

Report: Idaho among country's worst in enrolling kids for preschool

Study also shows Idaho and Washington students healthier but poorer

Samantha Malott and Shanon Quinn/Moscow-Pullman Daily

A report released today shows Idaho is among the worst states in the country in enrolling children in preschool programs, while Washington fares slightly better than the national average.

According to the 2014 Kids Count Data Book, 35 percent of 3- and 4-year-old children in Idaho attended preschool from 2010 to 2012. Only three states enrolled a lower percentage.

Although an improvement from the 31 percent enrolled in 2007, roughly 31,000 young children are not enrolled in preschool programs in Idaho. In Washington, 41 percent of the state's children were enrolled while 103,000 were not. Nationally, slightly more than 4 million children, or 54 percent, were not enrolled in preschool programs from 2010 to 2012. New study on state education shows Idaho and Washington students healthier but poorer

Moscow School District Superintendent Greg Bailey said the main reason for the lack of preschool programs in Idaho is lack of state funding for education.

"I would love to have one," Bailey said. "But right now, with our current funding, I think our legislators should focus on the funding for the current grade levels."

The new report paints a mixed picture for children's well-being in Idaho and Washington. Washington ranked 18th nationally, while Idaho came in at No. 21, both above average.

The data book information has four categories: education, family and community, health and economic well-being. Idaho is strongest in family and community at 11th in the nation, while 20th each in health and economic well-being, but dropped sharply to 33rd in

education. Washington is ninth in the U.S. in health, 17th in family and community, 20th in education and barely below

average in economic well-being at 27th.

Idaho and Washington saw small improvements in education and health rankings, including increases in math proficiency and high school graduation rates, but that came with declines in the economic well-being and family and community categories.

During the 2013-14 school year, Moscow offered a preschool program for 47 students with disabilities, funded by the federal government's Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, Part B.

"We accept kids in the preschool program who have special needs at the age of 3 and up," he said. "Usually the state doesn't provide enough funding to take care of a complete program."

There are other options in the community, including local educational day care programs, private preschools and even home-schooling children to prepare them for kindergarten, he said.

The Moscow Day School has about 15 preschool-age students and a total of 50 combined with the toddler and Pre-K classes, said Kylie Jessup, director. At a monthly price ranging from \$550 to \$675, the children learn what's needed to thrive in kindergarten, Jessup said.

Jessup said students aren't forced to learn to read because they gain that skill in kindergarten, but they learn their letters, numbers and the basic skills of sharing, making friends, listening quietly to the teacher and even lining up at the door, she said.

"If they haven't had these experiences, these first days of kindergarten can be a very scary experience," Jessup said, adding kindergarten teachers have told her they can see the difference between students who have and have not gone through a preschool program.

It has been shown through a number of studies that students who attend preschool have higher test scores, lower behavior problems, higher rates of participation, lower rates of drug abuse and depression, lower rates of grade repetition, higher graduation rates, reduced crime involvement and improved employment opportunities and earnings, said Lauren Necochea, director of Idaho Kids Count.

An earlier, stronger start in school has shown to improve students' performance both in and outside of the classroom, which could help improve the other struggling areas of the Idaho's education system.

- Math: Although still not an impressive percentage, the number of the Idaho's eighth-graders proficient in math in 2013 rose 6 percentage points since 2005 to 36 percent, while in Washington, the number of students proficient increased from 36 percent to 42 percent.
- Reading: Idaho fourth-graders proficient in reading remained steady at 33 percent in 2013, but Washington saw a 4 percent increase to 40 percent.

The report uses results of the National Assessment of Educational Progress test, which is completed by all students at the beginning of their fourth-grade year.

According to the report, fourth-graders are expected to understand the text, remember facts and make inferences.

"They should be able to extend the ideas in the text by making inferences, drawing conclusions, and making connections to their own experiences," the report's explanation reads.

In the Pullman School District, reading and literacy have been a major focus the past few years, district assistant superintendant Bob Maxwell said. Teachers and parents are working together both at home and in school and using a multitude of intervention materials, he said.

Maxwell said reading proficiency by the fourth grade is one of many signs that could indicate future successes.

"Students being able to read at a young age can tell us how generally effective they'll be in later grades," Maxwell said.

"It's one of the basic foundations of education," Maxwell added. "It's how students learn."

- **Graduation:** Both states also saw increases in the number of students graduating from high school on time. Only 16 percent of Idaho students and 21 percent of those in Washington did not graduate high school on time, according to statistics from 2011-12.
- **Poverty:** Disappointing numbers came out of the economic well-being category, as both states continued to see negative changes in the number of children living in poverty or parents who lack secure employment. There were an estimated 8,000 Idaho teens and 29,000 Washington youth not in school and not working in 2012. In Idaho, about 120,000 children, or 28 percent, were living in homes where parents lacked secure employment, with 492,000, or 31 percent, in Washington. The number of Idaho children living in poverty increased from 18 percent in 2005 to 21 percent in 2012, and similarly Washington saw an increase from 15 percent to 19 percent. Combined, the two states had an estimated 375,000 children living in poverty in 2012, while nearly 16.4 million were across the nation, the report says.
- **Health:** Despite these declining educational and economic standings, there have been positive improvements in student health in the states. Children without health insurance in Idaho dropped from 14 percent in 2008 to 8 percent in 2012, while during the same period in Washington, the Evergreen State saw a 2 percent decrease to 6 percent.

More information on local and national student data can be found at <http://datacenter.kidscount.org/>.

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