



Press Release

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2016 STATE OF PRESCHOOL YEARBOOK SHOWS MINNESOTA INCREASING FUNDING, STRIVING TO IMPROVE ACCESS

Minnesota maintains quality standards, per child spending ranks among best nationwide

New Brunswick, NJ — Minnesota increased preschool funding 18 percent and in 2016-17 launched a new early education program that could move the state up from its last-place ranking for access among 4-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.

Minnesota enrolled 1,617 children in its state supplement to federal Head Start, just one percent of 3- and 4-year-olds in the state. 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 Minnesota maintaining quality standards while making progress on enrollment and funding but more

work is needed to expand their high-quality pre-K program to help more children get the best possible start in life.”

In Minnesota:

- State funding exceeded \$12.8 million, an 18 percent increase of almost \$2 million adjusted for inflation from 2014-2015
- Enrollment totaled 1,617 children, an increase of 236 children from 2014-2015
- Minnesota enrolled just over 1 percent of the state’s 3- and 4-year-olds, ranking last in access for 4-year-olds, and 24th in access for 3-year-olds out of the 29 states serving 3-year-olds
- State funding per child was \$7,924, an inflation-adjusted increase of \$86; ranking 5th nationwide of 44 states
- Minnesota met nine of NIEER’s 10 current quality standards benchmarks
- Minnesota recently expanded investment in early childhood programs through a new Voluntary Prekindergarten program launched in 2016 and not included in this report

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.

Minnesota met seven 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 supports for curriculum implementation. However, current policies fell short of benchmarks requiring professional development and ongoing coaching for 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.