Ready to Start: Ensuring High-Quality Prekindergarten in SREB States
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This report is part of the Challenge to Lead education goals series, directed by Joan M. Lord. The goals are listed on the inside back cover. For more information, e-mail joan.lord@sreb.org. Goals for Education: Challenge to Lead also is available on the SREB Web site at www.sreb.org.
In 2002, leaders in SREB states set out to lead the nation in educational progress. Now, our states do — in providing access to high-quality, state-funded prekindergarten for 4-year-olds. Southern states have been called the “nation’s trailblazers” in providing access to prekindergarten. In fact, last year, the majority of all 4-year-olds attending prekindergarten in the nation were enrolled in SREB states. The SREB region also leads the nation in setting high standards of quality for prekindergarten programs. Spending rates per child in the SREB median states exceed the national rate.

But let us remember that the Challenge to Lead Goals for Education call for SREB states to ensure that all children are ready for school. Nearly all SREB states now provide sufficient access to prekindergarten to serve children in poverty. Yet, all SREB states have growing percentages of children from additional low-income or English-as-a-second-language families who need early care and educational services to be ready for school. Few SREB states provide sufficient prekindergarten access and services for all children from these families.

Further work to ensure program quality also is important. Research shows that high-quality prekindergarten makes a difference. SREB states already lead the nation in setting policies that the National Institute for Early Education Research has identified as essential, including program standards, reasonable class sizes, well-trained teachers and staff, appropriate attention to health and safety services, and site visits. But SREB states and the entire nation face the challenge of assessing program quality and effectiveness: How does your state know if prekindergarten is getting your children ready for school? Work in this area needs to continue.

Funding, too, remains a challenge. Studies on prekindergarten dating from the 1960s make clear that the investment pays off in educational, health, social, civic and economic ways. Increasing funding and finding sustainable sources, especially to keep pace with enrollment and inflation, are difficult but necessary.

This report challenges SREB states to adjust their priorities so they can be sure that all children are ready for school. Those who are not ready are the ones most likely to drop out of school, find themselves in low-paying jobs or unemployed, and face a lifetime of problems that reduce their own quality of life and weaken their communities. SREB states cannot afford for children to falter, particularly in their critical first transition to school. SREB states need to continue to blaze trails for them.

Dave Spence
Ready to Start:

*Ensuring High-Quality Prekindergarten in SREB States*

All children at risk of not being ready for school are served by quality, coordinated programs from education, health and social service agencies.

One of the *Challenge to Lead* Goals for Education

SREB states have heeded early warnings, repeated in the *Challenge to Lead* Goals for Education, that children who are not ready for school start behind — and risk staying behind. Over the last two decades, policy-makers and education leaders in SREB states have increased access and funding for prekindergarten programs for children at risk of not being ready for school. Today, several SREB states lead the nation in providing students and families access to prekindergarten, and many others have made considerable strides.

While many SREB states are leaders in access, policy-making and funding, a number of challenges remain. Only two SREB states have provided sufficient seats for all 4-year-olds in the state whose families wish for them to attend, and few SREB states provide sufficient seats for all low-income 4-year-olds — those whose families are just above the poverty level. Research shows that high-quality prekindergarten also benefits 3-year-olds, yet these children remain underserved. In addition, the number of young children from families who speak English as a second language is rising. And research shows the importance of early intervention in prekindergarten for children with disabilities. Few states have programs that meet the needs of all of these groups.

As a result, SREB states face competing demands for limited prekindergarten dollars. How can you as a policy-maker or education leader know whether all children at risk of not being ready for first grade in your state have access to high-quality prekindergarten? Should you direct new dollars to serve more students? Should you focus primarily on improving program quality? Or, should your state offer access to specific groups of children — if it cannot offer high quality for all?
This report will help you learn more about your state’s progress. First, it answers two fundamental questions.

- What is school readiness?
- How valuable is prekindergarten in preparing children for school, based on research in SREB states?

Next, it addresses the three key questions you need to consider about your state’s progress and possible next steps.

### Defining School Readiness

SREB’s Challenge toLead Goals for Education call for SREB states to ensure that all children are ready for school. **But what does “ready” mean?** Definitions of readiness — and how to assess it — vary. In 2005, the National Governors Association Task Force on School Readiness described “ready for school” as student development along five dimensions, including physical, emotional, approaches to learning, language development and cognition. Seventeen states, including three SREB states — Arkansas, Kentucky and Virginia — developed their state and local readiness indicators from the dimensions identified by this task force and aligned them with state-adopted early learning standards. Using these indicators, Virginia made its state definition practical and concrete. (See Box 1.)

Education Week’s Quality Counts 2007 report found that seven SREB states now have formal definitions of school readiness — Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Maryland, North Carolina and Texas. But the report noted that few states both define readiness and require districts to assess readiness for students entering school. The report identified four SREB states — Arkansas, Florida, Georgia and Maryland — that do both. (Texas also now assesses school readiness.)

Having clear definitions of readiness, establishing and using school readiness assessments, and then addressing the needs of children who do not meet school readiness indicators are fundamental to educational progress in prekindergarten. SREB states that have not achieved these objectives need to take steps to accomplish them.

### Research in SREB States on the Value of Prekindergarten

Defining School Readiness

Box 1

Comprehensive Dimensions of Readiness for School

- Physical well-being and motor development
- Social/emotional development
- Approaches to learning
- Language development
- Cognition and general knowledge

- Based on the National Education Goals Panel’s 1991 recommendations and adopted in 2005 as the definition of readiness by the National Governors Association Task Force on School Readiness

Children who are ready for school can:

- follow directions
- hold a crayon
- speak understandably
- identify shapes, letters and numbers
- share with others
- separate from parents without being upset

- Virginia Department of Education

also showed long-term academic gains over those who did not attend, and they had lower school dropout rates, higher employment rates, better health, lower crime rates and lower incarceration rates later in life.

The most recent research on prekindergarten in SREB states shows that programs in the region are working.

- A 2004 Georgetown University study of state-funded prekindergarten programs in Oklahoma provided evidence of the educational and social benefits of prekindergarten. After accounting for gender, racial and ethnic differences, family income, age and education level of the mother, researchers concluded that children who attended prekindergarten outperformed other children, especially in their readiness to begin reading. Prekindergarteners scored 21 percent higher on assessments in pre-mathematics, 27 percent higher in pre-writing and 52 percent higher in pre-reading.

- A 2005 NIEER study of high-quality prekindergarten programs — including those in Oklahoma, South Carolina and West Virginia — reported that kindergarteners who had attended state-funded prekindergarten significantly outperformed those who had not attended state-funded prekindergarten. Prekindergarteners had 31 percent greater gains in vocabulary scores, 44 percent greater gains in math skills, and 85 percent greater gains in print awareness.

