



First Five Years Fund

Governors across the country – Republicans and Democrats alike – are making early childhood education a priority as they draw up budgets and develop legislative initiatives for the coming year.

We've [rounded up quotes](#) on the importance of high-quality early education from recent speeches by a wide range of governors, as well as provided a summary of major state legislative movements or details about governors' proposals on early childhood education.

National Snapshot

According to the [Education Commission of the States](#), for the 2014-15 fiscal year, state funding for pre-K increased by \$672 million to a total of \$6.3 billion. This was the third year in a row that both Republican and Democratic policymakers made significant investments in state-funded pre-K programs. Last year, 28 states and the District of Columbia increased their total investment in pre-K, with 10 states increasing by more than 20 percent; overall this is a 12 percent increase in state investments in pre-K programs over fiscal year 2013-14. Only six states provided no state funding for pre-K (Idaho, Montana, New Hampshire, North Dakota, South Dakota and Wyoming), which could change this year.

Alabama – Gov. Robert Bentley (R)

“We will work to give young children a ‘new, strong foundation’ with the opportunity for a good education in a voluntary pre-K program. At the end of the next four years we will be able to tell every parent in Alabama, there is a pre-K classroom available for your child.”

– Inaugural Address, Jan. 19, 2015

During Gov. Bentley’s [State of the State address](#), he called for a [tax increase](#) to allow the state to address its budget shortfall and fix some of the state’s problems, including that only 12 percent of 4-year-olds have access to the state’s First Class Pre-K program. The governor said that he wants “every child in the state of Alabama to have the opportunity to get a quality First Class Pre-K education,” calling it “one of the best state-run programs in the country.” The governor had highlighted some of these ideas earlier in the Governor’s [Early Childhood Education Leadership Summit](#), and in his Inaugural Address in January 2015, when the governor [expressed](#) his desire to expand the state’s voluntary pre-K program until it is accessible to all who want it. The Alabama School Readiness Alliance is also [leading](#) a 10-year campaign, now in its third year, to fully fund the pre-K program.

An April 2015 Montgomery Advertiser editorial [applauded](#) the Legislature’s consideration of an increase for the program but said that the governor’s goal of getting Alabama to universal pre-K access by the end of his second term was not realistic, instead encouraging a goal to fully fund voluntary pre-K by 2023. In April 2015, the Senate [approved](#) an education budget that would increase pre-K funding by \$13.5 million and allow 2,600 more 4-year-olds into the program, increasing access to 17 percent of eligible children.

Alaska

In January 2015, a group of House Democratic lawmakers [pre-filed legislation](#) to create a statewide, voluntary pre-kindergarten program to prepare Alaska's children for entry into the education system. While that legislation was not voted on, a House subcommittee [voted](#) in February 2015 to completely cut funding for pre-K grants, Parents as Teachers and the state's Best Beginnings program. In March 2015, an attempt to add funding back to pre-K programs was [voted down](#) by House Republicans. The Senate [cut](#) funding as well. After lawmakers adjourned with a partially funded state budget, Gov. Bill Walker [called](#) for a special session to finalize the budget, highlighting an updated budget proposal that [restores](#) education funding, including pre-K.

Arizona

When Secretary of Education Arne Duncan [visited](#) a preschool class in Phoenix to promote the administration's efforts to get more federal funding for early childhood education, Gov. Doug Ducey [touted](#) the importance of early childhood development ... but then defended the fact Arizona puts no money into those programs for most students – or even funds full-day kindergarten.” While Gov. Ducey said that “Research shows that a quality early childhood education experience can yield significant long-term benefits on overall development of a child” and mentioned that helping children become able to read is “the most profitable investment we can make in their future,” he only said that he hopes to focus on reforming the state’s school-funding formula in the next legislative session.

Arkansas – Gov. Asa Hutchinson (R)

Gov. Asa Hutchinson said in an [early January 2015 speech](#) that he wanted to grow the state's economy so it could afford things like pre-K, but no increases were made to pre-K funding when he [released his budget](#) later that month.

But in March 2015, the Arkansas Legislature's Joint Budget Committee [endorsed](#) a \$133 million increase in state general revenue spending, made up of mostly surplus state funds, that includes \$3 million to the Department of Education for the Arkansas Better Chance pre-K program.

California – Gov. Jerry Brown (D)

Advocates were [disappointed](#) with Gov. Jerry Brown's increase of only 4,000 additional enrollment spots in his [2015-16 budget](#) (\$33.6 million in funding) for the state's preschool program, since Brown had already agreed during the previous legislative session to add those slots. Many hoped the budget would have funded at least 10,000 additional slots next year. In February 2015, the Senate President Pro Tem also [introduced](#) a bill aiming to address the state's critical child care shortage and give providers the right to unionize. In March 2015, the California Legislative Women's Caucus also [announced](#) a package of bills aimed at improving the lives of working women, which includes a \$600 million increase in state-subsidized child care. In May 2015, the Assembly Education Committee [unanimously](#) voted for the Preschool for All Act, which would provide free preschool for every low-income 4-year-old in the state by January 2017. The Appropriations Committee will hear the bill next.

Colorado

In late January 2015, the House Education Committee passed two bills [increasing](#) funding for both preschool and full-day kindergarten, but in April 2015, the House Appropriations Committee [indefinitely postponed](#) the bills due to a lack of funding in the state budget. The measure to add 3,000 slots to the Colorado Preschool Program would have cost \$11.3 million, while the proposal for the state to provide full-day kindergarten for all students would have cost \$236 million. The budget for the state Department of Human Services does include some [small boosts](#) that benefit poor children and families, including a \$2.5 million increase for home visiting. A Republican effort to deregulate child care providers that serve fewer than 10 children in their homes also [stalled](#) in committee, but could come up again during the session.

The House and Senate did [approve](#) a bill in May 2015 that will allow the state to create pay for success programs, in which private investors and foundations could pay for social services, like early childhood programs, and be paid off from future savings.

