

Public School Enrollment in Kindergarten and Preschool

DEFINITION

This indicator reports the number of kindergarten and preschool students in New Hampshire public schools.

CONTEXT

In the 2009-2010 school year, New Hampshire joined every other state in the country by providing public kindergarten in all school districts. In 2007, the legislature defined an adequate education to include kindergarten and appropriated funding for districts that had not previously offered kindergarten (Benson 2009). In the 2009-2010 school year kindergarten programs opened in Chester, Hudson, Litchfield, Mascenic Regional, Mason, Milford, Pelham, Salem and Windham. Lyndeborough decided to tuition its students to a private school in Milford. For the 2010-2011 school year, these ten districts enrolled a total of 1,044 kindergarten students. In the 2008-2009 school year 53 out of 153 New Hampshire school districts with kindergarten offered full-day programs; others offered half-day programs. Just over a quarter of New Hampshire kindergarten students in public school (3,100 children) were enrolled in full-day kindergarten programs in the 2008-2009 school year (NH DOE 2009 and author's estimates, see Appendix).

Nationwide, public preschool education has become the focus of extensive attention and advocacy. Some advocates argue for universal preschool, available to all three- and four-year-old children. Others argue that public funds for preschool should be targeted to under-resourced children based on income eligibility. Currently, of the 38 states that fund public preschool programs, 32 have an income requirement (Barnett, Epstein, Friedman, Sansanelli and Hustedt, 2009).

Nationwide in 2008-2009, 25 percent of four year olds were enrolled in regular state-funded pre-K education and 4 percent of three year olds were enrolled in such programs. The percentage of children enrolled in public pre-K nationally rises when special education programs and Head Start programs are counted. In addition, some children attend private pre-K programs or pre-K programs funded by local governments (Barnett, Epstein, Friedman, Sansanelli, and Hustedt, 2009). New Hampshire does not offer a regular state-funded pre-K program, but some children attend public schools for preschool through special education programs or on a tuition basis.

Public School Enrollment in Kindergarten and Preschool
By County, 2009-2010

	Kindergarten Enrollment	Kindergarten enrollment as percent of grades 1-12 enrollment	Preschool Enrollment	Preschool enrollment as percent of grades 1-12 enrollment
STATE TOTAL	11,969	6.6%	2,987	1.6%
Belknap County	647	7.5%	184	2.1%
Carroll County	387	6.7%	47	0.8%
Cheshire County	730	8.2%	209	2.3%
Coos County	287	6.9%	109	2.6%
Grafton County	738	6.7%	165	1.5%
Hillsborough County	3,505	5.8%	1,005	1.7%
Merrimack County	1,288	6.9%	292	1.6%
Rockingham County	2,862	6.4%	695	1.6%
Strafford County	1,124	7.5%	198	1.3%
Sullivan County	401	7.7%	83	1.6%



NEW HAMPSHIRE FINDINGS

In the 2009-2010 school year, 11,969 children were enrolled in kindergarten in New Hampshire and 2,987 were enrolled in preschool in a public school. An additional 194 were enrolled in readiness programs for students not considered prepared to enter the first grade. Readiness programs were widely used before the state adopted universal kindergarten.

Hillsborough County accounts for the greatest number of kindergarten students, with 3,505 children enrolled, and Coos County the least with an enrollment of 287 children. Some parents opt out of public kindergarten because they prefer private kindergarten, because half-day programs are inconvenient, or for some other reason, so the rate of usage of public kindergarten varies. Enrollment in kindergarten as a percentage of student participation in grades 1 through 12 varies from 5.8 percent in Hillsborough County to 8.2 percent in Cheshire County. (see chart on previous page)

Children enrolled in public preschool by county ranged from a low of 47 children in Carroll County to 1,005 children in Hillsborough County, with a state total of 2,987 children. Enrollment in public preschool as a percentage of enrollment in grades 1 through 12 varies from 0.8 percent in Carroll County to 1.7 percent in Hillsborough County.

SOURCE OF DATA FOR ILLUSTRATION/METHODOLOGY

New Hampshire Department of Education. 2010a. www.education.nh.gov/data/attendance.htm.

REFERENCES

Barnett, W. Stephen, Dale J. Epstein, Allison H. Friedman, Rachel A. Sansanelli, and Jason T. Hustedt. 2009. *The State of Preschool 2009*. National Institute for Early Education Research. Rutgers Graduate School of Education. <http://nieer.org/yearbook/pdf/yearbook.pdf>

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New Hampshire Department of Education. 2010b. *Full Day Kindergarten 2008-09*. Bureau of Data Management.