

# ***The State of Preschool 2011: 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 2012**

## Some Highlights from the Report



*“Over the past decade, state-funded pre-K has been education’s biggest success story. Enrollment has grown dramatically and, in a number of states, so has quality. More children than ever are served by state programs aimed at preparing them to succeed in school and life. But after years of steady progress, our data show that many states’ commitments to their youngest citizens are now slipping. Budget cuts in many states now limit enrollment at a time when family incomes have fallen. This is undermining the quality of state pre-K. Yet, research clearly shows that only high-quality pre-K programs significantly help prepare children for school.”* Source: Executive Summary, *The State of Preschool 2011-State Preschool Yearbook*, National Institute for Early Education Research, [www.nieer.org](http://www.nieer.org), p.4.

According to the report, in 2011:

- ✓ **Eleven states expanded program enrollment to 3-year-olds**, compared to the previous year. **Arkansas**, Illinois, Pennsylvania, **South Carolina**, **Texas** and Vermont reported enrollment gains of 3-year-olds.
- ✓ **Florida** moved past **Oklahoma** as having the **highest percentage of 4-year-olds enrolled in a pre-K program**; however, **Florida** ranks near the bottom nationally in spending per child. **Georgia** also reported substantial enrollment gains.
- ✓ **Kentucky** reported **gains in 4-year-old enrollment**; however, those gains were overshadowed by a significant decrease in the enrollment of 3-year-olds.
- ✓ **Georgia** met an **additional benchmark** by adding a requirement for teachers to have a Bachelor’s degree.
- ✓ **South Carolina CDEPP** lost a **benchmark** because of policy changes to the standard requiring regular site visits.
- ✓ **Alabama, Georgia, North Carolina** and **Louisiana NSECD** met **all 10 benchmarks**.



- ✓ **Arkansas, Kentucky, Louisiana LA4, Oklahoma** and **Tennessee** met **9 of 10** of the benchmarks.
- ✓ **Mississippi** continued to be the only SECA state without a state pre-K program.

Source: Executive Summary, *The State of Preschool 2011-State Preschool Yearbook*, National Institute for Early Education Research, [www.nieer.org](http://www.nieer.org), p.9-10.

The report also highlighted some “new” national statistics.

- **State funding for pre-K nationally decreased by almost \$60 million in 2010-2011** when adjusted for inflation, despite the use of \$127 million in funds from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA).
- **National per-child spending on pre-K went down by \$145 per child** from the previous year to \$4,151.
- **Per-child spending has decreased by more than \$700 for the past 10 years.** Without ARRA funds, spending would have dropped to \$4,054, the lowest amount since NIEER began collecting data.
- **State funding per-child** for pre-K declined in 26 of 39 states, when adjusted for inflation.
- Only **11 states increased pre-K funding; 8 states cut pre-K funding** by 10% or more from the previous year.
- **Few states are adding significantly to enrollment** and the educational quality of state pre-K is taking a backseat to budget cutting.
- **Enrollment increased nationally by 30,818 children.** Twenty-two states increased enrollment. Ten states cut enrollment.
- **More than half a million children, or 43% of nationwide enrollment, are served in programs that met fewer than half of the quality standards benchmarks.**
- **Two (2) states improved** on NIEER’s Quality Standards checklist, while **four (4) states lost ground on standards.**

Source: Executive Summary, *The State of Preschool 2011-State Preschool Yearbook*, National Institute for Early Education Research, [www.nieer.org](http://www.nieer.org), p.4-5



## 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 initiative is *funded, controlled and directed by the state*.
2. The initiative *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 initiative. The definition excludes programs that focus mainly on parent education and parent work status or child eligibility tied to work status.
4. The initiative *offers a group learning experience* to children at least two days a week.
5. The initiative is *distinct from the state's system of subsidized child care*; however, preschool initiatives may be integrated and coordinated with the state's subsidized child care system.
6. The initiative 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 2011-State Preschool Yearbook*, National Institute for Early Education Research, [www.nieer.org](http://www.nieer.org), p. 21.

## Highlights From the SECA States

Although the 2010-2011 program year was 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. Reduction of resources was minimal while one state, **Georgia**, put in place policy to meet an additional quality benchmark.



## ACCESS

Of the top ten (10) states serving 4-year-olds in 2009-2010, the SECA region had six (6) of the ten states. In the 2008-2009 year, the SECA region had seven (7) of the top ten.

In 2010-2011,

- ❖ **Florida** was **#1** with 76.0% of 4-year-olds served in pre-K.
- ❖ **Oklahoma** was **#2** with 73.5% of 4-year-olds served in pre-K.
- ❖ **Georgia** was **#4** with 59.3% of 4-year-olds served in pre-K.
- ❖ **West Virginia** was **#5** with 58.2% of 4-year-olds served in pre-K.
- ❖ **Texas** dropped to a ranking of **#8** with 51.7% of 4-year-olds served in pre-K.
- ❖ **Arkansas** fell to **#10** with 44.1% of 4-year-olds served in pre-K.