Connecticut – Gov. Dannel P. Malloy (D)

“We’ve built better schools, raised test scores, made college more affordable, and put Connecticut on a path toward universal pre-kindergarten.”

– State of the State Address, Jan. 7, 2015

Gov. Malloy [aims](#) to have more than 4,000 new early childhood slots open by 2019. In December, Connecticut was [awarded](#) nearly \$12.5 million in federal funding to expand pre-K across the state. And while the governor’s budget includes flat funding for local school districts, the governor is [calling](#) for full-day kindergarten by the fall of 2017, which he [says](#) won’t come at a cost to public education funding.

However, facing a major deficit forecast, Gov. Malloy has [proposed](#) \$13.7 million in cuts, including \$5.8 million from the Office of Early Childhood’s child care subsidy program that helps low-income parents pay for child care.

Delaware – Gov. Jack Markell (D)

“Ninety percent of children’s brain development occurs before they even enter kindergarten. So thanks to your support, we have enrolled more than 3,000 additional high-needs children in the best early childhood centers in the past two years. And we’ve given grants to 89 top early learning programs to offer the highest quality infant care to more of our neediest kids. We know that care is expensive and hard-to-find, yet key to our children’s success.”

– State of the State Address, Jan. 22, 2015

Gov. Markell’s [budget](#) includes \$3.1 million to support STARS, Delaware’s Quality Rating and Improvement System for early care and education.

Florida – Gov. Rick Scott (R)

Gov. Scott's recommended [budget](#) includes \$1.1 billion in [total early learning funding](#), an increase of \$33.5 million over current year funding. But with a surplus of over \$1 billion, some children's advocates [question](#) why boosts to voluntary prekindergarten aren't more than \$46 per student to \$2,483, which keeps Florida well below the national average of \$4,026 per student in pre-K spending. The budget also includes a \$30 million appropriation for a statewide initiative to decrease the school readiness program waiting list, and money for teacher scholarships and training. In March 2015, advocates were [continuing](#) to work for increasing pre-K spending and expanding the school readiness program, but the House education appropriations chairman said the Legislature would likely only include a \$50 per student increase for pre-K and add 1,000 slots to the school readiness program. After the 2015 legislative session [ended](#) on May 1 without passing a budget, Gov. Scott is calling a special session.

In late January 2015, the Senate Education Pre-K-12 Committee also unanimously [passed a measure](#) to upgrade the health and safety standards of Florida's early learning programs after failing to do so at the end of the 2014 legislative session. But despite the House unanimously approving their version of the bill, because the Senate wanted to make changes and the House [abruptly decided](#) to adjourn early, the bill has likely died for this session. The Senate Community Affairs Committee also [approved](#) an early education bill that would allow school districts to enroll 4-year-olds in kindergarten in mid-February 2015.

Georgia – Gov. Nathan Deal (R)

“I am establishing an Education Reform Commission to study a number of questions regarding our education system, such as increasing access to Georgia’s world class early learning programs.”

– State of the State Address, Jan. 14, 2015

The [newly created](#) Georgia Education Reform Commission will recommend improvements for the state by Aug. 31, 2015, and Gov. Deal says some of the recommendations could go into effect during the 2016-17 school year. State lawmakers are also considering a [proposal](#) to change the age of kindergarten eligibility in Georgia, but some [advocates](#) argue that the additional preparation for children with late summer birthdays will only make a difference if those students are spending time in learning and language-rich environments. In February 2015, the state House [passed](#) the kindergarten eligibility bill, which would phase in an age change for kindergarten students in 2017 and 2018, but the Senate’s approval is uncertain.

Hawaii

In February 2015, the Senate Committee on Education [passed](#) a bill to set up a statewide pre-K program at public and charter schools, asking for an additional \$30 million in funding on top of the current \$3 million. That bill, as well as a bill to fund the Preschool Open Doors Program to help low-income families pay for preschool, [passed](#) additional Senate committees in early March 2015. In April 2015, the House [unanimously passed](#) the Preschool Open Doors program bill, but with only \$1 in placeholder funding. A last-minute agreement in May 2015 will [potentially](#) fund Preschool Open Doors at \$6 million, but only for one year. The bill to set up universal pre-K was not scheduled for a hearing in the House Education Committee since passing the Senate.

Idaho

The House Education Committee [voted](#) in March 2015 to introduce a bill that would provide in-home early education for families who need or want help preparing a child for kindergarten. The bill would allow the Legislature to appropriate funding for the Upstart program currently in use in Utah. Two Republicans on the House Education Committee have also [introduced](#) a preschool pilot program that they're calling "kindergarten readiness" in an attempt "to make early childhood education more palatable to legislators who've been ideologically opposed to it." The three-year plan would cost \$1.4 million with half of the funding coming from private sources. It would allow roughly 100 4-year-olds to attend half-day preschool classes. The plan stalled in the House Education Committee, but some lawmakers believe an [approved](#) "pay for success" contracts law could encourage private entities to take up early childhood education.

After legislators tabled a bill to bring Idaho into compliance with federal child support laws, some are [concerned](#) that possibly losing \$30 million in Temporary Assistance for Needy Families funding could lead to 200 children being kicked out of Head Start, since TANF contributes \$1.5 million to the state's Head Start program. Gov. Butch Otter has [called](#) for a special session on May 18 to address the issue and [shared](#) a draft version of the child support bill.

Illinois – Gov. Bruce Rauner (R)

“Our budget will increase funding for early childhood education so that more at risk children can enter kindergarten ready to succeed. From cradle to career, our children's education needs to be our top priority.”