- A 2005 Georgia State University study showed the effects of Georgia’s prekindergarten program on 4-year-olds between 2001 and 2004. Georgia’s prekindergartners made significantly greater gains from the beginning of preschool to the end of first grade, compared with a national sample of children their age. By the end of first grade, Georgia’s children exceeded national norms on overall math skills, phonemic awareness, expressive language, and letter and word recognition.

- A 2007 NIEER study of the Arkansas Better Chance Program evaluates the readiness of kindergarteners who attended state-funded prekindergarten. The study shows that the Arkansas program increased children’s vocabulary by 31 percent over the year — equal to four additional months of progress. Arkansas’s
prekindergarteners also scored higher on math skills, including basic number concepts, simple addition and subtraction, telling time and counting money, with 37 percent more growth in the year.

Key Questions for State Policy-Makers

**QUESTION 1:**

*Is your state improving prekindergarten access for all children at risk of not being ready for first grade?*

**M**ost SREB states have improved access to state-funded prekindergarten significantly in the last four years. Enrollment gains in most SREB states outpaced the nation. From 2002 to 2006, the nation increased enrollment of 4-year-olds in prekindergarten by 5 percentage points, according to NIEER. Oklahoma led the nation in overall access for 4-year-olds. Six SREB states more than doubled the national gain: 17 percentage points in Louisiana, 16 points each in Maryland and West Virginia, 14 points in Oklahoma, 12 points in Arkansas, and 11 points in North Carolina.

Tennessee increased 4-year-old enrollment in state-funded prekindergarten by 9 percentage points, and Kentucky, Texas and Virginia had 5-point gains over the period. Two states showed slight increases: South Carolina with a 2-point increase and Alabama with a 1-point increase. Delaware had the same percentage of 4-year-olds enrolled in 2006 as in 2002. Georgia declined by 1 percentage point during the time period, but enrolled more than two-and-a-half times the national percentage in 2006. Mississippi does not have a state-funded prekindergarten program.

Calling states in the SREB region the “nation’s trailblazers” in 2006, NIEER recognized two states for leading the nation in access to state-funded prekindergarten: Oklahoma for serving more than two-thirds of its 4-year-olds, and Georgia for serving a majority of its 4-year-olds. Florida ranked fourth in the nation by serving 47 percent of 4-year-olds in its state-funded program. Texas was fifth in the nation with 44 percent of 4-year-olds in its state program. West Virginia, South Carolina, Maryland and Kentucky also ranked in the top 10 nationally, serving from 40 percent to 29 percent of all 4-year-olds in state programs. Additional children in every state attend Head Start, a federally funded prekindergarten for children from low-income families and children with disabilities. In fact, Oklahoma served nearly nine in 10 of its 4-year-olds in the two programs combined. The percentage of children served in Head Start in SREB states ranged from 6 percent in Maryland to 36 percent in Mississippi. (See Figure 1.)

The access that SREB states provide for 4-year-olds is impressive. In 2006, enrollment of 4-year-olds in all SREB state-funded prekindergarten programs rose to nearly a half-million, or 33 percent of all 4-year-olds in the region. At the same time, the total U.S. enrollment of 4-year-olds in prekindergarten was just over 800,000, or 20 percent. State leaders can be proud that five in eight 4-year-olds in prekindergarten programs in the nation attend in SREB states.

**But how does overall access for 4-year-olds compare with the numbers of children from families in poverty in the region? Currently, all**
SREB states except Alabama offer sufficient access so that all 4-year-olds from families in poverty can participate in prekindergarten, if their parents wish to enroll them. This access is based on the number of seats in a combination of state-funded programs and federally funded Head Start. In Mississippi, the seats are provided entirely by Head Start. SREB states have made dramatic gains since 2004 in providing prekindergarten for children in poverty. SREB’s 2005 report on prekindergarten showed that eight SREB states did not provide sufficient access to prekindergarten for all children from families in poverty. (See Figure 2.)

**Figure 1**

Percentage of 4-Year-Olds in Publicly Funded Prekindergarten Programs, 2006

![Bar chart showing percentage of 4-year-olds in publicly funded prekindergarten programs for 2006 by state.](chart1)

- **U.S.**
  - Percent not served by publically funded programs: 69
  - Percent in Head Start: 56
  - Percent in state-funded prekindergarten: 14

- **SREB**
  - Percent not served by publically funded programs: 16
  - Percent in Head Start: 33
  - Percent in state-funded prekindergarten: 51

- **OK**
  - Percent not served by publically funded programs: 16
  - Percent in Head Start: 7
  - Percent in state-funded prekindergarten: 42

- **GA**
  - Percent not served by publically funded programs: 58
  - Percent in Head Start: 4
  - Percent in state-funded prekindergarten: 47

- **FL**
  - Percent not served by publically funded programs: 40
  - Percent in Head Start: 3
  - Percent in state-funded prekindergarten: 44

- **TX**
  - Percent not served by publically funded programs: 20
  - Percent in Head Start: 20
  - Percent in state-funded prekindergarten: 40

- **WV**
  - Percent not served by publically funded programs: 11
  - Percent in Head Start: 31
  - Percent in state-funded prekindergarten: 31

- **SC**
  - Percent not served by publically funded programs: 31
  - Percent in Head Start: 29
  - Percent in state-funded prekindergarten: 16

- **MD**
  - Percent not served by publically funded programs: 31
  - Percent in Head Start: 14
  - Percent in state-funded prekindergarten: 18

- **KY**
  - Percent not served by publically funded programs: 31
  - Percent in Head Start: 15
  - Percent in state-funded prekindergarten: 14

- **LA**
  - Percent not served by publically funded programs: 11
  - Percent in Head Start: 13
  - Percent in state-funded prekindergarten: 11

- **AR**
  - Percent not served by publically funded programs: 11
  - Percent in Head Start: 12
  - Percent in state-funded prekindergarten: 12

- **NC**
  - Percent not served by publically funded programs: 9
  - Percent in Head Start: 11
  - Percent in state-funded prekindergarten: 9

- **VA**
  - Percent not served by publically funded programs: 8
  - Percent in Head Start: 16
  - Percent in state-funded prekindergarten: 16

- **TN**
  - Percent not served by publically funded programs: 7
  - Percent in Head Start: 16
  - Percent in state-funded prekindergarten: 16

- **DE**
  - Percent not served by publically funded programs: 5
  - Percent in Head Start: 7
  - Percent in state-funded prekindergarten: 5

