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2017 State of Preschool Report Shows Progress Stalling in Arkansas ***Preschool spending declines but state among top for enrolling 3-year-olds***

New Brunswick, NJ—A new state-by-state report shows more young children enrolled in public pre-K programs nationwide, with Arkansas serving nearly one-third of 4-year-olds and one-quarter of 3-year-olds.

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. 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.

In Arkansas, both preschool enrollment and spending continued to slide this year even though the state benefitted from a federal Preschool Development Grant to expand preschool and enhance program quality.

“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. “Once a leader in access and resources, Arkansas needs to renew their commitment to high-quality preschool.”

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

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.

ARKANSAS 2016-2017 Fast Facts

Met 8 of 10 new quality standards benchmarks

Enrolled 20,285 children, a decrease of 273 from 2015-16

Total state funding = \$111 million, a decrease of more than \$2.6 million from 2015-16

State spending-per-child = \$5,472, compared to \$5,527 in 2015-16

No policies to support preschool Dual Language Learners.

National rankings:

- 18 in access for 4-year-olds
- 5 in access for 3-year-olds
- 17 in state spending per child

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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