



## Press Release

73 Easton Avenue • New Brunswick, NJ 08901 • Phone 848.932.4350 • Fax 732.932.4360 • [www.nieer.org](http://www.nieer.org)

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Contact:

Justin Greenberg

[justin.greenberg@berlinrosen.com](mailto:justin.greenberg@berlinrosen.com)

202-800-7410

Michelle Ruess

[mruess@nieer.org](mailto:mruess@nieer.org)

848-932-4350

### **2016 STATE OF PRESCHOOL YEARBOOK SHOWS OKLAHOMA REDUCING FUNDING AS ENROLLMENT GROWS**

*Oklahoma ranks third in nation on preschool accessibility for 4-year-olds*

New Brunswick, NJ — Oklahoma decreased preschool funding almost 4 percent to \$143 million while enrollment grew by more than 1,100 children statewide, 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.

Oklahoma's public preschool program enrolled 41,241 children, nearly 74 percent of 4-year-olds and 3 percent of 3-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 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 Oklahoma maintaining access for 4-year-olds and beginning to serve 3-year-olds but more work is needed to provide the high-quality pre-K that helps children get the best possible start in life.”

## In Oklahoma:

- Total state funding was \$143 million in 2015-2016, an almost 4 percent decrease of \$5.6 million from 2014-2015, adjusted for inflation.
- Including federal and local resources, funding for the Oklahoma Early Childhood Four-Year-Old Program topped \$308 million.
- Oklahoma served 41,241 children, an increase of 1,156 children from 2014-2015.
- Oklahoma ranks 3<sup>rd</sup> out of 44 states in access for 4-year-olds and 18<sup>th</sup> in access for 3-year-olds out of 29 states that served 3-year-olds.
- State funding per child was \$3,476, an inflation-adjusted drop of \$240 from 2014-2015, ranking 31<sup>st</sup> nationwide in state resources per child. Including federal and local source, all-reported funding per child was \$7,479, ranking 15<sup>th</sup> on this indicator.
- Oklahoma met 9 of NIEER's 10 current quality standards benchmarks.
- New academic standards are aligning Pre-K to 12th grade standards and the state will be providing continuous professional development and support to districts to successfully implement these standards designed to strengthen pre-K programs and provide effective instruction and learning beyond the early years.

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.

Oklahoma met six of the new benchmarks, including the new requirement for supports for curriculum implementation. However, current policies fell short of benchmark requirements for early learning and development standards that are culturally sensitive, supported, and aligned with other state standards and child assessments; professional development, ongoing coaching, and individualized professional development plans for both 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.”

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