- **AL**
  - Percent not served by publically funded programs: 36
  - Percent in Head Start: 36
  - Percent in state-funded prekindergarten: 36

- **MS**
  - Percent not served by publically funded programs: 56
  - Percent in Head Start: 56
  - Percent in state-funded prekindergarten: 56

**Sources:** National Institute for Early Education Research and Head Start Bureau.

**Figure 2**

Percentage of Children in Poverty for Which SREB States Have Prekindergarten Seats Available, 2007

![Map showing percentage of children in poverty for which SREB states have prekindergarten seats available.](chart2)

- **All But One SREB State Offer Prekindergarten for All Children in Poverty**

  - Less than 100%
  - 100% to 199%
  - 200% or more

* Reached 100 percent access (or more) since 2005

**Sources:** National Institute for Early Education Research, The Annie P. Casey Foundation and U.S. Census Bureau.
Setting eligibility for prekindergarten

Seven SREB states — Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Virginia and West Virginia — make prekindergarten available for 4-year-olds without regard to the income level of their families. In Delaware, children are eligible for prekindergarten if their family income is below the federal poverty level. In the remaining seven SREB states with state-funded programs, children are eligible if their families are considered low income — but not as low as the federal poverty level.

Poverty is defined by the U.S. Census Bureau, and its threshold is set annually according to such factors as family income and size. The current poverty level is just under $20,000 in earnings per year for a family of four. By this definition, about 20 percent of children in the United States and about 24 percent in SREB states under age 5 are from families in poverty.

Low income is generally defined by students’ eligibility for the National School Lunch Program. Under the program, children are eligible for free lunches in public school if their annual family income is 130 percent of the federal poverty level, up to $26,000 for a family of four. Children from families of four with incomes of 185 percent of the federal poverty level (from $26,000 to $37,000) are approved for reduced-price lunches.

The number of students who are eligible for free and reduced-price lunches is growing as a percentage of all children and has been rising for more than a decade.

Five states set the eligibility requirement for prekindergarten at the thresholds set for the National School Lunch Program. However, states that have these eligibility requirements generally permit programs to provide unfilled seats to any child, after they have enrolled all eligible children who apply.

- Two of Louisiana’s prekindergarten programs — and the programs in Maryland, Tennessee and Texas — have set the income requirement for families at 185 percent of the federal poverty level, the same as the reduced-price lunch level — up to $37,000 for a family of four. Kentucky requires children to be from families at 130 percent of the federal poverty level — the same as the free-lunch level.
- Arkansas restricts its program to children from families at 200 percent of the federal poverty level.
- North Carolina restricts its program to children from families at or below 75 percent of its state median income.

The number of students who are eligible for free and reduced-price lunches is growing as a percentage of all children and has been rising for more than a decade. In 1990, the National School Lunch Program approved approximately one-third of all school-age children in the nation. By 2006, the percentage had grown to 45 percent. In 1990, the percentage of children approved for free or reduced-price lunches in the SREB region was 39 percent. By 2006, it had grown to 53 percent, and every SREB state had at least one-third of its school-age population approved for the National School Lunch Program. The SREB state with the highest percentage of approved students was Mississippi at 70 percent; the lowest was Virginia at 33 percent. (See Figure 3.)

Low income is not the only eligibility factor for prekindergarten that SREB states consider. Five of the SREB states that have income-based eligibility requirements make an exception for students with “limited English proficiency” and
serve these students regardless of family income — Arkansas, Maryland, North Carolina, Texas and Virginia. The growth of Hispanic and other immigrant populations in these and other states creates an increasing need to strengthen the English language learning skills of these children as early as prekindergarten. Without early intervention, they have little chance of closing achievement gaps in reading and mathematics that emerge in the early grades and persist throughout the middle grades and high school.

The National Task Force on Early Childhood Education for Hispanics challenges states to serve growing numbers of Hispanic children in prekindergarten. The Task Force recommends that states encourage Hispanic parents to enroll their children in prekindergarten because high-quality programs have been effective in helping Hispanic children become ready for school. States should ensure sufficient availability of high-quality programs for these children.

What about 3-year-olds? A 2005 RAND Education review of the relevance of current brain research for early childhood education points out important findings for policy-makers. It indicates that early care and education, particularly from ages 1 to 3, have a significant, positive and long-lasting effect on the brain development of children. This research makes clear that more than one year of early intervention can benefit young children, especially those who are most in need. Few states in the nation, however, have taken steps to open state-funded prekindergarten to 3-year-olds except for those with disabilities, generally because of funding constraints.

Three percent of 3-year-olds in the nation were enrolled in state-funded prekindergarten programs in 2006, compared with 20 percent of 4-year-olds. The percentage of 3-year-olds enrolled nationally has not grown since 2002. In SREB states, 2 percent of 3-year-olds were enrolled in state-funded prekindergarten in 2006, compared with 33 percent of 4-year-olds.

Enrollment patterns for 3-year-olds differ considerably from state to state. Kentucky and Arkansas rank fourth and fifth nationally in access...
for these children, with 11 percent and 10.6 percent of children served in state-funded programs, respectively. These two states also serve a large proportion of 3-year-olds in Head Start, with about 11 percent each. (Only Mississippi among SREB states serves more 3-year-olds, with 26 percent in Head Start.) South Carolina, Texas and West Virginia serve about 4 percent of 3-year-olds in state-funded programs. Most others serve none or a very low percentage.

Some SREB states are attempting better coordination among multiple child-care and social service agencies, prekindergarten, and Head Start to provide more coordinated services to very young children, particularly those most vulnerable.

**Overcoming barriers to access**

Policy-makers and education leaders need to consider several factors when working to provide students with greater access to prekindergarten.

**Partial-day and partial-year programs:**
Partial-day prekindergarten and programs available only during the public school calendar year present significant challenges to working parents and guardians of young children. Only six SREB states provide all state-funded prekindergarten programs in a full-day format. (See Table 3 on Page 19.) Most state-funded programs in SREB states attempt to reduce this problem by providing transportation for prekindergarten children to child-care centers.

**Language barriers:** Many of the parents and guardians whose children need prekindergarten lack English language skills. Among the improvements that the National Task Force on Early Childhood Education for Hispanics recommends is assistance for adults within immigrant communities in getting the information and skills they need so their children can participate in local prekindergarten programs: knowledge of programs, understanding of eligibility requirements and basic application skills.

Being unable to read English also hinders parents in their participation with their children in prekindergarten activities. The High Scope/Perry Preschool and the Chicago Child-Parent Centers required significant parental involvement. These programs provided education and support for the parents, with good results.

