



Press Release

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For Immediate Release: Wednesday May 24, 2017

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2016 STATE OF PRESCHOOL YEARBOOK SHOWS IOWA STANDING STILL WHILE OTHER STATES PROGRESS

Iowa is a leader in preschool access for 4-year-olds but momentum has slowed

New Brunswick, NJ — Iowa serves nearly two-thirds of the state's 4-year-olds in its two state-funded preschool programs but funding is not sufficient to provide high-quality learning experiences, 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.

Across Iowa's two programs, Shared Visions and the Statewide Voluntary Preschool Program (SWVPP), enrollment totaled 26,133 children, with more 4-year-olds yet fewer 3-year-olds compared to 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 8 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 Iowa as a leader in providing universal access to 4-year-olds but more work is needed to improve quality standards in order to provide the high-quality pre-K that helps children get the best possible start in life.”

In Iowa:

- State funding totaled \$81 million, a 4 percent increase of just over \$3.3 million from 2014-2015
- Enrollment increased by just 181 children from 2014-2015, adding 366 4-year-olds while 3-year-olds enrollment fell by 165
- Iowa ranks 7th out of 44 states on access for 4-year-olds, serving almost 64 percent of the state’s 4-year-olds; however, the state serves just 3 percent of 3-year-olds, ranking 19th out of 29 states serving that age
- State funding per child was \$3,246, up \$128 from 2014-2015, adjusted for inflation; ranking 36th in state funding per child, one lower than last year.
- Iowa meets an average of 6.9 of NIEER’s 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.

Iowa’s Shared Visions met six of NIEER’s new quality standards benchmarks and SWVPP met seven. Both programs met the new requirements for early learning and development standards that are culturally sensitive, supported, and aligned with other state standards and child assessments. They also meet the new curriculum supports benchmark. However, current policies in both programs fell short of benchmarks requiring professional development, ongoing-coaching, and individualized professional development plans for both 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. “

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.