

# Will Your Child be 3 or 4 this Fall? Time for PreK!

**We have details on how New Mexico PreK works and what you need to know**

Just what do people mean when they talk about New Mexico PreK? With all of New Mexico's programs for young children and their families, it can be hard to keep them straight. So, we've got the details on NM PreK, New Mexico's free, early childhood education program for 3- and 4-year-olds.

## **What is NM PreK, Anyway?**

New Mexico PreK prepares children for kindergarten and beyond. In these classrooms across the state, 3- and 4-year-olds are developing social and motor skills, learning to follow rules in a group, discovering their emotions, and learning through play. The program is based on research about the best ways to prepare children for success in kindergarten and beyond. The NM PreK website says it well: "You won't see children sitting quietly at desks in a PreK classroom. PreK children are active – busy – working."

## **What Does it Cost?**

Nothing! NM PreK is completely free to families. New Mexico has been expanding full-day PreK all over the state, although it's still often shorter than an eight-hour workday. But don't worry! Families who need a longer day of care can look for PreK providers that offer additional hours before and after the PreK day. Those extra hours aren't free, but more New Mexico families than ever before can qualify for help with covering child care costs through child care assistance. You can search for PreK programs using the Child Care Finder or call 1-800-691-9067 to speak to an expert navigator who can help you find PreK in your area.

## **What Exactly Are the Age Requirements?**

PreK generally aligns with the school year. The PreK year starts in the fall and ends in the spring, and is not in session during the summer. To begin PreK in the fall, children must have turned 3 or 4 by September 1. Three-year-olds are eligible for Early PreK, and 4-year-olds enroll in traditional NM PreK. Note that not all sites offer Early PreK, so you'll need to check for that when you search for a provider.

## **Where Does PreK Happen?**

New Mexico PreK is expanding all over the state, and is offered both in child care centers and public schools. This means families have choices about what kind of PreK works for them. For a family with a 4-year-old and a 1-year-old, having them both at one child care center might be perfect. If your 4-year-old is your youngest, you might want to have them at the same elementary school as their older siblings. Not all child care centers and elementary schools offer PreK, so you'll need to search for providers near you (more on how below!) PreK programs located in child care centers are generally more likely to offer extended hours and Early PreK for 3-year-olds. Public schools are more likely to start their PreK offerings at age 4.

### **Is There an Income Requirement?**

No. NM PreK is for everyone. Your PreK provider may ask whether you live in the boundaries of a low-income elementary school. This information may be used to help the state make PreK planning and funding decisions, but doesn't impact your family's eligibility for the program.

### **Does it Work?**

Yes! NM PreK has been studied repeatedly by evaluators at the state Legislature, who have found year after year that children enrolled in PreK see improved outcomes compared to similar children who did not enroll. Their latest research found NM PreK has positive effects on high school graduation rates and on reading and math scores in third, sixth and eighth grades.

### **Who Teaches PreK?**

PreK teachers are early childhood professionals with a variety of credentials and training pathways. Lead teachers are required to have or be working toward bachelor's degrees, and they receive ongoing training and consultation to continuously deepen their knowledge. PreK teachers are New Mexicans like Mikila and Maria, who find deep meaning in getting young children ready to succeed.

### **How Do I Sign Up?!**

NM PreK is funded and overseen by the state, but operated by individual sites in communities. That means you'll have to find a site that works for you, and apply through them. And start early! Many programs open PreK registration in the spring for the following fall. This web portal is designed to help you search for PreK programs in your area, and lets you see details such as which programs accept 3-year-olds. If you prefer to talk to a person, you can call 1-800-691-9067. You'll get a call back within 24 hours, from an expert whose job is to connect New Mexico families to early childhood services.