



Press Release

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2016 STATE OF PRESCHOOL YEARBOOK SHOWS KANSAS ENROLLMENT DIPPING WHILE FUNDING CONTINUES TO LAG

Kansas spending per child ranks last among 44 states funding public preschool

New Brunswick, NJ — Kansas invested \$18.4 million—the same as last year—in its two preschool programs while enrolling fewer children, 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.

Kansas, through its State Prekindergarten Program and Preschool Program, enrolled 7,903 children, almost 20 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 Kansas holding steady in its early childhood education investments and more resources will be needed to expand access across the state and provide the high-quality pre-K that can help children get the best possible start in life.”

In Kansas:

- Total funding was \$18.4 million in 2015-2016, unchanged from 2014-2015
- The two Kansas programs in sum enrolled 7,903 4-year-olds, a decrease of 231 children from 2014-2015
- Kansas ranks 27th out of 44 states in access for 4-year-olds
- Funding per child averaged \$2,328 across the two programs, an increase of \$62, adjusted for inflation, from 2014-2015, ranking 41st nationwide
- Kansas met a weighted average 7.1 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.

The Kansas Preschool Program met eight benchmarks, and the Kansas State Prekindergarten Program met seven. Both programs met new requirements for early learning and development standards that are culturally sensitive, supported, and aligned with other state standards and child assessments; and supports for curriculum implementation. However, current policies for both programs fell short of new requirements for 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.”

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