– State of the State Address, Feb. 4, 2015

While Gov. Rauner is making [deep cuts](#) in his proposed [budget](#), the governor wants to [increase](#) early childhood education funding by \$25.3 million, saying that “increasing funding for our youngest is the smart and the compassionate thing to do.” Democrats in control of the Illinois Legislature [might embrace](#) his proposals to spend more money on K-12 and early childhood education, but it depends on the other proposed cuts. The state’s child care program is also [dealing](#) with a \$300 million shortfall, which the governor called for solving during his [budget address](#). In March 2015, the Illinois House [passed](#) legislation to close a \$1.6 billion hole in this year’s state budget, including the child care shortfall, with a 2.25 percent across-the-board budget cut and authorization for Gov. Rauner to transfer other funds to make up the difference. After the Senate [passed](#) the agreement, the state comptroller said she would work with the Department of Human Services to expedite payments to child care providers.

Indiana – Gov. Mike Pence (R)

“We’ve increased support for schools, approved the first-ever state funding for quality pre-K ... Graduation rates are up. Test scores are up, the doors of our pre-K program are already open to disadvantaged kids ... Building on the historic first step we took last session, we will invest \$10 million a year to fund scholarships for our new pre-K pilot, because every Hoosier child deserves to start school ready to learn.”

– State of the State Address, Jan. 13, 2015

Indiana’s On My Way Pre-K pilot program launched in four out of five counties, with Gov. Pence calling for an [additional](#) \$10 million for two years for fully funding the pilot. Pence, however, did not apply for a potential \$80 million federal grant for preschool and [argued](#) he skipped applying because he wanted the state to use its own resources to launch and expand its pre-K program. The final two-year budget passed by the General Assembly in April 2015 [funded](#) the program at the \$10 million level.

Senate Democrats had wanted to [expand](#) Indiana’s pre-kindergarten pilot program beyond the initial five counties, with some [proposals](#) to add 13 additional counties, but the House [only funded](#) On My Way Pre-K at Gov. Pence’s recommended \$10 million when passing a budget on party lines in late February 2015. [Advocates](#) say that as many as 30,000 high-risk students do not have opportunities for quality, affordable preschool. The [initial grants](#) enrolled 465 families in pre-K programs after receiving 1,800 applications. A full rollout of the pilot program is expected to serve approximately 2,000 4-year-olds in five counties after Gov. Pence [announced](#) the addition of 600 spots for the fall launch.

Iowa

The Senate Appropriations Committee has [advanced](#) a proposal to the full Senate that had already [passed](#) the Senate Education Committee to authorize \$7.2 million in additional state aid to expand the state's preschool programs by about 6,000 children. A similar bill passed the Democratic-led Senate last session but was not considered in the House.

Kentucky – Gov. Steve Beshear (D)

“We increased enrollment in preschool programs. And we developed a screener to gauge whether early education programs were preparing our kids to hit the ground running on day one of kindergarten ... In this session, we need to continue our momentum by adding accountability and transparency to all of our early childcare facilities.”

– State of the Commonwealth Address, Jan. 7, 2015

Gov. Beshear is again seeking legislation to implement what’s called the [All-STARS plan](#) – Accelerating Learning Statewide Through an Advanced Rating System – which addresses safety, continuing education for staff members, nutrition and age appropriate curriculum. In late February 2015, the state House [passed](#) a bill that would require state agencies to work with early care and education providers to develop and fully phase in a state quality-based rating system for child-care and certified family child-care homes, state-funded preschool and Head Start by June 2017. The funding would come from the state’s Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge grant, so legislators would have to submit a report annually to recommend how to fund the system when federal grant dollars run out. The governor [signed](#) the bill in March 2015. Results from a statewide school readiness test also [showed](#) that half of Kentucky’s kindergartners were not ready for school.

In April 2015, Gov. Beshear also [issued](#) a line item veto on a House bill to protect early childhood education and other state programs from automatic budget cuts after a settlement payment came in lower than previously expected.

Louisiana

In March 2015, Louisiana's Board of Elementary and Secondary Education [approved](#) allocations of more than \$81.6 million in funding for the Cecil J. Picard LA4 Early Childhood Program and the Nonpublic Schools Early Childhood Development program, which will serve 17,851 children in the state. But advocates are [upset](#) that Gov. Bobby Jindal's budget does not include any new state preschool funding or restore a 58 percent reduction in funding to the Child Care Assistance Program. Democrats in the state House and Senate [introduced](#) bills in March 2015 that would create a new oil and natural gas tax, with \$80 million in funding raised proposed to go to pre-K or early childhood programs.

Maryland

Gov. Larry Hogan's proposed [budget maintains](#) most early childhood education funding, with \$4.3 million in state funds and \$15 million in new federal grant funds that will provide free pre-K to an additional 3,000 low-income students in fiscal year 2016. The budget also increases the child care subsidy by \$9.5 million.

Massachusetts

Early childhood education advocates are [upset](#) with Gov. Charlie Baker as he “missed an important opportunity” with his [budget](#) to “signal a commitment to early education.” As of March 2015, advocates are [pushing](#) to restore funding for Head Start and full-day kindergarten expansion grants in upcoming state budget deliberations. Gov. Baker says that the state’s \$15 million Preschool Development Grant will expand preschool programs and has stated that early education wasn’t a priority for his budget. However, the state-funded early education program has 17,000 children on a waitlist, and a group of state legislators have [introduced](#) legislation that would require the state to pay for full-day preschool as part of its education funding formula. It’s unlikely that the state has [funding](#) for it, but there’s hope that this bill may start an important conversation about universal pre-K in the state. Another [bill](#) proposed in March 2015 would create pre-K programs in underperforming school districts throughout the state, which was mentioned at the launch of the “[Pre-K for MA](#)” campaign event.

A proposed House budget [released](#) in April 2015 would spend \$5 million for child care vouchers that would move 800 children off an early education waiting list. The budget also includes a [\\$12.8 million increase](#) in funding for early childhood education.

Michigan – Gov. Rick Snyder (R)

“We should be absolutely proud, we have been a leader in the nation with early childhood and pre-school education. The last two years we made major budget commitments; \$65 million a year for a total of \$130 million in an on-going basis. We created over 29,000 new opportunities for people in need, young people in need to get pre-schooled.”

