



Press Release

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2016 STATE OF PRESCHOOL YEARBOOK SHOWS RHODE ISLAND AMONG LEADING STATES IN RESOURCES, QUALITY

Rhode Island expands enrollment yet reaches just five percent of state's 4-year-olds

New Brunswick, NJ — Rhode Island is a leader on funding per child and preschool quality standards, meeting all 10 current and new benchmarks, 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 Rhode Island State Prekindergarten Program used a federal Preschool Development Grant to nearly doubled access, but still enrolled just five percent of state 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 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 Rhode Island making slow progress on enrollment while maintaining policies to support a high-

quality program. More work is needed to expand access to high-quality pre-K that helps children get the best possible start in life.”

In Rhode Island:

- Funding was \$3.95 million, an inflation-adjusted increase of 34 percent, or almost \$1 million, from 2014-2015
- Enrollment increased from 306 to 594 4-year-olds from 2014-2015 to 2015-2016. Rhode Island ranks 36 out of 44 states in access for 4-year-olds, up from 41st last year.
- State funding per child was \$6,650 and all-reported funding (including federal Preschool Development Grant (PDG) funding) was \$10,506. Rhode Island ranking 3rd on all-reported resources and 10th on state funding per child, shifts from last year due to federal PDG funding.
- Rhode Island once again met all 10 of NIEER’s current quality standards benchmarks
- Rhode Island received a competitive federal Preschool Development Grant that was used to serve 285 4-year-olds in full-day, high-quality preschool

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.

Rhode Island is one of two states to meet all 10 of NIEER’s new quality standards 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 meet the new curriculum supports benchmark and the requirement for professional development, ongoing-coaching, and individualized professional development plans for both lead and assistant teachers. Rhode Island also has 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.