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2017 State of Preschool Report Shows Some Progress in Arizona *AZ boosts pre-K funding but enrollment slips and Dual Language Learner policies need improvement*

New Brunswick, NJ—A new state-by-state report shows more young children enrolled in public pre-K programs nationwide, with Arizona pre-K enrollment and spending falling below national averages, and no state policies in place to support growing numbers of young Dual Language Learners in the state.

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.

Arizona increased its investment in pre-K—but spending-per-child remains low. The state enhanced quality, but still earned only 3 of NIEER’s 10 minimum quality standards benchmarks. The state failed to expand enrollment and has no policies to meet needs of young Dual Language Learners and their families.

“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. “Arizona is one state that risks leaving children behind. Preschool enrollment, funding, and quality are all low. And, despite a large number of children in the state speaking a language other than English, the state has no policies to support Dual Language Learners in preschool.”

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

ARIZONA 2016-2017 Fast Facts

Met 3 of 10 new quality standards benchmarks

Enrolled 5,285 children, a decrease of 80 from 2015-16

Total state funding = \$18,972,738, an increase of \$312,612 from 2015-16

State spending-per-child = \$3,590, compared to \$3,478 in 2015-16

Despite high DLL population, Arizona has no policies to support preschool DLLs

National rankings:

- 39 in access for 4-year-olds
- 21 in access for 3-year-olds
- 32 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