– State of the State Address, Jan. 20, 2015

In addition to Michigan’s [major expansion](#) of the Great Start Readiness Program, Gov. Snyder also is [calling on](#) the Legislature to authorize an outside commission to focus on third-grade reading — considered a critical benchmark — and other prenatal-to-third grade issues. Snyder’s budget [includes](#) a new \$25 million investment for “a [third grade reading initiative](#) to continue and advance the state’s focus on early education so that Michigan children can read proficiently by third grade.” The budget also [proposes](#) nearly \$240 million to provide 63,000 half-day preschool opportunities to 4-year-olds across the state.

In late April 2015, the House [approved](#) a spending plan that did not include funding for Gov. Snyder’s early literacy initiative. But in early May 2015, the state Senate [passed](#) its version of the funding bill, which does include the third-grade reading initiative, so the two budgets will go into a conference committee.

Minnesota – Gov. Mark Dayton (D)

“I have also proposed a major new early childhood education initiative to fund pre-kindergarten classes for all of our state’s four year-olds. Taken on its own, this proposal has the power to transform the trajectory of Minnesota’s youngest learners. But my proposal doesn’t stop there. I am also proposing significant increases in childcare assistance, elimination of the Head Start waiting list, funding for home visiting, more resources to continue building the quality of childcare through Parent Aware, and expanded tax credits to parents for the costs of their child. In the education budget area alone, I am proposing \$372 million in additional funding to care for and educate our state’s children between the ages of 0 to 4 years-old.”

– State of the State Address, April 9, 2015

Gov. Dayton’s initial [budget](#) called for investing \$109 million to provide 31,000 4-year-olds access to free, high-quality pre-K learning opportunities, beginning in fall 2016. In late February 2015, the House Education Innovation Policy Committee [rejected](#) a universal, all-day preschool bill that had also been tabled earlier in the Senate Budget Division, and later, the House did not include universal pre-K in their budget targets. A Senate education budget bill also [provides](#) for scholarships rather than universal pre-K. In March 2015, Gov. Dayton also released a supplemental budget that includes a [call](#) to spend \$343 million to “give every 4-year-old access to a tuition-free preschool program” after state officials announced a huge jump in the state’s projected budget surplus. Gov. Dayton [highlighted](#) this and other early learning proposals in his April 2015 State of the State Address, with a call for universal pre-K, eliminating the Head Start waiting list and increasing child care subsidies as well as home visiting funding. However, both the House Republican and Senate DFL updated education budget plans [do not include](#) universal pre-K; the House bill includes \$30 million in early learning scholarships and \$9.5 million for school readiness programs for 3- and 4-year-olds and the Senate plan has \$5 million in early learning scholarships and \$65 million for school readiness programs. In late April 2015, the House [approved](#) their education budget bill, mostly on party lines, and the Senate [approved](#) its education budget bill as well. In early May 2015, Gov. Dayton’s Early Learning Council [recommended](#) that lawmakers spend \$196 million over the next two years on the state’s existing early learning scholarship system and \$194 million to expand home-visiting programs but not universal pre-K.

Mississippi – Gov. Phil Bryant (R)

“Funding early childhood learning programs began in our first Legislative session together, and this year I will support doubling the funding for the Pre-K Collaborative Program with a total appropriation of \$6 million.”

– State of the State Address, Jan. 21, 2015

The Mississippi Joint Legislative Budget Committee has [called](#) for level funding of the state’s current \$3 million Mississippi Early Learning Collaborative, which awards grants to 11 community groups to provide early education services. Another \$3 million for Mississippi Building Blocks aids private pre-K programs. A [budget bill](#) sent to Gov. Phil Bryant in March 2015 kept both early education programs at [level funding](#), despite original plans for the collaborative to grow each year.

Missouri – Gov. Jay Nixon (D)

“My budget will invest an additional \$11 million in pre-school, so that more children, regardless of their circumstances, start kindergarten ... ready to learn.”

– State of the State Address, Jan. 21, 2015

Some advocates have been [dismissive](#) of Gov. Nixon’s budget, which is actually just redirecting \$11 million in federal funds through the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program to preschools and \$5 million for school districts to provide preschool for children with special needs. Advocates through the Raise Your Hand for Kids group are [campaigning](#) to increase the state’s tobacco tax on the November 2016 ballot to increase early childhood education funding by \$250 million a year. A preschool funding bill passed last year could also [negatively affect](#) a number of school districts, as language in the law prohibits school districts from funding cuts if the state is falling short of paying for its school funding formula, which it currently is. In April 2015, Gov. Nixon also [released](#) \$43 million of general revenue funding for the current fiscal year, including \$1.5 million for the Missouri Preschool Program.

In early February, Gov. Nixon visited a Head Start center to [announce](#) a new local investment through the Missouri Smart Start program, which is working to “support the development, expansion or improvement of high-quality early childhood and pre-kindergarten programs throughout the state.” The governor’s budget proposes \$6 million to expand the program in fiscal year 2016.

Montana – Gov. Steve Bullock (D)

“How can it be that a child is already set to become a success or a statistic by the time he or she is five years old? ... We know that children in high-quality early childhood programs are more likely to read at grade level and more likely to earn a high school diploma. They are less likely to repeat a grade or require specialized education; less likely to become teenage parents, require public assistance, abuse drugs or end up in jail. The results are in, researchers and scientists across the country agree. This works. Not only that, but for every dollar spent on early childhood, communities get at least a \$7 return on investment. That’s why some of the biggest backers of pre-school programs are business leaders who see the significant economic benefit. While an investment in our earliest learners makes solid economic sense, this isn’t about the \$7 return. This is about children and this is about families.”

