



Press Release

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For Immediate Release: Wednesday May 24, 2017

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2016 STATE OF PRESCHOOL YEARBOOK SHOWS MISSOURI REDUCING FUNDING, ENROLLMENT SHRINKING

Missouri policies meet most quality standards, yet preschool access ranks among worst

New Brunswick, NJ — Missouri reduced preschool funding by 14 percent, as enrollment dropped by more than 1,700 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.

Missouri's Preschool Program served 2,489 children, including about two percent of state 4-year-olds and 1.2 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 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 Missouri has quality standards in place but more work is needed to increase funding and expand access to the high-quality pre-K that can help children get the best possible start in life.”

In Missouri:

- Total state funding was \$11,753,285 in 2015-2016, a 14 percent decrease of \$1.9 million from 2014-2015, adjusted for inflation
- Missouri's Preschool Program enrolled 2,489 children, including 1,563 or two percent of state 4-year-olds and 926 or 1.2 percent of state 3-year-olds; a decrease of 1,770 children from 2014-2015
- Missouri ranked 41st in access for 4-year-olds out of 44 states and 23rd for access for 3-year-olds out of 29 states serving 3-year-olds
- State funding per child was \$4,722, an inflation-adjusted increase of \$1,505 from 2014-2015, ranking 23rd nationwide, up from 33 in 2014-2015
- Missouri met 8 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.

Missouri 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 requirements for supports for curriculum implementation and a continuous quality improvement system. However, current policies fell short of the benchmark requiring 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.