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2017 State of Preschool Report Highlights Progress in Alabama ***AL leads by expanding enrollment, meeting all 10 quality standards benchmarks***

New Brunswick, NJ—A new state-by-state report shows more young children enrolled in public pre-K programs nationwide, with Alabama serving nearly a quarter of the state’s 4-year-olds while meeting all 10 new quality standards benchmarks.

The State of Preschool 2017 annual report finds states heeding the demand for pre-K and expanding access to publicly funded programs in a variety of settings, based on 2016-17 data. But instead of supporting quality early learning with adequate resources, most state programs invest too little to help children catch up with their more advantaged peers by kindergarten.

Alabama, however, is one of only three states to implement policies that support high-quality pre-K programs and meet all 10 of the NIEER quality standards benchmarks. Alabama also increased enrollment in First Class Pre-K by more than 2,700 children in 2016-2017, with increased state investments in the program and help from a federal Preschool Development Grant.

“Our report highlights which states invest best in their young children and which leave too many children behind,” said NIEER Senior Co-Director Steven Barnett. “Alabama is an exemplar state, having quadrupled enrollment since 2012 while maintaining high quality standards, and strong leadership support for preschool.”

This year’s report includes a special section on policies affecting Dual Language Learners (DLLs), and also highlights changes since 2002, when NIEER began tracking state pre-K. (*see box for Alabama specifics*)

Enrollment in state-funded preschool programs has more than doubled since 2002, according to the report. Nationally, 43 states, D.C. and Guam now provide publicly funded preschool to more than 1.5 million children. However, funding has failed to keep pace, with spending-per-child *decreasing* when adjusted for inflation.

“Fifteen years ago, only three states and the District of Columbia enrolled more than one-third of their 4-year-olds in publicly funded pre-K,” said Dr. Allison Friedman-Krauss, report co-author. “Today, that is the national average. But progress is patchy – 19 states still enroll less than 10% of their 4-year-olds.”

ALABAMA 2016-2017 Fast Facts

Met 10 of 10 new quality standards benchmarks

Alabama enrolled 14,032 children, an increase of 2,736 from 2015-16

Total state funding = \$64,462,050, an increase of \$15,519,857 from 2015-16

State spending-per-child = \$4,594, compared to \$4,333 in 2015-16

Alabama collects information on preschoolers’ home language and has other policy supports for preschool DLLs

National rankings:

- 24 in access for 4-year-olds
- 24 in state spending per child

The State of Preschool 2017 yearbook was supported with funding provided by the Heising-Simons Foundation. Data used in the report come from a general survey funded by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). The supplemental survey of state policies related to dual language learners and report was supported by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. 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.

The National Institute for Early Education Research (www.nieer.org) at the Graduate School of Education, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ, supports early childhood education policy and practice through independent, objective research. For more information, contact: Michelle Ruess mruess@nieer.org 848-932-4350

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