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*Same and Different: An Overview of Head Start and State-Funded Pre-K*

## HEAD START

**History:** Launched in 1965 when it served more than 100,000 5- and 6-year-olds through an eight-week, summer program.

**Mission:** To “promot[e] school readiness by enhancing the social and cognitive development of children through the provision of educational, health, nutritional, social and other services to enrolled children and families.”

**Enrollment:** In 2007-08, more than 1 million children and pregnant women were enrolled in 2,599 Head Start and Early Head Start Programs; 921,501 of Head Start enrollees were 3- and 4- year olds. (27,699 were 5-year-olds.)

**Eligibility:** Available only to families at or below the poverty line. As of December 2007, up to 30 percent of enrollees may be from families with incomes up to 130 percent of the poverty line. Foster children and children with special needs are also eligible, and eligibility waivers are available for some family circumstances.

**Funding:** The federal government provides grants to local agencies which administer Head Start centers; in 2008 these grants totaled \$6.8 billion. Agencies must fund 20 percent of their budgets with non-federal dollars, which can be raised through donations, state and local funds, or other sources, and can be provided in-kind. The federal government spends, on average, \$7,326 per child in Head Start.

## STATE PRE-K

**History:** States have a long history of investing in pre-K programs: California’s State Preschool Program, for example, began in 1965, the same year as the federal Head Start program, and Wisconsin has included state-funded preschool in its constitutions since 1848. The national movement to provide state-funded preschool didn’t really take off until the 1990s, however. Now 39 states and the District of Columbia have pre-K programs, with Florida, Georgia and Oklahoma offering access regardless of family income. Illinois, Massachusetts, Missouri, New Jersey, New York and West Virginia have initiatives aimed at universal access. One state, Illinois, has a goal of universal access for 3-year-olds as well.

**Mission:** Varies according to each state, though typically includes school readiness as a major goal.

**Enrollment:** In 2007-08, more than 1.1 million children aged 3 and 4 attended state-funded preschool education, according to the National Institute for Early Education Research, with vast disparities by state. Oklahoma, for example, enrolls more than 70 percent of its 4-year-old population. But 11 states have no public pre-K program at all.

**Funding:** \$4.6 billion in 2008. Annual per-pupil spending ranges widely from \$1,686 in Maine to \$10,989 in New Jersey. Averaged together, states spend \$4,061 per pupil.

SOURCES: [Head Start Program Fact Sheet](#); Head Start Program Information Report 2007-08; [The State of Preschool 2008 Yearbook](#) from the National Institute for Early Education Research.