

OFFICE FOR EDUCATION POLICY

POLICY BRIEF: THE NIEER REPORT: THE STATE OF **PRESCHOOL 2004 STATE PRESCHOOL YEARBOOK SUMMARY** *Policy Brief 10 February 2005*



This study was conducted by the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER), a unit of Rutgers University, which supports early childhood education policy by providing objective, nonpartisan, information based on research. The *2004 State Preschool Yearbook* is the second report in a NIEER series evaluating state-funded preschool programs. It describes state-funded prekindergarten in the 2002-2003 school year. Tracking these trends is essential, since the role states play in preschool education will increasingly affect how successfully America's next generation will compete in the knowledge economy. The *State Preschool Yearbooks* were developed by NIEER to serve as a resource for everyone from policymakers to advocates to researchers. The *Yearbook* data were collected from an intensive survey of the states. Information is presented regarding three key characteristics of prekindergarten programs: access, quality standards, and resources.

Data for the report were collected through surveys that were sent to state prekindergarten administrators looking at the 2002-2003 program year. The surveys consisted of yes/no questions, multiple choice questions on what choice best described their program, and open-ended questions.

Quality Standards

A 10-item Quality Standards checklist was used to compare standards of quality across the different state prekindergarten initiatives. These standards of quality were compiled from previous research of what contributes to quality prekindergarten programs. Benchmarks were then set for each item on the checklist. The benchmarks do not intend to represent high standards of excellence or an exhaustive list of standards. The benchmarks instead represent minimum standards for an educationally effective program, especially for those programs serving disadvantaged children.

The Quality Standards Checklist consists of the following benchmarks:

1. Curriculum standards – the state must have comprehensive curriculum standards that are specific to prekindergarten and cover the domains of language/literacy, mathematics, science, social/emotional skills, cognitive development, health and physical development, and social studies.
2. Teacher degree requirement – lead teachers in both private and public settings must be required to hold at least a BA.
3. Teacher specialized training requirement – preservice requirements for lead teachers should include specialized training in prekindergarten. Such training might involve licensure/endorsement in the prekindergarten area or a degree or credential in early childhood, such as CDA. Kindergarten endorsements and elementary teaching certification did not qualify as specialized training in a preschool area.
4. Assistant teacher degree requirement – assistant teachers are required to hold at least a CDA or equivalent training in both public and private settings.
5. Teacher in-service requirement – teachers must be required to attend an average of at least 15 clock hours of professional development per year. In-service training received in fulfillment of state recertification requirement was counted toward a program's teacher in-service requirement.
6. Maximum class size – class sizes must be limited to no more than 20 children, for both 3- and 4-year-olds.
7. Staff-child ratio – at least one staff member must be present per 10 children in a classroom, for both 3- and 4-year-olds.
8. Screening/referral requirements – programs are required to provide both screening and referral services covering at least vision, hearing, and health.

9. Required support services – programs must offer (either directly or through active referral) at least one type of additional support services for families of participants of the participants themselves. Types of services may includes parent conferences or home visits, parenting support or training, referral to social services, and information relating to nutrition.
10. Meal requirements – all participants must be offered at least one meal per day, including any meals offered due to requirements not specifically set by the preschool program. Snacks were not counted as meals.

State prekindergarten programs were given a summary score indicating the number of items for which the state met or exceeded the relevant benchmarks. For each area, states receive a checkmark when their policy meets or exceeds the related benchmark standard. Scores range from zero to a maximum of 10. The summary score is simply a count of items on the checklist that were met. It does not mean that the each item is of equal value or is interchangeable.

This data reflects *policy not practice*. Therefore, a state with good policies may have some programs that fail to comply with these policies, and conversely, a state with weak policies may have many programs that exceed the state standards. And remember that this is not an exhaustive list of all the important elements of a good prekindergarten program, so meeting all 10 standards is not necessarily sufficient for ensuring a high-quality program.

Arkansas received the highest summary score, a score of 10, on the Quality Standards Checklist which means they met the minimum standard in all ten categories. Arkansas was the only state to meet all minimum standards of the checklist (see Appendix A for a listing of all states and their summary score on the checklist).

Access

Access remains far from universal across the country. It varies not only between states, but also within them. The ability to attend a preschool depends greatly on family income and where families live. NIEER used enrollment of children at the ages of 3 and 4 to measure the extent to which states offer opportunities for preschool participation. For State Pre-K and Head Start Enrollment as a percentage of total population, the percentage for 3 year olds was 2% and the percentage for 4 year olds was 6% in Arkansas.

Resources

Resources, as measured by state expenditures for preschool, indicate each state’s commitment to expanding access and ensuring educational adequacy. State spending per child in a prekindergarten program is a key determinant of program quality and a measure of state support for access to a good preschool education. Under the Resources category, Arkansas’ Pre-K spending per child enrolled was \$4,996 and total state Pre-K spending was \$9,250,285.

Table 1. Rank of Arkansas on the variables measured (out of all 50 states)

Variables	Rank
Access to state prekindergarten for 3 year olds	12
Access to state prekindergarten for 4 year olds	26
Available Resources	21

Appendix A

2002-2003 State Pre-K Quality Standards

State	Quality Standards Checklist Summary Score
Alabama	8
Arizona	4
Arkansas	10
California	4
Colorado	4
Connecticut	4
Delaware	7
Georgia	6
Hawaii	5
Illinois	9
Iowa	5
Kansas	4
Kentucky	7
Louisiana (8g)	7
Louisiana (LA4/SP)	8
Louisiana ((NSECD)	6
Maine	3
Maryland	8
Massachusetts	6
Michigan	5
Minnesota	8
Missouri	4
Nebraska	6
Nevada	4
New Jersey (Abbott)	9
New Jersey (ECPA)	5
New Mexico	4
New York (EPK)	8
New York (UPK)	5
North Carolina	9
Ohio (HdSt)	7
Ohio (Public School)	5
Oklahoma	8
Oregon	6
Pennsylvania	2
South Carolina	8
Tennessee	8
Texas	3
Vermont	6
Virginia	5
Washington	6
West Virginia	5
Wisconsin (4K)	3
Wisconsin (HdSt)	6

Note: Alaska, Florida, Indiana, Mississippi, Montana, New Hampshire, North Dakota, Rhode Island, South Dakota, Utah, and Wyoming are not included in this table because they do not fund state prekindergarten initiatives.