

## WHAT QUALIFIES AS A STATE PRESCHOOL PROGRAM?

NIEER's *State Preschool Yearbook* series focuses on state-funded preschool education initiatives meeting the following criteria:

- The initiative is funded, controlled, and directed by the state.
- The initiative serves children of preschool age, usually 3 and/or 4. Although initiatives in some states serve broader age ranges, programs that serve *only* infants and toddlers are excluded.
- Early childhood education is the primary focus of the initiative. This does not exclude programs that offer parent education but does exclude programs that mainly focus on parent education. Programs that focus on parent work status or programs where child eligibility is tied to work status are also excluded.
- The initiative offers a group learning experience to children at least two days per week.
- State-funded preschool education initiatives must be distinct from the state's system for subsidized child care. However, preschool initiatives may be *coordinated* and *integrated* with the subsidy system for child care.
- The initiative is *not* primarily designed to serve children with disabilities, but services may be offered to children with disabilities.
- State supplements to the federal Head Start program are considered to constitute *de facto* state preschool programs if they substantially expand the number of children served, and if the state assumes some administrative responsibility for the program. State supplements to fund quality improvements, extended days, or other program enhancements or to fund expanded enrollment only minimally are not considered equivalent to a state preschool program.

While ideally this report would identify all preschool education funding streams at the federal, state, and local levels, there are a number of limitations on the data that make this extremely difficult to do. For example, preschool is only one of several types of education programs toward which local districts can target their Title I funds. Many states do not track how Title I funds are used at the local level and therefore do not know the extent to which they are spent on preschool education. Another challenge involves tracking total state spending for child care, using a variety of available sources, such as CCDF dollars, TANF funds, and any state funding above and beyond the required matches for federal funds. Although some of these child care funds may be used for high-quality, educational, center-based programs for 3- and 4-year-olds that closely resemble programs supported by state-funded preschool education initiatives, it is nearly impossible to determine what proportion of the child care funds are spent this way.

### AGE GROUPINGS USED IN THIS REPORT

Children considered to be 3 years old during the 2011-2012 school year are those who are eligible to enter kindergarten two years later, during the 2013-2014 school year. Children considered to be 4 years old during the 2011-2012 school year were eligible to enter kindergarten one year later, during the 2012-2013 school year. Children considered to be 5 years old during the 2011-2012 school year were already eligible for kindergarten at the beginning of the 2011-201 school year.