



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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New Mexico education leaders investing \$3 million in state's youngest learners

Waterford Upstart, a proven PreK learning program, is poised to reach thousands of unserved children.

SANTA FE — The Early Childhood Education and Care Department (ECECD) is partnering with education nonprofit [Waterford.org](https://www.waterford.org) to help more children prepare for kindergarten in New Mexico. ECECD is investing \$3 million, while Waterford is investing an additional \$1 million into the program. Research shows that Waterford Upstart has helped hundreds of children in New Mexico prepare for kindergarten, and now the state is hoping the program will work for thousands more.

ECECD is investing in the program with federal relief funds designated for pandemic relief. Right now, roughly 45% of New Mexico's preschool population is not participating in early childhood education. That's about 10,800 4-year-olds, according to the National Institute for Early Education Research. This funding would enroll 20% of those children in Waterford Upstart who are not currently enrolled in state funded PreK or Head Start. ECECD hopes to reach 2,160 children who otherwise would show up to school unprepared to learn. Instead, these kids could enter kindergarten reading at a nearly first-grade level if the program is done in a routine way. The program has received statewide support.

"I've supported [Waterford.org](https://www.waterford.org) since 2018, when Waterford Upstart was implemented in Albuquerque. Since then, over 1,000 children in New Mexico have participated in the program. I'm excited about this opportunity to expand Waterford Upstart in the state and am proud to be able to work in collaboration with Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham and her Administration to reduce by 20% the number of children who do not receive early education services," **state Sen. Mimi Stewart** said.

"Waterford was introduced into our state at a time when New Mexico families needed it the most," said ECECD cabinet secretary Elizabeth Groginsky. "During school closures, children, educators and families have had access to continued learning using Waterford's interactive curriculum, which supports family engagement, a key value of ECECD."

Waterford Upstart is a responsive, online education tool that adapts to the unique needs of children, moving them toward kindergarten readiness in just 15 minutes a day, five days a week. Parents and caregivers are given the

resources they need — including a computer and internet service at no cost — to become the first and most influential teachers of their children. The program provides a coach who is available to guide families along the way through phone calls, emails or text messages. A coach might offer, for example, tips on positive parent-child engagement offline that enhance mindset skills, which are critical in the education process. On average, 92% of the children participating in Waterford Upstart are ready for kindergarten — compared to a 65% average nationwide and 48% for children who receive free and reduced-priced meals at school.

Since the 2018-19 school year, before the pandemic, nearly 1,000 preschool-age children in New Mexico have used Waterford Upstart. The average participant went into kindergarten performing at a level generally not reached until the middle of the kindergarten year. Nearly 87% of Waterford Upstart graduates had outcomes demonstrating strong kindergarten readiness.

“It’s really pretty simple,” **Waterford.org national spokesperson Kim Fischer** said. “We empower parents and caregivers to empower their young people, who put in the work and end up understanding how great it feels to do well in school.”

Now state leaders are encouraging families to register.

“This program supports PreK-aged children through fun and active learning modules, helping equip them with the skills and resources they need to succeed in kindergarten and beyond,” Groginsky said. “Our partnership with Waterford is one of the important ways we are investing in tools that help New Mexico families and young children thrive.”

Waterford Upstart aligns with New Mexico Early Learning Guidelines, Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework and is endorsed by the Council of Administrators of Special Education.

Visit WaterfordUpstart.org to register for the program.

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Waterford.org

Waterford.org is an early education nonprofit with a mission to achieve universal literacy for children through equity, access and parent empowerment. Waterford develops educational tools that guide students along adaptive, individualized learning paths toward fluent reading and lifelong learning. We empower parents as a child’s first teacher, and we support teachers in taking the right actions at the right time for their students. Waterford serves more than 300,000 children every year through all of our programs, and that number is continually growing.

ECECD

The New Mexico Early Childhood Education and Care Department (ECECD) launched in 2020, one of only four cabinet level agencies nationwide that consolidated all early childhood agencies under one roof. ECECD’s mission is to optimize the health, development, education, and well being of babies, toddlers, and preschoolers through a family-driven, equitable, community-based system of programs and services. Learn more about how ECECD supports children, families, and the early childhood professionals that serve our communities at nmececd.org. On Facebook and Twitter as [@NewMexicoECECD](https://www.facebook.com/NewMexicoECECD).