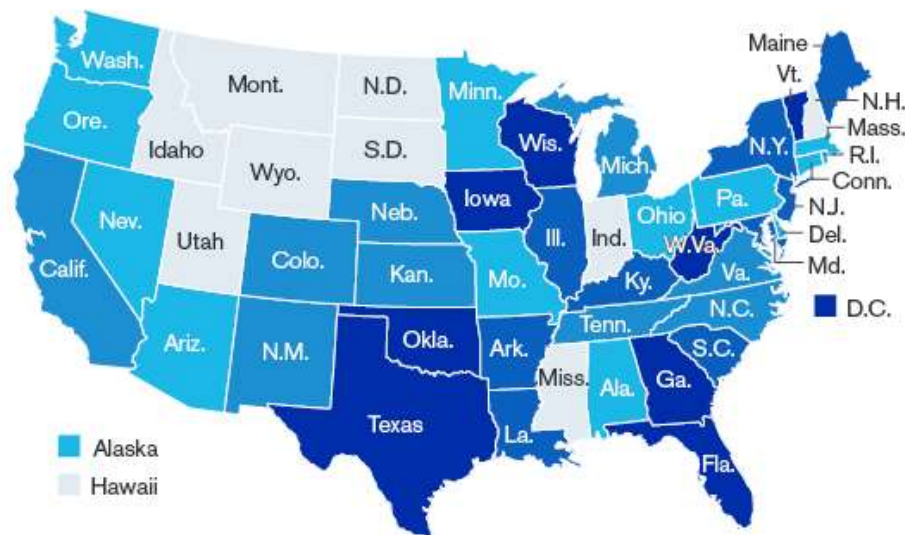


Push for pre-K in most states

Pre-K Enrollment, State-by-State

Percent of 4-year-olds enrolled in state-funded pre-kindergarten, 2012 data



Source: *National Institute for Early Education Research*

By William Selway, Bloomberg

Bill de Blasio won the mayoralty of New York City in part on a politically popular promise to expand access to pre-kindergarten for 4-year-olds. In doing so, the 21st-century liberal embraced a 20th-century ideal: Fifty years ago, President Lyndon Johnson created Head Start, a national program to provide education to young children, wagering that it would boost their chances of later academic and economic success. For two years running, President Obama has put proposals in his budget for “universal” pre-kindergarten for moderate-income as well as low-income children. The prospect of more kids heading to pre-K has re-opened debates over

whether early exposure to school really makes a long-term difference.

In New York, Gov. Andrew Cuomo struck a deal to give New York City \$300 million to expand pre-K starting in September, although without the tax increase on wealthy residents de Blasio sought to pay for it.

But across the U.S., preschool has taken a big hit from strapped budgets since the 2008 financial crisis. In 2012, state spending on preschool dropped 10 percent, the biggest decline ever. As a result of the across-the-board spending reductions, Head Start lost \$400 million last year, the deepest cuts since the program's creation. About 57,000 poor children were turned away during the current school year.

Obama's call in 2013 to raise cigarette taxes to pump about \$75 billion into preschool over 10 years went nowhere in the face of Republican opposition. This year, Obama added a new argument, focusing on early education's potential to offset America's growing income gap. As a separate debate rages over proposals to revamp U.S. schools, some educators point to a connection between preschool attendance and the scores on international tests that have raised fears about America's future competitiveness.

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