

The State of Preschool 2009: The SECA States

***The Latest in the Yearbook Series from the
National Institute for Early Education Research***

Southern Early Childhood Association



**SECA Policy Brief
May 2010**

Some Highlights from the Report

Nationally, progress was slower and total enrollment and spending increased, but not in every state. According to the report, in 2009:

- Thirty percent (30%) of children attended a state-funded pre-school program at age 4, including special education.
- When Head Start is added to that number, enrollment goes up to nearly 40% at age 4.
- 1,216,077 children attended state funded pre-K .
- 38 states funded preschool.
- Head Start enrolled 736,517 children (3-and 4-year-olds) nationally.
- 47 of 51 states had comprehensive early learning standards.
- 26 states required that teachers have a BA degree.
- 45 states required class sizes of 20 or lower.
- 45 states required staff/child ratios of 1:10 or better.
- 40 states required monitoring site visits.
- Total state preschool funding totaled \$5,037,696,733.
- State spending per child equaled \$4,143.

The report also highlighted some “new” statistics.

- ✓ Enrollment increased by 81,593 children at all ages.
- ✓ State’s pre-K enrollment of 3-and 4-year-olds exceeded 1.5 million, including both general and special education.
- ✓ Twenty-nine (29) states had increases in enrollment: nine (9) states had decreases.
- ✓ Eight (8) states improved on NIEER’s quality checklist: three (3) states decreased standards.
- ✓ Twenty three (23) states failed to fully meet NIEER standards for teacher qualifications: twenty-six (26) failed to meet the standards for assistant teacher qualifications.
- ✓ Total funding rose to more than \$5 billion but reflected a slowdown in the growth of pre-K funding across the country.
- ✓ Funding per child decreased from \$4,700 in 2002 to \$4,143 in 2009 but access increased.

Source: Executive Summary, **The State of Preschool 2009**, National Institute for Early Education Research, www.nieer.org



According to the report, findings for the 2008-2009 year confirmed the authors' "*worries about the effects of the recession on state pre-K. This was the first year to be influenced by the recession and we found a slow down in progress in all three key dimensions that are evaluated—access, quality standards, and resources.....State funding grew more slowly than in previous years so that inflation-adjusted spending per child fell, reversing the prior two-year trend toward increased funding per child. "*

NIEER's Definition of a State Preschool Program

The *State Yearbook Series* focuses on state-funded preschool education that meets the following criteria:

1. The program is *funded, controlled and directed by the state.*
2. The program *serves children of preschool age, usually 3 and/or 4.* Programs that serve only infants and toddlers are excluded from the definition.
3. *Early childhood education is the primary focus* of the program. The definition excludes programs that focus mainly on parent education and parent work status or child eligibility tied to work status.
4. The program *offers a group learning experience* to children at least two days a week.
5. The program is *distinct from the state's system of subsidized child care*; however, these programs may be integrated and coordinated with the state's subsidized child care system.
6. The program is *not primarily designed to serve children with disabilities.*
7. *State supplemental funding to Head Start* is counted as a state preschool program if the funding substantially expands the number of children served and if the state assumes some administrative responsibility for the program.

Source: *Executive Summary, The State of Preschool 2009, National Institute for Early Education Research, www.nieer.org*



Highlights from the SECA States

Although 2008 and 2009 were fiscally challenging for all SECA states, we continued to make progress and to lead the nation in providing state-funded pre-K for our children.

ACCESS

Of the top ten (10) states serving 4-year-olds in 2009, the SECA region had seven (7) of the ten states.

- ❖ **Oklahoma** was **#1** with 71% served in Pre-K. When state Pre-K, Special Education and Head Start are added together, Oklahoma served 87% of its 4-year-old children.
- ❖ **Florida** was **#2** with 67% served in pre-K and 77% served in all three programs.
- ❖ **Georgia** was **#3** with 53% served in Pre-K and 61% served in all three programs.
- ❖ **West Virginia** was **#5** with 51% served in Pre-K and 73% served in all three programs.
- ❖ **Texas** was **#7** with 45% served in Pre-K and 55% served in all three programs.
- ❖ **Arkansas** was **#8** with 44% served in Pre-K and 63% served in all three programs.
- ❖ **South Carolina** was **#10** with 38% served in Pre-K and 49% served in all three programs.

