



Press Release

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2016 STATE OF PRESCHOOL YEARBOOK SHOWS CONNECTICUT EXPANDING PRESCHOOL OPTIONS

Connecticut adds new program, enrolls more children but reduces state funding

New Brunswick, NJ —Connecticut launched a new Smart Start program as enrollment grew but state funding decreased, 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.

Connecticut's three state-funded preschool programs enrolled 14,940 children, about 24 percent of state 4-year-olds and less than 10 percent of state 3-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 Connecticut continuing to enroll more children but more work is needed to increase funding and quality standards to provide the high-quality pre-K that helps children get the best possible start in life.”

In Connecticut:

- Connecticut operated three state-funded pre-K programs in 2015-2016: Smart Start, School Readiness, and the Child Day Care Contracts which served a total of 14,940 children. Enrollment increased by 250 3- and 4-year-olds from 2014-2015.
- Total state funding was \$118 million in 2015-2016, a decrease of \$1.26 million from 2014-2015.
- In its first year of operation, Connecticut's Smart Start served 290 children, and met five of NIEER's 10 current quality standards benchmarks
- Connecticut's School Readiness program served 12,263 children, and met five of NIEER's 10 current quality standards benchmarks
- Connecticut's Child Day Care Contracts served 2,387 children, and met six of NIEER's 10 current quality standards benchmarks
- Connecticut ranked 23rd in access for 4-year-olds out of 44 states, and 8th in access for 3-year-olds out of 29 states that served 3-year-olds
- State funding per child was \$7,905, a decrease of \$216 from 2014-2015, ranking 6th nationwide
- The state received a competitive federal Preschool Development Grant allowing 712 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.

Connecticut's Smart Start and School Readiness programs met five of the new benchmarks and Child Day Care Contracts met four. All three programs met the new requirement for supports for curriculum implementation; but only School Readiness met the new requirement for early learning and development standards that are culturally sensitive, supported, and aligned with other state standards and child assessments. Current policies fell short in all three programs of new 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.