018.

Some 2020 Democratic candidates — including Elizabeth Warren, Joe Biden and Bernie Sanders — have pledged to support expanding access to universal pre-K programs as part of their platforms. So far, none have discussed enrollment in the programs as a metric, instead focusing on levels of investment on the state level. Oklahoma, Florida, and Georgia have already implemented universal pre-K programs, and states continue to increase their spending on pre-K programs overall and per student. However, access varies from state to state — even among states with relatively high levels of pre-K spending — and differs greatly between 3- and 4-year-old populations.

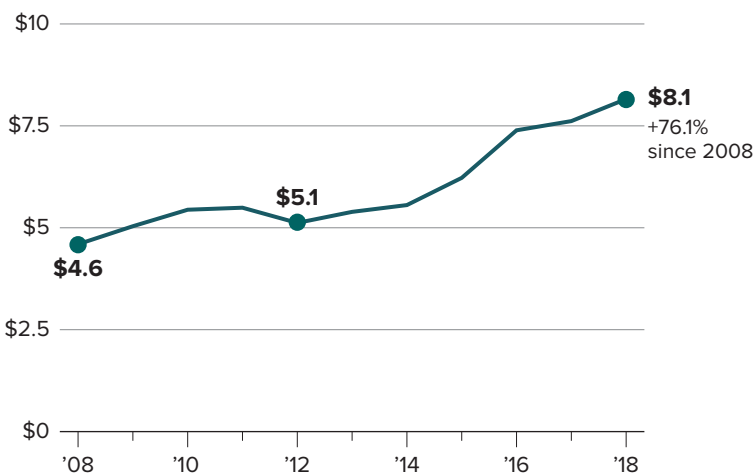
Total state pre-K spending per student

IN THOUSANDS OF DOLLARS



Total state spending on pre-K programs

IN BILLIONS OF DOLLARS

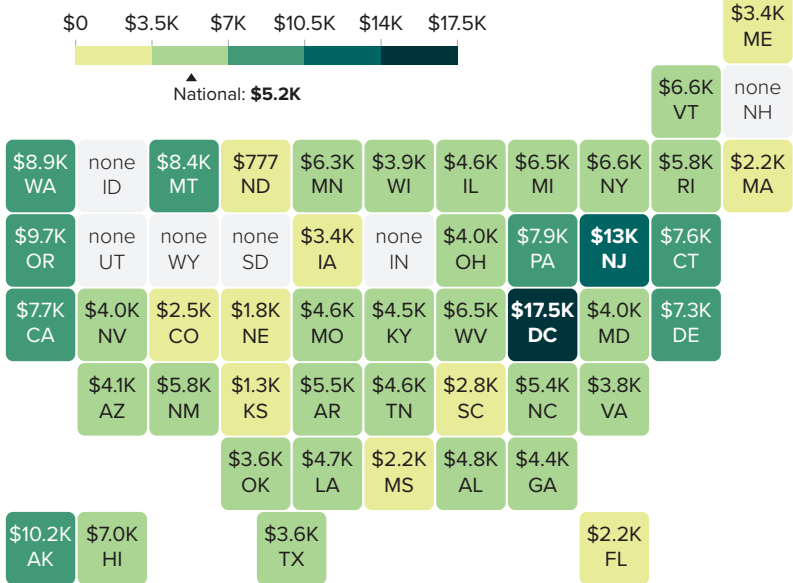


D.C. leads the way with high levels of investment and access, but the two don't always correlate

The states with the highest average spending per student are the District of Columbia, New Jersey and Alaska, though high levels of spending don't necessarily translate to higher pre-K enrollment. The District of Columbia ranks first for per-student spending and also has the highest pre-K enrollment among both 3- and 4-year-olds. As is the case with most states, enrollment in New Jersey and Alaska is much lower relative to their spending. According to a DataPoint analysis, there is no strong linear trend between state spending and access, though some kind of relationship may exist.

