



## Press Release

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### **2016 STATE OF PRESCHOOL YEARBOOK SHOWS DELAWARE RANKING IN TOP 10 FOR PRESCHOOL FUNDING PER CHILD**

#### *Delaware Holds Steady, Continues to Meet 8 Benchmarks*

New Brunswick, NJ — Delaware ranked among the top 10 states for preschool funding per child, yet enrolled less than 10 percent of state’s 4-year-olds, 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.

Delaware enrolled 843 children, about seven percent of the state’s 4-year-olds in 2015-2016, and has shown no progress in increasing enrollment. 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 Delaware continues to invest highly in its preschool program but more work is needed to expand access to the high-quality pre-K that can help children get the best possible start in life.”

In Delaware:

- Total state funding for the Early Childhood Assistance program was \$6,149,300; a three percent increase from 2014-2015
- Enrollment remained steady at 843 4-year-olds in the 2015-2016 school year. Delaware ranked 35<sup>th</sup> in access for 4-year-olds, out of 44 states.
- State spending per child was \$7,295 in 2015-2016, an increase of \$182; again ranking 9<sup>th</sup> nationwide
- Delaware met eight 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.

Delaware met six 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 assessment. They also met the new requirement for supports for curriculum implementation. However, current policies fell short of benchmarks requiring on-going coaching and 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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