**Geographic distribution:** Sufficient access to prekindergarten in every region of each state is important. Most SREB states have distributed the programs they have throughout their states. Now the challenge is to continue to distribute them well as the programs expand.

- Arkansas, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, North Carolina, South Carolina and West Virginia provide programs in all school districts or counties.
- Oklahoma serves 93 percent of its school districts, Tennessee serves 82 percent, and Texas serves 80 percent.
- Alabama serves 79 percent of its counties, and Virginia serves 68 percent of its cities and counties.
Question 1: Quick Summary

Is your state improving access to prekindergarten programs for all at-risk children?

- SREB states led the nation in prekindergarten enrollment growth in 2006.
- Enrollment growth in many SREB states has equaled or surpassed the national average gain since 2001.
- All but one SREB state now provide sufficient access to prekindergarten for 4-year-olds in poverty.
- About half of SREB states do not have family-income eligibility requirements for their state-funded prekindergarten programs. In most states that do, the requirements are linked to indicators of low income, not poverty.
- Partial-day programs and language barriers continue to be concerns for some families in enrolling their children in prekindergarten.
- The number of low-income children in SREB states is growing. If SREB states are to meet the goal of getting all children ready for school, they need to provide prekindergarten for this growing population of children at risk of not being ready.

Question 2:

Do your state’s prekindergarten programs meet recognized standards of high quality?

The National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) reports annually on whether states’ prekindergarten programs meet 10 standards of quality — ones very similar to those SREB recommended nearly two decades ago. Most SREB states have policies that meet eight or more of the standards. (See Box 2 and Table 1.)

- Alabama and North Carolina are the only states in the nation that have policies that meet all 10 standards.
- Arkansas, Oklahoma, Tennessee and two non-SREB states have policies that meet nine of the standards.
- Delaware, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana (in the LA4 program), South Carolina and three non-SREB states have policies that meet eight of the standards.

SREB states as a group are making greater gains on some standards than other states. All but one of the region’s state-funded prekindergarten programs (93 percent) met the standards for class size, child-to-staff ratio and health and safety screenings. In the nation, 65 percent of non-SREB states met the class-size standard, 78 percent met the child-to-staff ratio standard, and 57 percent met the standard for health and safety screening.

The standards that continue to challenge most states are teacher credentials, teacher training and assessments of readiness.

Six SREB states added policies in 2006 to require instructional and curriculum standards for their prekindergarten programs. Thirteen states now have those standards in place — 86 percent
of SREB states, compared with 69 percent of non-SREB states. Thirteen SREB states with state-funded programs also require that lead teachers have special training in early childhood development — 87 percent of SREB states, compared with 70 percent of non-SREB states. Eleven SREB states require site visits — the newest standard adopted by NIEER in 2005 — 80 percent of SREB states, compared with 70 percent of non-SREB states.

The standards that continue to challenge most states are teacher credentials, teacher training and assessments of readiness. While SREB states have made progress on meeting NIEER’s standard for early learning instruction and curriculum, this standard does not guide policy work fully. NIEER does not evaluate the extent to which states link their curriculum standards to assessments and interventions for students.

**SREB states continue to be challenged by teacher qualification standards**

Almost all states require special training for prekindergarten lead teachers, but according to NIEER six SREB states do not require these teachers to hold bachelor’s degrees. Only three SREB states require assistant teachers to hold the

### Box 2

**NIEER’s Recommended Standards for High-Quality Prekindergarten Programs**

1. **Instructional and comprehensive curriculum:** Curriculum standards in the five key areas of child development keep program design focused. (See Box 1 on Page 3 for five key dimensions of child development.)

2. **Maximum class size of 20:** Small class sizes allow teachers and children the possibility of high-quality social, emotional and instructional interactions.

3. **Child-to-staff ratio of 10-to-one:** A low child-teacher ratio protects the quality of the social, emotional and instructional interactions between child and teacher. Having assistant teachers in large classes can help keep the ratio low.

Four standards stress the importance of well-qualified teachers and classroom aides who are trained to help children who lag behind or have a limited range of social experiences:

4. **Bachelor’s degrees for lead teachers.**

5. **Special training beyond a bachelor’s degree for lead teachers.**

6. **Child Development Associate (CDA) certificates for assistant teachers.**

7. **Staff members complete at least 15 hours of professional development annually.**

8. **Health and safety services, and vision, hearing and health screenings:** States need to work with health and social agencies to ensure that all children have health screenings and the services they need.

9. **Minimum of one meal per day:** Most programs provide a snack and a meal each day. Full-day programs often provide more than one meal per day.

10. **Site visits by state agencies:** This new standard is intended to bring state oversight — and accountability — to state-funded programs. Site visits are typically conducted by teams of technical assistants, program specialists, state prekindergarten child-care specialists and nutrition consultants.

Source: National Institute for Early Education Research.
Limited numbers of teachers and staff for growing enrollments in prekindergarten programs may lead policy-makers to be cautious in setting standards for their credentials. You as a policy-maker or education leader need to know whether requiring lead prekindergarten teachers to hold bachelor’s degrees makes a significant difference in helping young children become ready for school. Will your state benefit from the extra cost of staffing prekindergarten with more highly credentialed — and therefore, more costly — teachers?

Some research emphasizes the importance of teacher and staff training in child development and classroom management over teacher credentials. Multistate studies of prekindergarten, centered at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, stress that the emotional and social interactions between prekindergarteners and teachers are a better assessment of program quality than child-to-staff ratios, class-size limits and teacher credentials. Such assessments of teacher-child interactions, however, are not commonly a systematic part of statewide program evaluations.

In light of the growing research on the importance of teacher-child interactions, the NIEER standard calling for site visits could take on added significance, if it includes observations of teacher-child interactions.

Others suggest that teacher credentials are important. A research survey from the 17-state School Readiness Indicators Initiative concluded in 2005 that early education providers who had bachelor’s degrees are more effective. The study’s sponsors included five key national organizations:

- The National Governors Association Center for Best Practices;
- The National Conference of State Legislators;
- The Council of Chief State School Officers;
- The Education Commission of the States; and
- The National Association for the Education of Young Children.

In a 2003 NIEER-sponsored study, researchers at Rutgers University re-examined NIEER’s recommended standard for teachers and concluded that “teacher qualifications, particularly a four-year degree with specialized training, are related to classroom quality and children’s development.”

The two prekindergarten programs involved in the classic studies mentioned earlier — the High/Scope Perry Preschool program and the Chicago Child-Parent Centers, both of which were the basis for studies of the long-term benefits of prekindergarten for children from low-income families — required teachers to have a bachelor’s degree or higher. A 2007 study of the continuing benefits of the Chicago Child-Parent Centers concluded that a well-trained and well-compensated staff is common in programs that have long-lasting effects.

