



## Press Release

73 Easton Avenue • New Brunswick, NJ 08901 • Phone 848.932.4350 • Fax 732.932.4360 • [www.nieer.org](http://www.nieer.org)

**For Immediate Release: Wednesday May 24, 2017**

Contact:

Justin Greenberg

[justin.greenberg@berlinrosen.com](mailto:justin.greenberg@berlinrosen.com)

202-800-7410

Michelle Ruess

[mruess@nieer.org](mailto:mruess@nieer.org)

848-932-4350

### **2016 STATE OF PRESCHOOL YEARBOOK SHOWS NEBRASKA REDUCING PRESCHOOL FUNDING AS ENROLLMENT GROWS**

*Nebraska spending per child drops yet remains a leader in access for 3-year-olds*

New Brunswick, NJ — Nebraska reduced preschool funding 13 percent to \$29.1 million as enrollment expanded, 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.

Nebraska's Early Childhood Education Program enrolled 12,652 children, including 31.6 percent of 4-year-olds and 14 percent of 3-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 eight 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 Nebraska making progress on enrollment but more work is needed to provide the resources needed to support the high-quality pre-K that can help children get the best possible start in life.”

In Nebraska:

- Total state funding was \$29,131,037 in 2015-2016, a 13 percent decrease of more than \$4 million from 2014-2015
- Nebraska's Early Childhood Education program served 12,652 children, including 8,227 or 31.6 percent of state 4-year-olds and 3,670 or 14 percent of state 3-year-olds. Enrollment increased by 579 children from 2014-2015.
- Nebraska ranks 6<sup>th</sup> in access for 3-year-olds out of 29 states serving 3-year-olds. They ranked 19<sup>th</sup> in access for 4-year-olds out of 44 states.
- State funding per child was \$2302, a decrease of \$462 from 2014-2015 ranking 42 nationwide
- Nebraska met six of NIEER's 10 current quality standards benchmarks

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.

Nebraska met seven of the new benchmarks meeting new requirements for early learning and development standards that are culturally sensitive, supported, and aligned with other state standards and child assessments. They also met the new requirement for supports for curriculum implementation. However, current policies fell short of new requirements for individualized professional development plans and ongoing coaching for lead and assistant teachers and a continuous quality improvement system. Nebraska is the only state to meet more new than current benchmarks.

“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](http://www.nieer.org).*