



## Press Release

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### **2016 STATE OF PRESCHOOL YEARBOOK SHOWS NORTH CAROLINA FUNDING AND ENROLLMENT STALLING**

*North Carolina maintains quality standards, accessibility is average among states*

New Brunswick, NJ — Funding for North Carolina’s Pre-Kindergarten program was \$142.3 million, a one percent decrease from 2014-2015, 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 North Carolina Pre-Kindergarten Program enrolled 26,851 children, 22 percent of 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 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 North Carolina maintaining quality standards but more work is needed to expand the high-quality pre-K that helps children get the best possible start in life.”

In North Carolina:

- Total state funding was \$142.3 million in 2015-2016, a 1 percent inflation-adjusted decrease of almost \$1.3 million from 2014-2015.
- The North Carolina Pre-Kindergarten Program served 26,851 or 22 percent of state 4-year-olds. Enrollment was unchanged from 2014-2015.
- North Carolina ranks 25<sup>th</sup> out of 44 states in access for 4-year-olds.
- State funding per child was \$5,301, an inflation-adjusted decrease of \$48 from 2014-2015, ranking 19<sup>th</sup> nationwide.
- North Carolina met all 10 of f NIEER’s 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.

North Carolina met nine of the new benchmarks, including new requirements for early learning and development standards that are culturally sensitive, supported, and aligned with other state standards and child assessments. The state also met new requirements for supports for curriculum implementation and a continuous quality improvement system. While lead teachers have a framework of standards-based mentoring, coaching and individualized professional development plans, current policy fell short of the new requirement for teacher assistants having accessing to professional development, ongoing coaching, and individualized professional development plans.

“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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