



Press Release

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2016 STATE OF PRESCHOOL YEARBOOK SHOWS TENNESSEE ENROLLMENT GROWING WHILE FUNDING PER CHILD DROPS

Volunteer state has work to be done on funding and quality

New Brunswick, NJ — Tennessee increased preschool funding just one percent to \$86 million as programs enrolled 1,800 new children statewide, 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.

Tennessee's Voluntary Pre-K enrolled 18,116 children, including nearly 22 percent of 4-year-olds and less than one percent of 3-year-olds statewide. 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 Tennessee maintaining quality standards but more work is needed to provide adequate funding and expand access to the high-quality pre-K that can children get the best possible start in life.”

In Tennessee:

- Total state funding was \$86,097,664 in 2015-2016, a one percent increase of \$1 million from 2014-2015, adjusted for inflation
- Tennessee's Voluntary Pre-K served 18,116 children, including 17,419 or 22 percent of 4-year-olds and 585 or one percent of 3-year-olds. Enrollment increased by 1,842 children from 2014-2015.
- Tennessee ranked 26th in access for 4-year-olds out of 44 states and 26th in access for 3-year-olds out of the 29 states that enrolled 3-year-olds
- State funding per child was \$4,753, an inflation-adjusted decrease of \$476 from 2014-2015, ranking 22nd nationwide
- Tennessee met nine of NIEER's 10 current quality standards benchmarks.
- The state received a competitive federal Preschool Development Grant, enabling at least 1,648 additional children to enroll in high-quality preschool, and enhancing preschool quality for 3,000 other children

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.

Tennessee met five of the new benchmarks. However, current policies fell short of new requirements for professional development, ongoing-coaching, and individualized professional development plans for both lead and assistant teachers; early learning and development standards that are culturally sensitive, supported, and aligned with other state standards and child assessments; supports for curriculum implementation; 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.”

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