Studies of Georgia and Oklahoma — two national pacemaker states in prekindergarten access — show that significant gains in language and mathematics readiness for participating children are related to teacher credentials and training. Researchers at Georgia State University in 2003 found that teachers with bachelor’s degrees teach in the state’s highest quality programs. Even though Georgia does not require lead teachers to have these degrees, most of them do. In Oklahoma, all prekindergarten teachers are required to have bachelor’s degrees and special training. Researchers at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, who studied Oklahoma’s program, reported in 2003 that children benefit when teachers have degrees, but they noted that “showing that students succeed because of the qualifications is difficult.”

Teachers with bachelor’s degrees and special training have been shown to help children develop appropriate social behaviors — and prevent a pattern of serious discipline problems. For some children, attending prekindergarten heightens aggressive behaviors. Studies have found that teachers who use a high-quality curriculum to teach social skills and who develop a warm and
caring relationship with children, including direct interactions, can reduce unusually aggressive behavior.

Teachers with bachelor’s degrees and special training also are able to screen very young children for learning disabilities. Compelling research indicates that prekindergarten teachers — with some training in special education — can identify potential learning delays among prekindergarten children as young as 3 years old and provide early interventions that may prevent learning delays. Otherwise, these children may not receive screening and intervention until they enter school. By then, they could require special education services.

Policy-makers need to ensure that teachers are well trained to provide the interactions that children need to make both social and academic progress in prekindergarten. In setting policy for teacher qualifications, you need to ask the following questions:

- Does my state require prekindergarten teachers to be trained to provide high-quality interactions that prepare young children, both socially and academically, for school?
- Does my state require that some teachers in every prekindergarten center are able to screen children for potential learning and physical disabilities and to provide interventions and referrals?
- Does my state require that teachers in every prekindergarten classroom are trained to recognize potential aggressive behavior, teach children appropriate social behavior, and provide necessary interventions?

Not all states assess school readiness

Since 2005, SREB states have made progress in setting prekindergarten instructional standards. Not all states, however, have used these standards as the basis for assessing the readiness of children for school or for gauging the effectiveness of prekindergarten. Yet, knowing whether children are ready for school is important. Researchers and practitioners are looking at how best to assess.

young children who are rapidly developing both socially and academically so teachers can intervene to help them. Program developers also could use assessment information to improve curriculum and materials and to design teacher training and professional development.

*Education Week's Quality Counts 2007* reports that few states have set standards and assessed school readiness of entering students. Some states are making progress, and SREB states are national leaders.

- Eleven SREB states were among 21 states nationally that had comprehensive early learning standards in 2005 — Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Texas and West Virginia. In 2007, among 41 states nationally, all SREB states have early learning standards, and they are all aligned with elementary-grade academic standards.
- Of the 16 states nationally that require districts to assess the readiness of entering students, 11 are SREB states — Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia and West Virginia.
- Four of these SREB states have both a formal definition of readiness and a requirement for assessing the readiness of children for school — Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, and Maryland.
- Of the 18 states nationally that have intervention programs for children not meeting school-readiness expectations, 10 are SREB states — Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia and West Virginia.

Since 2001, Maryland’s Model for School Readiness (MMSR) has required kindergarten teachers to document the readiness of all kindergarten children at the beginning of each year. The state matches this documentation with information about child-care or prekindergarten enrollment, if any, of its kindergarteners. The state provides an annual report on the overall school readiness of its kindergartners and is able to relate
the information to the type of prekindergarten enrollment to help prekindergarten programs be better aligned with kindergarten. MMSR provides intensive training for kindergarten teachers to help them accurately assess the readiness level of their students.

In 2007, Texas implemented a school-readiness certification system to rate its prekindergarten programs. Prekindergarten teachers provide information about curriculum, staffing, teaching practices and professional development. They also report the attendance of students. Kindergarten teachers evaluate their students on reading readiness and social behavior. Texas is the first state to include social behavior in this way in its school-readiness assessment. School districts then report the results of these assessments to the state. The prekindergarten and kindergarten information is matched, and prekindergartens are rated on their success in preparing children for school. Programs then can be certified as “school ready.”

Schools that do not meet the thresholds for certification can receive financial assistance for teacher training. The program is voluntary for prekindergartens; there is no penalty for programs that do not become certified. The director of the state’s Center for Early Childhood Development noted that Texas is the only state that links certification of prekindergartens to “what’s happening in the classroom and how it predicts kindergarten readiness.”

Policy-makers need to ensure teachers are able to participate in the assessment systems that their states develop — to assess both children and programs. In setting policy for assessment systems, you need to ask the following questions:

- Does my state require teachers to be trained in the assessment that my state uses to measure the readiness of children for success in school?
- Does my state have a training system for teachers in the programs that do not meet standards?

Most SREB states meet most of the standards of quality identified as important for prekindergarten programs by the National Institute for Early Education Research.

Nine SREB states require prekindergarten teachers to hold bachelor’s degrees. Research shows a link between quality programs and teachers with training to provide high-quality interactions with children. Ensuring that teachers are able to provide high-quality interaction may be more important than requiring specific credentials.

While most SREB states have set standards for prekindergarten programs and linked them to early grades standards, few have linked them to statewide assessments.
Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Standard</th>
<th>Instructional/ Curriculum Standards</th>
<th>Class Size</th>
<th>Child-to-Staff Ratio</th>
<th>Lead Teacher</th>
<th>Special Training for Lead Teacher</th>
<th>A</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alabama</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>20 or less</td>
<td>10 to 1 or less</td>
<td>Bachelor's</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arkansas</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>10:1</td>
<td>Bachelor's</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delaware</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>10:1</td>
<td>Bachelor's</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Florida</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>10:1</td>
<td>Bachelor's</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>10:1</td>
<td>Bachelor's</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kentucky</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>10:1</td>
<td>Bachelor's</td>
<td>Variable1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louisiana2</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>10:1</td>
<td>Bachelor's</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maryland</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>10:1</td>
<td>Bachelor's</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Carolina</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>9:1</td>
<td>Bachelor's</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oklahoma</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>10:1</td>
<td>Bachelor's</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Carolina</td>
<td>Not all areas3</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>10:1</td>
<td>Bachelor's</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tennessee</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>10:1</td>
<td>Bachelor's</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texas</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No limit</td>
<td>No limit</td>
<td>Bachelor's</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virginia</td>
<td>Not all areas4</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>9:1</td>
<td>Bachelor's</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Virginia</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>10:1</td>
<td>Bachelor's</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Mississippi does not have a state-funded prekindergarten program.

