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New Pre-K Report Finds State Policy for Young Dual Language Learners ‘Needs Improvement’

CA, TX Among Leaders on Enrollment, Support for non-English Speaking Children

New Brunswick, NJ—More than 20 percent of all preschool-aged children in the US speak a language other than English at home, yet most state pre-K programs do not collect data on children’s home language, making it nearly impossible to design effective supports for young dual language learners (DLLs), according to a new report from the National Institute for Early Education Research.

The State of Preschool 2017 annual report, based on 2016-17 academic year data, is the only national report on state-funded preschool programs. This year’s report includes a special section on policies affecting DLLs.

Nationwide, more than 1.5 million children are enrolled in 60 state-funded preschool programs in a variety of settings. But instead of supporting quality early learning with adequate resources, most state programs invest too little to help children catch up with their more advantaged peers by kindergarten.

“We are continually striving to close achievement gaps, including those between children who speak a language other than English at home and children who speak only English,” said Ellen Frede, NIEER Senior Co-Director. “We know the earlier we start with high-quality education programs the better.”

Six states with a high proportion of DLLs in their populations also have high DLL enrollment in state preschool: California, Illinois, Nevada, New Jersey, New Mexico and Texas. These states also have policies supporting dual language learners in preschool.

However, several states with high populations of DLLs—including Arizona, Florida and New York—cannot even report the home language of children enrolled in their state-funded preschool programs.

Research shows qualified teachers are key to providing the high-quality early learning experiences that can help prepare young children for kindergarten. Yet California’s Transitional Kindergarten, Illinois, and Texas are the only programs to require teachers to have bilingual certification.

“Due to the numbers of young DLLs in our communities, their learning outcomes have consequences for our future,” said Allison Friedman-Krauss, co-author

Dual Language Learner Fast Facts

19 state pre-K programs use non-English home language as an eligibility criterion

6 state pre-K programs require lead teachers to have specific training to work with DLLs

20 state pre-K programs require communications about a child be provided in the family’s home language

Many states with high numbers of non-English speaking children—including AZ, NM, NV, and NY--do not require pre-K teachers to have *any training* specific to working with DLLs

of *The State of Preschool 2017*. “Our report shows few states have policies supporting the quality early learning experiences these children need to thrive in kindergarten and beyond.”

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The National Institute for Early Education Research (www.nieer.org) at the Graduate School of Education, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ, supports early childhood education policy and practice through independent, objective research. For more information, contact: Michelle Ruess mruess@nieer.org 848-932-4350