

NIEER Pre-K Data Snapshot:

State Policies Supporting Comprehensive Preschool Services

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The [National Institute for Early Education Research \(NIEER\)](#) researches and disseminates an annual [report](#) profiling state-funded preschool programs throughout the United States. NIEER's *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, such as the presence of a qualified teacher and assistant, small class size, and low student-to-teacher ratio.

For the past 15 years, NIEER has been collecting information on what comprehensive services state-funded preschool programs have provided to children and families. Comprehensive services encompass health and nutrition, such as providing a daily meal, participation in transition to kindergarten activities, and referrals for those identified as needing additional services. In addition to offering comprehensive services to children, some programs assist parents in obtaining education services or job training.

Preschool programs might also offer opportunities for families to learn about their children in group sessions, such as during trainings or parent support meetings, or on an individual basis through parent conferences and/or home visits. Research has shown that children's overall well-being and success in school involves not only their cognitive development, but also their physical and social/emotional health¹.

Most state-funded preschool programs provide additional support services, according to [The State of Preschool 2017](#). Eighty-seven percent, or 53 out of 61 programs in 41 states, DC and Guam, were required to provide comprehensive services to either families or children attending the program. The most common types of support are parent involvement activities (offered by 51 pre-K programs) and parent conferences and/or home visits (49 programs), see Figure 1.

State Examples

In Rhode Island, preschool programs are required to offer comprehensive services utilizing existing state programs and systems. The preschool grantee does not have to directly provide the service, but rather make and track referrals to services. To fund this work, some grantees have allocated a percentage of staff time for coordinating, and if capacity allows, providing the service directly.

¹ Blair, C. (2002). School readiness: Integrating cognition and emotion in a neurobiological conceptualization of children's functioning at school entry. *American Psychologist*, 57, 111-127. Janus, M., & Duku, E. (2010). The school entry gap: Socioeconomic, family, and health factors associated with children's school readiness to learn. *Early Education and Development*, 18, 375-403.

Several states operate additional programs that preschool families or children may access or be referred to, including:

- 211/Help Me Grow Alabama. The Help Me Grow care coordinator works to connect families to local resources such as a home visiting program, behavioral counseling, or special education evaluation services.
- Kentucky's preschool programs have access to Family Resource Centers for support services and referrals.
- Missouri's preschool program requires partnerships with local Parents as Teachers (PAT) programs which provide parent education and health and developmental screenings. In addition, PAT also provides referrals to services that may be beneficial to the family based on need/request.

Preschool programs that operate primarily or exclusively in public schools, such as in Oklahoma, Hawaii, Tennessee, Pennsylvania's Ready to Learn Block Grant, South Carolina's EIA 4K, and Connecticut's Smart Start, rely on local school districts or schools to decide which services are provided based on the unique needs of their communities. Similarly, D.C. Charter Schools offering preschool are required to demonstrate family involvement through their chartering application; however, these services do not include education services or job training, health services for parents, or information about nutrition.

Some states, such as Oregon, Minnesota, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin, have specific preschool programs to supplement Head Start federal funding with state dollars. In these state programs, any school districts partnering with Head Start programs, or Head Start grantees receiving state funds, must follow federal Head Start requirements which require an array of support services including parenting support or training, health services for children, and nutrition information.

