



Press Release

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2016 STATE OF PRESCHOOL YEARBOOK SHOWS FLORIDA AMONG TOP STATES FOR PRESCHOOL ACCESS

Florida spending per child among lowest, fails to improve quality standards

New Brunswick, NJ — Florida remained a leader in preschool access--enrolling more than 75 percent of state 4-year-olds-- but failed to improve its low quality standards, 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. Florida has declined to complete NIEER’s state preschool survey for the past two years; information in our report reflects public sources.

Florida enrolled 169,025 4-year-olds in preschool, an increase of 2,503 children that reversed last year’s slight decrease in enrollment. 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 Florida’s program reaches a large number of children but the state needs to improve its commitment

to providing high-quality preschool in order to help its children get the best possible start in life. Offering a low-quality program to many children is not an effective strategy.”

In Florida:

- State funding for preschool topped \$397 million, a three percent increase in real dollars from 2014-2015
- Florida enrolled 76 percent of 4-year-olds, ranking 2nd out of 44 states in access for 4-year-olds. The state did not serve any 3-year-olds.
- State spending per child was only \$2,353, an increase of \$44 real dollars from 2014-2015. Florida ranks 40th out of 44 states in state resources per child and is one of six states where funding per child is less than \$3,000.
- Florida meets only three 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.

Florida met three of the new benchmarks, meeting new requirements for early learning and development standards that are culturally sensitive, supported, and aligned with other state standards and child assessments. They also met the new requirement for a having a continuous quality improvement system in place. However, current policies fell short of benchmarks requiring support for curriculum implementation and professional development, ongoing-coaching, and individualized professional development plans for both lead and assistant teachers.

“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.