



Press Release

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2016 STATE OF PRESCHOOL YEARBOOK SHOWS VERMONT INCREASING FUNDING TO SUPPORT UNIVERSAL ACCESS AND QUALITY

Vermont ranks in the top 5 nationwide for enrollment, but quality policies need attention

New Brunswick, NJ — Vermont boosted preschool funding 21 percent to \$54.6 million, expanding enrollment across all school districts through the new Universal Prekindergarten program and ranking among the top states on preschool access, 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.

Vermont's Prekindergarten Education – Act 166 program enrolled 7,326 children, almost 67 percent of the state's 4-year-olds and nearly 44 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 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 Vermont is making great strides on access but more work is needed to improve quality standards in order to provide the high-quality pre-K that helps children get the best possible start in life.”

In Vermont:

- Total state funding was \$54.6 million in 2015-2016, a 21 percent increase of \$9.5 million from 2014-2015, adjusted for inflation
- The Vermont Universal Prekindergarten Program served 7,326 children. Enrollment increased by 497 children from 2014-2015
- Vermont ranks 5th out of 44 states in access for 4-year-olds and 2nd in access for 3-year-olds out of 29 states that served 3-year-olds.
- State funding per child totaled \$7,457, an inflation-adjusted increase of \$856 from 2014-2015, ranking 8th nationwide.
- Vermont met 6 of NIEER’s 10 current quality standards benchmarks.
- Vermont received a federal Preschool Development Grant which was used to enroll 412 additional children in high-quality preschool and improve preschool quality.
- With Act 166, all districts must provide pre-k for a minimum of 10 hours per week for 35 weeks annually for all 3-, 4-, and 5-year-old children who are not enrolled in kindergarten

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.

Vermont met five of 10 benchmarks under the new approach. Current policies fell short of new requirements for supports for curriculum implementation and professional development, ongoing coaching, and individualized professional development plans for both lead and assistant teachers. As Vermont policymakers work to revise Act 166, they should include policies to support high-quality pre-K with a stronger continuous improvement system emphasizing timely, instructional feedback in the classroom to every teacher.

“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.