– State of the State Address, Jan. 28, 2015

Gov. Bullock’s [Early Edge plan](#) proposed offering state block grants to all communities to create or expand high-quality pre-kindergarten programs. The \$37 million plan, which would fund the voluntary program for two years, would make \$30,000 grants available to school districts for every 10 preschool-age students. The grants would be used to create preschool programs, partner with an existing one or a combination of the two. While Republicans in the Legislature were skeptical of the plan, a group of school superintendents across the state [agreed](#) that Montana should catch up “with other states by investing in the future of our young people through this important initiative.” However, in March 2015, Republicans on a House budget panel voted on party lines to [reject](#) the two-year proposal after rejecting nearly all Democratic-sponsored amendments to add money to the state budget. The governor’s plan also [failed](#) to get into the Senate’s approval of the House budget bill in April 2015, and the Legislature [adjourned](#) without including the preschool plan. Lawmakers in budget conference meetings [said](#) a “major sticking point” had been Bullock’s insistence for the preschool program to receive funding, but Republicans and some Democrats could not agree on funding the plan. Gov. Bullock, questioning whether Republicans opposed the plan because it was one of his “passionate priorities” [noted](#), “Forty-four other states have made these investments. They say it took eight years to pass all-day kindergarten, but we have kids who can’t wait eight years for this.”

Nebraska

A Senate committee [approved](#) a bill to eliminate the child care subsidy “cliff effect,” under which parents who made more than 130 percent of the federal poverty level would lose all child care help. Under the proposed bill, subsidies would be phased out as parents’ incomes improve up to 185 percent of the federal poverty level, which would benefit an estimated 1,944 children. After Gov. Pete Ricketts vetoed a version of the bill to raise assistance payments to low-income families, he did say he would agree to a [compromise](#) bill that would address the “cliff effect.”

The Senate education committee is also [considering](#) a proposal to suspend the 11 Learning Community districts’ common levy but continue a 1.5-cent levy used to support early childhood education, elementary learning centers and other programs. While that proposal stalled and senators are still discussing how to handle the Learning Community, the Omaha World-Herald [editorialized](#) that lawmakers should “recognize that some Learning Community Programs have shown potential,” including early childhood education.

Nevada – Gov. Brian Sandoval (R)

“I submit to you this evening that an education system for this century requires bold new ideas to meet the reality of our time ... This work begins with our youngest learners. Nevada has the lowest preschool attendance of any state in the nation. Thanks to a recent federal grant, and matching funds provided in my budget, we will improve this worst-in-the-country statistic.”

– State of the State Address, Jan. 15, 2015

Gov. Sandoval’s [budget](#) calls for a \$10 million increase for early childhood education. State Democrats have also [noted](#) that full-day kindergarten and universal pre-K have been “bedrock principles for Nevada Democrats for years,” hoping that the 2015 legislative session can bring bipartisan agreement on these issues. Nevada Democrats also shared a [policy blueprint](#) in March 2015, which calls for “high-quality pre-kindergarten through 12th grade education” and “fully funded, universal all-day kindergarten.” The Senate Finance Committee started [reviewing](#) components of Gov. Sandoval’s education agenda in late April 2015, including a program to provide pre-K for English-language learners and full-day kindergarten.

New Hampshire – Gov. Maggie Hassan (D)

“We must also ensure that when Granite Staters find a good job, they’ll also be able to find dependable childcare, housing that’s both convenient and affordable, and access to full-day kindergarten.”

– Inaugural Address, Jan. 8, 2015

A bipartisan group of state senators is currently [working](#) to expand access to full-day kindergarten by increasing state adequacy aid through a legislative proposal.

New Jersey

Former Govs. Tom Kean (R) and Jim Florio (D) have [joined](#) with local teachers, business leaders and parents to push for “[Pre-K Our Way](#),” an effort to urge state lawmakers to provide high-quality preschool programs in all of its communities, rather than just the [31 former Abbott districts](#) that receive preschool as a result of court orders.

Gov. Chris Christie’s [budget](#) also includes a \$3 million increase to state preschool funding and notes that the state’s win of a preschool development grant will ultimately support more than 2,000 4-year-olds.

New Mexico – Gov. Susana Martinez (R)

“On my watch, we’ve more than doubled pre-K funding, and I’m proposing more this year.”

– State of the State Address, Jan. 20, 2015

In April 2015, Gov. Martinez [signed](#) a budget that includes more than \$43 million to help pay for the state’s pre-K program and an expansion of the state’s K-3 Plus program, which allows struggling readers to take advantage of summer tutoring. The budget also includes an \$8 million increase for the Children, Youth and Families Department to increase funding for early childhood programs and to help the agency deal with an increasing caseload.

During the legislative session, while lawmakers again [considered](#) a measure, Senate Joint Resolution 5, to allow voters to [decide](#) on a constitutional amendment to tap the permanent fund for early childhood education, it [stalled](#) again in the Senate Finance Committee at the end of the 60-day legislative session. In mid-February 2015, U.S. Sen. Tom Udall [addressed](#) a joint session of the state Legislature to express his support for the measure. U.S. Sen. Martin Heinrich also [addressed](#) the Legislature in March 2015, similarly calling for the state to invest in early childhood education and expressing his support for tapping the permanent fund. And while in March 2015, the state Senate and House [passed](#) a bill to develop an accountability act aimed at improving child care assistance programs, it was pocket vetoed by Gov. Martinez.

New York – Gov. Andrew Cuomo (D)

“We’ll invest another \$365 million this year in pre-K for four year olds but we also want to take the next step and start designing programs – not for four year olds – but for three year olds. All of the studies say that the earlier you get them in, the better. Let New York be ahead of the curve by enrolling three year olds who are now making some of the largest cognitive and behavioral gains. We are going to start this with a \$25 million offering for pre-K for three year olds.”

