



Press Release

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2016 STATE OF PRESCHOOL YEARBOOK SHOWS ILLINOIS PRE-K FUNDING PER CHILD AMONG LOWEST IN NATION

Illinois meets eight of 10 national benchmarks, ranks 3rd in 3-year-old enrollment

New Brunswick, NJ — Funding for the Illinois Preschool for All exceeded \$246 million, while enrollment exceeded 73,000 children, including 26 percent of 4-year-olds and 20 percent of 3-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.

Funding for Illinois's Preschool for all increased by \$8.7 million, while enrollment declined slightly. The state provided high-quality pre-K for an additional 3,000 children using a federal Preschool Development Grant. 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. “Illinois should build on the increased investment made in the 2016-2017 school year to increase access and enhance quality so all children get the best possible start in life.”

In Illinois:

- Total state funding was \$246,729,910 in 2015-2016, a 4% increase from 2014-2015
- Illinois’ Preschool for All program served 73,118 children, including 41,397 4-year-olds and 31,458 3-year-olds; a slight decrease from 2014-2015
- Illinois ranked 21st nationwide in 4-year-old enrollment out of 44 states, and 3rd for 3-year-olds out of the 29 states that served 3-year-olds
- State funding per child was \$3,374, an increase of \$208 from 2014-2015, ranking 34th nationwide
- The state received a competitive federal Preschool Development Grant, enabling 3,110 additional children to attend high-quality preschool
- Illinois met eight 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.

Illinois currently meets seven of the 10 new benchmarks, having in place early learning and development standards that are culturally sensitive, supported, and aligned with other state standards and child assessments. They also meet the new curriculum supports benchmark. However, current policies fall 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.