



Press Release

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2016 STATE OF PRESCHOOL YEARBOOK SHOWS ARIZONA RANKS NEAR BOTTOM NATIONWIDE FOR ACCESS, SPENDING PER CHILD

Arizona meets three quality standards benchmarks, preschool enrollment shrinking

New Brunswick, NJ — Arizona's Quality First Scholarships serves four percent of the states' 4-year-olds and two percent of 3-year-olds statewide, according to the 2016 State of Preschool Yearbook released today by the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER).

The State of Preschool Yearbook is the only national report on state-funded preschool programs with detailed information on enrollment, funding, teacher qualifications, and other policies related to quality. Decades of research shows that early childhood education can prepare children for greater success in elementary school and beyond, with benefits largest for the most disadvantaged — but only if quality is high.

Funding for Arizona's preschool program dropped 17 percent from 2014-2015 to \$18.48 million, and enrollment fell to 5,365 preschool-aged children. Nationwide, state-funded preschool program enrollment reached an all-time high, serving nearly 1.5 million children, 32 percent of 4-year-olds and five percent of 3-year-olds. State funding for preschool rose eight percent to about \$7.4 billion, a \$550 million increase. State funding per child increased to \$4,967, exceeding pre-recession levels for the first time. Five states met all 10 current quality standards benchmarks. Nine states had programs that met fewer than half; and seven states do not fund preschool at all.

"Early childhood education is a great investment," said NIEER Director W. Steven Barnett, Ph.D. "We see Arizona continuing to meet only three quality standards benchmarks and more work is needed to increase resources and expand enrollment so more children can access the high-quality pre-K that helps children get the best possible start in life."

In Arizona:

- Total state funding was \$18.48 million in 2015-2016 for 3- and 4-year-olds
- Enrollment in Arizona's Quality First Scholarships dropped by more than 1,800 children from 2014-2015, to 3,763 4-year-olds and 1,602 3-year-olds
- Arizona ranked 37th in access for 4-year-olds out of 44 states. They ranked 21st for access for 3-year-olds out of the 29 states that served 3-year-olds.
- State funding per child increased \$363, adjusted for inflation, from 2014-2015 to \$3,444, ranking 32nd out of 44 states
- Arizona met three of NIEER's current quality standards benchmarks
- The state received a competitive federal Preschool Development Grant that enabled 2,370 additional children to attend preschool in the state

Current benchmarks were designed to help states build programs, focusing on resources and policies related to the structural aspects of public pre-K— elements needed for a high-quality program but not fully defining one. This year, NIEER is introducing major revisions to the policy benchmarks for the first time since the Yearbook was launched in 2003. The new benchmarks raise the bar by focusing on policies that more directly support continuous improvement of classroom quality. State profiles in the 2016 Yearbook include both current and new benchmark scores.

Arizona met only one of the new quality standards benchmarks, meeting the new requirement for curriculum implementation supports benchmark. However, current policies fell short of benchmarks requiring aligned and supported early learning and development standards, professional development, ongoing-coaching, and individualized professional development plans for both lead and assistant teachers *and* a continuous quality improvement system.

“States meeting current benchmarks should be proud of their accomplishments,” Dr. Barnett concluded. “But simply meeting the benchmarks does not guarantee children are receiving a high-quality classroom experience. Research indicates most states need to do more to ensure high quality for every child.”

The State of Preschool Yearbook was supported with funding provided by the Heising-Simons Foundation while the survey data on which it relies was funded by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). The findings, interpretations, and conclusions in this report are solely those of the authors. For more information and detailed state-by-state profiles on quality access, and funding, please visit www.nieer.org.