1 Site visits were added as a new indicator in the NIEER 2006 State Preschool Yearbook.

2 “A” refers to the 8(g) program; “B” refers to LA4 and Starting Points programs; and “C” refers to Non-Public School Early Childhood Development Program (NSECD).

3 Louisiana requires special training for lead teachers in the NSECD but not the LA4, Starting Points or 8(g) programs.

4 Maryland conducts programmatic audits but not site visits.

5 State has standards in some of the five areas of child development, but not all. (See Box 1, Page 3, for five areas of child development.)

Source: National Institute for Early Education Research.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assistant Teacher Preparation</th>
<th>Annual Professional Development: Lead Teacher and Staff</th>
<th>Health and Safety: Vision, Hearing and Health Screening</th>
<th>Site Visits¹</th>
<th>Meals Served</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CDA 15 hours or more</td>
<td>1 or more</td>
<td>Annual</td>
<td>1 or more</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CDA 40 hours</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Annual</td>
<td>1 + snack</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CDA 60/30</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Annual</td>
<td>2 + snack</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CDA 15</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Annual</td>
<td>1 + snack</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>120/10 Variable</td>
<td>Frequency not reported</td>
<td>Variable</td>
<td>Variable</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 days/18 hours</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A: 150 per 5 years</td>
<td>A: 1</td>
<td>A: Every 2 years</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B/C: 18</td>
<td>B: 5</td>
<td>B: Every 4 years</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C: 3</td>
<td>C: 2 per year</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 hours per 5 years</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>None⁰</td>
<td>Full day: 2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Partial day:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Variable</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CDA 150 per 5 years</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Frequency not reported</td>
<td>1 or 2 + snack</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2 per year</td>
<td>Variable</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Every 3 years</td>
<td>Variable</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2 per year</td>
<td>1 + snack</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>150 per 5 years</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Variable</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Every 2 years</td>
<td>1 + snack</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Annual</td>
<td>Variable</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Pre-K Now, a nonprofit prekindergarten advocacy organization, reports that state funding for prekindergarten has grown in all SREB states since 2005. The most dramatic increase was in Florida, where an amendment to the state constitution in 2002 requiring state-funded prekindergarten for all 4-year-olds led to an appropriation of $387 million in 2006. Increases in many other SREB states also were substantial. (See Table 3 on Page 19.)

Nationally, state spending for each child enrolled averaged $3,482 in 2006. According to NIEER, this is the lowest rate since 2001, when it was $4,171 (adjusted for inflation to 2006 equivalent dollars). It represents a 17 percent decline in spending per child over the period, after adjusting for inflation — equal to a $343 annual drop per child.

This drop is disappointing, because policymakers have increased funding for prekindergarten every year from 2001 to 2006, from about $2.9 billion (adjusted for inflation to 2006 equivalent dollars) to $3.3 billion in 2006. But enrollments have grown significantly during this time, and funding has not kept pace with enrollment.

Five SREB states that had substantial increases in funding from 2005 to 2007 had decreases in spending per child, largely because of enrollment growth — Kentucky, North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia and Texas. The largest decline in per child spending among these states was in South Carolina, where funding for prekindergarten programs increased 109 percent from 2005 to 2007, but spending per child dropped $289.

Despite these challenges, SREB states are doing somewhat better than the nation. The median spending rate per child in SREB states was $3,892 — higher than the national rate by $410 in 2006. From 2001 to 2006, nine of the 15 SREB states with state-funded prekindergarten programs increased spending per child — while expanding access and maintaining most of the standards of quality, or adding new ones — Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Louisiana, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia and West Virginia.
### Table 2

**Funding of Statewide Prekindergarten in SREB States, 2005 to 2007**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>2005</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2005 to 2007</th>
<th>Local Match Required</th>
<th>Sources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>State Funding (in millions)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SREB states total</td>
<td>$1,209(^1)</td>
<td>$1,740</td>
<td>$1,943</td>
<td>61</td>
<td></td>
<td>General revenue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alabama</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>Yes, 50% of funding</td>
<td>General revenue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arkansas</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>39</td>
<td></td>
<td>Beer tax and general revenue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delaware</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Yes, 40% of funding</td>
<td>General revenue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Florida</td>
<td>Transition year(^4)</td>
<td>387</td>
<td>390</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>General revenue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td>270</td>
<td>290</td>
<td>302</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Lottery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kentucky</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>44</td>
<td></td>
<td>General revenue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louisiana</td>
<td>LA4 and Starting Points</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>57</td>
<td></td>
<td>Tobacco settlement funds and general revenue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSECD(^2)</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8(g) block grant</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>14</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maryland</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>General revenue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Carolina</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Lottery and general revenue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oklahoma(^3)</td>
<td>199</td>
<td>209</td>
<td>209</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td>General revenue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Carolina(^4)</td>
<td>Half-day</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>General revenue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Steps</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CDEPP</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>16</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>109</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tennessee</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>450</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Lottery and general revenue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texas(^5)</td>
<td>PSPI</td>
<td>388</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>General revenue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TEEM</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>18</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expansion grant</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>84</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>388</td>
<td>410</td>
<td>502</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virginia</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>Yes, amount not specified</td>
<td>General revenue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Virginia</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>General revenue</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Notes:**
- See Table 3, Page 19, for information about partial- and full-day status of these programs.
- Mississippi does not have a state-funded prekindergarten program.
- “—” indicates not applicable.

1. SREB total does not include Florida. Florida transitioned to the Voluntary Prekindergarten Program for the 2006 school year.
2. Refers to the Louisiana’s Nonpublic Schools Early Childhood Development Program.
3. Oklahoma’s Head Start and state-funded programs work collaboratively; the funding for both is reported together here. Oklahoma also provided $5 million in 2007 for a birth-to-age 5 program called Educare.
4. The programs are the Half-Day Child Development Program, First Steps to Reading Readiness and the Child Development Education Pilot Program. The pilot program, established by court order, was funded at $23.3 million, of which $7.6 million was allocated to First Steps for full-day services to 4-year-olds. The remainder was allocated for new programs in the state.
5. PSPI stands for the Public School Prekindergarten Initiative. TEEM stands for Texas Early Education Model.

Sources: Pre-K Now, 2006; SREB Legislative Reports; National Institute for Early Education Research; and Tennessee Office of Legal Services.
Sources of funding

The challenge for all SREB states is to find sustainable sources of funding to meet the needs of an increasing number of 4-year-olds who need programs and services. SREB policy-makers have been creative and persistent in their pursuit of funding sources. They know if they cannot sustain — and even increase — funding, the consequence will be children not ready for school.

