



Press Release

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2016 STATE OF PRESCHOOL YEARBOOK SHOWS TEXAS INCREASED SPENDING AND EXPANDED ACCESS

Texas among leaders in enrollment, but lacks policies needed for quality

New Brunswick, NJ — Texas enrolled 220,640 children in state-funded preschool--second only to California--yet lacks most policies needed to provide minimum quality standards, 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.

Enrollment in the Texas Public School Prekindergarten program increase by 1,152 children from 2014-2015, reversing the decline in enrollment seen the previous year. Texas enrolled nearly half of all 4-year-olds statewide. 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 Texas leading on access for 4-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 Texas:

- State funding totaled just over \$898 million, a 14 percent increase of about \$110 million from 2014-2015, adjusted for inflation
- Enrollment totaled 194,861 4-year-olds, or 49 percent statewide, ranking 10th out of 44 states in access for 4-year-olds. Texas also served 25,779 3-year-olds, about seven percent statewide, ranking 14 out of the 29 states that served 3-year-olds.
- State funding per child was \$4,071, an increase of \$418, adjusted for inflation, from 2014-2015, ranking 26th in state funding per child, up from 30th in 2014-2015
- Texas meets four of NIEER’s current quality standards benchmarks
- Funding was cut for Texas’ grant program intended to improve quality standards

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.

Texas met four of the new benchmarks, meeting the new requirement for early learning and development standards that are culturally sensitive, supported, and aligned with other state standards and child assessments. However, current policies fell short of requirements for supports for curriculum implementation; 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.”

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.