



## Press Release

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### **2016 STATE OF PRESCHOOL YEARBOOK SHOWS GEORGIA INCREASING FUNDING, BUT LITTLE GROWTH IN ENROLLMENT**

*Preschool pioneer ranks 8<sup>th</sup> in nation for enrollment*

New Brunswick, NJ — Georgia, which in 1992 launched the nation’s first state-funded universal preschool program, now enrolls 60 percent of the 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.

Georgia enrolled 80,825 4-year-olds in preschool, a slight increase from 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 five 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 Georgia continuing to meet most quality standards benchmarks but more work is needed to increase funding to provide the high-quality pre-K that helps children get the best possible start in life.”

In Georgia:

- Total state funding was \$314,460,869 in 2015-2016, an increase of \$1.8 million from 2014-2015
- Georgia's universal Pre-K Program served 80,825 children, increasing by 395 children from 2014-2015, ranking 8<sup>th</sup> in access for 4-year-olds out of 44 states
- State funding per child had only a small increase (\$4) from 2014-2015 to \$3,891, ranking 28<sup>th</sup> nationwide
- Georgia met eight of NIEER's 10 current quality standards benchmarks
- A recent study found Georgia's program to have lasting effects, revealing significant improvements in classroom quality for Georgia's Pre-K teachers who participated in professional development
- Additional state funding supported 60 additional Summer Transition Programs statewide for children entering kindergarten

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.

Georgia 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 supports for curriculum implementation. However, current policies fell short of benchmarks requiring professional development and ongoing coaching 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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