Most SREB states use general revenue at least partially to support prekindergarten programs. Others use lottery proceeds, beer taxes and tobacco settlement funds. Some require local matching funds and make creative uses of various federal programs. Four SREB states require a local match in funds to supplement prekindergarten revenue, ranging from a specified percentage to a variable amount according to the local program’s ability to pay. The Oklahoma program has become a national model for coordinating with Head Start to gain economic efficiencies.

Georgia is the only SREB state that funds its prekindergarten program solely through lottery revenue. In 2005, the lottery in Georgia provided $276 million for prekindergarten. North Carolina and Tennessee use lottery revenue in conjunction with general revenue to support prekindergarten. Some SREB states use temporary sources of funding to begin and sustain programs, often while policy-makers seek longer-term funding. Arkansas, for example, partially funds prekindergarten using a combination of general revenue and beer taxes. In 2001, Arkansas began a 3 percent tax on beer sales, directing 80 percent of the proceeds for the Arkansas Better Chance early education program. The tax was set to expire in 2005 but was extended to 2007. Arkansas will need to find other ways to supplement its prekindergarten funding or make the tax permanent. Louisiana funds one of its programs through general revenue and tobacco settlement funds. When tobacco settlement funds run out, Louisiana will have to find other sources of funding to sustain its primary prekindergarten program, the LA4 program.

Researchers at RAND Education have shown that federal funds play a significant role in prekindergarten funding in addition to Head Start. Two federal programs, the Child Care and Development Fund and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, provide funds to states through social services agencies for child-care services and also may fund prekindergarten attendance for children from eligible families. RAND contends that even these funds are subject to “ups and downs.” States need to guard against dependence on them.

Just as funding streams for prekindergarten programs vary from state to state, so does the allocation from state prekindergarten agencies to individual programs. Seven of the 15 SREB states with state-funded prekindergarten — Kentucky, Maryland, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas and West Virginia — allow only public prekindergarten programs to receive funds directly. The remaining seven states — Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, North Carolina and Virginia — allow public as well as private, nonprofit and university-based prekindergarten programs, faith-based centers and Head Start centers to receive funds directly if they operate programs that meet state-determined standards of eligibility. Louisiana funds both types of programs directly.

Oklahoma has created a unique model in which prekindergarten programs in private settings contract with public school districts. In this arrangement, the private prekindergartens become responsible to the school districts. Teachers are supervised by the public school principals, for example. In Georgia, public and private prekindergarten providers must meet operating standards to be eligible for public funding. Funds are awarded through a competitive process, subject to funding availability, previous program compliance and regional needs.

Several SREB states, most notably Oklahoma, are developing collaborative relationships between their state prekindergarten programs and Head Start to serve more children more effectively.
Table 3
Enrollment and Spending: State-Funded Prekindergarten Programs, SREB States, 2006

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Spending Per Child Enrolled</th>
<th>Enrollment</th>
<th>Percent of Enrollment: 3-Year-Olds</th>
<th>Percent of Enrollment: 4-Year-Olds</th>
<th>Full or Partial Day</th>
<th>Income Eligibility Requirement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alabama</td>
<td>$4,216</td>
<td>1,026</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>Full</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arkansas</td>
<td>4,836&lt;sup&gt;2&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>10,663</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>Full</td>
<td>200% FPL&lt;sup&gt;3&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delaware</td>
<td>6,261</td>
<td>843</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>Partial</td>
<td>Below 100% FPL&lt;sup&gt;3&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Florida&lt;sup&gt;4&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Transition year</td>
<td>105,896</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>Determined locally</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td>3,977</td>
<td>71,645</td>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
<td>Full</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kentucky</td>
<td>2,398</td>
<td>21,519</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>Partial</td>
<td>130% FPL&lt;sup&gt;3&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louisiana</td>
<td>5,012</td>
<td>13,791</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>Full</td>
<td>Variable&lt;sup&gt;1&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maryland</td>
<td>1,787&lt;sup&gt;6&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>24,219</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>Partial</td>
<td>185% FPL&lt;sup&gt;3&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Carolina</td>
<td>3,892</td>
<td>15,227</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>Determined locally</td>
<td>75% SMIF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oklahoma</td>
<td>3,364</td>
<td>33,402</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>Partial</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Carolina&lt;sup&gt;8&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>1,085</td>
<td>20,117</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>Partial and full</td>
<td>None</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tennessee</td>
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<td>8,601</td>
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<td>Full</td>
<td>185% FPL&lt;sup&gt;3&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texas</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>91</td>
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<td>Virginia</td>
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<td>8,944</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>Partial</td>
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</table>

Note: Mississippi does not have a state-funded prekindergarten program.

1. Spending per child enrolled is determined by adding sources of funding including state, local and federal, and dividing by the number of children enrolled. Head Start is not included.
2. Arkansas also provided funding for a home-based program that is not reflected in this per-child spending amount.
3. “FPL” indicates federal poverty level.
4. Florida’s first year of “universal” prekindergarten program for 4-year-olds was 2006.
5. LA4 and Starting Points limit access to those at 185 percent of the federal poverty level. The Non-Public School Early Childhood Development Program limits access to those at 200 percent of the federal poverty level and evacuees of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.
6. Maryland provided $19 million for an Extended Elementary Education Program that NIEER includes in the per child spending calculation, but not in the program funding amount in Table 2.
7. “SMIF” indicates state median income.
8. Spending includes the half-day state and First Steps programs. A small percentage of South Carolina prekindergarten classes operate full-day schedules with the help of additional local, federal or state funds.

Source: National Institute for Early Education Research.
Generally, state-funded programs require higher levels of teacher training and preparation, and Head Start programs provide more comprehensive health screening and services. Partnerships can help both programs maximize efficiencies and effectiveness.

RAND Education recommended in 2005 that public prekindergarten be expanded as part of a “broader system of care, welfare, and education for children and families.” It urged states to establish a coordinating agency to help states focus on all of their early childhood efforts and, in doing so, leverage the various funding sources to support them. Virginia and Georgia have created such agencies. Virginia created its Department of Early Education and Care in July 2006. Georgia created its agency, Bright from the Start: Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning, from its previous Office of School Readiness in 2004. The new agency coordinates programs and services for children from birth to age 5, federal nutrition programs, state-funded prekindergarten and Head Start programs. The commission also works with Georgia’s teacher preparation programs to develop high-quality staff for early childhood programs. It provides coordination of the course work to prepare students to meet prekindergarten instructional standards. (See Box 3.)

