



## Press Release

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### **2016 STATE OF PRESCHOOL YEARBOOK SHOWS WASHINGTON D.C. LEADING NATION IN ACCESS AND FUNDING PER CHILD**

*The District of Columbia continues to make progress with a complex system*

New Brunswick, NJ — The District of Columbia modestly increased funding and enrollment in preschool, maintaining its leadership in access and funding per child, 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.

The District of Columbia preschool program served 81 percent of district 4-year-olds and 70 percent of district 3-year-olds, essentially reaching universal access. 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 D.C. again providing essentially universal coverage for 3- and 4-year olds, but more work is needed to provide the high-quality pre-K in all auspices that helps children get the best possible start in life.”

In the District of Columbia:

- State funding was \$217 million in 2015-2016, a modest increase over 2014-2015.
- The District of Columbia pre-K program served 12,902 3- and 4-year-olds. Enrollment increased by 290 from 2014-2015.
- D.C. ranks 1<sup>st</sup> out of 44 states in access for both 3- and 4-year-olds.
- State funding per child was \$16,812 up slightly from 2014-2015, and ranking 1<sup>st</sup> nationwide.
- D.C.'s Pre-K Act requires eight of NIEER's 10 current quality standards benchmarks. However, only four of these requirements apply to charter schools, which are given control over many policies in return for a greater focus on accountability for outcomes.

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 District of Columbia Pre-K Act sets standards that meet seven of the new benchmarks. However, charter school autonomy reduces that to three including new requirements for early learning and development standards that are culturally sensitive, supported, and aligned with other state standards and child assessments. D.C. also met the new requirement for supports for curriculum implementation. Public charter schools are not obligated to meet requirements for professional development and coaching for lead and assistant teachers, or for a continuous quality improvement system. However, charters operate under a rigorous system that incorporates continuous improvement practices including direct assessments of teaching quality in the classroom.

“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. “

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