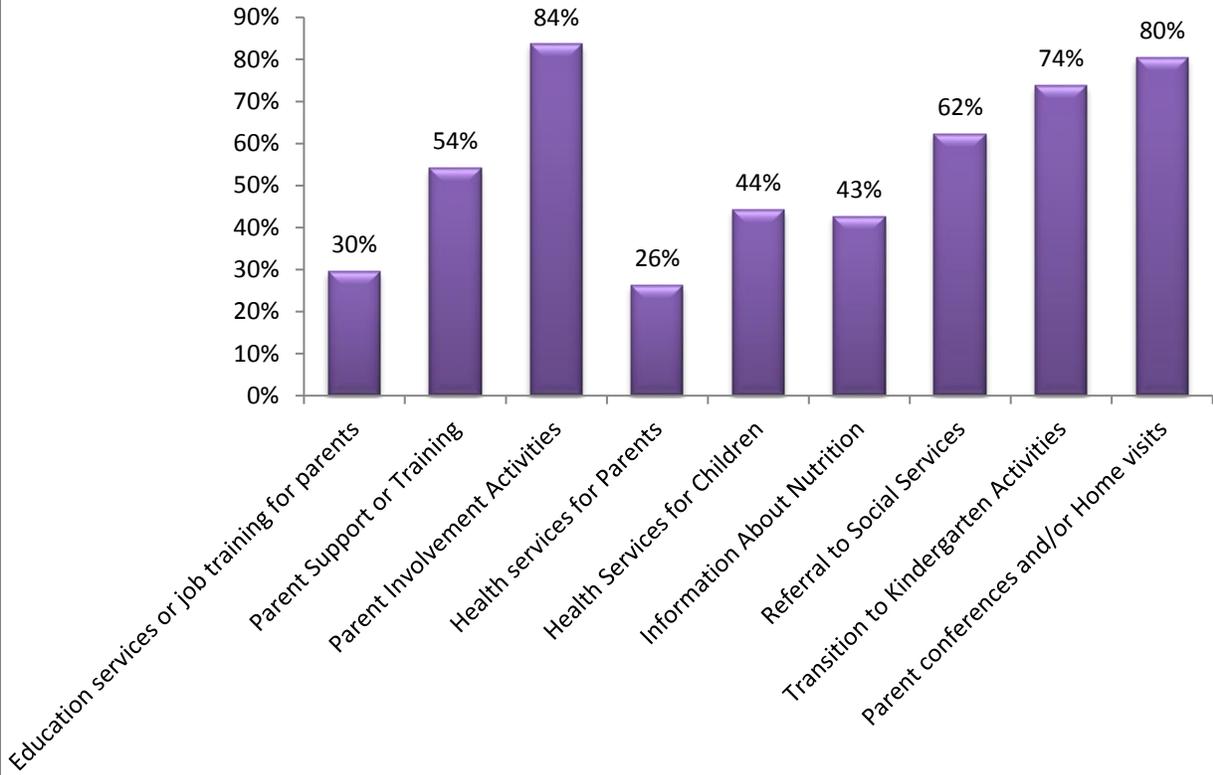
Longitudinal Trends

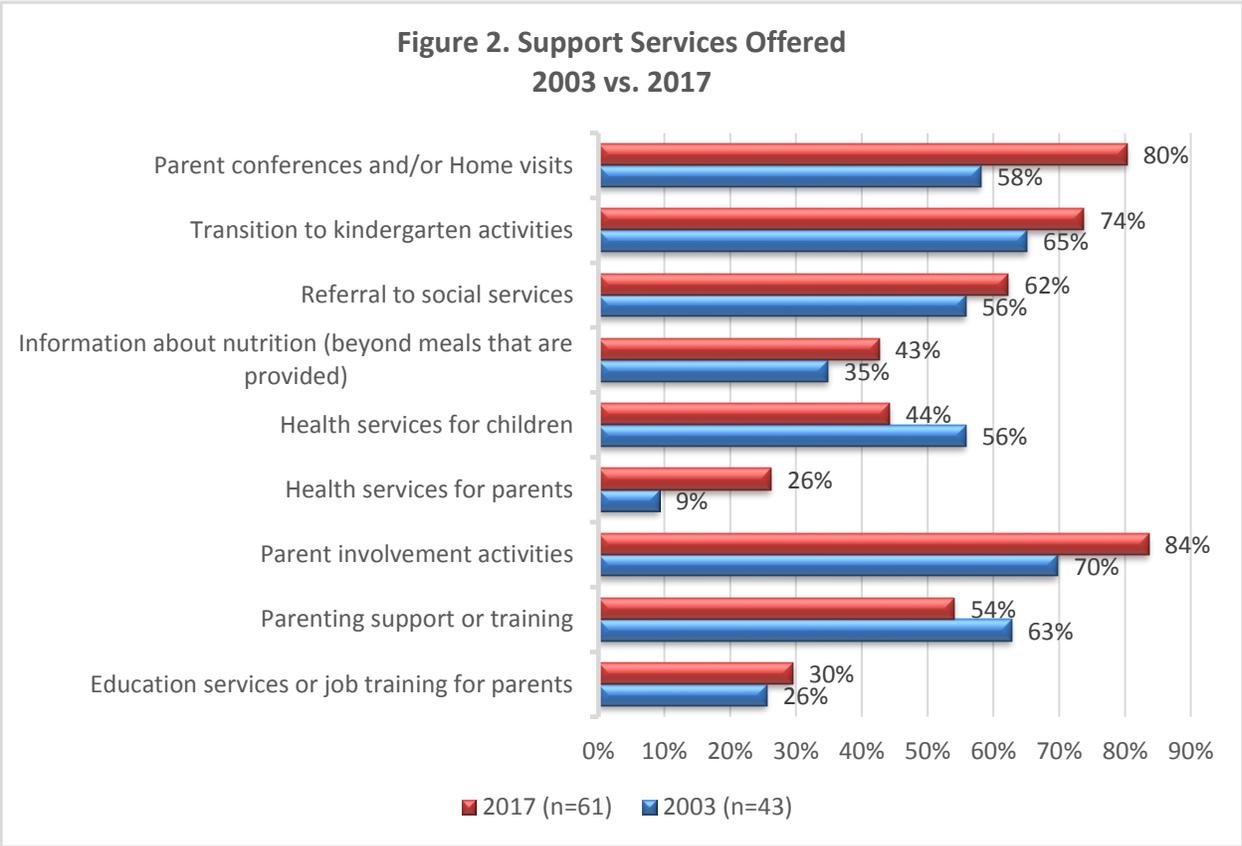
Through 15 years of *Yearbook* data, we see increases in some support services offered by preschool programs, and decreases in others, see Figure 2. The percentage of preschool programs offering parent conferences and/or home visits has increased from 58% in 2003 to 80% in 2017. Also, parent involvement activities increased from 70% in 2003 to 84% in 2017. The percentage of preschool programs offering health services for parents increased from 9% in 2003 to 26% in 2017. However, the percentage of programs offering health services for children decreased 12% from 2003 to 2017, from 56% to 44%. Some of this decrease may be due to more children being enrolled in Medicaid and being able to access health services outside of the preschool program.

Conclusion

The most effective preschool programs incorporate comprehensive services. These services may target just the child or the family. In 2016-2017, most state-funded preschool programs provided at least one comprehensive service, with the most popular being parent involvement activities, followed closely by home visits/parent conferences.

**Figure 1. Support Services Offered in 2016-2017
(n=61 pre-k programs)**





About NIEER

The National Institute for Early Education Research ([NIEER](http://nieer.org)) at the Graduate School of Education, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ, conducts independent, objective research to inform early childhood education policy promoting physical, cognitive and social development for all young children to succeed in school and later life.

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