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STATE OF PRESCHOOL

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Media Coverage of State of Preschool

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The recent publication of the National Institute for Early Education Research's *State of Preschool: 2003 State Preschool Yearbook* has received broad coverage from the media across the country. Television and print media reported on the status of their state preschool program and the comparison between their states to other state programs. The coverage of the *Yearbook* provides unique opportunities for preschool advocates to call the public and the legislators' attention to the components of a high quality preschool program and the steps needed to achieve high quality programs in their states. A selection of headlines and quotes are included:

Headlines

Preschool system faulted: Too many kids left out, not enough teachers have bachelor's degrees, *Detroit News*¹

Utah Scolded for Not Funding Preschool, *KSL TV Eyewitness News*²

States' Preschool Programs Faulted: Lack of real teachers criticized, *Columbus Dispatch*³

Oklahoma Gets Top Rank in Preschool Report, *KOCO Channel Oklahoma*⁴

Quotes from Articles:

"[Oklahoma's] performance was a bright post in a survey that found that most states are not providing enough preschool education."⁵

"Where they exist at all, state-run preschool programs in this country are mostly under-funded, inaccessible and lacking quality -- and Pennsylvania is at or near the bottom of the heap by most measures."⁶



"The country's preschool system is an uneven patchwork with too many children left out of programs and too many taught by teachers without a college degree, according to a new study."⁷

"[The study] says that states need to step up to the plate in providing preschool education, and it points a finger at Utah, but Utah is not alone."⁸

"Wisconsin stacks up well nationally when it comes to spending and access to preschool, but it needs to do more to ensure the quality of state-funded programs, concludes a report released Thursday."⁹

According to Carol Shipp, communications director at NIEER, there were very few surprises in the media's reporting of the *Yearbook*. She stated that press often "go for the negative" and in this case, focused on states that did not have preschool programs and the programs that did not meet the standards.¹⁰

On a positive note, Shipp stated that a positive outcome of the *Yearbook* is that many states are using the report as a tool to bring attention to the improvements needed in their state preschool programs. Georgia was noted as having an exemplary state preschool program and has the first state to offer preschool for all 4-year old by the

Yearbook. When the report was released, Georgia's governor Sonny Perdue took this opportunity to recognize the achievements of Georgia's early education program and proposed steps to improve the program, including the merging of early care and education resources in the proposed Bright from the Start: Georgia's Office of Early Care and Education.

The *Yearbook* concludes that all states need to improve in areas of access, quality, and funding. The quality standards checklist provides 10 benchmarks of quality and allows states to see which of the state pre-k requirements measure up to the benchmarks. Although each state preschool program is unique, the report also provides common language and measurement that allows comparisons between state programs. Since the *Yearbook* is an annual publication and publicly available, states will be held accountable for the progress and improvements of their preschool programs.

What Chief State School Officers Can Do

Chief state school officers can utilize reports such as the *Yearbook* to build support from parents, educators, and legislators for state prekindergarten programs. The report provides common language and indicators with which preschool programs across states can be compared and a checklist of components for a high quality preschool program. Calling attention to the report through media outlets raises public awareness of preschool programs and creates accountability for legislatures to adequately fund high quality programs.

For additional information on early childhood and family education at the Council, visit [Http://www.ccsso.org](http://www.ccsso.org) or write the author at jinheel@ccsso.org.

¹ Fredreka Schouten at Gannett News Service. (2004, Feb. 19). Preschool system faulted. *Detroit News*. Retrieved March 4, 2004 from <http://www.detnews.com/2004/schools/0402/19/a05-68956.htm>.

² Johnson, Kim. (2004, Feb. 20). Utah Scolded for Not Funding Preschool. *KSL TV Eyewitness News*. Retrieved March 4, 2004 from <http://tv.ksl.com/index.php?nid=5&sid=76528>.

³ Candinsky, Catherine. (2004, Feb. 19). National Report: States' Preschool Programs Faulted Lack of Real Teacher Criticized. *Columbus Dispatch*, pp. 1A.

Advancing Quality Preschool for All is a meeting hosted by the Council of Chief State School Officers as part of The Pew Charitable Trusts' initiative to advance high quality prekindergarten for all of the nation's three and four year olds through objective, policy-focused research; state public education campaigns and national outreach.

As part of the Trusts' early education initiative, CCSSO will educate and serve its membership to build support among chief state school officers for expansion of high quality, universal preschool opportunities for 3 and 4 year-olds.



⁴ Associated Press. (2004, Feb. 19). Oklahoma Gets Top Rank In Preschool Report. *Channel Oklahoma*. Retrieved March 4, 2004, from <http://www.channeloklahoma.com/education/2859087/detail.html>.

⁵ Candinsky, Catherine. (2004, Feb. 19). National Report: States' Preschool Programs Faulted Lack of Real Teacher Criticized. *Columbus Dispatch*, pp. 1A.

⁶ Kalson, Sally. (2004, Feb. 19). Preschool Programs Lagging State Ranks Last in Access for 3-year Olds. *Pittsburgh-Post Gazette*, pp. A13.

⁷ Fredreka Schouten at Gannett News Service. (2004, Feb. 19). Preschool system faulted. *Detroit News*. Retrieved March 4, 2004 from <http://www.detnews.com/2004/schools/0402/19/a05-68956.htm>.

⁸ Johnson, Kim. (2004, Feb. 20). Utah Scolded for Not Funding Preschool. *KSL TV Eyewitness News*. Retrieved March 4, 2004 from <http://tv.ksl.com/index.php?nid=5&sid=76528>.

⁹ Hezner, Amy. (2004, Feb. 20). Preschool programs get high grades; but state funding faulted in report. *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, pp. 3B.

¹⁰ Personal phone conversation with Carol Shipp on Thursday, March 4, 2004.