The other SECA states had these national ranks for serving 4-year-olds:

- ❖ **Alabama** was **#34** with 5.5% served in Pre-K.
- ❖ **Kentucky** was **#15** with 28.3% served.
- ❖ **Louisiana** was **#12** with 31.7% served.
- ❖ **North Carolina** was **#17** with 25% served.
- ❖ **Tennessee** was **#18** with 21.6% served.
- ❖ **Virginia** was **#25** with 14.1% served.

With seven (7) states in the top 10, another **four (4) states (Kentucky, Louisiana, North Carolina, and Tennessee) were in the top 20** of states with access to state funded Pre-K.

Mississippi was the only SECA state without a state funded Pre-K in 2008/2009.

Source: *Executive Summary, The State of Preschool 2009*, National Institute for Early Education Research, www.nieer.org



Changes in Pre-school Enrollment from 2001/2002 to 2008/2009

State	Change in 3-year-olds	Percent change	Change in 4-year-olds	Percent change
Alabama	0	n/a	2,628	347.6%
Arkansas	1,403	148.9%	14,794	665.2%
Florida	0	n/a	147,762	n/a
Georgia	0	n/a	14,697	23.1%
Kentucky	771	15.8%	3,025	23.6%
Louisiana	0	n/a	12,201	162.3%
Mississippi	0	n/a	0	n/a
North Carolina	0	n/a	30,245	2,439.1%
Oklahoma	0	n/a	10,163	39.3%
South Carolina	2,106	601.7%	6,760	43.2%
Tennessee	-176	-20.9%	15,810	899.3%
Texas	-774	-3.9%	53,425	41.9%
Virginia	0	n/a	8,707	148.1%
West Virginia	-5	-0.3%	5,759	113.2%

QUALITY

Most of the SECA states met at least 7 of the 10 quality benchmarks in 2008-2009; however, only three states, **Alabama**, **Louisiana (NSECD)** and **North Carolina** scored a perfect 10. The ten quality standards include:

- Comprehensive early learning standards
- Minimum teacher requirement: BA
- Specialized teacher training in Pre-K
- Assistant teacher has a CDA or equivalent
- Teachers must attend at least 15 hours a year of in-service training
- Maximum class size: 20
- Maximum staff child/ratio: 1:10
- Support services are required (vision, hearing, health)
- At least one meal is provided each day
- Monitoring site visits are required and conducted



According to the report:

Alabama scored a perfect **10** with all of the standards in place.

Arkansas met **9 of the 10** standards, missing on the teacher requirement for a BA degree.

Florida met only **3 of the 10** standards with only comprehensive learning standards, class size of less than 20, and monitoring site visits in place.

Georgia met **8 of the 10** standards, missing on the teacher BA requirement and support services.

Kentucky met **8 of the 10** standards, missing on the assistant teacher credential and monitoring site visits.

Louisiana has three programs that were rated. **Louisiana (8g)** met **7 of the 10** standards, missing on specialized training, assistant teacher credentials and support services. **LA4** met **9 of the 10** standards, missing only on the assistant teacher credentials. **Louisiana (NSECD)** met all **10** of the standards.

North Carolina met all **10** of the standards.

Oklahoma met **9 of the 10** standards, missing only on the assistant teacher credentials.

South Carolina also has two programs. **South Carolina (4K)** met **6 of the 10** standards, missing on assistant teacher credentials, support services, meals and site visits. **South Carolina (CDEPP)** met **7 of the 10** standards, missing on the teacher and assistant teacher credentials and support services.

