



Press Release

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2016 STATE OF PRESCHOOL YEARBOOK SHOWS PENNSYLVANIA INCREASING FUNDING ACROSS FOUR PROGRAMS

Progress on quality standards and resources yet enrollment remains relatively low

New Brunswick, NJ — Pennsylvania invested over \$176 million, a 20 percent increase from last year, in its four state-funded preschool programs, 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.

Pennsylvania's four state-funded preschool programs enrolled 26,803 children, about 12 percent of state 4-year-olds and six percent of state 3-year-olds. 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 Pennsylvania making progress on new policies, quality standards and funding but more work is needed to increase access to the high-quality pre-K that helps children get the best possible start in life.”

In Pennsylvania:

- Pennsylvania has four state-funded pre-K programs: The Pennsylvania Four-Year-Old Kindergarten and School-based Prekindergarten programs, the Ready to Learn Block Grant, the Pennsylvania Head Start Supplemental Assistance Program, and the Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts Program.
 - The Pennsylvania Four-Year-Old Kindergarten and School-based Prekindergarten programs served 1,988 children and met two of NIEER’s 10 current quality standards benchmarks
 - Ready to Learn Block Grant served 2,050 children and met five of NIEER’s 10 current quality standards benchmarks
 - Pennsylvania Head Start Supplemental Assistance Program served 5,650 children and met nine of NIEER’s 10 current quality standards benchmarks
 - Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts Program served 17,115 children and met nine of NIEER’s 10 current quality standards benchmarks, an increase of two from 2014-2015
- Total state funding was \$176,357,841 in 2015-2016, a 20 percent increase of \$29.5 million from 2014-2015
- Pennsylvania’s four state-funded preschool programs served 26,803 children, including 16,820 4-year-olds and 8,994 3-year-olds. Enrollment increased by 765 children from 2014-2015.
- Pennsylvania ranked 30th in access for 4-year-olds out of 44 states and 15th for access for 3-year-olds out of 29 states that enrolled 3-year-olds
- State funding per child was \$6,580, an increase of \$940 from 2014-2015, ranking 11th nationwide

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.

Pennsylvania’s Pre-K Counts Program met seven of the new benchmarks and Head Start Supplemental Assistance Program met six; with both of these programs meeting the requirements for early learning and development standards that are culturally sensitive, supported, and aligned with other state standards and child assessments. Pre-K Counts Program also met the new curriculum supports benchmark. However, current policies for all four 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. The Pennsylvania Four-Year-Old Kindergarten and School-based Prekindergarten programs met two of the new benchmarks and the Ready to Learn Block Grant met three.

“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.