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

- ❖ **South Carolina** was **#11** with 40.7% of 4-year-olds served in pre-K.
- ❖ **Alabama** remained at **#33** with 6.4% of 4-year-olds served in pre-K.
- ❖ **Kentucky** dropped to **#14** with 31.9% of 4-year-olds served in pre-K.
- ❖ **Louisiana** remained at **#13** with 32.8% of 4-year-olds served in pre-K.
- ❖ **North Carolina** moved up to **#19** with 24.2% of 4-year-olds served in pre-K.
- ❖ **Tennessee** moved to **#20** with 21.5% served of 4-year-olds served in pre-K.
- ❖ **Virginia** dropped to **#26** with 15.5% of 4-year-olds served in pre-K.

With six (6) states in the top 10, another **five (5) states (South Carolina, Kentucky, Louisiana, North Carolina, and Tennessee)** were in the **top 20** of states with access to state funded pre-K.

**Mississippi** continued to be the only SECA state without state funded pre-K in 2010-2011.

Source: Executive Summary, *The State of Preschool 2011-State Preschool Yearbook*, National Institute for Early Education Research, [www.nieer.org](http://www.nieer.org), Table 2, p. 14.



**TABLE 1: 2010-2011 Enrollment of 3- and 4-Year-Olds in State Pre-K, Preschool Special Education, and Federal and State Head Start**

State	3-year-olds (combined total)	Percent of Population of 3-year-olds	4-year-olds (combined total)	Percent of Population of 4- year-olds
<i>Alabama</i>	6,868	11.1%	14,966	24.4%
<i>Arkansas</i>	10,562	25.9%	25,401	64.1%
<i>Florida</i>	20,144	9.2%	187,403	86.6%
<i>Georgia</i>	14,028	10.0%	94,233	67.4%
<i>Kentucky</i>	9,913	17.2%	27,127	47.8%
<i>Louisiana</i>	12,999	20.2%	29,679	48.1%
<i>Mississippi</i>	11,308	25.7%	16,571	39.8%
<i>North Carolina</i>	11,385	8.8%	44,642	35.1%
<i>Oklahoma</i>	8,327	15.5%	46,480	88.4%
<i>South Carolina</i>	9,505	15.5%	30,653	51.6%
<i>Tennessee</i>	7,996	9.6%	29,064	35.3%
<i>Texas</i>	59,833	15.5%	240,864	62.5%
<i>Virginia</i>	7,935	7.7%	26,764	26.1%
<i>West Virginia</i>	4,221	20.0%	17,242	82.3%

Source: Executive Summary, *The State of Preschool 2011-The State Yearbook*, National Institute for Early Education Research, [www.nieer.org](http://www.nieer.org), Table 4, p. 16.

**SECA Note:** Although **Mississippi** is the lone SECA state without a state funded pre-K program, children are being served in Mississippi through the two federal programs—Preschool Special Education and Head Start. Also, if you look at the combined totals for all three programs in our states, you will see a substantially larger percentage of the population receiving services when the two federal programs are added to the count.

## QUALITY

Most of the SECA states met at least 7 of the 10 quality benchmarks in 2010-2011; however, only four states, **Alabama, Georgia, 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** scored a perfect **10** standards, an improvement from last year.

**Kentucky** met **9 of the 10** standards, missing on the assistant teacher credential.

**Louisiana** has three programs that were rated. **Louisiana (8g)** met **8 of the 10** standards, adding a standard on specialized training, missing on 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 multiple 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 site visits.

**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 **7 of the 10** standards, missing on the teacher requirement for a BA, the assistant teacher credentials and meal requirement.

**West Virginia** met **8 of the 10** standards, missing on teacher and assistant teacher credential.

Source: Executive Summary, *The State of Preschool 2011-State Preschool Yearbook*, National Institute for Early Education Research, [www.nieer.org](http://www.nieer.org), Table 5, p. 17.



## RESOURCES

Only five (5) of the SECA states (**Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, South Carolina, Texas**) fell out of the top 20 states nationally based on resources provided per child in state pre-K. This Yearbook contains a new estimate of how much each state should spend per child in order to meet all 10 NIEER benchmarks.

