Where We've Been, Where We Are Today, and Where We Need to Go

A Guide to Early Care and Education in Delaware, 2026-2027

FIRST STATE Pre-K

1 WHERE WE'VE BEEN

Delaware has made **meaningful investments**—and they are making a difference.

2016 Nearly **$100M+** in additional investment in Pre-K and Purchase of Care over **10 years** **2026**

STATE-FUNDED PRE-K

2X more children in high-quality Pre-K

Approximately **1,200** more served

3X funding

+21M in funding

PURCHASE OF CARE

140% increase in funding

+$76M in funding

4,400 more children eligible

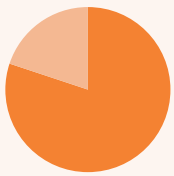
> "Statewide POC rate increases have been a game-changer for downstate providers. Many of us can hire more people and open new classrooms so we can serve new families"
>
> — Toni Dickerson, Sussex Preschools

2 WHERE WE ARE TODAY

Progress is real. So are the gaps.



1 in 5 children under 5 served by state-funded pre-K



80% do not have access to a public program

42nd nationally in access to state-sponsored pre-K for **3- and 4-year-olds**

11,507 of approximately **60,000** children

$74,250

Approximate **household income** to be **eligible for initial Purchase of Care subsidy and State-funded Pre-K** for a family of four

Shortages

2 children for every available child-care seat. And in some places, as many as **6 children for every available seat.**

*(children 0-9, based on physical space available)

Families Feeling the Pain

90%+ of parents have **challenges finding child care**

49% taking on **debt** or **dipping into savings**

1 in 5 skipping meals or basic needs

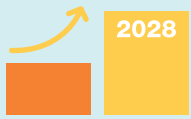
1 in 4 considering leaving Delaware

> Middle-class families are locked out of the child care system because we don't qualify for any state subsidies, but the price of child care is the same as a mortgage.
> — New Castle County parent

(First State Pre-K Survey, 2025)

But Also...
Big Goals ⟶ Raising the Bar

Delaware has set a goal to double enrollment in state-funded early care and education programs and services to 40% by 2028



(Del. Dept. of Education Strategic Plan)

3 WHERE WE NEED TO GO

Ensure investments are sustained in Delaware's operating budget to **serve 2X children, or around 11,000 more**



More Children and Families



Expand eligibility and invest in quality

Expand eligibility for both state-funded pre-K and Purchase of Care to at least **300%** of the Federal Poverty Level—roughly **$96,000** for a family of four—making **8,470** more children eligible

More Capacity



Invest in infrastructure

Invest in infrastructure to **create more classrooms and serve more children**—including through grants and by allowing public-school capital funding to support pre-K.

Sustainable Care

Fund the real cost of care

Increase Purchase of Care rates closer to the cost of care so providers can:



keep up with increasing costs



open more classrooms



increase staff pay and benefits

Invest in children. Invest in Delaware.

www.firststateprek.com