



Press Release

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2016 STATE OF PRESCHOOL YEARBOOK SHOWS CALIFORNIA LEADS IN TOTAL FUNDING, ENROLLMENT; QUALITY STANDARDS FALL SHORT

Policies for class size, ratio, and teacher development need improvement

New Brunswick, NJ — California invested the most in its preschool programs and enrolled the most preschool students--yet quality standards remained below average compared to other states, 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.

California enrolled 223,921 children in two state-funded preschool programs – the State Preschool Program and Transitional Kindergarten – the most among any state. California’s Transitional Kindergarten (TK) was included in NIEER’s report for the first time. 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 8 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 California making progress on expanding enrollment and increasing investments but more work is needed to provide the high-quality pre-K that helps children get the best possible start in life.”

In California:

- State funding for preschool exceeded \$1.4 billion – the largest investment nationwide and a 17 percent increase from 2014-2015, adjusted for inflation.
- California’s public preschool enrollment increased by 13,952 children, and included 35 percent of the state’s 4-year-olds, ranking 14th in access for 4-year-olds, out of 44 states. The state served less than 9 percent of 3-year-olds, ranking 10th in access for 3-year-olds out of the 29 states that served this age group.
- State funding per child was \$6,409, an increase of \$555 from 2014-2015. California, ranked 14th in state funding per child, up from 20th in 2014-2015.
- California’s State Preschool Program met six of 10 current quality standards benchmarks; TK met two.
- California plans to expand State Preschool Program enrollment and funding

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.

The California State Preschool Program met six of NIEER’s new quality standard benchmarks while TK met only two. Both programs met the new requirement to provide supports for curriculum implementation. The State Preschool Program also met the requirement for early learning and development standards that are culturally sensitive, supported, and aligned with other state standards and child assessments. However, current policies in both programs fall short of requirements for 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.