



Press Release

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2016 STATE OF PRESCHOOL YEARBOOK SHOWS WEST VIRGINIA RANKING AMONG TOP STATES IN ACCESS, QUALITY

West Virginia one of few states meeting all 10 current quality standards benchmarks

New Brunswick, NJ — West Virginia decreased preschool funding slightly yet continues to rank among the nation’s top states for accessibility and 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.

The West Virginia Universal Pre-K Program enrolled 16,387 4-year-olds, 66 percent of the state’s population, or 76 percent of 4-year-olds who attend the state’s kindergarten program as 5-year-olds. Only 11 percent of state 3-year-olds were enrolled. 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 West Virginia maintaining quality standards and expanding access, but more work is needed to ensure adequate resources supporting the high-quality pre-K that can help children get the best possible start in life.”

In West Virginia:

- State funding totaled \$97.8 million in 2015-2016, a slight decrease of \$419,745 from 2014-2015, adjusted for inflation.
- The West Virginia Universal Pre-K Program served 16,387 children; more than 66 percent of 4-year-olds according to census data; or 76 percent of 4-year-olds who enroll in the state's kindergarten program as 5-year-olds.
- Eleven percent of 3-year-olds in the state were enrolled in the program.
- West Virginia ranks 6th out of 44 states in access for 4-year-olds and 7th in access for 3-year-olds out of 29 states that served 3-year-olds.
- State funding per child was \$6,472, an inflation-adjusted increase of \$33 from 2014-2015, ranking 13th nationwide. Including federal and local resources, all-reported funding per child was \$9,898, ranking 5th nationwide on this indicator.
- West Virginia met all 10 of NIEER's current quality standards benchmarks
- West Virginia continues to increase the program operating schedule in 2016-2017 to at least 25 hours per week based on legislation passed in 2013.

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.

West Virginia met nine of the new benchmarks, including the new requirements for early learning and development standards that are culturally sensitive, supported, and aligned with other state standards and child assessments. The state also met new requirements for supports for curriculum implementation and a continuous quality improvement system. Current policy fell short of the new requirement for professional development, ongoing coaching, and individualized professional development plans for both lead and assistant teachers.

“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.