Tennessee met **9 of the 10** standards, missing only on the assistant teacher credentials.

Texas met **4 of the 10** standards, with only the learning standards, teacher credentials, specialized training and in-service requirements in place.

Virginia met **8 of the 10** standards, missing on the assistant teacher credentials and meal requirement.

West Virginia met **7 of the 10** standards, missing on teacher and assistant teacher credentials and meal requirement.

Source: *Executive Summary, The State of Preschool 2009*, National Institute for Early Education Research, www.nieer.org



RESOURCES

Only four (4) of the SECA states (**Florida, Kentucky, South Carolina, Virginia**) fell out of the top 20 states nationally in their rank based on resources provided per child in state Pre-K. These states faced major economic challenges in 2009 and significant cuts affected all areas of the education budgets in these states, including K-12, which is usually the last state budget to be affected.

National Resources Rank for SECA States

State	Resources Rank Based on State Spending	State \$ Per Child Enrolled in Pre-K	Change in state per-pupil spending from 2007-2008/2008-2009
<i>Alabama</i>	14	\$5,134	587
<i>Arkansas</i>	10	\$5,421	350
<i>Florida</i>	34	\$2,448	-127
<i>Georgia</i>	17	\$4,234	-143
<i>Kentucky</i>	24	\$3,497	-105
<i>Louisiana</i>	12	\$5,301	-760
<i>North Carolina</i>	11	\$5,414	202
<i>Oklahoma</i>	18	\$4,084	-2
<i>South Carolina</i>	37	\$1,633	-137
<i>Tennessee</i>	15	\$4,520	-80
<i>Texas</i>	20	\$3,790	102
<i>Virginia</i>	19	\$4,023	341
<i>West Virginia</i>	13	\$5,264	328

Seven (7) of the 14 SECA states (**Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee**) reduced their per-pupil expenditures in 2008-2009. Six (6) of the SECA states (**Alabama, Arkansas, North Carolina, Texas, Virginia, West Virginia**) increased their per-pupil expenditure in 2008-2009.

Source: Executive Summary, *The State of Preschool 2009*, National Institute for Early Education Research, www.nieer.org



What We Can Learn From the Report

- ✚ The **South's commitment to Pre-K** as a strategy that will improve the educational status of the region has remained strong, in spite of serious budget difficulties in many of the states.
- ✚ Some SECA states have made decisions **to increase access**, sometimes at the expense of quality. **Florida** and **Texas** rank in the top 10 in access but meet very few of the quality standards.
- ✚ **Increasing quality** seems to be the next big challenge for SECA states, and this effort will be directly impacted by the fiscal health of state budgets. The states of **Florida, Texas** and **South Carolina** meet fewer than 7 of the 10 quality standards.
- ✚ It appears that one of the **most problematic quality standards** for SECA states is the requirement that assistant teachers/aides meet certification requirements. Only the SECA states of **Arkansas, Georgia, Louisiana NSECD** and **North Carolina** are listed as meeting this standard. This may be a resources issue, both in funding and access to educational programs.
- ✚ During the period of 2001/2002 to 2008/2009, the SECA states **increased access for 4-year-olds significantly**, and many states chose to focus their efforts on this age group.
- ✚ Only the SECA states of **Arkansas, Kentucky, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas** and **West Virginia** created **3-year-old programs** during that period. The programs in *Arkansas, Kentucky and South Carolina were expanded* during that period: the programs in *Tennessee, Texas and West Virginia decreased slightly*.
- ✚ Two SECA states, **Louisiana** and **South Carolina**, have multiple programs with different programmatic standards. In *Louisiana*, one program meets 7 quality standards, one meets 9 quality standards and one meets all 10 of the quality standards. In *South Carolina*, one program meets 6 of the standards and the other program meets 7 of the standards. The **challenge for these states** may be the administrative structure of the state pre-K initiatives and how to consolidate programs to improve and enhance quality, particularly as the Early Childhood Advisory Councils begin their work.

