



## Press Release

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### **2016 STATE OF PRESCHOOL YEARBOOK SHOWS MASSACHUSETTS INCREASING ENROLLMENT WHILE REDUCING FUNDING**

*Massachusetts access and spending per child rank among lowest*

New Brunswick, NJ — Massachusetts decreased funding for its two state-funded preschool programs enrolling about 7 percent of children ages 3 and 4, but increased the total enrollment by 736 three- and four-year-olds in state-funded preschool over last year, 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.

Massachusetts' Universal Pre-Kindergarten and Inclusive Preschool Learning Environment Grant programs enrolled 13,731 children, including almost 8 percent of state 4-year-olds and 7 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 5 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 Massachusetts using federal grant dollars to expand preschool enrollment, but more state resources are needed to provide the high-quality pre-K that can help children get the best possible start in life.”

In Massachusetts:

- Total state funding was \$41.7 million in 2015-2016, a decrease of \$6.9 million, adjusted for inflation from 2014-2015.
- Massachusetts’ two state-funded pre-K programs served 13,731 children, increasing by 736 three- and four-year-olds since 2014-2015.
- Massachusetts ranks 34<sup>th</sup> out of 44 states in access for 4-year-olds and 12<sup>th</sup> in access for 3-year-olds out of 29 states that served 3-year-olds.
- State funding per child was \$3,309, an inflation-adjusted decrease of \$594 from 2014-2015, ranking 42<sup>nd</sup> nationwide.
- Massachusetts met a weighted average 6.6 of NIEER’s 10 current quality standards benchmarks.
- Massachusetts received a federal Preschool Development Grant, which was used to enroll 850 additional children in high-quality preschool in the state.

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.

Universal Pre-Kindergarten (UPK) meets seven new benchmarks, and Inclusive Preschool Learning Environment Grant program meets six new benchmarks. Both programs meet new requirements for early learning and development standards that are culturally sensitive, supported, and aligned with other state standards and child assessments; and the new curriculum supports benchmark. The UPK program also meets the new requirements for a continuous quality improvement system. However, current policies for both programs fall short of the new requirement for staff professional development, ongoing coaching, and individualized professional development plans for both lead and assistant teachers. Massachusetts does provide additional professional development supports to early educators through their state-funded Educator and Provider Support networks across the state, which are open to all programs and providers.

“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](http://www.nieer.org).*