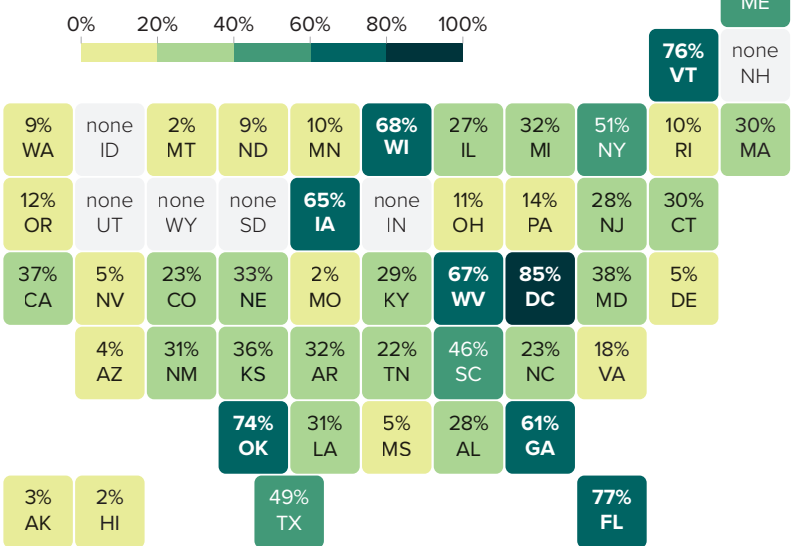
Overall, pre-K enrollment for children at least four years old is much higher in most states than for three-year-olds. Experts say that this is because children three years old are often enrolled in child care, so the low figures do not necessarily indicate an underserved population. The District of Columbia, Vermont, New Jersey and Illinois stand out for their higher levels of state-funded pre-K access for 3-year-olds. In all other states, less than 20 percent of 3-year-old children were enrolled in a state pre-K program.

State spending per student enrolled in pre-K in 2018



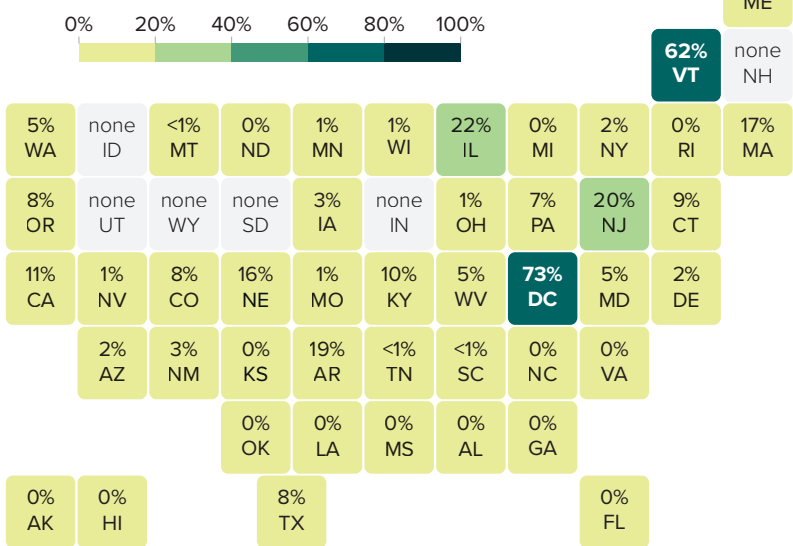
Access to state-funded pre-K among 4+ year olds

STUDENTS ENROLLED AS A PERCENTAGE OF ALL 4+ YEAR OLDS



Access to state-funded pre-K among 3 year olds

STUDENTS ENROLLED AS A PERCENTAGE OF ALL 3 YEAR OLDS



Source: Friedman-Krauss, A. H., Barnett, W. S., Garver, K. A., Hodges, K. S., Weisenfeld, G. G. & DiCrecchio, N. (2019). The State of Preschool 2018: State Preschool Yearbook. New Brunswick, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research.

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