– State of the State Address, Jan. 21, 2015

In addition to Gov. Cuomo’s [funding priorities](#) for early childhood education, including the \$25 million to [launch](#) pre-K for 3-year-olds, an early February 2015 [report](#) showed that only 5 percent of 4-year-olds outside of New York City were able to take advantage of last year’s pre-K expansion. Gov. Cuomo has pledged to spend \$1.5 billion over five years to make pre-K available to schools as soon as they can implement the classes. The governor’s [budget proposal](#) also includes \$3 million for QUALITYstarsNY, a quality rating and improvement system targeted at programs that serve children from birth to age 5, including prekindergarten to “ensure that we are offering our youngest children the highest quality programs possible.” Democrats in the state Assembly [unveiled](#) a budget proposal in March 2015 with an \$80 million increase for universal pre-K – evenly split between New York City and the rest of the state – that would bring total pre-K funding to \$835 million.

The budget [passed](#) in late March 2015 ended up including \$365 million to continue the state’s “\$1.5 billion commitment over five years for full-day 4-year-old pre-K” and \$30 million to expand pre-K for 3- and 4-year-olds in high-need districts.

North Carolina

A study from Duke University [released](#) in February 2015 found that children enrolled in the state's early education programs are less likely to be placed in special education by third grade, but not all poor children in the state have access to the program due to a lack of funding. The News & Observer [editorialized](#) that because of the study, "It will be more difficult now for Republicans in the North Carolina General Assembly to hesitate when it comes to more funding for pre-school programs and early childhood initiatives," calling for them to "provide full funding for the pre-K program, without hesitation."

Gov. Pat McCrory's 2015-17 budget proposal "continues the governor's commitment to high-quality early childhood programs through a recurring expansion of \$5.04 million for NC Pre-K," which will [expand](#) to accommodate 26,800 at-risk 4-year-olds.

North Dakota – Gov. Jack Dalrymple (R)

“We have an opportunity during this legislative session to build on our accomplishments by maintaining strong funding for K-12 schools, by investing in early childhood education...”

– State of the State Address, Jan. 6, 2015

Gov. Dalrymple also said in his December 2014 [budget address](#) that, “the time has come to support a proposal that will be brought before the Legislature to place funds behind every four-year-old child in North Dakota wishing to enter a certified Pre-K program.” A bill [passed](#) by the Senate in late February 2015 would provide approximately \$6 million in grant dollars to fund as many as 6,000 preschool children, covering roughly half the cost of the program. Under the proposal, the funding would be available in July 2016, giving school districts time to develop programs. Senators also [voted down](#) a competing bill that would have created a universal pre-K program through public schools at an estimated \$26 million per year. In April 2015, the House [approved](#) the Senate’s pre-K plan, but cut the appropriation in half, to \$3 million. The plan also tightened eligibility to only include students who qualify for free or reduced lunch. After the Senate concurred with the House’s changes, Gov. Dalrymple [signed](#) the bill into law, declaring, “we believe that this legislation is a major step forward and a major improvement in our education program.” It is estimated that the \$3 million could impact as many as 2,000 children, with \$2,000 grants for each child who qualifies for free school lunches and \$1,000 for those who qualify for reduced price lunches.

Ohio – Gov. John Kasich (R)

Gov. John Kasich's [budget proposal](#) includes \$63.8 million in new funds for [early childhood](#) programs, including an additional \$40 million to provide preschool to more than 6,100 children. In his [State of the State Address](#) in late February 2015, Gov. Kasich said that the state is aiming for 17,000 preschool slots for kids who “will be better prepared for school.” The governor also wants to end the child care “cliff” by softening “barriers to economic advancement by allowing families to keep subsidized child care on a gradually reducing scale up to 300 percent of the federal poverty level,” up from 200 percent currently, an issue he also [mentioned](#) in his State of the State.

Oregon – Gov. Kate Brown (D)

“Through my work early on as a family advocate and legislator, I know there is much more we can do as a state to make sure every Oregon child is ready to learn when she or he starts kindergarten, and reading proficiently by third grade. That is why I have prioritized investment in early learning and literacy programs for Oregon’s youngest learners - to close opportunity gaps for students before they develop.”

– State of the State Address, April 17, 2015

Two months after taking over as governor following former Gov. John Kitzhaber’s resignation in February 2015 amid criminal investigations, former Secretary of State Kate Brown pledged to focus on early learning during her first State of the State Address in April 2015. Gov. Brown had earlier [mentioned](#) that she is “asking the Legislature to deliver this year on new investments in early childhood education,” commenting on a new plan to replace Gov. Kitzhaber’s education board with an advisory council.

Former Gov. Kitzhaber’s [budget proposal](#) included a \$440 million investment in children from birth to third grade, including \$135 million for early learning. This includes funding for employment-related day care, early intervention mental health, home visiting and additional funding for early learning organizations. A [legislative proposal](#) from Democrats would spend less than the governor wants on early childhood education with a [\\$60 million increase](#) in early childhood hubs, home visiting programs and other early childhood programs, if funding is available. In April 2015, a \$30 million bill was [introduced](#) in the House Committee on Education that would create a “comprehensive, high-quality” preschool program, that would be introduced in conjunction with the other \$135 total million in early learning requests. Analysts [noted](#) that lawmakers will make decisions on how to use \$60 million set aside for targeted education priorities – which could include early childhood education – after the state’s next quarterly economic and revenue forecast in May.

In April 2015, Gov. Brown [signed](#) a \$7.255 billion K-12 schools budget that includes \$220 million to fund full-day kindergarten, which takes effect statewide this fall. While the budget includes a 9 percent increase in funding, which Democrats believe will cover the costs for expanding kindergarten from half- to full-day, some educators say it isn’t enough.

A Senate bill is also [pushing](#) to expand the state’s Working Family Child Care Tax Credit and a House bill is [working](#) to expand access of employment-related child care to low-income families.

Pennsylvania – Gov. Tom Wolf (D)

“[Our budget] recognizes that our responsibility to provide a great education does not begin at kindergarten and end with high school. That’s why my budget also expands access to early childhood education by increasing the number of children in Pre-K by 75 percent.”

