



## Press Release

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### **2016 STATE OF PRESCHOOL YEARBOOK SHOWS VIRGINIA INVESTING IN PRESCHOOL AS ENROLLMENT SLOWLY GROWS**

*Progress is needed in Virginia to improve access, resources, quality standards*

New Brunswick, NJ — Virginia increased preschool funding just slightly by \$228,484 to almost \$68.7 million as enrollment inched up from last year, 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.

Virginia's Preschool Initiative enrolled 18,356 children, about 18 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 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 Virginia investing more resources in preschool but more work is needed to expand access and

improve quality standards in order to provide the high-quality pre-K that can help children get the best possible start in life.”

In Virginia:

- Total state funding totaled \$68,651,478 in 2015-2016, an increase of \$228,484 from 2014-2015, adjusted for inflation.
- Virginia’s Preschool Initiative served 18,356 children, a 1 percent increase from 2014-2015.
- Virginia served almost 18% of 4-year-olds, ranking 29<sup>th</sup> in access for 4-year-olds out of 44 states.
- State funding per child was \$3,740, a slight decrease from 2014-2015, ranking 29<sup>th</sup> in state resources.
- Including local and federal resources, funding per child was \$5,964.
- Virginia met 5 of NIEER’s 10 current quality standards benchmarks. Although Virginia’s policies do not require all teachers to have a bachelor’s degree and early childhood teaching license, 98% of teachers do.
- Virginia received a federal Preschool Development grant through which the state enrolled an additional 1,230 children in high-quality preschool and also improved program quality.

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.

Virginia 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 benchmarks requiring 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. “

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