



## Press Release

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### **2016 STATE OF PRESCHOOL YEARBOOK SHOWS MISSISSIPPI INCREASING INVESTMENT, EXPANDING ENROLLMENT**

*Mississippi program is relatively new, yet a national leader on quality standards*

New Brunswick, NJ — Mississippi remained a leading state on preschool quality standards, increasing its investment two percent to \$3.1 million, 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.

Mississippi's Early Learning Collaborative, launched in January 2014, serves 1,781 children, only one percent of state 3-year-olds and four percent of 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 Mississippi investing in quality standards but more work is needed to expand access to and increase funding for the high-quality pre-K that can help children get the best possible start in life.”

In Mississippi:

- Total state funding was \$3,183,481 in 2015-2016, a small increase of \$49,433 from 2014-2015, adjusted for inflation. Local sources more than doubled the funding level to a total of \$7.2 million.
- Mississippi's state-funded program served 1,781 children, including 263 or one percent of state 3-year-olds and 1,517 or four percent 4-year-olds
- The state ranked 38<sup>th</sup> in access for 4-year-olds out of 44 states and 27<sup>th</sup> in access for 3-year-olds, out of 29 states that served 3-year-olds
- State funding per child was \$1,787; including local resources, funding per child reached \$4,031. Mississippi ranked last on state resources per child.
- Mississippi meets all 10 of NIEER's quality standards benchmarks, making it one of the top quality programs in the country

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.

Mississippi met eight 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 child assessments. They also met the new continuous quality improvement system benchmark. However, current policies fell short of benchmarks requiring ongoing-coaching and individualized professional development plans for both lead and assistant teachers and supports for curriculum implementation.

“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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