– Budget Address, March 3, 2015

Gov. Wolf’s 2015-16 budget request [includes](#) a \$120 million increase for the state’s investment in early learning programs – an additional \$100 million for the state’s Pre-K Counts program and \$20 million for Head Start Supplemental Assistance – which he says will increase early education enrollment by at least 75 percent. The request would bring the state’s support for early childhood programs to nearly \$256.6 million. The governor said this budget is part of a four-year goal to increase the state’s pre-K-12 investment by \$2 billion that would be paid by a [natural gas extraction](#) tax, called the “Pennsylvania Education Reinvestment Act.” In February 2015, Democratic Rep. Tina Davis [released](#) her own plan with a similar proposal, with half of the money raised from taxing natural gas extraction to go into the “Restore Our School Fund” which would include funding for early childhood education. Gov. Wolf also announced that the state [received](#) a \$24.3 million Early Head Start-Child Care Partnerships grant, which the governor said, “is a great first step towards ensuring that every child has access to quality pre-K education.”

Rhode Island – Gov. Gina Raimondo

“This budget also commits the necessary matching funds that allow us to more than triple the number of state sponsored pre-k classrooms in Rhode Island. It’s never too early to put our youngest learners on a path to opportunity.”

– Budget Address, March 12, 2015

Gov. Raimondo’s [proposed budget includes](#) \$1 million to add more pre-K classrooms and \$1.4 million to expand all-day kindergarten to the remaining communities in the state that do not offer it by September 2016. In her budget [address](#), Gov. Raimondo mentioned, “we still have almost 2,000 kindergarten students who don’t have access to full-day K. My husband and I know firsthand how much our kids flourished because of all day K and every Rhode Island kid deserves the same opportunity.” And thanks to the state’s federal Preschool Expansion Grant, the Rhode Island Department of Education is [adding](#) six sites next fall to the state’s pre-K program, bringing the total number to 18 sites that serve nine communities.

In February 2015, legislators also [proposed](#) a bill that would accelerate full-day kindergarten funding to several communities throughout the state. Under current law, programs set to start in the 2015-16 school year will receive baseline funds that gradually increase, but the Democratic proposal would allow programs to receive the maximum during the first year.

In May 2015, the Senate [approved](#) legislation to call on the state departments of Health, Human Services and Children, Youth and Families to develop and coordinate standards for a system of early childhood home visiting services, and have the Department of Health operate a statewide voluntary home visiting system. A companion House bill has been introduced as well.

South Carolina

The Education Policy Review and Reform Task Force [held](#) its first meeting in late February 2015 in response to the state Supreme Court's ruling that poor, rural districts were not providing their students with an adequate education. Former governor and U.S. Secretary of Education Dick Riley said that the group should recommend expanding pre-K programs and early childhood education. The task force will meet throughout this year and make recommendations to state lawmakers next January.

Tennessee

The House and Senate Republican chairmen attempted to [push](#) a bill that would void federal funding if a court decided Tennessee's \$70 million pre-K expansion grant to Davidson and Shelby counties discriminated against the rest of the state. The bill [failed](#) in the 2015 session of the Tennessee General Assembly after many called the measure a "setup to kill pre-K" that would encourage someone against pre-K programs to file a lawsuit.

Texas – Gov. Greg Abbott (R)

“To improve our schools we must begin by building a strong foundation at the very beginning. Our goal should be to ensure all Texas students are performing at grade level in reading and math by the time they finish the 3rd grade ... To begin the process of building a better education system in Texas, we must improve early education. This is why I’m declaring early education as my first emergency item as governor. Our children and their future have no time for delay.”

– State of the State Address, Feb. 17, 2015

During Gov. Abbott’s [State of the State Address](#), the governor declared early education as one of five emergency items for the Legislature to tackle during the session. The governor’s proposed [budget](#) calls for \$118 million for implementing a high-quality pre-K program for eligible students and \$64 million for pre-K through third grade teachers to have increased professional development. This would fund an additional \$1,500 per eligible 4-year-old for school districts willing to offer the governor’s proposed pre-K program. After the governor’s address, bills [filed](#) by Republican state Rep. Dan Huberty and Democratic state Sen. Judith Zaffirini would enact his plan for [expanding](#) early education with \$100 million into the program. In April 2015, the House gave [final approval](#) of House Bill 4, which would provide roughly \$130 million to school districts to provide half-day pre-K and improve quality through additional training for teachers and data collection to track performance. Some are critical that the bill does not require or provide funding for full-day pre-K programs or restore funding to a \$200 million pre-K grant program that lawmakers gutted in 2011. However, Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick’s Grassroots Advisory Board – a citizen group of tea party leaders – [sent](#) an “unsolicited” letter to the Senate calling House Bill 4 and Senate Bill 801 “a threat to parental rights.” After the letter added to friction between the House, Senate and the governor’s office, Lt. Gov. Patrick [referred](#) nearly 40 House-passed bills to Senate committees, including the pre-K bill, in an attempt to lower the tensions. At the end of April 2015, the Senate Education Committee [voted](#) 9 to 2 to send House Bill 4 for consideration by the full Senate.

At the end of March 2015, the House also [approved](#) a budget that included an amendment to spend \$1.6 billion to provide full-day pre-K statewide, though that would be contingent on “the unlikely passage” of legislation to call for full-day preschool. In April 2015, the Senate [approved](#) a budget that included \$118 million for pre-K.

Earlier, state Rep. Eric Johnson, D-Dallas, and state Rep. Marsha Farney, R-Georgetown, had [unveiled a plan](#) to heighten the quality of pre-K that includes making it a full-day system. A Dallas Morning News [editorial](#) in January 2015 said it was “persuaded by evidence that offering full-day pre-K does a better job than half day in getting youngsters enrolled and getting them ready for serious learning” and another [editorial](#) in March 2015 said that Gov. Abbott’s half-day proposal “doesn’t approach what’s needed to begin a real effort at change” through full-day pre-K expansion. Rep. Johnson’s [proposal](#) could cost an estimated \$318 million, which was more than Rep. Huberty said the state could afford. A San Antonio Express-News editorial in March

2015 [argued](#) that Rep. Huberty's half-day pre-K bill "falls short of expectations," noting that "Each year the Legislature fails to fully fund the pre-K program (with full-day classes) means another high school graduation class with members who didn't have the opportunity for early childhood education."

