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# Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-04-852](#), a report to congressional requesters

## Why GAO Did This Study

For nearly 40 years, the federal government has played a role in providing early childhood development programs for children of low-income families through Head Start and other programs. Since 1980, the number of states with preschool programs has also significantly increased. While most of these programs have targeted children at risk of school failure, more recently, interest has grown in expanding these limited programs because of the growing concern about children's readiness for school and subsequent achievement. It has also been fueled by new research on early brain development that suggests the importance of early education and by the high rate of mothers in the workforce and their need for early childhood services. In this context, questions have arisen about how the various programs are coordinated and what lessons have been learned from broad-based state preschool efforts.

This work focused on four states that have expanded their preschool programs to serve more children. In these states, GAO addressed (1) how prekindergarten programs were designed and funded, (2) the potential implications of these program features for children's participation and other programs that serve four year-olds, and (3) the outcome data that have been collected on participating children and families. To gather this information, GAO conducted site visits in four states—Georgia, New Jersey, New York, and Oklahoma.

[www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-04-852](http://www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-04-852).

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Mamie Shaul at (202) 512-7215 or [shaulm@gao.gov](mailto:shaulm@gao.gov).

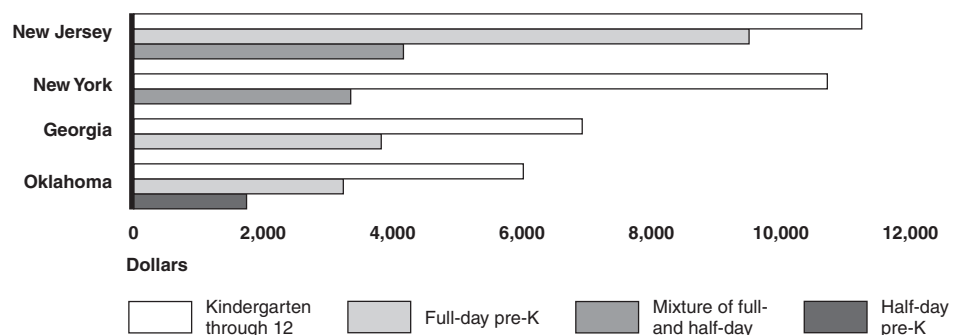
## PREKINDERGARTEN

# Four Selected States Expanded Access by Relying on Schools and Existing Providers of Early Education and Care to Provide Services

## What GAO Found

The expanded prekindergarten programs in Georgia, Oklahoma, New York, and New Jersey had some similarities in their design features. For instance, programs were offered at no direct cost to parents, regardless of family income, and each state incorporated some level of collaboration with community-based providers such as Head Start and large child care facilities. Some key differences in their design features also existed. For example, Georgia and Oklahoma had statewide programs providing prekindergarten services to over half of their four-year olds, while New York's and New Jersey's programs were more geographically targeted. States and school districts also varied in offering full- or half-day prekindergarten programs. States also varied in teacher qualifications, the percentage of prekindergarten children served by community-based providers, funding methods, and in the amount of funding per child.

**State Per Child Funding for Prekindergarten Programs and Kindergarten through Grade 12**



Sources: Data on per child funding for kindergarten through grade 12 were obtained from the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics; data on per child funding for state prekindergarten programs were obtained from the Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning, and the state departments of education in New Jersey, New York, and Oklahoma.

Some program features had potential implications for the participation of children and for early childhood programs. For example, none of the four states required providers to transport all children to and from prekindergarten, and many children were enrolled in half-day programs, which officials believed might have limited the participation of children from low-income and working families. Collaborations between programs and community-based organizations generally permitted rapid program expansion and were viewed as beneficial to early childhood programs. Finally, we found few data to determine the impact of state prekindergarten expansion on the availability or prices of child care.

While some data were available on outcomes for children who participated in prekindergarten programs, less was known about their impacts on families. For example, a study in Oklahoma showed that children who participated made significant gains on several school readiness measures relative to a comparison group of unenrolled children. However, none of the four states had measured effects on families, such as parents' work effort.