



Press Release

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2016 STATE OF PRESCHOOL YEARBOOK SHOWS ALASKA FUNDING, ENROLLMENT STAGNANT

Alaska preschool shifts to local control as budget woes continue

New Brunswick, NJ — Alaska, facing instability in state funding, made several changes to their preschool program, shifting responsibility to local entities, 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.

Funding for Alaska's state-funded preschool program, as well as enrollment, remained the same from the 2014-2015. 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 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 Alaska making adjustments to their preschool program in response to funding uncertainties but more work is needed to enhance quality and expand access and to the high-quality pre-K that helps children get the best possible start in life.”

In Alaska:

- Total state funding remained at the 2014-2015 level of \$2 million
- Enrollment also stayed the same from 2014-2015, at 319 4-year-olds, ranking 40th in access for 4-year-olds out of 44 states
- The state ranked 16th in state resources per child
- Alaska met seven of NIEER's current quality standards benchmarks
- Alaska shifted preschool into a more locally controlled program; preexisting programs can either earn three-year renewal grants or new programs can earn one-year pre-elementary grants to eventually move to three-year grants

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.

Alaska met five of the new quality standards benchmarks. The state did not meet new requirements for early learning and development standards that are culturally sensitive, supported, and aligned with other state standards and child assessments; supports for curriculum implementation; professional development for lead and assistant teachers; and a continuous quality improvement system.

“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.”

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