### National 2010-2011 Resources Rank for SECA States

State	Resources Rank Based on State Spending	Resources Rank Based on All Reported Spending	State \$ Per Child Enrolled in Pre-K	All Reported \$ Per Child Enrolled in Pre-K	Estimate of Per-Child Spending Needed to Meet NIEER Benchmarks	Additional Per-Child Funding Needed
<i>Alabama</i>	16	17	\$4,544	\$5,680	\$7,459	\$1,779
<i>Arkansas</i>	12	7	\$5,021	\$8,126	\$7,007	-0-
<i>Florida</i>	35	39	\$2,422	\$2,422	\$4,464	\$2,042
<i>Georgia</i>	19	24	\$4,298	\$4,299	\$8,359	\$4,060
<i>Kentucky</i>	29	14	\$3,399	\$6,718	\$4,107	-0-
<i>Louisiana</i>	14	21	\$4,669	\$4,768	\$7,382	\$2,614
<i>North Carolina</i>	11	8	\$5,166	\$7,910	\$8,036	\$126
<i>Oklahoma</i>	27	9	\$3,461	\$7,690	\$5,918	-0-
<i>South Carolina</i>	39	36	\$1,342	\$2,934	\$7,674	\$4,740
<i>Tennessee</i>	15	16	\$4,620	\$5,853	\$7,825	\$1,972
<i>Texas</i>	22	27	\$3,761	\$3,761	\$7,047	\$3,286
<i>Virginia</i>	21	15	\$3,808	\$5,892	\$9,067	\$3,175
<i>West Virginia</i>	8	4	\$5,605	\$9,136	\$6,169	-0-

According to NIEER estimates, four (4) of the SECA States provided enough funding per child to meet the NIEER benchmarks. The remaining 10 states in the SECA region did not provide enough per-child funding, ranging from a deficit of \$126 in North Carolina to \$4,740 in South Carolina.

Sources: Executive Summary, *The State of Preschool 2011-State Preschool Yearbook*, National Institute for Early Education Research, [www.nieer.org](http://www.nieer.org), Table 6, p. 18.

Executive Summary, *The State of Preschool 2011-State Preschool Yearbook*, National Institute for Early Education Research, [www.nieer.org](http://www.nieer.org), Table 7, p. 19.



## Snapshots from the SECA States

In most cases, the following information is excerpted verbatim from the State Profiles of *The State of Preschool 2011-State Preschool Yearbook*, National Institute for Early Education Research, [www.nieer.org](http://www.nieer.org). For the complete profiles by state, go to <http://nieer.org/yearbook/states/>.

- ❖ **Alabama** has offered state-funded preschool for 4-year-olds since 2000 through the Alabama Pre-Kindergarten Program which was re-named *First Class: Alabama's Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten Program* in the 2008-2009 school year. The program meets all of NIEER's quality benchmarks; however, enrollment has stayed very low because of limited resources. The program was flat funded in the 2010-2011 school year.
- ❖ The **Arkansas** Better Chance initiative participated in an evaluation for both process quality and program impact/child outcomes through a study that began sampling children in the 2005-2006 school year and continued through the 2009-2010 year. A second study replicating the first study began in the 2010-2011 school year.

Additionally, financial support is available for professional development for pre-K teachers, including pursuit of college degrees. The *Birth Through Prekindergarten Teaching Credential*, an additional professional pathway for preschool teachers in the ABC programs, was made available by Act 187 of 2009 and went into effect in January 2011.

- ❖ Legislation adopted in **Florida** in 2011 requires the State Board of Education to periodically adopt a minimum kindergarten readiness rate to assess satisfactory delivery of the VPK Education Program by providers and schools. VPK is assessed annually based on the *Florida Kindergarten Readiness Screener* administered within the first 30 days of kindergarten, comparing both children and programs that participated in VPK to those that did not.

Legislation passed in 2011 allows for the inclusion of non-public schools in the administration of kindergarten screening and is expected to result in greater numbers of VPK participants being screened. New legislation also changes the definition of "proficient" to require proficiency on both measures of the statewide kindergarten screening, eliminating the circumstance where proficiency on only one measure can determine kindergarten readiness.



- ❖ Since the 2008-2009 program year, **Georgia** has required a minimum of a CDA for assistant teachers. The 2010-2011 school year represents the first year lead teachers were required to have a bachelor's degree, though a waiver process will help current teachers transition to this new requirement.

In response to budgetary constraints, *Georgia's Pre-K Program* underwent a number of changes starting in the 2011-2012 school year. The program runs on a nine- instead of 10-month calendar and the maximum class size was increased to 22 children. This change will lead to a loss of two (2) of Georgia's quality benchmarks next year. The move is anticipated to drop Georgia further down in the rankings.

- ❖ During the 2010-2011 school year, **Kentucky** completed the two-year pilot phase of the Preschool Program Review (P2R) statewide monitoring process in which all districts will be reviewed at least once every five years. The P2R requires an ECERS-R for every classroom and an online survey, as well as site visit teams that observe classrooms, examine documentation and interview teachers, administrators and parents. The Early Childhood Regional Training Centers have established a pool of trained assessors in each district who will use the ECERS-R in order to help districts improve their teaching and learning processes.

