



## Press Release

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### **2016 STATE OF PRESCHOOL YEARBOOK SHOWS LOUISIANA FALLS BEHIND ON PRESCHOOL FUNDING AS OTHER STATES MOVE AHEAD**

*Louisiana maintains quality standards, but must ensure adequate spending per child*

New Brunswick, NJ — Louisiana’s funding for public preschool stagnated even as it strengthened its preschool accountability program, a key factor in maintaining 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.

Louisiana’s three state-funded preschool programs Cecil J. Picard LA 4 Early Childhood Program, 8(g) Student Enhancement Block Grant Program, and Louisiana Nonpublic Schools Early Childhood Development Program (NSECD) enrolled 19,860 children, about 32 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 5 percent 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 Louisiana maintaining quality standards but more work is needed to provide resources to expand access to the high-quality pre-K that can help children get the best possible start in life.”

In Louisiana:

- Total state funding was \$89,974,433 in 2015-2016, a decrease of \$372,540 from 2014-2015, adjusted for inflation
- Combined program enrollment of 4-year-olds increased by 128 children, as the state’s ranking for 4-year-old access fell from 16<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> of 44 programs
- State spending per child also dropped from the 2014-2015 school year by \$48 real dollars to \$4,530, dropping the state from 21<sup>st</sup> to 24<sup>th</sup> nationally.
- Louisiana’s combined programs met an average of nine of NIEER’s 10 current quality standards benchmarks.
- The 2015-2016 marked the first full year of implementation and learning year for the state’s new accountability program, replacing the QRIS program.
- The state received a competitive federal Preschool Development Grant, providing high-quality preschool for an additional 340 children in the state and enhancing quality

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.

Combined, Louisiana’s programs met an average of eight of the new benchmarks. All three programs met the 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 requirements for supports for curriculum implementation and continuous quality improvement system. However, current policies in all three programs fell short of the benchmark requiring professional development, ongoing coaching, and individualized professional development plans for 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.”

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