



## Press Release

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### **2016 STATE OF PRESCHOOL YEARBOOK SHOWS COLORADO ENROLLMENT AND FUNDING SLIPPING**

*Colorado meets six quality benchmarks, spending per child falls below national average*

New Brunswick, NJ — Colorado decreased funding for its preschool program and spending per child remained relatively low but the state served nearly one-quarter of all 4-year-olds, 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.

Colorado public preschool enrollment dropped slightly, including about eight percent of the state's 3-year-olds and 23 percent of the state's 4-year-olds. 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 Colorado experiencing slight setbacks in funding and enrollment and more work is needed to provide the high-quality pre-K that helps children get the best possible start in life.”

In Colorado:

- Total state funding was \$53 million in 2015-2016, a 3 percent decrease of almost \$1.4 million from 2014-2015. Including local resources, funding reached \$86 million.
- The Colorado Preschool Program served 21,469 preschoolers, a decrease of 217 children from 2014-2015
- Colorado ranks 24<sup>th</sup> out of 44 states in access for 4-year-olds and 11<sup>th</sup> in access for 3-year-olds out of 29 states that serve 3-year-olds
- State funding per child was \$2,471, a decrease of \$39 from 2014-2015, ranking 35<sup>th</sup> nationwide. Including local dollars, funding per child was \$4,001
- Colorado met six of NIEER’s 10 current quality standards benchmarks

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.

Colorado met five of the new benchmarks, including new requirements for early learning and development standards that are culturally sensitive, supported, and aligned with other state standards and child assessments. The state also met the new requirement for supports for curriculum implementation. However, current policies fell short of benchmarks requiring 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](http://www.nieer.org).*