



October 21, 2021

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT

# Biden's plan for early childhood education

## PRO POINTS

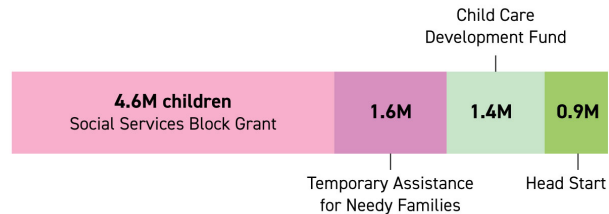
- **President Joe Biden has proposed a \$200 billion** initiative that would offer free, universal preschool for all 3- and 4-year-olds, as part of an expansive social spending package that faces protracted negotiations and uncertain prospects in Congress.
- **House Democrats' Build Back Better package includes \$450 billion** for child care and universal pre- K, though many details won't be clear until lawmakers reach an agreement and the federal government issues regulations and guidance for implementing policy specifics.
- **One in every 110 U.S. workers — and 1 in every 55 working women — makes a living** in early childhood education and care, according to the U.S. Treasury Department. Many of those workers are paid so little that they rely on public services.
- **Researchers at the University of California, Berkeley,** estimate that child care employment reached 90 percent of pre-pandemic levels, nationally, by August 2021 compared with February 2020. But in New York and New Jersey, only 74 percent of those jobs had recovered.

## HOW WE GOT HERE

Less than 5 million of the nation's roughly 8 million 3- and 4-year-olds attend preschool, according to researchers at Rutgers University, and more than half of 3- and 4-year-olds in poverty do not attend any program whatsoever. Federal programs for early childhood education date back decades, and most famously with Head Start under President Lyndon Johnson. But subsequent federal efforts to expand universal preschool have largely failed. Former President Barack Obama called upon lawmakers in 2013 to approve a cost-sharing agreement that would build out access to the early learning programs. Congress didn't bite. Now, President Joe Biden faces a different kind of fight on Capitol Hill as he tries to carry out the Obama administration's ambitions.

### Block grant served more than 4 million children

NUMBER OF CHILDREN SERVED IN FISCAL YEAR 2019 BY GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS THAT EXPLICITLY FUND CHILD CARE



Source: U.S. Department of the Treasury

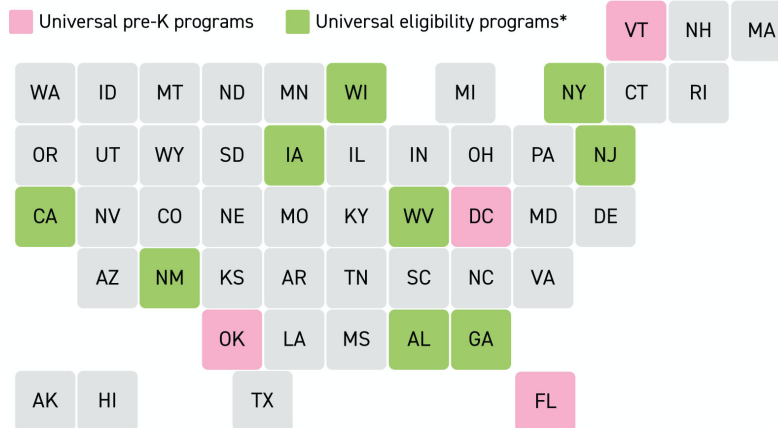
Most states offer publicly funded preschool programs to children, though only eight managed to enroll more than half of their 4-year-olds in the 2019-2020 school year, according to an annual Rutgers' study. State spending on these programs often falls short of what researchers and advocates who support expanded programs say is necessary to boost development among children and better prepare them for school, especially for those from low-income backgrounds. And Rutgers researchers also estimate growth in state-funded programs had slowed before the Covid-19 pandemic: States added only 12,000 preschool seats in 2019-2020, and the number of 4-year-olds in state-funded preschool declined for only the second time since 2002.

The Biden administration says the preschool plan in its Build Back Better package would benefit five million children and save the average family \$13,000 when fully implemented, while the broader initiative included proposals to spend another \$225 billion over 10 years subsidizing and expanding child care programs.



## The state of universal pre-K

13 STATES OFFER SOME FORM OF UNIVERSAL PRE-K PROGRAMS



\* D.C., Florida, Oklahoma and Vermont require school districts to participate and have sufficient funding to enroll all eligible children. The other states have 'universal eligibility' programs that serve a significant portion of the 4-year-old population, but are not necessarily available to all eligible students.

Source: Education Commission of the States, April 2021

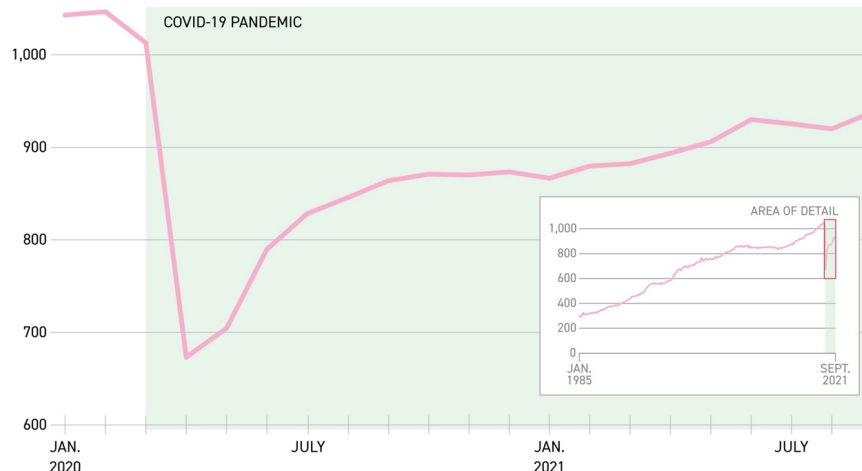
### WHAT'S NEXT

Democrats are still tussling internally over how to trim the overall \$3.5 trillion price tag of Biden's social spending plan, tweak the duration of any programs and assess which items should make the final cut of the reconciliation legislation. While those political factors promise to narrow the scope of the president's original ambitions for his Build Back Better agenda, it's not yet clear how child care and early childhood education will fare.

A group of economists and policy scholars backed by the left-leaning Center for American Progress have urged lawmakers to support major spending on affordable child care. And polling from the First Five Years Fund advocacy group suggests there's considerable public support for federally funded child care and early learning programs, but any new spending will have to confront considerable labor market challenges.

### A hard-hit workforce inches back to pre-pandemic levels

CHILD DAY CARE SERVICES EMPLOYEES IN THOUSANDS, SEASONALLY ADJUSTED



Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Center for the Study of Child Care Employment



## POWER PLAYERS

- **National Head Start Association:** The advocacy organization says it represents more than 275,000 staff and 1,600 Head Start grant recipients. It has praised House Democrats' initial version of the reconciliation bill, including provisions that prioritize Head Start programs and improve compensation for its workers. The group has also met with HHS Secretary Xavier Becerra to rally attention to staff shortages among early childhood education programs.
- **HHS Secretary Xavier Becerra:** Under House Democrats' version of Biden's social spending plan, universal pre-K would, like Head Start, be housed within the Department of Health and Human Services. However, the Education Department would still have to offer input on the program.
- **Sen. Patty Murray (D-Wash.) and Rep. Bobby Scott (D-Va.):** The chairs of Congress' education-focused committees have already introduced H.R. 1364 (116), the Child Care for Working Families Act, which is similar to Biden's free universal pre-K plan. Murray, a former preschool teacher, has been vocal about this issue on Capitol Hill for many years.