Utah

In March 2015, state lawmakers [approved](#) \$1 million to expand the Upstart program to more than 6,000 children, which provides in-home school readiness preparation. And in February 2015, a bill in the Senate was [proposed](#) to require more transparency and background checks from certain exempt providers of child care, including church groups and some charter schools. A state senator has also decided to [wait until 2016](#) to propose legislation that would work to “disrupt cycles of intergenerational poverty” by providing qualifying households up to \$1,500 per year in income tax reimbursements for educational expenses.

Vermont – Gov. Peter Shumlin (D)

“We have had many successes. I am proud that my Administration secured two highly competitive early childhood grants, attracting \$70 million dollars in federal funds to help give our youngest Vermonters a strong start.”

– Budget Address, Jan. 15, 2015

Gov. Shumlin’s budget also has [discussed](#) the importance of high-quality, affordable child care, including the formation of a Blue Ribbon Commission to research financing options for statewide access to child care. Last year, the Legislature passed a universal pre-K mandate to districts, but later announced that implementation would be [delayed](#) until the 2016-17 school year. While funding is tight this year, advocates are still [pushing](#) for legislators to increase early childhood education funding. In March 2015, the House Education Committee [restored](#) \$200,000 in Early Education Initiative grant money, which will help pay for providers in the year delay until universal pre-K is rolled out. In early February 2015, Gov. Shumlin also [launched](#) the “Promise Community Initiative,” which will allow communities to apply for \$200,000 grants to implement in communities “committed to serve the young children birth to age 6” through coordination of education, health and social services. The funding comes from Vermont’s \$36.9 million Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge win. [Seven communities](#) across the state were selected in April 2015. The House also preliminarily [approved](#) a bill in April 2015 that would require the state’s nearly 300 school districts to study mergers with neighboring districts and become pre-K-12 “integrated education systems” by 2019.

Virginia – Gov. Terry McAuliffe (D)

“If we are going to lead in a global economy, we cannot wait until our students reach kindergarten to begin preparing them for success ... I was proud to work with U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan to help Virginia win a \$17.5 million grant last month to expand our pre-school program so that another 1,600 at-risk four-year-olds can learn in a Pre-K classroom in their community ... I have introduced budget language that will allow communities that have exceeded their pre-K budgets to receive leftover funds not used in other divisions, so that they can offer more children the great start to their education they deserve ... I am also proposing legislation to keep our children safe by increasing the number of day care facilities across Virginia that are licensed and properly inspected by state and local governments.”

– State of the Commonwealth Address – Jan. 14, 2015

Gov. McAuliffe has [proposed](#) initiatives to increase oversight on day care facilities after fires last year claimed the lives of children at unlicensed daycares, and other reports have found that quality at unregulated facilities is consistently lower than those that are regulated. In late February 2015, lawmakers in the House and Senate [passed](#) compromise legislation that will improve safety and accountability in child care programs, including lowering the threshold for state licensing of a home daycare to five or more children, from six children. In March 2015, Gov. McAuliffe made [technical amendments](#) to the bill that he said were needed to continue federal funding. In a veto session, the House [rejected](#) Gov. McAuliffe’s substitutes for the child care bills that would have broadened fingerprint requirements to comply with the Child Care and Development Block Grant law, leaving it up to the governor to finalize.

The governor also wants to [expand](#) pre-K programs in the state, but [budget amendments](#) approved by the General Assembly that adjust the preschool funding formula and eligibility criteria could cause some communities to lose Virginia Preschool Initiative slots. While advocates were asking Gov. McAuliffe to [veto](#) the amendments, the governor signed the budget in March 2015 but is [allowing](#) a one-year transition to the new eligibility requirements, something that could also be brought up in the 2016 legislative session.

Washington state – Gov. Jay Inslee (D)

“Our most fundamental commitment needs to be to the very youngest Washingtonians. We know the greatest untapped asset in the state is the potential of a 3- and 4-year-old. The latest neuroscience research at the University of Washington shows that at this age, children’s minds have a tremendous capacity for learning. Early learning is the best investment we can make in our future ... That’s why my proposal makes a \$2.3 billion investment in our children’s future, including the largest-ever state investment in early learning. This means 6,000 more low-income children could attend high-quality preschools.”

– State of the State Address, Jan. 13, 2015

Gov. Inslee has [proposed](#) adding an additional \$156.3 million into early education to add 6,358 slots for the Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program and expand the Early Achievers program to rate and train child care providers. The governor’s proposal also includes \$2 million in funding over two years to expand home visiting. While state legislators will have to discuss how to fund a state Supreme Court decision mandating the state fully pay for basic education, a Seattle Times editorial [called on](#) lawmakers to “keep in mind it is never too early for a child to succeed academically.”

In March 2015, House Democrats [unveiled](#) a budget that includes \$227 million more for pre-K programs, with \$89.1 million going to preschool for low-income families and families with disabled children and another \$47.7 million for the Early Achievers program. The House [passed](#) the budget in April 2015. The state Senate GOP also [released](#) a budget that would spend \$116 million more on early learning. Both the Senate and the House also [passed](#) a bill that would restrict state subsidies to preschools and day cares with high marks on the state’s Early Achievers rating system.

West Virginia

The state Senate and House of Delegates [passed](#) bills that require at least 1,200 minutes of instruction in preschool, likely resulting in a four-day preschool week, rather than an earlier Department of Education policy that would have changed pre-K to five days a week in the 2016-17 school year. However, in April 2015, Gov. Earl Ray Tomblin [vetoed](#) the bill to offer four days of early childhood education instead of the current five.