



Press Release

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2016 STATE OF PRESCHOOL YEARBOOK SHOWS KENTUCKY INVESTING MORE, EXPANDING ENROLLMENT

Kentucky dedicates new resources to support preschool quality

New Brunswick, NJ — Kentucky boosted preschool funding by nearly 30 percent to almost \$93 million as enrollment edged up over last year, 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 Kentucky Preschool Program enrolled 19,182 children, about 26 percent of the states' 4-year-olds and 9 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 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 Kentucky investing resources and maintaining quality standards but more work is needed to expand access to provide the high-quality pre-K that helps children get the best possible start in life.”

In Kentucky:

- Total state funding was \$92,677,908 in 2015-2016, a 30 percent increase of over \$20 million from 2014-2015
- The Kentucky Preschool Program served 19,182 children, including 14,232 4-year-olds and 4,950 3-year-olds. Enrollment increased by 466 children from 2014-2015
- Kentucky ranked 22nd in access for 4-year-olds out of 44 states and 9th for access for 3-year-olds out of 29 states serving 3-year-olds.
- State funding per child was \$4,832, an increase of \$990 from 2014-2015, ranking 23rd nationwide out of 44 states, up from last year
- Kentucky met nine 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.

Kentucky met eight of the new benchmarks, including meeting the new requirement for supports for curriculum implementation and a continuous quality improvement system. The state also met the new requirement for early learning and development standards that are culturally sensitive, supported, and aligned with other state standards and child assessments. However, current policies fell short of requirements for 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.