Plans are underway to develop an integrated data management system aligning program and child outcome data from KPP, Head Start, and child care with the K-12 system. The University of Kentucky is playing an instrumental role in this design.

- ❖ **Louisiana** is planning to provide voluntary preschool access for all 4-year-olds regardless of income by the 2013-2014 school year. Since the 2008-2009 school year, the Department of Education has coordinated with the Department of Social Services to create a professional development plan to permit cross-agency technical assistance and training. Since the 2009-2010 school year, school districts must allocate at least 10% of new funding to provide programs in diverse delivery settings.

Louisiana school districts utilized more than \$28 million in Title I funding to support preschool services for more than 7,300 students in the 2010-2011 school year. The Department of Education's plan to draft guidelines for a LA3 program has been temporarily suspended due to budget constraints.

- ❖ During the biennial budget writing session in 2011, **North Carolina's *More at Four*** program funding was cut 20%. In addition, the program was renamed NC Pre-K, moved from the Department of Public Instruction, and placed administratively in the Department of Health and Human Services in a move to align the program with the



state's child care subsidy system. The state Superior Court ruled that *More at Four* must serve all eligible children to meet the constitutional right of a sound and basic education and must eliminate any barriers to enrollment for at-risk 4-year-olds. The North Carolina General Assembly has filed a notice of appeal. The legal issue, as well as other debates over the program, was on-going at the time of publication of the *Yearbook*.

- ❖ **Oklahoma** concluded a five year ***Pilot Early Childhood Program*** in the 2010-2011 school year and will continue the program through in the 2011-2012 school year with yearly contracts with the Community Action Project of Tulsa County. This program provides services year-round to at-risk children, ages birth through 3.

The ***Early Childhood Expansion Project*** uses public and private funding to serve children ages birth through 4 years and, in the 2011-2012 school year, there are 26 classrooms serving 314 children. Oklahoma also provided supplemental funding to Head Start in the amount of \$2,191,700 for FY 2011.

In the 2011 Oklahoma state legislative session, a new law was enacted, overhauling the state's former Reading Sufficiency Act. The law is designed to ensure that all students are reading on grade level by the end of third grade and focuses on early intervention for children in pre-K. Specific requirements include conducting a series of assessments, reviewing literacy instruction in kindergarten through third grade, and providing intensive interventions (including an individualized reading plan and ongoing progress monitoring) to those students identified as having a reading deficiency.

- ❖ Due to reduction in staff of *CDEPP* (Child Development Education Pilot Program) in **South Carolina**, these programs only received site visits or technical assistance upon request in the 2010-2011 school year.
- ❖ The **Tennessee** Voluntary Pre-K program was fully funded through general education funding in the 2010-2011 school year. Federal funding sources such as Head Start can serve as match for VPK. Since the 2008-2009 school year, the program has managed to maintain existing classrooms; however, no expansion has occurred.
- ❖ In the 2007-2008 school year, the **Texas** Education Code amended its reporting requirements to work with the *Texas School Readiness Certification System* (SRCS) and programs are required to participate. Programs must develop a Readiness Integration Plan, which is a collaboration among multiple partners, including prekindergarten and early education providers as well as local workforce



development boards to share resources across delivery settings. Funds were not appropriated for this initiative for the 2011-2012 program year.

- ❖ The **Virginia** Preschool Initiative was evaluated by the University of Virginia for both process quality and program impact/child outcomes in 2011. Monitoring of VPI is conducted by state education staff and consultants once every two years in addition to annual review of program-level outcomes based on review of local plans and results of child assessments. In the 2010-2011 school year, there was an overall funding reduction of \$401,010 from the previous year. (Local spending increased by \$2.2 million to compensate for a decrease of \$2.6 million in state funding.) All state funding for VPI in the 2010-2011 school year came from lottery proceeds.
- ❖ Most programs participating in the **West Virginia** Universal Pre-K System use Creative Curriculum in their classrooms. During the 2010-2011 school year, child assessment was revised and now includes a comprehensive assessment system that will encompass the *Early Learning Scale*, health data, and additional information from the *West Virginia Early Learning Standards Framework*. (Previous assessments were completed through the Creative Curriculum web-based portfolio system.) Program assessment requirements were also revised and programs will no longer be required to complete an ECERS-R annually. Instead, programs will use the ECERS-R once every three years and develop a comprehensive monitoring system to provide ongoing continuous quality improvement.

### ***As a State Advocate-- Some Questions to Ask***

- ❖ How effectively is your state coordinating federal and state resources to fund educational services to young children?
- ❖ When resources from Pre-K, Head Start and Preschool Special Education are combined, does that change the picture for how effectively at-risk children are being served in your state?
- ❖ Does the combination of funds, both state and federal, provide enough funding per child to meet all 10 NIEER benchmarks?
- ❖ What components of quality must still be addressed in your state?