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**Box 3**

**Georgia’s Bright from the Start**

**Leadership:** Georgia’s commissioner is on the governor’s Alliance of Agency Heads. The department is governed by a board of directors.

**Charge:** Merge the former Office of School Readiness, which administers Georgia’s prekindergarten; the child-care licensing division of the Department of Human Resources; the Even Start Program of the state Department of Education; the Georgia Child Care Council; and the federally funded Head Start Collaboration Office.

**Mission:** Prepare Georgia’s children to succeed.

**Vision:** Make high-quality early learning experiences accessible to all children.

**Actions:**

- Develop the Georgia Early Learning Standards for children from birth to age 3, aligned with prekindergarten and kindergarten standards.
- Develop a statewide professional development system for teachers of children from birth to age 5 in collaboration with the state university system.
- Create a technical assistance credentialing program.
- Build community support for early learning, creating local “one-stop shops” to provide comprehensive information and resources for parents and caregivers of children from birth to age 5.
- Expand support services to after-school programs.
- Identify indicators of quality to develop a quality improvement system.
- Identify quantifiable measures of quality for the department itself.

Source: Bright from the Start.
Question 3: Quick Summary

Is your state investing enough in prekindergarten so that it can meet high standards and provide greater access for all children?

- All SREB states with state-funded prekindergarten programs had increases in funding from 2002 to 2006; however, in five SREB states the increases were not sufficient to meet enrollment growth and inflation.
- In many SREB states, finding sustainable sources of funding for prekindergarten continues to be a challenge.
- A few SREB states have begun to coordinate the work of various state agencies responsible for the education and welfare of young children and federal programs (such as Head Start) to increase the effectiveness of program delivery and coordination of funding and to improve economies of scale.

What can you and your state do to ensure high-quality prekindergarten and help prepare all children for school?

All but one SREB state have reached a significant milestone in prekindergarten access: They now can serve all 4-year-olds from families in poverty if they enroll. Only two years ago, that was not true.

SREB states also are leaders in adopting the policies that lead to high-quality programs. But while they may be trailblazers in access and in setting policy, they have not reached the goal of ensuring all children are ready for school. SREB states have begun to focus on the needs of children from low-income families — a growing proportion of the school-age population — as well as those from non-English speaking families, and those with disabilities. Research confirms that high-quality prekindergarten pays hefty dividends for all of these children.

But the research is not as clear on how to set priorities for spending on prekindergarten to get the most gain. The dilemma for policy-makers and education leaders is how to spend limited funding wisely, to get more students ready for school. What is the best use of the most dollars that states can make available?

As a policy-maker or education leader, you should consider setting these priorities:

1. Provide prekindergarten for all 4-year-olds from low-income families and 3-year-olds with disabilities as required by federal law for Head Start funding.
2. Require prekindergarten teachers to be trained to provide high-quality interactions that prepare young children, both socially and academically, for school.
3. Ensure that all prekindergarten programs have lead teachers who can identify children with social and learning disabilities and provide intervention or referrals.
4. Coordinate prekindergarten, early learning and child-care services statewide to achieve effectiveness in program delivery, better coordination of funding, and economies of scale.
5. Study the funding streams for prekindergarten in your state and ensure they are stable and adequate.
6. Establish assessments based on the state’s definition of school readiness that provide the state with information about children’s
readiness for school; ensure that the assessments measure both social and early academic skills and that they are linked to the early grades curriculum.

7. Provide full-day and yearlong programs for children whose families are unable to use partial-day programs because of work and transportation complications.

8. Add funding for 3-year-olds from impoverished families as funding becomes available.

SREB states are leaders in providing access to prekindergarten and ensuring program quality for 4-year-olds. But challenges remain in serving more children, in meeting the needs of diverse groups of children and in reaching higher standards of quality — particularly in the interactions between children and teachers. As a policy-maker or education leader, you need better assessment tools and strategies to know if programs intended to prepare children for school are effective. You also need to play a stronger role in ensuring that services and programs are coordinated at the highest level and that funding from various sources is used most effectively.

Research makes clear that high-quality prekindergarten is worth the investment. But what are the payoffs? More children will begin school ready to learn and be able to build the foundations they need to be successful in school and life. States will spend less on special education, educational remediation, unemployment, welfare, incarceration and health care. States also will see higher student achievement and graduation rates, personal incomes, tax revenues and worker productivity. In short, better-quality prekindergarten can lead to an improved quality of life, economically and socially, for the entire region.
References


**Building the Foundation for Bright Futures.** National Governors Association Task Force on School Readiness, 2005 — (www.nga.org).


U.S. Census Bureau — (www.census.gov).


Challenge to Lead  Goals for Education

The reports listed below for each goal, and other reports on the goals, are found at www.sreb.org.

1. All children are ready for the first grade.
   *Building a Foundation for Success by Getting Every Child Ready for School*

2. Achievement in the early grades for all groups of students exceeds national averages and performance gaps are closed.
   *Mastering Reading and Mathematics in the Early Grades*

3. Achievement in the middle grades for all groups of students exceeds national averages and performance gaps are closed.
   *Getting the Mission Right in the Middle Grades*

4. All young adults have a high school diploma — or, if not, pass the GED tests.
   *Getting Serious About High School Graduation*

5. All recent high school graduates have solid academic preparation and are ready for post-secondary education and a career.
   *Getting Students Ready for College and Careers*

6. Adults who are not high school graduates participate in literacy and job-skills training and further education.
   *Investing Wisely in Adult Learning is Key to State Prosperity*

7. The percentage of adults who earn postsecondary degrees or technical certificates exceeds national averages.
   *Creating College Opportunity for All: Prepared Students and Affordable Colleges*

8. Every school has higher student performance and meets state academic standards for all students each year.
   *Focusing on Student Performance Through Accountability*

9. Every school has leadership that results in improved student performance — and leadership begins with an effective school principal.
   *Progress Being Made in Getting a Quality Leader in Every School*

10. Every student is taught by qualified teachers.
    *Resolve and Resources to Get a Qualified Teacher in Every Classroom*

11. The quality of colleges and universities is regularly assessed and funding is targeted to quality, efficiency and state needs.
    *Holding Colleges and Universities Accountable for Meeting State Needs*

12. The state places a high priority on an education system of schools, colleges and universities that is accountable.
    *From Goals to Results: Improving Education System Accountability*

The Southern Regional Education Board has established these Goals for Education. They are built on the groundbreaking education goals SREB adopted in 1988 and on an ongoing effort to promote actions and measure progress. The goals raise further the sights of the 16 SREB states and challenge them to lead the nation.